



# STATE OF IOWA



TERRY E. BRANSTAD, GOVERNOR  
KIM REYNOLDS, LT. GOVERNOR

IOWA CHILD ADVOCACY BOARD  
CASA and ICFCRB Programs  
JUDGE GERALD W. MAGEE, CHAIRPERSON  
JAMES A. HENNESSEY, ADMINISTRATOR

July 25, 2014

The Honorable Members of the Iowa General Assembly  
State Capitol Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Members of the Iowa General Assembly:

On behalf of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board, I submit to you the Board's Annual Report for calendar year 2013 with great pleasure. The volunteers who work in the programs overseen by the Board, the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program and the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) Program, have continued their exceptional performance during the past year.

- During the year, 486 Court Appointed Special Advocates served a total of 1,466 children.
- A total of 195 Foster Care Review Board members conducted 2,025 reviews of foster children
- These volunteers contributed a total of more than 42,000 service hours in pursuit of positive safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for Iowa's abused and neglected children.

Members of the Child Advocacy Board are excited about the groundwork being laid to increase the number of children who can be served by CASA volunteers and to enhance the outcomes achieved through services of both CASA and FCRB volunteers. We ask readers to note in the Annual Report the highlights of the forward-looking work being done and the accomplishments to date. Our expectation is that progress in the current and future years will be built on the foundational work completed in 2013.

Finally, I would like to call to your attention three Child Advocacy Board recommendations in the report that are important to future progress in advocating for and achieving better outcomes for Iowa's vulnerable children and youth. In brief, we urge public officials in Iowa to 1) support the implementation of the Child and Family Services Plan that the Iowa Department of Human Services will submit to the federal child welfare agency in 2014, 2) support the allocation of sufficient resources to complete the development of the automated system that supports the CASA and FCRB programs, and 3) carefully monitor the continued implementation of Differential Response to ensure effective protection of and service to children who have been reported to be abused and neglected.

We thank all Iowa public officials for their continued support of children in need of protection and ask for careful consideration of the enclosed report.

Respectfully submitted,

Judge Gerald W. Magee  
Chair, Iowa Child Advocacy Board

Enclosure

# IOWA CHILD ADVOCACY BOARD

*advocating for abused and neglected children in Iowa*

## 2013 ANNUAL REPORT

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) is an independent board appointed by the Governor of Iowa to provide for citizen involvement in child welfare issues. ICAB oversees two volunteer child advocacy programs designed to help protect Iowa children and their best interests while they are being served by the child welfare system.



Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers are appointed by the Court to advocate for a child. Throughout the life of the child's court case, the CASA meets with the child, parents, attorneys, DHS workers, service providers, teachers and others. The CASA volunteer regularly reports to the Court about the child's situation offering recommendations to help assure the child's best interests are being met.



Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) volunteers serve on local community boards that meet regularly to review case plans, hear from all interested parties, and provide the Court and DHS with their findings and recommendations about the safety, well-being and permanency of children from their communities who are in foster care.

### Child Advocacy Board Operations in Calendar Year 2013

The State Child Advocacy Board commends the trained Court Appointed Special Advocates and Foster Care Review Board members throughout the state for their excellent, caring service to Iowa's most vulnerable children – those before the juvenile courts due to abuse and neglect. During 2013, on a typical day 381 CASA volunteers were assigned by judges to advocate for 951 children from 470 Iowa families in distress. Throughout the course of the year, a total of 486 CASAs served a total of 1,466 children. The volunteers made many thousands of advocacy contacts on behalf of the children, donating 28,648 hours and 228,008 driven miles in pursuit of positive outcomes for the children's safety and well-being.

Similarly, the Foster Care Review Board volunteers held monthly meetings in 25 Iowa locations, during which the 195 local board members reviewed and then reported back to the judges on the progress and concerns noted during the 2,025 reviews held for 1,194 different children living in foster care in 50 of Iowa's counties. The FCRB volunteers donated 13,444 hours and 26,574 driven miles toward those causes.

