

Iowa Child Advocacy Board

Advocating for the protection of Iowa's children and improvement in the child welfare system



To: Iowa's Elected Officials and the Iowa Judiciary
Directors of State Agencies that serve children
Court Appointed Special Advocates and Coaches
Foster Care Review Board Members
Child Advocacy Board Staff

On behalf of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board, I am pleased to submit to you the Child Advocacy Board's Annual Report for calendar year 2014. Once again, our exceptional pool of volunteer Court Appointed Special (CASA) Advocates and Coaches and Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) members have performed admirably in their pursuit of better outcomes for the abused and neglected children with whom they work.

- During the year, 545 Court Appointed Special Advocates served a total 1460 children.
- A total of 201 Foster Care Review Board members conducted 2,082 reviews of foster children
- These volunteers contributed a total of nearly 33,000 service hours and traveled nearly 210,000 miles in pursuit of positive safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for Iowa's abused and neglected children.
- The value of service and miles contributed totals approximately \$1.7 million.

Members of the Child Advocacy Board, the staff who manage the CASA and FCRB programs, and our volunteers have been steadfast throughout the year in their pursuit of our mission, **"Advocating for the protection of Iowa's children and improvement in the child welfare system."** As a Board, we have worked with staff to develop strategic goals and operational plans for the next five years that will position our programs to provide more effective advocacy services for significantly more children over this period of time. The Board's planning work relied heavily on the work of staff, volunteers and partners in other organizations who collaborated on two Iowa Lean Government process improvement events designed to increase the efficiency and improve the outcomes of both the CASA and FCRB programs.

Many of our current CASA Advocates have stepped up to serve as Coaches for newly recruited Advocates. They are able to share their valuable on-the-ground experience and expertise as they guide the new recruits in their work. The efforts of the Coaches can lighten the load of program Coordinators. This allows the Coordinators to focus more of their time on developing and providing more formal learning opportunities for both new and experienced Advocates. We believe these initiatives will pay off in terms of increased advocacy effectiveness which contribute to better outcomes for the children involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. We ask readers to note in the Annual Report the continuation of the forward-looking work being done and the accomplishments to date. In future years, we anticipate a significant return on the investment we are making together in the enhancement of our organization, the skills and knowledge of our volunteers and our overall capacity to advocate effectively for Iowa's vulnerable children.

Finally, I would like to call to your attention the Child Advocacy Board recommendations, which begin on page 19 of this report. We believe implementation of our recommendations would contribute to future progress in advocating for and achieving better outcomes for Iowa's vulnerable children and youth.

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

Gerald W. Magee
Chair, Iowa Child Advocacy Board

The 2014 Annual Report was approved for publication by the Iowa Child Advocacy Board: August 28, 2015

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ABOUT THE CHILD ADVOCACY BOARD AND THE CASA AND FCRB PROGRAMS

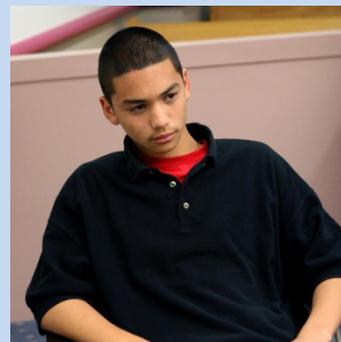
The Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) is an independent board appointed by the Governor of Iowa to provide for citizen involvement in child welfare issues. ICAB oversees two volunteer child advocacy programs designed to help protect Iowa children and their best interests while they are being served by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



ICAB OPERATIONS: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

During the past year, ICAB volunteers, board members and staff have progressed rapidly in their activities and plans to advance the CASA and FCRB programs toward goals of serving more children more effectively. The State Child Advocacy Board takes notes with great satisfaction the passionate and caring work of the trained Court Appointed Special Advocates and Foster Care Review Board members throughout the state.

Over the course of the year, a total of 545 CASAs served a total of 1,460 children. The volunteers made many thousands of advocacy contacts on behalf of the children, reporting 21,445 hours and 209,602 driven miles in pursuit of positive outcomes for the children's safety and well-being.

The 31 Foster Care Review Boards held monthly or bi-monthly meetings in 25 Iowa locations, during which the 201 local board members reviewed and then reported back to the judges on the progress and concerns noted during the 2,082 reviews held for 1,347 different children living in foster care in 50 of Iowa's counties. The FCRB volunteers donated 11,444 hours toward those causes.

The total time and other costs donated by ICAB volunteers in 2014 are valued at approximately \$1.7 million. The value of the long term effects of these volunteers' efforts grows immeasurably as children served by the programs are reunited with their families or are established in new permanent caring homes and achieve increasing success in all life arenas.

Youth Advocacy Grant Spurs New Action

In June 2013 and again in June 2014, Iowa received Youth Advocacy grants from the National CASA Association. Over these project years, the awarded funds have been used to initiate substantial, systemic change within our organization. Funds were utilized to create a marketing campaign that is still utilized by Coordinators today. ICAB also implemented the CASA Coach model, conducted a Kaizen event and implemented process changes found as a result of the Kaizen, along with changing our overall organizational structure. All of these steps have been part of a capacity-building effort, which has and will continue to allow our agency to increase the number of advocates and ultimately serve more children and serve them better. The remainder of this section of the Annual Report reviews activities and progress toward re-energizing the ICAB programs

CASA Recruitment Campaign

A stated goal of the Child Advocacy Board has long been to increase the number of children served by the CASA program. With funding provided by the Youth Advocacy Grant, ICAB initiated a four-month recruitment push for new CASA volunteers in January 2014. The campaign relied on low-cost tools including media announcements, advertising in print and broadcast media, movie theaters, and social media at both a state and local level. The campaign, though small in scope and duration, produced dramatic results.

