

OUT OF COURT AND IN COLLABORATION:

EVALUATING A NEW MODEL FOR SEPARATION  
AND DIVORCE IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING



**OUT-OF-COURT AND IN COLLABORATION:  
EVALUATING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY MODEL FOR  
SEPARATION AND DIVORCE IN A UNIVERSITY  
CAMPUS SETTING**

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**June 2016**

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INSTITUTE *for the* ADVANCEMENT  
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## **IAALS—Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System**

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IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, is a national, independent research center at the University of Denver dedicated to facilitating continuous improvement and advancing excellence in the American legal system. We are a “think tank” that goes one step further—we are practical and solution-oriented. Our mission is to forge innovative solutions to problems in our system in collaboration with the best minds in the country. By leveraging a unique blend of empirical and legal research, innovative solutions, broad-based collaboration, communications, and ongoing measurement in strategically selected, high-impact areas, IAALS is empowering others with the knowledge, models, and will to advance a more accessible, efficient, and accountable American legal system.

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*Honoring Families* is an initiative of IAALS dedicated to developing and promulgating evidence-informed processes and options for families involved in divorce, separation, or parental responsibility cases that enable better outcomes for children and that provide greater accessibility, efficiency, and fairness for all parties, including those without counsel.

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## I. PREFACE

Separation and divorce are a reality for millions of Americans. Even when families intend to divorce with dignity, integrity, and support for their children, the structure of the court system is often at odds with that approach. Court processes continue to emphasize traditional civil adjudication in family cases, which naturally places parents in the position of adversaries. Litigation has been shown to exacerbate stress and increase conflict, detrimentally affecting both parents and children. Indeed, it is well-established that parental conflict during separation or divorce can increase children's risk of emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems.<sup>1</sup>

Courts have an important role in fact-finding, protection, and enforcement. However, what many families need during their reorganization is simply access to problem-solving and future-planning services. Although some courts provide these services, structural, cultural, and resource issues pose significant challenges. Responding to the observed need and inspired by Australia's Family Relationship Centres,<sup>2</sup> the *Honoring Families Initiative* of IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System at the University of Denver, developed an interdisciplinary out-of-court model to better serve the needs of separating and divorcing families.

## II. INTRODUCTION

The University of Denver (DU) supported implementation of the IAALS model on campus as a demonstration project, establishing the organization and providing the infrastructure (physical and human resources) for it to function. DU also designated key decision makers to work with members of the Denver family law community on a steering committee to guide implementation. In addition to IAALS, these decision-makers included representatives from DU's:

- Sturm College of Law
- Graduate School of Professional Psychology
- Department of Psychology
- Graduate School of Social Work
- Butler Institute for Families

The Resource Center for Separating and Divorcing Families (RCSDF or the Center) provided services between September 2013 and August 2015. The first center of its kind in the United States, RCSDF provided legal dispute resolution, therapeutic, and educational services to

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Grych, *Interparental Conflict as a Risk Factor for Child Maladjustment*, 43 FAM. CT. REV. 97 (2005). Also see Robin M. Deutsch and Marsha Kline Pruett, *Child Adjustment and High-Conflict Divorce*, in THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF CUSTODY DECISIONS 353 (Robert M. Galatzer-Levy et al. eds., 2nd ed. 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Parkinson, *The Idea of Family Relationship Centres in Australia*, 51 FAM. CT. REV. 195 (2013).

separating and divorcing families in a single location outside the courthouse, thus providing a non-adversarial alternative to the courts. In the Center's on-campus setting, the services were provided by teams of DU graduate students (student interns) supervised by a staff of licensed professionals, thus providing an educational opportunity to support future professionals who wish to work with children and families. For needed services that could not be provided at the Center, RCSDF offered referrals to outside services based on established relationships.<sup>3</sup>

This report chronicles and analyzes the Center's two-year experience. It includes information on: the service process; the families who came into contact with the Center; service utilization and program progression; well-being outcomes; feedback from parents, supervising staff, and members of the community; and student intern self-assessments. The purpose is to provide insight into one implementation of the IAALS model, both as a broad demonstration of how family-centered innovations can improve our family law system and as a tool for building upon and replicating the model. The primarily positive results will be useful for policy makers and decision makers nationwide.

With completion of the on-campus demonstration project, IAALS supported the creation of a community-based version of the Center. The Center for Out-of-Court Divorce – Denver (COCD) is designed to be financially self-sustaining, with services provided primarily by licensed professionals ([centerforoutofcourtdivorce.org](http://centerforoutofcourtdivorce.org)). It opened its doors in September 2015, and will be evaluated in a similar fashion. Whether on-campus or community-based, the IAALS interdisciplinary model has the potential to serve separating and divorcing families across the country and well into the future.

### III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the course of the two years during which RCSDF served families seeking separation and divorce in a collaborative environment out of the traditional adversarial court process, a total of 249 parents—representing 143 different families—expressed interest in services at the Center by submitting an Intake Form. About half of these parents lived in Denver; however, the remaining half were widely distributed across 29 Colorado municipalities. These parents most commonly heard about RCSDF through word of mouth or the courts.

Two-thirds of the parents who submitted an Intake Form went on to receive services at RCSDF. In total, 82 families availed themselves of the RCSDF program. Generally speaking, parents in these families were largely college educated, had full-time employment, and came from lower to middle class income brackets. Most of these families were relatively small, with about two-thirds having one or two children and no families having more than four children. A sizeable majority of parents reported seeking a separation or divorce, though about one in ten were never married.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, as explained in more detail in the section below on RCSDF parent services, financial planning services were offered by a local-area financial planner.

Parents had lived with each other for an average of 13 years at the time of seeking RCSDF services.

Parents tended to come to RCSDF early in the legal process, with only about a third having filed for divorce and only one-quarter having sought legal advice prior to submitting an Intake Form. More than nine in ten parents were not working with a lawyer at the point of intake. Although fewer than 10% of parents had a court order for child support, more than three-quarters reported that one parent was paying child support with or without a court order prior to seeking RCSDF services.

Parents expressed interest in ensuring children's needs were met, obtaining guidance with financial issues, minimizing conflict between the parents, and facilitating a smooth transition for their family. Prior to receiving services at RCSDF, a majority of parents reported being more or less communicative with the other parent, though the quality of the communications varied depending on the matters being discussed. All things considered, this group of parents was relatively low-conflict, with over half arguing with one another only monthly or less often and these arguments being of moderate intensity. Still, about half of parents reported having experienced at least one violent incident (physical, verbal, or controlling) during the relationship.

The Intake and Screening process lasted about a month, on average—the shortest time being one week and the longest being just over three months. Clearly, some parents were highly motivated to begin receiving services, while some parents needed more time before feeling ready to begin the transition process in earnest. Additionally, scheduling a Service Planning Meeting (thus, completing the Intake and Screening process) was sometimes challenging, considering the meeting time must accommodate both parents' schedules, student schedules, and the Center's hours of operation.

RCSDF provided legal education and mediation services, as well as an array of counseling services, including services aimed at promoting the well-being of individual parents and children, educating parents about how to foster a healthy co-parenting relationship, and providing a forum for discussion among parents going through the process. Overall, RCSDF held 524 service sessions—155 legal sessions and 369 counseling sessions. RCSDF conducted 106 mediation sessions and 49 legal education sessions, with the average number of legal service sessions per family being 2.18. Generally, parents attended two mediation sessions and one legal education session. Among the most utilized counseling services were co-parent coaching at 142 sessions, adult individual counseling at 72 sessions, and child interviewing and counseling at 51 and 68 sessions, respectively. On average, families utilized 5.70 counseling sessions.

A total of 43 families completed the RCSDF program—39 received permanent orders at a non-contested hearing held at RCSDF.<sup>4</sup> The legal process lasted about six and a half months, on

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<sup>4</sup> The remaining four families were either post-decree and, thus, did not require a permanent orders hearing or requested a hearing during a month RCSDF was unable to hold one.



average, including Intake and Screening. The duration of the therapeutic process was substantially shorter, at just under three months, on average.

About one-third of the families who received services at RCSDF—28 families—left the program prior to completion. The reasons for leaving were varied, with some deciding to reunify, some opting for the adversarial process after having difficulty coming to agreement, and some simply disengaging from the process without providing a reason. The remaining families—11 in total—transitioned to the community-based center and continued receiving services there.

Of course, a critical question the RCSDF evaluation sought to answer was whether the model would have positive impacts on the well-being of those who received services. In fact, parents showed significant improvements in the following areas during a time when a negative trajectory would be expected:

- Lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression;
- Decreased acrimony between the parents;
- Increased shared decision-making skills;
- Better communication skills, especially with respect to less violent and more collaborative styles of communication;
- Increased confidence in the ability to co-parent;
- Decreased levels of parenting stress in terms of parental distress, dysfunction between parents and children, and difficulties with children; and
- More appropriate emotional expectations for their children.

In addition, parent report of child well-being indicated a significant increase in adaptive behaviors with respect to internalizing anxiety and depression. Further, more than four out of five parents reported that RCSDF had a positive impact on themselves, their children, and their family as a whole.

Parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with their experience at RCSDF, with sweeping majorities providing positive feedback about the process, interactions with RCSDF students and supervising staff, and the agreements reached with the other parent. Moreover, more than nine out of ten parents reported coming to full agreement with the other parent with respect to parenting time, finances, and decision-making responsibilities—no parents reported being unable to come to at least partial agreement on these matters. When asked the proportion of issues upon which parents were able to reach agreement, the vast majority reported coming to agreement on 100% of the issues.

Feedback from RCSDF's partner organizations within the Denver community—including courts and referral organizations—was largely positive, with more than four out of five indicating satisfaction with RCSDF. Positive comments noted the unique, valuable, affordable nature of RCSDF services, along with the benefits of the interdisciplinary approach. Suggestions for

improvements reflected a desire for RCSDF to expand in terms of number of cases and populations served; a need for more frequent communication with the courts; and a need for RCSDF to provide additional support and guidance to those who return to the courts.

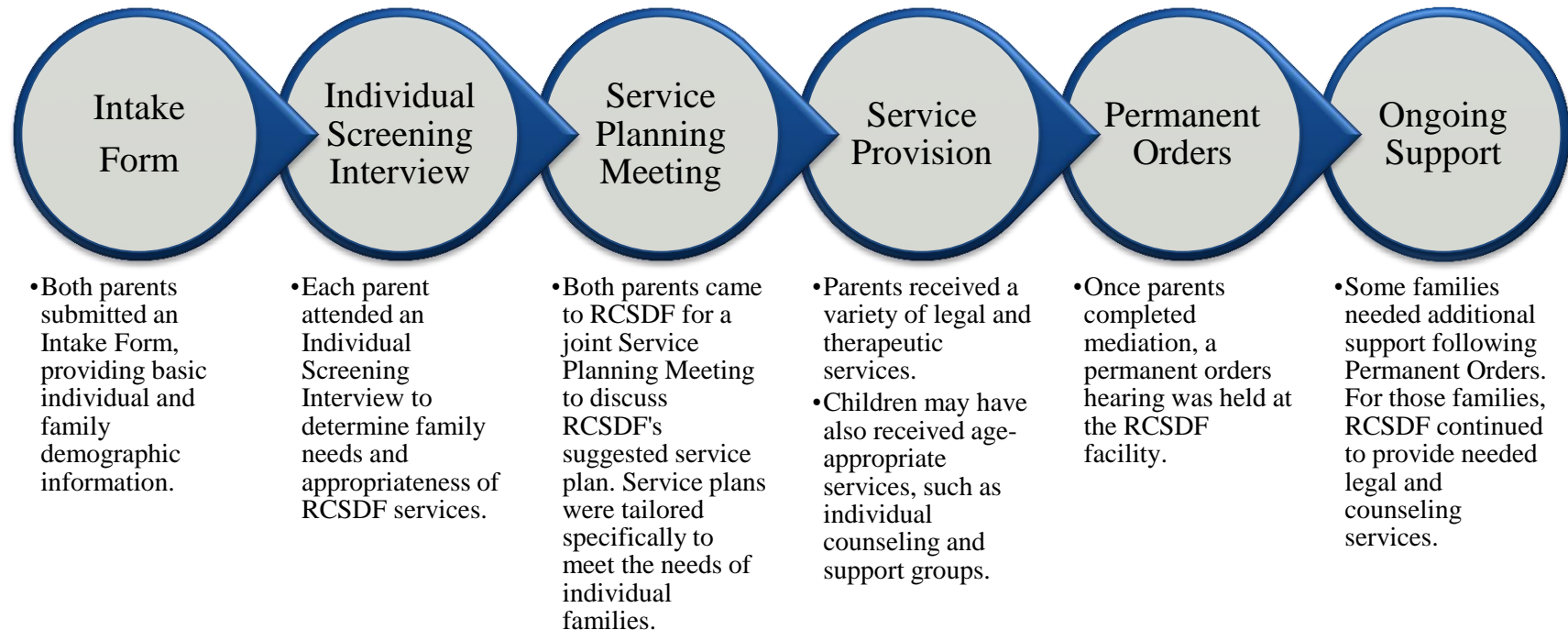
RCSDF interns—graduate students in law, psychology, and social work—showed increased knowledge in relevant substantive areas, such as divorce law, parenting plans, counseling, and family dynamics. Student interns also reported increased levels of comfort in accomplishing professional tasks, including problem-solving, negotiating agreements, and drafting field-appropriate professional documents. Positive feedback from student interns related to the advantages in working with an interdisciplinary team and real-world experience working with families. Student-identified areas for improvement related to a lower-than-expected workload, disorganization at the Center, and communication between students and staff.

As a very young organization, which was the first of its kind in the country and undertook the monumental task of changing the face of divorce, RCSDF certainly confronted many obstacles and challenges. Still, the evaluation—which employed a truly comprehensive approach—demonstrates that RCSDF was successful in providing needed and wanted services to families, having a positive impact on parents and children, working collaboratively with the courts and community, and providing a meaningful and fruitful educational opportunity for students.

## IV. THE RCSDF PROCESS

In order to fully grasp the information presented in this report, as well as to comprehend the truly unique nature of the RCSDF program, it is important to understand the flow of the process. To that end, the sections below outline the process families experienced at RCSDF—first at a glance, then more in-depth.

### A. A SNAPSHOT



## B. THE WHOLE PICTURE

### 1. FITNESS OF RCSDF SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES

From the outset, RCSDF was designed to serve families in the beginning stages of separation or divorce, by providing parents who wished to work together for the benefit of their children both a collaborative environment and a constructive system of resources to address legal, counseling, and financial planning needs. The transition through separation and divorce is a critical period in family life regardless of the family's structure, background, or situation. RCSDF's system of coordinated interdisciplinary services in a centralized location offered families a unique environment in which to navigate through their transition.

Accordingly, RCSDF was set up to serve the broadest swath of families with children rather than specific populations. To ensure affordable services, there was a sliding scale fee structure,<sup>5</sup> with no income criteria limiting eligibility. Importantly, however, RCSDF was not equipped to serve families with recent or current domestic violence or serious mental health concerns, including chemical dependency. The ability to meet family needs was defined on a case-by-case basis, and RCSDF staff determined the appropriateness of the program in light of each particular family's circumstances. Table 1 presents the factors related to determination of RCSDF's ability to meet family needs.

*Table 1: Determination of RCSDF Ability to Meet Family Needs*

Both Parents Must Have...	An interest in participating in the program and cooperating with the other parent on services.
	A case or potential case with Colorado court jurisdiction.
	No history of lengthy parental litigation.
Neither Parent Can Have...	An extensive history of mental health issues.
	A history of serious substance abuse.
	A history of domestic violence or child abuse and neglect.

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<sup>5</sup> During the first year of operations, the fee range was \$15 to \$55 for services charged at an hourly rate (information on which services were chargeable and which were provided as part of program participation is presented in the discussion on services later in the report). During the second year of operations, the fee range was \$20 to \$95 per hour. It should be noted that RCSDF services were highly subsidized, as the focus for this particular demonstration project was programmatic rather than financial. This evaluation does not examine the Center from a business operations perspective.

Although the original conception of the model included only allowing families seeking pre-decree separation and divorce services, it bears mentioning that RCSDF deviated from this plan in two ways. First, the Center allowed a few individual parents to participate in individual counseling, without engaging in the full process. Second, the Center accepted some families who were already legally separated or divorced, but needed help amending their existing agreements (i.e., post-decree families). These exceptions enabled the mental health student interns to meet the clinical hour requirements set out by their respective schools.

