

A report prepared for the Supreme Court of Ohio
and the Ohio Department of Children and Youth

Ohio Legal Representation Pilot Program: Year Two Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

At the request of the Supreme Court of Ohio and in partnership with the Ohio Department of Children and Youth, Action Research is evaluating the Legal Representation Pilot Program initiative. The initiative includes pilot programs in six Ohio counties that provide multidisciplinary legal representation to parents involved or at risk of involvement with the child welfare system. Each multidisciplinary team includes at least one lawyer, social worker, and parent advocate who work together to address family issues, including child safety issues, and help families avoid involvement with the child welfare system.

This report describes findings from the second year of the four-year evaluation. The research team conducted site visits to each of the six pilots and focus groups and interviews with 58 pilot staff, judges, public children services agency (PCSA) staff, and community partners. The team gathered additional information from aggregate program and expenditure data, as well as program materials and reports submitted by pilot programs. Researchers also observed technical assistance sessions and attended an all-pilot convening. The team analyzed data using a framework approach to identify themes and patterns while keeping abreast of the research literature and developments in the field.

Key Findings

This year's report focuses on pilots' strategies for effective internal collaboration, client engagement, community engagement, and government partner collaboration.

Internal Collaboration. Pilot programs use several approaches to build the cohesiveness of their teams. These include recruiting staff with values that align with program practice, such as empathy and a passion for meeting parents' needs; outlining the roles, responsibilities, and scope of work for each team member to ensure alignment; tailoring communication strategies to their office layout and locations; and making consistent use of many modes of communication, including phone, text, email, impromptu conversation, and team meetings as appropriate. In some cases, pilot staff turnover made applying these strategies challenging. In others, staff had some conflicting understandings of their roles and responsibilities that created tension.

Client Engagement. Some pilot programs promote early client engagement using "contracts" or participation handbooks that describe client responsibilities, functions of pilot staff, and distinctions between the roles of pilot, court, and PCSA staff. Further, pilot staff reported that early interactions between clients and parent advocates helped build client trust in the program, as did providing concrete support, such as clothing, baby supplies, or furniture, as soon as possible. One pilot worked with an organization to provide low- or no-cost cell phones and internet, which facilitated communication between clients and program staff. Pilots reported stronger engagement after explaining to clients what to expect in meetings and hearings with PCSA and court staff, as well as roleplaying these events.

Community Engagement. Devoting considerable time and effort to developing relationships with service provider organizations that can address client needs was described by pilots as an integral step in their community engagement efforts. Building community resource guides that include comprehensive and up-to-date information about community agencies helped staff connect clients with provider agencies quickly, as did establishing streamlined procedures with agencies

for making client referrals. Staff reported stronger community engagement when social workers and parent advocates established a presence in neighborhoods most impacted by the child welfare system by attending community events.

Government Partner Collaboration. Pilot programs strive to balance their duty to provide zealous defense for clients with their frequent need to work with government stakeholders to reach the best outcomes for their clients. Pilots cited frequent communication both at the leadership level and with frontline staff as critical to building trusting relationships with government partners. This communication includes orienting PCSA and court staff to the pilot so that they know the role the pilot plays, as well as establishing protocols for keeping all parties informed of families' progress while respecting client confidentiality. Several pilots found that government partner support was boosted by county staff witnessing the pilot's work to resolve child safety concerns and prevent families from deeper involvement in the child welfare system.

Recommendations

Most pilot programs employ some but not all of the approaches described above. The team recommends that pilots compare their practices to these and other approaches described in the body of this report. Based on the data collected in Ohio and our experience in the field, the research team offers three recommendations:

1. *Review efforts aimed at minimizing staff turnover.* The child welfare field suffers from comparatively high turnover rates, as pay is low and the work is challenging. That said, working to minimize turnover, in part by employing the strategies described in the internal collaboration section above, is essential to maintain the stability and effectiveness of the pilots.
2. *Ensure community connections.* Staff's connections with service providers and community members often are what distinguish the experience of multidisciplinary parent defense from that of other models of parent representation. These connections build trust, facilitate client flow, and often are a precursor to helping parents solve issues that put their children at risk of harm.
3. *Assess communication strategies.* The importance of communication among pilot staff and with local partners came up frequently in our discussions with stakeholders. Programs tend to function well when parties engage in frequent and consistent communication about both client cases and general program processes.

Conclusion

The pilots have served over 250 families with 600 children in the past two years. All pilot sites are accepting new clients and continuing to learn how to best do this work, toward creating positive change in the lives of those they serve. The body of this report provides detailed information about the above and other areas of their practice.

Introduction

In 2020, the Supreme Court of Ohio (SCO) and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, now part of the Ohio Department of Children and Youth, collaborated to pilot six innovative programs that aim to divert parents from deeper involvement in the child welfare system. Each program employs a multidisciplinary legal advocacy approach to keep families together safely. This is the second of four yearly reports that the SCO contracted with Action Research to produce. This report covers pilot developments during the 2023 calendar year and quantitative data encompassing Program Year 2, from October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. The report begins with an overview of the six pilot programs and developments since Year 1, followed by a brief description of the second-year evaluation methodology. It moves into a discussion of client demographics and successes, then findings organized by the following sections: physical site conditions, internal collaboration, client engagement, community engagement, government partner collaboration, grant support team collaboration, and sustainability. Throughout, we offer recommendations for multidisciplinary legal representation programs based on the experiences and suggestions of pilot teams.

Program Overview

Background

Many national child welfare and legal experts believe that effective parent representation in child welfare cases serves the vital purposes of engaging parents, supporting the safety and well-being of children and families, reducing the need for foster care, and saving government dollars (American Bar Association [ABA], 2017). However, several studies suggest that there are substantial variations in the quality and practice of parent representation (ABA, 2009, 2011, 2013). This shortage of consistent, high-quality representation can have devastating consequences, such as needlessly separating children from their families and delaying reunification for children already in foster care (Gerber et al., 2019; Gerber et al., 2020; Guggenheim & Jacobs, 2013).

In 2006, the ABA approved Standards of Practice for Attorneys Representing Parents in Abuse and Neglect Cases, which were “intended to promote quality representation and uniformity of practice” among these attorneys (Thornton & Gwin, 2012). The standards emphasize appointing an attorney early in the court process and encourage attorneys to engage parents outside of court to build stronger attorney-client relationships, while using a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates social workers and parent advocates into the legal team. However, many jurisdictions neither provide practice oversight nor guarantee representation to parents who cannot afford to hire a private attorney. The Ohio pilots represent an aggressive effort to introduce parent access to high-quality, multidisciplinary legal representation in the state.

Multidisciplinary services provided by attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates complement legal representation in child welfare and other civil legal matters. Studies indicate that children whose parents are represented by multidisciplinary teams return to their families more quickly than those whose parents are represented by solo practitioners, without diminishing child safety (Gerber et al., 2019, 2020; Courtney & Hook, 2012). Social workers and parent

advocates with lived experience navigating the child welfare system assess clients' needs, connect families with appropriate services and resources, provide case management services, offer social-emotional support, and advocate for parents to court and child welfare officials. Of note, federal support for this work has expanded in recent years. In September 2023, the Administration for Children and Families under the Department of Health & Human Services proposed codifying a 2019 policy manual change allowing for the use of Title IV-E funding to support multidisciplinary parent representation teams.¹ This proposed rule change highlights the value of expanding parental access to high-quality, multidisciplinary legal representation as a means to mitigate child safety concerns and prevent avoidable entries into foster care.

