



Abstract

Congress enacted the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [1] mandating a Free Appropriate Public Education[2] in the Least Restrictive Environment[3]. Appropriate education is a significant public health concern, as educational achievement is closely associated with health outcomes. Project HEAL (Health Education Advocacy and Law) provides pro-bono legal advocacy for low income families to ensure children with disabilities receive appropriate education. Project HEAL services include legal counsel and representation provided by lawyers and law students. This study reports the legal and policy outcomes of the Project HEAL. From 2009 through 2013, Project HEAL provided 2,112 instances of advocacy services. The average age of the child served was 11 (S.D. 5). The majority of children served were African American (>61%). The top five diagnoses were Autism Spectrum Disorder (21.02%), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (17.97%), Emotional Disturbance (9.49%), Learning Disabilities (8.47%), and Intellectual Disabilities (7.12%). Project HEAL resulted in 220.5 hours of compensatory services awarded, 79 (24.9%) clients with implemented professional recommendations, 74 (23.3%) clients with changes in accommodations, 83 (26.2%) clients had changes in program supports and 94 (29.6%) clients had a change in services. Over 300 (N=312) IEP meetings were attended and 63 (19.8%) clients moved to more appropriate placement.

Expansion of pro bono and sliding scale advocacy services will facilitate the ability to obtain free and appropriate educational services in the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities.

Study Objectives

- To examine the characteristics of individuals who received services from Project HEAL
- To study the services provided by Project HEAL
- To summarize the outcomes of legal advocacy services provided by Project HEAL

Methods

- Demographic, service, and outcome data from all families served by Project HEAL were collected from 2009-2013
- Descriptive statistics were used to summarize client and outcome data

Participant Characteristics (N=241)

Demographics	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Male	11	33	49	58	32
Female	2	6	15	17	18
Average Age	0.00	9.0	10.0	10.6	9.3
Race/Ethnicity [Number (%)]	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
White	7 (21.2)	17 (36.2)	19 (29.7)	24 (32.0)	20 (28.6)
Black	26 (78.8)	29 (61.7)	41 (64.1)	49 (65.3)	48 (68.6)
Hispanic	0	0	1 (1.6)	2 (2.7)	2 (2.9)
Bi-Racial	0	1(2.1)	3(4.7)	0	0