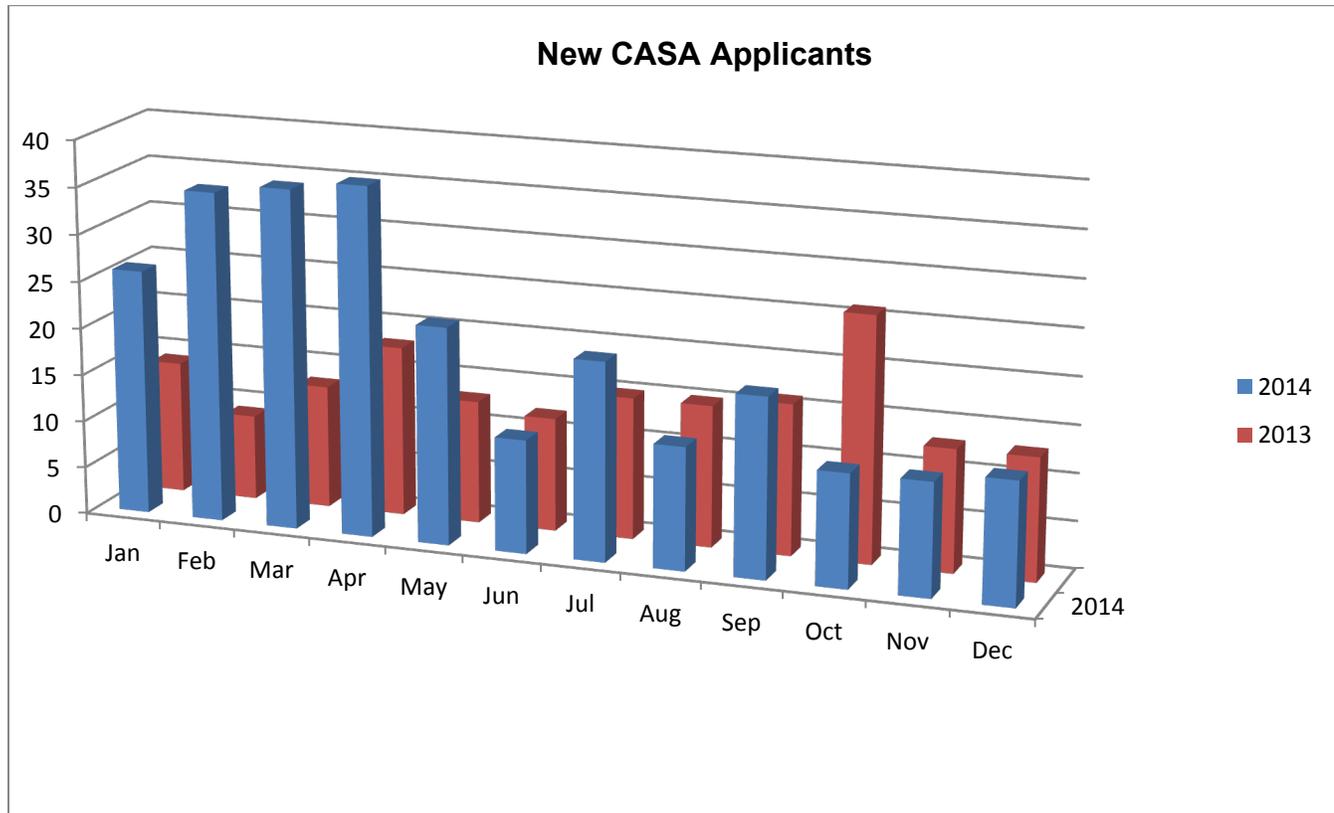
Between January and May 2014, the number of CASA program volunteer applications nearly tripled over the previous year. Not all applicants followed through with training and assignment as Advocates, but those who did increased the ranks of active CASA Advocates from 365 at the end of January to 430 at the end of the year.

A graphic illustration of these results appears on the next page.



Example of CASA recruitment brochure used in 2014 campaign

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF NUMBER OF NEW CASA APPLICANTS IN 2013 ND 2014



ICAB learned from this recruitment effort that a small effort was capable of bringing a substantial increase in applicants. This campaign also revealed a need to expand capacity of staff members to train, coach and monitor the increased number of volunteers. Local Coordinators were particularly strained in the more populous areas of the state. These areas tend to see a greater number of children in care, a greater demand for CASA assignments and a higher volume of CASA applicants. The increased demand placed on Coordinators in the more populated counties highlighted an imbalance in the allocation of staff in relation to the number of child-welfare involved children per county.

The question confronting the Board and staff was how to increase capacity and provide equitable allocation of existing staff within the existing funding and staffing limits. This question has been addressed through a series of activities and events throughout the course of the year:

- ✓ Continuation of a pilot project to test the viability of a volunteer Coach Model to expand the CASA program capacity to serve more children.
- ✓ A Kaizen Event to improve the efficiency of CASA program workflow processes.
- ✓ A LEAN Government Design Event to similarly increase the efficiency of the FCRB administrative workflow.
- ✓ A new Child Advocacy Board Strategic Plan for the years 2014 through 2019 focused on increasing capacity of the CASA program and enhancing the service outcomes of both programs.
- ✓ A reorganization of staff to provide a more balanced staffing allocation in comparison to the location of children needing CASA services.
- ✓ Initiation of CASA pre-service training redesign.

Coach Model Pilot and Implementation Planning

In June 2013, the Iowa Child Advocacy Board obtained a grant from the National CASA Association to broaden the CASA program's impact throughout the State. This effort included the development of a peer coordinator model which recruits experienced volunteers to serve in a supportive role with newer advocates. The Iowa CASA Coach model was developed and piloted in four areas of the state. In August 2014, the CASA Program conducted an evaluation of the CASA Coach Model pilot. The evaluation included interviews of staff, advocates and coaches. The evaluation concluded that the pilot program was successful and offered great potential for the CASA program to continue statewide growth and expansion. In the fall of 2014, all CASA Coordinators participated in the CASA Coach training. Coordinators were asked to ask CASA Advocates interested in becoming Coaches to attend the training as well. By December 2014, the CASA program had trained 56 coaches statewide. Each Coordinator has been trained on the coach model and an ICAB Lead Coordinator serves as the contact point for coach-related matters.

LEAN Government Events

CASA Kaizen

The early 2014 volunteer recruitment campaign brought recognition that increasing staff time and capacity to manage a larger number of volunteers was essential. At the time, the CASA Coach Model was in early pilot stages and held some promise. ICAB staff and managers determined it imperative also to look for efficiencies in our work processes to conserve staff time and process costs while increasing the potential for good outcomes for the children being served.

Because of this, in June 2014 ICAB worked with representatives of the court system, human services, CASA Advocates, other advocacy organizations, youth and ICAB staff to conduct a Kaizen event. The CASA Kaizen was a weeklong rapid change event in which participants mapped the paperwork process of the CASA program from point of referral to case closure, identified and prioritized potential improvements in the process, developed specific plans for implementing the improvements, and initiated the work needed to accomplish the improvements. The primary goal was to find efficiencies that allow staff to focus more time on up-front training and coaching of volunteers to increase the amount and quality of CASA program child advocacy in Iowa.

The Kaizen produced some tangible results related to work processes:

- 21% reduction in the number of work process steps,
- 83% reduction in process delaying activities,
- 2% increase in value added steps,
- 59% reduction in handoffs between staff and volunteers as a result of empowering CASA Advocates and Coaches to make all decisions within their authority, some of which had been previously reserved for staff,
- 33% reduction in redundant loop-back activities, and
- 62% decrease in time-eating decision points.

Some of the process changes stand out as contributors to achievement of the planned efficiencies. Most importantly, Coaches assume full responsibility, upon full training, for supervising CASAs. With this value added by the Coaches, more Coordinator time is available for training of volunteers. In turn, more training produces greater federal revenues available for training volunteers. Finally, with the increased federal funds, contractual support positions are added to further support Coordinators and improve case data entry accuracy and quality of advocacy.

