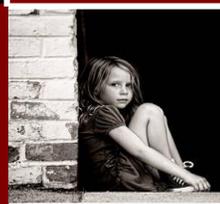


Annual Report 2017



July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Center for Child Welfare and Education

Educational Access Project for DCFS

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What We Do...

We are working to
increase access to education,
address challenges,
remove barriers,
equip caseworkers and
empower caregivers to
benefit youth in care.

General Description of Service

Advocacy

Support

Collaboration

Northern Illinois University's Educational Access Project (EAP) partners with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to promote the educational wellbeing of children and youth in foster care. This partnership supports DCFS in its effort for youth in care to attain educational parity with youth who are not in foster care, and help them receive services that meet their educational needs.



Obtained needed education programs and services for youth in care

Increased the capacity of caseworkers & caregivers to support youth education

Developed strategies, interventions and plans to address youth in care needs

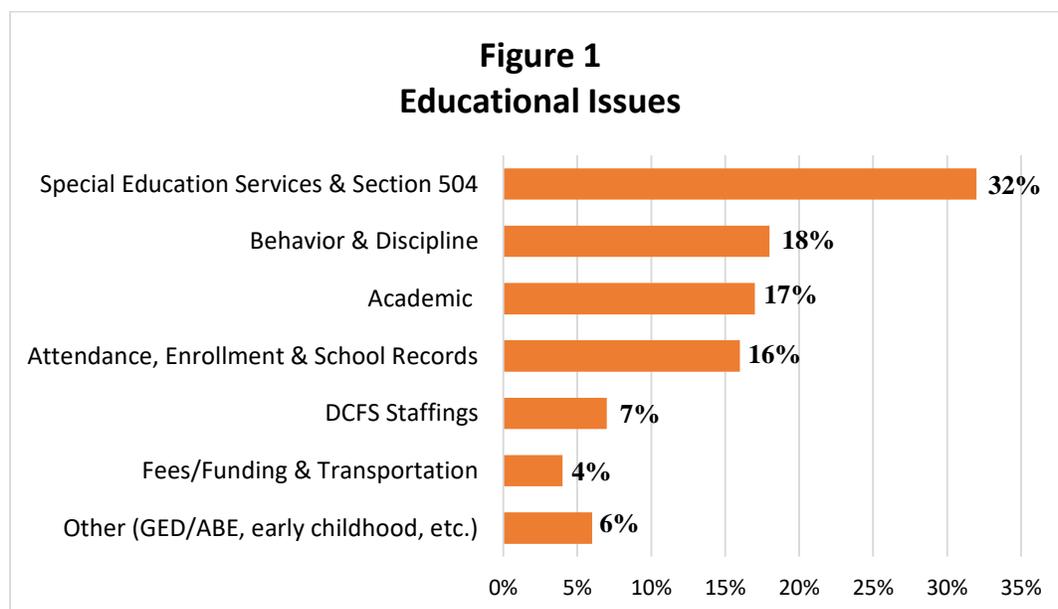
Strengthened relationships between school, home and child welfare to support youth education

EAP Staff

Educational Technical Assistance

When youth in care experience problems with education, child welfare staff, caregivers, youth, schools, court, and others made referrals to EAP for technical assistance. Some of the matters referred include: special education services, enrollment, school discipline, behavioral issues, academic obstacles, and school fees/funding. Many of these problems if not addressed, could impede school performance and stability. The EAP staff delivered services to help mitigate the educational issues that youth were facing.

Almost half (49%) of issues resolved were related to academic and special education services. Nearly one in five (18%) were for behavior and/or discipline, and another 16% were issues connected to enrollment and/or attendance. About 7% of the issues needing help involved non-school DCFS staffings, such as Clinical Intervention for Placement Preservation (CIPP) and Child and Family meetings, to participate in education planning and problem solving. (See Figure 1). Other issues included GED/ABE, early childhood, etc.



