Response to the State of Michigan’s Request for Information
Social Impact Bonds – Pay for Success Based Financing
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The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy
University of Michigan Law School

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Submitted by:

Vivek Sankaran, JD
Clinical Professor of Law, Program Founder
vss@umich.edu

Robbin Pott, JD, MPP
Executive Director
rpgonzal@umich.edu

University of Michigan Law School
701 S. State Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-3091
(734) 763-5000

Detroit Center for Family Advocacy is located at
3031 W. Grand Blvd., Suite 440, Detroit, MI 48202
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foster care is expensive – not only in terms of maintaining children out of their homes and supporting the system of county agencies, service providers, courts to monitor cases and attorneys for children, parents and the agency, but also in terms of the emotional toll and lifelong negative effects to the children and families involved. Every day a child is not in foster care translates to calculable real time savings in terms of agency, service provider, court and legal costs that can be obtained and measured. Preventing avoidable foster placements allows the state to realize immediate cost savings, while also improving the lives of children and families.

The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA) is the program to do just that. CFA provides unique legal advocacy and social work services to low-income families to prevent the unnecessary placement and prolonged stay of children in foster care. By doing so, CFA empowers families to care for their own children, keeps children safe within their families, minimizes the emotional trauma caused by removal, and allows the foster care system to realize dramatic savings from avoiding foster care costs.

CFA has a track record of preventing children from entering care and for expediting children’s exit from care. An independent evaluation of its first three years (2009-2012) revealed a greater than 95% success rate. CFA prevented foster care for ALL of the children in its prevention cases and expedited the exit from care for 77% of its permanency cases. These successes translate to significant cost savings above and beyond the initial program costs.

CFA is structured and poised to mount a randomized controlled evaluation after expanding its services to additional counties. The Center’s screening and enrollment process would allow for eligible clients to be randomly assigned to
enroll (treatment) or deny (control) groups. This clean experimental design will allow for a true comparison of outcomes (such as whether a child enters foster care and length of time in placement) of similarly situated children using state and county administrative data and survey data. These data would allow the Center to truly determine whether its interventions are saving not only the state foster care costs, but also families the trauma of foster care.

CFA is an ideal fit for the Pay for Success paradigm. It is an effective – and testable -- social service program that predictably reduces measurable high-cost government expenditures at a rate above and beyond the initial investment in the program.

SOCIAL ISSUE TO BE ADDRESSED

Many children entering foster care do not need to be there. And children who unnecessarily enter and remain in foster care are much more likely to experience poor life-long outcomes. In Michigan, close to eighty percent of children enter foster care due to parental neglect as opposed to serious physical or sexual abuse. A myriad of issues, including poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness are often the underlying causes for removing children from their homes. In many of these situations, however, families who are provided the right mix of legal advocacy and social work services, would be able to provide safe and healthy homes and prevent a child from entering foster care. A domestic violence victim may need a restraining order to protect herself and her children. A child’s aggressive behavior may be the result of a school system’s failure to provide adequate educational services. A family’s substandard housing conditions may have been created by a landlord’s negligence. In these and other situations, advocacy on behalf of the family can resolve safety concerns regarding the children and can eliminate the need for removal.
Strong legal advocacy also expedites the exit of children already in foster care who may have extended family members willing to provide them with a permanent home. All too often, relatives, who may play a pivotal role in the lives of their kin, face obstacles in providing permanency for the children in their care. For example, a grandmother may need an attorney’s assistance to fill out paperwork to file for a guardianship. A grandfather may be required to obtain a divorce before he can adopt the child. An uncle may need advocacy to have warrants recalled stemming from traffic tickets for which he could not afford bond. A sister may need help to get her named expunged from the child protection registry based on an incident that occurred thirty years ago. Very few can afford legal assistance and pro bono legal services to represent them in these matters do not exist. Without counsel, these relatives are told by caseworkers to resolve complicated legal issues on their own prior to being considered as placement options. What might be relatively simple for an attorney to achieve may be impossible for a family member with limited resources to accomplish without professional help.

