

# A Program Evaluation of the Colorado Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel Social Work Pilot Program

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## Executive Summary

In dependency and neglect cases (also known as “child welfare” or “child protection” cases), the Respondent Parents’ Counsel (RPC) plays a critical role in protecting the constitutional and other legal rights of parents. Pursuant to statutory guidelines in C.R.S. § 13-92-101(1)(a), the RPC helps to achieve the best outcomes for children by providing effective legal representation for parents which includes protecting due process, presenting balanced information to the judge and promoting the preservation of family relationships. In recognition of this critical role, the Colorado Children’s Code, under authority pursuant to C.R.S. § 19-3-202(1), affords parents who are respondents in a dependency and neglect case the right to counsel. The Office of Respondent Parents’ Counsel (ORPC) is an independent governmental agency within the State of Colorado Judicial Branch and has been vested with the oversight and administration of Respondent Parents’ Counsel representation in Colorado since July 1, 2016. Lawyers for parents are provided via an independent contractor model, which operates by providing courts with lists of lawyers from which they must appoint. Lawyers bill the ORPC for their work and also request other resources from the ORPC, such as social workers, investigators, and experts. The ORPC’s mission is to protect the fundamental right to parent by providing effective legal advocates for indigent parents in child welfare proceedings. This right is protected when a parent has a dedicated advocate knowledgeable about child welfare laws and willing to hold the state to its burden. The office’s duties are to provide accountability, training, and resources; develop practice standards; and advocate for systemic and legislative changes in Colorado.

Nationwide, social workers are becoming an important part of high-quality, interdisciplinary legal defense teams. This practice is reflected in the social science research and in the 2006 American Bar Association (ABA) Standards of Practice for Attorneys Representing Parents in Abuse and Neglect Cases. In July 2017, the ORPC undertook the Social Work Pilot Program (SWPP) to implement a multidisciplinary legal representation model for Colorado, which combines lawyers and social workers to provide legal representation to a parent involved in a child welfare case. Based on models from other states, the SWPP believes a family’s chance of success improves dramatically when providing an attorney with a multidisciplinary approach that includes an appropriate clinical assessment, timely and effective services, and strong advocacy within the child welfare system by the inclusion of a parent’s social worker. Preliminary data analysis for the SWPP from July 2017 through August 2019 indicates the pilot program is obtaining results consistent with other successful programs across the country, such as improving permanency outcomes (children returning home to their parents more often and sooner than without a multidisciplinary team or remaining with families of origin) and shortening length of stay in out-of-home placement (i.e., foster care and group homes).

The mission of the SWPP is to empower and advocate for families by providing high-quality, strengths-based, compassionate, and comprehensive social work services to parents in

dependency and neglect (D&N) cases. The ORPC initiated the SWPP in three (3) Colorado Judicial Districts that include Adams, Broomfield, El Paso, Teller, and Mesa Counties. The SWPP Coordinator contracted with social workers in the identified districts. Three independent contract social workers, and one comparable professional, have been intentionally partnered with attorneys for Expedited Permanency Planning (EPP) cases, which involve young children (age six and under). The social worker provides an independent assessment of the parent and family needs, makes recommendations toward the court-ordered treatment plan, and provides clinical case management support and advocacy to the parent throughout the D&N case process.

Cases are assigned via a triage system. Respondent parent counsel provide an intake form for each D&N case assigned and the SWPP coordinator appoints an independent contract social worker. Cases must be EPP, which by statutory authority are required to reach permanency for the minor children within one (1) year of their removal from the home unless good cause is shown to extend such time. Independent contract social workers receive clinical supervision from the SWPP coordinator in order to support consistency of services and further best practices.

Control data was provided by Colorado Department of Human Services for preliminary analysis. Specifically, the data show definitive trends in all data sets for the analyzed counties in three judicial districts. Namely, data indicated that ORPC cases across the jurisdictions had higher rates of permanency with least restrictive outcomes (reunification with parents or relatives) and a significant decrease in days spent in out-of-home care, leading to savings in out-of-home care costs compared to similar cases without the social work intervention.

## Introduction

Dependency and neglect proceedings in child welfare are extremely serious, holding the gravity of parents possibly losing all custody and contact with their children. Since termination of parental rights and removal of children permanently from their family of origin are intense and traumatic matters, child welfare proceedings should be handled thoughtfully and with respect for the rights of children and parents. Emerging research and program evaluations show that high-quality legal representation for parents in child welfare cases that includes a multidisciplinary team leads to better outcomes for children and parents.