## 2. INTAKE AND SCREENING

To ensure the appropriateness of RCSDF services for each individual family, RCSDF employed a comprehensive intake and screening process. This process began with an Intake Form, which each parent completed separately, typically through an online portal. The purpose of the Intake Form was to give RCSDF service providers basic information (e.g., demographics, number and ages of children, current situation, reasons for seeking RCSDF services, etc.) as a foundation for interacting with each parent and with the family in general.

Once both parents in a family submitted an Intake Form, each participated in an Individual Screening Interview—a private, long-form, in-person interview conducted by a team of two student interns,<sup>6</sup> one law student and one mental health student (psychology or social work). The Individual Screening Interview was designed as a tool for in-depth inquiry into the particular circumstances and issues facing each family (and each individual within each family).

Together, the Intake Form and Individual Screening Interview (referred to collectively as Intake and Screening) captured a great deal of information from the perspective of each parent, including indicators of mental health issues, violence, and substance abuse. If any of those indicators showed reason for concern, further evaluation was conducted to determine RCSDF's ability to meet the family's service needs (e.g., administration of the MASIC screening tool for intimate partner violence and abuse<sup>7</sup>).

Once the Intake and Screening process was completed, the originally assigned two-student team (guided by their supervisors) made a decision concerning RCSDF's ability to meet the family's service needs. If RCSDF was not considered appropriate, the parents were provided with referrals to outside resources. Some parents were offered limited transitional counseling at RCSDF until they were able to secure services with a more appropriate resource.

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<sup>6</sup> The three DU graduate schools have differing terms for student experiential learning (i.e., internship, externship, etc.). In the interest of clarity and brevity, this report refers to student interns in all three schools as interns.

<sup>7</sup> The full name of the tool is The Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns (MASIC).

### 3. SERVICE PLANNING

If RCSDF was deemed appropriate for the family, the parents proceeded to a joint Service Planning Meeting, during which the same student team discussed an initial plan of recommended services prepared specifically for the family, based on needs determined during the Intake and Screening process. At the Service Planning Meeting, the parents had the opportunity to decide whether they wished to participate in the program and, if so, to select the services they anticipated utilizing. If the parents were not ready to proceed to mediation of the legal issues (i.e., if one or both parents were unsure about separation or divorce as the intended outcome), a Discernment Therapy session was recommended as part of the Service Plan.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, if the RCSDF team determined that one or both parents could benefit from individual services (such as individual counseling or participation in support groups), the team met with the parent(s) individually at the conclusion of the Service Planning Meeting to discuss those services.

### 4. SERVICES

Once services were underway, the two students who worked with the family through the Intake and Screening process and the Service Planning Meeting jointly conducted the Mediation Session(s), with the law student providing Legal Education separately. To protect confidentiality, any additional counseling services (including Co-Parenting Coaching, Family Therapy, Child Interviews, Adult Individual Counseling, and Child Counseling) were assigned to a mental health student who was not on the originally assigned team.

### 5. PERMANENT ORDERS

In terms of handling the legal aspects of the case, RCSDF worked in partnership with the courts to provide benefits beyond the service sessions. RCSDF made arrangements with the Colorado Judicial Branch for limited access to the judicial case management system, as well as for the appointment of a retired judge to hold uncontested permanent orders hearings at the Center. When a case was filed, whether before or after arriving at the Center, RCSDF notified the court that the family was in the program and the judge would generally waive the status conference requirement. RCSDF also handled any filing subsequent to the filing of the dissolution or allocation of parental rights, such as financial affidavits or the final decree. This, combined with the on-site permanent orders hearing if the parents reached agreement on all issues through mediation, meant that those who completed the RCSDF process never had to step into a courthouse.

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<sup>8</sup> As more fully explained in Section VII.A, pages 31-32, Discernment Therapy is a service that was introduced approximately nine months after RCSDF opened its doors in response to a recognized need to give some parents more time and support in making a decision about separation or reconciliation.

## 6. ONGOING SUPPORT

Some individuals, including both parents and children, expressed a need or desire to continue receiving services at RCSDF following completion of services. For these families, student interns and supervisors continued providing the appropriate counseling and legal services on an as-requested basis. Though the fact that this occurred speaks to the RCSDF's services and its relationship with families, the remainder of this report addresses only what happened between submission of the Intake Forms and conclusion of services for RCSDF families, and excludes any ongoing support activity.

## V. THE IAALS EVALUATION: A COMPREHENSIVE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

IAALS undertook evaluation of the RCSDF program in order to assess the first implementation of its campus-based out-of-court model. Objectives of the evaluation were to describe RCSDF and the families reached, gauge the impact of services on families, and measure the professional growth of the student interns.

This evaluation report provides information on the entirety of RCSDF operations, containing data gathered for two years between September 2013 and August 2015. There are four sources of data: 1) parents who sought services at RCSDF; 2) the RCSDF leadership team; 3) community partners; and 4) RCSDF student interns. Table 2 contains more information on data collection instruments and measures.

*Table 2: Data Collection Instruments and Measures*

Data Tool	Data	Data Source	When Provided
RCSDF Parents and Families			
Intake Form	Individual and family demographic information, presenting issues	All parents who submitted an Intake Form (data more limited for parents who did not ultimately participate in services)	Completed by each parent as the point of entry into RCSDF
Individual Screening Interview	Individual and family circumstances, presenting issues	All parents who completed an Individual Screening Interview (data more limited for parents who did not ultimately participate in services)	Completed by the student team at the Individual Screening Interview
Service Plan	Services offered and accepted	Parents who consented to RCSDF services and to research participation	Presented to parents and agreed upon at the Service Planning Meeting
Schedule of Services	Timeline and schedule of key process benchmarks, including services utilized and completion or discontinuation of services	Parents who consented to RCSDF services and to research participation	Tracked throughout service provision

Data Tool	Data	Data Source	When Provided
Parent Well-being Questionnaire	Parent self-report of physical and mental well-being, parental conflict, parenting stress and attitudes; parent report of child well-being	Parents who consented to RCSDF services and to research participation	Administered before services begin (pre-service) and upon completion or discontinuation of RCSDF services (post-service)
Exit Survey	Impact, accessibility, helpfulness, procedural fairness, and satisfaction with respect to RCSDF services	Parents who consented to RCSDF services and to research participation	Administered upon completion or discontinuation of RCSDF services (administered to all consenting parents who received services)
<b>RCSDF Leadership Team</b>			
Supervisor Focus Group	Feedback regarding programs and services, supervising students, working with families, and the multi-disciplinary nature of RCSDF	Professional staff supervising the student interns	Conducted at the end of each year of operations
Director Interview	Feedback regarding programs and services, working with students/supervisors/families, outreach and communication, and the multi-disciplinary nature of RCSDF	Executive director	Conducted at the end of each year of operations
<b>RCSDF Community Partners</b>			
Partner Survey	Feedback regarding relationship with RCSDF, strengths and weaknesses of RCSDF, new ideas	Individuals with a professional connection to RCSDF	Administered at the end of each year of operations
<b>RCSDF Student Interns</b>			
Student Questionnaires	Self-report of professional learning objectives and student feedback	Student interns	Administered before student training, at the conclusion of training, and upon completion of the internship

The remainder of this report addresses each element of the RCSDF evaluation in the following order:

- Characteristics of parents who submitted an Intake Form and their families;
- Characteristics of families who utilized some combination of legal and therapeutic services;
- Parent and child service utilization;
- Timelines for each part of the RCSDF process;
- Impacts of participation on parents and children;
- Perspectives of the executive director and student supervisors;
- Feedback from the community on relationships with RCSDF; and
- Experiences of student interns.

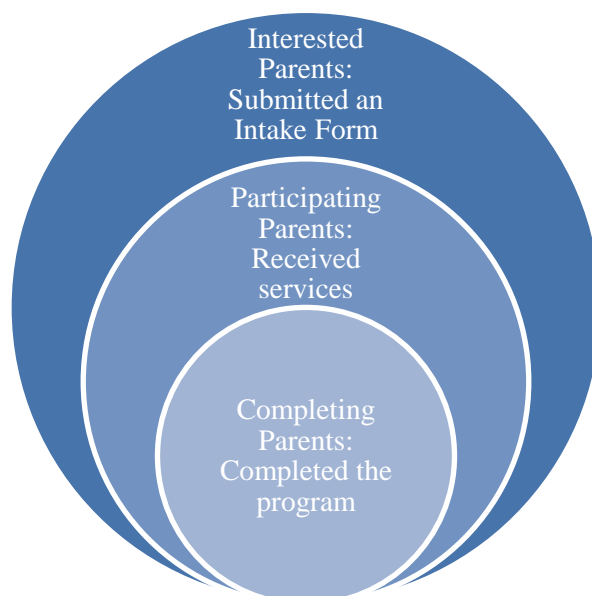


To ensure a complete picture of the Center’s experience, Year 1 and Year 2 data are presented separately as well as combined. As with any start-up, RCSDF went through some operational and programmatic changes during the first year as it discovered through trial and error what would work best for families, interns, and staff.

## VI. RCSDF FAMILIES: A PORTRAIT OF THOSE WHO CAME TO RCSDF

The largest group with whom RCSDF interacted consisted of parents who expressed interest in RCSDF services by submitting an Intake Form (interested parents). Of those who expressed interest, a smaller group of parents proceeded through Intake and Screening, attended a Service Planning Meeting, and received services (participating parents). Of that smaller group who received services, some families discontinued services prior to completion, while others went on to complete services and receive permanent orders (completing parents). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of these parent groups. This and subsequent sections explore each of these groups of parents in some detail.

*Figure 1: RCSDF Parent Groups*



### A. PARENTS WHO EXPRESSED INTEREST IN RCSDF SERVICES

Parents initiated the RCSDF process by completing an Intake Form, which provided RCSDF staff with basic demographic information about the individual and family, along with high-level information about the family’s unique circumstances. The information supplied in the Intake Form allowed student interns and supervising staff to make an initial assessment of the fitness of RCSDF for each family and provided a basis for initial interactions with each family. Examining

all interested parents who submitted an Intake Form, even if they did not ultimately participate, can be instructive in understanding what kinds of parents were reached and attracted to the model.

## 1. INTERESTED PARENTS: INDIVIDUAL DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

In the two years of RCSDF operations, a total of 249 individual parents from 143 different families submitted an Intake Form.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the life of RCSDF, men (48.6%) and women (51.0%) submitted Intake Forms at about equal rates, with one individual identifying as other with respect to gender (0.4%). The average age for this group of parents was about 40 years, with the youngest being 21 and the oldest being 59. Just over two-thirds identified as Caucasian (68.0%), while smaller proportions of parents identified as Hispanic (18.9%) or African American (9.4%).<sup>10</sup> Most of these parents reported being somewhat religious (52.2%), with fewer reporting being not religious (40.1%); a much smaller proportion reported being very religious (7.7%).

The group of interested parents was largely educated, with 85% having attended at least some college. A sizable majority (69.1%) of these parents had full-time employment, while smaller proportions either had part-time employment (14.4%) or were unemployed (16.5%). This group spanned the income spectrum, with about one-fifth each of parents reporting annual earnings below \$20,000 (22.6%) and those reporting annual earnings between \$21,000 and \$35,000 (19.8%); interestingly, the next largest proportion of parents in this group reported an annual income greater than \$95,000 (12.1%).

Interested parents had a broad geographical distribution throughout Denver and the surrounding areas. Just over half of those who submitted an Intake Form (52.5%) lived in Denver. The remaining parents were spread across 30 other municipalities—29 in central Colorado and one in central Wyoming. The wide distribution of parents interested in RCSDF services highlights the fact that the services offered were desired, but unavailable elsewhere.

Finally, this group of parents found their way to RCSDF through multiple avenues, with the most common being word of mouth (45.1%; including the other parent, another RCSDF client, co-workers, family, and friends). The second largest proportion of parents heard about RCSDF through the courts (22.5%; including the court self-help center and an appointed mediator). Fewer parents learned about services from a therapist (8.1%), an internet search (7.7%), an outside organization (6.0%), a brochure (4.7%), the media (2.6%), or some other source (8.0%). Details concerning efforts made to spread the word about the Center are outlined in Section IX.B (page 50) below.

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<sup>9</sup> All demographic information presented in this report reflects how interested parents described themselves, their families, and their circumstances in the Intake Form or during the Individual Screening Interview (depending on the question).

<sup>10</sup> The remaining parents identified as Asian (1.2%), Native American (0.4%), or Other (2.0%).

## 2. INTERESTED PARENTS: FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

About three-quarters of interested parents reported being in the process of separation/divorce (73.3%), about half of whom were still living with the other parent (47.5%) and about half who were living apart (52.5%). A substantially smaller group reported having never been married to the other parent (15.8%), three-quarters of whom used to, but no longer, live together (74.4%). Just under 10% reported simply contemplating separation/divorce and the very few remaining parents indicated already being divorced (8.5% and 2.4%, respectively). *Notably, the two parents in a given family did not always agree about the current situation—including whether or not they were living together and whether or not they were already divorced.*

A marked majority of these parents had relatively small families, with nearly half of these parents having a single child (49.4%) and another third having two children (30.5%). Fewer parents reported having a three-child (15.3%) or four-child family (4.8%), and no parent had more than four children.<sup>11</sup>

Consistent with RCSDF's stated goal of reaching families early in the reorganization process, before the situation became contentious, almost three-quarters of parents who reached out to RCSDF had not received legal advice prior to submitting an Intake Form (71.7%) and a near identical proportion reported not having a divorce case filed (72.0%). Further, over 90% of these parents were not currently working with an attorney.

Another central tenet of the RCSDF model is the cooperation of both parents to foster and encourage a collaborative attitude with respect to separating and co-parenting, while providing an opportunity to resolve disputed legal issues. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that a sweeping majority of parents who expressed interest in RCSDF services indicated that the other parent was aware of the effort to seek services (87.9%; 6.7% indicated the other parent was not aware; 5.4% were not sure) and that the other parent supported this effort (82.9%; 0.8% indicated the other parent did not support the effort; 16.3% were unsure). Furthermore, just over 90% of these parents were willing to talk with the other parent about ways to plan for the future of the family (2.1% were unwilling; 7.8% were unsure).

## 3. CONVERSION RATES AND REASONS FOR NOT UTILIZING SERVICES

Of the 249 parents who submitted an Intake Form, about two-thirds (65.1%) proceeded through the Intake and Screening process and utilized some combination of legal and therapeutic

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<sup>11</sup> As was true for parents when reporting current family situation, parents sometimes did not report having the same number of children as their counterpart. The disparity here comes from some parents including children from relationships other than the one for which they were seeking RCSDF services.

services.<sup>12</sup> Almost the full remaining third discontinued the process at some point during Intake and Screening (32.1%), while a very small proportion received some form of individual therapy services without engaging in the full RCSDF process (2.8%).<sup>13</sup> Table 3 below illustrates that the proportion of interested parents who became participating parents (i.e., utilized services) remained constant over the two years of RCSDF operations.

*Table 3: Service Utilization Status of Parents Who Submitted an Intake Form, Year-to-Year Comparison*

	Year 1		Year 2		Combined	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Parents who utilized RCSDF services	96	65.8%	66	64.1%	162	65.1%
Parents who did not utilize RCSDF services	50	34.2%	35	35.9%	85	34.9%
<i>Total Intakes</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>249</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

For the third of parents who initiated the process but did not utilize services, Table 4 presents the reasons for discontinuation of the RCSDF process during Intake and Screening.

*Table 4: Reasons Parents Did Not Utilize Services, Year-to-Year Comparison<sup>14</sup>*

	Year 1		Year 2		Combined	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Initiating parent's engagement dropped off during Intake and Screening.	18	36.0%	16	43.2%	32	39.1%
The other parent did not submit a corresponding Intake Form.	15	30.0%	15	40.5%	30	34.5%
The Intake and Screening process revealed evidence of domestic violence or child abuse/neglect.	12	24.0%	2	5.4%	14	16.1%
The parent received individual counseling only.	3	6.0%	4	10.8%	7	8.0%
RCSDF did not have the ability to facilitate the court case (outlying jurisdiction).	2	4.0%	0	0.0%	2	2.3%
<i>Total Parents Who Did Not Utilize Services</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>100.0%</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

The most common reason for parents not utilizing services was that one or both parents dropped-off during Intake and Screening (e.g., declined to participate in a Screening Interview or ceased communications with the Center). The second most common reason in both years was one parent

<sup>12</sup> There were two parents who did utilize services, but never submitted an Intake Form. Those individuals are not included in the calculations in this section, but are included in subsequent sections where applicable.

