

Solicitors help break-up couples to avoid court

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A NEW approach to family law, especially marriage break-up, is a service now being made available in Galway by a number of solicitors.

On Tuesday, the retired High Court Judge, Catherine McGuinness was the guest speaker at the launch of the Collaborative Law service in Galway.

A number of local solicitors have become involved in the Galway Collaborative Law Practitioners (GCLP), one of them Bríd Manifold who points out that although relatively new to Ireland, Collaborative Law has been used for many years in the US as a non-confrontational means of solving family law problems.

Pauline Tesler, a well-known American Attorney qualified in the discipline and author of a number of books on the topic, travelled to Galway last year to train a group of local solicitors in the collaborative method. At present, Collaborative Law is being used extensively in Cork and Wicklow.

"The feedback is encouragingly positive and it is the aim of the Galway group to present the collaborative method as an effective alternative approach to clients undergoing a breakdown in their relationship, married or otherwise," said Ms Manifold, now one of fifty Galway solicitors signed up to this process.

Collaborative Law differs from the traditional methods of dealing with family law in that the focus is on communication and resolution, with the emphasis on, and indeed threat of, Court being removed.

The couple, together with their collaboratively trained

lawyers, have a series of four-way round table meetings to negotiate agreement on child care and all financial matters. The process requires a commitment by the couple to be honest and open with each other and make full and frank disclosure of their income and assets.

A formal participation agreement is signed by both clients and their lawyers at the outset, and if either party later decides to opt out of the process and proceed to court, the collaborative process ends and the clients must instruct new lawyers to take their case to court.



Mrs Justice Catherine McGuinness, retired Judge of the Supreme Court, speaking at the launch of Collaborative Law Practitioners.