



# IOWA CHILD ADVOCACY BOARD

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



## 2015-2016 Annual Report

January 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016

# Report of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board for January 2015 to June 2016

Dear Colleagues,

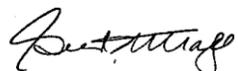
The Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) is an independent board appointed by the Governor of Iowa to provide for citizen involvement in child welfare issues. ICAB oversees two volunteer child advocacy programs designed to help protect Iowa children and their best interests while being served by the child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

The Iowa Child Advocacy Board is pleased to submit to you its report on the work of the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program and Foster Care Review Board Program for the period of January 2015 through June 2016. In the past, Child Advocacy Board reports have been submitted on a calendar year basis. Future reports will be produced for each fiscal year to align with the Board's fiscal year planning, programming and budgeting processes.

The Board commends the 940 volunteers who worked as Court Appointed Special Advocates and Foster Care Review Board Members serving nearly 5000 children during the past 18 months. We are confident their professionalism and dedication to their advocacy missions has given hope and improved the life outcomes for these children. The CASA and FCRB volunteers are supported by a corps of equally dedicated staff and contracted partners, most of whom have devoted their lives to the service of vulnerable children in Iowa.

The Board has great appreciation for the support and partnership of the Legislature, Governor, the Iowa Court System, and the Iowa Department of Human Services with Iowa's CASA and FCRB programs.

Respectfully submitted,



Gerald W. Magee, Judge (Ret.)  
Chair, Iowa Child Advocacy Board

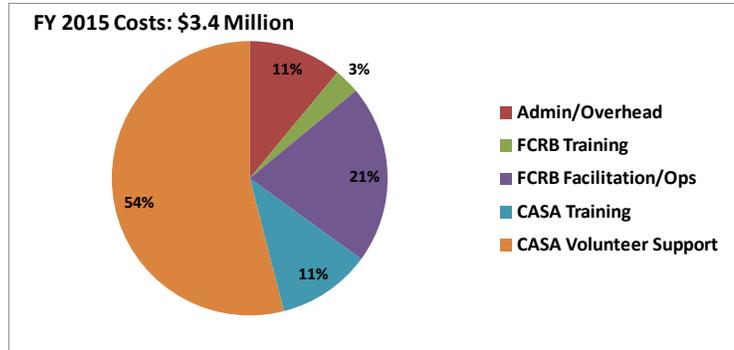
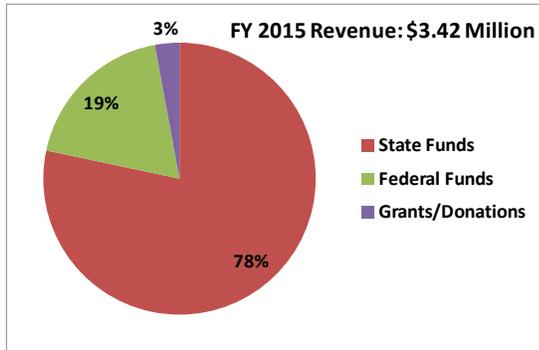
*Board Members -2015- 2016:*

<i>Mark Hargrafen</i>	<i>Beth Myers</i>	<i>Jeanne Sorensen</i>
<i>Bruce Johnson</i>	<i>Elaine Sanders</i>	<i>Michael Steele</i>
<i>Gerald Magee</i>	<i>Wayne Schellhammer</i>	<i>Shannon Unternahrer</i>

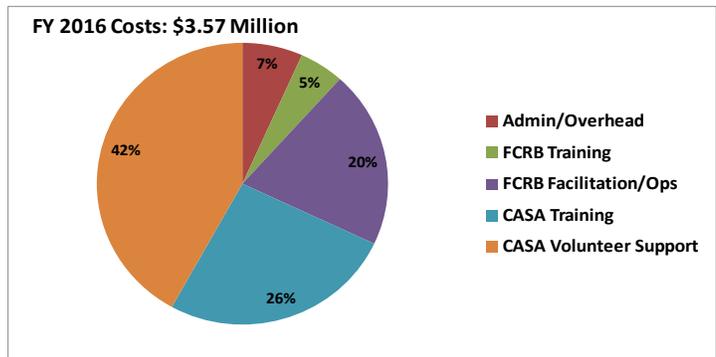
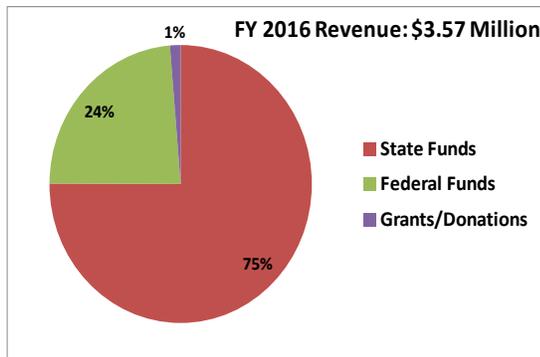
# Child Advocacy Board Financial Report

