

Preliminary and Partial Findings from the Dependent Children Legal Representation Study

Study design

- A majority of children who entered the study have cases that are still ongoing. We have yet to see the closing of the median case.
- 417 children entered care in Grant and Lewis after the start of the Dependent Children Legal Representation study, which accepted cases from September 2017 through August 2019.
- The study design compares post-implementation outcomes for youth in Grant and Lewis against those of matched children in five comparison counties. We used County Health Rankings from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to select
 - Adams County
 - Clallam County
 - Grant County
 - Grays Harbor County
 - Mason County
- 342 children in Grant and Lewis counties matched to 342 children in Adams, Clallam, Grant, Grays Harbor, & Mason counties.

Findings—All findings reported below are subject to revision between now and when we conclude analysis.

- Analysis assessed the likelihood of children exiting to three outcomes over the course of their observed dependency: Reunification, Guardianship, or Legally Free/Adoption.
 - Children with mandatory legal representation were more likely to experience reunification or guardianship than to become legally free or adopted. Specifically, the reunification or guardianship rate of children with mandatory representation is about 41% higher than the rate of reunification or guardianship for children without mandatory representation (i.e. business as usual).
 - All guardianships have been with relatives
- Older children and non-white children: Overall, minority (i.e. non-white) children and adolescent children (**i.e. over the age of 12**) with mandatory legal representation were more likely to exit to guardianship than children without mandatory representation (i.e. business as usual). Older children and children of color who are not reunited with their biological parents are less likely to be adopted and more likely to be in guardianships with relatives
 - Specifically, the guardianship rate for represented **adolescent children** is 2.7 times higher than other children in the study.
 - The guardianship rate for represented minority children is over 5.3 times higher than other children in the study.
- For any permanency, children **aged 12 years or older** who were represented by attorneys reached permanency faster than children in that age range who were not represented by attorneys.

Preliminary and Partial Findings from the Dependent Children Legal Representation Study

- For placement changes, **children aged 12 years or older** who were represented by attorneys experienced fewer placement changes than similar children in the comparison group.
- For placements, children who were represented by attorneys and who were removed from their parents at the initial shelter care hearing were placed more likely than similar children in the comparison group to be placed with relatives in the first six months of the case.
- For juvenile justice involvement, children represented by attorneys were less likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system than similar children in the comparison group. This was seen primarily for minority **children aged 12 years or older**.

Prepared by Carl McCurley, Washington State Center for Court Research