<sup>13</sup> The parents who received individual counseling only are considered non-participants for the purpose of this report, which is to illuminate the comprehensive RCSDF process.

<sup>14</sup> Note that these figures relate to individual parents, not to families as a whole.

chose not to submit an Intake Form. This suggests that either these families decided not to move forward with their case at the time or that these families decided to pursue their case through the traditional routes. Notably, there is quite a large difference between the number of parents with indicators of domestic violence or child abuse/neglect between the first year and the second. The sharp drop in domestic violence cases suggests that, in the second year, the community may have been more aware of the limitations on RCSDF’s ability to serve families with such circumstances.

## B. PARENTS WHO UTILIZED RCSDF SERVICES

As discussed in detail in the previous section, about two-thirds of the parents who expressed interest in RCSDF services completed the Intake and Screening process and went on to receive services. This section examines this group of 164 parents in greater depth.<sup>15</sup>

### 1. PARTICIPATING PARENTS: INDIVIDUAL DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

In all, 82 families—comprised of 164 parents and 160 children—utilized RCSDF services.<sup>16</sup> Exactly half of these parents were men and half were women (all families had heterosexual parents, although RCSDF welcomed same-sex parents). All parents in this group were fluent in English, with only one person indicating a preference for Spanish. Additionally, this group of parents represented a wide range of occupations, though they tended toward white collar or professional work. Table 5 below presents a year-to-year comparison of parent demographic information. Note that in Table 5, as well as several other tables throughout this report, cells are shaded based on value—that is, lighter cells represent lower values and darker cells represent higher values. This is intended to help the reader decipher and interpret the information.

*Table 5: Individual Demographics of Participating Parents*

		Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Highest level of education	Primary school	1.1%	0.0%	0.6%
	High school/GED/Certificate	10.6%	15.3%	12.5%
	Some college study	20.0%	18.5%	19.4%
	Undergraduate degree	42.1%	38.5%	40.6%
	Graduate degree	26.3%	27.7%	26.9%
Individual income (annual) <sup>17</sup>	Under \$35,000	38.5%	32.3%	36.0%
	\$36,000 to \$55,000	24.0%	21.5%	23.0%

<sup>15</sup> This number represents the 162 parents who submitted an Intake Form, plus the two who did not submit an Intake Form (see note 12), who received services at RCSDF.

<sup>16</sup> Numbers reported throughout the report include only those who both provided a response to the particular question and consented to allowing collection of their information for evaluative purposes (where IAALS was not authorized to collect information from all parents).

<sup>17</sup> Income bands are collapsed from a larger set of response options provided in the Intake Form.

		Year 1	Year 2	Combined
	\$56,000 to \$75,000	16.7%	20.0%	18.0%
	\$76,000 or more	20.8%	26.2%	23.0%
Employment status	Full time	75.3%	69.7%	73.0%
	Part time	15.1%	13.6%	14.5%
	Unemployed	9.7%	16.7%	12.6%
Ethnic identity	African American	9.8%	3.1%	7.0%
	Asian	3.3%	0.0%	1.9%
	Caucasian	62.0%	78.5%	68.8%
	Hispanic	21.7%	15.4%	19.1%
	Native American	0.0%	1.5%	0.6%
	Other <sup>18</sup>	3.3%	1.5%	2.5%
Religion <sup>19</sup>	Catholic	24.0%	28.8%	25.9%
	Islamic	0.0%	1.5%	0.6%
	Jewish	4.2%	3.0%	3.7%
	New Age/Metaphysical	1.0%	6.1%	3.1%
	Protestant	22.9%	21.1%	22.2%
	Other	10.4%	22.7%	15.4%
	None	15.6%	16.7%	16.0%
Religiosity	Not religious	40.4%	43.9%	41.9%
	Somewhat religious	51.1%	53.0%	51.9%
	Very religious	8.5%	3.0%	6.3%

For the most part, the first year group was comparable to the second year group: largely educated, primarily lower to middle class with respect to income, employed full-time, and ethnically and religiously diverse. There are, however, a few areas of divergence. Specifically, the second year saw a slightly larger percentage of high-income parents and a lower percentage of low-income families, as well as a greater proportion of Caucasian parents.

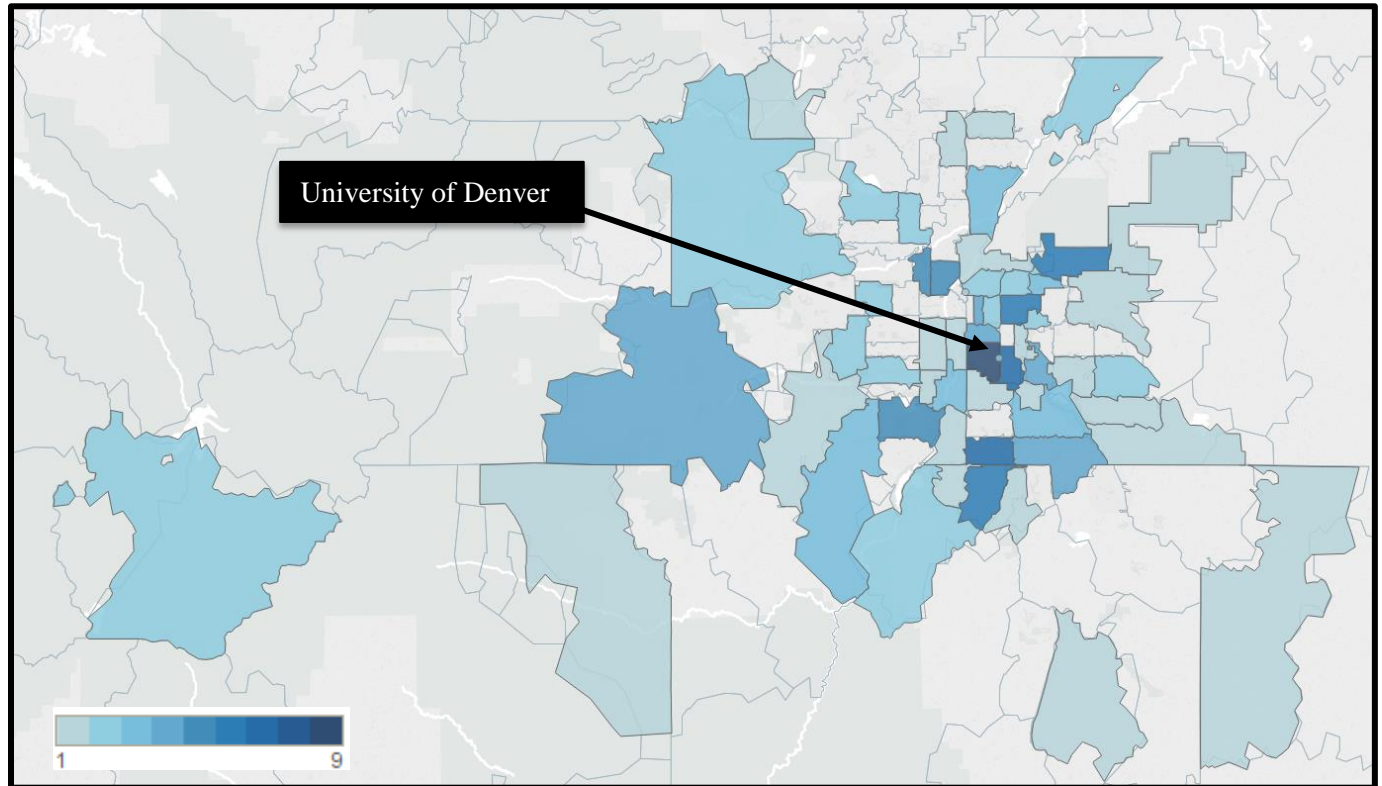
In addition to being a relatively diverse group demographically speaking, participating parents came from a variety of geographic areas. As to be expected, a majority lived in Denver (55.1%), but several parents lived in more distant locations, including Boulder to the north; Castle Rock and Elizabeth to the south; and Evergreen, Golden, and Morrison to the west. In all, these parents came from 25 municipalities and 57 zip codes in Colorado. The wide geographic spread suggests

<sup>18</sup> The one parent who provided a text response for Other indicated being Caucasian and African American (this was the one person from the second year), the three parents who indicated Other in the first year did not provide a text response.

<sup>19</sup> The percentages for Religion do not add up to 100% because parents were allowed to select all that applied.

that parents were willing to travel to receive the otherwise unavailable services the Center offered. Figure 2 shows the distribution of parents in this group by zip code.

Figure 2: Zip Code Distribution for Participating Parents



## 2. PARTICIPATING PARENTS: FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Of the families who received services, over one-third had one child (39.0%) and another third had two children (32.9%), with smaller proportions having three (22.0%) or four children (6.1%). Comparing these numbers with those of all parents who submitted an Intake Form (where half of the parents reported one child and 15% reported three), it appears as though *single-child families tended to discontinue the RCSDf program during Intake and Screening at higher rates than larger families.*

On average, parents in these families had lived together for 13.1 years, with the minimum cohabitation time being one year and the maximum being 26 years. There was a certain degree of variation between the first and second years with respect to who decided to end the relationship; *the second year saw a substantially smaller proportion of families in which the decision was*

*mutual, the concomitant being that the decision was unilateral for greater proportions of families.* Table 6 below presents a comparison.<sup>20</sup>

Table 6: Decision to End the Relationship as Reported by Participating Parents, Year-to-Year Comparison (n = 132)

	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Own decision	29.6%	35.3%	32.8%
Other parent's decision	25.9%	33.3%	28.8%
Mutual decision	40.7%	21.6%	33.3%
Not applicable <sup>21</sup>	3.7%	9.8%	6.1%

Another area in which there was much variation for this group of parents was the current family situation with respect to the status of the relationship and the living arrangement. In the first year, 20% more parents reported being at the stage of separation/divorce than did so in the second year, with most of the difference attributable to those living apart. *These numbers suggest that as time passed at RCSDF, more families used the Center as a resource for determining whether to end the relationship (i.e., as an early intervention resource) or as a process for uncoupling parents who never married.*

This pattern of variation carried over from the larger group of parents who expressed interest in services.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that the difference observed between the first and second years reflects a change with respect to the living arrangement and relationship status of families who came to RCSDF rather than some mechanism in the Intake and Screening process that selected for families in a particular living and relationship situation. Table 7 shows the proportions of parents reporting each specific family situation.

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<sup>20</sup> The calculations related to whose decision it was to end the relationship includes responses from both parents in a family (where consent was given to use this information for evaluative purposes); it should be noted that the parents in a given family did not always agree.

<sup>21</sup> For the 8 total individuals who selected Not Applicable, 6 indicated that it began as one parent's idea then became mutual. The remaining two described more complicated family circumstances.

<sup>22</sup> For all parents who submitted an Intake Form: Never married, living together, 0.0% (Y1), 1.0% (Y2); Never married, used to live together, 11.6% (Y1), 11.9% (Y2); Never married, never lived together, 1.4% (Y1), 6.9% (Y2); Contemplating separation/divorce, 8.2% (Y1), 8.9% (Y2); Separating/divorcing, living together, 32.2% (Y1), 38.6% (Y2); Separating/divorcing, living apart 45.2% (Y1), 28.7% (Y2); Already divorced, 1.4% (Y1), 4.0% (Y2).



*Table 7: Relationship Status and Living Arrangement of Participating Parents*

		Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Never married	Living together	0.0%	1.5%	0.6%
	Used to live together	8.3%	10.8%	9.3%
	Never lived together	0.0%	3.1%	1.2%
Contemplating separation/divorce		6.3%	13.8%	9.3%
Separating/divorcing	Living together	40.6%	47.7%	43.5%
	Living apart	44.8%	16.9%	33.5%
Already divorced		0.0%	6.2%	2.5%

Table 8 presents the family legal situation reported by the group of parents who received services at the time of completing the Intake Form. These numbers suggest that, in general, parents were coming to RCSDf early in the family's transitional process, as was the intent. More than 90% of parents reported not currently working with an attorney, not having a court order designating custody, and not having a court order for child support; there was very little variation in this result from year to year. About three-quarters reported not having received legal advice.

*Table 8: Legal Situation of Participating Parents*

			Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Court Cases	Have you filed for divorce?	Yes	41.5%	14.8%	31.0%
		No	58.5%	85.2%	69.0%
	Other court cases pending?	Yes	8.6%	5.2%	7.2%
		No	91.4%	94.8%	92.8%
Legal Assistance	Have you received legal advice about your current situation?	Yes	24.0%	27.7%	25.5%
		No	76.0%	72.3%	74.5%
	Are you working with a lawyer now?	Yes	4.2%	7.8%	5.7%
		No	95.8%	92.2%	94.3%
Child Issues	Court order designating responsibility/custody for the children?	Yes	8.3%	6.6%	7.6%
		No	91.7%	93.4%	92.4%
	Court order for one parent to pay child support?	Yes	2.3%	11.5%	6.1%
		No	97.7%	88.5%	93.9%
	One parent paying child support (with or without an order)?	Yes	77.9%	77.0%	77.6%
		No	22.1%	23.0%	22.4%

The legal situation numbers reveal one rather notable difference between the first and second years. Namely, there were almost 30% fewer participating parents who reported a divorce case had already been filed in the second year than in the first year. This is roughly consistent with the proportions of all interested parents who submitted an Intake Form, where there were 20% fewer parents reporting a divorce case had been filed. Similarly to the relationship status and living

arrangement data presented above, the legal situation data suggests a change in the characteristics of families who came to RCSDF, consistent with the notion that they were seeking assistance early in the process.

Also notable with respect to the legal situation of participating parents is that, although very few parents reported that one parent was under a court order to pay child support, over three-quarters indicated that one parent was currently paying child support. Thus, many families had implemented a plan for child support without legal intervention, which suggests that the parents coming to the Center had a collaborative attitude about their ending relationship, a central and express goal of RCSDF.

Further evidence of the collaborative attitudes of parents coming to RCSDF is found in the numbers of parents willing to cooperate for the benefit of the family, as Table 9 illustrates. About 90% of participating parents stated a willingness to work together, with most of the remaining parents open to the idea. In fact, only one parent in this group was unwilling to cooperate (this person must have been persuaded otherwise at some point during Intake and Screening). Once again, this trend is consistent with the numbers when considering all interested parents who submitted an Intake Form, suggesting that parents coming to RCSDF were indeed collaborative-minded.

*Table 9: Participating Parents' Willingness to Talk About Planning for the Future*

		<b>Year 1 (n = 94)</b>	<b>Year 2 (n = 66)</b>	<b>Combined (n = 160)</b>
Are you willing to talk with the other parent about ways to plan for the future of your family?	Yes	93.6%	86.4%	90.6%
	Maybe	5.3%	13.6%	8.8%
	No	1.1%	0.0%	0.6%

### 3. PARTICIPATING PARENTS: WHAT THEY SOUGHT FROM THE PROCESS

The Individual Screening Interview opened with an opportunity for parents to discuss what brought them to RCSDF. This was the parent's opportunity to tell their story and for the RCSDF team to become acquainted with the unique circumstances and issues within the family. Parents named a variety of matters with which they would like RCSDF guidance.

The themes arising from these conversations show that parents most often mentioned wanting RCSDF help in the following areas:

- Meeting child(ren)'s needs
- Information and guidance on the divorce process
- Co-parenting and parenting time
- Financial issues

- Minimizing conflict and providing a safe place to resolve conflicts
- Facilitating a smooth, easy transition
- Providing counseling for parents and children
- Improving communication between the co-parents

One parent said, “The family doesn’t have to be broken. There is adjustment and it is uncomfortable, but it doesn’t have to be devastating. RCSDF can bring the family to a better place. I want tools to learn to do this.” Another commented that, “[RCSDF can help] navigate the untangling of lives.... We need help figuring out how to do it.” Yet another reflected that, “We are trying to put the best interest of the kids before anything else.”

Parents were next asked to select, from a pre-set list of options, as many issues of concern as applied to their family circumstance. Table 10 provides year-specific and combined numbers for cited issues of concern for participating parents. Interestingly, and despite relatively stable income data, about 20% fewer parents were concerned with financial issues in the second year than were in the first year, although the proportion remained a sizable majority in both years. Similarly, nearly 20% fewer parents were concerned with child support in the second year.

