

International Review of Parent Advocacy in Child Welfare

STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S CARE AND
PROTECTION THROUGH PARENT PARTICIPATION

**Better
Care
Network**



International
Parent
Advocacy
Network

With support from:



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABA:	American Bar Association, U.S.	JCCA:	Jewish Child Care Association, New York City, U.S.
AMALIPE:	Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, Bulgaria	LMIC:	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
ABAAD:	A civil society organization based in Lebanon	MEHE:	Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), Lebanon
ACS:	Administration for Children's Services, New York City, U.S.	MENA:	Middle East and North Africa
BPNN:	Birth Parents National Network, U.S.	MoPH:	Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon
BxD:	Bronx Defenders, New York City, U.S.	MoSA:	Ministry of Social Affairs, Lebanon
CBCS:	Capacity Building Center for States, U.S.	MOU:	Memorandum of Understanding
CPS:	Child Protective Services	NTAECSC:	National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, U.S.
CRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	OBF:	Organisasjon for Barnevernsforeldre, Organization for Child Welfare Parents, Norway
CSO:	Civil Society Organization	P4P:	King County Parent for Parent, Washington State, U.S.
CWOP:	Child Welfare Organizing Project, New York City, U.S.	PAR:	Parent Advocacy and Rights, Scotland
F2F:	Family to Family, California, U.S.	PFAN:	Parents Family Advocacy Network, United Kingdom
FearlessR2W:	R2W is a postal code in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada	PMAO:	Parent Mutual Aid Organization, Canada
FIN:	Family Inclusion Network (various), Australia	PPP:	Positive Powerful Parents, Melbourne, Australia
FIN A:	Family Inclusion Network, Inc., the umbrella organization for all FINs in Australia	SNAICC:	National Voice for Our Children, Australia
FISH:	Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH), New South Wales, Australia	SOP:	Standard Operating Procedure
FGC:	Family Group Conference	SUD:	Substance use disorders
FRG:	Family Rights Group, London, England	START:	Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams, U.S.
GBV:	Gender-Based Violence	TPR:	Termination of Parental Rights
GMAR/NSW:	Grandmothers Against Removal/ New South Wales, Australia	UN:	United Nations
HIC:	High-Income Countries	UNGA:	United National General Assembly
IPAN:	International Parent Advocacy Network	WSPAC:	Washington State Parent Alley Committee, U.S.

1 INTRODUCTION

“ We must uplift and center parents’ voices. We must really listen to them. As we work to transform this system, parents’ stories and solutions must drive this effort. We must recognize the structural forces at work in the child welfare system. We must not forget the historical context of child welfare and the long-lasting impact it has had on poor communities, particularly communities of color. We must see the institutional racism in this system, and work to undo it every day. We must remember that no parent, in any community, is perfect. And that parents have intrinsic value to their children. Those bonds must be respected in communities like mine, just as they are in more privileged communities. We must look to parents as the experts on their children. ”

DINAH ORTIZ-ADAMES
PARENT ADVOCATE¹

The mission of child protection and child welfare systems should be to support parents and families to care for their children, and to enable children to grow up in safe, loving and nurturing families. Yet child welfare systems throughout the world too often fail to protect children, do not provide the support families need, and in some cases harm children in their care. This report shows how parent advocacy can be an important element to achieving better outcomes for children and their families. In particular, it highlights the role parent advocacy can play in preventing unnecessary separation of children

from their families. As this report shows, parent advocacy has been demonstrated to reduce the number of children placed into care, the length of time children remain in care, and improve the experience of parents and professionals in child welfare.

Engaging and involving service users in child welfare is at the forefront of public service policy reform in many high-income countries internationally.² The importance of participation of parents and the wider family for achieving better outcomes for children and their families

1 <https://www.risemagazine.org/2018/11/dinah-benefit/>

2 See for example: Bilha Davidson-Arad and Hagith Kaznelson, “Comparison of parents’ and social workers’ assessments of the quality of life of children at risk,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, no. 5 (2010): 711-719; Gertrud Lenzer and Brian Gran, “Rights and the role of family engagement in child welfare: an international treaties perspective on families’ rights, parents’ rights, and children’s rights,” *Child Welfare* 90, no. 4 (2011); Joan Pennell, “Restorative practices and child welfare: Toward an inclusive civil society,” *Journal of Social Issues* 62, no. 2 (2006): 259-279; Rudi Roose, Griet Roets, Sabine Van Houte, Wouter Vandenhole, and Didier Reynaert, “From parental engagement to the engagement of social work services: Discussing reductionist and democratic forms of partnership with families,” *Child & Family Social Work* 18, no. 4 (2013): 449-457; Ingunn Studsrød, Elisabeth Willumsen, and Ingunn T. Ellingsen, “Parents’ perceptions of contact with the Norwegian Child Welfare Services,” *Child & Family Social Work* 19, no. 3 (2014): 312-320.

has been identified in a range of studies.³ This paper presents the findings from a preliminary review of practice in increasing parent participation through parent advocacy in child welfare decision-making at the case, program and policy level. It looks at the opportunities and challenges parent advocacy creates; lessons learnt across different settings and contexts, and evidence of the benefits of supporting such engagement as a key element in system reform.

It includes the results of the first international survey of parent advocacy programs and a literature review showing the developing evidence base for parent advocacy. The survey provides a first step toward understanding the range of parent advocacy activities internationally.

Currently, parent advocacy in child welfare operates primarily in high-income countries. The report provides an initial attempt to identify the extent of parent advocacy in high, middle and low-income countries.⁴ It considers ways that the experience and benefits of parent advocacy

in high-income countries might be relevant for low- and middle-income countries, and how the experience in low- and middle-income countries may be beneficial to other countries.⁵

The paper also describes the ways parents in high income countries, working with their allies, are beginning to be a countervailing force to push child welfare systems to change to create better outcomes for children and their families. They are being trained as leaders, helping other parents and working to reform child welfare policies and practices.

1.1 Key terms

The report focuses on increasing parent participation in child welfare through parent advocacy. Certain terms are used with specific meanings and may be used differently in varying contexts and different countries. For example, the report uses the term parent in a much wider sense in recognition of the diversity of family structures around the world. Key terms are defined in [Box 1 on page 4](#).

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- 3 Ravit Alfandari, "Evaluation of a national reform in the Israeli child protection practice designed to improve children's participation in decision-making," *Child & Family Social Work* 22 (2017): 54-62; Jeri L Damman, "Better practices in parent engagement: Lessons from the USA and England," *European Journal of Social Work* 17, no. 1 (2014): 32-44; Yvonne Darlington, Karen Healy, and Judith A. Feeney, "Challenges in implementing participatory practice in child protection: A contingency approach," *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, no. 7 (2010): 1020-1027; James Gladstone, Gary Dumbrell, Bruce Leslie, Andrew Koster, Michelle Young, and Afisi Ismaila, "Looking at engagement and outcome from the perspectives of child protection workers and parents," *Children and Youth Services Review* 34, no. 1 (2012): 112-118; Susan P. Kemp, Maureen O. Marcenko, Kimberly Hoagwood, and William Vesneski, "Engaging parents in child welfare services: Bridging family needs and child welfare mandates," *Child welfare* 88, no. 1 (2009): 101-126; Karen A. Randolph, Frank Fincham, and Melissa Radey, "A framework for engaging parents in prevention," *Journal of Family Social Work* 12, no. 1 (2009): 56-72; Jill C. Schreiber, Tamara Fuller, and Megan S. Pacey, "Engagement in child protective services: Parent perceptions of worker skills," *Children and Youth Services Review* 35, no. 4 (2013): 707-715.
- 4 For the current 2021 fiscal year, low-income economies are defined as those with a GNI per capita, calculated using the World Bank Atlas method, of \$1,035 or less in 2019; lower middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$1,036 and \$4,045; upper middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$4,046 and \$12,535; high-income economies are those with a GNI per capita of \$12,536 or more: <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>
- 5 Countries use different words regarding child protection and alternative care, such as "removed from custody" or "placed in out-of-home care." This paper uses language that will be widely understood, although the words may not correspond to ones used in a particular country.

BOX 1: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

Advocacy: a service that enables people to influence the decisions that affect them. It:

- safeguards people who are vulnerable and discriminated against or are seen as difficult to serve;
- empowers people who need more influence by enabling them to express their own needs and make their own decisions;
- enables people to gain access to information, explore and understand their options and to make their views and wishes known.

Case advocacy: increasing parent participation in decisions that relate to the case management of the child. This includes providing advocacy when a decision to remove a child from a parent's care is actively considered; playing a role in the development of a case/family support plan; and making ongoing decisions on a child's care (such as health care or education).

Child protection system: UNICEF define this as "Certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children." In many low-income countries the term child protection system is used to refer to what in this document is termed child welfare⁶.

Child welfare: a group of public and private services that are purposed to ensure that all children live in safe, permanent and stable environments that support their well-being. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), government has an overall responsibility for ensuring there is an effective child welfare system.

Parent: is defined widely to recognize the diversity of family structures around the world. Parents

include biological parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child.

Parent advocacy: parent advocacy in child welfare is when parents with child welfare experience promote parent participation and the rights of parents and children through advocacy. This includes advocating for and helping other parents; working in and strengthening child welfare programs; and working to change policies that improve systems and the lives of children and families. Parent advocacy includes parents working with allies toward these goals, and focuses on three areas: case, program and policy.

Program advocacy: This includes parents working as trained parent advocates in child welfare agencies (such as prevention, family support, out-of-home placement and legal assistance) to design, plan, evaluate and strengthen the program and to assist parents who are struggling to raise their children safely or to be reunited with them.

Policy advocacy: This involves parents: a) acting politically to change policy, legislation and resources for family support; b) participating in governmental and NGO advisory boards, speaking on panels at conferences, teaching in classes of social work and law, writing about their experience and recommendations; and c) working at the grassroots and community levels to advocate for reform.

Parent participation: this relates to parental involvement in child welfare decisions that affect their lives and their children's lives. This covers a continuum from being involved in decisions about the care of their children through to their involvement in local and national policy making about child welfare.

6 Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, *Families at Risk: Guidelines for advocates*, (2014), Downloaded 15/08/19 from https://www.siaa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SIAA_FamiliesAtRisk_web.pdf

Parent with child welfare experience: this refers to a parent who has been involved with the child welfare system, either through having a child placed in alternative care or through having a child who was the subject of a child protection investigation.

Parent leadership: this is when an organization has parents actively involved in managing and running an organization or program.

Parent-led: refers to a program in which parents with child welfare experience have power and are at least

half of a program's staff, at least half of the members of the organization's governing board, and have a significant influence on the organization's programs.

Parent-supported: refers to programs or organizations that are supported by parents who are actively involved in shaping the organization's parent advocacy program, but where these parents are fewer than half the staff and half of the members of the organization's governing board.

1.2 The importance of country context

Much of the work on parent advocacy has been undertaken in high income countries, and particularly in anglophone countries which have an adversarial child welfare system. These countries have a context of growing neo-liberalism⁷ that focuses on child protection through a system that is highly legalistic and overly reliant on removing a child from his/her family, in contrast to the family service orientation more typically found in countries with social democratic welfare state regimes that are more centered on prevention and support for families⁸. In systems

with a child protection centered approach, "Children are constituted in individualistic ways; as vulnerable victims requiring intervention to optimize future functioning, dichotomized against their irresponsible and invulnerable parents."⁹ Parents are increasingly seen to be individually responsible for any difficulties they face and the impact of structural forces is denied.¹⁰ Aspects of this are amplified in the mainly adversarial legal systems through which states increasingly intervene to 'protect' children from the actions of their parents. This is associated with the rapid increase of surveillance,¹¹ investigation¹² and

7 Gary Spolander, Lambert Engelbrecht, Linda Martin, Marianne Strydom, Irina Pervova, Päivi Marjanen, Petri Tani, Alessandro Sicora, and Francis Adaikalam, "The implications of neoliberalism for social work: Reflections from a six-country international research collaboration," *International Social Work* 57, no. 4 (2014): 301-312.; Nigel Parton, and Sasha Williams, "The contemporary refocusing of children's services in England," *Journal of Children's Services* (2017), 85-96.

8 For example, in England in the last 9 years, spending on safeguarding and care has risen dramatically and increased from 58% to 78% of total local government spending on children's services. This has meant that spending on prevention has fallen by 46% alongside many other cuts in benefits and wider services; National Children's Bureau, "Children and young people's services: Funding and spending 2010/11 to 2018/19," (2020), https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Research_reports/Children%27s%20and%20young%20people%27s%20services%20-%20funding%20and%20spending%20report%202018-19.pdf

9 Emily Keddell, "The vulnerable child in neoliberal contexts: the construction of children in the Aotearoa New Zealand child protection reforms," *Childhood* 25, no. 1 (2018), 93.

10 See, for example, David Jones, "Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: Third Report: Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability," International Federation of Social Workers (2018), <https://www.ifsw.org/product/books/global-agenda-for-social-work-and-social-development-3rd-report/>

11 Frank Edwards, "Saving children, controlling families: Punishment, redistribution, and child protection," *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 3 (2016): 575-595.

12 Andrew Bilson, "More parents accused of child abuse than ever before," *The Conversation*, (2018), <https://theconversation.com/more-parents-accused-of-child-abuse-than-ever-before-10047>

separation of children from parents in many high-income countries¹³.

The child welfare systems in these countries are concentrated on poor families¹⁴ and those from excluded groups – particularly people of color, ethnic minorities and children with disabilities. For example, using data from the U.S. national child abuse data set from 2003 to 2014, it was estimated that 53% of all African American children were investigated for child protection before the age of 18;¹⁵ in New Zealand 42% of Maori children were investigated;¹⁶ Roma children across both high- and middle-income countries (for example in Bulgaria Roma children were about 10% of the under 18 population and half the children in institutions; they were also found to be over-represented in care in Italy and England).¹⁷ Similarly children with disabilities in the U.S. represent between 10% and 31% of children in institutional care and in South Australia over 30% of children in care have a disability.¹⁸

Neo-liberalism is also having far-reaching effects on child welfare in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC)¹⁹, though the picture of their

child welfare systems is far from uniform.²⁰

There is a range of systems in which the state takes differing roles. In many LMIC there is only minimal social welfare state infrastructure. As a result, children are deprived of parental care or placed in institutions without state intervention or oversight at either national or local levels. In contrast, in other middle-income states, including many of the states that were formerly part of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the state is the provider of most alternative care, which is often institutional.

The extent and nature of child welfare systems also varies widely. A review of social work for children without parental care in LMIC found that in many countries there was a low level of social services provision, although there were examples of rapid development of national systems in a few countries.²¹ The study also found that in most LMIC countries, including countries with an extensive child welfare system, there were very few social workers and limited staff development, often combined with high levels of bureaucracy limiting the ability of social workers to engage directly with families and children. The report also found that in

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- 13 Neil Gilbert, Nigel Parton, and Marit Skivenes, eds. *Child protection systems: International trends and orientations*, Oxford University Press, USA, (2011).
 - 14 P. Bywaters, L. Bunting, G. Davidson, J. Hanratty, W. Mason, W. C. McCartan, and N. Steils, *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, (2016).
 - 15 Hyunil Kim, Christopher Wildeman, Melissa Jonson-Reid, and Brett Drake, "Lifetime prevalence of investigating child maltreatment among US children," *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 2 (2017): 274-280.
 - 16 Bénédicte Rouland, Rhema Vaithianathan, Denise Wilson, and Emily Putnam-Hornstein, "Ethnic disparities in childhood prevalence of maltreatment: Evidence from a New Zealand birth cohort," *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 9 (2019): 1255-1257.
 - 17 European Roma Rights Centre, *Life Sentence: Romani Children in Institutional Care*, (2011).
 - 18 Alexandra Trout, et al, "Overlooked: Children with disabilities in residential care," 88, no.2 (2009): 111, For South Australia see: <https://indaily.com.au/news/2019/06/25/disability-rate-among-children-in-care-a-travesty/>
 - 19 Spolander et al, "The implications of neoliberalism for social work"; Jones, "Global Agenda for Social Work".
 - 20 Spolander et al's six countries were South Africa, England, Italy, Russia, Finland and India.
 - 21 Andrew Bilson and Joanne Louise Westwood, "Making Social Work Work: Improving social work for vulnerable families and children without parental care around the world: A literature review," (2012).

countries where social work was developing, there was also a dominance of western social work models which were often inappropriate for the economic, political and social context of resource constrained countries.²²

In presenting the current research and existing models, this paper focuses primarily on the evidence from Anglo-American countries where parent advocacy is most prevalent and better documented. Parent advocacy models need to be adjusted to local context, which includes the nature of the child protection system. These wide variations make it difficult to generalize about the strategies and approaches that would be most effective and the form that parent advocacy should take. These will have to be carefully crafted at the local level. Thus, low- and middle-income countries may need very different approaches compared to the predominantly U.S.-based literature and programs described here. The paper makes some first steps toward looking at approaching parent advocacy in LMIC.

However, the issue of parent participation, as argued in the next section, is a matter of human rights and of children's rights in particular. It is thus relevant in all country contexts. The inequalities in power between parents and state authorities are found even in high-income countries with a family service orientation rather than an Anglo-American type child protection system.²³ Also, many middle- and low-income countries are working to strengthen their care and protection systems, including preventing unnecessary separation and placement in out-of-home care, especially child institutionalization. Most of the children in care in these systems are not deprived of parental care due to removal by child welfare authorities. They are placed in out-of-home care by parents and other caregivers,



22 Andrew Bilson, Jolly Nyeko, Joanna Baskott, and Chris Rayment. *Developing Social Care and Support Services in Uganda: A Situational Analysis and Policy Recommendations*. Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Expanding Social Protection, (2013).

23 Studsrød et al; Björck-Åkesson, Eva, and Mats Granlund, "Family involvement in assessment and intervention: Perceptions of professionals and parents in Sweden," *Exceptional Children* 61, no. 6 (1995): 520-535.

often because of poverty and lack of access to basic human services, such as education.²⁴ The participation of all those affected by child welfare at all levels during these reforms will enable these countries to build a system to benefit from parents' first-hand knowledge of the challenges parents and children face. As this paper will highlight, parent participation forms an essential basis for achieving children's rights.

1.3 Overview of the report

The report starts by articulating the need for parent participation and its basis in human rights, including children's rights, before looking in more detail at what we know about parent participation in child welfare. It then introduces parents' experience of child welfare in high-income countries through the first-hand experiences of five parents.

Section 3 gives an overview of the current state of parent advocacy, how it is organized and the current activities that are being undertaken.

Section 4 then presents the literature on outcomes of parent advocacy and the lessons on effective implementation.

Section 5 describes the details of the survey of programs in high-income countries that represent the range of parent advocacy organizations, programs and groups. Brief descriptions of the programs surveyed are shown in boxes throughout the report. **Section 6** covers survey results from low- and middle-income countries and groups them into four categories.

Finally, **section 7** draws these three elements together and makes suggestions for how the

benefits of parent advocacy can be promoted internationally. Specific consideration is given to the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches in high-income countries and what can be learned from them to promote better care for children and families and to reduce the need for child removal globally.



24 Andrew Bilson, and Pat Cox, "Caring about poverty: Alternatives to institutional care for children in poverty." *Journal of Children and Poverty* 13, no. 1 (2007): 37-55.

2 PARENT PARTICIPATION

This section discusses the basis for parent participation in child welfare as a human right. It looks at parent participation in child welfare and some of the barriers that make this difficult.

2.1 Parent participation – a basis in human rights

Participation is key to the achievement of all human rights, including children’s rights. Thus, the Guidelines on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs states:

Participation enables the advancement of all human rights. It plays a crucial role in the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development. It is essential for reducing inequalities and social conflict. It is also important for empowering individuals and groups, and is one of the core elements of human rights-based approaches aimed at eliminating marginalization and discrimination.²⁵

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) articulates children’s rights and recognizes participation by children as a right. It also makes clear the centrality of the role and responsibilities of a child’s parents, or where applicable, the members of the extended family or community, in achieving and maintaining all children’s rights.

The CRC also stresses the fundamental role of a family environment, focusing on preventing

unnecessary separation and supporting parents and other caregivers to care appropriately. Parent participation is required to achieve these rights.

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2009 are particularly relevant here. They provide a key resource for considering the “desirable orientations for policy and practice” to support the implementation of the CRC as well as the provisions of other international instruments relevant to the protection and well-being of children deprived of parental care, or who are at risk of being so deprived. They are intended to assist and encourage governments to implement their obligations to provide a comprehensive welfare system, taking into account prevailing social, cultural, and economic conditions. They clearly state that parents have the primary responsibility with regard to bringing up their children and indicate that the state’s efforts should primarily be directed towards supporting families in their caregiving role, thereby enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his or her parents or, where appropriate, other close family members.²⁶ While they recognize that there are situations in which the child’s best interests are served by being placed outside of parental care, this should only be where “the child’s own family is unable, even **with appropriate support**, to provide adequate

25 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Guidelines for States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs, section 1.

26 “Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children,” UN General Assembly (UNGA), 2010, A/RES/64/142, II. A. para. 3.

care,” and that “removal of a child from the care of the family should be seen as a **measure of last resort** and should, wherever possible, be temporary and for **the shortest possible duration**”.²⁷

The Guidelines also underline that a comprehensive child welfare system should be available to prevent the separation of children from their families. This includes measures to enhance the capacity of families limited by factors, including disability, and drug and alcohol misuse. They call for specific action to prevent discrimination against families and children based on: indigenous or minority backgrounds; poverty; religion; sex; mental and physical disability; HIV/AIDS or other serious illnesses; social stigma, notably related to socio-economic status and children born out of wedlock; and other circumstances that give rise to children being relinquished and/or removed from their families.²⁸

The realization of these rights requires participation of all those involved, in particular, both children and their parents. Child and youth participation have often been tokenistic; parent participation has most often been non-existent.

2.2 Violence against children in families

The United Nations Survey on Violence Against Children highlights that for most children their family has the greatest potential to protect them and provide for their physical and

emotional safety.²⁹ However, it also recognizes that physical and sexual violence, deliberate neglect and psychological harm also occur within families. This includes violence in the context of punishment. Whilst acknowledging that services to address violence after it has occurred are essential, the report stresses the need to combat the underlying causes of violence and prioritize prevention, stating:

*Policies and programmes should address immediate risk factors, such as a lack of parent-child attachment, family breakdown, abuse of alcohol or drugs, and access to firearms. In line with the Millennium Development Goals, attention should be focused on economic and social policies that address poverty, gender and other forms of inequality, income gaps, unemployment, urban overcrowding, and other factors which undermine society.*³⁰

Parent participation can play a central part in identifying need and developing, fighting for, and in some cases providing these preventive approaches. It can also work alongside children’s advocacy to challenge individualized responses that ignore the underlying causes of violence. Where there has been violence, the research into parent advocacy reviewed in section 2.4 on page 14 shows how parent advocacy can promote better outcomes for children.

27 “Guidelines for Alternative Care,” UNGA, Paras 5 and 14, Emphasis added.

28 UNGA Guidelines, Para 10.

29 Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro. “World report on violence against children.” (2006) https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/document_files/world_report_on_violence_against_children.pdf

30 Pinheiro, 2006, paragraph 99

2.3 Increasing child welfare involvement in families in high-income countries

Despite these international commitments, increasing investigation, surveillance and removal of children, particularly by Anglo-American child welfare systems, have underlined the need for increasing parent participation.

In many high-income countries the number of children in alternative care is increasing.³¹ This

includes countries like the U.S. and UK, where children are both separated by placement in alternative care and through growing numbers of adoption following termination of parental rights. These adoptions hide the actual level of children separated from parents. In England the number of children separated from parents has increased by 56% between 2008 and 2018.³² Research in England showed that, rather than decreasing the number of children in alternative care, the local agencies where more children left care to be adopted had large increases in the numbers in care, whilst in those with lower adoption rates the number of children in care fell. This trend was not associated with higher levels of deprivation in these areas.³³ In these agencies where adoption was promoted as an alternative to care, child removal rapidly expanded and more children languished in care, whilst in similar areas where adoption was not promoted the number of children separated from parents fell.

There are increasing numbers involved in the child welfare system more generally. The number of parents investigated for possible maltreatment is increasing rapidly in many English-speaking high-income countries, with little evidence that it reduces harm to children.³⁴ There has also been a fall in the proportion of investigations that are substantiated.³⁵ Most



Photo by Ian Rees

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- 31 Neil Gilbert, Nigel Parton, and Marit Skivenes, eds. *Child protection systems: International trends and orientations*. OUP USA, 2011.; Australian Institute of Health. *Child protection Australia 2018-19*. No. 53. AIHW, 2020.
- 32 Andrew Bilson, and Elizabeth Hunter Munro. "Adoption and child protection trends for children aged under five in England: Increasing investigations and hidden separation of children from their parents." *Children and Youth Services Review* 96 (2019): 204-211.
- 33 Andrew Bilson. "The government's adoption drive isn't achieving its aims." 2017. http://bilson.org.uk/wp_new/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/community-care-update.pdf
- 34 Ruth Gilbert, John Fluke, Melissa O'Donnell, Arturo Gonzalez-Izquierdo, Marni Brownell, Pauline Gulliver, Staffan Janson, and Peter Sidebotham. "Child maltreatment: Variation in trends and policies in six developed countries." *The Lancet* 379, no. 9817 (2012): 758-772. Also see Andrew Bilson, Rosemary L. Cant, Maria Harries, and David H. Thorpe. "Accounting for the increase of children in care in western Australia: What can a client information system tell us?" *Child Abuse & Neglect* 72 (2017): 291-300.
- 35 Andrew Bilson. "More parents accused of child abuse than ever before." *The Conversation*, 2012. <https://theconversation.com/more-parents-accused-of-child-abuse-than-ever-before-100477>

of this increase in child protection activity and the focus of the majority of programs is not on physical or sexual maltreatment, but on neglect. For example, according to Child Trends, in the U.S. “among all reported maltreated children, the proportion with reported neglect increased from 49% in 1990 to 75% in 2017, while those with reported sexual abuse declined from 17 to 9%, and the share with reported physical abuse declined from 27 to 18%.”³⁶

The impact is wide-spread. A recent study showed that in the U.S., 37% of all children were investigated before the age of 18.³⁷ Similarly, studies in Australia³⁸ and New Zealand³⁹ found around a quarter of children were investigated for child protection before the age of 18. This burden of investigations falls disproportionately on those in poverty,⁴⁰ people of color and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. In the U.S., over half

of African American children were investigated; similar rates were found for Aboriginal children in Australia and Maori children in New Zealand.⁴¹

The outcomes for the growing number of children in alternative care are poor, including but not limited to worsened outcomes in physical and mental health, education, justice, homelessness, sexual exploitation and even early mortality.⁴² This includes intergenerational issues for parents with experience in care who have high rates of their own children taken into care, adopted without their permission,⁴³ and multiple children taken into care sequentially.⁴⁴ There is also considerable negative impact on parents who lose a child to care, which reduces their capacity to parent in the future. The negative consequences of child removal include but are not limited to: trauma;⁴⁵ mental health problems;⁴⁶ mothers’

36 <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/child-maltreatment>

37 H. Kim, C. Wildeman, M. Jonson-Reid, B. Drake. “Lifetime prevalence of investigating child maltreatment among U.S. children.” *American Journal of Public Health*. 2017 Feb;107(2):274-80.

38 Dorothy Scott. “Children in Australia: Harms and hopes.” *Family Matters* 96 (2014): 14.

39 Bénédicte Rouland, and Rhema Vaithianathan. “Cumulative prevalence of maltreatment among New Zealand children, 1998–2015.” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 4 (2018): 511-513.

40 Paul Bywaters, Geraldine Brady, Tim Sparks, and Elizabeth Bos. “Inequalities in child welfare intervention rates: The intersection of deprivation and identity.” *Child & Family Social Work* 21, no. 4 (2016): 452-463.

41 Kim et al; Scott; Rouland and Vaithianathan.

42 See, for example, the recent longitudinal study of children entering care in Western Australia which shows that children who had spent any time in care were more likely to have poor outcomes in the areas of physical health, mental health, education and justice - Fernando Lima, Miriam Maclean, Melissa O'Donnell “Exploring outcomes for young people who have experienced out-of-home care.” Perth, Telethon Kids Institute, 2018. For these outcomes across Europe see “Eurochild Children in Alternative Care: National Surveys Second Edition.” Brussels: Eurochild, 2010. https://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/public/05_Library/Thematic_priorities/06_Children_in_Alternative_Care/Eurochild/Eurochild_Publication_-_Children_in_Alternative_Care_-_2nd_Edition_January2010.pdf

43 Louise Roberts, Sarah Meakings, Donald Forrester, Audra Smith, and Katherine Shelton. “Care-leavers and their children placed for adoption.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 79 (2017): 355-361.

44 Karen Broadhurst, Bachar Alrouh, Emily Yeend, Judith Harwin, Mike Shaw, Mark Pilling, Claire Mason, and Sophie Kershaw. “Connecting events in time to identify a hidden population: Birth mothers and their children in recurrent care proceedings in England.” *The British Journal of Social Work* 45, no. 8 (2015): 2241-2260.

45 Kathleen S. Kenny, Clare Barrington, and Sherri L. Green. “I felt for a long time like everything beautiful in me had been taken out’: Women’s suffering, remembering, and survival following the loss of child custody.” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 26, no. 11 (2015): 1158-1166.

46 Elizabeth Wall-Wieler, Leslie L. Roos, James Bolton, Marni Brownell, Nathan Nickel, and Dan Chateau. “Maternal mental health after custody loss and death of a child: A retrospective cohort study using linkable administrative data.” *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 63, no. 5 (2018): 322-328.

high mortality and suicide rates;⁴⁷ and grief, loss and despair.⁴⁸

Involvement in the child protection system without necessarily losing children to state care also causes collateral damage to both the child and parent, often with lifelong consequences.⁴⁹ In their 2017 study, Wendy Haight and colleagues highlight the “moral injury” of parents through involvement in the child protection system. Their research found that involvement in parental advocacy could help parents to cope with this debilitating issue.⁵⁰ They also found benefits from involvement in system reform aspects of advocacy that helped parents to overcome this type of harm “... through engagement in social programs and advocacy to improve CPS-systems and thereby reduce the future suffering of others.”⁵¹

There are also financial costs for families involved in child welfare. A parent survey conducted in Scotland showed 69% of parents faced financial hardship directly relating to child protection.⁵² Parents on benefits whose children enter care often lose much of their income and can face penalties for receiving

overpayments.⁵³ In order to be involved in planning processes for their child they may have to attend frequent meetings, undertake parenting courses, and visit their children regularly, all of which impact their ability to work. Many lose their homes due to these increased financial pressures, which further reduces their ability to achieve reunification. Similarly, parents not eligible for legal aid can be faced with huge legal fees. One parent’s experience is recounted here:

*The initial blow was having to spend all our savings on legal fees before we could qualify for legal aid. Years of hard work and saving gone almost overnight. Next, we went from being a two-income household to being on benefits. This was a huge adjustment for us as a family but to continue to qualify for legal aid we could not afford to work. And if we worked, we could not possibly make enough to pay our legal expenses. It is devastating ... and – the authorities are spending huge sums pursuing blame – not a solution or support.*⁵⁴

47 Elizabeth Wall-Wieler, Leslie L. Roos, Nathan C. Nickel, Dan Chateau, and Marni Brownell. “Mortality among mothers whose children were taken into care by child protection services: A discordant sibling analysis.” *American journal of epidemiology* 187, no. 6 (2018): 1182-1188.

48 Maria Harries and Alana Thompson. *The experiences of parents and families of children and young people in care*. Family Inclusion Network, WA, 2008.

49 Bilson and Munro, “Adoption and child protection.” 2019; Debra J. Brown. “Working the system: Re-thinking the institutionally organized role of mothers and the reduction of “risk” in child protection work.” *Social Problems* 53, no. 3 (2006): 352-370.; Rosie Smithson, and Matthew Gibson. “Less than human: A qualitative study into the experience of parents involved in the child protection system.” *Child & Family Social Work* 22, no. 2 (2017): 565-574.

50 Moral injury is defined as “... the lasting harm caused by one’s own or another’s actions in high-stakes situations that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations. This harm can occur at multiple, interacting psychological, social and spiritual levels.” Wendy Haight, Erin Sugrue, Molly Calhoun, and James Black. “Everyday coping with moral injury: The perspectives of professionals and parents involved with child protection services.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 82 (2017): 108-121. page 108.

51 Haight et al, “Everyday coping,” 115.

52 Gary Clapton. “Uncovering the Pain: Parents’ Experiences of Child Protection.” Parent Family and Allies Network, 2020. <https://www.pfan.uk/uncovering-the-pain/>

53 Ibid.

54 Andrew Bilson and Taliah Drayak. “We can’t afford child protection.” Parent Family and Allies Network, 2020. <https://www.pfan.uk/we-cant-afford-child-protection/>

2.4 What is parent participation in child welfare?

Parent participation is used in a broad way to refer to parents' involvement in the child welfare decisions that affect their lives and their children's lives. This includes everything from decision-making in cases that affect them to their involvement in local and national policy making.⁵⁵ In practice, just as in child participation, there are existing examples of limited or no parental participation, with no recognition of the power differential and other factors that prevent effective engagement; there are also instances of significant parental involvement, not only in their cases, but through active partnership in policy-making. The latter, however, is rare.⁵⁶

2.5 Which parents need to/ should participate?

Parents who need to have influence in child welfare decision-making include:

- parents of children seeking support services;
- parents whose children have been referred to the child protection system;
- parents whose children have been removed / placed in alternative care pending investigation or whilst the family is receiving services;
- parents whose children have been permanently removed/parental rights terminated;
- caregivers and guardians who have become primary caregivers either informally or formally (see for example [Program Survey 1 on page 14](#)).

This includes the views and experiences of parents, caregivers and children who have grown up being affected by challenges, such as mental health issues, discrimination, substance abuse, neglect, abandonment, violence and many more issues.

PROGRAM SURVEY 1: NEW HAMPSHIRE GRANDPARENT GROUP

The New Hampshire Grandparent group began in Atrium, NH in 2015. It is an informal group supported by two non-profits, the Grapevine Family and Community Resource Center and the River Center-Community Resource Center. The Grandparents group began when grandparents who had custody of their grandchildren requested support to access health care, court services and other resources. The group, which now has 12 grandparent advocates, began with storytelling and efforts to overcome the stigma of raising

grandchildren. They continue to provide support to individual grandparents but also advocate for state legislative reform. They helped pass two pieces of legislation: to support a coalition to do research on grandparents raising grandchildren, and to give grandparents a greater voice in court to advocate for alternative placements.

The group now develops materials to support other grandparents and has helped set up a smaller grandparent support group in at least one other city, Keene.

55 Roose et al. "From parental engagement."

56 Mark Horwitz, and Tim Marshall. "Family engagement in child protection social work." *Journal of Family Social Work* 18, no. 4 (2015): 288-301.

2.6 Parent participation in practice: barriers and lessons

There is extensive research showing the problems of implementing parental participation in the child welfare system in high-income countries. The situation will be similar in some middle-income countries where reforms have led to child protection systems modelled on those found in Anglo-American countries.

There are many barriers to parent participation. A key issue is the power differential between parents and child welfare professionals.⁵⁷ There are many individual and organizational factors that complicate parent participation. Individual factors include but are not limited to: previous negative experiences of services; parental shame, fear and stigma; and parental problems, including mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence.⁵⁸ One critical organizational factor is the adversarial nature of child protection involvement and a culture of child rescue that can lead to an “othering” of parents who are treated without recognition and respect.⁵⁹ These problems are exacerbated by the high demands for child welfare staff, large caseloads, paperwork, unconscious bias, extensive court work and the demands of recording and information systems

which severely limit the time available for building a trusting relationship with parents.⁶⁰ In addition, there are major challenges to effective participation by parents in the court environment⁶¹ and in the political environment when service reform is sought.⁶²

2.6.1 HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

An English study of participatory child protection conferences found that, whilst 90% of the parents surveyed said they welcomed the opportunity to attend a conference, many felt their views were not taken into account and they were unable to express their needs or to correct inaccurate statements.⁶³ This led to the view that they were being informed of decisions rather than being involved in them. Another UK study found that:

The overwhelming theme of the parents’ experiences was that the system was uncaring, inflexible and for some harmful to both themselves and their children. Despite being included in the child protection process, parents felt they were not afforded the same rights as a participant, as a decision-maker or as a partner in seeking to improve the situation. The threat of consequences

57 E.g. Gary C. Dumbrill. “Parental experience of child protection intervention: A qualitative study.” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 30, no. 1 (2006): 27-37.

58 Brenda D. Smith and Stella EF Donovan. “Child welfare practice in organizational and institutional context.” *Social Service Review* 77, no. 4 (2003): 541-563.

59 Anna Gupta, Hannah Blumhardt, and ATD Fourth World. “Poverty, exclusion and child protection practice: the contribution of ‘the politics of recognition & respect.’” *European Journal of Social Work* 21, no. 2 (2018): 247-259.

60 National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care [NTAECSC]. Family involvement in public child welfare driven systems of care. 2008.

Damman, Jeri L. “Birth parent involvement: Developing indicators to establish meaningful involvement.” (2014).

61 E.g. Alicia Summers, and Adam Darnell. “What does court observation tell us about judicial practice and the courts in child welfare?” *Journal of Public Child Welfare* 9, no. 4 (2015): 341-361.

62 Tor Slettebø. “Partnership with parents of children in care: A study of collective user participation in child protection services.” *British Journal of Social Work* 43, no. 3 (2013): 579-595.

63 Brian Corby, Malcolm Millar, and Lee Young. “Parental participation in child protection work: Rethinking the rhetoric.” *The British Journal of Social Work* 26, no. 4 (1996): 475-492.

*silenced parents who felt unable to speak out or challenge the things they disagreed with or coerced others into signing agreements they did not agree to. Such experiences related to a sense that they were being treated as 'less than human.'*⁶⁴

A Canadian qualitative study of child welfare-involved parents identified system navigation skills as a pressing need.⁶⁵ The type of support needed was identified in particular in the following areas:

*(a) the ability to communicate effectively, (b) skills in researching needed resources and services and problem solving in the face of frustrations, (c) knowledge of institutional policies and practices, and (d) skills in managing and containing negative and conflicted emotions to avoid negative judgments by workers.*⁶⁶

In Spain, Maria Àngels Balsells et al researched the views of parents about what would help with reunification from state care and concluded: "Empowering families so that they can be agents of support for other families can be a way to consolidate reunification, allowing families to be active agents in the reunification process."⁶⁷

A review of the literature on parent engagement in Australia identified similar issues.⁶⁸ Many of



these issues about the need for advocacy support are summed up in the statement of one mother who had lost her child to state care in Australia:⁶⁹

Basically, I mean, the Department ruined my life, I mean I was suicidal for a long time, and I think the only reason I'm here today is because I had a few supporters that really kept me, that believed in me, knew the truth and just you know, urged me to keep going. It was me against them basically, and they had all the power and all the money, you know, and I was not only weak

64 Rosie Smithson and Matthew Gibson. "Less than human: A qualitative study into the experience of parents involved in the child protection system." *Child & Family Social Work* 22, no. 2 (2017): 565-574.

65 Debra J. Brown. "Working the system: Re-thinking the institutionally organized role of mothers and the reduction of "risk" in child protection work." *Social Problems* 53, no. 3 (2006): 352-370.