At the conclusion of the Kaizen, 69 action items required further work and implementation over the course of the year following the event. At the end of calendar year 2014, 34 of the items were completed while work had been initiated on 33 and two awaited initiation. A more complete summary of the Kaizen process and results are available on the Child Advocacy Board website.

FCRB Design Event

The Foster Care Review Board program has the potential to assist the Courts and the Department of Human Services (DHS) in moving individual children and youth toward timely permanency and to contribute to overall improvements in the child welfare system. Working together ICAB and DHS identified a need to 1) design and implement a more efficient and consistent process, 2) inform and train all partners on their roles and responsibilities within the new process, and 3) implement the new process effectively.

With these needs in mind, a team of participants from ICAB and DHS met for three days at the end of July 2014 to conduct a rapid design event to achieve several key objectives, including:

- Streamline and clarify processes/procedures and clearly detail standardized statewide steps for each agency in a manner that recognizes the permanency goals and needs of children and families
- Incorporate all process elements needed to meet the statutory and policy requirements of the agencies involved.
- Include process features that increase participation of legal interested parties to the child's case in the FCRB review process.
- Reconcile inconsistencies among DHS policy, ICAB policy and Iowa statutes.
- Increase FCRB member knowledge about state and federal laws that impact permanency for children.
- Document the process flow both graphically and in text and use these materials to train staff in both organizations on the new process.

Through animated, intense and thoughtful discussions during this three day event, participants were able to "reinvent" the paperwork flow for FCRB process from the time a child enters foster care until the child exits foster care. A new method of identifying cases needing review was developed that relies on a new report DHS sends to ICAB each month. In addition to providing complete information about entry of children into the foster care system, the report provides a single source of all data DHS is required to provide to ICAB throughout the child's foster care placement. The new method of initiating FCRB reviews allows a "just-in-time" approach and eliminates a large number of steps deemed to add no value to the process or outcomes of the process. "Just-in-time" also meant sending FCRB hearing notices earlier than in the old process as one means of encouraging greater participation by interested parties. The new process fully incorporated the use of the Judicial Branch's Electronic Data Management System (EDMS) for timely collection of records and documents FCRB Members need to conduct reviews, thereby eliminating many process steps for staff in both DHS and ICAB. Finally, the new process outlined a clear and consistent approach to safeguarding the confidentiality of all data and documents throughout the FCRB work process.

During the Design Event, the group identified 43 action items to be completed over the course of the year following the Event. Of these, 26 were completed by the end of Calendar Year 2014 and 15 had been initiated. Implementation phase-in was scheduled to begin in 2015. As of this writing, the changes in process are taking hold among all FCRBs and completely revised training for FCRB Members is slated to be conducted for the first time at the end of August 2015.

Child Advocacy Board Five Year Strategic Plan

In July, the Child Advocacy Board began development of a new strategic plan. Led by planning facilitator Elizabeth Weinstein, the Board analyzed results of two CASA surveys of internal and external customers and considered feedback from participant comment cards completed following each Foster Care Review Board. Information from the ICAB Annual Report, recent internal metrics, volunteer recruitment statistics, the CASA Kaizen process and demographic social, political and economic trends were all examined.

The Board cast its vision as **"Working together to build a brighter future for Iowa's abused and neglected children."** In recognition of the requirements of Iowa law, the Board framed its mission as **"Advocating for the protection of Iowa's children and improvement in the child welfare system."**

With vision and mission as a backdrop, the group examined strengths and weaknesses of the CASA and FCRB programs. Five key issues commanded the Board's attention resulting in the development of five corresponding strategic goals:



Reorganization and Program Change Plan

The Board delegated responsibility to the ICAB managers and staff for developing and implementing an operational plan to carry out the strategic goals established by the Board. Viewing the vision, mission and goal statements together, the Board's message to ICAB managers and staff is to serve more children through our programs and serve them better. In very concrete terms, this means a future where the number of Iowa children who benefit from having a CASA Advocate is tripled. In addition, this message points out the need to enhance the advocacy abilities ICAB staff and volunteers and expand the fertile ground for welcoming receipt of useful CASA and FCRB findings and recommendations among our partners in the child welfare and court systems.

With significant fiscal and human resources support from the Department of Inspections and Appeals, the process of making the Board's strategic plan operational began in September 2014. At that time ICAB's staff and volunteers were organized into four Regions, each with a Lead Coordinator and several Local Coordinators. The Regional areas were aligned with the eight Iowa Judicial Districts in a manner that provides a relatively equivalent number of children needing advocacy services in each Region. Full implementation of the needed administrative, program and advocacy delivery changes are expected to take three to five years to achieve.

The implementation plan includes a three pronged approach. Together, the three prongs will support achievement of success in serving more children and serving them better.

Three-Pronged Approach



Implement the Coach Model where possible

- Experienced Advocates support newer Advocates
- Increased number of volunteers can be supported by existing staff
- Coordinator staff freed to recruit, train and collaborate



Redevelop training specifically for CASA and FCRB programs

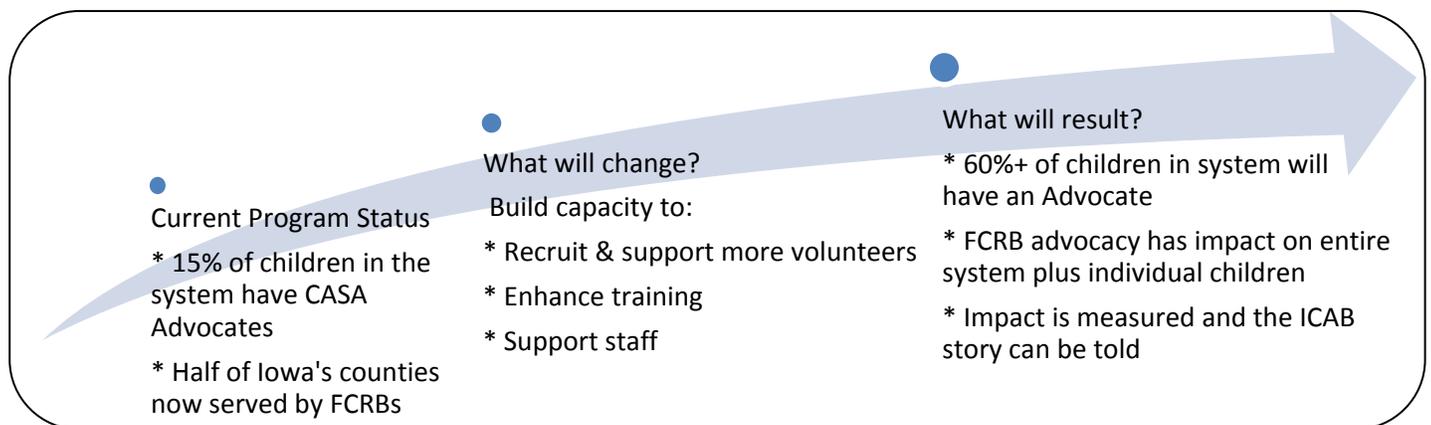
- Delivery close to volunteer homes
- Flexible scheduling that meets need of volunteers
- Training topics tailored to the needs of children being served
- Federal reimbursement is increased due to increased staff time on training



Increase Local Coordinator support for volunteers

- Add FCRB Facilitators and CASA Assistants (possible because of increased federal funding from increased training)
- Establish Regional Lead Coordinators to build efficiencies through regional teamwork
- Coordinator staff support further increases their time available to recruit, train and collaborate within their communities

The planned changes are expected to significantly increase the number of children for whom our volunteer CASA Advocates and Foster Care Review Board Members can effectively advocate.



