

Key Findings from
Investing in Our Most Vulnerable:
A Cost Analysis of the ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Teams Project

By E. Michael Foster, PhD and Kimberly L. McCombs-Thornton, PhD

- Good economic analysis starts with determining the true costs of the program. This study identifies the costs of the Court Teams initiative from the societal perspective. We calculate an average direct cost of \$10,000 per child. These costs are similar to or substantially lower than those found in other early childhood interventions.
- This study demonstrates the ZTT Court Teams' ability to leverage substantial in-kind resources. Data show that the projects yielded a range of \$8,500 to \$18,000 of in-kind costs per child. Moreover, for every dollar grant dollar, ZTT was able to generate another dollar of in-kind support.
- Children in the Court Teams initiative exit foster care significantly faster than the comparison group. Savings generated from their earlier exits are estimated at an average of \$7,300 per child. In other words, reduced costs of foster care placements alone generated from the Court Teams initiative cover two-thirds of the average costs per child.
- This study also shows that ZTT Court Teams cases access more services than the comparison group. In particular, Court Teams children were significantly more likely to receive a developmental screening (92% v. 25%), health care visit (94% v. 76%), and dental visit (29% v. 18%). The costs of these services are relatively low, based on Medicaid reimbursement rates across the states.
- The cost calculations in this study lay the foundation for a full economic analysis that could incorporate longer term outcomes. More significant savings would be expected from improved outcomes, especially those in the nearer term (like reduced grade retention). Very modest reductions in these and longer-term outcomes (like high school graduation) could more than offset the costs of the program.