*Table 10: Issues of Concern for Participating Parents*

	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Financial issues	82.7%	61.8%	74.2%
Child’s adjustment to separation	80.7%	71.7%	76.8%
Child support	72.6%	55.3%	65.8%
The time each parent spends with child	65.2%	56.6%	61.8%
Where child(ren) live(s)	63.2%	52.6%	58.9%
Holiday schedules	61.9%	52.6%	58.2%
Individual parent’s adjustment to separation	57.5%	52.6%	55.6%
Spousal support	55.0%	43.4%	50.3%
How parents make decisions	47.8%	52.6%	49.7%
Special expenses for child	45.0%	40.8%	43.3%
Parenting style/ability/value	45.0%	43.4%	44.4%
How parents share information	42.7%	32.9%	38.7%
Child’s relationship with other parent	36.9%	43.4%	39.6%
One parent moving away	35.5%	35.5%	35.5%
Exchange of child	33.3%	32.9%	33.2%

Within the financial arena, general financial issues between the parents were more frequently cited than support issues (child and spousal). Examining this in conjunction with the open-ended comments, *it seems that some parents were worried that unresolved financial issues might derail what could otherwise be a positive relationship with the other parent.*

Within the realm of concern for the child, parents most frequently cited concern about the child's adjustment, which also is consistent with the stated reasons for coming to the Center. Other specific concerns related to parenting plan issues, including time with each parent, where the children will live, and holiday schedules.

#### 4. PARTICIPATING PARENTS: HEALTH AND BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS

The Individual Screening Interview also captured particular health and behavioral issues that might be facing parents and children coming to the Center. Generally speaking, these parents were more likely to express concerns about the other parent than concerns about themselves. Table 11 presents the proportions of participating parents who had concerns about themselves or the other parent and, correspondingly, the proportions who believed the other parent had concerns about them.

*Table 11: Health of Behavioral Concerns of Participating Parents*

	Concerns About Self			Concerns About the Other Parent			Other Parent's Concerns About Self		
	Year 1	Year 2	Combined	Year 1	Year 2	Combined	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Mental health issues	51.8%	31.1%	43.1%	46.9%	49.2%	47.9%	8.0%	9.8%	8.8%
History of alcohol or drug abuse	7.1%	4.9%	6.2%	16.9%	16.4%	16.7%	4.6%	19.7%	10.8%
Current alcohol or drug abuse	1.2%	4.9%	2.8%	9.6%	9.8%	9.7%	4.6%	8.2%	6.1%
Problematic behaviors	7.3%	9.8%	8.4%	19.0%	19.7%	19.3%	2.3%	0.0%	1.4%
Criminal history	10.2%	4.9%	7.5%	8.5%	11.5%	10.0%	3.4%	3.3%	3.4%
Child abuse or neglect	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	9.8%	5.9%	4.6%	13.1%	8.1%

*By a wide margin, this group of parents most commonly reported mental health concerns—both about themselves and the other parent. Interestingly, though, relatively low percentages of parents thought the other parent would have mental health concerns about them, suggesting they may have underestimated the other parent's awareness of their own issues. Also with respect to mental health, year two saw 20% fewer parents with concerns about their own mental health (that is, 24 fewer parents in the second year); even so, mental health was most commonly indicated. Parents were also quite concerned about the other parent's problematic behaviors (19.3%) and history of substance use (16.7%).*

Though substantial proportions expressed mental health concerns about themselves, parents who received services tended to report feeling sad or depressed with only low to moderate frequency (mean = 2.4, where Almost Never = 1 and Almost Always = 5), as illustrated by Table 12. Further, a small number of these parents reported experiencing a desire to harm themselves in the past three months (six parents in the first year, seven in the second).

*Table 12: Frequency of Depressed Feelings in Participating Parents*

	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Almost Never	14.1%	26.7%	19.3%
Occasionally	47.1%	36.7%	42.8%
Half the Time	10.6%	25.0%	16.6%
Often	20.0%	10.0%	15.9%
Almost Always	8.2%	1.7%	5.5%

Parents were also asked during the Individual Screening Interview about various aspects of their children's wellbeing. They were given the opportunity to provide feedback for each of their children. Of the 160 children whose families utilized services at the Center, parents identified a total of 43 children as having one or more specific individual needs with respect to their physical (e.g. allergies, hearing impairment), emotional (e.g., anxiety, autism, aggression), or educational (e.g., dyslexia) wellbeing. Table 13 shows the proportion of children having these special needs from the first year to the second.

*Table 13: Special Needs of Children in Families Who Utilized Services*

	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Total Number of Children	98	62	160
Total Number of Children with Additional Needs	36	7	43
Percent of Children with Additional Needs	36.7%	11.3%	26.9%
Physical (allergies, hearing impairment, heart condition)	16	0	16
Emotional (depression, autism, aggression)	13	6	19
Educational	13	1	14

## 5. PARTICIPATING PARENTS: FAMILY COMMUNICATION PRIOR TO RECEIVING SERVICES

In the Individual Screening Interview, each parent was queried about the frequency and quality of communications with the other parent. This information provided guidance to supervising staff and student interns in addressing individual parent and family needs. Parents were asked separately about interactions on day-to-day matters (such as scheduling, carpooling, chores, and bills) and interactions related to dynamics and relationships in the family (such as conversations about the relationship, how the children are doing, what the future might look like, things that are

important to one or both parents, and topics of mutual interest). Table 14 presents information related to the frequency and quality of such communications, respectively.

*Table 14: Frequency and Quality of Communication between Participating Parents Before Services*

		Day-to-Day Matters			Dynamics and Relationship Matters		
		Year 1	Year 2	Combined	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
<b>Frequency</b>	Less than once a month	4.8%	6.7%	5.6%	25.3%	33.3%	28.7%
	Monthly	1.2%	3.3%	2.1%	18.1%	18.3%	18.2%
	Several times each month	6.0%	10.0%	7.6%	24.1%	25.0%	24.5%
	Weekly	25.0%	35.0%	29.2%	25.3%	18.3%	22.4%
	Daily	63.1%	45.0%	55.6%	7.2%	5.0%	6.3%
<b>Quality</b>	Very poor	7.2%	15.0%	10.5%	13.1%	13.6%	13.3%
	Poor	12.0%	10.0%	11.2%	21.4%	28.8%	24.5%
	Neither good nor poor	28.9%	35.0%	31.5%	32.1%	35.6%	33.6%
	Good	41.0%	36.7%	39.2%	28.6%	16.9%	23.8%
	Very good	10.8%	3.3%	7.7%	4.8%	5.1%	4.9%

With respect to day-to-day matters, more than 80% of parents in each year reported communicating with the other parent on either a daily or weekly basis. Moreover, the quality of these communications tended to be good or very good, with just under 50% of parents who received services categorizing them as such. Nearly another third of parents indicated these communications were of neutral quality.

Parents tended to communicate less frequently about family dynamics and relationship matters. In fact, more than one in four parents reported engaging in these types of discussions less than once a month; fewer than one in ten reported communicating on these matters daily. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the quality of these communications tended to be somewhat lower, with about one-third each rating these communications as either a variation of poor or neither good nor poor and just over one-quarter rating them as a variation of good.

The other side of cooperation is conflict. Table 15 contains information on the frequency of arguments between the parents before receiving services. Most parents reported arguing on a monthly basis or less. However, nearly one-quarter of parents reported weekly disputes.

*Table 15: Arguments between Participating Parents Before Services*

	<b>Year 1 (n = 84)</b>	<b>Year 2 (n = 60)</b>	<b>Combined (n = 144)</b>
Less than once a month	31.0%	35.0%	32.6%
Monthly	23.8%	21.7%	22.9%
Several times each month	16.7%	15.0%	16.0%
Weekly	22.6%	18.3%	20.8%
Daily	6.0%	10.0%	7.6%

More than half of participating parents reported arguing with the other parent once a month or less, with about another third reporting arguments weekly or several times per month. Only 11 parents reported arguing on a daily basis. With respect to the severity of these arguments, parents reported, on average, a low to moderate degree of intensity. Specifically, on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), the average level of intensity reported was 2.70 (median 3), with very little variation from year to year (2.74 in the first year, 2.65 in the second). In addition, about two out of three parents (64.3%) indicated having arguments when children were in the house or when children could see or hear the argument, with a slightly larger proportion of parents indicating so in the first year (64.3%) than in the second year (72.1%). *Thus, these were relatively low-conflict parents and good candidates for an out-of-court alternative.* Although RCSDF service providers actively screened for indicators of domestic violence (and referred to other organizations, where appropriate), some parents who received services did report at least one incident in which the other parent behaved in a violent manner, either physically, verbally, or through controlling actions. The second year saw an increase in the proportions of parents reporting some form of violent behavior. Overall, about half (52%) of parents who received services reported some incidence of violent behavior during their relationship with the other parent (48.3% in the first year, 57.4% in the second).

*Table 16: Reports of Violent Behavior by Participating Parents Before Services (values represent the proportion of parents who responded in the affirmative)*

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Combined</b>
Does the other parent ever get physical and push, grab, or hit you?	17.1% (14)	22.2% (14)	19.3% (28)
Does the other parent ever restrict your comings and goings, try to control you through money, scare you on purpose, or threaten you?	18.3% (15)	30.2% (19)	23.4% (34)
Has the other parent ever yelled at you to the point you were afraid?	10.0% (8)	15.9% (10)	12.6% (18)

Somewhat perplexingly, parents in the second year were substantially more likely to report that either they or the other parent had access to weapons. In fact, the proportions more than doubled and the number of parents nearly tripled. However, it was a minority of parents in both years.

*Table 17: Reports of Access to Weapons by Participating Parents (values represent parents who responded in the affirmative)*

	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Do you own or have access to any weapons?	12.7% (7)	31.7% (20)	22.9% (27)
Does the other parent own or have access to any weapons? <sup>23</sup>	13.5% (7)	36.45% (20)	25.2% (27)

In sum, the data demonstrate that parents had relatively healthy communication patterns even before receiving services. Further, although a majority of parents reported at least one violent incident in their relationship with the other parent, such reports clearly did not rise to the level of violence as would preclude the parents from receiving services at the Center. These points align with RCSDF's goal of serving parents who are able to cooperate with one another.

## VII. UTILIZING SERVICES: A CLOSE-UP OF THE WAYS IN WHICH FAMILIES INTERACTED WITH RCSDF

### A. SERVICE PLANNING: A ROADMAP

Upon completion of the Intake and Screening process, parents participated in a joint Service Planning Meeting. Over the course of the first year, this meeting evolved from a more business-like to a more therapeutic platform through which the RCSDF team introduced a Service Plan prepared specifically for the family. Parents were able to select or decline any or all of the services the RCSDF team offered. Importantly, though, the Service Plan was not intended as a binding agreement to a particular set of services. Rather, it served as a roadmap for what the process would look like for each family. As families progressed through the RCSDF process, parents and children often utilized services not originally presented in the Service Plan or, conversely, chose not to utilize services originally agreed upon. The following is a description of the available services at the Center.

#### ***Discernment Therapy:***

- Couples counseling session(s) designed to help the parents figure out whether they want to separate by working through any ambivalence about the relationship. Note that this service was introduced nine months into operations, as it became clear that some parents were not in agreement with respect to the status of the relationship.

#### ***Mediation:***

- Structured problem-solving session(s) facilitated by a two-person student team, including one law student and one mental health student, working toward solutions for family restructuring and agreement on disputed issues related to children and finances.

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<sup>23</sup> With respect to the other parent, 3.8% are not sure.



***Legal Education:***

- Informational session provided by a law student intern on what to expect in the legal system when separating/divorcing, including information about how to draft legal documents (e.g., complete forms) and navigate the court system. There was no charge for this service, but it was mandatory for families that had not had a court initial status conference.

***Child Interviewing:***

- Session in which a mental health intern assessed the child's view about the family's situation, determined how the child was coping with the transition, and supported the child in expressing concerns. There was no charge for this service, and feedback was provided to the parents.

***Co-Parenting Coaching:***

- Session(s) designed to provide assistance and support toward effective co-parenting, which may include feedback to both parents regarding the child interview(s) and the development of a parenting plan.

***Adult Individual Counseling:***

- One-on-one therapy session(s) with a neutral mental health intern to work on individual emotional and mental health issues related to the transition process.

***Child Counseling:***

- Therapy session(s) with the child provided by a mental health intern to work on emotional and mental health issues related to the transition process. Generally, these were individual sessions; however, some sessions included two or more siblings.

***Transition Support Group:***

- Gender-specific group sessions designed to provide an opportunity for parents to meet and support other parents going through the separation/divorce process.

**B. SERVICE UTILIZATION: THE PATH THROUGH THE RCSDF PROCESS**

The 82 participating families utilized a total of 560 service sessions during the two years of RCSDF operations, with 405 of those being counseling service sessions and the remaining 155 being legal service sessions.<sup>24</sup> On average, families utilized 7.88 service sessions during their time at the Center, with the most sessions for a single family being 41 and the fewest being one; considered separately, families utilized an average of 5.70 counseling service sessions and 2.18 legal service sessions, ranging between zero and 37 and zero and 5, respectively. Table 18 presents the number of sessions held for each service during each year. The date a service was first provided is included because some of the services did not begin immediately with the Center's opening, which was part of the evolution of the program but did affect the numbers.

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<sup>24</sup> The total number of services reported here is slightly higher than the total sessions presented in Table 18 due to the fact that each support group session had multiple attendees from multiple families.

*Table 18: Total Number of Sessions for Legal and Counseling Services*

Service		Date First Provided	Year 1	Year 2	Combined
Legal Services	Legal Education	10/9/2013	27	22	49
	Mediation	11/14/2013	56	50	106
	Total Legal Service Sessions		83	72	155
Counseling Services	Discernment Therapy	7/3/2014	6	2	8
	Co-Parenting Coaching	10/9/2013	50	92	142
	Family Counseling	12/3/2013	7	3	10
	Adult Individual Counseling	12/20/2013	32	40	72
	Men’s Transition Support Group	4/10/2014	6	0	6
	Women’s Transition Support Group	2/26/2015	0	6	6
	Children’s Support Group	2/26/2015	0	6	6
	Child Interview	10/22/2013	31	20	51
	Child Counseling	4/17/2014	30	38	68
	Total Counseling Service Sessions		162	207	369
TOTAL SERVICE SESSIONS			245	279	524

Perhaps to be expected, the first and second years saw about the same number of Legal Education and Mediation sessions. Note that the Center generally held one legal education and two mediation sessions per family with the ability to alter that standard to meet particular family needs. However, there was one striking difference with respect to counseling services. Namely, *the second year saw nearly twice as many Co-Parenting Coaching sessions. This indicates the successful introduction of this type of service and its increasing identification by parents as a benefit of being at the Center.*

Of the 160 children in the 82 RCSDF families, a total of 114 (71.2%) were between 5 and 17 years old and, therefore, eligible to receive services; 30 children (18.8%) were too young and 16 (10.0%) were too old. Overall, 59 children (51.8% of those eligible) participated in an interview, with many of those children continuing counseling services in either Child Counseling or, to a lesser extent, Family Counseling sessions.<sup>25</sup>

### C. PROGRAM PROGRESSION: A TIMELINE

One central question this evaluation sought to address was how families progressed through the RCSDF program. This, of course, includes the amount of time required for families to get through Intake and Screening, as well as time spent utilizing services. Also included are the

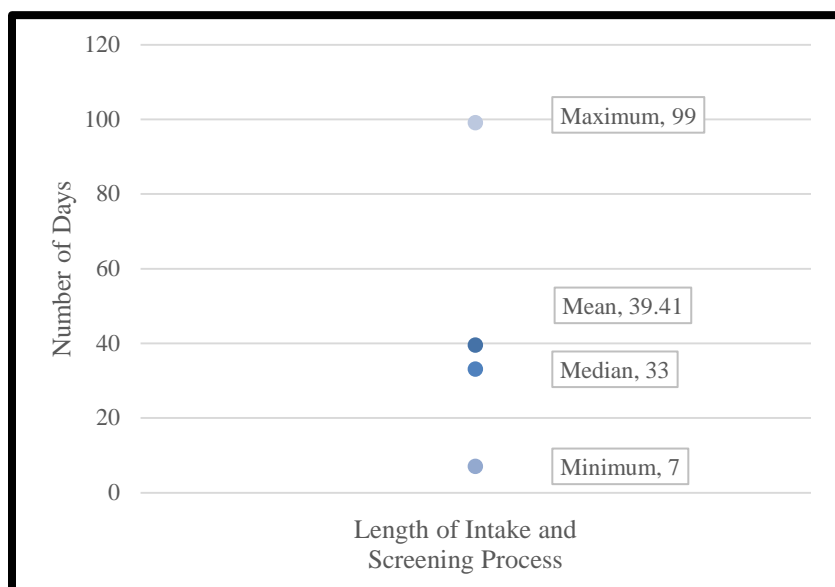
<sup>25</sup> The number of children participating in a Child Interview here is slightly higher than the number of Child Interview sessions. This is because some siblings participated during the same session.

numbers of families who completed services and, for those families who did not complete services, the reasons for discontinuing the program.

