



CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER

# BREAKING THE FOSTER CARE CYCLE

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Advocacy for Former Foster Youth  
at Risk of Child Welfare Involvement

OCTOBER 2021



**Children's Law Center  
of California**

*Excellence In Advocacy*

The within proposal details CLC's plans to expand beyond its current representation of youth under the jurisdiction of the dependency court to support and advocate for former clients with young children of their own at imminent risk of involvement with the child welfare system.

With philanthropic support, CLC will build from its successful prevention/pre-filing model of serving current foster youth to assisting our former clients who are now parenting children to break the generational cycle of foster care/child welfare involvement.



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## Background

### Who We Are

Children's Law Center of California (CLC) is a nonprofit, public interest law firm providing legal representation for tens of thousands of children and youth impacted by abuse and neglect. We provide an unparalleled level of expertise in and out of the courtroom. CLC's highly skilled, passionate, and committed attorneys, investigators, and support staff work to ensure the well-being and future success of our clients through a multi-disciplinary, independent, and informed approach to advocacy. We are a powerful voice for our clients fighting for family reunification, permanence, educational opportunity, health and mental health services, self-sufficiency, and overall well-being.



**+100,000**

Annual court appearances by CLC attorneys to advocate on behalf of our young clients



**+35,000**

Youth represented in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer Counties each year



**+13,000**

Children reunified with family or adopted each year



**+1,000**

Holiday wishes granted for CLC clients during our annual Adopt-a-Family event



**+500**

Attorneys, social work investigators, paralegals, and other professional staff



**+60**

Child Welfare Law Specialists on staff



**+50**

Pieces of child welfare legislation sponsored since 2002



**31**

31 Years of tireless advocacy for children in foster care

CLC is the largest children's legal services organization in the nation, advocating for over 33,000 children and youth in the Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer County foster care systems. Our staff of over 500 lawyers, social work investigators, peer advocates and support staff work to ensure that all of California's children to have the opportunity to succeed through direct legal representation and multidisciplinary advocacy.

CLC offers specialized programming and expertise in the areas of education; mental health; immigration; dual jurisdiction youth (foster youth with delinquency system involvement); reproductive health; Transition-Age Youth (TAY); Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC); and Expectant and Parenting Youth (EPY) and engages in targeted system reform efforts.

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# Opportunity: Support Former Foster Youth and Their Young Families to Prevent the Next Generation of Child Welfare Involvement

## The Problem

The data supports what we as practitioners have long known from decades of experience advocating for children and youth in the child welfare system: a young person's previous involvement with the system places them at higher risk of their own family's contact with child welfare in the future. CLC's project is focused on breaking this cycle.

### *Data: Intergenerational Child Welfare Involvement*

The Children's Data Network study "*California's Most Vulnerable Parents: When Maltreated Children have Children*" demonstrated that:

- Multi-generational involvement with Child Protective Services is not uncommon;
- A teen mother's history of alleged or substantiated maltreatment emerged as a strong and significant **predictor of offspring maltreatment**;
- By age 5, children born to teen mothers who were victims of maltreatment were **abused and neglected at twice the rate** of other children;
- A maternal history of maltreatment is the **single strongest predictor** of allegations of offspring maltreatment by age 5; and
- Among girls who had been in foster care at age 17, **more than 25 percent had given birth** at least once before age 20. <sup>1</sup>

Indeed, over the last 30 years, most studies on parenthood among transition-aged foster youth report that **foster youth are more likely than their peers to parent a child at a young age**.<sup>2</sup> The Midwest Study, among the first longitudinal studies to examine parenthood among young adults who had been in foster care in their late teens and early 20s, found that:

- Two-thirds of females and almost half of males had at least one living child at age 23 or 24; and
- Females (67%) and males (44%) in the Midwest Study were more than twice as likely as their same-aged female (30%) and male (18%) counterparts to have had at least one living child. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Putnam-Hornstein, Cederbaum, King, and Needell, *California's Most Vulnerable Parents: When Maltreated Children have Children* (2013), available at [http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/PriorityAreas/FosterYouth/Downloads/Vulnerable\\_Parents\\_Full\\_Report\\_11-11-13.pdf](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/PriorityAreas/FosterYouth/Downloads/Vulnerable_Parents_Full_Report_11-11-13.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Eastman, Palmer, and Ahn, *Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Care and Their Children: A Literature Review* (2019); Svoboda, Shaw, Barth, and Bright, *Pregnancy and parenting among youth in foster care: A review*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, (2012) Volume 34, Issue 5, Pages 867-875.

<sup>3</sup> Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, and Rapp, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24*, (2010).