The total in-kind donation from Iowa ICAB volunteers is valued at approximately \$1,786,800. The effects of these efforts will continue to accumulate as the cases they have assisted are successfully resolved and potential long-term fiscal and social costs are avoided.

The members of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board are excited with the progress made in 2013 toward increasing the organization's capacity to serve Iowa's vulnerable children. The Board and program administrators have focused efforts during calendar year 2013 on enhancing the capabilities of the CASA and

FCRB programs in order to both expand the capacity and increase the effectiveness of the already successful programs. A newly energized ICAB staff across the state has been highly successful in advancing important program priorities that will benefit Iowa's children greatly both short and long term. Some highlights for the past year include:

- ✓ **Changes in Board leadership and administration.** 2013 saw changes to the ICAB operation and programming. The Board hired a new administrator, Jim Hennessey, who began work on March 4, 2013. Judge Gerald Magee was voted as Chairperson and Michael Steele was elected as Vice Chairperson at the Board's May meeting. Together, the Board and the new administration have embraced changes to the already effective CASA and FCRB programs that are expected to position the programs for even higher levels of excellence in the future.
- ✓ **Stakeholder involvement in program improvement.** ICAB has initiated efforts with Judges and DHS to improve both the CASA and FCRB programs. These efforts are expected to lead to completion of inter-departmental LEAN government events in calendar year 2014 to improve consistency of the FCRB approach across the state. The goal is to streamline operations from the perspective of both ICAB and the Department of Human Services and to increase the value of FCRB to the courts and DHS. For the CASA program, ICAB plans to meet Iowa's juvenile court judges' requests to provide, within the program's current funding level, CASAs for a greatly expanded number of children. Through a Kaizen event to be conducted in 2014, ICAB will seek to improve both its customer orientation and increase its CASA program efficiency.
- ✓ **Operational improvement.** Early in 2013, the new administrator sought input from Board members, staff and other ICAB stakeholders about program strengths and needs. Based on analysis of information obtained, the program administrator and staff identified key areas needing attention including 1) program automated system, 2) updates in administrative rules, policies and procedures, 3) training of staff and volunteers, 4) public awareness and recruiting and 5) development of staff networking and teamwork. Staff committees were assigned to focus on each of these areas with participation by Board members, program volunteers and other stakeholders with expertise or interest. Charters were established for each committee, and release time from normal duties was provided to staff to assure adequate attention could be given to the charters. The committees have lead work that has resulted in several promising developments described below.
- ✓ **Youth Advocacy Grant.** ICAB was awarded a grant by the National CASA Association to assist with expanding volunteerism for the CASA program. Under the terms of the grant, ICAB is focused on achieving two goals: 1) Developing and conducting a pilot of a new program model that uses volunteer Coaches to expand the capacity of current staff to monitor and support volunteer CASAs, and 2) developing and implementing a multi-media volunteer recruitment campaign. During 2013, the committee responsible for this area developed marketing and recruiting plans and media materials for implementation in 2014. In addition, a pilot of the volunteer Coach model was initiated in Polk County. Due to the success of first year grant funded activities, the National CASA Association funded the project for a second year prior to the completion of this report.
- ✓ **Administrative rules.** Staff drafted new administrative rules for the CASA program for Board review. The revised rules have been filed and adopted in 2014 prior to the completion of this report. The rules establish standards for the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program as directed by statute.

The new chapter will formalize requirements for the selection and screening of volunteers, preservice training, ongoing education, and assignment and supervision of volunteers who serve as CASAs. Additionally, the rules are intended to address:

- Expansion of the CASA Program to serve additional children by formalizing the volunteer position of CASA Coach. Jurisdictions in other states that have implemented similar staffing and volunteer service models have more than tripled their capacity to provide oversight and coaching to CASAs without decreasing the quality of their programs.
  - Designate the program certification standards of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association as the national guidelines to which the Iowa CASA Program will adhere,
  - Delineate the children eligible for CASA Program service, and
  - Set forth basic requirements for an annual program report to the General Assembly, Governor and Supreme Court.
- ✓ **Networking.** The Networking Committee developed and successfully implemented a plan for regional teams of ICAB staff to meet regularly to share information and ideas that have proven successful in each of their catchment areas. The committee also initiated monthly statewide staff conferences calls to keep all staff current on plans and initiatives under development, activities and deliberations of the State Board and program successes across the state.
- ✓ **Digital Dashboard.** Additional focus has been placed on program performance factors to inform the practices for ICAB through use of a monthly DashBoard. This tool monitors the training and assignment of CASA volunteers and the conduct of Foster Care Review Boards. The DashBoard provides both a statewide “snapshot” to the ICAB Board and an individualized report to each staff member. The visual display of efforts made and results achieved has been well received and has helped focus management and staff attention on key program outputs and results.