Initiation of Change Process

In September 2014, four Coordinators were designated as Lead Coordinators, one for each of four quadrants of the state. From September through November, the Lead Coordinators worked with ICAB managers to develop and explain the plan for realignment of work and reallocation of cases among Local Coordinators and Administrative Assistants in each of the Regions. Starting in November, the transfer of cases between some Coordinators was initiated. For most, the transfer did not begin until calendar year 2015.

Once the general framework for evening out workloads was established and initiated, the Lead Coordinators along with the training specialist and management analyst initiated work on redesigning pre-service training for the CASA program. Goals for the redesign included 1) developing a training approach and curriculum that more fully prepares CASA Advocates to successfully complete the essential tasks of their advocacy assignments, 2) preparing training materials that could be easily and effectively delivered by Local Coordinators with fidelity to the training model, 3) including enough flexibility in the curriculum design to permit the training to be delivered to groups ranging in size from

five or fewer participants to a maximum of 25 to enable training to be provided as close to the home locations of the persons volunteering to become CASA Advocates. During the remainder of 2014, only the basic outline for the training design and curriculum was completed. As of this writing, the training redesign is complete and Lead and Local Coordinators have begun delivery of the material throughout the state.

Other Program Highlights

Transitioning Youth Pilot Project Meets Special Needs of Selected Older Youth

In 2013 the Child Advocacy Board obtained a grant from Polk County Decategorization to develop a program specifically aimed at providing advocacy and mentoring services for older youth in Polk County. Program development in the latter half of calendar year 2013 included a committee whose main function was to identify the needs of the youth in question and provide thoughts and suggestions on serving this underserved population. Program Development also included a focus group with older youth to learn about the needs and wishes of youth in transition. Funding for this phase of the project continued into the first half of calendar year 2014.

Upon completion of initial development in July 2014, the project began providing specific training to Advocates who wish to work with older youth. The youth who are served by this project are older and are adjudicated either Child In Need of Assistance or Delinquent. The youth are placed outside of their home and are expected to "age out" of the system without a life-long positive connection with a caring adult. The project receives referrals from Juvenile Court Services or Department of Human Services. Upon receiving a referral, an Advocate-Mentor is matched with the youth only if the youth approves. The Advocate-Mentor helps the youth navigate the transition from foster care to independence and ultimately becomes a connection and mentor for the youth throughout the youth's life. The Transitioning Youth project is managed by a contracted Program Manager with specific intent of ensuring the unique aspects of this program are respected and upheld outside of the traditional CASA Program. First assignments to Advocate Mentors began in the fall of 2014. Some data about initial outcomes of this project are anticipated in 2015.

Fostering Futures Grant Provides Funding Expands Focus to all Older Youth Served by CASAs

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board was awarded a National CASA grant to build capacity to increase awareness of the needs of foster care youth ages 14 to 21, to recruit volunteers who wish to contribute their time or resources to our advocacy efforts, to provide high quality training, supervision and coaching to a specialized pool of advocates for foster youth ages 14-17, and to achieve an increase in the number of youth ages 14 to 17 served by the Iowa CASA program.

To date, the funds have been used to train ICAB's Lead Training Specialist on the Fostering Futures Curriculum and to deliver this training material statewide to volunteer advocates, volunteer coaches, and CASA Coordinators to help them effectively advocate for transitioning youth who are served by Iowa's CASA program. This grant has been instrumental in enhancing our goal of having specialized advocates for youth transitioning to adulthood.

ICAB has trained a total of 71 Advocates, Coaches, and Staff during the first year of the National CASA grant. With this pool of trained Advocates and staff, the CASA program served an additional 25 youth age 14 and over as of this writing. All youth served demonstrated academic progress and none had reported incidents of delinquency offenses

ICAB was awarded a continuation grant for the upcoming year which will continue to build our capacity to serve older youth, to inform our communities of how the CASA program can help foster youth meet their needs, and to recruit volunteers who wish to contribute their time or resources to our advocacy efforts. Beginning January 2015, all Advocates who serve youth in this age group will be required to complete Foster Futures training. In addition, the Lead Trainer Specialist will prepare all local Coordinators to deliver this training for their areas of the state on an ongoing basis as an important element of our sustainability plan. In addition, funds will be used to develop a targeted public information and recruitment campaign that will encourage assignment of a CASA to older youth and to increase the number of volunteers interested in serving this population.

2014 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Foster Care Placement Data

One result of the FCRB Design Event has been greater collaboration between ICAB and the Department of Human Services. This includes a change the manner in which DHS transmits monthly data to ICAB. In November 2014, DHS began transmission of monthly list that includes all children placed in out of home care along with demographic and placement data and pertinent case information for every child in placement. In the past, the monthly DHS report included information for only those children for whom a change had occurred in some factor related to their placement.

This data now being reported monthly by DHS will allow ICAB to provide a more complete picture of the status of children in placement as required by Iowa law, which states in part that ICAB is required to:

"Accumulate data and develop an annual report regarding children in foster care. The report shall include:

- (1) Personal data regarding the total number of days of foster care provided and the characteristics of the children receiving foster care.*
- (2) The number of placements of children in foster care.*
- (3) The frequency and results of court reviews.*

"Evaluate the judicial and administrative data collected on foster care and disseminate the data to the governor, the supreme court, the chief judge of each judicial district, the department, and child-placing agencies."

See Iowa Code sub-section 237.18 (2), paragraphs (b) and (c)

With the statewide implementation of the Court's Electronic Data Management System (EDMS), the possibility of gathering Court data contemplated by the statute is possible. ICAB will work with the State Court Administrator's Office during 2015 to obtain data that supplements the DHS data now available.

With only two months data, it is possible to include only initial production of baseline data in this report for Calendar Year 2014. Mapping the data into an ongoing database will allow comparative and longitudinal analysis in future years.

Number and Characteristics of Children Receiving Foster Care

Using the monthly report provided by DHS for December 2014, it is possible to provide end-of-month information about the number of children in care whose placements are supervised by DHS and the age and race/ethnicity characteristics of those children. The two columns on the far right side of the table display the total population of each group and the rate of placement per thousand children in each group.