Unfortunately, for low-income families, these legal needs are rarely met. As one can imagine, with very few resources at their disposal, many of these families are unable to resolve their legal issues, and children unnecessarily enter or remain in care. Families in Wayne County, where the poor are overrepresented, are especially susceptible to these tragic consequences. Sixty-seven percent of children in Detroit live in high-poverty neighborhoods. Nearly three in four children are raised by single parents, and thousands of babies are born each year to parents under nineteen. Not surprisingly, Wayne County has the largest and most challenged foster care system in the State of Michigan. More than a third of all Michigan foster children are in Wayne County. The Wayne County Department of Human Services investigates over two thousand allegations of child abuse and neglect each month, which results in over fifteen hundred new court filings each year. Annually, the County assumes temporary custody of approximately four
thousand children and permanent custody of nearly three thousand children, making up half of all of the permanent court wards in the entire state of Michigan.

Plus, the majority of these children in Wayne County are African American. A 2009 comprehensive review of Michigan’s child welfare system conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy\(^1\) concluded that African American children were more likely to be removed from their homes, spend longer periods of time in out-of-home care, and have inadequate access to relevant and helpful social services. This report recommended that legal and social work advocacy for these families must be improved to achieve racial equality in the child welfare system.

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA) is a sponsored project at the University of Michigan Law School, which provides legal and social work advocacy to at-risk families to prevent children from unnecessarily entering or remaining in foster care. The Center’s work focuses on removing the legal barriers that can either cause children to enter foster care or force them to remain there. Often legal remedies like obtaining a custody or personal protection order, resolving criminal warrants, or getting a divorce allow children to be protected by their family without requiring placement in foster care. Similarly, legal barriers can prevent children from remaining with a caring and committed adult. CFA’s multidisciplinary team seeks to overcome these obstacles by providing families with the assistance of an attorney, a social worker and a family advocate to create a tailored service plan to address the families unique needs.

Nearly 90% of our case referrals come directly from the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS). CFA accepts two types of cases, each aimed at a well-defined population:

\(^1\) This report can be found at http://www.cssp.org/publications/child-welfare.
• A **prevention case** involves a family where the children have not been removed by DHS from the care of the family, and DHS has not filed a petition with the juvenile court, but has substantiated an abuse or neglect incident. In these cases, legal and social work advocacy on behalf of the family can prevent the need to remove the child from the home.

• A **permanency case** involves a family where the children are not in the care of the custodial parent, and instead, in the typical case, are placed in the home of the non-custodial parent, a relative or foster parent. Legal and social work advocacy is necessary to overcome a legal impediment, which is preventing the child from achieving permanency in the home. If the impediment is not removed, the child may be at risk of being removed from the caregiver's home and continuing to linger in foster care.

CFA’s multidisciplinary approach – through the assistance of an attorney, social worker and family advocate – is to formulate a plan to address safety risks while preserving the child’s placement with the family or caregiver. Each member of the team offers a distinct set of skills to address the situation. A multidisciplinary approach to child welfare services is a developing trend nationally and is now recognized as a “best practice” among many child welfare experts and practitioners. CFA, however, is a pioneer in using this approach to serve both low-income parents and relatives in its efforts to preserve the integrity of the family and reduce the number of kids in foster care.

Please see the attached program brochure and the program’s website at [http://www.law.umich.edu/centersandprograms/pcl/cfa/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.law.umich.edu/centersandprograms/pcl/cfa/Pages/default.aspx) for more information.
EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM’S IMPACT

CFA ran as a three-year pilot project from July 2009 to June 2012. An independent process and outcome evaluation was conducted using a variety of data sources. The results of that evaluation clearly demonstrates that CFA is making a positive impact on the children and families it serves, as well as on the foster care system.

In our prevention program, our goal is to eliminate legal barriers that would allow a child to safely remain within the family, thereby diverting foster care placement. Our prevention project closed 55 cases involving 110 children during the pilot period. CFA achieved its legal objectives in 98.2% of cases. In none of our cases were children placed in the home of unrelated foster parents.

Our permanency project closed 69 cases involving 128 children during the pilot period. In these cases, our goal is to eliminate legal barriers that impede a foster child's achievement of permanency. CFA staff were able to eliminate the barriers in 97% of our permanency cases, paving the way for those children to exit the foster care system. In 56% of those cases, the elimination of the barriers facilitated the adoption of a child; in 29% of our closed cases, children returned back home to their birth parents. In other cases, we have helped to facilitate guardianships, supervised independent living arrangements or long-term placements with fit relatives, which in turn allowed the court to end the wardship of the child.

