

**Project Name: Iowa Child Advocacy Online**

**Requesting Agency:** Iowa Child Advocacy Board, Department of Inspections and Appeals (ICAB)

**Project Point(s)-of-Contact:** Richard Moore, 515-242-5816

**Project Sponsor:** Richard Moore, 515-242-5816

**Agency Information:** Iowa Child Advocacy Board (ICAB) programs were created to increase the level of protection the state can provide to abused and neglected children. First, ICAB's Local Foster Care Review Boards are trained groups of volunteers that conduct case-review hearings to regularly assess the care and treatment of abused and neglected children placed in the state's foster care system. Second, ICAB also supports the work of volunteer court appointed special advocates (CASAs). A CASA is assigned by the court to one abused or neglected child or sibling group. Throughout the life of the case, the CASA monitors all aspects of the case to make sure the child is safe and his or her best interests are being met.

In SFY2006, over 3,700 children were served by CAB programs that involved over 900 certified volunteers. That year, ICAB volunteers donated more than 58,000 hours and over 294,119 travel miles with an estimated cash value to the state of over \$2,500,000. In addition to the case-specific advocacy provided by the two programs described above, CAB also advocates for all of Iowa's disadvantaged children through public information, outreach and the promotion of recommendations for system-wide improvements.

**Goal:** To improve public access of ICAB services to children and families; child welfare system officials; and the citizen volunteers who are the primary workforce of the ICAB programs (Local Citizen Foster Care Review Board members and Court Appointed Special Advocates - CASAs).

**Project Purpose:** To plan and implement enhancements to the information distribution and collection environment of ICAB in a manner that will: 1) decrease staff time and resources devoted to data entry and the receiving, copying, sending and storing of paper documents and program records; 2) increase access for ICAB volunteer recruitment, application procedures and training. 3) improve access to ICAB non-case specific information, assessments and reports for the general public, state and local policy makers and child welfare system officials; and, 4) enhance the speed and accessibility of case-specific and system wide reports to the Court, DHS ,other officials.

**Background:** ICAB is statutorily responsible for the Local Citizen's Foster Care Review Board and Court Appointed Special Advocate programs. Both programs recruit, train and support volunteers whose duties are to advocate for the best interests of children caught up in Iowa's child welfare system.

These programs are administered through a central state office with 14 local program offices. Program operations involve large volumes of Court records, DHS case file information, volunteer-generated reports, volunteer application and support forms and records and other information that ICAB receives, generates or stores as paper-only. Other than email messages, most information exchanges between ICAB staff and volunteers and system officials are paper-based. ICAB program monitoring and planning data are manually entered into data bases that are maintained at each local office with no real-time aggregation due to the lack of electronic data transmission capacities. ICAB has no user-interactive website. ICAB's current IT environment is not structured to interface with current and emerging technologies and applications in the Judicial Branch and other Executive Branch agencies that could be used to increase efficiencies and otherwise improve services and outcomes.

**Expected Results in this Project:** The ultimate result of this project is expected to be improved safety and permanency outcomes for abused and neglected children being served by Iowa's child welfare system. Project-specific expected result is the development and implementation of Iowa Child Advocacy Online. Operational improvement results are expected to include: a general public accessible website that promotes public awareness of child advocacy issues and includes a volunteer recruitment application and training functions; a secure website accessible to ICAB staff, volunteers, DHS, Court and other officials designed to facilitate a variety of information exchanges to reduce reliance on paper-based information exchanges and retention practices; the establishment of a centralized ICAB program operations data system that allows real time updating and accessing by all local offices; business rules to control the

security, storage, backup, and flow of data between office staff, volunteers and the general public; and, an ICAB capacity to facilitate and participate in future service oriented architecture initiatives and other multi-agency efforts to enhance the coordination and usefulness of data systems with connections to Iowa's child welfare system.

**Request:** \$20,000 to support the development of a sequential plan to modernize ICAB's operations through the application of currently available web enabled technologies.

**Interested Parties:** ICAB staff; current and potential citizen volunteers; Court, DHS and other child welfare system officials and practitioners; state and local policy-makers, interested public individuals.

**Recipients of this Service:** Thousands of child victims of abuse and neglect and their families, hundreds of citizen volunteers, and child welfare system officials and practitioners throughout the state.