TABLE 2: CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE BY AGE, RACE AND ETHNICITY

Age Group	0 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 19	20+	Grand Total	Total Child Population (2014 Est)*	Placements per Thousand Children
Race	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count		
(Blank)		2	1	1		4		
American Indian or Alaska Native	37	30	21	20		108	5,669	19.1
Asian	7	7	2	8		24	19,952	1.2
Black or African American	136	127	105	150	1	519	39,352	13.2
Multi-Race	74	68	42	45	1	230	32,336	7.1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	2	4	4		12	1,126	10.7
Unable to Determine	141	107	64	38		350		
White	955	947	679	904	2	3487	714,499	4.9
Grand Total	1352	1290	918	1170	4	4734	812,934	5.8
Hispanic	130	123	84	123	1	461	87,740	5.3

*Source: <http://www.census.gov/popest/>

The column on the far right of Table 2 on the previous page shows the percent of Iowa children in each racial identity group (including White children) who were placed in foster care under DHS supervision at the end of December 2014. When the racial group of a child is identified in the DHS data as “unable to determine” or is “blank,” the child is not counted as a member of any racial identity group. The Table 2 data show that placement ratios for children in all minority racial identity groups except for Asian children exceed the placement ratio for White children. The ratio for American Indian or Alaskan Native children is nearly four times higher than that of White children. The ratios are more than twice that of the White children ratio for Black or African American children and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children.

Disproportionate Representation of Minority Children in Foster Care

The disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare and foster care systems reflected in Table 2 is an issue of long-standing concern. Iowa initiated efforts to reduce racial disproportionality and disparities among children and families involved in foster care system more than 10 years ago. Starting with work focused on Native American children and families in Sioux City along with African American children and families in Des Moines, these efforts have expanded to nine counties throughout the state as of 2014. These communities have used a Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) method to institute changes that reduce racial disparities. Developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, BSC is a quality improvement approach that uses small-scale rapid tests of change, measures the results, adjusts the change and implements more widely without continuing the failed parts of the change.

Supported initially by funding from Casey Family Programs and led by the Department of Human Services (DHS), BSC participants include court, service provider, and advocate representation. A review conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) in 2014 highlighted system practice, organizational culture, and child and family outcome changes resulting from Iowa's efforts to reduce racial disproportionality and disparity:

- A learning exchange using *Race: the Power of an Illusion* has helped community partners to become comfortable with engaging in courageous conversations about race, disproportionality and race.
- Rates of racial disparity have been lowered for entry in foster care for African American and Native American children.

DHS and the courts lead several other initiatives aimed at addressing disparity in the child welfare system. DHS supports The Cultural Equity Alliance, formed as an interagency group which reviews efforts and makes recommendations to address disparity in the child welfare system and the emerging racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in Iowa. The court participates in the Alliance with other agencies to reduce Disproportionate Minority Contact within the juvenile justice system.

While the extent of disproportionality has decreased with the combined efforts of DHS, the courts and other community partners, much work remains. The data in Table 3 on the next page reflect placement ratios for age cohorts of all minority children in foster care under both DHS and Juvenile Court Services (JCS) supervision. These data show 20.6% of Iowa children placed in foster at the end of December 2014 as members of one of the racial identity groups listed above, substantially higher than the 12.1 percent minority children in the total child population.

As of the end of December 2014, a total of 955 children supervised by DHS and JCS had been placed in foster care in excess of two years. Of these children, 252 were identified in the data as minority children, approximately 26.5% of the total in care longer than two years. This is more than twice the ratio of minority children in Iowa's total child population. Further investigation is needed to understand why the extent of racial disproportionality increases with length of time in care.

TABLE 3: DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITY CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Age Cohort	# Minority Children in Care	Minority Children as % of Total Children in Care	# Minority Children in care > 2 yrs	Minority Children in Care > 2 yrs as % of Total Children in Care > 2 yrs	# White Children in Care > 2 yrs	White Children in Care > 2 yrs as % of Total Children in Care > 2 yrs
0	21	28.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
1	65	19.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
2	68	17.9%	1	11.1%	5	55.6%
3	61	17.6%	4	16.7%	20	83.3%
4	60	18.8%	7	26.9%	18	69.2%
5	47	16.8%	5	20.8%	18	75.0%
6	55	20.7%	6	23.1%	19	73.1%
7	44	17.1%	1	7.1%	14	73.7%
8	48	20.0%	6	2.3%	15	5.7%
9	34	16.3%	3	13.0%	19	82.6%
10	23	13.1%	4	19.0%	16	76.2%
11	34	19.5%	9	31.0%	19	65.5%
12	39	21.9%	12	37.5%	18	56.3%
13	40	18.3%	13	28.9%	32	71.1%
14	68	24.6%	12	20.3%	46	78.0%
15	90	23.0%	29	30.5%	61	64.2%
16	118	22.9%	37	24.8%	110	73.8%
17	134	23.2%	51	25.6%	145	72.9%
18	93	26.5%	47	28.7%	116	70.7%
19	7	35.0%	4	36.4%	7	63.6%
20	1	20.0%	1	20.0%	4	80.0%
TOTALS	1151	20.6%	252	26.5%	702	

Foster Care Placement Data by County

Table 4 displays data on the

- Number of children supervised by DHS who were placed in foster care at the end of December 2014,
- Number of children placed in care per 1000 children in the total county population, and
- Average length of time the children had been in care during their current placement episode as of December 2014 in each county.

These data show variance among the counties in the number of children placed per thousand children ranging from 0.41 to 18.94 per thousand. Variance among the counties in the average amount of time children had been in placement at the end of December 2014 ranges from 0.23 to 3.18 years. Much additional analysis and research is needed to understand the causes of these variances. With continued assistance from DHS and the Courts, ICAB will enlarge the scope of its review of the data that may provide some explanation of the differences in these rates.

Table 4: Foster Care Placements per Thousand Children and Average Length in Care by County

County	Children in Placement Per Thousand Child Population				Avg Length of Time in Care		
	Number of Cases	2014 Estimated Child Population	Foster Care Placements per Thousand Children	Rank (Ascending Order)	Avg Days Care per Child	Avg Yrs Care per Child	Rank (Ascending Order)
Statewide	4734	811644	5.83		496	1.36	
Adair	3	1792	1.67	8	622	1.70	80
Adams	8	905	8.84	80	467	1.28	49