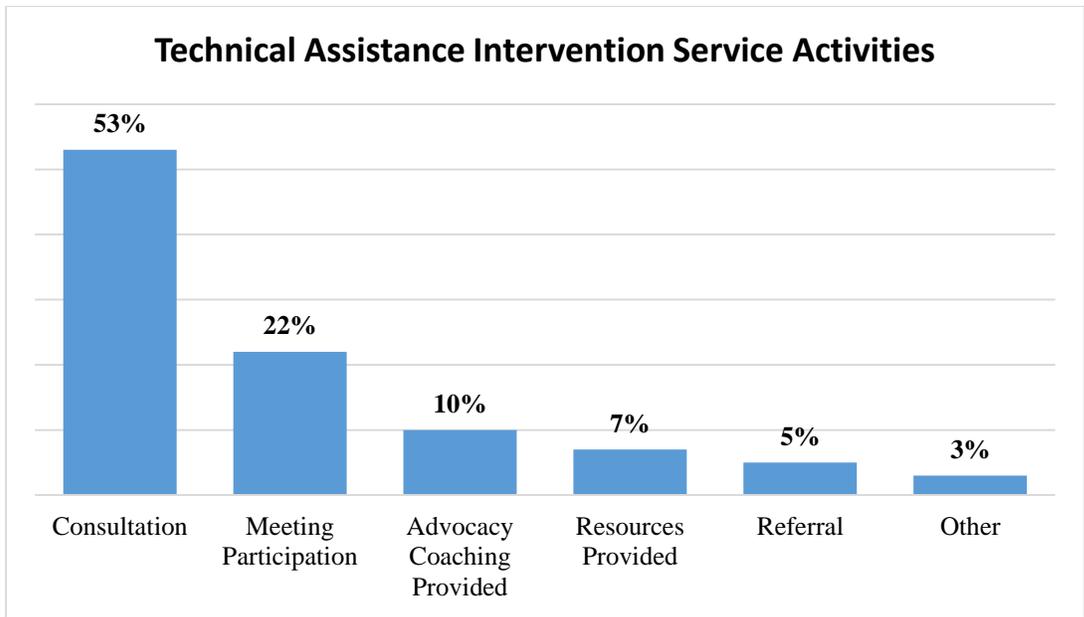
Just as the educational problems youth in care encounter differ in nature and degree, the steps for resolving them, and the intervention service activities also vary. EAP's general categorization of the intervention service activities that staff utilize to address issues are consultation, meeting participation, resource provision, referral for additional services, and advocacy coaching. (For a definition of these categories refer to Appendix B.) Staff also conduct classroom observations, homeschool assessments, research for resources, etc.

The quantity of time required for some service activities differ from others. For instance, participation in meetings entail more time commitment as they generally involve: reviewing documentation in preparation for the meeting, preparing people for more informed participation, travel to and from meeting locations, participation in the meeting, and follow up.