Results Summary

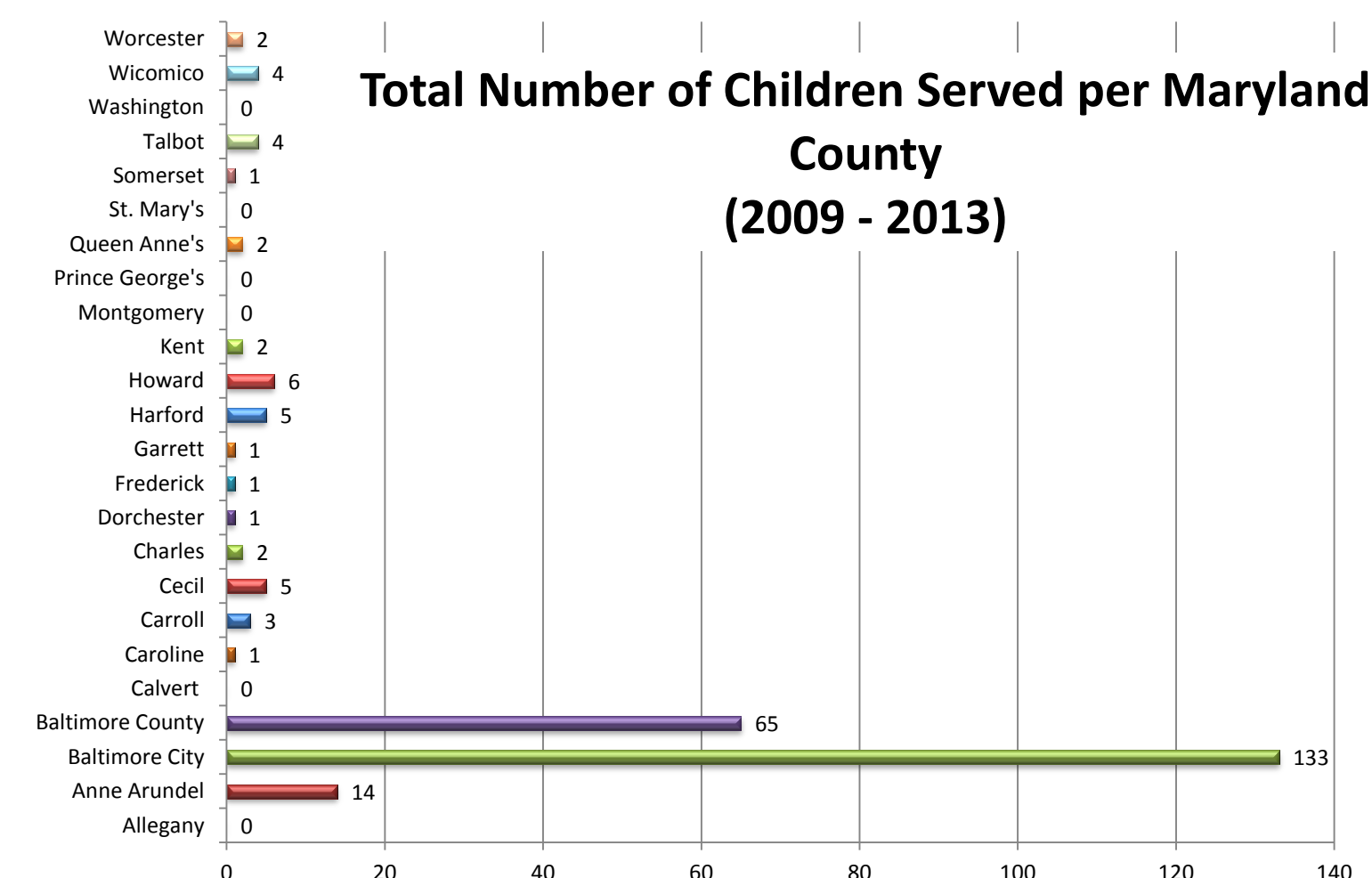
Diagnoses of Children Served by Project HEAL

Primary Diagnosis	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	Percent
Autism Spectrum Disorders	9	8	18	17	10	62	21.0%
ADHD	5	11	14	12	11	53	19.0%
Emotional Disturbance	6	3	6	12	1	28	9.5%
Learning Disabilities	2	4	9	10	0	25	8.5%
Intellectual Disabilities	3	7	3	6	2	21	7.1%

