



**FLORIDA
INSTITUTE
FOR CHILD
WELFARE**

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2022
2023**

October 1, 2023

Submitted to:

Governor Ron DeSantis

Senate President Kathleen Passidomo

Speaker of the House Paul Renner



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

Mission

The Florida Institute for Child Welfare seeks to use collaborative partnerships, research, policy analysis and training to enhance the sustainability of the child welfare workforce. The overall goal of cultivating a competent, diverse, professional, and effective workforce would positively impact engagement with vulnerable families. To accomplish this mission, the Institute will create a supportive community for child welfare professionals to enhance their skills, plan for their careers and receive ongoing well-being support. The Institute will sponsor and support interdisciplinary research and program evaluation initiatives to inform all professional development content to contribute to a dynamic knowledge base relevant for enhancing Florida's child welfare outcomes. The Institute will collaborate with community agencies across all sectors to translate research into well-being oriented, actionable, and skill-based opportunities.

FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS



PARTNERSHIPS



RESEARCH &
EVALUATION



TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE
& TRAINING



POLICY
ANALYSIS

October 1, 2023

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
PL-05 State Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399



Dear Governor DeSantis,

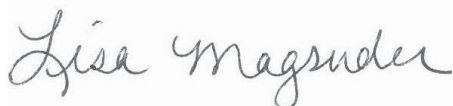
On behalf of the Florida Institute for Child Welfare at Florida State University, I submit the FY2022-2023 Annual Report for your consideration. It has been an incredibly productive year for our Institute and partners. Notably, all initiatives mandated through Chapter No. 2020-152 ([Senate Bill 1326](#) [SB 1326, 2020]) are in initial implementation within our Greater Resilience of the Workforce (GROW) Center. Highlights include statewide piloting of university courses infused with problem-based/case-based learning; graduating the first cohort of workers who participated in an advanced certification in trauma; development of an interactive resource portal for the child welfare workforce; and provision of intensive technical assistance to organizations undertaking change initiatives. In the coming year, we will rely on evaluation findings and key partnerships to expand these efforts.

We continue to produce research focused on serving youth, serving families, and changing systems in child welfare, and offer data-driven recommendations to our partners. We strive to include individuals with lived experience on our teams and as participants in our work, such as the Florida Youth Experiences Study (FL YES) and the Power of Parents study. In the coming year, we look forward to partnering with the legislatively created Task Force on the Monitoring of Children in Out-of-Home Care to interview current and former foster youth about their experiences leaving their placements.

Our partnerships have deepened in the last year as we work toward mutual goals, such as supporting the development and implementation of the Department of Children and Families' new preservice training. We regularly communicate with our legislative staff liaisons through written quarterly progress updates, and as needed throughout the year. We appreciated the opportunity to present findings from our independent life skills evaluation during the 2023 Legislative Session. Importantly, we continue to engage directly with the child welfare workforce through our many initiatives. We were pleased to bring together professionals from across Florida to attend our largest ever annual symposium in May, the theme of which was Transformational Leadership: Leading at All Levels.

The Institute is privileged to serve Florida's children, families, and child welfare professionals through this work. I extend my gratitude for the opportunity.

Sincerely,



Lisa Magruder, Ph.D., MSW
Director
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

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Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Florida Institute for Child Welfare’s (FICW, Institute) vision is to provide nationally acclaimed child welfare research, training resources, and policy and practice implementation guidance with our partner organizations in support of vulnerable children and families in Florida, in particular, those who become involved in the child welfare system. The FICW team seeks to cultivate a competent, diverse, professional, and effective workforce through the GROW Center; produce translational research that can inform improved processes and outcomes in child welfare for children, families, and systems; and share expertise through technical assistance and training opportunities with our partners. The Institute’s growth has resulted in a year of robust program development, research, and evaluation. This executive summary provides an overview of the FICW’s myriad projects between October 2022 and September 2023. Additional details on each of these projects are available in the full 2022-2023 Annual Report.

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The GROW Center

The Greater Resilience of the Workforce (GROW) Center was established in 2021 in response to Chapter No. 2020-152 ([Senate Bill 1326](#) [SB 1326, 2020]), which mandates that the Institute develop career-long resources for child welfare professionals. The vision of the GROW Center is to prepare and support Florida's child welfare workforce from classroom (Academic Innovation) to case work (ALIGN) to competent leadership (the Alliance for Workforce Enhancement). Previous Institute research findings, including those from the longitudinal Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF), points to the importance of building professional capacity within our child welfare workforce to meet the complex needs of vulnerable families, support the onboarding and hiring process, and invest in the ongoing well-being of the workforce.



The GROW Center Advisory Committee (GCAC) supports the visibility and successful execution of the GROW Center programs. The GCAC brings together statewide volunteers who have invaluable expertise and experience to contribute to the transformation of the child welfare workforce in the state of Florida. Its 19 competitively selected members provide informed guidance, professional expertise, stakeholder experience, and advice to GROW Center staff. GROW Center Advisory Committee members bridge the gap between organizations and child welfare professionals while advocating for GROW Center initiatives. Committee members are to promote, uphold, and advocate for the GROW Center's innovation of child welfare curricula, support of child welfare professionals, and transformation of the child welfare workplace throughout Florida. The GCAC held four quarterly meetings to inform members of program updates, discuss plans and upcoming projects, and share announcements. At the culmination of FY2022-2023, the GROW Center filled four committee member vacancies for the upcoming FY2023-2024.

[Read more about the GCAC](#) 



Academic Innovation

To truly professionalize the child welfare workforce, students in social work and other academic programs should be prepared through knowledge gained but should also understand the complexities and realities of working with vulnerable families. The Academic Innovation (AI) program is working to achieve this through a comprehensive approach: creating child welfare exposure opportunities for students, organizing strategic child welfare engagement events to generate interest and create networking opportunities, and implementing robust instructional innovation across disciplines.

Initial efforts are part of Project WAKEUP, which is led by the Florida State University (FSU) College of Social Work (CSW), in collaboration with other university affiliates, per Chapter No. 2020-152, Florida law. The Project includes both curriculum enhancements and an interprofessional course.

CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENTS

In the last year, Project WAKE UP developed and piloted problem-based learning and case-based learning (PBL/CBL) materials, increased faculty capacity through trainings, created an interprofessional course for undergraduate and graduate students, facilitated a learning community of faculty from across the state interested in using Project WAKE UP materials, and started evaluations of these efforts. In addition, Project WAKE UP led the initiative for FSU CSW to become nationally recognized by the Zero Abuse Project as a Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) program. This work laid a solid foundation for Project WAKE UP to build on and roll out these initiatives across the state. Preliminary findings suggest that the leadership team and pilot course instructors perceived the planning stage of implementing PBL/CBL into existing social work courses as challenging but meaningful work. Initial results also suggest positive student outcomes as measured by pre- and post-test assessments.

INTERPROFESSIONAL COURSE

The interprofessional course, *Working with Families: An Interprofessional Perspective*, develops students' skills necessary to working effectively in interprofessional collaborations and on multi-disciplinary teams. Focused on addressing the well-being of children and families, students learn about working with teams that include professionals from various backgrounds. An interprofessional faculty workgroup at FSU developed the course and an immersion event with a trauma-informed child welfare focus for students from varied disciplines that are likely to work with children. The immersion event, *Child Welfare Involvement Collaborative Simulation (CWICS)*, was piloted in March 2023 with participation from 32 students and 14 faculty from 8 disciplines. Formative evaluation feedback on the event was resoundingly positive, and another CWICS event is planned for November 2023.

NEXT STEPS

Currently, the Institute is hiring in-house programmatic and evaluation leads for its Academic Innovation initiatives. These positions will lead the future of Academic Innovation at the FICW, in the short-term focusing on collaborating with the Project WAKEUP team to fully assume responsibility for the redesigned curriculum and plan for sustainability and statewide dissemination. The FICW plans to continue to build capacity for this work through training and asset development for faculty, conducting an exploratory study on students' perspectives of and interest in a child welfare career, and developing a career mapping resource for prospective and current workers to better understand potential career pathways in the field.

[Read more about Academic Innovation](#) 



ALIGN (Advance, Learn, Innovate, Grow, and Network) serves as a learning community for child welfare professionals with the goal of providing career-long professional development opportunities that will include coaching, mentoring, and avenues for specialization and certification. In collaboration with the DCF, the Institute is creating a clear path for professional development and credentialing and for child welfare professionals to receive supplemental support in their ongoing work. ALIGN is a learning community that offers holistic support for child welfare professionals and advancement opportunities throughout their career. Child welfare professionals who join the community will have access to training and onboarding enhancement activities, opportunities for specialization through advanced certification courses, and ongoing mentorship and coaching. When fully realized, the ALIGN community will offer myriad specialty areas for the child welfare professional to take courses, learn about relevant issues, and gain experience in problem-solving to become more confident in their approach and feel supported throughout their learning pathway. Training offered through this platform will supplement the professional's ongoing certification and career and leadership development.

ALIGN LEARNING PROJECTS

This year, ALIGN launched its first Advanced Certification for the Workforce—*STARS: Strength, Trauma, and Resilience Studies*. This advanced certification includes 12-18 hours of self-paced, online course content with two virtual, synchronous sessions with a university faculty member to practice and reinforce learned skills. Learners had additional opportunities to connect with peers and a coach. Nearly all (30 of 31) enrolled learners, representing 15 of the 20 circuits and 11 of the 19 child welfare organizations, completed the certification. Initial evaluation indicated promising findings. Although not statistically significant, average scores on self-efficacy, personal resilience, and attitudes that were consistent with trauma-informed care increased, and burnout scores decreased.

Statistically significant increases in compassion satisfaction and decreases in intention to leave were observed. Currently, STARS is going through the course management process based on feedback from the formative evaluation. Cohort two is anticipated to launch February 2024.

Two additional Advanced Certifications are being finalized for launch in the upcoming year: 1) *Support of Substance Use (SOS) Interventions in Family Systems* and 2) *Strategies for Addressing Family Violence and Enhancing Resilience (SAFER)*.

In addition to the lengthier Advanced Certifications, the Institute worked with partners to develop shorter, on-demand learning tracks. The first learning track, *Nonviolent Communication (NVC)*, sometimes referred to as compassionate communication, offers a powerful tool for positive social change. According to its creator, psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, NVC is effective in relationships among families, colleagues, and in conflicts of any nature as it encourages empathic communication. For child welfare professionals, compassion and empathy are cornerstones to building trust among families, as well as within interprofessional relationships. There are two learning track foci, one for child welfare professionals and another for group home staff members/foster parents. The nonviolent communication learning track was released on July 31, 2023. As of mid-September, 14 learners enrolled in the learning track. The learning track will be reviewed for course management at six months. Evaluation of learning outcomes is included in the learning track.

Additional learning tracks planned for release in the coming year include *Infant Mental Health; Training for Harnessing and Integrating Neurodiversity Knowledge (THINK)*; and *Support of Substance Use Interventions Special Topics*, which will focus on opioids, methamphetamine, and alcohol and serve as either a pre-requisite or enhancement to the SOS Interventions Advanced Certification.

MYALIGN

MyALIGN, a customized digital platform for the child welfare professional, aims to provide support by leveraging technology to create streamlined access to resources, establishing a networking and coaching community, and providing real-time data on worker well-being. It is a multi-faceted software as a service (SaaS) mobile-app and web-based cloud solution. This centralized and individualized hub will house career-long learning opportunities and holistic ongoing support for college students, recently trained personnel, trainers, and middle and upper management positions working in child welfare agencies. The goal of MyALIGN is to offer the child welfare professional community opportunities to easily access networking and support, take courses that supplement their ongoing career development, learn about relevant issues, enhance well-being, and gain experience in problem solving to feel both more confident in their work and supported throughout their learning pathway and career progression.

The Institute partnered with eCare Vault to develop the MyALIGN hub and customize workflows to fit the Institute's identified needs, onboard users, and provide ongoing support. eCare Vault's technology is highly configurable and can be customized and deployed to meet a variety of needs and use cases. Between May and July 2023, three small groups of pilot users from the DCF and Northwest Florida Health Network were recruited into MyALIGN. Beta testing will continue through December 2023, and efforts are underway to find an additional pilot site. As the 2024 managed rollout goal approaches, a readiness tool for assessing potential MyALIGN sites is being developed as well as a formalized plan for onboarding and a strategic planning meeting in September will address ongoing needs for the successful management and statewide roll-out of the platform. Finally, marketing materials are also being developed. These include handouts, posters, emails, and MyALIGN branded merchandise for wider recognition. An IRB for the system/user data was submitted and approved in May 2023. Initial data collection started with beta testing groups.

NEXT STEPS

Worker feedback indicated positive perceptions of the FICW's limited coaching offerings. In an effort to expand these efforts thoughtfully and efficiently, a program director of coaching is currently being recruited. This position will work across GROW Center teams to strategize and implement coaching. Initial priority will be given to assisting the MyALIGN team with developing a model and plan for implementing virtual coaching through the platform. Simultaneously, the MyALIGN team is continuing its efforts to develop meaningful resources for the platform. In addition, the Institute is actively exploring topics for the next Advanced Certifications, with significant consideration being given to engagement with clients.

[Read more about ALIGN](#) 



Alliance for Workforce Enhancement

The Alliance for Workforce Enhancement (AWE) program intends to enhance the child welfare workforce through specialized leadership development and adaptive technical assistance. Informed by implementation science and adapted from the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, Florida-based child welfare organizations participate in a three-year initiative, which includes a comprehensive assessment to determine organizational strengths and challenges, co-creation of a plan to address challenges, guided implementation activities, and sustainability planning. These tailored growth opportunities are supported by well-being and resiliency activities and leadership development training. Currently, the AWE is being piloted at two sites: the DCF's Leon County Service Center (LCSC), and the CBC lead agency Partnership for Strong Families (PSF).

The LCSC has been actively engaged in the strategy phase of AWE capacity-building and leadership development efforts. **Based on their assessment findings and their own work experiences, they decided to change the first-year experiences of new investigators.** The LCSC also sent twelve leaders through a 14-month Leadership Academy that is implemented from start to finish by the AWE team. LCSC staff are also offered regular well-being supports.

The Partnership for Strong Families entered their second year as an AWE site. Throughout the past year, they actively engaged in taking the time to understand their assessment findings and configure a strategy phase to guide the planning process. Given their structure, PSF has two teams: one representing the lead agency and the other representing the case management organizations. **Their identified change initiatives are creating a results-oriented accountability culture and cultivating physical and psychological safety within the workplace, respectfully.** PSF is at the beginning of its Leadership Academy process, with their first in-class session scheduled for mid-October 2023.

The AWE formative evaluation team monitored all aspects of AWE implementation thus far and is providing regular reports to the AWE Program Team, including data-informed recommendations for programming.

NEXT STEPS

Through spring 2024, the AWE Team will be finalizing the application and onboarding process for potential new sites. The AWE Team will then meet with interested parties to discuss the onboarding of additional sites in 2024. The team will continue to utilize formative evaluation findings to inform programmatic changes as needed.

[Read more about AWE](#) 

Research and Evaluation

As part of its establishing statute, the Institute is required to maintain a program of research that contributes to scientific knowledge related to child safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. To achieve this, the Institute has built a research agenda around three overarching areas—Serving Youth, Serving Families, and Changing Systems—in addition to responding to singular research and evaluation mandates as well as evaluations of each of our major GROW Center programs.

The research team has expanded in the last year to include in-house faculty who have expertise and agility to respond to emergent research needs as indicated by our partners, including the Florida Legislature. Still, the FICW relies on its mandated Affiliate Network to contribute ideas and carry out research as needed. As of August 2023, the Affiliate Network is comprised of 37 members, representing 13 universities and 5 organizations. Quarterly conference calls were held with the affiliates to provide updates on legislative news, Institute funded research projects, Institute programming, and the exponential growth of the Institute. In addition, the conference calls serve as a platform for affiliates to present their current projects, discuss future plans, and request, if needed, support from other affiliates.

Legislative Mandates

SENATE BILL 80 SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES: YOUTH OUTCOMES

Co-Principal Investigators: Hyunji Lee, Ph.D., MSW, and Kasey Longley, Ph.D.,
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Status: Complete

In October 2022, the Institute submitted the SB80 (2021) Permanency Analyses report.¹ Following submission of the report, the Institute conducted two supplementary analyses at the request of House staff. The first analysis focused on establishing prevalence of all exit outcomes of youth in the original sample. Researchers found that, within two years of entering care, over two-thirds (68.1%) of Florida youth achieved permanency and that, though it may take more time, permanency (i.e., reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship) is the most common outcome. Reunification is the most common outcome within the first two years after entry into care. Approximately one-quarter of youth (26.5%) experience termination of parental rights (TPR), and those who did had a higher prevalence of remaining in care than

those youth who did not experience TPR. Generally, these findings are similar to national findings². With limitations of the study in mind, the researchers recommend following national recommendations from the Children’s Bureau, including prioritizing 1) increasing parental supports for those with very young children, and 2) improving relational permanency efforts for older youth.

The researchers also examined predictors of foster care exit for both youth who achieved permanency and those who experienced TPR. Findings provide a more nuanced understanding of youth outcomes. For example, among those who achieved permanency, youth entering care at older ages were less likely to achieve adoption and more likely to exit to guardianship, as opposed to reunification. Among youth who experienced the TPR of one parent, children removed due to parental substance abuse were more likely to be adopted and less likely to end up in guardianship, in contrast to reunification. With limitations of the study in mind, the researchers recommend prioritizing interventions for parents who have substance use disorders and continuing to explore kinship placements for youth who experience removal.

[Read more](#) 

1 Lee, Longley, & Magruder, 2022

2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth, and Families [HHS], 2021

SB 204: TASK FORCE ON THE MONITORING OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Principal Investigator: Katie Ropes Berry, Ph.D., MSW, Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Status: Active – Planning

In June 2023, SB 204 “Task Force on the Monitoring of Children in Out-of-Home Care” was passed into law in Florida. This legislation created a task force composed of a range of child welfare and law enforcement stakeholders across the state to identify and address the causes for children going missing from Florida’s out-of-home care system. As mandated in this legislation, the Institute will assist the task force in accomplishing its goals in two primary ways. First, the Institute will “conduct focus groups or individual interviews with children in out-of-home care and young adults who have aged out of the foster care system to assist the task force in fulfilling its duties.” Focus groups and interviews will be conducted and analyzed in fall 2023 and spring 2024. A final report summarizing the findings will be submitted to the task force by April 1, 2024. Second, the Institute will collaborate with the task force to “identify best practices used in other states for monitoring the location of children in out-of-home care who go missing, and evaluating whether such practices should be adopted in this state.” This collaboration will be ongoing throughout the course of the task force’s work, which will be completed by October 1, 2024. The project lead and the FICW director attended the first Task Force meeting and submitted an initial plan for member review in September 2023.

[Read more](#) 

Serving Youth

The following summary provides a brief overview of the Institute’s recent and current youth-oriented research. Additional details and findings, where available, are included in the full annual report.

FLORIDA YOUTH EXPERIENCES STUDY (FL YES)

Principal Investigator: Martie Gillen, Ph.D., University of Florida

Status: Active – Recruitment

A first-of-its-kind in Florida, the longitudinal FL YES study will follow up to 325 youth for 5 years. Youth will be enrolled prior to their transition from care and participate in annual interviews and quarterly engagement surveys during their transition to adulthood. Dr. Gillen received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and will begin participant recruitment and enrollment following finalization of agreements with the DCF.

[Read more](#) 

TRAUMA TREATMENT FOR YOUTH RESIDING IN RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT

Co-Principal Investigators: Tanya Renn, Ph.D., Florida State University; Taylor Dowdy-Hazlett, Ph.D., University of Kentucky

Status: Active – Recruitment and Intervention

This study aims to build on the supporting evidence of the delivery of an adapted version of the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) and establish the efficacy of adapted CBITS for foster youth and their caregivers. CBITS is a group treatment modality delivered in the school setting that aims to assist children in the social, emotional, and cognitive domains, to in turn impact substance use behaviors and deviant behaviors. Boys Town is the community partner in this study. Drs. Renn and Dowdy-Hazlett received IRB approval and have launched recruitment efforts at both Boys Town sites and received consents for youth.

[Read more](#) 

FOLLOW THE LOVE: STRENGTHENING RELATIONAL PERMANENCY FOR FOSTER YOUTH IN FLORIDA CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

Principal Investigator: Annette Semanchin-Jones, Ph.D., University at Buffalo

Status: Complete

The Selfless Love Foundation, with a team of collaborative partners, launched the Follow the Love–Youth Relational Permanency initiative as an intervention to enhance relational permanency for transition-aged youth. The team experienced recruitment challenges and the project was discontinued. However, the team provided process-related recommendations should this or a similar initiative be launched in the future.

[Read more](#) 

HOPE COURT

Principal Investigator: Melissa Green, Esq., FLITE Center

Status: Active – Planning for Next Phase

Housed within the Fort Lauderdale Independence, Training and Education (FLITE) Center, Helping Older Teens Powerfully Engage (HOPE) Court is a restorative approach to the dependency system for youth aging out of the foster care system without an intact family. Over the past few years, with Nova Southeastern University (NSU) IRB and DCF approval, the NSU research team conducted case study research with cohorts one and two of HOPE Court. The Institute financially supported the evaluation component of this project for cohort two, which is nearing completion. Initial evidence from the first cohort suggests HOPE Court was successful in giving youth aging out of care youth a voice within the dependency system and supporting their needs. Notably, HOPE Court received a \$200,000 non-recurring appropriation in the FY2023-2024 state budget to support its operations. The Institute is developing the contract to support the FLITE Center in continuing evaluation of cohort three.

[Read more](#) 

IT TAKES A VILLAGE: AN EXAMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AMONG TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Principal Investigator: Khalilah Louis Caines, Ph.D., LCSW, University of Central Florida

Status: Complete

This study examined whether county-level risk and protective factors were associated with educational achievement outcomes for transition-age youth in foster care. Secondary data from several government sources (i.e., DCF, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Census Bureau) were obtained from the years 2018-2022, merged, and linked at the county level to create an interdisciplinary data set for analysis by year. While findings from this study found significant associations between some risk factors, these relationships occurred in an unexpected direction. Only two protective factors were found to have significant associations with educational achievement—participation in organized sports and school band. The researcher made several recommendations for future research direction in her final report to the Institute.

[Read more](#) 

Serving Families

The following summary provides a brief overview of the Institute's recent and current families-oriented research. Additional details and findings, where available, are included in the full annual report.

