

An Assessment of the Economic and Societal Impacts of Family and Children's Law Center



**A Report Prepared for:
The Marin
Community
Foundation**

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Family and Children's Law Center

A. Introduction

Founded in 1986, Family and Children's Law Center (FACLC) serves low-income families and children in Marin County on legal matters ranging from child abuse and domestic violence to child custody and support.

Representation by FACLC's advocates fulfills one of our society's most basic promises: *Equal Justice Under Law*. In the process, it benefits everyone by reducing the incidence and cost of domestic violence, and by securing child support, promotes economic stability and reduces the need for public assistance to low-income families.

This report¹ describes the findings of an assessment of the economic and societal impacts of the civil legal services provided by Family and Children's Law Center, one of the three nonprofit organizations funded by the Marin Community Foundation. It summarizes the legal assistance provided by FACLC over the four-year period 2009-2012, the vital benefits received by clients seeking to stabilize their lives, and the economic impacts that ripple outward to benefit the entire Marin community.

B. Legal Assistance Provided and Impacts on Clients

The Family and Children's Law Center seeks to address the following goals:

- **Help children and families resolve the issues of divorce and paternity**, including custody, visitation, support, uncontested guardianship, and stepparent adoptions, with minimal disruption to the well-being of family members.
- **Represent the best interests of children in the legal system.** FACLC reports that children benefit from advocacy that puts their interests above all else, especially stability related to custody, visitation, housing, income, medical care, and education.

At a Glance:

Family and Children's Law Center

Location: San Rafael

Client Services: About 1,200 cases handled per year for low-income residents a year and 110 cases for domestic violence victims (regardless of income level)

Legal Needs Addressed:

- Custody/Visitation
- Divorce/Separation/Annulment
- Child Support
- Domestic Violence
- Children's Needs

Staffing: A total of 4.6 staff, including:

- 2.6 attorneys

Services:

- Legal advice and brief service for \$30 on a drop-in basis;
- Full service legal representation for a reduced fee, based on income limits
- Referrals to other providers for non-family law matters or conflicts
- Educational materials and outreach

Budget: \$500,000 in 2012

Web: www.FACLC.org

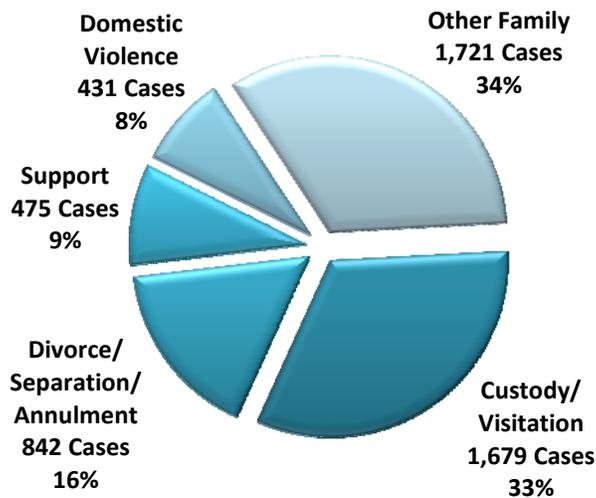
Economic Impact, 2009 through 2012: \$10.5 million in economic benefits and savings for clients and communities.

¹ This report is excerpted and adapted from, "An Assessment of the Economic and Societal Impacts of Three Legal Services Programs Funded by the Marin Community Foundation – 2009 to 2012: Final Report, September 10, 2013," prepared for the Marin Community Foundation (MCF) by The Resource for Great Programs and available upon request from MCF.

- **Work collaboratively with other community-based providers** to assure that families and children have access to services aimed at stabilizing their family situations. FACLC routinely provides and receives referrals related to families and children with a variety of legal and socio-economic needs.

As shown in **Exhibit 1** below, Family and Children’s Law Center handled a total of 5,148 individual cases in the four-year period from 2009 to 2012. One-third of the cases related to general family matters, another one-third to helping low-income residents with custody and visitation issues, and 16 percent of cases aimed at helping residents deal with divorce, separation, and annulment.