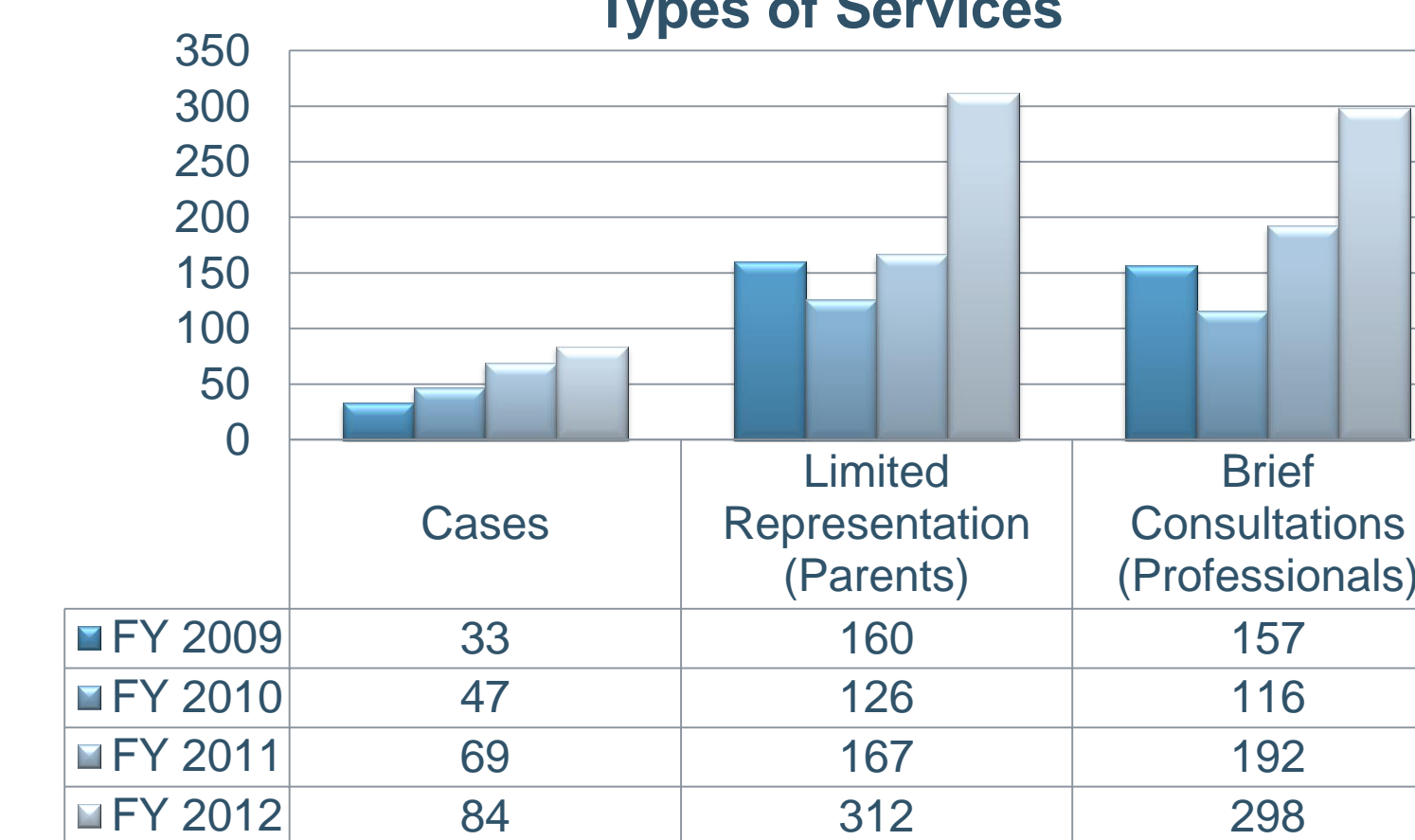
Service Outcomes by Year

Outcome Measures	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
# moved to a more appropriate placement	11	13	11	25	3	63
# IEP Meetings	42	36	95	105	34	312
# of clients with a change in services	9	14	30	32	9	94
# of clients with a change in prog. supports	6	12	30	30	5	83
# of clients with changed accommodations	6	5	22	30	11	74
# of clients found eligible for services	3	3	9	6	4	25
# of clients with implemented KKI rec's	3	9	32	28	7	79
# of complaint letters filed	5	7	5	0	0	17
# of compensation hours awarded	212	0	8.5	0	0	220.5