Description of Pilot Programs

Below are descriptions of the six pilot programs in Ohio, each of which provides multidisciplinary legal representation to caregivers involved or at risk of involvement with the child welfare system. All teams are comprised of at least one attorney, social worker, and parent advocate.

Three of the pilot programs (in Cuyahoga, Stark, and Clark Counties) provide *pre-petition* services, meaning they work with families before prosecutors for the public children services agency (PCSA) file a complaint in juvenile court. Their goal is to prevent trauma to children and families associated with families' penetration into the child welfare system, thereby reducing substantiated investigations, court filings, children entering foster care, subsequent maltreatment reports, and public expenditures for clients. Referrals to pre-petition programs often come from a county's PCSA, schools, or community-based organizations. See Table 1 in Appendix A for referral sources for each county. For more information on the pre-petition program framework, see Appendix B.

The Cuyahoga County Public Defender Office was already providing multidisciplinary representation to caregivers who were the subjects of child maltreatment reports. They used the grant to expand their model to serve pre-petition families through their newly created Family Intervention Representation and Services Team (FIRST) program and to add a parent advocate to the team.²

The Stark County Family Court partnered with parent advocates from the Stark County Family Council, attorneys from the county's Public Defender Office and Community Legal Aid, and the local PCSA (i.e., Department of Job and Family Services)³ to develop and implement the Boosting Understanding, Interventions, & Legal Defense (BUILD)

¹ Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides federal reimbursement for a portion of the administration, operation, and service costs pertaining to youth both in foster care and at-risk of entering foster care who meet certain eligibility requirements. The proposed rule can be found here:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/09/28/2023-20932/foster-care-legal-representation>.

² Cuyahoga County's pilot continues to serve formerly pre-petition clients for whom there has been a court filing.

³ While the PCSA is part of the pilot planning process, they are not involved in the representation of parents. Instead, they are a referral source for the pilot team.

program. Parents are represented by public defenders, legal aid attorneys, and attorneys contracted through the Court. Case coordination is provided by a program coordinator funded by the Court.

The Clark County Juvenile Court partnered with Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE) to create the SUCCESS program, serving families with elementary school-aged children experiencing attendance issues. Through their relationship with the Juvenile Court's mediation program and Springfield City School District truancy officers, the program provides civil legal and case management services to prevent involvement in the child welfare and justice systems. The attorneys and parent advocate are employed by ABLE, and the social worker is employed by the Juvenile Court.

Another pilot program, located in Summit County, offers *post-petition* services, wherein they work with families only after the filing of a petition and, for some clients, placement of children into foster care. These services aim to reduce time to permanency, increase reunification rates, and prevent subsequent system involvement. Post-petition program referrals come from the juvenile court. For more information on the post-petition program framework, see Appendix C.

The Summit County Juvenile Court engaged court-employed case coordinators, panel attorneys funded by the Court, and parent advocates from Greenleaf Family Center to create the Multidisciplinary Representation Team (MRT).

Two programs (in Erie and Wayne Counties) work with both *pre- and post-petition* clients.

Within the Erie County Public Defender office, public defenders, a social worker, and a parent advocate staffed by Sandusky Artisans Recovery Community Center together form Project STRENGTH ("Solving Truancy Related Educational Needs & Generating Teachable Homes").

The Wayne County Juvenile Court partnered with contract attorneys from Hoffee Law Firm, the county's Public Defender Office, a parent advocate from The Ridge Project, a social worker from Anazao Community Partners, and their local PCSA (i.e., Children Services Board)³ to create a multidisciplinary legal representation pilot program in the county.

Staffing

Whether the programs are based in public defender offices, juvenile courthouses, or spread across multiple offices, the pilots all have multidisciplinary teams comprised of attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates. See Table 2a below for the total number of staff working with the six pilot sites in Year 2, as well as sums of the average proportion of time that each of these staff members devoted to pilot work. We use the full-time equivalent (FTE) unit of measurement to standardize time across full- and part-time staff. For example, a 4.7 combined FTE among seven pilot social workers suggests that, on average, these staff devote two thirds of their time to pilot

work (i.e., individual FTEs average .67). See Table 2b in Appendix A for more information about staffing, combined FTEs, and average caseloads in each county. Note that data is self-reported for each site. While some pilots were able to reference data collected throughout the year, others were able only to offer estimates.

Table 2a. Staffing Across All Pilot Programs in Year 2

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 6 pilot programs

Staffing Metric	Attorney	Social Workers	Parent Advocates	Other Staff	Total
Number of Staff	22	7	7	24	60
Combined FTE	3.3 ⁴	4.7	5.5	1.9	15.4

Note: “Other Staff” category includes administrative staff and supervisors.

The SCO awarded pilot counties between \$148,440 and \$150,000 for second-year program implementation. These awards included federal Court Improvement Program, Children’s Justice Act, and Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention funds. As in Year 1, in-kind contributions from the pilot sites played a considerable role in supporting the initiative, as grant funding covered only a portion of the project’s total costs. In-kind contributions included, but were not limited to, staffing costs for pilot management and program services.

Developments Since Year 1

The most consequential change in the past year occurred within Wayne County’s program. A low caseload in Year 1, vacancies in the county’s PCSA, and turnover in the Court Administrator position led the court to revamp their pilot’s model. The pilot transitioned from a pre-petition model to a hybrid approach, which will enable staff to work with clients involved in pre- and post-petition matters. The attorneys originally working with the pilot continue to offer legal assistance to pre-petition clients, while a new group of attorneys has started to work with post-petition clients.

Most pilots experienced staffing changes in 2023. Attorneys in Clark, Cuyahoga, Erie, and Stark Counties paused or ended their involvement with the pilot. Erie and Wayne Counties also experienced turnover in their social worker position. These open positions have been filled in Erie and Wayne Counties. Concurrently, Stark County hired a new parent advocate, and Summit County expanded their number of attorneys from three to nine and replaced one of their parent advocates who chose to leave the pilot.

In 2023, all programs developed new partnerships with community-based organizations and government agencies to extend their offerings. In Clark County, they expanded their work from one local elementary school to all elementary schools in the district. Pilots also have presented at

⁴ One pilot has a full-time (i.e., 1 FTE) attorney. Among the other 21 pilot attorneys, their FTE averages .11, suggesting that these attorneys devote an average of 11% of their time to pilot work. Clients may also be referred to other attorneys (e.g., legal aid) for additional legal services, but that time is not counted in the combined FTE.

conferences, seminars, forums, and local organizations to promote awareness of their work. Cuyahoga County’s program was spotlighted in Ohio’s largest newspaper.⁵

Research Methodology

In the second year of this four-year evaluation, the research team amended the process evaluation plan to include elements of a comparative case study, a qualitative approach used to assess similarities and differences across multiple cases sharing common objectives (Goodrick, 2014). This revised evaluation design will compare the context, program designs, implementation, and family outcomes across the six pilots. It aims to examine individual site developments, compare these developments across sites, and situate the sites in the larger context in which they operate. While we incorporate elements of the approach into this report (e.g., comparing sites that offer pre- or post-petition services), the full comparative case study will be presented in the final Year 4 report.

In the second evaluation year, the research team conducted site visits to five counties in April 2023 and Clark County in November 2023. During these visits, the team conducted assessments of physical conditions at all six sites, as well as six semi-structured focus groups and 17 semi-structured interviews, speaking with a total of 58 program staff and stakeholders across the pilot programs.⁶ We used a framework analysis approach to derive key themes from the focus groups, interviews, and assessments of physical site conditions and to synthesize our findings with other data collected.⁷ We analyzed aggregate data submitted by programs related to participant demographics, referrals, case outcomes, and staffing in Year 2 (October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023), as well as pilot expenditure data, program materials, and quarterly and monthly progress reports submitted by the pilot programs to the SCO in 2023. In addition, we reviewed notes from quarterly technical assistance calls with each pilot, an all-pilot convening held at the SCO in November 2023, and other meetings among pilot and support staff.