66 Susan P. Kemp, Maureen O. Marcenko, Kimberly Hoagwood, and William Vesneski. "Engaging parents in child welfare services: Bridging family needs and child welfare mandates." *Child Welfare* 88, no. 1 (2009): 107.

67 Maria Àngels Balsells, Crescencia Pastor, Ainoa Mateos, Eduard Vaquero, and Aida Urrea. "Exploring the needs of parents for achieving reunification: The views of foster children, birth family and social workers in Spain." *Children and Youth Services Review* 48 (2015): 159-166.

68 Frank Ainsworth and Patricia Hansen. "The experience of parents of children in care: The human rights issue." *Child & Youth Services* 32, no. 1 (2011): 9-18.

69 Maria Harries and Alana Thompson. *The experiences of parents and families of children and young people in care*. Family Inclusion Network WA, (2008): 21.

compared to them, but I was also, you know, dealing with a lot of grief and distress during the whole time as well, you know, worried about my children, you know because, of the alternative placements.

2.6.2 LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

There is less written about experiences of parental participation in child welfare in low- and middle-income countries, though there is little evidence of widescale effective involvement.⁷⁰ The dynamic is often different from that found in high-income countries because of the differences in the systems, though many similar problems exist.

In Estonia it was found that treating parents as active partners and giving them respect was key to promoting parents' participation, but child protection workers did not see supporting parents as one of the aims of their involvement.⁷¹

In the first study in Ghana to explore parental participation within a child protection context, parents and social workers were interviewed. It was found that parent participation in child protection was important and that, in a culture where children are not expected to speak in front of adults, the involvement of parents takes a more important role and may also promote child involvement. Parents raised issues about their participation similar to those raised in

other countries, but the huge caseloads of social workers prevented them from adequately undertaking participative work.⁷²

In many low- and middle-income countries a major intervention has been the establishment of community-based child protection committees⁷³ to protect children and support families. A review of these committees reports that "Community mechanisms are an essential component of wider child protection systems. Strategically, community level mechanisms, such as child protection committees, are useful in part because they interconnect different levels of national child protection systems".⁷⁴ The committees vary considerably in their formation, composition, roles and responsibilities, and mode of functioning. Not all of them focus solely on child protection issues, and some do not call their work "child protection".⁷⁵

These committees are generally composed of residents of a community, often one that is poor, rural or marginalized, in which children are vulnerable. The committees primarily focus on identifying children with child protection issues and linking them with the existing child protection system or services available through NGOs, though some focus on the broader issue of child rights.

These child protection committees are community-based and address a wide variety of child protection and well-being issues, such as family

70 E.g. Ebenezer Cudjoe and Alhassan Abdullah. "Parental participation in child protection practice: The experiences of parents and workers in Ghana." *Qualitative Social Work* 18, no. 4 (2019): 693-709.

Egle Vålba, Karmen Toros, and Anne Tiko. "Family engagement within the context of assessment in child protection practice: The case of Estonia." *Child & Family Social Work* 22, no. 4 (2017): 1506-1514.

71 Vålba et al; K. Toros and M.C. LaSala. "Child protection workers' understanding of the meaning and value of self-reflection in Estonia." *Reflective Practice*, 20(2), (2019): 266-278.

72 Cudjoe & Alhassan.

73 A range of other terms are used, including 'child welfare committees' and 'child protection networks'.

74 Michael Wessells. "What we are learning about protecting children in the community." Save the Children's Fund. (2009) 9.

75 Ibid, 10.

separation, discrimination, sexual exploitation and abuse, displacement, family violence and gender-based violence (GBV), living and/or working in the streets, recruitment into and demobilization from armed groups, HIV and AIDS, and stigma associated with disability. The particular focus (or foci) is selected according to context.⁷⁶

Michael Wessells developed a 4-tier typology of these community committees based on the level of community ownership. The vast majority of the literature he reviewed, which reflect the types of existing community programs, are programs that were either implemented or initiated by an external agency, reflecting the limits of true community ownership or control within these groups.⁷⁷

Wessells concludes, based on the extensive literature reviewed, a “significant limitation [of these committees] is the emphasis on externally initiated or supported community-based child protection groups.”⁷⁸ These are mostly projects

initiated by external groups to integrate children and community members into the existing system of child protection.

It appears that these community committees primarily focus on identifying children with child protection issues to link them with existing protection mechanisms and strengthening policies to protect them. Some groups secondarily engage in advocacy to secure additional resources for communities to prevent child protection violations and strengthen families.

Nevertheless, these community child protection committees are composed of members of communities in which children are at risk. Some of these committee members are parents who have children who are vulnerable and might be interested in playing a greater role to support parents and families and to advocate for policy reform to better meet their rights and their families’ needs.

BOX 2: LEVELS OF COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

1: Direct implementation by agency: the agency is a service provider, and community members are beneficiaries.

2: Community involvement in agency initiative: the agency is a promoter of its own initiative, a planner and a trainer, and community members are volunteers and beneficiaries.

3: Community-owned and managed activities mobilized by external agency: the agency is a catalyst, capacity builder, a facilitator of linkages,

and a funder after community ownership has developed. The community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors, and beneficiaries.

4: Community-owned and managed activities initiated from within the community: the agency is a capacity builder and funder, and community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors and beneficiaries

76 Ibid, 30.

77 Ibid, 18.

78 Ibid, 21.

Successful examples of a variety of approaches to promoting parent participation in areas related to the child welfare system in low- and middle-income countries provide possible models for such involvement in child welfare. For example, an empowerment approach, which includes empowering parent groups, forms part of the World Health Organization's community-based rehabilitation strategy, with examples from many countries.⁷⁹ Self-advocacy has also been widely used in mental health and has been successfully used across seven African countries.⁸⁰

2.7 The role of advocacy

There is evidence that a wide range of advocacy for parents is important in their encounters with the child welfare system. In the UK, a study of the Family Rights Group, which is staffed by highly qualified lawyers, social workers and people with comparable experience, showed many improvements in outcomes and engagement with child protection professionals. Both parents and social workers felt the experience of the child protection system had improved through access to this professional parent advocacy.⁸¹ An earlier English study that interviewed parents, advocates and social workers found that parents

wanted advice at an early stage from someone knowledgeable and independent of the child protection system, because, "those whose children were the subject of child protection inquiries experienced enormous stress, anxiety and fear about what might happen. This was exacerbated by a sense of isolation, and ignorance about the process in which they were involved".⁸²

Similarly, parents with an intellectual disability were found to benefit from professional advocates in the child protection system in the UK⁸³ and Australia. The Australian study states:

*Parents felt powerlessness as they navigated a bewildering child protection and court system that had prejudged them unfit to parent. This compounded the grief and loss of child removal. The advocate played a critical role in creating a bridge between parents and professionals. This helped to build parents' skills and confidence and improve the disability awareness of professionals.*⁸⁴

In all these programs professional advocates carried out tasks that were similar to those undertaken by parent advocates in the programs discussed later in this paper.

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- 79 Chapal Khasnabis, Motsch K. Heinicke, K. Achu, K. Al Jubah, S. Brodtkorb, P. Chervin, P. Coleridge et al. "Community-based rehabilitation: CBR guidelines." (2010).
- 80 Sharon Kleintjes, Crick Lund, and Leslie Swartz. "Organising for self-advocacy in mental health: experiences from seven African countries." *African Journal of Psychiatry* 16, no. 3 (2013): 187-195.
- 81 Brid Featherstone and Claire Fraser. "I'm just a mother. I'm nothing special, they're all professionals': parental advocacy as an aid to parental engagement." *Child & Family Social Work* 17, no. 2 (2012): 244-253.
- Brid Featherstone, Claire Fraser, Cathy Ashley, and Pam Ledward. "Advocacy for parents and carers involved with children's services: Making a difference to working in partnership." *Child & Family Social Work* 16, no. 3 (2011): 266-275.
- 82 Bridget Lindley, Martin Richards, and Pam Freeman. "Advice and advocacy for parents in child protection cases-what is happening in current practice." *Child & Fam. LQ* 13 (2001): 175.
- 83 Beth Tarleton. "Specialist advocacy services for parents with learning disabilities involved in child protection proceedings." *British Journal of Learning Disabilities* 36, no. 2 (2008): 134-139.
- 84 Susan Collings, Margaret Spencer, Angela Dew, and Leanne Dowse. "She was there if I needed to talk or to try and get my point across': Specialist advocacy for parents with intellectual disability in the Australian child protection system." *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 24, no. 2 (2018): 162.

3 PARENT ADVOCACY

3.1 What is parent advocacy?

Parent advocacy is a form of peer advocacy where parents who themselves have had experience of the child welfare system help other parents involved to navigate it. In addition, they also help to develop strategies to change the system. Parent advocacy takes many forms, as shown below. It can be referred to by different names, including peer advocates, parent mentors, peer mentors, consumers, partner, alumni, activist, coach, buddy, leader, family coaches, family leaders, life-trained paraprofessionals, birthparent-to-birthparent mentors and veteran.⁸⁵

The aim of this form of advocacy is to empower parents and help them assert their rights and their children's rights. In particular, it:

- Safeguards parents who are vulnerable and discriminated against;
- Empowers parents enabling them to express their views and make their own decisions;
- Enables parents to gain access to information, explore and understand their options;
- Brings parents with similar experiences together to increase their influence and power to organize for change.

Parent advocacy covers three areas:

- **Case advocacy:** This promotes parent participation in decisions regarding their own involvement with child welfare systems.

It includes providing advocacy when removing a child from a parent's custody is under consideration; playing a role in the development of a case/family support plan; and making ongoing decisions on a child's care (such as health care or education).

- **Program advocacy:** This includes parents working as trained parent advocates in child welfare agencies (such as prevention, family support, out-of-home placement and legal assistance) to design, plan, evaluate and strengthen the program and to assist parents who are struggling to raise their children safely or to be reunited with them.
- **Policy advocacy:** This involves parents:
 - a) acting politically to change policy, legislation and resources for family support;
 - b) participating in governmental and NGO advisory boards, speaking on panels at conferences, teaching in classes of social work and law, writing about their experience and recommendations; and c) working at the grassroots and community levels to organize and advocate for change.

3.2 The history of parent advocacy in child welfare

In New Zealand the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act* in 1989, based on traditional Maori practices, created a process called the family group conference (FGC), which soon spread around the world. Unlike other locations,

⁸⁵ J.L. Damman. *Birth Parent Involvement at a System Level in Child Welfare: Exploring the Perspectives of Birth Parents in Parent Partner Programs 2018* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas). p.29 and Mary Ivec. "A necessary engagement: An international review of parent and family engagement in child protection." *Anglicare Tasmania*, (2013): 35.

however, the New Zealand context included an additional legal requirement. During the initial child safety conference to determine whether a child can remain safely within the family or needs to be removed from parental custody, families participate in the FGCs, and relatives and friends of the family have an opportunity to take responsibility for their loved ones. The FGC brings together family support networks—parents, children, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors and close family friends—to make important decisions about the care of children that might otherwise be made by professionals or the court.⁸⁶ Although these conferences are not a panacea for the vast power inequality that parents experience when they enter the child welfare system, they are a systemwide acknowledgement that families should be supported in using their strengths to solve their own challenges.

In the early 1990s, soon after the New Zealand model of Family Group Conferencing spread globally to include parents, extended family members and friends in initial case decisions, a broad-based reform movement developed in New York City. It was led in part by parents with child welfare experience to increase the role and power of parents in child welfare decisions, not only at the case level but to work in child welfare programs and to influence child welfare policy in general.⁸⁷ The movement in New York was based on an alliance between parents and their allies (social workers, lawyers, administrators

and foundation officers), using a multi-pronged, long-term approach, with both a top-down and bottom-up strategy, working within child welfare and pushing from outside of the system. This movement created a countervailing force within New York's child welfare system that contributed to dramatic changes, including a reduction in the number of children in out-of-home care from almost 50,000 in 1992 to fewer than 8,000 in 2020.⁸⁸ [Box 3 on page 22](#) provides a short history of the developments in New York City.

Models of parent advocacy that developed in New York City later spread across the United States for several reasons. First, the social welfare community recognized that parent participation improves outcomes. And second, parent advocacy reduced the number of children in care, saving government resources. More recently, the movement for parent advocacy has begun in other high-income countries, including England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, Finland, Norway and Canada.⁸⁹

The Birth Parent National Network, which works with and supports parent advocacy groups across the United States, maintains a compendium of parent advocacy organizations. Although many additional groups have arisen since the compendium was updated in 2017, it lists 60 parent advocacy groups in the United States alone.⁹⁰ Research for this paper identified over 100 parent advocacy programs supporting parents and policy reform in child welfare systems in

86 <https://www.iirp.edu/defining-restorative/5-3-family-group-conference-fgc-or-family-group-decision-making-fgdm>

87 D. Tobis. *From Pariahs to Partners: How Parents and Their Allies Changed New York City's Child Welfare System*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2013.

88 "Keeping track. New York: City Limits Community Information Service." *Child Welfare Watch* (1) Spring 1997: 7. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/data-policy.page>

89 Other countries also include parent participation. In Netherlands, for example, child protection legislation includes Family Group Conferencing; no child can be placed out of the family without it. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1077559518808221>

90 Birth Parent National Network. *Parent Partnership Compendium of Organizations*. National Alliance Children's Trust and Prevention Funds. 2017.

high-income countries. In low- and middle-income countries, parents are still largely excluded from a significant role in child welfare decision-making, though some parent advocacy is emerging.

Parents with child welfare experience in some parts of these high-income countries have begun to play a role, both to help individual parents and to change child welfare systems. In the United States, some parent advocacy initiatives are campaigning to create a political climate that prioritizes investments in strengthening families and communities, and also reduces the likelihood of child removal and ultimately of child welfare involvement all together. The role of parent advocates in the passage of the 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act by the U.S. Congress is one example of these efforts.⁹¹

Parent advocates are working to ensure parents' rights are respected, their needs and their children's needs are met, and that fewer children are removed from their custody. These goals

are reached by increasing parent participation in child welfare decisions at the case, program and policy levels. Pressure from parents push for political reforms that support families and strengthen communities, particularly those that are overrepresented in the child welfare system.

Many challenges confront the expansion of parent advocacy in child welfare. These include: prejudice among social workers, administrators, government officials, the media and the general public who often demonize and blame parents rather than see them in their full humanity as people who are struggling to care for their children with limited resources and few options; fear of reprisals among child welfare-involved parents if they criticize any aspect of the child welfare system; and the functioning of child welfare systems which can be punitive rather than supportive, remedial rather than preventive and are inadequately funded to address the needs of struggling families.

BOX 3: ORIGINS OF PARENT ADVOCACY IN NEW YORK CITY

New York City was the first jurisdiction globally in which parents became advocates and activists to reform the child welfare system. In the early 1990s parents and their allies created a movement that brought about significant changes. The movement was aided by the Child Welfare Fund (CWF) that supported the participation of parents and their allies in child welfare decisions. New York became an example of reform that parents, NGOs and

government agencies in other jurisdictions have looked to as they explore involving parents in child welfare decisions.

STAGES OF THE PARENTS MOVEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY

The parents' movement in New York City evolved in four stages.⁹² The first was from 1994–2001, a period of protest when parents were outsiders.

91 Testimony of Sandra Killett. August 4, 2015. U.S. Senate Committee on Finance Hearing "A Way Back Home: Preserving Families and Reducing the Need for Foster Care". <https://www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04aug2015-KillettTestimony.pdf>

92 D. Tobis, *Parents organizing a grassroots movement to reform child welfare. The Routledge Handbook of Critical Social Work*. Edited by Stephen A. Webb. (London: Routledge, 2019): 284-286.

Organizing through the Child Welfare Organizing Project and People United for Children, among other groups, they agitated and demonstrated on the streets outside of the system. This is the period when parents were pariahs, demonized and not part of the decision-making process, either on their own cases, or in shaping public policy or programs.

The second phase between 2002 and 2012 was a period of collaboration between Parent Advocates and the city's child welfare system. Slowly, as the city became more responsive to the pleas and demands of parents and their allies, the movement and the main grassroots parent advocacy organization, the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP), shifted to collaborating with the city's child welfare agency, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS).

For example:

- ACS created the Parent Advisory Working Group which met with the commissioner to advise on problems parents confronted and to present recommendations.⁹³
- Parents were employed to work in ACS and foster care agencies.
- Parent advocates from CWOP attended Initial Child Safety Conferences in one community

The third phase, from 2012 till 2014 was a period of institutionalization of reforms which has had some remarkable developments:

- The executive director of CWOP became head of ACS's Office of Advocacy and as of 2020 remains in that position.⁹⁴
- The editor of the Child Welfare Watch, a publication which wrote analytic reports that severely criticized ACS, became Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Planning at ACS and as of 2020 remains in that position.⁹⁵
- ACS contracted with two agencies to deploy parents with child welfare or similar experience to attend all Initial Child Safety Conferences, 10,000 last year.⁹⁶
- Parents write for Rise (risemagazine.org) that is read by parents and child welfare workers to learn the experience of parents and to read their recommendations.
- Parents work in government-funded interdisciplinary legal teams to ensure the perspective of parents is heard and they receive the services to which they are entitled. A recent study found these teams reduced by 9 months the length of stay of children in care, saving the city \$40 million per year.⁹⁷

The fourth phase, the current period, is a time with diminished parent organizing and slippage in the system with increased frustration and agitation because of increased CPS involvement in families' lives, though the number of children in care continues to be fewer than 8,000.

93 Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Letter from Viviane deMilly, Director, office of advocacy, and Tanya Krupat, consortium co-coordinator, Division of foster care & preventive services, December 2, 2003.

94 Administration for Children's Services (ACS). (2017, Oct. 15, 2017). Administration for Children's Services Organizational Chart. Retrieved at: http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/org_chart/OrgChart.pdf

95 Ibid.

96 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. "Family group decision-making: Parent Advocates in New York City." 2017. Retrieved at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-welfare-podcast-fgdm-parent-advocates>; NYC Children's Services. "Initial Child Safety Conference (ICSC)." 2017. Retrieved from: <https://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/TrainingNetwork/InfoReq/SafetyPlans/ICSCBrochureNY.pdf>

97 L.A. Gerber, Y.C. Pang, T. Ross, et al. "Effects of an interdisciplinary approach to parental representation in child welfare." *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilcyouth.2019.04.022>

3.3 Who are the parent advocates?

Parent advocacy is carried out by parents with child welfare experience. These parents have been involved with the child welfare system either through having a child placed in alternative care or through having a child who was the subject of a child protection investigation. Parents are the experts of their own lives. Most parents involved in child welfare systems, certainly in high-income countries, are single mothers, often victims of domestic violence, often people of color, ethnic minorities, refugees or immigrants⁹⁸ who love their children, lack the resources to adequately care for them, often are isolated and face overwhelming challenges of poverty and racism. They are often charged with neglecting their children in ways that are confused with poverty.⁹⁹

In the case studies described below, some of these mothers, and a few fathers, have had children removed from their care, changed their lives, often been reunited with their children and then have been trained to be parent advocates. They have then gone on to be advocates for other parents who are going through what they went through.

The following five stories represent situations in high-income countries in which children were removed from their parents' home. Some of the mothers permanently lost custody of their children. Others were reunited with their children after long and painful struggles. Most became

advocates or writers to help other parents avoid the pain they experienced.

Four of the stories are written by parents themselves; one is written by a journalist. Four of the mothers chose to use their full names; one chose to use only her first name. Although these stories are common, they are drawn from only three countries and do not represent the full range of reasons for removal, or the range of outcomes for either the children or the parents. Nevertheless, these stories reflect the pain that parents experience, the possibility that families could have been helped without removing a child, and the fact that parents had little if any influence. In fact, they were most often disregarded in the decisions that were made about their lives and their family's well-being.



98 E.g. in Australia see Scott; and David Thorpe. "Policing minority child-rearing practices in Australia." *Child Protection and Family Support: Tensions, Contradictions and Possibilities*. (2002): 59. In the UK Paul Bywaters, Geraldine Brady, Tim Sparks, and Elizabeth Bos. "Inequalities in child welfare intervention rates: The intersection of deprivation and identity." *Child & Family Social Work* 21, no. 4 (2016): 452-463. In the U.S. see Kim et al; in New Zealand see Rouland and Vaithianathan; in Canada see Trocmé, Nico, Della Knoke, and Cindy Blackstock. "Pathways to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in Canada's child welfare system." *Social Service Review* 78, no. 4 (2004): 577-600. For migrants see Ann Laquer Estin. "Child migrants and child welfare: Toward a best interests approach." *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.* 17 (2018): 589.

99 P. Bywaters, L. Bunting, G. Davidson, J. Hanratty, W. Mason, C. McCartan, and N. Steils. *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York. 2016.



UNITED STATES

Dinah Ortiz-Adames previously worked at the Bronx Defenders, NYC, as a Parent Advocate Supervisor. She is now a consultant on child welfare.¹⁰⁰

[For the seven years that child welfare was involved with my family], there was no part of my life that wasn't picked over by the system.

I was residing in a family shelter with my 2, 4, and 6-year old boys when it happened. I never denied the use of drugs, but I did deny that I was a horrible parent because of it. After my family was separated, I had countless new workers dictating what I should do, when and how to do it. I found an apartment, a job and attended another drug program and parenting class and anger management.

My children's doctors knew who ACS [Administration for Children's Services, the government child welfare agency] was and why they were in my life. Workers went to every shelter I stayed in to speak with case planners. When I tried to go back to school, the caseworker introduced herself to my advisor.

I had never felt so degraded in my life.

Every court appearance was an insult to my boys and me. The workers, who were allowed to speak as experts about my family, gave misinformation that was accepted without question. I was silenced into submission, not allowed to speak up about what my family needed.

Now I work as a parent advocate supervisor at The Bronx Defenders, a holistic family defense practice. I have helped hundreds of families maneuver the system.

We must remember that no parent, in any community, is perfect. And that parents have intrinsic value to their children. Those bonds must be respected in communities like mine, just as they are in more privileged communities.

I urge parents affected by the system to get involved in the parent advocacy movement. To speak up and speak out and to work alongside all other advocates to create the change they want to see. There is no better voice than that of a parent who has experienced it firsthand.

Rebecca Mohammed is a writer for Rise. She lives in NYC.¹⁰¹

My childhood was painful. My mother died when I was 7. One day she went into the hospital, never to come back out. I learned to fight so that older children wouldn't mess with me. To survive in foster care, I tried to hide feelings from myself.

When my son was born, he went to live with my sister from birth. I went into treatment to give myself a chance at life, and I was clean for 10 years. But I did not open up fully in treatment, and I relapsed. Eventually ACS removed my daughter. That day I thought I was going to die right on the spot.

I couldn't hide from myself anymore if I wanted to bring my daughter home. But the first treatment program I went to was dirty and disgusting. The second had a lot of active addicts. My caseworker would not hear that I really needed a different kind of program.

For 18 months I was visiting my daughter but not making progress on my case. Believe me, my case planner and I had clashes. Finally, the agency's parent advocate took me to the side and we talked. Then she [sent me to a program just for women.] When I went there, I realized that was just what I needed. What made the biggest difference was being believed. Unlike when I was a child, I could speak up, and my words finally had power.

¹⁰⁰ This story appeared in Rise's Parent Advocacy Issue, winter 2019.

¹⁰¹ This story appeared in Rise's Parent Advocacy Issue, Winter 2019.



UNITED STATES (continued)

Samantha Johnson is a writer for Rise. She lives in Kentucky.¹⁰²

On August 25, 2015, I experienced a parent's worst nightmare. I arrived at my daughter's bus stop to pick her up only to find out she was not on it. It's a horrible feeling not knowing where your child is. Then one of my daughter's friends said that she had left school with two adults.

I called the school and learned that the Department for Families and Children of Lexington, Kentucky had taken her. I called the office but did not get an answer or a return call that day, or the next. . . . It took almost two weeks for anyone from social services to contact me. I was told they didn't have my number.

When I finally spoke to a social worker. . . I was being accused of neglect. Someone had reported that I did not have adequate housing and had been homeless and that I was on drugs.

A social worker had come to visit me three months earlier to investigate a similar report.

At the time, my daughter and I were living in a hotel. The worker said it was a drug-infested area. But she also said that if I kept my daughter safe and obtained adequate housing, they wouldn't take her. There was no further mention of drug use. On the phone with the new worker, I thought: "If it's about me not being able to support my child, why not help me? If drugs were such an issue, why not help me get treatment? Why go behind my back and take my child?"

[When my daughter was in foster care], I worked my

case plan and tried to stabilize my life. But as soon as I would get close to completing my services, I'd get knocked down. Domestic violence was never an issue in my life, yet DV classes were thrown into my plan. Then in August 2016, almost a year after my daughter was taken, the caseworker changed the goal from reunification to adoption. I was taking too long to finish my service plan. I was devastated.

She also told me that I would have a better chance if I moved back to Lexington for drug tests, so I gave up my home and moved. For weeks I was broke, homeless and hungry. I took a third shift job at McDonald's, but I couldn't win. I had to have adequate housing and be able to support my child without help. But I made \$7.25 an hour and I might get 20 hours a week. My check was garnished \$86.34 for child support to pay for my daughter in foster care. So I was left with like \$50. It was an endless cycle.

[Eventually they terminated my parental rights.] Since then, memories of my daughter flash through my head, her laughter, her hugs. I hear myself screaming in anger and I drop to my knees bawling. She's gone.

I'm not waving the white flag, though. My attorney filed a motion to vacate the decision and I was granted a "supplemental TPR [Termination of Parental Rights] hearing," where I will be allowed to provide evidence that I complied with my service plan, am clean and sober, and capable of raising my child. I have no idea what will happen. But I will go to the edge of the earth to fight for my daughter.

102 This story appeared in the Rise issue, The Price of Parenting While Poor, Fall 2017.



AUSTRALIA

Helen Eason is an Aboriginal mother in New South Wales (NSW), Australia.¹⁰³

Helen had her baby son Tyson removed by the Department of Family and Community Services in January 2014. Tyson was Helen's fourth child put into care. *"I had an older boy, I'd fought for, for seven years", Helen says. "I'd already had kids in care. So when it came to Tyson - as it always goes when you have other kids in care - they feel like they have the right to just come in and take more kids if they want". In the past she had challenges with drug addiction, but Helen says that there was no risk in Tyson's instance. "They had no grounds to come and take Tyson, there wasn't risk or anything like that, but because the other kids were gone it was just... how it is."*

Australia had federal and state governmental legislation and practice from about 1905 to 1967 that required the removal of "half-caste" (mixed-race) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to prevent the contamination of Caucasian culture and race and to promote the destruction of indigenous culture and race. These removals, known as the "Stolen Generations" continued into at least the 1970s. The national government apologized in 1999 for the policy that created stolen children but the vestiges of that policy and practice remain;

Aboriginal children are overrepresented in the out-of-home population by at least 10 times, there is an extremely high rate of second, third and fourth generation children being removed after one child has been taken from a family.¹⁰⁴ Contributing to these removals is a specific clause in the Act in NSW which changes the evidence that the court requires when there is already a child of that parent in the system. The burden of proof shifts from the department to the parent. In addition, since Australia's 1997 "Bringing Them Home" report (the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families), the disproportionality of removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has increased.¹⁰⁵

Helen's mother, Aunty Hazel Collins, has organized Grandmothers Against Removal to prevent Aboriginal children from continuing to be a stolen generation. Aunty Hazel says: *"They don't only take the children from the parents as such, they take them from the whole family, and the community... Kids shouldn't have to be ripped out of their mother's arms, driven away in a car and put with complete strangers, and then - what? - it's 'goodbye' for 18 years?"*¹⁰⁶

103 This story is excerpted from an article in NITV. "The women fighting against a rising tide of indigenous child removals." <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/feature/women-fighting-against-rising-tide-indigenous-child-removals>

104 Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. "The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, Bringing them home." 1997. https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/submissions_un_hr_committee/6_stolen_generations.pdf

105 <https://www.familymatters.org.au/the-issue/>; <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/child-protection>

106 The Women Fighting Against the Rising Tide of Child Removal. NITV, accessed November 5, 2019: <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/feature/women-fighting-against-rising-tide-indigenous-child-removals>



SCOTLAND

Louise is an active member and trustee of Parent Advocacy and Rights (PAR). She writes for the PAR magazine and speaks at PAR events about her experience and the need for child welfare reform.

I cannot get over the image of my older daughter's little hand pressed against the window of the police car driving her away or the memory of my younger daughter freezing at the threshold of our front door and being physically lifted over it by the social worker who was basically abducting her. Even now, with both girls out of care at last, I don't think any of us will ever recover from what we went through.

Both girls have been returned to me but I don't know how either child is going to heal and become again the happy, well-adjusted girls that they were before I so stupidly and naively asked social work to come into our lives to carry out an assessment of my older daughter who has autism with a view to securing some help when I became a single parent after I separated from my husband, the girls' father.

The social worker who removed the girls did so on the basis that according to her I was mentally ill and was emotionally abusing my older daughter by providing her with books and information about autism when she did not, at that point, have a formal diagnosis of autism.

I was never mentally ill. My own doctor said that she had no concerns about my mental health, but this view was dismissed by the social worker. A psychiatrist and two psychologists assessed me and cleared me of any mental disorder other than anxiety and trauma directly resulting from having my children removed from my care.

My older daughter had by then been given a working diagnosis of autism. This was refused by the social worker on the basis that it was not a full and formal diagnosis. I therefore obtained a formal diagnosis from a private autism consultant. This was refused on the basis that I had paid for it. A formal diagnosis of autism was finally made by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). This, they had to accept. It did not, however, result in an apology, any kind of retraction on what had been done (removing both girls on the basis that I was fabricating and inducing autism as an excuse for what the social worker alleged was

the result of my poor parenting - despite my being an approved adoptive parent).

Instead, both girls were kept in care, separated from each other for over 10 months and kept away from our wider family. My younger daughter was summarily removed from the school she attended with my older daughter and placed in another, closer to the home of her foster carer, with no notice to me or her sister. Both girls suffered terribly from the loss of each other on top of the loss of their mother.

At every stage, the word of the social worker was taken above mine. She alleged that my daughter was out of my control and a danger to her little sister. The reality was we were dealing with undiagnosed autism and a terrified little girl whose desperate need for predictability and routine in her home - her safe place - was being violated daily by the people claiming to be protecting her.

I hope one day to become an advocacy worker to support others who find themselves faced with the might and unstoppable momentum of the Scottish child protection machine. In my experience, my voice as a mother and the voices of my children were absolutely not heard or believed. I came to be viewed with suspicion by school and health workers because the social worker was telling them all she had concerns about what was going on in the home. The words CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS were enough to cow every participant.

Parents are shattered and devastated when their children are removed. They are at their very weakest at the point when they need to be at their strongest to fight for their children. I could hardly open my eyes, let alone speak for weeks, and then I could not speak without falling apart in floods of tears. It took every iota of strength I possessed to actually stay alive and not kill myself during the time I was apart from my children. Only the knowledge that I could never ever add bereavement to what they already had to cope with kept me from ending my own life. I was so incredibly lucky to have the unshakable support of my loving family and circle of close friends and the advice of an eminent independent social worker, without whom I know with sickening certainty both my girls would still be in care. Most parents are not so fortunate.

3.4 What do parent advocates do?

Parent advocacy can take many forms. Parent advocates work in child welfare agencies, support individual parents and families and work to change child welfare systems through grassroots organizing, public speaking, teaching and writing, and legislative and policy advocacy, and work to change the underlying social conditions that contribute to child welfare involvement (see [Box 1 on page 4](#) for parent advocacy and the three areas it covers).

Sometimes advocates are individuals who, because of their own experience, have set up a service on their own or with a group of others to help others in their situation. For example, Scots mums guide to safeguarding and child protection is a website¹⁰⁷ set up by an individual to offer advice, support and limited advocacy to parents involved in the Scottish child protection system and is similar to Safeguarding Survivor, whose service are described in the review of programs (see [Program Survey 2](#)). Similarly, there are groups of parents who

campaign, offer support, and sometimes provide individual advocacy, often around a single issue. For example, Flightback offers support in the UK for those accused of Fabricated or Induced Illness (also known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy or medical child abuse).¹⁰⁸

Another type of advocacy which is seldom covered in academic writing is grassroots organizing in which parents and their allies organize to become a countervailing force to bring about change. [Box 3 on page 22](#) shows how parents and their allies in New York City organized to reform one of the United States' largest and most troubled child welfare systems.

The literature on parent advocacy rarely covers individuals or informal groups and is more concerned with established programs working alongside or within the system, with most of these being in the U.S.

PROGRAM SURVEY 2: SAFEGUARDING SURVIVOR

Safeguarding Survivor was established in England in 2015 after a mother had one of her children removed from her custody. The mother began writing about her experience and then began assisting and advocating on behalf of other parents going through the system. The project is unfunded, has no staff except for the mother, and is not incorporated. The parent, through her website, guides parents and their families through the child protection process based on her own knowledge and experience, providing advice, support and links to other agencies. She

also speaks at conferences and provides training which brings together parents and new social workers. Her work contributed to the creation of an advisory committee to a local Child Protection Council. She works to encourage social workers and parents to work together for the best interests of the whole family. She is now working to launch a United Kingdom parent advocacy network and the International Parent Advocacy Network to ensure parents and their families have a voice in child protection proceedings.

107 <http://thescottishmumsguidetosafeguarding.blogspot.com/>

108 <https://www.facebook.com/flightback/>

In the **Parent Partners Program**, for example, advocates are described as “life trained paraprofessionals” (i.e. those who have successfully negotiated the child welfare system).¹⁰⁹

*A parent partner is a parent who has successfully navigated the child welfare system, is interested in working with other parents to help them be successful, and is able to reach out to other parents while maintaining appropriate boundaries.*¹¹⁰

Many parents involved in the child welfare system had substance use or alcohol problems and advocacy can help parents overcome these problems. Criteria were set for parents to be employed as advocates/mentors to ensure they had overcome their own problems. They had to:

*“... be sober and have their child welfare cases closed for at least 1–2 years prior to serving as peer mentors. As one family member noted, ‘Seventy or 80 percent of us are recovering addicts or alcoholics. I definitely say a year of sobriety [is needed] before starting as a [peer mentor]... We’re addicts; we shouldn’t be trying to help other people get clean and through the court system, and bring up all those emotions when we’re just trying to get clean ourselves... Some people might relapse or get overwhelmed from that... Get your life together first and then you can help other people’.”*¹¹¹



A summary of several research papers reported that parent advocates:

- Help birth parents understand child welfare and legal system policies and procedures, support and navigate the process, and focus on goals they need to achieve on their path to reunification with their children;
- Educate birth parents about their rights and responsibilities, refer them to appropriate social services, and model attitudes and sets of behaviours that may lead to empowerment, healthy families and reunification.

109 Kemp et al, 2009.

110 M. Marcenko, L. Orlando, S. Barkan, and M. Orme. “Evaluation of the Parent to Parent Program, Pierce County, Washington: Final Report.” Seattle, WA: University of Washington, School of Social Work, Partners for Our Children (2009). p. 30.

111 Erin Williamson and Aracelis Gray. “New roles for families in child welfare: Strategies for expanding family involvement beyond the case level.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, no. 7 (2011): 1214.

Within child welfare agencies they play the “critical role of a mediator between CPS and birth parents; an advocate for parental rights; an educator to birth parents about their rights, systems, services and resources as well as to CPS workers about parents’ needs and feelings; and a supporter of birth parents as they navigate the system and take steps towards reunification.”¹¹²

3.5 Program models for parent advocacy

The **Capacity Building Center for States (CBCS)**¹¹³ describes three program models used in the context of the child welfare system in the U.S.:

1. Parent advocates as Child Welfare Agency Staff:

In this model parents are directly employed by the child welfare agency. The CBCS describes this approach as follows:

As staff, parent partners help support other agency staff by exploring service options tailored to parents’ needs, encouraging staff to be family centered, and engaging families. Deeply embedded in all decision-making processes, parent partners encourage staff to use practices that reflect respect for families’ voices and choices. This model facilitates the matching of parent partners with parents entering child welfare and needing support.

2. Parent Advocates Contracted by Non-profit Organizations

In this model the state contracts with a non-profit organization to provide a parent advocacy service. This is described as follows:

Parent partners are either employed or contracted by the nonprofit organization, which implements processes for building relationships between the child welfare workers and the parent partners. Parent partners are compensated for their work with parents, including attending family team meetings, court hearings, and one-on-one meetings. Parent partners also sit at child welfare decision-making tables and create relationships with child welfare administrators, agency workers, service providers, court personnel, and community representatives.

3. Parent Advocates as Legal Aid Staff

In the U.S.’s highly legalistic systems, many parent advocates are employed as part of a legal aid agency and work with its staff. This is described as:

... a comprehensive approach to addressing the legal and child protection issues that families face with the goal of preventing or ending a child’s placement in foster care. Under this model, a multidisciplinary team is created consisting of attorneys, social workers, and parent partners. This model helps address the needs of families who have legal problems that put their children at risk for out-of-home placement and may not have resources to pay for legal services.

112 Marina Lalayants. “Partnership between child protective services and parent representatives.” *Child & Family Social Work* 22 (2017): 41 – 42.

113 Capacity Building Center for States. *Parent Partner Program Navigator: Designing and implementing parent partner programs in child welfare*. Washington, DC: Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016): 22-23.

PROGRAM SURVEY 3: ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ACS)

ACS is the New York City government's child welfare agency. ACS has supported and promoted parent advocacy since the early 2000s. ACS's current parent advocacy activities include: the ACS commissioner established a parent advisory group which advises the leadership of ACS. Two parent advocates with child welfare experience are full-time, salaried employees in the ACS office of advocacy. ACS contracts with two NGOs to deploy 70 parent advocates to participate in about 10,000 initial child safety conferences per year. An evaluation of this program when it was a pilot project found that "rates of foster care/remand as an initial recommendation decreased from 2013 to 2016 and that children remained at home at higher

rates." Most recently ACS will require all foster care agencies which contracts with ACS to hire parent advocates to work with families with children in care. Preventive service contracts will include two budget lines for each agency for Parent Advocates/Case Aids.

ACS has piloted a program to integrate parent advocates into follow-up conferences after the initial child safety conference, with ten hours of work by parent advocates after the initial child safety conference. Parent advocates now are trained alongside of child protection personnel to have a shared understanding of policies and procedures.

The **Administration for Children's Services** covered in the parent advocacy survey provides an example of how these models have been developed and encouraged by a statutory agency in New York (see [Program Survey 3](#)). These models of parent advocates as paid professionals are relevant to the system in the U.S., where a market orientation to child welfare is firmly established. Even in this context other models exist, such as **Parents Anonymous** described below.

In other countries different models will need to be developed that are relevant to the way services are provided in the country or region, and resources made available for advocacy. For example, parent advocacy groups, called **Family Inclusion Networks (FIN)**, have developed differently across Australia.¹¹⁴ These range from a community work approach to one network

which employs professional staff providing direct casework to some parents. In addition, FIN networks have telephone advice lines and provide information from a parent and family perspective online.

3.6 National and international parent advocacy networks

There are also national groups promoting reform and parent advocacy in Australia, the United Kingdom and the U.S. These groups are able to advocate at a national level and are described below.