Analyzing petition and court order dates allowed for the calculation of how much time the children at issue were in care before CFA became involved, and how much time it took the court to terminate wardship after CFA became involved. Three-quarters of the children had been in care longer than the national average of 21 months; 54.7% had been in care longer than two years, and 20.3% longer than four years. Once CFA became involved, 59% of cases were closed within a year, and 77% within 18 months.
RETURN ON INVESTMENT ANALYSIS

Preliminary cost analyses are just beginning to document the potential savings this service could have to government foster care systems. For example, for $833,000 over three years, 110 children, all of whom were formally identified by the state as victims of child maltreatment, were prevented from being placed in foster care -- but still kept safe. Typically, children who enter foster care stay in care for an average of 21.1 months. The average in Wayne County, where this program resided, is higher. A conservative estimate of the cost to the government when a child enters foster care is $47,433. If we assume conservatively that 25% of the 110 prevention case children would have entered foster care and stayed for the national average length of stay, the cost avoided by the Michigan child welfare system for these cases alone is $1,304,407. Thus, CFA’s service model saved the state roughly $500,000 with its prevention case work, which is only half of the CFA program. The savings from the permanency work are likely equally compelling.

This analysis only reflects the direct costs to the state’s foster care system. It does not account for the value of preventing the trauma to children and families caused by removal. It does not account for the long-term savings associated with lower rates of incarceration, joblessness, welfare dependency or other life-long challenges foster care children experience.

The cost savings for this program are immediately measurable and revolve around days a child is in foster care. Those potentially avoided costs include:

• DHS workers and supervisors to monitor and service a case
• Private agency service providers
• Subsidies to the foster care provider
• Court costs to administer and oversee the case, and
• Attorney costs for parents, children and the agency.
For the 110 children for which CFA prevented petitions being filed during its pilot phase, it also prevented the need for a foster care worker and supervisor to manage the case, the court appointment of attorneys for the parents, the children, and an increase in case loads for the prosecutors, and prevented the need for subsidies to be paid to a foster care provider. These savings can be calculated and realized contemporaneously when the services conclude; there is no need to wait to assess these savings. And, these savings alone are substantial enough to pay for the service and provide a return on investment.

However, there are harder to measure savings that the state will likely realize over time by preventing or ending foster care for children. These include the incalculable value of preventing the trauma of removal to a child and her family, but also the avoidance of the negative lifelong outcomes that statistic show are likely to occur to children who experience the foster care system such as homelessness, criminality, health and mental health issues, unemployment, and welfare dependency. While the immediate cost savings of avoided days of foster care more than justifies state spending on this service model, it is important to remember that there is more value resulting from this service model than a Return on Investment analysis can capture.

**REPLICATION AND RANDOM-CONTROLLED TRIAL**

For much of CFA’s existence, it has been the only office in the nation that provides legal services to remove barriers that put children in risk of entering or lingering in foster care. There are now a few offices in other states doing similar work and there has been much interest, both in and outside of Michigan, in replicating this model, especially now that the pilot period evaluation results reveal just how promising this model is for reducing the number of kids in foster care.
CFA is currently only serving Wayne County. The Center has a contract with the county’s Department of Children and Family Services, through their First Contact initiative but it is interested in expanding to additional counties to increase the number of families it serves and to continue to make a positive impact on child welfare system. With the agency’s main office remaining in Detroit, the Center wishes to open satellite offices in these other counties. These satellite offices would have their own staff, but would be trained and supervised by the experienced leadership of the Detroit office. This structure serves to ensure fidelity to the original model as well as to produce efficiencies by sharing leadership staff.