## FY 2015 & FY 2016

### FY 2015



### FY 2016



## Value Proposition

Investment in the CASA and FCRB programs provides both immediate and long term value. The short term value of the contributions of volunteer time and mileage costs is but a small portion of the return on investment. Far more important is the value of more informed decisions of caseworkers and judges that emerge as a result of the observations and recommendations of the CASA and FCRB volunteer advocates. Emerging research shows that the real long term value occurs as dependable and caring adult relationships with children improves the potential for life-long success.

### Short Term Values

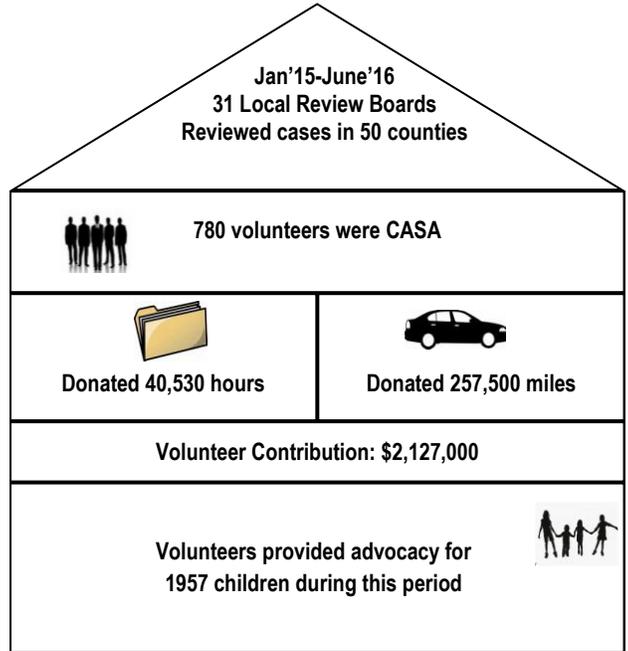
- ✓ Volunteer time and mileage contribution: \$3.05 million (18 months)
- ✓ Highly trained volunteer advocates
- ✓ Objective court reports with case observations and recommendations

### Long Term Values for Children

- ✓ Reduced time in out of home care
- ✓ Increased educational success and stability
- ✓ Services targeted more timely and accurately to needs
- ✓ Enhanced life outcomes for children

# Court Appointed Special Advocate Program

*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.*



## **CASA Volunteer Contribute Selflessly**

- *Serve as an effective voice in court for abused and neglected children.*
- *Safeguard children who are already victims of abuse or neglect from further harm by the system.*
- *Are appointed by judges to guide one child or one set of siblings through the system to safe and permanent homes as quickly as possible.*
- *Meet with their assigned child or sibling group monthly, at a minimum.*
- *Research case records and speak to each person involved in a child's life, including family members, teachers, doctors, therapists, lawyers, and social workers.*
- *Prepare a Report to the Court for each hearing involving the child, which allows the Court to make better informed decisions.*
- *Monitor the progress of the child and family throughout the case and advocate for the child's current and future needs in court, in school, and in agency meetings.*
- *Serve as a consistent presence in the life of their assigned child and remain assigned to the case until successful case closure.*
- *Offer fairness and objectivity in all activities concerning their assigned case including openness to other viewpoints.*
- *Receive extensive pre-service and in-service training.*

The CASA program needs new applicants on a continuous basis. Currently sufficient Advocates are available to serve only about 16% of the children eligible for this service. Over the past 15 months, slightly over 200 individuals have applied to become advocates. Their willingness to step up this work is highly valued. Program staff are working diligently to develop new recruitment methods to double, and then triple the number of new applicants.