## Increased Parent Engagement Through Case Management

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It can be difficult for parents to trust the system or state agencies. The child welfare system can be overwhelming and confusing, with multiple professionals, laws, high-stakes procedures in court, and strict timelines. This mistrust is furthered by parents' lack of understanding of parental legal rights or relevant child welfare statutes. Research demonstrates that lack of trust and understanding contributes to barriers with engagement (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017). When parents do not engage in the child welfare process, every facet of case planning and service delivery that will assist in family reunification can be impeded (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017). Alternatively, when respondent parents experience a sense of fairness in the process and trust in the system, they are more likely to comply with court orders, be present for hearings, and be engaged in the process (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017).

Multidisciplinary teams benefit from the addition of social workers who are dedicated to parent engagement. As part of the multidisciplinary team, social workers can help address collateral issues in a family that contribute to a family's vulnerability to involvement in the child welfare system (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017). These issues can include access to assistance in mental health, substance abuse, housing, employment, domestic violence counseling, health care, and public benefits (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017; Oregon Task Force on Dependency Representation, 2016). While agency caseworkers are tasked with minimal requirements to make assessment and service referrals for parents, social workers on interdisciplinary teams may have more capacity to recommend the community service providers that are better able to address a parent's specific needs, and address the barriers parents incur in accessing and participating in those services. Social workers also work closely with the parents, the attorney, and other members of the system to ensure the parent's voice is heard (Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015; Cohen & Cortese, 2009). Social workers help promote parent engagement and understanding of the child welfare process, and parent engagement is shown as a vital factor in successful reunification (Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015; Cohen & Cortese, 2009; Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017). When parents receive (1) access to client-centered services, (2) support in case planning, (3) more frequent and meaningful family visitation, (4) a voice in decision-making meetings, and (5) an attorney that is well-trained and has a manageable caseload, research shows families are reunified more quickly, children do not have to be separated from their families for longer than necessary, and parents receive the help they need to achieve child safety and overall stability in the home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017; Cohen & Cortese, 2009; Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015; ABA Center on Children and the Law, n.d.).



## Quality Representation of Respondent Parents Through Multidisciplinary Models

Research shows that high-quality legal representation of respondent parents helps contribute to numerous improved outcomes, including (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017):

- Increased engagement in case planning, services, and court hearings
- Increased visitation for families
- Case plans and services that are best fits for the parents
- Accelerated permanency
- Cost savings for the state government due to reduced foster care utilization

There is both an economic and social justice impetus to provide families with multidisciplinary legal representation. Models of family representation that include well-trained and high-quality counsel and a social worker demonstrate markedly decreased foster care usage and family separation (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2017; Cohen & Cortese, 2009; Washington State Office of Public Defense, 2002; Oregon Task Force on Dependency Representation, 2016; Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015). This leads to substantial foster care cost savings and the reduction of traumatic childhood experiences. Foster care, besides being expensive for the state, is traumatizing for children, and is associated with homelessness, poverty, and increased involvement with the criminal justice system. In addition, foster care is associated with increased teen pregnancy, and decreased access to education and good employment (Thornton & Gwin, 2012).

Preliminary research shows that multidisciplinary teams for respondent parents are associated with a significant decrease in foster care stays for children in care (Gerber et al., 2019). Additionally, parents that receive services from a multidisciplinary team reach permanency and reunification at a much faster rate (Gerber et. al., 2019). Research and program evaluations indicate that multidisciplinary approaches are an efficacious intervention to accelerate permanency for children in foster care. For every child who can remain home safely, or whose length of foster care stay is shortened, the government saves thousands of dollars in out of home (foster care) costs (Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015; Thornton & Gwin, 2012; Oregon Task Force on Dependency Representation, 2016).

Several agencies in different states, including the Center for Family Representation, Bronx Defenders and Brooklyn Defenders in New York, the Washington State Parent Representation program through the Washington State Office of Public Defense, and the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy in Michigan, have experienced an array of success with multidisciplinary approaches. The Center for Family Representation in New York has saved the government \$30 million since 2007 (Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015), and the Washington State Office of Public Defense program has shown an 11% increase in reunification rates, reduced the number

of children in foster care, and drastically increased family reunification rates (ABA Center on Children and the Law, n.d.).

