



**BAYLOR**  
UNIVERSITY

**McLennan County Parent Advocacy Program  
Interim Report  
June 2023**

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## PROGRESS TOWARD EVALUATION GOALS

Dr. Elissa Madden, Associate Professor, Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University, was contracted by the Texas Supreme Court Children's Commission in February 2022 to complete a program evaluation of the McLennan County Parent Advocacy Program (PAP). The focus of the evaluation is to determine whether PAP activities have been implemented as intended and to track available outcomes for the project. Results of the evaluation will allow us to answer the following questions about the program:

- How well the program has been working.
- The extent to which the program has been implemented as designed.
- Whether the program has been accessible and acceptable to those served by the program.
- Short-term outcomes of those served by the program.

Addressing these questions will help program staff understand potential barriers to service provision and the actions that are needed to improve services for clients.

### McLennan County Parent Advocacy Program Overview

The McLennan County Parent Advocacy Pilot Program (PAP) was launched in winter 2022 with initial funding provided by Casey Family Programs, a large private foundation focused on child welfare issues in the United States. PAP serves parents and caregivers who reside in McLennan County who have become involved with the child welfare system and who are in need of legal representation. The program is one of three active legal assistance programs in Texas that provides preventative legal services for parents and caregivers. PAP assists clients with legal issues such as providing parents with representation during active Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations, assisting non-offending parents or caregivers with custody modifications, helping obtain protective orders, as well as other family law matters. PAP staff include two contract family attorneys experienced in defending parents and caregivers involved with CPS and a social service worker who is a retired Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) supervisor with extensive knowledge of the CPS investigation process, DFPS's priorities, and local community resources. The program's website notes that the purpose of the program is "to help keep families together by providing legal services that families may need, but sometimes can't afford." A primary goal of the program is to prevent children entering the foster care system.

### Status of Program Evaluation Activities

Below is a summary of the program evaluation components included in the evaluation plan and brief summary of the evaluation team's current progress and future plans during the final months of the evaluation.

## Interviews

- **Program Stakeholder Interviews:** The evaluation team contracted to complete 15 qualitative interviews with stakeholders to assess the program and better understand the challenges and strengths of PAP. To date, the evaluation team has completed 19 interviews with PAP stakeholders, four more than planned. These individuals included 15 different representatives from the following areas:
  - Local court system
  - PAP program staff
  - Casey Family Programs staff
  - Care Portal staff
  - Church representatives who have partnered with Care Portal to meet PAP clients' needs
  - CPI/CPS caseworkers who have referred cases to the program.

Since submission of the last interim report in December 2022, we conducted interviews with Robin Houston and Michelle Cummings, the two attorneys who joined the PAP team and replaced Amanda Milam and Dan Stokes. Given the timing of the initial round of interviews with stakeholders, we also interviewed some key stakeholders a second time to gather their perspectives on the program's progress since their initial interviews in summer 2022. See the Appendix for select quotes from participant interviews with stakeholders.

- **Caregiver Interviews:** The evaluation team contracted to conduct 20 interviews with caregivers who have received legal services from the program. The inclusion criteria for these interviews includes: 1) clients must have received legal services from the program and 2) their legal case must be closed by PAP program staff. At the time of this report, program staff have closed 32 cases involving 31 unique clients.<sup>1</sup> Of the 31 clients who received services, 19 clients received legal assistance and social services assistance through the program, two just received legal services, and 10 clients accessed social services through the program but did not receive any legal assistance.<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for select quotes from participant interviews with parents and caregivers.

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<sup>1</sup> One client received assistance on two different occasions and had two cases closed.

<sup>2</sup> Nineteen (n=19) clients received legal services through the program; however, we were unable to interview two of the 20 clients who received legal services. One parent passed away shortly after their case was closed. Another parent's child experienced passed away within a month of accessing services through the program. As such, were unable to interview either of these clients for the evaluation.

Figure 1: Services received by parents and caregivers (n=31)



- As stated previously, the program's primary mission is to provide legal assistance for parents and caregivers involved with CPS; thus, interviews for this portion of the evaluation centered on clients who received legal services through the program. To date, we have completed interviews with six parents/caregivers. At this point in time, we have identified 11 other parents and caregivers with closed cases who have not yet been interviewed by the evaluation team but who currently qualify for this portion of the evaluation. Efforts to contact these parents and caregivers have begun and will continue throughout the summer and early fall. Interviews with caregivers will be ongoing until the evaluation team reaches 20 interviews or the data collection period ends (September 30, 2023) in preparation for the evaluation final report. Parents and caregivers who complete an interview are provided with a \$35 e-gift card from Walmart as an incentive and in appreciation of their time.

### Caregiver Survey

- Per the evaluation plan, we created a brief survey for parents and caregivers to provide us with details about their experience with the program. This survey assesses parents and caregivers' perceptions about the program and their beliefs about whether they achieved a positive resolution for their case. Prior to initiating the survey, we provided program staff with opportunities to review the survey and provide feedback. In addition, Tara Grigg Green, the Executive Director of the Foster Care Advocacy Center (FCAC) and a consultant on this project, was also asked to review the survey and provide feedback. The evaluation team incorporated all of the suggested edits into the final survey. The evaluation team recently launched the survey. To date, we have received six responses from clients who have received legal services through the program. Additional efforts are being made this summer to reach out to parents and caregivers to increase the response rate for this evaluation component. Parents and caregivers who

complete the survey are provided with a \$20 e-gift card from Walmart as an additional incentive to complete the survey.

When data collection efforts end, we will work with program staff to incorporate the survey into their normal case closure process so that they will have access information that they can use to improve the program on an ongoing basis.

### **Review of Program Policies and Procedures**

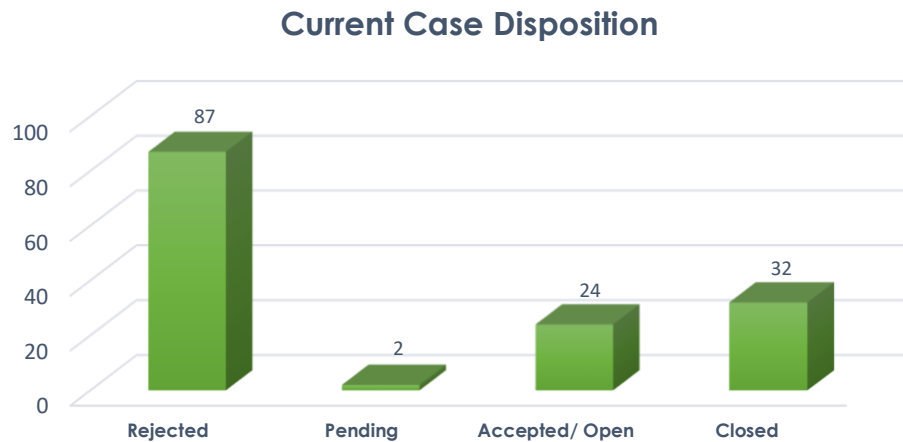
- The evaluation plan also includes a review of PAP's policies and procedures. Program staff report that written policies and procedures for the program are in progress. The evaluation team has recommended that the program develop organizational policies and procedures and current job descriptions for all staff positions. Other policies suggested include a written description of the intake and staffing process, the inclusion and exclusion criteria used by program staff to determine which cases they will accept or reject, and projected timelines for various case events, such as staffing cases and notifying clients of a decision. Our understanding is that Tara Green with FCAC has been contracted to work with program staff to document and formalize PAP's policies. The creation and formalization of policies is a need for all newly formed programs. As such, the delayed timeline for completing this task is not unexpected given the newness of the program and the limited program staff on the project. It is our assessment that current program staff are committed to developing practices and policies that will best serve their clients and provide the program with structure and consistency.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF REFERRED CASES**

The information presented below presents a brief snapshot of case characteristics and initial program outcomes as of June 23, 2023.