## CASA Training for Advocacy Effectiveness

During the past 18 months, the CASA program has undertaken 3 major efforts to increase training capacity and improve our CASA training materials.

*In early 2015, ICAB initiated a complete revision of the CASA training approach to better prepare Advocates to carry out their volunteer work in an effective manner. The revised curriculum, which follows a fictional family from the beginning of court involvement through case permanency allows for delivery of content and application of important concepts in a manner that accurately reflects the real work the Advocates will perform.*



Between January 2015 and July 2016, ICAB expanded its volunteer CASA Coach model as a means of extending the capacity of the program to serve children without increasing the cost of the program. Through the Coach model, experienced Advocates receive specialized training to prepare them to guide and support newly assigned Advocates. The CASA Coach curriculum was revised in 2015 and delivered throughout the state in 2016. While this model is still in its formative stages, several CASA program staff have used the model effectively to help the Advocates with whom they work provide increasingly effective advocacy and court reports on behalf of the children they serve. Plans are underway to expand the Coach model in FY2017.

In early 2015, each CASA Coordinator was assigned an area of preferred interest in which to develop as "Subject Matter Consultants." In this role, each Coordinator developed formal in-service training materials in the assigned area. The Coordinators also developed numerous informal trainings that could be delivered through online or telephonic distance learning. The increased training efforts and activities helped the agency produce incredibly well-trained, effective advocates, while also increasing the amount of federal Title IV-E reimbursement. The increased reimbursement allowed ICAB to enter contractual agreements for

These new training assets are adding to the strengths and abilities of our already talented and dedicated CASA Advocates and Coaches.

## Iowa Citizens Foster Care Review Board Program

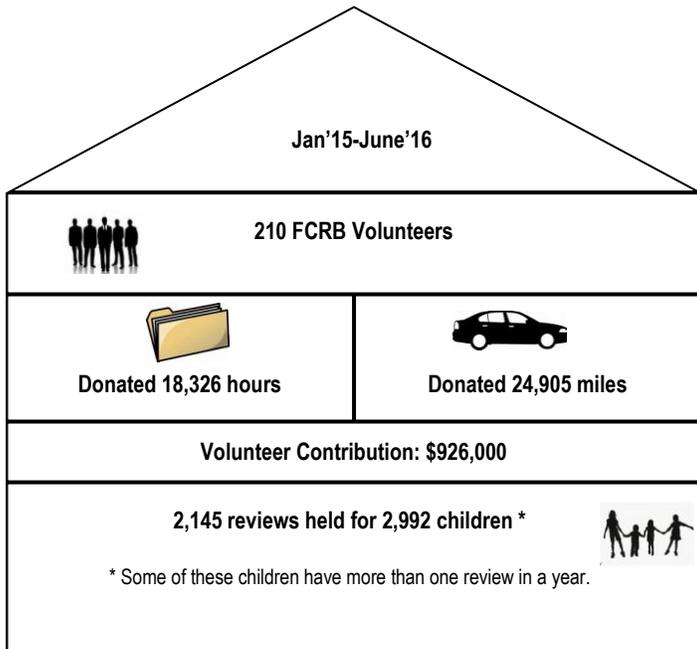
*Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) volunteers serve on local community boards that meet regularly to review case plans, hear from all interested parties, and provide the Court and DHS with their findings and recommendations about the safety, well-being and permanency of children from their communities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

*Each month FCRB members individually review case files for up to seven cases then join their facilitator to review those cases as a group. In the individual session for each child, the professionals, the parents and foster parents and the child are invited to share information. As a group the Board considers all the information presented. After each individual review the Board makes findings about the child's needs and recommends to the court steps intended to promote legal and relational permanency for each child.*



Following each individual review, all groups of participants provide quite positive feedback about the reviews. The Boards and staff are diligent in their efforts to be fair and thoughtful in their work. This set of survey responses documents that more than 95% of participants agree or strongly agree they were listened to and treated respectfully.