## Model Programs

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There have been several pilot programs that have initiated multidisciplinary teams on D & N cases, and evaluation of these programs have given important lessons and shown impressive results. For example, evaluation of a pilot program through the Washington State Office of Public Defense provided several recommendations for both attorneys and social workers on multidisciplinary teams. Best practices for attorneys include reducing continuances, capping caseloads, implementing standards and training, communicating frequently with parents, and staffing social workers to work alongside the attorney (Washington State Office of Public Defense, 2002). In Washington's model, social workers help prepare cases, help parents access resources and services, and serve as effective liaisons between attorneys and parents, increasing advocacy and communication flow (Washington State Office of Public Defense, 2002).

Another multidisciplinary model that has shown promise is New York's Center for Family Representation's practice of assigning an attorney, social worker, and parent advocate (a parent who has personally navigated the child welfare system) to a parent's case. The team devotes intensive and focused advocacy during the first 60 days of a case (Cohen & Cortese, 2009). Their advocacy efforts focus on frequent and family-oriented visits between children and families, child placements that help foster the child's connection to their parents, client-centered services that are focused on the specific needs of the parents, and the inclusion of parents in decision-making meetings and case planning (Cohen & Cortese, 2009). As a result of this approach, 55% of the center's clients' children are not in foster care, and those that are have significantly reduced lengths of stay (Cohen & Cortese, 2009). This model helps maintain family attachments and reduce trauma as much as possible. Social workers are a key component in this model as they are crucial in ensuring that services for parents are tailored to the root problem of the D & N case, with the intent of creating future sustainability and family stability that will keep the family out of the child welfare system (Cohen & Cortese, 2009).

In April 2019, independent researchers published a comprehensive evaluation of three New York City interdisciplinary law offices, using administrative child welfare data to assess the foster care and safety outcomes of 9,582 families and their 18,288 children in neglect and abuse cases filed in court between 2007–2014. This study found that multidisciplinary representation decreased the length of stay in foster care by nearly four months (118 days) (Gerber et al., 2019).

A 2016 pilot program in Oregon shows that reduced caseloads, increased attorney training and accountability, and implementation of multidisciplinary teams has reduced the rate of foster

care utilization and increased the reunification rate (Oregon Task Force on Dependency Representation, 2016).

As these examples show, multidisciplinary teams help to ensure that every respondent parent gets a team that works together to problem solve; to identify resources, strengths, and needs; and to advocate on behalf of the parent (Washington State Office of Public Defense, 2002; Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015). When litigation in the courtroom is combined with social work referrals, service planning, parent mentoring and support, and case management, outcomes for families dramatically improve and family reunification is often the result, meaning that children can spend less time in out-of-home placements in the foster care system (Washington State Office of Public Defense, 2002; Sankaran, Rideout, & Raimon, 2015; Cohen & Cortese, 2009; ABA Center on Children and the Law, n.d.).

Child welfare is a nexus of social work and law. The central issue in D & N cases is whether and when a child can be reunified safely with their parents. Representation of children and families in D & N hearings benefits from a collaboration between attorneys and social workers, as shown by the models and pilot programs discussed. The literature indicates that the creation of multidisciplinary teams for respondent parents, combining both legal and social work, is an effective method for achieving family reunification and avoiding foster care for children.

## Social Work Pilot Program

Starting in July 2017, the ORPC Social Work Pilot Program (SWPP) rolled out in three judicial districts that include Adams, Broomfield, El Paso, Teller, and Mesa Counties. The SWPP currently has a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) in the coordinator position. The SWPP coordinator is able to provide supervision to the three contracted social workers, and one comparable professional, in each judicial district. ORPC staff provided information and training to the stakeholders in each judicial district to include court personnel, local county department of human services, and RPCs. RPCs were required to fill out and submit a form titled the Social Worker Assessment/Intake form in the Respondent Parent Payment System (RPPS), the ORPC's database. The form asked for information related to the safety and risk factors of each parent. The form was required for all EPP cases entered into RPPS. The SWPP coordinator assigned the individual cases to the contract social worker. Only one parent within each case qualified for the SWPP. The social worker collaborated with the RPC and the parent to establish recommendations for the court-ordered treatment plan, provide case management support, attend court-dates and DHS-facilitated parent engagement meetings, make referrals to resources, and advocate for kinship placements for the minor children.