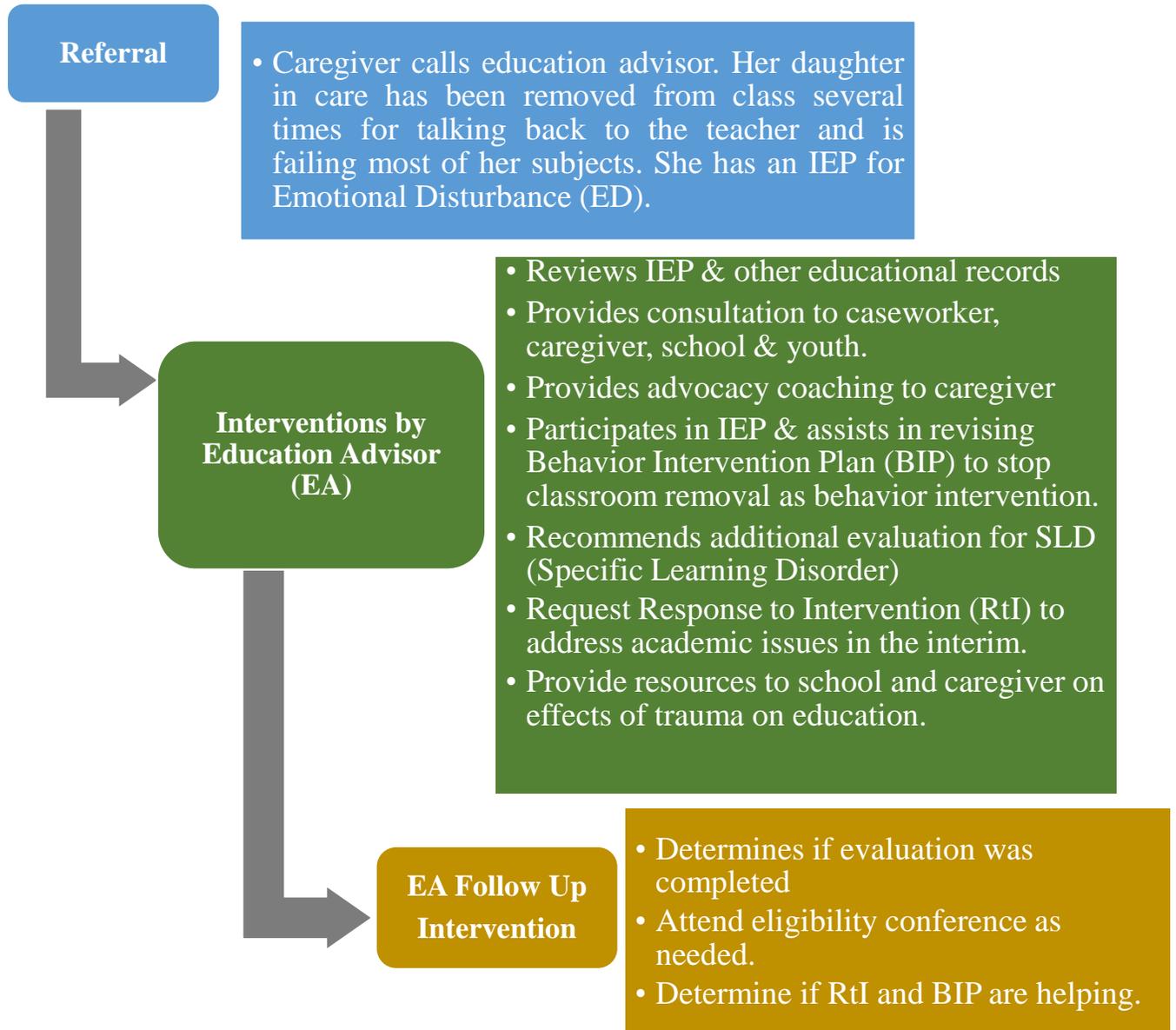
Furthermore, while all interventions require some sort of consultation whether brief or long, very few issues are resolved using just one type of service. For instance, to address behavioral issues, staff engaged in intervention service activities, which include: participating in meetings, providing consultations, and providing advocacy coaching.

Eight education advisors provided approximately 3,900 intervention service activities on educational issues for youth in care this year. Consultation was the most frequently used intervention service activity followed by meeting participation. Below is a graph that represents the frequency with which staff engaged in each category of intervention services. This is followed by an example of the technical assistance process for resolving educational problems on the next page (page 6).

3,900
Interventions
to resolve
education
issues



Technical Assistance Intervention Process



This example demonstrates a process of interventions that started with one youth referred for help with two education issues (academic & behavior) that required at least 10 interventions (including multiple consultations, advocacy coaching, meeting participation, resource provision, etc.) over a period of time. As a result, the youth got access to educational services and evaluations. She received a changed Behavior Intervention Plan allowing her to remain in the classroom during instruction time, an evaluation for a probable learning disability, and RtI services to address academic issues in the interim.

