

The background of the cover features a low-angle, perspective view of a classical building's facade, characterized by several tall, fluted columns with ornate capitals. The image is rendered in a light, monochromatic grey tone, creating a sense of grandeur and institutional authority. A solid blue diagonal shape cuts across the bottom left corner of the page.

FINAL REPORT

ON THE

**MCLENNAN COUNTY PARENT ADVOCACY
PROGRAM**

FEBRUARY 2024

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The Texas Supreme Court Children’s Commission contracted with the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University for this report. This report was researched and written by Dr. Elissa Madden, Assistant Professor, Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, Baylor University; Ms. Amber George, Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, Baylor University; and Solomon Akpan, MSW Candidate and Graduate Assistant, Diana R. Garland School of Social Work, Baylor University. We would like to acknowledge and thank the parents, caregivers, and community stakeholders who generously provided their thoughts and time to assist with this evaluation. Cover photo designed by Freepik.

DISCLAIMER

The material in this report should not be construed as an advisory or ruling by or from the Supreme Court of Texas or any other court on specific cases or legal issues. This report is solely intended to address the improvement of the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The act of removing a child from their primary caregiver itself is traumatic for both children and their caregivers and causes significant grief and confusion about family roles and identity. Placement into foster care introduces a number of challenges, including high rates of instability with multiple placements, lack of adequate medical and dental care, and poor mental health outcomes. Studies have shown that children in foster care have worse life outcomes than peers who remain at home. Child welfare agencies and advocates have increasingly turned their attention to developing and implementing programs designed to keep families intact by identifying those at risk of their children entering care and intervening with appropriate services and support before a situation escalates to the point of necessitating child removal. One such effort aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by families involved in the child welfare system is parental legal advocacy programs. These programs exemplify the intersection of legal and social work expertise, ensuring the legal and physical needs of parents and caregivers seeking aid to prevent their children from entering care are adequately met (Gerber et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2021).

Services provided by parental legal advocacy programs are intended to protect the legal rights and interests of parents who may be at risk of losing custody of their children due to ongoing safety concerns. In addition to providing legal representation for parents and caregivers who would otherwise not be able to afford or access an attorney, legal advocacy programs offer support and resources to families to help them address the underlying issues that led to child welfare involvement. When children have been removed from their caregiver, program staff—most often an attorney and a social worker—will work to facilitate family reunification when it is safe and in the child’s best interests. In cases where the child has not yet been removed but removal is an imminent risk, program staff work with caregivers to prevent the child from being placed in out-of-home care. Ultimately, the goal of parental legal advocacy programs revolves around ensuring that parents involved in child welfare or family court proceedings receive competent legal representation and advocacy at different stages of the process.

While legal advocacy is still a relatively new practice, the available research suggests the interdisciplinary approach of parental legal advocacy programs featuring a collaboration between social workers and attorneys has significant positive impacts on child welfare outcomes (Gerber et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2021). The Utah Indigent Defense Commission (IDC) Parent Representation Program (PRP) pilot, which partnered attorneys with social workers, affirms this effectiveness as collaborated cases had more positive results than those without assigned social workers (Jagers et al., 2021). A 2013 report indicated high success rates for the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA) efforts, achieving its legal objectives in over 98 percent of prevention cases (where children were not yet removed from their families but maltreatment had been substantiated) and 97 percent of permanency cases (where a child resided with a non-custodial parent, relative, or foster parent, but a legal impediment hindered permanent placement) (Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, 2015). In addition to preventing foster care entry and keeping children at home, the multidisciplinary advocacy model also generates significant cost savings compared to the expense of foster care placement. Over \$500,000 was saved in Detroit (Sankaran, 2014). Providing effective legal representation and support to parents can lead to better outcomes for children and substantial government cost savings.

McLennan County Parent Advocacy Pilot Program

The McLennan County Parent Advocacy Pilot Program (PAP) launched in November 2021 with two years of seed 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 child welfare-related legal representation. The program provides preventative legal services for parents and caregivers involved with the child welfare system. PAP assists clients with legal issues, such as providing parents with representation during active child welfare investigations, assisting non-offending parents or caregivers with custody modifications, helping obtain protective orders, and other family law matters. 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 unnecessary entry of children into the Texas foster care system.

Overview of Evaluation

The focus of the evaluation was to determine whether PAP activities were implemented as intended and to track available outcomes for the project. The evaluation sought to answer the following questions about the program:

- How well the program worked
- The extent to which the program was implemented as designed
- Whether the program was accessible and acceptable to those served by the program
- Short-term outcomes of clients served by the program

Another intention of this evaluation was to help PAP program staff and future legal advocacy programs understand potential barriers to service provision and the actions needed to improve client services. While the initial contract with the Texas Supreme Court Children's Commission called for a one-year evaluation, the program encountered some delays and staff changes that necessitated an extension of the evaluation. As such, the evaluation was extended for a second year to allow for additional case closures by the PAP attorneys.

Program Evaluation Components and Methods

Program Stakeholder Interviews: The evaluation team completed 19 semi-structured interviews with PAP stakeholders from the following areas:

- Court system
- DFPS investigators and workers who referred cases to the program
- Parent Advocacy Program staff
- Casey Family Programs staff
- Care Portal staff
- Local church representatives who assisted PAP clients with concrete services

Parent and Caregiver Interviews: The evaluation team completed interviews with 13 (34.2%) parents/caregivers who received legal assistance through the program. The inclusion criteria for these interviews included: 1) clients who received legal services from the program, 2) their legal case was closed by PAP program staff, and 3) the client was no longer receiving legal assistance through the program.

Parent and Caregiver Survey: A brief survey was developed for parents and caregivers to describe their experience with the program. Thirteen (n=13) responses were received from clients who received legal services through the program.

Key Findings: Program Strengths

Strong Need for Pre-Petition Legal Services: Stakeholders noted the lack of legal assistance available for parents and caregivers in the county and underscored the need for a pre-petition legal advocacy program. Parents and caregivers interviewed for the evaluation were effusive in their gratitude for the program and their recognition of the need for a program in McLennan County to help families navigate the intricacies of the child welfare system.

Clear Sense of Mission and Purpose: Community stakeholders and program staff articulated a clear understanding of the mission and purpose of the program: to prevent the unnecessary removal of children into the foster care system. In addition to preventing the removal of children, several community stakeholders emphasized the importance of parents and caregivers having access to legal representation to help them navigate interactions with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Several stakeholders with DFPS or court experience noted the fundamental disadvantage that parents without legal representation experience when they become involved with the child welfare system.

Consistent Referrals: Program staff worked to gain the trust and respect of local DFPS administrators, area churches, and local social service agencies. This support translated into consistent referrals from DFPS and other community agencies. DFPS investigators referred most cases (142 of 185 referrals), evidence of the trust that DFPS investigators and administrators had in the program. In addition to referrals by DFPS investigators, the program received 38 referrals from other community agencies and sources in McLennan County. While the program benefitted from consistent referrals from DFPS, some stakeholders emphasized the need to spread awareness of the program with other community agencies to help increase referrals from other sources.

High Regard for the Program Attorneys and Legal Services Provided: Interviews with DFPS investigators who referred to the program indicated that investigators had high regard for the PAP attorneys and the services provided by the program. The investigators expressed an appreciation for what they viewed as the attorneys' willingness to work with the Department to help clients address safety concerns in the home. Similarly, clients interviewed for the program voiced their unanimous support for the program and many expressed gratitude for the attorneys who assisted them with their cases. Additionally, several clients mentioned not knowing what they would have done without the program's assistance. They expressed concerns that had the program not been available or had their

cases not been accepted by the program, CPS would have removed their children or would have required them to participate in services that would not be beneficial.

Knowledgeable and Experienced Social Worker: Interviews with clients and stakeholders who collaborated with the program indicated the PAP social worker was widely respected and had strong connections in the community. Additionally, several stakeholders commented the social worker was a particular strength of the program. Several parents and caregivers who participated in interviews expressed gratitude for the program's social worker. They commented on the importance of her role in keeping them informed about the status of their cases, accessing resources for their families, and helping them address safety concerns in their homes.

Responsive to the Legal Needs of the Community: Responding to caregivers' clear need for assistance, program staff broadened their acceptance criteria to include legal representation for other types of caregivers, such as grandparents or other family members seeking to formalize custody arrangements of children already in their care.

Clarification of the Types of Cases Best Suited for the Program Resources: Over time, program staff developed a better sense of the resources and time required by different types of cases and understood what was needed to achieve a positive outcome for their clients in a timely manner. This knowledge allowed staff to screen cases more effectively and focus on cases within the program's scope and the resources staff could offer. This shift was particularly evident in the last year of the evaluation and allowed staff to serve their clients more efficiently and close cases more quickly. PAP attorneys identified three types of cases that were consistent with the program's mission and would not over-extend the program's resources: 1) investigation defenses, 2) custody modifications when all parties are in agreement, and 3) custody modifications with non-offending parents.

Hopes for the Future of the Program: Stakeholders and clients interviewed for the evaluation strongly desired to see the program succeed and expand. Some stakeholders voiced they hoped to learn from this pilot project and replicate the program model in different communities. Other stakeholders observed that the program model might apply to different populations, such as caregivers or family members of youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

Key Findings: Program Challenges

Need for Ongoing Funding: The program's most pressing concern is the urgent need to secure ongoing funding. Current funding for the program will end in the spring of 2024. As such, the future of the program is unclear. Funding is needed to ensure the program's sustainability and capacity to continue serving families within McLennan County and to see current open cases through to closure. Participants expressed concern that parents and caregivers who do not qualify for indigent representation will not have access to legal counsel without a program such as this, as representation may be outside their financial reach.

Building Capacity to Accept New Cases: The part-time nature of the attorneys contracted to represent clients significantly limits the program's ability to accept new clients. The program would benefit from having at least one full-time attorney to serve as the program's lead attorney and Executive Director.

Stakeholders also commented on the need for additional attorneys, either contracted or those willing to serve in a volunteer capacity (e.g., licensed attorneys or supervised law interns), to assist with the more complex cases, as well as a certified paralegal to assist the attorneys with legal research, retrieving information and documents, and drafting legal documents, correspondence, and pleadings for clients' cases. PAP staff and others also mentioned the need to formalize the policies and procedures the program had developed but had not yet committed to paper.

Addressing the Backlog of Cases Accepted for Services: Shifts in the legal personnel at the end of the program's first year resulted in a backlog of pre-petition cases. This backlog created confusion for the new attorneys who were phased in to replace the original attorneys and the clients waiting to hear updates about their cases or, in other circumstances, whether their cases would be accepted for services. The complex nature of cases program staff accepted in the program's first few months delayed cases and contributed to the backlog.

Marketing the Program and Diversifying Referrals: Several stakeholders mentioned a desire to diversify referrals by promoting the program to other community agencies, churches, and local businesses. Program staff wrestled with when and how to best promote the program and, at times, questioned the wisdom of promoting the program given its limited capacity. This was particularly true towards the end of the first year, after the two initial contracted attorneys left the program. Some stakeholders also expressed concerns that DFPS might have been overly selective in the cases they referred to PAP. Members of the planning and implementation team mentioned this concern in monthly planning meetings held during the program's first two years; however, no consensus was developed on how to best explore or mitigate this concern.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Determine 501(c)3 Status: While there are several organizational models and structures that legal advocacy programs can use, programs should examine the pros and cons of applying for recognition by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code—a process that takes time and effort and a designation that many local, state, and federal funders require. In the second year of the PAP program, the planning and implementation team determined that 501(c)3 status was a necessary next step to ensure the program would be eligible for external funding. The program subsequently received 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service in fall 2023.

Organizational Roles and Structure: Prior to initiating client services and contracting with attorneys, new programs should develop a clear organizational chart to clarify the program's leadership and who will make day-to-day decisions for the program. Based on the interviews conducted with external community stakeholders and current PAP staff, new programs would benefit from including the following roles when planning their advisory and staffing needs:

- *Board of Directors*
- *Executive Director/Lead Attorney*
- *Contract Attorneys*
- *Social Worker/Intake Coordinator*
- *Certified Paralegal/Office Manager*

- *Director of Development and Marketing*
- *Parent Advocate*

Clear Eligibility Criteria: Program staff must establish clear eligibility criteria for the program and identify the types of cases that are best served by other legal counsel in the community. This process should be determined before services to clients are initiated and should be available to potential clients and referral sources. Clearly articulated eligibility criteria will promote transparency and ensure that the program's mission remains unchanged.

Formal Policies and Procedures: Clear policies and procedures should be developed and implemented within the program's first six months. Formalized policies and procedures will ensure everyone understands their role and responsibilities and help the organization identify processes requiring more clarity. To aid in this process, programs should consider securing a copy of existing policies and procedures from an established child welfare legal advocacy program to use as a template to guide the process.

Case Management Database: The program requires a database capable of tracking adverse parties and other case variables needed to identify conflicts of interest, client information, legal actions, and case outcomes. Legal advocacy groups and scholars have made recommendations regarding the specific types of data and case outcomes that pre- and post-petition legal advocacy programs should collect. New organizations should consider these guidelines when planning the information that will be tracked and how the organization will evaluate the program's immediate and long-term impact.

Adequate Office/Meeting Space: Sufficient office space is needed to meet with clients and allow program staff to work in the same office space. New programs should consider the space needs of program staff to ensure that adequate private meeting space is available for intake assessments and client meetings.

Funding: External funding must be a priority from the program's onset. Programs should identify city, county, state, and federal funding mechanisms that might contribute to the program's sustainability, as well as funding from private foundations and donors. Establishing methods for individuals to donate funds, their time, and in-kind services will benefit the program and increase capacity.

Fee Generation: The Executive Director and the program's Board should consider implementing a sliding scale fee structure for services or a pay-what-you-can model to help generate additional funds for the program. The use of a sliding scale fee structure or similar model will allow the program to generate revenue, while also customizing their fee structure to clients' needs. Over time, this additional revenue would enable the organization to hire additional personnel to support the mission and activities of the program.

Develop Relationships with Formal and Informal Community Supports: Community support for the program is essential to the overall visibility and sustainability of the program. New programs should look for ways to promote the visibility of their program through local media platforms, social media, and coordinated community engagement strategies.

Case Procedures and Timelines: Before the program launches, timelines and procedures for processing cases should be determined. Program staff should determine appropriate goals for how cases will be processed prior to the program's implementation. For example, timelines that should be determined include, but are not limited to, the timeframe for staffing pending cases, the timeframe and manner in which clients should be notified of whether or not the program will accept their case, internal goals for finalizing cases (e.g., three months, six months, etc.), as well as timeframes for how long staff have to document and close cases that have been finalized with the courts or DFPS.

Case Type and Complexity: The type and complexity of the client's legal case matters. During the pilot period, PAP attorneys identified specific types of cases that could be addressed in a reasonable period (e.g., 3 to 6 months) without over-extending the program's overall resources and capacity. These cases included: 1) investigation defenses, 2) custody modifications when all parties are in agreement, and 3) custody modifications with non-offending parents. New programs are advised to identify the types of cases that are a good fit with the program's mission and focus, as well as the types of cases the program is best suited to address with regard to legal expertise and resources.

Waitlist and Backlog Procedures: Cases should be prioritized based on urgency, and if a backlog occurs, programs should develop a clear plan for clearing the backlog. To prevent backlogged cases and improve communication with clients seeking legal assistance, programs might benefit from the creation of a formal waitlist in which clients are periodically contacted by program staff (e.g., every six weeks or quarterly) to determine if the program's legal services are still needed. While a waitlist may not be an appropriate option for all case types—specifically, investigation defenses—it should be weighed for parents and caregivers seeking custody modifications, assistance with divorces, protective orders, or other family law matters that could result in unnecessary removal of children into the child welfare system.

Client Survey

Types of Legal Assistance Provided to Survey Respondents: Investigation defense (n=8, 69%) and custody modification (n=7, 54%) were the most common types of legal assistance provided to survey respondents, followed by "other family law issue" (n=2, 15%). Other types of legal assistance provided to respondents included "divorce petition" (n=1, 8%), "protective order" (n=1, 8%), and "referred to another attorney" (n=1, 8%).

Survey Respondent Satisfaction with their Attorney: Using a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, and Strongly Disagree), respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with five statements about the PAP attorney assigned to their case. For the statement, "*The attorney I worked with understood my situation,*" 11 responded either "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" to the statement. Two (15%) additional respondents indicated they were "Neutral" about the statement. Regarding the statement, "*The attorney I worked with seemed knowledgeable about CPS,*" 11 (85%) responded either "Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree" to the statement, while one (8%) responded "Strongly Disagree," and another (8%) responded they felt "Neutral" about the statement. For the statement, "*The attorney I worked with answered my questions,*" 11 (85%) respondents answered "Strongly Agree" and two (15%) responded the statement was "Not Applicable." Regarding the statement, "*The attorney informed me of the next steps for my*

case,” nine (69%) responded “Strongly Agree” and one (8%) responded they felt “Neutral” about the statement. Another (8%) respondent answered “Strongly Disagree” and two (15%) indicated the statement was “Not Applicable” to their situation. For the final question, “*The attorney respected my wishes for how to resolve my case,*” 11 (85%) responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the statement. The remaining respondents answered “Strongly Disagree” (n=1, 8%) or “Not Applicable” (n=1, 8%) to this statement.

Survey Respondent Satisfaction with Social Worker: Survey respondents had differing levels of involvement with the PAP social worker. Because of the variability in interaction with the social worker, some respondents determined that some statements were “Not Applicable” to their situation. Regarding the statement, “*The social worker I worked with understood my situation,*” 11 (85%) responded “Strongly Agree” to the statement. Additionally, two (15%) respondents indicated the statement was “Not Applicable” to their situation. In response to the second statement, “*The social worker I worked with seemed knowledgeable about CPS,*” 10 (77%) respondents answered “Strongly Agree” and three (23%) responded “Not Applicable.” For the third statement, “*The social worker I worked with answered my questions,*” 11 (85%) responded “Strongly Agree,” one (8%) responded “Strongly Disagree,” and one (8%) responded “Not Applicable.” In response to the statement, “*The social worker informed me of the next steps for my case,*” 10 (77%) responded “Strongly Agree,” while one (8%) responded “Strongly Disagree,” and two (15%) responded “Not Applicable.” For the final question, “*The social worker connected me with other services in my community,*” seven (54%) responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the statement and the remaining six (46%) responded “Not Applicable.”