POWER OF PARENTS IN CHILD PROTECTION

Co-Principal Investigators: Melissa Radey, Ph.D., MSSW, MA, and Lenore McWey, Ph.D., Florida State University

Status: Active – Recruitment and Data Collection

The central goal of this study is to understand safety nets, including public and private sources and programs, to inform strategies to provide effective child welfare services and interventions that are responsive to the context of parents' lives. In addition to preliminary focus groups and interviews with key child welfare leaders, the researchers will collect survey and interview data from parents with open, substantiated child welfare cases in urban and rural counties in Florida. The study began in early 2023 and includes an advisory panel of professionals and individuals with lived experience. The parent survey and interview guide were finalized with input from the CBC lead agencies and the advisory board, and data collection began in late summer 2023. Initial respondents are enthusiastic about the study and eager for changes in the child welfare system. All survey participants were interested in an interview.

[Read more](#) 

INCLUSIVE NURTURING THROUGH ELEVATING RELATIONSHIP PROGRAMMING FOR INCARCERATED PARENTS AND COMMUNITY CAREGIVERS (INTER)

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Curley, MSW, Florida State University

Status: Active - Planning

The justice-involved family system is at high-risk for child welfare needs not only due to related pre-existing issues but also the cumulative effect of these risks being magnified by incarceration circumstances. Many children with incarcerated parents reside with relative caregivers. Inclusive Nurturing Through Elevating Relationship (INTER) outcome programming is designed to target the co-parenting alliance of the parent-caregiver relationship to create immediate change for the participants through an eight-week psychoeducation and skills-training intervention. Dr. Curley is piloting the INTER programming in collaboration with the Leon County Correctional Facility. This project commenced in May 2023. Since then, the Principal Investigator worked to refine the recruitment plan and secure IRB approval, as well as hiring the interventionist. Wave one participant enrollment is scheduled to begin this fall.

[Read more](#) 

CONCEPTUALIZING, PLANNING, AND IMPLEMENTING A CO-CONSTRUCTED APPROACH TO JUSTICE-CENTERED CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

Principal Investigator: Morgan Cooley, Ph.D., LCSW, Florida Atlantic University

Status: Active – Nearing Completion

Originally proposed as *A Mixed Methods Evaluation of the Authentic Family Engagement and Strengthening (AFES) Approach*, in October 2022, the researchers provided the Institute an updated proposal due to systemic barriers in successful execution of the original plan. The AFES project was renamed as *Conceptualizing, Planning, and Implementing a Co-constructed Approach to Justice-Centered Child Welfare Practice (JCCWP)*. The final deliverables include a conceptual article on justice-centered child welfare practice, a participatory action qualitative research study, and evidence of submission for future funding. A mini report on cultural competence was submitted in June 2023. A copy of the manuscript submitted for peer-review and a report of the qualitative findings will be submitted in October 2023.

[Read more](#) 

EVALUATION OF KIDS CENTRAL, INC.'S KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

Principal Investigator: Anna Yelick, Ph.D.,
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Status: Active – Planning for Next Phase

Since 2018, the DCF received funding through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to support ongoing kinship efforts throughout the state. The funding allocated for fiscal year 2022-2023 focused on continuing the evaluation efforts of the process and outcome evaluation of Kids Central, Inc.'s Kinship Navigator Program (KNP). The researchers also deployed a client satisfaction survey to caregivers. The Institute submitted a report to the DCF in September 2023 that included a report on the outcome evaluation and two manuscripts submitted for peer-review. As this evaluation is nearing completion, the Institute recommended to the DCF: 1) ongoing data collection through June 2024, so that baseline, case closure, and 6-month follow-up data can be collected on all kinship caregivers; and 2) reports examining the effectiveness of Kids Central, Inc.'s kinship program from baseline to case closure and 6-months post-case closure.

[Read more](#) 

SUPPORTS FOR CAREGIVERS IN STRENGTHENING PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR FOSTER PARENTING

Principal Investigator: Vivian Mills, Ph.D., MSW,
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Status: Active – Recruitment and Data Collection

The primary aims of the current study are to: 1) assess foster parents' needs for support and trainings, 2) explore protective factors at multiple levels that significantly influence foster parents' perceived parenting competence, and 3) provide recommendations for more concrete

strategies for strengthening protective factors that improve competence in parenting and providing care. Particularly, driven by the findings from the Institute's evaluation of independent life skills development, the current study will also examine whether caregivers of youth ages 13 years or older have specific needs for additional trainings and support in this area. The researchers began data collection, with analysis expected to occur in fall 2023.

[Read more](#) 

Changing Systems

The following summary provides a brief overview of the Institute's recent and current systems-oriented research. Additional details and findings, where available, are included in the full annual report.

ANNUAL CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE SURVEY

Principal Investigator: Lauren Herod, MSW, MPA,
Florida State University, Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Status: Active – Recruitment and Data Collection

As indicated in the strategic plan, the Institute established an annual workforce survey to remain empirically attuned to the experiences of the workforce and to promote voices from the field at all levels of practice. This effort is inspired by the Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF) which was conducted between September 2015 and May 2020, and the recognition of the importance of collecting timely and relevant data from those in the field. Resultant findings, in conjunction with other data sources, will inform near-term Institute priorities for the Greater Resilience of the Workforce (GROW) Center. Data are currently being analyzed, with preliminary findings expected to be reported in late October 2023.

[Read more](#) 

SEXUAL SAFETY PROGRAMMING AND EVALUATION FOR YOUTH AND FOSTER FAMILIES IN FLORIDA

Principal Investigator: Morgan Cooley, Ph.D., LCSW, Florida Atlantic University

Status: Active - Planning

The purpose of this project is to examine evidence-based programming and strategies for promoting sexual safety among youth in foster care and evaluate the existence of current sexual safety programming for youth and foster families in the state of Florida. This two-year multi-phase investigation will broadly include three phases of work: 1) a systematic and/or scoping review of (a) evidence-informed and evidenced-based sexual safety programming and strategies for youth in foster care and foster families and (b) youth, caregiver, and child welfare worker perceptions of sexual safety for youth in foster care; 2) a needs assessment of sexual safety programming for youth in the state of Florida; and 3) an agency case study and qualitative case review of an agency with advanced screening and programming options available to youth and foster families. The project commenced in May 2023.

[Read more](#) 

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH OF FORT LAUDERDALE INDEPENDENCE TRAINING & EDUCATION (FLITE) CENTER IN BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

Principal Investigator: Fabio A. Naranjo, Ph.D., MSW, Barry University¹

Status: Complete

This translational research project assessed the Fort Lauderdale Independence Training & Education (FLITE) Center's program model. The investigators employed

¹ Dr. Naranjo is no longer with Barry University, though this work was completed prior to his departure.

a mixed methods research design to assess the FLITE Center's program model. The quantitative data (consisting of service output and client outcomes) was collected by the FLITE Center for each of its six main programs: Education, Housing, Employment, Resources/Navigation, Health/Wellness, and System of Care Coordination. Analyses of both the quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of the successes of the FLITE Center's programmatic model and of the challenges the organization faces administratively. In their final report to the Institute, the researchers offered recommendations for the FLITE Center and larger policy and programmatic implications and considerations.

[Read more](#) 

EMPOWERING CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE: SUPPORTING CHILD WELFARE STUDENT INTERNS AND AGENCY SUPERVISORS THROUGH GROUP SUPERVISION, TUITION SPONSORSHIP, AND STIPEND

Principal Investigator: Courtney Wilson, Ph.D., LCSW, Florida International University

Status: Complete

Turnover among child welfare workers is prevalent and can negatively affect the outcomes of children and families in the child welfare system. Existing interventions to address turnover focus on either supporting prospective child welfare workers in their post-secondary education or changing child welfare agencies through organizational interventions. The Empowering Child Welfare Workforce (ECW) project aimed to increase intention to stay in child welfare workforce through a three-component intervention: 1) tuition sponsorship and stipend for social work student interns in child welfare agencies; 2) manualized bi-weekly group supervision for social work student interns in child welfare agencies; and 3) manualized monthly group supervision for supervisors in child welfare agencies.

The Empowering Child Welfare Workforce project aimed to increase the intention to stay in child welfare for students interning in child welfare; however, students' intention to stay in child welfare did not increase throughout the project's duration. The researchers suggested several reasons for these findings. In light of the study's limitations, including small sample sizes, the researchers made several recommendations to those considering similar initiatives or should the project be replicated in the future.

[Read more](#) 

FLORIDA STUDY OF PROFESSIONALS FOR SAFE FAMILIES

Co-Principal Investigators: Dina Wilke, Ph.D., MSW, and Melissa Radey, Ph.D., MSSW, MA, Florida State University

Status: Active - Nearing Completion

The FSPSF principal investigators continue to perform analyses to inform GROW Center operations, disseminate knowledge relevant to child welfare workforce issues, and work with the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) to disseminate FSPSF data files for public use. NDACAN released Waves One and Two of the FSPSF data in July 2023 and already received licensing requests for use of the data. Waves Three and Four are in review with an anticipated dissemination date of fall 2023. The remaining waves are in the final stages of editing with plans to disseminate by December 2023. The FSPSF researchers currently have projects underway focusing on worker burnout, client violence over time, and self-care impacts on employment outcomes such as psychological distress and work self-efficacy.

[Read more](#) 

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY'S CASEAIM PROGRAM

Principal Investigator: Lauren Stanley, Ph.D., LCSW, Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Status: Active - Nearing Completion

The Children's Home Society of Florida requested support from the Institute to evaluate the effectiveness of CaseAIM's three components on three broad outcomes: case manager care coordination, client engagement, and child outcomes. The evaluators completed a mixed methods evaluation using (a) quantitative data provided by CHS and (b) qualitative interview data collected from case managers using CaseAIM. The mixed methods evaluation considered both areas in which CaseAIM services impacted case manager outcomes (quantitative) and how case managers perceived CaseAIM services to impact their work (qualitative). The evaluation included two overarching research questions: 1) do CaseAIM services improve case manager outcomes, and 2) how do case managers describe the impact of CaseAIM on their work? Preliminary quantitative findings suggest that many factors outside of CaseAIM may contribute to dependency case manager turnover and the number of children's home visits. Qualitative findings underscore the importance of CaseAIM for service delivery. In particular, dependency case managers with experience before and after CaseAIM implementation suggested that CaseAIM increased their efficiency in providing referrals and transport to clients, thus, allowing more time for engagement with children and families. A final report is expected in fall 2023.

[Read more](#) 

EVALUATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD COURTS

Principal Investigator: Katie Ropes Berry, Ph.D.,
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Status: Complete – Support Ongoing

The Institute was approached to help support an updated evaluation using administrative court data on Early Childhood Court (ECC) dependency cases closed between January 1, 2020, and June 29, 2022. Evaluation questions were developed by a group of ECC stakeholders. The evaluation report included many questions addressed in the previous Institute report published in 2020, as well as emergent questions brought forth by the group. Early Childhood Courts appear to provide equitable outcomes and fewer days to case closure. However, this evaluation is limited by the data available. As the team continues to work on improving ECC outcomes, it is important that additive data sources be explored. The researcher provided data-related recommendations to the ECC workgroup. The workgroup then developed a sub-group to continue this evaluation to identify opportunities for improvement in Early Childhood Courts.

[Read more](#) 

YOUNG ADULTS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM

Principal Investigator: Amy Nourie, MS,
University of South Florida

Status: Active – Recruitment and Data Collection

Year one of this study was supported as one of two FICW Dissertation Fellowship Awards for the 2022-2023 academic year. Although the PI initially hoped to conduct interviews with Guardian ad Litem program volunteers and staff, she was unable to do so due to lack of agency support for the project. Following revisions to the dissertation—both in name and plan—the study will now focus solely on the lived experiences of young adults formerly in foster care who were also appointed a Guardian ad Litem. Narrative analysis will be used to understand how the participants construct their own stories and then the PI will reconstruct their stories based on these personal experiences. The current working title for this study is Aged Out: The Lived Experiences of Young Adults Who were Formerly in Florida Foster Care and Appointed a Guardian ad Litem. Currently, the Institute is considering an additional year of dissertation funding to support the completion of this work, which is anticipated in spring 2024.

[Read more](#) 

Technical Assistance and Training

The provision of training and technical assistance to state partners is one of the Institute's foundational pillars. Institute staff and our partners serve in a variety of capacities to assist entities as requested or required.

Webinars

The Institute hosted six webinars throughout the past year, which were well attended live and continue to garner views on publicly posted recordings. Evaluations indicate that learning objectives were met for each webinar, most of which also offered continuing education units for child welfare professionals. Webinars included:

- ❖ ***Attending to Trauma During Child Welfare Removal***, presented by Dr. Beverly Jean-Jacques
- ❖ ***Family Engagement in the Dependency System***, presented by Judge Anthony Miller
- ❖ ***Nonviolent Communication, Part 1 – Using Empathy***, presented by Janelle King and A'Miracle Smith
- ❖ ***Nonviolent Communication, Part 2 – Using Expression***, presented by Janelle King and A'Miracle Smith
- ❖ ***The Importance of Mentoring, Safety, and Boundaries with Child Welfare Professionals***, presented by the Stoops Center for Communities, Families, and Children
- ❖ ***Support of Substance Use Interventions: Debuting a New Approach to Best Practices with Families***, presented by Jennifer Luther and Jane Dwyer Lee

[Read more](#) 

Technical Assistance | Department of Children and Families

THE ACADEMY

The Institute supports the Department's preservice overhaul through the participation in workgroups, the procurement of virtual reality software and equipment for CBC lead agency and Department training purposes, curriculum alignment, and training. This assistance has primarily included exploration and implementation support, including evaluation of VR in preservice component pilots. In addition, the GROW Center supports the Department in the statewide implementation of customized simulation training, content development, and evaluation of the preservice training overhaul. The GROW Center continues to work collaboratively with the Department to identify areas of opportunity for the development of new supportive learning tracks specifically designed for child welfare professionals.

The Institute plans to contract with affiliates Drs. Morgan Cooley (Florida Atlantic University) and April Steen (Warner University) to lead the development of an evaluation plan for the Academy, including specific attention to the virtual reality and simulation components noted below. Following receipt of an evaluation plan in November 2023, the Institute will contract with the proposed lead researcher to execute the evaluation. At the time of this writing, the Department indicated the first group of workers will participate in The Academy in January 2023, which will coincide with commencement of the evaluation.

[Read more](#) 

HUMAN TRAFFICKING SCREENING TOOL

The Institute continues to support research on human trafficking screening. Following multiple meetings with the Department, including one with Secretary Harris, the Institute agreed to continue to support the validation attempts of the Department's human trafficking screening tool (HTST) and identify or develop a short form tool that can be used as a screener for all youth ages ten and older. The Institute contracted with Dr. Joan Reid, Associate Professor of Criminology and Director of the USF Trafficking in Persons Risk to Resilience Research Lab, to lead the next phase of this work. In September 2023, Dr. Reid authored a report for the DCF that reviewed 40 existing tools. Currently, Dr. Reid is in a planning period, where she is establishing a regular meeting cadence with relevant DCF representatives to ensure collaborative progress toward meeting the Department's needs regarding HTST validation. She is developing a research proposal for the next validation attempt of the tools, to include plans for both the HTST and short-form tool. Following receipt of an acceptable proposal, the FICW can execute a second contract with Dr. Reid's team to carry out the plan.

[Read more](#) 

Workgroups

Institute staff serve on several work groups, including:

- ❖ **DCF Preservice Redesign/The Academy:** Associate Director of Professional Development Kristina Finch sits on both the communication and implementation sub-group meetings, while Director Lisa Magruder sat on the evaluation sub-group. Currently, affiliates Drs. Morgan Cooley (Florida Atlantic University) and April Steen (Warner University) are sitting on evaluation sub-group meetings as they prepare the preservice evaluation plan.
- ❖ **State Interagency Workgroup:** Associate Director for Administration Marianna Tutwiler continues to sit on the Statewide Interagency Workgroup and attends the meetings monthly. This Workgroup reports to the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet and operates under the Cabinet Interagency Agreement to Coordinate Services for Children Served by More Than One Agency.
- ❖ **Critical Incident Rapid Response Team:** The Director of the Institute continues to serve on the Critical Incident Rapid Response Team (CIRRT) Advisory Committee and attends quarterly meetings. Since assuming the role of the FICW Director, Dr. Magruder sat in on two CIRRT meetings.
- ❖ **Early Childhood Court:** An Early Childhood Court (ECC) task group was formed in July 2023 to strategize ways to improve and evaluate time to permanency for child cases in ECCs. Research faculty Dr. Katie Ropes Berry serves as a member of this group, on behalf of the FICW, to provide research and evaluation support.

[Read more](#) 

Communications and Dissemination

The Institute's communications team is tasked with disseminating information to our various networks on topics and opportunities related to the child welfare workforce, working with families, and youth in care. Clear and effective communication is essential to the Institute's mission and the communications staff collaborates with all the Institute's programs and teams to support and promote Institute initiatives. With the Institute's recent growth, the communications team also grew to meet the increasing needs. Activities such as paid marketing, exploring additional opportunities for brand development, and continuing expansion of the Institute's website are advancements to existing responsibilities, while assisting in resource development and content creation to be used by frontline professionals in the major initiatives under the ALIGN program—both in the Advanced Certification courses and the MyALIGN platform—were new additions to the team's responsibilities.

Email Campaigns

The Institute added 377 new subscribers to its general mailing list in the past year and increased its average email open rate by three percent. The team continued to send out the Institute's Monthly Matters, an e-newsletter that communicates the monthly theme or topic of awareness in the child welfare system and offers relevant resources as well as updates from the Institute, our programs, and partners. The team transitioned away from the quarterly Institute Insights and instead posts more frequently to its website and social media pages. Lastly, the Program Director of Research Administration continues to send the monthly Affiliate Advisor to our statewide affiliate network to streamline communication about opportunities, FICW updates, and other pertinent news for that group.

Publications and Presentations

To translate information generated by in-house research, as well as to provide in-depth details about the Institute's initiatives and other resources, the communications

team regularly publishes a variety of documents, such as reports, executive summaries, handouts, briefs, one-pagers, graphics, and news stories. In addition, FICW staff and affiliates remain active in their dissemination efforts. Between October 2022 and September 2023, staff and affiliates gave 15 invited or peer-refereed conference presentations and published 9 peer-reviewed journal articles based on FICW-conducted or -funded work.

Social Media

Over the last year, the Institute's social media presence has been consistent on major social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn). These platforms serve as a channel to share our resources (such as podcast, research reports, newsletters); communicate the Institute's activities (events, webinars, milestones); engage the child welfare workforce and leadership; and build a reputable presence among the child welfare professionals in Florida and nationally. There was growth on all the FICW social media platforms, most notably on LinkedIn, which is becoming the most reliable way to directly contact the child welfare workforce.

Marketing

In summer 2023, the Institute began integrating paid marketing strategies to assist in expanding reach to Florida's frontline workers. This audience is difficult to meaningfully contact through organic approaches, so to ensure successful marketing and recruitment for the GROW Center programs (specifically, ALIGN initiatives), the communications team began using targeted ads on LinkedIn and Facebook. The communications team ran two paid campaigns for the SOS Interventions Advanced Certification and the SAFER Advanced Certification. Based on the data, the campaigns had a positive impact on recruitment, resulting in 30 enrolled learners for the SOS Interventions Advanced Certification. The paid ads increased reach to the workforce and helped position the Institute as a credible resource portal in Florida.

Podcast

This year, the Institute's Child Welfare podcast premiered its sixth season, *Elevating Lived Experience: Co-Creating Knowledge through Partnership in Child Welfare Research*. This season explores how child welfare researchers can incorporate the voices of those with lived experience. This season was hosted by then Associate Director of Research and now Institute Director, Dr. Lisa Magruder, making it uniquely representative of the Institute's "voice." The season's episodes provided an in-depth look at five of the Institute's research projects, with one episode focusing on the ethics and best practices of utilizing lived expertise in child welfare research. Guests include child welfare researchers, Institute affiliates, and study participants, all of whom gave a unique perspective of their involvement in research; they brought the data to life through recounting firsthand experience. Planning for season seven is underway, set to launch in winter 2024.

Video

Over the past year, the communications team began utilizing video in different ways, focusing efforts on creating videos as a more engaging form of marketing, to be used on social media, and as practical resources for the various ALIGN platforms. The communications team hosts the majority of our video content on our YouTube channel, but recently created a Vimeo account where they post content related to the ALIGN initiatives (i.e., marketing videos for Advanced Certifications). Moving forward, the communications team plans to utilize Vimeo as the video platform for any content embedded in the AdCerts or Learning on Demand courses.

Branding

As the Institute's mission and programs have expanded, the communications team has established separate brand identities, beyond our main identity and that of Florida State University, to create program awareness and

recognition across our distinct audiences in Florida and across the field of child welfare. Each brand identity is intentionally crafted through a process of first conducting research and market analysis, brainstorming and ideation using data-informed strategy, developing concepts for stakeholder review and assessment, and packaging guidelines and finalized concepts for publication and use.

Our branding efforts seek to build trust, support engagement, and facilitate promotion of our initiatives with partners and other networks. By strategically developing custom branded materials, while still maintaining cohesion and connection to our main brand identity, the Institute hopes to amplify the impact and memorability of our collective work.

The use of branding outlines and demonstrates a distinct identity and voice for the organization and supports our ability to create clarity and consistency across communications while resonating with target audiences. Brand guidelines include both visual and voice elements to represent the values of the organization as a whole. These guidelines serve to unify designers, writers, other team members, and partners in upholding the Institute's values and reflecting the standard of communication for the organization.

In September 2023, the Institute hired a Creative Director to oversee continued branding efforts, including in-house design and project logos.

Website

The Institute's website went through a redesign process with the Florida Center for Interactive Media that culminated in an improved site that launched in January 2023. This multi-year process resulted in a more user-friendly experience that enhances the Institute's mission, vision, and resources. The new website was built from the ground up and features an improved organizational system to promote ease of finding information, a resource library, and extensive use of graphic and interactive elements. Website edits will be ongoing.

Events

2023 SYMPOSIUM I TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: LEADING AT ALL LEVELS

This year's annual symposium was held on May 2 and 3, 2023 in Tallahassee. Our largest attended symposium to date brought 200 child welfare professionals from around the state to learn about transformational leadership and network with experts. Workshops were geared toward current and emerging leaders and participants engaged in interactive sessions on topics that included passion-driven leadership, diversity in leadership, creating a culture of learning and growth, and skill-building for transformational change. Twenty-one presenters facilitated eight workshops and a panel over the course of two days. These presenters included Institute staff and affiliates, DCF leadership, and state and national experts.

AFFILIATE AND GCAC MEETING

The Institute's fourth quarterly affiliate meeting is an annual in-person meeting, with the objective of creating dialogue, identifying gaps in research, disseminating research findings, and proposing future research priorities in areas mutually agreed upon by the affiliates. This year's annual meeting was held in Tallahassee in May 2023, and for the first time, was a joint meeting with the GROW Center Advisory Committee (GCAC). Affiliates and GCAC members participated in an open forum with the Institute's Director and discussed the importance of connecting community organizations with university partners. The discussions led to the formal announcement of the Community-University Partnership (CUP) Award. The meeting concluded with presentations from the Project WAKEUP and FL YES teams, as well as an open mic for any Affiliate or GCAC member to share news with the groups.