The board listened to my comments and concerns and treated me respectfully.							
Relationship to Child	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response	Grand Total
CASA	68	8				1	77
Child's Attorney	48	2	2				52
Child's Attorney/GAL		1					1
DHS	460	177	16				653
Foster Parent	313	44	5				362
GAL	93	12				1	106
Not reported	19	8	4	1		2	34
Other	150	45	11	2	1	9	218
Parent	174	55	13	6	4	4	256
Parent's Attorney	129	38	1			4	172
Service Provider	218	57	2			1	278
Youth	56	11	1			2	70
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1728</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2279</b>
<b>% Responses</b>	<b>75.82%</b>	<b>20.10%</b>	<b>2.41%</b>	<b>0.39%</b>	<b>0.22%</b>	<b>1.05%</b>	



Foster Care Review Board members give their time and resources freely to this vital work as shown by the chart on the left. Social workers frequently thank the members for sharing their knowledge of community resources available to meet the children's permanency needs. Often, the children themselves show their gratitude to the Board members for the helpful advice and recognition of accomplishments they receive.

DHS staff participate in FCRB reviews regularly. All parties involved can contribute to a more thorough review and effective report to the court. Data show a need to improve participation:

Interested Party	Participation Rate
Child's Attorney/GAL	29%
DHS	90%
Parents	24%
Youth	41%
Other	35%



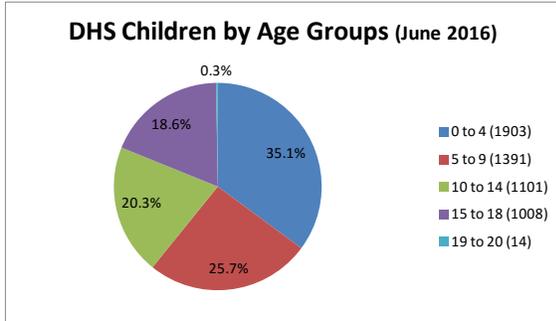
**Foster Care Review Board CFSR Findings.** DHS uses a modified Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) approach to help measure achievements for children in Iowa's foster care system. Twenty (20) federal child welfare benchmarks are reported on by the trained FCRB volunteers at the time each youth receives 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 975 CFSR reviews of children in foster care placement between July and December 2015. The FCRB members found 100% success on 8 of the measures and more than 85% success on 9 other measures. Areas of concern are with 1) reunification/guardianship/relative placement within 12 months (51%), 2) timely filing of termination petitions (52%), and 3) adoption within 24 months (57%).

**Citizen Foster Care Review Boards provide an important resource to the community:**

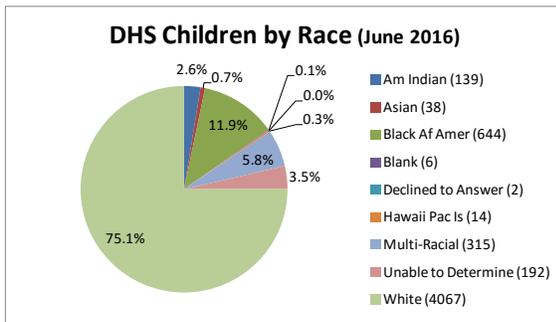
- They prevent the child welfare agency from becoming a "system unto itself". Local Board Members provide objective views on the safety, care, appropriateness, timeliness of services and permanency for Iowa's most vulnerable children and families. They help all Iowa citizens hold the system accountable.
- They move us toward community based protection of children versus the child protection system having sole responsibility
- They meet an important and federally mandated need for timely periodic review of foster care cases.

# DHS FOSTER CARE DATA SUMMARY – FROM JUNE 2016

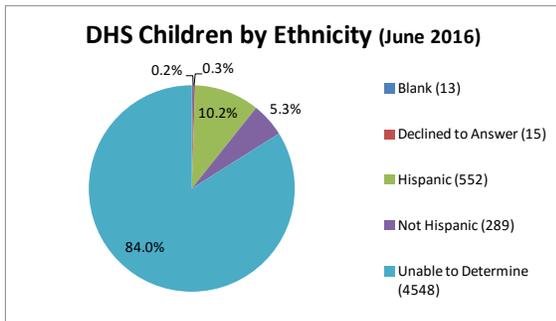
During fiscal year 2016, DHS began providing a monthly data file that includes extensive foster care data that allows ICAB to perform its statutory responsibility to analyze the data and provide an annual report to Iowa decision makers. This year’s report provides a brief summary of the key information about children placed in all types of out of home care at the end of June 2016. These data vary from one month to the next. Beginning next year, the monthly data will be compiled throughout the year permitting development of more comprehensive analysis and reports.