Overall Satisfaction with the Program: Respondents were generally satisfied with their experience with the program. When asked about their overall satisfaction with the program, 11 (85%) respondents reported they were “Extremely Satisfied” with the program, while the remaining two (15%) respondents noted they were “Somewhat Satisfied.”

Recommend Program to Others: All 13 (100%) survey respondents reported that they would recommend the program to other parents and caregivers in similar circumstances.

Conclusion

Findings from this evaluation provided insights into how the program was implemented in practice and highlighted many of the challenges that new pre-petition legal advocacy programs are likely to encounter. While the program experienced challenges during the pilot period, program staff remained flexible and responsive to their clients’ needs. Many of the difficulties encountered during the pilot are common to new programs and, with ongoing attention and sustainable funding sources, will be resolved over time. Regardless, the program fills a much-needed role for vulnerable families in McLennan County. Although the program has sustained a number of changes during the past two years, the information collected from community stakeholders and the clients who utilized the program’s services suggests that the Parent Advocacy Program has great value. With a sustainable funding structure, the program will be a lasting benefit to McLennan County residents and a model for other communities across the state and beyond.

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Child welfare agencies and child advocates have made concerted efforts in recent years to develop and implement programs aimed at mitigating the entry of children into the United States foster care system. According to the most recent statistics from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), there has been a substantial 23 percent decrease in the number of children entering foster care between the fiscal years 2017 and 2021. This reduction from 270,197 children in 2017 to 206,812 in 2021 (AFCARS, 2022) reflects collaborative endeavors of child welfare agencies at the federal, state, and local levels (Courtney & Hook, 2012; Gerber et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2021; Sankaran, 2014). The underlying motivation for these initiatives lies in the growing acknowledgment of the paramount importance of preserving family units whenever possible, with child removal considered a measure of last resort.

Removal from parents and other primary caregivers can cause severe emotional and psychological trauma for children due to disruptions in core attachments and bonding. It can lead to long-term issues for children, such as depression, anxiety, aggression, as well as developmental setbacks (Sankaran et al., 2019). The act of removing a child from their primary caregiver itself is traumatic for both children and their caregivers and causes significant grief and confusion about family roles and identity. Children of color suffer additional cultural and social harm when removed from their communities as they lose important connections to their heritage and support systems (Trivedi, 2019). Placement into foster care introduces its own set of challenges, including high rates of instability with multiple placements, lack of adequate medical and dental care, and poor mental health outcomes. Studies have shown that children in foster care have worse life outcomes than peers who remain at home. A child's likelihood of experiencing favorable outcomes is notably higher when they are able to stay within their familial home, as opposed to being placed into the foster care system (Doyle, 2013; Sankaran et al., 2019; Trivedi, 2019; Mishra et al., 2020, Dubois-Comtois et al., 2021).

In response to these challenges, child welfare agencies and advocates have increasingly turned their attention to developing and implementing family preservation programs. These programs are designed to keep families intact by identifying those at risk of their children entering care and intervening with appropriate services and support before a situation escalates to the point of necessitating child removal. These actions are consistent with the mandate outlined in the Families First Prevention and Services Act of 2018, which necessitates that social service agencies exert reasonable efforts to preserve families before removing a child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

One such effort aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by families involved in the child welfare system is parental legal advocacy programs. These programs exemplify the intersection of legal and social work expertise, ensuring the legal and physical needs of parents and caregivers seeking aid to prevent their children from entering care are adequately met (Gerber et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2021). Services provided by parental legal advocacy programs are intended to protect the legal rights and interests of parents who may be at risk of losing custody of their children due to ongoing safety concerns. In addition to providing legal representation for parents and caregivers who would otherwise not be able to afford or access an attorney, legal advocacy programs offer support and resources to families to help them address the underlying issues that led to child welfare involvement. When children have been removed from their caregiver, program staff—most often an

attorney and a social worker—will work to facilitate family reunification when it is safe and in the child’s best interests. In cases where the child has not yet been removed but removal is an imminent risk, program staff work with caregivers to prevent the child from being placed in out-of-home care. Ultimately, the goal of parental legal advocacy programs revolves around ensuring that parents involved in child welfare or family court proceedings receive competent legal representation and advocacy at different stages of the process.

The Continuum of Legal Advocacy Services

Legal representation and support can be provided to caregivers at all stages of the process. Representation is often provided after the child has come to the attention of the child welfare system but before removal from their home and placed in foster care. Sometimes referred to as “preventative legal advocacy,” legal advocates work to prevent the removal of children from their families. This is frequently done by providing parents with formal legal representation during a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation. Attorneys advise parents of their legal options and liaise with CPS about the case and next steps. This phase is known as pre-petition legal advocacy (Casey, 2023a). The next phase, post-petition legal advocacy, occurs after a petition for removal of the child has been filed with the court (Casey, 2023b). Advocates in this stage provide legal advocacy and representation for parents in court proceedings and other civil legal issues that may have led to the child’s removal from the home and problems that may impede family reunification efforts. Post-petition legal advocacy programs may also support caregivers as they seek to comply with court-ordered services. Some parental legal advocacy programs specialize in either of these stages, while others offer pre-petition and post-petition legal advocacy services. The choice of focus frequently depends on the resources available and the specific needs of the families the program serves. In cases where both phases are addressed, a seamless transition from pre-petition to post-petition representation can be beneficial in ensuring continuity and comprehensive support for families involved in the child welfare system. By providing legal support at different stages of the process, these programs contribute to a more equitable and family-centered approach to child welfare.

In many states, attorneys are only appointed to represent parents after a child enters foster care. When this occurs, many parents and caregivers engaged in the child welfare system through investigations lack preventative legal assistance (Sankaran, 2014). Conversely, parental legal advocacy programs provide critical legal assistance to resolve issues threatening child safety and well-being, thereby preventing unnecessary foster care placement (Carter, 2021). For instance, the legal advocacy team might help a caregiver struggling with substance abuse temporarily transfer guardianship of their child to a relative while the caregiver seeks inpatient treatment. Other examples include assisting a domestic violence victim in filing and obtaining a protection order against her abusive partner to prevent further exposure of the victim’s child to violence in the home or appealing denials and access entitlements for a father wrongly denied public benefits like food stamps or disability benefits that would allow him to provide for his child’s basic needs. Furthermore, advocates may assist parents in navigating legal challenges and working toward resolving pending criminal charges or legal debts that must be addressed before family reunification can occur.

Impact and Cost-Efficiency of Interdisciplinary Parental Legal Advocacy

While legal advocacy is still a relatively new practice, the available research suggests the interdisciplinary approach of parental legal advocacy programs featuring a collaboration between social workers and attorneys has significant positive impacts on child welfare outcomes (Gerber et al., 2019; Jaggars et al., 2021). The Utah Indigent Defense Commission (IDC) Parent Representation Program (PRP) pilot, which partnered attorneys with social workers, affirms this effectiveness as collaborated cases had more positive results than those without assigned social workers (Jaggars et al., 2021). A 2013 report indicated high success rates for the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA) efforts, achieving its legal objectives in over 98 percent of prevention cases (where children were not yet removed from their families but maltreatment had been substantiated) and 97 percent of permanency cases (where a child resided with a non-custodial parent, relative, or foster parent, but a legal impediment hindered permanent placement) (Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, 2015). In addition to preventing foster care entry and keeping children at home, the multidisciplinary advocacy model also generates significant cost savings compared to the expense of foster care placement. Over \$500,000 was saved in Detroit (Sankaran, 2014). Providing effective legal representation and support to parents can lead to better outcomes for children and substantial government cost savings.

The PRP in Washington State implemented in a staggered fashion across counties, was associated with faster rates of family reunification. The reunification rate was 11 percent higher in PRP counties. For children who did not reunify, PRP sped up permanency through adoption and guardianship. The adoption rate was 83 percent higher and the guardianship rate was 102 percent higher in PRP counties (Courtney & Hook, 2012). Using propensity score matching on administrative data from New York City, the impact of interdisciplinary law offices (ILOs) providing legal representation to parents in child welfare cases was compared to solo practitioner attorneys. The study compared outcomes for over 9,500 families. The findings showed that ILO representation reduced the number of days children spent in foster care by 118 days, on average, compared to solo attorney representation and increased rates of timely reunification (43 percent faster early on) and guardianship (106 percent faster early on) for children entering foster care. The study's authors predicted that ILO could lead to annual savings of about \$40 million in New York City (Gerber et al., 2019). This backdrop, therefore, underscores the relevance and efficacy of the McLennan County Parent Advocacy Pilot Program.

"I was just thankful that there is a program out there like [the Parent Advocacy Program]. Because obviously, I wasn't aware that [the program] was even a thing. And I just remember, like, I obviously wasn't expecting something like this to happen. So, in that moment, you're really just kind of depending on someone else to lead you in the right direction. Like, tell you what's out there for help. And so, I was thankful to even hear that there is such a program out there like [the Parent Advocacy Program] that I could even just ask questions because I had a lot of questions in the beginning."

- PAP Client

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The McLennan County Parent Advocacy Pilot Program (PAP) was launched in November 2021 with two years of seed 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 child welfare-related legal representation. The program is one of three active legal assistance programs in Texas that provides preventative legal services for parents and caregivers involved with the child welfare system. PAP assists clients with legal issues, such as providing parents with representation during active child welfare investigations, assisting non-offending parents or caregivers with custody modifications, helping obtain protective orders, and other family law matters. The PAP staff includes two part-time contract family attorneys experienced in defending parents and caregivers referred to the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) for investigation and a social worker with extensive knowledge of the child welfare 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 unnecessary entry of children into the Texas foster care system.

OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION

The 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 one-year evaluation of the McLennan County Parent Advocacy Program (PAP) in Waco, Texas. The focus of the evaluation was to determine whether PAP activities were implemented as intended and to track available outcomes for the project. The evaluation sought to answer the following questions about the program:

- How well the program worked
- The extent to which the program was implemented as designed
- Whether the program was accessible and acceptable to those served by the program

- Short-term outcomes of clients served by the program

Another intention of this evaluation was to help PAP program staff and future legal advocacy programs understand potential barriers to service provision and the actions that are needed to improve client services.

While the initial contract with the Texas Supreme Court Children’s Commission called for a one-year evaluation, the program encountered some delays and staff changes (outlined in the December 2022 interim report) that necessitated an extension of the evaluation. As such, the evaluation was extended for a second year to allow for additional case closures by the PAP attorneys, which allowed for further input from clients who accessed legal assistance through the program.

The Current Report

The analysis presented in this report is primarily based on client data extracted from four sources: 1) LegalServer, the database used by PAP to track client information and outcomes, 2) a client survey, 3) individual interviews conducted with clients (n=13) who received legal services from the program and 4) interviews with various community stakeholders (n=19).

Clients who received services through the program and whose cases were closed by the program (i.e., no longer receiving services) were eligible for an interview. Stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation fell into one of four categories: 1) individuals who were members of the planning and implementation team for the program, 2) professional staff contracted to provide services to clients (i.e., two part-time attorneys and a social worker), 3) DFPS investigators and workers who referred clients to PAP, and 4) those connected with the program in some other capacity. Stakeholders were selected based on their proximity to the project and their ability to observe the overall implementation and impact of the program.

This report includes participants’ comments about the program in their own voices. All identifying information and some contextual references have been removed from quotes to protect the participants’ confidentiality. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of questions asked clients, an application for Human Participant Protections was filed with the Baylor University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before recruitment or data collection efforts were undertaken. The Board determined the study to be “exempt” from ongoing IRB oversight.

Program Evaluation Components and Methods

Program Stakeholder Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders to assess the program and better understand the challenges and strengths of PAP. The evaluation team completed 19 interviews¹ with PAP stakeholders, which included 15 representatives from the following areas:

- Court system

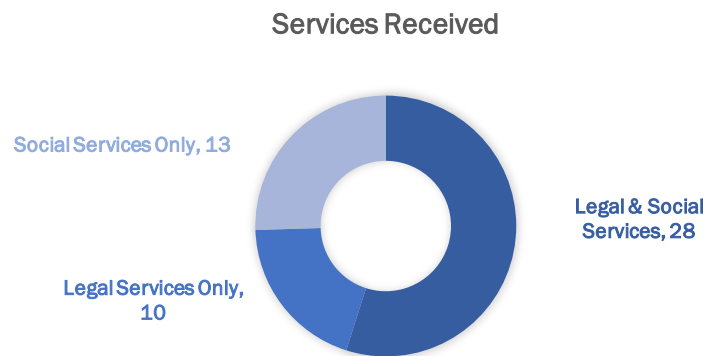
¹ Four stakeholders were interviewed two times. The second interviews occurred in the second year of the evaluation and centered on fundraising efforts to ensure the sustainability of the program.

- DFPS investigators and workers who referred cases to the program
- Parent Advocacy Program staff
- Casey Family Programs staff
- Care Portal staff
- Local church representatives who assisted PAP clients with concrete services

Different semi-structured interview protocols were used to guide stakeholder interviews (See Appendix A). Questions for stakeholders depended on their role with the program and addressed topics, such as their views about how the program was being implemented, the program’s strengths, barriers impacting the program’s effectiveness, whether information about the program was effectively being shared with potential clients and other potential community partners or referral sources, the overall effectiveness of the program, thus far, and ways the program might be improved moving forward. One open-ended question was included at the end of the interview that allowed participants to address issues not previously addressed by the interviewer. The 15 stakeholders who completed an interview were offered a \$35 e-gift card from Walmart as an incentive and in appreciation of their time.²

Parent and Caregiver Interviews: Parents and caregivers who received legal services from the program were also interviewed for the evaluation. The inclusion criteria for these interviews included: 1) clients who received legal services from the program, 2) their legal case was closed by PAP program staff, and 3) the client was no longer receiving legal assistance through the program. As of the end of this evaluation (fall 2023), program staff had closed 51 cases. Of the 51 closed cases, 38 (74.5%) received legal assistance, while the remaining 13 (25.5%) clients received social services through the program (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Services received by parents and caregivers (n=38)



As stated previously, the program’s primary mission is to provide legal assistance for parents and caregivers involved with the child welfare system; thus, interviews for this portion of the evaluation focused on clients who received legal aid through the program or a combination of legal and social service assistance.³ The evaluation team completed interviews with 13 (34.2%) of the 38 eligible parents/caregivers who received legal assistance through the program.

² Some stakeholders declined to accept the \$35 e-gift card.

³ Clients who only accessed social services through the program were not eligible to participate in an interview for this evaluation.

A semi-structured interview protocol with nine questions guided the interviews with parents and caregivers (See Appendix B). Additional prompts were asked as needed to clarify participants' answers. The questions asked about the legal circumstances that brought the participants to the Parent Advocacy Program, their experience with their attorney and the social worker, their thoughts on the potential outcome of their situation had they not had help from the PAP attorney, whether they would recommend the program to other parents and caregivers experiencing similar circumstances, and things program staff could do to strengthen services for others seeking assistance from the program. As with the interview protocol for stakeholders, one open-ended question was included at the end of the interview so participants could add additional comments about the program. Parents and caregivers who completed an interview were given a \$35 e-gift card from Walmart as an incentive and in appreciation of their time.

Parent and Caregiver Survey: A brief survey was developed for parents and caregivers to describe their experience with the program (See Appendix C). The survey assessed parents' and caregivers' perceptions about the program, their experiences with program staff, the types of services provided by their PAP attorney and the social worker, and their beliefs about whether they resolved their case favorably. Before initiating the survey, program staff were asked to review the survey and provide feedback. In addition, an Executive Director of another legal advocacy program in Texas also reviewed the survey and provided feedback. The evaluation team incorporated all suggested edits before inviting participants to complete the survey. Thirteen (n=13) responses were received from clients who received legal services through the program. Parents and caregivers who completed the survey were provided with a \$20 e-gift card from Walmart as an incentive to complete the survey.

Data Analysis

The primary data sources for this report included transcripts from the recorded telephone interviews with parents and caregivers (n=13) and community stakeholders (n=19), as well as data from the client survey (n=13) and the program's client tracking platform, LegalServer. Data from participant interviews were analyzed using NVivo version 14 qualitative software and completed concurrently during the final stages of data collection to identify emerging themes. Conventional content analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994; Patton 2002) was used to analyze the 32 interview transcripts. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. After the completed interview transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and completeness, core themes and concepts were identified through an iterative coding process.

Quantitative program data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. Univariate descriptive statistics were used to examine questions on the client survey and program data downloaded from LegalServer. An analysis of missing data revealed no significant patterns; therefore, data were assumed to be missing at random. Missing data were not imputed or replaced.

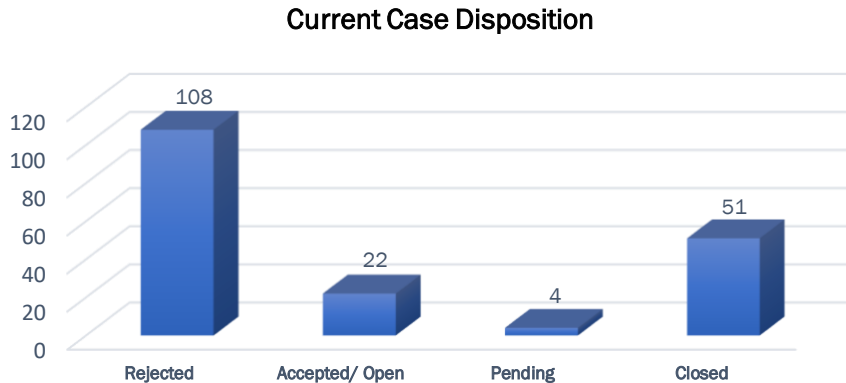
CLIENT AND CASE CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics of All Cases Referred to the Program

Below is a summary of relevant case characteristics and program outcomes for all cases referred to the program.⁴

Current Case Disposition for All Cases Referred to the Program: As of the end of data collection efforts in fall 2023, the program had received 185 referrals. Case dispositions for the 185 referrals included 108 (58%) rejected cases, 4 (2%) pending cases, 22 (12%) open cases accepted by the program for services, and 51 (28%) closed cases (See Figure 2).