## 1. INTAKE AND SCREENING

As described in detail above, the Intake and Screening process began with a parent's submission of an Intake Form and ended when the parents completed a Service Planning Meeting. Figure 3 presents the time it took for all participating parents to complete Intake and Screening.<sup>26</sup>

*Figure 3: Length of Intake and Screening for Participating Parents (n = 151)*



Parents completed Intake and Screening in about five and a half weeks on average, with the longest time being just over 3 months. This represents a reasonable average, with the maximum time longer than optimal. As explained in Section VIII.B (page 47) below, it could be challenging to schedule a time that fit within the Center's hours, worked for the supervisor and the two assigned student interns, and accommodated both parents. Anecdotally, there were also situations in which one parent simply needed more time to adapt to the situation before he or she felt ready to move forward in scheduling the Service Planning Meeting.

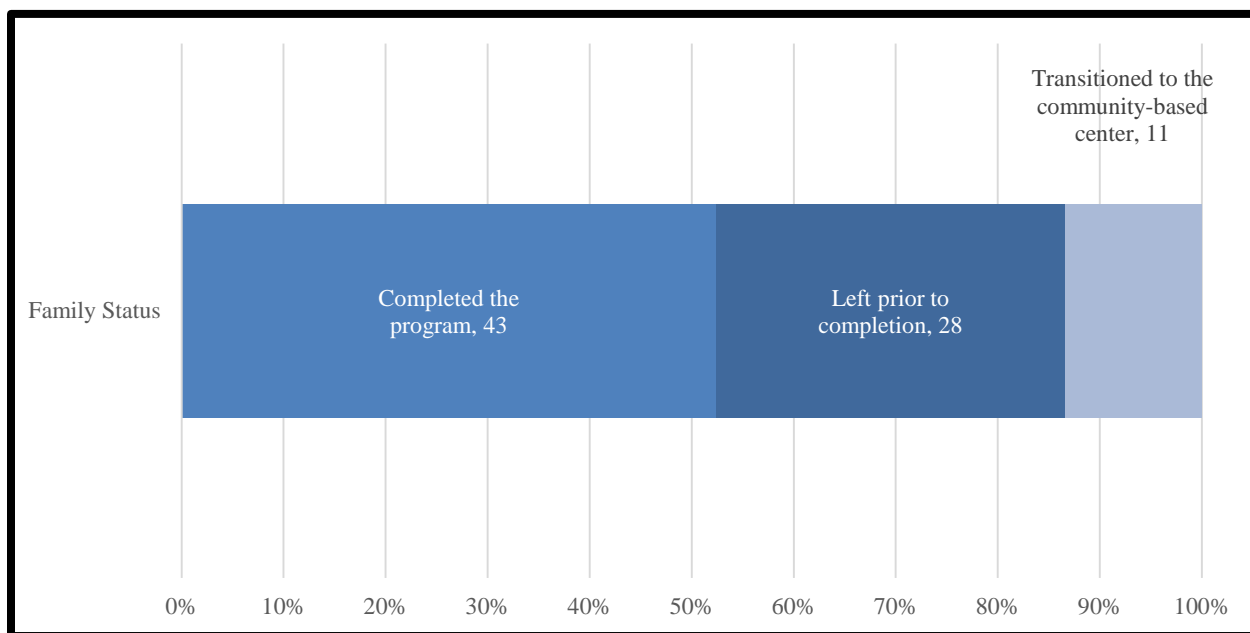
## 2. COMPLETION STATUS OF FAMILIES WHO RECEIVED SERVICES

Just over half of the families who received services at RCSDF completed the program (52.5%)—with 39 total families receiving permanent orders at an RCSDF hearing.<sup>27</sup> As to be expected,

<sup>26</sup> These calculations exclude 11 parents for whom the Intake Form submission date is unknown and 2 parents who never submitted an Intake Form.

there was some attrition from the program (34.1%), which occurred for various reasons as outlined below. Additionally, there was a group of families who were still receiving services at the time RCSDF closed its doors and transitioned to the new community-based incarnation of the model (13.4%).

*Figure 4: Status of Families Who Utilized Services (n = 82)*



Families who left RCSDF prior to completion of the program did so for a few different reasons. Ten families returned to court after determining the collaborative approach was not a good fit for them (12.2%). Eight families either stopped scheduling appointments or did not appear for multiple scheduled appointments (9.8%). Three families ultimately decided to reunify instead of separating (3.7%). One family left after RCSDF determined there was a conflict of interest (1.2%) in providing services to them. Finally, there were six families who decided to leave for family-specific reasons (7.3%).

### 3. LENGTH OF THE PROCESS FOR FAMILIES WHO COMPLETED SERVICES

The tracking of process timelines helps assess the efficacy of legal services, as speedy resolution of parents' disputed issues is typically considered a positive contributing factor to the well-being of the children—and the newly-structured family as a whole. Yet with respect to counseling services, speed is not necessarily a primary goal and outcomes may actually be better if the

<sup>27</sup> The remaining 4 families did not have permanent orders at RCSDF either because they were post-decree cases or needed their hearing to occur during a month in which RCSDF was unable to have a hearing.

participant dedicates time to work through issues on a deeper level. Accordingly, the timelines for completion of legal and counseling services are set forth separately in Table 19.

Given that the legal process did not begin until after the Intake and Screening Process, the time from Service Planning is the more salient measure with respect to legal services. To the extent that parents benefitted therapeutically from events during the Intake and Screening process, the time from Intake Form submission is probably the more important measure with respect to counseling.

*Table 19: Legal and Counseling Timeframes for Families Who Completed Services in Number of Days*

		Average	Minimum	Median	Maximum <sup>28</sup>
<b>Legal Services</b>	Legal Services: Service Planning to Completion (n=84)	175.1	24	141.5	506
	Entire Process: Intake to Completion (n=72 <sup>29</sup> )	193.3	58	163.5	577
<b>Counseling Services</b>	Counseling Services: Service Planning to Completion (n=64 <sup>30</sup> )	70.3	6	30.5	561
	Entire Process: Intake to Completion (n=55 <sup>31</sup> )	86.9	15	67	254

As Table 19 shows, although they received more counseling than legal service sessions, *families spent far more time in legal than in counseling services*. In fact, they spent more than twice as much time on the legal process, whether considering the entire process or from the Service Planning Meeting onward.

## VIII. THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE: OUTCOMES AND FEEDBACK

Yet another key objective of the RCSDF evaluation was to determine how well the process worked for families. More specifically, interactions with RCSDF foster positive mental health and well-being outcomes for participating parents and children. Further, the evaluation sought to sort out whether parents found the RCSDF experience to be useful, accessible, and satisfactory. This section presents the findings on these questions.

<sup>28</sup> Note that the maximums reported here reflect outliers.

<sup>29</sup> This calculation excludes the 11 parents for whom the Intake Form submission date is unknown, one parent who never submitted an Intake Form, and two parents whose exact legal services completion date is unknown.

<sup>30</sup> This is the total number of parents who received counseling services in families that completed services.

<sup>31</sup> This calculation excludes nine parents for whom the Intake Form submission date is unknown.

## A. IMPACTS ON WELL-BEING

To help gauge RCSDF's impact on individual parents and children, researchers developed a Parent Well-Being Questionnaire, combining multiple measures on different aspects of parent and child physical, mental, and emotional well-being, as outlined below. Consenting parents were asked to complete the Parent Well-Being Questionnaire twice—once at the time of the Service Planning Meeting (pre-service) and again upon leaving RCSDF, either prior to or upon completion of services (post-service).

### **Parent Self-Report of Well-Being Measures:**

#### *Physical Health:*

- Parent Survey—Physical Health Measure Subscale (Markman, unpublished)

#### *Negative Emotional States:*

- Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

#### *Hostility and Conflict Resolution Strategies:*

- Acrimony Scale (Emery et al., 2001)
- Couple Communication Measure (CCOM)—Avoidant Style, Collaborative Style, Power Struggle, Violent Style Subscales (Cowan & Cowan, 1990)

#### *Shared Decision-Making:*

- Discuss and Share Decision-Making Scale (DSDMS)—Decision-Making and Co-Parenting Subscale (Ahrons, 1981)
- Parent Survey—Confidence in Co-Parenting Subscale (Markman, unpublished)

#### *Parenting Stress:*

- Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF)—Parent Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction, Difficult Child Subscales (Abidin, 1995)

#### *Parenting Role:*

- Adult-Adolescent Parenting Index (AAPI)—Role Reversal, Appropriate Emotional Expectations Subscales (Luttenbacher, 2001)

### **Parent Report of Individual Child Well-Being Measures:**

#### *Parenting Self-Appraisal for Specific Child(ren):*

- Parent Survey—Positive Parenting Subscale (Markman, unpublished)

#### *Parent Report of Adaptive Behaviors in Specific Child(ren):*

- Child Adaptive Behavior Inventory (CABI)—Academic Competence, Social Competence, Externalizing Aggressive, Externalizing Hyperactive, Internalizing Social Isolation, Internalizing Anxious/Depressed Subscales (Cowan, Cowan, & Heming, 1995)

## 1. ESTABLISHING A BASELINE

An important consideration in the evaluation was the general state of parent well-being prior to beginning services at RCSDF. Table 20 shows all pre-service parent scores on each of the parent self-report well-being measures (as outlined above).

*Table 20: Pre-Service Parent Well-Being Scores on Self-Report Measures*

Instrument and Subscales (Interpretation)		Possible Score Range	Mean	Minimum	Median	Maximum	Standard Deviation
<b>Markman Parent Survey – Physical Health Measure</b> (Lower scores indicate poorer health)		4-20	17.22	9	18	20	2.44
<b>Depression Anxiety Stress Scales</b> (Higher scores represent higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress) <sup>32</sup>	Depression	0 – 42	9.04	0	7	32	8.18
	Anxiety	0 – 42	4.75	0	2	24	5.46
	Stress	0 – 42	12.82	0	12	34	8.57
	Overall Scale Score	0 – 126	26.61	0	25	80	19.13
<b>Acrimony Scale</b> (Higher scores show greater levels of acrimony)		1 – 4	1.74	0.88	1.68	3.00	0.39
<b>Discuss and Share Decision-Making Scale</b> (Higher scores represent better skills)		0 – 44	26.17	12	26.5	42	7.41
<b>Couple Communication Measure</b> (Higher scores reflect poorer communication and conflict resolution skills)	Power Struggle	0 – 7	2.39	0	2	6	1.59
	Violent Conflict Style	0 – 14	1.03	0	0	9	1.66
	Avoidant Conflict Style	0 – 4	1.51	0	1	4	1.28
	Collaborative Style	0 – 5	2.87	0	3	5	1.81
	Overall Scale Score	0 – 30	7.80	0	8	19	4.11
<b>Markman Parent Survey – Confidence in Co-Parenting</b> (Lower scores indicate lower confidence in the co-parenting relationship)		7 – 49	35.43	10	37	49	9.11
<b>Parenting Stress Index – Short Form</b> (Higher scores indicate higher levels of parenting stress)	Parental Distress	12 – 60	22.90	12	22	43	7.55
	Parent-Child Dysfunction	12 – 60	19.82	11	17	47	7.07
	Difficult Child	12 – 60	25.03	12	23	54	10.33
	Overall Scale Score	36 – 180	68.49	37	66	145	21.13
<b>Adult-Adolescent Parenting Index</b> <sup>33</sup> (Higher scores reflect better parenting beliefs and attitudes)	Role Reversal	9 – 45	38.12	25	39	45	3.78
	Appropriate Emotional Expectations	8 – 40	29.80	15	30	40	5.41
	Overall Scale Score	17 – 85	38.12	46	39	85	3.78

<sup>32</sup> For the short scale versions used here, scores have been multiplied by two.

<sup>33</sup> Although this scale was designed for use with adolescent children, researchers deemed it appropriate for a wider age range and it was administered to RCSDF parents of children of all ages.

These results demonstrate that parents were in a relatively healthy state even before beginning services. Parents generally were physically healthy; had low to moderate amounts of parenting stress; articulated a low to moderate degree of acrimony toward the other parent; engaged in moderate to high levels of shared decision-making; and expressed adaptive beliefs about parenting. Additionally, parent responses indicate a moderately high degree of confidence in the co-parenting relationship, which supports the notion that parents maintained a collaborative posture throughout the Intake and Screening process.

Parents were also quite healthy with regard to negative emotional states—depression, anxiety, and stress. This is an interesting result when compared with responses during the Individual Screening Interview, in which over half of parents reported having mental health concerns about themselves (see Section VI.B.4, page 27, above).

Instructions for the portion of the questionnaire addressing parents' report of child well-being directed parents to complete each of the two scales (detailed above) either for each child between ages 6 and 17 whom the parent judged would benefit from counseling services, or only for the oldest child in that age range, if the parent judged that none of his or her children would benefit from counseling services.<sup>34</sup> Thus, naturally, some parents completed the two scales only one time, while others completed them multiple times (both in the pre- and post-service instruments). Table 21 presents parents' pre-service scores for these two scales.

*Table 21: Pre-Service Parent Well-Being Scores on Report of Child Well-Being*

Instrument and Subscales (Interpretation)		Possible Score Range	Mean	Minimum	Median	Maximum	Standard Deviation
<b>Markman Parent Survey – Positive Parenting</b> (Higher scores reflect more positive parenting behaviors in relation to the specific child)		16 – 112	91.4	28	93	112	12.83
<b>Child Adaptive Behavior Inventory</b> (Higher scores reflect more adaptive behavior for the specific child)	Academic Competence	8 - 32	26.36	16	26	32	3.41
	Social Competence	6 - 24	19.25	8	19	24	3.40
	Externalizing Aggressive	12 - 48	40.06	32	40	48	5.02
	Externalizing Hyperactive	6 - 24	18.55	11	18	24	3.58
	Internalizing Social Isolation	12 - 48	37.81	12	37	48	6.61
	Internalizing Anxious/Depressed	8 - 32	27.13	19	27	32	3.75
	Overall Scale Score	52 - 208	169.15	114	172	198	17.77

<sup>34</sup> These are the instructions for the pre-service instrument. Instructions for the Post-Service Parent Well-Being Questionnaire were to complete either for all children who received counseling services or for only the oldest if no children received counseling services.



With respect to parents' self-appraisals of their parenting behaviors for specific children, average scores reflected moderately high report of positive parenting behaviors. Furthermore, parents' reports of child behavior for specific children reflected average scores ranging from moderate to high on the various subscales.

*Thus, the data show that parents and children were in a relatively favorable state of well-being, even before beginning services. This could be a consequence of RCSDF's requirement of cooperation between the parents—that is, parents who seek separation or divorce based on cooperation may also endorse other adaptive, positive behaviors and attitudes for themselves and their children.* Indeed, the Center was designed to prevent the separation and divorce process from having an expected negative impact on parents and children.

## 2. IDENTIFYING AREAS OF IMPACT

Comparing the pre-service and post-service scores, it is clear that although parents were already generally healthy prior to beginning services, they still showed significant improvements in nearly all measured areas after receiving services.<sup>35</sup> Table 22 shows the mean scores, statistical results, and interpretation of those results for the Parent Well-Being Questionnaire; statistically significant results are highlighted in blue.