With these new offices, CFA would be poised to run a random assignment, controlled trial to further test the effectiveness of its program. An experimental design study is possible due to the Center’s referral and screening process. DHS workers refer potential clients to CFA that they identify as needing legal services that directly affect a child’s well-being and permanence. When CFA receives the referral, an experienced attorney screens the case by investigating the client and collateral parties to fully flesh out whether the case qualifies for the Center’s services. For a randomized controlled study, CFA could continue to make the determination of whether a client qualifies for services and at that point, randomly select cases to enroll and cases to deny, thereby creating a similarly situated control group to which to compare outcomes, such as percentage that entered foster care and length of out-of-home placements. CFA typically serves about 120 children a year in Wayne County. Opening satellite offices would ensure that the Center served at least 200 children, and likely more.

The metrics that were used during the initial three-year pilot evaluation are continuously being measured. CFA’s has designed a data collection and analysis system to assess performance data ongoingly. With this system CFA continues to measure:

- Percentage of cases in which the legal objectives were met
• Percentage of prevention cases where the children at issue did not enter foster care
• Percentage of cases in which social services were referred
• Percentage of permanency cases that closed within 6, 12, & 18 months of CFA getting involved
• Percentage of permanency cases that resulted in return to parents or adoptions
• Demographic data
• Process data (length of a case, hours spend on a case, number of issues resolved, etc.)

We expect to maintain our success rate above 90% for meeting the objectives of clients’ service plans. We also expect to continue to keep kids out of foster care for our prevention cases and expedite the closing of cases for kids who are lingering in care.

By tracking outcomes using county and state administrative data for both the randomly assigned control and treatment groups, estimates of how many foster care days were avoided by CFA services can be calculated.

CONCLUSION

The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA) is an innovative approach to keeping and getting children out of foster care and has a track record of success. An independent evaluator found that during its three year pilot phase, the Center achieved its service plan goals in over 95% of its cases, prevented foster care stays for all of the children in its prevention cases, and expedited the exit from care for the children in its permanency cases. CFA’s referral and screening process would allow for a rigorous experimental-design evaluation of the program, to compare
placement outcomes of the Center’s clients and those who do not receive its services. CFA’s services are tailored to a distinct population and there is sufficient need to justify the program’s existence. There are significant savings attributable to the program’s outcomes that are easily monetized and calculable the year they occur – the costs to keep a child in foster care are measurable and translate to real time savings for every day a child is not in foster care. The project is led by the University of Michigan Law School, which is capable of replicating this model throughout the state and taking it to scale if the data continue to show the program’s effectiveness.
PROMOTING SAFE AND STABLE FAMILIES

DETOURIT CENTER FOR FAMILY ADVOCACY
AN INSPIRED
The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy (CFA) started with a simple idea to address an injustice being witnessed in child welfare practice—children being removed from their families because their caregivers do not have access to help with legal issues affecting the safety and permanency of the children in their care.

In response to this problem, the Child Advocacy Law Clinic at the University of Michigan Law School, led by Professors Vivek Sankaran and Don Duquette, set out to prevent removals and expedite permanency by providing multidisciplinary services to at-risk families. It was believed that by providing such families with an individualized plan of legal and social work advocacy, it would reduce the number of children in foster care. The data from CFA’s three-year pilot clearly demonstrates that it does.
Nathan’s mother loves him. But she struggles with mental health issues and has a history of putting Nathan’s safety at risk due to her inability to provide consistent adequate supervision. Fortunately for Nathan, his great grandparents were there for him when Child Protective Services decided to remove him from his mother’s care.

CFA became involved with the case to establish a legal guardianship. Despite participating in appropriate services, Nathan’s mother was not able to make progress toward reunification at this time in her life. But she was trying. Nathan was 11 years old. Terminating his mother’s rights didn’t seem to be the right solution given that she wanted to stay involved and was making an effort at getting better. Instead, CFA negotiated a guardianship plan between the great grandparents and the mother that provided Nathan with the legal stability he needed while keeping a connection with his mother.

The guardianship, however, was not the only thing the great grandparents needed to successfully welcome Nathan into their home. They also needed support. In collaboration with the family, a CFA social worker helped them apply for food assistance and Medicaid benefits for Nathan, and she made referrals for counseling services. She also helped establish a supervised visitation schedule between Nathan and his mother. With Nathan placed in a safe and permanent family placement, the Department of Human Services closed its case.