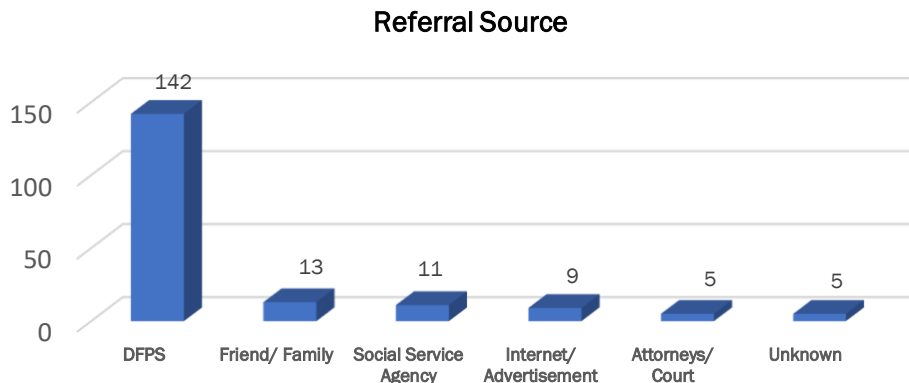
Figure 2: Disposition of cases referred to the program (n=185)



Referral Sources for All Cases Referred to the Program: Of the 185 cases referred to the program, the vast majority were referred by DFPS (n=142, 77%). The remaining cases were referred by friends or family (n=13, 7%), staff from other agencies in McLennan County or area schools (n=11, 6%), or an internet search or advertisement (n=9, 5%). Five (3%) clients reported “Other” legal or court-related referral sources, such as the McLennan County Court system or local attorneys. The referral sources for five (3%) clients were “Unknown” (See Figure 3).

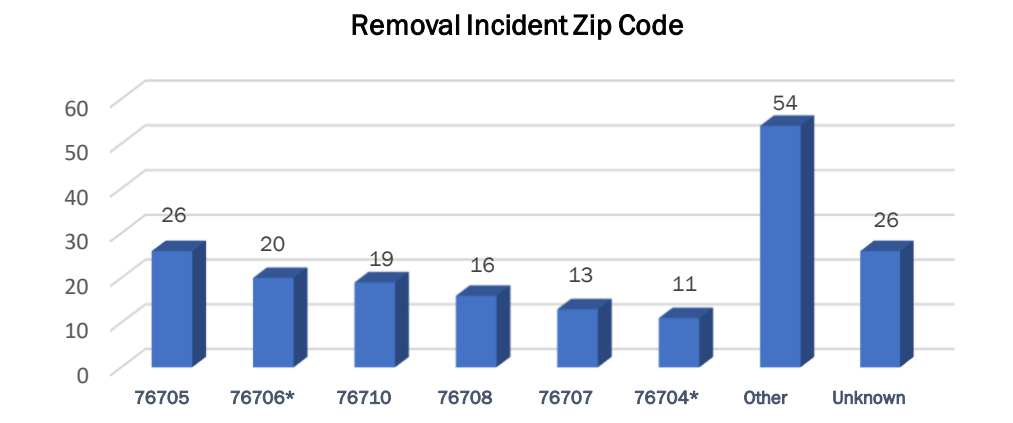
⁴ All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number and therefore the total percentages for some sections may be greater than 100 percent. Additionally, it should be noted that all figures in this report depicting client and case characteristics present exact counts rather than percentages.

Figure 3: Referral source for cases referred to the program (n=185)



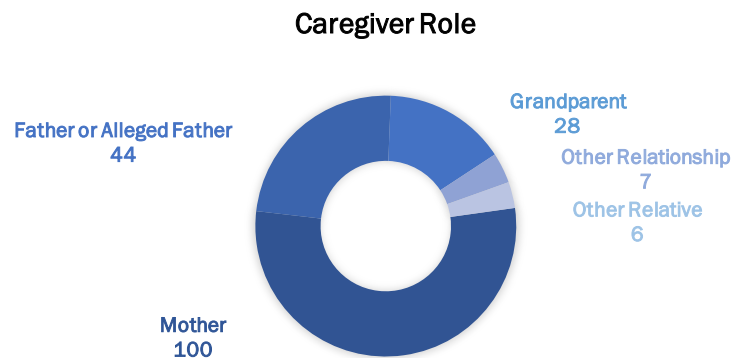
Removal Incident Zip Code for All Cases Referred to the Program: Clients referred to the program reported the incident that led to their involvement with DFPS occurred in the following zip codes, in order of most frequent occurrence: 76705 (n=26, 14%), 76706—a target* zip code for the program (n=20, 11%), 76710 (n=19, 10%), 76708 (n=16, 9%), 76707 (n=13, 7%), and 76704—another target* zip code for the program (n=11, 6%). Fifty-four (29%) clients reported the incident occurred in other zip codes within McLennan County or surrounding counties. The removal incident zip code was “Unknown” for 26 (14%) clients (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Removal incident zip codes (n=185)



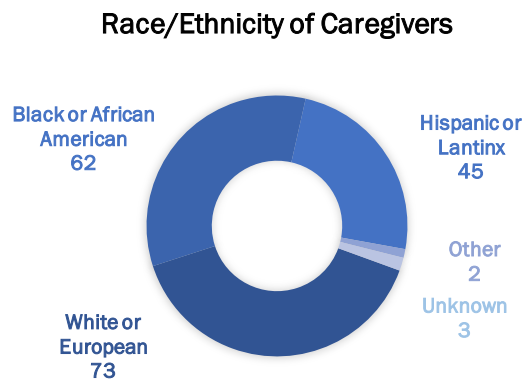
Caregiver Role for All Cases Referred to the Program: Clients primarily identified their caregiving role for the child(ren) as “mother” (n=100, 54%), “father or alleged father” (n=44, 24%), or “grandparent” (n=28, 15%). The remaining clients reported their relationship to the child(ren) as “other relationship” (n=7, 4%) or as “other relative” (n=6, 3%) (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Caregiver role of clients referred to the program (n=185)



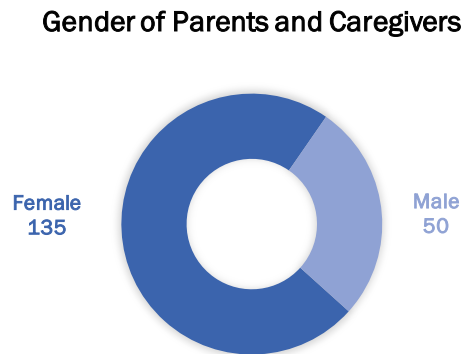
Caregiver Race/Ethnicity for All Cases Referred to the Program: Clients primarily identified their race/ethnicity as “White or European” (n=73, 39%), followed by “Black or African American” (n=62, 34%), “Hispanic or Latinx” (n=45, 24%), or “Other” (n=2, 1%). Race and ethnicity were “Unknown” for three (2%) clients (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Caregiver race/ethnicity of clients referred to the program (n=185)



Caregiver Gender for All Cases Referred to the Program: Most clients referred to the program identified their gender as female (n=135, 73%). Fifty (27%) clients identified their gender as male (See Figure 7).

Figure 7: Gender of clients referred to the program (n=185)

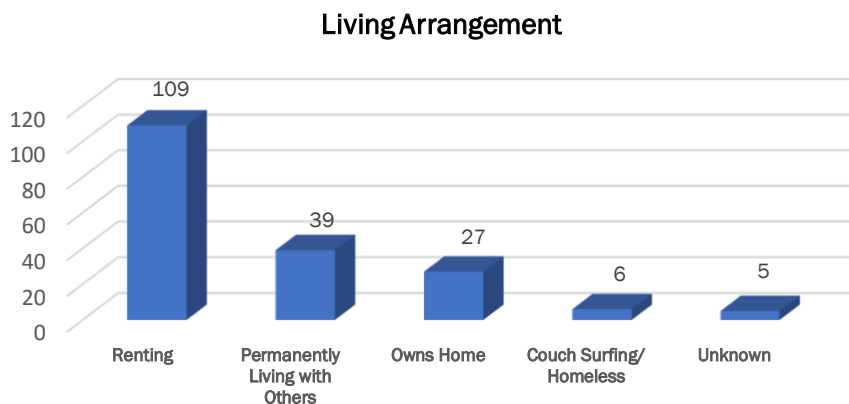


Average Caregiver Age at Intake for All Cases Referred to the Program: Clients referred to the program ranged between 20 and 77 years old (n=182, 98%). The mean age for clients was 38.45 years old (SD= 11.77). The age of three (2%) clients was “Unknown.”

Number of Children Involved for All Cases Referred to the Program: A total of 347 children were reported at issue in the 183 (99%) cases referred to the program for which information was known. The number of children for two (1%) cases was “Unknown.” The mean number of children listed at issue was 1.90 (SD= 1.29), with a range of 1-9 children.

Client Living Arrangement for All Cases Referred to the Program: Most (n=109, 59%) clients referred to the program reported renting a house or an apartment. The remaining clients reported permanently living with friends, relatives, or others (n=39, 21%), owning their own home (n=27, 15%), and “couch surfing” or homeless (n=6, 3%). Living situation information was “Unknown” for four (n=4, 2%) clients (See Figure 8).

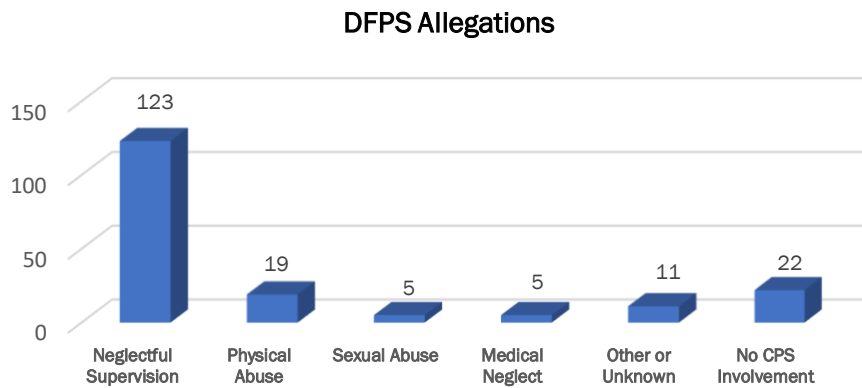
Figure 8: Living arrangement of clients referred to the program (n=185)



DFPS Allegations for All Cases Referred to the Program: A majority (n=123, 66%) of clients reported allegations of neglectful supervision of the children involved in their case. Nineteen (10%) clients reported allegations of physical abuse. Five (3%) clients reported allegations of sexual abuse and five (3%) reported allegations of medical neglect. Nine (5%) clients reported their cases involved “Other”

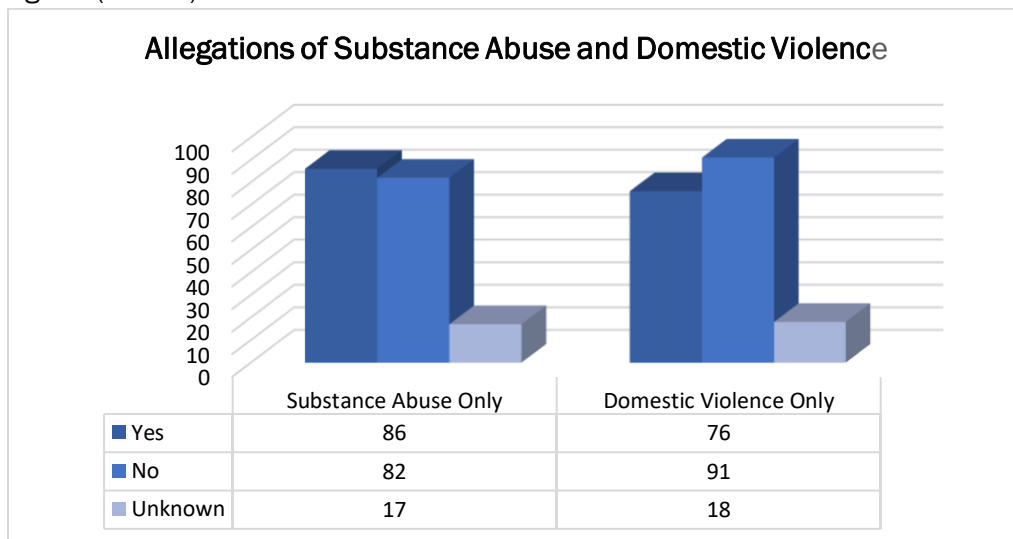
issues. Allegations for two (1%) cases were “Unknown.” Finally, 22 (12%) clients reported that DFPS was not currently involved in their case but were concerned that DFPS might eventually intervene (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: DFPS allegations for all cases referred to the program (n=185)



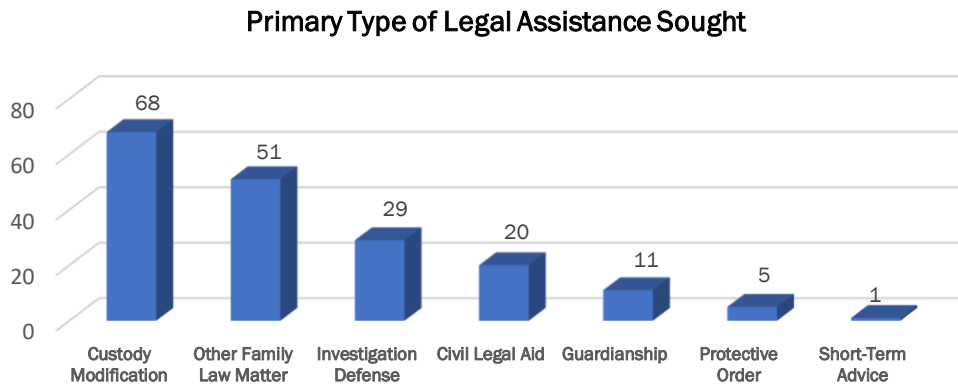
Allegations of Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence for All Cases Referred to the Program: Of the 130 cases in which substance abuse or domestic violence was alleged, 86 (66%) cases involved allegations of substance abuse and 76 (58%) involved allegations of domestic violence. For the variable, “Substance Use,” information was “Unknown” for 17 (9%) cases. Similarly, information was “Unknown” in 18 (10%) cases for the variable, “Domestic Violence” (See Figure 10).

Figure 10: Allegations of substance abuse and domestic violence for all cases referred to the program (n=185)



Primary Type of Legal Assistance Sought for All Cases Referred to the Program: Requests for assistance with custody modifications (n=68, 37%) were the most common type of legal assistance sought by clients referred to the program, followed by requests for help with various family law matters (n=51, 28%), assistance with an investigation defense (n=29, 16%), help with civil legal aid matters (n=20, 11%), assistance with seeking guardianship (n=11, 6%), help to obtain a protective order (n=5, 3%), and short-term advice (n=1, 1%) (See Figure 11).

Figure 11: Primary type of legal assistance sought by clients referred to the program (n=185)

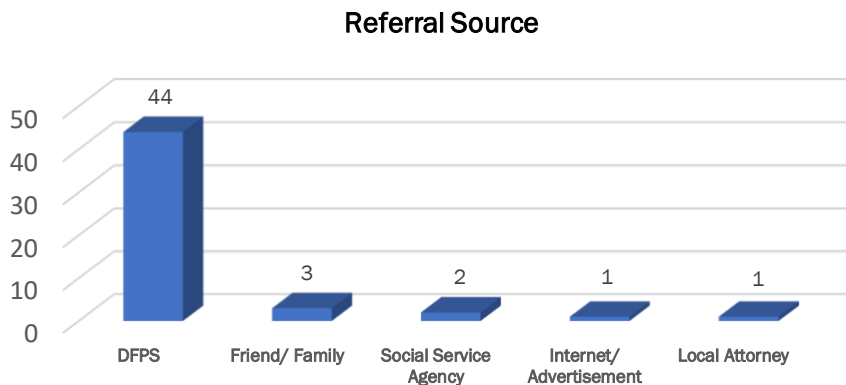


Characteristics of Closed Cases

Below is a summary of characteristics of closed cases that received legal or social services from the PAP program. At the conclusion of data collection efforts for the evaluation, program staff had resolved the legal issues for 51 cases and closed the clients' cases.

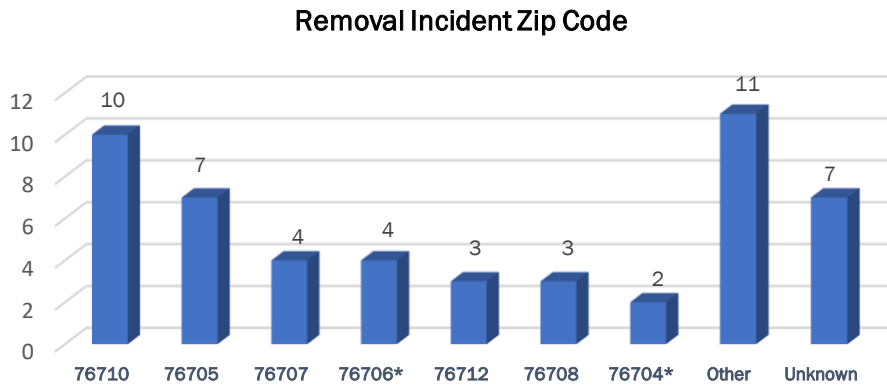
Referral Sources Closed Cases: Most of the 51 closed cases were referred by DFPS (n=44, 86%). The remaining cases were referred by friends and family (n=3, 6%), other social services agencies in Waco (n=2, 4%), an internet search or advertisement (n=1, 2%), or another attorney in the community (n=1, 2%) (See Figure 12).

Figure 12: Referral source for closed cases (n=51)



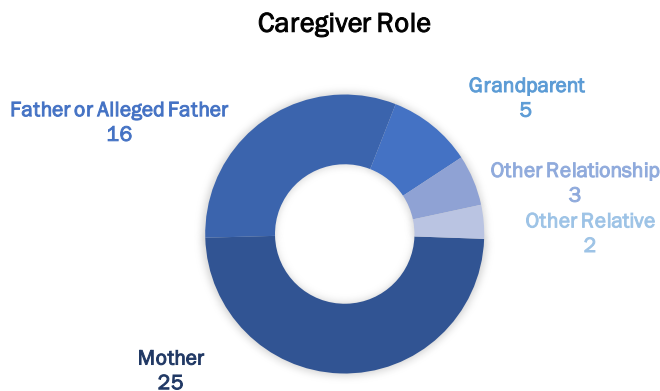
Removal Incident Zip Code for Closed Cases: Clients with closed cases reported the incident that led to DFPS’s involvement in their case occurred in the following zip codes, in order of most frequent occurrence: 76710 (n=10, 20%), 76705 (n=7, 14%), 76707 (n=4, 8%), 76706—a target* zip code for the program (n=4, 8%), 76712 (n=3, 6%), 76708 (n=3, 6%) and 76704—another a target* zip code for the program (n=2, 4%). An additional eleven (22%) clients reported the removal incident for their case occurred in other zip codes within McLennan County. The removal incident zip code was “Unknown” for seven (14%) cases (See Figure 13).

