

Demonstrating Value: Outcome Measures & Data Points for Preventive Legal Advocacy and Pre-Petition Programs

Closing the
gap

Data Points

Outputs

Outcomes

Action Plan

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LAW

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We know the value of our services, but

our intuitive conclusions about the value of upstream legal representation in the child welfare context is not enough to drive public investment.

The field of social science research has developed substantially, and our programs are expected to be able to prove their worth through industry-standard social science research.

Unfortunately, existing empirical evidence in support of the proposition that upstream civil legal representation improves outcomes of interest to parents, children, and policymakers remains weak.

So, we have some work to do.

Note 1: why we shouldn't be having this conversation

Note 2: it takes all types of data

Note 3: data has its limitations

The mere fact we have to rely on data to establish the value of legal services for at risk families is deeply problematic. No one questions whether bankruptcy attorneys are helpful in bankruptcy cases, or whether tax attorneys are of benefit to corporations. As a fundamental matter, we shouldn't have to prove that access to legal representation is good for indigent families.

No one would seriously question whether access to legal services was good for their own family or "worth it" when needed.

Effective assessment requires a wide range of data. Information about the type, volume, and scope of services (outputs) and the results of those services (outcomes) are both needed to effectively evaluate the impact of client services.

Effectively understanding the needs of the client community and the efficacy of different delivery approaches and advocacy strategies may include the analysis of information such as:

- Census data and data from other federal and state sources regarding the demographic and economic characteristics of the low-income population in the service area
- Court records and data regarding services and operations of the Department and other governmental and private entities
- On-going engagement with client and community groups
- Surveys and interviews with staff and community members
- Reports by academic institutions, policy groups, and research organizations
- GPS or similar data to align services with the needs of the client community

1. Data collection, and outcomes measures in particular, are based on assumptions that can limit validity and value. Programs need to be transparent about the limitations.
2. Are we measuring the right things? To what degree are the things we're measuring aligned with the program's mission and goals as and the types of issues addressed in particular cases?
3. Consider the data entry process: are staff entering data into the system accurately? (ease of use, time it takes to enter data, etc.)
4. Many aspects of a program cannot be meaningfully quantified:
 - The quality of an advocate's casework
 - The value and impact of the program's "other services" (e.g., pro se clinics, community legal education, self-help materials on websites)
 - The impact of the program's work on a client's sense of well-being (e.g., from avoiding homelessness, escaping from an abusive partner) or empowerment
 - If and how the program's work increases the accountability of the child welfare system
 - The impact of the program's work with community organizations



data points defined:

a data point is a discrete unit of measurement (or any single fact)

Data points for each case will likely be collected in phases:

1. screening phase
2. intake phase, and
3. case evaluation/team staffing phase
4. as the work is actually completed

Examples

data points examples:

examples of data gathered at screening:

- Referral Source
- Reason for declining referral if declined
- Type of referrals made for non-eligible representation

examples of data gathered at intake

- demographics information
- total number of children in household
- total number of individuals in household
- number of dependents
- active CPS investigation?
 - allegation type

examples of data gathered at staffing

- Identification of each legal issue (examples)
 - Needs divorce
 - Needs to resolve warrants
- Identification of each social service need (examples)
 - Needs transportation
 - Needs counseling

Outputs defined:

Outputs are the activities a program conducts and the services it provides to address the needs of its client community.

A program's outputs—e.g., the services provided to clients—are necessary to achieve benefits for clients, but outputs data doesn't tell us what benefits, if any, those services provide to the clients.

Examples

Example outputs:

- Total number of referrals received
- Total number of intakes performed
- Total number of clients served
- Total number of cases by category (e.g. prevention / permanency)
- Total number of legal issues addressed
- Totals by service type (e.g. Information and advice, Case management by SW, In court representation)
- Total time spent on cases by team member type
- Total number of informational sessions held
- Total number of trainings or other Dept outreach efforts
- Percentage of cases where a parent ally, peer parent mentor, or youth ambassador was used
- Average attorney caseload

Outcomes defined:

Outcomes are the results of a program's services for its clients or community.

Outcomes measure:

- a) changes in clients' circumstances, conditions, and attitudes that result from the program's work, or
- b) changes in organizations and institutions that directly affect clients' lives.