*All names have been changed.*
CFA accepts two types of cases:

- A **prevention case** involves a family where the children have not been removed from their caregivers by the Department of Human Services (DHS), and DHS has not filed a petition with the juvenile court, but has substantiated an abuse or neglect incident. In these cases, legal and social work advocacy on behalf of the family can prevent the children from entering foster care.

- A **permanency case** involves a family where the children are not in the care of the custodial parent and reunification is no longer the goal. Instead, in the typical case, are placed in the home of a non-custodial parent, relative or foster parent. Legal and social work advocacy is necessary to overcome a legal impediment, which is preventing the child from achieving permanency in the home. If the impediment is not removed, the child may not achieve permanency and may be at risk of being removed from the caregiver’s home.

CFA’s multidisciplinary approach—through the assistance of an attorney, social worker, and family advocate—is to formulate a plan to address safety risks while preserving the child’s placement. Each member of the team offers a distinct set of skills to address the situation. A multidisciplinary approach to child welfare services is a developing trend nationally and is now recognized as a “best practice” among many child welfare experts and practitioners. CFA is a pioneer in using this approach to serve both low-income parents and relatives in its efforts to preserve the integrity of the family.

Nearly 90 percent of CFA’s referrals come directly from the Michigan Department of Human Services. The Wayne County Juvenile Court is also a main source of referrals, as well as private agencies and self-referrals through outreach activities.
Many children entering foster care do not need to be there. And children who enter and remain in foster care are much more likely to experience poor lifelong outcomes. In Michigan, for example, close to 80 percent of children enter foster care due to parental neglect as opposed to serious physical or sexual abuse. In many of these situations, however, families that are provided the right mix of legal advocacy and social work services would be able to provide safe and healthy homes and prevent a child from entering foster care. Strong legal advocacy also expedites the exit of children already in foster care who may have extended family members willing to provide them with a permanent home. All too often, relatives, who may play a pivotal role in the lives of their kin, face obstacles in providing permanency for the children in their care.

Collateral legal issues:

- A landlord/tenant dispute is putting a child at risk of being removed from his family.
- A personal protection order is needed to keep a mother safe and able to keep custody of her child.
- Outstanding warrants create a threat of jail time for a child’s caregiver or are a barrier to an adoption or placement.
- A divorce is needed to enable a grandparent to adopt a child in his or her care.
- A non-offending parent needs a custody order.
- An aunt needs a guardianship to establish permanency.

Unfortunately, for low-income families, these legal needs are rarely met. As one can imagine, with very few resources at their disposal, many of these families are unable to resolve their legal issues, and children unnecessarily enter or remain in care.

In addition, there is a disproportionate number of minority children in the child welfare system. A 2009 comprehensive review of Michigan’s child welfare system conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy concluded that African-American children are more likely to be removed from their homes, spend longer periods of time in out-of-home care, and have inadequate access to relevant and helpful social services. This report recommended that legal and social work advocacy for these families must be improved to achieve racial equity in the child welfare system.

\footnote{This report can be found at http://www.cssp.org/publications/child-welfare.}
CFA employs a diverse strategy. Its core work is delivering direct legal and social work services, while using outreach and training, policy advocacy, collaboration, education, and instruction to push for change on all levels.

Service: Legal and Social Work Advocacy
At the core of CFA is its multidisciplinary approach to addressing the multiple legal and other service needs of families. CFA attorneys guide parents and family members through the complex laws and procedures governing the child protection and foster care systems, and provide legal services that might remove any danger to the child, preventing the need for foster care. CFA social workers assess the family’s strengths and weaknesses and provide service referrals and case management. The CFA family advocate—a parent who has experienced the child welfare system—provides clients with a unique perspective on how to navigate the system. She also helps parents stay focused and motivated in the face of adversity.

Through this multidisciplinary approach, the individual needs of families are addressed and the emotional trauma to children caused by removal and prolonged separations are minimized. Additionally, the burdens on the child welfare system are reduced so that the system may respond more effectively to those children with an immediate need for protection.
Outreach and Training

CFA has established a collaborative relationship with the Wayne County Department of Human Services and the Wayne County Juvenile Court, which are the primary sources of case referrals for CFA. CFA staff have trained hundreds of DHS case workers about the Center, and staff return quarterly to collaborating DHS district offices to reinforce such training. Additionally, CFA has developed similar relationships with private foster care and adoption agencies, and it regularly conducts outreach presentations to such organizations. CFA also has trained judges, lawyers, and social workers at the Wayne County Juvenile Court on its services, who, in turn, have referred numerous cases to CFA.