While frequently overlooked in practice, the right to maintain a relationship with one's parents is fundamental to a child's best interest. Research clearly indicates that children thrive when provided consistent, nurturing, and healthy relationships in their home environment. The SWPP process is congruent with the literature in that the pilot strives to reduce the length of time in out-of-home care and foster permanency, factors long associated with positive psycho-social outcomes for children. The ABA standards of practice for attorneys representing parents in abuse and neglect cases clearly state that "whenever possible, the parent's attorney should engage or involve a social worker as part of the parent's team" to promote use of appropriate case planning and advocacy. Given emerging practice models of multidisciplinary legal representation, RPC wanted to investigate using multidisciplinary teams. The following study explores pilot data on the SWPP as collected from the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) TRAILS and the ORPC Respondent Parent Payment System (RPPS).

## Method

In 2018 ORPC entered into an agreement with Ms. Lori Darnel, MSW, JD, Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work at Metropolitan State University of Denver, to explore the relationships between the ORPC SWPP and out-of-home placement experiences, permanency outcomes, and costs. Qualitative data were collected from the Colorado Department of Human Services TRAILS database and compared to records from the ORPC database, the RPPS. The ORPC provided data for SWPP closed client cases. In addition, MSU conducted initial interviews with previous client participants in the SWPP program. Parent interviews explored clients' perceived experience of their cases and the social worker on the case.

Three quantitative hypotheses were explored:

- (1) A social worker's involvement with an RPC case will reduce the number of days in out-of-home care.
- (2) A social worker's involvement with an RPC case will increase permanency in less restrictive placements.
- (3) Given less restrictive placements are also less expensive, a social worker's involvement with an RPC case will decrease cost associated to out-of-home placement.

## Measures

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### **TRAILS Database**

TRAILS is the Colorado Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) adopted in 2001, mandated by the Children's Bureau, and specifically designed as a database to



case manage foster care and adoption throughout the state of Colorado. Along with individual counties, the State of Colorado recognizes the accuracy of the information obtained through the TRAILS system for reliable data. This evaluation used the TRAILS data as a comparison to evaluate the ORPC SWPP.

Measures used from TRAILS for this report:

- Days in out-of-home placement (number of days)
- Costs for out-of-home placement (average daily rate)
- Permanency outcomes (reunification, living with kin, adoption)

### **RPPS Database**

RPPS is the ORPC's proprietary database system created specifically to obtain data from RPC and their legal teams to maintain specific case information from appointed D & N cases. RPPS functions as the payment system for RPCs, requiring accuracy in case entries.

Measures used from RPPS for this report:

- Days in out-of-home placement (number of days)
- Permanency outcomes (reunification, living with kin, adoption)

### **Parent Interviews**

In order to add more depth to the understanding of our exploratory evaluation of the SWPP, researchers interviewed parents who worked with an assigned social worker through the pilot program.

## **Data Collection**

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### **Quantitative**

Quantitative data of closed cases from July 1, 2017, through September 1, 2019, were collected through the two sources: CDHS TRAILS and ORPC RPPS records. However, only 2017 and 2018 data were included, as not enough cases opened and closed in 2019 to be representative. In addition, Broomfield and Teller Counties were not included in the analysis this year, as the sample of cases were too small. CDHS data were provided in the aggregate and on two levels: statewide data and county-level data for Adams, El Paso, and Mesa Counties (three counties involved and analyzed in the SWPP). Data from RPPS records were compiled and provided to researchers in an electronic Excel worksheet. All data were secured on password protected, State-owned and

-operated servers and computers. It is important to note that because the data was reported from the state system to the evaluators in aggregate, the options for types of statistical testing were limited. This limitation is important to consider when reading the remainder of the report. Ideally, case specific data would strengthen future evaluation efforts and insight to the program.

### **Qualitative / Parent Interviews**

Previous clients whose cases were completed and closed were identified from ORPC records. Clients were invited to participate in face-to-face or telephone meetings. The ORPC invited participants to engage in interviews. Seventeen participants responded that they were willing to participate over the phone or via Zoom Video Conferencing. Of the 17 participants, 11 interviews were scheduled; however, a number of participants requested the ability to reschedule or were no longer available to interview despite rescheduling. Ultimately, data were collected from three participants. All interviews were conducted via Zoom Video Conferencing and were concluded within 45 minutes. Two researchers interviewed each of the participants. Themes were collected from the following questions:

**Engagement:** Did you have a social worker assigned to your case? What was their role?

**Reunification:** How did your case end / work out? Do you feel like the process was faster/slower than you expected? Were there barriers to reunifying earlier? Did the social worker help? Did you have a say in the plan?

