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# Feasibility Study to Assess Medical Student Visits to Developmentally Disabled Adults

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# Feasibility Study to Assess Medical Student Visits to Developmentally Disabled Adults

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## Introduction

The Probate Court of Kalamazoo appoints guardians to minors removed from the custody of their parents and to legally incapacitated or disabled adults. The state mandates that any child under age six placed into a guardianship be visited at least once a year to ensure proper care of the child, but there is no such mandate for the approximately 300 developmentally disabled (DD) adults under the care of the Probate Court. Reports on ways to improve adult guardianship indicate that data obtained from home visits are essential to improving care, because it allows states to identify trends and weaknesses in care<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, recent studies have found that the prevalence of elder abuse is at 10%, with a greater risk in the elderly with functional impairment and those that need assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs)<sup>4</sup>. This elder abuse is linked to increased rates of hospitalizations and poor health outcomes<sup>2,3</sup>. Therefore, it is imperative to monitor the living conditions of DD adults to prevent abuse and ensure a safe living environment.

Previous volunteer programs have been used to visit DD adults, however there is no such program currently in place in Kalamazoo. We partnered with the Kalamazoo Probate Court in order to establish a volunteer program that focused on visits to the DD adult community currently under guardianship. Research into the use of medical students to visit individuals under guardianship revealed that no such program currently exists. Given the lack of data on these programs, we decided to determine the feasibility of annual visits to DD individuals conducted by volunteer medical students.

## Methods

Measured parameters involving medical students include the number of visits conducted to DD adults, time spent reviewing cases, travel time to and from the visitation site, time spent conducting the visit and completing the required court paperwork, and safety. Measured parameters for Probate Court Staff were time spent training students, and preparation time prior to and after visitation.

## Results

An initial 16 hours of training on how to conduct visits to the developmentally disabled (DD) was received. We conducted a total of 6 visits to DD wards over a period of 7 months, from May through November of 2016. During this time we visited 32 DD adults in 12 different homes; 3 individual homes, 7 group homes, and 2 residences. A total of 21 hours was spent completing visits to these DD adults. The majority of time was spent in preparation (29.0%) and time at the facility (32.6%) while a small fraction of time was spent post-visit (Figure 1). The overall average time (range) spent at the facilities was 34 (12-90) minutes. On average a greater amount of time was spent at group homes (40 mins) than at residences (25 mins) or individual homes (26 mins). A self-reported subjective safety rating was recorded for each location visited. The overall average rating (range) was 9.3 (7-10) on a safety scale of 10. The average safety rating for group homes (9.8) was higher than that for individual homes (7.6).

