



Children in court need lawyers of their own.
We're working to make sure they have them.



Counsel for Kids Internal Campaign Evaluation 2025

Background

One year after launching the first national policy campaign to establish the right to counsel for youth in foster care, Counsel for Kids (C4K) commissioned an independent consultant to evaluate its early progress. The [comprehensive report](#) assessed the Campaign's state-based efforts, identified strengths, and highlighted opportunities for growth and scaling.

Since this initial evaluation in 2022, with multi-year funding, a strong team, expanding coalitions of allies, and a robust resource toolkit, the Campaign has continued to achieve measurable progress. Three years later, in the spirit of continued learning and quality improvement, a follow-up assessment was warranted to once again assess the effectiveness of C4K strategies and tools.

This report summarizes findings from NACC's 2025 internal analysis of the Counsel for Kids Campaign. Staff spearheaded a three-part review by (1) surveying state recipients of technical assistance (TA), (2) holding a virtual, focus group-style feedback session with our National Advisory Council, and (3) studying our communications strategies and results.

State Technical Assistance: Feedback from the Field

A written survey was distributed to C4K technical assistance recipients C4K target states via Google Forms. Responses were accepted over a 4-week period. Eleven anonymous responses were received. Overall, the survey revealed that C4K technical assistance continues to be highly valued and impactful. Survey respondents specified that support with policy strategy development, coalition building, and communications are especially useful. The C4K online toolkit, customized resources, and one-on-one guidance were also highlighted as valuable resources. As a result of NACC's TA, participants reported stronger advocacy skills, greater confidence, and policy wins. Key needs for the future include more lobbying support, training on establishing statewide systems, financial resources, and guidance on engaging lived experience experts, alongside addressing persistent external barriers like attorney shortages, state budget shortfalls, and political resistance to reform. A copy of the written survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Satisfaction with Technical Assistance

Overall, respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with the TA they received. Eighty-two percent (82%) ranked the helpfulness of TA at 9 or higher on a 10-point scale, reflecting the Campaign's success equipping advocates with tools, strategies, and confidence to advance their work.

Types of Technical Assistance Provided

The survey found that TA was comprehensive and responsive to the needs of advocates:

- **Campaign strategy and policy analysis:** Received by over 70% of respondents.

- **Resource development:** Received by 63% of respondents.
- **Coalition building:** Received by 45% of respondents.

This distribution highlights the breadth of services and the Campaign’s ability to tailor support to state-specific contexts.

Contributions of Technical Assistance

TA was most helpful in the areas of:

- **One-on-One Support:** Valued most by 82% of respondents
- **Advocacy Tools, Factsheets, and Templates:** Valued most by 64% of respondents
- **Strategy Calls and Webinars:** Valued most by 46% of respondents

Respondents emphasized that one-on-one support was the most valuable form of TA. Although unsurprising, it is also the most time-consuming and underscores the critical importance of dedicated staff for this Campaign.

Respondents reported that the [C4K online toolkit](#), as well as various [customized materials](#) such as factsheets, maps, and policy briefs, are highly effective in supporting state advocacy campaigns.

Development of Skills and Approaches

Survey responses revealed that TA enhanced advocates’ skills, expanded their strategies, and contributed directly to measurable progress. 82% of respondents identified policy and advocacy strategy support as areas TA strengthened the most. Key themes include:

- **Learning from other states:** *“We learned what other states were doing and what models would help us best advocate for change. We saw what we were doing well and what we could improve.”*
- **Strengthened legislative advocacy:** *“We benefitted greatly from information concerning C4K availability nationwide. This helped our coalition develop clear materials to educate legislators, which led to the passage of a bill establishing C4K for foster youth in our state.”*
- **Increased confidence and empowerment:** *“We were far better equipped to explain why C4K was necessary—and felt far more empowered.”*

Collaboration with Counsel for Kids

Respondents noted that collaboration with the Counsel for Kids Campaign was a significant contributor to success. This partnership provided:

- A national perspective that elevated local efforts;
- Legitimacy in advocating for high-quality legal representation;
- A framework of best practices to guide state-level strategy.

Even in states where policy change has been limited, respondents reported that TA has helped to build relationships, plant seeds, and prepare for future opportunities.

Areas for Improvement

Respondents identified several areas where TA could be strengthened to maximize impact:

- Greater access to lobbying support;
- In-person trainings with practical, action-oriented strategies to build statewide systems;
- Expanded financial support for state advocacy campaigns;

- Support with integrating youth with lived experience in policy advocacy.