Key Questions

In Year 2, the research team aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do the pilots promote community engagement, client engagement, internal collaboration, and government partner collaboration?
2. How have the pilots’ program designs changed over time?
3. What have been the successes of families served?
4. What is the nature of collaboration between pilot stakeholders?
5. What are the pilots’ physical site conditions and how are these conditions associated with client engagement and internal collaboration?

⁵ The article, which is behind a paywall, can be found here: <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2023/09/new-first-program-keeping-cuyahoga-county-families-together-avoiding-dcfs-custody.html>.

⁶ To accommodate pilot stakeholders’ schedules, four interviews were conducted virtually.

⁷ For more information on the methodology used to produce this report, please contact the authors.

Limitations

This research has three key limitations. For one, the report does not include feedback from clients on their experiences with the pilot programs. The research team developed a Caregiver Survey to capture former clients' perspectives, which pilots distributed when clients were discharged from the program. However, there was a low response rate that precluded the inclusion of such information. Additionally, the program data included in this report was self-reported by staff at each pilot using an aggregate program data form created by the researchers. Programs described varying capacities for data collection, which may have impacted the reliability of some data. Several sites could only provide estimates of certain requested data, and we did not have access to the state system of record to verify the accuracy of submissions. Finally, the team did not collect data on a comparable group of parents not receiving pilot services, so we cannot compare the experiences of families who did and did not participate in pilots. To address limitations in Years 3 and 4, the research team hopes to collect caregiver input through interviews with former pilot clients and will continue to refine the aggregate program data form to support pilot staff with data collection and management.

Findings

In Year 2, the six pilots continued to innovate, strengthen their programs, and overcome challenges. Below, we outline client demographics, client successes, and case outcomes in Year 2, as detailed by the pilots. We organize our key findings from data collection efforts by the following topics: physical site conditions, internal collaboration, client engagement, community engagement, government partner collaboration, grant support team collaboration, and sustainability. We describe pilots' experiences based on information they reported to the research team, as well as provide recommendations derived from their insights and suggestions. We focus on actionable practices that the pilots, or other jurisdictions seeking to implement a multidisciplinary legal representation program, may pursue to strengthen their programs.

Client Demographics

In Program Year 2 (October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023), the six pilots served 199 clients (145 pre-petition and 54 post-petition) and impacted the lives of 443 children. Across Program Years 1 and 2, the pilots served a total of 271 clients and 600 youth (see Table 3 for clients and children served in each county).

As in Year 1, significantly more clients in Year 2 identified as female (91.5%) than male (8.5%).⁸ At the time of program enrollment, most of these clients again were between the ages of 26 and 49 (77%). Clients aged 18-25 made up 14% of all clients served in Year 2, followed by clients over 50 (8%). No clients were reported to be under 18, and age was unknown for 1 client.

The race of program clients is similar to the demographics of children in care in Ohio⁹: 59% (118) identified as White, 33% (65) identified as Black/African American, 3% (6) identified as

⁸ No clients identified as a gender other than female or male.

⁹ See <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/courts/services-to-courts/children-families/permanency-docket-quarterly-report/>.

Multiple Races, 1% (2) identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, and no clients identified as American Indian/Alaska Native. Race was unknown for 4% (8) of clients (see Table 4 below). Five clients (3%) identified as Hispanic, but ethnicity was unknown for 37% of clients.¹⁰

Table 4. Race of Program Clients in Year 2 (all sites)

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 199 clients

Race	Number	Percent
White	118	59%
Black/African American	65	33%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0%
Multiple Races	6	3%
Unknown	8	4%
Total	199	100%

Client Successes

In the second year of the evaluation, staff from the six pilots shared case examples of how they partnered with their clients to address challenges that contributed to child safety concerns. These examples illustrate how the pilots provide high-quality legal and case management services for their clients involved at different points in the child welfare system.

A pilot with pre-petition services received a referral for a family with multiple children, most of whom had special needs and all of whom were considered truant in their schools. Upon assessing the family’s strengths and needs, pilot staff determined that the truancy was related to a lack of adequate educational support services for the children and the family’s unstable housing arrangement. The pilot team advocated on behalf of the family with school officials to establish Individualized Education Programs and worked with the mother to locate and secure stable housing. With these interventions, the children started to attend school consistently and the family avoided a child protective court filing.

Another pre-petition pilot shared an anecdote illustrating how they worked with a family to address concerns the PCSA had about conditions in their home resulting from a lack of financial resources. Over the course of one weekend, the team used grant funding and donations to furnish this family’s apartment with beds, bedding, clothing, and groceries prior to a home visit by the PCSA. Without this intervention, pilot staff believe all four children would have been removed from the home and split among different foster homes.

A pilot with post-petition services worked with a client to satisfy her court-ordered service plan and reunify with her child. At the time, the court permitted the client to see her child only during supervised visits. The pilot’s social worker, who collaborated closely with the client over the life

¹⁰ One pilot served three individuals with a tribal affiliation. Among the other counties, three pilots did not collect this data, so tribal affiliation is unknown for 61% of clients.

of the case, explained to the court that, of the three remaining stipulations of the service plan, two services were inappropriate for the client’s needs, and the client had already completed the third. The judge included the social worker’s explanation in the subsequent court order, and as a result, the client was reunified with her son shortly thereafter.

Case Outcomes

In Program Year 2, the six pilots received a total of 225 referrals. Of those referrals, 133 resulted in enrollment and 92 did not result in enrollment. Clients were referred to the pilot for many reasons, including truancy (19%), mental health needs (16%), substance use (15%), domestic violence (12%), and lack of housing (12%). See Table 5a below and Table 5b in Appendix A for further detail on each county. The pilots also received a total of 91 referrals for a variety of other legal and non-legal reasons, including physical health concerns, medical neglect allegations, utility shutoff, custody and visitation matters, caregiver incarceration, and caregiver death. Note that quantitative data was self-reported by the pilot programs and the research team was unable to verify it against the state system of record.

Table 5a. Reasons for Program Referrals in Year 2 (all sites)

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 225 referrals

Reason for Referral	Number	Percent
Truancy	67	19%
Need for mental health services	57	16%
Substance use	52	15%
Domestic violence	44	12%
Lack of housing	42	12%
Other	91	26%
Unknown	1	<1%
Total	354	100%

Note: The total does not equal the n referenced above because some individuals had multiple reasons for referral.

In the second program year, pilot programs closed 104 client cases. Of these cases, nearly two-thirds (64%) were closed after clients completed the program successfully (see Table 6a below), though it is worth noting that definitions of client success varied by program. In 22% of cases, the client became unresponsive to efforts to contact them. In three cases, pilot staff decided to terminate services with the client for reasons other than the provided categories. In two of these cases, the pilot staff determined that they could not be of further assistance to the client. The client in the third case was transferred to a different court-operated program. “Other” reasons pilots listed for case closure (11%) include “family left the county,” “kinship legal custody placements,” “permanent custody to [the PCSA],” and “formal filing not avoided.”¹¹ See Table 6b in Appendix A for case closure reasons disaggregated by county.

¹¹ In some pre-petition pilots, services are only provided up to a court filing. In other pilots, services continue even if there is a court filing.