STAFF RETREATS

The Institute held its first annual staff retreat in October 2022, where local and remote employees gathered to focus on team building, as well as discuss the Institute's 2023-2028 strategic plan and the upcoming Director transition. As a service project, staff volunteers aided the Wakulla Environmental Institute, the host location, with gardening tasks and indoor organization duties.

The Institute's second annual staff retreat was moved up this year to August 2023 and held at the Tallahassee Community College Center for Innovation. This year's theme was "Pause, Breathe, Collaborate, and Flourish." Staff explored their personal and team strengths through the Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment, discussed organizational well-being and supporting employee wellness, as well as engaged in team-building activities. As part of the retreat activities, the Institute collected donations and supplies for Capital City Youth Services.

[Read more](#) 

Administration

Staffing

At the time of the FY2021-2022 Annual Report, the Institute employed 20 full-time and 17 part-time staff. Since October 2022, an additional six full-time and three part-time staff were hired. For Administration, two full-time positions were hired in May 2023: a business manager and the vacant administrative specialist position. To disseminate the additional research findings, expand our social media outreach, and create branding for the GROW Center initiatives and marketing activities, three full-time media specialists were hired to write, oversee all social media activities, create graphics, and format documents. For Research, two new faculty assistant directors were hired to oversee research and evaluation related to professional development and well-being programs (e.g., ALIGN) and organizational development (e.g., AWE), with a third assistant director currently being sought for work related to academic innovation. The Professional Development team now has ten full-time and two part-time staff to ensure that the GROW Center programs are fully developed and implemented and to seek out new innovations. Institute leadership continues to monitor personnel needs and works closely with the Florida State University Human Resources Department to ensure adequate staffing to meet our goals.

Importantly, in April 2023, the Institute experienced a transition in leadership, with former Associate Director of Research Dr. Lisa Magruder assuming the position of FICW Director following a nationwide search. Dr. Magruder continues to serve as interim Associate Director of Research, with a search for that position expected to begin in Fall 2023. The Institute is grateful to former Director Dr. Jessica Pryce for her leadership over the past six years.

Financial Summary

The Institute began the 2022-2023 fiscal year with a budget of \$10,756,081. In September 2023, the approved carry forward monies (\$5,219,884) were applied to the budget for a total of \$15,975,965. Over \$8.5 million was spent during the fiscal year; with nearly \$6,324,471.25 being spent on contracts related to research and evaluation and GROW Center programs and initiatives.

The FY2023-2024 operating budget is \$11,058,805. A plan to spend \$6.8 million in carry forward monies was submitted to the Board of Governors in August 2023.

[Read more](#) 

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS



Exploration and Implementation of Recruitment Support

While workforce retention remains a significant challenge, our partners from around the state have indicated the crisis has shifted upstream to one of recruitment. The Institute is aware that many of our partners are already implementing strategies deemed effective by the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (n.d.). Still, there remains a clear need to further develop realistic job previews for students and new workers. Based on the Institute's research and conversations in the field, we recommend that child welfare agencies continue efforts to provide realistic job previews for applicants and suggest that social work and other disciplines can serve as an initial recruitment support by matching students with genuine interest in entering the child welfare field after graduation and offering financial support, when feasible. The Institute is engaging in activities to support recruitment, including research exploring students' perceptions of a career in child welfare and development of a learning lab that can serve both students and workers.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that child welfare agencies continue efforts to provide realistic job previews for applicants and suggest that social work and other disciplines can serve as an initial recruitment support by matching students with genuine interest in entering the child welfare field after graduation and offering financial support, when feasible.



Increased Supports for Parents and Workers Engaging with Parents

Based on permanency analyses conducted this year, Institute researchers recommended prioritizing interventions with parents who have substance use disorders to improve reunification outcomes (Lee, Longley, Magruder, & Posada, 2023). As a complement to the supports parents need, the Institute and its partners are finalizing development of an advanced certification for workers focused on substance use interventions.

The same researchers, in a separate analysis of exit outcomes, found that infants are particularly vulnerable to maltreatment (Longley, Lee, Killian, Posada, & Magruder, 2023) and recommended increasing parental supports for those with very young children, so those parents have the opportunity for reunification, and receive support for strengthening the parent-child relationship. To this end, the Institute continues to support evaluation of Early Childhood Court as an intervention for families with young children who have experienced removal. We are also currently engaged with partners to build a learning track for workers focused on infant mental health.

Despite a known need for these resources, the FICW frequently receives feedback – both through our research (Magruder & Marshall, 2021) and informal conversations – that resources for parents and caregivers are lacking in Florida. Communities might benefit from localized needs assessments to identify both true service gaps and previously unknown or underutilized resources for parents. Currently, the Institute is taking a similar approach with Children’s Home Society to identify available post-adoption non-clinical supports.

The Institute is currently supporting and developing several studies that seek to understand how to better support parents. Further, to support a productive, respectful partnership between worker and parent, the Institute is currently conducting exploration for its next planned advanced certification course, which will focus or include content on parent engagement. This exploration includes the voices of both parents and professionals to ensure representation of multiple perspectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Prioritizing interventions with parents who have substance use disorders.
- ❖ Increasing parental supports for those with very young children.
- ❖ Communities might benefit from localized needs assessments to identify both true service gaps and previously unknown or underutilized resources for parents.



Exploration of Mentorship and Relational Permanence Supports for Youth

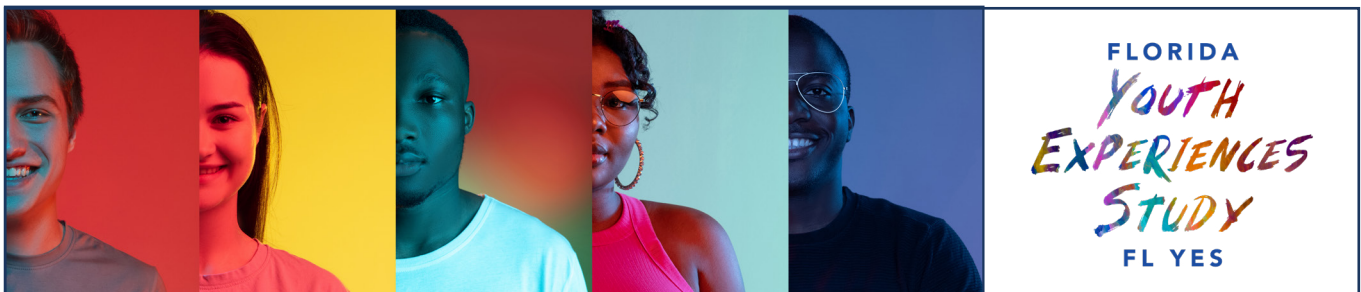
In the Institute’s 2022 report on independent life skills development in Florida (Henson, Lee, Magruder, & Schelbe, 2022), connecting youth to mentors was one area in which caregivers felt particularly challenged in supporting their foster youth. The Institute is currently exploring evidence-based models for this type of mentorship that could be piloted in Florida and recently shared one such program with the Department of Children and Families for their consideration. Also, Hope Florida recently expanded its efforts in partnership with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), connecting families of at-risk youth to mentors. This could help meet the mentorship need for youth who are dually-served by DJJ and the Department of Children and Families.

In addition, the Institute-funded pilot of the Follow the Love initiative recently concluded, which aimed to improve the number and strength of youth’s supportive adult connections. Unfortunately, recruitment into the pilot was low despite initial interest on the part of agencies and workers. The team offered initial recommendations for consideration for future development and implementation of relational permanency initiatives, including to integrate discussions about supportive connections early and widely throughout the system to help make these conversations feel more organic and natural.

The Institute has partnered with affiliate Dr. Martie Gillen (University of Florida) to lead the Florida Youth Experiences Study (FL YES). FL YES is a first of its kind study in the state, where transition-aged youth will be followed for at least five years to better understand their transition to adulthood and identify ways in which supports can be developed or enhanced for them. The study began in summer 2023 and findings will be shared with our partners as they are available.

RECOMMENDATION

Integrate discussions about supportive connections early and widely throughout the system.



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Overall Recommendations

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS



Exploration and Implementation of Recruitment Support

Child welfare workforce efforts have primarily focused on support and retention of existing workers given high turnover rates. While this remains a significant challenge, our partners from around the state have indicated the crisis has shifted upstream to one of recruitment. The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute ([NCWWI], 2022) similarly acknowledged recruitment has gone from challenge to crisis across the U.S.

In July 2023, the Institute partnered with the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) and John Cooper, CEO of Kids Central, Inc., to run a community café on recruitment and retention at the FCC annual conference. During the session, approximately sixty attendees broke out into group discussion to gather workers' perceptions of what traits make exceptional child welfare workers and coworkers and how agencies might improve recruitment and retention efforts. A summary of these discussions was provided to FCC for distribution to their partners. Generally, attendees shared several main insights regarding workers and recruitment:

- ❖ **Ideal workers are empathetic; possess strong skills in communication, documentation, and time management; and set personal-professional boundaries.** Professional background matters less than personal characteristics but workers from disciplines outside of social work can bring unique skillsets and perspectives.
- ❖ **Recent recruitment has been challenging.** Limited professional experience—and sometimes a lack of general professionalism—is present in the applicant pool. Many attendees felt their human resources department did not offer realistic portrayals of the work ahead, resulting in turnover.
- ❖ **To improve the recruitment process, a number of child welfare professionals suggested that both more realistic job previews and inclusion of current frontline workers on hiring committees could make a difference.** Additional suggestions included more shadowing and mentorship opportunities, redirection of candidates to other agency positions if a candidate is skilled but not a fit for the current position, and increased compensation offers.

The Institute is aware that many of our partners are already implementing strategies deemed effective by the NCWWI. For example, the Department of Children and Families is finalizing development of its career ladder. The Florida Coalition for Children received additional legislative funding in 2022 to support compensation increases for workers. The Institute is providing tailored technical assistance through its Alliance for Workforce Enhancement to the Leon County Service Center and Partnership for Strong Families to improve worker experiences and organizational functioning.

Still, there remains a clear need to further develop realistic job previews for students and new workers. **The Institute recommends that child welfare agencies continue efforts to provide realistic job previews for applicants.** This could include, as professionals have suggested, including frontline workers on hiring committees, or otherwise arranging time for applicants to discuss the opportunity with a current worker. In addition, making visible the many job pathways within the organization during the hiring process could help applicants better understand long-term opportunities. The Institute plans to develop a broad child welfare job pathway resource for our audience to complement more localized efforts.

Prior to the job market, meaningful student internship experiences can serve as realistic job previews. Institute affiliate Dr. Courtney Wilson (Florida International University) recently completed a [FICW-funded study](#) regarding social work field placements. Notably, despite students being offered jobs at the conclusion of their internships, they did not accept these offers. Dr. Wilson and colleagues suggested it is possible that there was an initial mismatch between student interest in child welfare and their field placement, as placements are often based on availability. Students did, however, appreciate the stipend offered and felt valued by the field. Although the sample was small and concentrated to one area of Florida, the study suggests that **social work and other disciplines can serve as an initial recruitment support by matching students with genuine interest in entering the child welfare field after graduation and offering financial support, when feasible**. In fall 2023, the Institute will conduct an exploratory study regarding students' perspectives about entering a career in child welfare to identify potential points of intervention.

The FICW leadership team is also currently developing plans for a learning lab at the Institute, which will include space for simulation and virtual reality (VR) activities. The Institute is already supporting these activities in the Department's new preservice experience and recognizes the opportunity to expand the reach of this technology by housing it in a centralized location. Specifically, the learning lab can serve local students from multiple disciplines and pre- and in-service workers by offering realistic job previews in collaboration with our university and community partners. Open house- or job fair-style activities could also be held in conjunction with child welfare employers to recruit from the non-student population. Pending positive outcomes, learning labs could be implemented at other state universities, creating localized and ongoing university-community partnership opportunities to support the emerging and current workforce.

2

Increased Supports for Parents and Workers Engaging with Parents

Data from the Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF) suggest that issues with parents or caregivers are the second-most commonly reported type of difficult case (Henson, Cain, Wilke, & Radey, 2023). This includes parents' struggles with mental health and substance use, as well as hostile behaviors directed toward the worker. Research has established that mental health and substance use are both common contributing factors to child welfare system involvement (e.g., Austin, Lesak, & Shanahan, 2020) and have impacts on child outcomes. For example, in our recent examination of youths' exits from care, researchers found that youth who were removed due to parental substance abuse were more likely to exit to adoption and guardianship compared to reunification (Lee, Longley, Magruder, & Posada, 2023). As such, the researchers recommended **prioritizing interventions with parents who have substance use disorders** to improve reunification outcomes. As a complement to the supports parents need, the Institute and its partners are finalizing development of an [Advanced Certification](#) for workers focused on substance use interventions.

The same researchers, in a separate analysis of exit outcomes, found that infants are particularly vulnerable to maltreatment (Longley, Lee, Killian, Posada, & Magruder, 2023). Given similarities to national findings, and that termination of parental rights can move quickly for this age group, the researchers suggest consideration of relevant recommendations from the Children's Bureau (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2021). This includes **increasing parental supports for those with very young children**, so those parents have the opportunity for reunification, and receive support for strengthening the parent-child relationship. To this end, the Institute continues to support evaluation of [Early Childhood Court](#) as an intervention for families with young children who have experienced removal. We are also currently engaged with partners to build a learning track for workers focused on [infant mental health](#).

Despite a known need for these resources, the FICW frequently receives feedback—both through our research (Magruder & Marshall, 2021) and informal conversations—that resources for parents and caregivers are lacking in Florida. For parents, a lack of providers creates long wait lists, which can delay case plan engagement or completion. Research has shown this concern was exacerbated in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic given system disruptions, such as to visitation (Goldberg, Brodzinsky, & Crozier, 2021). **Communities might benefit from localized needs assessments to identify both true service gaps and previously unknown or underutilized resources for parents.** Currently, the Institute is taking a similar approach with [Children's Home Society](#) to identify available post-adoption non-clinical supports.

The Institute is also funding the [Power of Parents](#) study to better understand the safety nets of child welfare-involved parents, including public and private sources and programs, to inform strategies for effective services and interventions that are responsive to the context of parents' lives. The Institute believes parents deserve this type of tailored support to help them successfully meet the goals of their case plans in a timely manner. We also recognize that child welfare workers and parents often interact in an emotionally challenging context, which can escalate to hostility. To support a productive, respectful partnership between worker and parent, the Institute is currently conducting exploration for its next planned Advanced Certification, which will focus or include content on parent engagement. This exploration includes the voices of both parents and professionals to ensure representation of multiple perspectives.

[Additional upcoming research](#) studies aim to illuminate the needs of specific sub-populations of child welfare-involved parents, including mothers with substance use disorders and fathers.

3

Exploration of Mentorship and Relational Permanence Supports for Youth

In our FY2021-2022 report, the Institute recommended a continued legislative focus on older youth and young adults, to include incorporation of youth voice. In January 2023, the Institute was privileged to present our independent life skills evaluation findings alongside programming presentations by system partners as well as a panel of youth who directly shared their experiences with the Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Senate committee. Further, we recognize that, as a result of the 2022 Legislative Session, legislation was passed that provides increased support to youth, including establishing The Office of the Children’s Ombudsman and requiring youth input on certain written materials to be shared with them (Ch. 2023-248).

In the Institute’s 2022 report on independent life skills development in Florida (Henson, Lee, Magruder, & Schelbe, 2022), connecting youth to mentors was one area in which caregivers felt particularly challenged in supporting their foster youth. The Institute is currently exploring evidence-based models for this type of mentorship that could be piloted in Florida and recently shared one such program with the Department of Children and Families for their consideration. Also, Hope Florida recently expanded its efforts in partnership with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), connecting families of at-risk youth to mentors. This could help meet the mentorship need for youth who are dually-served by DJJ and the Department of Children and Families.

In addition, the Institute-funded pilot of the [Follow the Love](#) initiative recently concluded, which aimed to improve the number and strength of youth’s supportive adult connections. Unfortunately, recruitment into the pilot was low despite initial interest on the part of agencies and workers. Based on limited data, the research team was

able to identify both barriers (e.g., difficulty engaging supportive adults) and facilitators (e.g., prioritizing rapport building, tapping into youth’s unique social networks) to implementation. Anecdotally, participants felt there were benefits to both the youth and agencies who participated. The team offered initial recommendations for consideration for future development and implementation of relational permanency initiatives. One specific recommendation is to **integrate discussions about supportive connections early and widely throughout the system**. Discussions and plans to maintain supportive connections should be integrated throughout all ages and stages of a youth’s involvement in child welfare, and foster care in particular. Discussions around life-long connections and supportive networks, if integrated throughout the system, can help make these conversations feel more organic and natural.

The Institute has partnered with affiliate Dr. Martie Gillen (University of Florida) to lead the [Florida Youth Experiences Study](#) (FL YES). FL YES is a first of its kind study in the state, where transition-aged youth will be followed for at least five years to better understand their transition to adulthood and identify ways in which supports can be developed or enhanced for them. The study began in summer 2023 and findings will be shared with our partners as they are available.

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The GROW Center

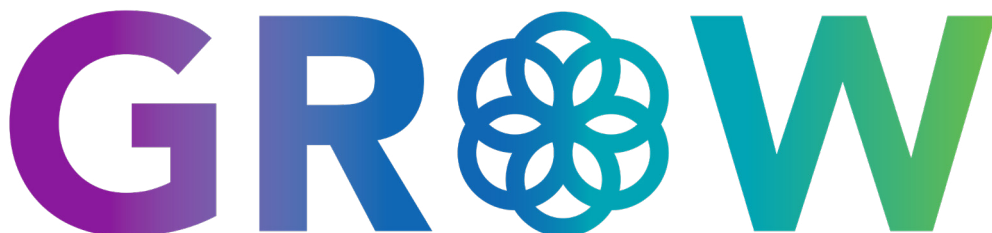
THE GROW CENTER

The [Greater Resilience of the Workforce \(GROW\) Center](#) was established in 2021 in response to Chapter No. 2020-152 ([Senate Bill 1326](#) [SB 1326, 2020]), which mandated that the Institute develop career-long resources for child welfare professionals. The vision of the GROW Center is to prepare and support Florida’s child welfare workforce from classwork ([Academic Innovation](#)) to casework ([ALIGN](#)) to competent leadership (the [Alliance for Workforce Enhancement](#)). Previous Institute research findings, including those from the longitudinal [Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families](#) (FSPSF), points to the importance of building professional capacity within our child welfare workforce to meet the complex needs of vulnerable families, support the onboarding and hiring process, and invest in the ongoing well-being of the workforce.

The following section describes the Institute’s response to these needs by highlighting the effort and activities of each GROW Center program and its advisory committee. It also includes insight into additional measures taken by the GROW Center to support the DCF in their efforts to enhance its preservice training, now known as [The Florida Academy for Child Protection and Family Resilience](#). To this point, the GROW Center expanded its stabilizing initiatives and efforts to not only focus on providing both the Department and community-based care lead agencies’ professional development resources, but also recommendations for innovating recruitment, preparation, and ongoing support.

Resources
GROW Center Website
Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families
Chapter No. 2020-152 (Senate Bill 1326)
Implementation Plan
Logic Model Narrative
GROW Center Video
GROW Center Overview
Academic Innovation Website
ALIGN Website
Alliance for Workforce Enhancement Website

FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE



Greater Resilience Of the Workforce

Preparing and supporting Florida's child welfare workforce from *classroom* to *casework* to *competent leadership*.



ACADEMIC INNOVATION

To truly professionalize the child welfare workforce, students in social work and other academic programs should be prepared through knowledge gained but should also understand the complexities and realities of working with vulnerable families. The [Academic Innovation](#) (AI) program is working to achieve this through a comprehensive approach: creating child welfare exposure opportunities for students, organizing strategic child welfare engagement events to generate interest and create networking opportunities, and implementing robust instructional innovation across disciplines.



Child welfare engagement & exposure events



Networking opportunities



Instructional innovation across disciplines

Changes to the curriculum are the initial focus of the GROW Center’s Academic Innovation agenda and these efforts are led by the Florida State University (FSU) [College of Social Work](#) (CSW) in collaboration with other university affiliates. The FSU CSW was charged to design and implement a curriculum that includes interactive and interdisciplinary approaches and opportunities for students to gain an understanding of real world (client) cases “with a focus on children and families in the state of Florida” and to share the curriculum and implementation strategies with other social work programs throughout the State of Florida (FL S.B. 1326, 2020). This was the impetus to create Project WAKE UP.

Resources
Academic Innovation Website
Academic Innovation Video
Academic Innovation Overview



FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE

Project WAKE UP | Curriculum Enhancements

Summary

In the last year, CSW staff and faculty working on Project WAKE UP developed and piloted problem-based learning and case-based learning (PBL/CBL) materials, increased faculty capacity through trainings, created an interprofessional course for undergraduate and graduate students, facilitated a learning community of faculty from across the state interested in using Project WAKE UP materials, and started evaluations of these efforts. In addition, Project WAKE UP led the initiative for the FSU CSW to become nationally recognized by the Zero Abuse Project as a Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) program. This work laid a solid foundation for Project WAKE UP to build on and roll out these initiatives across the state.

In spring semester 2023, three FSU CSW instructors piloted the integration of PBL/CBL into their courses:

- ❖ **SOW 4341 Social Work Practice with Individuals and Families**
- ❖ **SOW 4650/5656 Child Welfare Practice**
- ❖ **SOW 5308 Social Work Practice** (online)

During the summer 2023 semester, three FSU CSW instructors and one University of South Florida (USF) College of Public Health instructor piloted the integration of PBL/CBL into their courses; The courses were:

- ❖ **SOW 4615/5614 Family Violence**
- ❖ **SOW 4702/5712 Substance Use and Misuse**
- ❖ **SOW 5308 Social Work Practice** (online)
- ❖ **PHC 6550 Child Health and Development** (USF)

The FSU CSW instructor for the SOW 5308 Social Work Practice (online) also taught the course in the fall with the PBL/CBL content.

Instructors who were piloting the courses used various Project WAKE UP cases and content including the videos, written material, and milestones (assignments).

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Major Milestones

- ❖ Finalized the creation of 18 video and written cases with assignments
- ❖ Pilot tested Project WAKE UP materials in seven courses
- ❖ Developed a state-wide learning community to support faculty in using PBL/CBL and adopting Project WAKE UP materials in their classes
- ❖ Trained faculty on the use of case method approach
- ❖ FSU CSW received national recognition from the Zero Abuse Project as an implemented CAST Program



Evaluation

The evaluation of the Project WAKE UP pilot materials includes a formative evaluation and an outcome evaluation. The formative evaluation focuses on understanding 1) the implementation of PBL/CBL materials and 2) what worked and what did not work as intended during the planning and implementation phases of pilot courses.