The **Family Inclusion Network of Australia**, formed in 2011, represents the state and territory FINs described above when making submissions or comments regarding child protection policy, related issues and practices to Commonwealth,

114 Frank Ainsworth and John Berger. "Family inclusive child protection practice: The history of the family inclusion network and beyond." *Children Australia* 39, no. 2 (2014): 60.

State or Territory governments or the media. It is an umbrella network of member **Family Inclusion Networks (FINs)** in states and territories of Australia, supporting and advocating for parents, families and community when children are involved in the child protection system. FIN of Australia has no funding and is dependent on participation resourcing by member organizations. State and Territory FINs actively operate in the states of Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria (see below for a description of individual FINs).

In Scotland, **Parents Advocacy and Rights (PAR)** is a national parent-led group seeking to support parents with children in the care system, as well

as through children's hearings, child protection investigations, and other situations where they have lost care of their children, or risk losing care.¹¹⁵ They are a group of parents and allies who offer peer support advice and advocacy to parents and families who need help to be heard and respected. They also campaign on child protection policy and practice at the regional and national level and provide their own journal (<https://parparentsadvocacyrights.com/par-magazine/>).

Across the UK the **Parents, Families and Allies Network (PFAN)** works to promote principles of social justice and human rights in social work interventions of family life. It was formed in October 2019 and currently has around a hundred members. It campaigns on parent advocacy and social justice issues in the child protection system (<https://www.pfan.uk/>).

In the United States, the **Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)** works to promote and champion parents as leaders and strategic partners in prevention of family separation and child welfare systems reform (see [Program Survey 4 on page 34](#)).¹¹⁶ BPNN, with hundreds of individual parents and organizational members, organizes webinars and virtual convenings on parent advocacy in child welfare, provides training materials and supports national and local legislative reform to improve child welfare systems in the United States. BPNN is a program of the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, which works to support all families and surround them with supportive communities, services and systems (<https://ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn/>).



115 PAR (undated) *About* <https://parparentsadvocacyrights.com/about/>

116 Damman, 2018.

PROGRAM SURVEY 4: BIRTH PARENT NATIONAL NETWORK (BPNN)

The Birth Parent National Network was established in 2013 in the United States, with support from Casey Family Programs “to promote and champion parents as leaders and strategic partners in prevention and child welfare systems reform.” BPNN is a network of 49 parent advocacy organizations nationwide which focuses on raising awareness with policy makers on challenges families face and how services can be designed that benefit children and families. It reports having a large impact on introducing policy changes at local and national levels, speaking at events, conducting webinars and involving parents at every level of decision-making in and around child welfare. BPNN was instrumental in promoting the voice of parents for the successful passage of the Family First legislation in 2018. BPNN

has extensive training materials for service providers and parents on practice and policy issues. It also seeks to promote research on parent advocacy.

Globally, the International Parent Advocacy Network (IPAN, <https://www.parentadvocacy.net>) was established in 2018 in Edinburgh, Scotland and is incorporated in the United States. IPAN aims to increase the influence and power of parents effected by child protective systems. Parents and their allies from the United States, England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Norway and other countries are working together with IPAN to change child protection systems. IPAN works to empower parents around the world so that their views are heard and listened to and their rights protected.¹¹⁷

117 IPAN, in collaboration with Rise Magazine in October 2020 will release a parent advocacy toolkit on-line that provides links to stories, videos and reports for individuals and organizations to develop parent advocacy programs.

3.7 Different forms of parent advocacy

Parents with child welfare experience are involved in helping other parents with child welfare decision-making and activities in many different ways.

3.7.1 CASE LEVEL

Case level advocacy takes a number of forms, including:

CASE ADVOCACY

In the UK and other countries there are self-help groups run by parents who support parents in the child protection system. Some provide online materials, others give support over the telephone and some provide advocacy during social work meetings and in the courts. This review found

little published on informal case advocacy, but there is an extensive and growing research base on programs of support discussed in the section below on program level interventions. Parents also accompany other parents to family group conferences and family team meetings.

SUPPORT, MUTUAL AID AND EMPOWERMENT GROUPS

A number of groups provide support, mutual aid and empowerment. These do not necessarily provide direct support in case meetings, but they are parent led and involve learning from other parents with child welfare experience.

Parents Anonymous® is a long-standing group providing a range of services aimed at family strengthening. Parents Anonymous® groups

offer a weekly support group for parents and caregivers and also provide a separate group for their children. Parent leaders work within this self-help group to deal with any problems brought by parents, including their involvement in the child welfare system. These groups are not purely self-help and are described as follows:

*Parents Anonymous® groups are ongoing, open to anyone in a parenting role (there are no eligibility criteria), and operated in shared leadership jointly led by a trained Parent Group Leader and Group Facilitator . . . A central precept of Parents Anonymous® is the belief that parents are in the best position to help other parents and, in so doing, also help themselves.*¹¹⁸

In a similar vein, in Canada there are examples of parent groups supporting each other, although such support did not specifically include direct advocacy in child welfare meetings. Three parent mutual aid organizations (PMAO) were set up for parents involved in child welfare. Research compared outcomes of families served by these organizations with other matched groups receiving treatment as usual.¹¹⁹

Data were collected from PMAO and comparison samples over a three-year period to assess changes in out-of-home child placement, independence from formal service providers, integration in the community, levels of perceived social support, self-esteem, perceived stress,

parental attitudes and cost savings. On all of these measures, the study revealed that PMAO members showed positive gains over the evaluation time period that were not apparent for the comparison group members receiving regular child welfare services.

HELPLINES

There are several examples of groups providing telephone helplines staffed by volunteers, including parents and their allies, through which parents may receive support, information and guidance.¹²⁰

Parents Anonymous® provides a national (U.S.) parent helpline to provide emotional support between the weekly groups.¹²¹ And in Australia Ainsworth and Berger (2014) found that some Family Inclusion Networks provided telephone helplines for those having contact with child protection services.

IN SUMMARY, CASE ADVOCACY TAKES THE FOLLOWING FORMS:

- Providing advice and guidance through telephone helplines, online materials and through social media;
- Parent advocates participate in groups where they provide advice and help to other parents in the child welfare system;
- Parent Advocates participate in a range of child welfare casework, planning and decision-making processes to ensure that parents have influence and are respected;

118 Margaret L. Polinsky, Lisa Pion-Berlin, Tanya Long, and Angela M. Wolf. "Parents Anonymous® Outcome Evaluation: Promising Findings for Child Maltreatment Reduction." *OJJDP* (2011): 34.

119 Gary Cameron and Shelly Birnie-Lefcovitch. "Parent mutual aid organizations in child welfare demonstration project: A report of outcomes." *Children and Youth Services Review* 22, no. 6 (2000): 421.

120 Ivec, 2013.

121 Polinsky et al, 2011.

- Parent Advocates provide ongoing support to parents to assist them as they respond to child welfare requirements and to ensure their concerns are heard.

3.7.2 PROGRAM LEVEL

Program advocacy occurs when parents with child-welfare experience are employed by child welfare agencies or other agencies to strengthen the program’s culture and to provide advocacy for parents involved in various parts of the welfare system in order to help, support and empower them in their contacts with child welfare.

ADVOCACY IN WELFARE AGENCIES

In the Parent Partners Program, Parent Partners are:

... contracted paid staff in a county child welfare agency, they serve as mentors by providing one-on-one support at critical moments in the parent’s interface with the child welfare system, such as court hearings, important meetings like Team Decision Making ... and when appropriate, during meetings between the parent and caseworkers. Parent Partners also serve as parent leaders, identifying and recruiting other Parent Partners, training child welfare staff on working with Parent Partners, and collaborating with agency staff in designing and improving services. In addition, many opportunities exist for Parent Partners to provide informal support outside of scheduled meetings.¹²²

122 Edward Cohen and Linda Canan. “Closer to home: Parent mentors in child welfare.” *Child Welfare-New York*- 85, no. 5 (2006): 870.

123 Williamson and Gray, (2011): 1213.

Similarly, a review of a group of programs which received funds to promote family engagement identified projects that:

... included programs at the peer level, where family members who had been involved in the child welfare system served as mentors, partners, or resource guides to help other parents navigate the system and meet their case plan goals. In general, peer mentors connected families to resources, educated family members about their rights and responsibilities, and in some communities, offered appointment and court accompaniment. Peer mentors also often attended family teaming meetings, where they provided support to family members and advocated for services on their behalf.¹²³



Photo by Fizzi events and London Borough of Camden

PROGRAM SURVEY 5: BRONX DEFENDERS (BXD)

Bronx Defenders is a not-for-profit law firm with a family defense practice to provide parents in child protective proceedings with robust, high quality legal representation. It is a legal services organization with a social justice framework. It began representing parents in child protective proceedings in 2005.

It is funded by New York City to be the institutional provider for parent representation in Bronx County. Representation is interdisciplinary, including a range of attorneys with different areas of expertise (child protection, criminal, immigration, housing), parent advocates and social workers to assist with public benefits and to provide support to parents and families. Almost 70 people work in the family defense practice, including 41 attorneys, 9 social workers and 10 parent advocates.

Although the city does not fund parent representation or parent advocacy during child welfare investigations, Bronx Defenders uses private funds to represent parents before a case is filed.

Parent advocates employed by Bronx Defenders receive extensive training, and in turn train attorneys, other advocates and child welfare personnel across the state and nation.

Bronx Defenders also works with the state legislature to modify or enact legislation to increase the rights of parents in child welfare proceedings, such as reducing the length of time a parent's name remains on the central registry of abuse, or to permit contact between children and their parents after adoption.

PARENT ADVOCACY IN LEGAL REPRESENTATION

One of the best evidenced areas is the involvement of parent advocates alongside legal attorneys and social workers in supporting families in legal representation. In 2008 the American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law was engaged to carry out research into the representation of parents in child protection proceedings in Michigan. Their report described a Parent Partner program in Wayne County that is representative of the work done by parent advocacy in the legal system in many areas:

This program pairs a parent new to the family courts with a mentor parent who has previously had a case in the court and been reunified with

his or her child[ren]. These parent partners help the parent access services, communicate with others involved in the case, and generally lend moral support to the parent. Parents who have the benefit of a parent partner had a positive experience with the program. In particular they indicated the program helped them get their 'voice heard.' Parent partners work closely with parents' attorneys to improve communication with parents and help parents access services that the parents and attorneys agree are important.¹²⁴

The report recognized the need for sweeping changes to improve parents' representation in child welfare proceedings and made a

124 ABA Center on Children and the Law. *Legal representation for parents in child welfare proceedings: A performance-based analysis of Michigan practice.* (2009): 7. https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/parentrepresentation/michigan_parent_representation_report.pdf

slew of recommendations to improve parent representation. This included that Michigan should “adopt a statewide administrative structure to address parent representation ... [to] address compensation, support systems, training, and oversight”¹²⁵ and importantly that the Wayne County Parent Partner program should be institutionalized throughout the state. The ABA Center on Children and the Law continues to campaign nationally for parent advocacy as a key element of high-quality legal representation.¹²⁶

A recent study of the Iowa Parent Partner Program provides a description of this area of advocacy and shows its success in reducing stays in care.¹²⁷ The program pairs parents whose children have been removed from their home with parents who were formerly involved with the child welfare system but achieved successful reunification. Parent Partners are allocated as soon as a child has been removed and matched as much as possible to parent partners with “... similar experiences and history, such as challenges with substance abuse, mental health problems, and domestic violence.” Involvement in the program is voluntary and, if the parent(s) accepts, a Parent Partner provides support, guidance, motivation, and hope to involved

parents. They work with social workers, legal professionals, community-based organizations, and other professionals to provide resources for the parents they are mentoring and have access to flexible funds used specifically for individualized family needs.

Similarly, the Center for Family Representation in New York represents parents involved in the child welfare system with a team consisting of a parent advocate, a social worker and an attorney. They have developed an approach aimed at speeding reunification that:

*... devotes intensive work in four areas: Placement options that support a child's connection to family and community; Service plans that are not duplicative or burdensome and that truly build on a family's strengths; Advocacy at Conferences convened by the child welfare agency and foster-care agencies to keep the case progressing; and Visiting arrangements where families separated by foster care spend as much time as possible with as little supervision as is necessary, out of an agency whenever possible and doing activities that mimic family life.*¹²⁸

125 Ibid p.8.

126 ABA Center on Children and the Law (2017). ABA National Project to improve representation for parents. http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/ParentRep/At-a-glance%20final.authcheckdam.pdf

D. Kelly D and J. Milner. “High-Quality Legal Representation is Critical to Creating a Better Child Welfare System.” *Child Law Practice Today* (July 2019). https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/january---december-2019/high-quality-legal-representation-is-critical-to-creating-a-bett/

127 Jeff M. Chambers, Sandy Lint, Maggie G. Thompson, Matthew W. Carlson, and Michelle I. Graef. “Outcomes of the Iowa Parent Partner program evaluation: Stability of reunification and re-entry into foster care.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 104 (2019); see also Gerber et al 2019.

128 Elizabeth Thornton and Betsy Gwin. “High-quality legal representation for parents in child welfare cases results in improved outcomes for families and potential cost savings.” *Fam. LQ* 46 (2012): 144.

PROGRAM SURVEY 6: JEWISH CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION (JCCA)

JCCA is a large, multi-service child welfare agency that began in 1822. It began its parent advocacy program in 2013. The **Administration for Children's Services (ACS)** contracts with JCCA to deploy 50 parent advocates (45 have child welfare experience) in initial child safety conferences that take place in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens. In these meetings parent advocates provide support, advocacy and clarity about the purpose of the initial child safety conference. Before working, JCCA parent advocates receive six, one-hour trainings on engagement, resources

and trauma, as well as monthly follow-up training, which includes secondary trauma, boundary creation and maintenance. Parent advocates are paid in different ways, depending on their position: coordinators are paid part-time, field work is paid per diem and parent advocates who work in the **Family Resource Center** receive full-time salaries.

Parent advocates also participate in committees and child welfare policy forums both within and outside of JCCA.

PARENT ADVOCACY IN CHILD SAFETY CONFERENCES

In many countries, decisions about responses to alleged abuse are made during a child safety conference.¹²⁹ A child safety conference is a meeting of family members and protection services to discuss the safety concerns with the aim of making the best decision for the child, including whether or not to apply to the court to remove the child. In the evaluation of the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP)'s parent advocacy program, during initial child safety conferences it was found that, in the control group where parents did not have a parent advocate present, families felt misunderstood by caseworkers and had little or no opportunity to voice their opinion or challenge child protective services workers' preconceived views of their problems and family needs. Similarly, parents

have been shown to experience repeated stigmatization and blame and feelings of shame through the actions of caseworkers and other professionals.¹³⁰ Parents are often unable to express their perspective and dispute the decisions that caseworkers make because of the noticeable power disparity between them and child welfare caseworkers. All of this leads to ineffective decision-making. For these reasons, parents need advocates who can:

*play a critical role of a mediator between CPS and birth parents; an advocate for parental rights; an educator to birth parents about their rights, systems, services and resources as well as to CPS workers about parents' needs and feelings; and a supporter of birth parents as they navigate the system and take steps towards reunification.*¹³¹

129 Different terms are used. For example, in England it's called a child protection conference.

130 Smithson and Gibson, 2017; Kemp et al 2009.

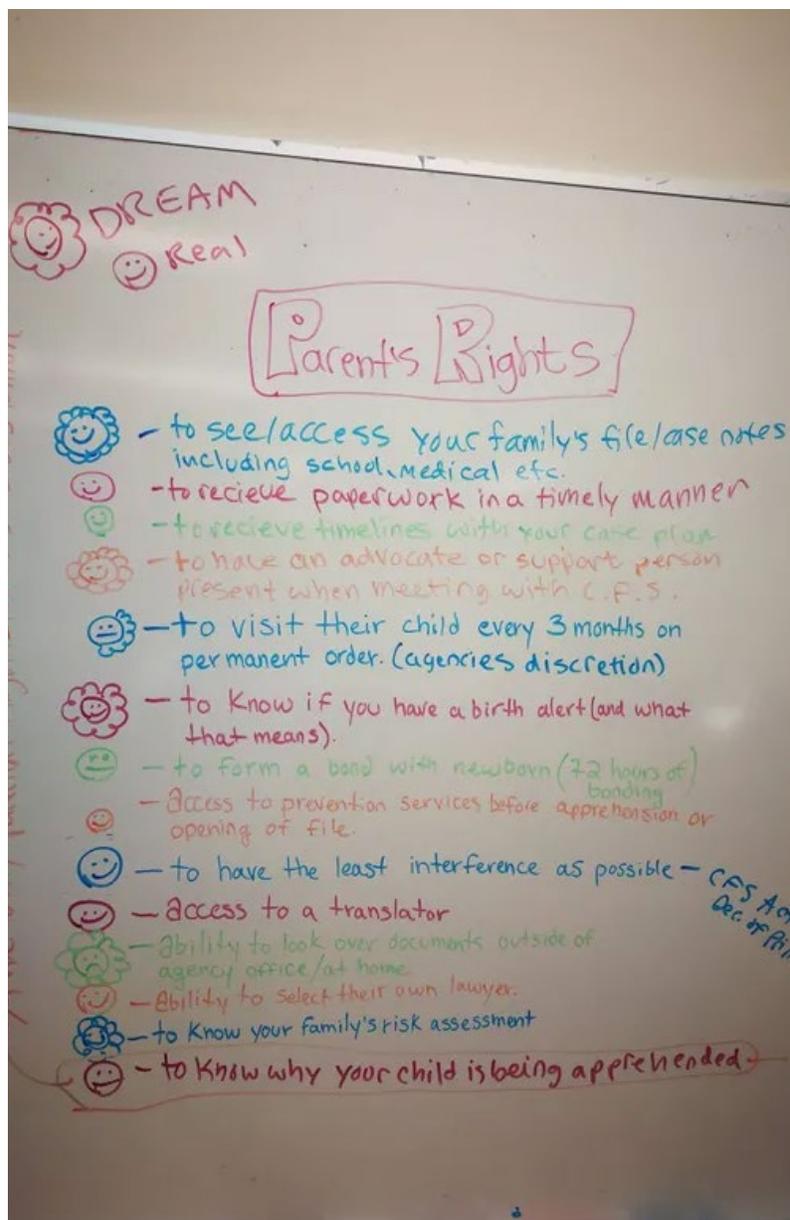
131 M. Lalayants. "Building Evidence about Parent Advocacy Initiative in Initial Child Safety Conferences: Program Evaluation." New York; Silberman School of Social Work. (2019): 41.

In the CWOP program, parent representatives who had experience of the child protection system were full-time paid employees of CWOP. Once parents were scheduled for a child safety conference, a CWOP parent representative was notified by the child protection service and invited to attend the child safety conference. CWOP parent representatives attended all initial child safety conferences in their district.¹³² The evaluation of the CWOP program is discussed below (see also the Jewish Child Care Association Program Survey 6 on page 39.)

IN SUMMARY, PROGRAM LEVEL PARENT ADVOCACY INVOLVES:

- Parent advocates employed in programs both to help families and to strengthen programs to better serve families;
- Parent advocates are employed in child welfare agencies as one-on-one coaches and guides to parents so their children can remain safely with them or be reunited as quickly as possible;
- Parent advocates lead parent support groups to share experiences, concerns and to gain support from each other;
- Parent advocates work in law firms as part of interdisciplinary legal teams to ensure the parent's side of the story is heard, to provide emotional support through difficult legal proceedings and to help secure needed services;
- Parent advocates lead trainings and work to develop an agency culture and practice that is more respectful and inclusive of parents;

- Parent advocates lead trainings, either alone or in collaboration with professionals, to enable other child welfare-affected parents to become advocates, thus growing the ranks of trained parent advocates.



132 Lalayants, (2017).

CWOP operated for 25 years as the leading parent advocacy organization in New York City. After several changes in leadership and reform strategy, CWOP ceased to operate in 2019. Many of its activities are now carried out by other parent advocacy organizations.

PROGRAM SURVEY 7: WASHINGTON STATE PARENT ALLY COMMITTEE (WSPAC)

In the United States, the **Washington State Parent Alley Committee (WSPAC)** was set up in 2007 to support and/or safely reunite children with their parents or relatives. WSPAC is a parent-led collaboration of parents and professionals. It has local chapters throughout Washington State and central meetings in Seattle. WSPAC brings the parent's voice into the development of child welfare policy and practice and trains parents to be leaders. WSPAC helped pass legislation in 2016 officially creating and funding the Parents for Parents program statewide (see [Program Survey 11 on page 49](#) and [Annex 1, Profile 11 on page 133](#)) which supports parent advocates to

assist parents at court, facilitate classes that help parents navigate the system, help parents develop coherent and effective stories, and help parents prepare questions for hearings or meetings. WSPAC has successfully advocated for other significant policy and program reform. For example, WSPAC supported a measure passed by the state legislature called the "Family Assessment Response."

When a non-severe allegation of abuse or neglect is reported, parents are not subjected to an investigation by child protection, but instead are able to receive a short intervention to support the parents' needs.

3.7.3 POLICY LEVEL

Parent advocacy programs vary substantially but most serve a dual role that includes both working with families and functioning as a parent representative for the host agency by engaging in service improvement activities such as organizational decision-making, planning, and staff and career development.¹³³ For example, one study found several programs which:

... invited family members to serve on decision-making bodies; inform the development of agency policies, procedures, and practices; and lead trainings for

*agency staff on issues related to consumer involvement and client satisfaction, or co-train with agency staff on family engagement and inclusion.*¹³⁴

In Norway, a group of parents who had had children removed by the child protection service met regularly with social workers.¹³⁵ This group was designed to empower parents. There were many issues that hindered parental involvement, including fear, parents' sense of failure as individuals, anger and hopelessness, issues of confidence and health problems. However, there were many benefits. The agency implemented a range of changes based on parents' feedback,

133 Robin Leake, Laricia Longworth-Reed, Natalie Williams, and Cathryn Potter. "Exploring the benefits of a parent partner mentoring program in child welfare." *Journal of Family Strengths* 12, no. 1 (2012): 6; Williamson and Gray, 2011. N. Bossard, A. Braxton, and D. Conway. "Meaningful family engagement." *Child welfare for the twenty-first century: A handbook of practices, policies, and programs*. (2014): 70-85. Capacity Building Center for the States, 2016. M. Lalayants. "Parent engagement in child safety conferences: The role of parent representatives." *Child Welfare*, (2012b): 91(6).

134 Williamson and Gray, (2011): 1213.

135 Tor Slettebø. "Partnership with parents of children in care: A study of collective user participation in child protection services." *British Journal of Social Work* 43, no. 3 (2013): 579-595.

including joint training for parents and foster carers; a greater emphasis on maintaining contact between parents and their children; increased emphasis on resolving conflicts in difficult cases; and better supervision of social workers. Parents themselves benefited from becoming more confident and knowledgeable.

In Australia, Positive Powerful Parents (see Program Survey 8, below) is a self-advocacy group of parents with intellectual disabilities that aims to ensure that parents with disabilities are empowered and not discriminated against. They met with child protection workers, gathered their authentic stories, and produced a report that made recommendations for change in child welfare policy and practice. They promoted this report within their campaign for policy and practice change.¹³⁶

In another vein, parent advocacy has been identified as a promising practice in addressing poverty in child protection, stating:

Child welfare systems that incorporate the analyses, critique, and recommendations of parent advocates will receive valuable insights and advice on how policy can be developed to distinguish poverty from neglect. A parent who has experienced the child welfare system is the real expert on how that child welfare system and its corresponding dependency court system treat families, and yet parent participation in policy reform efforts within agencies is all too rare.¹³⁷

PRESSURE GROUP AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY

In the early stages of reform in New York, parents were involved in direct action.

PROGRAM SURVEY 8: POSITIVE POWERFUL PARENTS (PPP)

Positive Powerful Parents was established in Melbourne, Australia in 2012 by parents with intellectual disabilities who had been affected by the child welfare system. It is now run by parents whose children are with them and parents who have had children taken by the state government. PPP is part of an incorporated organization called **Reinforce Self Advocacy**. Five parent advocates work for PPP as volunteers; PPP does not have a budget.

PPP works with the child welfare agency in the state of Victoria to create resources to help child

protection officers understand the particular challenges and strengths of parents with disabilities and to understand the supports that parents with intellectual disabilities need when they have a child protection case. PPP focuses on programming and training to improve the advocacy potential of individuals in PPP. The program's experience is that parents' stories drive change. They have thus produced writings and songs as well as a series of videos that illustrate the challenges parents with intellectual disabilities face in parenting and when they are involved with child welfare.

136 Parenting Research Centre. *Positive Powerful Parents: Report from the Hand In Hand Parent Meeting*. (2018) <http://www.daru.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Hand-in-Hand-Parents-meeting-final.pdf>

137 Joy Duva and Sania Metzger. "Addressing poverty as a major risk factor in child neglect: Promising policy and practice." *Protecting Children* 25, no. 1 (2010): 70.

This was:

*... a period of protest when parents were outsiders, organizing and agitating outside of the system. Parents demonstrated in the streets outside of St. Patrick's Cathedral because children had been killed in foster care homes in Catholic-run agencies. Parents and their allies demonstrated at the home of Commissioner Scoppetta ... They demonstrated at the headquarters of ACS and at the offices of private foster care agencies.*¹³⁸

In addition to the pressure group and political activity, a number of other strategies proved useful in achieving system change. These include the development of **Rise Magazine** which has 20,000 readers nationally (see [Program Survey 9](#)).¹³⁹ Alongside helping parents to undertake public speaking and training child welfare professionals, Rise promotes the voice of parents telling their stories and gives testimony to council members. It also publishes articles raising

PROGRAM SURVEY 9: RISE MAGAZINE

Rise Magazine was established in 2003. It is a parent-led organization that produces a regular online magazine and trains parents to write and speak about their experiences within the child welfare system and to become advocates for reform. Rise develops resources, builds skills and trains leadership for parents involved in child welfare. Rise produced *Rise and Shine Leadership Program* for writing and public speaking workshops.

Rise developed a system wherein parent advocates define their own experiences and inform child safety practices. Since 2015 Rise has focused on partnering with child welfare agencies and law firms to improve frontline practice to support safe and timely reunification. Rise employs nine parent advocates who are paid full-time salaries; six other people work at Rise.

Rise works with individual parents to write about their experiences, but does not provide assistance on individual cases. Rise Magazine has a contract with ACS to provide technical assistance and training to child welfare agencies and professionals

to improve frontline practice with parents. Rise produced *Power and Partnership: A Guide to Improving Frontline Practice with Parents*.

Parents working for Rise have been able to influence child welfare by writing for the magazine, which is read nationwide and internationally by parents, social workers and child welfare administrators. Rise has also sent its parent advocates to the state capital and City Hall to advocate for better child welfare policies and practices, including permanent legal representation for parents and improved prevention practices in child welfare.

Rise provides extensive training at the individual level (impact of trauma and stress, writing personal stories, reporting and writing speeches), at the organizational level (developing and facilitating trainings), and at the policy level (child welfare history, the history of parent advocacy, physical and emotional components of public speaking, writing and delivering an effective speech, handling question and answer sessions).

¹³⁸ Tobis, 34.

¹³⁹ See <http://www.risemagazine.org/about/>

PROGRAM SURVEY 10: KASPER

Kasper in Finland is a non-profit organization that provides support to parents with children in foster care and peer support groups for divorced parents. Parent advocacy began in 2010. Kasper's **Voikukkia** group model promotes the parent's voice in child protection services and in the media to overcome prejudice towards parents with children in out-of-home care. The program has 20 parent advocate volunteers and one full-time paid parent advocate. Voikukkia has a four-day training process presented by a professional and a parent.

Although Kasper does not do direct individual case work, it does provide support and assistance to local advocates and local groups doing individual case work. Kasper also sets up about 30 parent

support groups and assists in training other groups throughout Finland. Next year it will set up a child welfare-involved parent online chat room for parents throughout Finland.

At the policy level, Kasper parents submit comments on national health and child welfare legislation, allowing their voices to be heard. They speak at seminars in universities, to social workers and parents. Parent advocates participated in writing a book, published in 2014, about parents' emotional journey when a child is removed. It published other books subsequently: a guidebook for parents, a guidebook on parent support methods, a workbook about support persons, and a workbook about the Voikukkia-group model.

awareness of particular issues, such as the growing level of surveillance in child welfare across the United States.¹⁴⁰

Another publication, **Child Welfare Watch**, was established in New York City.¹⁴¹ This aimed at critically appraising child welfare policies and outcomes and in the long term had a powerful impact on city and state programs. It was published every six months and each issue was accompanied by a public forum that discussed the findings of the report. Presentations were made by advocates, parents, and representatives of the government's child welfare agency to an audience representing the child welfare community—parents, social

workers, government administrators, and representatives of child welfare agencies.

COMBATTING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION IN CHILD WELFARE

A new movement has recently developed in the United States and elsewhere that seeks to use the power of parents and their allies to dismantle or abolish the child welfare system, which is seen as inherently oppressive to African American, indigenous and other minority communities. This movement was inspired by the book by Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds*, which describes institutional racism in the U.S. child welfare system.¹⁴² **The Movement for Family Power (MFP)**, a collaboration of parents and allies,

140 R. Blustain, ed. "Surveillance Isn't Safety – How over-reporting and CPS monitoring stress families and weaken communities." 2019. Accessed 15/11/2019 from <http://www.risemagazine.org/2019/09/surveillance-isnt-safety/>

141 See <http://www.centernyc.org/child-welfare-watch>

142 D. Roberts. *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*. New York: Basic Books. 2002.

recently produced a report, “How the Foster Care System has become Ground Zero for the U.S. Drug War” which calls for dismantling child welfare systems to end the oppression of African American and indigenous communities.¹⁴³ MFP supports work at the grassroots level to dramatically change child welfare systems.

Globally, indigenous, Aboriginal and Native American communities have begun to organize to help individuals and to fight for legislative change in child welfare systems that are seen as racist. **Grandparents Against Removal (GMAR and GMAR NSW)** in Australia, the Secretariat of **National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)** that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and **Fearless R2W**, a First Nation community organization in Manitoba, Canada, are such groups. GMAR, NSW for example, was founded in New South Wales, Australia in 2014 to fight against the systematic removal of Aboriginal children from their families after an Aboriginal woman’s grandchildren were removed.¹⁴⁴ GMAR NSW has become a national network with local grassroots chapters of families who have been directly affected by child removals. Across the country, GMAR NSW organizes rallies, marches and healing camps in order to reduce the high numbers of Aboriginal children removed from their immediate and extended families. GMAR NSW also works successfully to reunite individual children with their families (see below for additional information on GMAR and Fearless R2W).

SUMMARY

In summary, at the policy level parent advocates:

- Advocate, lobby and act politically to bring about changes in local and national policies and laws and to increase resources for family support;
- Advise program, administrative and legislative policy makers;
- Work at the community and grassroots level organizing parents and their allies to be a force for policy and program change;
- Speak in schools of social work and law to expose the next generation of social workers and lawyers to parents’ perspectives and experience;
- Write their stories and present their recommendations in publications;
- Participate in and undertake research to evaluate child welfare programs and systems.

It should be noted, however, that although parent advocacy in child welfare is a growing movement, it is currently active in only a few high-income countries and in most of those jurisdictions affects only a small number of families.

3.8 Parent advocacy efforts in low- and middle-income countries

Parent participation in child welfare is still at a very early stage in low- and middle-income countries. In many LMIC countries HIV/AIDS had a major impact on family structures. Thus, a systematic

143 Movement for Family Power and NYU Family Law Clinic. “How the Foster Care System has become Ground Zero for the U.S. Drug War.” New York: MFP. 2020. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5be5ed0fd274cb7c8a5d0cba/t/5eead939ca509d4e36a89277/1592449422870/MFP+Drug+War+Foster+System+Report.pdf>

144 GMAR is not one of the 15 organizations profiled as part of the survey for this report.

review of carers for AIDS-orphaned children in LMIC countries in South America and Africa found that many caregivers were older females (i.e. grandparents), with the exception of a small number of child headed households.¹⁴⁵ Caregivers required different types of support depending upon their situation and that of the child, including the children's health, behavior, education and food security. Recent research highlights social support as a protective factor in the mental health of women who are caregivers.¹⁴⁶ A study of support programs for orphans and vulnerable children in Kenya and Tanzania also found that the participation of the guardians or carers in peer support groups and income generation activities promoted positive outcomes for the whole household.¹⁴⁷ This included positive psychosocial outcomes for the guardians or carers alongside a reduction in household abuse, and an increase in the pro-social behavior of the children. This indicates that parent advocacy in the form of peer support groups and income generation might be a way to support carers and prevent child separation and institutionalization.

In related areas of social welfare, there is more of a history of advocacy, which can be a useful guide for developing parent advocacy in child welfare in LMIC. For example, parent associations and parent advocacy have been used in campaigns and action on inclusive schooling and disability rights in many middle- and low-



income countries.¹⁴⁸ National and local parents associations have been established and training in advocacy, intervention strategies, leadership, lobbying, rights and inclusion helped to make them powerful forces for change.¹⁴⁹

145 Caroline Kuo and Don Operario. "Caring for AIDS-orphaned children: A systematic review of studies on caregivers." *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 4, no. 1 (2009): 1-12.

146 Marisa Casale, Lauren Wild, Lucie Cluver, and Caroline Kuo. "Social support as a protective factor for depression among women caring for children in HIV-endemic South Africa." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 38, no. 1 (2015): 17-27.

147 F. Nyangara et al. "Effects of programs supporting orphans and vulnerable children: Key findings, emerging issues, and future directions from evaluations of four projects in Kenya and Tanzania." USAID/MEASURE (2009).

148 E.g. in Jamaica see Bean, Gerlin, and Marigold J. Thorburn. "Parent Participation." <https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/jamaica.doc>

149 E.g. McConkey, Roy. *Inclusive Education in Low-Income Countries: A resource book for teacher educators, parent trainers and community development*. Disability Innovations Africa, 2014.

A literature review was carried out using a range of methods. Initial database searches proved difficult because of the various terms used to describe parent advocates,¹⁵⁰ as well as the overlap with these terms used in other areas--such as mental health, disability, education. Also, many of the papers are not formal scholarly publications and are thus not included in these databases. The search was therefore enhanced by a snowballing approach that identified key papers and followed both the references cited by them and the papers that cited these papers. Owing to resource limitations, the searches were limited to English language literature, including both peer reviewed papers and grey literature published on the internet.

Over 100 papers providing descriptions of parent advocacy and/or outcome research were identified. These have been analyzed and key themes that emerge have been identified and presented below. The papers originated mainly in the U.S. with smaller numbers coming from other high-income countries. This means that the application of parent advocacy lessons/ to settings outside the U.S., and particularly to low- and middle-income countries, will require careful adaptation. This is because the context of parental advocacy in the U.S. is strongly related

to the legal system of child welfare and the approaches used in this context.

Information from the literature review has been included in the descriptive sections above. The following summaries focus on two areas:

- The growing body of research which shows the impact of parent advocacy; and
- Lessons and guidance for implementing parent advocacy.

4.1 Outcome research

Overall, there is a growing body of research showing how parent advocacy can strengthen positive outcomes for children, parents, and families, and promote reunification and prevention. The following themes show the impact of parent advocacy systems.

4.1.1 REDUCTION OF MALTREATMENT

An evaluation of Parents Anonymous mutual support groups was undertaken to assess whether they were associated with child maltreatment prevention. Parents new to groups across the United States were interviewed at baseline, one month, and six months. The study used standardized scales that showed that all parents improved in some child maltreatment outcomes, risk factors, and protective factors. Parents who started with particularly serious

¹⁵⁰ Parent advocates are called peer advocates, parent mentors, peer mentors, consumers, partner, alumni, activist, coach, buddy, leader, family coaches, family leaders, life-trained paraprofessionals, birthparent-to-birthparent mentors and veteran. See for example Ivec, (2013) 35; and Damman, (2018): 29.

needs showed statistically significant improvement on every scale.¹⁵¹

4.1.2 BETTER ENGAGEMENT IN COURT PROCESS

A further benefit of peer advocacy was that parents were more able to engage with the court process and in court ordered case plans.¹⁵² For example, a report published by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges found the **King County Parent for Parent (P4P)** program (see also [Program Survey 11 on page 49](#)) led to increased compliance in the court-ordered case plan, with court-ordered visitation, and in maternal participation at key court events.¹⁵³ This meant that the likelihood of reunification increased and the likelihood of termination of parental rights decreased.

A further study found:

... that there was a significant, positive change in attitudes following program participation—parents increased trust in child protection

*services, better understood the role of the stakeholders, increased their awareness of case issues, and increased belief that they had personal control over the case outcomes.*¹⁵⁴

Sarah Walker et al found that program participants believed their peer partners to offer a more caring, family-centered experience than court staff. Peer partners were credited by the authors with an increased ability to absorb knowledge imparted during the program, which led to increased self-efficacy and a reduction in perceived stigma.¹⁵⁵ This shows the potential positive impact on parent-peer groups and the effect they can have from the beginning of the interaction with child welfare systems.

4.1.3 REDUCTIONS IN ENTRY TO CARE, INCREASED REUNIFICATION AND PLACEMENT WITH KIN, PERMANENCY AND ENGAGEMENT IN CHILD PROTECTION

Several studies of parent advocacy in legal representation have shown the positive impact of a range of different programs on entry to

151 Margaret L. Polinsky, Lisa Pion-Berlin, Sandra Williams, Tanya Long, and Angela M. Wolf. "Preventing child abuse and neglect: a national evaluation of Parents Anonymous groups." *Child Welfare* 89, no. 6 (2010).

152 Theresa Bohannon, Carlene Gonzalez, and Alicia Summers. "Assessing the relationship between a peer-mentoring program and case outcomes in dependency court." *Journal of Public Child Welfare* 10, no. 2 (2016): 176-196.

N. Bossard, A. Braxton, and D. Conway. "Meaningful family engagement." In G. P. Mallon & P. M. Hess (Eds.), *Child welfare for the twenty-first century: A handbook of practices, policies, and programs* (2014). (2nd ed., pp. 70-85). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Summers, Alicia, and Adam Darnell. "What does court observation tell us about judicial practice and the courts in child welfare?." *Journal of public child welfare* 9, no. 4 (2015): 341-361.

Summers, Alicia., Duarte, C., Wood S. M., Bohanan, T. L. Parents for Parents Outcome Evaluation: Additional Examination of Case Outcomes & Racial Differences. (2013) Washington. Reno, NV: NCJFCJ.

Summers, A., Macgill, S. O., Russell, J. R., & Wood, S. M PPCD Research Report: Evaluation of the Parents for Parents Program King County, WA. Reno, NV. (2011) NCJFCJ. <http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/Parents%20for%20Parents%20Outcome%20Evaluation%20Final.pdf>

Summers, Alicia, Steve M. Wood, Jesse R. Russell, and Stephanie O. Macgill. "An evaluation of the effectiveness of a parent-to-parent program in changing attitudes and increasing parental engagement in the juvenile dependency system." *Children and Youth Services Review* 34, no. 10 (2012): 2036-2041.

153 Summers et al, 2013.

154 Summers et al, 2012, p. 2036.

155 Sarah Cusworth Walker, Asia Sarah Bishop, Karen Trayler, Ron Jaeger, Steve Gustaveson, and Anne C. Guthrie. "Impact of peer partner support on self efficacy for justice-involved parents: A controlled study of juvenile justice 101." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 443-454.