Table 6a. Reasons for Client Discharge / Case Closure in Year 2 (all sites)

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 104 discharges or closures

Reason for Client Discharge / Case Closure	Number	Percent
Program completed / case successfully resolved	67	64%
Unable to contact client / client unresponsive	23	22%
Client requested termination	0	0%
Program decision	3	3%
Other	11	11%
Total	104	100%

Few clients experienced deeper penetration into the child welfare system due to abuse, neglect, or dependency (AND) allegations (see Table 7a below). Eight clients (4%) had subsequent referrals for AND allegations after enrollment in a pilot program, and six clients (3%) had allegations that were substantiated. Nine clients (5%) had children enter foster care after enrollment. Of the 145 pre-petition clients served in Year 2, 11 cases (8%) progressed to a formal filing in juvenile court. Of the 54 post-petition clients, 13 clients (24%) were reunified with one or more children after program enrollment. The available data indicate neither how many post-petition clients had children removed from their homes nor how many children achieved permanency with a kinship caregiver. Further, while promising, the finding has limitations: the research team has limited data on child welfare involvement after pilot case closure and no data on a comparable group of parents who did not receive pilot services at this time. See Table 7b in Appendix A for subsequent child welfare involvement in each county as of September 30, 2023.

Table 7a. Subsequent Child Welfare System Involvement (all sites)

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 199 clients enrolled (145 pre-petition and 54 post-petition)

Type of Involvement	Number	Percent
Had subsequent referrals for AND allegations	8	4%
Had substantiated reports after enrollment	6	3%
Had AND court filing after enrollment (pre-petition only)	11	8%*
Had children enter foster care after enrollment	9	5%
Were reunified with 1+ children after enrollment (post-petition only)	13	24%*

*Note: Denominator for “pre-petition only” is the 145 clients enrolled prior to a petition being filed. Denominator for “post-petition only” is the 54 clients enrolled after a petition had already been filed. Denominator for other rows is 199 total enrolled clients.

Physical Site Conditions

Five of the pilot programs are housed in government buildings, with three programs in juvenile courthouses and two programs in county public defender offices. The offices are secure: uniformed and sometimes armed security guards or police officers staff courthouse building entrances, and clients must pass through metal detectors before going to pilot program offices. Office spaces are clean, well-lit, accessible for staff and clients with disabilities, and have conference rooms appropriate for team meetings. Most staff have individual offices that

accommodate private client meetings, and several pilots have family waiting rooms furnished and decorated to help children and parents feel comfortable. In both counties with pilots hosted by the public defender office, all program staff work together in the same office space, which they reported facilitates communication and relationship-building.

The physical features of the programs create four core challenges. For one, at some pilots, attorneys primarily work from their own private law firm offices and parent advocates work from the offices of organizations contracted to provide peer support services, which several pilots suggested may result in challenges related to developing and sustaining teamwork. Second, security measures and building architecture may intimidate pilot program clients, especially those not escorted by program staff and coming from communities of color or low-income communities that may have a history of negative experiences with government authorities. Third, the locations of pilot programs often create a geographic and social distance from the communities the pilot programs seek to serve. However, grant awards were not large enough to support new community-based offices. Finally, limited public transportation to pilot sites means that clients without cars may face long and arduous trips. To mitigate these issues, many pilot staff meet with clients by video conference, in clients' homes, or in their communities, unless an in-person court hearing or Family Team Meeting is scheduled. While helpful, video conferences are subject to technological challenges and some clients may be reluctant to have staff enter their homes. Most programs also offer transportation subsidies to clients, including bus passes and complimentary cab rides.

[Internal Collaboration](#)

Pilots identified strategies to promote collaboration within their multidisciplinary teams that centered on recruiting appropriate staff, establishing shared norms and goals, maintaining consistent communication, and providing program oversight.

Several pilots emphasized that hiring and retaining staff who hold shared perspectives and values is an integral first step toward positive internal collaboration. Pilots noted that staff best suited for the program have empathy for parents, a desire to strengthen families, a passion for proactively helping meet parents' needs, and a strong belief that the program can work. Programs found that recruiting staff from organizations already involved in this type of work proved to be effective. For the parent advocate role, which most programs found challenging to fill, pilot staff suggested reaching out to the PCSA and local peer support organizations. Several staff endorsed recruiting attorneys whose legal philosophy matches that of the model and who can dedicate all or most of their time to pilot cases. Further, two pilots using attorneys from outside offices suggested that having in-house attorneys may be more conducive to collaboration. However, one pilot reported success using panel attorneys with only a few pilot cases each. Of note, judges appointed these attorneys based on the fit of their legal philosophy to the program model.

To facilitate collaboration, staff noted that pilots should build consensus around the program's goals and operating norms. They suggested that clear role definitions and expectations boosted team coherence and reduced strain among staff. For example, some attorneys described frustrations expressed by social work and parent advocate staff due to confusion around legal

norms and strategies. One attorney recommended fostering a common understanding of court processes to align the expectations of social workers and parent advocates with the realities of family court, perhaps by providing basic legal training on family court procedures or sending them to a multidisciplinary family defense conference. Some pilots reported tensions between social workers and parent advocates due to a lack of clarity over which staff members are responsible for handling specific issues and how they should share overlapping responsibilities. To delineate duties, one pilot found it beneficial for social workers and parent advocates to share a supervisor with social work training. In general, some respondents suggested that pilot staff seem to place less weight on the contributions of parent advocates and their insights related to lived experience, as opposed to professional perspectives. At the all-pilot convening, the research team observed several attendees raise concerns about parent advocate compensation (i.e., lack of livable wage and benefits) that is incommensurate with their work efforts, which is a common issue for multidisciplinary representation programs.

Pilot staff emphasized that maintaining ongoing and consistent communication with teammates is essential to managing intra-team dynamics and promoting effective case collaboration. Five pilots meet to discuss cases as a full team either monthly, bi-monthly, or weekly. Social workers and parent advocates at some pilots also meet more frequently. Due to the size of their team, one of these pilots chooses to only hold meetings between these staff rather than with their full team, instead relying on sending the team regular emails with case updates. Many pilot staff members are in contact about cases daily to weekly via text, call, email, or Utrust, an app that facilitates communication with clients and staff. One pilot uses a case management system that all staff can access to keep up to date on cases. Some pilot teams converse in person because staff are frequently in the same building or work in the same office. In general, pilots that established internal communication strategies tailored to the layout of their offices and locations of their staff (e.g., increased use of text, email, and team meetings at programs with staff scattered across separate locations) appeared to have high levels of staff cohesion.

Several pilot staff suggested that project leadership and managers who exhibit attentiveness to and enthusiasm for the program promote effective collaboration, especially in early implementation and when substantive changes to the program occur. Typically, these leaders foster positive working relationships among staff and help teams overcome barriers and challenges. Specifically, several pilots reported that program oversight provided by an individual in a position of authority (e.g., judge, head public defender) contributes to improved collaboration. Oversight encompasses leaders' efforts to guide teams through developing procedures and establishing clear direction and goals – helping them achieve alignment from program onset – as well as through troubleshooting issues that arise in program implementation. Some staff reported that team members who are passionate about the program and have the time and position to promote it also facilitate intra-program collaboration. These individuals take responsibility for the team's work and facilitate consistent conversation among pilot staff so that issues are addressed proactively.

Client Engagement

Pilots offered suggestions for facilitating clients' engagement with the program, including holding tactful initial client meetings as quickly as possible, addressing families' urgent needs, building connections between clients and parent advocates, providing comprehensive support, maintaining consistent communication, and advocating for parents to government staff.