Why they matter

Direct vs Indirect

Examples

Developing Outcomes

Telling the Story

Outcome measures are essential to program success because they allow us to:



Frame mission goals and objectives

Allocate resources and develop strategies

Evaluate success in achieving the program's mission and strategic goals

Fundraise and "tell the story" in the community.

Improve organizational performance and staff engagement

Goals and Objectives

Resource Allocation

Assessing success in achieving program goals & objectives:

Strategic goals (desired end results) for client services may include:

- Improve client health & safety
- Promote financial security
- Secure decent affordable housing
- Prevent reports to CPS

Outcomes data is essential to determining whether and how well your program is accomplishing your goals and objectives.

**Is the work being done actually aligned
with your goals and objectives?**

Assessing appropriate allocation of resources:

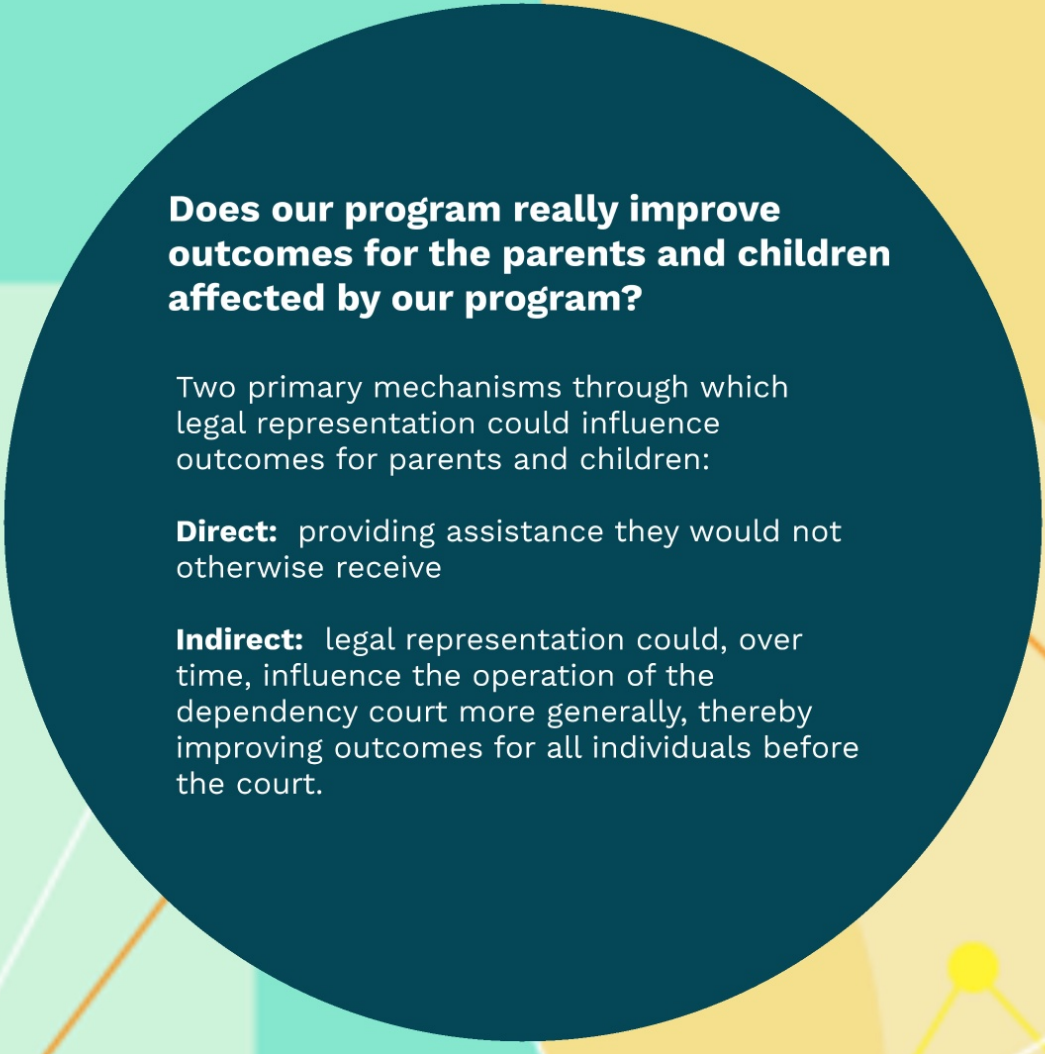
By allowing for a more complete understanding of the results and impact of your work, outcome data enables your program to assess the allocation of resources as between different areas of substantive law or among different services areas/regions.