**General:** Looking back on it, would you do anything different? Would you like the social worker to do anything different?

## **Findings**

SWPP data were provided at the case/individual level. CDHS county and state data were provided in the aggregate. As a result, options for analysis were limited to descriptive trends rather than significance testing.

### **Days in Care**

County averages for number of days in care and costs for that care were provided for the 18-month period of July 1, 2017 – December 31, 2018. Average calculations were based on the total number of cases (including SWPP cases) and total costs for the state and counties, respectively. While there was variability in the number of days in care across the 18-month period, costs per day in care, as determined by the State, increased over time. The increase in costs occurred across the state and all three counties.

Table 1. Average Number of Days in Out-of-Home Care for EPP Cases

	2017 (July 1–Dec 31)		2018 (Jan 1–Dec 31)		2019 (Jan 1–Sept 1)	
	Average number of days in out-of-home care	Cost per Individual Child per Day	Average number of days in out-of-home care	Cost per Individual Child per Day	Average number of days in out-of-home care	Cost per Individual Child per Day
<b>State Average</b>	124	\$29	181	\$34	150	\$36
<b>Counties</b>						
<b>Adams</b>	111	\$31	166	\$35	142	\$37
<b>El Paso</b>	111	\$28	153	\$37	136	\$46
<b>Mesa</b>	138	\$46	198	\$49	156	\$44

**Descriptor of data** Table 1 demonstrates the average number of days in placement in out of home care for EPP cases. The first row provides information on EPP cases for the state as a whole. The subsequent rows provide information of analyzed counties within the judicial districts. Columns are designated by calendar years, average number of days in out-of-home care, and average cost per day in care.

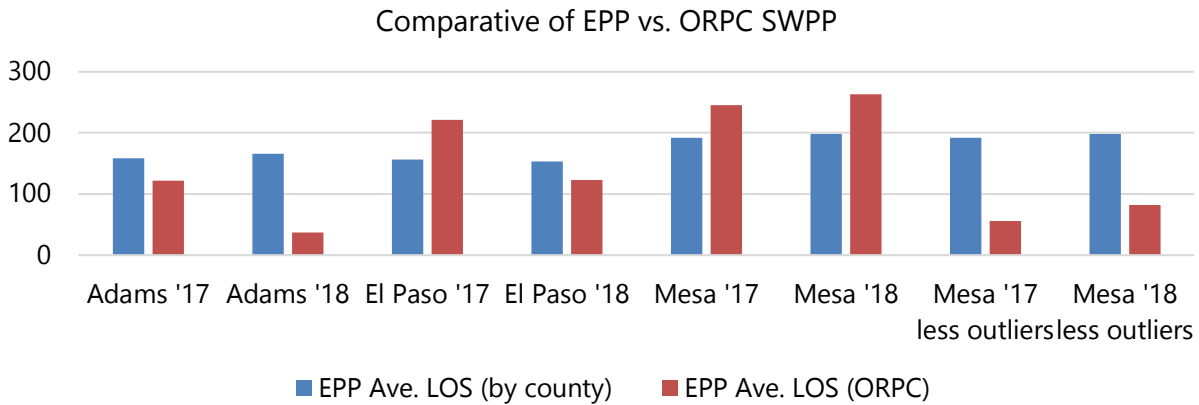
Data on the Length of Stay (LOS) in out-of-home care for *standard Expedited Permanency Planning* (EPP) cases and EPP cases *with a social worker assigned* by the SWPP coordinator were collected at the county level. Adams and El Paso Counties demonstrated a trend in decreased LOS. Data for Mesa County were more complex to analyze. Data were skewed as three of the twenty-nine cases reported extended time in care (extended time in care defined as any case beyond 365 days in care). When researchers remove the 3 statistical outliers to length of days in care, Mesa County averages 44 days in care for 2017 and 82 days in care for 2018. Data indicated that clients who participate in the ORPC SWPP spend fewer days in out-of-home care than clients who do not receive the extra support of a social worker as part of the RPC team.