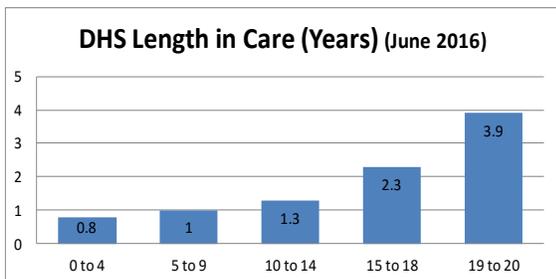
For this particular month, the largest number of children in care under DHS supervision is the youngest age group, with placement numbers decreasing with each succeeding older age group.



White children comprise the largest number of children in out-of-home placement. On page 9, data are provided on the proportion of children in placement to the total number of children by race.



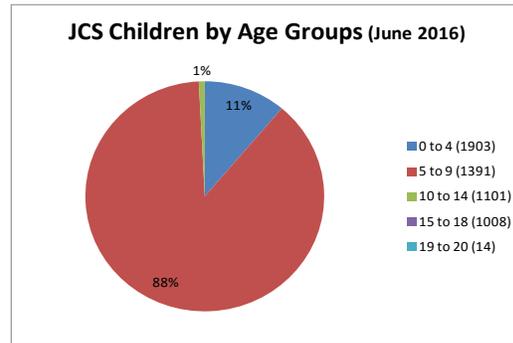
This monthly data report shows the ethnicity of a large majority of children as “unable to determine.” Analysis of proportionality of ethnic representation in the placement population could be useful with more complete reporting of ethnicity



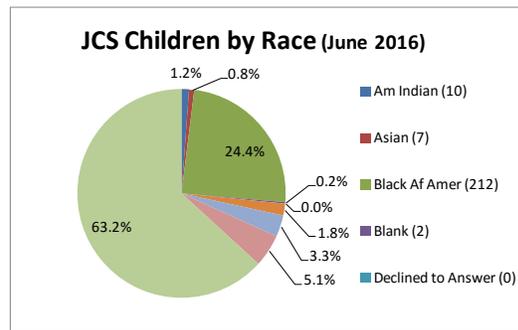
This figure shows the average length of stay in years for children in each of the age groupings.

# JCS FOSTER CARE DATA SUMMARY – FROM JUNE 2016

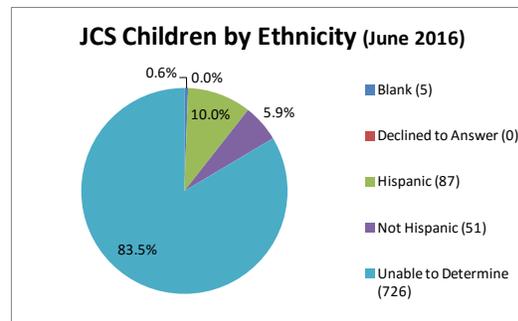
For this particular month, the largest number of children in care under Juvenile Court Services supervision is the 15 to 18 age group.



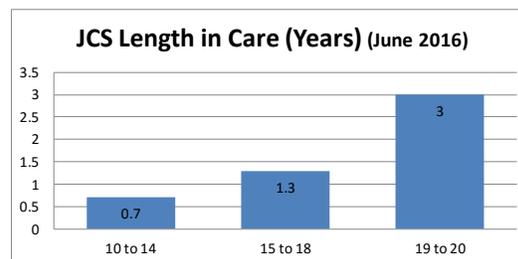
White children comprise the largest number in out-of-home placement. On page 9, data are provided on the proportion of children in placement to the total number of children by race.



This monthly data report shows the ethnicity of a large majority of children as “unable to determine.” Analysis of proportionality of ethnic representation in the placement population could be useful with more complete reporting of ethnicity.



This figure shows the average length of stay in years for children in each of the age groupings. Data on the length of stay will provide the rest of the story.