Table 22: Difference in Pre-Service and Post-Service Scores on Parent Self-Report of Well-Being Measures

Instrument and Subscales (Interpretation)		Pre- Service Mean	Post- Service Mean	Difference in Means from Pre- to Post- Service (p-value)	Interpretation
<b>Markman Parent Survey – Physical Health Measure</b> (Lower scores indicate poorer health)		17.43	16.77	-0.66 (0.159)	No significant change in physical health.
<b>Depression Anxiety Stress Scales</b> (Higher scores represent higher levels of depression / anxiety / stress) <sup>36</sup>	Depression	9.73	6.46	-3.27 (0.004)	Parents show significant decreases in depression.
	Anxiety	5.46	2.77	-2.68 (0.002)	Parents show significant decreases in anxiety.
	Stress	13.73	10.27	-3.45 (0.017)	Parents show significant decreases in stress.
	Overall Scale Score	28.91	19.50	-9.41 (0.002)	Parents show significant decreases in overall negative emotional state.
<b>Acrimony Scale</b> (Higher scores show greater levels of acrimony)		1.67	1.54	-0.14 (0.003)	Parents reported significant decreases in acrimony toward the other parent.
<b>Discuss and Share Decision-Making Scale</b>		28.48	31.64	3.17 (0.006)	Parents demonstrated significant increases in shared decision-making skills.

<sup>35</sup> Repeated measures t-test. Statistical significance is reported at  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>36</sup> For the short scale versions used here, scores have been multiplied by two.

Instrument and Subscales (Interpretation)		Pre- Service Mean	Post- Service Mean	Difference in Means from Pre- to Post- Service (p-value)	Interpretation
(Higher scores represent better skills)					
<b>Couple Communication Measure</b> (Higher scores reflect poorer communication and conflict resolution skills)	Power Struggle	2.24	2.17	-0.07 (0.803)	No significant change in communication skills with respect to power struggle.
	Violent Conflict Style	1.07	0.29	-0.79 (0.014)	Parents reported significant decreases in the violent conflict communication style.
	Avoidant Conflict Style	1.64	1.21	-0.43 (0.113)	No significant change in avoidant conflict style communication.
	Collaborative Style	2.86	1.62	-1.24 (0.000)	Parents reported significant increases in the collaborative conflict style. <sup>37</sup>
	Overall Scale Score	7.81	5.29	-2.52 (0.001)	Parents showed significant improvements in overall communication and conflict resolution skills.
<b>Markman Parent Survey – Confidence in Co-Parenting</b> (Lower scores indicate lower confidence in the co-parenting relationship)		36.83	40.51	3.68 (0.005)	Parents demonstrated a significant increase in confidence in their ability to co-parent with the other parent.
<b>Parenting Stress Index – Short Form</b> (Higher scores indicate higher levels of parenting stress)	Parental Distress	21.48	19.19	-2.29 (0.032)	Parents reported a significant decrease in parental distress.
	Parent-Child Dysfunction	17.95	15.71	-2.24 (0.012)	Parents reported a significant decrease in parent-child dysfunction.
	Difficult Child	21.67	17.43	-4.24 (0.029)	Parents reported significant decreases with respect to difficult child stress.
	Overall Scale Score	61.86	52.33	-9.52 (0.002)	Parents demonstrated significant decreases in overall parenting stress.
<b>Adult-Adolescent Parenting Index</b> (Higher scores reflect better parenting beliefs and attitudes)	Role Reversal	38.52	38.38	-0.14 (0.877)	No significant change with respect to role reversal.
	Appropriate Emotional Expectations	28.57	32.45	3.88 (0.000)	Parents showed significant increases in appropriate emotional expectations.
	Overall Scale Score	67.10	70.83	3.74 (0.016)	Parents showed significant improvement in overall parenting beliefs and attitudes.

These results provide strong evidence of the positive impact of RCSDF services on parents. This is true even for the measures showing a small change in the right direction given that the expectation in the traditional adversarial process would be that parents would decline with respect to these indicators for well-being. Parents improved in the following ways: decreased levels of depression, anxiety, and stress; decreased acrimony; better shared decision-making skills; better communication and conflict resolution skills with respect to collaborative, avoidant, and violent styles; increased confidence in the co-parenting relationship; lower levels of parenting stress; and better parenting beliefs and attitudes around appropriate emotional

<sup>37</sup> Note that the decrease in scores here represents an increase in positive behavior, as higher scores reflect poorer skills.

expectations of children. *Those poised to be positive in their divorce were able to capitalize on the Center's services.*

In contrast, when it came to parents' report of the well-being of specific children, the results generally did not show significant improvements. Table 23 below presents the results for those two scales.<sup>38</sup>

*Table 23: Difference in Pre-Service and Post-Service Scores on Parent Report of Child Well-Being Measures*

Instrument and Subscales (Interpretation)		Pre- Service Mean	Post- Service Mean	Difference in Means from Pre- to Post- Service (p-value)	Interpretation
<b>Markman Parent Survey – Positive Parenting</b> (Higher scores reflect more positive parenting behaviors in relation to the specific child)		90.755	92.000	1.2453 (0.640)	No significant change in parenting behaviors.
<b>Child Adaptive Behavior Inventory</b> (Higher scores reflect more adaptive behavior for the specific child)	Academic Competence	26.558	26.36	-0.1977 (0.746)	No significant change in academic competence.
	Social Competence	19.462	19.70	0.2385 (0.685)	No significant change in social competence.
	Externalizing Aggressive	40.192	41.36	1.1677 (0.217)	No significant change in externalizing aggressive behavior.
	Externalizing Hyperactive	18.577	19.44	0.8631 (0.181)	No significant change in externalizing hyperactive behavior.
	Internalizing Social Isolation	38.135	39.02	0.8854 (0.444)	No significant change in internalizing social isolation.
	Internalizing Anxious/Depressed	27.288	28.70	1.4115 (0.038)	Parents reported a significant increase in adaptive behavior with respect to internalizing anxiety and depression.
	Overall Scale Score	170.212	174.58	4.3685 (0.148)	No significant change in overall adaptive behavior.

Most of these results were non-significant although they trended in a positive direction—one result was statistically significant. The general lack of significant improvement is, perhaps, unsurprising. Both the pre-service and post-service scores place children's well-being in the moderate to high range. In addition, although RCSDF provides a positive, collaborative

<sup>38</sup> Somewhat regrettably, the reality of multiple responses for each parent for each of these scales, coupled with the inability to match responses related to individual children from pre-service to post-service, resulted in a need to approach the analysis in a slightly different manner than the other scales. More specifically, these two scales were analyzed as independent samples, rather than repeated measures. In order to most closely approximate the results of a repeated measures statistical test, only respondents who completed *both* the pre-service and post-service instruments were included in the analysis.

atmosphere, the fact remains that having parents who are separating is a difficult process for children. Their lives are likely, if not certain, to change dramatically during their family's involvement with the Center. Although not measured directly here, positive changes in the parents may also positively impact the parenting those children receive.

## B. PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON RCSDF SERVICES

The Exit Questionnaire, administered to consenting parents at the time the family discontinued services at RCSDF, either prior to or upon completion, asked parents to provide feedback on their experience with various aspects of the Center.

*Table 24: Parent Satisfaction with Experience*

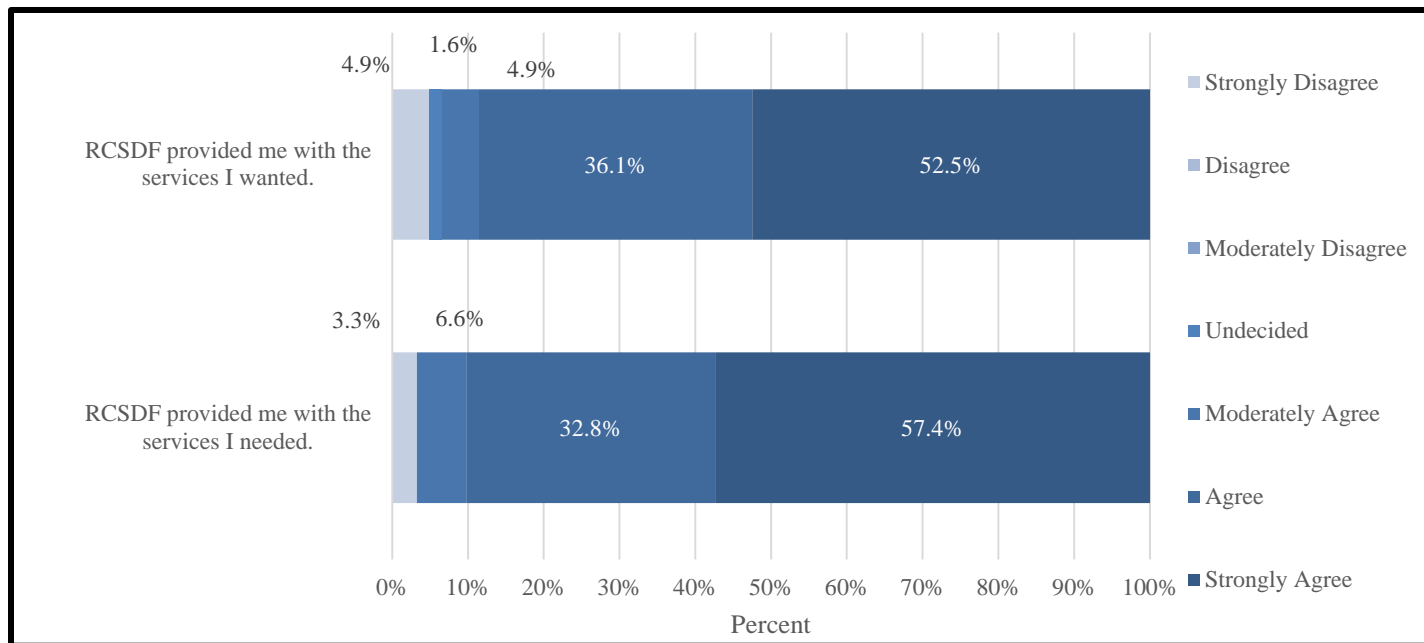
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Undecided	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Process Items	I am satisfied with the court's role. (n = 55)	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	7.3%	52.7%	34.5%
	I am satisfied with my own role in the process. (n = 56)	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	5.4%	7.1%	53.6%	32.1%
	I am satisfied with the fairness of the agreements we made as parents and former partners. (n = 57)	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	3.5%	19.3%	50.9%	24.6%
	I had control over the decisions we made. (n = 57)	0.0%	3.3%	7.0%	7.0%	8.8%	47.4%	26.3%
	My child(ren)'s other parent had control over the decisions we made. (n = 56)	0.0%	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	14.3%	48.2%	26.8%
	My rights as a parent were protected and considered through the process. (n = 57)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.5%	10.5%	42.1%	43.9%
	My child(ren)'s interests were protected and considered through the process. (n = 57)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	5.3%	38.6%	54.4%
	I learned about my available options for separating and divorcing. (n = 57)	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	8.8%	49.1%	38.6%
	I learned about my available options...early enough in the process to make informed choices...(n = 57)	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	3.5%	5.3%	50.9%	38.6%

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Undecided	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Interactions Items	I felt understood by RCSDF staff and interns. (n = 57)	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	14.0%	43.9%	38.6%
	Concern was shown for me at RCSDF through the process. (n = 56)	1.8%	0.0%	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	42.9%	44.6%
	Concern was shown for my child(ren) through the process. (n = 57)	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	43.9%	54.4%
Resolution of Issues Items	The agreements we reached will last until we decide to make changes. (n = 57)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	52.6%	45.6%
	As a result of coming to RCSDF, my child(ren)'s other parent and I have settled problems between us. (n = 55)	5.5%	3.6%	0.0%	3.6%	12.7%	45.5%	29.1%
	As a result of coming to RCSDF, my child(ren)'s other parent and I have more problems between us. (n = 57)	54.4%	33.3%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	0.0%

For each aspect of their interactions with RCSDF, at least 80% of parents expressed agreement for all but the final item, for which disagreement constitutes positive feedback. For many aspects—including satisfaction with the court and parent roles, satisfaction with agreements made, feeling that RCSDF considered the interests of children, and feeling that RCSDF considered parents and children throughout the process—more than 90% of parents provided positive feedback. *These results demonstrate that there was overwhelming agreement among parents that RCSDF provided a fair and beneficial process that focused on the family's interests. Belief that the children's interests were kept in the forefront of the process was a particularly strong finding, supporting a process resonant with the Center's purported goal.*

Further evidence of parent satisfaction with the RCSDF process is found in Figure 5. About 90% of parents each agreed that RCSDF provided wanted services and agreed that RCSDF provided needed services.

*Figure 5: Provision of Needed and Wanted Services (n = 61)*



The Exit Questionnaire also allowed parents an opportunity to provide feedback on the accessibility of RCSDF services. Table 25 presents that feedback.

*Table 25: Parent Feedback on RCSDF Accessibility*

How easy or difficult was it to...?	Very Difficult	Difficult	Moderately Difficult	Undecided	Moderately Easy	Easy	Very Easy
Reach someone by phone at RCSDF who could help me (n = 58)	1.7%	0.0%	12.1%	5.2%	25.9%	21.4%	31.0%
Navigate RCSDF's website (n = 49)	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.2%	12.2%	36.7%	40.8%
Find the information I needed through RCSDF (n = 59)	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	18.6%	45.8%	30.5%
Schedule convenient appointment times at RCSDF (n = 61)	3.3%	3.3%	13.1%	1.6%	24.6%	26.2%	27.9%
Get to and from the RCSDF building (n = 61)	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	0.0%	8.2%	37.7%	50.8%

A sizeable majority of parents found RCSDF to be accessible. About 95% of parents reported that they were able to find the needed information through RCSDF with ease. Further, almost 98% of parents easily got to and from the Center and about 90% found the website easy to navigate. While broad majorities of parents reported ease in scheduling appointments and contacting RCSDF, nearly 20% reported difficulty in the former and almost 15% reported

difficulty in the latter. Notably, the challenges in scheduling are a recurring theme across various analyses; see Section VII.C.1, page 35, above and Section IX.C, page 50, below for more on student intern scheduling issues.

Finally, parents were asked to provide their assessment of the overall impact of RCSDF on their children, themselves, and their family as a whole. As illustrated by Table 26, more than four out of five parents indicated that RCSDF had a positive impact with respect to each. There were one or two parents who reported a negative impact on the children, themselves, or their families. Further comments by that small group indicate that there may have been interpersonal communication issues between these individuals and those staffing the Center. While RCSDF aimed to create positive impacts for all parents and children, it is conceivable that there will always be a few unsatisfied people—and finding out if the Center staff could have done anything different to help them is one goal going forward in evaluating the community-based center.

*Table 26, Parent Report of Overall Impact of RCSDF*

	Good	Neutral	Bad
Child(ren)	81.7%	16.7%	1.7%
Self	85.2%	11.5%	3.3%
Family	86.7%	10.0%	3.3%

### C. AGREEMENT ON ISSUES

Another component of the RCSDF evaluation explored agreement between the parents. The Exit Questionnaire captured information on the degree to which parents came to agreement on specific issues, as well as the total proportion of issues in the case on which parents were able to reach agreement.

Table 27 shows that about 98% of parents reported coming to complete agreement with the other parent on parenting and financial issues, while only about 2%—that is, one parent—indicated coming only to partial agreement. No parents reported being unable to come to agreement on these issues.<sup>39</sup>

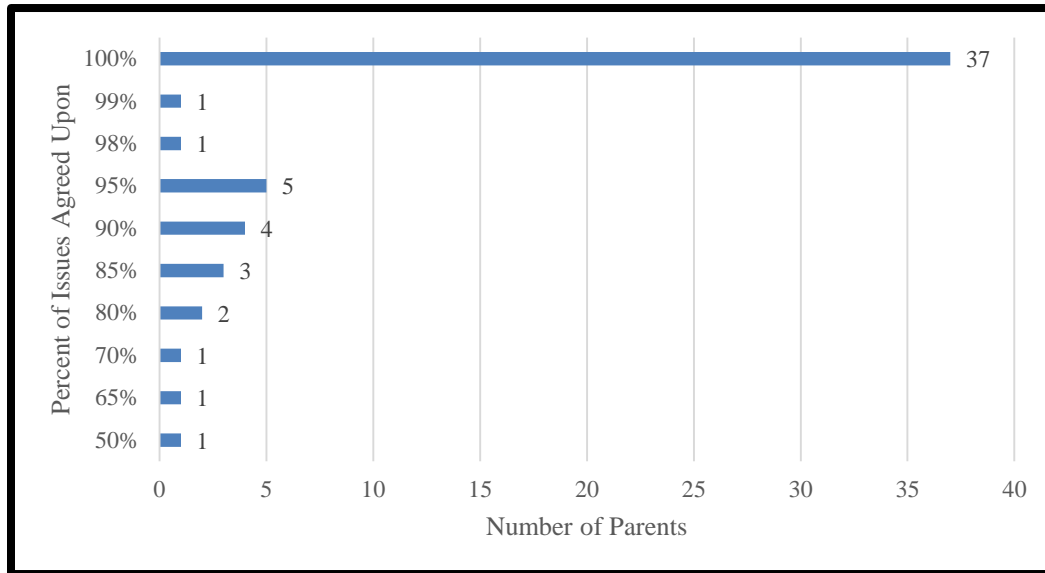
*Table 27: Parent Agreement on Parenting and Finances (n = 56)*

	Yes	Partially	No
Parenting time	98.2%	1.8%	0.0%
Decision-making responsibilities of each parent	98.2%	1.8%	0.0%
Finances	98.2%	1.8%	0.0%

<sup>39</sup> Parents were also asked to indicate if there were other issues on which agreement with the other parent was reached. Only six parents out of 61 total responses to the Exit Questionnaire indicated there were other issues, thus the data for that item is not included here.