Educational Planning

While working on behalf of individual youth in care to overcome obstacles and help them access educational services, EAP staff supported education planning for youth in care to enhance their education opportunities for achieving success. Staff participated in school meetings such as IEP meetings, 504 Plan meetings, behavior intervention planning meetings, manifestation determination reviews, etc.; In addition, EAP provided educational subject matter expertise as they took part in DCFS child centered planning meetings such as CIPP and Child and Family Team meetings.

Children and Youth Receiving Technical Assistance Services

As previously mentioned, youth in care received needed services from EAP to overcome educational barriers and support planning that aids educational wellbeing. Caseworkers, caregivers, schools, youth, CASA, GAL, DCFS legal, and others made referrals to obtain the help youth needed when they encountered educational issues. EAP staff provided multiple technical assistance services (3900 interventions) during the year to resolve these issues. The nature, magnitude and complexity of the issues, as well as factors such as receptivity of schools and institutional practices, impact the quantity and types of technical assistance provided for resolution. The number of youth in care served in each quarter is show below. These youth were referred for technical assistance. The first and fourth quarters included summer breaks when some schools are not in session.

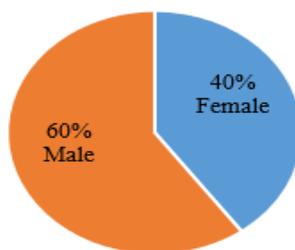
Youth Served			
1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
275	336	347	286

The youth ranged from two to over 21 years of age. They were students in grades ranging from preschool to postsecondary education. All were youth in care or youth involved in one or more DCFS postsecondary education programs.

Following is information on their gender, race/ethnicity, and age.

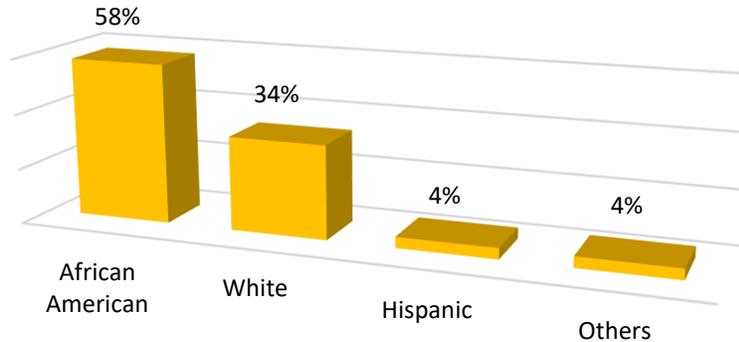
Gender

Sixty percent of students who received educational technical assistance by EAP were male and 40% were female.



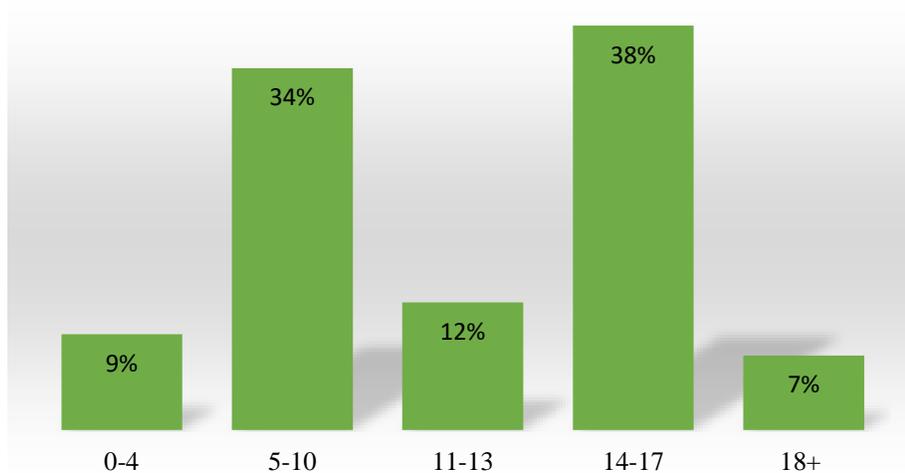
Racial/Ethnic Distribution

The largest percentage of children served were African American (58%). White children represent one in three (34%) and Hispanic children represented 4%.