Figure 13: Removal incident zip codes for closed cases (n=51)



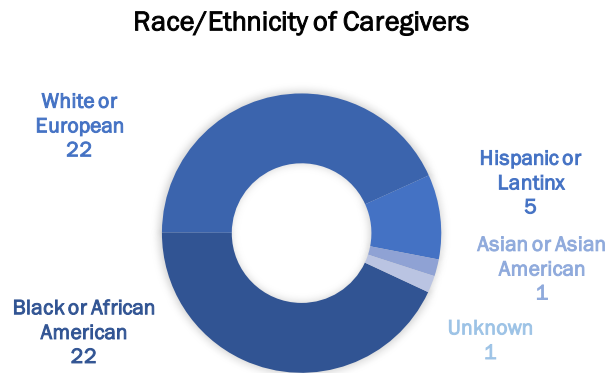
Caregiver Role for Closed Cases: Clients with closed cases primarily identified their caregiving role as mother (n=25, 49%), father or alleged father (n=16, 31%), and grandparent (n=5, 10%). Finally, three (6%) clients identified their role as “other relationship” and two (4%) clients identified their role as “other relative” (See Figure 14).

Figure 14: Caregiver role of clients with closed cases (n=51)



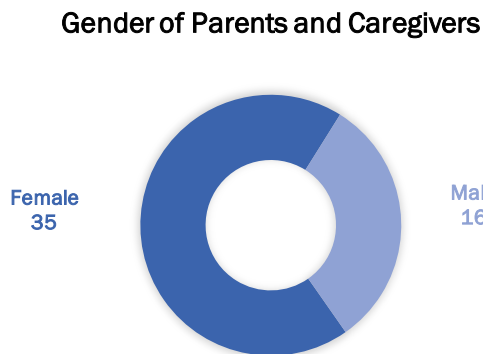
Caregiver Race/Ethnicity for Closed Cases: Clients with closed cases primarily identified their race/ethnicity as “Black or African American” (n=22, 43%), followed by “White or European” (n=22, 43%), “Hispanic or Latinx” (n=5, 10%), and “Asian or Asian American” (n=1, 2%). The race/ethnicity of one (2%) client was “Unknown” (See Figure 15).

Figure 15: Race/ethnicity of clients with closed cases (n=51)



Caregiver Gender for Closed Cases: Slightly more than two-thirds (n=35, 69%) of clients with closed cases identified their gender as female, while the remaining 16 (31%) clients identified their gender as male (See Figure 16).

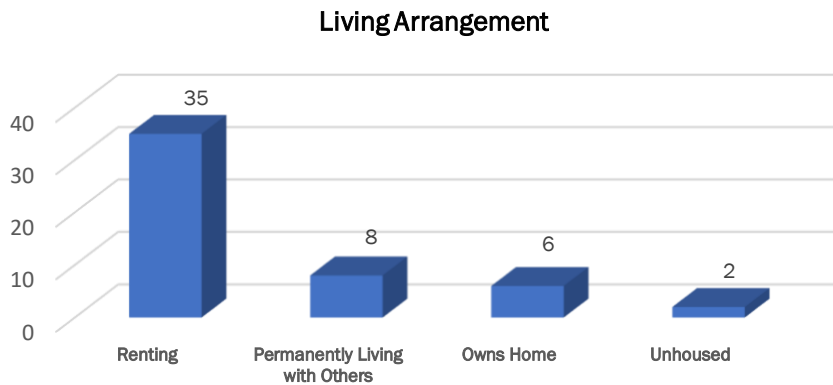
Figure 16: Gender of clients with closed cases (n=51)



Average Caregiver Age at Intake for Closed Cases: Parents and caregivers with closed cases ranged in age from 20 to 72 years old. The mean age of clients with closed cases was 37.51 (SD= 10.08).

Client Living Arrangement for Closed Cases: Most clients with closed cases reported renting a house or an apartment (n=35, 69%). The remaining clients reported the following living arrangements, in order of most frequent occurrence: permanently living with friends, relatives, or others (n=8, 16%) or owning their own home (n=6, 12%). Two (4%) clients report that they are currently without housing (See Figure 17).

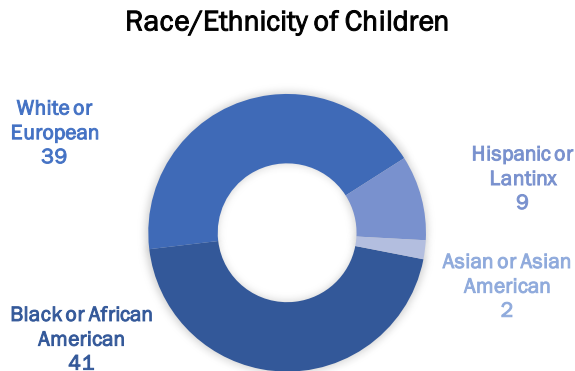
Figure 17: Living arrangement of clients with closed cases (n=51)



Number of Children Involved with Closed Cases: Ninety-one (n= 91) children were reported to be at issue in the 51 closed cases. The mean number of children listed as parties to clients' cases was 1.80 (SD= 1.22), with a range of 1 to 7 children.

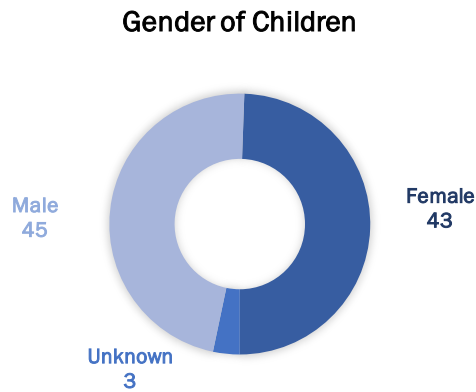
Race/Ethnicity of Children in Closed Cases: Of the 91 children at issue in the closed cases, parents primarily identified their children as “Black or African American” (n=41, 45%), followed by “White or European” (n=39, 43%), “Hispanic or Latinx” (n=9, 10%), or “Asian or Asian American” (n=2, 2%). (See Figure 18).

Figure 18: Child race/ethnicity for closed cases (n=91)



Gender of Children in Closed Cases: Of the 91 children in closed cases, there were slightly more male children (n=45, 49%) than female children (n=43, 47%). The gender of three (3%) children was “Unknown” (See Figure 19).

Figure 19: Gender of children in closed cases (n=91)



Characteristic Comparison: McLennan County Children, McLennan County Removals, and Children in Closed Cases: Table 1 provides a comparison of characteristics of the overall child population in McLennan County (N=64,930), McLennan County children removed by DFPS from their homes (N=171), and the 91 children whose parents or caregivers received services through the Parent Advocacy Program during the evaluation period.

Table 1: Racial/ethnic and gender comparison: All children in McLennan County, removals in McLennan County, and children in closed PAP cases

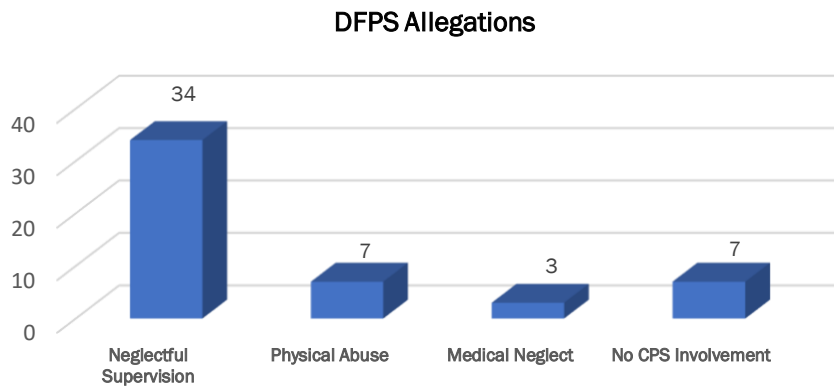
	All Children in McLennan County* (2023)		Children Removed by DFPS in McLennan County* (2023)		Children in Closed PAP Cases (2023)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
	N=65,382		N=205		N=91	
Gender						
Male	33,441	51	93	45	45	49
Female	31,941	49	112	55	43	47
Unknown	0	0	0	0	3	3
Race/Ethnicity						
African American or Black	9,913	15	63	31	41	45
Anglo or White	26,291	40	54	26	39	43
Hispanic or Latinx	25,519	39	69	34	9	10
Other	3,659	6	19	9	2	2
Age						
One and under	7,230	11	73	36	5	6
2-4	10,726	16	50	24	19	21
5-7	10,633	16	32	16	17	19
8-10	10,561	16	22	11	15	17
11-13	10,704	16	15	7	13	14
14-16	11,349	17	12	6	14	15
17 and over	4,179	6	1	<1	5	6
Unknown	0	0	0	0	3	3

Source: DFPS Data Book* and PAP program data

Age of Children in Closed Cases: Of the 91 children in closed cases, children had a mean age of 8.51 years old ($SD=5.04$) with a range of 1 to 18 years of age. The ages of three (3%) of the 91 children were “Unknown.”

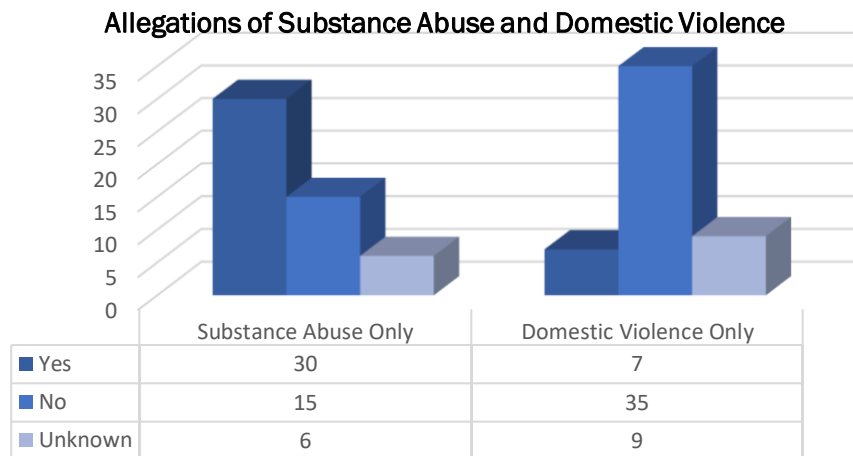
DFPS Allegations for Closed Cases: A majority ($n=34$, 67%) of clients with closed cases reported allegations of neglectful supervision of the children involved in their case. Seven (14%) clients reported allegations of physical abuse of the child involved in their case and three (6%) cases involved allegations of medical neglect. Seven (14%) clients reported that DFPS was not currently involved in their case (See Figure 20).

Figure 20: DFPS allegations for closed cases ($n=51$)



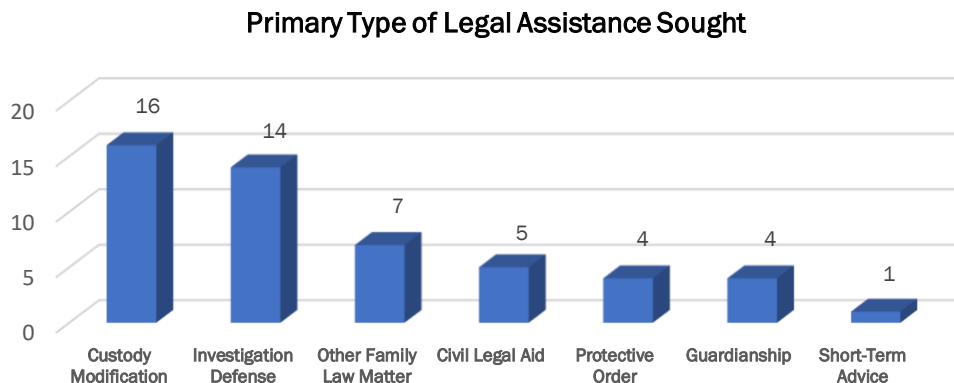
Allegations of Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence for Closed Cases: Thirty (88%) of the 51 closed cases involved allegations of substance use and seven (21%) closed cases involved allegations of domestic violence. Information was “Unknown” for several cases, including six (12%) cases for the variable that looked at substance abuse and nine (18%) cases for the variable that looked at domestic violence (See Figure 21).

Figure 21: Allegations of substance abuse and domestic violence for closed cases ($n=51$)



Primary Type of Legal Assistance Sought for Closed Cases: Assistance with a custody modification (n=16, 31%) was the most common type of assistance sought by clients with closed cases, followed by requests for help with an investigation defense (n=14, 27%), assistance with other family law matters (n=7, 14%) or civil legal aid matters (n=5, 10%). In addition, four (8%) clients sought assistance obtaining protective orders and four (8%) more requested help seeking guardianship of a child already in their care. Program staff also provided one client (n=1, 2%) with short-term legal advice regarding an existing court order (See Figure 22).

Figure 22: Primary type of legal assistance sought by clients with closed cases (n=51)

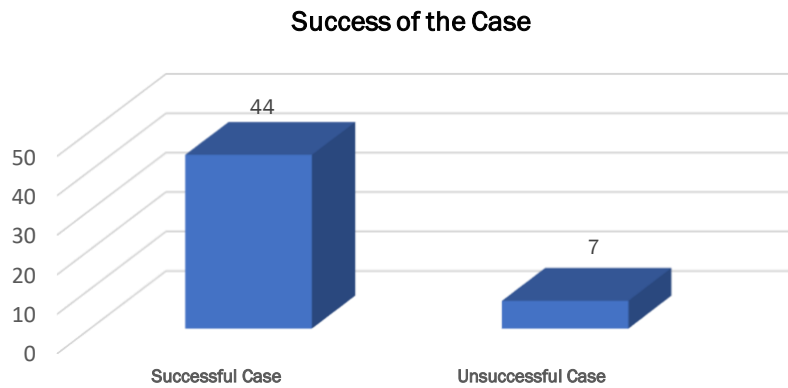


Program Outcomes for Closed Cases

Two program outcomes were examined for closed cases: 1) whether the case was deemed “successful” and 2) whether DFPS removal of the child(ren) was avoided.

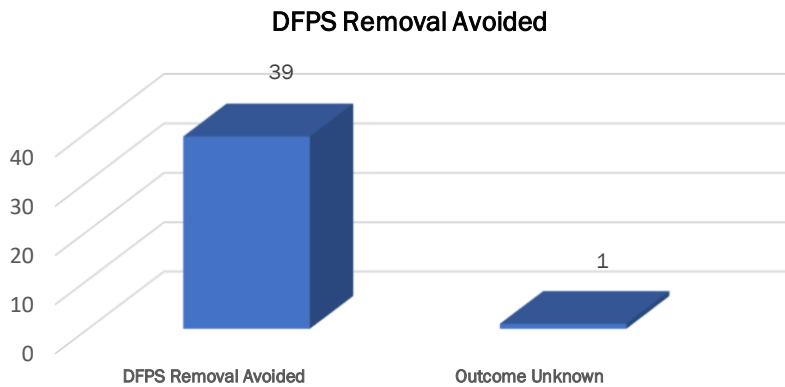
Whether the Case was “Successful”: During the closing process for each case, the attorney is prompted to answer several questions in LegalServer, the software used by the program to track cases. During this process, attorneys are prompted to answer a question about whether the case was “successful.” PAP attorneys make this determination based on whether the goals and needs articulated in the client’s contract were successfully achieved. Of the 51 closed cases, PAP attorneys reported 44 (86%) cases were “Successful.” For various reasons, some unrelated to the program, seven (14%) cases were deemed “Unsuccessful” (See Figure 23).

Figure 23: Whether or not the closed case was “successful” (n=51)



Whether DFPS Removal was Avoided: PAP attorneys entered and tracked a limited number of case outcomes during the case closure process. “DFPS Removal Avoided” was a case outcome tracked for all clients. Of the 51 cases, removal of the children by DFPS was possible in 40 (78%) cases.⁵ Of the 40 cases where removal was a potential outcome, case outcome data show that DFPS removal was avoided in almost all the cases (n=39, 98%) cases. Information was unknown for the one remaining case.⁶ (See Figure 24).

Figure 24: DFPS removal of the child(ren) in the closed case was avoided (n=40)



CLIENT SURVEY

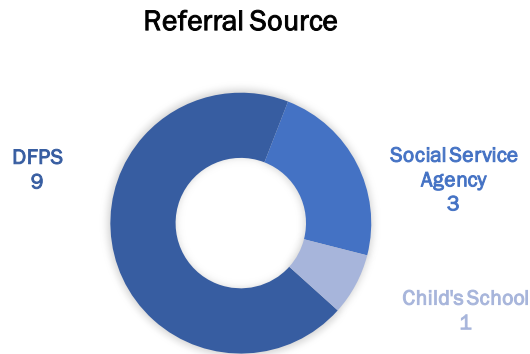
⁵ Some PAP cases did not have DFPS involvement when the parent or caregiver sought assistance from the program. Some cases were addressed as alternative response cases by DFPS or DFPS had already closed the clients' case. In these instances, DFPS removal of the children was not an immediate threat. While the facts of each case vary, the clients in these situations were provided services because the program attorneys determined the children were at increased risk of future removal.

⁶ The program withdrew from the client's case after the client was arrested and charged with assault of a family member. The outcome for the children at issue in the case is not known.