Exhibit 1²
Numbers of Cases Handled from 2009 through 2012
by Legal Problem Area



² Throughout this report, we use the terms, “handled” cases and “completed cases” (also called “closed cases”) as basic measures of the output of legal services programs. “Handled” cases consist of all cases on which activity was performed during a period, and include all cases that were closed or completed during the period as well as new cases that were carried over into the next period.

In the four years examined in this assessment, Family and Children's Law Center:

- **Handled 1,721 cases aimed at helping clients to address** essential family legal problems (divorce, legal separation, etc.).
- **Handled 1,679 cases aiding clients seeking to preserve custody** or visitation of clients' children.
- **Handled 842 cases assisting clients without children to obtain a divorce,** separation, or annulment.
- **Handled 475 cases for clients seeking to secure child support** to help pay for food, shelter, health care, and other essential needs.
- **Handled 431 domestic violence cases helping victims and their families** to secure safety from their abusers. Family and Children's Law Center is the primary legal agency serving domestic violence victims in Marin County, serving all victims regardless of income level. Private attorneys often do not take such cases and instead make referrals to FACLC.

Other examples of societal and economic impacts – non-quantifiable but highly significant – flowing from FACLC's legal services include the following:

- **FACLC contributes to a more stable workforce for employers** through prevention of domestic violence and other challenges that can lead to tardiness, absenteeism, and low job performance.
- **FACLC helps children stay in school.** Domestic violence and divorce can lead children to struggle to attend and keep up in school. By helping parents to manage their legal crises, FACLC helps their children get an education and continue with their development toward adulthood.

Example: Domestic Violence Legal Assistance

A Mother's Safety and Her Children's College Education Secured

Sharon is a mother of four children – two boys, and two girls. She first came to Family and Children's Law Center in 2006 to seek protection from abuse by the father of her children.

FACLC helped Sharon secure a restraining order against her abuser, and successfully fought off his attempts to modify their custody agreement and reduce his child support payments.

Still, the father had not paid child support since the restraining order was first acquired, falling behind in support payments by over \$125,000.

As a result, Sharon worked two jobs and still struggled to make ends meet, often borrowing money for rent and other necessities.

Working with the California Department of Child Support Services, FACLC was able to have a lien placed on property that the father had inherited, which eventually resulted in Sharon receiving the more than \$125,000 she was owed and an advance payment by the father for future child support.

Sharon reports that the settlement will enable her to pay off her debts and help provide a college education for her four children.

C. Impact on the Court System

Congestion in the courts due to the flood of self-represented litigants is reaching crisis proportions. For example, 85 percent of the people showing up in Family Court in Marin County do so at least initially without lawyers.³

Family and Children's Law Center eases the strain on court resources by providing representation to low-income clients and by educating and preparing people who represent themselves in court. In 2012, FACLC handled 1,378 cases and also delivered other assistance, including:

- Legal advice and brief service for \$30 on a drop-in basis,
- Guidance to clients who represent themselves in court,
- Extended legal representation for a fixed fee, based on income limits,
- Educational materials and outreach, and
- Referrals to other providers of legal and other services.

In addition, FACLC attorneys regularly volunteered at family law hearings at the Marin County Superior Court to answer the legal questions from self-represented residents and help them complete legal paperwork. FACLC reports that such volunteering expands the community's awareness of their legal services, builds relationships with private attorneys, and facilitates referrals.

D. Economic Impacts

1. Overview: *Family and Children's Law Center produced \$10.5 million in economic benefits and savings for low-income clients and the larger community in 2009 through 2012*

These impacts are summarized in **Exhibit 2** below and discussed in detail in the subsections that follow. They include:

- **Direct-Dollar Benefits for Clients: \$7.5 million.** Child support payments obtained through FACLC's successful legal assistance promoted economic stability for children and reduced the need for public assistance to their families.