Table 2. Comparison of EPP and ORPC SWPP

	<b>Total SWPP Cases</b>	<b>EPP Average LOS (by county)</b>	<b>EPP Average LOS (SWPP)</b>
<b>Database System</b>	RPPS	TRAILS	RPPS
<b>Adams SWPP</b>			
<b>2017</b>	35	158	122
<b>2018</b>	21	166	37
<b>El Paso SWPP</b>			
<b>2017</b>	53	156	221
<b>2018</b>	39	153	123
<b>Mesa SWPP</b>			
<b>2017</b>	23	192	245
<b>2018</b>	6	198	263
<b>2017 less 2 outliers</b>	21	192	56
<b>2018 less1 outlier</b>	5	198	82

**Descriptor of data** Table 2 demonstrates the EPP case comparison regarding length of stay. The rows reflect county-level data by year. The second column represents the total number of SWPP EPP cases for the county. The third column represents the average length of stay in out-of-home care by county/year. The fourth column represents the average length of stay in out-of-home care for cases involved with ORPC and assigned social workers.

Figure 1. Length of Stay Compared for County EPP and SWPP Cases



**Descriptor of data** Figure 1 visually represents a comparison of all EPP cases for the county (blue) and their lengths of stay across 2017–2018. These are compared to the ORPC EPP cases (red) who were assigned social workers. It is important to note that in Mesa County, SWPP case assignments did not begin until August 23, 2017. Interpretation of data needs to take this into account. Mesa County data were impacted by a delay in participation in the SWPP due to protracted time in hiring a qualified professional.

### Costs and Savings

Data on the Length of Stay (LOS) in out-of-home care for *Expedited Permanency Planning* (EPP) cases for the county and EPP in the ORPC SWPP were used to calculate potential estimated savings at the case, county, and project level. During the years 2017 and 2018, Adams County ORPC SWPP saved \$56,140 and \$94,815, for all cases respectively. During the 2017 start-up year, the El Paso County ORPC SWPP cases cost an additional \$84,747. During the 2018 year, the ORPC SWPP in El Paso County reversed this trend and had a savings of \$43,290. As previously stated, there were outliers in the Mesa County data. An outlier occurs when data reflects an event outside the normal range of experiences. When we removed the outliers, we found a savings of \$105,037 and \$166,525 for 2017 and 2018, respectively. Total projected savings across all three counties are \$271,562. In future years, case specific data will enable a greater level of specificity with case costs and savings.



Table 3. Comparison of SWPP Costs vs. County Costs

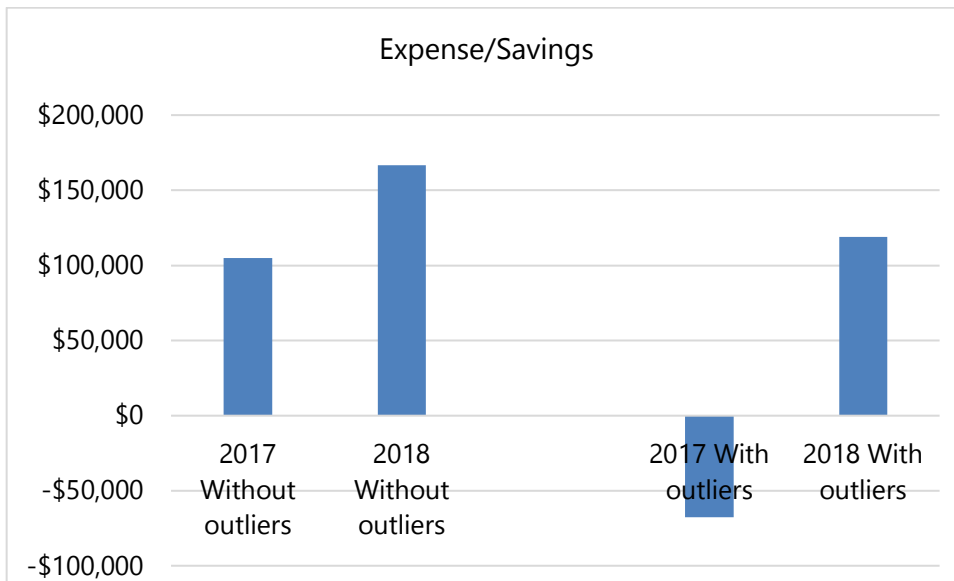
	<b>Average SWPP Out-of-Home Care Cost per Child</b>	<b>Average County Out-of-Home Care Cost per Child</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>2017 Adams</b>	\$3,294	\$4,898	\$1,604
<b>2018 Adams</b>	\$1,295	\$5,810	\$4,515
<b>2017 El Paso</b>	\$5,967	\$4,368	(\$1,599)
<b>2018 El Paso</b>	\$4,551	\$5,661	\$1,110
<b>2017 Mesa</b>	\$10,535	\$8,832	(\$1,703)
<b>2018 Mesa</b>	\$12,887	\$9,702	(\$3,185)
<b>2017 Mesa w/o outliers</b>	\$1,892	\$8,256	\$6,364
<b>2018 Mesa w/o outliers</b>	\$4,018	\$9,702	\$5,684