Client and Case Characteristics for Survey Respondents

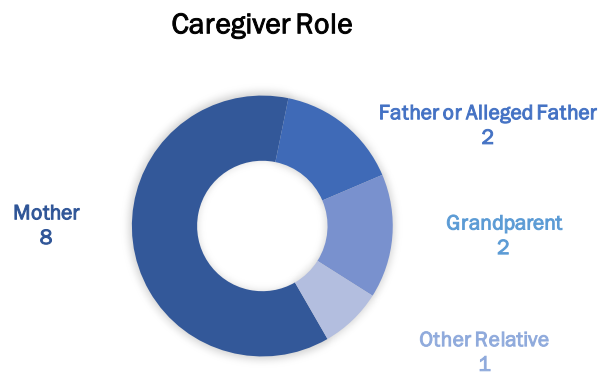
Referral Sources for Survey Respondents: Consistent with the broader sample of clients referred to the program, most of the 13 respondents were referred by DFPS (n=9, 69%). The remaining four respondents were referred staff from other agencies in McLennan County (n=3, 23%) or their child's school (n=1, 8%) (See Figure 25).

Figure 25: Referral sources for survey respondents (n=13)



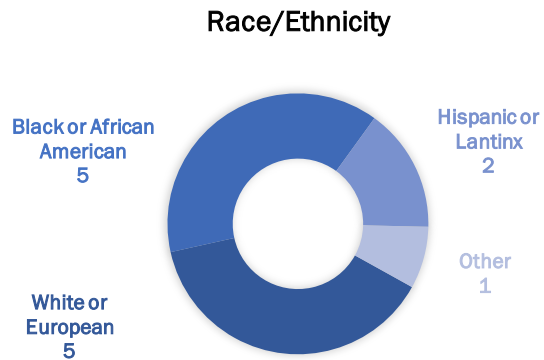
Caregiver Role of Survey Respondents: A majority of survey respondents identified their caregiving role for the child(ren) as “mother” (n=8, 62%), “father or alleged father” (n=2, 15%), or “grandparent” (n=2, 15%) or “other relative” (n=1, 8%) (See Figure 26).

Figure 26: Caregiver role of survey respondents (n=13)



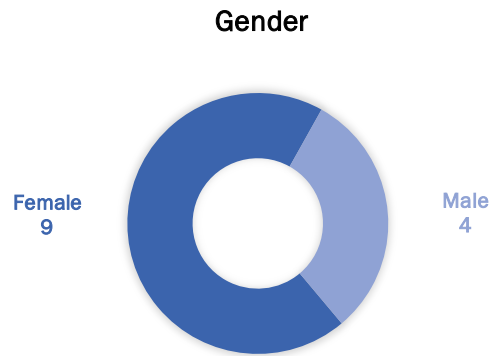
Caregiver Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents: Survey respondents primarily identified their race/ethnicity as “Black or African American” (n=5, 38%) or “White or European” (n=5, 38%), followed by “Hispanic or Latinx” (n=2, 15%), or “Other” (n=1, 8%). (See Figure 27).

Figure 27: Caregiver race/ethnicity of survey respondents (n=13)



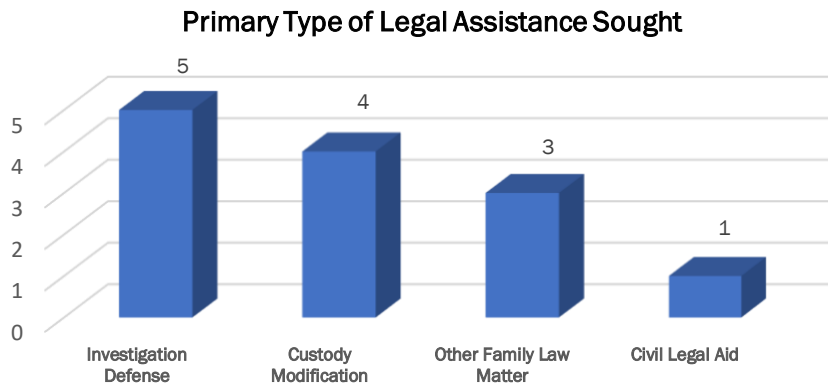
Gender of Survey Respondents: Most respondents identified their gender as female (n=9, 69%). Four (31%) respondents identified as male (See Figure 28).

Figure 28: Gender of survey respondents (n=13)



Primary Type of Legal Assistance Sought by Survey Respondents: Survey respondents primarily sought assistance with investigation defenses (n=5, 38%) followed by assistance with custody modifications (n=4, 31%), requests for help with various family law matters (n=3, 23%) and help with civil legal aid matters (n=1, 8%). (See Figure 29).

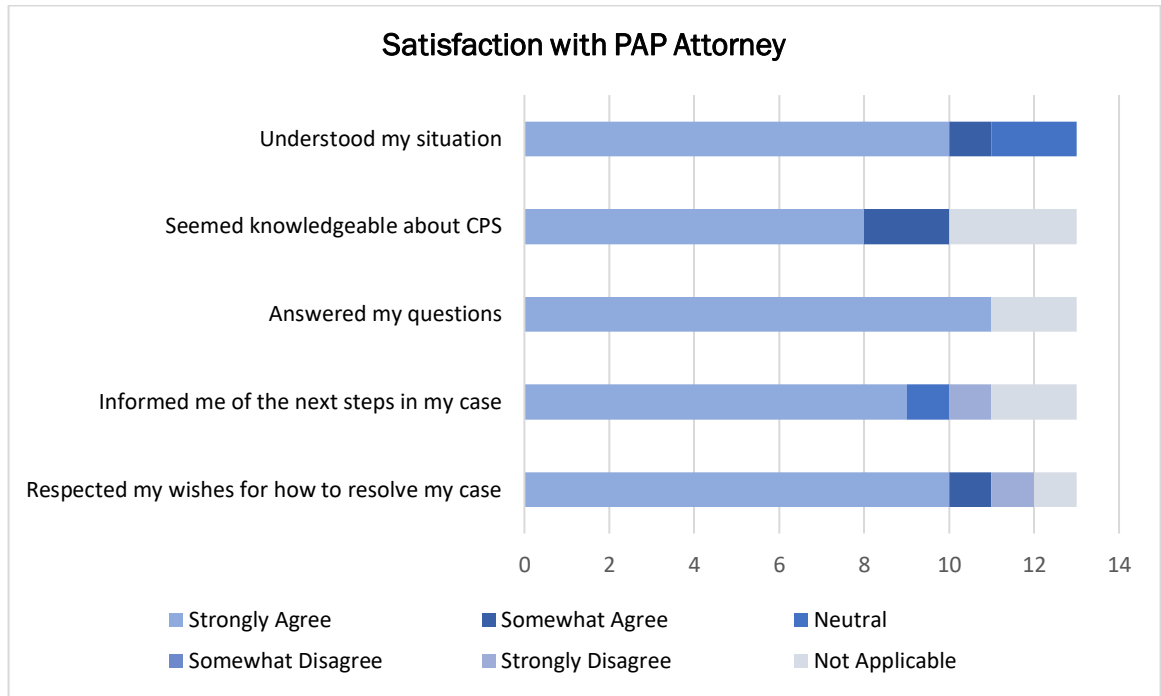
Figure 29: Primary type of legal assistance sought by survey respondents (n=13)



Survey Respondent Satisfaction with their Attorney: Using a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, and Strongly Disagree), respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with five statements about the PAP attorney assigned to their case. Respondents were also given the option to answer “Not Applicable” if they believed the question did not apply to their circumstances. In situations when respondents worked with more than one attorney during the life of their legal case, respondents were directed to answer the statements concerning the attorney they worked with the most.

Generally, respondents answered the five statements positively. For the statement, “*The attorney I worked with understood my situation,*” 11 responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the statement. Two (15%) additional respondents indicated they were “Neutral” about the statement. Regarding the statement, “*The attorney I worked with seemed knowledgeable about CPS,*” 11 (85%) responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the statement, while one (8%) responded “Strongly Disagree,” and another (8%) responded they felt “Neutral” about the statement. For the statement, “*The attorney I worked with answered my questions,*” 11 (85%) respondents answered “Strongly Agree” and two (15%) responded the statement was “Not Applicable.” Regarding the statement, “*The attorney informed me of the next steps for my case,*” nine (69%) responded “Strongly Agree” and one (8%) responded they felt “Neutral” about the statement. Another (8%) respondent answered “Strongly Disagree” and two (15%) indicated the statement was “Not Applicable” to their situation. For the final question, “*The attorney respected my wishes for how to resolve my case,*” 11 (85%) responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the statement. The remaining respondents answered “Strongly Disagree” (n=1, 8%) or “Not Applicable” (n=1, 8%) to this statement (See Table 2).

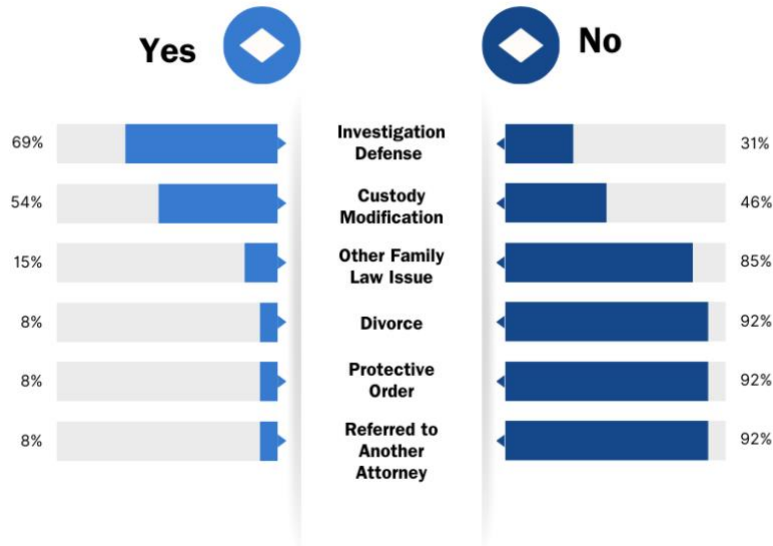
Table 2: Survey respondent satisfaction with PAP attorney (n=13)



Types of Legal Assistance Provided to Survey Respondents: Investigation defense (n=8, 69%) and custody modification (n=7, 54%) were the most common types of legal assistance provided to survey respondents, followed by “other family law issue” (n=2, 15%). Other types of legal assistance provided to respondents included “divorce petition” (n=1, 8%), “protective order” (n=1, 8%), and “referred to another attorney” (n=1, 8%) (See Figure 30).

Figure 30: Types of legal assistance received from PAP attorney (n=13)

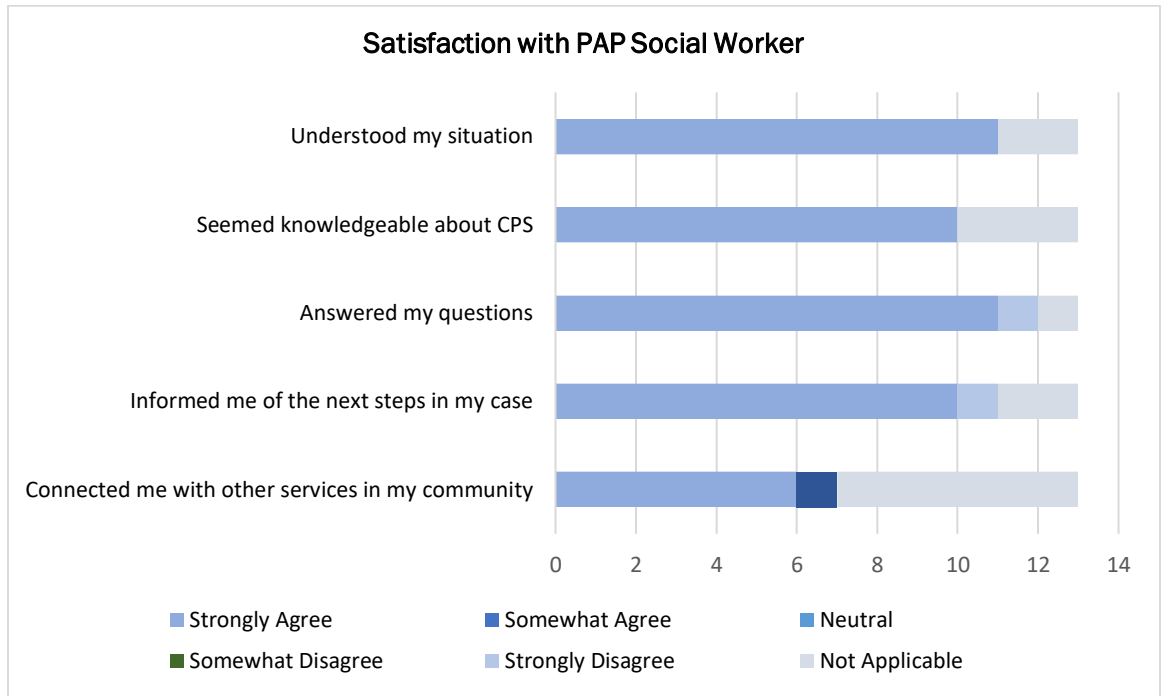
Legal Services Received



Survey Respondent Satisfaction with Social Worker: Survey respondents had differing levels of involvement with the PAP social worker. Some engaged with the social worker in several capacities beyond the initial intake assessment, including referrals to other community agencies for social services or resources or periodic updates about the progress of their legal case. Because of the variability in interaction with the social worker, some respondents determined that some statements were “Not Applicable” to their situation. Similar to their responses about their interactions with a PAP attorney, most respondents reported favorable interactions with the program’s social worker.

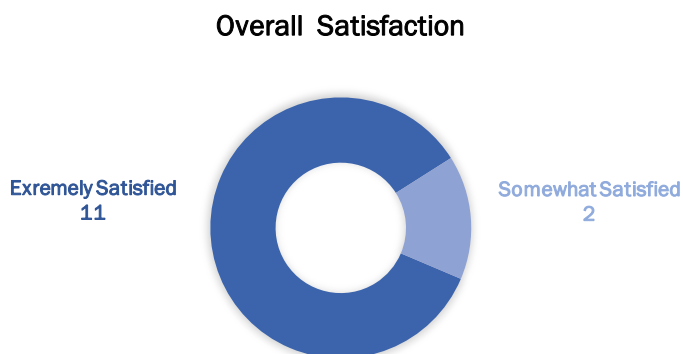
Regarding the statement, “*The social worker I worked with understood my situation,*” 11 (85%) responded “Strongly Agree” to the statement. Additionally, two (15%) respondents indicated the statement was “Not Applicable” to their situation. In response to the second statement, “*The social worker I worked with seemed knowledgeable about CPS,*” 10 (77%) respondents answered “Strongly Agree” and three (23%) responded “Not Applicable.” For the third statement, “*The social worker I worked with answered my questions,*” 11 (85%) responded “Strongly Agree,” one (8%) responded “Strongly Disagree,” and one (8%) responded “Not Applicable.” In response to the statement, “*The social worker informed me of the next steps for my case,*” 10 (77%) responded “Strongly Agree,” while one (8%) responded “Strongly Disagree,” and two (15%) responded “Not Applicable.” For the final question, “*The social worker connected me with other services in my community,*” seven (54%) responded either “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” to the statement and the remaining six (46%) responded “Not Applicable” (See Table 3).

Table 3: Survey respondent satisfaction with PAP social worker (n=13)



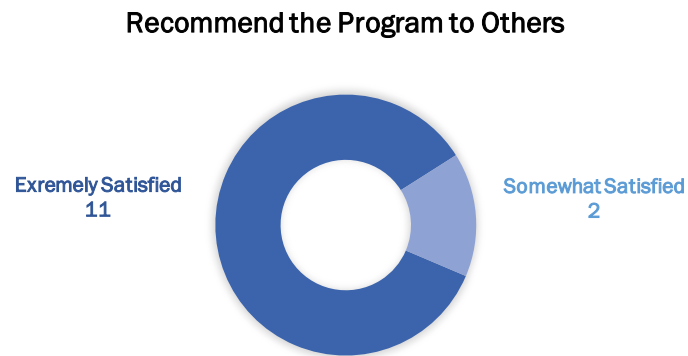
Overall Satisfaction with the Program: Respondents were generally satisfied with their experience with the program. When asked about their overall satisfaction with the program, 11 (85%) respondents reported they were “Extremely Satisfied” with the program, while the remaining two (15%) respondents noted they were “Somewhat Satisfied.” (See Figure 31).

Figure 31: Overall satisfaction with the program (n=13)



Recommend Program to Others: All 13 (100%) survey respondents reported that they would recommend the program to other parents and caregivers in similar circumstances (See Figure 32).

Figure 32: Recommend the Parent Advocacy Program to others (n=13)



“The reality is if you do this work, you always have to evolve it. If you've ever decided, ‘Hey, we do a great job!’ then it's time to leave because if you don't keep changing, you're going to absolutely not continue to reach the people that need to be reached. And so, whatever we're doing, I think we can do it better. That's not to say we're doing a bad job of it, but I think you've got to consistently evaluate, ‘Hey, what can we do to improve getting the message out?’” – Community Stakeholder

INTERVIEWS: PARTICIPANTS AND KEY FINDINGS

This section identifies key findings and conclusions based on interviews with parents, caregivers, and community stakeholders and the client survey administered to parents and caregivers. Thirty-two (n=32, 100%) interviews were conducted with community stakeholders and clients who received legal and social services through the program. Table 4 presents the demographic characteristics of individuals interviewed for this evaluation.

When appropriate, participants’ statements supporting the findings have been included. As previously noted, all identifying information and some contextual references have been removed from quotes to ensure participants’ confidentiality.