Staff at each pilot reported that the initial meeting with potential clients is a critical time to explain the program's purpose, goals, and structure toward encouraging both enrollment and ongoing engagement in the program. Pilot staff endorsed creating client onboarding processes that establish mutual expectations for clients and staff, communicate pilot staff roles and responsibilities, differentiate the roles of pilot and PCSA staff, and clarify that the pilot operates independently of both the PCSA and court. Several pilots recommended including this information in a retainer, engagement contract, or participation handbook that clients can take home, as they may need time to process all the information provided. Staff typically have to repeat these explanations in subsequent meetings and calls. This approach was designed to help potential clients develop clear expectations of their responsibilities as clients and of what each pilot staff member can do for them while screening out individuals not interested in the services offered. It also aims to reduce confusion related to the many people involved in their case and signal that pilot staff will advocate on their behalf to relevant parties. Several pilots suggested that attorneys can foster engagement during early meetings by helping clients understand the potential legal consequences of their action or inaction.

Initial meetings are led by different combinations of staff members, depending on the pilot program's structure. For example, one pilot endorsed including an attorney, social worker, and parent advocate in initial meetings, so clients only need to tell their story once and all staff get the same information. Alternately, a program with post-petition services introduces clients only to their attorney before the shelter care hearing to avoid overwhelming them, then holds a meeting with all three roles represented. Initial meeting attendance at other pilots varies by staff availability or level of program involvement. Of note, potential clients' interest in the program at these meetings tends to vary according to the timing of the program's intervention. At the program where all clients are post-petition, 100 percent of referrals in Year 2 enrolled in the program. By comparison, two pre-petition programs had enrollment rates of 46 percent. One of these programs explained that, while post-petition clients likely experience the possible removal of their children as their most pressing concern, pre-petition clients often have other more critical needs that cannot be met by the program (e.g., immediate rental assistance to avoid eviction).

Following enrollment, client engagement is often strengthened via social workers' and parent advocates' work with families, starting with immediate efforts to meet their basic needs. Staff help clients obtain, for example, beds for children, diapers, school uniforms, and groceries. One pilot reported that clients are typically on board with the program after staff have done just one thing to tangibly help them. Moreover, multiple pilots suggested that parent advocates are integral to fostering early engagement, including by building trust and helping clients see that the program is trying to help them. Several staff noted that parents tend to be suspicious of the

program's intentions, as many clients are accustomed to systems offering help and then presenting their challenges as personal failings. In addition to working to meet parents' expressed needs, parent advocates listen without judgment, empathize with clients' struggles, share how they personally overcame similar challenges, and model successful strategies for clients. Several parent advocates said that they are willing to push through clients cursing and yelling at them because they recognize that it comes from a place of pain and is not truly directed at them. They described connecting deeply with clients over time and reported that clients feel more comfortable with them than with other staff members. In the words of one parent advocate, "There are places that a parent advocate can go in the life of an individual that the social worker and attorney can't go. There's value in that."

Multiple pilots emphasized the value of staff's willingness to go "above and beyond" in providing support, encouragement, and advice. For example, one parent advocate attended over a dozen apartment tours with a client, offering input as needed until the client secured adequate housing. Another parent advocate attended several OBGYN appointments with a client and walked her through how to advocate for herself with medical providers. A social worker helped install a stove that the program acquired for a client so she could start cooking for her family immediately. According to most pilots, working with clients on evenings and weekends, when they tend to be available, further facilitates engagement, though some respondents noted that staff need to avoid pushing themselves to the point of burnout. To this end, one pilot suggested allowing staff to maintain flexible work hours (e.g., starting work later in the morning if they worked after hours the prior evening). Attendees at the all-pilot convening discussed how to build self-care routines for parent advocates and other staff. Further, while dedicated support from pilot staff was valuable for clients, the pilots' technical assistance provider highlighted the importance of staff helping clients gain confidence in advocating for themselves and their families, rather than them becoming dependent on the pilot team.

As detailed in the description of the programs' physical features, addressing client access issues is core to improving engagement. Minimizing demands on clients' time and resources by using video conferencing software, offering transportation subsidies, and meeting with clients in their homes or communities makes participation easier. Nearly all pilots also emphasized the importance of frequent, quick, informal contacts with clients, typically via call or text. To facilitate communication – which can be challenging to maintain when clients' phones are shut off, numbers change, or internet access is unreliable – one pilot connects clients with an agency that provides free cell phones and internet. Several pilots also suggested that it is important to keep children engaged in program activities.

Most pilots noted that their staff serve as strong advocates for parents during interactions with PCSA, court, or school staff, depending on the program. They emphasized that parents appreciate having knowledgeable and assertive supporters in their corner. When clients witness advocacy by, for example, social workers in Family Team Meetings with the PCSA, attorneys in

court,¹² and multiple staff members in meetings with schools, it builds clients' confidence in pilot staff. One PCSA staff member suggested that many parents can engage with and manage their emotions around PCSA staff better when they are accompanied by someone who they feel is on their side. Several pilots also emphasized that clients value staff's ability and willingness to prepare them to navigate interactions with the PCSA. This work often includes frank discussions of how clients' communication with PCSA staff impacts their decision-making. For example, staff at one pilot engage in conversations and roleplaying scenarios to prepare clients for what to expect at a home visit or Family Team Meeting, including what questions might be asked and why. They highlight what clients should and should not say, particularly to avoid being perceived as resistant to change. Staff remind clients that nonverbal communication, such as body language that communicates anger, may be interpreted as resistance.

Strategies to address disengagement by clients vary according to the timing of programs' initial intervention, as well as program preference. Disengagement rates (i.e., the percentage of clients that pilot staff are unable to contact) for most pilots are approximately 20 to 30 percent. A post-petition pilot has found success re-engaging clients by simply calling a meeting between them and the team. In other counties, staff reported that they make ongoing efforts to contact clients via call, text, letter, and home visit at different times of the day and month. One pilot attempts to re-engage clients based on their most pressing need (e.g., housing support). However, some clients are unwilling or unable to continue to work with programs, often due to substance use or mental health issues. Multiple staff members stressed that pilots need to be willing to close cases when clients are not engaging so that they can serve other families, especially in counties with a high unmet demand for pilots' services. Some pilots choose to close cases via letter and require new referrals, while another allows clients to re-engage as needed, stating that PCSA staff could knock on their door at any time.

Community Engagement

Pilots suggested that programs can enhance engagement with community partners and the community at large primarily by fostering relationships with provider agency leadership and staff, hiring a social worker with pre-existing community connections or enthusiasm for developing them, tabling at community events, and distributing information about the program.

According to pilots, the most vital component of community engagement is building relationships with service provider agencies. Multiple pilot staff recommended engaging in proactive outreach to these stakeholders early in the program development process. They emphasized that social workers, and parent advocates for some pilots, need to devote substantial time to meeting with these organizations' executives and frontline staff to build connections with them as well as to understand the nature and availability of the services they offer.¹³ Of note,

¹² In some Ohio counties, attorneys for the pilot and PCSA have known one another for years, so pilot attorneys avoid being seen as overly friendly with prosecutors to prevent their clients from mistrusting them.