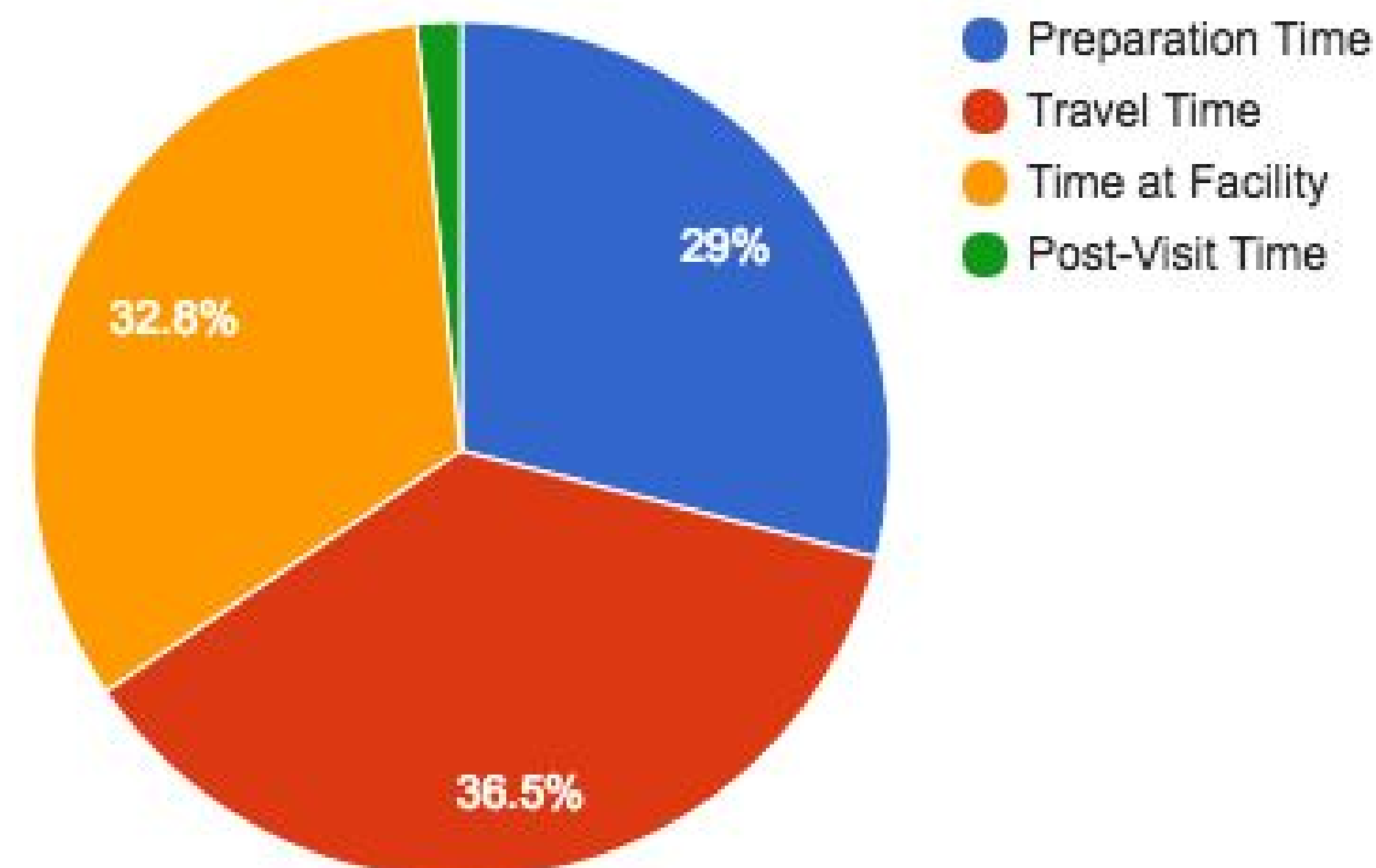


Figure 1: Division of time spent conducting visits to DD adults.

## Discussion

Continuing this program is a valuable addition to Probate Court. As a group we were able to conduct 32 DD visits that would not have otherwise been conducted by the Probate Court. These visits themselves amounted to 21 hours of time that the Probate Court saved by using volunteer medical students.

We have no concerns that this program is unsafe for medical students, with the overall average safety score of 9.3 out of 10 for these visits. Visiting the homes in pairs to ensure that no one visited a home alone helped to maximize student safety. In group homes, this is beneficial because there are usually multiple individuals to visit. However we still advise this method in individual homes to ensure proper safety.

Improvements for future classes of medical students include decreasing the amount of time that Probate Court spends training students and arranging visits. Probate Court spent 73.3 hours preparing cases for us to review. Aspects of the preparation to visit such as calling the DD adult's home could be passed on to the student. Older volunteers conducting the training of new volunteers would also decrease the burden on the court.

In conclusion, we believe that this program provides a valuable service for the Probate Court and the DD adults in the Kalamazoo community. We are hopeful that this feasibility study can pave the way for more in depth studies on the specific impact of using medical students on these visits, including health outcomes and the ability to identify potential abuse in this vulnerable population.

## References

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