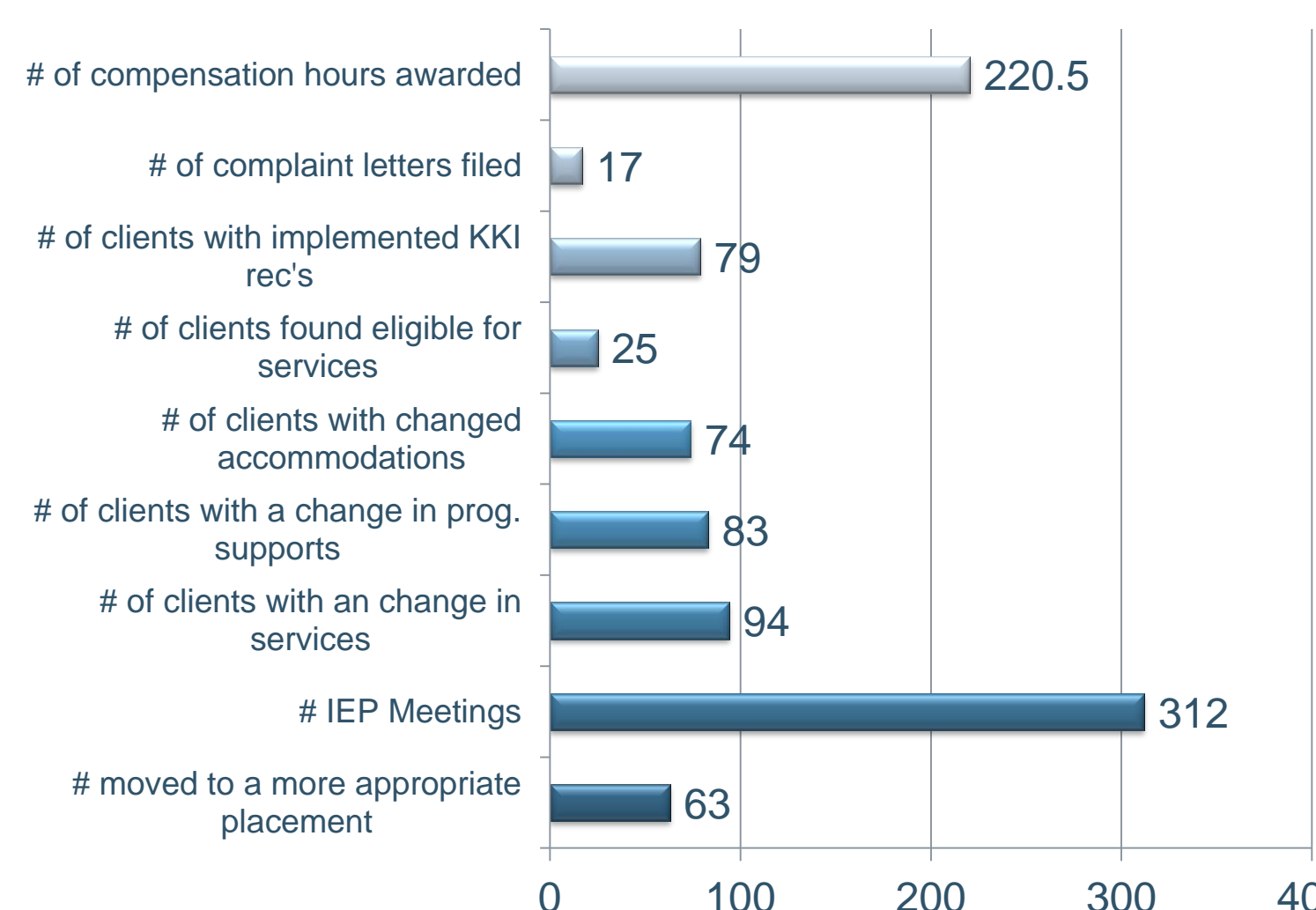
Results Summary



Project HEAL at KKI Types of Services



Total Service Outcomes (2009 - 2013)



Summary

Project HEAL provides comprehensive advocacy and legal services for low and moderate income Maryland parents and caregivers who have children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Project HEAL services assist families so children may receive free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, in accordance with PL 101-476 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and PL 108-446 Amendments to IDEA. Project HEAL's pro bono legal services and interdisciplinary approach represent an actuation of the original intent of IDEA enabling families, regardless of resources, to be able to protect the educational rights of their children.

During the study period, Project HEAL services almost doubled. The majority of families served lived in Baltimore City and Baltimore County and were Black (61.7% to 78.8%). Hispanic/Latino children and families were underrepresented in Project HEAL cases. Accompanying parents to IEPs was the most frequent (32%) advocacy service provided. Advocacy services resulted in almost 20% of referred children moving to more appropriate settings.

Conclusion

- There is an ongoing need for pro bono advocacy services to support families who have children with special educational needs.
- Expansion of advocacy services to all counties in Maryland appears to be warranted.
- Current demographic data from Project HEAL suggest that outreach to Hispanic/Latino population is indicated.
- Project HEAL advocacy services are effective in supporting the appropriate placement of children within the educational system.

References

- Public Law 101-476
- 20 U.S.C §1400
- Daniel R.R. v. State Bd. Of Educ., 874 F.2d 1035, 1050 (5th Cir. 1989)