Data collection for the planning stage of the formative evaluation began in December 2022 and commenced in early February 2023. To examine lessons learned from the planning stage, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with leadership team members ($N = 7$) and pilot course instructors ($N = 3$). Interviews were conducted on Zoom and ranged between 20-110 minutes. Transcripts from the interviews were obtained from the Zoom recording and later edited for clarity. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to examine and synthesize data from the 10 semi-structured interviews. A codebook was created to organize, conceptualize, and operationalize codes and themes that emerged from the interviews.

Preliminary findings suggest that the leadership team and pilot course instructors perceived the planning stage of implementing PBL/CBL into existing social work courses as challenging but meaningful work. An important lesson learned was the importance of clearly conceptualizing and operationalizing the PBL/CBL pedagogies to support the effective application and alignment of new materials into established course objectives. The leadership team and pilot course instructors agreed that timely pedagogical training and a collaborative approach to course planning was critical to the overall success of implementing PBL/CBL into the pilot courses. Findings from this evaluation highlight the importance of adequately utilizing local and state-level experts in child welfare to serve as key informants and implementation champions. Finally, pilot course instructors and leadership team members agreed that efforts to engage faculty and elicit buy-in should begin at the start of the planning stage and remain ongoing. Faculty support was seen as crucial to the success of the implementation of the initial pilot courses as well as the wider statewide dissemination of PBL/CBL by early adopters.

The outcome evaluation includes pre- and post-test data from students. At present, only data from the spring 2023 semester have been analyzed. In January 2023, the student pre-test data for the courses were collected through a Qualtrics survey. After excluding incomplete or duplicate responses, there was an analytic sample of 43 students (81.1% of 53 responses).

Sample characteristics were as follows:

- ❖ **A majority of the students were enrolled in the SOW5308 - Social Work Practice** (online) ($n = 21$, 48.8%) followed by the SOW4341 - Individuals and Families course ($n = 10$, 23.3%).
- ❖ **The average age of all students was 29.7 years** ($SD = 9.51$), with BSW students ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 4.99$, median = 20.0, range of 19 to 35) being significantly younger ($t = 5.20$, $df = 39.53$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.44$) than the MSW students in the sample ($M = 33.42$, $SD = 9.23$, median = 32.0, range of 21 to 57).
- ❖ **A majority of the students reported being White/Caucasian** ($n = 34$, 79.1%).
- ❖ **BSW students all reported less than 12 months of practice experience with 75 percent of these students reporting "little to none"** ($n = 12$). MSW students reported a range of prior social work experience, but the same number of MSW students reported less than 12 months as did at least one year of experience.

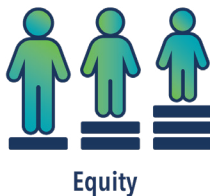
Pre-assessment surveys were completed by 43 students across the classes, and 31 of those completed both the pre- and post-test assessments (72.1%). Of those 31 students, nearly half were from multiple online sections of SOW5308 Social Work Practice ($n = 15$, 48.4%). Students were vastly White ($n = 23$, 74.2%), non-Hispanic ($n = 27$, 87.1%), and identified as female ($n = 29$, 93.5%). On average, students were 29.42 years of age ($SD = 10.22$). Compared to those completing only the pre-test ($n = 8$, 18.6%), those completing both the pre- and post-test assessments were largely similar in demographic characteristics except that for possible differences among the type of social work program in which the student was enrolled. With small sample size and lack of attrition, these differences should be interpreted with caution.

Differences from pre- to post-test assessments were examined to understand the change over the course of the semester for participants in the pilot Project WAKE UP study. Students reported significantly higher total and subscale scores in the Competence and Aptitude in Social Work scale (CASW), each with a large effect size ($d > .80$). A significant increase in each the Revised Study Process Questionnaire Surface Motive ($t = 2.25$, $p = 0.04$, $d = .50$) and Surface Approach subscale ($t = 2.08$, $p = 0.05$, $d = .48$) scores were found with a moderate to strong effect. Students reported significant increase in the social worker and client congruence score ($t = 2.16$, $p = 0.04$, $d = .39$). Lastly, the Jefferson Scale of Empathy Perspective Taking subscale score saw a significant reported increase over the semester with moderate effect size ($t = 3.00$, $p = 0.01$, $d = .54$).

Project WAKE UP | Interprofessional Course

Summary

The interprofessional course, *Working with Families: An Interprofessional Perspective*, develops students' skills necessary to working effectively in interprofessional collaborations and on multidisciplinary teams. Focused on addressing the well-being of children and families, students learn about working with teams that include professionals from various backgrounds including criminology, education, law, medicine, nursing, and social work. The course teaches models of trauma responsive care and effective communication with partners and those who professionals serve. It also focuses on leadership and mediation among teams of professionals and highlights the parallel process. Course content is grounded in equity, with students learning about reducing disparities and disproportionalities. This course uses a PBL/CBL pedagogical approach.



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The interprofessional workgroup, comprised of faculty from seven different academic units at FSU, met regularly to develop an interdisciplinary course and an immersion event with a trauma-informed child welfare focus for students from varied disciplines that are likely to work with children. The workgroup includes faculty from the following FSU academic units: medicine, nursing, early childhood education, communication sciences and disorders, psychology, criminology, law, and social work.

The workgroup finalized a syllabus for the interprofessional course which was unanimously approved by FSU CSW faculty at their February 2023 faculty meeting to be taught as a special topics course in fall semester 2023. The course is currently active.

The interprofessional workgroup also planned the Child Welfare Involvement Collaborative Simulation (CWICS) immersion event. The CWICS event was held March 31, 2023 at the FSU Warren Building, where a studio apartment space and trailer were staged as areas for a [FORECAST](#) simulation that used trained facilitators and standardized patients. Thirty-two students and 14 faculty participated from eight different disciplines, including communications, criminology, education, law, medicine, nursing, psychology, and social work.



CHILD WELFARE IMMERSIVE COLLABORATIVE SIMULATIONS



Communications



Criminology



Education



Law



Medicine



Nursing



Psychology



Social Work

Major Milestones

- ❖ Developed a syllabus and content for an interprofessional course
- ❖ Hosted an immersion event: Child Welfare Involvement Collaborative Simulation (CWICS)
- ❖ Developed content for a follow-up CWICS event and facilitated the new simulation
- ❖ Received feedback from various interested parties for the interprofessional course
- ❖ Received approval from FSU CSW for the interprofessional course syllabus to be taught as a special topics course in the fall 2023 semester

Evaluation

The evaluation of the interprofessional course and immersion event is a formative evaluation, wherein information is collected about the process. Feedback was solicited by those involved in the CWICS event and those who wish to review the interprofessional course. The feedback received from students and faculty who participated in the CWICS event was overwhelmingly positive.

The interprofessional workgroup held three listening sessions to receive feedback from various interested parties about the content for the interprofessional course. There was a total of 26 participants from community partners across the state, including those from Child Advocacy Studies (CAST), Florida Association for Infant Mental Health (FAIMH), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Health (DOH), sheriffs' offices, other Florida universities, FSU students, and FSU faculty.

There was representation across gender, age, ethnicity, child welfare experience, and professional background. There were also representatives with lived experience in the system, both as youth and parents. There were an additional two people who provided written feedback but did not attend a listening session. Including all of the interprofessional workgroup, Project WAKE UP leadership, and reviewers, 43 people have given input on this course. The feedback was resoundingly positive. Of particular note was the praise for the active learning, interprofessional collaboration, and real-world application.

AI Planned Exploration and Activities

As previously noted, Project WAKE UP has been the primary pilot project in the GROW Center's Academic Innovation sector. The Institute is planning several activities in the coming year to support the growth of the existing work and plan for new programs.



Building capacity through training and asset development.

In August, Dr. Terry Wolfer trained additional FSU CSW faculty, early statewide adopters, and interprofessional workgroup members to use the case method approach. Dr. Wolfer will also train a small group of faculty in the case writing method so new real-life cases can be integrated into courses. In the fall of 2023, Project WAKE UP will create a toolkit to assist faculty in integrating PBL/CBL content into courses. Project WAKE UP will develop five cases in fall 2023. Various learning communities and workgroups will create toolkits and content in fall 2023 to disseminate information about PBL/CBL across the state.



Ensuring sustainability and statewide dissemination.

In fall 2023, GROW Center leadership will work with Project WAKE UP leadership to develop a transition plan that transfers oversight and management from the FSU CSW to the GROW Center. The goal is to ensure that the GROW Center is properly equipped to provide ongoing and robust technical assistance to other social work programs across the state on the assets developed and knowledge gained through the initial work by the CSW. The Institute intends to hire both a programmatic and evaluation project lead for academic innovation initiatives, including Project WAKE UP.



Exploring students' perspectives of and interest in a child welfare career.

In fall 2023, FICW postdoctoral scholar Dr. Melissa Murphy will lead an exploratory study of students' perspectives of and interests in a career in child welfare. The goal of the study is to understand areas of strength and opportunity for engaging students from multiple disciplines in a pathway to a career in child welfare. Findings will be used to inform upcoming Academic Innovation programming. Dr. Murphy is a co-investigator on Project WAKE UP and will collaborate with that team for data collection, if feasible, to reduce student burden.



Develop a career mapping resource.

Although there are many nuanced professional positions in the child welfare field, there are no quick reference guides to the various pathways one might take in the field in a state as large and complex as Florida. The Institute's communications team will work collaboratively with Institute staff, affiliates, GCAC members, and community partners to develop a visual map of careers in the field that can help students or those otherwise considering a career in child welfare to see possible pathways that align with their interests and goals.

ALIGN

ALIGN (Advance, Learn, Innovate, Grow, and Network) serves as a learning community for child welfare professionals with the goal of providing career-long professional development opportunities that will include coaching, mentoring, and avenues for specialization and certification. In collaboration with the DCF, the Institute is creating a clear path for professional development and credentialing and for child welfare professionals to receive supplemental support in their ongoing work.

Child welfare professionals who join the community will have access to training and onboarding enhancement activities, opportunities for specialization through advanced certification courses, and ongoing mentorship and coaching. When fully realized, ALIGN will offer myriad specialty areas for the child welfare professional to take courses, learn about relevant issues, and gain experience in problem-solving to become more confident in their approach and feel supported throughout their learning pathway. In addition, the ALIGN learning community integrates technological innovations—like the MyALIGN platform—that aim to streamline the workforce’s access to skill-building resources and well-being tools. Training offered through this platform will supplement professionals’ ongoing certification and career and leadership development.

Resources
ALIGN Website
ALIGN Video
ALIGN Overview



FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE
ALIGN
 Advance • Learn • Innovate • Grow • Network



ALIGN Learning Projects

Major Milestones

- ❖ First cohort graduates from the **Strength, Trauma, and Resilience Studies Advanced Certification**
- ❖ Launch of the **Support of Substance Use Interventions in Family Systems Advanced Certification** and first cohort begins
- ❖ Launch of the first learning track, **Nonviolent Communication**
- ❖ Launch of the **Strategies for Addressing Family Violence and Enhancing Resilience Advanced Certification** and first cohort application period opens

Advanced Certifications

The advanced certification (AdCert) courses facilitate the implementation of a cohesive and progressive path of professional development that meaningfully connects to preservice training. The courses provide an engaging trauma-informed, university-led, evidence-based training that increases workers' preparation and self-efficacy to handle the complexity of their caseloads. These ongoing courses and other learning projects engage child welfare workers and give them new knowledge, technical assistance, and support throughout their advancement up the career ladder. This allows them to build expertise and specialize, ideally resulting in both improved worker job satisfaction and advanced and diverse competencies within the workforce.



Trauma-informed



University-led



Evidence-based

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STARS: STRENGTH, TRAUMA, AND RESILIENCE STUDIES

The STARS AdCert includes 12-18 hours of self-paced, online course content with two virtual, synchronous sessions with a university faculty member to practice and reinforce learned skills. Learners have additional opportunities to connect with peers and a coach.

Developed with input from DCF leadership, lead agency representatives, case management service representatives, and other child welfare partners, the STARS AdCert course is an engaging, university-led, evidence-based, trauma-informed, workforce resilience training that aims to motivate, educate, and improve the skills of the child welfare workforce to improve child safety.

The course material addresses coping mechanisms, stress management, secondary trauma, and primary trauma and explores how trauma history interferes with learning. Learners will build better resilience skills for supporting themselves and the families they serve.

A cohort of 31 learners was enrolled into the ALIGN Learning Portal on October 31, 2022. The cohort represented 15 of the 20 circuits and 11 of the 19 child welfare organizations ([CBC Lead Agencies](#) and the DCF), with an additional seven learners from other direct service provider organizations. One individual had to leave the cohort within the first week due to unforeseen circumstances.

Learners worked on chapters 1-3 until the beginning of February. They were required to participate in a virtual direct instruction training before chapters 4-6 unlocked. Thirty learners made it through the first direct instruction training. Learners had until the end of May to complete chapters four through six and participate in the second direct instruction training. Twenty-seven out of 30 learners completed all coursework and both direct instruction training sessions. Learners received a certificate of completion and a [digital badge](#) to share with their networks.

Currently, STARS is going through the course management process based on feedback from the formative evaluation. Cohort two is anticipated to launch February 2024.

Resources

[STARS Website](#)

[STARS Video](#)

[STARS Overview](#)

[Course Outline](#)

[For Supervisors: Develop your Employees with STARS](#)

[Institute for Family Violence Studies](#)

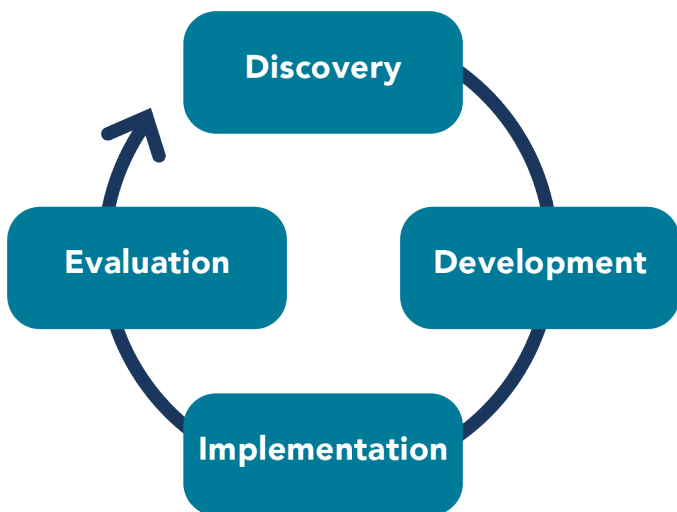


Evaluation

A formative and summative evaluation of the first AdCert (STARS Cohort 1) was completed in FY 2022-2023. The purpose of this evaluation was twofold. First, a formative evaluation aimed to describe the processes related to development and implementation of the STARS AdCert course. Second, a summative evaluation aimed to provide preliminary evidence related to participants’ experiences with the course including their reaction (or satisfaction), learning (knowledge, attitudes), and initial behavioral changes (e.g., changes in professional practices).

The formative evaluation included two primary data sources—formative interviews with the members of the project teams and a systematized review of the curriculum. Formative interviews revealed a development process that resembled existing models of instructional design (e.g., ADDIE Model; Nada, 2015). Three primary phases emerged—Discovery, Development, and Implementation—summarized in Figure 1 with an added evaluation component and circular arrow indicating a continuous process. Although depicted as linear, the proceeding phases were described as ongoing throughout the process. For instance, members of the curriculum development team described constantly seeking out new research to inform training content.

FIGURE 1: ADCERT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



The teams identified key successes that contributed to development and implementation:

- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Ongoing information exchange
- ❖ Consistent progress updates
- ❖ Mutual respect
- ❖ Role clarity

Having a strong team allowed them to effectively address unexpected challenges, revealing an increased capacity that would further facilitate quality control by bringing externally sourced elements in-house. Lessons learned that emerged from the formative interviews mirrored participant feedback regarding adjustments to the timing and pace of the course. Following the completion of the first cohort, members of the project team and participants both indicated a desire for less time between the online modules and live sessions as well as more frequent and, perhaps, shorter live sessions.

Based on results of the curriculum review, it is evident that the STARS curriculum meets most of its intended goals with slight room for improvement across several domains. The average score for all six modules was 23.16 out of a possible 28. Module six was the lowest scoring (20/28), while module three had the highest score (25/28). Areas of strength in this curriculum included navigation, look and feel, accessibility, and instructional design process and strategies.

Strengths



Navigation



Look and feel



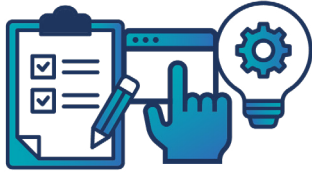
Accessibility



Instructional design

Areas for potential development across multiple modules included providing more activities for learners to explore and apply concepts presented in meaningful and authentic ways and to enhance retention and transfer of training content through modeling real-world scenarios.

Areas for potential development



Providing more activities for learners to explore and apply concepts



Modeling real-world scenarios to enhance retention and application

A particularly strong example of this can be found in module three, during which participants were guided through a motivational interviewing example with a realistic client. Overall, the STARS curriculum has many strengths, however, efforts should be made to replicate the strongest learning strategies within all modules to ensure consistency across the entire curriculum.

The summative evaluation included quizzes and pre- and post-surveys on measures of resilience, efficacy, and attitudes toward trauma-informed care, job-related well-being, and intention to stay. In addition, participants' satisfaction and experiences with the course were examined using feedback surveys and focus groups. Quiz data showed most participants passed on the first attempt, with some greater difficulty observed with modules one and five. Comparisons of pre- and post-measures show some promising preliminary trends. First, although not statistically

significant, average scores on self-efficacy, personal resilience, and attitudes that were consistent with trauma-informed care increased, and burnout scores decreased.

Increased



Self-efficacy



Personal resilience



Trauma-informed care attitudes

Decreased



Burnout

Statistically significant increases in compassion satisfaction and decreases in intention to leave were observed. The preliminary nature of the study and small sample warrant caution when drawing conclusions, but these potentially promising trends are worth noting and should be further examined for continued replication, longer-term effects, and effects among different cohorts (e.g., less experienced child welfare professionals, front-line staff).

Feedback surveys supported that participants responded positively to the training with views on relevance, applicability, and ease of use of the platform in the agree to strongly agree ranges. Focus groups lent further support for these findings and added to an understanding of participant learning and engagement with the course. Most focus group participants had five or more years of experience and prior trauma training. Thus, for this group, the training was mostly a review and believed to be more appropriate for early child welfare professionals.

Unfortunately, few participants with less than five years of experience chose to participate in the focus groups, limiting the ability to capture their perspectives. Despite this, focus group participants expressed largely positive views on the course with consensus on the relevance to their day-to-day work, whether it was working directly with families, training, or in supervision. A stated goal of the curriculum team was to “provide workers with an understanding of their own trauma and how their work has impacted their lives.” Evidence of this emerged from discussions with participants who shared having moments of contemplation and processing their own traumas and how this shaped their decision to work with families who have experienced trauma. Participants also discussed how what they learned in the course helped increase empathy for colleagues and provided skills and helpful resources they were already using or planned to use.

Limitations

There are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the evaluation findings. First, the design of the study, including research design and sampling method, limits generalizability of the findings beyond the present cohort. Further, the themes found in the focus groups were generated from a relatively more experienced subset of the training cohort. Thus, the views and experiences shared may not represent those with less experience in the cohort or in general. Further, although the training was designed with CPIs and case managers in mind, most of the cohort were currently serving in other roles which may also limit generalizability.

In addition, this study was exploratory in nature. Therefore, although some promising findings emerged from both the qualitative and quantitative analyses, the design of the study does not lend itself to causality or firm conclusions related to the effects of the training on participants.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations were offered for consideration of the continued development of the STARS and other advanced certifications:

1. Target training to the intended audience.



The intended audience during course development along with participant feedback supports that the current training may be best suited and most beneficial to early career CPIs and case managers. A recruiting strategy aimed at targeting this subgroup of child welfare professionals was recommended. Among recruitment strategies that were utilized to obtain the first cohort, direct emails to supervisors yielded the greatest returns. This same approach could be duplicated with a focus on direct outreach to supervisors of newer workers. In addition, outreach to preservice training administrators, trainers, or managers may be an option along with longer recruitment periods when feasible. A consideration for future development of the STARS AdCert may be to consider creating two tracks—one introductory track for new CPIs and case managers and another advanced track for those with five or more years of experience and prior trauma training.

2. Adjust timing and pacing of the course.



Trainers and training participants expressed that they felt the time between completing the modules and attending the live sessions could be reduced. Participants found the live sessions especially enjoyable and beneficial to their learning. They indicated a desire for more frequent and shorter live sessions.

3. Consider requiring engagement with the Virtual Engagement and Learning Coach (VELC).



The addition of the VELC was considered a major asset. Some participants suggested making the coaching session a requirement. Requiring this may allow participants who might not otherwise participate in coaching sessions to experience the benefits shared by those who participated during this round.

4. Create opportunities for learners' continued collaboration with each other and with course content.



Among the reasons participants enjoyed the live sessions and coaching was the supportive environment. Several participants indicated a desire to extend the connections they experienced during the course with their cohort members. Creating avenues to continued contact and building sustainable support networks for child welfare professionals could be added into the course experience. This may include taking opportunities at the end of the course to discuss this option, creating an email list, or establishing a position with the Institute to facilitate this process. Participants also expressed a desire to be able to return to the course and access resources such as handouts in the future for review and to use as training and supervision tools.

5. Continue evaluation of STARS and other Advanced Certifications.



Continued evaluation is recommended to strengthen the knowledge base; to examine effects on participant learning and practice; and longer-term workforce well-being, advancement, and retention.

SUPPORT OF SUBSTANCE USE (SOS) INTERVENTIONS IN FAMILY SYSTEMS

The SOS Interventions AdCert is a 12–15-hour online course that offers child welfare professionals a simplified model that infuses best practices to promote effective engagement with substance-involved families.

Developed with input from DCF leadership and subject matter experts, the SOS Interventions AdCert course is designed specifically for child welfare professionals and provides a structured approach with practical tools they can quickly incorporate during visits with family members. The course is modeled on a protective factors approach that allows participants to recognize and understand strengths and areas for improvement in families. In addition to supporting work with families, the tools taught in the SOS Interventions AdCert course also promote self-growth, encouraging participants to benefit from the concepts in their own lives.

Together, the components of the SOS Interventions AdCert course will provide child welfare professionals with skills to increase effectiveness, reduce burn-out, and find more meaning in the important work they do.