Parents were also asked to estimate the percent of issues on which they reached agreement with the other parent. As illustrated in Figure 6, the vast majority of parents reported reaching agreement on 100% of the issues, while most of the remaining parents reached agreement on between 80% and 99% of the issues. Only three parents reported agreeing on fewer than 80% of the issues, with the lowest reported percent being 50%.

*Figure 6, Percent of Issues Parents Agreed Upon (n = 56)*



Certainly, resolving family issues in a collaborative environment and without invoking the adversarial process has many benefits for families and their individual members.

## IX. RCSDF STAFF PERSPECTIVE

Yet another component of the RCSDF evaluation involved gleaning feedback from the student supervisors and the executive director. At the conclusion of each year of operations, the three student supervisors participated in a focus group and the executive director participated in a one-on-one interview. The intention of these long-form discussions was to put the results presented above in context, as well as to provide information not otherwise addressed in the evaluation. Specific topics of discussion included successes and lessons learned, the multi-disciplinary model, and advice for similar centers. The discussion also included student intern training and student/staff roles; however, those topics will be covered below in Section XI (pages 53-63) on the student experience. Overall, these discussions with the leadership team revealed that RCSDF had many successes, as well as its fair share of challenges over the two years of operations.



## A. SERVICES

In terms of services overall, the expressed sentiment was that the second year saw an increase in the degree of confidence and comfort in provision of service, with respect to both service content and delivery. This increase was felt not only by staff and student interns, but also with the families that came to the Center.

There was a consensus among the supervisors and the executive director that the legal services offered were effective and well-received by parents in both years. Legal education and mediation were a good pairing of services, even for those who came to RCSDF thinking they did not need the legal education piece.

There was agreement that counseling services were effective, although the mental health supervisors reflected that it was sometimes difficult to get people in to certain kinds of therapy—the implication being that there should be special effort given to promoting participation in counseling services in the future. Services were especially helpful when used in concert. One supervisor noted that services such as co-parent coaching prepared parents to successfully mediate the legal issues. The executive director noted that co-parent coaching worked well, and helped to lay the groundwork for future family therapy. One area in which the supervisors would have liked more activity was child therapy; a suggested reason for lower-than-hoped utilization of child therapy is that some parents expressed reticence about student interns facilitating counseling with their children. Additionally, the executive director noted that increased participation in the support groups would have been beneficial.

Both the supervisors and the executive director agreed that, despite the many challenges part and parcel of operating a start-up non-profit organization that was the first of its kind, RCSDF was consistently able to provide help and support to families during a difficult and uncomfortable part of their lives. They concurred that families benefited from the interdisciplinary approach and came out of the process with skills to work together into the future. One supervisor commented on how much the parents enjoyed having their permanent orders hearing at the Center rather than at the courthouse.

## B. OUTREACH EFFORTS

In the first year, the executive director reported that outreach was made on the national and local levels. The executive director found communicating with the therapeutic community was more challenging than the legal community given the privacy and individuality of how therapeutic services are provided, and RCSDF resolved to make further efforts to determine effective outreach methods in the coming year.

In the second year, the executive director indicated an increased focus on interdisciplinary groups and employee assistance programs, noting that the message that seemed to resonate most

with people was understanding the differences between RCSDF and the traditional adversarial system—that it was a true alternative to battling in court. One recurring theme in the discussion on outreach was the need to interface more with the DU community. The executive director reflected that, perhaps because the supervisors were recruited from private practice rather than DU faculty, there was a gap in acceptance and participation from the university.

### C. FURTHER CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

RCSDF faced significant scheduling challenges. Specifically, the limitations on student intern availability made coordinating with complex family schedules a source of difficulty and frustration. Also, there was often not much time during which both the part-time supervisor and his or her students were at the Center, resulting in a dearth of time for instruction and education.

RCSDF experienced a series of difficulties getting an electronic case management system in place and, unfortunately, this was never resolved. Thus, the Center operated entirely on a paper-based system which, unsurprisingly, created considerable inefficiencies in case management, recordkeeping, and scheduling. Also with respect to the organizational aspect of RCSDF operations, the supervisors expressed that having student interns perform administrative functions on a rotating basis contributed to confusion. Additionally, due to the terms of the agreement with the court, the law supervisor was not allowed access to the court case management system, which created a substantial barrier in the ability to track legal case activities and deadlines.

## X. FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The RCSDF evaluation included one more component—feedback from its partner organizations within the Denver community. The aim of this aspect of the evaluation was to identify strengths and areas for improvement as seen from the community perspective. To that end, researchers developed a Partner Organization Feedback Questionnaire which asked respondents to provide information about the nature of the relationship, the duration of the relationship, and level of satisfaction with the relationship, as well as RCSDF's strengths, areas for improvement, and new ideas for the future.

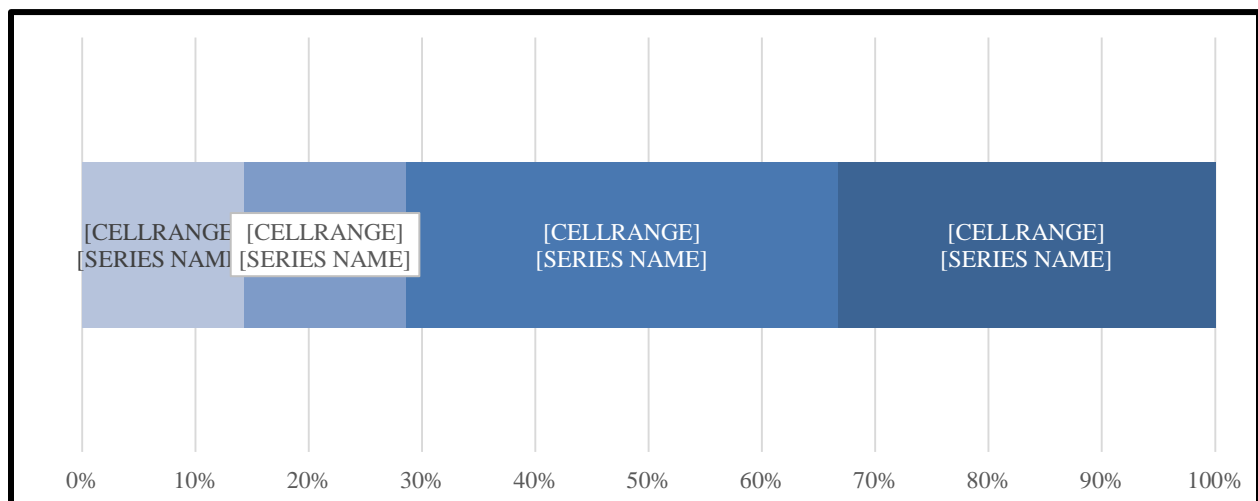
In total, 21 responses were received from organizations in the community (14 in the first year, 7 in the second). Of these, 10 responses came from local courts and two came from a mediation organization, while one response each came from a private attorney, a private counselor, and an organization that works with high conflict parents. In the first year, all but two respondents indicated having had a relationship with RCSDF since its inception, while in the second year all but one indicated so.

## A. SATISFACTION WITH RCSDF

In 18 responses (85%), the community partner respondent indicated satisfaction with the RCSDF relationship, with 15 of those being mostly or completely satisfied, as presented in Figure 7. Responses from both years show that, from the community perspective, RCSDF provided a range of important and affordable services and resources that are not available in the courts, including those that reorient parents from conflict to the best interests of their children. Respondents reported receiving positive feedback from participants on the experience. They also commented on the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to separation and divorce (e.g., counseling prior to mediation). One respondent noted: “The multi-disciplinary approach to these issues is a critical innovation.” Another stated: “There is no other organization that is comparable. It’s the wave of the future.” In terms of how RCSDF conducted business, respondents described RCSDF as proactive, responsive, friendly, and always working to improve service delivery.

There were, however, three respondents who reported dissatisfaction; these respondents came from the court setting and cited process inefficiencies as areas for RCSDF improvement.<sup>40</sup> This dissatisfaction is likely reflective of the unavailability of the court case management system to the law supervisor (see Section IX.C, page 50, above for further discussion).

*Figure 7, Community Partner Levels of Satisfaction with the RCSDF Relationship (n = 21)*



## B. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Suggestions for improvement fell into two general categories. First, respondents voiced a desire for RCSDF to accept more cases and to expand the populations served, providing the following

<sup>40</sup> Only two of the three respondents provided specific feedback on improvement areas. The comments related specifically to e-filing, following court protocols, and submitting electronic recordings of hearings (as opposed to tape recordings).

specific examples: parents with chemical dependency; parents with mental health issues; families experiencing domestic violence; poor populations with limited access to transportation; monolingual Spanish speakers; juvenile parents; parents who need assistance with post-decree matters; and unbundled services for those who could benefit from discrete services instead of the entire RCSDF program (e.g., child counseling).

Second, and as alluded to above, court respondents expressed a need for RCSDF to communicate more frequently on case progression, through status updates or informal communications. Respondents in a range of roles within the courts noted that when families are not able or willing to reach final resolution at RCSDF and return to court, judges and court staff have inadequate information with respect to what has happened and must essentially start over on the case. This was a planned firewall between the two processes, but nevertheless, it was a frustrating one for some court staff. The parents returning to court could also use more direction from RCSDF on how to move forward with their case, as they seem “more lost than ever” in court.

### C. IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

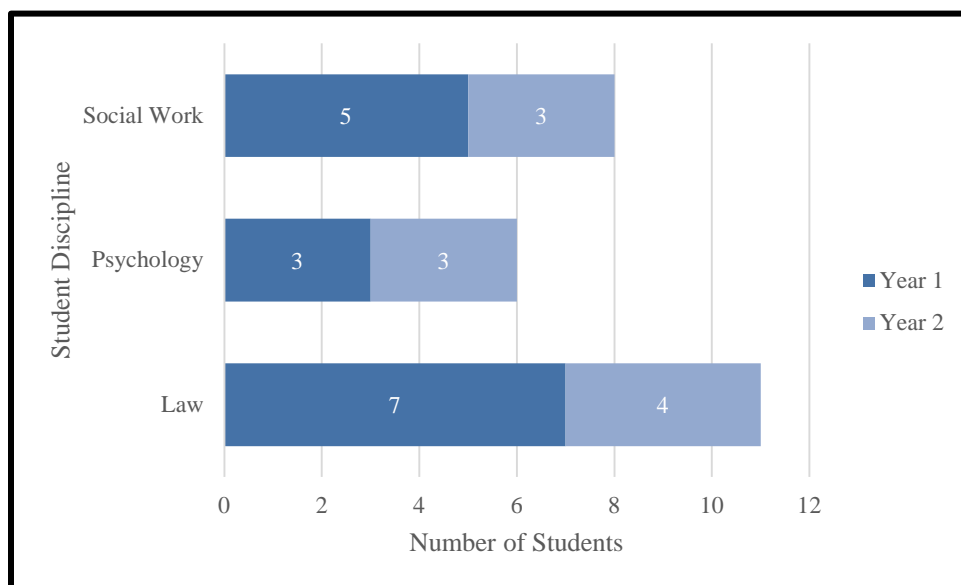
In addition to asking partner organizations about what RCSDF did well and areas for improvement, the evaluation sought feedback about ideas for the future of the Center. Ideas shared with RCSDF related largely to marketing the Center, including reaching parties before a petition is filed. Suggestions included outreach to schools, churches, community service organizations, and therapists—“basically, anywhere kids and parents are found is a good place to market.” There were also suggestions to expand outreach in both the legal community (including to Parental Responsibilities Evaluators and Child and Family Investigators) and the academic community (including the law school and graduate schools). Many of these suggestions were, in fact, targeted for outreach, though respondents may not have been aware of existing outreach and marketing efforts.

## XI. THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: A PANORAMA OF THE RCSDF INTERNSHIP

Graduate students from three different schools on the University of Denver campus—the Sturm College of Law, the Graduate School of Social Work, and the Graduate School of Professional Psychology—participated in an internship at RCSDF, working as legal and mental health service providers. In addition to providing services directly to parents and children, the student interns were responsible for many administrative functions, including scheduling, reception, and billing.

In total, 25 students completed an internship at RCSDF—six psychology students, seven social work students, and 11 law students.<sup>41</sup> Figure 8 presents the numbers of student interns from each discipline for each year of RCSDF operations.

*Figure 8: Number of Student Interns by Discipline and Year*



#### A. A NOTE ON APPROACHES TO STUDENT TRAINING

The student intern training in the first year was a two-week, full-time program prior to RCSDF's official opening, taking place in a large conference space on campus. Local and national experts were brought in to participate, observe, and lead various aspects of the training. The first week was dedicated to a variety of short presentations on relevant legal and clinical topics,<sup>42</sup> as well as interviewing role plays with professional actors and a field trip to Denver District Court. The second week was dedicated entirely to a 40-hour mediation training.

The student intern training in the second year was a six-day, full time program followed by a series of shorter training sessions spanning several weeks. It was facilitated only by RCSDF staff

<sup>41</sup> Law students outnumber the other disciplines due to the fact that the law students had semester-long internships in the first year and year-long internships in the second year, while psychology and social work students had year-long internships both years. Further, based on lessons learned in the first year regarding the number of families receiving services at RCSDF and the students' needs for a higher workload, RCSDF reduced the total number of student interns going into the second year (see Section XI, pages 60-63, below for a discussion of the workload).

<sup>42</sup> Substantive topics included: Colorado divorce law and procedure, family issues in separation and divorce, ethics, working with and interviewing children, parenting plan development, financial planning, legal drafting, cultural issues, family violence, crisis management and safety, and RCSDF processes and policies.

and the mediation trainer, and it took place at the Center. The content was generally the same, though more tailored to RCSDF based on what had been learned about the program and the families served over the course of the previous year. See Section XI, pages 56-62, below for further discussion on the student trainings.

## B. ASSESSING STUDENT OUTCOMES

In addition to measuring various aspects of the family experience and impacts on parents, the RCSDF evaluation included mechanisms for measuring learning outcomes for the student interns. Researchers administered a Student Questionnaire at three stages of the internship: before completing the training (pre-training); after the training but before beginning the internship (post-training); and at the conclusion of the internship (post-internship). All elements of the Student Questionnaire are self-reported, rather than objective, measures.

### 1. AREAS OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT

The aim of the internship experience at RCSDF was to prepare student interns in the three disciplines for working with separating and divorcing families. Thus, the Student Questionnaire was developed with the goal of measuring various indicators of student preparedness. Specific items within the four assessment areas are outlined below.

#### *Comfort in accomplishing professional tasks:*

- Listen in a professional context
- Respond to clients professionally
- Problem-solve in a professional context
- Work in a multi-disciplinary team
- Adapt recommendations to changing circumstances
- Negotiate agreements
- Draft field-appropriate professional documents

#### *Knowledge in substantive areas:*

- Uniform Dissolution Act
- Colorado Dispute Resolution Act
- Parenting Plans
- Counseling
- Maintenance and Alimony
- Financial Planning Post-Separation
- Child Support
- Common Law Marriage
- Retirement and Pension Issues
- Self-Represented Litigants
- Domestic Violence
- Mandatory Disclosure Requirements
- Code of Professional Responsibility/Conduct
- Family Dynamics
- Child Development
- Interviewing Adults
- Interviewing Children
- Ethical Practice
- Early Neutral Evaluation/Assessment
- Mediation

*Positive attitudes and beliefs about the internship experience:*

- I am excited to have trained for work in the area of separation and divorce.
- I feel prepared in my knowledge and skills to work with separating and divorcing families.
- I believe there are many benefits to be gained by working with students and professionals from disciplines other than the one I am studying.
- I believe I will benefit from networking with professionals in my local community.
- I want to work with separating and divorcing families after graduation.