Table 4: Interview participant characteristics

	Community Stakeholders		Parents and Caregivers	
	(N=15)		(N=13)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	4	26.6	3	69.2
Female	11	73.3	9	30.8
Race/Ethnicity				
African American or Black	3	20.0	5	38.5
Anglo or White	10	66.7	5	38.5
Hispanic or Latinx	1	6.7	2	13.3
Other	0	0.0	1	7.7
Unknown	1	6.7	0	0.0

Program Strengths

Strong Need for Pre-Petition Legal Services: McLennan County exhibited several factors that suggested the community could benefit from a child welfare legal advocacy program. A PAP planning and implementation team member explained how McLennan County was selected as a location for the pilot program. She stated, *“McLennan County had some really unique characteristics...One of them, other than just being geographically kind of in the middle of the state, which certainly helped. [The County] had a high removal rate, a high percentage of kids in care...and they had high, high rates of disproportionality. Racial disproportionality...And so those were some unique characteristics that we hope to address with this program, and not that we’re going to directly address the racial disparity, but simply by narrowing it.”* A local official involved in the initial planning of the program further elaborated, *“Through multiple conversations, it was pretty apparent we met the, I guess, most favorable demographics for this program to be successful in terms of county size, the ability to have the different stakeholders work in a collaborative way...there were several different criteria that I just think we were a good match for this pilot program.”*

Additionally, several stakeholders noted the lack of legal assistance available for parents and caregivers in the County and underscored the need for this program. One participant explained that McLennan County did not have resources for parents and caregivers who lacked the financial means to hire an attorney to assist with investigations and other pre-petition matters before PAP. When asked about their initial impression of the program, all of the community stakeholders interviewed expressed positive views about the program. They also mentioned the lack of affordable and available legal resources for parents and caregivers prior to the program’s implementation. One professional remarked: *“I thought it was a really great idea when I was told about [the program]...We don’t really have anything like that in McLennan County. 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.”* Another professional with prior experience working for the Department commented, *“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.”*

Parents and caregivers interviewed for the evaluation were effusive in their support and gratitude for the program and their recognition of the need for a program in McLennan County to help families navigate the intricacies of the child welfare system. When asked about their initial thoughts about the program, a father who sought assistance with a custody modification stated, *“I thought that it was awesome because they were offering me a lot. Like, I got right in and I got to meet [the PAP attorney] up front and [the social worker]. And everything that they said they’d do, they did. They walked me through it, helped me, helped explain everything to me so that I understood what was going on, what was happening, and what could happen.”* A mother who sought legal representation for an investigation defense noted, *“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, 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 [them]. They can help.’”*

Other related comments included:

- *“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.”* – DFPS Investigator
- *“I think [the program is] fantastic. I think the goals of catching families upstream, providing services, keeping kids out of the system is a very lofty, worthy goal. I wish that it could. I wish that it could be available to even more families.”* – Community Stakeholder

Clear Sense of Mission and Purpose: Community stakeholders and program staff articulated a clear understanding of the mission and purpose of the program. When asked about the program’s mission, those involved with planning and implementing the program explained its primary mission was to prevent the unnecessary removal of children into the foster care system. A community stakeholder stated, *“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.”* A PAP planning and implementation team member also explained, *“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, [program 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.”*

In addition to preventing the removal of children, several community stakeholders emphasized the importance of parents and caregivers having access to legal representation to help them navigate interactions with DFPS — a system they noted is unfamiliar and confusing for most clients. A number of the stakeholders reported having current or prior professional experience with DFPS or the court system. When explaining the program’s purpose, several stakeholders with DFPS or court experience noted the fundamental disadvantage that parents without legal representation experience when they become involved with the child welfare system. A planning and implementation team member commented: *“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 [CPS] 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.”* A parent who received assistance with an investigation defense following wrongful allegations of drug use and neglectful supervision echoed this sentiment. She stated, *“CPS, you know, it’s pretty 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, how, or what. And with the Parent Advocacy Program it 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.”*

Other related comments made by community stakeholders, parents, and caregivers about the purpose and mission of the program included:

- *“Keeping [children] out of the child welfare system as a whole is the goal.”* – Community Stakeholder
- *“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...”*
– Community Stakeholder
- *“It’s the culmination of events that have happened to the family that have just kind of spiraled to the point that they’re at the place. And if you could just take a pause and let somebody kind of come in and sort it all out for them, then you can have some real, you know, alleviate some of that stress for that parent, which then alleviates the risk of future abuse and neglect...On the advocacy side, I think there’s, the right family [for the program] is someone who wouldn’t otherwise know how to advocate for themselves or know how to navigate this process in a fair way so that they are not, I don’t say, taken advantage of, but too easily kind of just overwhelmed by just system issues, you know, to actually know how to voice what their truth is and stand up for themselves.”*
– Community Stakeholder

Consistent Referrals: Following the program’s implementation, PAP staff worked to gain the trust and respect of local DFPS administrators, area churches, and local social service agencies. This support translated into a consistent flow of referrals from DFPS and other community agencies. DFPS investigators referred most cases (142 of 185 referrals), evidence of the trust that DFPS investigators and administrators had in the program. In addition to referrals by DFPS investigators, the program received 38 referrals from other community agencies and sources in McLennan County, including the Heart of Texas Behavioral Health Network (formerly the Heart of Texas Region MHMR Center), Veteran’s One Stop, McLennan County CASA, Waco Housing Authority, and Waco-area schools. One DFPS investigator expressed that she initially had doubts about the program, but the program quickly became a resource she relied on to assist her clients. She stated, *“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 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.”* The investigator noted that her only critique of the program was the need for more attorneys because the demand for pre-petition support is high in McLennan County and the two PAP attorneys could not provide legal assistance to all the individuals referred to the program. She explained, *“I wish that [the Parent Advocacy Program] 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." The investigator stated that she appreciated that families can access support to help them navigate their interactions with the Department. She noted, *"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...[The program has] a former [DFPS] 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 [parents] at ease whenever [the Department is] able to hook them up with [the program] and get them that support."*

While the program benefitted from consistent referrals from DFPS, some stakeholders emphasized the need to increase referrals from other sources. One stakeholder reported, *"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."* Another stakeholder commented that program staff were working to increase awareness of the program with other community agencies. She stated, *"We're trying to broaden our outreach so that we do get referrals of families from other sources than just CPS."*

High Regard for the Program Attorneys and Legal Services Provided: Interviews with DFPS investigators who referred to the program indicated that they had high regard for the PAP attorneys and the services provided by the program. The investigators expressed an appreciation for what they viewed as the attorneys' willingness to work with the Department to help clients address safety concerns in the home. One DFPS investigator who was interviewed commented, *"I think we all work together well in order to have the same goal. Clients know what a removal is and the attorney knows what a removal is, so [the PAP attorneys] want to prevent it just as much as we do. [Removals are] 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...So, I really like the communication and [the program's] willingness to help clients."* Another investigator explained that he had found the program helpful in his work with clients and that the PAP attorneys lightened his workload. The investigator explained, *"[The program] helps me get my cases closed. It helped me and it helped this family so 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 alleviates a lot of stress on [CPS] workers as well because it's almost like we're putting some of the work off on [the attorney], 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]."*

Similarly, almost all of the clients interviewed for the evaluation communicated their appreciation and respect for the attorneys who provided legal counsel for their cases. During the evaluation, the two initial attorneys contracted to work with clients transitioned off the program after the first year. The PAP planning and implementation team identified two new part-time attorneys to represent and advise eligible clients. Despite the changes in personnel, feedback from clients remained largely positive. Clients interviewed for the program voiced their unanimous support for the program and many expressed gratitude for the attorneys who assisted them with their cases. A parent who sought

assistance with a custody modification exclaimed, *"I loved [my attorney]! She was there with me every step of the way...Whatever I requested, she made sure it, like, she stood on her word and made sure that was what got successfully done."* When asked about their experience with the program and the attorney, another parent stated, *"[The PAP 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."* Another caregiver whose case was accepted in the early months of the program worked with two different attorneys while they worked to resolve her case. When asked about her experience with the attorneys, the caregiver stated, *"For both of [the attorneys], I have nothing but positive comments."* When asked to elaborate on her experience with the attorneys, the caregiver praised how quickly the second attorney resolved her case, exclaiming, *"She was like a rocket! She got everything done within two weeks. And I'm like, 'Oh, my God, so fast... I'm like, 'Holy moly.' But I was shocked to have gotten [a protective order and my divorce] so fast."*

Additionally, several clients mentioned not knowing what they would have done without the program's assistance. They expressed concerns that had the program not been available or had their cases not been accepted by the program, CPS would have removed their children or would have required them to participate in services that would not be beneficial. One mother reported that had she not had the help of the PAP attorney, she feared she would have lost custody of her children and, eventually, her parental rights. The mother stated: *"I have a feeling—just again, this is coming again from my very first experience dealing with CPS—I have a feeling that [had I not had the attorney's help] they would have tried to take me to court and done the family planning meeting and all of that. With my experience, 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, and try to take my kids away."* A father who sought assistance with an investigation to fight allegations that his ex-wife made explained, *"So, [my ex-wife] and her friends reported me to CPS. They said I was doing drugs and acting erratic. And I was like, 'What?' So, it was one of those things where CPS is kind of being used for something it's not supposed to be used for. And to [CPS's] credit, one of the [investigators] gave me a card to the Parent Advocacy Center. I called them up, and man, they really helped me out because it could have been bad."* When asked what might have happened without the program's help, the father replied, *"I probably would have lost my joint managing custody with the kids. It would have been lost. You know, all it [would take] is, you know, one overzealous caseworker to just kind of kind of ruin it and take that away from me. I definitely would have been lost. I wouldn't have known what to do. I could have been in big, big trouble, and so would the kids. They wouldn't have their dad."* Another father seeking full custody of his daughter to remove her from an unsafe situation with his ex-wife stated, *"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. And especially with the costs [of hiring a family attorney], like, I mean, um, you know, it wouldn't have, it wouldn't have turned out. I wouldn't have been able to get the custody modification that I was looking for or any kind of result, really, without their help."* Similarly, a grandparent who had custody of her grandchildren and was reported to DFPS for alleged neglectful supervision noted, *"Had I not had an attorney, it would have been probably a whole different outcome...I probably still would have been fighting [the investigation]."*

Several clients appreciated how accessible and responsive the program attorneys were with them when they had questions. One parent stated, *"I really appreciated the time that she spent with me. I*

could always call her and she would answer, or she would call me back at her earliest convenience. And I really like that because I had a lot of questions when I first started this... And at that time, I had a lot of questions for [the attorney] and she always had [answers] for me.” Another parent who was referred to the program for help with an investigation defense noted, “[Our PAP attorney] did a really good job... it is nice when you can’t afford a lawyer and you’re not going up against [CPS] by yourself. Because that’s when they tend to get— CPS tends to get a little pushy... I’m like, ‘No, you want to talk to us? Talk to the lawyer, talk to the parent advocacy group. Because I’m not going to.’” Another parent who sought help with an investigation defense reported, “It was great. It was excellent. Like, I have no bad things to say about how [the attorney] 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, [the attorney] already had it answered.”

Other relevant statements made about the program and the attorneys included:

- “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.” – Community Stakeholder
- “It was great. It was excellent. Like, I have no bad things to say about how [the attorney] 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, [the attorney] already had it answered.” –PAP Client
- “[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.” –PAP Client
- “Everybody did what they needed to do, program-wise and attorney-wise. Everything like that was all perfect.” – PAP Client
- “[The attorney] knew what she was doing...She did what was best for my daughter; she did what was best for me.” – PAP Client
- “I got to meet [the attorney] up front and [the social services worker]. And everything that they said they’d do, they did. They walked me through it, helped me, helped explain everything to me so that I understood what was going on, what was happening, what could happen.” – PAP Client
- “[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 with this?’” – PAP Client
- “Without [the program], we’d still be in that same situation. So, I’m so grateful for the program. I really am.” – PAP Client

- *“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.”* – PAP Client

Knowledgeable and Experienced Social Worker: While shifts in PAP legal personnel occurred, the social worker contracted to work with the program remained in this position for the entire evaluation. A former supervisor for a DFPS investigation unit in McLennan County, the social worker was permitted in-person access to DFPS personnel to promote the program’s legal and case management services. Additionally, interviews with clients and stakeholders who collaborated with the program indicated the PAP social worker was widely respected and had strong connections in the community. When asked about the program’s strengths, several stakeholders commented the social worker was a particular strength. One community stakeholder expressed, *“I think [the PAP social services worker] 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.”* Another stakeholder noted, *“[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.”* In addition to the individual talents of the PAP social worker, one stakeholder commented on the importance of the social work role to the overall pre-petition legal advocacy model. The stakeholder stated, *“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’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.”*

Several parents and caregivers who participated in interviews expressed gratitude for the program’s social worker. They commented on the importance of her role in keeping them informed about the status of their cases, accessing resources for their families, and helping them address safety concerns in their homes. A parent who sought representation for an investigation reported, *“[The PAP social services worker] has been nothing but a blessing and, well, the program has too.”* Another parent noted, *“They were just super helpful and they always offered information.”*

In addition to routine referrals and other forms of assistance, the social worker worked with DFPS workers to provide Christmas presents for the children whose parents had an open case with the program. The parents indicated that this support was unexpected and very appreciated. A parent who sought help from the program for a custody modification stated, *“The social worker] helped out a lot with, like clothes for Christmas... [The program] gave my baby an amazing Christmas and I really appreciated that.”* Another parent who asked for assistance with a DFPS investigation reported, *“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, and did the home check with [the PAP social worker] there. They did the home check and then as they were leaving, [the PAP social worker] goes, ‘What do your kids want for Christmas? Please send me a Christmas list.’ And we’re like, ‘Okay.’ And that was even for 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.'"

Responsive to the Legal Needs of the Community: Program staff remained flexible and responsive to the community's legal needs. During the initial months of the program, several kinship caregivers sought legal assistance from the program to obtain formal guardianship of children already in their care. Many of the caregivers were grandparents or extended family members of the children. They expressed concern that the child's parent(s), often individuals who had been previously deemed as 'unsafe' by DFPS during prior investigations due to various allegations of maltreatment, would take the child back into their care, placing the children at high risk of eventual entry into the foster care system. The caregivers were concerned that without legal custody of the child, they would have no recourse to stop the parent from taking the child from the stability and safety of their care. Responding to the clear need for assistance, program staff broadened their acceptance criteria to include legal representation for other types of caregivers, such as grandparents or other family members seeking to formalize custody arrangements of children already in their care. An attorney for the program explained, *"[The program serves] any person with an open CPS investigation or kind of related to a CPS investigation. When we started, one of the criteria was that we wanted to represent parents of children with an open CPS investigation. And we've had some cases come in that deviate from that a little bit in that there's not a parent that has contacted the program, but there's some other person related to the child that has contacted the program. By representing or helping or helping that person, we can achieve the ultimate goal of preventing a [child's] removal."*

Clarification of the Types of Cases Best Suited for the Program Resources: Over time, program staff developed a better sense of the resources and time required by different types of cases and understood what was needed to achieve a positive outcome for their clients in a timely manner. This knowledge allowed staff to screen cases more effectively and focus their efforts on cases within the program's scope and the resources staff could offer. This shift was particularly evident in the last year of the evaluation and allowed staff to serve their clients more efficiently and close cases more quickly.

During the evaluation period, four attorneys were contracted to work with clients and provide legal services on behalf of PAP.⁷ All four contracted attorneys were interviewed for the evaluation. When asked about the types of cases with which they had been most successful, a PAP attorney interviewed during the program's second year stated the program had been most successful with investigation defenses and custody modifications. Additionally, she indicated the program should focus on cases with legal issues that could be addressed in a shorter timeframe and cases with more agreement between parties. The attorney explained that during the program's first year, some cases that were far too complex for the program attorneys' time and resources available were accepted. Additionally, she noted the attorneys who were first contracted to serve clients on behalf of PAP had access to resources

⁷ Two attorneys were contracted in fall 2021 to implement the program and provide representation to clients on behalf of the program. In the fall of 2022, the two initial attorneys left the program for different positions and were subsequently replaced by two other attorneys.

the current attorneys did not have, such as the assistance of a certified paralegal. When asked if the program was serving everyone it should, the attorney responded, *“I think one of the things we need to concentrate on going forward is on investigation defenses and helping people who are really having that direct contact with [DFPS] 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.”* Another PAP attorney affirmed her colleague’s desire for the program to focus more on investigation defenses. She stated, *“Investigation defense representation works really well [for the client] if the parents will contact us before they interview with the Department. Because after [a parent participates in an interview], there’s really no point.”* An additional priority mentioned by PAP attorneys included assisting with custody modifications. The PAP attorney noted her focus with custody modifications was assisting non-offending parents. She stated, *“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.”*

In addition to assisting non-offending parents, the attorneys also mentioned a desire to assist extended family members and other kin in formalizing custody arrangements for children already in their care. One attorney explained, *“We still should be helping caregivers who are affected kin or related kin where a parent has on purpose placed a child with this person because either they’re facing incarceration or there’s some other reason, but they know that they’re going to have to be separated from their child and they want that particular person to have some legal standing so that they can do things with them at school or just, you know, a bunch of those kinds of things. So, the children have that protection of a legal relationship and hopefully, the parents are on board, too.”* Another attorney clarified that while helping caregivers is important, PAP attorneys have been taking more care in ensuring that they are selecting caregiver cases that do not go against a parent’s wishes for their child. The attorney stated, *“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 [of the program]. But we have some cases from the early days that are 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.”*

Hopes for the Future of the Program: Stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation strongly desired to see the program succeed and expand. When asked about the program’s future, one staff member responded, *“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 parent or family. [I hope] that this program can help and resolve some of those issues.”* In response to the same question, another PAP planning team member stated, *“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.”* One PAP attorney explained why the program has not accepted some cases other parental legal advocacy programs might take, such as assistance with child support or housing issues. She noted that the program’s attorneys do not have expertise with all types of cases.

She explained, *“So, if someone came to me with a housing situation, like, ‘Hey, I’m being evicted, can you defend that?’ I’ve never done that before. I’ve just not done that area of law—not that I couldn’t do it—but it would be a lot of time and research and investment to try to do something that’s new to me. So, when we think about like the overall scope, you know, we have limited resources, limited attorney hours. Is spending 20 hours on that case, would that be worth my time when, with those 20 hours, maybe I could take on two or three other [cases]?”*

Other stakeholders voiced they hoped to learn from this pilot project and replicate the program model in different communities. One community stakeholder noted, *“A goal is to show that by offering this early representation and working with families to keep their children safe at home, that we can demonstrate that it’s possible to keep children safe and keep families out of the child welfare system, period, so that not as many families enter in, but children are safe. And then to the extent we can demonstrate that, to take that information to the legislature and get them to fund it in other areas around the state.”* In addition, another stakeholder observed that the program model might apply to different populations, such as caregivers or family members of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. A local judge interviewed for the evaluation stated, *“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’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...”*

Clients interviewed for the evaluation also expressed a desire for the program to expand. When asked what could be done to improve the program, one client quickly replied, *“Get more lawyers involved...Yes, get more of the family law practice lawyers involved [in the program].”* Other clients mentioned that more should be done to inform families and other agencies about the program. One client suggested, *“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 [the social worker] explained it to me. I give them five [out of five] because they really were a blessing.”* In addition, many clients said they would like the program to continue beyond the pilot stage. A father who received assistance with an investigation defense stated, *“[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].”*

Additional related comments made by community stakeholders, parents, and caregivers included:

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

- *“[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...I think it’s hard to replicate this in all counties, but I hope that [McLennan County] will have a model that’s easy to replicate in mid-size counties and smaller counties.”* – Community Stakeholder

Program Challenges

While the program experienced steady growth during its first two years, program staff encountered several challenges. Some initial challenges discussed in the first interim report (December 2022) were addressed and satisfactorily resolved before the second interim report (June 2023) was released. Other challenges took more time to resolve but were eventually addressed. Examples included the resignation of the two initial contracted program attorneys at the end of the first year of the program and the search to identify experienced attorneys to fill the positions, as well as recognition by program staff that an on-site director or “lead counsel” was needed to help ensure cases progressed and to make day-to-day decisions for the program. These and other logistical challenges are common and should be expected when implementing a new program. The following challenges remained at the end of the evaluation period and must be addressed to ensure the program’s long-term sustainability.