External Challenges Affecting Advocacy

Despite the high value of TA, advocates continue to face significant external barriers that limit progress. These include:

- **Capacity constraints:** Attorneys often lack time for advocacy beyond their caseloads.
- **Institutional opposition:** Pushback from child welfare agencies, courts, and CASA programs.
- **Resource limitations:** Budget constraints and unfavorable political landscapes.
- **Attorney shortages:** Acute workforce shortages further straining advocacy systems.

Federal Counsel for Kids Advocacy: Feedback from National Advisory Council

On September 8, 2025, the Counsel for Kids team convened a meeting of our National Advisory Council – an esteemed and diverse group of partners and allies who inform our federal advocacy. In a focus group-style conversation, participants were asked to provide candid feedback about their observations of the Campaign. For attendees who preferred to provide comments anonymously, NACC made a Google form available. The C4K team solicited feedback on three simple but salient questions: When you think about the Counsel for Kids Campaign...What’s working? What’s not working? What adaptations should we make going forward?

Much like the feedback offered from state level stakeholders, the National Advisory Council similarly shared a high appraisal of the Campaign’s work thus far. They offered specific examples of efforts that had been influential, such as (1) our “top notch” toolkit, which they readily share with others (and embed in their own trainings), (2) C4K’s “on the ground” support, which fills a critical gap in the field, and (3) its natural tie-in with other ongoing NACC work, such as amicus brief filings and [Title IV-B reauthorization assistance for court partners](#). Respondents noted that Campaign staff serve as “trusted national partners” who have been able to help with improving legislation, if not wholesale, then incrementally (“even where it’s not perfect, there’s been steps”).

Looking ahead, two Advisory Council members expressed concern about continuing to expend resources on federal advocacy in the current political climate, noting skepticism about the chance of bipartisan legislative reform. The group agreed that one way to address this concern is to continually emphasize the efficiency and cost-savings of legal services, a priority goal of the current Administration.

Participants also shared their enthusiasm for the forthcoming child developmental capacity resource (“Kids Can Be Clients”) and suggested two new items to add to the toolkit in 2026: (1) a “Child Welfare 101” Explainer for Judges; and (2) a tool about child safety that articulates how legal counsel helps address and mitigate safety concerns children face. They also suggested alternative media outlets to explore in the future, including Mother Jones, the Wall Street Journal (where we have sought op-ed placement, but not yet been accepted), and television outlets such as the John Oliver show that cover serious topics (like immigration and youth justice) with a comedic spin.

Counsel for Kids Communications: Internal Reflection and Landscape Scan

Since Counsel for Kids launched in 2021, key components of the Campaign have been communicating the importance of right to counsel for youth and supporting legislative advocacy through messaging. Below is a review of progress and challenges in Counsel for Kids communications efforts.

Digital Media

CounselforKids.org has been the online home of the Campaign since fall of 2021. In the first couple of years of the Campaign, the website usually had less than a thousand unique visitors every six months. This increased dramatically as the Campaign grew. Over the last two years (July 2023 – July 2025), the website has averaged approximately 5,000 users per year. In that period, people visited the website more than 40,000 times and collectively downloaded Counsel for Kids materials more than 2,300 times. Aside from the homepage, the right to counsel map page, the toolkit, and the technical assistance application page have been the most popular portions of the website over that period, demonstrating that people come to the page for up-to-date information, new resources, and help pursuing Counsel for Kids advocacy in their state. This is exactly the function the website was designed to provide.

Counsel for Kids' social media presence has also grown. In the last 3 quarters of 2024, NACC Counsel for Kids posts reached 10,700 people. In the first half of 2025, NACC's Counsel for Kids posts reached more than 10,400 people. Hiring NACC's Policy and Communications Associate in 2024 – who dedicates significant time to social media - was essential to this success.

Traditional Media

The Counsel for Kids Campaign earned or influenced 68 traditional media hits (articles, op-eds, letters to the editor, television pieces, audio interviews, etc.) since its launch in 2021. This is an average frequency of one publication every three and a half weeks over the entire course of the Campaign.

These pieces fall into three broad categories, some of which overlap. The first is articles authored by or featuring NACC staff, Board, Advisory Council members, or by state-level advocates who received significant guidance or support from NACC staff (approx. 14 pieces). For example, The [Imprint published an op-ed by NACC's Allison Green](#) about the importance of counsel for kids, regardless of which party has political power. These types of pieces allow NACC staff to share our message and expertise directly. Our organization successfully pitched and grabbed opportunities to advance the Campaign.