PROGRAM SURVEY 11: PARENT FOR PARENT (P4P)

Parents for Parents (P4P) is a statewide parent-led network in 13 counties in Washington State. The program began in 2013 and was officially established and funded as a program by the state legislature in 2015-2016. The branch in Spokane (profiled here) is housed under Catholic Charities' **Rising Strong** Program. Parents for Parents "empowers, connects and educates parents navigating the dependency court system through peer support."

The Spokane chapter has five parent advocates who are paid hourly for 3-12 hours per week. The program has one full-time parent advocate who is paid part-time by Parents for Parents and part-time by Rising Strong.

The program provides a range of training for parent advocates, including at the individual level (compassion, burn-out, resilience, boundaries, de-escalation, story sharing, court hearings, self-care, mandated reporting); at the organizational level (data collection confidentiality, creating folders, resource creation, cultural competency); and at the policy level through local and statewide connected advocacy groups like **WSPAC** (lobbying, facilitating). Child Welfare Services, court teams

and stakeholders refer parents to the program to be trained and given the opportunity to become certified peer counsellors.

Parents for Parents advocates attend the initial child welfare hearing for parents and subsequent check-ins. Parents with open child welfare cases attend P4P classes for at least four months and use the program's resources. P4P works with parents to become involved in WSPAC (see [Program Survey 7 on page 41](#) and [Annex 1, Profile 11 on page 133](#)) to call and visit state legislators, encouraging them to pass legislation to increase benefits and supports to struggling parents. The group conducted research on the housing shortage for child welfare-involved families, which led to legislation to provide more housing resources for families waiting to reunify.

The Spokane program is one of three Parents for Parents sites being evaluated to determine if the program can qualify for evidence-based status. It is now classified as a Promising Practice Program. State legislation was passed to fund Parents for Parents in all 39 counties in the state, with the possibility of increased funding should P4P achieve evidence-based status.

care and speed to reunification.¹⁵⁶ For example, Jill Berrick and colleagues found children were four times as likely to be reunified if their

parents participated in the **Parent Partner** program.¹⁵⁷ Reductions of entry to care and increases in reunification were also found

156 Summers et al, 2013, 2016; Chambers, Jeff M., Sandy Lint, Maggie G. Thompson, Matthew W. Carlson, and Michelle I. Graef. "Outcomes of the Iowa Parent Partner program evaluation: Stability of reunification and re-entry into foster care." *Children and Youth Services Review* 104 (2019): 104353; Thornton and Gwin, 2012; Anthony et al, 2009; Gerber et al, 2019; ABA Center on Children and the Law, 2017; Enano, Stephanie, Bridget Freisthler, Derrick Perez-Johnson, and Kristina Lovato-Hermann. "Evaluating parents in partnership: A preliminary study of a child welfare intervention designed to increase reunification." *Journal of Social Service Research* 43, no. 2 (2017): 236-245; Cohen and Canan, 2006; Rauber, D.B. (2010). From the courthouse to the statehouse: Parents as partners in child welfare. Retrieved from http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/parentrepresentation/from_courthouse_to_statehouse.authcheckdam.pdf; Obispo, Marilyn, and Cynthia Cuevas. "Parent Partners Contribution to Reunification Rates" (2019); Berrick, Jill D., Edward Cohen, and Elizabeth Anthony. "Partnering with parents: Promising approaches to improve reunification outcomes for children in foster care." *Journal of Family Strengths* 11, no. 1 (2011): 14; Sankaran, V. S., Rideout, P. L., & Raimon, M. L. (2015). Strange bedfellows: How child welfare agencies can benefit from investing in multidisciplinary parent representation. Center for the Study of Social Policy downloaded 14/08/2019 from <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1086&context=other>; The Detroit Center for Family Advocacy. Promoting safe and stable families. (2013) https://issuu.com/michiganlawschool/docs/cfa_report; Bohanan et al, 2016; Gerber et al, 2019).

157 Berrick et al, 2011.

where parent advocates were involved in child safety conferences.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, approximately 60% of children whose parents had a Parent Partner reunified with their parents within 12 months of removal, compared to the 26% of reunified children among those whose parents were not served.¹⁵⁹ A statistical analysis that allowed for other differences in these two groups showed that those receiving parent advocacy were more than four times as likely to achieve positive reunification outcomes as parents in the comparison group.

A large statistical analysis of data from New York City Family Court found that when parents received representation that included parent advocacy, they achieved overall permanency, reunification and guardianship more quickly than those who received no advocacy.¹⁶⁰ Children also spent, on average, 118 fewer days in state care during the four years following the abuse or neglect case filing. This study did not find evidence for a reduction in entry to care, presumably because legal support came so late in the child protection process.

The study of the Iowa Parent Partner program also found that children were significantly more likely to be reunified with parents. In addition:

*... participants were significantly less likely to have a subsequent child removal within 12 months of the child returning home than matched non-participants.*¹⁶¹



A large cohort study comparing outcomes in courts with and without parental advocacy found that parent advocacy programs sped up reunification with parents, and for those children who do not reunify, it shortened the length of the court proceedings.¹⁶²

Lalayants' evaluations of the use of parent advocates during initial child safety conferences found that the rates of Foster Care/Remand as a recommendation of the conferences decreased

158 Marina Lalayants. "Parent engagement in child safety conferences: The role of parent representatives." *Child Welfare* 91, no. 6 (2012): 9-42; Marina Lalayants. "Parent representation model in child safety conferences." *Child welfare* 92, no. 5 (2013); Marina Lalayants. "Partnership between child protective services and parent representatives." *Child & Family Social Work* 22 (2017): 40-50; Marina Lalayants. "Building Evidence about Parent Advocacy Initiative in Initial Child Safety Conferences: Program Evaluation Final Report" January 2019. New York; Silberman School of Social Work.

159 Anthony et al (2009): 89.

160 Gerber et al, (2019).

161 Chambers et al, (2019): 1.

162 Mark E. Courtney and Jennifer L. Hook. "Evaluation of the impact of enhanced parental legal representation on the timing of permanency outcomes for children in foster care." *Children and Youth Services Review* 34, no. 7 (2012): 1337-1343.

between 2013 to 2016, from 35.9% to 25.4%.¹⁶³ Where children entered care, they were more likely to enter kinship care. She concluded that alongside many benefits to parents involved in initial child safety conferences:

*The PA Initiative, among other ACS Initiatives, significantly contributed to the reduction of foster care placements and, as a result, more children remained home. Whenever foster care was recommended, out-of-home placement gave way to increased kinship care placements.*¹⁶⁴

Several studies found that parents were more satisfied with services if they had a parent advocate at their child safety conference, and benefitted across a wide range of measures.¹⁶⁵

4.1.4 ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE USE

A large number of studies discuss the role advocates can play in supporting parents with alcohol or drug use problems.¹⁶⁶ Several of these studies show the positive effects that advocacy from parent advocates who understand addiction can have on child welfare system involvement, recovery, and resilience in the face of ongoing life stressors.¹⁶⁷

Huebner et al studied the **Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams (START)**, which uses family mentors to assist parents with substance

use disorders (SUD) with young children who are referred to child protection.¹⁶⁸

START pairs specially trained CPS workers with peer recovery supports (family mentors). Together these dyads [a CPS worker and a family mentor] share a capped caseload of 12 to 15 families, providing intensive child welfare services such as frequent home visits, family team meetings (FTM), and supports for parents and children.

In the START program, family mentors are full-time employees who've recovered from substance use problems, and most have had experience with the child protection system. They are carefully selected and have at least three years of sustained recovery, as well as experiences that sensitize them to child welfare issues. Nearly three-quarters (71.4%) had direct and documented prior involvement with CPS, including lost child custody, and the rest had indirect exposure to child welfare.

*Family mentors are critical to supporting parents through the SUD treatment and child welfare systems ... With at least weekly contact, mentors serve as peer recovery supports to families—they transport parents to treatment, coach them on safe and sober parenting and daily living skills, and engage them in community recovery.*¹⁶⁹

163 Lalayants (2019): 7.

164 Ibid.

165 Lalayants, 2012; Rauber, 2010; Summers et al, 2012.

166 Berrick et al, 2011; Jill D. Berrick, Elizabeth W. Young, Ed Cohen, and Elizabeth Anthony. "I am the face of success': Peer mentors in child welfare." *Child & Family Social Work* 16, no. 2 (2011): 179-191.; Huebner et al, 2010; Huebner et al, 2012; Huebner et al, 2017; Huebner et al, 2018; Williamson and Gray, 2011; Lalayants, 2012; Drabble et al, 2016).

167 Huebner et al, 2012, 2017, 2018; Lalayants, 2012, 2013, 2014; Lalayants et al, 2016.

168 Huebner et al 2012, 2017, p. 276.

169 Huebner 2017, p. 296.

The START program was particularly effective helping parents, particularly mothers, to achieve sobriety and retain custody of their children.¹⁷⁰

4.1.5 IMPROVED PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The studies of parent advocacy often found that parents engaged better with child protection staff and programs.¹⁷¹ For example, where mentoring was effective to build caring relationships, provide guidance, and put parents in charge, this helped motivate parents to think and act in ways that supported their goals and child welfare case plans.¹⁷²

The **Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP)** support groups mentioned above (see [Box 3 on page 22](#)) help people to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to engage with their own cases. As one mother involved in a CWOP's group explained:

"I learned from what other people had gone through and their stories and testimonies . . . I took the tools, knowledge and skills that I got from the groups and combined that to fight my battle"¹⁷³

Marcenko and colleagues found that the **Parent to Parent Program** in Pierce County,

WA, reduced parents' feeling of social isolation, resistance, and hopelessness, while providing valuable information about the child welfare and court systems.¹⁷⁴ Parent advocates were shown to have better relationships with parents, and this led to better relationships with the child protection system as a whole.¹⁷⁵ Berrick et al studied parents' views on the Parent Partner program and found:

Unlike social workers or other allied professionals, Parent Partners provided genuine encouragement in parents' capacity to change and hope that their family might be reunited. Parent Partners' communication style was direct and clear, and their availability at odd hours helped many birth parents through some of the darker moments of despair. At the core of parents' comments was a sentiment that Parent Partners were interested in building parents' self-reliance and individual capacities so that they would succeed in parenting their children.¹⁷⁶

Similarly, research supports the idea that shared geographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and experiential background represents a key point of connection in helping relationships.¹⁷⁷

170 Huebner et al, 2012.

171 Anna Rockhill, Carrie J. Furrer, and Thuan M. Duong. "Peer mentoring in child welfare: A motivational framework." *Child Welfare* 94, no. 5 (2015): 125; Lalayants et al, 2015; Marcenko, 2009; Damman, 2018.

172 Rockhill et al, 2015.

173 Lalayants et al, 2015, p. 318.

174 Marcenko et al, 2009.

175 Berrick et al, 2011; Leake et al, 2012; Williamson and Gray, 2011; Drabble et al, 2016; A. Dogan. "Building on success: parent partners in contra costa county." Undated http://mackcenter.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/building_on_success_parent_partners_in_contra_costa_county.pdf

176 Marcenko et al, 2009.

177 Wendy J. Nilsen, Melissa L. Affronti, and Margaret L. Coombes. "Veteran parents in child protective services: Theory and implementation." *Family Relations* 58, no. 5 (2009): 520-535; Williamson & Gray, 2011.

Drabble and colleagues explored the utility and reliability of a client satisfaction and engagement survey designed to measure interim outcomes of a parent advocacy program. They suggest that:

*the survey is a useful, parsimonious and reliable tool for measuring key dimensions of parent mentor services including client engagement; client-centred support and empowerment; and help with systems navigation and accessing resources. The survey may be adapted for use in other FDTC or parent mentor contexts.*¹⁷⁸

4.1.6 AGENCY CULTURE CHANGE

Many of the papers suggest that parent advocacy can change the culture of child welfare agencies.¹⁷⁹ For example, the Parent Partners Program transformed the relationship between the social welfare agency and client families.¹⁸⁰ Other studies describe how social workers' opinions change through involvement with parents in group settings.¹⁸¹ For example, the START program employs family mentors in the child protection system working with parents with substance abuse disorders (SUD). They operate side by side with child welfare, SUD treatment and court personnel. This was found to be a catalyst for changing the culture, reducing stigma, and showing that persons in recovery

can make worthy community contributions.¹⁸²

This was also confirmed by a study finding that numerous professionals from a range of agencies and disciplines discussed how family mentors had changed the workplace, community culture and attitudes.¹⁸³

4.1.7 BENEFITS FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

The benefits of parent advocacy in promoting sobriety and ending substance misuse has been discussed above, as has parents having their children living with them.

Parents involved in child safety conferences found that advocates benefited parents in a variety of ways:

Advocates were praised for comforting, encouraging, and empowering families and instilling hope. Their guidance and advice in navigating the child welfare system was invaluable. ... [Parent Advocates] further helped parents improve understanding of the reasons for an [Initial Child Safety Conference] as well as safety factors. To this end, advocates could be relied upon to defend parental rights, and give parents a voice. Finally, advocates provided referrals to community-based resources, helped connect to services, and

178 Laurie A. Drabble, Lisa L. Haun, Hilary Kushins, and Edward Cohen. "Measuring client satisfaction and engagement: The role of a mentor parent program in family drug treatment court." *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 67, no. 1 (2016): 19.

179 Dogan, undated; Anthony et al, 2009; Casey Family Programs. *How do parent partner programs instill hope and support prevention and reunification?* (appendix) (2019). Casey Foundation. Downloaded 17/07/2019 from https://caseyfamilypro-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/media/HO_APPENDIX-Parent-Partner-Research-Summary.pdf; Rauber, 2010; Huebner et al, 2017, Huebner et al, 2012; Lewis-Brooke, S., Bell, L., Herring, R., Lehane, L., O'Farrell-Pearce, S., Quinn, K., & So, T. (2017). Mothers apart: an action research project based on partnership between a local authority and a university in London, England. *Revista de Asistentia Sociala*, (3), 5-15.

180 Dogan, undated.

181 Slettebø, 2013; Lewis-Brooke et al, 2017.

182 Huebner et al, 2017; Huebner et al, 2012.

183 Huebner et al, 2010.

*provided concrete services to parents, a task, which workers highly valued for ensuring continuity of services.*¹⁸⁴

A study of parents successfully reunited with their children through parent advocacy made the “striking finding” that many of these parents had started to help other parents in difficulties and they reported that “giving social support and helping others brought purpose to their lives”.¹⁸⁵

4.1.8 BENEFITS FOR PARENT ADVOCATES

Several papers identify the benefits of being involved in parent advocacy work.¹⁸⁶ The evaluation of the involvement of parent advocates in child safety conferences in New York found that advocates found their work very rewarding.¹⁸⁷ Benefits found in studies included growth in confidence, improvements in their ability to parent their own children and many more.¹⁸⁸

In the very intensive and challenging START program there were mixed results. Around a third of the peer mentors had to leave the program because they had “relapse, violation of parent boundaries, drug trafficking, or ethical/policy violations”.¹⁸⁹ However, the other two-thirds experienced career advancements “... earning college degrees,

advancing their careers including moving into child welfare positions, and sustaining long term employment”.¹⁹⁰

4.2 Lessons on effective implementation of parent advocacy

The implementation of parent advocacy programs is not straightforward. It requires a paradigm shift from a deficit-based approach to a strengths-based approach to parents, and challenges the power imbalance between social workers and parents.¹⁹¹

Lalayants describes resistance from some child protection staff to the involvement of parent advocates in decision-making in child protection conferences. Parent advocates reported that some individual child protection workers came to child protection conferences with:

*... their mind set. They would go in with a removal in mind. And, no matter what I would say or what kind of different ideas I would give, you could feel that it was already their mindset. And we would get into little battles, which is not good for the family. CPS say, 'I'm ACS and I say they need to be removed'. And I'm like, 'Maybe the kids do not need to be removed ...'*¹⁹²

184 Lalayants, 2019, 4.

185 Cynthia A. Lietz, Jeffrey R. Lacasse, and Joanne Cacciatore. “Social support in family reunification: A qualitative study.” *Journal of Family Social Work* 14, no. 1 (2011): 14.

186 e.g. Anthony et al, 2009; Lalayants, 2019, 2012; Huebner et al, 2018.

187 Lalayants, 2019; Lalayants, 2012.

188 e.g. Anthony et al, 2009.

189 Huebner et al, 2018, p. 243.

190 Huebner et al, 2018, p. 245.

191 L. Frame, J. D. Berrick, and J. Knittel. “Parent mentors in child welfare: A paradigm shift from traditional services.” *The Source* 20, no. 1 (2010): 2.

192 Lalayants, 2017, p. 46.

Frame and colleagues describe the challenges of integrating parent advocates with a range of unusual attributes into a professional system:

*Parent mentors are often unconventional individuals by typical public child welfare agency standards. They are unlikely to possess an advanced educational degree, to have strong writing and speaking skills upon employment, and may have little work experience to draw upon to help them adhere to common standards of timeliness, dress codes, or other matters of professional etiquette and discourse. Importantly, some parent mentors may have past criminal convictions that would otherwise preclude their employment in a public child welfare agency.*¹⁹³

In the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care initiative, successful programs identified four main challenges to building meaningful family-agency partnerships:

*agency readiness, training and professional development for families, recruitment and retention of family members to serve as resources to other parents, and funding issues.*¹⁹⁴

The following lessons learned cover these and other issues with a degree of overlap.

4.2.1 AGENCY READINESS FOR PARENT ADVOCACY

The Capacity Building Center for States (CBCS) defines organizational readiness in its toolkit as follows:

*“Readiness” refers to the extent to which an organization is both willing and able to implement change, in particular, a new program or practice. When readiness is present, staff are more likely to accept changes, take leadership in implementing those changes, and remain resilient when facing obstacles or setbacks. Readiness is both a process and a condition that changes over time and needs to be assessed at the individual and organizational level.*¹⁹⁵

It identifies three elements key to readiness: a) motivation of people in the organization to adopt the change; b) organizational capacity; and c) program specific capacity.



Photo by Wonderlane on Unsplash

193 Frame et al, 2010, p. 4.

194 NTAECSC, 2008, p. 3.

195 CBCS, 2016, p. 9.

In their description of the implementation of the START program on substance use disorders in rural Appalachia, Hall et al describe how there was limited readiness to implement the program:

*... due in part to attitudes and beliefs about addiction treatment, as well as a significant lack of any community infrastructure for treatment or recovery supports.*¹⁹⁶

This lack of program specific capacity meant that the managers of the START program had to work with local agencies to establish an intensive outpatient treatment program and community recovery support groups. At the same time, they had to work on motivation and overcome mistrust of the community and agency staff and convince them that the program could be trusted, that treatment was necessary and that recovery was possible. In another review of START programs, Hall et al suggest that:

*Before initiation, a formal assessment of infrastructure and readiness for implementation is needed and a strategic plan should be developed with state leadership to identify resource needs and establish realistic time frames.*¹⁹⁷

The National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care (NTAECSC) also stresses the need for strengths rather than deficits-based approaches to families.¹⁹⁸

The CBCS has developed a readiness assessment tool that focuses on "... resources, infrastructure, knowledge and skills, culture and climate, and engagement and partnership" that can be used for planning the introduction of parent advocacy.¹⁹⁹

4.2.2 STRONG AND COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

A common requirement for successful implementation of parent advocacy is the need for strong leadership to promote change and support innovation in family engagement. This is summed up by Frame (2010), who states that this requires strong leadership that: "promotes a collaborative spirit, in which parent mentors are considered to be legitimately 'at the table' with other child welfare staff".²⁰⁰

A collaborative approach is required that balances concern for child well-being with compassion for parents who fight shame and despair.²⁰¹ Collaboration aims to develop a shared vision for children and families, which includes respect for the input of families and professionals in decision-making, and mutual accountability for outcomes.²⁰²

Huebner et al describe a challenging long-term process to implement the START programs:

To achieve a high functioning family-centered integrated treatment model required at least 3 years of work and committed leadership

196 Martin T. Hall, Ruth A. Huebner, Jeanelle S. Sears, Lynn Posze, Tina Willauer, and Janell Oliver. "Sobriety treatment and recovery teams in rural Appalachia: Implementation and outcomes." *Child Welfare* 94, no. 4 (2015): 126.

197 Ibid, 134.

198 NTAECSC, 2008.

199 CBCS, 2016, 9.

200 Lalayants, 2017.

201 Kemp et al, 2014.

202 Huebner et al, 2017.

*with persistence and consistent messaging ... intensive facilitation of the change process by START and state leadership [w]as fundamental to achieving collaboration.*²⁰³

This process involved stormy periods of conflict that required strong leadership and “was marked by heated negotiations and sometimes staff departures.”²⁰⁴ They go on to describe a number of strategies that supported the development of family centered treatment. This required clear contractual agreements including funding arrangements; common data collection that was used to monitor and motivate effective implementation of programs; and:

*... required state and local leadership, multiple cross-training opportunities, state-level workshops and seminars, and frequent meetings. Monthly “direct line” meetings among all START service provider staff paired with regional and state meetings were dedicated to resolving issues hindering collaboration.*²⁰⁵

In the Child Welfare Organizing Project’s (CWOP) work in New York the overall perception of the project was positive. However, both child protection service staff and parent advocates mentioned multiple strategies to promote improved collaboration between the two organizations:

... the themes prevalent in both groups concern the importance of debriefings and providing

*opportunities for open communication. CWOP representatives recognized that being present at meetings made them visible to CPS workers over time, allowed CPS workers know who CWOP and their representatives were, and learn about their role. They noted that being assertive, upfront, and making personal contacts with CPS was a successful way to establish a relationship with workers.*²⁰⁶

4.2.3 TRAINING FOR PARENT ADVOCATES

A wide range of literature raised the need for parent advocates to receive training to enable them to effectively undertake their advocacy role.²⁰⁷ Thus, parent partners need to be trained in order for them “to assist other parents to navigate the child welfare system, as well as prepare them to understand the system as insiders”. The training was based on modules of an already existing induction training for new child welfare staff that was incorporated into a specially designed curriculum.²⁰⁸ The topics included:

*an overview of the child welfare system, mandated reporting of child abuse, and an overview of the juvenile court, including types and purposes of hearings. In addition, training was developed around time use of self and setting boundaries for paraprofessionals*²⁰⁹

203 Huebner et al, 2017, 294.

204 Heubner et al 2017, 295.

205 Heubner et al, 2017, 293.

206 Lalayants, 2012, 9.

207 Lalayants, 2017; Cohen and Canan, 2006; Polynsky et al, 2013; Tobis, 2013; Huebner, 2017, NTAECSC 2008, Williamson and Gray, 2011.

208 Cohen and Canan, 2006.

209 Cohen and Canan, 2006, 871.

Similarly, an overview of the training given to parent mentors in the nine communities concluded:

*The training covered the following types of issues: mandated reporting; boundaries; strength-based service delivery; family teaming meetings; drug and alcohol use/abuse; court processes; presentation and communication skills; self-care; and crisis management. During this training peer mentors learned about their unique roles and responsibilities, how they fit into the larger child welfare system, and how their roles and responsibilities complemented and supported those of case managers.*²¹⁰

In the CWOP program for child representatives in child safety conferences the training for advocates

involved a rigorous six to eight-month training program including courses in communications skills, community organizing and the inner workings of the child welfare and family court systems.²¹¹ Similarly, an intensive training regime with co-training was part of the START program:

*START workers, supervisors, family mentors, and [substance use disorder] treatment providers are trained in family-centered practices during a pre-implementation year with ongoing coaching.*²¹²

The CBCS (2016) sums up the common elements of this training, which are shown in Box 4.

It is also important for parent advocates to be able to come to terms with the impact of their previous involvement in child protection. Training also needs to focus on helping parents overcome the trauma and anger caused by their involvement in the child protection system

BOX 4: COMMON ELEMENTS OF PARENT ADVOCACY TRAINING PROGRAMS

Training can vary in duration, with some as intensive as 60 hours. Parent partner training commonly covers the following core domain areas:

- Strengths-based service delivery
- The child welfare system
- The role of the parent partner
- The peer-to-peer support process
- Family team meetings
- Court processes
- Drug and alcohol use/abuse
- Mental health and domestic violence
- Confidentiality
- Mandated reporting
- Presentation and communication skills
- Participation in policy making
- Setting boundaries
- Crisis management
- Self-care

SOURCE: Capacity Building Center for States. (2016 p.29).

210 Williamson and Gray, 2011, 1214.

211 Lalayants, 2012.

212 Huebner, 2017, 291.

4.2.4 TRAINING FOR AGENCY STAFF

Linked to the need for organizational readiness, training for agency staff is needed to prepare for a new approach in which parents take on a different role in the agency.²¹³ Such training must be ongoing because of the high staff turnover in child protection agencies; successful programs instituted training on parental advocacy as part of the induction training for new staff.

Williamson and Gray note the importance of parents being involved in leading the training:

*... lead trainings for agency staff on issues related to consumer involvement and client satisfaction, or co-train with agency staff on family engagement and inclusion.*²¹⁴

Interestingly, parent partners and newly hired staff were trained together as a strategy to infuse the program into the organizational culture. Similar ideas about opportunities for joint training were key elements in several papers.²¹⁵

4.2.5 CLEAR ROLE DEFINITIONS

Defining and communicating clear roles and responsibilities of parent advocates is important to create clear expectations amongst advocates and agency staff.²¹⁶ This helps to promote effective and open communication and reduce potential conflicts.²¹⁷ The CBCS suggests role descriptions should cover: the primary role of

peer to peer support and the secondary role of providing parent influence in child welfare policy and practice development. It also suggests the need to be clear on what is not the responsibility of parent advocates, saying advocates should not be expected to:²¹⁸

- Take on the role of the caseworker
- Supervise visits between parents and children
- Do assigned tasks “for” the parent
- Provide housing or financial help to the parent
- Take an adversarial advocacy stance

4.2.6 SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

Changing roles from client to colleague and developing the skills for effective advocacy require careful supervision and support.²¹⁹ In high stress work involving people with substance use issues, this requires ongoing supervisory coaching and guidance on issues like professionalism, transference, boundaries, and maintaining one’s own recovery.²²⁰ Frame et al lay out a detailed framework for supervision and support of parent advocates. They state:

As a result of life experience and often a personal experience of transformation, parent mentors tend to bring passion and natural strengths to their work. Effective supervision and support of parent mentors involves nurturing these

213 Huebner et al, 2017.

214 Williamson and Gray, 2011, 1213.

215 Lalayants, 2017, 2019; Williamson and Gray, 2011; Cohen and Canan, 2006; Kemp et al, 2009; Huebner et al, 2017; Huebner et al, 2010.

216 CBCS, 2016.

217 Lalayants, 2017.

218 CBCS, 2016, 28.

219 Frame et al, 2010; Huebner et al, 2017; Berrick et al, 2011a; Williamson and Gray, 2011; Huebner et al, 2018; SSIA, 2014.

220 Huebner et al, 2018.

*strengths, while committing significant energy and resources toward skill development, and building the capacity of parent mentors to function effectively in the child welfare arena.*²²¹

Supervision and support need to be individually tailored. Many advocates will not have experienced development-based supervision so the environment will need to:

*... help parent mentors learn to make good use of supervision, and promote an emotionally safe environment in which questions can be asked, struggles can be openly examined, and new skills can be tried out.*²²²

A second issue is the need to help advocates change from the role of client to employee. They may feel intimidated or have unsettling feelings entering the child welfare building, meeting their former social worker or entering court.

Thirdly, many norms and skills basic to the work environment may need to be learned. This may include areas such as dress codes, making appointment calendars, time keeping, and using appropriate language, humor, and tone of voice when addressing colleagues and supervisors. Parent advocates may need tutoring on assertiveness and communication and the importance of relationship building, especially where they need to build bridges to support a parent they feel has been wronged.

A fourth area concerns role clarification:

... role clarification is a recurring theme. Particularly in the beginning, parent mentors

*need help clarifying the nature of their role and the definition(s) of advocacy, mentorship, and support. Additionally, they need concrete, "how to" guidance: What are different ways to advocate for someone? What is a mentoring stance? What actions might be considered supportive and best in helping parents to help themselves? ... Parent mentors will need support managing their alliance with a parent while trying to foster a collaborative working relationship with a worker, and guidance in determining what information must be shared.*²²³

Thus, implementing parent advocacy requires careful attention to the requirement to provide effective supervision and coaching to advocates.

4.2.7 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

There are various approaches to the recruitment and selection of parent advocates. These include advertising the role broadly, as is the case for any other position within an organization. Other agencies ask their staff to recommend parents for the role and then invite them to apply for the position. Some agencies have developed a program structure to recruit parent advocates. In these agencies, parents start initially as a parent leader and serve in various roles as committee members, training partners, practice advisors, and team members. After serving the agency in these roles for a while, these parents may be engaged to provide peer-to-peer support to other parents.

221 Frame et al, 2010, 4.

222 Frame et al, 2010, 4.

223 Frame et al, 2010, 5.

BOX 5: CRITERIA USED IN PARENT ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

Criteria used by existing parent advocacy programs vary, yet often include the following:

EXPERIENCE WITH CHILD WELFARE AND CURRENT STABILITY

- Candidates have a healthy and stable family situation with no current child welfare involvement for safety issues.
- Candidates' involvement with the child welfare agency has ended and they have been reunited with their children for at least one year, OR, have had at least one year to resolve issues related to termination of parental rights or another permanency decision that did not involve reunification.
- There is clear evidence that issues resulting from an out-of-home placement or termination of parental rights have been resolved and that the parent is in a place where he or she can provide effective peer support to others.
- Candidates who were noncustodial parents have had experience related to working with the child welfare system and are able to assist other noncustodial parents.

Candidates whose cases involved substance disorders have been substance free for at least one year; some programs require 18 or 24 months of sustained sobriety.

SOURCE: Capacity Building Center for the States, 2016

AVAILABILITY AND COMMITMENT

- Candidates can commit to the required tasks.
- Candidates are available to engage and routinely meet parents assigned to them for peer support.
- Candidates are able to attend regular team meetings and co-facilitate groups.

SKILLS AND QUALITIES

- Candidates have demonstrated personal qualities that promote collaboration and partnerships with the child welfare system such as integrity, good listening skills, ability to empathize, and a positive attitude.
- Candidates have demonstrated appropriate behaviors consistent with professional conduct and commit to sustain such professionalism at all times.
- Candidates are comfortable in sharing their own child welfare experience, but have insight to share it only when it can help the other parent.
- Candidates have demonstrated commitment to the safety and well-being of children and are willing to embrace the mission of the agency.
- Candidates understand the requirements of a mandated reporter of child abuse and neglect.

Regardless of which recruitment strategy the agency adopts, the agency needs to ask:

- Who will be included in the pool of parent partner candidates?
- How will the agency reach potential candidates?

- What criteria will be used to select the best candidates in a consistent manner?²²⁴

Eligibility criteria must be strict, related to family needs and have clear criteria. The criteria commonly used in parent advocacy are shown in [Box 5 on page 61](#).

224 CBCS, 2016, 24.

BOX 6: FUNDING SOURCES USED FOR U.S. PARENT ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

Programs use varied funding streams to support parent partner programs and compensate parent partners. Funding sources vary across programs and include:

- Foundation or nonprofit program support
- Grant programs
- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) funds
- Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program funds

SOURCE: Capacity Building Center for the States, 2016; p. 46

- Title IV-E waiver funding
- Various State funding sources (services for child welfare, health, and mental health and substance abuse treatment)

While it may be necessary to use short-term funding sources for specified periods, it is important for program administrators to plan for long-term support of parent partners.

Selection of parent advocates is essentially a human resources issue. For example, the vetting process used in START includes multiple steps and interviews with simulations of real-life experiences; for this challenging program, the process must be rigorous and objective.

Retaining parent advocates requires a range of good practices. A key element of supervision and support is discussed above. In addition, parent advocates, like other employees, require clear role descriptions, good quality training and remuneration, as discussed elsewhere in this section.

4.2.8 FUNDING PARENT ADVOCACY

Providing adequate and secure funding for parent advocacy programs is key to their

success.²²⁵ Finding funding for parent advocacy programs presents an important challenge. [Box 6 on page 62](#) shows sources of funding used for parent advocacy programs in the U.S. Information on 15 different birthparent-to-birthparent mentor models from various states and counties can be found in the Birth Parent Involvement Models: Discussion notes from the California Family to Family (F2F) Coordinators' Meeting.²²⁶ This includes details of funding arrangements and approaches to payments for parent advocates.

Once in operation, the impact of these programs on entry to state care and speedier reunification from state care means large savings for state child welfare budgets. The **ABA Centre on Children and the Law** says this is "investment that makes

225 NTAECSC, 2008; Courtney & Hook, 2012; Williamson & Gray, 2011; ABA Center on Children and the Law. *ABA National Project to improve representation for parents*. (2017) Retrieved from http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/ParentRep/At-a-glance%20final.authcheckdam.pdf; Sankaran et al, 2015; Corwin, T. (2012). Strategies to increase birth parent engagement, partnership, and leadership in the child welfare system: A review: Retrieved from Casey Family Programs website: <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/BirthParentEngagement.htm>; and Cocks J. (2018) If a community values its children, it should cherish their parents: Family inclusion initiatives in child welfare, Churchill Report, 2018. Downloaded 03/08/2019 from <https://www.lwb.org.au/assets/Uploads/Family-Inclusion-in-Child-Welfare-J-Cocks-Final-Churchill-report2.pdf>

226 Family to Family. *Birth Parent Involvement Models: Discussion notes from the California Family to Family Coordinators' Meeting* (2006) <http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/BirthParent.pdf>

sense” and demonstrates substantial savings due to the operation of three parent advocacy programs, the Center for Family Representation in New York, Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, and Office of Public Defense Parent Representation Program in Washington State.²²⁷

4.2.9 PAYING PARENT ADVOCATES

Many Parent Advocates work voluntarily without pay, some for many years. Parents advocates are a valuable resource and parents should be paid for all aspects of their involvement:

including meeting with parents, attending court, connecting families to community resources, participating in family team meetings, and communicating with families via texts, emails, and phone calls. They also should be compensated for trainings, conferences,

*committee meetings, or presentations they participate in. In addition, expenses and mileage incurred should be reimbursed.*²²⁸

However, paying parent advocates can pose a challenge to child welfare agencies that, in the U.S., often have restrictions on hiring staff whose names have been on a state child abuse central registry and/or have a criminal background. The NTAECSC describes strategies that were used to provide reimbursement.²²⁹ These included in Colorado, parents were paid using gift cards; in Kansas a new policy was created to allow payment; and in California parent advocates were hired as employees. The Capacity Building Center for the States suggest a creative response, including having parent advocates as independent contractors or through partnership with a non-profit organization that hires the parent advocates. In New York, a legal brief was prepared that showed the conditions required for the child welfare department to legally employ parent advocates with lived experience of child welfare.²³⁰

Actual methods for payment vary. Some programs provide compensation for parent advocates on a service basis (that is, specific payments for each training, family team meeting, etc.), often at an hourly rate. Others provide payment on a case basis, with consideration of the amount of time typically spent with families in different case situations. A difficulty can be that payments for part-time work can affect parent advocates’ income if they are claiming welfare benefits; this needs to be carefully considered.



227 ABA Centre on Children and the Law, 2017, 3.

228 Capacity Building Center for the States, 2016, 46.

229 NTAECSC, 2008, 6.

230 see Guggenheim, 2008.

5 PARENT ADVOCACY SURVEY IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

A variety of research methods was used to prepare the survey of parent advocacy programs. These include a snowball methodology to identify, interview and profile parent advocacy programs in high-, middle- and low-income countries. Site visits were also conducted to several NGO parent advocacy programs in HIC. The intention of the approach was to identify the range of activities undertaken to support and promote parent involvement in child welfare decision-making. The intention was not to use a random sample of programs, as the universe of programs is not known. We therefore identified and interviewed an illustrative sample. However, generalizations from the sample should be made with caution.

A full description of the methodology is in [Annex V on page 157](#).

The 15 programs reviewed here²³¹ illustrate a range of the types of parent advocacy programs that operate in high-income countries. Parent advocacy programs vary greatly. The information provided by the organizations are based on their self-assessments. **A full profile for each organization is included in Annex I on page 102.** The research did not independently verify the information reported. The list of programs which were surveyed is below and descriptions of programs are shown in boxes distributed throughout the report. This section then summarizes findings from the review, followed by reports on new developments and further programs not included in the full review.

These following programs were surveyed and short descriptions are shown in boxes throughout the report. The list is in alphabetical order.

1. **Administration for Children's Services (ACS)** [on page 32](#)
2. **Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)** [on page 34](#)
3. **Bronx Defenders (BxD)** [on page 37](#)
4. **Family Inclusion Networks (FINs)** [on page 65](#) [including three profiled FINs: Queensland (Townsville), Victoria, FISH]
5. **Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA)** [on page 39](#)
6. **Kasper** [on page 44](#)
7. **New Hampshire Grandparent Group** [on page 14](#)
8. **Parents Advocacy and Rights (PAR)** [on page 69](#)
9. **Parent for Parent (P4P)** [on page 49](#)
10. **Positive Powerful Parents (PPP)** [on page 42](#)
11. **Rise Magazine** [on page 43](#)
12. **Safeguarding Survivor** [on page 29](#)
13. **Washington State Parent Ally Committee (WSPAC)** [on page 41](#)

5.1 Summary of survey findings

The majority of the organizations surveyed, other than those in New York City, were created

231 The three FINs are listed as one program.

PROGRAM SURVEY 12: FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORKS (FINS)

The **Family Inclusion Network of Australia Inc. (FIN A)** was formed as a national body in 2011. It is an umbrella network of member **Family Inclusion Networks (FINS)** in states and territories of Australia to support and advocate for parents, families and community when children are involved in the child protection system. FIN A has no funding and is dependent on participation resourcing by member organizations.

State and Territory FINS actively operate in the states of Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. New South Wales has two member organizations – FIN NSW and Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH). Queensland also has two member organizations – FIN Queensland (Townsville) and FIN South East Queensland. FINS have previously operated in other states and territories, but these are not currently active. Each current FIN is an independent organization, sometimes supported through a partnership or alliance with a larger NGO. Since 2008, FIN Western Australia has received state government funding. FIN Western Australia is the only FIN to receive government financial support to provide direct advocacy and support service to parents and family members, as well as pursuing public policy and legislative changes. FIN South East Queensland receives a government grant to undertake systemic advocacy so that parents can participate in government consultations and processes. The establishment of a statewide parent advisory committee has been endorsed by the Department of Child Safety with committee meetings between

parents and senior departmental staff to commence late 2019. Amongst other parent-led priorities, FIN South East Queensland continues to advocate for a pilot to demonstrate the role individual parent advocacy can play in providing a fairer child protection system.

All other FIN organizations have very small budgets and are staffed by volunteers with varying levels of parent leadership and support.

Each FIN provides information and support to individual parents and families involved in the child welfare system. Some of this support is provided remotely by phone, email or Facebook. In Western Australia where there is funding, direct advocacy occurs face to face and in FIN Townsville, volunteer “Resourceful Friends” undertake face to face advocacy with up to 25 families each year. Parent advocates from FINS also speak in public forums, lead trainings and workshops for child welfare staff and carers, and contribute written submissions and comments on child welfare legislation.