Are we focusing our resources in the right areas given our goals and objectives?

Demonstrating the impact of investment on clients' lives

Outcomes data enables you to demonstrate the value of your work and convince funders that supporting your services is a good investment.

Anecdotes about how you helped specific clients can be very powerful. Outcomes data enables you to show that the benefit described is an example of the broad benefit you provide to the community.



Does our program really improve outcomes for the parents and children affected by our program?

Two primary mechanisms through which legal representation could influence outcomes for parents and children:

Direct: providing assistance they would not otherwise receive

Indirect: legal representation could, over time, influence the operation of the dependency court more generally, thereby improving outcomes for all individuals before the court.

Example Outcomes:

non-financial outcomes include:

- Evictions prevented or delayed
- Foreclosures prevented
- Divorces obtained
- Domestic violence protective orders obtained
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or other public benefits maintained or obtained

financial outcomes include:

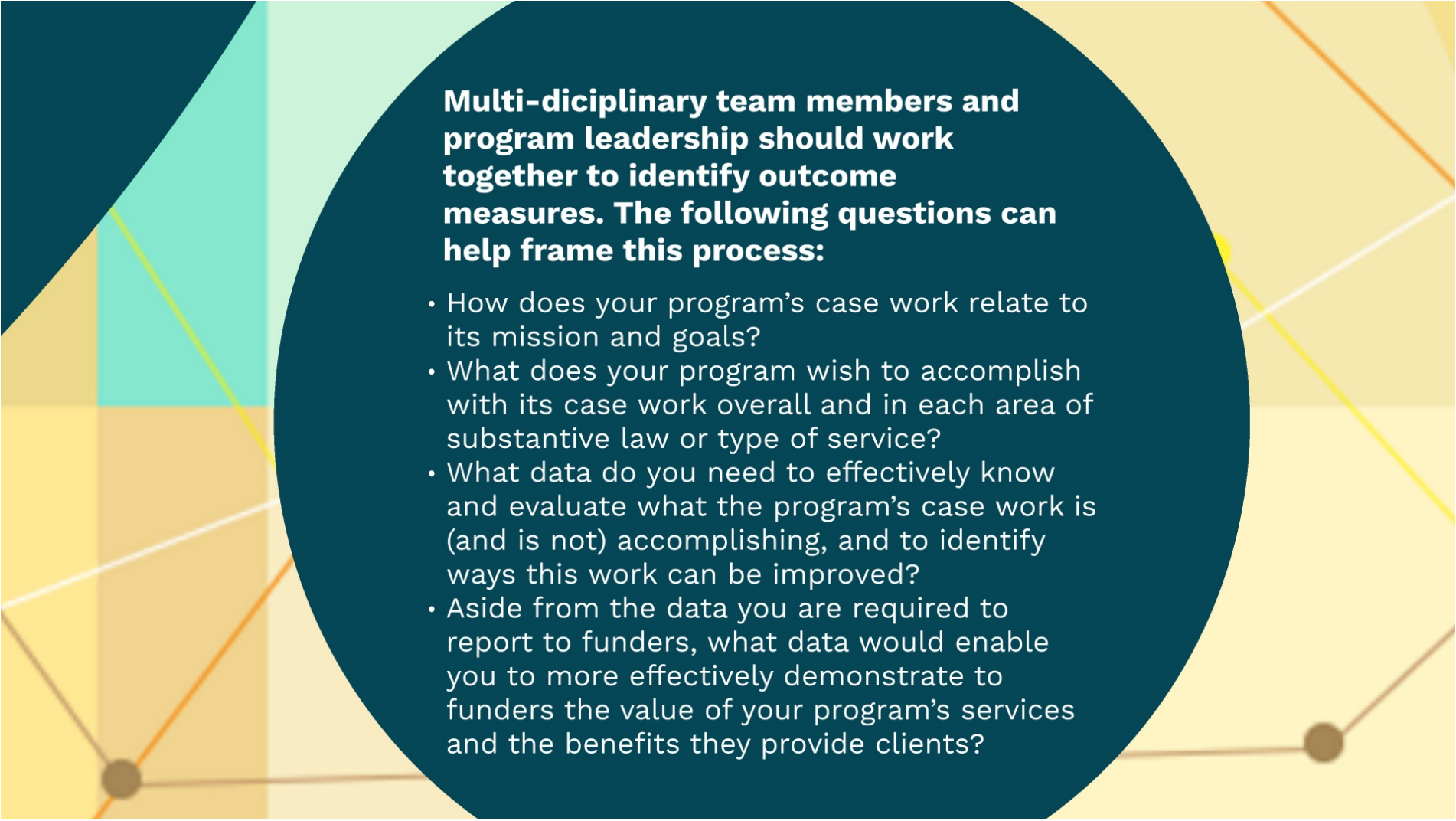
- The monetary value of benefits obtained
- The monthly amount of SNAP benefits
- The retroactive amount and monthly amounts of child or spousal support