The focus on operational and program improvement is expected to continue throughout calendar year 2015. Each of the working committees has developed plans for operational improvement in 2014 work to be completed with an internal Steering Committee providing overall coordination of all committee activities.

### Calendar Year 2013 Foster Care Review Board Data Analysis

ICAB has utilized a modified Child and Family Services Review (CSFR) approach to help measure achievements for children in Iowa’s foster care system. Nineteen (19) federal child welfare benchmarks are reported on by the trained FCRB volunteers for each youth receiving a review. Those benchmarks relate to important safety and permanency issues for foster youth to determine our child welfare systems strengths and areas needing to be strengthened (some of which are reported on the online DHS Digital Dashboard at [https://secureapp.dhs.state.ia.us/CWIS\\_DigitalDashboard](https://secureapp.dhs.state.ia.us/CWIS_DigitalDashboard)). An analysis of data gathered by the local Foster Care Review Boards in the first half of the year noted that of 1,028 children reviewed during that time period, many of the desired targets were met or exceeded; however, areas that showed need for improvement related to timely reunification of children with family/guardian/relatives, and timely adoption of children whose parental rights had been terminated. Table 1 provides an overview of findings of all local review boards.

Table 1. Foster Care Review Board CFSR Findings	# of Responses	Yes Responses	Percent Yes
Re-entry was not within 12 months of a prior episode	529	499	94.33%
FC placement stable, with any changes consistent with achieving goal	928	890	95.91%
The current goal matches the child's need for a permanent home	918	832	90.63%
If foster care entered in past 6 months, CPP goal was written within 60 days	289	270	93.43%
Reunification/Guardianship/Relative placement on target for 12 months	451	268	59.42%
Adoption expected within 24 months of most recent entry to FC	211	135	63.98%
APPLA - Current placement committed to provide care until majority age	202	172	85.15%
For child age 16, transition planning and independent living skills provided	95	84	88.42%
TPR was sought by filing in 15 of 22 months, unless compelling reasons	307	303	98.70%
FC placement within 1 hour travel from parent of removal	704	650	92.33%
Placement with siblings (up to 4 in same home) unless safety concerns	464	373	80.39%
Concerted efforts for child visits with parents and sibs in FC unless safety concerns	793	788	99.37%
Concerted efforts to preserve a child's connections with school, clubs, faith, etc.	840	706	84.05%
Inquired about Indian heritage, notified tribe, and followed ICWA placement pref pm	846	842	99.53%
Concerted efforts made to seek relative placement, maternal and paternal	792	792	100.00%
Concerted efforts to promote and support positive relationships of child with parents	732	732	100.00%
Concerted efforts made to involve child and parents in case planning process	766	762	99.48%
Concerted efforts to meet child's educational needs	901	896	99.45%
Concerted effort to meet child's physical and dental health needs	931	926	99.46%
Concerted efforts to meet child's mental and behavioral health needs including substance abuse	758	753	99.34%

Throughout the year, ICAB staff initiated conversations with Juvenile Court Judges with regard to the CASA and FCRB programming. In addition, facilitated round table discussions were held in conjunction with the Permanency Summit. When provided with the fact that currently only 14% of Iowa's CINA youth are assigned to a CASA, the judges expressed need to greatly increase the numbers of children being served. The judges cited specific populations in need of extra attention: the very young; those youth experiencing mental health issues; and teens transitioning to adulthood. For both programs, the fact that the volunteers provide independent views and outside recommendations were voiced as especially important contributions.