In a new development, FISH, funded by the New South Wales Law Foundation, is partnering with the University of Newcastle and a non-government organization, **Life Without Barriers**, to provide peer support to parents in the Children’s Court. The project provides support in court, group processes for parents and online learning resources. The goal of the project is to educate, support and empower parents to participate in legal and other child protection proceedings. This project has supported over 200 parents with care matters in the Children’s Court and is being evaluated.

and have developed within the last three years. Parent advocacy, however, had begun as early as 2008 in FIN Western Australia (not in the survey) and soon after in other FINS (see [Program Survey 12 on page 65](#)).

Parent advocacy programs in child welfare have been identified during this research in eight high-income countries (United States, England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Finland, Norway and Australia). Over 100 parent advocacy programs in child welfare were

identified during this research in these countries, with the majority of them located in the United States.

Nevertheless, the high-income countries with parent advocacy programs represent roughly 10% of 80 high-income countries.²³² Within those countries, parents appear to be involved in child welfare parent advocacy in a very limited number of locations, their work and recommendations reaching only a small fraction of the families that are affected by child welfare systems, even in the jurisdictions in which parents play a role in decision-making.

5.1.1 AUSPICES

Parent advocacy programs in this sample are primarily operated by NGOs (see [Table 1 on page 67](#)). Eleven of the programs are operated by NGOs; one is operated by a government agency, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and three are informal, unincorporated entities.

NGOs: Most (11) parent advocacy programs in the sample are operated by NGOs. Most of these programs (7) are located within a larger NGO. Among the programs located in larger NGOs, three are parent-led and four are parent-supported.

Most FINs in Australia and Rise Magazine in New York are the only parent advocacy programs in the sample that are free-standing, incorporated NGOs.

Government: ACS is the only government agency in the sample. It has its own parent advocacy program, which includes the Office of Advocacy. Established in 2013, it employs two parent advocates to respond to concerns and questions

raised by parents in the child welfare system. It also has a newly established commissioner's parent advisory committee. In addition, ACS contracts with two NGOs to deploy parents in initial child safety conferences when a decision is made whether a child can remain safely with his or her family or has to be removed. The contracted agencies deploy a parent advocate or parents with similar experiences in most initial child safety conferences, about 10,000 a year.²³³

Informal: There are three informal parent advocacy programs in the sample, each with a different profile. The first is Parents Advocacy and Rights (PAR), established in 2016 and based in Edinburgh, Scotland. It is in the process of incorporating as a charity. PAR has an organizing committee of six to eight parents and three allies.

The second informal group, Safeguarding Survivor, is operated by one mother working from her home in England, primarily online. Established in 2015 the program has provided to individual parents' advice, support, and links to other agencies, and promotes humane relationships from social workers toward service users.

The third informal group is the New Hampshire Grandparents Group, founded in 2015. It is a group of 12 grandparents and two professionals supported by two local NGOs in Antrim, New Hampshire. The group provides a safe and welcoming space for grandparents who foster their grandchildren, provides training in advocacy for their grandchildren and themselves, and advocates with state legislators to improve the state's child welfare system.

232 According to the definitions of the World Bank, there are 80 high-income countries, 104 middle-income countries and 31 low-income countries. <http://chartsbin.com/view/2438>

233 Interview with Mike Arsham, Director of the Office of Advocacy, Administration for Children's Services. 2019.

TABLE 1: PARENT ADVOCACY PROGRAMS INTERVIEWED IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

NAME	COUNTRY	AUSPICES	TYPE OF ADVOCACY PROVIDED	LEADERSHIP
Administration for Children’s Services	US	Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent supported
Birth Parent National Network	US	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program • Policy 	Parent supported
Bronx Defenders	US	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case (legal) • Policy 	Parent supported
Family Inclusion Network (FIN) Queensland (Townsville) Inc.	Australia	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent supported
Family Inclusion Network-Victoria (FIN)	Australia	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent supported
Family Inclusion Strategy in the Hunter (FISH)	Australia	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent led
Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA)	US	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent supported
Kasper: Finnish Association for Child and Family Guidance: Voikukka-operations	Finland	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent supported
New Hampshire Grandparent Group	US	Informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Grandparent supported
Parent Advocacy and Rights (PAR)	Scotland	Informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program • Policy 	Parent led
Parents for Parents	US	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent led
Positive Powerful Parents (PPP)	Australia	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent led
Rise Magazine	US	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program • Policy 	Parent led
Safeguarding Survivor	England	Informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent led
Washington State Parent Ally Committee (WSPAC)	US	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case • Program • Policy 	Parent led

5.1.2 PARENT LEADERSHIP

Among the 15 programs (counting 3 FINs separately) profiled, seven are parent led and eight are parent supported.

5.1.3 TYPES OF ADVOCACY PROVIDED

The specific mission of the groups interviewed vary considerably, but they all have in common the goal of bringing “the parents voice into the development of child welfare policy and practice”, as presented in the mission statement of WSPAC.

Most (11) parent advocacy programs in the sample do parent advocacy work at all three levels -- case, program and policy -- though the boundaries between these three areas are not always precise. However, their work has different emphasis. Slightly more than a third of the groups work primarily at case level and secondarily do policy advocacy. Slightly fewer than a third of the groups primarily do policy work and secondarily help individuals. The final third help individuals and work for policy reform as equal components of their programs.

Three programs do not provide support for individuals for their child welfare cases. One is Rise Magazine, a parent led organization which works with individual parents to write about their experiences and recommendations but does not provide assistance on individual cases. The second is PAR, a parent led group that focuses on policy advocacy and may begin to do individual advocacy. Finally, the Birth Parent National Network, a parent supported organization, provides policy and program support to parent advocacy organizations throughout the United States.

All groups have websites (see [Annex I on page 102](#)) and many use a variety of social media

platforms to assist individual parents and as a means of outreach.

5.1.4 TRAINING

Training provided to parents in these parent advocacy programs is limited. Although two thirds (10) of the programs in the sample provide some formal training (including a set curriculum), for a person to work as a parent advocate, these trainings generally cover only a limited portion of the training areas that parents and professionals report to be optimal to be an effective advocate.²³⁴ One-third of the programs provide only informal training without a formal curriculum. Several types of informal training are provided, which consists of mentoring, shadowing or informal learning from experienced parents and/or professionals. [Table 2 on page 70](#) presents a summary of the types of training provided by the programs in the sample.

Programs which deploy parent advocates for specific, well-defined, and funded tasks, provide



234 See [section 7.1 on page 86](#) for a discussion of training and an outline example of the areas required in [Box 4 on page 58](#).

PROGRAM SURVEY 13: PARENTS ADVOCACY AND RIGHTS (PAR)

In Edinburgh, **Scotland Parents Advocacy and Rights (PAR)** was established in 2016 as a parent led/professional supported unincorporated group and recently filed to be an incorporated charity. PAR advocates countrywide for parents with children in the care system. PAR advocates for system reform with legislators, administrators and other policy makers. Parent advocates have taught social work students and spoken at other social work forums to change the relationship between social work and parents/families. PAR produces a newsletter

written by and for parents and conducted an online survey of parents with child welfare experience. PAR organized a Scotland-wide conference in 2018 in which parents, professionals, and NGOs participated. Representatives of the child protection government review panel came to the conference and embraced PAR's message for prevention and a greater role for parents in child welfare decision-making. Subsequently PAR had a parents' conference which was hosted by the government's care review panel in September 2019 in Glasgow.

more extensive training. These programs include JCCA, which trains parents to attend initial child safety conferences; Bronx Defenders, which trains parents to be advocates in interdisciplinary legal teams that represent parents in child welfare proceedings; the Administration for Children's Services, in which parents are employed in the Office of Advocacy; and Rise Magazine, which trains parents to lead writing groups in which parents write about their personal experiences. Several other groups that provide both support for individuals and policy advocacy also provide more extensive training. These groups include WSPAC and Parents for Parents, both in Washington State, United States.

Parents and professionals who were interviewed expressed a strong desire for more training and training in greater depth. Specific areas in which additional training was wanted include but are not limited to: self-care, coping with the emotional toll of care-work, legal procedures, legislative writing and advocacy, designing policy proposals, leadership and committee training, and fundraising.

Although parent advocates report that some of this needed training can occur informally or while working, such as by shadowing a parent or another staff member, parents expressed a desire for a robust training program and resources in the areas identified above in order to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

Several professionals in parent advocacy organizations also expressed interest in additional training for them related to law and financial matters. Some parents and professionals also talked about the importance of professionals receiving support and training to work collaboratively with parents and creating environments that are conducive to robust parent participation and leadership.

The International Parent Advocacy Network (www.Parentadvocacy.net), with support from the Oak Foundation and UBS-Optimus Foundation, has developed a [parent advocacy toolkit](#) in collaboration with Rise. It has a wide range of online training materials to establish and strengthen parent advocacy programs globally.

TABLE 2: TRAINING CURRENTLY PROVIDED BY PARENT ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

AGENCY	FORMAL/ INFORMAL TRAINING	TRAINING FOR INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY	TRAINING ON POLICY ADVOCACY	COMMENTS
Administration for Children's Services (ACS)	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferencing skills • Cultural responsiveness • Expanded role of parent advocate • Theory of Change • Research • History of CWOP • Service to women in criminal justice system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural and institutional challenges in child welfare 	
Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting parents • Engaging fathers • Parents rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Planning and evaluation • Policy development • Communicating with policy makers • Finance reform • Preparing presentations 	
Bronx Defenders	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training to be a legal parent advocate • Shadowing professionals to conferences and court 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training is facilitated by parent leaders and professionals • Supervision and weekly case conferencing is provided
Family Inclusion Network (FIN) Queensland (Townsville) Inc.	Informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shadowing 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support provided to parent advocates with twice monthly meetings and supervision

AGENCY	FORMAL/ INFORMAL TRAINING	TRAINING FOR INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY	TRAINING ON POLICY ADVOCACY	COMMENTS
Family Inclusion Network: Victoria (FIN)	Informal		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge sharing between professionals and parents
Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH)	Informal and Formal	How the system works, working as a team, using own experience to help others, boundaries, self-care and other topics. FISH also supports parent leaders to undertake independent leadership training		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering between an experienced parent leader and a new leader. • One-on-one peer support
Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA)	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement, resources and trauma • Monthly training updates (secondary trauma, boundaries, maintenance) 		<p>All new Parent Advocates must go through a training program of six 1-hour modules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credentialing process through the state is optional • Outside professionals provide some of the training.
Kasper	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster care process • Group model training to help support groups flourish 		<p>4-day training program provided by a professional and a parent advocate volunteer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent advocates and professionals go through the same training.
New Hampshire Grandparents Group	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schooling for grandchildren • Special education resources • Legal advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking in public • Advocacy skills 	

AGENCY	FORMAL/ INFORMAL TRAINING	TRAINING FOR INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY	TRAINING ON POLICY ADVOCACY	COMMENTS
Parents Advocacy and Rights (PAR)	Informal			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides intensive preparation for conferences and meetings • Advocacy mentorships
Parents for Parents (P4P)	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassion fatigue/burn-out • Resilience • Boundaries • Story sharing • Court hearings • Self-care • Mandated reporting for advocates • Recovery coaching • Certified peer counseling • Trauma informed cultural competency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy at legislatures • Class facilitating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One day trainings • Outside consultants are brought in for some of the trainings
Positive Powerful Parents (PPP)	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group skills • Leadership skills • Telling your story • Self-advocacy • Administrative and organizational skills • Empathy skills • Emotional regulation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainings are facilitated by two NGOs that provide support to PPP

AGENCY	FORMAL/ INFORMAL TRAINING	TRAINING FOR INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY	TRAINING ON POLICY ADVOCACY	COMMENTS
Rise Magazine	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child welfare history • History of parent advocacy • Impact of trauma and stress • Emotional impact of parent advocacy • Writing personal essays • Writing speeches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and facilitating trainings • Public speaking • Answering questions 	Training is provided by parents and professionals
Safeguarding Survivor	NA			<p>The director of the informal organization has been trained on counselling and risks of working with vulnerable people</p> <p>Most knowledge has been learned through personal experience and conversations.</p>
Washington State Parent Ally Committee (WSPAC)	Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundaries • Story sharing • Protective factors • Adverse childhood experiences • Ethics • Trauma informed leadership advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to advocate • Legislative advocacy • How bills are made 	

5.1.5 FUNDING

About half of the groups interviewed report having very small budgets. As a result, the staff in most of the programs interviewed, both parents and professionals, work as volunteers or only receive payment when engaged in income generating activities for the organization, such as training or consulting. In a few programs, parents receive a small stipend or are only reimbursed for expenses. Professionals who work as volunteers in parent advocacy programs generally are employed in the social welfare agency that supports the parent advocacy work or are employed in the child welfare sector more broadly.

Six groups report having substantial budgets for work in parent advocacy (ACS, BPNN, Bronx Defenders, JCCA, Rise Magazine, and Parents for Parents). The groups with significant funding get their support from several sources, primarily government contracts, foundations and individual fund raising. Parent advocates in most of these programs receive a salary with associated employment benefits.

Three parent advocacy programs in the sample receive funding through contracts for their parent advocacy work from local or state government agencies. All of these government-supported programs are in New York City: Bronx Defenders is funded by the New York City government for its family defense work; JCCA has a contract with ACS to deploy certified parent advocates in initial child safety conferences; and Rise Magazine has a contract with ACS to provide technical assistance and training to child welfare agencies

and professionals to improve frontline practice with parents.

Within the United States, many state or local governments have provided contracts to NGOs to provide one-on-one parent advocacy for parents currently involved with child welfare.²³⁵ With a few exceptions, however, governments outside the United States have been slow to incorporate parents in child welfare decision-making or to provide funding to involve parents in child welfare decision-making.

5.1.6 EVALUATION AND IMPACT

Three of the programs in the sample have had or are having an evaluation conducted. Another organization, **Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH)** is a partner in a pilot peer support project that is being evaluated.

ACS contracted with Hunter College to evaluate the program in which parent advocates are deployed in initial child safety conferences. The study found that when a parent advocate is present, families feel better about their experience with the child welfare agency, and fewer children are referred or placed into foster care.²³⁶

Bronx Defenders' interdisciplinary legal representation of parents at risk of child removal was evaluated as part of a larger study of interdisciplinary legal representation of parents in New York City. The study reported that with an interdisciplinary team, children who are placed into out-of-home care on average remain in care at least four fewer

235 David Tobis. *From Pariahs to Partners: How Parents and Their Allies Changed New York City's Child Welfare System*. New York: Oxford University Press. (2013): 145.

236 Marina Lalayants. "Building evidence about parent advocacy initiative in initial child safety conferences, Executive summary." Administration for Children's Services, New York, NY. 2019.

months, which saves \$40 million per year. And there is no increase in the rate of subsequent abuse or neglect and no increase in the rate of returning children to care.²³⁷

Parents for Parents in Washington State, U.S. was evaluated by a university as part of a series of evaluations. The findings “suggest a positive relationship between P4P and parental engagement and case outcomes.”²³⁸

The remaining parent advocacy programs in this sample have not been evaluated, either with a process or outcome evaluation. Nevertheless, these programs report having a significant impact on the lives of the individuals they assist and on local and state child welfare policies.

5.2 New developments in state and local governments

There are important new developments with state and local governments in high-income countries that are beginning to involve parents in child welfare decision-making:

- The Turku Local Authority in Finland sent a delegate to New York to view parent advocates in action. As a result, it is developing a program of parents helping other parents and to advise government and service providers on policy and programs from their perspective.
- The Local Authority of Southwark, London, UK is hiring a Family Inclusion Coordinator to support a parent council to advise on local policy and develop a peer advocacy program that will involve mothers working

to reduce the need for children to enter, or remain in, alternative care.

- In Queensland Australia, the Minister of Child Safety, Youth and Women met with mothers and fathers with child welfare experience, facilitated by Micah (a local social service agency) and FIN, to learn from their perspectives and determine how the department can better meet their needs. In New South Wales the Sydney Local Health District (which administers the child protection system), in partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice Sydney District, is hiring two parents to be parent supporters to help families experiencing the child welfare system. Also, in New South Wales a pilot Parent Peer Support Project, funded by the Law and Justice Foundation, is a collaboration of parent-led organization FISH, Life Without Barriers and the University of Newcastle. Parents who previously negotiated the Children’s Court provide peer support to parents currently in court proceedings. The program is being evaluated by a cross faculty research team at the University of Newcastle, led by Newcastle Law School.
- In England, the need for advocacy in child protection is now acknowledged in national guidance on child protection, which states that where a child protection conference is being convened, social workers should: “Give information about advocacy agencies and explain that the family may bring an advocate, friend or supporter”.²³⁹

237 L.A. Gerber, Y.C. Pang, T. Ross, et al. “Effects of an interdisciplinary approach to parental representation in child welfare.” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.04.022>

238 S. Trescher, A. Summers. “Outcome evaluation for Washington State’s parents for parents program.” Capacity Building Center for Courts, (2020): 1.

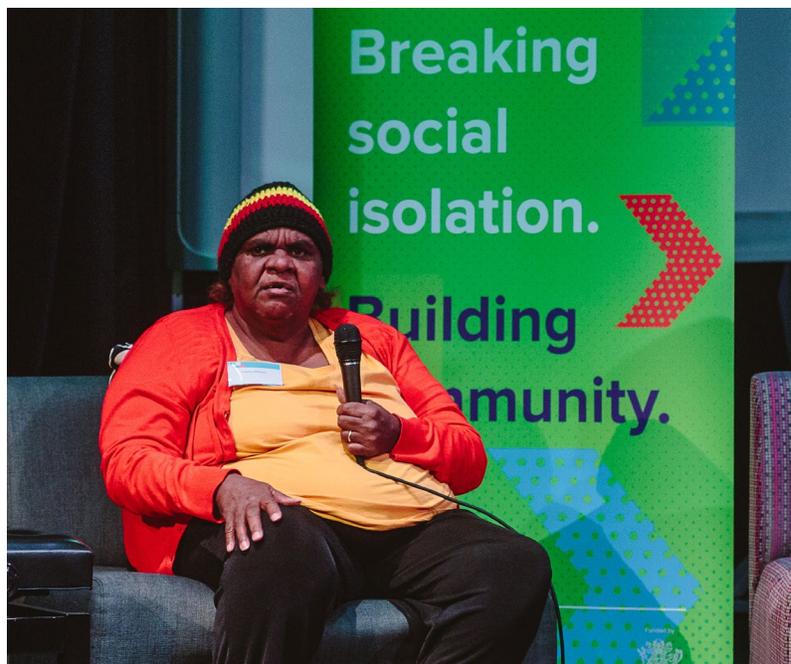
239 Department for Education. “Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.” H.M. Stationery Office UK, 2018: 45.

- Nevertheless, there is a lack of trained and organized advocates to carry out this guidance for parents in the UK.

5.3 Further programs not included in the full survey

Here are details of some additional programs which could not be included in the programs reviewed as part of the survey.

- Norway has a parent advocacy organization called **OBF (Organisasjon for barnevernsforeldre)**. It represents parents in advocacy activities. They are represented on the Service User Board of the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs, and take part in the development of services to parents with children in care on a national level.²⁴⁰ OBF is funded by the government.
- **Grandmothers Against Removal NSW (GMAR NSW)** was founded in New South Wales (NSW), Australia in 2014 to fight against the systematic removal of Aboriginal children from their families after an Aboriginal woman's grandchildren were removed.²⁴¹ Aboriginal children are overrepresented in the Australian out-of-home care system by ten times the rate of non-Aboriginal children.²⁴² GMAR NSW has become a national network with local grassroots chapters of families who have been directly affected by child removals. Across the country, GMAR NSW organizes rallies, marches and healing camps in order to reduce the high numbers of Aboriginal children removed from their



immediate and extended families. GMAR NSW also works successfully to reunite individual children with their families.

After one of its demonstrations, GMAR NSW approached the NSW Department of Justice and Communities (DCJ) to discuss greater community involvement in decision-making to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal children removed from families. GMAR NSW received a commitment from the NSW Minister for DCJ to reduce the number of children in care and to work with GMAR NSW to implement the Guiding Principles for Strengthening the Participation of Local Aboriginal Community in Child Protection Decision-making. GMAR NSW's goal is not to liaise with the department, but to gain community control over its own affairs.

240 Email correspondence, Tor Slettebo, Professor of Social Work, VID Specialized University, Oslo, Finland, October 15, 2019.

241 GMAR is not one of the 15 organizations profiled as part of the survey for this report.

242 <https://www.familymatters.org.au>

Grandmothers Against Removals NSW was awarded the Aboriginal Justice Award in 2016.²⁴³

- In Australia, Family Matters is “Australia’s national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. Family Matters aims to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care within a generation (by 2040)”. Family Matters is a collaboration of SNAICC—National Voice for our Children, the Family Matters Campaign -- and a range of other academic and non-academic institutions, and it includes several parent advocacy groups.²⁴⁴
- In Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada a group called Fearless R2W was launched in 2014 by indigenous parents and grandparents involved in child protection systems. The group of volunteers helps individual parents navigate the child and family service system. The group holds regular meetings to provide support and information to parents and has developed policy recommendations to present to the minister of Child and Family Services and the Foster Family Network.²⁴⁵
- Family Rights Group (FRG) is a collaboration of professionals and parents in England and Wales whose children are at risk, are

in the care system or are living with other family members. Parents and their allies campaign together to champion policies and practices that keep children safe within their family and give parents influence in decision-making. FRG influenced the preparation of the 1989 Children Act in England and Wales, which introduced the key principle of working in partnership with parents to secure the best interests of children. FRG’s achievements are in large part due to its consistency in bringing evidence of injustices to the attention of politicians, practitioners and the media, and putting forward workable solutions in the interest of the child. FRG also has a free advice line for parents about their rights and options when social workers make decisions about their children’s welfare; it also features confidential online discussion boards.²⁴⁶

- There are several other informal groups in the UK where parents affected by the child protection system have joined forces. These are often issue-based groups. For example, there are several groups of parents of children with disabilities organizing to combat child protection responses which accuse parents of fabricating or inducing illness, and other groups of parents who have lost their children to adoption or care.

243 <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/feature/women-fighting-against-rising-tide-indigenous-child-removals>

244 Family Matters Campaign. 2019. Family Matters 2019. <https://www.familymatters.org.au>

245 <https://www.ayomovement.com/fearless-r2w.html>
<https://fearlessr2w.ca/>; <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/fearless-group-aims-to-keep-kids-with-families-563528162.html>

246 Family Rights Group could not be interviewed during the survey. Because of FRG’s importance within the UK, information is included about the group based on its website: <https://www.frg.org.uk>

6 PARENT ADVOCACY SURVEY IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

This description of the extent and range of parent advocacy activities in child welfare in low- and middle-income countries is more a preliminary scoping exercise than a formal review or assessment. The findings are therefore not comprehensive and cannot be generalized. However, as a first effort the findings are helpful to identify the range of parent participation and advocacy activities taking place in child welfare in low- and middle-income countries and the areas of social welfare in which child welfare related parent advocacy activities occur. This section reviews five programs which have developed parent advocacy in child welfare and related areas. It then gives a case example of Bulgaria showing the need to develop an understanding of the context for parent advocacy.

6.1 Parent participation in low- and middle-income countries

Within what is traditionally defined as the system of child welfare or child protection, few programs in low- and middle-income countries are involved with parents as advocates to support other parents, hiring parents with child welfare experience to work in programs, or involving parents in policy reform of child welfare or child protection.

It was beyond the scope of this study to review the extent to which parents play a meaningful role in the decisions about their own cases, such as: developing a plan for a child to remain safely at home; identifying services they need to remedy their problems; or if the child enters alternative care, ongoing involvement in their children's lives, such as decisions about medical care or education.²⁴⁷

During the research for this report one program, Voluntas, was identified in a middle-income country (Belarus). Parents with child welfare experience have been trained by Voluntas to coach or mentor parents who have open child welfare cases. It is possible that there are other programs in low- and middle-income countries in which parents are trained to be advocates for other families, but this preliminary review was not able to identify them.

Robust child welfare and child protection systems are still relatively new developments in many low- and middle-income countries. In many of these countries, child welfare issues such as sexual abuse, gender-based violence, child trafficking, unaccompanied minors or children with disabilities, are handled by a variety of ministries other than the formal child welfare/child protection agency. These include the ministries of health, education, labor, interior (police) and

²⁴⁷ Based on two of the authors' decades of experience assessing child protection systems in low- and middle-income countries, however, it appears that parents infrequently, perhaps rarely, have a meaningful role in decision-making on their own case when dealing with government child protection agencies, and have inadequate or non-existent legal representation when a child is at risk of removal. Parents may have a greater participation in decision-making when they are involved with NGOs that are service providers in the community though not when NGOs run large residential institutions.

justice.²⁴⁸ This section outlines the program run by Voluntas and parent advocacy in the areas of disabilities, gender-based violence and education as examples of parent advocacy in these areas.

6.1.1 PARENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR OWN CHILD WELFARE CASE

Voluntas is run by an international NGO in Belarus, operating under the auspices of Voluntas, a British-based NGO.²⁴⁹ Voluntas is a nationwide program in Belarus for the deinstitutionalization of vulnerable and disabled children. Its programs include early intervention and support for children with profound multiple learning disabilities, deinstitutionalization initiatives, daycare and respite centers for children with disabilities, and equal access playgrounds for children with and without disabilities to play together. The parent support program in Belarus is funded by the World Childhood Foundation. The program has a preventive model that supports families at risk of having their children taken into care and placed in a foster family or an institution. Support is offered by a mentor family that has previously been in a similar situation. Each family also receives support from a group of specialist psychologists and social workers who offer both individual and group support.²⁵⁰

6.1.2 PARENT ADVOCACY IN FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

In low- and middle-income countries, some at risk children who are removed from their homes are

placed into residential institutions administered by the social welfare ministry, or in NGOs or religious organizations that are contracted by the government child welfare agency. Other children, those with intellectual or physical disabilities, particularly in post-Soviet countries, are also placed into institutions administered by or contracted with the ministry of education or health. Many NGOs or religious organizations operate independent of ministerial contracts or oversight. This study looked into programs that work with or train parents as advocates for children with disabilities placed in these systems.

There is considerable parent advocacy in low- and middle-income countries for children with intellectual disabilities and their families. Parents of children with disabilities and parents with disabilities themselves have become advocates for themselves, for their children and for their families. Their focus in some low- and middle-income countries has primarily been within the education and health systems, which have primary responsibility for providing assistance to families and out-of-home care of children with disabilities.

Inclusion International,²⁵¹ for example, a 60-year old network of organizations working in 115 countries, supports parent advocacy for at risk children with disabilities. It is a disability rights organization that primarily focuses on inclusion and rights for adults with intellectual disabilities, with an additional focus on children. Many of their member organizations

248 In high-, middle- and low-income countries, children in conflict with the law (juvenile offenders) are placed in institutions administered by the child welfare agency as well as other government agencies (justice, interior, police). This study has not reviewed the participation or advocacy of parents of juvenile offenders.

249 <https://bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/organizations-working-on-childrens-care/voluntas>

250 Information is drawn mainly from the website as staff from Voluntas did not participate in the review. See <https://childhood.org/this-is-childhood/projects/voluntas/>

251 <https://inclusion-international.org>

are led by parents with intellectual disabilities themselves. Roughly half of the governing board of Inclusion International are people with intellectual disabilities.²⁵²

One of Inclusion International's primary areas of activity is to support programs that train people with disabilities to be self-advocates. This advocacy is focused on family support and prevention, including prevention of placement of children with disabilities in out-of-home care. The advocacy promotes inclusive education based on the belief that children with disabilities who are not in school are at increased risk of placement into residential institutions.

A focus of Inclusion International's work is to support member organizations globally that are supporting parents to be advocates to prevent their children from being removed from their custody and placed into residential care facilities primarily in the health and education systems. Although Inclusion International does not have any of its own programs focused on parents at risk of having a child with disabilities placed into a residential institution, it is considering developing materials as part of its **Empower Us** program to train parents of children with disabilities to be advocates for their children and their families.

6.1.3 PARENT ADVOCACY ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Different ministries in LMIC are responsible to intervene when women are victims of domestic violence, trafficking and other forms of gender-based violence. These ministries include

justice (courts), interior (police), education (for prevention) and social affairs. The following example from Lebanon involves survivors of domestic violence on its board and amongst its staff – a model that could be expanded to address parent advocacy in child welfare.

LEBANON

ABAAD, a Middle East and North Africa (MENA) civil society organization based in Lebanon, is an example of a civil society organization that works with women (parents) as advocates on gender-based violence (GBV) and to strengthen capacities of the ministries involved in prevention of and response to gender-based violence,²⁵³ and to reform national systems to ensure gender sensitivity and inclusiveness. ABAAD works for gender equality in Lebanon and throughout the MENA region. A portion of ABAAD's staff are survivors of domestic violence; they administer leadership and self-care programs for women (and programs for men as well) and advocate for the development and implementation of laws and policies that promote women's effective participation in society.²⁵⁴

ABAAD is a parent supported organization. Fourteen of its 164 staff and about one quarter of its governing board are persons affected by GBV and domestic violence. Survivors of domestic violence participate as advisors, reviewers and developers of ABAAD's programs, but are generally not involved in negotiations with the various ministries in which ABAAD seeks policy change.

252 This section is based primarily on an interview with Connie Laurin-Bowie, Executive Director of Inclusion International, October 16, 2019.

253 <https://www.abaadmena.org>

254 This section is based on an interview with Ghida Anani, Executive Director of ABAAD, on October 14, 2019.

ABAAD focuses on two main areas: prevention and policy change. In the area of prevention ABAAD works with women in the community (mostly mothers) to sensitize them about issues of GBV. They also provide support (including safe spaces and holistic care services) and training. The training includes 1) basic life skills; 2) rights education; 3) leadership skills; and 4) self-care. Some of the women who participate in these trainings go on to be trained by ABAAD to be activists and leaders to work for the rights of all women, including survivors of domestic violence and their families.

In the area of policy reform, ABAAD focuses on four ministries that play a significant role on issues of women's rights and the government's response to gender-based violence: 1) the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), which includes

the child welfare/child protection system); 2) the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (police); 3) the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE); and 4) the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). ABAAD's advocacy has led to significant policy changes within these ministries:

- A memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Interior describing how all security forces (including the police) will respond to and process cases of sexual violence, including rape, regulated by a mandatory Service Memo. The Interior Security Forces dedicated a hotline number for reporting gender-based violence/family violence and a monitoring system to review compliance and ensure accountability.
- An MOU with the Ministry of Education which regulates national work on the review of the educational system and school curriculum to ensure gender sensitivity and to foster: gender protection; training of teachers on gender and gender-based violence; training of parents on positive parenting; and to enhance the application of a unified policy for the school system on child protection.
- A GBV Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) within the Ministry of Social Affairs for responding to and preventing cases of gender-based violence and regulating coordination with other sectoral ministries with clear roles and responsibilities. The MOU will strengthen MoSA's internal procedures regarding gender-based violence and will require that all contracts between MoSA and NGOs have criteria for responding to cases of gender-based violence.



Photo by Save the Children

6.1.4 PARENT ADVOCACY IN THE AREA OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Parents in LMIC are actively involved in strengthening education policies and programs to better meet the needs of their children. In addition to the work on general education reform, groups work on education reform in ways that intersect with child protection issues. What follows are examples from Mexico and South Africa.

MEXICO

Although it appears that neither NGOs nor governments in Mexico are working to involve or empower parents in child welfare decision-making at the case or policy levels, some related activities may affect child welfare and form a basis for future strategies for parent advocacy. A network of over 400 organizations called **Pacto por la Primera Infancia (Early Childhood Pact)** focuses on policy advocacy by citizens, primarily in the area of education. One of Pacto's first activities was to prepare a report entitled, "The First Exercise of Citizen Participation (El 1er Ejercicio de Participación Ciudadana)".²⁵⁵

The report, based on interviews with large numbers of children, adolescents, parents and other citizens, identified several primary issues of concern regarding the education system in Mexico. Among other areas identified was the lack of attention to child abuse and abandonment. The report states: "It is urgent to implement actions that expand the knowledge of primary caregivers about the consequence of violent discipline; and

create support and support mechanisms that facilitate non-violent parenting techniques and practices for families".²⁵⁶

Pacto will now organize national working groups to develop a policy reform agenda for each of the areas of concern and will mobilize organizations to work for change. Although parents of children in the child welfare system will not be part of the working groups, Pacto will try to address on a policy level the concerns raised about abuse and abandonment.

Given the absence of parent participation in child welfare, it seems unlikely that Pacto will advocate for a role for parents in child welfare decision-making.²⁵⁷

Promotoras are another example of community-engagement that may have relevance for parent participation and advocacy in child welfare. Promotoras are community members, mostly women, who act as helpers and liaisons for their neighbors. Promotoras work primarily "to increase access to health services (particularly among racial and ethnic minority groups) ...to improve quality of care and contribute to broader social and community development". Promotoras "draw on their insider status and understanding to act as culture and language brokers between their own community and systems of care".²⁵⁸

In Mexico, Promotoras are generally mothers who are trained, certified and paid, and are primarily deployed to work in the area of health care. Nevertheless, Promotoras are a model of

255 Pacto por La Primera Infancia, Reporte de Resultados Preliminares (Versión 2), Ejercicio de participación para niñas y niños menores de 56 años, adolescentes, ciudadanos y ciudadanas en general. Ciudad de México 2019.

256 Ibid, 23.

257 Interview, July 24, 2019 with Samara Perez, Coordinator of Mobilization of Pacto por Primera Infancia.

258 Satterfield et. al., 2002; Love et al. 2004, p. 418. <http://www.ncsl.org/documents/immig/promotora.pdf>

community and parent engagement that may have applications for families involved in child welfare.

In spite of these parallel developments in Mexico in areas that intersect with child welfare and protection, it appears that parents who have had involvement with the child welfare system are not directly engaged in advocacy, or working in direct services to improve the child welfare system.

SOUTH AFRICA

The Seven Passes Initiative

The Seven Passes Initiative is a non-profit organization located in George, South Africa.²⁵⁹ It works to “make a positive difference in the lives of people in the rural communities of Touwsrante and the rural area surrounding Hoekwil since 2008.” Parents work as advocates in the program, write about their experiences, have input on policy activities and have a say in how the organization is run.²⁶⁰

The organization focuses on three areas of programming: education, parenting, and youth development. Its focus is not specifically on the South African child welfare system, but serves all parents and families in the community. Thus, the majority of their parent advocacy work is not specifically on the formal child welfare system.

They have interpreted parent advocacy as helping parents understand their roles better, learn how to communicate better with their children, and improve material circumstances such as poverty and hunger in order to strengthen relationships within families. Seven Passes began this type of parent advocacy in 2016. The organization has a

staff of twenty-three; all but two people are from the community. Five are directly involved in parent related programming. All of the staff members work full-time. The organization receives funding from World Childhood Foundation, among others.

Their programs initially involved parents who were looking to improve their relationships with their children; now they are helping parents who face struggles with their children and with the larger society. The Seven Passes Initiative has reached about one third of the community’s parents with parenting programs, contributing to an increase in parents’ influence within the community.

The organization employs full-time parent facilitators from the community who receive training both from the organization and from outside organizations in order to deliver programs to the community. They also have volunteer professionals, including medical workers, who help pregnant women and people with psychological problems in the community. However, they have encountered many issues affecting their community, requiring a higher level and breadth of services for trauma and counselling than they are equipped to provide.

On a policy level the organization supports violence prevention legislation and promotes large scale violence prevention programs. Seven Passes wants to expand parent input in its policy work, which has just begun.

6.2 Understanding the context for parent advocacy

Bulgaria is one country in which parents are involved in child welfare advocacy in different

259 <https://www.sevenpasses.org.za/>

260 Interview with Wilmi Dipensaar, Executive Director of Seven Passes, April 4, 2019.

ways at the grassroots level, often to advocate for the preservation of conservative family values. The following summarizes the complex advocacy situation in Bulgaria.

Since the early 1990s when Bulgaria began to move toward a market economy, international donors, multi-lateral agencies and NGOs (UNICEF, the European Union, the World Bank, Oak Foundation, Hope and Homes for Children, the National Network for Children, and others) have funded and/or worked to implement CRC principles. A major focus has been to strengthen children's rights, to establish a child protection system with elements of mandated reporting of child abuse, and to reduce Bulgaria's reliance on residential institutions for children from impoverished families, children who have been abused or neglected, children with disabilities and children from Roma families. These organizations have primarily used a top-down strategy to bring about reforms.²⁶¹

Parents of children involved in the child protection system have generally not been engaged in grassroots child protection reform efforts. However, there are limited examples of NGO-led grassroots initiatives. The **Tulip Foundation** is one example. Supported by the Oak Foundation, the Tulip Foundation leads a regranting program that supports empowerment of parents, families and communities to prevent neglect, violence and the institutionalization of children.

Parents of children with disabilities have been active in organizations to press for legislative reforms to ensure access to services for their

children and supports for their families. It is a grassroots, bottom-up movement of parents whose children have disabilities. These activities have some overlap with child welfare services.

Bulgaria has been involved in a major initiative to deinstitutionalize children from large residential institutions. In 2010 the government of Bulgaria committed to close all outdated large institutions for children through a deinstitutionalization reform largely supported by European Union funds. Only about 10% of institutionalized children with disabilities went to live in the community with their families; most of the children were placed in small group homes rather than being reintegrated into the community, either by reunification with their families or placement into foster care.

Bulgaria has begun to create a neo-liberal social welfare system, with the child welfare system focusing on child protection rather than support for families. As one observer reported: "Families are understandably wary of seeking help from social workers because of the assumption (based on reality in many cases), that the response will be the removal of the child."²⁶² Little research has documented the impact of these policies and programs on outcomes for children and families. All of these activities, nevertheless, have significantly reduced the number of children in large residential institutions over the past 25 years.

In reaction to these activities, other international and domestic organizations have promoted an alternative agenda for children and families. These

261 The analysis of the socio-political environment is based on interviews with Vyara Ivanova, former program associate of the Oak Foundation in Bulgaria and currently the program officer for Tanya's Dream special initiative. Interviews were conducted July 23 and August 15, 2019.

262 Consultant report for the Oak Foundation.

organizations fear state intervention in the family, oppose Bulgaria's National Strategy for the Child 2019-2030 and oppose the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. In addition to using a top-down strategy, these groups also use a bottom-up strategy with engagement, mobilization and activism of parents, including street demonstrations, to support their policy goals. These groups are religious NGOs (such as the Society and Values Association, which has links to the World Congress of Families; and the National Association March for the Family, which opposes abortion and same-sex marriage); civil society organizations (Confederation for Child Rights) and individuals using Facebook to promote traditional family values and non-intervention by the state (No to the Strategy for the Child); and nationalistic, right wing political groups (the Revival party, VMRO party, Attack party).

One other factor has contributed to the contentious social and political environment in Bulgaria. Bulgaria has a large, impoverished, Roma population that has experienced extreme forms of discrimination. Whereas 15.6% of ethnic Bulgarians are living below the poverty level, 68.3% of Roma live in poverty.²⁶³ In child welfare, Roma children are significantly overrepresented in the out-of-home population by more than six times their representation in the population.²⁶⁴

Many Roma NGOs in the country, mainly local, work on a wide range of Roma integration issues. A few are focused on children and families. These include the **AMALIPE** Center for Interethnic

Dialogue and Tolerance, which works to increase integration and retention of Roma children in schools, the **Co-Participation Association**, which works to reduce the risk of abuse and abandonment of Roma children, and the **Trust for Social Achievement**, which works to reduce poverty and the achievement gap.