Out of 48 submitted applications, 30 applicants were invited to join the first cohort for the SOS Interventions AdCert course. The cohort represents 14 of the 20 circuits and 11 of the 21 identified CBC lead agencies and the DCF, with one additional learner from a direct service provider organization.

Evaluation

Dr. Boel-Studt and her team are conducting the formative and summative evaluations of the SOS Interventions AdCert course, the methodologies of which mirror the STARS AdCert course evaluations. The evaluation team has had ongoing meetings with the CFC and the FICW to discuss progress in curriculum development and implementation, and finalization of measures to be used to assess participant reaction, learning, and behavior changes. An IRB for this study has been submitted and the evaluation team is awaiting approval. Progress reports are submitted quarterly, with a final report anticipated in late 2024.

Resources
SOS Interventions Website
SOS Interventions Video
SOS Interventions Overview
Sample Resource: Managing Implicit Bias
Sample Resource: Family-centered Engagement
Sample Resource: Purposeful Pause
Sample Resource: Mindful Breathing
Stoops Center for Communities, Families, and Children



SAFER: STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ENHANCING RESILIENCE

The SAFER AdCert is a 12–15-hour online course that provides child welfare professionals with practical tools to address domestic violence in cases of child maltreatment. Learners will build expertise in domestic violence-related child welfare cases. A cohort of 30 learners will participate in the SAFER AdCert course with a launch date of October 23, 2023.

Developed with input from DCF leadership, lead agency representatives, case management service representatives, and other partners for child welfare professionals, the SAFER AdCert course is an engaging, university-led, evidence-based, trauma-informed domestic violence training. It motivates, educates, and improves the skills of the child welfare workforce to improve child safety, especially for families impacted by domestic violence.

The SAFER AdCert course material is in the final stages of development and addresses:

- ❖ The complex dynamics of domestic violence
- ❖ The intersection of child maltreatment and domestic violence
- ❖ Practical trauma-informed skills
- ❖ Prevention strategies for primary and secondary trauma

Evaluation

Dr. Boel-Studt and her team are conducting a summative evaluation of the SAFER AdCert course. The evaluation team had ongoing meetings with the IFVS team to discuss the progress of curriculum development and to review measures to be used for this AdCert. Next steps will include the submission of an IRB for evaluation and implementation of the training. Progress reports are submitted quarterly, with a final report anticipated in late 2024.

Resources
SAFER Website
SAFER Overview Video
SAFER Introduction Video
SAFER Overview
Sample Resource: Supporting Children Exposed to Domestic Violence
Institute for Family Violence Studies



Learning Tracks

The ALIGN program at the Institute's GROW Center offers online, self-directed, and self-paced training opportunities for the child welfare workforce on a variety of topics.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Communication skills are fundamental to social work practice. Nonviolent communication (NVC), sometimes referred to as compassionate communication, offers a powerful tool for positive social change. According to its creator, psychologist [Marshall Rosenberg](#), NVC is effective in relationships among families, colleagues, and in conflicts of any nature as it encourages empathic communication. For child welfare professionals, compassion and empathy are cornerstones to building trust among families, as well as within interprofessional relationships. There are two learning tracks available for the nonviolent communication learning on demand course; one for child welfare professionals and another for group home staff members/foster parents.

The nonviolent communication learning track was released on July 31, 2023. As of mid-September, 14 learners enrolled in the learning track. The learning track will be reviewed for course management at six months. Evaluation of learning outcomes is included in the learning track.

INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

This learning track will help child welfare professionals understand how to best serve families with young children using practices informed by a large and compelling body of research. Rethinking practice with this new knowledge increases the likelihood of better short-term and long-term outcomes for the large number of infants and toddlers in professionals' caseloads. The learning track will be released January 2024. Evaluation of learning outcomes will be included in the learning track.

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CONTENT DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS: THINK

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CONTENT DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS: SOS INTERVENTIONS SPECIAL TOPIC

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TRAINING FOR HARNESSING AND INTEGRATING NEURODIVERSITY KNOWLEDGE (THINK)

This learning track allows child welfare professionals to explore educational content on neurodevelopmental differences and cognitive variations in children and families while gaining new approaches to better accommodate and collaborate with their neurodiverse clients. Learners will be engaged with simulation activities and media, offering new knowledge and practical skills while enhancing their expertise in their career fields. Child welfare professionals will leave this learning track with a greater understanding of professionalism when working with families and children that are neurodiverse and will enhance their skillset by learning about neurodiversity and its prevalence in their work environment. This knowledge will allow learners to build more significant connections with families and increase their work satisfaction. The learning track will be released in the spring of 2024. Evaluation of learning outcomes will be included in the learning track.

SUPPORT OF SUBSTANCE USE (SOS) INTERVENTIONS SPECIAL TOPICS

This learning track is being developed as either an entry-level course or as an enhancement to the SOS Interventions AdCert. The learning track will focus on opioids, methamphetamine, and alcohol. The learning track is expected to be released in spring of 2024 and will include evaluations of learning outcomes.

Resources
Learning On Demand Website
Learning On Demand Overview
Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy
Institute for Family Violence Studies
Stoops Center for Communities, Families, and Children



MyALIGN

Overview

MyALIGN, a customized digital platform for child welfare professionals, aims to provide support by leveraging technology to create streamlined access to resources, establishing a networking and coaching community, and providing real-time data on worker well-being. It is a multi-faceted software as a service (SaaS) mobile-app and web-based cloud solution. This centralized and individualized hub will house career-long learning opportunities and holistic ongoing support for college students, recently trained personnel, trainers, and middle and upper management positions working in child welfare agencies.

The goal of MyALIGN is to offer the child welfare professional community opportunities to easily access networking and support, take courses that supplement their ongoing career development, learn about relevant issues, enhance well-being, and gain experience in problem solving to feel both more confident in their work and supported throughout their learning pathway and career progression.

MyALIGN's vision is to cultivate a learning community of professionals who will benefit from enhancement of skills as well as comprehensive support such as coaching, AdCert offerings, leadership development, reflective supervision, trainings, and well-being resilience-building resources as they advance in their child welfare careers.

The Institute partnered with eCare Vault to develop the MyALIGN hub and customize workflows to fit the Institute's identified needs, onboard users, and provide ongoing support. eCare Vault's technology is highly configurable and can be customized and deployed to meet a variety of needs and use cases.

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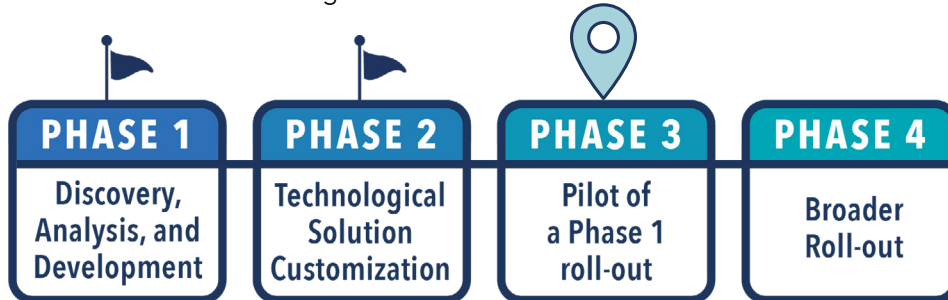
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Powered by
eCare Vault

Status Update

This project has four distinct phases. The Institute and eCare Vault are currently in phase 3 of the project (pilot of phase 1 roll-out) and are working together to determine how to continue to enhance the MyALIGN platform to meet worker engagement needs and the Institute's goals.



Phase 1: Discovery, Analysis, and Development

Elements of phase 1 include discovery and analysis sessions with key stakeholders, workflow planning sessions, integration scoping, and platform personalization

Phase 2: Technological Solution Customization

Elements of phase 2 were informed by determinations made during phase 1 and include building the platform

Phase 3: Pilot of Phase 1 Roll-out

Phase 1 roll-out began as scheduled in May 2023 for a limited number of child welfare professionals (preservice employees [CPIs & CMs] and trainers)

Phase 4: Broader Roll-out

The broader target roll-out date will be informed by determinations made during the phase 3 roll-out

The first pilot group was onboarded into the platform on May 24, 2023 in collaboration with the DCF in Tallahassee. Six incoming CPIs were given a presentation and overview of the platform at DCF headquarters. The second and third pilot groups are part of Northwest Florida Health Network (NWF) in Chipley and Pensacola. The Chipley group included individuals from Circuits 2 and 14, while the Pensacola group had individuals from Circuit 1. These groups were onboarded on July 10 and 11. For the NWF groups, an eCare Vault representative assisted with onboarding and platform development. Feedback from the DCF group led to platform improvement ideas. Meetings with the NWF groups were held in September. Beta testing will continue through December 2023, and efforts are underway to find an additional pilot site.

In September, a strategic planning meeting for MyALIGN's future was held. Discovery meetings with eCare Vault are ongoing for year 2 and the insights gleaned from these meetings will shape the ongoing development and strategic planning of the platform. As the 2024 managed rollout goal approaches, a readiness tool for assessing potential MyALIGN sites is being developed as well as a formalized plan for onboarding. The strategic planning meeting in September addressed the ongoing needs for the successful management and statewide roll-out of the platform. Finally, marketing materials are also being developed. These include handouts, posters, emails, and MyALIGN branded merchandise for wider recognition.

Major Milestones

- ❖ **A project support specialist and program manager were hired and FICW faculty onboarded to lead evaluation activities.**
- ❖ **User-acceptance testing began** on April 5, 2023 and consisted of 3 separate sessions where internal stakeholders from the DCF, CBC lead agencies, and sheriff's office representatives entered the platform and completed a list of detailed tasks to ensure proper functionality.
- ❖ **The co-branded marketing and communications materials were created.**
- ❖ **The platform's resource library has ongoing development of resources** specifically designed to support new child welfare professionals.
- ❖ **The first pilot group at the DCF was onboarded on May 24.**
- ❖ **Two additional pilot groups from NWF were onboarded on July 10 and 11.**
- ❖ **Year 2 discovery and platform development efforts began with eCare Vault.**

Resources

[MyALIGN Website](#)

[eCare Vault](#)

[MyALIGN Video](#)

[MyALIGN Sample Resource](#)

[MyALIGN Sample Marketing](#)

Evaluation

An IRB for the system/user data was submitted and approved in May 2023. Initial data collection started with beta testing groups that were onboarded between May and July. Dr. Mills began her position in July and Dr. Magruder submitted a modification to the original IRB to change the PI of the MyALIGN evaluation to Dr. Mills. After several meetings between MyALIGN team members, it was decided to conduct focus groups utilizing a semi-structured protocol to understand participant use and engagement of the MyALIGN platform. In August, a modification to the IRB was submitted and approved to include focus groups with beta testing groups. Recruitment and scheduling of focus groups began. Next steps include meeting with the eCare team and determining data receipt (timeline, mechanism, etc.) for the internal user data (e.g. clicks, assessment scores) as well as finalizing the plan for the follow-up surveys.

ALIGN Planned Exploration and Activities



Exploration for future Advanced Certifications.

Engagement with clients is being considered for the next Advanced Certification and exploration is underway. In September, Dr. Mills held focus groups to gain a better understanding of workforce needs regarding engaging with parents in the system. In the fall, focus groups will be held with parents who have been involved in the child welfare system to hear their experiences in working with professionals and to learn what they believe workers should know when engaging with families.



Onboarding a program director of coaching.

Worker feedback has indicated positive perceptions of the FICW's limited coaching offerings. In an effort to thoughtfully and efficiently expand these efforts, a program director of coaching is currently being recruited. This position will work across GROW Center teams to strategize and implement coaching. Initial priority will be given to assisting the MyALIGN team with developing a model and plan for implementing virtual coaching through the platform.



Ongoing resource and platform development.

The MyALIGN team continues to meet with the Department and members from CBC lead agencies to determine resources for new child welfare professionals that are lacking or needed and how the MyALIGN platform may be leveraged to meet that need. Discovery work on a community resource database for the MyALIGN platform will begin in October of 2023.

ALLIANCE FOR WORKFORCE ENHANCEMENT

The Alliance for Workforce Enhancement (AWE) intends to enhance the child welfare workforce through specialized leadership development and adaptive technical assistance. Informed by implementation science and adapted from the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, Florida-based child welfare organizations participate in a three-year program that includes a comprehensive assessment to determine organizational strengths and challenges, co-creation of a plan to address challenges, guided implementation activities, and sustainability planning. These tailored growth opportunities are supported by well-being and resiliency activities and leadership development training. Currently, the AWE is being piloted at two sites: the DCF's Leon County Service Center (LCSC), and CBC lead agency Partnership for Strong Families (PSF).

Resources

[Alliance for Workforce Enhancement Website](#)

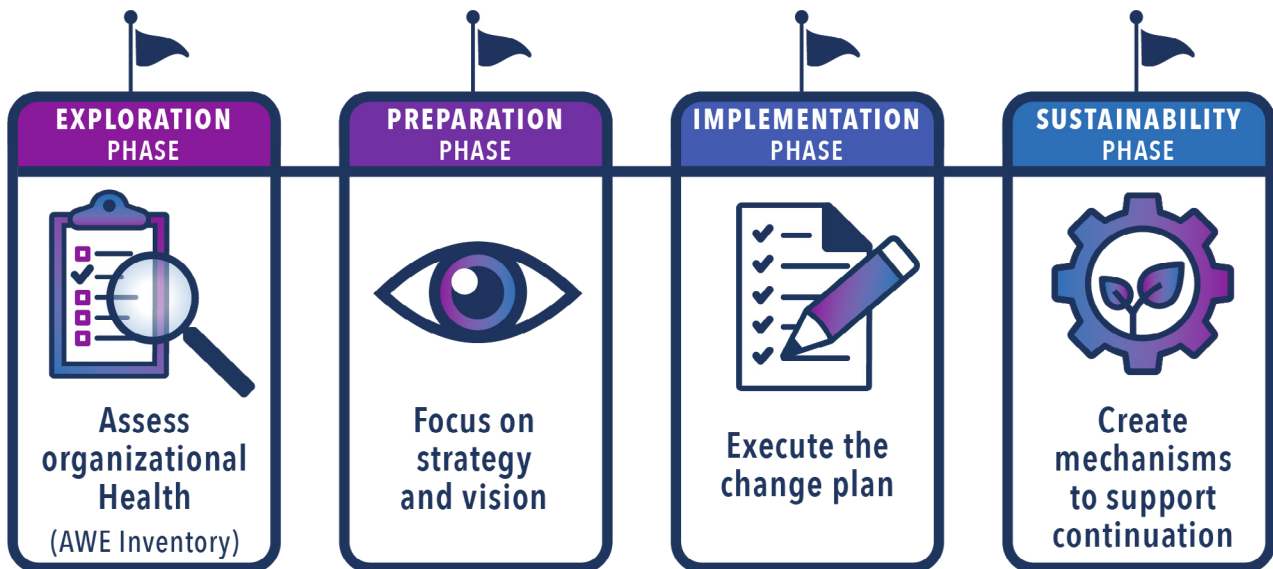
[Alliance for Workforce Enhancement Video](#)

[Alliance for Workforce Enhancement Overview](#)

FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE



SPECIALIZED CAPACITY-BUILDING



The AWE uses the components of implementation science to guide their work with sites. The exploration phase includes a comprehensive organizational health assessment, known as the AWE Inventory (AWE-I). The preparation phase includes the organization working collectively to establish a strategy and vision for their workforce initiative and prepares a plan for change, which has been accomplished by both sites. The implementation phase is the execution of the plan. The sustainability phase creates mechanisms within the organization which will support the continuation of the strategies.

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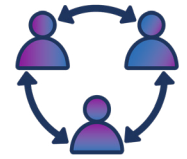
The AWE was designed to foster **organizational change**, **innovation**, and **collaboration** among diverse teams.



Organizational change



Innovation



Collaboration

In the past year, there have been significant strides in the capacity building and leadership development endeavors across the two participating AWE sites. The onboarding process of each site was intentionally staggered. The LCSC and PSF were onboarded in January and July 2022, respectively. This allowed the FICW team to provide focused attention and resources to address the specific site needs. This approach has also proven instrumental in both tailoring the AWE leadership development efforts and leveraging the strengths of the FICW team, then aligning them with the distinct timelines of each site’s progress.

A key tenet of the AWE is the creation of site-specific teams that function in tandem with the AWE Team at the FICW. First, the Strategy Team, comprised of visionary thinkers, has been instrumental in making key decisions and ideating solutions and envisioning the path ahead. Complementing this group is the Action Team, characterized by its action-oriented members, that will oversee the implementation of the ideas and translate them into tangible interventions.

Central to the mission of the AWE is a profound commitment to the well-being of child welfare professionals at each participating site. Within this past year, the AWE Team provided ongoing well-being support that nurtures the mental and emotional fortitude of the participants. Based on monthly reports from the well-being consultants, the individuals who are engaging in this voluntary resource consistently report its benefits.

The AWE Team is thrilled about the progress being made at the sites and eagerly anticipate the innovative solutions and positive changes they will create. Together, the AWE is helping to build a stronger and healthier workforce, one rooted in strategy, innovation, and the courage to lead change. In the next section, each site’s progress is outlined.

Leon County Service Center

The LCSC has been actively engaged in the strategy phase of AWE capacity-building and leadership development efforts. Leveraging the insights gleaned from the AWE-I, the Strategy Team was equipped with a comprehensive understanding of the agency's current state. This knowledge laid the foundation for informed decision-making and strategic planning. Guided by the question, "What is our vision for our workforce?", the Strategy Team embarked on a collaborative journey of co-creation. This process linked the collective aspirations and values of the team members, resulting in the formulation of an inspiring and forward-looking work culture vision. **Based on their assessment findings and their own work experiences, they decided to change the first-year experiences of new investigators.** The site desired for new employees to have several opportunities throughout their first year for mentorship, ongoing learning, and well-being support through peer-driven groups.

Twelve LCSC leaders are participating in a 14-month Leadership Academy that is designed and implemented by the FICW AWE team. Participants in the Leadership Academy benefit from live classroom instruction, monthly 1-on-1 leadership coaching, and the invaluable opportunity to conceive and execute their own change projects. The AWE Team quickly realized that key individuals shouldered a substantial workload and bandwidth was limited for a new team. In response, the AWE Team adapted the approach, which included continuing to collaborate with the initial Strategy Team rather than constructing a new Action Team. At this particular site, as the action phase approaches, their work will be facilitated by the members of their Leadership Academy alongside their coaches, and the AWE Team. The Leadership Academy cohort has identified strategies (i.e., their change projects) to bridge the gap between the current state of the agency and the new first year experience.

As the strategy phase and Leadership Academy near a close, the LCSC is preparing for implementation. During this phase, the AWE team anticipates witnessing the tangible impact of their strategic ideation. The alignment between vision and action, coupled with the LCSC's dedication to continuous improvement, positions them for continued success and positive transformation for their new employees, which ultimately impacts their system at large.

Major Milestones

- ❖ **Configuration of the Strategy Team within the site to serve as decision makers, as well as participation in a concerted effort to vision cast and strategically plan.** With any organizational change, the establishment of a dedicated team serves as a pivotal cornerstone. The Strategy Team, consisting of decision-makers, identified strengths and weaknesses of the organization, collaboratively co-created a plan, and exhibited remarkable flexibility and commitment. Notably, due to the size of this site, Strategy Team members also volunteered to serve as coaches for the Leadership Academy.
- ❖ **Selection of their area of organizational change: *Transforming the First Year Experience for Incoming Child Welfare Professionals.*** Creating a systematic program of support for new child welfare professionals is essential for both successful integration into their roles and ensuring that they receive the necessary knowledge and resources to effectively carry out their responsibilities. Spreading the program over one year recognizes the importance of not overwhelming the new employees and allowing them sufficient time to absorb the information provided. Changes will start with a focus on preservice training and the quality of field days in order to ensure valuable hands-on experience. In the first three months, connecting new workers to needed resources and providing them with knowledge about what lies ahead will help them feel more equipped and confident in their roles. Equipping them with a field toolkit and time management skills during months four to six further reinforces their ability to navigate their work environment effectively. Promoting work-life balance through workshops is important for preventing burnout and ensuring their overall well-being.

The subsequent focus will be on balancing life and creating a sort of harmony between life and work while also learning more about consistent documentation (months seven to nine). Measurement and evaluation activities will culminate the year. By adopting this approach, this site emphasizes the value of continuous learning and support for new professionals, ultimately leading to their professional growth and better outcomes for the children and families they serve. The LCSC is poised to be a leader in this field as it relates to how they recruit, retain and providing thoughtful and timely support.



Alliance for Workforce Enhancement

Leadership Academy

- ❖ **Implementation of monthly coaching for each Leadership Academy participant.** In total, 10 coaches were trained for the Leadership Academy. During the nine-week coaching training program, participants completed four comprehensive sessions of coaching instruction. Instructors leveraged coaching definitions and guidance that have been embraced by the International Coaching Federation. This coaching training program is designed with child welfare leaders in mind. There is also time spent distinguishing between coaching and alternative support such as mentoring or consulting. Each coach has been prepared to engage with the entirety of an individual, using a coaching mindset, which should enable them to adeptly facilitate Leadership Academy participants in discovering their own solutions. Throughout the coaching training, coaches engaged in group exercises outside the classroom to apply and refine their coaching skills after each session. These exercises not only reinforced the training content but also took into consideration the unique context of child welfare.
- ❖ **Twelve participants are in the Leadership Academy and have completed the synchronous classroom learning.** All leaders have completed the modules for the academy, centered on: Fundamentals of Leadership, Leading Change, Leading in Context, Leading for Results, and Leading People. Key competencies revolved around differentiating between adaptive and technical leadership and how to understand context when attempting to lead people. Leaders have successfully grasped the concept of adaptive change and have seen how it can prepare them to innovate during even the most trying times. By understanding the complexities of adaptive problems, leaders have developed skills in fostering collaboration, managing resistance, and empowering their teams.
- ❖ **All members of the Leadership Academy presented their change projects to the AWE Team, site leadership and coaches.** All presentations were required to paint a vivid picture of the project's direction and purpose. It also needed to establish a clear rationale. Additionally, each were expected to include a roster of key partners who were essential for project success. Collectively, their presentations were strong springboards to the ongoing coaching and implementation that is on the horizon.
- ❖ **To date, six groups and 35 participants have engaged in ongoing well-being support at the site.** What sets the AWE program apart is the dedication to promoting well-being throughout the organization. These well-being support sessions are private, confidential and a safe space for child welfare professionals to prioritize their own wellness. AWE sites are offered year-long monthly well-being sessions accessible to child welfare professionals at all levels of the agency. Well-being consultants provide monthly reports on their sessions and recommendations for site leadership.