*Preparedness to work with separating and divorcing families in substantive areas (asked only at post-training and post-internship):*

- Basics of Colorado Divorce Law
- Denver Court Process
- Early Neutral Evaluation/  
Assessment
- Mental Health and Separation/Divorce
- Ethics
- Intake and Interview
- Crisis Management and Safety
- Family Violence/Abuse and Neglect
- Interviewing Children
- Legal Drafting
- Parenting Plans
- Financial Issues
- Financial Planning
- LGBT Issues
- Cultural Diversity

Student interns rated each item within each assessment area on an accompanying area-specific five-point scale with higher scores representing higher levels of comfort, substantive knowledge, positive attitudes and beliefs, and preparedness, as the case might be. Possible score ranges are presented in Table 28.

Table 28: Student Intern Assessment Areas

	Number of Items	Range of Possible Scores
Comfort in accomplishing professional tasks	7	7 - 35
Knowledge in substantive areas	20	20 – 100
Attitudes and beliefs	5	5 – 25
Preparedness to work with separating and divorcing families	15	15 - 75

## 2. IMPACTS OF THE RCSDF TRAINING

In order to facilitate understanding and interpretation of student outcomes, scores are collapsed across the four assessment areas (detailed in the previous section). Table 29 presents pre-training to post-training outcomes for all student interns for the first year, the second year, and both years

combined.<sup>43</sup> Again, statistically significant results are presented in blue. It is important to note that the number of student interns was relatively low and, for that reason, statistical results are instructive, but should be interpreted with caution.

*Table 29: Pre-Training to Post-Training Outcomes by Year*

	Year 1			Year 2			Combined		
	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Training Mean	Difference in Means (p-value)	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Training Mean	Difference in Means (p-value)	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Training Mean	Difference in Means (p-value)
Comfort in accomplishing professional tasks	25.69	31.46	+5.77 (0.041)	25.89	29.33	+3.44 (0.153)	25.77	30.59	+4.82 (0.011)
Knowledge in substantive areas	55.92	71.23	+15.31 (0.000)	54.00	70.38	+16.38 (0.007)	55.19	70.90	+15.71 (0.000)
Attitudes and beliefs	23.07	23.21	+0.14 (0.686)	20.78	22.11	+1.33 (0.050)	22.17	22.78	+0.61 (0.075)

*The results demonstrate that student learning increased in every area as a result of the trainings, with most results being statistically significant.* Thus, it seems that both approaches to training resulted in improvements for student interns. The increase in the area of comfort in accomplishing professional tasks in the second year was not statistically significant, suggesting that the intensive approach of the first year more effectively increased comfort than did the more spread out approach in the second year (note that pre-training scores were roughly equivalent in both years, indicating that students started at the same baseline comfort level).

Interestingly, student interns in the second year demonstrated a statistically significant increase in positive attitudes and beliefs about the internship experience, whereas the students in the first year did not. Though student interns in both years had high pre-training scores, the first year students scored higher at pre-training than the second year students did at post-training, suggesting that the first year students came in with more positive attitudes and beliefs than did the second year students.

Perhaps most importantly, significant gains in substantive knowledge spanned across both years. It appears, therefore, that although there were substantial differences in the training approaches in the first and second years, both approaches resulted in measurable improvement.

Considering the efficacy of the training from a different vantage point, Table 30 presents the pre-training to post-training scores by discipline across both years. Because there are relatively few student interns within each discipline, the differences in means are presented without reference to statistical significance.

<sup>43</sup> Repeated measures t-test; statistical significance is reported where  $p < 0.10$ .



*Table 30: Pre-training to Post-training Outcomes by Student Discipline*

	Law Students			Psychology Students			Social Work Students		
	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Training Mean	Difference in Means	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Training Mean	Difference in Means	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Training Mean	Difference in Means
Comfort in accomplishing professional tasks	27.90	28.67	0.77	27.33	31.50	4.17	23.75	29.38	5.63
Knowledge in substantive areas	55.45	72.22	16.77	56.67	72.80	16.13	53.50	67.86	14.36
Attitudes and beliefs	23.64	24.22	0.59	21.83	21.67	-0.17	21.00	22.00	1.00

Although all student interns reported improvements with respect to levels of comfort in accomplishing professional tasks, increases for law students were relatively low compared with those of the mental health students. Increases in substantive knowledge were sizeable and generally constant across disciplines. Gains with regard to positive attitudes and beliefs about the internship experience were quite small for law students and mental health students. In fact, psychology students actually decreased very slightly in this area from pre-training to post-training. However, such a small change within such a small number of student interns is not instructive. This ought to be an area for further exploration in any future campus-based centers.

The student interns were asked to list the competencies/skills that most improved as a result of the training. Although there were differences in the approach to training between the first and second years, the students' reports of the competencies/skills that improved during the training were virtually indistinguishable from one year to the next. A majority of student interns expressed that the training improved mediation skills. Students also indicated that the training improved clinical skills such as interviewing (both children and adults), conducting intakes with clients, listening, and communicating. Student interns reported having improved knowledge of divorce law, as well as skills that cut across disciplines such as issue spotting, preparing parenting plans, and reframing. This data is largely consistent with the students' responses on the quantitative scale items.

### 3. IMPACTS OF THE RCSDF INTERNSHIP

Most crucial to the evaluation of the RCSDF student intern experience is measurement of the impacts of the internship as a whole—that is, from pre-training to post-internship. Considering student outcomes by year, Table 31 presents scores for the first and second years separately and combined.

*Table 31: Student Questionnaire Scores from Pre-Training to Post-Internship*

	Year 1			Year 2			Combined		
	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Internship Mean	Difference in Means (p-value)	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Internship Mean	Difference in Means (p-value)	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Internship Mean	Difference in Means (p-value)
Comfort in accomplishing professional tasks	25.25	32.25	7.00 (0.021)	26.60	29.90	3.30 (0.314)	25.86	31.18	5.32 (0.014)
Knowledge in substantive areas	54.92	72.85	17.92 (0.000)	54.22	73.67	19.44 (0.011)	54.64	73.18	18.55 (0.000)
Attitudes and beliefs	23.15	22.77	-0.38 (0.544)	21.44	22.67	1.22 (0.305)	22.45	22.73	0.27 (0.650)

These results closely mirror those for the impact of the training. The first year saw significant increases in levels of comfort with professional tasks and in substantive knowledge, as well as a very slight, non-significant decrease with respect to attitudes and beliefs. In the second year, there were increases in both comfort levels in professional tasks and attitudes and beliefs, but neither proved significant. Taking both years together, increases in comfort levels and substantive knowledge were significant.

*Table 32: Pre-training to Post-internship Outcomes by Discipline*

	Law Students			Psychology Students			Social Work Students		
	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Internship Mean	Difference in Means	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Internship Mean	Difference in Means	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Internship Mean	Difference in Means
Comfort in accomplishing professional tasks	27.90	32.22	4.32	27.33	31.83	4.50	23.75	29.75	6.00
Knowledge in substantive areas	55.45	72.78	17.32	56.67	73.20	16.53	53.50	73.63	20.13
Attitudes and beliefs	23.64	23.00	-0.64	21.83	23.20	1.37	21.00	22.13	1.13

Once again considering the results by discipline, as illustrated in Table 32 above, the impacts of the internship as a whole demonstrate a familiar pattern. The area of comfort in accomplishing professional tasks showed sizeable increases across all disciplines, as did the area of substantive knowledge. Gains for social work students in substantive knowledge were largest when considering the whole internship and smallest when considering training impacts alone. Also, comfort levels for law students show a much larger increase when considering the whole internship, as opposed to the training alone.

Another interesting result relates to the area of positive attitudes and beliefs about the internship experience. Specifically, law students saw a slight increase over the training with regard to

attitudes and beliefs, but a slight decrease for the overall internship experience. This contrasts with the psychology student results, where the pattern was reversed. While it is possible that the internship actually did result in a decrease in positive attitudes and beliefs for law students, it would be unwise to draw strong conclusions from this data, as the sample sizes are quite small. As similarly noted above, this could be an aspect of evaluating future campus-based centers, as it deserves more attention.

In terms of preparedness to work with separating and divorcing families, student interns left the training feeling relatively well-prepared (mean scores were 57.6 out of a possible 75).

Preparedness increased over the course of the internship, but this increase was not statistically significant. One possible interpretation here is that, though students felt prepared following the training, it took actual experience working with these families during the internship for the students to understand their level of preparedness. In other words, it is possible student interns tended to overestimate how prepared they were before beginning the internship.

When asked to provide an overall assessment of the effectiveness of the internship, all student interns expressed agreement that the training provided the needed skills and information to provide services (mean scores were 6.13 on a seven-point scale). Furthermore, all students also agreed that the internship as a whole provided the needed skills and information to work with separating and divorcing families (mean scores were 6.21 and 6.39, respectively). Scores were only slightly lower when it came to recommending the internship to other students interested in working with separating and divorcing families (mean scores were 5.39).

Students were asked to identify three competencies/skills that improved as a result of the internship. Almost every student wrote that mediation skills improved over the course of the internship. Many student interns indicated that interdisciplinary or teamwork skills improved, an aspect that was not mentioned by students in relation to the training and was probably only appreciated after having experienced the work environment. Students also tended to describe clinical and therapeutic skills, specifically: interviewing, family dynamics, and communicating with clients. With respect to legal skills, some students mentioned parenting plans and legal drafting. A few students described improved case management abilities.

### C. MOST POSITIVE AND LEAST POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE INTERNSHIP

Students were also asked to identify the three most positive and the three least positive aspects of the internship. The most positive aspects identified mirrored responses to the most improved skills, as mediation and working on an interdisciplinary team were most commonly reported. Many student interns also described the hands-on experience with real families going through a divorce, working with the supervisors, and working with the other interns as positive aspects.

Aspects student interns identified as the least positive included a low and unpredictable workload, disorganization at the Center, and issues with case management. However, several

students noted that these issues were likely attributable to RCSDF being a new organization still figuring out what would work best. Additionally, several student interns reported that effective communication between supervisors and students was at times lacking. Further, students in both years noted not feeling included in decision-making processes.

#### **D. STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Large portions of the annual focus group with the staff supervisors and interview with the executive director were dedicated to discussing student-related matters. These discussions centered on the approach to student training, working in staff-student teams, and the multidisciplinary model.

##### **1. STUDENT TRAINING**

The supervisors and executive director were in agreement that the second year training was a vast improvement over the first year training. The general consensus was that, because so much was up in the air operationally prior to RCSDF's opening, the first student intern training was constricted in several respects. First, because RCSDF did not yet know who would come to the Center, policies and solid definitions of RCSDF services were not yet established and thus could not be provided to student interns. Also, the first year training lacked integration of the various topics, as it wasn't yet clear which ones would be most relevant to students' internship experience. The shared feeling of the supervisors and the director was that the first-year students left the training overwhelmed by the volume of information presented in a short time and uneasy about how to digest it.

Although not necessarily reflected in the self-reported student intern data, the consensus among the supervisors and the executive director is that the second-year training was a much more productive experience for all involved. Conducting the training at the Center with the supervisors completely involved (rather than participating primarily as trainees as was the case in the first year), fostered a more intimate, conversational, and supportive atmosphere. As a result, the training was more cohesive and helped the student interns better understand the respective staff roles. In addition, having had a year of experience working with the families and providing services, the second-year training was presented with more concrete expectations of what it would be like to work at RCSDF.

In terms of how prepared the student interns were after the trainings, the legal supervisor noted that the mediation portion in both years served more to familiarize law students with the mediation process, rather than to prepare them to conduct mediations on their own. From the mental health perspective, exposing students to training relevant to other disciplines in addition to their own, as was done in the second year, helped to better prepare students for working with separating and divorcing parents.

With regard to areas for improvement, there was agreement among RCSDF leadership after the second year that the training still had not hit on the right balance of instructional and hands-on content, though there was disagreement on the right direction to achieve such a balance. The supervisors expressed the need for more practice and role-playing scenarios, as well as additional fact patterns to keep everyone interested and engaged (moving from straightforward to more complicated scenarios as comfort increases). However, the executive director saw the need for more instructional content. While these experiential and instructional elements are not incompatible, fitting them in during the time available for training presents an ongoing dilemma.

Further, in the second year interview, the executive director made suggestions related to presenters. Specifically, presenters in the first year were professionals from around the country, whereas presenters in the second year were local to Denver, with many coming from the DU community. The executive director noted that faces familiar to students from around the university in the second year helped them put the information in context. Finally, the executive director suggested that presenters participate in a session together, prior to the training, to prepare for and coordinate the training presentation.

## 2. WORKING AS A TEAM

The executive director noted that the supervisors worked very well with each other and with the student interns. There was the sentiment, though, that there could be improvement in terms of the director and the supervisors working together as a leadership team to foster a community atmosphere and a commitment to the organization as a whole rather than to individual students and families. For example, coming to agreement with respect to consistent student intern responsibility and accountability expectations across the disciplines would have decreased role confusion for students. The executive director also expressed that, in neither year was the ratio of student interns to workload ideal—in the first year, there were too many, while there were not quite enough law students in the second year.

The supervisors agreed that having an open line of communication with their respective students was invaluable. One supervisor noted that, because RCSDF is unique in that the supervisors do not have caseloads of their own, they are able to be more available to the students. The supervisors agreed that having a weekly meeting with all of the student interns to debrief on cases was very helpful and allowed everyone to stay on the same page in terms of each family's progress through the program. One concern, however, was that communicating across the entire team could be challenging, as aside from the weekly meeting, the student interns were rarely all at the Center at the same time.

With respect to selecting students for the internship positions going forward, supervisors identified a few key qualities. Students who have life experience, maturity, initiative, flexibility, genuine interest in the subject matter, and interest in the multidisciplinary work are the ideal candidates.

### 3. INTERDISCIPLINARY MODEL

Generally speaking, there was agreement among the supervisors and executive director that the interdisciplinary aspect of RCSDF worked very well for student interns as well as families. The families benefitted from holistic assistance, while students were able to gain understanding of other disciplines and an appreciation for the importance of collaborating across disciplines. The two-student teams worked well because the students were able to share case management responsibilities while working closely with a student intern of another discipline. There were, however, some issues that arose as a result of the relatively low volume of families in the first year. Namely, there was some tension between the psychology and social work students with regard to case assignments and being able to satisfy the clinical hour requirements of their respective schools.

Furthermore, while the supervisors agreed that the Friday Seminars—sessions in which student interns from all disciplines attended presentations on various topics related to separation and divorce—were a positive aspect of the internship experience, the students might have received more instructional value from discipline-specific presentations.

## XII. CONCLUSIONS

RCSDF truly was a singular organization that provided needed, wanted, and impactful services to families in transition, as well as invaluable learning opportunities for students. While it is certainly true that RCSDF faced many hurdles during its two-year life-span—as expected for an entirely new non-profit offering a wholly original service delivery model—the evaluation results clearly support the conclusion that the Center was a success by most measures.

Families who received services at RCSDF were a diverse group, representing an array of socio-economic backgrounds, coming from all around the Denver-metro area and Colorado, and presenting a variety of issues and challenges to be addressed in the process. Staff and student interns came together to form cohesive problem-solving, interdisciplinary teams that worked toward positive solutions for families in transition. Together, families and the RCSDF team were able to forge ahead in the unfamiliar territory of a cooperative, therapeutic separation and divorce in an out-of-court environment.

In addition to the successes, the evaluation uncovered many areas for growth, development, and improvement. Certainly, each of these issues will be addressed with an eye toward innovation and creativity at COCD, the new community-based center in Denver, as well as in any replication efforts going forward.

The comprehensive evaluation results serve as a signpost, demonstrating that RCSDF was a positive force, both historically and pragmatically significant, in the realm of separation and divorce. The story is far from over, though. COCD will be evaluated in a similar fashion and it is

hoped that those results, combined with the RCSDf evaluation results, will provide ample grist for the mill of collaborative, interdisciplinary, out-of-court separation and divorce.