As a result of these conditions, Bulgaria has a highly charged and polarized child welfare/social welfare reform environment. Parents and families have been mobilized by religious and political far-right, nationalistic groups to fight against Bulgaria's National Strategy for the Child, and by extension to undermine the role of the state and NGOs to support families following the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The left (the Bulgarian Socialist Party) opposed both the Istanbul Convention and Bulgaria's National Strategy for the child. There is little grassroots support across the political spectrum for reforms consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There is one hopeful area. Parents of children with disabilities are mobilized to press for reforms to improve the lives of their children and families.

Against this context the Oak Foundation is supporting **Tanya's Dream** to develop and implement a strategy to engage and mobilize at risk parents and parents with child welfare involvement to advocate for policies and work in programs that will improve the lives of their children and families in line with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

263 Republic of Bulgaria, National Statistical institute, Poverty and Social Inclusion Indicators in 2018, p. 5, http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/SILC2018_en_U9NYYPp.pdf

264 European Romani Rights Center, Romani Children in Institutional Care, June 2011, p.7.; http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/life-sentence-20-june-2011.pdf

7 LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report was written to bring together the evidence so far on the role of parent advocacy in achieving better outcomes for children and their families and to encourage parents and their allies to work together to change child welfare systems. Change will come about by increasing the influence and role of parents with lived child welfare experience in the development of better child welfare systems. Parent participation is both a right and also a fundamental element to protecting the rights and meeting the needs of children.

This section presents elements of a strategy for parents and their allies to reform child welfare. It identifies lessons learned from the different sections of this report and suggests how the benefits of parent advocacy can be promoted internationally. It considers the strengths and limitations of the approaches in high-income countries, and what can be learned from them to promote better care for children and families and to reduce the need for placement in alternative care in high-income countries as well as in low- and middle-income countries. It then considers the situation in middle- and low-income countries

7.1 Strengths and limitations of current parent advocacy

7.1.1 HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

EFFICACY

The extensive literature review in this report documents the many ways that parent participation in child welfare decision-making in

high-income countries has improved program performance, reduced the number of children in out-of-home placements, decreased the length of time children remain in care, improved how parents experience the child welfare system, and has helped ensure that parents' and families' needs are met and their rights are respected. Generally, however, parent advocacy and interdisciplinary legal representation come late in the child protection process, limiting the impact on child removals.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and most child welfare systems recognize that the family is the best environment for the child, and that children need to grow up in families that should be supported to care for children. Instead, the punitive approach of many child welfare systems and their lack of focus on prevention make it extremely difficult for families who have been in contact with the system to be strengthened by the process rather than weakened by it. These parents, like the children and young people who have gone through the system, are in the best position as a result of their lived experience to identify what helps and what doesn't. It is precisely the expertise of these parents and young people from which the system needs to learn and change to deliver better outcomes.

Recommendation: Promoting the influence and role of parents in child welfare decision-making should be expanded. Additional public and private resources—financial, organizational and individual—should be devoted to expanding the participation of parents in child welfare decision-



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making to increase the likelihood that families' needs are met, their rights are respected and that state parties fulfill their obligations to assist families. Parent advocacy and interdisciplinary legal representation should be available earlier in the child protection process to reduce unnecessary child removals.

PREVALENCE

Parent advocacy in child welfare—increasing the influence and leading role of parents in child welfare decisions—has been growing since its origins 30 years ago. As of 2020, based on the preliminary research for this report, there are at least eight high-income countries with programs that involve trained parents as advocates at the case, program or policy level. These countries are the United States, England, Scotland, Finland, Norway, Canada, Ireland and Australia. It is likely that there are programs in

other countries that have not been identified by this preliminary research.

Parent advocacy is growing in several HIC. Nevertheless, parents have influence in child welfare in a very small proportion of high-income countries, and within many of those countries, parent advocates are involved in child welfare decision-making in a very limited number of localities; their work and recommendations reach only a small fraction of the families that are affected by child welfare systems, even in the jurisdictions in which parents play a role in decision-making.

Recommendation: Significant additional work is needed to prepare parents and their allies to embrace parent advocacy. These activities include changing social workers' and the larger society's attitudes toward child welfare involved parents. Parents are now often seen as pariahs when in fact they are most often people struggling to care for their children without adequate resources or options to do so. Training and support should be available for parents to become spokespersons and leaders and for parent advocacy organizations to be created. Forums should be opened up or created for parents to speak and be heard. Trained parent advocates should be employed in child welfare and social service agencies to help other parents who are struggling with child welfare involvement. These programs should be evaluated.

PREVENTION

Poverty is an endemic and structural problem throughout the world. Primary prevention is a universally needed approach to reduce child removal and to promote child and family well-being. Prevention of violence against children and child removal—strengthening community

resources and networks, promoting community development, building an infrastructure to protect children and families, and providing additional resources and supports to families—is needed to promote child and family well-being. Promoting prevention activities was a significant focus of the programs reviewed in HIC and in LMIC.

Recommendation: Programs and infrastructure that support families and prevent the need for alternative care should be expanded. These prevention programs should be based on parental and child understandings of the difficulties they face and should address structural problems such as poverty and access to health and education. These programs could be an effective entry point in which parents could be trained and supported to participate.

RANGE OF PROGRAMS

The parent advocacy programs reviewed for this report vary in many ways, including size, funding, range and types of activities, reform strategies, extent of parent leadership and collaboration with allies, training provided, and impact. Many factors contribute to this diversity, including the degree of community readiness to embrace parent participation, availability of funding, and whether the initiative comes from parents, existing service providers or from activists outside the child welfare system.

Recommendation: This diversity is a strength of the parent advocacy movement and should be encouraged to build upon local conditions and available resources.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

Existing parent advocacy programs are primarily operated by NGOs. With a few

important exceptions, governments at the local, state and national levels have been slow to incorporate parents as advocates in child welfare decision-making or to provide funding to NGOs to employ parents in their child welfare programs.

Recommendation: Governments who are supporting parent advocacy or are considering doing so should be encouraged and supported. Governments also need to be pushed, pressured and forced by parents and their allies to listen to, incorporate and fund parent participation and parent advocates in child welfare decision-making. There should be proper investment in well evaluated pilot programs to demonstrate impact as part of ongoing child welfare improvement.

PARENT LEADERSHIP

The extent to which parents lead parent advocacy organizations in child welfare varies considerably. Among organizations interviewed for the survey in high-income countries, almost half are parent-led. Some other governing boards, however, have only one or two parents on the board, and larger organizations with a parent advocacy program do not have any parents on their governing board.

Recommendation: Parent-led organizations are optimal for parents to have meaningful influence and power within child welfare systems. It is essential for there to be a critical mass of parents working in organizations and on the governing boards of those organizations. If not, parent participation will be tokenistic. There should be discussion and reconceptualization of what parent leadership means and vigorous efforts to realize it.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF PARENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATE PARTIES

The CRC and other international human rights instruments place a duty on states to support family life and to develop a child welfare system that can ensure the rights of children are upheld. Most saliently, international instruments place an obligation on states to give families economic, social and legal protection and assistance to ensure they are able to play their fundamental role in providing safe, loving, and nurturing care for their children and to prevent unnecessary child-family separation and placement in alternative care. In many countries, the child welfare system does not achieve this aim and separation from parents and families is increasingly used, sometime even the norm, particularly for children of excluded minorities and families in poverty. Developing effective parent advocacy alongside other strategies to promote the rights of the child form key elements in ensuring states meet their obligations.

Recommendation: The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child should consider and assess the extent to which parent participation and advocacy is a key element of the child welfare system in its reviews of the implementation of the CRC by member states.

REFORM STRATEGIES

The jurisdictions in which parents have achieved deep and long-lasting improvements in child welfare systems have been based on a collaboration between parents and their allies, using a multi-pronged, long-term approach, with both a top-down and bottom-up strategy, working within child welfare and pushing from outside the system. Entire systems need to be

restructured to meet the needs of children and families, to reduce unnecessary child removals, and to ensure that their rights are respected. Parent advocates and their allies not only work to reform child welfare systems per se, but work within other systems, such as bringing a child welfare justice lens to economic and racial justice movements.

Recommendation: Collaboration between parents and their allies should be encouraged to create an effective, broad-based countervailing force for change. Although parents and their allies working independently are also effective change agents, working together, building on and mobilizing their respective strengths, can increase their impact to strengthen families and reduce unnecessary removal of children.

INDIGENOUS ADVOCACY

The use of child welfare systems to destroy Native American cultures in North America, Aboriginal cultures in Australia, and indigenous cultures throughout the world have had a devastating effect on those communities. These systems of genocide persist in the functioning and impact of child welfare systems in those countries today. There is a heightened need for community control and increased influence and power of parents, family and community members in those systems.

Recommendation: Parents and grandparents from indigenous cultures—including Native American, First Nation, Aboriginal, Maori, Inuit, Ainu, Sami—as well as from other ethnic groups, immigrants and refugees, are organizing for community control within child welfare and other systems. Those communities should serve as leaders of their struggles for community control and for parents to have influence and power within

child welfare systems. These indigenous leaders should be supported by parents and allies outside their communities in ways that they determine are beneficial and are culturally sensitive.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Parent advocacy includes many different activities. The most widespread of these involve parent advocates working one-on-one, and in support groups, to engage parents and to support them as they struggle through the child welfare system. This assistance often includes work beyond child welfare, including housing issues, public benefits, and drug rehabilitation. At a policy level, parents in most organizations speak on panels (child welfare, legislative, social work), provide training to child welfare workers and carers and write about their experience and present their recommendations through newsletters and magazines. Less frequently parents meet formally with child welfare policy makers. Although several organizations surveyed cite community level work as important for their effectiveness, bottom-up grassroots organizing for direct action is an underutilized strategy.

Recommendation: These parent advocacy activities should be supported and expanded. Bottom-up grassroots organizing among parents involved in child welfare and their allies is an important way to create a countervailing force to press child welfare systems to reduce unnecessary child removals, improve programs of alternative care and to better meet the needs of children and families. Grassroots community organizing should be supported and expanded.

TRAINING

Among the parent advocacy organizations interviewed, most provide some training or

shadowing for parents to become advocates. In a few programs, this training includes several months of in-class didactic training on relevant topics, with internships and experiential learning and support groups. More common, however, are brief training sessions on a few issues of advocacy, or shadowing people who currently work as advocates.

Most parent advocacy organizations expressed a need and desire for more training and materials to support their parent advocacy work. Other organizations that were not part of the survey that do not yet have parent advocacy programs, or lack well-developed parent advocacy programs, expressed a desire to have materials and training that would enable them to set up a



Photo by Fizzi Events and London Borough of Camden

parent advocacy program. Organizations in the survey expressed a desire for robust training in areas such as self-care, coping with the emotional toll of care-work, legal procedures, legislative writing and advocacy, designing policy proposals, leadership training, fundraising and training to participate in committees.

Recommendation: Training materials and training programs should be made widely available to help individuals start parent advocacy programs, to train parents to be advocates, to support parent advocates in their work, and to train parent allies to support the work of parents with child welfare experience. [Annex IV on page 156](#) identifies areas in which parent advocacy training would be useful.

FUNDING

The survey found that about half of the groups interviewed had very small budgets. As a result, the staff in these programs, both parents and allies, work as volunteers. In some of these programs, parents receive a small stipend or reimbursement for expenses. Allies who work as volunteers in parent advocacy programs often are employed in the social welfare agency that supports the parent advocacy work.

Seeking and using external funding is a complex decision that may require adjustments (e.g. an administrative infrastructure, a reporting system, possibly modifying the focus of an organization's activities). An organization needs to weigh the benefits of independence from the constraints that external funding may require versus the expanded impact that funding may provide.

Recommendation: Small, independent, catalytic funding is necessary to expand an organization's impact and to pay a living wage to parent advocates and other staff. Donors should be encouraged to

provide grants of unrestricted funding to support the growth of parent advocacy programs and organizations, and enable testing and learning about innovative interventions and organizational models. Governments should provide contracts to parent advocacy organizations to deploy parent advocates to assist families at various points of the child protection process.

Materials and guidance on fundraising should be developed to empower parent advocacy groups to effectively seek funding where they deem it necessary.

EVALUATION

There is a growing research base on the impact of parent advocacy in a number of areas, as identified in the literature review. Although some parent advocacy programs have been assessed and/or evaluated, many have not. Among the groups interviewed in this sample, only three have been evaluated.

Recommendation: Additional research is needed to expand the understanding of and increase the efficacy of parent advocacy. Areas that would benefit from additional research are: parent advocacy with different populations and in different settings; the utility of various types of training; the extent and areas of parent leadership; parent advocacy by informal groups and in grassroots activism; and the impact of parent advocacy on family well-being and child removal.

7.1.2 LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

Although this paper focuses on parent advocacy in child welfare in high-income countries, it provides a preliminary scoping of areas in low- and middle-income countries in which parents participate

as advocates, not only in the child welfare and protection systems per se, but in some of the other systems that overlap or intersect with child welfare. The recommendations above will need to be adapted for the particular circumstances of LMIC and the following recommendations address this issue.

CHILD WELFARE IN LMIC

Wide variations in child welfare systems in low- and middle-income countries and limited documentation make it difficult to generalize about the strategies and approaches that would be most effective or about the form that parent advocacy should take. Strategies will have to be carefully crafted at a local level. In some states, child welfare systems have some similarities to systems in HIC, particularly where states have developed systems that use the Anglo-American model. In such instances many of the lessons from high-income countries are more easily applicable despite differences including: a focus on a limited number of child protection investigations; reliance on residential institutions rather than foster care, which is a recent development in these countries; significant proportion of out-of-home placements of children into other systems, such as health and education that administer residential placements.

Recommendation: The child welfare systems and the role of parents in LMIC need further review to understand the context in which parent participation should occur. Issues to be reviewed include: the various systems involved in family supports and out-of-home care for children; the legal frameworks; social work and community attitudes toward parents who are involved in child welfare systems; socioeconomic characteristics of parents whose children enter out-of-home

care; reasons for placement; resources available to support families; entry points for parent participation; and other social movements that might support or promote increased parent participation in child welfare. Parent participation and advocacy should be specifically developed in each country. Where countries are receiving support to reform their child welfare systems, parent participation and advocacy should be introduced as early as possible to inform the reform agenda with parent participation built into all aspects of the reform process. An assessment process would be created to identify countries in which to pilot test or expand child welfare parent advocacy. Criteria for selection include local conditions, parent and allied leadership, resource availability and entry points conducive to parent participation and advocacy. These initiatives should be evaluated to assess their impact on children and families.

PARENT ADVOCACY IN CHILD WELFARE AND CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Parent participation in child welfare decisions at the case level is very limited for parents who are at risk of having or have had a child removed from their care. Parent advocates working in child welfare/child protection programs or participating in child welfare policy decisions is almost non-existent.

Recommendation: Parent advocacy has been a useful approach to reduce child removal and to decrease the length of time children remain in out-of-home care in HIC. It may be similarly beneficial in LMIC. Additional research, including pilot projects, are needed to determine if, and under what circumstances, parent advocacy can contribute to improved child well-being, reduced child removal and to protect the rights of parents, children and families in LMIC.



Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

It is also important to determine which aspects of parent advocacy are most resonant in a particular low- and middle-income country. These aspects may include parents helping other parents, writing about their lives and presenting policy recommendations, participating in public forums, creating community-based and community-controlled service programs and working on a grassroots advocacy campaign. Finally, for parent advocacy to be introduced in a particular country, training materials and resources would be needed to prepare parents to be effective advocates and leaders. These materials will need to be customized for the specific country context.

Elements to develop a strategy to support and promote parent advocacy in low- and middle-income countries might include:

- Identifying existing parents' groups
- Identifying entry points
- Working as part of care and protection system reforms
- Developing pilot projects, working with parents who might become active. These include parents:
 - of children with a disability
 - of children in institutions
 - of minority and excluded groups
 - involved in child protection
 - who themselves have been in institutions
- Creating a locally-relevant parent advocacy curriculum and training
- Parent councils in municipalities
- National networks for parent advocacy

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN AREAS RELATED TO CHILD PROTECTION

Although parent participation and advocacy in low- and middle-income countries rarely occurs in relation to the child welfare/child protection ministry, parent advocacy is taking place in areas related to or intersecting with child welfare, including disabilities, education, health, and gender-based violence.

Recommendations: In strategies to introduce parent advocacy in child welfare, NGOs in which parents participate as trained advocates in areas outside of the child welfare system are possible entry points to increase parent participation in child welfare. NGOs working in areas mentioned above might be encouraged to expand their focus to support a broader range of parent advocacy. High income countries should also learn from the experiences of the community committee approaches in LMIC.

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ANNEX I: PROFILES OF PARENT ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

PROFILE 1: NEW HAMPSHIRE GRANDPARENT GROUP

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS	
LOCATION	New Hampshire, US
CONTACT INFORMATION	Carol and Wendy of Grapevine and the River Center, respectively.
WEBSITE	https://grapevinenh.org/ https://grapevinenh.org/grandparents-parenting-relative-caregivers/
PHONE	+1 603-588-2620 (Grapevine) +1 603 924-6800 (River Center)
TYPE	Informal Group, supported by the River Center and the Grapevine Family and Community Resource Center (two non-profits)
PROGRAM MISSION	<p>“To provide a safe and welcoming space for grandparents to come and feel that they can share stories with one another in confidentiality and get support for one another. To provide resources to grandparents. Give skills and training in advocacy, in terms of the grandchildren and themselves, leadership skills. To expand therapeutic, legal support and resource access for children and grandparents.”</p>
PROGRAM ORIGINS	<p>The grandparent group began in 2015, when grandparents with custody of their grandchildren requested support to access things like health care, court services, and other resources at the Grapevine Center. As a facilitator of the group, Carol describes there “is nothing more powerful than hearing somebody’s personal story,” and rings true for the grandparents she works with as well. Considering that many of the grandparents are retired and have to look for new jobs for an additional source of income to support their grandchildren, they face unique challenges, according to Carol, that must be recognized by others. When the group first started, Carol explained that it began with story sharing, which in itself was very powerful, but they noticed they needed something more. That is when advocacy began at the group. She and the co-facilitator, Wendy, collaborate and work on resources to increase the capacity of the grandparent group in Antrim, NH and to expand to other cities. Rosemary, one of the grandparents in the group, explains that it took her two years to overcome the stigma of being a grandparent raising her grandchildren and she says that now she realizes it’s worth it to fight, to keep calling state representatives, and to not be afraid.</p>
COMPONENTS	
SIZE OF STAFF	14 staff members
PARENT ADVOCATES	12 grandparent advocates

PROFILE 1: NEW HAMPSHIRE GRANDPARENT GROUP

BOARD COMPOSITION	No formal board
PROFESSIONALS	2 professionals
BUDGET	Using grants, they help fund the grandparents' travel to advocate at different events/conferences/locations
TARGET POPULATION	Grandparents of New Hampshire, particularly the Antrim Area
IMPACT	As Wendy explains, many grandparents came from a space of isolation and guilt and with this group moved into a place of networking, strength, and courage. The move to better understand their children with opioid addiction has also been important, in terms of public discourse as well as improving the child welfare situation in general. The policy level work has been one of the most important parts of the grandparent group, as it gave them the ability to improve the situation for themselves and other grandparents like them on a wider scale.
COMPENSATION	Work as volunteers.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	<p>Training: The group brings in experts from different fields to train grandparents, with the help of Carol and Wendy.</p> <p>Individual Level: Schooling for grandchildren and resources: special education resources, legal advice and referral training, therapeutic/counseling training</p> <p>Policy Level: Improving advocacy skills (how to speak in front of commissions)</p>
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>GROUP STORY SHARING</p> <p>The group started from and continues to thrive in terms of group story sharing, at their monthly group meetings. Both Carol and Wendy expressed the need for grandparents to feel validation and have their voices and challenges be heard by people similar to them. The start of the group was focused on moving through trauma and grief, and the group now is at a space where they are able to advocate for themselves and others.</p> <p>CHILD CARE DURING MEETINGS</p> <p>One of the most impactful measures of the grandparent group is instituting child care during meetings, so grandparents did not have to make other arrangements and could focus completely on the meetings. This had a large impact on attendance and level of conversation during the groups.</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>INFLUENCING THE TRAJECTORY OF GROUPS</p> <p>Grandparents have free reign to request the different information and speakers they would like to have at their groups. This allows them to tailor their learning and advocacy pathway in a way that most benefits them and other grandparents. Additionally, considering the difficulty in grandparents from other towns accessing the resources of this grandparent group, smaller groups in different cities (i.e. Keene) have cropped up in order to improve access and visibility for grandparents taking care of their grandchildren.</p>

PROFILE 1: NEW HAMPSHIRE GRANDPARENT GROUP

POLICY LEVEL WORK

COMMISSION TO DEVELOP RESOURCE GUIDE FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE

Two of the grandparents were on a committee to develop a resource guide, that is available online, for the state of New Hampshire. As Wendy explains, the guide is used to help grandparents navigate the difficult space of child welfare through resource sharing on stipends, housing, work opportunities, health care, etc.

PASSING BILLS TO IMPROVE GRANDPARENT VOICE

The grandparents' group has visited the House and Senate of New Hampshire often to improve resource building and research on their role in children in the child welfare system.

- **Research:** Currently they have helped pass two bills, one for building a coalition to research grandparents raising grandchildren.
- **Advocacy in Courts:** The second is to give grandparents more of a voice in court, so that grandparents could advocate for alternative placement. This, particularly with the opioid crisis, has been important for grandparents to play more of a role in advocacy on behalf of the grandchildren. (House Bill 629)
- **Prevention:** They are also working on legislation on preventative procedures, before a child welfare case is opened, in order to ease the burden on grandparents who are often low-resourced.

EVALUATIONS

No formal evaluations

PARENT-SUPPORTED / PARENT-LED

Grandparent-supported

PROFILE 2: SAFEGUARDING SURVIVOR

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS	
LOCATION	UK
CONTACT INFORMATION	Annie survivingsafeguarding@gmail.com Twitter: @survivecourt
WEBSITE	http://survivingsafeguarding.co.uk
PHONE	
TYPE	Informal Non-profit Organization
PROGRAM MISSION	<p>“To guide parents and their families through the child protection process through my own extensive knowledge and experiences, providing advice, support and links to other agencies, to encourage social workers and parents to work together as experts in the best interests of the whole family, to use my experiences to promote humane working practice and help social workers to reconnect and nurture vital human relationships with their service users through my unique, supportive training packages, and to launch a nationwide parental advocacy program run by experienced parents like me which will: provide one-to-one support for parents and their families through the child protection process, ensure parents and their families have a voice, bridge the gap between social workers and service users and promote collaborative and good working relationships.”</p>
PROGRAM ORIGINS	<p>Safeguarding Survivor began in 2015, when she began writing and then a year later when she began advocating on behalf of parents. Annie lost custody of her infant child due to “future risk of emotional harm” and after 258 days of fighting was able to regain custody. This required intensive work and support from a local charity, learning about legal procedures and laws, and having resilience to never give up despite solicitors, child protection officers, and ministers of government telling her that the case was unwinnable. From her treatment throughout various child protection cases, supervised contact with her children, mandatory therapy and parenting classes, fractured relationships with her children from the trauma of separation, Annie has built a space and platform where she is able to use these traumatic experiences to influence how social work and parents can go beyond an “us” versus “them” framework, and instead can change collectively to “we.”</p>
COMPONENTS	
SIZE OF STAFF	1
PARENT ADVOCATES	1
BOARD COMPOSITION	No formal board

PROFILE 2: SAFEGUARDING SURVIVOR

PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	N/A
BUDGET	No formal budget
TARGET POPULATION	The larger UK population, and anyone globally who accesses her website
IMPACT	Annie has been able to interact with parents from a wide range of UK locales, and has even impacted local child protection authority in London through her outsourced work, which has led to the creation of a council that influences child protection practices in London.
COMPENSATION	Annie does not take a regular salary or payment; as she says “I don’t get paid for it but I wouldn’t take it if someone did pay me a wage because it would be like I was being paid twice.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	Annie explains that she has gone through different iterations of training, including counseling training, risks involved in taking care of vulnerable populations, and training that is not directly related to child welfare and some that are directly related to child welfare. She spends her time with professionals in the field to obtain control over technical jargon and increase her legal knowledge base, with parents to build stories to promote parent visibility, and with legislative officers to improve her public speaking and manage power dynamics.
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>OUTREACH THROUGH BLOGGING</p> <p>Although Annie has stepped away from doing individual casework due to constraints in traveling and family, she is contacted by many people through her website. In doing this work, Annie has seen the impact of parent advocacy, in validating experiences through counseling, and the legwork needed to secure legal counsel. Through her facebook connections, Annie is able to see the women flourish beyond her interactions with them, which makes the work even more fulfilling.</p> <p>EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INCREASED KNOWLEDGE BASE</p> <p>Annie finds that being able to “translate the system” and being able to question social workers and other authority figures on their use of technical jargon enables her to note where change can occur and also gives her direct ability to change dynamics in the room. It has been challenging for Annie to occupy more legislative and public roles in doing individual work, as parents expect her to have more control over the situation. This is what she cites as the challenge in being an individual and not an organization. However she finds the continued outreach of parents important to working on big picture legislation and increasing the visibility of parents overall.</p>

PROFILE 2: SAFEGUARDING SURVIVOR

ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	Annie imagines the future of her organization as having parent advocates as employees (around 10-15), have designated training programs for parent advocates, institutional officers, be funded fully as an organization, and to influence more preventive work in the child welfare space overall.
POLICY LEVEL WORK	<p>WORKING GROUP ON SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP</p> <p>Annie is able to speak from the birth parents’ perspective over the topic of special guardianship, where children are sent to live with wider family members that could include extended family or friends. She is able to articulate the issues that birth parents may and will have regarding special guardianship and is able to impact policy decisions and perspective shifts among the professionals in the working group.</p> <p>IMPACT ON LOCAL AUTHORITY</p> <p>By interacting with local authorities at conferences and panels, Annie has been able to tell her story in order to influence child protection officers’ conceptualization of the parents they are affecting. Her talks have also illuminated how the law protects the officers’ abilities to reach into parents’ lives rather than giving parents true due process. Her close relationship with the local authorities and consistent requests to speak at conferences demonstrates the value in story and representation in institutions that have historically caused harm.</p> <p>BRINGING SOCIAL WORKERS AND PARENTS TOGETHER</p> <p>In Camden, Annie was able to design and deliver training to bring together new social workers and parents with child welfare experience. She demonstrates that through this, many barriers were broken, about their positions and were able to have civil and productive discourse. Through this conference, it built the groundwork and membership, which led to the creation of to an advisory committee for the Child Protection Council.</p> <p>Annie notes that her time has largely shifted from equal division of individual work and policy work to mostly policy level work. And although she has not specifically written any legislation, she envisions that within a year she will be writing legislation and policy.</p>
EVALUATIONS	No formal evaluation.
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-led

PROFILE 3: ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES (ACS)

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	New York, NY	
CONTACT INFORMATION	Michael Arsham <i>Executive Director of the Office of Advocacy</i>	Ms. Shaquana Green <i>Family Specialist and Parent Advocate</i>
WEBSITE	https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/advocacy.page	
PHONE	+1 (212) 676-9421 (Helpline)	
TYPE	Government Agency	
PROGRAM MISSION	“The Office of Advocacy provides information and responds to the concerns of parents, youth, foster parents, and others affected by the child welfare system, juvenile justice system, and other ACS services.”	
PROGRAM ORIGINS	As Mr. Arsham explains, ‘In December of 2013, the parent advocacy wing of the ACS department was established in order for parents in an initial child safety conference to have the comfort of a parent advocate who could “help and guide them through the process, represent their interests, be certain that protocols were respected, and also act as a consultant in terms of neighborhood resources.”	
COMPONENTS		
SIZE OF STAFF	13 in the Office of Advocacy	
PARENT ADVOCATES	2 in the Office of Advocacy, however partner organizations have about 70 parent advocates (who participate in ACS conferences).	
BOARD COMPOSITION	No parent advocates on the board, currently	
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	11 professionals in the Office of Advocacy	
BUDGET	Around \$1.5 million for parent advocacy initiative	
TARGET POPULATION	New York City parents who are involved with the child protection system (ACS).	

PROFILE 3: ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES (ACS)

IMPACT	As there are many, many parent safety conferences scheduled on the same day and at one time, it can be difficult to deploy a limited number of caring advocates, however ACS staff about 50% of all initial conferences, which amounts to about 10,000 conferences a year. Mr. Arsham talks about the transformative power in parent advocacy in working within a system that once caused parent advocates grief and now advocating for parents using their own set of best practices. Ms. Green, a parent advocate at ACS since 2016 and a consultant since 2013, echoes that hearing from the parents she has worked with has made her proud to be a parent advocate, as she is reassured that her position makes a difference in their journey through child welfare. She emphasizes that a parent advocate must “heal before you try to heal others” and their job is to give parents “the tools necessary to navigate their own journey.”
COMPENSATION	Full-time, Salaried
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	<p>Individual Level Training: Conferencing skills, Cultural responsiveness, Debriefing, History of C WOP, Theory of Change and Research</p> <p>Organization and Policy Level Training: Expanded role of parent advocate, Racial equity, Structural and institutional challenges in the child welfare system</p> <p>Ms. Green explains that training about how to provide services to women involved with the criminal justice system has really made a difference in her practice as well.</p>
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>INITIAL CHILD SAFETY CONFERENCE MEETINGS</p> <p>In initial parent safety conferences, parents are asked whether they would like a parent advocate to engage in the initial meeting and if it is agreed to, parent advocates play a big role in supporting the parent navigate policies and procedures that ACS recommends. Ms. Green explains that around 90% of her time involves working on individual cases. She explains there is a lot of interagency work she does, “it is not just child welfare, it’s also child support issues, housing issues, domestic violence issues.” She explains that as she appears younger than she is, they do not think she has children and do not think she has the experience, but she focuses on “making [them] a promise that [she’ll] do everything in her power to make sure [they] get the best services.”</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>INFORMING AND IMPLEMENTING NEW MODELS</p> <p>Mr. Arsham explains that one of the weaknesses of the baseline model that ACS works off of is that it is a “one-shot” system, where parent advocates interface with the parent in one conference and does not continue a relationship. However, parent advocates noted that parents were calling and seeking support even after the one conference and were faced with the difficult decision to say no because of lack of funding and authorization. ACS has evolved into integrating a follow-up conference, with 10 hours of work in between to ensure that connections are strengthened and resources and referrals are made and evaluated, because of the demonstrated need parent advocates highlighted. This ensures that parents are able to show that they can follow through with recommendations made by ACS and integrate self-identified needs and goals.</p>

PROFILE 3: ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ACS)

ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK (CONTINUED)	<p>TRAINING WITH CHILD PROTECTION PERSONNEL</p> <p>Parent advocates requested to train with child protection personnel in order to learn conference protocols and leave trainings with a shared understanding of policies and procedures in order to be on the same page when they enter the initial child safety conference; which they are able to attend because of these efforts.</p>
POLICY LEVEL WORK	<p>WORKING TO AVOID OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS</p> <p>After noting cases of extended family members coming to ACS who felt they were not given serious consideration for potential kinship resources, ACS partnered with institutional legal service providers who represent parents to create a survey instrument using ACS's office of Policy Planning and Measurement and identified any kinship elements in these cases. Their results revealed that the family members coming to ACS were in the minority and ACS was responsible in effectively evaluating kinship solutions during their procedures. It also institutionalized this type of questioning and evaluation in the process of out-of-home placement solutions.</p>
EVALUATIONS	<p>PARENT ADVOCACY IN INITIAL CHILD SAFETY CONFERENCES</p> <p>A pre- and post-test multivariate analysis of conferences completed in 2013 (before implementation of Parent Advocacy Initiative Conference and 2016 (after the implementation) was completed. Through the evaluation of 5598 conferences, it was determined that rates of Foster Care/Remand as an initial recommendation decreased from 2013 to 2016 and children remained at home at higher rates in 2016 as compared to 2013. Dr. Loyalants, the author, notes that although this finding cannot conclusively be solely attributed to the parent advocacy initiatives. Parent respondents expressed satisfaction for the presence of parent advocates and conferencing. Parents described similar race and gender, personal characteristics, dedication and genuine concern, lived experiences, and knowledge as key components of strong parent advocates.¹</p> <p>ENHANCED FAMILY CONFERENCING INITIATIVE (ECI)</p> <p>The enhanced model of care and advocate participation in family group decision making, which was supported by a three-year grant from the federal Children's Bureau of Health and Human Services, took place in the South Bronx. It included parent advocates presence at a follow up conference and in-between conferences. Additionally, it includes parents developing their own service plan based on their self-identified needs and goals. The third part of this is where parent advocates train with child safety officers. There is an evaluation associated with this initiative that is expected to be completed later this year.</p>
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-Supported

1. Loyalants, Marina. "BUILDING EVIDENCE ABOUT PARENT ADVOCACY INITIATIVE IN INITIAL CHILD SAFETY CONFERENCES." The Program Evaluation Report Was Prepared for The Administration for Children's Services, Jan. 2019, pp. 1–38., <http://www.risemagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ACS-PA-Initiative-Evaluation-Report-1.31.2019.pdf>

PROFILE 4: BIRTH PARENT NATIONAL NETWORK

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	United States
CONTACT INFORMATION	Meryl Levine Senior Consultant Meryl.levine@gmail.com
WEBSITE	https://ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn/
PHONE	818-523-9410
TYPE	Non-profit organization, under the umbrella of the National Alliance for Children’s Trust
PROGRAM MISSION	“The Birth Parent National Network (BPNN) is working to promote and champion birth parents as leaders and strategic partners in prevention and child welfare systems reform.”
PROGRAM ORIGINS	The Birth Parent National Network (BPNN) launched in 2013. It began with the Casey Family Programs approaching the National Alliance of Children’s Trust Prevention. The National Alliance had experience in working with parents in order to impact policy and practice. Casey Family Programs wanted to build a parent advocacy network where the voices of parents could be elevated and create change within the child welfare system. The focus of the network was to promote the voice of birthparents and “raise awareness with policy makers and key stakeholders around what are the themes and challenges that families face and how can we design services and systems both within the child welfare system as well as in the community that would benefit children and families,” as Meryl, who manages the BPNN, explained.

COMPONENTS

SIZE OF STAFF	49 parent advocacy organizations nationwide
PARENT ADVOCATES	Varies from organization to organization
BOARD COMPOSITION	20 members, majority parent advocates
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	Varies from organization to organization
BUDGET	Budgeted
TARGET POPULATION	Birth parents across the United States

PROFILE 4: BIRTH PARENT NATIONAL NETWORK

IMPACT	BPNN reports it has had a large impact on informing and introducing policy changes at local and national levels, attending and speaking at various events, webinars to network and meet with parents and other policymakers, and essentially involve parents in every level of decision making in and around child welfare.
COMPENSATION	Meryl is the only salaried member of BPNN. When parents speak at various events, BPNN and Casey Family Programs support them and provide honoraria and stipends for travel and hotel.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice: Activities that focus on planning, developing, improving or evaluating practices on local, state, or national levels, which can involve a variety of stakeholders from service providers to individual parents. For example: finance reform, foster partnering • Policy: Activities that focus on planning, developing, refining, or evaluation policies at local, state, and national level. For example: communicating with policy makers, public policy training • Recruitment: Identifying and recruiting parents to engage in policy work • Advocacy/Education: preparing and leading presentations or discussions to improve outcomes for families through best policies and practices. For example: strategic sharing, father engagement, parent rights
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS THAT DO INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK</p> <p>BPNN members include many organizations that do individual level work. BPNN encourages parent</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>ENSURING VISIBILITY OF PARENT ADVOCATES</p> <p>In encouraging and supporting parent advocates to become part of planning committees of various child welfare associated endeavors, i.e. The Family First Bill, BPNN builds its own organizational base as well as expands the deployment of parent advocates throughout the country on local, state-wide, and national committees.</p>
POLICY LEVEL WORK	<p>WORKING WITH RESEARCHERS TO IMPROVE PARENT VOICE</p> <p>Parent advocates from BPNN-membership organizations have worked with researchers studying the outcomes of parents working at the policy and practice level, i.e. serving on different councils or panels. Meryl explains that she hopes to elevate research about parent advocacy to support efforts to reunify families.</p> <p>NATIONAL LEVEL LEGISLATION: FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION CARE</p> <p>BPNN reports that parent advocates had a large role in the passage of the Family First Bill in February of 2018, particularly the preventive aspect of the legislation. In implementing in-home family support services, early intervention in substance abuse cases, early entry into mental health services, and introducing preventive steps to the child welfare process, parent advocates “made a difference in getting passage of the Family First Act,” as Meryl describes. BPNN made educational materials available to inform legislators and the public about preventive services, testified at congressional hearings, and spoke extensively about opioid crisis.</p>

PROFILE 4: BIRTH PARENT NATIONAL NETWORK

POLICY LEVEL WORK	<p>SPEAKING AT CONFERENCES</p> <p>As Meryl mentions, “We’re getting requests for parents to speak at different events to help educate policymakers around different issues. That was not what it was like 10 years ago.” Since they have online training modules, BPNN has a wide net of people attending trainings as well as an increased number who recognize the importance of birth parents having a voice in child welfare decision making.</p> <p>SUPPORTING EVALUATION RESEARCH</p> <p>BPNN’s members report that parent advocacy improves outcomes in a variety of ways, as seen in legislation passed, the impact of story sharing, and the requests to speak at events, Meryl explains. The research now, she says, is moving toward “hardcore data that shows that parent partner programs help reunify [children with their] parents” and has an impact in improving outcomes overall.</p>
EVALUATIONS	No formal evaluation
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-Supported

PROFILE 5: THE BRONX DEFENDERS (BXD)

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	360 East 161st Street, Bronx, NY 10451	
CONTACT INFORMATION	Emma Ketteringham Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice	Dinah Ortiz-Adames Parent Advocate Supervisor https://www.bronxdefenders.org/ contact/
WEBSITE	https://www.bronxdefenders.org	
PHONE	+1 (718) 838-7878	
TYPE	Tax Exempt Non-Profit Organization	
PROGRAM MISSION	The mission of The Bronx Defender’s family defense practice is to “provide parents in child protective proceedings with robust high-quality representation inside and outside of court with the goal of keeping families together.”	
PROGRAM ORIGINS	<p>The Bronx Defenders (BxD) began representing parents in child protective proceedings in 2005 and they started with one parent advocate and one lawyer. In 2007, BxD became the institutional provider for parent representation in Bronx County. BxD is assigned to represent parents on the first day that parents appear in court and parents receive assistance from an attorney and a parent advocate or social worker. BxD is one of the only organizations in the country that also provides parents with early access to counsel and advocacy during the child welfare investigation, even before a case is filed in court, which often results in preventing family separation or a case filing altogether. Representation is multidisciplinary meaning that parents who are represented by BxD are also given access to a criminal defense attorney, an immigration attorney, and attorneys and advocates to assist with housing and public benefits issues if necessary. Dinah Ortiz-Adames, a 7-year parent advocate, explains that social workers and parent advocates at BxD play an essential role in the representation of parents and partner with the attorneys. Parent advocates and social workers provide advocacy and support to parents during meetings and conferences with child protective services and assist the attorney in providing high quality representation in court. The social workers and parent advocates at The Bronx Defenders receive extensive training and support. BxD assists and nurtures their advocates in order for them to grow professionally.</p>	
COMPONENTS		
SIZE OF STAFF	Entire Bronx Defenders practice contains >400 members. The family defense practice at BxD is almost 70 – we have 41 attorneys and 21 parent advocates and social workers. 10 of the 21 are parent advocates.	
PARENT ADVOCATES	9 social workers and 10 parent advocates	

PROFILE 5: THE BRONX DEFENDERS (BXD)

BOARD COMPOSITION	BxD is a large organization and has a board that consists of 11 members, as of this time this does not include parent advocates.
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	9 social workers and 10 parent advocates
BUDGET	The Family Defense Practice has a formal budget, and family defense work is funded by the city
TARGET POPULATION	The Bronx Defenders serves Bronx residents who qualify for free legal counsel. The Bronx consists of about 1.5 million people.
IMPACT	Over the years, the family defense practice at BxD has represented over 11,000 parents and represents 1,500 new parents each year. The model is successful at preventing family separation and keeping children at home or having children who are separated from their parents quickly returned home. This work is critical in the Bronx, which is one of the poorest congressional districts in New York City, and a community that experiences a disproportionate number of child protection interventions. According to data from 2017, the Bronx experienced twice the number of emergency removals compared to any other borough.
COMPENSATION	Parent advocates are employed full time and are salaried positions.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	Emma describes that the parent advocacy training process is as rigorous as it is to become a lawyer in their practice. It includes training facilitated by parent advocates, like Dinah, social workers, and various professionals from inside and outside the organizations. In addition to training, parent advocates are provided with the opportunity to shadow other advocates at conferences and courts until a parent advocate is ready to appear independently. Parent advocates are also supervised and receive weekly case conferencing and daily support.