Evaluation

The formative evaluation for the LCSC focused on evaluating processes related to planning and implementing the Leadership Academy, the well-being initiative, and the change initiative:

- ❖ **Planning.** The LCSC Strategy Team assumes responsibility for the planning process which occurs during Strategy Team meetings. Two sources of data are being utilized to evaluate the planning process—notes from Strategy Team meetings and a focus group with Strategy Team members.
- ❖ **Leadership Academy Implementation.** Upon completion of the first phase of the Leadership Academy (the pre-work phase), evaluators utilized administrative data about participation and surveyed key stakeholders (i.e., program planners/trainer, coaches, participants) to determine their views on implementation supports and barriers, and to get their recommendations for improving the Leadership Academy pre-work phase. A report of the findings was prepared and shared with the AWE program team. Evaluators are now preparing to conduct an evaluation of the next phase of the Leadership Academy—classroom learning and developmental coaching.
- ❖ **Well-being Initiative Implementation.** The Center for Black WellBEing (CBW) is providing the well-being programming for the LCSC. Upon completion of the first phase of the CBW well-being initiative, evaluators surveyed LCSC staff to determine their satisfaction with well-being activities and, for those who did not participate, reasons for non-participation. A report of the findings was prepared and shared with the AWE program team and CBW staff. Evaluators are now preparing to conduct an evaluation of the next phase of the well-being initiative.
- ❖ **Change Initiative Implementation.** The change initiative is still in the planning stage. As such, evaluation activities related to implementation have not begun.

KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ **Planning.** Six Strategy Team meetings were held since October 2022. Although member attendance averages about 37 percent, the LCSC leadership remains very active and works closely with the AWE program team in planning all components of the AWE program (i.e., the Leadership Academy, the well-being initiative, and the change initiative). The Leadership Academy began in January 2023 and the well-being initiative began in February 2023. The focus group findings revealed that Strategy Team members hold positive views about meeting structure and the facilitator. They recommended replacing in-person meetings with hybrid meetings to increase meeting attendance. Since then, hybrid meetings have been offered.
- ❖ **Leadership Academy Implementation.** Participation data for completion of 1) modules, 2) 360 assessments, and 3) number of coaching sessions were collected. The data revealed that, out of 14 participants, 3 (21%) completed both modules, 7 (50%) completed the first module, and 8 (57%) completed the second module. All participants completed their 360 assessments. Out of 42 total possible coaching sessions, (14 participants x 3 sessions per participant), 28 (67%) coaching sessions were held. Regarding views on implementation supports, program planners noted the support from NCWWI staff who are experienced with the Leadership Academy model. The major barrier encountered was engaging participants to fully complete all components of the program. Recommendations included more deeply reinforcing the important role of the coaches in helping participants become ready and figure out ways to help protect time so that participants can get their pre-work done. Coaches noted the quality of their training and the virtual venue as supports. They identified difficulty in finding times to meet with their coachee as a major barrier. Recommendations were to provide more focus during the coaching support sessions on what needs to be discussed with coachees.

- ❖ **Leadership Academy Satisfaction and Perceptions.** Participants were asked about their satisfaction with the Leadership Academy, supports and barriers to participation, and recommendations. All participant respondents reported being satisfied with the pre-work phase of the Leadership Academy.



Pre-work phase of Leadership Academy

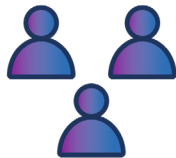
Regarding participation supports, respondents identified encouragement from coaches, LCSC leadership, other participants, and the course material.



Encouragement from coaches



LCSC leadership



Other participants



Course material



Time

The major barrier to participation was not being able to find time during work hours to complete pre-work tasks, given their caseload responsibilities. Participant respondents recommended setting time aside to complete pre-work tasks.

- ❖ **Well-being Initiative Implementation.** About 50 percent of the staff who attended CBW well-being activities responded to the survey. Findings revealed that participants are generally satisfied with their experiences. In terms of reasons for not participating, the most frequently cited reason for not attending was due to workload demands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the evaluators made the following recommendations to the program team:

Planning:

- ❖ **Monitor Strategy Team membership** to make sure key stakeholders are engaged.
- ❖ **Monitor Strategy Team meeting attendance;** reach out to individual members as needed to facilitate their attendance.
- ❖ **Continue to provide hybrid meeting options.**

Leadership Academy Implementation:

- ❖ **Identify and implement methods to increase completion of pre-work activities.** For instance, it may be useful to work with LCSC leadership to determine ways to protect/schedule participant time to complete pre-work activities. Another idea is to educate coaches regarding participant expectations, so that coaches can more closely support and monitor participant activities.

Well-being Initiative Implementation:

- ❖ Because very few non-attendees responded to the survey, information about reasons for non-attendance is limited. It might be useful to **get feedback from the staff at a LCSC staff meeting regarding why they did not attend the CBW workshops.**
- ❖ **Determine mechanisms for reducing workload demands** as a barrier to participation.

Partnership for Strong Families

The Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) CBC lead agency has entered their second year as an AWE site. Throughout the past year, they have been actively engaged in taking the time to understand their AWE-I findings and configure a strategy phase to guide the planning process. The PSF agency has multiple contracts for case management and related services. Therefore, the AWE Team (at the request of the site) adapted the general Strategy Team protocol and created two separate Strategy Teams to guide specific goals based on respective workplace challenges.

The first Strategy Team represents the CBC lead agency, and the second Strategy Team represents the contracted case management agencies. Each Strategy Team is facing different challenges, so they engaged in separate strategic planning and visioning sessions. The sessions ran concurrently over the past six months and were led by the AWE project director. Both Strategy Teams leveraged the AWE-I, which provided the foundation for informed decision-making and strategic planning. Guided by the question, “What is our vision for our workforce?” the Strategy Teams embarked on a collaborative journey of co-creation. Based on their assessment findings and their own unique work experiences, the two Strategy Teams selected their main workforce focus. The CBC lead agency Strategy Team chose to focus their efforts towards creating a results-oriented accountability culture. The case management agency Strategy Team will work to cultivate physical and psychological safety within their workplace.

This site’s implementation will be facilitated by Action Teams working towards their respective agency goals. Through their commitment to tailored solutions, two separate Action Teams were assembled. Alongside the Action Team, there will also be the Leadership Academy, though, this site is only at the beginning of their Leadership Academy process. They have selected their cohort and those members have been matched with their coach. Their first in-class session is scheduled for mid-October 2023.

Major Milestones

- ❖ **Configuration of Strategy Teams within the site who serve as decision makers and participation in a concerted effort to vision cast and strategically plan.** Due to the size of the CBC lead agency and their partnership agencies, there was a desire to focus on specific workforce needs. Therefore, this site assembled two separate Strategy Teams. Both teams met monthly with the AWE project director to co-create a plan that culminated in a logic model and narrative that describes their theory of change. The work of the Strategy Teams will thereby be handed over to the Action Team in the next phase of work.
- ❖ **Selection of their areas of organizational change: Results Oriented Accountability Culture & Promoting Physical and Psychological Safety.** The CBC lead agency Strategy Team (Team One) decided, in the short term, to focus on increasing its capacity around the current data landscape and the data systems. The organization intends to focus on creating opportunities for collaborative learning through cycle of accountability exercises, which involves monitoring, data analysis, research reviews, evaluation, and quality improvement. By providing training with practical utility, they aim to equip their employees with the necessary skills to understand data and extract valuable insights. All trainings will contribute to the establishment of a transparent system, one which is inclusive of all staff and aimed at enhancing the CBC workforce and organizational culture. The case management agency Strategy Team (Team Two) decided, in the short term, to focus on enhancing awareness of existing safety protocols and available well-being resources within the organization. Moving forward, the organization

plans to place a strong emphasis on improving their competency in trauma-informed and trauma-responsive well-being support. They plan to achieve this through the implementation of a train-the-trainer program facilitated by an external well-being consultant. The train-the-trainer program aims to empower selected individuals within the organization to become champions of wellness, equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide trauma-informed support to their colleagues.

❖ **Partnership for Strong Families has configured two separate Action Teams that will work alongside the AWE Team during the Implementation phase.**

Both Action Teams are poised to spearhead the implementation phase of the AWE work. These Action Teams, comprised of dedicated individuals, have met with the AWE project director to prepare for the next phase and have all completed an orientation. The orientation focused on their pivotal role in translating the site-specific theory of change into tangible interventions, marking a decisive step towards achieving workforce enhancement.

- ❖ **The Leadership Academy involves monthly coaching for each member of the cohort. In total, 13 coaches were trained for Partnership for Strong Families.** During the 9-week coaching training program, participants completed four comprehensive sessions of coaching instruction. Instructors leveraged coaching definitions and guidance that have been embraced by the International Coaching Federation.
- ❖ **The Leadership Academy has been selected and all members have been matched with a coach.** There are 12 participants, across the organization, who will begin their journey through the Academy, beginning with classroom sessions in October 2023.
- ❖ **Staff engagement in well-being support at the site.** To date, 13 groups and 27 participants have engaged in well-being groups. Alia Innovations is providing the well-being support for PSF.

Evaluation

The formative evaluation for PSF focused on evaluating processes for the baseline assessment focus groups, and planning and implementing the Leadership Academy, the well-being initiative, and the change initiative:

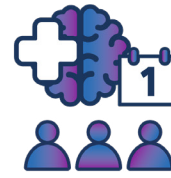
- ❖ **Baseline Assessment Focus Groups.** The focus of the formative evaluation of the baseline assessment focus groups was to examine processes for conducting these groups in a CBC lead agency setting. Two sources of data were utilized, including 1) descriptive information about focus group characteristics, recruitment, and participation, and 2) individual interviews conducted with each evaluation team member. The purpose of the interviews was to get evaluator views on planning and conducting the focus groups.

- ❖ **Planning.** Two Strategy Teams in PSF are responsible for the conducting planning process—the CBC lead agency and the case management agencies. As such, notes from both Strategy Team meetings are utilized to evaluate the planning process. A focus group with each Strategy Team is planned for October 2023.

- ❖ **Leadership Academy Implementation.** The focus of the formative evaluation of the PSF Leadership Academy was on the coaches training. Data came from surveys of PSF coaches (12 of 13; 92%). Coaches were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the coaching training, strengths of the coaches’ training, and recommendations. A report of the findings is being prepared. Evaluators are also preparing to conduct an evaluation of the first phase of the Leadership Academy (pre-work).

- ❖ **Well-being Initiative Implementation.** The well-being initiative for PSF is being provided by Alia Innovations. The initiative includes two components—monthly well-being groups and micro-learnings, which are offered twice per month.

The focus of the formative evaluation is to determine 1) participant attendance at well-being groups and micro-learnings, 2) attendee satisfaction, and 3) for those who do not attend, reasons for non-attendance. PSF staff are asked to respond to brief surveys once per month. Monthly reports of the findings are prepared and shared with the AWE program team and Alia staff.



Well-being groups (monthly)



Micro-learnings (twice per month)



Formative evaluation

Participant attendance



Attendance satisfaction



Reasons for non-attendance



Brief surveys (monthly)



Findings reports (monthly)

- ❖ **Change Initiative Implementation.** The change initiative is still in the planning stage. As such, activities related to evaluating implementation have not begun.

KEY FINDINGS

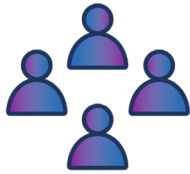
❖ **Assessment Focus Groups.** Sixteen groups were conducted between November 3 and December 6, 2022. Of the total, 5 groups (31%) were conducted in person and 11 groups (69%) were conducted virtually. Six groups were conducted with Camelot staff (2 in person and 4 virtually); six groups were conducted with PSF staff (5 virtual and 1 in person), and three groups were conducted with Lutheran Services staff (1 virtual and 2 in person). The total number of participants across all focus groups was 56, for an overall participation rate of 53 percent (56/106).

In terms of planning the baseline assessment focus groups, evaluation team members shared two major supports—being able to utilize the existing LCSC focus group plan as a place to start and existing relationships with PSF.

Supports



Existing focus group plan



Existing relationships

Challenges included figuring out how best to organize the focus groups, given the complexity and size of PSF, and the short timeframe within which to complete the focus group process.

Challenges



Complexity



Time

While conducting the focus groups, the focus group facilitator noted that the in-person groups were easier to conduct relative to virtual groups. They were better able to pick up on and respond to participant non-verbal cues. Conversely, the facilitator stated that the virtual groups “flowed” better than the in-person groups.

In-person groups



Easier to conduct

Virtual groups



Better “flow”

However, they also observed that, in the virtual groups, the flow of the discussion, interactions between participants, and ability to respond to feedback were impacted negatively because several participants had their cameras off and/or microphones muted. Also, the facilitator noted that the level of interaction varied across groups and across units. There are also differences across agencies in the level of participation.

❖ **Planning.** Five meetings were held with each Strategy Team, beginning February 14, 2023. Between 12-15 staff attend the PSF Strategy Team meeting per month; attendance at the CMA Strategy Team meetings ranged from 4 to 13 members. The focus of planning was on implementing the Leadership Academy, which began in July 2023, and the well-being initiative, which began in February 2023. More recently, discussions focused on planning the change initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the evaluators made the following recommendations to the Program Team:

Assessment Focus Groups:

- ❖ Given the complexity of the CBC structure, **work closely with the CBC leadership early in the planning stage** to determine the best way to configure and carry out focus groups.
- ❖ **Increase the amount of time** to conduct the focus groups and prepare a report of the findings.
- ❖ If virtual focus groups are used in the future, **determine methods to increase participation.**

Planning:

- ❖ **Monitor Strategy Team membership** to make sure key stakeholders are engaged.
- ❖ **Monitor Strategy Team meeting attendance;** reach out to individual members as needed to facilitate their attendance.
- ❖ Given the distance between the case management agency sites, **consider offering hybrid meeting options.**

Well-being Initiative Implementation:

- ❖ **Identify communication mechanisms** to better inform staff about opportunities to participate in well-being groups and micro-learnings.
- ❖ **Continue to closely monitor staff participation** in well-being activities. If needed, determine ways to increase participation.
- ❖ **Determine and institute strategies** for increasing survey participation.

Well-being Initiative Implementation.

Thus far, four formative evaluation reports were completed for March through June. Findings reveal a lack of participation in both the well-being groups and the micro-learnings. For the well-being groups, 29 attended the March group; 18 attended the April group, 14 attended the May group, and 9 attended the June group. Among those who did attend a well-being group, the findings indicate overall satisfaction. In terms of reasons for not attending, the most frequently cited reasons for not attending were workload demands and not knowing about the groups.



Out of the eight micro-learnings offered between March and June, a total of 15 staff reported attending a micro-learning. Attendees indicate being generally satisfied with the micro-learnings. The primary reported reason for not attending a micro-learning was a lack of awareness that they were being offered.



AWE Planned Exploration and Activities



Over the course of the next six months, the AWE Team will meet with child welfare leaders to discuss the program and announce the timeline for onboarding of new sites.

Through Spring 2024, the AWE Team will be finalizing the application and onboarding process for potential new sites. The AWE Team will then meet with interested parties to discuss the onboarding of additional sites in 2024.



The AWE Team intends to utilize the formative evaluation findings to adapt the program and finalize all processes and their timelines.

The formative evaluation is being used to document program development and assess how well the AWE program was implemented in the demonstration sites. Currently, the evaluation team provides monthly formative evaluation reports to the AWE Project Team to inform needed enhancements or adjustments to the initiative.

GROW CENTER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Resource
[GROW Center Advisory Committee Website](#)

The GROW Center Advisory Committee (GCAC) brings together statewide volunteers who have invaluable expertise and experience to contribute to the transformation of the child welfare workforce in the state of Florida. The GCAC serves to provide informed guidance, professional expertise, partner experience, and advice to GROW Center staff. GROW Center Advisory Committee members bridge the gap between organizations and child welfare professionals while advocating for GROW Center initiatives. The vision statement leading the Committee’s work asks members to promote, uphold, and advocate for the GROW Center’s innovation of child welfare curricula, support of child welfare professionals, and transformation of the child welfare workplace throughout Florida.

The Committee is organized to ensure that each member’s activities and decisions are in the best interests of the GROW Center. The Institute’s associate director of professional development serves as chair, ensuring sufficient guidance is provided to the Committee as they embark on their work. The Advisory Committee secretary will be appointed to their position by the Institute. The expectations of committee members include programmatic advising and input, leveraging of networks to spread awareness of the GROW Center, serving as ambassadors to increase visibility and engagement within the broader community, and other critical activities which serve to represent the GROW Center’s programs and initiatives in the state.

GCAC members are selected through a rigorous application process. A multidisciplinary team is established to select the top applicants that exhibit the GCAC vision.



Meetings

The GCAC meets quarterly to learn about the GROW Center updates and to discuss plans, upcoming projects, and/or announcements. During FY 2022-2023, the GCAC met on June 30, 2022; October 13, 2022; and February 16, 2023, virtually, and on May 1, 2023, in-person for half a day with Institute Affiliates during the Annual Symposium at FSU's Turnbull Center in Tallahassee, Florida. During the joint meeting, an open forum was held between the GCAC and Affiliates with facilitated conversations focused on turning connections into collaborations. This open discussion introduced and promoted future collaboration between the networks, namely the inaugural Community-University Partnership Award (detailed below).

To kick off FY 2023-2024, a new member orientation was held virtually on August 1, 2023, welcoming new members. The first full GCAC meeting of FY 2023-2024 was held virtually on August 15, 2023. All GCAC meetings are recorded, and minutes are provided for members to access and review. This is done via the GCAC Teams channel to streamline communication.

GCAC meeting agendas can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Current Status

In its full capacity, the GCAC has 19 members. At the culmination of FY 2022-2023, the GROW Center filled four committee member vacancies for the upcoming FY 2023-2024. Twenty-nine applications were accepted from June 12, 2023 through June 23, 2023. Using a standard rubric, the multi-disciplinary selection team reviewed the candidates and—based on the applicants' expertise and their described willingness to contribute to the GROW Center's vision—selected four applicants. The newly appointed members of the GCAC are Rick Manuel, program director for child welfare services at Youth and Family Alternatives; Yanelys Sanchez, early childhood community coordinator at Citrus Care Family Network; Juliet Reutcke, initial licensing supervisor at Safe Children Coalition; and Lauren Fuentes, vice president of child and family well-being at Children's Home Society. The GCAC's members represent all six Department regions: Northwest, Northeast, Central, Suncoast, Southeast, and Southern. The committee consists of representatives from the DCF, CBC lead agencies, and state universities as well as a parent advocate.

Planned Exploration and Activities

As the GROW Center expands its offerings, the Institute regularly seeks their input and expertise to inform programming. In the upcoming year:

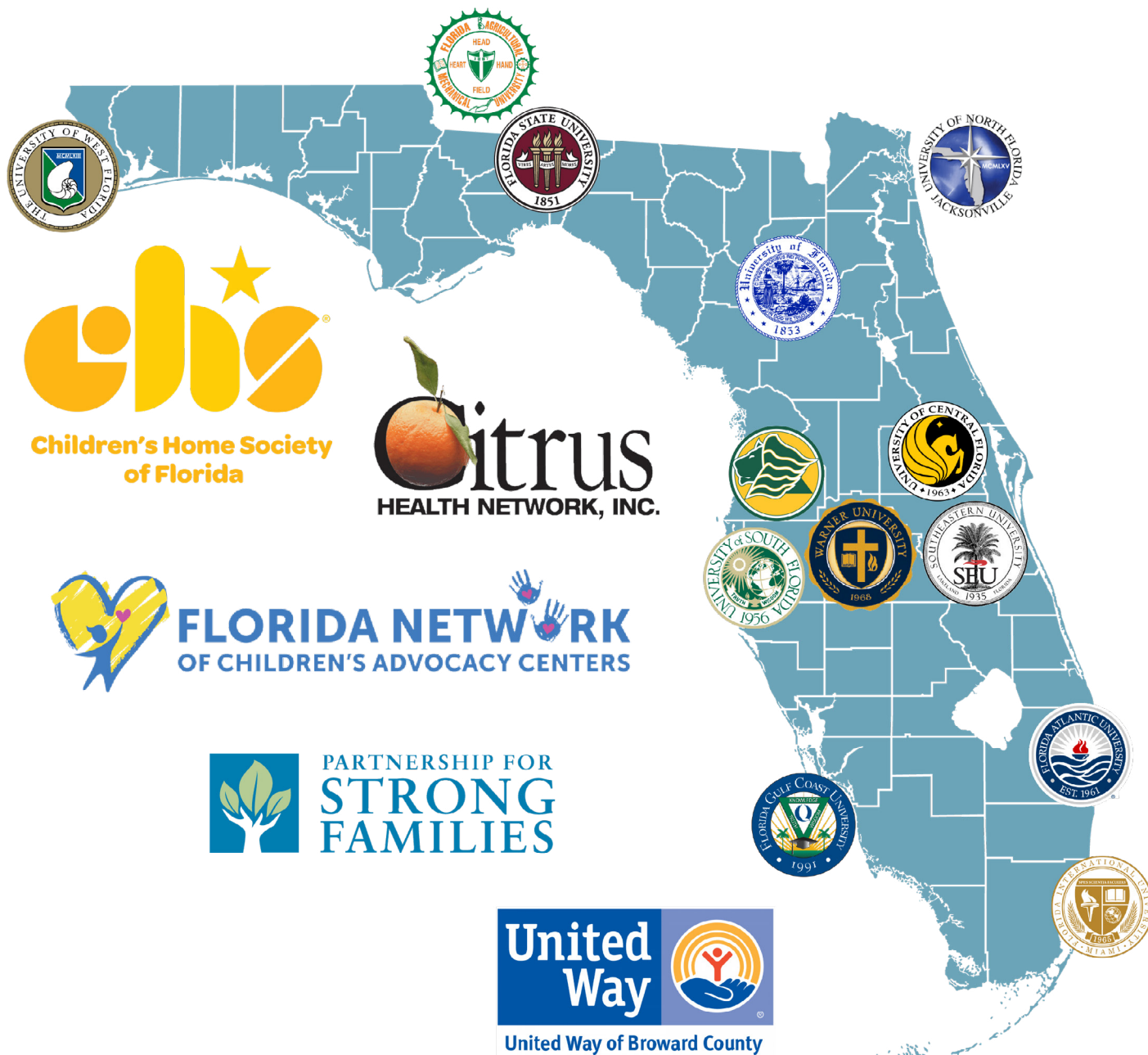
- ❖ **Dr. Vivian Mills, Assistant Director of Professional Development and Worker Well-being Research & Evaluation, will engage in exploration activities with the GCAC.** Dr. Mills will leverage the GCAC members' experience and host focus groups that will inform and enhance the GROW Center's current programs and future initiatives.
- ❖ **The inaugural Community-University Partnership Awards will be offered to an affiliate/GCAC partnership.** The Institute recently accepted research proposals for the inaugural Community-University Partnership (CUP) Award. The CUP Award was developed to increase support for meaningful community-university partnerships in child welfare through a partnership between the Institute's Affiliate Network and the GCAC. An awardee will be selected this fall, with a project start date of January 2024.