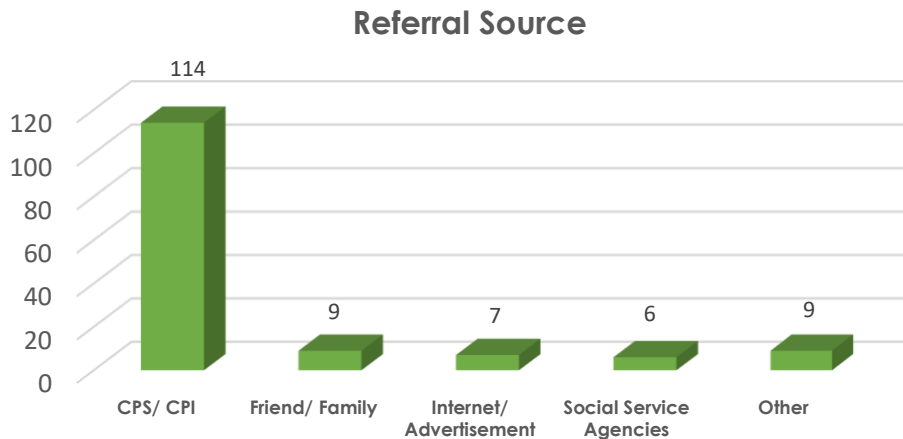
- **Current Case Disposition for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Thus far, the program has received 145 referrals. The current disposition for the 145 referrals includes 87 rejected cases, 2 pending cases, 24 open cases, and 32 closed cases.

Figure 1: Disposition of cases referred to the program (n=145)



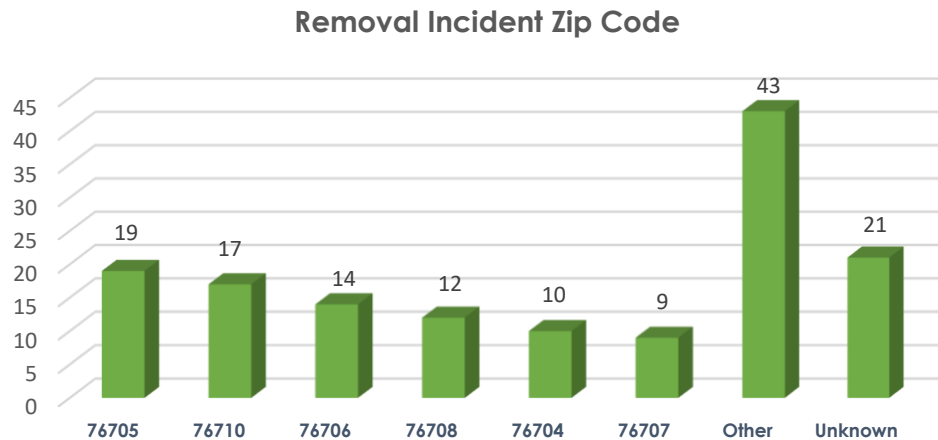
**Referral Sources for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Of the 145 cases referred to the program, a majority were referred by Child Protective Investigations or Child Protective Services (CPI/CPS) (n=114). The remaining 31 cases were referred by friends or family (n=9), an internet search or advertisement (n=7), or staff from other social services agencies in McLennan County (n=6). An additional nine (n=9) clients reported “Other” referral sources, such as other local attorneys, area schools, or the housing authority.

Figure 2: Referral source for cases referred to the program (n=145)



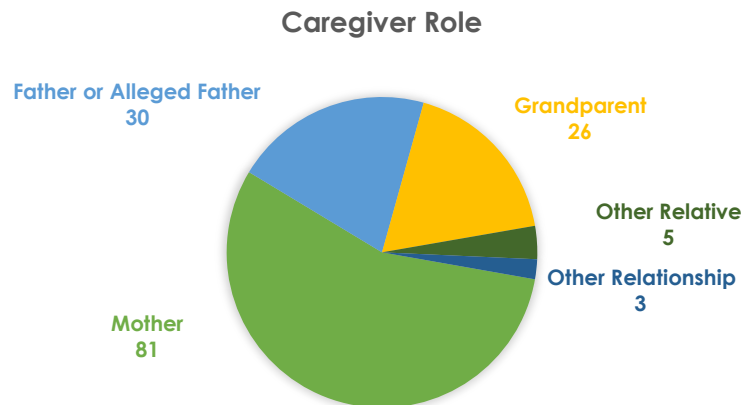
- Removal Incident Zip Code for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Clients referred to the program reported the incident that led to their involvement with CPI occurred in the following zip codes, in order of most frequent occurrence: 76705 (n=19), 76710 (n=17), 76706 (n=14; a target zip code), 76708 (n=12), 76704 (n=10; a target zip code), or 76707 (n=9). An additional 43 clients reported the incident that led to their involvement with CPI occurred in other zip codes within McLennan County or surrounding counties. The removal incident zip code was “Unknown” for 21 clients.

Figure 3: Removal incident zip codes (n=146)



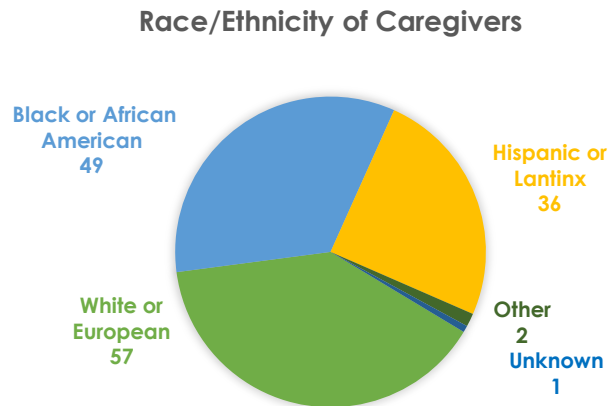
- Caregiver Role for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Clients primarily identified their caregiving role for the child(ren) as “mother” (n=81), “father or alleged father” (n=30), or “grandparent” (n=26). A small number of clients reported their relationship to the child(ren) as “other relative” (n=5) while the remaining clients reported their connection to the child(ren) as “other relationship” (n=3).

Figure 4: Caregiver role of clients referred to the program (n=146)



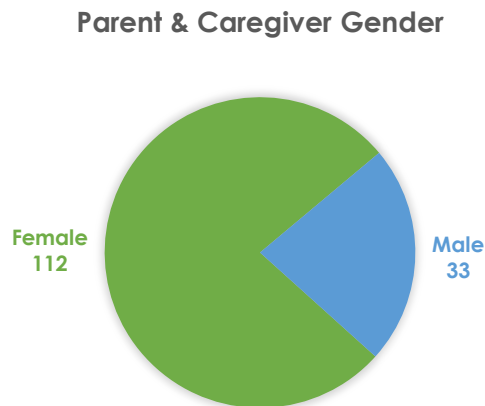
- Caregiver Race/Ethnicity for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Clients primarily identified their race/ethnicity as “White or European” (n=57), followed by “Black or African American” (n=49), “Hispanic or Latinx” (n=36), or “Other” (n=2). The race and ethnicity was “Unknown” for one (n=1) client.

Figure 5: Caregiver race/ethnicity of clients referred to the program (n=145)



- **Caregiver Gender for All Cases Referred to the Program** – A majority of the clients referred to the program identified their gender as female (n=112).