Age Range

The chart below demonstrates that 34% of youth served were between the ages of five and 10. Youth 14 and older represented 45%. Additionally, nearly one in 10 of children (9%) were under five.



Unusual Incident Reports from DCFS

EAP also monitored suspension and expulsions identified on Unusual Incident Reports (UIRs) that DCFS provided. EAP staff examined report characteristics such as: date of incident, date EAP received report, incident type, description of the incident and duration of discipline term.

Staff documented information and provided follow-up on suspensions that were reported in a timely manner and were reason for concern based on report characteristics. Major criteria for intervention included duration, discipline type, and severity of incident.

Follow-up and interventions provided by EAP staff included: education advocacy, consultation, participating in meetings with caseworkers, caregivers, school and legal personnel, referral for legal assistance, and resources. As a result, EAP staff increased knowledge and awareness of student behaviors and collaborated on approaches to correct or prevent future incidents. In addition, staff addressed youth who were improperly disciplined for disability related conduct, and obtained suspension type and duration being amended.

There were no UIRs for expulsion; all of the UIRs reported were for suspensions. While 90% of UIRs were out of school suspensions, and the rest were for in school and bus suspensions. African Americans students were suspended at a higher rate (70%) than white students (26%). Moreover, males (60%) were more likely than female (34%) to be suspended.

Building Capacity and Fostering Communication between Systems

Increasing the knowledge of caregivers and professionals and equipping them to understand issues related to the education of the population they serve is critical to the educational success of youth in care. As such, EAP staff worked to build the capacity of caregivers, and professionals.

EAP staff provided information and shared resources to equip caseworkers, caregivers, youth, and POS Education Liaisons with knowledge and skills to address educational issues while using their expertise and connections to deliver individual intervention services that address problems. By doing so, EAP helped build capacity within the field for resolution of education issues youth in care experience.

Furthermore, staff worked to develop and facilitate collaboration with schools, districts, caseworkers, and others to identify and address system issues and avert further educational obstacles for youth in care. In addition, they fostered communication between schools, caregivers, DCFS, and Purchase of Service (POS) child welfare agencies to benefit the youth they served.

Moreover, EAP developed and delivered educational training workshops to equip caregivers, caseworkers, POS Liaisons, school, court, and others involved in the education of youth in care.

96% of participants' said EAP training increased their knowledge.



Training/Professional Development

A formal component of EAP's capacity building approach is providing professional development that is made available to child welfare staff, caregivers, school and court personnel, and others involved in the education of youth in care. EAP developed training material to educate the field about policy and approaches that help youth in care thrive educationally. EAP's training workshops are designed to increase participants' knowledge on content, including: preparing for back to school, DCFS Educational Procedures 314, education planning, education advocacy, postsecondary education, and education supports.

EAP delivered training workshops each quarter; they advertised each workshop through D-NET announcements, email, flyers, and word of mouth. EAP staff emailed announcements directly to POS Education Liaisons, DCFS staff, school personnel, and others. Training audience was interdisciplinary and included DCFS and POS caseworkers, child welfare administrators, caregivers, community providers, school personnel, etc. There were 316 attendees. Participants had the opportunity to complete training evaluations.

The combined evaluation from training workshops indicate that 96% of participants report the training increased their knowledge on the subject. Participants' additional comments on the evaluation also indicate they valued the training. Following are a few verbatim excerpts from evaluations:

"This was new for me and I learned a lot."