Research and Evaluation

AFFILIATE NETWORK

Since the Institute’s inception, the [Affiliate Network](#), comprised of faculty, researchers, and other partners around the state, played an integral role in the execution of Institute research and evaluation. A comprehensive listing of affiliate contributions can be found in [Appendix C](#). As of August 2023, [the Affiliate Network is comprised of 37 members, representing 13 universities and 5 organizations](#). During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the Institute executed two new Memorandums of Understanding with James Jolley (Florida Network for Child Advocacy Centers) and James Weaver (Partnership for Strong Families, Inc.).



Communication and Activities

The Institute continues to prioritize engagement of its affiliates. The monthly Affiliate Advisor, a specific e-newsletter that highlights Institute activities and shares relevant announcements (e.g., calls for proposals, child welfare legislation), is provided to all active affiliates. It continues to be a platform for affiliates to request collaborations from one another. See the *Communications and Dissemination* section for additional information.

During FY2022-2023, the Network held two virtual Lunch and Learn sessions, featuring Morgan Cooley, Ph.D., LCSW, Associate Professor at Florida Atlantic University. In October 2022, Dr. Cooley shared findings from her study, [A Mixed Methods Examination of Comfort Call Implementation in South Florida](#). Dr. Cooley was the first recipient of the Affiliate Award for translation research. This talk was well attended, with 46 participants, primarily from the public. In May 2023, she presented Recruiting, Training, and Supporting New Foster Parents: What we Know and Where We Need to Grow to a small group of nine Institute staff and affiliates.

In an effort to provide formalized administrative support to affiliates with similar interests, the Program Director of Research Administration offered to organize and host topical workgroups in FY2022-2023. This resulted in the *Youth Transitioning Out of Care Workgroup* and included affiliates Martie Gillen, Ph.D., Associate Professor at University of Florida; Rene' Ledford, MSW, LCSW, Senior Director of Research, Training, and Accreditation at Children's Home Society; and Khalilah Louis Caines, Ph.D., LCSW, Director of Graduate Social Work Field Education at St. Leo University. As principal investigator of the Florida Youth Experiences Study (FL YES), Dr. Gillen led the group, utilizing their time to discuss and troubleshoot issues that arose during the development of the study. The group concluded their work in May 2023, and the study launched this fall.

Affiliate Meetings

Quarterly conference calls were held with the affiliates to provide updates on legislative news, Institute funded research projects, Institute programming, and the exponential growth of the Institute. Additionally, the conference call serves as a platform for affiliates to present on their current projects, discuss future plans, and request, if needed, support from other affiliates. During this reporting period, conference calls were held in November 2022, February 2023, August 2023. The Institute's fourth quarterly meeting was in-person in May 2023; see the *Communications and Dissemination* section for additional information.

Resources

[Affiliate Website](#)

[Affiliate Directory](#)

LEGISLATIVE MANDATES



Senate Bill 80 Supplementary Analyses: Youth Outcomes

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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Overview

In October 2022, the Institute submitted the SB80 (2021) Permanency Analyses report (Lee, Longley, & Magruder, 2022). Following the submission of the report, the Institute conducted two supplementary analyses at the request of House staff. For both supplementary analyses, the sampling frame included youth who entered foster care in Florida from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2017 through FFY 2021 ($N = 52,774$).

Prevalence of Exit Outcomes of Youth in Care in Florida

Whereas the focus of the initial SB80 report was on permanency outcomes (i.e., adoption guardianship, reunification), this supplemental study focused on all possible exit outcomes. Exit outcomes included: 1) reunification, 2) adoption, 3) guardianship, 4) transfer to another agency (i.e., tribal court), 5) transfer to a licensed private agency (i.e., private adoption agencies), 5) aged out, and 6) emancipation.

Two sub-samples of youth were used: 1) youth who entered care before May 6, 2020 (in order to provide a full assessment of youth within and after two years of entering care), and 2) youth who experienced termination of parental rights (TPR). Univariate analyses were utilized to present exit outcomes for the youth from each sub-sample.

KEY FINDINGS

Within two years of entering care, over two-thirds (68.1%) of Florida youth achieved permanency, similar to national prevalence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children, Youth, and Families [HHS], 2021). There are differences of several percentage points between the nation and Florida, respectively, for reunification (44.0% vs. 41.9%), adoption (9.0% vs. 11.6%), and guardianship (14.6% vs. 8.0%).

Additional findings include:

- ❖ Though it may take more time, permanency is the most common outcome. When including youth who achieve permanency after two years, the percentage of youth with these outcomes rises to 82.2 percent.
- ❖ Reunification is most common within the first two years after entry.
- ❖ For youth entering at age 16 or older, emancipation is a prevalent outcome.

Again, like national prevalence (HHS, 2021), 26.5 percent of youth in the current sample experienced TPR of one or both parents. Youth who experienced TPR ($n = 13,961$) had a higher prevalence of remaining in care than those who did not experience TPR:

- ❖ Among all youth with TPR of both parents, the most common outcomes were adoption (61.1%) or remaining in care (31.5%) regardless of age of entry into care.

Among youth with both parents' TPR, the likelihood of remaining in care increased as the age of entry increased through the age of 14 years old.

- ❖ Among youth with TPR of one parent, for nearly all ages of entry into care, the most common outcomes were reunification (38.7%) or remaining in care (41.1%). For youth who experienced TPR of one parent and entered care at the age of 17 years old, emancipation (33.3%) and aging out (33.3%) were the most common outcomes.
- ❖ The common exit outcome was adoption for children who entered care before one year of age and experienced TPR.

LIMITATIONS

Similar limitations to those noted in the original report apply to these findings (Lee et al., 2022). Given the small sub-sample sizes of non-permanency exits, which was further decreased by multiple age groups, statistical comparisons for these outcomes were not conducted. Thus, interpretation of the results should be made with caution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though exact methodologies differ, the current findings are similar to those identified in the federal report; with that, the Institute recommends consideration of the relevant recommendations put forth by the Children's Bureau (HHS, 2021). This includes prioritizing the following:

- ❖ **Increasing parental supports for those with very young children.** Acknowledging that infants are most vulnerable to maltreatment and that TPR and adoption can move quickly for that age group, parents should have the opportunity for reunification, and receive support for strengthening the parent-child relationship.

- ❖ **Improving relational permanency efforts for older youth.** Given the high prevalence of youth who enter care at ages 16 to 17 years and age out or emancipate from care, continued efforts toward relational permanency are warranted. Relational permanency involves youths' connections to family members and supportive adults who can provide lifelong support for their transition to adulthood (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Examining Predictors of Foster Care Exit

The primary goals of the second supplementary analyses were to: 1) identify significant factors predicting permanency outcomes and 2) provide a nuanced understanding of permanency outcomes. Multivariate analyses, specifically multinomial logistic regression, were utilized to find important determinants for permanency outcomes while concurrently accounting for other factors (i.e., demographics and length of stay in care). Two sub-samples of youth were used: 1) youth who achieved legal permanency and 2) youth who experienced TPR. For the first sub-sample of youth, reunification was chosen as the reference category as it is the preferred goal of permanency outcomes and accounted for the largest proportion of permanency outcomes. For the second sub-sample of youth, due to the rarity of cases in which youth with TPR of both parents are reunified, a different reference category (i.e., remaining in care) was used in the multinomial logistic regression model.

KEY FINDINGS

Among the total sample of youth included in these analyses ($n = 35,880$):

- ❖ Youth entering care at older ages were less likely to achieve adoption and more likely to exit to guardianship, as opposed to reunification.

- ❖ While youth removed due to circumstantial/adverse experiences (e.g., death of a parent, adoption dissolution, relinquishment, parental incarceration) and parental substance abuse were likely to exit to adoption and guardianship, youth removed due to maltreatment were less likely to be adopted or exit to guardianship, as compared to reunification.
- ❖ Compared to youth in relative foster homes, youth placed in non-relative foster homes and youth in group homes had lower odds of exiting into adoption and guardianship versus reunification.
- ❖ Youth placed in institutions were more likely to be adopted and were less likely to exit to guardianship versus reunification.

Within the total sample, 13,961 youth experienced TPR. Among those who experienced TPR of both parents:

- ❖ Youth who experienced both parents' TPR at an older age were less likely to be adopted and more likely to achieve guardianship rather than remaining in care.
- ❖ Youth removed because of circumstantial/adverse experiences were more likely to exit to adoption or guardianship, compared to being in the remaining in care group.
- ❖ Youth in non-relative foster homes and group homes had a lower likelihood of exiting to adoption and guardianship, compared to youth in relative foster homes.

Among youth who experienced TPR of one parent:

- ❖ Age at the time of TPR was not related to exiting to adoption and guardianship.
- ❖ In contrast to reunification, children removed due to parental substance abuse were more likely to be adopted and less likely to end up in guardianship.
- ❖ Youth placed in group homes were less likely than youth in relative foster homes to achieve adoption and guardianship as opposed to reunification.

LIMITATIONS

Only youths' initial entries into care were used. In addition, due to the considerable amount of missing data (e.g., initial removal reasons), the evaluation team revisited the categories for initial removal reasons and modified them based on previous research and team consensus. Since other researchers may categorize the variable differently, replication studies are needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Institute recommends the following course of action:

- 1. Prioritizing interventions with parents who have substance use disorders.**
- 2. Continuing to explore kinship placements for youth who experience removal.**

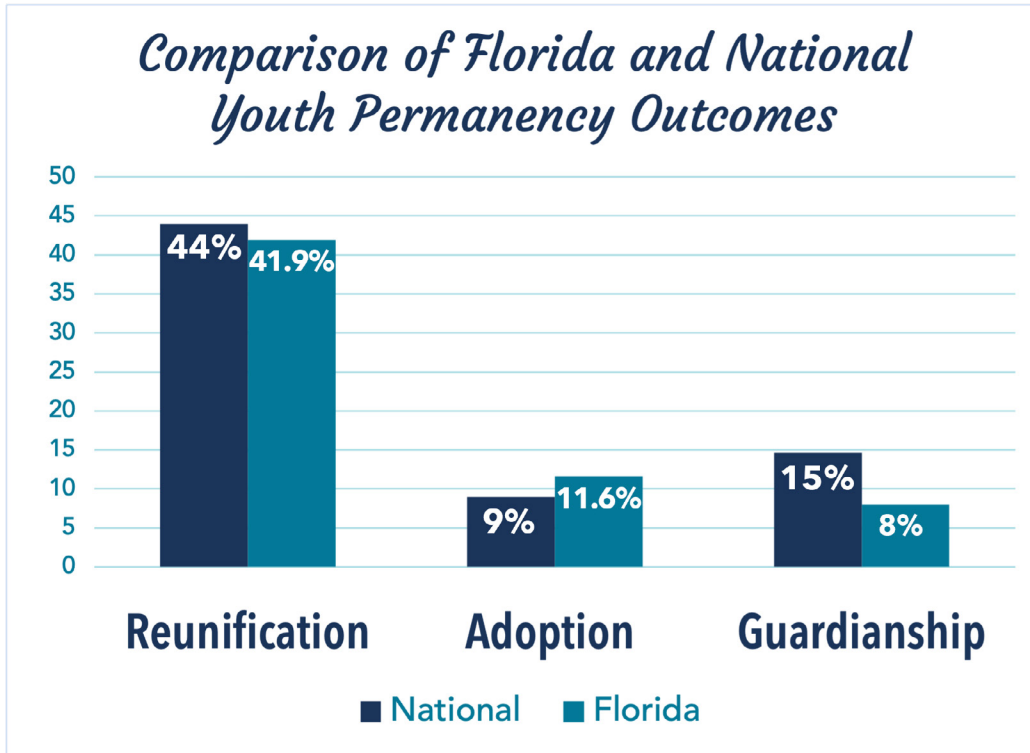


FIGURE 2: COMPARISON OF FLORIDA AND NATIONAL YOUTH PERMANENCY OUTCOMES

Resources
SB 80 Website
SB 80 Report

Senate Bill 204: Task Force on the Monitoring of Children in Out-of-Home Care

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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Florida Institute for Child Welfare

PROJECT TEAM

Sophia Lutz, B.S.

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Florida Institute for Child Welfare

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Florida Institute for Child Welfare

As mandated in this legislation, the Institute will assist the task force in accomplishing its goals in two primary ways. First, the Institute will “conduct focus groups or individual interviews with children in out-of-home care and young adults who have aged out of the foster care system to assist the task force in fulfilling its duties.” Focus groups and interviews will be conducted and analyzed in fall 2023 and spring 2024. A final report summarizing the findings will be submitted to the task force by April 1, 2024. Second, the Institute will collaborate with the task force to “identify best practices used in other states for monitoring the location of children in out-of-home care who go missing, and evaluating whether such practices should be adopted in this state.” This collaboration will be ongoing throughout the course of the task force’s work, which will be completed by October 1, 2024.

Overview

In September 2021, an estimated 4,240 youth were reported as missing from foster care nationally (Children’s Bureau, 2022). While this represents about one percent of the total number of youth in foster care, the number of youth missing from care is believed to be higher when also considering youth who returned to care (Wulczyn, 2020). These youth became a key concern for researchers and policymakers due to the higher risks for experiencing harm (i.e., human trafficking, substance use) and adverse outcomes (i.e., poor permanency outcomes) when compared to youth who have not gone missing from care (Akin, 2011; Crosland & Dunlap, 2015; Latzman et al., 2019).

In June 2023, SB 204 “Task Force on the Monitoring of Children in Out-of-Home Care” was passed into law in Florida. This legislation created a task force composed of a range of child welfare and law enforcement stakeholders across the state to identify and address the causes for children going missing from Florida’s out-of-home care system. Passing this legislation and creating the task force are important steps towards better serving this subpopulation.

TIMELINE

Fall 2023:

Begin focus groups and start analysis;
begin to identify best practices

Spring 2024:

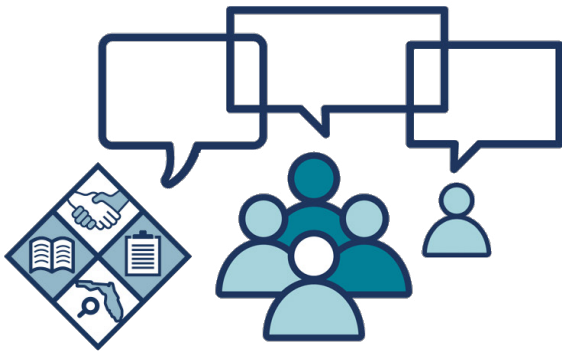
Analyze focus group responses

April 1, 2024:

Submit report to task force

October 1, 2024:

Finalize collaboration identifying
best practices



Current Status

Since SB204 passed on June 16, 2023, the project team accomplished the following major milestones:

- ❖ Created a database of state policies related to children who go missing from out-of-home care to help guide policy-focused collaboration with the task force.
- ❖ Drafted an initial plan for completing the focus group and interview mandate of SB204.
- ❖ Met with Senate staff to discuss FICW's work related to SB204, received feedback on the focus group and interview plan, and answered any questions.
- ❖ Received commitment from an affiliate to serve as a research consultant for additional thought partnership.
- ❖ Identified initial points of contact for the task force.

Next Steps

Initial work on this mandate was completed by Michael Henson, Ph.D., who transitioned from the Institute in September 2023. Next steps will be led by FICW faculty, Katie Ropes Berry, Ph.D. Immediate next steps are to share the plan with the task force for feedback; finalize composition of the research team, including a youth advocate for participants; secure FSU IRB approval for study implementation; and complete data collection and analysis. A final report will be submitted to the task force on or before April 1, 2024. A copy of the report will be shared with legislative staff partners.

In addition, a member of the research team will attend the task force's monthly meetings from now through October 1, 2024. Further, the research team will support the task force in identifying potential best practices and policy recommendations to improve Florida's approach to addressing youth who go missing from out-of-home care.

Resources

[History and the versions of CS/SB204](#)

SERVING YOUTH



Overview

The Institute's FY2021-2022 annual report recommended a continued legislative focus on older youth and young adults, to include incorporation of youth voice. We were pleased to debrief our findings from the independent life skills development evaluation at a Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs during the 2023 legislative session, alongside presentations from other organizations and youth with lived experience. We are appreciative of the Legislature's ongoing support for older youth in care, as research shows this is an especially vulnerable group within child welfare. In this section, we detail our current and recently completed youth-oriented research and evaluation activities, providing recommendations, where appropriate, based on the stage of the research.

Planned Work

In addition to the studies summarized below in this section, the Institute has several youth-oriented research projects planned or under consideration:

- ❖ **Youth Who Die by Suicide in the Child Welfare System: Improving Suicide Prevention Standards and Efforts for High-risk Youth.** Maxine McGregor, MS, MSW, LMSW, a FICW Affiliate at the University of Central Florida, received funding to examine child welfare records of children aged 10 to 21 who died by suicide while in care of the child welfare system.

Research in this area is scant, which impedes the development of prevention strategies. Using best-practice postmortem data collection procedures (i.e., psychological autopsy), demographic, biographical, and other collateral records from

2010-2022 will be examined to identify key risk factors and potential warning signs of suicide. Findings from this research project will generate best-practice guidelines and recommendations for improving suicide prevention, education, and strategies for child welfare workers in the state of Florida. This project will run from October 2023 to September 2024.

- ❖ **Trauma Diversion with Department of Juvenile Justice-Involved (DJJ) Youth.** Stephen Tripodi, Ph.D., MSSW, Associate Professor of Social Work at Florida State University and Faculty Director of Academic Dissemination at the Institute for Justice Research and Development, is leading the development of a proposal for evaluation of a trauma diversion program with DJJ-involved youth.

The proposed sample will include dually-served or "crossover youth"—those who are also DCF-involved. The proposal will be reviewed by a committee of FICW researchers and affiliates to determine appropriateness for funding.

The Institute Director notified the Department of Children and Families of an evidence-based mentorship program, Fostering Healthy Futures, whose developer is seeking expansion opportunities into additional states. Our evaluation of Florida's approach to life skills development indicated caregivers struggled to connect their youth to mentors; thus, this program could provide a formalized opportunity to meet this need. The Institute is open to expending resources to support a pilot of this program in Florida and/or an evaluation of implementation and will continue conversations with the Department and other interested parties in the coming year.

Florida Youth Experiences Study (FL YES)

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Martie Gillen, Ph.D.
University of Florida

PROJECT TEAM

Selena Garrison, MS
University of Florida



Overview

It is well documented in the literature that many youth who age out of foster care face barriers and challenges as emerging adults that can affect their ability to achieve self-sufficiency as adults. A first-of-its-kind in Florida, the longitudinal FL YES study will follow up to 325 youth for 5 years. Youth will be enrolled prior to their transition from care and participate in annual interviews and quarterly engagement surveys during their transition to adulthood.



Current Status

During FY2022-2023, Dr. Gillen completed her planning period, designing the FL YES study through collaborations with multiple partners, including youth, affiliates, and experts who conducted similar studies in other states. Dr. Gillen received University of Florida IRB approval in August 2023 and, at the time of this writing, is collaborating with the DCF to execute a data sharing agreement and confirm their decision to allow for blanket study participation consent for youth.

Next Steps

Now in Phase Two (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2023), participant recruitment and enrollment will begin following finalization of agreements with the DCF. Dr. Gillen will submit a progress report on October 15, 2023, and quarterly thereafter, which will be summarized and included in the FICW's quarterly reports to the Florida Legislature. Progress will also be documented on the FICW website at: FICW.FSU.EDU/FLYES

Resources
Florida Youth Experiences (FL YES) Website
Florida Youth Experiences (FL YES) Video
Florida Youth Experiences (FL YES) News
Florida Youth Experiences (FL YES) Resource

Trauma Treatment for Youth Residing in Residential Treatment

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

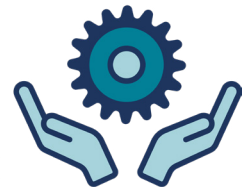
Tanya Renn, Ph.D.
Florida State University

Taylor Dowdy-Hazlett, Ph.D.
University of Kentucky

80 youth from
BOYS TOWN



40 youth
receive
intervention



Overview

Youth in foster care are at high risk for exposure to traumatic events and are less likely to receive services to treat trauma-related symptomology. Due to this, youth in care are living with untreated mental health problems, which increases issues related to substance misuse and delinquency. Based on previous research conducted by the study team, this study aims to build on the supporting evidence of the delivery of an adapted version of the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) and establish the efficacy of adapted CBITS for foster youth and their caregivers. CBITS is a group treatment modality delivered in the school setting that aims to assist children in the social, emotional, and cognitive domains, to in turn impact substance use behaviors and deviant behaviors. Using a quasi-experimental design, the impact of the adapted CBITS intervention will be explored for the effect on trauma symptomatology, substance use behaviors, and delinquency behaviors. Follow-up data on these outcomes will be completed at the completion of the intervention, 3-months post intervention, and 6-months post intervention. This research is being completed in partnership with Boys Town, which is the community-based care lead agency collaborator on this work to date. A total of 80 youth from Boys Town are participating in the study, with 40 youth receiving the intervention.

Current Status

During FY2022-2023, the research team received IRB approval from Florida State University, submitted and received IRB approval from Boys Town, and hired and trained staff involved with the project. Study team members worked on getting consent and baseline data surveys in Qualtrics. IRB approval took longer than anticipated, so the study team updated the timeline to include running additional groups to ensure the project stays within the funding period. Recruitment of participants began in July 2023, with groups beginning immediately after that.

Next Steps

The project team will submit progress reports quarterly, which will capture the current stage of the research study and provide preliminary findings as they are available. Progress reports will be distributed to Boys Town, the FICW, the CFC, and other relevant parties. A final report will be submitted to the Institute in August 2024.

Follow the Love Pilot Project – Strengthening Relational Permanency for Foster Youth in Florida Child Welfare Systems

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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PROJECT TEAM

Lisa Schelbe, Ph.D.

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Elizabeth Wynter, Ed.D., LMHC

Selfless Love Foundation¹

The FTL initiative includes youth engagement and strengths-based training to participating child welfare agencies by training and deploying FTL facilitators (e.g., Guardians ad Litem, clinicians, or independent living or youth well-being specialists) to implement the FTL initiative with youth ages 16 and 17 years old, who are in non-kinship out-of-home placements.