Exhibit 2

Family and Children's Law Center: Summary of Economic Benefits and Savings	Impact, Millions
I. Estimated Direct-Dollar Benefits for Clients	
A. Child Support	\$7.5
II. The Economic Multiplier Effect	
B. Economic Multiplier Effect of Outside Revenue on Marin County	\$1.2
C. Estimated Cost Savings: Prevention of Domestic Violence	\$1.8
Total Economic Impact (Sum of Lines A, B and C)	\$10.5

³ Alexandria Quam, Esq., Marin County Superior Court.

- **The Economic Multiplier Effect: \$1.2 million.** Revenue brought into the county by FACLC’s services and operations circulates in the local economy, supporting businesses and providing jobs for working families.
- **Cost Savings for the Community: \$1.8 million.** FACLC’s legal assistance reduces the incidence and cost of domestic violence.

2. Direct-Dollar Benefits – Child Support: \$7.5 million

As indicated in **Exhibit 2** on the previous page, child support revenue secured for clients comprised about three-quarters of the economic impact of FACLC’s work in 2009 through 2012. **Exhibit 3** below indicates the computations and assumptions used in deriving the impact of child support. Court orders for child support were obtained through successful representation of clients in divorce, separation, paternity, and custody proceedings.

Exhibit 3

Estimated Direct-Dollar Benefits - Child Support	
1. Number of cases closed by program in 2009-2012 potentially involving child support (divorce, custody, support and/or domestic violence) - <i>see Note 1</i> :	399
2. Estimated number of the above cases for which child support order was awarded (<i>see Note 2</i>):	319
3. Average monthly amount of child support (<i>see Note 3</i>):	\$308
4. Average percent of child support awards that are actually received (<i>see Note 3</i>):	71%
5. Assumed duration of payments in months (<i>see Note 4</i>):	108
Total Estimated Revenue Received by Clients in 2009-2012 (“2” x “3” x “4” x “5”), Millions:	\$7.5

Note 1: Source: Program's case tracking data system.

Note 2: The assumed "success rate" is a weighted average of measured success rates from two sources: (1) a scientific survey by The Resource in which 400 legal aid clients in Pennsylvania randomly sampled from all who had received advice or brief services in the latter half of 2011 were interviewed by phone to determine the outcomes of their cases; and (2) measured outcomes of extended representation cases handled by all legal service providers in New York and Virginia in 2011. We assumed for purposes of this analysis that the success rate of FACLC was the same as the composite success rates of the programs determined from these two sources.

Note 3: Source of the figures in lines 3 and 4: Marin County Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Note 4: Assumed duration of child and spousal support: 9 years. This is the average time elapsed from the average age of children at divorce (9 years) to the age of majority (18 years). Source of figure for average age of children at divorce: Liu, Shirley H., "The Effect Parental Divorce and Its Timing on Child Educational Attainment: A Dynamic Approach," page 17; available at the following website: http://moya.bus.miami.edu/~sliu/Research_files/divorcetiming.pdf.

3. The “Economic Multiplier Effect”: \$1.2 million

Every dollar brought into Marin from *outside* the county – e.g., from grants to Family and Children’s Law Center from agencies and foundations outside Marin – circulates in the local economy 1.16 times before leaving the county, thereby producing revenue for local businesses and supporting jobs for working families throughout Marin County. **Exhibit 4** below indicates the computations and assumptions used in deriving the above figure.⁴

Exhibit 4

Economic Multiplier Effect	
1. Child support from payers residing outside Marin County, millions (see Note 1):	\$0.75
2. Funding to FACLC in 2009-2012 from outside Marin County, millions (see Note 1):	\$0.32
3. Total funds into Marin County from outside sources ("1" + "2"), millions:	\$1.07
4. Economic multiplier for Marin County:	1.16
Total Economic Multiplier Effect ("3" x "4"), Millions:	\$1.2

Note 1: Child support and funding figures for the four-year period 2009 through 2012 were estimated by multiplying 2012 figures by 4. It was assumed conservatively that 10 percent of total child support payments obtained by FACLC came from payers residing outside Marin County.