Table 4 Continued

County	Children in Placement Per Thousand Child Population				Avg Length of Time in Care		
	Number of Cases	2014 Estimated Child Population	Foster Care Placements per Thousand Children	Rank (Ascending Order)	Avg Days Care per Child	Avg Yrs Care per Child	Rank (Ascending Order)
Allamakee	12	3431	3.50	27	492	1.35	55
Appanoose	22	3082	7.14	71	395	1.08	28
Audubon	12	1290	9.30	83	418	1.14	35
Benton	19	6704	2.83	18	929	2.54	98
Black Hawk	182	33355	5.46	57	494	1.35	57
Boone	27	6578	4.10	41	335	0.92	14
Bremer	18	6462	2.79	17	465	1.27	47
Buchanan	20	6040	3.31	24	524	1.44	60
Buena Vista	57	5928	9.62	84	681	1.86	85
Butler	10	3843	2.60	13	285	0.78	12
Calhoun	6	2247	2.67	15	671	1.84	84
Carroll	19	5387	3.53	28	349	0.96	20
Cass	34	3304	10.29	89	471	1.29	50
Cedar	3	4626	0.65	2	250	0.68	10
Cerro Gordo	85	4488	18.94	99	392	1.07	27
Cherokee	30	2723	11.02	94	560	1.54	69
Chickasaw	19	3194	5.95	64	374	1.02	23
Clarke	11	2455	4.48	45	1162	3.18	99
Clay	36	4102	8.78	79	415	1.14	33
Clayton	25	4286	5.83	62	890	2.44	96
Clinton	57	12051	4.73	48	476	1.30	53
Crawford	16	4921	3.25	23	710	1.95	87
Dallas	93	23610	3.94	37	445	1.22	41
Davis	10	2738	3.65	33	83	0.23	1
Decatur	11	2271	4.84	51	223	0.61	6
Delaware	12	4553	2.64	14	742	2.03	90
Des Moines	43	10116	4.25	43	534	1.46	63
Dickinson	36	3504	10.27	88	528	1.45	61
Dubuque	93	25254	3.68	35	640	1.75	82
Emmet	25	2443	10.23	86	714	1.96	89
Fayette	28	5008	5.59	59	596	1.63	74
Floyd	24	4089	5.87	63	462	1.27	43
Franklin	27	2596	10.40	90	665	1.82	83
Fremont	6	1688	3.55	30	226	0.62	7
Greene	20	2286	8.75	78	409	1.12	31

Table 4 Continued

County	Children in Placement Per Thousand Child Population				Avg Length of Time in Care		
	Number of Cases	2014 Estimated Child Population	Foster Care Placements per Thousand Children	Rank (Ascending Order)	Avg Days Care per Child	Avg Yrs Care per Child	Rank (Ascending Order)
Grundy	9	3153	2.85	19	462	1.27	44
Guthrie	20	2616	7.65	75	494	1.35	56
Hamilton	9	3785	2.38	11	592	1.62	72
Hancock	10	2748	3.64	32	473	1.30	51
Hardin	14	4222	3.32	25	206	0.56	4
Harrison	16	3567	4.49	46	515	1.41	59
Henry	15	5080	2.95	20	839	2.30	94
Howard	8	2572	3.11	21	130	0.36	2
Humboldt	18	2421	7.43	74	418	1.15	36
Ida	25	1817	13.76	98	416	1.14	34
Iowa	17	4197	4.05	40	283	0.78	11
Jackson	23	4774	4.82	49	430	1.18	39
Jasper	90	9048	9.95	85	364	1.00	21
Jefferson	18	3248	5.54	58	403	1.10	30
Johnson	99	36436	2.72	16	569	1.56	71
Jones	28	4850	5.77	61	465	1.27	48
Keokuk	20	2578	7.76	76	315	0.86	13
Kossuth	9	3677	2.45	12	391	1.07	26
Lee	51	8346	6.11	65	456	1.25	42
Linn	393	57328	6.86	68	568	1.56	70
Louisa	4	2863	1.40	5	463	1.27	46
Lucas	2	2214	0.90	3	552	1.51	66
Lyon	11	3517	3.13	22	891	2.44	97
Madison	19	4389	4.33	44	685	1.88	86
Mahaska	42	5947	7.06	70	383	1.05	24
Marion	52	9200	5.65	60	386	1.06	25
Marshall	51	11221	4.55	47	594	1.63	73
Mills	14	3953	3.54	29	420	1.15	38
Mitchell	14	2824	4.96	52	232	0.64	8
Monona	11	2773	3.97	38	886	2.43	95
Monroe	13	2057	6.32	67	344	0.94	18
Montgomery	24	2599	9.23	81	371	1.02	22
Muscatine	43	11914	3.61	31	605	1.66	75
O'Brien	19	3609	5.26	55	769	2.11	91
Osceola	8	1577	5.07	53	771	2.11	93

Table 4 Continued

County	Children in Placement Per Thousand Child Population				Avg Length of Time in Care		
	Number of Cases	2014 Estimated Child Population	Foster Care Placements per Thousand Children	Rank (Ascending Order)	Avg Days Care per Child	Avg Yrs Care per Child	Rank (Ascending Order)
Page	39	3510	11.11	95	335	0.92	15
Palo Alto	4	2270	1.76	9	207	0.57	5
Plymouth	33	6816	4.84	50	491	1.34	54
Pocahontas	18	1754	10.26	87	338	0.93	16
Polk	916	126989	7.21	72	445	1.22	40
Pottawattamie	262	24650	10.63	92	462	1.27	44
Poweshiek	44	4735	9.29	82	412	1.13	32
Ringgold	2	1281	1.56	7	191	0.52	3
Sac	1	2434	0.41	1	770	2.11	92
Scott	152	45528	3.34	26	533	1.46	62
Shelby	12	2988	4.02	39	712	1.95	88
Sioux	10	10896	0.92	4	609	1.67	77
Story	89	24263	3.67	34	506	1.39	58
Tama	51	4641	10.99	93	559	1.53	68
Taylor	8	1550	5.16	54	239	0.66	9
Union	24	3236	7.42	73	474	1.30	52
Van Buren	7	1882	3.72	36	559	1.53	67
Wapello	73	8820	8.28	77	419	1.15	37
Warren	73	13583	5.37	56	397	1.09	29
Washington	25	5957	4.20	42	635	1.74	81
Wayne	3	1672	1.79	10	607	1.66	76
Webster	126	9268	13.60	97	541	1.48	64
Winnebago	31	2561	12.10	96	610	1.67	78
Winneshiek	8	5155	1.55	6	339	0.93	17
Woodbury	312	29675	10.51	91	548	1.50	65
Worth	13	1843	7.05	69	345	0.94	19
Wright	20	3217	6.22	66	612	1.68	79
Count Data Missing	0						

Foster Care Review Board CFSR Findings

DHS uses a modified Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) approach to help measure achievements for children in Iowa's foster care system. Twenty(20) federal child welfare benchmarks are reported on by the trained FCRB volunteers at the time each youth receives a review. Those benchmarks relate to important safety, permanency and well-being issues for foster youth to determine child welfare systems strengths and areas needing to be strengthened. ICAB analyzed data gathered by the local Foster Care Review Boards in 988 reviews of children in foster care placement between January and June 2014. Many of the desired targets were met or exceeded.