¹³ One pilot recommended tailoring outreach to different stakeholders by adjusting content and language to better resonate with them. Another mentioned that pilots may need to remind organizations multiple times about program services, because they are busy and hear about many programs.

every pilot mentioned that, typically, housing quality and security are clients' most pressing concerns yet are the most difficult for pilot staff to address. Accordingly, programs have engaged local government and nonprofit housing support resources, and, to better meet related legal needs, pilot attorneys have attended housing law training and connected with local housing law experts. Most programs also developed relationships with their local legal aid agency to supplement their legal offerings (e.g., to manage actions outside the purview of the juvenile court, such as eviction, immigration, and criminal matters). Pilots recommended reaching out to housing and legal aid resources early in the program development process. To facilitate clients' ability to access services, several pilot staff suggested establishing simple standard procedures for referrals between the program and agencies, including identifying points of contact at each organization and outlining all required forms and documents. Pilot social workers and parent advocates often help clients fill out these forms. Multiple pilots integrated all this information into a comprehensive list of community resources to which they can refer clients. Pilots that did not create resource lists said they struggled to remember everything available to their clients.

Pilot staff reported that fostering relationships with community-based organizations enhances client access to services, especially at organizations that are enthusiastic about supporting the program's mission. Several such agencies have been willing to move pilot clients to the top of their waitlist, as they seek to help prevent child removals or speed up reunification. One pilot supplemented its offerings by developing relationships with organizations that, like the program itself, serve to connect families with vital services and resources. Another pilot is working with a group of community leaders hoping to develop a similar organization in their community. Individual service providers, especially those offering wraparound services, also may be able to connect pilots with other pertinent resource organizations. For example, a provider in one county introduced a pilot to nearly 25 service organizations. Further, some pilots found it valuable to mine their colleagues' existing relationships with service providers. One such program leveraged leadership's relationship with a local nonprofit to help fund a position to coordinate rideshare services for the pilot's clients, and several pilots contract with agencies to provide parent advocates or social workers.

Pilots that employed a social worker with established knowledge of the local service landscape and longstanding relationships with service providers were able to meet clients' service needs quicker and easier than were pilots with less experienced social workers. Experienced social workers often helped increase the team's capacity to effectively serve families. For example, one pilot has met clients' needs by consulting a spreadsheet of resources, dubbed "the underground railroad," that their social worker built over several years before the pilot program launched. Otherwise, pilots were well-served by hiring a social worker with enthusiasm for building such connections, as integration into communities is time- and labor-intensive work. One pilot suggested that they underestimated the work required, recommending that pilots engage in extensive relationship-building with community partners well before they start accepting cases. Several staff noted that pilots, especially those with less experienced social workers, should take time to understand the service landscape, such that they are aware of what connections with community resources they need to cultivate. Moreover, as new programs are launched and

service availability changes, pilot social workers have been well-served by staying up to date on developments across the service landscape so they can adjust referrals accordingly. For example, one pilot recognized that their clients encountered long waitlists when seeking behavioral health or substance use treatment at the organizations to which they referred clients, so their social worker compiled a list of other providers to improve the chances of finding open service slots.

To increase community awareness of their program, several pre-petition pilots host program information tables at community events, such as neighborhood block parties, county fairs, and resource fairs. Bringing “swag” (i.e., branded merchandise like t-shirts, tote bags, water bottles, magnets, and pens) that included a phone number for the pilot drew families to their tables and ensured that families left knowing the program’s name and contact information. Developing a higher profile may not be appropriate in some instances. For example, one pilot limited public outreach to avoid stoking opposition from individuals against programs that serve parents accused of child maltreatment. Community outreach for post-petition programs tends to focus on engaging service providers, as all client referrals come from the family court. To build program awareness, several pre- and post-petition pilots include information about their program on court websites, on fliers and pamphlets, in community newsletters, or in reports and status updates. Multiple pilots also suggested that social workers and parent advocates spend time in the neighborhoods frequently impacted by the child welfare system so that they are recognizable to community members who might need their services.

Government Partner Collaboration

Pilots devoted significant effort to engaging government stakeholders, especially staff at PCSAs, courts, and schools. Recommended strategies include establishing shared norms and goals, maintaining communication among leadership, building upon longstanding relationships, keeping frontline staff informed about the program, and demonstrating that the program effectively serves families.

Family court is inherently adversarial as PCSA prosecutors file petitions against parents and parent attorneys defend their clients against the allegations in those filings. Parent defense teams have an ethical duty to zealously represent their clients, and prosecutors have an ethical duty to truth-seeking. Accordingly, collaboration among pilot programs, the family court, and child welfare authorities is a delicate issue. The pilots, and other multidisciplinary representation programs, are new, and they challenge some of the longstanding assumptions these organizations have about each other and child welfare proceedings. Moreover, many Ohio counties are small enough that court, PCSA, and pilot staff often know one another and are staffed on the same cases in front of the same judges or magistrates. While in large jurisdictions, like New York City where these programs were first established, attorneys can be aggressive in their defense of clients, Ohio pilot attorneys often take a more delicate approach to avoid alienating their colleagues and inhibiting their ability to represent all their clients effectively. Pilot collaboration with government partners thus focuses on establishing trust, effective communication, and shared understandings of roles, processes, and goals.

Pilot staff and government stakeholders endorsed that developing a shared understanding of the program's structure as soon as possible, ideally before pilots take on cases, is a core facilitator of government partner collaboration. In one Ohio county, the judge met with government stakeholders at the start of the implementation process to explain the program, how it is implemented in other jurisdictions, and how she intended to implement it in their county. Generally, program leads were well-served by holding early meetings with PCSA, court, and/or school staff to ensure that implementation plans aligned with their partners' interests, capacity, and practices. During these meetings, multiple pilots suggested aligning on topics including who can attend hearings or testify in court, what the distinctions are between the roles of PCSA and pilot social workers, who is eligible and ineligible for program enrollment, and how to refer potential clients. To find solutions to disagreements, pilots suggested showing respect for stakeholders' perspectives and the pressures they face (e.g., funding, staffing, speed of cases), while maintaining accountability to their clients and pilot teammates rather than the partners' desires. According to PCSA and court stakeholders, conducting conversations about these topics increases partners' support for the program, fosters referrals, generates trust, and reduces tension and misunderstandings.

Successful planning was also characterized by explicit discussions between pilots and partners about their goals and values. According to several pilots, while goals do not necessarily have to align, collaboration with government partners tends to be easier when partners' overarching philosophy aligns with the pilot's mission of preventing filings and removals. For partner organizations not sharing this view, staff suggested identifying individual collaborators who support the pilot's mission and will encourage their colleagues to collaborate with the program. Several pilot staff suggested that collaboration with government stakeholders is an ongoing process that is strengthened by maintaining an open line of communication and quickly addressing issues that arise.

Multiple respondents said that consistent, ongoing, reciprocal communication about general program functioning among leadership, including judges, children's services directors, other members of the Family and Children First Council,¹⁴ and pilot leads, helped these organizations work toward shared goals and understand one another's role in the program. Respondents in all six counties also expressed that building upon relationships between partners with a history of strong collaboration was integral to effective pilot implementation. Longstanding relationships – in which there is a high level of trust and an appreciation of the other party's interests, needs, and limitations – opened lines of communication between pilots and government partners, increased partners' willingness to work with the pilot, and facilitated problem-solving on issues that arose during implementation. Pilots were well-served by hiring staff with such connections.

¹⁴ In each Ohio county, these councils meet consistently to streamline and coordinate government services for families. Other participants include superintendents and directors of the Departments of Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health & Addiction Services.