Need for Ongoing Funding: The program’s most pressing concern is the urgent need to secure ongoing funding. Current funding for the program will end in the spring of 2024. As such, the future of the program is unclear. Funding is needed to ensure the program’s sustainability and capacity to continue serving families within McLennan County and to see current open cases through to closure. One stakeholder expressed concern that the program might not secure funding by the end of the pilot period. She stated, *“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 [funding] is something that’s able to happen and that we can replicate [the program] in other places.”* She justified the program’s continuation and cited the potential cost savings for McLennan County, *“The cost-benefit analysis for counties who have to pay for legal [representation]—by the Family Code [they] have to pay for legal fees for post-petition stuff. [The PAP program is] saving [McLennan County] like 20+ thousand dollars every time you [resolve a case].”*

The program’s second year corresponded with Texas’ 88th legislative regular session. Members of the program’s planning and implementation team spoke with several state representatives about the need for financial and legislative support for legal advocacy programs, particularly in light of Texas House Bill 730. HB 730 is an omnibus child welfare reform bill passed in May 2023. The legislation requires DFPS to provide parents with a written and verbal summary of their rights, including notification of the right not to speak with DFPS employees and investigators without an attorney present. The legislation also stipulates, among other things, that parents may have legal counsel present before allowing a DFPS investigator into their home or to interview the child. Clients and stakeholders expressed concern that parents and caregivers who do not qualify for indigent representation will not have access to legal counsel without a program such as this, as representation may be outside their financial reach. A stakeholder familiar with the legislation and who was hopeful for a legislative appropriation that would help fund PAP and other similar child welfare legal advocacy programs in Texas commented, *“Because*

both the House and Senate have bills that basically say that say ‘You knock on the door you’re going to have to give them a piece of paper that says you have a right to an attorney. You don’t have to talk to me.’ And all these things. And the legislative offices are saying, I mean, they recognize how flat it is to say you have a right to an attorney when the families that are most likely getting this piece of paper have no idea, I mean, the ability to get an attorney is so far from the truth for them.”

Building Capacity to Accept New Cases: An additional 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. In 2023, an estimated 2,462 cases were assigned by DFPS for investigation in McLennan County (DFPS, 2024), far more than the program can serve. While the program is unlikely to have the capacity to serve all eligible families, the part-time nature of the attorneys contracted to represent clients significantly limits the program’s ability to accept new clients. The program would benefit from having at least one full-time attorney to serve as the program’s lead attorney and Executive Director. Additional attorneys, either contracted or those willing to serve in a volunteer capacity (e.g., licensed attorneys or supervised law interns), would also increase the program’s ability to serve the parents and caregivers of McLennan County who have DFPS involvement.

The vision to increase the program’s capacity is consistent with stakeholders’ long- and short-term hopes for the program. When asked to rate the program’s progress on a scale of 1 to 10, one PAP attorney stated, *“I feel like the clients that we have helped, we’ve done a really great job for. But I would say that we’re not a ten because I think there are more people that we could reach...If we could reach more people, whether by like greater capacity, plus greater intakes, that would be better.”*

Other stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation commented on the need for additional attorneys or volunteers to assist with the more complex cases. Some stakeholders noted the many “hats” that PAP attorneys wear in their work with the program. When asked how the program might be strengthened, one stakeholder immediately responded, *“An attorney. [Hiring] an additional attorney who’s able to respond and be a part of the program because I know [with other parent legal advocacy programs], their attorneys, this is all that they do. [PAP] attorneys have other jobs and they have other duties.”* The stakeholder elaborated, *“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.”* Other stakeholders suggested the addition of a certified paralegal would also help strengthen the program. Notably, when interviewed, all four program attorneys mentioned that a certified paralegal—part-time or full-time— would be very helpful to the program and would expand the program’s capacity to serve the community. One PAP attorney noted, *“If the program had the capacity for a paralegal, that would be ideal...a paralegal would be really helpful, even a part-time paralegal.”* Attorneys noted that the paralegal could assist with legal research, retrieving information and documents, as well as drafting legal documents, correspondence, and pleadings for clients’ cases.

PAP staff and other stakeholders interviewed for the project also mentioned the need to formalize the policies and procedures the program had developed but had not yet operationalized in writing. One of the attorneys stated, *“We have policies. It’s hard to like, call them [that]. They’re all informal. [The policies are] constantly being reevaluated as well. You know, ‘Is this working? No? Then we’re going to try something else.’”* Another attorney responded similarly when asked what changes were needed

in the program moving forward. She stated, *“...I think getting written policies and procedures, how we do things.”* Another stakeholder with a general knowledge of the program echoed this need and noted, *“Policies, procedures, clear guidelines for staff.”*

Addressing the Backlog of Cases Accepted for Services: Shifts in the legal personnel at the end of the program’s first year resulted in a backlog of pre-petition cases. This backlog created confusion for the new attorneys who were phased in to replace the original attorneys and the clients waiting to hear updates about their cases or, in other circumstances, whether their cases would be accepted for services. The complex nature of cases program staff accepted in the program’s first few months delayed cases and contributed to the backlog. Some cases were exceptionally complex and consumed more time and resources than the attorneys had available. After the program’s first year, PAP attorneys developed a sense of the case types with which they were most equipped to assist and those most suited to the program’s mission. A stakeholder familiar with the program’s cases and the difficulties program staff had encountered with the past cases commented, *“The referrals coming in now are more parent-driven and [the attorneys] have gotten their processes in place now. [Now] they can be more selective about who they’re [representing].”* However, prior to this period, program staff wrestled with how to best serve clients with particularly complicated cases. A PAP attorney who joined the program after the first year explained, *“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.”*

Marketing the Program and Diversifying Referrals: Several stakeholders mentioned a desire to diversify referrals by promoting the program to other community agencies, churches, and local businesses. When asked what the program could do better, several clients mentioned the need to advertise the program more and “get the word” out to parents and caregivers in need of advice or representation with pre-petition child welfare matters. One parent observed, *“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.”* Another caregiver echoed this statement: *“More advertising [is needed]. Because a lot of people who have CPS cases don’t know about the program.”* One mother suggested that DFPS investigators should promote the program and have cards for the PAP program printed and available to provide to clients. She stated, *“[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.”*

During the evaluation, program staff wrestled with when and how to best promote the program and, at times, questioned the wisdom of promoting the program given its limited capacity. This was particularly true towards the end of the first year, after the two initial contracted attorneys left the program. However, as the number of backlogged cases decreased, this issue appeared less of a concern. During this same period, some stakeholders expressed concerns that DFPS might have been overly selective in the cases they referred to PAP. One stakeholder explained, *“We don’t know what other cases are out there that aren’t calling [for help from the program]. But it just seems like knowing what we know about CPS and about the calls that come into 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."

Members of the planning and implementation team mentioned this concern in monthly planning meetings held during the program's first two years; however, no consensus was developed on how to best explore or mitigate this concern.

“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. But that's the reality of being a pilot project, you know, going in that you're really not going to do some things well and you're going to hopefully figure out a way to resolve it so the next folks that do it, you can tell them, ‘Oh, by the way, don't do this. That's actually a trap door - don't go down that path, that's not going to work out.’ And so that's just part of the process. It's not it's not easy to do those things. But I think [the program has] been successful, with the understanding that we've got to continue to push to figure out what we can do better.” – Community Stakeholder

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the evaluation, several helpful lessons were learned that will benefit future parental legal advocacy programs. The following section addresses the lessons learned in this evaluation and recommendations for implementing future parental legal advocacy programs.

Organizational Structure: Formalize the Structure of the Organization

Determine 501(c)3 Status: While there are several organizational models and structures that legal advocacy programs can use, programs should examine the pros and cons of applying for recognition by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code—a process that takes time and effort and a designation that many local, state, and federal funders require. In the second year of the PAP program, the planning and implementation team determined that 501(c)3 status was a necessary next step to ensure the program would be eligible for external funding. The program subsequently received 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service in fall 2023.

Organizational Roles and Structure: Prior to initiating client services and contracting with attorneys, new programs should develop a clear organizational chart to clarify the program's leadership and who will make day-to-day decisions for the program. Based on the interviews conducted with external community stakeholders and current PAP staff, new programs should consider including the following organizational structure and roles (see Figure 33):

- **Board of Directors** – Identify and appoint an experienced, diverse, client-focused Board of Directors. It is essential to identify board members who are committed to the program's mission and who possess a diverse range of skill sets and viewpoints to help guide the organization. Once identified, board members should receive professional nonprofit board training addressing their legal and fiduciary responsibilities in monitoring compliance with the organization's bylaws and all relevant federal, state, and local laws. In addition, board members should work with the program's leadership to establish long- and short-term goals

and plans for the organization, help elevate the organization's visibility in the community, and assist with ongoing fundraising efforts.

- **Executive Director/Lead Attorney** – During the first year, the program did not have a director or lead attorney appointed to provide day-to-day leadership for the program. The lack of leadership created confusion for staff at times and made it difficult to enforce program timelines for tasks such as client documentation or communicating with clients. As such, new programs should identify and appoint a full-time Executive Director/Lead Attorney before initiating client services. In addition to experience in family law—specifically with child welfare cases—the Executive Director should have experience with or receive training in nonprofit management. Many of the issues the PAP program encountered during the first year and detailed in the evaluation's interim reports (December 2022 and June 2023) might have been better anticipated by an individual with management experience in a nonprofit setting or an attorney who has worked in a nonprofit setting that provides legal assistance to clients.
- **Contract Attorneys** – The community's need for pre-petition legal assistance was present as soon as the McLennan County program launched. The community's need overextended the resources that two part-time contracted attorneys with their own existing law practices had to provide. Full-time resources are invaluable when growing community awareness, learning to balance caseloads, prioritizing complex issues, and establishing client relationships and communication patterns. That said, a contract model should not be wholly disregarded. Rather, new programs should consider contracting with additional qualified attorneys (e.g., 4-5) to help share the workload and allow the organization increased flexibility when one or more contracted attorneys are unavailable to assist with new cases. Additionally, contracting with additional attorneys would enable the program to access a broader range of legal expertise to aid parents and caregivers (e.g., landlord/tenant issues, warrants and traffic tickets, child support, public benefits).
- **Social Worker/Intake Coordinator** – The Social Worker/Intake Coordinator establishes a strong point of first contact with prospective clients during the intake process. While clients interviewed for the evaluation were exceptionally thankful for the legal services they received through the program, almost all the clients specifically mentioned being grateful and appreciative of the services provided by the PAP social worker, the first person they first spoke with when contacting the program.
- **Certified Paralegal/Office Manager** – Citing the high need in the community for pre-petition representation and services and the part-time status of their work with the program, each of the PAP attorneys interviewed for the evaluation mentioned the need for a certified Paralegal to assist the attorneys with legal research, retrieving information and documents, and drafting legal documents, correspondence, and pleadings for clients' cases. Additionally, as the organization grows and funding increases, there will be a need for someone to fill the role of Office Manager and bookkeeper to ensure that financial transactions, such as donations and sliding scale payments from clients, remain separate from the organization's leadership and the ongoing fiscal integrity of the organization can be maintained. An individual acting in this

role would provide leadership and oversight to ensure that all funds are spent and managed according to the organization's goals and mission.

- **Director of Development and Marketing** – Building a sustainable revenue stream of grants and donations and increasing community awareness of the program through marketing and development efforts should be a central priority for the Parent Advocacy Program and other similar organizations. The Director of Development and Marketing will work with the Executive Director and Board of Directors to develop and implement a comprehensive fundraising plan that aligns with the organization's goals and mission. The person in this role would also identify local, state, and federal grants and work with the Executive Director to submit funding applications. The Director of Development and Marketing would also be responsible for establishing processes for accepting and managing individual, foundation, and corporate gifts and develop and follow clear policies on the types of gifts the program will accept (e.g., stocks, real estate, cash, in-kind donations, etc.). Lastly, the person in this role should develop a clear plan to increase community awareness of the program. Broadening awareness of the program will result in additional clients, increased donations, and supporters throughout the area.
- **Parent Advocate** – The PAP program did not have the resources to hire a Parent Advocate. This role is widely acknowledged in the literature as an essential component of pre- and post-petition legal advocacy program support. Some stakeholders who were interviewed acknowledged that PAP clients could have benefitted from someone in this role. As a former DFPS Investigation supervisor and well-known member of the community, the PAP social worker was able to fill some of the roles that a Parent Advocate would typically fill, such as explaining and answering questions about the investigation process and providing case updates to clients. However, available research on other pre-petition and post-petition programs that employed a parent advocate suggests that clients can benefit from having access to someone who has experienced the child welfare system as a client (American Bar Association, 2011; Guggenheim & Jacobs, 2019). Moving forward, the PAP program and new programs in development should consider the feasibility of implementing this role, whether in a full-time, part-time, or volunteer capacity.

Figure 33: Proposed organizational structure



Eligibility, Systems, and Infrastructure

Clear Eligibility Criteria: During the evaluation, the eligibility criteria for the program shifted while program staff determined the types of cases and issues best suited to the program. Program staff reported that during the early months of the program, they accepted cases that, in retrospect, were either not a good fit for the program’s mission or proved too complex for the limited resources and time that program attorneys had to offer. To ensure the organization remains consistent with its stated mission and purpose, program staff must establish clear eligibility criteria for the program and identify the types of cases that are best served by other legal counsel in the community. This process should be determined before services to clients are initiated and should be available to potential clients and referral sources. Clearly articulated eligibility criteria will promote transparency and ensure that the program’s mission remains unchanged

Formal Policies and Procedures: While some duties will shift as program procedures become more solidified, the program implementation team should develop job descriptions for employees prior to the launch of the program. In addition, clear policies and procedures should be developed and implemented within the program’s first six months. Formalized policies and procedures will ensure everyone understands their role and responsibilities and help the organization identify processes requiring more clarity. To aid in this process, the planning and implementation team should consider securing a copy of existing policies and procedures from an established child welfare legal advocacy program to use as a template to guide the process.

Case Management Database: The program requires a database capable of tracking adverse parties and other case variables needed to identify conflicts of interest, client information, legal actions, and case outcomes. The program used the case management software platform, LegalServer, for this purpose. However, program staff noted the licensing fees for this platform were steep and they were

uncertain if it would be financially feasible to use the platform once the pilot funds ended in December 2023.

Regardless of the platform utilized, the types of client information and outcomes that will be tracked must be determined before the program is implemented. Program staff found it challenging to capture variables or outcomes added to LegalServer after the program initiated client services. For example, a year after the program was implemented, program staff obtained a list of recommended client and outcome variables that needed to be entered and tracked for each client. Some of the variables on the list corresponded to information the program already collected during their intake process; however, other variables included new, more detailed information the program had not previously collected, such as the race and ethnicity of the children involved in each case. Given that the program's intake process did not address this information, program staff struggled to capture this information accurately for families referred to the program during the first year. Legal advocacy groups and scholars have made recommendations regarding the specific types of data and case outcomes that pre- and post-petition legal advocacy programs should collect. New organizations should consider these guidelines when planning the information that will be tracked and how the organization will evaluate the program's impact.

Adequate Office/Meeting Space: Sufficient office space is needed to meet with clients and allow program staff to work in the same office space. Restrictions on the pilot program's seed funding limited the program's ability to secure office space for the program. This required staff to use their personal office spaces, which were too small to accommodate other program staff or allow for a private meeting space for client consultations when other staff were present. While the program's attorneys made the space limitations work, they acknowledged that the situation was not ideal. New programs should consider the program staff's space needs to ensure adequate private meeting space is available for intake assessments and client meetings.

Interpretation and Translation Services: Table 1 of this report details the racial/ethnic and gender comparison of all children in McLennan County, those children removed by DFPS in McLennan County, and the 91 children served by the Parent Advocacy Program. Data presented in Table 1 suggests that Hispanic/Latinx children in McLennan County were underserved by the program (39% vs. 10%, respectively) when compared to children who were identified as White (40% vs. 43%, respectively) or those who were identified as Black or African American (15% vs. 45%, respectively). The disparity in the racial and ethnic populations served was likely due, in some part, to a lack of program staff who spoke Spanish. Additionally, the zip codes targeted by program staff during recruitment and marketing efforts were those with the highest proportion of removals by DFPS in McLennan County when the program was initiated in fall 2021.

Nevertheless, Texas currently ranks second in the United States in the number of Hispanic or Latino individuals – an increase of 23 percent between 2010 and 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Spanish interpretation and translation services have become essential for organizations providing legal and social services in Texas. Interpretation and translation services, whether they are provided in person or via telephone or video, ensure the organization can provide effective communication with clients who are not fluent in English and ensure that clients have equal access to all of the services and resources offered by the organization. The PAP program's ability to serve all clients in

McLennan County would be greatly enhanced through the provision of these services.

Sustainability Through Marketing and Development

Funding: External funding must be a priority from the onset of the program. Program staff should consider local, state, and federal funding sources and focus on building a sustainable revenue stream. Additionally, program staff must increase program awareness through marketing and development efforts. Specifically, programs should identify city, county, state, and federal funding mechanisms that might contribute to the program's sustainability, as well as funding from private foundations and donors. Establishing methods for individuals to donate funds, their time, and in-kind services will benefit the program and increase capacity.