DHS and ICAB administrators held several meetings to work toward a better understanding of the roles that each organization plays in administrative reviews. Progress was made in the identification of the categories of youth in care who benefit from independent review. It was determined that it would be useful to hold a KAIZEN lean event for the agencies around the FCRB process in calendar year 2014.

### Findings and Recommendations

#### 1. Iowa Collaborative for Child and Family Services Recommendations

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board endorses the findings and recommendations of the *Report of Stakeholder Recommendations* produced by the Collaborative for Children and Family Services, an advisory body established by the Iowa Department of Human Services to assist with child welfare planning. The Board urges the Governor, General Assembly, Court and all affected officials and organizations to review the Collaborative's report along with the final Child and Family Services Plan to be submitted to the federal child welfare agency by DHS in 2014. Iowa's public decision makers will provide a valuable service by monitoring the progress of the plan and by responding to policy, budget and system coordination requests that arise during its implementation.

In its 2012 Annual Report, ICAB urged all policy makers, system officials, service providers, community organizations and the general public to review *Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families* and "continue to seek answers to its challenge to find new ways they can improve permanency outcomes for our children." (See the Blueprint at <https://childadvocacy.iowa.gov/images/library/file/BlueprintforPermanency.pdf>) In 2013 the

Iowa Department of Human Services convened a Collaborative for Child and Family Services to review the state's efforts to ensure safety, permanency and well-being for Iowa's children. The Iowa Child Advocacy Board was represented as a stakeholder in the Collaborative. During its deliberations during the last five months of calendar year 2013, the Collaborative saw its deliberations as a continuation of the process initiated by the *Blueprint for Forever Families*. Based on the findings of the 2013 review, the Collaborative prepared and submitted a *Report of Stakeholder Recommendations* to the Iowa Department of Human Services in February 2014 and asked that DHS consider the recommendations for inclusion in the Iowa Child and Family Services Plan for FFY 2015-2019.

Based on an analysis of the current status of child welfare services and outcomes in Iowa, the Collaborative has recommended that DHS and its child welfare partners focus on five goals believed to hold promise for positive impact on the system elements in greatest need of support and improvement. The recommend goals:

- 1) Family engagement in child welfare will be genuine, effective, and meaningful across all diverse populations.
- 2) In order to keep children safe in their home, abuse cannot occur. To reduce victimization, prevention and supports to high-need families are critical. If this is not avoidable and victimization occurs, then prompt and effective services and supports need to be available, accessible, and utilized to ensure child safety is not compromised.
- 3) Children in out-of-home placement will experience fewer placement changes while also having their needs met.
- 4) Children will achieve timely, quality, permanent reunification, adoption, or guardianship.
- 5) All youth in transition will be equipped to make informed choices and have access to resources to ensure their long-term success.

All of the Collaborative's recommended goals are closely associated with ICAB areas of responsibility. Two of the goals are particularly well-aligned with ICAB's current areas of focus. The goal of increasing the effectiveness of family engagement in the child welfare system is viewed as essential in promoting the long term success of children involved in the child welfare system. Because ICAB volunteers have the opportunity to contribute significantly to achievement of this goal, the Collaborative adopted an ICAB-specific objective related to this goal for inclusion in the final Collaborative report:

***Improve Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) support for effective family engagement by the end of year 3.***

The Child Advocacy Board views this objective as a reasonable commitment of both the CASA and FCRB programs. If selected for inclusion in the Child and Family Service Plan, the Board will carefully monitor development of ICAB strategies and procedures for its implementation.

A second area of current ICAB focus is increasing the success of Iowa's youth as they leave the child welfare system and transition to adulthood. During 2014 and subsequent years, ICAB is placing increased focus on helping youth find the support needed to 1) achieve educational stability and success; 2) connect with health, mental health and dental services; 3) find safe and affordable housing and transportation; 4) develop ability to achieve success in the world of work; 5) manage finances; and 6) negotiate the complex

social and family relationships they will need to confront as they depart from the structure of the child welfare system.