CFA also aims to educate families on what to do when Child Protective Services becomes involved in their lives and on the things they can do to provide a permanent and safe home for the children in their care. Staff have conducted informational presentations at local schools, Head Start programs, domestic violence shelters, and other community locations about the child welfare system and how best to work with agencies to reduce the need for children to be removed from their homes.

Policy Advocacy

CFA staff work with local, state, and national groups to help reform the child welfare system by sharing information about its innovative approach. Staff members closely collaborate with the Michigan Department of Human Services and the Wayne County Juvenile Court, along with other community organizations. Staff members sit on the boards of key child welfare groups including the Court Improvement Project, the DHS Race Equity Committee, and the ABA National Project to Improve Parent Representation, among others. Additionally, staff have presented at national child welfare conferences and have consulted with stakeholders in other jurisdictions on how to replicate the model.

Collaboration

Collaboration with existing community resources is central to the CFA approach. The Center has important relationships with many Detroit community agencies.

CFA's goal is to be embedded within the network of community service agencies. It seeks to provide supportive, problem-solving legal services in coordination with social services available through other agencies. CFA avoids duplication of services and emphasize the legal services that it is uniquely able to provide.

The partnership with the University of Michigan Law School has provided a synergy to CFA that benefits the individual children and families being served, the formal child welfare system, and the University itself. The presence of CFA provides a great opportunity for the University of Michigan to pursue its mission of service, teaching, and research in Detroit, a community to which it has demonstrated a commitment over many years.

Education and Instruction

CFA is analogous to the role of teaching hospitals in the urban environment. Like a teaching hospital, CFA is providing excellent service through a combination of the best clinical professors, highly skilled lawyers, social work expertise and other support services, and trainees. CFA is able to extend to its clients the advantages and quality of a high-priced law firm—which benefits the clients and the students who are assisting and learning. CFA has become a site for interdisciplinary professional education in service to the urban poor and prepares students for professional leadership roles within communities and nonprofit organizations.
KEEPING KIDS WITH THEIR
Keisha experienced abuse by her mother’s live-in partner, and Child Protection Services decided to remove her from her mother’s care. But CFA’s advocacy on her father’s behalf saved her from the additional trauma of entering foster care.

Keisha’s father was referred to CFA for help in establishing custody of Keisa. CFA sought a custody order for legal and physical custody of Keisha on its client’s behalf and got her placed with him immediately. Not only was custody awarded to the father, but CFA also renegotiated child support. After getting to know the family, it was clear that it was in Keisha’s best interest to maintain a relationship with her mother. A CFA intern, guided by a staff attorney, successfully negotiated a parenting agreement between Keisha’s mother and father that kept Keisha safe.

As the custody agreement was taking shape, the CFA social worker and intern provided ongoing emotional support to assist its client with the transition of his daughter coming to live with him. As a result, the family was referred to a community mental health provider for therapeutic services. In addition, these events occurred close to the holidays; the CFA social worker helped ensure it was a good one for the family by acquiring a donated holiday basket filled with food and gifts.

With the custody order in place and a final assessment that Keisha was safe, Child Protective Services closed its case.

*All names have been changed.*
Prevention Cases

In these cases, the goal is to eliminate legal barriers that would allow a child to safely remain within the family, thereby diverting foster care placement.

CFA achieved its legal objectives in 98.2 percent of cases.

None of the children served entered foster care.
Permanency Cases
In these cases, the goal is to eliminate legal barriers that impede a foster child's achievement of permanency.

CFA staff were able to eliminate the barriers in 97 percent of its permanency cases, paving the way for those children to exit the foster care system.

At the time of the evaluation, the court had closed 88.4 percent of the permanency cases CFA served.
Not only is CFA expediting the closing of child welfare cases, it is facilitating strong permanency outcomes. In 56 percent of those cases, the elimination of barriers facilitated the adoption of a child; in 29 percent of CFA’s closed cases, children returned back home to their birth parents. In other cases, CFA helped to facilitate guardianships or supervised independent living arrangements or long-term placements with fit relatives.

