Our Parent Representation Project uses an innovative team approach to help struggling families involved in the child welfare system. The Project Team, comprised of a lawyer, case manager, and parent advocate, holistically supports the caretaker to achieve positive outcomes for the family.

The Project stabilizes families and minimizes trauma to young children. It also achieves cost savings and delivers financial benefits to the families and their communities.

**Reduction of Court Costs:** When a family is on the brink, the Team steps in to prevent the need for juvenile court involvement.

- The Department of Human Services refers the safe parent or caretaker to the Team,
- The Team addresses the needs of the caretaker and the children, including physical and emotional needs of a child or caretaker, unaddressed substance abuse or mental health issues, housing instability, and barriers to employment, transportation, and education,
- The Team provides civil legal representation, supporting the safe caretaker and legally protecting his/her rights (by obtaining a custody/guardianship order, stopping domestic violence, preventing an unlawful eviction, securing safe housing, etc.).

**Faster Reunification:** If a family is already going through juvenile action, the Team’s involvement reunifies children with their parents faster - **in half the time of the district average** - thereby reducing the trauma to the family and the costs of out-of-home placement.

**Reducing Re-Entry:** The Team’s involvement reduces the caretaker’s rates of re-abuse and re-entry into the child welfare system in the future, avoiding future costs to the State.

**Bolstering Safe Caretakers:** The Team improves the caretaker’s compliance with recommended services, resulting in faster reunification and prevention of re-entry into the child welfare system. The Team helps caretakers better support their families by helping them obtain legally required child and spousal support payments and access to other benefits.

For further information contact: Michelle Jungers, Managing Attorney
515-243-2980 x 1711 mjungers@iowalaw.org
LIVES TOUCHED

- In 2018, the Project closed 62 pre-filing cases, which helped 118 children avoid court involvement. An additional 28 pre-filing cases were opened in 2018 and remained open into 2019.

- Our advocacy brought more than $500,000 in financial benefits to our clients, comprised primarily of child support (including arrears) and spousal support. These funds help caretakers participate in the workforce and their communities, increasing the economic impact in their neighborhoods.

FINANCIAL IMPACT ON THE SYSTEM

The costs avoided by the family justice system are substantial. By preventing just one Child In Need of Assistance Action, the Project can avoid the need for:

- foster care - average of $852 per month\(^i\)
- court-appointed guardians ad litem - approximately $1,200 per case\(^ii\)
- court-appointed parent attorneys - approximately $2,400 per case\(^iii\)
- county attorneys and judicial costs.

Conservatively - cost savings of $6,000 per CINA case

- In 2018, the total funding for the Project was approximately $200,000.
- Without our intervention, the pre-filing cases handled by the Project would have cost an estimated $372,000 (62 x $6,000).

The Parent Representation Project is an outstanding investment:

- $500,000 caretaker benefits
- $372,000 saved costs by avoiding juvenile court
- $872,000 Net economic impact

That is a 436% return on investment.

For every $1.00 Iowa invests in Iowa Legal Aid, $4.36 in economic gains are realized by Iowans.

This only scratches the surface of the benefit to the family and community by avoiding juvenile court action. There are countless other indirect cost savings.

\(^i\) [http://www.ifapa.org/resources/foster_care_resources.asp](http://www.ifapa.org/resources/foster_care_resources.asp)
\(^ii\) Based on established fees in 493 IAC 12.6(2).
\(^iii\) Based on established fees in 493 IAC 12.6(2).
\(^iv\) The National Institute of Justice (Miller, Cohen & Wiersema, 1996)
\(^v\) The Longer-Term Influence of Civil Legal Services on Battered Women, [https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249879.pdf](https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249879.pdf)