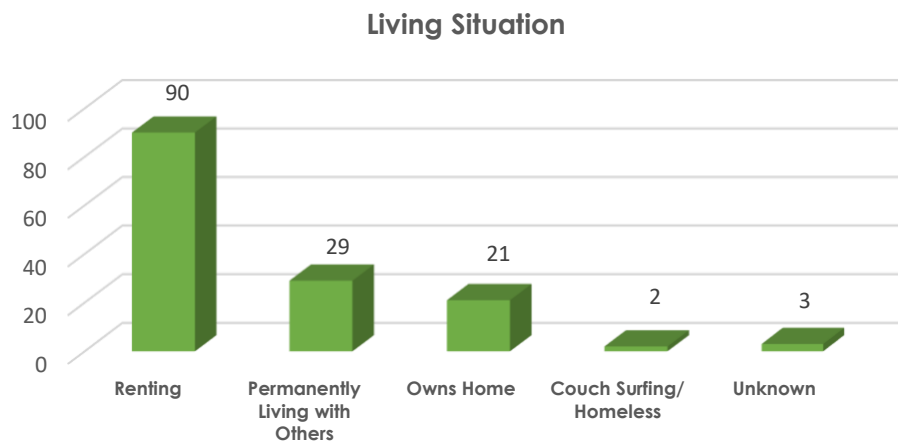
Figure 6: Gender of clients referred to the program (n=145)



- **Average Caregiver Age at Intake for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Caregivers referred to the program ranged between 20 and 76 years old. The mean age of caregivers referred to the program was 38.39 years old ( $SD= 12.48$ ).
- **Number of Children Involved for All Cases Referred to the Program** – A total of 278 children were reported as a party to the 145 cases referred to the program for which data is known (n=143; the number of children for two cases is “Unknown”). The mean number of children listed as a party to clients’ cases was 1.94 ( $SD= 1.32$ ), with a range of one to nine children.
- **Client Living Situation for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Most clients referred to the program reported renting a house or an apartment (n=90). The remaining 55 clients reported permanently living with friends, relatives, or others (n=29),

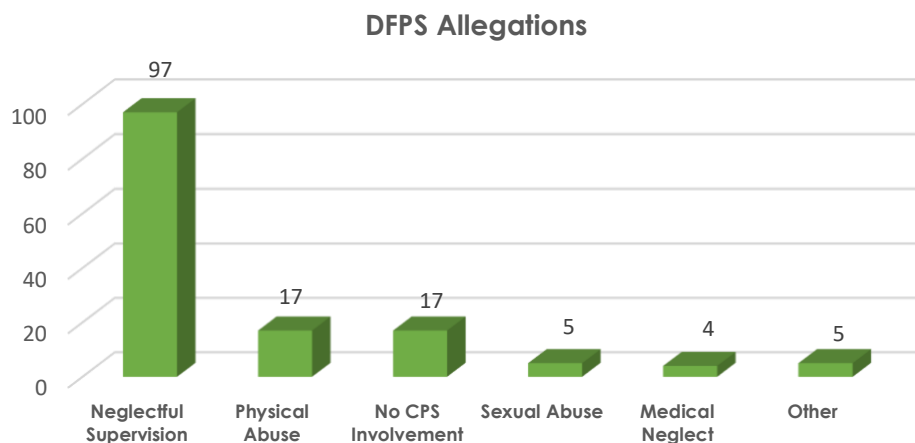
owning their own home (n=21), or couch surfing or homeless (n=2). Living situation information was “Unknown” for three (n=3) clients.

Figure 7: Living situation of clients referred to the program (n=145)



- DFPS Allegations for All Cases Referred to the Program** – A majority (n=97) of clients reported allegations of neglectful supervision of the children involved in their case. Seventeen (n=17) of the clients reported allegations of physical abuse of the child involved in their case and another 17 clients reported CPS was not currently involved in their case but nevertheless they had concerns that CPI/CPS would eventually intervene. In addition, five (n=5) cases involved allegations of sexual abuse, four (n=4) involved allegations of medical neglect, and five (n=5) involved “Other” issues.

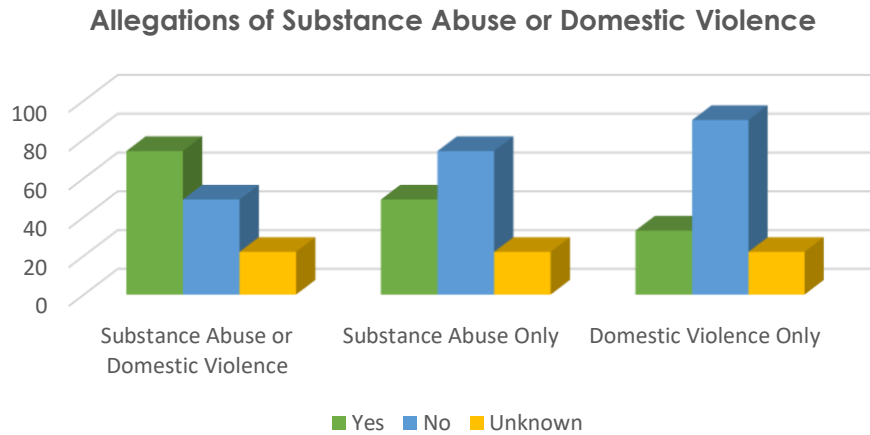
Figure 8: DFPS allegations for all cases referred to the program (n=145)



- Allegations of Substance Abuse or Domestic Violence for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Three-fourths (n=74) of the cases referred to the program involved allegations of substance abuse or domestic violence. Information was “Unknown” for 22 of the cases. Of the 74 cases in which substance abuse or domestic

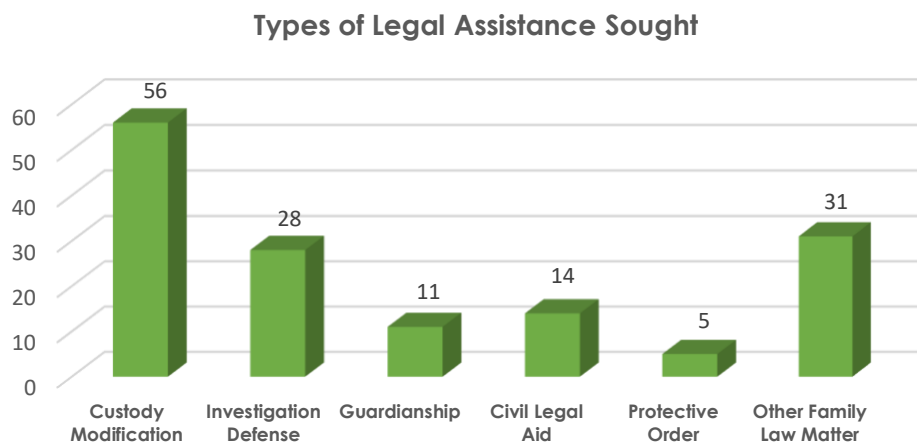
violence was alleged, 49 cases involved allegations of substance abuse and 33 involved allegations of domestic violence.

Figure 9: Allegations of substance abuse or domestic violence for all cases referred to the program (n=145)



- Types of Legal Assistance Sought for All Cases Referred to the Program** – Requests for assistance with a custody modification (n=56) was the most common type of legal assistance sought by clients referred to the program, followed by assistance with an investigation defense (n=28), assistance with guardianship (n=11), help with civil legal aid matters (n=14), or obtaining a protective order (n=5). Thirty-one (n=31) clients sought help with various other family law matters.