The second type is reporting on legislation or advocacy efforts of coalitions that NACC provides technical assistance to, works with key legislators on, or otherwise helps influence (approx. 45 pieces). Local and state level publications typically publish these pieces, and they are essential to educating the public and drawing attention to the need for Counsel for Kids in specific states. An example of this is [Seacoast Online's reporting on C4K implementation](#) in New Hampshire. The volume of these pieces illustrates the effectiveness and importance of the Campaign. NACC successfully provided communications support to advocates and leaders who benefit from our technical assistance.

The third type is a broad group of articles, op-eds, and other pieces where the author or journalist relies on Counsel for Kids data, research, or talking points, or otherwise closely aligns with our mission, without direct involvement from our Campaign (approx. 15 pieces). [For example, the Missouri Independent cited Counsel for Kids Campaign statistics.](#) These pieces demonstrate NACC organically influences the national conversation through our resources, alliances, and partnerships. This is particularly encouraging because it means the Campaign’s messaging and resources moved the needle of the right to counsel discourse across the country.

Challenges

Despite these successes, many communications challenges remain:

- Misunderstanding/lack of understanding of child welfare system by general public;
- Misunderstanding/distrust of lawyers generally;
- Patronizing and ageist views of children and their rights;
- Name recognition of opponents of youth right to counsel efforts;
- Child welfare and access to justice must compete with other hot topics in the news.

Additional Reflections

Unsurprisingly, NACC has had communications success in local and state-level publications in target NACC states. This is both by design and a natural result of Campaign work in those places. In the future, we hope to place more op-eds and interviews in national publications to draw attention to the importance of Counsel for Kids at the federal level.

Conclusion

The 2025 internal evaluation of the Counsel for Kids Campaign demonstrates significant progress in advancing the right to counsel for youth in foster care—measured not only in policy wins, but in improved advocacy capacity, stronger coalitions, empowered state leaders, and direct impact on the national narrative. Findings across all three evaluation components affirm that the Campaign’s strategies continue to yield measurable results. Counsel for Kids remains well-positioned to build on its success by deepening partnerships, expanding its communications reach, and supporting state and federal efforts to expand children’s right to legal representation. Despite the Campaign’s increasing influence and visibility, persistent external barriers and resource limitations underscore the need for continued investment, innovation, and strategic adaptation. As the Campaign enters its next phase, this evaluation affirms the results of C4K’s 2022 external evaluation that sustaining the Campaign’s three-pronged strategy (state, federal, national communications) continues to be the most highly valued and impactful approach to reshaping policy to guarantee the right to counsel for youth in foster care nationwide.

Appendix A

Counsel for Kids (C4K) Campaign Evaluation Survey

NACC launched the C4K campaign in 2021 offering free technical assistance to state advocates seeking to reform state law and policy to ensure youth access to legal counsel. Please help us evaluate our technical assistance program by participating in a brief survey about the impact of C4K TA on your policy advocacy efforts. Your feedback is critical to our continuous improvement.

1. What forms of TA have you received from the C4K campaign? (Check all that apply)

- a. policy analysis
- b. data review
- c. policy drafting/review
- d. resource development
- e. campaign strategy support
- f. youth engagement
- g. coalition building
- h. litigation strategies
- i. media or communications support

2. Which of the following areas did C4K TA most strengthen? (Select all that apply)

- Policy/advocacy strategy
- Coalition-building
- Youth/community engagement
- Communications or messaging
- Project management or coalition support
- Other: _____

3. What types of support from C4K TA were most valuable to you? (Check top 2)

- One-on-one support
- Advocacy Tools, fact sheets, and templates
- Peer learning/community of practice
- Strategy calls or webinars

Other: _____

4. What communications or messaging support has been most useful to your advocacy?

Check all that apply

- Assistance writing or editing an op-ed or article
- legislative letters of support
- The C4K online toolkit
- Customized information, fact sheets, or other tools
- Other: _____

5. What tools in the C4K toolkit did you find yourself using frequently during your advocacy? _____

6. What new skills or approaches did your team develop through this TA? How did TA build capacity or enhance expertise at the local level? _____

7. Has collaboration with NACC directly or indirectly helped influence key stakeholders or helped achieve any key advocacy milestones?

8. How could NACC TA be improved? Please identify any resources or tools that were not available that could enhance your advocacy.

9. Were there any external factors that threatened the progress of your advocacy? (i.e. staffing, time, political climate, internal conflict, state budgetary limitations etc.)

10. On a scale of 1–10, how helpful was the technical assistance (TA) your team received from NACC’s Counsel for Kids Campaign (C4K)?