"Very helpful, interactive and shared valuable resources"

"Information was thorough, relevant, and organized much appreciated."

"Great info., new laws defined and discussed"

Policy Review and Analysis

EAP provided assistance with the review and revision of policies, procedures and protocols related to education in accordance with current Federal and State laws and that promote best practice. EAP provided on-going consultation on Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and its interpretation and application to youth in care. Furthermore, EAP delivered guidance and advice to clarify ESSA issues regarding school transportation for regional school districts, caregivers, school personnel, and DCFS. EAP also assisted DCFS, caregivers, and schools with practice, protocol and regulatory changes in school discipline pertaining to Public Act 99-0456 (SB 100).

Supporting DCFS Education Initiatives and Serving on Committees

EAP staff supported DCFS education initiatives and served on education related committees to help improve the educational wellbeing of youth in care. Committees in which staff participated include: DCFS/CPS Collaborative with Residential and Group Homes, DCFS Youth Summit, DCFS Foster Parent Advisory Board, and DCFS Youth Advisory Board.

Developing and Maintaining Collaboration

Collaboration and shared decision-making between systems to promote educational wellbeing is more effective in addressing education needs. As previously mentioned, EAP staff fostered communication between school, home and child welfare on behalf of youth in care, collaborated with school districts and court representatives to increase understanding of children's educational rights, DCFS Educational Procedures 314, etc.

Supporting DCFS Postsecondary Education Programs

EAP provides support to DCFS in administering postsecondary education programs. EAP staff monitored youth involved in DCFS postsecondary education programs for compliance and processed DCFS documentation for education related expenses that could be covered by DCFS. For example: 342 applications were approved by DCFS for the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds, and 35 applications for the Community College Payment Program (CCPP). EAP staff also helped identify university and community college resources, create awareness of DCFS financial supports available to youth in care, evaluate student applications for DCFS scholarships, etc.

Outcomes and Metrics

- Over 99% of youth gained access to needed student centered planning, programs, services, evaluation and/or assessment.
- 100% of youth gained access to needed financial support or waivers or assistance applying.
- About 96% of training participants reported an increase in their knowledge through their participation in the training sessions.

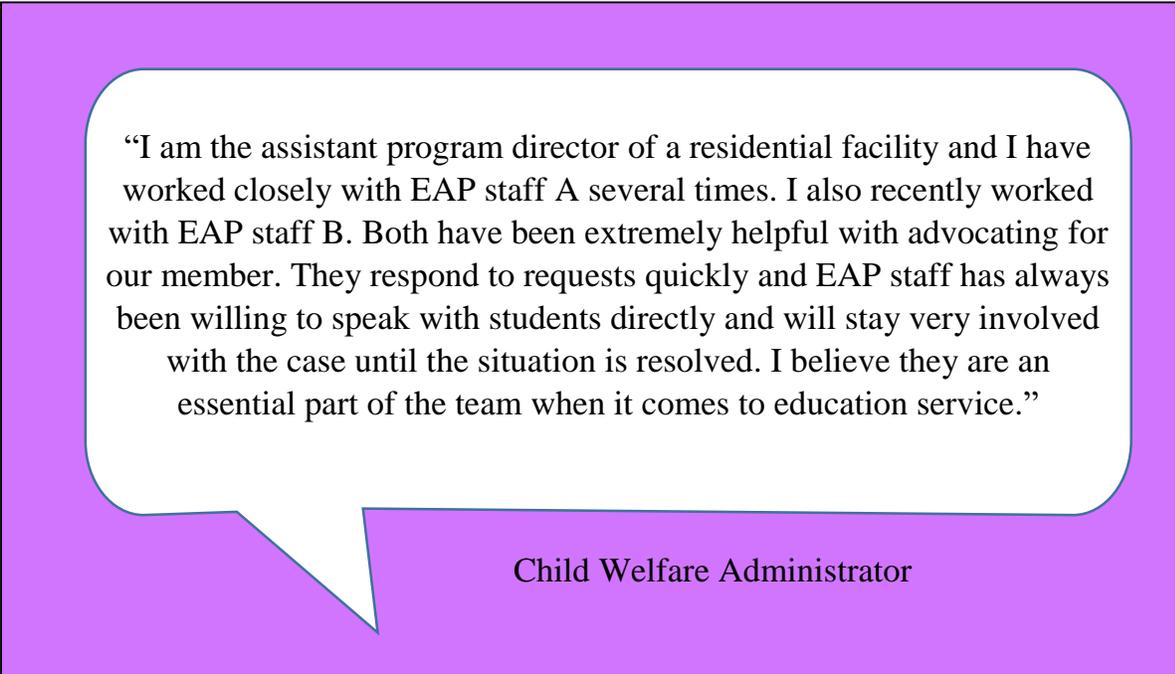
- Over 99% client satisfaction survey respondents reported they were satisfied with the services.
- Over 96% of technical assistance provided had a completed referral form.