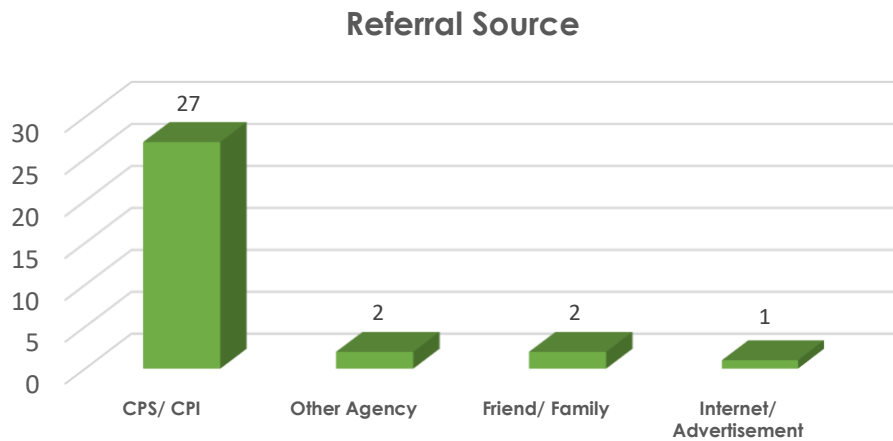
Figure 10: Types of legal assistance sought by clients referred to the program (n=145)



## CHARACTERISTICS OF CLOSED CASES

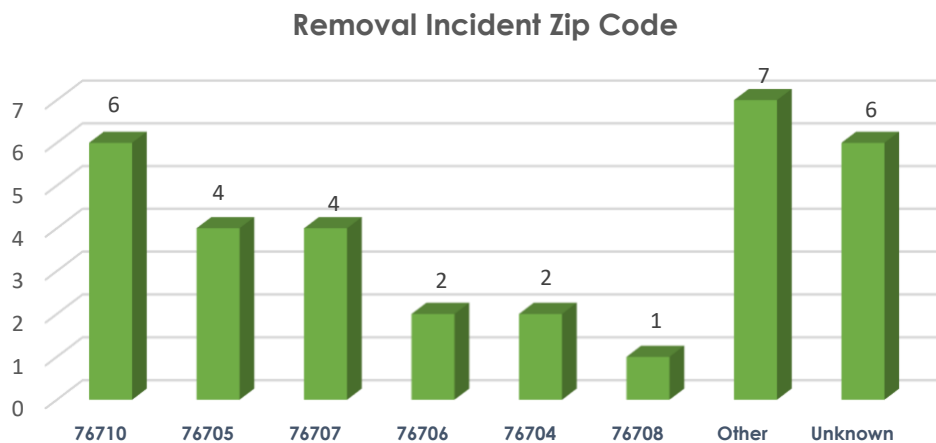
- **Referral Sources Closed Cases** – A majority of the cases for that have been closed were referred by CPI/CPS (n=27). The remaining five cases were referred by other social services agencies in Waco (n=2), friends or family (n=2), or an internet search or advertisement (n=1).

Figure 11: Referral source for closed cases (n=32)



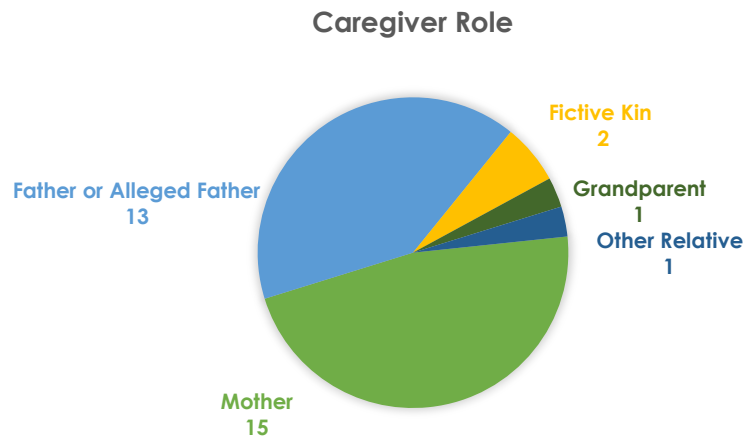
- **Removal Incident Zip Code for Closed Cases** – Clients with closed cases reported the incident that led to CPI's involvement in their case occurred in the following zip codes, in order of most frequent occurrence: 76710 (n=6), 76705 (n=4), 76707 (n=4), 76706 (n=2; a target zip code), 76704 (n=2; a target zip code), or 76708 (n=1). An additional seven (n=7) clients reported the removal incident for their case occurred in other zip codes within McLennan County. The removal incident zip code was "Unknown" for six (n=6) cases.

Figure 12: Removal incident zip codes for closed cases (n=32)



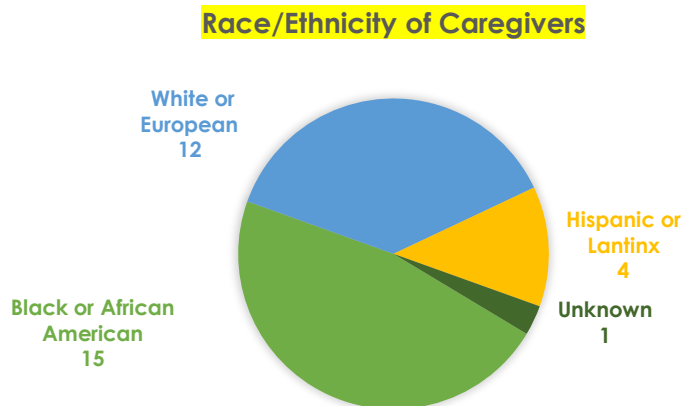
- Caregiver Role for Closed Cases** – Clients with closed cases primarily identified their caregiving role as mother (n=15), father or alleged father (n=13), and fictive kin (n=2). Finally, one (n=1) client identified their role as grandparent while another (n=1) client identified their other relative (n=1).

Figure 13: Caregiver role of clients with closed cases (n=32)



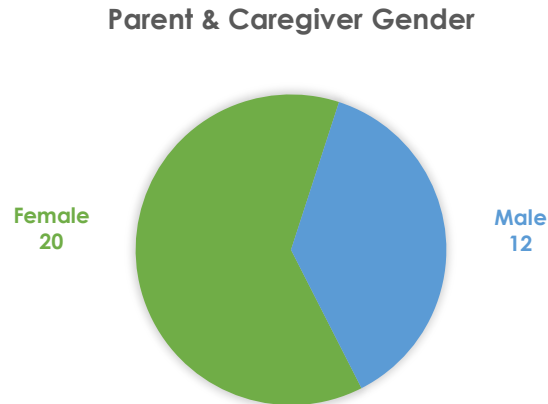
- Caregiver Race/Ethnicity for Closed Cases** – Clients with closed cases primarily identified their race/ethnicity as Black or African American (n=15), followed by White or European (n=12), or Hispanic or Latinx (n=4). The race and ethnicity was “Unknown” for one (n=1) client.

Figure 14: Race/ethnicity of clients with closed cases (n=32)



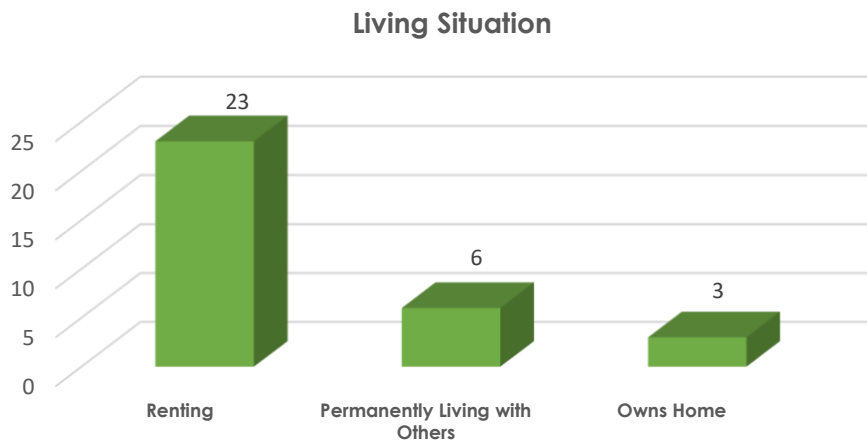
- **Caregiver Gender for Closed Cases** – A majority of the clients with closed cases identified their gender as female (n=20).