# FOSTER CARE DATA SUMMARY – FROM JUNE 2016

## Placements per Thousand Children

The two figures below provide comparisons among DHS Service Areas and Judicial Districts about the number of children in out of home placements per thousand children in the general population. 2015 estimated child populations available from the Iowa State Data Center along with data in the June 2016 management report from the Department of Human Services, which includes both DHS and JCS supervised cases, provide the basis for the comparisons.

For DHS Service areas the rates of placement range from a low of 7.05 children per thousand in the Southeastern Service Area to a high of 11.46 in the Western Service Area with an average of 9.09 for the state as a whole.

DHS Service Area	Children and Youth in Placement	Under 18 Population	Placements per Thousand Children
Western Service Area 1	1,615	140,964	11.46
Northern Service Area 2	1,003	121,509	8.25
Eastern Service Area 3	831	117,818	7.05
Cedar Rapids Service Area 4	1,316	144,705	9.09
Des Moines Service Area 5	1,859	203,800	9.12
Total	6,624	728,796	9.09

For Court Districts, the lowest placement rate is in Judicial District 7 which includes Scott County while the highest is in District 3 which includes Woodbury County.

Judicial District	Children and Youth in Placement	Under 18 Population	Placements per Thousand Children
1	565	84,254	6.71
2	923	98,484	9.37
3	959	80,492	11.91
4	506	42,834	11.81
5	1,819	190,924	9.53
6	852	99,937	8.53
7	478	71,508	6.68
8	522	60,363	8.65
Total	6,624	728,796	9.09

## Disproportionality in Placement of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

The June 2016 DHS report reflect placement rates for American Indian and Multi-Racial children being 3.9 times the rate for White children; 3.25 times higher for African American children.

RACE	TOTAL POPULATION	CHILDREN & YOUTH IN PLACEMENT			RATE OF PLACEMENT PER 1000 CHILDREN & YOUTH		
		DHS	JCS	TOTAL	DHS	JCS	TOTAL
Am Indian	6,219	139	10	149	22.35	1.61	23.96
Asian	23,271	38	7	45	1.63	0.30	1.93
Black Af Amer	43,208	644	212	856	14.90	4.91	19.81
Hawaii Pac Is	1,259	14	16	30	11.12	12.71	23.83
Multi-Racial	34,821	315	29	344	9.05	0.83	9.88
White	759,345	4067	549	4616	5.36	0.72	6.08
Blank		6	2	8			
Declined to Answer		2	0	2			
Unable to Determine		192	44	236			
	868,123	5217	823	6040	6.01	0.95	6.96

## Child Advocacy Board Recommendations

1. The foster care data reported in this document provide a view of the rates of out-of-home placement among Judicial Districts and DHS Service Areas. While there are variations in rates, a much higher level of variation is apparent at the county level. Variation in placement rates ranges from a low of 1 child per thousand in the total county population to a high of 21 children per thousand. A host of factors contribute to these variations, and no simple explanation of the differences is available.

***The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends that DHS and the Courts examine the reasons for high variance in rates of out-of-home placement. One focus of this assessment might be to identify effective policies or practices in counties with low placement rates for possible replication.***

2. Despite long-term efforts by DHS and the Courts to address the higher than average rates of out of home placements among minority youth, disproportionality in placements remains high. Among all child placements supervised by DHS and JCS at the end of June 2016, the average rate of placement is 6.96 children per thousand children in the total population. The rates for minority children are much higher, notably 23.96 for American Indian children, 23.83 for Multi-Racial children and 19.81 for African American children. Many factors affect these rates including:
  - ✓ Upstream factors – environmental and social factors endemic to communities
  - ✓ Midstream factors – system responses that result in divergent handling similarly situated children of different races and ethnicities, and
  - ✓ Downstream factors – intended and unintended race-based responses to similarly situated children of different races and ethnicities.

***The Iowa Child Advocacy Board recommends continuation of current efforts to address the challenge of disproportionate placement of minority children and youth. In addition, a new inter-agency and multi-ethnic coalition should be developed to examine and understand the issue and its causes and to develop and implement remedies that address the upstream, midstream and downstream factors that result in this disproportionality in Iowa.***



Go to [iamforthechildiowa.com](http://iamforthechildiowa.com) to learn more about volunteering.