Client Satisfaction

Information in this section of the report is derived from the online continuous survey used to measure client satisfaction about EAP services. People who use this tool include: students, DCFS and POS caseworkers, caregivers, CASA, schools, and others who seek/ receive assistance from EAP to address educational needs of children and youth in care and/or DCFS postsecondary education programs. The individuals rate their level of satisfaction with EAP services and are able to comment on their overall experience with the service. EAP staff inform individuals of the opportunity to provide feedback about their service using the online client satisfaction form.

There were 196 survey respondents, and 99% said they were satisfied with EAP services. The following excerpts are taken from the comment section of the survey. They represent the opinions of people who received services expressed in their language. Comments are verbatim, specific EAP staff names have been replaced by other identifiers (EAP staff A and staff B)

Client Satisfaction Quotes about EAP Service



“I am the assistant program director of a residential facility and I have worked closely with EAP staff A several times. I also recently worked with EAP staff B. Both have been extremely helpful with advocating for our member. They respond to requests quickly and EAP staff has always been willing to speak with students directly and will stay very involved with the case until the situation is resolved. I believe they are an essential part of the team when it comes to education service.”

Child Welfare Administrator

“Staff A’s expertise, professionalism and passion for education is unmatched. She really went the extra mile by showing support, providing additional resources and advocating for the best educational accommodations for my children. Without her my family would be still fighting for our children educational needs met.”

Caregiver

“I just want to say thanks to all for the great help. I’M GREATFUL. THANK YOU!”

Student

“Great working relationship. EAP staff is extremely professional and helpful.”

Attorney

Conclusion

*“They are great human beings and great support
for placements worker like me
They do excellent job”*

-- excerpt from EAP Client Satisfaction Survey

Advocacy, support and collaboration are among the key things EAP does to enhance the wellbeing of youth in care. To promote educational success for children and youth, EAP staff gathered information, reviewed school documentation, consulted with parties involved, participated in school and DCFS meetings, conducted homeschool monitoring visits, conducted classroom observations, provided advocacy coaching, and advocated for appropriate educational programs and services to meet student’s needs. Staff also supported DCFS involved youth in postsecondary education programs, helped revise DCFS procedures, and contributed to education initiatives and workgroups that benefit this population. EAP’s work also involved building the capacity of child welfare professionals, caregivers, school and others through training workshops and service intervention.

Addressing educational needs of youth in care requires a collaborative effort. EAP continues to be committed to advancing access to appropriate educational services as youth forge pathways towards successful adulthood.

Appendix A: Data Sources

The primary data used for the annual report are retrieved from EAP staff documentation and client feedback entered into the NIU secure-web-based database. In addition, the report contains information from documentation maintained by EAP Post-Secondary Education Specialist staff related to the DCFS postsecondary education programs.

Appendix B: Intervention Services to Address Education Issues to Meet Students Needs