Figure 15: Gender of clients with closed cases (n=32)



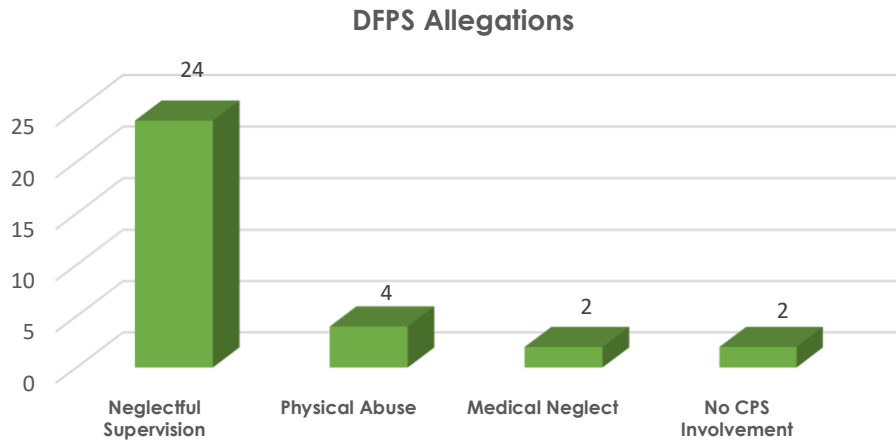
- **Average Caregiver Age at Intake for Closed Cases** – Caregivers with closed cases ranged between 20 and 72 years old. The mean age of caregivers with closed cases was 34.66 years old ( $SD= 9.67$ ).
- **Number of Children Involved for Closed Cases** – A total of 62 children were reported as a party to the 32 closed cases. The mean number of children listed as a party to clients' cases was 1.94 ( $SD= 1.48$ ), with a range of one to seven children.
- **Client Living Situation for Closed Cases** – Most clients with closed cases reported renting a house or an apartment (n=23). The remaining nine clients reported permanently living with friends, relatives, or others (n=6), or owning their own home (n=3).

Figure 16: Living situation of clients with closed cases (n=32)



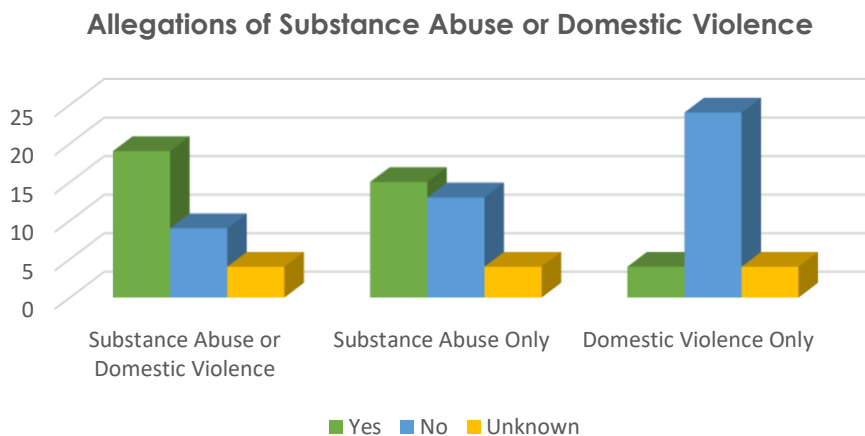
**DFPS Allegations for Closed Cases** – A majority (n=24) of clients with closed cases reported allegations of neglectful supervision of the children involved in their case. Four (n=4) clients reported allegations of physical abuse of the child involved in their case and two (n=5) cases involved allegations of medical neglect. Two (n=2) other clients reported CPS was not currently involved in their case.

Figure 17: DFPS allegations for closed cases (n=32)



- **Allegations of Substance Abuse or Domestic Violence for Closed Cases** – Nineteen (n=19) of the closed cases involved allegations of substance use or domestic violence. Of these 19 cases, 15 involved allegations of substance use and four (n=4) involved allegations of domestic violence. Information was “Unknown” for four (n=4) cases.

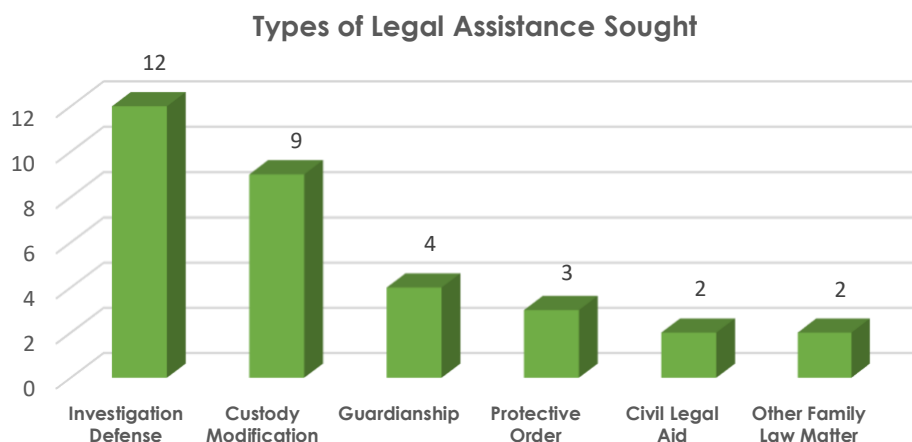
Figure 18: Allegations of substance abuse or domestic violence for closed cases (n=32)



- **Types of Assistance Sought for Closed Cases** – Help with an investigation defense (n=12) was the most common type of assistance sought by clients with closed

cases, followed by requests for a custody modification (n=9), assistance with guardianship (n=4), obtaining a protective order (n=3), or needing help with another civil legal aid matter (n=2). Two (n=2) clients sought help with other family law matters.

Figure 19: Types of legal assistance sought by clients with closed cases (n=32)



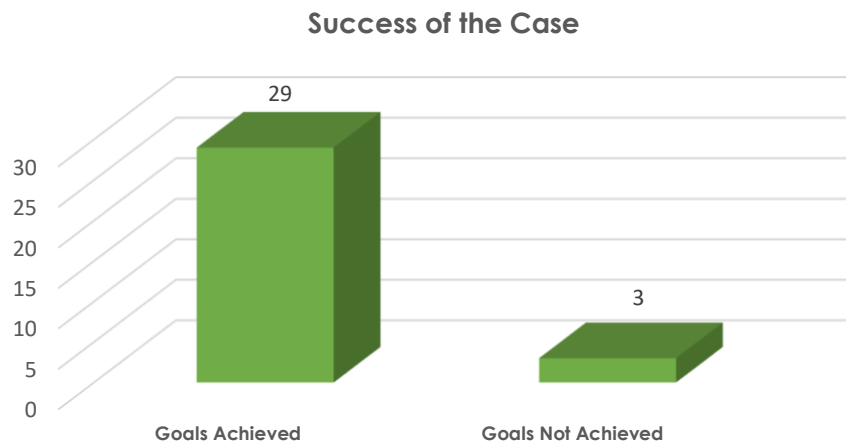
## SNAPSHOT OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES FOR CLOSED CASES

For the current report, two outcomes were examined for closed cases: 1) whether or not the case was successful and 2) the number of cases in which DFPS removal of the child(ren) was avoided.

- Whether or Not the Case was “Successful”** – During the closing process for each case, the attorney is prompted to answer a number of questions in LegalServer, the software the program uses to track cases. During this process, attorneys are prompted to answer a question about whether or not the case was “successful.” PAP attorneys make this determination based on whether the goals and needs articulated in the client’s contract were successfully achieved. Of the 32 closed cases, PAP attorneys reported 29 cases were “Successful.” For various reasons, some unrelated to the program, three (n=3) cases were deemed “Not Successful.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> One client was arrested and charged with assault of a family member while seeking services from PAP, another client passed away while services were being provided by a PAP attorney, and a third client stopped responding to program staffs’ contact attempts after a contract for representation had been signed.

Figure 20: Whether or not the closed case was successful (n=32)



- **Number of Cases in Which DFPS Removal was Avoided** – A limited number of case outcomes are entered and tracked by PAP attorneys at the end of each case during the case closure process. “Avoided DFPS Removal” is a case outcome that was listed for 30 of the 32 closed cases. For the two cases that did not have this outcome listed, we determined CPS was not involved in the clients’ cases; thus, the children in these two cases were not at risk of removal from their parents or caregivers.

## SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

### Successes

The program has experienced notable successes in the first 17 months that should be acknowledged and celebrated. These include:

- Local and state-wide stakeholders were able to quickly mobilize and work together to plan and implement a complex program model in just a few short months.
- Strong community and state support exists for the program. PAP staff have worked to gain the support of local and state-level CPI/CPS administrators, the McLennan County court system, local churches, and area social service agencies. This support has translated into client referrals and creative collaborations with different agencies, such as CarePortal, to meet clients’ complex legal and social service needs.
- Representative of the need for a child welfare-focused legal advocacy program in McLennan County, the program has experienced a consistent flow of referrals. CPI/CPS has referred the majority of cases thus far, which is further evidence of the trust that CPI/CPS caseworkers and administrators have in the program. In addition

to referrals by CPI/CPS, the program has received 31 referrals from other sources in McLennan County, including the Heart of Texas Behavioral Health Network (formerly Heart of Texas Region MHMR Center), Veteran's One Stop, McLennan County CASA, the Waco Housing Authority, Waco-area schools, and local attorneys.

- Program staff have been flexible and responsive to the community's legal needs. For example, program staff initially broadened the acceptance criteria for cases to include those in which a legal remedy is available that will allow the program staff to work to prevent the entry of children into the foster care system. As a result, program staff have been able to offer legal assistance to other types of caregivers, such as grandparents and other family members seeking to modify the custody arrangements of children currently in their care.
- While staff have remained flexible to the needs of McLennan County, program staff have also developed a better sense of the time and resources required by different types of cases. They now know what will be needed to achieve a positive outcome for the client in a timely manner. This knowledge has allowed staff to screen cases more effectively and focus their efforts on cases that are within the scope of the program and the resources staff are able to offer. This shift has been especially evident in the last 6 months of the program and has allowed staff to become more efficient in serving clients.
- Stakeholders have a strong desire to see the program succeed and be replicated in other communities. In addition, some stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation noted the program model might have application to other populations, such as caregivers or family members of youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Clients we have interviewed for the evaluation have voiced strong support for the program and for the program staff who assisted them with their cases. Several clients mentioned not knowing what they would have done without the program's assistance and expressed concerns that had the program not accepted their case, CPS would have removed their children from their care and/or would have required them to participate in services that would not be beneficial.

## Challenges

While the program has experienced significant growth in the last 17 months, the program has also encountered challenges. The program encountered several initial challenges reported in the December 2022 report that have subsequently been resolved. These early challenges included shifts in staff after the first 6 months of the program, the need to appoint a director or "lead counsel" for the program, as well as other inherent logistical challenges that commonly occur when initiating a new program. Currently, the following challenges remain and should be addressed to ensure the short and long-term sustainability of the program:

- The most pressing concern, is the urgent need to secure ongoing funding for the program. Funding for the program ends in December 2023. Funding is needed to ensure the program's future and capacity to continue serving families within McLennan County and see current cases through to closure.
- Another challenge relates to the program's current capacity to accept new cases. Simply put, the community's need for legal advocacy services exceeds the program's current capacity. The program's ability to accept new cases is limited by the part-time nature of the attorneys contracted for the program. Additional attorneys, either contracted or volunteer, would increase the program's capacity and ability to serve the community.
- Some of the cases program staff accepted in the first six months of the program were exceptionally complex have taken time and resources. After 17 months, the staff have a better sense of the types of cases with which they are most equipped to assist. That said, many clients present with complex legal needs that qualify for assistance through the program; however, they would require resources beyond what staff can currently dedicate. Additional legal staff or volunteers are needed to assist with more complex cases.

## SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to work toward sustainability of the program and consider local and other funding sources that can be accessed before funding for the program through Casey Family Programs discontinues in December 2023.
- Continue to examine the pros and cons of applying for 501(c)3 status—a process that may take some time and a designation that private funders may require.
- Continue to establish and formalize policies and procedures for the program. These should include the development of clear job descriptions for each contract position, as well as outline procedures and timelines for intake, staffing, and closing cases. In addition, policies should include targeted timeframes notifying caregivers of the program's decision. To aid in this process, program staff and/or FCAC should consider securing a copy of policies and procedures from an established child welfare legal advocacy program to use as a template.
- Determine if there are additional ways that the social services worker, Faye Stewart, can assist the program attorneys with legal tasks that might help expedite cases from the date of intake to the date of case closure.
- Continue to assess the need for a parent advocate or a paralegal assistant. If either is determined to be a need, work to determine if the program is in a position to onboard someone for this role in a volunteer or paid capacity.
- Continue to build traditional and nontraditional relationships with businesses and nonprofit organizations in the Waco area. Barbershops and salons are examples of

spaces and community gathering places that other social service programs have used to successfully increase community awareness. In addition, program staff should consider reaching out to KWBU-FM (Waco's National Public Radio affiliate), the Waco Tribune Herald, the Wacoan magazine, and other local media platforms to build community support for the program and to inform potential future donors of the program's services.

## CONCLUSION

In the first 17 months of the McLennan County Parent Advocacy Program, the program has experienced some challenges; however, staff have shown an ability to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the community. Many of the difficulties encountered thus far are common to new programs and will be resolved over time and by addressing concerns regarding the program's capacity and long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, the program has numerous strengths and fills a much-needed role within McLennan County. While the evaluation is in on-going, the information we have collected thus far from stakeholders and parents and caregivers suggests that there is shared consensus on the program's value and a strong desire for the program to succeed. With a sustainable funding structure, the program could be a lasting benefit to McLennan County and a model to other counties across the state.

## APPENDIX: PARTICIPANT QUOTES

The following section includes a selection of quotes from some of the evaluation interviews with parents and caregivers and stakeholders that we have conducted thus far (n=25). The evaluation team is in the process of validating the transcriptions from interviews conducted to date and will provide additional quotes and a full analysis of the interviews in the final report for the evaluation.

### Parents and Caregivers

Parent and caregiver responses when asked questions about their experience with the program:

*"[The program] was perfect...I've never had any kind of help like that. So, it was as simple as possible, really. I mean, easy. [The attorney] was easy to reach out, easy...like I could text. She was available pretty much when she said she was available. So, you know, all that good stuff."*

*"The program is perfect. Everybody did what they needed to do. Program-wise and attorney-wise, and everything like that was all perfect."*

*"[The attorney] knew what she was doing...She did what was best for my daughter; she did what was best for me."*

*"It was great. It was excellent. Like I have no bad things to say about how they handled everything. I mean, everything was on point. They were friendly. I didn't have any questions when it was time for me to end anything. I had no questions at all because before I could ask the question, they already had it, they already had it answered."*

*"I have a feeling—just again, this is coming again from my very first experience dealing with CPS—I have a feeling that they would have tried to take me to court and do the family planning meeting and all of that. But with my experience, they, they tend to do that. In my mind it's like...they're going to take me to court, they're going to terminate, they're going to try to terminate my parental rights, try to take my kids away."*

*"[The social service worker] has been nothing but a blessing and, well, the program has too."*

*"I was going through so much and I look at the things that [program staff] did overall. Whatever they didn't get a chance to do, I'm [still] grateful. I give them a five [out of five]. The whole organization."*

*[The program staff] communicated with me. I didn't have to call them and be like, 'Hey, what are y'all doing? Where we going on with this?'"*

*"We got a call, I want to say it was like, a few weeks before Christmas, or right before Thanksgiving or after Thanksgiving...The, investigative agent had come by, you know, did the home check with Faye, there. They did the home check and then as they were leaving Faye goes 'What do your kids want for Christmas? Please send me a Christmas list.' And we're like, 'Okay.' And that was even for not just the two kids that I have, but my husband has a daughter who lives with him. He has 50-50 custody with his ex-wife and [the program] actually had gifts for her as well. We got a call like a couple of days before Christmas saying, 'You need to go to the CPS office. They have something for you.' And we had completely forgotten about it. So, we were like, 'Oh, no, we caught another case, didn't we?' And then [they were] like, 'No, it's just Christmas gifts.' I never intend, like I never expect people to help out with anything like that...But just having somebody reach out and say, 'Hey, we want to do something nice for you.'"*

Parent and caregiver responses when asked what would have happened without the PAP support services:

*"I probably would have lost my joint managing custody of the kids...I definitely would have been lost. I wouldn't have known what to do. I could have, I could have been in big, big trouble and so would the kids. They wouldn't have their dad."*

*"Honestly I don't think it would have turned out how it turned out. I don't think I would have got the custody modified because of my ex-wife."*

*"Had I not had an attorney, it would have been probably a whole different outcome...I probably still would have been fighting [the investigation]. [CPS] would have made me take the parent classes and stuff like that."*

Parent and caregiver responses when asked what advice or recommendations they have for program staff:

*"I would say I would say don't quit this program. Whatever you're doing...I would say that I'm satisfied, yeah. Because, you know, average people can't afford, you know, like me...There's not a lot of guys out there that have like full custody of their kids. So, it's like, we need the help, you know?"*

*"[Do] not cut this program off, especially if you get the word out there and let people know about it and how to use it. It's extremely helpful. I mean, I wouldn't have what I have now, I wouldn't have my family, my daughter, you know, in a better situation...without [the program]."*

*"Get more lawyers involved...Yes, getting more of the family law practice lawyers involved [in the program], because I know it's a case when it's like one lawyer and they're dealing with that [case], plus other cases that are actually people are paying them."*

*"When they say [they help] families...there needs to be more in the pamphlet that [they] gave me. [The program pamphlet] should have been more specified of what they do...it just should have been more detailed, but [Ms. Stewart] explained it to me. I give them five [out of five] because they really were a blessing."*

*"Overall, I think no one really, it seemed like no one knows about the program...it seems like it is just hidden...because no one else that I knew that had a CPS case knew anything about the organization."*

*"[Investigators] should be given a card for the program [to hand out to clients] because I guess, [CPS] has had a lot of new [workers] and I guess they come in already with judgment instead of saying 'what is going on in the home?'...Yeah, they need to come with your cards... I knew [the PAP program] had nothing to do with CPS. But I'm telling you, I don't care if they don't have anything to do with CPS. CPS needs to carry your cards."*

*"More advertising [is needed]. Because a lot of people who have CPS cases don't know about the program. And if I wouldn't have been a foster parent, I probably wouldn't have even known about the program."*

Parent response when asked about their initial impression of the program and mission:

*"My initial thought was, 'Awesome, there actually is a place where those that can't actually afford to even pay the retainer fees for lawyers.' They actually care. They're not like, not all of them are out for money. And we can reach out again [for help]. It's just getting legal help, you know, it's just that security knowing, 'Hey, there is a group out there we can call. I can get in contact with. They can help.'"*

Comment by a parent who was referred by the program to CarePortal and received assistance:

*"The Parent Advocacy [program] helped because at the time when we used them, my son had like, just like a mattress on the floor. They helped get him a brand-new bed. And they dropped off some food, like all in the same night...[They] brought over a completely brand-new bed frame, completely brand-new mattress, like still in the plastic. And those are things that I couldn't afford."*

## Program Stakeholders

Stakeholder responses when asked about the purpose of the Parent Advocacy Program and who the program is designed to serve:

*"The foundational purpose of the program is to keep kids from being removed by the state and coming into the care of the state through a DFPS removal...Many kids that might be facing removal have parents or guardians that can't go hire lawyers. So, by virtue of the fact they're not able to secure their own legal services, they can't really start a case to come in and maybe give conservatorship or share conservatorship... Consequently, those cases wind up lingering and lingering until the State has to get involved and remove those kids because of some sort of abuse or neglect. This [program] makes it possible for those individuals to have legal representation to circumvent the removal process through DFPS."*

*"[PAP is for] those families who are not able to get custody because they can't afford [an attorney] and the children are placed in their home, and they need to keep these kids safe. I think the program steps in and helps those families get custody [and] provide other services. If there's a restraining order that is needed, instead of going through the CPS route—which could take up to a year, sometimes a year and a half— to get permanency. [The program can] provide permanency and safety faster and the Department and keep the children with those families who otherwise may not have been approved by CPS."*

*"What [the program is] trying to do is to provide legal services for parents who need pre-petition work because of involvement in CPS or potential involvement in CPS. So, [staff are] trying to perform social services and legal work for them so that they can remain outside of the CPS system and so that their children can remain with them or in the home or with a family member."*

Stakeholder responses when asked what a "good" client outcome looks like:

*"A good client outcome looks like at the at the end of the case that the children are safe. The children are with the most appropriate caregiver. Services that are needed to assist the family in meeting the children's needs have been provided by many other community resources and overall, the family is together and everything has been [provided] to meet their needs."*

*"A good client outcome would be, essentially a client contacting the program, getting a timely response, timely referral for service, if that's what's needed, or timely legal representation in whatever matter. I mean, at the end of day, [the program] can't control the outcome of a court hearing, but in that case, as long as the family has what they need and can move forward with most of the things they want in a legal sense, because very rarely do [families] end up with everything that [they] want. And then keeping kids safe and families together."*

Response from a stakeholder who had prior experience working for CPS when asked about their initial impression of the program and mission:

*"I felt like we needed [the program]. I mean, I've been on the other side of CPS and I'm saying to myself, 'I worked for the Department, but I don't agree with everything they've always done.' So, to have a program like this, to fight for the parents—it was a great idea."*

Responses from other stakeholders when asked about their initial impression of the program and mission:

*"I thought it was a really great idea when I was told about it. That just basically where you've got a lot of people who are in a situation with CPS and an investigation who just, you know, they don't understand what their rights are. They don't understand what they can say or not say to CPS. They don't understand when they can tell them not to be in their house, what things they actually have to sign versus what things are optional. Just like the whole idea of they have a right to an attorney during an investigation, but no means of getting an attorney during an investigation because generally speaking, you're talking about people who don't have the means to hire an attorney to help them out with a CPS investigation. So, we don't really have anything like that in McLennan County. We've got, we've got Legal Aid Services but they usually have a pretty deep waiting list. And these are people who, if they are an investigation defense situation, they need somebody pretty quickly who can get in and give them advice and help them negotiate with the Department."*

*"[The program] didn't really sound like something I would use, but it's something that I use all the time now. I wish that they had more resources because they just don't have enough people like they're really behind because it's such a great program and it's someone that we always refer our clients to. So, I really enjoy the program, but I didn't think I would use it initially. I'm like, 'that is not going to have anything to do with any of my clients.' But probably shortly after it launched, I referred like three people right off the bat. So, it has become something that I use all the time now."*

Response from stakeholders about their experience with the program as referral sources:

*"It has met my expectations. I mean, I do wish it was a little bit faster, but as far as everything else goes, I get it. [The program] helps me get my case closed. It helped me and it helped this family to where that child can remain in the home with [their] grandparents. Now, it's up to the family to ensure that they follow [through] because CPS will come right back...So I think having this program, it alleviates a lot of stress on [CPS] workers as well, because it's almost like we're putting some of the work off on them, so it takes a little bit off of our plate and we just have to kind of follow up and make sure it's done then we can document and close [the case]. But yeah, it's definitely met my expectations..."*

*"I find [the program] very advantageous for families because now they can have a group that is there to support them through the process of working with CPS. Not only that, but it is headed up by somebody who has worked with CPS before. So, they have a former supervisor that knows the policies and all of that working with them to provide support. So, a lot of parents get very nervous when they have a CPS case. A program like this seems to put them at ease whenever [CPS is] able to hook up with [the program] and get them that support."*

*"What has worked well is how quickly I get a response and how quickly the family hears back. I think [families] like this as well, because there's so many programs right now that we'll refer parents over to that have long wait times. And the Parent Advocacy Program has been a very quick, quick response kind of solution at this time."*

Stakeholder responses when asked about the strengths of the program:

*"The strengths are that we have been able to serve parents, grandparents, caregivers. And we have been able to provide services, legal services to people who are not parents, who are grandparents, who are caregivers...and provide safety to those children."*