An additional longitudinal study which followed a cohort of children over a 30-year period concluded that **parents maltreated as children were more likely to have child welfare involvement with their own children**. Notably, the study found that surveillance may play a key role in this phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

In serving current foster youth under dependency jurisdiction, CLC has seen overwhelming success when we can assist clients such that they are well prepared to parent and keep their children safe. Positive outcomes that have prevented the filing of a petition to separate the family have ranged from stabilizing placements for the youth and baby, obtaining restraining orders on clients' behalf in domestic violence situations, and ensuring clients' consistency in attending programs and mental health services. In one case, a threatened allegation of general neglect was deterred simply by the fact that the client is receiving CLC's pre-filing support, thereby demonstrating that the client has a stable source of support as they embark on their parenting journey.

Instead of becoming another statistic of intergenerational child welfare involvement, former foster youth - often just out of the system and struggling to make it on their own - deserve the same opportunity to succeed in parenting their babies.

## The Solution

### *Success of Programs in other Jurisdictions Demonstrate Potential Positive Impact of Proposed Project Model*

While the model of intervening with young families prior to child welfare involvement is still an emerging practice, early research shows it can play a crucial role in reducing entries into foster care.

One particularly germane study of a Michigan pilot program implementing a pre-court involvement model of representation for families at risk of entering the child welfare system shows significant and promising results. The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA) serves families at risk of child welfare involvement by utilizing a multidisciplinary approach of legal representation. Parents are represented by a team of an attorney, a social worker, and a parent advocate working together on a host of issues relevant to the family's circumstances, including landlord-tenant, domestic violence, and child custody.

Over a three-year pilot period implementing this innovative approach, CFA successfully closed 100% of their clients' cases without foster care placement; 110 children were kept out of the system, at a projected cost savings to the state of over \$1.3 million. This type of model and the success shown in such a short period of evaluation demonstrates the tremendous potential that collaborative, early legal advocacy has with regard to keeping families together and keeping children from entering foster care altogether (Detroit Center for Family Advocacy Pilot Evaluation Report 7/2009-6/2012, University of Michigan Law School, 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> Widom, Czaja, and DuMont, "Intergenerational transmission of child abuse and neglect: Real or detection bias?" (2015) National Library of Medicine - Science.

## CLC's Prevention Model

CLC's recent success in supporting and advocating for expectant and parenting youth in foster care is a prototype for our proposed new program providing similar support for former clients in local communities.

Our plan is to expand our current pre-filing intervention service model to support former clients no longer under dependency court jurisdiction. Within this new framework, our advocacy team will serve community members referred to us through other service providers, by contacting their former attorney or peer advocate, or through what will be our extensive community outreach efforts, including via social media.

The new program will be housed in a location similar to many other community-based providers serving people in need in the areas of housing, family law/custody issues, and more. This will allow for potential clients to simply walk in; we will also develop other referral processes and pipelines to ensure that any former CLC client in need is able to reach our team and receive supportive services.



The core of our program will be a team of attorneys and parent support case managers working within a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to help clients by identifying their strengths, connecting them to needed services, and providing true support – without the attachment of punitive strings. The model is fundamentally client-centered: rather than seeking to impose a one-size-fits-all model of parenting upon them, the team's attorneys and case managers begin by getting to know our client and building rapport with them, providing a safe space for them to express their fears, needs, and goals. Once that connection has been established, the team carefully develops an individualized case plan and strategy. Our program creates an individualized supportive network for each client by implementing a three-step approach: first, we help the client navigate pre-existing services; second, we connecting various stakeholders in the client's life to facilitate a collaborative 'it takes a village' approach (for example, assisting the client in transportation to needed services and encouragement to continue participating/making progress); and third, by creatively building resources where none exist to meet a particular client need. The team's advocacy will often include acting as a bridge between our clients and social workers, hospital staff, mental health clinicians, and other service providers.

The CLC attorney advises clients on their rights as parents and how the complicated child welfare system works with an approach that emphasizes client autonomy and volition. We strive to ensure that every one of our expectant and/or parenting clients is able to assert their own voice in processes that too often fail to take account of it. Smaller than typical caseloads ensure that the team has the time and ability to do attend prenatal visits and other important appointments with clients; help youth procure needed baby items so they are ready for the baby to come home; explain legal documents such as leases or family law orders; and collaborate with DCFS to create detailed safety plans in the event there is an open referral and the possibility of Court involvement.