Fee Generation: The Executive Director and the program's Board should consider implementing a sliding scale fee structure for services or a pay-what-you-can model to help generate additional funds for the program. Income data collected during the intake assessment suggests that many of the clients assisted by the program possessed some, albeit limited, ability to pay for representation. The use of a sliding scale fee structure or similar model will allow the program to generate revenue, while also customizing their fee structure to clients' needs. Over time, this additional revenue would enable the organization to hire additional personnel to support the mission and activities of the program.

Develop Relationships with Formal and Informal Community Supports: Community support for the program is essential to the overall visibility and sustainability of the program. During the pilot stage, PAP staff worked to gain the trust and respect of local DFPS administrators, investigators, and other stakeholders in the community. This support they gained resulted in a consistent stream of referrals from DFPS and other community agencies. Program staff should continue to work to develop 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 increase community awareness successfully. In addition, program staff should consider reaching out to KWBU-FM (Waco's National Public Radio affiliate), Waco Tribune-Herald, 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. Similarly, new programs should look for ways to promote the visibility of their program through local media platforms, social media, and coordinated community engagement strategies.

Streamline Case Process and Establish Timelines

Case Procedures and Timelines: Before the program launches, timelines and procedures for processing cases should be determined. Program staff should determine appropriate goals for how cases will be processed prior to the program's implementation. For example, timelines that should be determined include, but are not limited to, the timeframe for staffing pending cases, the timeframe and manner in which clients should be notified of whether or not the program will accept their case, internal goals for finalizing cases (e.g., three months, six months, etc.), as well as timeframes for how long staff have to document and close cases that have been finalized with the courts or DFPS.

Case Type and Complexity: The type and complexity of the client’s legal case matters. As previously noted, staff accepted cases during the program’s first year that ultimately proved too complex for the limited resources and time that part-time contracted attorneys could offer. Over time, PAP attorneys identified specific types of cases that could be addressed in a reasonable period (e.g., 3 to 6 months) without over-extending the program’s overall resources and capacity. These cases included: 1) Investigation defenses, 2) custody modifications when all parties are in agreement, and 3) custody modifications with non-offending parents. Program staff noted that these three case types were consistent with the program’s mission and could be addressed within a few months in most cases. New programs are advised to identify the types of cases that are a good fit with the program’s mission and focus, as well as the types of cases the program is most suited to address with regard to expertise and resources.

Waitlist and Backlog Procedures: Cases should be prioritized based on urgency and if a backlog occurs, programs should develop a clear plan for clearing the backlog. As of the close of this evaluation, PAP attorneys had made great strides in addressing the program’s backlog; however, to help prevent future backlogs and improve communication with clients seeking legal assistance, the program might benefit from the creation of a formal waitlist in which clients are periodically contacted by program staff (e.g., every six weeks or quarterly) to determine if the program’s legal services are still needed. While a waitlist may not be an appropriate avenue for all case types—specifically, investigation defenses—it should be weighed for parents and caregivers seeking custody modifications, assistance with divorces, protective orders, or other family law matters that could result in unnecessary removal of children into the child welfare system.

CONCLUSION

As of 2022, the most recent year for which DFPS data is publicly available, an estimated 64,000 children live in McLennan County. This program provided legal assistance for 51 cases, which included 50 parents and caregivers and 91 children. Given the many outside influences present in child welfare cases, one of the greatest methodological difficulties in conducting evaluations is understanding the overall difference the program made for those who accessed services from the program. Nevertheless, the evaluation results suggest that for the parents and caregivers who received services and their 91 children, this program mattered by ensuring their safety and preventing them from entering the Texas foster care system.

Findings from this evaluation provided insights into how the program was implemented in practice and highlighted many of the challenges that new pre-petition legal advocacy programs are likely to encounter. While the program experienced challenges during the pilot period, program staff remained flexible and responsive to their clients’ needs. Many of the difficulties encountered during the pilot are common to new programs and, with ongoing attention and sustainable funding sources, will be resolved over time. Regardless, the program fills a much-needed role for vulnerable families in McLennan County. Although the program has sustained a number of changes during the past two years, the information collected from community stakeholders and the clients who utilized the program’s services suggests that the Parent Advocacy Program has great value. With a sustainable funding structure, the program will be a lasting benefit to McLennan County residents and a model for other communities across the state and beyond.

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APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

The following section includes the various stakeholder interview schedules used in the evaluation. Different interview protocols were created for the different community stakeholder groups. In total, four different interview protocols were used. These included interview protocols for 1) individuals who worked to plan and implement the program, 2) professional staff contracted to provide services to clients, 3) individuals who referred clients to the program, and 4) those connected with the program in some other capacity.

External Planning and Implementation Team Members

1. If you can just start by telling me your name, where you work, and your role or relationship to the Parent Advocacy Program?
 - a. How did you first become involved with the Parent Advocacy Program?
2. What is your understanding of the purpose of the program?
 - a. Who is the program designed to serve?
 - b. Is the program serving everyone that you think it should be? If not, who is being missed?
3. What does a “good” outcome look like?
4. What need does the Parent Advocacy Program fill in McLennan County?
5. Specifically, what role if any did you play in the shaping of the program?
 - a. What was your initial impression of the program?
6. The program has been operational since January. Can you tell us about your thoughts on the program implementation and first year activities thus far?
 - a. Are things going as planned? Why or why not?
 - b. What changes, if any, in the program or the program’s policies have you witnessed or learned about?
 - c. Have the activities met your expectations and initial vision?
 - d. What changes would you like to see made or considered?
7. What are the strengths of the program based on what you have seen thus far?
8. Are there aspects of the program that have been challenging? If so, can you tell me more about these?
 - a. What steps could the program staff take to address these challenges?
9. Do you believe information about the program has been shared appropriately and effectively?
 - a. With potential clients?
 - b. With other stakeholders such as yourself, or other potential partners or referral sources?
 - c. What are some steps that the program could take to improve communication with these parties?
10. On a scale of 1-10, overall, how effective has the program been thus far?
 - a. Why did you give it this score?
 - b. What would need to happen for you to rank this higher?
11. Can you share any success stories that you know about?
12. What do you see for the future of the Parent Advocacy Program?

13. What do you think would happen in Waco if this program goes away?
14. Is there anything that you think is important for us to know about the Parent Advocacy Program that I have not asked you?

PAP Staff

1. If you can just start by telling me your name and your role with the Parent Advocacy Program?
 - a. How did you first become involved with the Parent Advocacy Program?
2. What is your understanding of the purpose of the program?
 - a. What need does the Parent Advocacy Program fill in McLennan County?
 - b. Who is the program designed to serve?
 - c. Is the program serving everyone that you think it should be? If not, who is being missed?
3. What does a “good” client outcome look like?
4. Specifically, what role if any did you play in the shaping of the program?
 - a. What was your initial impression of the program?
5. The program has been operational since January. Who is responsible for what among the three of you?
 - a. What formal (or informal) policies have been developed for the program? If so, where are these located?
 - b. If no policies have been developed, who should this responsibility fall to?
6. Can you tell us about your thoughts on the program implementation and first year activities thus far?
 - a. Are things going as planned? Why or why not?
 - b. What changes, if any, in the program or the program’s policies have you witnessed or learned about?
 - c. Do you feel those changes were appropriate and necessary?
 - d. Have the activities met your expectations and initial vision?
 - e. What changes would you like to see made or considered?
7. Do you feel you have been empowered to make appropriate choices in your role to serve the clients? Why or why not?
8. Specifically, when it comes to acceptance/qualifying a client, have you witnessed any criteria or barriers that prevent you from serving anyone you feel should be included in the program? If so, please elaborate.
9. What are the strengths of the program and the staff based on what you have seen thus far?
10. Are there aspects of the program that have been challenging? If so, can you tell me more about these?
 - a. What steps could be taken to address these challenges?
11. Do you think information about the program has been shared effectively...
 - a. With potential clients?
 - b. With other stakeholders, including potential partners or referral sources?
 - c. What are some steps that could be taken to improve communication with these parties?
12. On a scale of 1-10, overall, how effective has the program been thus far?
 - a. Why did you give it this score?

- b. What would need to happen for you to rank this higher?
- 13. Can you share any success stories that you know about?
- 14. What do you see for the future of the Parent Advocacy Program?
- 15. What do you think would happen in Waco if this program goes away?
- 16. Is there anything that you think is important for us to know about the Parent Advocacy Program that I have not asked you?

Referred Clients to PAP

1. If you can just start by telling me your name, where you work?
2. How did you first find out about the Parent Advocacy Program?
3. What is your understanding of the purpose of the program? How was it described to you?
 - a. In your opinion, what need, if any, does the Parent Advocacy Program fill in McLennan County?
4. What were your initial thoughts about the program when you first heard about it?
5. Do you believe information about the program has been shared appropriately and effectively.
 - a. With CPS?
 - b. With potential clients?
 - c. What are some steps that the program could take to improve communication and awareness about the program?
6. I'd like to shift now and find out more about the referral process. Can you tell me about the referral process. What did that process look like for you? How was it?
 - a. What worked about the process?
 - b. What could be strengthened?
7. Are you satisfied with the communication efforts by staff after referral?
8. What impact, if any, did this program have on your client and their situation?
9. Is there anything about the program that you would like to see changed?
 - a. What steps could the program staff take to make these changes?
10. Is there anything about the program or the staff that you think is working particularly well. The strengths of the program, that is.
11. Based on what you have seen of the program thus far, has the program met your expectations or hopes? Why or why not?
12. On a scale of 1-10, overall, how effective has the program been thus far?
 - a. Why did you give it this score?
 - b. What would need to happen for you to rank this higher?
13. Is there anything that you think is important for us to know about the Parent Advocacy Program that I have not asked you?

Other Stakeholders

1. If you can just start by telling me your name, your affiliation, and your role with your organization.
2. How did you first become involved with the Parent Advocacy Program?
3. (If not already answered) Can you clarify what CarePortal is and what its relationship is with the Parent Advocacy Program?

4. What is your understanding of the purpose of the Parent Advocacy Program?
 - a. What need does the Parent Advocacy Program fill in McLennan County?
5. What were your initial thoughts about the program when you first heard about it?
6. I'd like to shift now and find out more about your organization's work with the program.
7. How does the process work? Who communicates with you, who pays?
8. How would you rate the communication efforts with your organization?
9. Do you feel valued by the Parent Advocacy Program staff as a partner? Why or why not?
10. Do you believe the Parent Advocacy Program is effective? Why or why not?
11. Can you tell me about the referral process. What did that process look like for you?
 - a. What types of referrals are you receiving? Do you feel the requests are appropriate? Why or why not?
 - b. What worked about the process?
 - c. What could be strengthened?
 - d. Are you satisfied with the communication efforts by staff after referral?
12. Are there other observed client needs that the program may not be aware of?
13. What changes would you like to see made in the program or the referral process to help you better serve the clients?
14. Do you have any success stories you would like to share with us of clients that you have worked with the Parent Advocacy Program to serve?
15. Based on what you have seen of the program thus far, has the program met your expectations or hopes? Why or why not?
16. On a scale of 1-10, overall, how effective has the program been thus far?
 - a. Why did you give it this score?
 - b. What would need to happen for you to rank this higher?
17. What do you see for the future of the Parent Advocacy Program?
18. What do you think would happen in Waco if this program goes away?
19. Is there anything that you think is important for us to know about the Parent Advocacy Program that I have not asked you?

APPENDIX B: PARENT AND CAREGIVER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Can you tell me about what brought you to the Parent Advocacy Program?
 - a. Why did you need legal assistance?
 - b. What specific assistance were you looking for from the program – For example, seeking a custody modification, help with fighting CPS's investigation, help obtaining a protection order, etc.?
2. After you heard about the program, what were your initial thoughts about the program?
3. What do you think would have happened with your situation if you had not had access to an attorney through the program?

What would you have done if the program had not been able help?

What would have happened to your child(ren)? For example, would they have been removed?
4. Since the program is a legal assistance program, I have some questions about your experience with working with an attorney to address your situation:
 - a. Did you work with an attorney?
 - b. What was your experience with the attorney like?

Can you tell me more about why your experience was (positive/negative/mixed)?
 - c. Did the attorney seem to understand your situation?

Why or why not?
 - d. Who communicated with you about your case?

Were you satisfied with the level of communication? Why or why not?
 - e. Did you get what you were looking for from the attorney? Why or why not?
 - f. Was there anything that you wish the attorney had done differently?
5. Did you work with the program's social worker to access any resources?
 - a. If yes, what was your experience like working with the social worker?
 - b. What did she help you with?
 - c. Was there anything that she was not able to help you with? If so, what was it?
6. Would you recommend the Parent Advocacy Program to others? Why or why not?
7. What could the program do to make getting legal assistance a better experience for parents and caregivers?
8. Was it clear to you when you were working with the Parent Advocacy Program, that they are separate from Child Protective Services (CPS) or the investigation unit?

Ask if answered "no": Why not?

If it was not clear the two entities were different: What could help make this more clear to parents and other caregivers?
9. Is there anything I have not asked that you think is important for me to know about your experience working with the staff of the Parent Advocacy Program?

APPENDIX C: CLIENT SURVEY

Q0: Please indicate below if you would like to participate in the survey.

- I would like to participate in this survey (1)
- I do not want to participate in this survey (2)

Q1: Who referred you to the Parent Advocacy Program?

- Child Protective Services (CPS) or Child Protective Investigations (CPI) (1)
- Child's school (2)
- Family member (3)
- Friend (4)
- Online search/ Internet (5)
- Community agency (Please explain): (6) _____
- Other (Please explain): (7) _____

Q2: Why were you referred to the Parent Advocacy Program? (Check all that apply)

- Needed an attorney to represent me with a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation or another matter with CPS (1)
- Needed help with a custody modification (2)
- Needed help getting a protective order (3)
- Needed help with my divorce petition (4)
- Needed help with another family law matter (Please explain) (5) _____
- Other (Please explain) (6) _____

Q3: What is the current status of your case with CPS?

- My case is closed with CPS (1)
- My case is still open with CPS (2)
- I am not sure (3)
- Other (Please explain): (4) _____

Skip To: Q5 If Case_Status = My case is still open with CPS

Q4: Did you get the outcome that you wanted for your situation after working with the Parent Advocacy Program?

- Yes (1)
- No (Please explain) (2) _____

Skip To: Q6 If Case_Outcome = No (Please explain)

Skip To: Q7 If Case_Outcome = Yes

Q5: In your opinion, will the Parent Advocacy Program help you achieve the outcome you want for your situation?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Maybe (3)

Skip To: Q7 If In your opinion, will the Parent Advocacy Program help you achieve the outcome you want for your... = Yes

Skip To: Q7 If In your opinion, will the Parent Advocacy Program help you achieve the outcome you want for your... = No

Skip To: Q7 If In your opinion, will the Parent Advocacy Program help you achieve the outcome you want for your... = Maybe

Q6: In your opinion, what was the reason you did not get the outcome that you wanted for your situation? (Check all that apply)

- Child Protective Services (1)
- Judge (2)
- Attorney with the Parent Advocacy Program (3)
- Social Worker with the Parent Advocacy Program (4)
- Something I did or did not do (5)
- Other (Please explain) (6) _____

Q7: What is your overall satisfaction with services received through the Parent Advocacy Program?

- Extremely Satisfied (1)
- Somewhat Satisfied (2)
- Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied (3)
- Somewhat Dissatisfied (4)
- Extremely Dissatisfied (5)

End of Block: Case Status & Outcome

Start of Block: Attorney

Q8_a: The next few questions are about the attorney you received services from at the Parent Advocacy Program.

Q8_b: What services did the attorney provide to you (*Check all that apply*)

- Helped me communicate with Child Protective Services about an investigation or other matter (1)
- Helped me obtain a protective order (2)
- Helped me with my divorce petition (3)
- Helped me modify my custody agreement for my child(ren) (4)
- Helped me with a housing issue (5)
- Helped me with another family law matter (6)
- Referred me to another attorney for a different law matter (7)
- Referred me to a social service agency for assistance (8)
- Other (Please specify) (9) _____

Q9: The **attorney** I worked with...

	Strongly Agree (1)	Somewhat Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
Understood my situation (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seemed knowledgeable about CPS (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Answered my questions (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informed me of the next steps for my case (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respected my wishes for how to resolve my case (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10_a: The next few questions are about the social worker you received services from at the Parent Advocacy Program.

Q10_b: What services did the **social worker** provide to you (Check all that apply)

- Helped me get things I needed for my home (1)
- Helped me with transportation (2)
- Helped me get food for my household (e.g., SNAP, WIC, local food pantries) (3)
- Helped me with housing (4)
- Helped me pay a utility bill (5)
- Referred me or my child for mental health services or support (e.g., MHMR, counseling) (6)
- Helped me get public benefits for my children (e.g., Medicaid, CHIP, Social Security, etc.) (7)
- Referred me to parenting classes (8)
- Referred me to anger management classes (9)
- Referred me for a substance use assessment or treatment services (10)
- Referred me to a domestic violence resource (11)
- Other (Please explain): (12) _____

Q11: The **social worker** I worked with...

	Strongly Agree (1)	Somewhat Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
Understood my situation (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seemed knowledgeable about CPS (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Answered my questions (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informed me of the next steps for my case (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connected me with other services in my community (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12: Would you to recommend the Parent Advocacy Program of McLennan County to other parents and caregivers?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q13_a: These last few questions will help us know more about the individuals who completed this survey. Individual responses will not be shared with Parent Advocacy Program staff.

Q13_b: Please enter the zip code in which you currently live. _____

Q14: What is your race? *(Check all that apply)*

- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
 - Asian (2)
 - Black or African American (3)
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (4)
 - White (5)
 - Prefer to not answer (6)
-

Q15: What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic (1)
 - Non-Hispanic (2)
 - Prefer to not answer (3)
-

Q16: What is your age?

- 19 or younger (1)
- 20 - 29 (2)
- 30 - 39 (3)
- 40 - 49 (4)
- 50 - 59 (5)
- 60 - 69 (6)
- 70 or above (7)
- Prefer to not answer (8)

Q17: Please provide an email address where you would like your \$20 Walmart electronic gift card sent?

End of Survey: Thank you for completing this survey