

Office of Public Defense Services

PARENT CHILD REPRESENTATION PROGRAM

POSITIVE OUTCOMES AND COST-EFFECTIVE RESULTS



High Quality Legal Representation

- Quality legal representation leads to higher rates of permanency for children.¹
- Repeated studies indicate that when parents are represented by attorneys with reasonable caseloads, the attorneys spend more time with parents and, as a result, both parents and children have better experiences with the child welfare system.²
- Families are more likely to be reunified when mothers and mothers' attorneys are present at early stage hearings.³
- The direction a case takes early on often predicts whether a child will return home.⁴
- The attorney's advocacy for frequent visitation, parent engagement, and the right service plan helps steer the case toward early reunification.⁵



Multidisciplinary Client Advocacy & Support

- Independent social workers help parents succeed: cases reach reunification more quickly and have a substantial cost savings.⁶
- Parents' level of engagement within the child welfare system is critical to reunification. Even a moderate increase in engagement is associated with a 47% increase in the rate of reunification.⁷
- Too often, agencies choose from a formulaic menu of services in making referrals for parents. Additional advocacy is needed to find flexible and creative services for parents to enable parents to move faster towards reunification.⁸



Positive Outcomes

- Children served by Washington's Parent Representation Program return home one month faster and reach other permanency outcomes one year sooner.⁹
- Children served by New York's Center for Family Representation team representation model are twice as likely to be safely reunified and stay home with their families permanently.
- Jurisdictions which want to improve parental representation and potentially shorten the time children are in foster care should consider a program similar to Washington's PRP.¹⁰



Cost Effective

- Reducing the time children spend in foster care saves money. Annual cost of foster care per child in Oregon is about \$26600.¹¹
- New York Center for Family Representation's similar program saves \$9 million/year by reducing the length of stay in foster care and promoting safe reunification with parents.¹²
- Washington's Parent Representation Program provides a cost benefit to the state through reduced foster care stays. In 2013, the program saved \$7.5 million.¹³

¹ Courtney, Hook & Orme, *Evaluation of the impact of enhanced parental legal representation on the timing of permanency outcomes*, Partners for Our Children (Discussion Paper Vol. 1(1)) (2011).

² Laver, *Improving representation for parents in the child-welfare system*, American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation (October 2013).

³ National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, *Effects of parental and attorney involvement on reunification in juvenile dependency cases*. PPCD Research Snapshot August 2011 (August 2011).

⁴ Cohen and Cortese, *Cornerstone advocacy in the first 60 Days: achieving safe and lasting reunification for families*, ABA Child Law Practice (May 2009).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Pilnik, *Parents' social workers help parents succeed*, ABA Child Law Practice Vol. 27 No. 9.

⁷ Marcenko, Newby, Mienko, and Courtney. *Family reunification in Washington State: which children go home and how long does it take?*, Partners for our children (August 2011).

⁸ See FN 4.

⁹ Washington Partners for Our Children, *Washington's Parents Representation Program helping children in child welfare systems reach permanency*, Partners for Our Children Issue Brief (February 2011).

¹⁰ See FN 5.

¹¹ Fixen, *Children in Foster Care: Societal and Financial Costs*, A Family for Every Child (November 2011). This figure includes not only room and board, but personal care services, one-time payments and staff time but does not account for court costs, legal representation, and other system costs.

¹² New York Center for Family Representation, *2013 Report to the Community*.

¹³ American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, *ABA National Project to Improve Representation for Parents*, http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/ParentRep/At-a-glance%20final.authcheckdam.pdf.