Relationships CLC has cultivated with DCFS has enabled CLC to become aware of, and weigh in on, investigations into our clients and their babies when issues arise; a critical component of this new program will be to work with DCFS to extend this to former foster youth clients. The ability to support our clients in this pre-petition and proactive way, including de-escalating the situation in many cases, is critical. In our experience with current foster youth, team members have attended child welfare agency investigations to support and de-escalate the client if needed. Parents struggling with patterns of behavior that will likely trigger a filing may be counseled and supported in making a plan with a relative or friend who is willing to care for the baby temporarily without agency intervention.

## Program Components

### Key elements of the new program:

- Offsite satellite office convenient to potential clients and other providers (likely mid-Wilshire/Koreatown)
- Development of comprehensive network through community outreach to establish client pipeline and referral process to support clients
- Intensive team-based support for each client and their young family
- Detailed tracking of case progress, data, and outcomes to inform impact and needed programmatic changes
- Staff well-versed in the dependency process, including pre-detention processes, and with deep connections to DCFS and the county
- Established infrastructure of CLC's Admin, IT, HR, and Executive functions to ensure successful program implementation
- Support of CLC resources and expertise in areas including housing navigation as needed
- Professional evaluation to assess efficacy of model

## Team/Key Roles

### Initially, the team will consist of five staff members:

- Program Director
- Attorney
- Case Manager/Parent Partner
- Case Manager/Parent Partner
- Office Manager/Administrative Support

### Program Director

- The Program Director will be responsible for overall programmatic implementation, staff supervision, community networking, a successful client recruitment strategy, ongoing quality assurance, and evaluation coordination.

### Attorney

- The Attorney will provide critical guidance to clients regarding the child welfare process and their rights as parents. They will also act as a liaison to DCFS to establish contact before a petition is filed and advocate to keep the parent and child together, and ideally avoid the filing of a dependency petition altogether. In the event a petition is filed, the Attorney will ensure the client's court-appointed attorney has all relevant information to handle the case most effectively from the earliest possible time.

### Case Manager/Parent Partner

- In conjunction with the Attorney, the two Case Managers/Parent Partners will provide direct, one-on-one support to clients; they will be by their side as the team navigates the client's individual challenges and develops and implements a case plan. Activities will include connection to service providers; consistent (often daily) client contact to provide support and encouragement in meeting case plan goals; and accompanying the client as needed to access services and/or attend needed meetings. These staff will document client case progress and activities in our case management system, and monitor client progress from intake through resolution.

### Office Manager/Administrative Support

- This position will be responsible for logistical support and daily office operations. They will also act as a liaison to CLC in the areas of HR, Administration, Operations, IT, and Finance to ensure a clear and consistent flow of information and consistency of process.

*Importantly, all program staff will have the benefit of access to CLC's depth of training opportunities and collaboration with in-house experts on a wide range of issues impacting program clients and their young children.*

## Evaluation

CLC is currently in discussions with Action Research to conduct an in-depth study regarding the efficacy of our prevention work and to inform needed changes going forward.

## Cost

We estimate the cost for program start-up through the first eighteen months of serving clients to be approximately \$1.2 million. Please see the spreadsheet below for our detailed budget breakdown.

<b>BUDGET: CLC BREAK THE FOSTER CARE CYCLE PROJECT</b>	<b>STARTUP/MONTHS 0-18</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Personnel</b>		
Program Director - 1 FTE	165,000	165,000
Attorney - 1 FTE	150,000	150,000
Case Manager/Parent Partner - 2 FTE	165,000	165,000
Administrative Support/Office Manager - 1 FTE	85,000	85,000
Benefits (20%)	113,000	113,000
Subtotal Personnel	678,000	678,000
<b>Non-Personnel</b>		
Rent (\$2,500/month)	45,000	45,000
Utilities	1,500	1,500
Office furniture (\$1,500/employee x 5 and conference room)	12,000	12,000
Office supplies/materials/copying	6,000	6,000
Computer/phone equipment (\$4,000/employee x 5)	20,000	20,000
Insurance (liability)	1,500	1,500
Staff Travel & Transportation	6,000	6,000
Conferences, Meetings & Trainings	6,000	6,000
Client Needs/Emergency Support Fund	25,000	25,000
Experts/Consultants	15,000	15,000
Case Management System - Development and Maintenance	30,000	30,000
Program Evaluation - Feasibility Study (months 1-6)	75,000	75,000
Program Evaluation - Year 1 of data (months 6-18)	100,000	100,000
Subtotal Non-Personnel	343,000	343,000
Total Personnel & Non-Personnel	1,021,000	1,021,000
Overhead*	102,100	102,100
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1,123,100</b>	<b>1,123,100</b>

*\*Overhead includes HR/IT/Finance/Admin/Executive support) calculated at 10% of total project budget*