

## The Parent Representation Clinic: A Mixed Method Evaluation of Parent Representation and Law Student Education

*Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.*

*In this research brief we examined the quality of legal representation provided by a student- and faculty-run law clinic to parents involved in the foster care system, and education received by student attorneys. In particular, we examined how successful the clinic was in achieving outcomes desired by participants, and the strengths and challenges of the clinic's parent representation and legal education from the perspectives of clients, clinic staff, and court professionals. Findings indicated that the Child Protection Clinic is a promising model for providing quality legal representation to impoverished parents involved with child protection, and for delivering critical lessons in practical lawyering and life to law students.*

### Discussion on Practice Implications

1. Participants in the law school clinic noted that parents may feel overwhelmed, disempowered, and de-humanized by their experiences attending the clinic. In your role, how can you encourage parents to seek legal education and services? Why is it important to access such services? How can you (or do you) support parents in this process?
2. Most law school students have relatively few experiences working with parents in CPS. Fortunately, participants described Clinic students as being enthusiastic and willing to work hard to understand clients' experiences. What information do you believe is important for law school students to understand about working with families in CPS prior to receiving their first case? How can you convey this information to these students?
3. The outcomes of CPS cases (e.g., reunification within 12 months, case closure within 12 months, and placement with relatives) achieved by student attorneys did not differ significantly from those obtained by fully licensed attorneys. This finding has several implications for practice. In what ways can our state best support the use of law school clinics? In what ways can you advocate for children and families in CPS involved in legal issues?

### Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. This study suggests that law school clinics offer appropriate and affordable services for families involved in CPS. What are some of the benefits of having law school clinics (i.e., for children, parents, law students, social workers, communities)? What are some of the challenges each group may face working with students at the law school clinic? What are ways to overcome such challenges? Does your agency have a connection to law school clinics near you? Are other legal resources available to CPS-involved parents in your area? What changes to CPS are necessary to ensure that parents are best represented?
2. Law school clinics may offer an opportunity for social workers and child welfare workers to collaborate with legal representatives. What type of information would be helpful to communicate with legal representatives? How would this change decision-making, child welfare practice, and family outcomes?