4. Cost Savings – Reducing Domestic Violence: \$1.8 million

Exhibit 5 on the next page indicates the computations and assumptions used in deriving the above figure. This work not only saves money but also reduces crime, allows survivors to go back to living healthy and productive lives, and reduces the likelihood that children will become victims or perpetrators of violence in the future.

⁴ For a further description of the multiplier effect, see page 17 of the full report on the study on which this analysis is based, page 17. (See the citation to the full report in the footnote on page 1.)

Exhibit 5

Estimated Cost Savings - Reducing Domestic Violence	
1. Estimated number of family law cases that involve domestic violence (see Note 1):	431
2. Assumed success rate - percentage of cases for which victim received protection from DV (see Note 2):	80%
3. Estimated number of clients protected from domestic violence ("1" x "2"):	345
4. Average cost per year of medical treatment, counseling, police protection and other support per DV victim (see Note 3):	\$5,193
Total Estimated Cost Savings from Prevention of Domestic Violence, ("3" x "4"), Millions:	\$1.8

Note 1: Estimate by program based on program's case tracking data system, intake priorities and professional judgment of advocates.

Note 2: The estimated "success rate" was provided by the program based on the experience and professional judgment of the advocates who handle these cases.

Note 3: To estimate this impact, we applied the results of national studies cited in a 2011 analysis in New York in which we were engaged. Those studies provided the basis for an estimate of annual direct costs of medical care and lost wages for victims, counseling for affected children, police resources, and incarceration of abusers. To err on the conservative side, they did not include costs such as emergency housing which were not addressed in the national studies on which the estimate was based. We adjusted the average impact per case derived in our New York analysis to allow for the differential in costs relevant to treatment of domestic violence victims in California versus New York.

E. The “Justice Gap:” *A Disparity Between the Legal Needs of Low-Income Marin Residents with the Capacity That Exists to Meet Them.*

Previous sections of this report have documented the economic and societal benefits that result from Family and Children’s Law Center’s legal assistance for low-income Marin County residents. Legal assistance strengthens Marin County’s families by reducing the incidence and cost of domestic violence and securing child support payments that promote economic stability and reduce the need for public assistance.

FACLC could do even more to benefit families and the local economy if it had the resources to address more than just a fraction of the legal need that exists.

On average, more than **seven out of ten** of Marin County’s poorest residents experiencing a legal problem do **not** receive individualized legal assistance.⁵ This is primarily due to a severe shortfall in the resources that are available to legal service providers. The great majority of those in need do not even bother to seek help because it is well known in the low-income community that legal service providers have only enough resources to handle emergency cases and a few other high-priority matters. The latter often require long waits for service.

This disparity between legal needs and the capacity to address them – the “justice gap” – represents both a challenge to the justice system and a unrealized opportunity for the funders and partners of Family and Children’s Law Center to produce even more profound economic and societal benefits for low-income Marin County residents and the entire community – as demonstrated in the previous sections of this report – through expansion of their support for this clearly effective program.

F. Conclusion

This analysis has shown that Family and Children’s Law Center, with support from the Marin Community Foundation, and other funders and partners, is providing essential services that help thousands of low-income residents of Marin County each year to address critical legal issues directly affecting their families and their physical and economic well-being.

At the same time, there is a huge gap between the need for these services and the capacity of Family and Children’s Law Center and other legal service providers serving Marin County to address them.

The results achieved by Family and Children’s Law Center in 2009-2012 provide compelling evidence that additional investments aimed at bridging the “justice gap” will not only help many more people, it will have dramatic economic and societal impacts that spread far beyond those directly served, to provide important benefits touching the entire Marin community.

⁵ For details on this computation, see the Justice Gap analysis conducted for Marin County, excerpted here from: “An Assessment of the Economic and Societal Impacts of Three Legal Services Programs Funded by the Marin Community Foundation – 2009 to 2012: Final Report, September 10, 2013,” prepared for the Marin Community Foundation (MCF) by The Resource for Great Programs and available upon request from MCF.