Table 5: Foster Care Review Board CFSR Findings

CFSR Findings	# of responses	Yes responses	Percent Yes
Re-entry was not within 12 months of a prior episode	614	602	98%
FC placement stable, with any changes consistent with achieving goal	961	914	95%
The current goal matches the child's need for a permanent home	980	921	94%
If foster care entered in past 6 months, CPP goal was written within 60 days	262	224	85%
Reunification/Guardianship/Relative placement on target for 12 months	448	295	66%
Adoption expected within 24 months of most recent entry to Foster Care	233	176	76%
APPLA – Current placement committed to provide care until majority age	188	165	88%
For child age 16, transition planning and independent living skills provided	87	81	93%
TPR was sought by filing in 15 of 22 months, unless compelling reason	247	131	53%
FC placement within 1 hour travel from parent of removal	758	716	94%
Placement with siblings (up to 4 in same home) unless safety concerns	507	400	79%
Concerted efforts for child visits with parents and sibs in FC unless safety concerns	821	812	99%
Concerted efforts to preserve a child's connections with school, clubs, faith, etc.	865	735	85%
Inquired about Indian heritage, notified tribe, and followed ICWA placement preference	929	929	100%
Concerted efforts made to seek relative placement, maternal and paternal	845	841	100%
Concerted efforts to promote and support positive relationships of child with parents	775	775	100%
Concerted efforts made to involve child and parents in case planning process	807	805	100%
Concerted efforts to meet child's educational needs	947	947	100%
Concerted efforts to meet child's physical and dental health needs	988	988	100%
Concerted efforts to meet child's mental and behavioral health needs including substance abuse	774	772	100%

CASA and FCRB Survey and Focus Group Results

Child Welfare Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

In early 2015, ICAB staff conducted a survey of CASA Advocates and Coaches and focus groups with many of the Foster Care Review Boards in Iowa to gather their opinions and perceptions of the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) inherent in child welfare in Iowa over the course of calendar year 2014.

- Of 409 CASA Advocates and Coaches who were invited to participate in the SWOT Analysis Survey, 65 individuals participated. Of the 65 respondents, 50 were CASA Advocates and 15 were CASA Coaches. This is a 15.89% response rate.
- 20 of ICAB's 31 local Foster Care Review Boards completed the analysis. This is a 64.5% participation rate.

This is the first time ICAB has collected information from ICAB volunteers in this manner. While the response rates were lower than anticipated, the respondents represent a relatively broad cross-section of the Iowa's lay citizens who volunteer in both programs. As such, these volunteer perspectives are one of the inputs that inform the Child Advocacy Board as it considers and develops findings and recommendations for this annual report.

The summary below represents the some of the frequently stated opinions of the responding CASA and FCRB volunteers based on their perceptions about the circumstances of the children and youth with whom they have had contact.

CASA Survey Results

Survey participants were asked to identify up to five strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they have observed in Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems that relate to the children for whom they advocate. Of the 430 CASA Advocates invited to participate in the survey, 65 responded. The 65 participants reported observations of a total of 241 strengths, 244 weaknesses, 176 opportunities and 163 threats.

Table 6 on the next page summarizes the top five responses in each SWOT category.

TABLE 6: CASA SWOT - SURVEY RESULTS

STRENGTHS

1. Emphasis on finding services and resources to assist children and families.
2. Caring and committed professionals working with children and families.
3. Inter-agency collaborative approach.
4. Child Advocacy presence.
5. Emphasis on permanency.

WEAKNESSES

1. Lack of sufficient resources and services to meet needs of children and families.
2. Lack of communication/information sharing among all parties in a case.
3. Lack of foster homes and group care placements for youth.
4. DHS caseloads too high to effectively meet needs of children and families.
5. Uninvolved court appointed attorneys.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Increase the number of DHS workers; reduce their caseloads to allow more direct time to work with children and families.
2. Improve communication and sharing of information among individuals working with the child and family.
3. Reduce barriers for accessing community resources or services.
4. Increase support and accountability for parents and foster parents.
5. Provide public education and training on the needs of children and increase community involvement.

THREATS

1. Underfunded system (DHS, contracted services and CASA programs mentioned).
2. DHS caseloads too high to effectively meet needs of children and families.
3. Lack of quality foster homes.
4. Establishing permanency "at all costs" to meet a legal timeline rather than in best interest of the child.
5. Lack of sufficient resources for services and non-foster family placements for youth.

An explanation of the main points in each section of the SWOT analysis is located at Appendix 1 to this report.

Foster Care Review Board Focus Group Results

Of the total 31 Foster Care Review Boards in the state, 20 of the Boards participated in the focus groups and shared their perspectives about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they have observed in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In their assessments, board members were asked to consider on a local and statewide level: court process/timelines; DHS case management; contracted services; attorney representation; foster care and group care placements; Iowa KidsNet; services and resources available to meet the needs of children and families. Increase

funding for more DHS case managers; lower caseloads so DHS can spend adequate time with children and families to oversee, assess and manage cases.

1. Increase communication between all parties to a case; explore paperless case management system where all parties have access to information.
2. Increase attendance of interested parties at foster care review boards.
3. Increase quality and quantity of foster home placements.
4. Increase funding for group care placements.
5. Increase funding for more services (substance abuse, mental health) especially in rural areas.

TABLE 7: FCRB FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

STRENGTHS

1. One judge, one family practice.
2. Knowledge of local resources identified by DHS, providers and FCRB members.
3. CASA Advocates involved in cases.
4. Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association is a valuable resource.
5. Knowledgeable and involved DHS caseworkers.

WEAKNESSES

1. Lack of foster homes, especially for specific populations (teens, minorities).
2. Too few DHS workers; high caseloads
3. Case Permanency Plans (difficult to find information, progress and needs not updated, etc.)
4. Lack of services in rural areas; distance to services is a barrier for families
5. Insufficient number of group care facilities in Iowa for youth.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. More ongoing training is needed for review board members.
2. Need more early intervention programs to help prevent DHS involvement.
3. Need funding for more group care facilities in Iowa.
4. Electronic case management system that could be utilized by all parties involved in a case to improve communication, sharing of information.

THREATS

1. Lack of funding throughout the child welfare system.
2. Relative placements as a standard is not always good for the child.
3. Gaps in information sharing among parties working with the child and family.
4. Decrease in the number of licensed foster homes.
5. Number of failed adoption cases returning into care.

Since the board members participated in a discussion rather than a survey, the rationale behind each of the the identified SWOT areas was not necessarily captured by the facilitators. Common themes that emerge about system needs based on a review of all responses include.

A complete listing of the SWOT areas identified by local foster care review boards is located at Appendix 1 to this report.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Availability of Out of Home Placement Options

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that the Iowa Department of Human Services fully implement its *Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan* for a statewide recruitment campaign to expand the array of available licensed homes that can meet the full range of needs of children in the foster care system.