Additionally, consistent communication was necessary to ensure that frontline staff were informed about and, as relevant, providing referrals to programs. Court and PCSA staff often hear about these programs from judges, PCSA leadership, or pilot staff at team meetings. Effective strategies for spreading program awareness among PCSA frontline staff (i.e., caseworkers and supervisors) include pilot and PCSA leadership developing handouts, promotional materials, or videos on working with the program to share with staff, as well as pilot staff going to PCSA staff meetings to train caseworkers on program processes. High caseworker turnover requires regular information sharing so that staff are familiar with the program and its offerings. To minimize the impact of turnover and streamline referral processes, pilots recommended assigning specific caseworkers or groups of caseworkers to pilot cases. For most pilots, PCSA leaders and/or judges also were integral to encouraging frontline staff cooperation. For example, a high-ranking PCSA official in one county suggested that, because he and another high-ranking official were part of the pilot development process, they have been able to show their passion for the program and push workers to engage with it.

A strong partnership with the PCSA is particularly important for pre-petition programs given that most of these programs rely on referrals from PCSA staff. This is a delicate relationship, as PCSA staff in Ohio and other jurisdictions are liable to see pre-petition services as an intrusion into their investigative process. Pre-petition programs thus emphasized devoting considerable time and effort to relationship-building with the PCSA. One pilot noted that their PCSA initially did not write them a letter of support, and they regret not spending more time trying to obtain PCSA support before starting to work with clients. Several pilots identified specific strategies to develop partnerships between the program and PCSA. One such approach that pilots can employ prior to or after initial program implementation is highlighting shared objectives to PCSA staff. Per PCSA leadership, pilot staff should emphasize that, like caseworkers, they aim to help parents work through the PCSA-devised case plan, seeking to reduce cases' burden on the worker rather than to encroach on caseworkers' roles and responsibilities. Relatedly, some PCSA staff recommended positioning pilots as case coordination service providers. Other shared goals that pilots emphasized to advance their partnership with PCSAs include promoting child safety, avoiding court, keeping children out of foster care, and doing what is best for children, youth, and families.

Pilots described several other strategies that can enhance their relationship with the PCSA after they have started seeing clients. For one, pilots demonstrate that the program effectively serves families. Several PCSA staff stressed that leadership, supervisors, and caseworkers alike want to hear from pilots about clients' progress and successes throughout their involvement with the program. Accordingly, some pilot and PCSA staff found it helpful to institute a system of keeping one another informed of families' accomplishments as permissible given client confidentiality considerations. Such efforts – coupled with pilot staff reliably following through on anything they told PCSA staff they would do – build trust and clarify the tangible impacts that pilot staff have on cases. A PCSA staff member in one county also suggested that her impression of the program improved when she saw how much stronger engagement tended to be among families involved in the pilot. Respondents also indicated that cultivating relationships among PCSA and pilot frontline staff can engender respect between these parties and enhance their

collaboration on cases. One PCSA staff member indicated that their caseworkers getting to know and genuinely like the pilots' social workers boosted their impression of and inclination to work with the program. However, some pilots found garnering PCSA support after initial program implementation to be exceptionally challenging. One pre-petition pilot lacking strong relationships with PCSA stakeholders suggested that they might have benefited from first proposing post-petition services, as family court judges were supportive of the program and willing to provide referrals. Once such services established a working relationship with the PCSA, pre-petition services might have been more palatable.

Grant Support Team Collaboration

As occurred in most states, Ohio's child welfare and family court systems experienced many changes as the country moved into the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. In Ohio, these changes included new leadership, staff turnover, and organizational restructuring that resulted in temporary but substantial new responsibilities for some members of the grant support team. At the SCO, tasks included supporting the transition of leadership and devoting time to staff recruitment. Additionally, the state moved child welfare programs from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) to a new cabinet-level department created in the state's 2023 operating budget, the Ohio Department of Children and Youth, which incorporated programs serving children and families from six cabinet agencies. This required ODJFS staff to take on some of the many planning responsibilities required for creating a new department. These added duties reduced team members' capacity to provide support to the pilots.

In response, the grant support team employed several strategies. The SCO hired a temporary attorney to conduct research into IV-E funding strategies for the pilots and a program assistant to provide day-to-day grant support. The pilots' technical assistance consultant took on an expanded role. She, along with ODJFS and SCO staff, attended site visits to each pilot in the spring and fall of 2023 to learn more about the programs and the challenges they face and to provide on-the-ground support. To foster peer-to-peer and cross-site learning, the group also planned the all-pilot convening that took place in November 2023. These strategies helped limit the impact of the grant team's added responsibilities on support for the pilots.

Staff from all six pilots reported appreciating that the grant team has consistently been available to troubleshoot issues, navigate barriers, and answer questions that arise. Support was particularly impactful for attorneys, who were learning a new type of legal practice in its interdisciplinary nature, and pilot leads, most of whom had limited to no grant experience. Pilot staff also found it helpful that, to improve their practice, the team connected them with training, other Ohio pilots, and additional groups doing this work. Several pilots noted that they would like more support on training for social workers and parent advocates, as well as on program sustainability.

Sustainability

In Year 2, the six pilots received up to \$150,000 in continued funding. Maximum grant awards for each pilot will be reduced to \$120,000 in Year 3 and \$75,000 in Year 4. Programs are not

permitted to carry over unused grant funds from one program year into the next. As pilot staff prepare for grant award reductions in the coming years, the need to identify and secure other funding to maintain current staffing levels and program operations becomes more pressing.

To address pilot staff sustainability concerns, the grant support team began hosting regular pilot-wide meetings on external funding opportunities. In 2023, the team hosted three meetings, two virtual and one at the all-pilot convening, to inform pilot leaders about potential funding streams. During these meetings, the grant team and pilot leadership discussed several funding sources, including foundations and government sources (e.g., RECLAIM Ohio,¹⁵ Title IV-E, and legislative funding). The team will hold additional meetings in 2024 to develop funding strategies and facilitate inter-county collaboration on these efforts.

Some pilots have begun diversifying their funding sources. As discussed in the Year 1 report, one pilot based in a juvenile courthouse used RECLAIM Ohio funding to expand their staff. In 2023, another pilot received \$10,000 in grant funding from a local charitable organization, and two pilots became Family Justice Initiative (FJI) demonstration sites.¹⁶ While becoming a demonstration site does not involve a funding award, these pilot sites can work with the FJI to identify and leverage local, state, and federal funding opportunities.

Conclusion

In Program Year 2, pilots touched the lives of nearly 200 clients, contributing to improved outcomes for numerous children and families. As part of this work, the pilot programs developed many strategies to engage clients and community stakeholders as well as to facilitate collaboration internally and with government partners. Fostering these components of their practice enhanced pilots' capacity to meet their clients' needs and streamline program operations. This report presents practical, feasible strategies that programs used to improve the likelihood of pilot staff collaborating effectively within their teams, and with clients, community stakeholders, and government partners. Should other counties in Ohio and beyond seek to start similar initiatives, these approaches may promote successful replications. In Year 3, the research team will further examine topics such as program sustainability and the impact of parent advocates. As part of a comparative case study, the final evaluation report in Year 4 will compare how the pilots developed in different contexts to better inform future expansion.

¹⁵ Established in 1993, RECLAIM Ohio is a funding initiative available to juvenile courts to support the development of community-based alternatives for juvenile offenders or juveniles at-risk of offending, thereby diverting youth from entering Ohio Department of Youth Services institutions.