Analyzing petition and court order dates allowed for the calculation of how much time the children at issue were in care before CFA became involved, and how much time it took the court to terminate wardship after CFA became involved. Three-quarters of the children had been in care longer than the national average of 21 months; 54.7 percent had been in care longer than two years, and 20.3 percent longer than three years. Once CFA became involved, 59 percent of the cases were closed within a year, 77 percent within 18 months, and 88 percent within two years.
Preliminary cost analyses are just beginning to document the potential savings this service could provide to government foster care systems throughout the United States. For example, for $833,000 over three years, 110 children, all of whom were formally identified by the state as victims of child maltreatment, were prevented from being placed in foster care—but still kept safe. Typically, children who enter foster care stay in care for an average of 21.1 months. The average cost to the government when a child enters foster care is $47,433 (some put it higher). If we assume conservatively that 25 percent of the 110 prevention-case children would have entered foster care and stayed for the national average length of stay, the cost avoided by the Michigan child welfare system for these cases alone is $1,304,407. Thus, this half of the CFA service mode—the prevention cases—alone saved the government about $500,000.

This analysis does not account for the value of preventing the trauma to children and families caused by removal, nor the saved costs from avoiding lifelong negative outcomes that are typically seen with foster children. And, this calculation does not include any of the cost savings associated with decreased length of stay of children in foster care that occurs through CFA’s work in permanency cases.
REMOVING BARRIERS
Owen, Justin, and Kyle had lived with their aunt for the past four years, ever since they were removed from their mother’s care. The state terminated the mother’s parental rights long ago, but the aunt’s plan to adopt her three nephews had stalled—she had outstanding warrants for unpaid tickets and court costs. Now, the adoption agency was threatening to remove these three boys from their safe and stable placement with a relative, simply because the adoption could not move forward unless these warrants were cleared.

The plea to the court was simple: If these warrants could be dismissed, three children could exit foster care and be adopted by their loving aunt. The CFA attorney shared our client’s dilemma with the court and the court responded with empathy. The client’s warrants were set aside, all charges against her but one were dismissed, and the remaining charge was cleared from her record in six months. In addition, through CFA’s zealous advocacy, the court essentially forgave the client’s balance of outstanding fees and fines and she no longer owed money to the court.

The client needed additional help removing barriers to finalizing adoption, and CFA’s multidisciplinary approach helped ensure the client’s success. For example, the client was initially informed by the adoption agency that she would not be eligible to receive medical subsidies for the children due to a lack of reports from the children’s therapist. CFA’s social worker was able to obtain all of the therapeutic records and the adoption/medical subsidies were approved. In addition, the CFA social worker and staff attorney successfully advocated for the adoption fees ($500) to be waived.

The family was also linked to community resources and support aimed at improving the overall quality of their lives. For example, the oldest nephew was referred to a life skills and job skills program, and the CFA social worker communicated regularly with the program’s staff to aid his success in the program.

By the end of its representation, the CFA team attended the adoption hearing and celebrated the family’s successful exit from foster care.

*All names have been changed.*
CFA’s funding structure is as innovative as its service model—it uses private funds to leverage public dollars. In partnership with the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services, CFA uses private funds to leverage state matching funds from Michigan’s Child Care Fund.

CFA is most grateful to the following individuals and organizations. Without their belief in this idea and their courage to support it, CFA would not have achieved its success.

- Casey Family Programs
- Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan
- Dewitt C. Holbrook Memorial Fund
- McGregor Fund
- Pillsbury Family Advocacy Fund
- Retired Justice Bobbe & Jon Bridge
- Skillman Foundation
- Quicken Loans Foundation
- Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services
- W. K. Kellogg Foundation

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POSSIBLE ALL
DETROIT CENTER FOR FAMILY ADVOCACY

MAIN OFFICE
3031 W. Grand Blvd
Suite 440
Detroit, MI 48202

313.875.4233
313.875.4313
lawdetroitcfa@umich.edu

www.law.umich.edu/CFA

OSBORN OFFICE
Matrix Human Services Center
13560 East McNichols
Detroit, MI 48205