Both the State Board and local volunteers recognize the significant contribution that foster care service providers, foster parents, social workers and IFAPA make to the needs of Iowa children who need out of home placement and their families. Local ICAB volunteers also expressed concerns about a range of factors related to this issue, including:

- need for a broader array of available licensed homes in all counties of the state that provide options for matching foster parent capacities with child needs (older youth, ethnically diverse and culturally sensitive foster homes for minority youth, children with challenging behaviors and needs),
- despite an appreciation for the increased attention to transition needs of children and youth in care, the need for an even greater emphasis on planning for transition to adulthood for children in out of home care,
- belief that a treatment or therapeutic foster care option should be available for children who need foster parents with a higher level of training and preparation for children with challenging needs,
- increase in training availability for newly recruited foster parents to prepare them more quickly to provide foster care,
- need for a concerted foster home recruitment effort closely coordinated among all agencies and organizations that can contribute to informing the public about the need for more foster homes with greater diversity,
- perception that Iowa KidsNet does not always select the closest and best matched placement for children,
- need for a greater array of group care facilities that are in closer proximity to children who need this level of care,
- perception that turnover in group care facilities and provider agencies have a negative effect on outcomes for the children they serve,
- concern that the results of analysis of the relative costs and benefits of various levels of care and the needs for the various levels of care are not well known or are poorly understood by system decision makers and the public.

Court Appointed Attorneys and Guardians Ad Litem

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that court appointed attorneys for children and parents and Guardians Ad Litem enhance their capacity to provide crucial services to meet children's legal advocacy needs through increased visits with clients, advising clients of their legal options and court ordered requirements, being prepared for court and preparing clients for court.

Members of the Child Advocacy Board recognize the resource challenges inherent in providing high quality legal advocacy in every situation and the efforts recently undertaken to bolster training for attorneys providing these services. Both the State Board and local ICAB volunteers also recognize the excellent representation that many attorneys provide for the children and families they serve.

In this area of concern, the Child Advocacy Board envisions the possibility of more consistent collaboration between Guardians ad Litem and volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates to enable synergy between the legal advocacy the GALs can provide and the best interest advocacy CASAs can provide through sharing of more thorough information about the child's situation and needs.

Use of Technology for Increased Communication and Collaboration

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that child welfare partners maximize the use of technology to enhance communication and collaboration among child-service agencies and organizations and to conserve strained resources across entities and systems.

The Child Advocacy Board notes the value ICAB's local volunteers place on cooperation, communication, collaboration, joint training and information sharing among the entities involved in meeting the needs of the children they serve. The flip side of the coin is the often repeated call by local volunteers for improvements in all these areas.

The Child Advocacy Board foresees the possibility of improved use of existing electronic case management and information systems that would streamline the sharing of data and documentary materials to support increased service effectiveness at the individual and case level. Similarly, an exploration of cross-system analysis of data and information might yield improvements in use of scarce resources in service delivery processes that, of necessity, rely upon the contributions of the legal, social service, mental health, education, financial support, and other systems to help children we collectively serve to achieve successful life outcomes.

Differential Response

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board continues its call from last year to review and analyze the effectiveness of Differential Response in responding to abuse and neglect.

DHS has developed and implemented some new methods of collecting data that hold promise for providing a base for more thorough analysis of the impact of Differential Response and the services provided in follow-up to this initial intervention approach. It continues to be important for DHS to provide ongoing clarity to the child welfare community, public officials and the public on the outcomes achieved through Differential Response and the methods by which outcome achievements are measured and assessed.

The Child Advocacy Board recommends that its staff work collaboratively with DHS, the courts and child welfare service providers to assist with the collection and analysis of data and information that will underscore the value of the approach and inform possible improvements in the process.

Going Beyond the Child and Family Services Review

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that the Iowa Department of Human Services continue to assess variations across the state in placement stability, out of home placement rates, lengths of time in care, and disproportionality.

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board commends the Iowa Department of Human Services for successfully completing the actions steps of its Program Improvement Plan (PIP) and achieving its PIP goals, which resulted from the State's Children and Family Services Review (CFSR). Our State appears to be doing well as viewed through the CFSR measures. Yet, the high level data published in this report and the more thorough analysis provided in the current DHS Child and Family

Service Plan for the years 2015 through 2019 show some of the wide-ranging geographic differences and differences among population sectors that exist in Iowa.

The Child Advocacy Board and its staff stand ready to assist with developing and advocating for the continued improvements DHS is pursuing to deliver quality services in the right amounts to Iowa's increasing diverse population of children and families in every corner of the State.

Continue Advocacy Enhancements

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that its managers and staff design and implement improved opportunities for Foster Care Review Boards (FCRB) and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) to advocate for services and supports that result in improved outcomes for abused and neglected children in Iowa. Especially important for volunteers in both programs is enhancing the learning opportunities on advocacy needs related to:

- 1) older youth who are transitioning from the foster care system to adulthood and**
- 2) awareness of issues related to cultural diversity, the factors that can have an unintended but disparate impact on children and families of color, and approaches to advocacy that can lessen these disparate and disproportionate outcomes.**

ICAB is increasingly focused on increasing the success of Iowa's youth as they leave the child welfare system and transition to adulthood. This will require advocacy that helps 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.

As evidenced by data provided earlier in this report, minority children are over-represented in the foster care system by significant margins. The Iowa Department of Human Services and the Iowa's court system have embarked on a path to decrease the rate of disproportionality and any resulting disparate outcomes for minority children. Child Advocacy Board managers, staff and volunteers are encouraged to engage in the community efforts already in place and to increase their base of knowledge and advocacy skills in this area to better assist in addressing this issue and to prepare for emerging diversity of Iowa's child and youth population.

To help carry out this recommendation, the Board encourages ICAB Managers to engage with the Department of Human Services, the Children's Justice State Council, and Juvenile Courts throughout Iowa for the review and analysis of data and information about these critical issues. The Board anticipates this will improve understanding of areas and approaches to advocacy that may contribute to improved outcomes for children.

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that ICAB managers and staff develop a plan to enhance the value of Foster Care Review Board reports to the courts and child welfare service providers and to increase the judges' understanding of the value these reports can bring in terms of improved permanency outcomes for children and youth.

The analysis of Focus Group discussions with Foster Care Review Boards reveal a concern on the part of the local Boards about the extent to which courts use and rely upon the effort represented by the Boards' reports. Some have indicated concern that the review process needs to be updated and the report substance needs to be expanded. As noted in the summary of the focus group responses, some members have shared the perception that some judges do

not use the reports. Over the course of the next two years, the Child Advocacy Board anticipates significant efforts will be undertaken to improve the FCRB process, report substance, the perception of the value of FCRB reports and, where possible, the number and types of cases reviewed by the local Boards.

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 or fund an alternative 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 positive 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, a Sr. Business Analyst with OCIO and the Department of Administrative Services throughout 2014 to identify the corrections and enhancements needed in the automated system. 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.