**Ascend
Justice**

Sara Gilloon with Ascend Justice in Chicago was kind enough to share the outcomes measures they're using:


- Safety Plan Ended or Favorably Modified
- Investigation Unfounded
- Family members reunified
- Employment Access Restored
- Indicated Finding Expunged
- Results achieved? (yes, no, partially, or NA)

tracked via LegalServer CM software



Multi-disciplinary team members and program leadership should work together to identify outcome measures. The following questions can help frame this process:

- How does your program's case work relate to its mission and goals?
- What does your program wish to accomplish with its case work overall and in each area of substantive law or type of service?
- What data do you need to effectively know and evaluate what the program's case work is (and is not) accomplishing, and to identify ways this work can be improved?
- Aside from the data you are required to report to funders, what data would enable you to more effectively demonstrate to funders the value of your program's services and the benefits they provide clients?



Everything we've discussed thus far can be integrated into most case management systems.

There are a lot of different CM systems on the market with varying degrees of functionality depending on your budget and IT capabilities.

Consider grants and other funding opportunities

Current practices

The Importance of Follow-Up

Citations and Resources

**Referrals
received v.
accepted**

We recently asked cohort participants a few questions about their data collection practices. Results varied, but the survey showed that many programs are missing opportunities for important data collection.

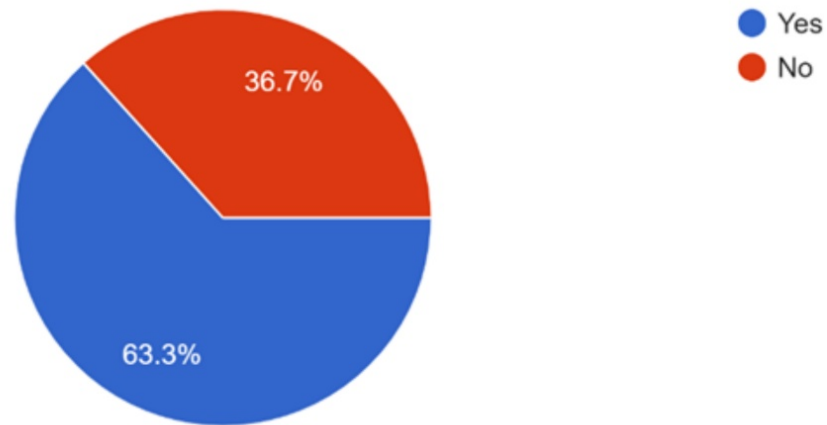
**Client
Feedback**

**Follow up
contact**