PROFILE 5: THE BRONX DEFENDERS (BXD)

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK

FLOURISHING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENT ADVOCATES AND PARENTS

Parent advocates at BxD are assigned to parents and their goal is to provide parents with the information and advocacy they need so that their children remain in their care or are returned to them as quickly as possible. Parent advocates work hard to establish relationships with parents based on trust, loyalty, and confidentiality. When parents have child protection cases, they “are immediately viewed as deviant and treated poorly” by the agency that is supposed to help them, and judicial system that will adjudicate them, and society. Their actions are rarely viewed in the context of their parenthood or meaning to their children. Parent advocates work to ensure that parents’ strengths and value are seen and considered and that parents are empowered to speak up for themselves and what they need. Dinah adds that the role of the parent advocate is to “get [their] clients to be given the same benefit of the doubt that parents with more resources get.” Parents have a hard time understanding or accepting the requirements that child protection and their caseworkers lay out and cases often occur in a time of crisis. A parent advocate plays an integral role in explaining how to navigate these larger systems, and are accountable only to the parent, meaning they will do what it takes to reunite a family, rather than simply make the efforts required by the law. This contributes to a high success rate.

EARLY REPRESENTATION FOR PARENTS

Although New York City does not fund parent representation or parent advocate services during child welfare investigations, BxD uses private seed money to represent parents before a case is filed. This is because early access to advice and advocacy prevents unnecessary and traumatic family separation and court filings.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES BEYOND COURT

As families targeted by the child welfare system are facing a multitude of issues, parent advocates often step in to meet the clients wherever they need help, which includes getting food stamps and other public benefits, securing housing and/or advocating with landlords about fixing repairs, identifying quality services available in the community for themselves or family members, and transportation assistance in order to attend medical and other appointments. Emma explains that this is often what child welfare cases are about and the guiding principle at BxD is “to go where our client needs [us].”

ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK

DEFINING AND IMPROVING SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

BxD is a legal services organization with a social justice framework. As such, the organization as Emma explains has a good feedback loop from parent advocates and lawyers in order to ensure that proceedings and meetings are client-centered and everyone on the team is responsive to clients’ needs and questions.

PROFILE 5: THE BRONX DEFENDERS (BXD)

POLICY LEVEL WORK

TRAINING LAWYERS IN NY AND NATIONWIDE

Parent advocates train attorneys, other advocates and child welfare agencies across the state and nation on a number of issues including how best to advocate and empower parents in the child welfare system, the importance of family time and visitation when children and parents are separated, and the harm of family separation. They also speak and write on child welfare issues in an effort to connect the issues to rights-based movements for social, racial, gender, and reproductive justice.

SPEAKING AT THE CAPITAL TO AMEND FOUNDED INVESTIGATION PROTOCOL

As Emma explains, BxD is limited in the amount of lobbying and policy work they can do because they are a 501(c)(3) organization and not specifically funded for this work. They work with other parent advocacy organizations on various legislative proposals, however, to reform the child protection system. For example, BxD is currently working on a proposed law to change the state central registry in New York State. Each state in the United States has a registry that lists parents with founded child protection investigations and makes it available to certain employers, severely limiting a parent's ability to obtain employment and support their family. The parent's name remains on the list until their youngest child is 28 years old, regardless of the allegations. BxD has drafted a bill that, if adopted, would limit the number of years a parent remains on the registry in certain cases. In 2017 and 2019, parent advocates, lawyers, and social workers from BxD went to Albany to talk to legislators about proposed changes and will continue to do this work. BxD is also supporting legislation to permit contact between children and their parents after adoptions when it is found to be in the child's best interest and various reforms around drug use and child protection cases.

EVALUATIONS

Evaluation of some programming is in progress.

PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED

Parent-supported

PROFILE 6: JEWISH CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION (JCCA) OF NEW YORK

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	858 E. 29th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11210	
CONTACT INFORMATION	Ms. Marleen Litt, Assistant Vice President Ms. Veronica Worley, Parent, Parent Coordinator	Ms. Yudelca De La Cruz, Program Director for the Parent Advocacy Program and Family Resource Center
WEBSITE	https://www.jccany.org/	
PHONE	+1 917-808-4800	
TYPE	Non-profit organization	
PROGRAM MISSION	"JCCA's mission is to provide the highest quality child welfare and mental health services to New York's neediest and most vulnerable children and families to ensure that their safety, permanency and well-being leads to a life of stability and promise."	
PROGRAM ORIGINS	<p>JCCA began its parent advocacy program in December of 2013, with the organization going back to 1822. The programs that Ms. De la Cruz oversees have parent advocates who have personal lived experience with child welfare. They are present in the initial child safety conferences, provide support and advocacy, and help parents understand the purpose of the conference. The JCCA has parent advocates "who have been there since 2013" and that level of commitment is only seen with those with lived experience. The relationship between parent and parent advocate is strong because there is intrinsic value in the lived experience, as Ms. Litt notes. She also explains that it is integral that the agency has people very supportive of the work they do, including the executive director, Ron Richter, who believes that peer advocacy will be a billable service throughout NY, beginning in July 2019. Ms. Worley, a parent advocate since 2013, reports that there is a large focus of the JCCA on preventative services, to wrap a family in services and resources to move beyond any obstacles they may have.</p>	
COMPONENTS		
SIZE OF STAFF	50 in the parent advocacy division of JCCA	
PARENT ADVOCATES	45 parent advocates with child welfare experience	
BOARD COMPOSITION	JCCA's board is composed of professionals and non-parent advocates.	
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	5 professionals within the parent advocacy division of JCCA	
BUDGET	\$732,000 of the parent advocate division	
TARGET POPULATION	Low income, residents of Brooklyn and Queens ACS offices	

PROFILE 6: JEWISH CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION (JCCA) OF NEW YORK

IMPACT	Parent advocacy program: January 2018-Dec 2018, parent advocates have attended about 3400 child safety and related conferences. As Ms. Litt explains, through parent advocate presence, fewer children are remanded into care.
COMPENSATION	Parents are paid in multiple ways depending on their work at the JCCA. Coordinators are paid part-time, field work is done per diem, and Family Resource Center (FRC) parent advocates are paid full-time salaries.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	<p>Before onboarding, parent advocates undergo 6 one-hour modules on engagement, resources, and trauma. There are also monthly trainings that involve updates on training, which include secondary trauma, boundary creation and maintenance. The training coordinator runs the modules and comes up with the topics. Some of the training is done by outside trainers/professionals.</p> <p>A credentialing process for parent advocates is currently a non-required process that is run through the state, conducted with family and peer advocates. There are 1000 hours of advocacy experience, and training (online and in person), phone consultation. Overall it is a rigorous procedure. Once one becomes credentialed, parent advocates have to have 20 hours of educational credits of continuing education every year, and file a short application about how they are using the training.</p>
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>POWERFUL PRESENCE IN INITIAL CHILD SAFETY CONFERENCES</p> <p>Parent advocates of the JCCA predominately spend their time with parents during the Initial Child Safety Conference that is conducted by the city. They are able to interact with parents a few minutes before, be a source of support throughout the conference, and debrief after the conference. Parents see peer advocates as supportive and understanding. They ask the questions that parents do not feel comfortable asking, and ask for breaks. Ms. Worley explains that although their work is designed around the initial safety conference, it often goes beyond this. She is working with families that call as a result of work she did 2 years ago. She explains that the JCCA is supportive of that kind of relationship, promoting strong bonds and confidence between parent advocate and parent.</p> <p>ABILITY TO RELATE TO A DIVERSE POPULATION</p> <p>Parent advocates in the JCCA interact with many people that are from different backgrounds. As Ms. Worley explains, she has learned through training and in practice, how to understand and respect boundaries of people from different faiths and cultures, which not only helps her in work, but gives her skills to interact as a global citizen daily.</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>ACTING ON STRENGTHS</p> <p>Parent advocates at JCCA, as Ms. Litt describes, have the ability to hone their skills in a particular area, either in their roles at The Family Resource Center or at child safety conferences. In this way they are able to develop new ways parent advocates can participate in the process of program development at the JCCA.</p>

PROFILE 6: JEWISH CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION (JCCA) OF NEW YORK

POLICY LEVEL WORK

PARTICIPATION IN THINK TANKS AND COMMITTEES

As Ms. Litt describes, the JCCA parent advocates participate in larger committees and think tanks outside of the JCCA and within JCCA in order to develop best practices in child welfare situations. Part of their work has been working with parents in residential programs, who have specific and defined needs that differ from the general population of parents that the JCCA works with.

RESEARCH PROJECT PARTICIPATION TO HIGHLIGHT PARENT ADVOCACY ROLE

Additionally, JCCA routinely participates in research conducted on parent advocacy. For example, JCCA parent advocates have participated in research conducted by the Administration of Children's Services in New York and by PhD candidates from universities throughout New York City. Through publishing of research on parent advocates, JCCA hopes to demonstrate that the benefits of parent advocates is not just experiential, but also evidence-based.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH COLLABORATION

As a part of The Family Resource Center of the JCCA, parent and family advocates and social workers "support, empower, and strengthen the capabilities of parents and caregivers in Central and South Brooklyn." Ms. De La Cruz explains that by providing comprehensive and holistic care and support to families of children with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs, the JCCA and its parent advocates have a preventive focus.

TRAINING ALONGSIDE CHILD PROTECTION

The JCCA is currently working on policy to train parent advocates alongside child protection officers, so that they are aware of the correct protocol and can correct behaviors within the parent advocates' main work in initial safety conferences, as Ms. Worley describes.

EVALUATIONS	No formal evaluation of JCCA's parent advocacy program has taken place.
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-Supported

PROFILE 7: WASHINGTON STATE PARENT ALLY COMMITTEE (WSPAC)

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	Washington, United States
CONTACT INFORMATION	Ambrosia Eberhardt Regional Representative Parent Ally from Region 1 of WSPAC
WEBSITE	https://www.childrenshomesociety.org/parentally
PHONE	+1 206-695-3263
TYPE	Non-profit organization, housed under and supported by Children's Home Society*
PROGRAM MISSION	"To maintain and/or safely reunite children with their birth parents or relatives. It brings the parent's voice in to the development of child welfare policy and practice. It promotes improved and equitable outcomes for all children and parents regardless of their race, gender, or circumstance. It advocates for parent leadership in the direct service training and public awareness activities that strengthen and support those families."
PROGRAM ORIGINS	WSPAC was established in March 2007 and parent advocacy began when WSPAC began. Ambrosia, a parent advocate at WSPAC, explains that there was a demand for a statewide movement for parent advocacy. WSPAC, as it is now, took several years to develop and began with having representatives from local chapters of parent groups meet in a central location, in Spokane. By having this centralized meeting, parent advocates were able to feel part of a bigger community of passionate individuals spurred to create big changes. WSPAC's statewide parent advocacy initiative with local chapters throughout the state has inspired other similar organizations throughout the country, that have developed differently from the WSPAC model. It is something that parent ally Ambrosia "would have never imagined or even thought of."

COMPONENTS

SIZE OF STAFF	Approximately 59 members
PARENT ADVOCATES	3 paid parent advocates, 10-20 stipended volunteer parent advocates up to 10 alumni that get paid through there a job to serve.
BOARD COMPOSITION	No formal board, WSPAC serves as the board
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	10-15 professionals who provide support and advice for parent advocates
BUDGET	\$7000-\$9000, WSPAC had to restructure to have three meetings and use skype for rural communities versus four in order to support the increasing volunteer work that parent advocates do.

PROFILE 7: WASHINGTON STATE PARENT ALLY COMMITTEE (WSPAC)

TARGET POPULATION	Parents impacted by the child welfare system in Washington State.
IMPACT	Parent advocates at WSPAC have striven to make systems less punitive and more restorative. Using their voices as parents with experience in child welfare has helped to shape policy and procedures to create large system changes within child welfare. As Ambrosia states, strengthening the parent voice has enabled policy-makers and government officials to recognize the importance of supporting parents and thereby strengthening families. In that vein, formalized parent advocacy and programs have been instituted in Washington State with the help of WSPAC parent advocates.
COMPENSATION	WSPAC has 1 part time staff. Up to 10-20 parent advocates volunteer on a stipended basis which pays for travel and childcare. There are also alumni that serve and get paid through their job to participate.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	<p>Individual Level Training: Boundaries, Story Sharing/Knowing your audience, Protective Factors, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Ethical Dilemmas</p> <p>Organization Level Training: Trauma Informed, Leadership, advocacy, policy</p> <p>Policy Level Training: How to advocate, how bills are made, legislative advocacy how to effectively share your story with limited time</p> <p>On a local level, Ambrosia highlights that local chapters of WSPAC play a role in defining the types of training they would like to have based on group interest. The training is done, as is much of their work, collaboratively, where parent advocates and professionals facilitate the work together.</p>
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL PARENTS</p> <p>As Ambrosia describes, parent advocates support parents in many different ways, through other local programs, like Parents for Parents Program, that often has some of the same parent leaders including accompanying them to court, going to meetings with parents, developing coherent and effective stories, and helping prepare questions. The role of parent advocates is thus to help parents advocate for themselves on an individual level in difficult situations. SPAN the local committee that feeds into the larger statewide committee does things like train up leadership, plan and put on Reunification day celebrations, collaborate with other stakeholder or parent led groups, put on a Holiday Party around Christmas for Parents in the system to get an extra visit and exchange gifts with their child that are provided to them. We are part of using our story locally to humanize involved parents to foster parents by sharing what we need and how to best work with us.</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>PARENT ADVOCACY COMMITTEES THROUGHOUT THE STATE</p> <p>As parent groups developed throughout the state, there was initiative to have representatives from these groups join larger, centralized group meetings so that information and policy could be more easily disseminated. Ambrosia credits these centralized meetings and local representation as having a significant impact on development of large parenting programs and groups such as Parents4Parents.</p>

PROFILE 7: WASHINGTON STATE PARENT ALLY COMMITTEE (WSPAC)

POLICY LEVEL WORK

ADVOCATING FOR PREVENTIVE PATHWAYS IN CHILD WELFARE

WSPAC supported a measure called the “Family Assessment Response.” When a non-severe allegation of abuse or neglect is reported, parents are not subjected to an investigation by child protection and instead are able to receive a short intervention to support the parents’ needs. This way parents do not have a founded case on their record, which can disqualify those looking for employment or volunteer work with children, the elderly, and disabled populations.

MITIGATING HOUSING BARRIERS

As Ambrosia explains, a huge issue in reunification for parents and children is housing availability. In order to apply for housing, there are often screenings that costs \$35-\$50 for each apartment and thus a significant amount of money must be spent in order to apply for different apartments. WSPAC has supported a measure that allows these screenings to apply for 30 days and is accepted everywhere. Additionally, WSPAC supported parents in Washington as landlords were discriminating against parents who had SSI, Social Security benefits, or TANF. Anti-discrimination legislation supported by WSPAC was passed in 2017.

STRENGTHENING BONDS WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

As parenting is evaluated by child protection, incarcerated parents face additional challenges to prove the vitality of the bond between them and their children. WSPAC parent advocates help facilitate connections--keeping parents in touch with a social worker and sending letters to their children whenever possible. By keeping evidence of a parent’s relationship with her children, parent advocates can extend the evaluation period for reunification until the parent is in a more stable position.

CREATING LEGISLATION

WSPAC is committed to creating a more equitable and fair process for parents who have been found to have abused or neglected a child and have transformed their lives and are seeking employment. WSPAC seeks to develop a certificate of rehabilitation to remove the life-long handicap of a founded case. WSPAC’s position towards the founded finding reflects their larger legacy initiatives, including increasing the amount of time parents have once a case is first filed in order to have time to contest the allegations, developing certificates of rehabilitation to remove parents from a lifelong founded finding, and allowing parents to receive welfare benefits to up to 6 months after a child has been removed.

TESTIFYING ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Ambrosia describes that WSPAC parent advocates testified on the federal Family First Prevention Act, legislation to provide family supports rather than child removal.

EVALUATIONS	No formal evaluation, but Parents for Parents has numerous one and is currently under review in hopes to attain evidence-based status. This is due in December 2019
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-led

* The Washington State Parent Ally Committee (WSPAC) and Parents for Parents (see profile) are two separate organizations that operate out of Washington, that work closely together. WSPAC focuses on statewide policy advocacy, while the Parents for Parents program provides peer mentoring for parents involved in child welfare throughout the state.

PROFILE 8: POSITIVE POWERFUL PARENTS (PPP)

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS	
LOCATION	Melbourne, Australia
CONTACT INFORMATION	Susan Arthur, Parent Advocate Melanie Keely, Project Advisor at Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU)
WEBSITE	https://www.facebook.com/positivepowerfulparents/
PHONE	
TYPE	Part of an incorporated organization called Reinforce Self Advocacy (Reinforce)
PROGRAM MISSION	"Positive Powerful Parents is an organization run for and by parents with an intellectual disability that have their children with them or have had their children taken by state government."
PROGRAM ORIGINS	Positive Powerful Parents was started 7 years ago, originally with three members who were each impacted by child welfare. Susan, a parent advocate at PPP and one of the founding members, explains that her own and Positive Powerful Parents' position is that they want to be treated like any other parent and their disabilities do not preclude them from being a good parent. PPP started under the organization of Reinforce and is supported by Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU). The function of these larger organizations and their personnel assigned to support PPP, like Melanie Keely who is a Project Manager at SARU, is to facilitate programs and develop resources that are clearly linked to the desires of PPP members, as described by Melanie, Susan, and Julie. Julie, a parent advocate at PPP, highlights that although PPP parents do not expect to reunite with their children, they hope that parents with an intellectual disability will be able to keep their children.
COMPONENTS	
SIZE OF STAFF	8
PARENT ADVOCATES	5 Parent Advocates
BOARD COMPOSITION	PPP's parent organization (Reinforce Self Advocacy) has a board of directors that is comprised of people with intellectual disabilities, usually 2 are from PPP directly.
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	3
BUDGET	No formal budget, but working on applying for continued funding from an external source or government.

PROFILE 8: POSITIVE POWERFUL PARENTS (PPP)

TARGET POPULATION	Parents with intellectual disability who have been impacted by child welfare services in Victoria, and the larger Australia area.
IMPACT	PPP's main focus has been creating change. Whereas initially the group was interested in learning that there were other parents with disabilities who were facing similar difficulties with child welfare, the group has taken on an interest in having future generations not face the same difficulties that they have face and continue to face, according to Julie. Susan, similarly, emphasizes the growing support they provide to parents and the connections they have with parents with intellectual disabilities, especially in more rural areas in Victoria. Positive Powerful Parents has been involved in working with the child welfare agency in order to create resources to help child protection officers understand and consider the particular challenges for parents with disabilities.
COMPENSATION	Parents work on a volunteer basis.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	PPP has trainings that are facilitated by Reinforce and SARU, which include group skills, leadership skills, telling your story, self-advocacy, administrative and work skills, empathy skills, organizational skills, emotional regulation. Julie explains that her future career goals involve becoming a support worker, much like the role that Melanie occupies, in order to have parents with intellectual disabilities able to rely on parent leaders with intellectual disabilities instead of relying on professionals.
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>SELF-ADVOCACY FOCUS</p> <p>In order to build resources and skills for parents with intellectual disabilities and being under the umbrella of organizations like Reinforce and SARU, the focus of programming and training has been largely on improving the advocacy potential of individuals in PPP. As there are particular challenges that parents with intellectual disabilities face in child welfare, many of the groups and trainings are about skill-building and generating confidence in parent advocates. Melanie notes that the stories of parent advocates are largely what drives policy change, thus expanding the reach and skills of parent advocates of Positive Powerful Parents will create changes and awareness not only in child welfare agencies, but in other parent advocacy groups.</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>DETERMINING GOALS AS PARENT ADVOCATES</p> <p>Parent advocates at PPP are passionate about determining what their projects and next goals should be, and SARU and Reinforce are there to provide technical support in their work. Melanie emphasizes that each member of PPP brings separate strengths, which is what makes their work compelling and successful. In understanding the differing realities of parent advocates within PPP, Susan explains that they have adapted to make their group to be as open and support-oriented as possible. Both she and Julie emphasize that people are at different stages in their growth. One of PPP's goals is to create an environment where parents with intellectual disabilities are not afraid of coming forward, but at the same time respecting everyone's privacy.</p>

PROFILE 8: POSITIVE POWERFUL PARENTS (PPP)

POLICY LEVEL WORK

CREATING RESOURCES FOR CHILD PROTECTION AGENCY

PPP parent advocates are currently working on resources to educate the child protection authority that parents with an intellectual disability can parent a child and to describe the types of support that parents need during a case. Using notes from conversations with community organizations and experiences from parents with intellectual disabilities, they are creating a brochure for the child protection agency to better understand, work with, and listen to parents with intellectual disabilities.

FOSTERING SOLIDARITY AND AWARENESS WITH MUSIC*

In writing, producing, and developing songs about parents with intellectual disabilities' experiences with child welfare, parent advocates have artistically created a way to convey their struggles, their hopes, and their needs. This has not only helped in sharing their stories and promoting their voice throughout Australia, but has helped in recovery and strength building amongst PPP members.

VIDEOS TO CONVEY EXPERIENCES AND BEST PRACTICES*

Parent advocates from PPP have developed a series of videos that illustrate the experiences parents with intellectual disability face in parenting and with child welfare cases. Susan describes that the videos they have developed are often very impactful in evoking emotions, however she believes that more than highlighting emotions, it shows the real issues of what is happening in Australia regarding child welfare. The production of videos from PPP started shortly after the conception of the group. It came from the members voicing their need to share their struggles and it allowed all members to participate in all aspects of the video production.

DISABILITY LEGISLATION IN AUSTRALIA

Melanie explains that Australia is currently undergoing big changes in its disability legislation, especially the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). PPP and its support organizations want to ensure that "parents with intellectual disability are always included under that scheme." Parents with disabilities have not been able to access funds to support parenting efforts. PPP therefore looks to community partnerships and long-term, systemic change in order to improve experiences amongst this community.

* To see videos, poems, and songs created by PPP: <https://www.voicestogether.com.au/community/resources-and-videos/positive-powerful-parents/>

EVALUATIONS

No formal evaluation.

PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED

Parent-led

PROFILE 9: RISE MAGAZINE

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	224 W. 30th #804, New York, NY 10001	
CONTACT INFORMATION	Nora McCarthy Director	Jeanette Vega Training Director
WEBSITE	http://www.risemagazine.org	
PHONE	+1 (646) 543-7099	
TYPE	Fiscally sponsored program by the Fund for the City of New York (for financial and administrative support)	
PROGRAM MISSION	"Rise trains parents to write and speak about their experiences with the child welfare system and become advocates for reform. Our mission is to build parent leadership to drive child welfare solutions that parents believe will help their families thrive."	
PROGRAM ORIGINS	Rise was founded in 2003 by Nora McCarthy and started out as a project within the Child Welfare Organizing Project in New York. The program evolved by integrating parent voice in the forefront of the writing process. By building resources, skills, and leadership for parents involved in child welfare, Rise developed a system where parent advocates defined their own experiences and informed child safety practices. Jeanette Vega, the Training Director at Rise magazine, began in 2008 and describes the difficulty in working with a system "that was really cruel to [her] at one point in [her] life," but explains that being a parent in the room at these conferences she can influence how child safety officers talk to and about parents. Since 2015, Rise has focused on partnering with child welfare and legal agencies to improve frontline practice to support safe, timely reunification.	

COMPONENTS

SIZE OF STAFF	9 staff in parent advocacy	
PARENT ADVOCATES	One full-time staff, three part-time staff, 4-6 part-time contributors/year, 12-25 paid participants/year	
BOARD COMPOSITION		
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	6 people	
BUDGET	Through foundation funding, individual philanthropy, contracts, and government funding: \$550,000	
TARGET POPULATION	Population affected by child welfare in NYC, with national reach.	

PROFILE 9: RISE MAGAZINE

IMPACT	There are “no standards for entry into the organization,” as Jeannette describes, which means that parents have been able to influence child welfare from writing for the magazine, which is read nationwide, to making concrete and specific recommendations to child welfare agencies. Rise’s interdisciplinary partnerships have allowed it to influence and change power dynamics within the child welfare system.
COMPENSATION	Parent advocate contributors are paid according to their participation. Parent advocates employed by Rise are paid full-time salaries.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	<p>Individual Level Training: Child welfare history, history of parent advocacy, impact of trauma and stress, coping with the emotional Impact of parent advocacy, training on writing personal essays, reporting, and writing speeches</p> <p>Organization Level Training: Developing and facilitating trainings</p> <p>Policy Level Training: Training on the physical and emotional components of public speaking, writing and delivering an effective speech, handling question and answer sessions</p>
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>Individual level casework is not a large component of Rise’s work, but as Jeanette explains “as [Rise] is targeting the [child protection services] to change their practices, [Rise] is helping people on an individual level!”</p> <p>RESOURCE CREATION AND DISTRIBUTION</p> <p>Rise builds tips, handouts, and videos which are informational reservoirs that are created by and for parents, so parents are able to better navigate the child welfare system. Rise also highlights its facebook page (www.facebook.com/readrisemag/) as key in order to give and receive real-time feedback. With its frequent publications, Rise distributes information about safe parenting, parents’ rights, medical and clinical resources, with an emphasis on a preventative approach.</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>As Nora and Jeanette detail, Rise believes in building leadership amongst parents so that they are able to become active partners in the design and delivery of services that reach the goal of protecting families and thereby children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>RISE & SHINE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM:</i> The writing and public speaking workshops that Rise leads allows parents to develop their voice. It also provides educational workshops to understand the child welfare system • <i>RISE MAGAZINE:</i> Parents are able to publish their writing and influence the creation of the magazine, which offers concrete guidance on how to navigate the child welfare system.

PROFILE 9: RISE MAGAZINE

POLICY LEVEL WORK

INFLUENCING BEST PRACTICE BY TRAINING CHILD WELFARE AGENCY

Rise participates in training child welfare officials to improve frontline practice. The underlying idea behind Rise’s training, as Jeanette and Nora explain, is the idea that parents should not be powerless surrounding decisions and experiences that they are intimately involved in. Through contracts with ACS’s (Administration of Children’s Services) Workforce Institute, CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children), the courts, and child welfare agencies, Rise parent leaders deliver presentations to guide staff in better understanding and working with parents.

IMPROVING FOSTER CARE PRACTICES

Parent advocates at Rise have created a TIPS Approach to Visiting, which is a model that has been adopted by 7 agencies to train their caseworkers using print and video materials.

PREVENTION-FOCUSED WORKGROUP

Rise is focusing on implementing policy and practice recommendations outlined in its spring 2018 Insights paper on young mothers who grew up in foster care to highlight the trend of intergenerational foster care placement¹

BUILDING COLLABORATIVES IN GOVERNMENT

Rise has sent its parent advocates to the state capital and City Hall in order to advocate for better policies and practices in child welfare, including permanent legal representation for parents and prevention practices in child welfare systems. Additionally, a contingent of the Rise staff work at the policy level to write letters and recommendations to the commissioner, in negotiating contracts within child welfare and foster care agencies, and introducing stipulations that emphasize the importance of parent voice in child welfare situations. Rise participates in publishing “white papers” on policy and practice reform, creating or participating in task forces, developing new practice models for child welfare and associated legal services, and leading cross-agency collaborations to test new approaches.

EVALUATIONS	No formal evaluation
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-Led

PROFILE 10: KASPER - THE FINNISH ASSOCIATION FOR CHILD AND FAMILY GUIDANCE/VOIKUKKIA-OPERATION

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS	
LOCATION	Finland
CONTACT INFORMATION	Ms. Mareena Heinonen Parent Advocate at Kasper mareena.heinonen@suomenkasper.fi <i>Mirjami Koivunen</i> <i>Specialist/Team Leader</i> <i>mirjami.koivunen@suomenkasper.fi</i>
WEBSITE	https://www.voikukkia.fi/
PHONE	+358 044 345 0939
TYPE	Non-profit organization
PROGRAM MISSION	Kasper has two main objectives: 1) foster care parent support (VOIKUKKIA-group model) 2) peer support groups for children whose parents have divorced
PROGRAM ORIGINS	Parent advocacy began in 2010. Each foster care situation is always a crisis and parents are usually left alone in the situation, so the support that Kasper provides markedly helps their situation. As Ms. Heinonen, a parent advocate that has been involved with Kasper for nearly 10 years describes, VOIKUKKIA group model has a good track record of strengthening parent's own coping skills and parenthood. VOIKUKKIA-operations promotes more visibility for parents' own voice, both in the media and in child protection services. The biggest hurdle they have faced is prejudice toward parents with children in out-of-home care. They want people to realize that supporting parents is something that is necessary and helpful.
COMPONENTS	
SIZE OF STAFF	11 full time staff, 20 volunteers
PARENT ADVOCATES	20 parent advocate volunteers, 1 full-time parent advocate
BOARD COMPOSITION	1 parent advocate on governing body out of 5 members
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	11 professionals; 5 professionals work directly with parent advocacy
BUDGET	Undisclosed formal budget
TARGET POPULATION	Child welfare, foster-care affected population of Finland

PROFILE 10: KASPER - THE FINNISH ASSOCIATION FOR CHILD AND FAMILY GUIDANCE/VOIKUKKIA-OPERATION

IMPACT	VOIKUKKIA-operations has worked to ensure that parent voice is integrated and is heard in every aspect of child welfare, whether that is on the local level with support groups, to peer mentoring, and in larger institutions, which include legislative bodies and educational institutions.
COMPENSATION	Mostly volunteers, there is one full-time parent advocate who is salaried.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	VOIKUKKIA-operations has a training process that takes 4 days which involves training by a professional and a parent advocate volunteer. Parent advocates and professionals go through the same training. The training process involves talks and information about the foster care process and stages, and what the support process looks like. Parent advocates have described that learning about the foster care process and its different stages helps provide parents a better understanding of the legalities, according to Ms. Heinonen. VOIKUKKIA-operations upholds and supports the national network of group counsellors.
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>WORK WITH LOCAL ADVOCATES</p> <p>Although Kasper does not do direct individual case work, they do provide support and assistance to local advocates and local groups doing individual case work.</p> <p>SUPPORT GROUP ASSISTANCE</p> <p>Kasper parent advocates help set up support groups and assist in training of groups. Currently they helped set up about 30 groups across Finland. Online services – VOIKUKKIA-operations organizes online peer support groups. In year 2020 online chat for parents will be tested, where anyone can participate in a low threshold from anywhere in Finland</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>IMPROVING PARENT ADVOCACY WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION</p> <p>Parent advocates have a active role in developing methods for parent support. They have a important role in suggesting policies, training content, and improving leadership positions for parent advocates within the organization and in the community.</p>

PROFILE 10: KASPER - THE FINNISH ASSOCIATION FOR CHILD AND FAMILY GUIDANCE/VOIKUKKIA-OPERATION

POLICY LEVEL WORK	<p>SUPPORTING PARENTS THROUGH IMPROVING POLICIES</p> <p>VOIKUKKIA-operations team members help parent advocates in face-to-face meetings and on-line meetings to help prepare parents to speak in front of legislative bodies and facilitate policy work. Parent advocates also collaboratively work to create brochures, pamphlets, materials and presentations for events.</p> <p>COMMENTING ON NEW DRAFTED LEGISLATION</p> <p>VOIKUKKIA-operations parent advocates have a role in submitting comments on new legislation brought locally and country-wide. For example, healthcare and child welfare-related legislation was recently updated and Kasper's parent advocates submitted recommendations to integrate the perspective of parents.</p> <p>SPEAKING AT SEMINARS</p> <p>Parent advocates regularly speak at seminars involving universities, parents, and social workers, which helps inform the public, researchers, and those working in child welfare-related fields about the importance of including parent voice in legislation.</p> <p>CHILD WELFARE LEGISLATION PROGRAM UPDATE</p> <p>Parent advocates were involved in submitting comments and providing a unified, message that parents' voice must be considered in the upcoming new child welfare system revisions. Also, parents emphasized the need for legislation to take a longer-term perspective, as current practices have tended to focus on "here and now."</p> <p>THE AFTERCARE SYSTEM</p> <p>Parents have also discussed with the legislature the need for improvements in aftercare system for children placed in foster care and ways to strengthen families. VOIKUKKIA-operations integrates the perspectives of parent advocates with the views of youth who are currently in or were in the foster care system.</p> <p>PUBLISHING A BOOK ABOUT CHILD WELFARE EXPERIENCES</p> <p>Parent advocates participated in writing a book that includes stories and poems related to the emotional journey when a child is removed from his or her home. The book was published in 2014.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small guidebook from parent to parent was published in 2014. • Guidebook for parent support methods was published in 2015. • Workbook about support person operations was published in 2019. • Workbook about VOIKUKKIA-group model was published in 2019. • Other materials from parents to parent: videos, social media contents and other materials found in www.voikukkia.fi
EVALUATIONS	No formal evaluation.
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-supported

PROFILE 11: PARENTS FOR PARENTS (P4P)

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	Parents for Parents Office 1428 West Broadway Ave Spokane WA, 99201
CONTACT INFORMATION	Ambrosia Eberhardt P4P Program Manager and Parent Ally Ambrosia.eberhardt@cceasternwa.org
WEBSITE	https://www.childrenshomesociety.org/parentsforparents
PHONE	509-934-0966
TYPE	Non-profit, statewide program in Washington State. This profile is of one of the 10 divisions of Parents for Parents. It is currently housed under the Catholic Charities, Rising Strong Program.
PROGRAM MISSION	“Empower, connect, and educate parents navigating the dependency court system through peer support.”
PROGRAM ORIGINS	Spokane Parents for Parents was established in 2013 and was officially established as a program by the state legislature in 2015-2016 legislative session. In Spokane, a woman from the court system came to Spokane’s local parent advocacy network meeting, which is where she heard about the Parents for Parents program in other counties. The Children’s Home Society of Washington had seed money that enabled Spokane to start its own branch in Spokane. Heather Cantamessa, a parent advocate (called Parent Allies in Washington State) at Parents For Parents, was able to pull resources and training materials together to build a full program in Spokane. Ambrosia has served since the implementation and now runs the program.
COMPONENTS	
SIZE OF STAFF	6
PARENT ADVOCATES	5 parent advocates.
BOARD COMPOSITION	Oversight committee that includes Heather and Ambrosia (Parent allies), P4P clinical supervisor, Court Commissioner, Rising strong Staff(Parent Program of P4P) A local foundation member, key child welfare stakeholders, and Training a lead Parent ally.
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	1 professional, (Clinical Supervisor)

PROFILE 11: PARENTS FOR PARENTS (P4P)

BUDGET	Around \$600,000 bi-annually for 13 counties, around 42,000 annually in Spokane In Parents for Parents: If the subgroup is just doing 101 class, they receive around \$28,000/year. There is also administration cost at the state level that is taken from that sum. There is currently a legislative ask to take this statewide in every county by mid-2020.
TARGET POPULATION	Parents in the child welfare system in Spokane and moving towards statewide in all counties.
IMPACT	Overall, Parents for Parents has had a large impact in the way child welfare and parent advocates function in Washington State. Ambrosia explains that the program saves money, and importantly reduces time in care and trauma to all members of the family. Every person, besides the clinical supervisor, who has had their children removed from their care, navigated a child welfare case and had a successful result, Ambrosia reports, though not necessarily reunification with all children. There is previous research done on P4P in another county and that gave us Promising Practice outcome. We hope for evidence based this current research time.
COMPENSATION	Ambrosia is the only full-time paid employee with Spokane's Parents for Parents program, part time hours with P4P and part-time hours at Rising Strong doing similar things. Most parent advocates paid as part-time volunteers (\$12.50/hr stipend) with a range of 3-12 hours a week.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	<p>Have one-day 101 and 201 programs that run monthly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Level Training: Compassion fatigue/burn-out, Resilience Training, Boundaries, De-escalation/reframing, story sharing, court hearing training, self-care, soft/hard skills, mandated reporting for advocates. • Organization Level Training: Data collection, confidentiality, Building folders, resource creation, dependency system, trauma-informed, cultural competency • Policy Level Training: lobby training, class facilitating • Outside Trainings: Recovery coaching, certified peer counseling, Poverty and incarceration simulations. • Inside for parents currently involved: Helping Other Parents Engage (HOPE) Class parent advocates and court professionals provide training so parents are more empowered to be successful during their dependency case. Additionally, they have 'Building Hope' classes, three times a month, focusing on housing, employment and college resources, building a support network, protective factors, childcare resources, how to show the courts they're making progress, perspective taking, boundaries, and healthy communication.

PROFILE 11: PARENTS FOR PARENTS (P4P)

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK

PARENT REFERRAL BY CHILD WELFARE SERVICES TO THE PARENTS4PARENTS PROGRAM

Parents often mentored along during their case and encouraged to get involved, if interested once their case closes. The parent is paid to gain experience and work with the parent advocates at the program. It enables them to get priority for their certified Peer Counseling license, and therefore be licensed by the state. This gives them an opportunity to learn about and be referred to jobs. Certified Peer Counselors have a livable wage and, as Ambrosia explains 'a way out of poverty.' Doing work at Parents for Parents gives parents experience doing peer work.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS

Parent advocates at Parents for Parents are present at the first hearing for families and follow up for any additional hearings or check-ins. They offer classes for at least the first four months of the individual case, so that families are able to use the resources that Parents for Parents offers. They help create written documentation of parents going 'above and beyond' in their case by filling a certificate of attendance at court to each and every class they attend with Parents for Parents.

ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK

REGULAR VISION MEETINGS

Parents for Parents ensures that parent advocates have yearly lunch meetings at which they plan how they want the organization to function and operate in the next year, to discuss what has been working and what has not been working, and to bring new ideas to the table.

SURVEYS AT EVERY TRAINING AND CLASS

At every class parents and parent advocates attend, they receive a survey about what the organization could be doing better and what they are doing well. Based on these surveys, Ambrosia explains, they have made changes in the trainings.

PROFILE 11: PARENTS FOR PARENTS (P4P)

POLICY LEVEL WORK

INVOLVEMENT WITH POVERTY ACTION NETWORK

When parents first are reunited with their children, they often rely on government benefits and support for housing and food. Parents for Parents works toward ensuring that these safety nets are still present for parents in the future and are expanded if possible. Parent advocates play a role in calling and speaking to legislators, asking that they pass legislation related to these topics.

HOUSING SURVEY AND HOUSING LEGISLATION

Parents for Parents parent advocates have worked on a housing survey with the population they are directly serving asking about housing barriers in their child welfare case. This led to a working group being formed to discuss the issues raised, and a bill that is slated to be reviewed by the governor. The housing bill focuses on funding for housing opportunities for child welfare involved parents waiting to reunify, as housing is often the last barrier for reunification.

DIRECT FUNDING THROUGH LEGISLATURE

In having direct funding through the state legislature, Parents for Parents is able to utilize different strategies in creating programs that are most helpful to the populations they serve. As Ambrosia states, this allows for less restriction because although they are involved in government, it comes with less restrictions than if they were housed directly under the government.

EVALUATIONS

Spokane is one of the three sites being researched for evidence-based status, with results expected in December 2019.

PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED

Parent-led

PROFILE 12A: FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK (FIN) OF QUEENSLAND

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	Townsville, Queensland, Australia	
CONTACT INFORMATION	Rosamund Thorpe President of FIN Queensland	Bobbi Robertson Parent Advocate
WEBSITE	http://www.fin-qldtsv.org.au	
PHONE	+61 402 254 984	
TYPE	Incorporated	
PROGRAM MISSION	"To ensure that parents and family members have access to the information, support and advocacy they require to actively and equitably participate in the child protection process."	
PROGRAM ORIGINS	<p>FIN Queensland (Townsville) is a part of the larger network of FIN organizations and functions to support parents of families when child protection authorities intervene in their families lives by preventing their children from being taken into care, to maintain contact with children in care, or to work to have children returned to their own care. Dr. Rosamund Thorpe, a professor of Social Worker and the President of FIN Queensland (Townsville), has a long history of working as an academic. Her work involving speaking to hundreds of parents about their experiences with child protection propelled her and others to build a secondary organization of FIN in Townsville Queensland. Bobbi Robertson, a parent advocate at FIN Queensland, encountered the organization as a potential placement location in her social work school. With her experience in the child protection system, Bobbi grew into her role of parent advocate. "I can understand, I will cry with you," Bobbi says, because she knows that her experience goes beyond textbooks, it comes from intimately understanding what it means to be a parent under the gaze of child welfare agencies. This empathy and better understanding of parents is paramount as a parent advocate, as Bobbi explains, "Child Protection Services talks to you in child welfare terms. . . , they quickly go through things and don't explain it properly." Parent advocates operate by bridging this gap at a time when parents are embroiled in their emotions, fears about their children, and their own sense of dignity.</p>	
COMPONENTS		
SIZE OF STAFF	10: all volunteers	
PARENT ADVOCATES	1-2	
BOARD COMPOSITION	2 Parent Advocates on a board of 7	
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	5-6	

PROFILE 12A: FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK (FIN) OF QUEENSLAND

BUDGET	There is no formal budget currently. However, with sausage sizzles, family fun days, FIN Queensland highlights the importance of a grassroots community level approach. In working with various community programs, whether it is printing pamphlets, securing funding for community events, recruiting volunteers from other disciplines, FIN Queensland demonstrates that community development is an important way for small organizations to produce big results.
TARGET POPULATION	North Queensland area parents who are impacted by the child protection system, however they emphasize they do not turn anyone away.
IMPACT	FIN Queensland (Townsville) this year has supported 32 new parents this year and carried on work with 6 from previous years. Dr. Thorpe notes that usually the new contacts are higher, from visits to the women's prison in Queensland, however they have not visited this year due to constraints in timing and staffing. Though it has been scaled down this year, Dr. Thorpe emphasizes that working with women's prisons demonstrates a huge unmet need for parents who have their children in care.
COMPENSATION	All staff work as volunteers on a part-time basis
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	There is no formal training program for parent advocates. Instead, FIN Queensland (Townsville) boasts a support system between professionals and parent advocates with at least twice monthly meetings for preparation, shadowing opportunities, and supervision. This informal training is especially in concert between the staff and students from social work and parent advocates.
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	Their unfunded status and no obligation of keeping records of what parents say allows FIN Queensland to function as a safe space for parents. "Many of [the parents] feel like they can't go anywhere to speak," Dr. Thorpe explains about parents, who are afraid that the realities they reveal will be used against them. She describes the gradual process by which parents integrate themselves in the FIN Queensland (Townsville) organization, where parents may not reveal their whole story right away, "and that's okay." Parents are encouraged to share "enough to help them identify goals they want to work towards." This speaks to a broader philosophy that FIN Queensland (Townsville) supports: "new careers" for parents, whether that pursuit is social work, starting university, or career development in general. In this way, FIN Queensland (Townsville) visions itself as a sustainable program, which builds parents as future leaders whether that involves parent advocacy or not.
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	Parent Advocates play a role in defining what the needs are in the organization based on their perspective, whether that is advocating for training, playing a role on the board of the organization, and defining new community events or programs to create and facilitate.

PROFILE 12A: FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK (FIN) OF QUEENSLAND

<p>POLICY LEVEL WORK</p>	<p>FIN Queensland (Townsville) reports marked success in utilizing the strengths and stories of their parent advocates in meeting with the commissioner of Child Protection Services in the regional offices, which have informed inquiries and comments (available online on the child protection website), helped establish involvement of parent advocates as good practice, and spread the value of parent advocacy throughout Australia and globally.</p> <p>SHIFTING PRACTICE WITHIN CHILD PROTECTION AGENCIES: Their work has influenced a new “child safety framework of strength-based work” within the child protection agency, and as Dr. Thorpe describes, FIN Queensland (Townsville) counters any decisions that do not align with these views.</p> <p>USING PARENT STORIES FOR SUBMISSIONS: In terms of preventing out-of-home placements, FIN Queensland (Townsville) has countered these policies through their policy work of writing submissions and comments. Due to the history of indigenous people and the “stolen generations,” Queensland as a state are less enthusiastic about adoption than other regions of Australia. However, with introduction of Australia-wide and New South Wales legislation about adoption as an option for children taken into state care, FIN Queensland (Townsville) has made submissions to the federal government’s House of Representatives Social Services Committee in order to prevent any establishment of permanent child adoption policies and advocating for an alternative system where there is a Long-Term Custody Order with parents’ continued involvement. The work of journalists who have taken up the opinions of FIN Queensland (Townsville) advocates, parent advocates, and the voices of adult adoptees is reported to have had a large impact on this work.</p> <p>CHANGING DYNAMICS BETWEEN CHILD PROTECTION AND PARENTS USING MEDIA: To change the relationship between child protection services and parents, FIN Queensland (Townsville) parent advocates partnered with local child protection services to create a DVD about the parent viewpoint and what good practice should look like, which is now provided to child protection staff and related organizations. Involving themselves in planning, the script, and giving feedback on initial shoots, parent advocates saw their stories and ideas portrayed by actors. The DVD also helped create respect for FIN Queensland (Townsville), and as Bobbi explains, they are often consulted and sent referrals from community organizations and from child protection themselves.</p> <p>ATTENDING AND SPEAKING AT CONFERENCES, SOCIAL WORK TRAINING FIN’s parent advocates have attended various conferences and social work trainings and have been able to impact the different ways child welfare interacts with parents.</p>
<p>EVALUATIONS</p>	<p>No formal evaluation</p>
<p>PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED</p>	<p>Parent-Supported</p>

PROFILE 12B: FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK – VICTORIA

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	Victoria, Australia
CONTACT INFORMATION	Denise Smith Secretary of FIN Victoria info@finvic.org.au
WEBSITE	https://www.finvic.org.au/
PHONE	
TYPE	Non-profit organization
PROGRAM MISSION	<p>The purposes of the Association are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide information, and access to support, for parents and families who have had, or are at risk of having, children placed in out-of-home care. 2. To provide information to workers providing support to parents and families who have had, or are at risk of having, children placed in out-of-home care. 3. To provide opportunities for parents and families who have had, or are at risk of having, children placed in out-of-home care to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. provide support and advocacy for one another; and b. be heard by professionals and policy makers so they may have a deeper understanding of, and responsiveness to, the issues and concerns raised by them. 4. To promote knowledge and understanding throughout the community of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> c. issues faced by parents and families leading to, and following, children being placed in out-of-home care; d. the impact and outcomes for children placed in out-of-home care; and e. assistance and support that can be provided to parents and families to prevent children being placed in out-of-home care or to facilitate re-unification.”
PROGRAM ORIGINS	<p>FIN Victoria was incorporated in 2013. Denise is the founder and now secretary of FIN Victoria. FIN began working with another non-FIN related non-profit organization that did support work with the Family Inclusion Network. In Victoria, she noticed that there was no organization doing the work that FIN was doing, and thus was supported by the larger, national FIN organization to begin a chapter in Victoria. Since then, they have worked largely independently to fund and initiate projects that build parent advocacy in the state.</p>
COMPONENTS	
SIZE OF STAFF	16 members
PARENT ADVOCATES	7 parent advocates

PROFILE 12B: FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK – VICTORIA

BOARD COMPOSITION	Six board members, including two parent advocates
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	9 professionals
BUDGET	Have received two \$5000 grants to fund volunteers.
TARGET POPULATION	Parents in the state of Victoria
IMPACT	
COMPENSATION	Parent advocates and professionals are volunteers. FIN Victoria is able to provide reimbursement and travel stipends occasionally.
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	By partnering with a larger organization, called Village that is based in Victoria, FIN Victoria was able to provide some training with Village's support and also send members to Village's training. They focus on advocacy training. Denise notes that much of their training happens in an informal way, especially through knowledge sharing between professionals and parents.
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	ASSISTING INDIVIDUAL PARENTS WHETHER REMOTELY OR IN PERSON FIN Victoria parent advocates and professionals are able to help individual parents on a case-by-case basis through largely by phone and emails. Considering the landscape of Victoria, it is often difficult for parents to come to the FIN Victoria offices, and thus FIN provides remote support. FIN Victoria members help with providing resources, participating in individual cases and answering any questions parents have.
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	DRAWING ON DIFFERENT SKILL SETS AND EXPERIENCES FIN has a "shoestring budget" as Denise describes. Parent advocates have assisted in website creation, writing, and videos, to support the growth FIN as a grassroots organization in Victoria. Denise explains that working so closely together, it is easy to realize the different strengths members have in contributing to the growth of FIN Victoria.

PROFILE 12B: FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK – VICTORIA

POLICY LEVEL WORK

REDUCING THE POWER OF THE CHILDREN'S COURT

Considering the history of the Lost Generation in Australia, FIN Victoria plays particular mind to the ways that the children's court and other court systems have contributed to the harm of children in care. FIN Victoria is working to promote the rights of parents in court to avoid permanent care.

IMPROVING THE FUNDING OF ADVOCACY SERVICES

In every submission to local government that FIN Victoria has worked on since its inception, it has included funding of advocacy services in Victoria. Parent advocates traveled to a recent Australia-wide Senate Inquiry, to give evidence on how advocacy works and how it functions within child welfare. One of the main recommendations that came out of the inquiry was to fund advocacy.

WORKING ON INCLUSION IN ADVOCACY

FIN Victoria notes that many parents that they have worked with have intellectual disabilities, and they are currently working on resources and partnerships that support parents with intellectual disability going through the child welfare system. Additionally, they are looking to partner with an Aboriginal organization, as they are a group in Australia that faces a higher burden in child welfare with many children languishing in care.

EVALUATIONS

No formal evaluation

PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED

Parent-supported

PROFILE 12C: FAMILY INCLUSION STRATEGIES IN THE HUNTER

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia
CONTACT INFORMATION	Jessica Cocks contact@finclusionh.org
WEBSITE	http://www.finclusionh.org https://www.facebook.com/familyinclusionhunter/
PHONE	+ 61 429 004 450
TYPE	Charity Organization (Incorporated Association according to NSW law with charity status)
PROGRAM MISSION	“Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter (FISH) is a group of parents and workers who have formed to promote family inclusion in the lives of children in child protection and out of home care and family inclusive practice in the child protection and out of home care service system.”
PROGRAM ORIGINS	FISH started in 2014 as the discourse in New South Wales worsened surrounding child welfare including a push for adoptions from care. A group of social workers and other child welfare workers and researchers organised a family inclusive practice forum that talked about “the way parents and family were treated in the system and the need for greater inclusion.” The practice forum included parent’s voices which was incredibly powerful. From there, FISH developed.
COMPONENTS	
SIZE OF STAFF	There are a maximum of 10 people on the Committee – all volunteers. FISH has no paid staff.
PARENT ADVOCATES	We aim for a minimum of 50% of the Committee to be parents with lived experience.
BOARD COMPOSITION	As above.
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	As above. There is a maximum of 50% committee membership to be made up of people without lived experience.
BUDGET	FISH generates all its own income through delivering training and workshops in the community. Some of this income is used to pay parent leaders and the rest is retained by FISH. We also receive occasional donations. FISH spends approximately \$5,000 - \$10,000 per annum predominantly on payments to parent leaders.
TARGET POPULATION	Parents in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales, Australia, with impact rippling nationally. Six million people live in New South Wales and 500,000 live in the Hunter Valley. Between 1.5 and 2% of the children in the Hunter Valley are in care – a very high rate

PROFILE 12C: FAMILY INCLUSION STRATEGIES IN THE HUNTER

IMPACT	FISH parent advocates are regularly invited to participate and provide training and workshops to staff and carers. FISH promotes “family inclusion,” which is a term that is used in Australia in the field of child welfare by parent advocacy organisations such as FISH. It is now starting to be used more broadly.
COMPENSATION	Volunteer-based organization
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	New parent leaders in FISH are usually partnered with an experienced parent leader, and learn through working on support groups, talks, workshops, or conferences. FISH makes sure parents are well supported, by providing one on one and peer support in everything we do. FISH feels more training and support is needed especially for parent leaders /advocates but has limited resources.
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	<p>SUPPORT GROUP WORK: FISH runs a support group every month that is facilitated by parent leaders. The group is focused on parent to parent emotional support and information sharing.</p> <p>FISH administers a website and a Facebook page. Both are aimed primarily at parents and family.</p> <p>FISH provides some one to one support via phone, Facebook messaging and emails. We would like to do more but have limited resources.</p>
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	<p>PARENTS IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS What FISH parent leaders and members cite as a powerful component of their work is the fact that parents are in leadership positions. This makes a difference in their individual lives, as well as a big impact on those interfacing with parent leaders at different events. Parents present at conferences, deliver training and workshops run support group meetings, and contribute to policy submissions.</p>

PROFILE 12C: FAMILY INCLUSION STRATEGIES IN THE HUNTER

POLICY LEVEL WORK	<p>PANELS AND COMMUNITY EVENTS FISH parent leaders have spoken on panels and community events, to share their experience and expertise with carers, parents, families, etc. The parents speak from their lived experiences to different audiences. “The talks, events and workshops can vary from an hour to a full day on family inclusion in the child protection system”.</p> <p>PARITICIPATING IN INQUIRIES AND PUBLICATIONS FISH has written many submissions “to promote family inclusion, the importance of parent voice and the need for change to the child welfare system”. They have played a role in running a campaign statewide to oppose changes to permanency through the greater use of adoption. The FISH submissions and other publications are available on the FISH website.</p> <p>PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM AT CHILDREN’S COURT The University of Newcastle, in partnership with FISH has recently acquired funding for a six-month trial to provide court support in the Children’s Court with parents at the care application stage – who have just had children removed. The project has three elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court support • Workshops for parents • Online learning resources <p>The project is called the parent peer support project and is being evaluated by the same research team that did research into parent experiences when children are removed in 2017. FISH also participated in this research and will contribute to the ongoing research program.</p>
EVALUATIONS	FISH is participating in the evaluations above but there is no formal evaluation of FISH itself in process.
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-Led

PROFILE 13: PARENT ADVOCACY AND RIGHTS (PAR)

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

LOCATION	Edinburgh, Scotland	
CONTACT INFORMATION	Maggie Mellon parparents@gmail.com	<i>Taliah, Parent Advocate</i> scotsmumsguidetosafeguarding@gmail.com
WEBSITE	https://parparentsadvocacyrights.com/	
PHONE		
TYPE	Voluntary Organization	
PROGRAM MISSION	"Parents Advocacy and Rights (PAR) is a parent led group with support from professionals seeking to support parents with children in the care system, child protection, children's hearings, and other situations where they have lost care of their children, or risk losing care."	
PROGRAM ORIGINS	PAR began in 2016 with a group of parents and two independent social workers after hearing Dr. David Tobis speak about the success of parent advocacy in New York City, where parents working with allies were able to significantly reduce the number of children in out of home care. As a social worker for over 40 years, Maggie Mellon realized that "parents were being persecuted." After working for 20 years within the local child protection authority, which is where all statutory social workers are stationed, Ms. Mellon began writing and advocating for a better and different practice. Ashley, a parent advocate at PAR, has experienced the benefit of having a parent advocate during her child protection case and explains that "they were angels who came and rescued me in my darkest days and made a world of difference." With publishing and writing experience, Ashley hopes to illuminate the experiences of parents in the child welfare system, to build resources, and to demonstrate the importance of parent advocates.	

COMPONENTS

SIZE OF STAFF	9-11
PARENT ADVOCATES	6-8
BOARD COMPOSITION	No formal board yet, but have an organizing committee with all members participating
PROFESSIONALS / OTHER STAFF	3
BUDGET	No formal budget, PAR fundraises for conferences and relies on local and community support.

PROFILE 13: PARENT ADVOCACY AND RIGHTS (PAR)

TARGET POPULATION	Central Scotland, and Scotland as a whole.
IMPACT	PAR's conference in November of 2018, as Ashley explains, had a very big impact on her and the parents and professionals attending the conference. She explains that the parents set up the conference, talking about their experiences and generating discussion about how child protection impacts families on a multitude of levels. Maggie describes it as an all-Scotland conference for which PAR was able to raise money and fund. Especially important was that there were those from senior levels of government who listened. As there were parents from all across Scotland, Maggie explains that parents are able to take back their experience from the conference to their local groups and fight back against how child protection treats them.
COMPENSATION	Small stipends for conferences; parent advocates largely work as volunteers
FEATURES	
TRAINING RESOURCES	PAR does not have a formal training procedure for their parent advocates, but do intensive preparation for conferences, meetings, and advocacy mentorship. PAR believes that the idea of professional knowledge and power must be leveled to the parents' experience, which comes with its own knowledge and power, as Ms. Mellon relays.
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL WORK	PAR's parent advocates do not do individual case level work.
ORGANIZATION LEVEL WORK	As a very new organization, PAR is building a coalition and supporting parent advocacy initiatives across Scotland and one of the ways this was executed was through the Parent Advocacy Conference on November 3rd. PAR supports parent advocates as leaders in participating in conferences and media

PROFILE 13: PARENT ADVOCACY AND RIGHTS (PAR)

POLICY LEVEL WORK

RESOURCE BUILDING

In terms of the information available to parents undergoing child protection cases, Ashley explains, there is no centralized location and understanding of what is expected of parents, what questions should be asked, what the outcomes are for families, and what are the long-term repercussions for individuals and families. Ashley is developing the magazine to answer these gaps in resources for parents and has already done work through her website Scots Mums Guide to Child Protection (<http://thescottishmumsguidetosafeguarding.blogspot.com/>). She explains the website and magazine as functioning as a one-stop shop for parents to find resources, advice, and community.

EXPOUNDING ON EXPERIENCES

There will be development of parent voice and experience in PAR's magazine in order for parents to find community in similar stories. There is also room for professionals to write guest articles that will be written for parents in a supportive way in order to be more informed about trends and new resources. Ashley also describes adding a youth section to the magazine for older teens to contribute as there is not much existing support for teens going through the child protection system, or a chance to hear their voice.

COMMISSION FOR A REVIEW OF THE CARE SYSTEM

There was a call to have a review of the care system after ministers in Scotland received complaints and lobbying calls about the problems in the care system. Initially, there was no mention of parents. As PAR registered as participants in initial workshops, Maggie demonstrated that they found the government representatives to be very supportive of the preventative message that PAR highlights. They expect that the experience of the parent advocates at these reviews will have a great impact on how Scotland approaches child protective cases and has more of a role in supporting parents. Members of the government review panel attended the PAR conference.

NATIONWIDE CONFERENCES THAT OPENS DOORS

PAR's initial large-scale conference was developed to introduce Scotland to the idea of parent advocates and the importance of parent experience. Using the platform of the conference, PAR was able to reach many people, including parents and parent groups, social workers, and government board members. Maggie explains that the collaborative experience of PAR leads to making significant change and leadership amongst parent advocates.

TRAINING SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

Maggie notes that PAR parent advocates have taught social worker students and social groups in order to change the relationship between social work and parents/families.

EVALUATIONS	No formal evaluation
PARENT-SUPPORTED /PARENT-LED	Parent-Led

ANNEX II: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT FOR HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

QUESTIONS FOR PARENT ADVOCATES

BASIC INFORMATION:

NAME OF PERSON INTERVIEWED:	NAME OF ORGANIZATION:
POSITION:	EMAIL:
LOCATION:	DATE OF INTERVIEW:

REVIEW OF PARENT ADVOCACY ACTIVITY:

To start off, I would like to ask you some questions about the impact of (organization) on you.

1. What are you most proud of regarding your work as a parent advocate?
2. What are the benefits of being a parent advocate within the child welfare system?
3. What kind of challenges have you overcome regarding parent advocacy?
4. What challenges in your work as a parent advocate are you looking to overcome? How do you see yourself overcoming them?
5. Since becoming a parent advocate, what improvements have you seen in your professional development?
6. What improvements are you working on in your role as a parent advocate?
7. What advice would you give parents about how to work as a parent advocate in this organization? *(For these questions ask specifically about how the organization fits into this if it is not mentioned)*

GENERAL:

Now, I have a few general questions about yourself and (organization).

1. How long have you been with this organization?
2. Tell us about any prior training, work, or volunteer experience you've had in the child welfare system.
3. What other experiences help you to be a good parent advocate?
4. What are the greatest strengths you bring to your role as a parent advocate?
5. What does this organization do to help parents and families involved in child welfare?
6. What does the organization do to train parents as advocates or to increase parents' role in decision making in the child welfare system at the case, program, or policy levels? *(Explicate what is meant by case, program, policy levels: CASE – individual case level;; PROGRAM LEVEL– at the level of their organization; POLICY LEVEL– at local, national, or international level)*
7. How did the training provided by this organization prepare you for your role as a parent advocate? Any specific part of training that helped you the most?

8. What does your organization do in these areas of parent advocacy: (Ask at each level in general first, then specify with additional questions)
 - a. CASE LEVEL:
 - i. Do you help other parents negotiate with social workers and other professionals about their case? (involvement with family and child, administrative – case conferences, legal processes – e.g. accompanying to court, speaking on behalf of parent in court)
 - ii. Are you working as trained parent advocates in agencies within the child protection system to assist parents who are struggling to raise their children or to be reunited with them?
 - b. PROGRAM LEVEL:
 - i. Are you helping the organization clarify the role of parent advocates in terms of what responsibilities you could potentially have within the case level, within the organization, and on a larger scale?
 - ii. Do you play a role in evaluating programs, training methods, or recruitment of other parent advocates?
 - c. POLICY LEVEL:
 - i. Are you participating in governmental and NGO advisory boards, speaking on panels at conferences, teaching in classes of social work and law, writing about their experience and recommendations?
 - ii. Are you carrying out other forms of activism? (For example: working at the grassroots and community levels to advocate for reform; or acting politically to change policy, legislation and resources for family support)
9. What percentage of time in the organization do you spend at the case level, program level, and policy level?
10. How did your role change as you spent more time in this organization?
11. How do you incorporate self-care in your daily life as a parent advocate?
12. What motivates you to continue this line of work?
13. How do you uphold and advance the mission of the organization? Now, I have a few general questions about yourself and (organization).

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT:

Now I would like to ask you some questions about your experience with the staff in (organization).

1. What do you value most from the program in helping you as a parent advocate?
2. What kind of activities and programs (small group, orientations, individual support, legal assistance, social supports) have you had from this program?
3. Can you describe the activity or program that has had the biggest impact on you?

CONCLUSION

We're now wrapping to a close, with a few last questions. Thank you for sharing thus far.

1. Suppose you spend a year working away from your current organization, and in that time this organization has been transformed for the better. When you return, what do you see that shows you it has improved? Who is doing what? What else do you see that is different about the organization?
2. Has parent advocacy changed your outlook on the child welfare system? If so, how has your view changed?

3. What are your hopes for the future regarding parent advocacy for yourself and in general? How can they be achieved?
 4. What advice would you give to organizations or groups wanting to start parent advocacy in the child welfare system?
 5. Are there other organizations that are involved in parent advocacy or activism that we should contact?
 - a. Name of organization:
 - b. Name of contact person:
 - c. Contact Information:
 - d. Brief Description:
 6. And finally, is there anything we've missed? Is there anything else you would like us to know about your organization?
-

QUESTIONS FOR ORGANIZATION

BASIC INFORMATION:

NAME OF ORGANIZATION:	CONTACT PERSON:
POSITION:	EMAIL:
PHONE:	WEBSITE:
LOCATION:	YEAR ESTABLISHED:
YEAR PARENT ADVOCACY BEGAN:	MISSION:

STRENGTH BASED INTRODUCTION ABOUT PARENT ADVOCACY:

To start off, I would like to ask you some questions about parent advocacy initiatives.

1. What are you most proud of regarding parent advocacy? (detailed answer)
2. What are the benefits in having parents as parent advocates within the child welfare system?
3. What challenges have you had to overcome to make parent advocacy work well?
4. What challenges do you still have? How do you plan on overcoming them?
5. What has helped you the most to achieve good outcomes for parents and children?
6. How did parent advocacy evolve over time within your organization? Who contributed to this evolution?
7. What are your hopes about parent advocacy for the future?

PARENT ADVOCACY:

I have a few more detailed questions now about parent advocacy and the organization.

1. Who is considered to be a parent advocate within your organization?
2. How are parents with child welfare experience recruited as advocates?
3. Does the organization compensate parent advocates for their services? If so, what is the compensation and rate (Salary? Stipend? Expenses?)
4. Is there training of parent advocates? If so, what does the training consist of? Specifically ask about:
 - a. training curriculum:
 - b. length of training:
 - c. who provides the training (parents or professionals):
 - d. certificates or formal qualifications:
5. What roles do parents who are parent advocates play in your organization? (Ask separately and specifically about how much (# of cases, percent of time, etc.) they do each of the following--)
 - e. CASE LEVEL:
 - i. Do parent advocates help other parents negotiate with social workers and other professionals about their case? (*involvement with family and child, administrative – case conferences, legal processes – e.g. accompanying to court, speaking on behalf of parent in court*)
 - # of cases / % of time:
 - ii. Are parents working as trained parent advocates in agencies within the child protection system to assist parents who are struggling to raise their children or to be reunited with them?
 - # of cases / % of time:
 - f. PROGRAM LEVEL:
 - i. Do parents help the organization clarify the role and scope of parent advocates in terms of what responsibilities you could potentially have within the case level, within the organization, and on a larger scale?
 - # of cases / % of time:
 - ii. Are parent advocates playing a role in evaluating programs, training methods, or recruitment of other parent advocates?
 - # of cases / % of time:
 - g. POLICY LEVEL:
 - i. Are parents participating in governmental and NGO advisory boards, speaking on panels at conferences, teaching in classes of social work and law, writing about their experience and recommendations?
 - # of cases / % of time:
 - ii. Are parents carrying out other forms of activism? (*For example: working at the grassroots and community levels to advocate for reform; or acting politically to change policy, legislation and resources for family support*)
 - # of cases / % of time:
6. Can you speak to the accomplishments you've had in parent advocacy on several levels, including:
 - h. Case-level:
 - i. Program-level:
 - j. Policy-level:

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

I have a few general questions about your organization.

1. In what way did this work of parent advocacy interest you and how did you get started?
2. How do parents perceive the child welfare system in your city/state/country?
3. Please describe your organization, in terms of its:
 - k. Programs:
 - l. Population Served (*what type of people/i.e. types of problems, relationship to protective services or child welfare in general*):
 - m. Size of Program (number of people served per year):
 - n. Area Served:
 - o. Impact (*answers will be largely anecdotal; if there are any evaluations, request a copy*):

STAFF AND RESOURCES:

Now, I have a few questions about the structure of the organization.

1. Can you give a brief statement about your organizational structure (in terms of non-profit, incorporated, or an informal network of people)?
2. How many staff are employed by your organization? By the parent advocacy program? In the parent advocacy program:
 - p. How many are parent advocates, with direct child welfare experience?
 - q. How many are community members with no direct child welfare experience?
 - r. How many are professional?
3. What are the organization's community partnerships and affiliations?
4. Are your staff members salaried? How many?
5. How many parents directly impacted by a child welfare experience are employed in your organization? Full-time? Part-time?
6. Are parents with child welfare experience on the organization's board of directors or governing body? If so how many and how many people are on the board all together?

BUDGET:

I have some questions about the funding of this organization.

1. In what range is your overall budget?
2. Is there a budget for parent advocacy? If so, how large is it (as a portion of the overall budget)?
3. Through what means is parent advocacy funded?
4. Do you receive any external funding from grants for parent advocacy? What are these grants for and who are they from?
5. What strategies have you successfully employed to address budget constraints?
6. What are you most proud of regarding how this organization is funded?

CONCLUSION

We're now wrapping to a close with a few last questions. Thank you for sharing thus far.

1. In five years' time, what do you picture the organization to look like in regards to parent advocacy?
2. What advice would you give to organizations or groups wanting to start parent advocacy in the child welfare system?
3. Are there other organizations that are involved in parent advocacy or activism that we should contact?
 - s. Name of organization
 - t. Name of contact person
 - u. Contact Information
 - v. Brief Description
4. And finally, is there anything we've missed? Is there anything else you would like us to know about your organization?

DOCUMENT REQUESTS:

I have a few document requests if they are available to you.

- Training Manuals for Parent Advocates
- Resources that are distributed and available to parent advocates
- Pamphlet/Promotional clippings of your organization in terms of parent advocacy
- Evaluations of your organization or of your parent advocacy

ANNEX III: MEMBERS OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

International Parent Advocacy Network Board of Directors

PARENTS

- Heather Cantamessa (US)
- Taliah Drayak (Scotland)
- Tony Lawlor (US)
- Bobbi Robertson (Australia)
- Sabra Jackson (US)
- Louise Supron (Scotland)
- Ambrosia Eberhardt (US)
- Teresa Bachiller (US)
- Cephia Williams (Australia)
- Jennifer Swan (Australia)
- Mary Burton (Canada)

ALLIES

- Andy Bilson (England)
- Jessica Cocks (Australia)
- Sue Jacobs (US)
- Ghazal Keshavarzian (US)
- Maggie Mellon (Scotland)
- David Tobis (US)

Advisory Committee to Review the Draft Report

PARENTS

- Mary Burton: FearlessR2Ws, Manitoba, Canada, IPAN board of directors, Canada
- Shantelle Common: Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH), Australia
- Taliah Drayak: IPAN board of directors, Scotland
- Bobbi Robertson: Family Inclusion Network, Townsville, Australia

ALLIES

- Jessica Cocks: Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH), Australia
- Maria Herczog: Institute for Human Services, Columbus, Ohio, APSAC Center for Child Policy formerly member and rapporteur U.N. Committee for the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Hungary
- Ghazal Keshavarzian: formerly director, Elevate Children, IPAN board of directors, USA
- Maggie Mellon: Parent Advocacy and Rights, IPAN board of directors, Scotland

ANNEX IV: TRAINING TOPICS FOR PARENT ADVOCACY IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

Support and Self-Help for Advocates

- Self-care
- Understanding and addressing the emotional toll of parent advocacy work
- Parents speaking about their experiences
- Parents writing about their experiences
- Leadership training
- Creating internships or shadowing for parents to learn good practice
- Licensing

Organizational Issues

- Setting up a parent advocacy program (stand alone or within another organization)
- Defining your organization's goals/where you stand in relationship to the system
- Funding and financing training, including how to fundraise for non-profits; value and cost; and constraints related to what funders will support
- Importance of and ways to pay parents (stipends, reimbursements, salaries, and impact on public benefits)
- Creating a grassroots strategy (including challenges and benefits of grassroots organizing)
- Parent advocacy within law firms
- Parent advocacy within the public child welfare agency
- Creating an organizational culture that is receptive to parents and parent advocacy
- Training professionals to work with parents

Advocacy Work with Parents Individually and in Groups

- Working one-on-one with parents
- Strategic use of self
- Role as advocate for parents within the system
- Role as mediator between parents and the system
- Setting up parent support groups that are parent led
- Skills in group facilitation
- Participation in Initial Child Safety Conferences, Family Team Conferences, etc.

Policy Work and Practice Reform

- Parent advocacy at the policy level
- Legal procedures and legal framework for child welfare in your jurisdiction
- Parents formulating policy and practice recommendations/designing policy proposals
- Legislative writing and advocacy
- Preparing for a meeting with a policymaker
- Strategic sharing
- Training for participation on committees
- Avoiding tokenism

ANNEX V: METHODOLOGY FOR THE SURVEY

A variety of research methods were used to prepare the survey of parent advocacy programs. These include:

- Interviews to profile parent advocacy programs in high-income countries
- Interviews to profile parent advocacy programs in low- and middle-income countries.
- Site visits to several NGO parent advocacy programs in HIC

Parent Leadership

There is not yet a universally or even widely accepted definition of a “parent-led” organization or a parent-supported program in the field of child welfare parent advocacy. For the purposes of this survey:

A parent-led program is one in which parents with child welfare experience are at least half of a program’s staff and are at least half of the members of the organization’s governing board and have a significant influence on the organization’s programs.

A parent-supported program is one in which parents work in a program but are fewer than half the staff and are fewer than half of the members of the organization’s governing board and have a voice in shaping the organization’s parent advocacy program.

Programs in High-Income Countries

Identification of programs: A snowball methodology was used to identify parent advocacy projects, programs and organizations in high-income countries. The three main ones were: 1) more than 60 parent advocacy projects, programs and organizations in high-income countries were known to the researchers on the project; 2) staff in programs that were interviewed identified several additional parent advocacy programs; and 3) approximately 30 individuals who are members of the planning committee to create the International Parent Advocacy Network identified several additional programs. These individuals include parents, academics, service providers and government officials who are involved

in parent advocacy globally. A total of approximately 75 parent advocacy programs were identified at the start of the research, with this number expanding during the research with over 100 programs identified.

The intention of the approach was to identify the range of activities undertaken to support and promote parent involvement in child welfare decision-making. The intention was not to use a random sample of programs as the universe of programs is not known. We therefore identified and interviewed an illustrative sample. However, generalizations from the sample should be made with caution.

Programs interviewed: Fifteen programs were selected to be interviewed. The dimensions on which parent advocacy programs were selected were:

- programs that work at the individual case, program and policy levels
- service programs, advocacy programs, and programs that provide legal representation
- local government agencies and NGOs
- parent advocacy programs located in larger service agencies and free-standing parent advocacy programs
- formal organizations, informal groups and activities of individuals that do not belong to an organization

Programs were selected to reflect the range of these dimensions.

Interviews: Interviews were conducted between October 2018 and March 2019 with a senior executive of the organization and in the majority of cases with a parent working with the organization. The interviews were strength-based rather than analytic. The interviews were conducted by Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, or phone and took approximately one hour per interview, with a semi-structured interview format. If interviewees requested to see the interview instrument, they were provided with it before the interview. Interviews were recorded with the permission of interviewees.

Interview instruments: Two strength-based questionnaires—one for professionals and one for parents—were designed to focus on parent advocacy in child welfare (see [Annex II on page 149](#) for the

interview instruments for high-income countries). The instrument for organizational staff focused on organizational and parent advocacy issues; the instrument for parents focused on parent advocacy issues and parents' roles and experience in the program.

Agency profiles: The interviews were machine-transcribed using "Transcribeme.com" or the Zoom transcribe function and were reviewed using the audio recordings. A profile of the organization and its parent advocacy activities was constructed using the interview data from both interviews from each organization. The profile was drafted, reviewed, edited, and sent to each organization to be reviewed for accuracy, and then revised as appropriate.

[Annex I on page 102](#) provides the profiles of the 15 parent advocacy programs that were interviewed.

Programs in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

Identification of programs: A snowball methodology was used to identify parent advocacy activities in child protection/child welfare in low- and middle-income countries. Interviews were conducted between January and October 2019. The intention of the approach was first to determine the extent to which parent advocacy occurs in child welfare in low- and middle-income countries, and second, to identify the range of activities undertaken to support and promote parent participation in child welfare decision-making.

A variety of sources were used to identify parent advocacy programs:

- a prominent announcement to identify parent advocacy programs was placed in the monthly newsletter of the Better Care Network, which has a circulation of over 4,000 individuals and organizations involved in care reform globally
- members of the International Parent Advocacy Network planning committee
- academics, researchers, and evaluators in the field of child protection/child welfare, including the researchers on this project
- service providers in child protection/child welfare
- foundations that support care reform

Several programs which might use parent advocacy and were considered for interviews were not able to be interviewed for a variety of reasons, including

language barriers, scheduling problems, disinterest or not actually having a parent advocacy program. These included programs in which parents support LGBTQ youth, abducted children, children with disabilities, or child rights in general.

It soon became clear that very little if any parent advocacy occurs in the formal child protection/child welfare systems of low- and middle-income countries. However, parent advocacy programs were identified in other fields that intersect or overlap with child protection, including disabilities, education, gender-based violence and community awareness committees. These programs and activities are described in this report.

Site Visits to Selected Programs

The authors of this report together and separately visited several parent advocacy programs in England, Scotland, Finland, Australia and the United States during the course of this research to meet parents, to learn about the organizations' work with parents, and to identify their training resources and needs. The parent advocacy programs visited were selected as a convenience sample: Families in Care (Durham, England), Micah (Brisbane, Australia) which works with FIN of Southeast Queensland, Parent Advocacy and Rights (PAR, Edinburgh, Scotland), Legal Action for Women (London, England), Kasper (Helsinki, Finland) and Rise (New York City, USA).

Advisory Committee

An advisory committee was established to identify parent advocacy programs globally and to help carry out the project. The advisory committee are the members of the board of directors the International Parent Advocacy Network. Participants include parents with child welfare experience, professionals who promote parent participation, academics and researchers who have experience in strengthening child welfare systems in low, middle and high-income countries, government officials involved in parent advocacy, and service providers involved in parent advocacy.

A smaller advisory committee consisting of four parents with lived child welfare experience and four allies with experience in parent advocacy reviewed the draft of the report. See [Annex III on page 155](#) for a listing of the members of the advisory committee who reviewed the report.

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