¹⁶ FJI demonstration sites are jurisdictions that aim to improve legal representation for parents and children and are willing to commit to utilizing high-quality legal representation attributes consistent with FJI recommendations. The demonstration sites are guided by a collaboration between the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, the Children's Law Center of California, and the Center for Family Representation.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Tables

Table 1. Sources of Program Referrals in Year 2

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 225 referrals

Source of Referral	Clark	Cuyahoga	Erie	Stark	Summit	Wayne	Total
Children's services	0	61	5	54	0	19	139
Community agency	2	7	4	0	0	4	17
School	20	0	9	0	0	0	29
Word of mouth	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
Court	1	2	5	0	22	0	30
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other	0	4	2	0	0	0	6
Total	24	74	27	54	22	24	225

Table 2b. Staffing at Each Pilot Program in Year 2

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs

Staff Role	Staffing Metric	Clark	Cuyahoga	Erie	Stark	Summit	Wayne
Attorneys	Number of Staff	1	3	2	5	9	2
	Combined FTE	1.0	0.9	0.3	0.02	0.9	0.2
	Average Pilot Caseload	11	4	7-8	3-8	2	4
	Average Overall Caseload	11	50-60	186	Unknown	20	37.5
	Average Total # Cases	28	75-100	319	Unknown	20	39
Social Workers	Number of Staff	1	1	1	1	2	1
	Combined FTE	0.2	0.5	0.94	0.9	2.0	0.15
	Average Pilot Caseload	11	10	15	15-25	10	3
	Average Overall Caseload	41	25	15	15-25	10	40-50
Parent Advocates	Number of Staff	1	1	1	1	2	1
	Combined FTE	0.71	1.0	1.0	0.25	2.0	0.5
	Average Pilot Caseload	11	10-15	15	8	9	3
	Average Overall Caseload	11	10-15	15	8	9	3
Other Staff	Number of Staff	6	5	3	2	6	2
	Combined FTE	0.6	0.05	0.07	0.03	1.0	0.1

Note: "Other Staff" category includes administrative staff and supervisors.

Caseloads denote the average number of clients that staff are working with at any given time.

"Unknown" suggests that the program does not collect the requested data.

Table 3. Clients Served and Children Impacted

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs

Impacts	Time Period	Clark	Cuyahoga	Erie	Stark	Summit	Wayne	Total
Clients served	Year 2	16	50	22	56	40	15	199
	Across Years 1 & 2	17	75	35	66	62	16	271
Children impacted	Year 2	39	115	58	125	76	30	443
	Across Years 1 & 2	41	171	89	141	127	31	600

Table 5b. Reasons for Program Referrals in Year 2

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 225 referrals

Reason for Referral	Clark	Cuyahoga	Erie	Stark	Summit	Wayne	Total
Truancy	22	15	19	5	5	1	67
Need for mental health services	0	3	17	10	22	5	57
Substance use	0	5	6	25	15	1	52
Domestic violence	0	7	8	15	12	2	44
Lack of housing	4	5	7	12	14	0	42
Other	8	9	16	20	18	20	91
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	34	44	73	87	86	30	354

Note: The total does not equal the n referenced above because some individuals had multiple reasons for referral.

Table 6b. Reasons for Client Discharge / Case Closures in Year 2

Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 104 discharges or closures

Reason for Client Discharge / Case Closure	Clark	Cuyahoga	Erie	Stark	Summit	Wayne	Total
Program completed / case successfully resolved	1	22	6	21	9	8	67
Unable to contact client / client unresponsive	3	6	3	2	7	2	23
Client requested termination	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Program decision	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Other	0	1	1	4	5	0	11
Total	5	29	11	27	22	10	104

Table 7b. Subsequent Child Welfare System Involvement as of Sept. 2023

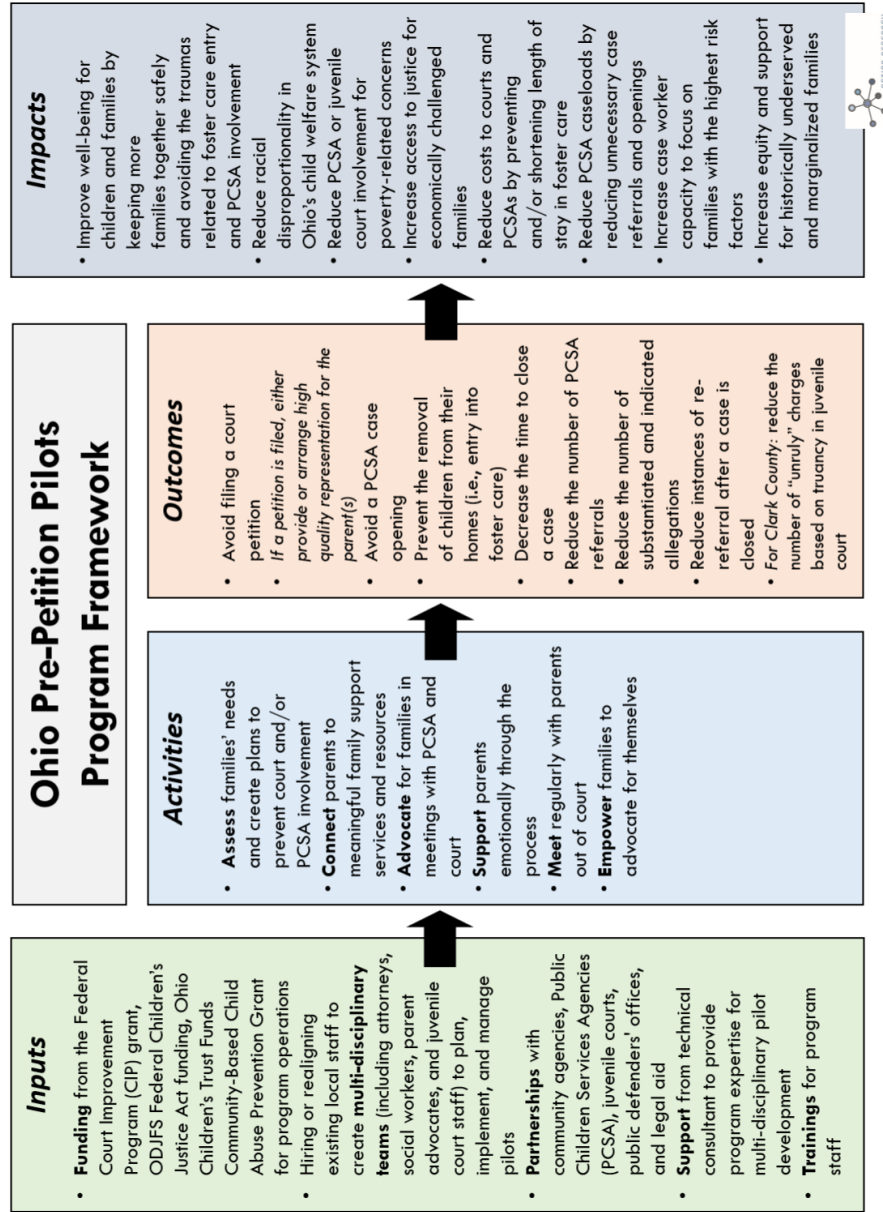
Source: Ohio Pilot Programs, n = 199 clients enrolled (145 pre-petition and 54 post-petition)

Type of Involvement	Clark	Cuyahoga	Erie	Stark	Summit	Wayne	Total
Had subsequent referrals for AND allegations	2	Unknown	1	5	0	0	8
Had substantiated reports after enrollment	0	Unknown	1	5	0	0	6
Had AND court filing after enrollment (pre-petition only)	1	5	0	5	N/A	0	11
Had children enter foster care after enrollment	0	5	1	2	1	0	9
Were reunified with 1+ children after enrollment (post-petition only)	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	9	N/A	13

Note: "N/A" denotes that the program does not enroll the category of clients referenced in the row.

"Unknown" denotes that the program does not collect the requested data.

Appendix B. Pre-Petition Program Framework



Appendix C. Post-Petition Program Framework