**Future CPS
Involvement**

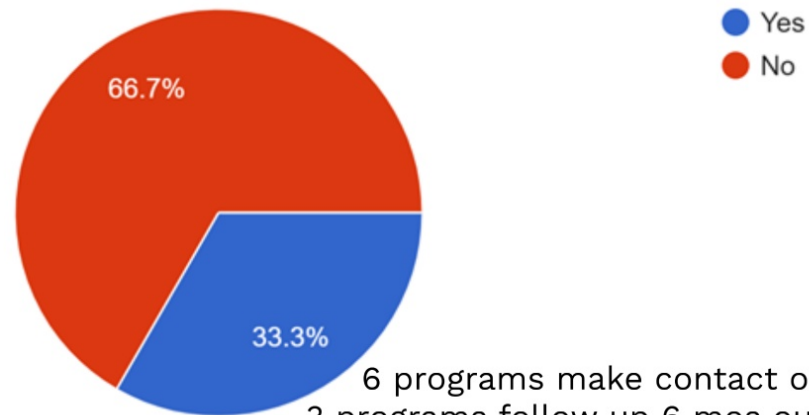
Does/will your program preform exit interviews or utilize forms, surveys or other means of gathering client feedback following termination of the representation?

30 responses



Does/will your program initiate follow-up contact with parents and families who have received services through your program?

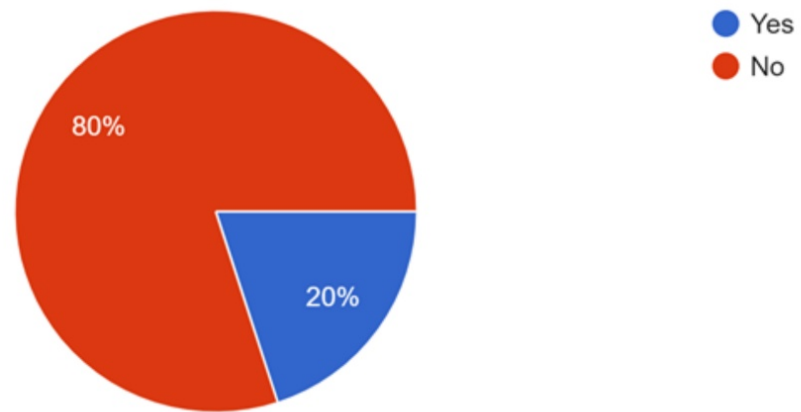
30 responses



6 programs make contact only "as needed"
3 programs follow up 6 mos out, and 1 repeats at 12
2 programs follow up if notified of subsequent CPS action

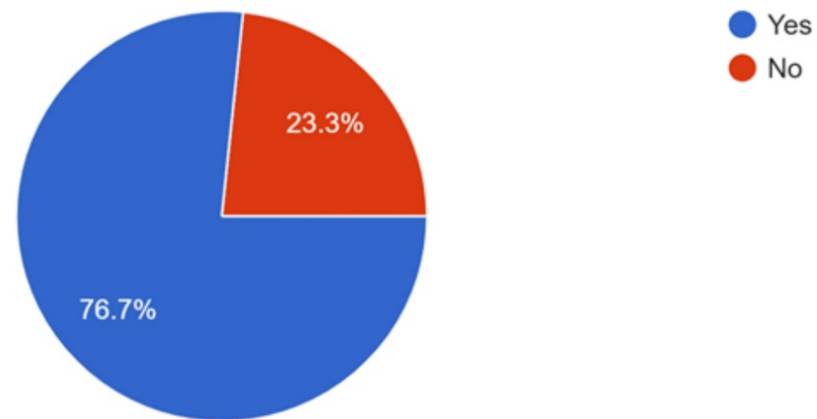
Does your program track future instances of family engagement with the child welfare system, e.g. new CPS investigations or re-entries into care?

30 responses



Does/will your program track total number of referrals received vs total number of referrals accepted?

30 responses



Follow-up contact with clients is vital, both as a means of ensuring successful outcomes and also as an evaluative tool.

Presents a great opportunity for utilizing law students, social work students, and even pro-bono attorneys where further legal services are needed.

see LSC Atlanta Legal Aid Enhanced Services Project casestudy in LSC Outcome Measures Toolkit

Legal Services Corporation, Outcomes Toolkit and Case Studies, available at <https://www.lsc.gov/grants-granteeresources/civil-legal-outcomes/case-studies>, accessed on Nov. 15 2022

LSC's site provides a wonderful list of additional resources, research papers, and presentations on this topic. You can find many of them already uploaded to the shared google drive.

Other resources are contained in the shared google drive :

c. Articles & References Sources >
Outcome Measures & Data Points