**Descriptor of data** Table 3 reflects the cost variance between the average SWPP out-of-home care cost per child compared to the average county out-of-home care cost per child. The third column provides the cost variance, whereby the variance listed in black reflects savings while red within () indicates the SWPP cost was higher for that year.

Table 4. Projected Costs or Savings with SWPP vs. EPP Standard Case

<b>Projected Variance</b>	<b>Expense/Savings</b>
2017 Without outliers	\$105,037
2018 Without outliers	\$166,525
2017 With outliers	-\$67,776
2018 With outliers	\$118,995

Figure 2. Projected Costs or Savings with SWPP vs. EPP Standard Case



**Descriptor of data** Table 4 and Figure 2 provide a summary of costs associated with days in care for SWPP cases. The savings or expense is compared to standard county experiences for EPP cases. Outliers are removed in the first two rows as these are not within the normal scope of the SWPP and county EPP experience. Outliers are included in the last two rows.

### Permanency Outcomes

The second hypothesis explored permanency outcomes. Data indicated that all ORPC cases across Adams, El Paso, and Mesa Counties showed increased permanency outcomes in less restrictive settings or increased rates of reunification and kinship placements. The one exception was the first year of the ORPC program (2017) in Mesa County, which had 47.8% non-kin adoptions as compared to the state average of 25%. Note: Mesa County data were impacted by a delay in participation in the SWPP due to protracted time in hiring qualified personnel. Therefore, Mesa SWPP cases reflect services from the third week of August until the end of December.

Table 5. Comparison of Permanency Outcomes across State and Counties

	Reunification		Living with Kin		Adoption	
	SWPP	All EPP	SWPP	All EPP	SWPP	All EPP
<b>State</b>						
<b>2017</b>		36.20%		38.90%		25%
<b>2018</b>		37.10%		38.50%		24.50%
<b>2019</b>		36.60%		24.50%		29.10%
<b>Adams</b>						
<b>2017</b>	65.50%	14.90%	17.20%	54.70%	13.80%	30.40%
<b>2018</b>	40%	22.50%	45%	58%	15%	19.40%
<b>2019</b>		28.90%		43.40%		27.70%
<b>NOTE:</b> One case was no longer represented by ORPC pilot program prior to permanency being established						
<b>El Paso</b>						
<b>2017</b>	77.50%	40.80%	16.40%	47.20%	6.10%	12.10%
<b>2018</b>	79.50%	32%	20.50%	46.90%	0%	20.90%
<b>2019</b>		35.30%		41.70%		23.10%
<b>Mesa</b>						
<b>2017</b>	43.40%	39.70%	8.70%	20.70%	47.80%	39.60%
<b>2018</b>	50%	50.40%	33.30%	9.70%	16%	39.90%
<b>2019</b>		59.40%		2.90%		36.20%

**Descriptor of data** Table 5 demonstrates the EPP case comparison regarding permanency outcomes. The rows reflect state- and county-level data by year. The second, fourth, and sixth columns represent the percentage and type of permanency outcomes for ORPC SWPP cases. The third, fifth, and seventh columns provide the comparison groups for the state and county as a whole, respectively.

## Parent Interviews

Themes were identified on the client's perception of the ORPC SWPP social worker's engagement and case outcomes. Even though each of the participants were from separate cases, themes of advocacy, engagement, responsiveness, and trust/rapport emerged across all the interviews. The theme of advocacy focused on a feeling that the parent was not only supported, but they also had an opportunity to voice a position and concerns and felt as if they were heard. Engagement was identified as the ability to fully understand the process, be able to recognize the necessity of resources and community referrals and have clear directions and goals for participation in the treatment plan. Responsiveness addressed the availability of the respondent parent counsel team when a parent was in need of assistance from communication of an urgent concern. Trust and Rapport was the most amorphous but profound information, whereby a client felt safe to be vulnerable about their parenting issues, able to work to improve, and protected in that process. Participants reported that they believed their case outcome was positive due to the social worker's activities. All qualitative participants reported that their case resulted in their children returning home as the case outcome.