*"[The PAP social services worker] is incredibly knowledgeable about the Department, and she's good at talking to people. She is a well-known entity and so I think the Department folks trust that she's going to do right by them in a kind of weird way, even though that's not necessarily [PAP's] mission. But it's a good thing to have that kind of a working relationship with them. And by and large, the families that I've seen, especially the zip codes that we want to reach, have responded well to her."*

*"[Program staff] work very, very well together and while they're still kind of figuring out their roles and their responsibilities, I do think that the team itself is very cohesive. They communicate well. They interact with each other...they have a lot of respect in their community. I do think it's really important for projects like this, for it to be people from the community trying to make change within their own community. I think you get a lot more respect, a lot more buy-in. So, I think that they're very highly regarded in their community, and that has made it really helpful."*

*"I think the communication is well. Communication between myself and the attorney about our expectations and like, 'hey if this doesn't happen, you know, we're going to be looking at a removal' kind of thing. And same thing with Ms. Faye. I communicate a little bit more with Ms. Faye than I do with the attorneys, but I think that's working well. I think we all work together well in order to have the same goal. They know what a removal is, the attorney knows what a removal is, so they want to prevent it just as much as we do. It's hard work. It's a lot of paperwork. It's not something we want to do. But at the same time, we can't continue to allow a child to remain in an unsafe situation because that's on me. So, I really like the communication and their willingness to help clients."*

*“Because [a McLennan County judge] recommended the lawyers. I think we have good, strong lawyers that [the County has] confidence in, and I think that's a strength. I think our social worker, Faye, has been a real strength to the program because she's not only well-respected within the ranks of the CPS, but she goes out in the community...she's drawing people in.”*

Stakeholder responses that address some of the current and past challenges experienced by the program:

*“One of the biggest challenges [the program has] now is kind of figuring out what to do with the cases that were already accepted that are very, very complex. And I think that's a big thing. That's a big challenge that [the program has] right now.”*

*“[Increasing referrals] is something that everyone struggles with in all sorts of communities, everywhere. So, I think you really need someone to physically go into the communities and show up and meet the school counselors, meet the pastor, meet the whoever. And that is a lot of man hours and that is time, especially if they're feeling like they're at caseload capacity. The idea of taking time away from casework to go do this resource development work feels very overwhelming.”*

*“[Establishing legal advocacy programs] statewide is a challenging prospect. Every county has different stakeholders. Every county has different political dynamics and social dynamics that make it hard to launch a program like this. Then you may just have five or six great counties that would be ideal for this. But you don't have lawyers that are interested in participating. So, it just varies. I think it's hard to replicate this in all counties. I hope that [McLennan County] will have a model that's easy to replicate in mid-size counties and smaller counties.”*

*“We don't know what other cases are out there that aren't calling. But it just seems like knowing what we know about CPS and about the calls that come in to the hotline, it just seems like there's cases out there that we are missing. I find it hard to believe that there's not some families out there that are under investigation, that we couldn't do a whole lot of good for that we don't know about.”*

Stakeholder responses when asked how the program could be strengthened:

*“An attorney. [Hiring] an additional attorney who's able to respond and be a part of the program, because I know in Harris County, their attorneys, this is all that they do. [PAP] attorneys have other jobs and they have other duties.”*

*“If the program had the capacity for a paralegal, that would be ideal...I don't think we necessarily need to have a hired parent advocate for the program. But I think a paralegal would be really helpful, even a part-time paralegal.”*

*“I think having a parent advocate would be great. I know that we haven't really had the means to do that.”*

*"It is kind of hard to do this [work] on a part-time basis. I mean, I don't think it's impossible, but it's just hard to do the client services portion and have somebody running it and all those kinds of things."*

*"I mean, I think the program is amazing. I really am so happy that we have it. But I do think that maybe they need more help because there's like three of them, but there's 30 [investigators] referring, combined with how many people are on their caseload. So, it adds up so fast."*

*"The only thing I would say would be strengthened is possibly having like an online form referral. That's the only change that I would suggest."*

Stakeholder responses when asked about the future of the program:

*"I hope it expands. I hope it expands so that we can really make some changes in family's lives. I hope we can keep families together and [help] with disproportionality and these kids coming into foster care and not being with their with their parent or family. [I hope] that this program can help and resolve some of those issues."*

*"We still have some trailing cases that we are involved in where the caregiver needs the legal services, but the parents aren't necessarily on board. And frankly, I kind of think that's a little bit off the mission trail. But we have some cases from the early days still that are kind of open that I think are kind of more in that direction. And I don't think it's invalid. I mean, I think those people absolutely need services, but I think probably this program is best served if it's actually doing direct services to parents."*

*"I think one of the things we need to concentrate on going forward is we really need to concentrate on investigation defense and helping people who are really having that direct contact with CPS where there is a threat of removal or threat of something else going on and just provide legal services to them when they're in the middle of the investigation. And our secondary focus should be helping non-offending parents get some sort of legal remedy if they don't have custody or they don't have, you know, full custody or whatever their situation is."*

*"I think [the program's] really important and critical. There's a hole [with legal services] and we've got people who have the right to have these kinds of services and have the right to not just have CPS kind of run ramshod over them, which they do in lots of situations. We just don't have any people who are representing parents in those kinds of capacities. And I just hope [the program] gets the word out where it's not just CPS referring things but where people actually know about it so that they are calling and trying to get some help."*

*"I hope that [the program] can get into some of the things that other programs do, like evictions and things like that. Now [the program] doesn't have the capacity to do any of that right now. But sometimes, you know, families just need help"*

navigating other legal systems in order to keep themselves clear of the Department."

"I think that ultimately, I think it would be helpful to find a way to bring more kids and families into this project that are dually involved youth that have cases pending in juvenile [court]. I think that that's one of the real areas of growth the program could have. I don't know that that's why it was created originally, but I know that there are a lot of kids that have been charged with crimes, and for whatever reason, the families are not in a position to have them back home or in some cases they don't want them back home. But there are other fictive kin or other relatives that they could be placed with... I don't know if that's necessarily part of the original vision that other folks had, but I think that's an area of growth in the next 24 to 36 months..."

"What I worry will happen, is that we'll get to the end of the program, have this great program and no one to fund it or sustain it, or no functional way to sustain it. And then it just feels like a sad, sad loss to the community and the state. So, I'm really, really, hopeful that that is something that's able to happen and that we can replicate in other places...The cost benefit analysis for counties who have to pay for legal by the family code have to pay for legal fees for post-petition stuff, you're saving them like 20 plus thousand dollars every time you [represent a client]."

Other miscellaneous quotes from stakeholders:

"I think the idea of having a social worker or a social services person on the ground doing the work initially helping them out is a great model. I think that's very helpful because they they're going to know kind of, if there's something you can do short of legal services, they're going to have that covered if, and they're kind of going to know what direction they think the case is going because they've got experience doing those things."

"There's a huge need for [these] services for families. Also, when the families get confronted with CPS, they are often very defensive. They don't understand, they are frustrated, angry, and their willingness to cooperate with the Department sometimes is diminished. And having those families have the ability to have an attorney that can kind of help them through that from the very beginning...Sometimes parents wind up in [court] just because they don't cooperate with the Department. Maybe nothing's even really wrong, but they have such a negative view of the Department or a negative history with the Department that their own frustration with the Department causes the Department to have more concerns...So, I think that those folks that have the benefit of an attorney from the very [beginning], before it comes to court, is so important for the parents or families."

"CPS, you know, it's pretty scary. Kind of bizarre. Scary...if you don't know what you're doing, you can get, I mean, you can get in trouble. Your kids can be taken from you. There's a lot of different things that can happen and you have no idea

*why or how, what. And with the Parent Advocacy Program it really, really defends people, defends parents, helps parents, and shows everybody involved how they can use the community to get out of the pickle they're in and figure stuff out. And that advocacy is, it's rare and it's so important."*

*"I think this type of program plays a huge role in changing the way we help families around the state, and I just think we have to remain committed to being critical of ourselves and trying to evaluate those things that we can do better."*