## 2. ICAB Automated Support.

**The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that sufficient resources be provided to complete and enhance development of the Iowa Child Online (ICO) automated system to increase the efficiency of the CASA and FCRB programs, increase the capacity of the programs to serve more of Iowa's vulnerable children, and to assist in identifying program improvements that will serve children more effectively.**

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) was established to assist in promoting good outcomes for Iowa's children in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being. Through oversight of its Court Appointed Special Advocate and Foster Care Review Board programs and the services provided by volunteers in those programs, ICAB is able to carry out its purpose competently for individual children served by the programs. ICAB's programs are supported by a partially completed automated system which needs to be fully completed and enhanced to provide improved CASA and FCRB program operation throughout Iowa. The current incomplete level of automation:

- ✓ Hampers both staff and volunteers in performing their duties in the most efficient manner possible.
- ✓ Limits the ability of current staff to expand the number of children served by the CASA program.
- ✓ Provides little opportunity to analyze aggregated case data to assist in identifying program improvements that would serve children more effectively.

ICAB staff have worked with the Iowa Chief Information Officer and the Department of Administrative Services throughout 2013 to identify the corrections and enhancements needed in the automated system and will complete this diagnostic work in 2014. Programming corrections are needed to 1) provide correct functionality throughout the system, 2) produce accurate output reports, and 3) complete and implement FCRB functions. In order to support system use by volunteers, enhancements are needed to 1) streamline system navigation, 2) allow system access from multiple devices including tablets and smart phones, 3) provide data fields that allow case progress tracking, 4) produce output reports and data volunteers need to prepare court reports, and 5) increase Coordinator and CASA Coach ability to monitor and review case activities. It is anticipated that funding resources over and above the current funding level will be needed to correct and complete an automated system which is adequate to meet operational needs.

## 3. Differential Response.

**The Iowa Child Advocacy Board commends the Iowa Department of Human Services for its thoughtful and effective development and rollout of Differential Response. ICAB recommends continued review and analysis of the effectiveness of this new approach to handling abuse and neglect referrals. The review should focus on two primary factors:**

- 1) The degree to which Differential Response is effective in maintaining safety, permanency and well-being for Iowa's vulnerable children, and
- 2) The extent to which the new approach safely decreases reliance on formal child welfare and juvenile court intervention for children and families who can benefit more from voluntary involvement with community services.

During its 2013 session, the Iowa General Assembly adopted legislation to establish two discrete pathways to respond to accepted reports of child abuse, a child abuse assessment and a family assessment. The child abuse assessment path requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to make a determination of abuse while the family assessment path allows the agency to provide or arrange for services without a formal determination of abuse. The new law limits the use of the family assessment path to a carefully defined set of reports in which a relatively low level of risk is evident. The family assessment path is a less adversarial approach that has the potential to promote change within families by empowering them to build on their strengths as they use available services to meet their unique needs in providing a safe home for their children.

Leading up to the January 2014 implementation of Differential Response, DHS worked diligently to develop the policies and systems needed to implement the new approach. DHS implemented an ambitious training and informational campaign to ensure the broadest possible understanding and preparation for implementation among staff, collateral agencies and the public. In 2014, prior to the preparation of this report, the implementation and rollout of Differential Response appears to be nearly flawless.

Even with this success, it is important for DHS to provide clarity to the child welfare community, public officials and the public on the outcomes Differential Response is intended to achieve and the methods by which outcome achievement will be measured and assessed. How successful will the new approach be in ensuring safety, permanency and well-being for children reported as being abused? Will more families and children safely avoid entry to the formal child welfare system? If they do, will the avoidance be lasting? Will the children served in this manner be more likely to achieve better outcomes than if they had been served in the traditional manner? Long-term, will the new approach decrease the generational incidence of abuse as the children served in this manner become adults and begin raising their own children?

Iowa's children and families and the child protection system would be well-served to develop an open, transparent and broad-based approach to the assessment and evaluation of Differential Response. Establishing and implementing this type of assessment early in the implementation can be expected to promote increased understanding of the approach, increase alignment of service providing agencies with it, and provide opportunities to shape the model in a way that enhances its potential for success.