Table 6. Parent Interviews

Theme Label	Theme Description
Advocacy	<p>Quotes that indicated active support for completion of treatment and not feeling alone in the process. Participant 1 reported: "<i>Really important for anyone with CPS case to have social worker with them. Never felt alone, someone on my side.</i>"</p> <p>Participant 3 stated: "So hard to understand what is said in court but felt defended. Tried to step up and say things, but when [social worker] spoke up, she was heard."</p>
Engagement	<p>Quotes that reference an understanding of the process, the resources, and action steps necessary to be successful in the treatment plan. Participant 2 indicated: "<i>tried to look things up online but internet did not give a good understanding. [Social worker] knew what to do.</i>"</p>
Responsiveness	<p>Quotes that indicate a more comprehensive understanding of the resources and that referrals were made much faster. Also indicated that answers to questions and support provided quickly. Participant 3 indicated: "<i>Availability of [social worker] important, [social worker] would answer immediately when lawyer would not get back right away.</i>"</p>
Trust and Rapport	<p>Quotes reference expressing feelings of concern with ability to talk to the social worker when not trusting anyone else. Respected the confidential</p>

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nature of help. Participant 3 stated: *"Felt like I could talk to [social worker] when I couldn't talk to anyone else. Felt like CPS was hard and judgmental, but able to tell [social worker] about struggles. Best thing was to have 'that person' to talk to and ask questions without needing to talk to CPS."*

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## Limitations and Implications

Quantitative data (days in out-of-home placement, cost of placement, types of placement, and permanency outcomes) were collected from the CDHS TRAILS system. County and State data were only available in the aggregate, meaning that the evaluators had no way of extracting the cases that received the pilot program services from the averages. As a result, this report is limited to stating only county-wide trends, and the results are confounded. The ORPC plans to enter into a data sharing agreement with the necessary state entities to reduce this barrier. It is recommended that case-level data be explored, which compares:

- State- and county-wide data on adoptions;
- Number of placement open days (LOS) for adoption cases; and
- Costs for out-of-home care by type of case and case specifiers.

The evaluators recommend expanding the qualitative interviews to include additional child welfare system stakeholders such as judicial officers, county attorneys, GALs, and respondent parent counsel, in order to form a comprehensive view of how the program affects the life of cases where a social worker is assigned. Finally, receiving the Department of Human Services case-level data early in the analysis period will provide time for a robust analysis of case-specific data.



## Conclusion

This initial report reflects early evaluation outcomes of the Social Work Pilot Program (SWPP) and indicates that having a trained social worker can decrease time that children spend in out-of-home care and improve case outcomes (return home faster or placement with kin). While evaluation outcomes indicate reductions in out-of-home care, it is incumbent on programs to provide high-quality legal representation of parents through the use of interdisciplinary teams. This is even more imperative in Expedited Permanency Planning cases, which are, by definition, the most vulnerable of cases. The Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel's pilot program utilized ABA and best practice standards in providing counsel to parents. To explore the relationship between case outcomes, permanency, and the associated costs, quantitative data were collected from TRAILS and RPPS, and preliminary qualitative data were collected through parent interviews from a client list of closed cases. Data explored lengths of stay in out-of-home care, associated costs for LOS, permanency outcomes, and client's perceptions of the SWPP. Congruent with other practice models, SWPP data reflected that on average SWPP cases spend less days in care, cost less per average case, and have permanency outcomes that are least restrictive (returning home or being permanency placed with kin). Participants in the interviews stated that they perceived their ORPC contract social worker favorably and their overall experience was positive. The findings from the data suggest that clients who engage with the SWPP have less time in out-of-home care and have better permanency outcomes.

Subsequent research reports will explore case specific data (as associated costs) and explore outcomes with comparable counties that do not participate in the SWPP. These findings are consistent with the models reviewed for research, providing similar results regarding lengths of stay in foster care, improved permanency outcomes, and reduced costs for out-of-home placements. Given the importance of permanency on the welfare of children, models like the ORPC pilot program are an important component of responsible legal representation.



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