BACKGROUND

As noted in the FY 2021-2022 annual report, the team worked with three pilot sites for Round One: Family Support Services of North Florida, Community Partnership for Children, and Heartland for Children. In Round One, the team reported slow implementation, which continued into FY 2022-2023 with Round Two pilot sites: ChildNet; Kids Central, Inc.; and Brevard Family Partnership-Family Allies. The primary challenge with implementation was engagement, both of the facilitators and youth. In response to the continued challenges, the SLF, the evaluation team, and FICW met in May 2023 to reflect on these challenges and determine next steps. Collectively, they decided that the FTL pilot would end after Round Two, and that the team's focus would shift to aggregation and dissemination of implementation challenges, lessons learned, and potential implementation strategies that might be more effective for future efforts.

Overview

Florida has yet to operationalize the concept of relational permanency for older youth in foster care and has yet to fully engage youth in discussions and decision-making around supportive connections. The Selfless Love Foundation (SLF), a Florida-based organization that promotes foster youth voice, approached the Institute about collaborating on a new relational permanency initiative. The SLF, with a team of collaborative partners, launched the Follow the Love – Youth Relational Permanency initiative (FTL) to address these current gaps in the field. The primary aims of the projects were as follows:

- ❖ Enhance Florida's child welfare systems' understanding and prioritizing of relational permanency
- ❖ Improve the number and strength of youth's supportive adult connections
- ❖ Increase the engagement of transitioning youth in permanency planning and decision-making

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team continued recruiting FTL facilitators and youth for qualitative evaluation interviews and encouraged completion of the agency post-survey in meetings and via email outreach. Limited data were provided by SLF to the evaluation team pertaining to Youth

¹ Dr. Wynter is no longer with Selfless Love Foundation, though this work was completed prior to her departure.

were collected and analyzed from qualitative interviews with FTL facilitators and minutes from monthly FTL facilitator check-in meetings.

To date, interviews with four participants were conducted by the evaluation team using a semi-structured interview guide designed to collect data to understand the experiences of FTL facilitators. The interview questions sought to understand the perceived facilitators and barriers to implementing FTL as well as reflections on possible impacts of the FTL pilot. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and were audio recorded. The interview data was de-identified during transcription and the summary of learnings and findings reflect aggregated data from all four participants, including stakeholders from both Rounds One and Two. Other qualitative data for evaluation of this project were collected through notetaking during monthly check-in meetings with Round One and Two facilitators. As part of the check-in meetings, FTL facilitators were asked to share successes and barriers encountered during the implementation process, as well as other reflections and recommendations to improve implementation in future efforts.

Inductive analysis of the participant responses from the interview data and the monthly facilitator check-in meetings using thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clark, 2012). Thematic analysis was selected as the data analysis strategy as the aim of the evaluation was to understand the facilitators' perspectives of newly implemented activities and experiences. Thematic analysis supports analysis of the data set as a whole by producing predominant and generally important themes, as well as analysis of more detailed data pertaining to facilitators, barriers, and impacts of the FTL pilot implementation. Each interview was analyzed as a whole using initial coding (Saldana, 2009) to identify preliminary codes, and then these codes were further analyzed and organized to reflect overall themes of the facilitator perspectives of the FTL pilot.

Preliminary Findings

Given the limitations of the sample size, the following findings are considered preliminary as reflections and learnings from the pilot.

FACILITATORS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Prioritize rapport building. Facilitators identified rapport building as a key facilitating factor to implementing the FTL intervention with youth. Facilitators emphasized the importance of ensuring that time is taken to prioritize rapport building in Step One of the FTL process, before attempting to move into the next steps of the process. Rapport building was noted as crucial with youth, but also with the supportive adults and potential permanent connections who were identified. In addition, FTL facilitators noted the importance of providing clear information about the intention and purpose of the intervention and allowing time for discussion and questions to emerge. Several facilitators noted that youth were more likely to engage fully and with less hesitancy if the intentions of the facilitator were clear and the time to build a relationship with the youth was attended to. Also included in this was the importance of ensuring that the rapport building and FTL conversations were taking place in comfortable and confidential spaces. Many stakeholders perceived that youth who had a pre-existing or already developed relationship with their FTL facilitator seemed to have higher levels of engagement compared to relationships that were new, or that changed during the pilot due to turnover. The latter relationships were more likely to stall or disrupt the process.

Pre-existing positive relationships. Some youth in the pilot had a strong relationship in place with an identified adult who already served as a supportive connection for the youth. A majority of the youths' identified adults were described as current or past foster parents who were already invested in helping youth as part of their role. One facilitator who was able to successfully complete a permanency pact described the pre-existing relationship with the identified adult as "*already very committed to a connection post eighteen*" and that the youth was

“very certain of his connection with this person.” The FTL approach might be particularly helpful for some youth who have existing connections with caring adults, with helping to solidify and sustain these relationships for the long-term.

Using youth’s unique experiences and social network.

For youth that did not have an obvious or current supportive adult already identified, some facilitators found it helpful to use the YCS to help youth sort through adults in the youths’ lives and reflect on their unique experiences and social networks. As described by one facilitator:

- ❖ Step Two for this youth was great. We completed the scale together. There were a couple of times the categories for how adults are identified were different for him. He wanted to count his current caregiver as his mom, because he was like “that’s my mom.” It was a little more complicated with this youth...but it was good.

Youth understanding the purpose and role of permanency. Part of the process for some FTL facilitators was having intentional dialogue with youth about the role of supportive networks and caring adults. Facilitators indicated some youth began to see the bigger picture and long-term benefits of having supportive adults to help with varying needs in their young adulthood, thinking beyond just adults with whom they could live.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Barriers to trust and engagement with youth. Several barriers arose within the FTL pilot, as identified by FTL facilitators as they tried to engage youth, including: a general lack of trust of adults based on previous experiences while in care; youths’ hesitancy to engage in another intervention, particularly with a new adult; youths’ difficulty conceptualizing permanency and support after age 18 and what that support might look like; and loss of contact or disrupted contact between FTL facilitators and youth due to youth turning 18, their choosing to opt out of services, or placement instability. Several FTL facilitators

remarked on the need to screen youth cautiously to ensure they are in an appropriate stage to engage in the process, which was particularly true for youth who experienced multiple placements and had difficulty identifying any supportive adult connections due to prior disruptions within their family and extended family. Understanding that conversations for youth who are not feeling connected may be difficult and triggering, feeling the importance of having time to process and debrief, and having appropriate supports in place for youth to begin to rebuild and create those supportive networks, is even more crucial. Putting additional supports in place that can help youth on a path to healing and re-connection should be considered, with a focus on youth addressing past trauma, grief, loss, and feelings of ambivalence.

Difficulty engaging supportive adults. FTL facilitators noted that some supportive adults were cautious in signing the Permanency Pact with fear of what it means to commit long-term to helping youth and what would happen if they could no longer help or changed their mind later. One of the suggestions to consider for future efforts was to re-consider the length of time that might be needed for some supportive adults and youth to continue to strengthen their relationships, before long-term commitment was possible. Another significant barrier to implementation was locating and engaging with supportive adults once identified by youth. This was especially prevalent for youth who experienced multiple placements and group home placements, and who were in care (or in and out of care) for longer periods of time. In these cases, again, there might be need for increased resources to engage in a more formal process of Family Finding, as this can be a very time-intensive process to both locate and re-engage with these potentially supportive connections.

IMPACTS ON YOUTH

While the project team was unable to interview youth directly, FTL facilitators shared some observations about youth who participated in the pilot. Some youth were observed to be more empowered and assertive as their

definition of “permanency” and “supportive connections” were elicited, and for some youth, it was the first time they felt their own preferences for support were heard. Other youth were inspired and motivated to think more about permanency and the role of supportive connections as they transition to adulthood, when there was little understanding or emphasis on this prior to the intervention.

Some youth were observed to begin using new problem-solving skills and resources. For example, one facilitator reported noticing one youth advocating for themselves more often, increasing their voice in decision-making and asking for help in navigating difficulties within relationships in their supportive network. Increasing youth voice in future efforts should be prioritized.

FTL facilitators remarked on a new, or renewed, understanding of the importance of permanency planning and a desire to continue to incorporate as many of the six steps of FTL and the YCS into future work with transition age youth as possible. Facilitators also remarked on new, or renewed, agency commitment to including youth opinions and preferences in planning regarding the adults and peers they would like to include, as well as what type of plan or placement they would prefer to have after transitioning to adulthood.

Many noted an overall increased understanding of the need for, and role of, permanency planning with youth post-foster care with a deeper understanding of the importance and potential value of this intervention for long-term well-being. Some facilitators remarked on having “eye-opening” discussions with youth about life after foster care and “humanizing” the youth’s experiences for facilitators. Others identified that although there is momentum toward these efforts, more work will be needed. One specific suggestion is the importance of focusing on supportive connections from day one, as soon as youth enter care, so that youth are not having these conversations for the first time when they are six months away from “aging out.” Some participants provided insights into larger system barriers that may impede these efforts such as incompatibility with other

required interventions and procedures, family court and judge requirements and rulings, and perceived conflicting goals with other components of the system, such as adoption finding.

Some facilitators reported already observing changes in agency operations through the creation of positions to focus on this work with youth. FTL facilitators also discussed the usefulness of the YCS in redefining what support looks like and helping expand thinking and problem-solving beyond what youth and facilitators might otherwise consider. Several FTL facilitators also noted a “ripple-effect” of the FTL pilot, seeing this increased focus on supportive connections and importance of including youth voice in all planning with their partner agencies as well.

Recommendations

Based on preliminary findings, the study team offered initial recommendations for consideration when developing and implementing relational permanency initiatives:



Be trauma-informed. Be sure to engage youth in a collaborative process of identifying supportive connections, with transparency, and with the goal of building trust. It is also important to acknowledge youth in care may be more likely to have developed mistrust with adults or system interventions, and additional supports should be in place to help youth process and heal from these past experiences with trauma, grief, and loss.



Focus on supportive connections from day one. As noted above, discussions and plans to maintain supportive connections should be integrated throughout all ages and stages of child welfare/foster care involvement. Discussions around life-long connections and supportive networks, if integrated throughout the system, can help make these conversations feel more organic and natural.



Center youths' voices. Following the youths' lead in how to define support is critical. Engaging foster care alumni who have lived experience may help sustain these efforts.



Utilize an implementation science approach.

There were a number of learnings from this project that would have benefited from an implementation science approach, and should be considered for future efforts including:

- ❖ Engage more agency stakeholders in the planning process to identify implementation barriers and facilitators initially.
- ❖ Assess how this type of model might fit with other current agency initiatives, within agency culture and climate, and with external policies and mandates.
- ❖ Select and carry out specific implementation strategies to address all barriers.
- ❖ Ensure proper resources and staff are in place, including selecting facilitators who are committed to increasing youth voice and engaging a supportive network of adults with youth.
- ❖ Develop a plan for sustaining these efforts throughout the process, beginning from exploration and initial implementation.

In partnership with FICW, the evaluation team will continue to further expand the understanding of lessons learned to help inform strategies for future implementation, and to develop a plan to disseminate these learnings to the field.

HOPE Court: An Explanatory Case Study of Restorative Practice in Child Welfare

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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HOPE Court engages and serves youth who are approximately 17 years of age, and who will become adults while in foster care without an intact family. Youth are identified through collaboration with the support of Broward County’s child welfare system. HOPE Court eligibility criteria include age (youth prior to their eighteenth birthday), informed and voluntary consent (youth agree to participate and have capacity to consent), and availability (youth can invest in participation). HOPE Court supports youth beyond their eighteenth birthday and works with Broward County child welfare professionals and judicial personnel involved in the youths’ lives.

HOPE Court is achieved through partnerships and collaboration. The proposal to launch HOPE Court was presented to the seventeenth Judiciary Circuit, specifically the Administrative Judge for Unified Family Court and the Unified Family-Dependency Chair. As a result, the seventeenth Judiciary Circuit agreed to collaborate with HOPE Court operations and evaluation and cooperate with the restorative practices and programmatic components of HOPE Court. The Unified Family-Dependency Chair serves as the presiding HOPE Court judge, and the seventeenth Judiciary Circuit supports scheduling HOPE Court every six weeks, implementing the HOPE Court docket, managing docket flow, and following the scripting of the HOPE Court hearings.

To ensure fidelity to restorative practice, HOPE Court staff provides free restorative and empathic communication training to key Broward County child welfare system professionals and judiciary personnel. Fidelity measures

Overview

Helping Older Teens Powerfully Engage (HOPE) Court is a restorative approach to the dependency system for youth aging out of the foster care system without an intact family. Housed within the Fort Lauderdale Independence, Training and Education (FLITE) Center, HOPE Court is a problem-solving court that applies restorative practices to ensure a safe space where youth can be heard and co-create their futures. It is designed to empower youth aging out of foster care by increasing the connection, compassion, and community they require to become self-sufficient adults.

HOPE Court



Connection



Compassion



Community



and assessments were developed and utilized to ensure optimal implementation. Training modules include facilitating supportive circles as well as empathic and nonviolent communication. Both the HOPE Court Project Director and Project Coordinator became restorative justice and nonviolent communication trainers.

Community collaboration for HOPE Court encompasses a number of system professionals and life coaches from Broward County's child welfare agencies and system. Participation of the County's child welfare community ensured TIL youth referrals and direct service provision. Furthermore, each participating agency identified the employee(s) to serve as HOPE Court ambassadors, and this team comprises the HOPE Court advisory council.

Over the past few years, with Nova Southeastern University (NSU) IRB and DCF approval, the NSU research team conducted case study research with cohorts one and two of HOPE court. The Institute financially supported the evaluation component of this project for cohort two, which is nearing completion.

Current Status and Preliminary Findings

Initial evidence from the first cohort suggests HOPE Court was successful in giving youth aging out of care youth a voice within the dependency system and supporting their needs. The second cohort of youth participating in HOPE Court is underway, with youth participating in nine or more support circles and up to nine court hearings. Scheduled circles for cohort two are complete, though these young adults can continue to request circles as needed or desired. Through the FLITE Center, the HOPE Court team provided additional supports (e.g., food pantry, GED programming, employment and public benefits coordination, and housing assistance) to youth. Services through the FLITE Center and

assigned child welfare professionals will remain in place. Data collection is nearing completion, and a final report will be submitted to the Institute in fall 2023.

The HOPE Court team made significant efforts to author grants and apply for funding to continue programming, and notably, HOPE Court received a \$200,000 non-recurring appropriation in the FY2023-2024 state budget to support its operations.

Next Steps

In addition to the legislative funds, the project team requested additional evaluation funds from FICW to continue work with a third cohort of youth. At the time of this writing, the Institute is developing the contract to support the FLITE Center in continuing evaluation of cohort three. Preliminary findings from cohort two will be shared in an upcoming FICW quarterly report.

Resources

[HOPE Court Website](#)

It Takes a Village: An Examination of Educational Achievement Among Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care


2022-2023
**DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIP
AWARD RECIPIENT**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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Overview

Macro-level prevention efforts frequently target communities as a critical pathway for improving outcomes for children and older youth. Neighborhood research supports this connection with community characteristics serving as a predictor of various youth outcomes such as academic achievement and mental and physical health (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Liu, Santacrose, & Modir, 2018)

While many youth aspire to pursue postsecondary education, there are barriers for some marginalized youth, such as those transitioning from foster care, creating additional disparities into adulthood. The state of Florida implemented several programs to improve outcomes for transition-age youth (TAY) through programs such as tuition waivers, Postsecondary Educational Services and Supports (PESS), and school and campus liaisons (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2021). However, these efforts are limited to targeting individual factors to improve individual outcomes with limited consideration for the impact of community-level characteristics on community outcomes.

This study focused on educational achievement as an outcome of interest due to education having a positive impact on the transition into adulthood (Doyle & Skinner, 2017; Ma et al., 2019), based on the Social Development Model (SDM) (Hawkins & Weis, 1985), an evidence-based model which seeks to explain the causal process of behavior in youth across developmental transitions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study utilized the SDM to identify community-level risk and protective factors as conceptualized by Catalano & Hawkins (1996) and examine their association with county-level educational achievement for TAY in foster care in the state of Florida.

The primary research questions were:

- ❖ Are county-level risk factors, as conceptualized by Catalano & Hawkins (1996), negatively associated with county-level rates of educational achievement such as completion or enrollment in secondary, vocational/technical, and post-secondary education for TAY in foster care?
- ❖ Are county-level protective factors, as conceptualized by Catalano & Hawkins (1996,) positively associated with county-level rates of educational achievement such as completion or enrollment in secondary, vocational/technical, and post-secondary education for TAY in foster care?

METHODOLOGY

A nonexperimental correlational research design was used to examine the relationship between 10 risk and protective factors and county-level educational achievement.

Secondary data from several government sources (i.e., DCF, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Census Bureau) were obtained from the years 2018-2022, merged, and linked at the county level to create an interdisciplinary data set for analysis by year. The sample for this study included Florida counties and sample sizes ranged from 52 to 57 counties, depending upon the year. Florida counties were studied to identify potential frameworks to improve county-level educational achievement across the state of Florida.

There was one dependent variable (educational achievement) and ten independent variables to represent community-level risk and protective factors. Five variables represented risk factors and included county-level poverty, unemployment, high school dropout, crime, and residential mobility rates. Five variables represented protective factors and included county-level percentages of participation in school sports, organized sports, school band, school clubs, and community clubs.

IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 24) was used for all quantitative analyses. Descriptive statistics were analyzed for each variable. Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between each independent variable and dependent variable. Due to the small sample sizes, only variables found to be significant at the bivariate level were included in the final regression models. Lastly, linear regression models were built and tested to examine the effect and strength of effect for each variable found to have a significant relationship at the bivariate level.

Key Findings

RISK FACTORS

Prior research suggests a negative relationship between community risk factors, such as economic deprivation and neighborhood disorganization, and educational achievement (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993; Vartanian & Gleason, 2011; Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011).

Five variables represented community-level risk factors and included county-level rates of (1) poverty, (2) unemployment, (3) high school dropout, (4) crime, and (5) residential mobility. Only three risk factors were found to have significant associations with educational achievement—poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout rates; however, this varied by year.



Poverty was found to be significantly positively associated with educational achievement prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2018, 2019, and two years following in 2022 at the bivariate level; however, it did not reach statistical significance in any regression models. Unemployment was found to have a positive association in 2018 at the bivariate level; however, not in regression models. Unemployment was not found to be significant in 2019, 2020, 2021, or 2022. Like poverty, high school dropout rates were found to have a significant positive association in 2018 and 2022 at the bivariate level; however, not in regression models. There was no significant association between high school dropout rates and educational achievement in 2019, 2020, or 2021. There was not a significant association between county-level crime or residential mobility and educational achievement for any year. While findings from this study found significant associations between some risk factors, these relationships occurred in an unexpected direction.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Literature also supports the positive impact that participation in prosocial involvement can have on educational achievement for all youth, including youth in foster care (Avant, Miller-Ottk, & Houston, 2021; Eisman, Sotddard, Bauermeister, Caldwell, & Zimmerman, 2016; Knifsend, Green, & Clifford, 2020). Five variables represented prosocial involvement as a community-level protective factor and included (1) participation in school sports, (2) organized sports, (3) school band, (4) school clubs, and (5) community clubs. Only two protective factors were found to have significant associations with educational achievement – participation in organized sports and school band. In 2018, participation in organized sports was found

to have a significant negative association with educational achievement at the bivariate level and in the regression model in 2018 only. Participation in school band also had a significant negative association with educational achievement at the bivariate level in 2020 and 2022. No significant association was found between participation in school sports, school clubs, and community clubs and educational achievement for any year. These relationships, again, are in unexpected directions. Furthermore, these findings do not align with previous youth development research that supports extracurricular involvement as a pathway to improve educational outcomes. Some studies do highlight the potential negative impact that sports and other extracurricular involvement can have on youth not involved in these activities (Langbein & Bess, 2002) and for youth where involvement is overemphasized (Braddock, 1980).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that are important to consider when interpreting the results. First, several counties were excluded from the analysis due to missing or unavailable data. Many of these counties were smaller rural counties with smaller populations that may have impacted county-level percentages. As a result, the findings may not be representative of all counties, requiring further data collection and analysis, particularly for these smaller areas. In addition, this study utilized secondary data which limited the availability of some variables. For example, only one protective factor was included in this study due to data for other protective factor variables being unavailable for the years analyzed.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, and considering noted limitations, the principal investigator made the following recommendations for future research direction:

- ❖ **Future research should include additional data representing other risk and protective factors from a variety of communities.** While the SDM has been found to predict a variety of individual behaviors, results from this study do not support the use of SDM as a framework for predicting community-level outcomes. Findings from this study do not align with previous research pertaining to the SDM; however, they do reveal paradoxical relationships that warrant further research. The limitations previously discussed may have contributed to a lack of full support for the variables identified by the SDM. For example, only one protective factor was included in this study due to the availability of data. While the data for this variable was based on a random sample of youth across the state, it is unknown if the responses reflect the experiences of youth in foster care who often report barriers to prosocial involvement (Perlmutter, 2017).
- ❖ **Research examining the impact of COVID on older youth in care supports the need to examine long-term impacts on youth outcomes, including education (Greeson, Jaffee, Wasch, & Gyourko, 2020).** While the focus of the study was not related to the COVID-19 pandemic, recent studies emphasize the negative impact that the pandemic and subsequent school closures have had on marginalized groups such as TAY (Rosenberg, Sun, Flanningan, & O'Meara 2022). Descriptive statistics from the current study show a slight decrease in educational achievement prior to the pandemic with the average county-level percentage of educational achievement being 94 percent in 2018 and 92 percent in 2019. This is consistent with previous studies (Blake et al., 2020). In 2020, with school closures taking place worldwide, educational achievement in the current study declined at the onset of the pandemic but returned to pre-pandemic percentages as seen before COVID. However, the lowest average rate of educational achievement was found in 2022, two years following the pandemic, prompting the need to understand the long-term impact on educational outcomes for TAY.
- ❖ **Research should incorporate multi-level modeling to disentangle community-level and individual-level factors that may impact educational achievement.** This study focused on county-level risk and protective factors on county-level outcomes. Previous research involving TAY cites that there are factors across domains that may contribute to educational outcomes for this population (Heath, Park, & Millward, 2021). Also, the incorporation of community-based participatory research methodology would allow for other stakeholders such as TAY, foster parents, and child welfare professionals to share their perspectives of community-level factors that can be explored in future research. Including participants with lived experience and expertise is critical.
- ❖ **Researchers should identify alternative frameworks to help public affairs and child welfare administrators refine approaches to understand community characteristics that can help to strengthen community outcomes to support some of our most vulnerable youth, such as TAY.** Findings from this study warrant further research to identify alternative frameworks such as those that suggest limited economic opportunities increase educational enrollment and other frameworks that emphasize the negative effects that a lack of social capital can have on youth in environments where extracurricular is valued.

SERVING FAMILIES



Overview

The Institute recognizes family members—in varying roles—as crucial partners toward advancing the well-being of children and families in Florida. Recognizing the need for partnership from all areas of child welfare, we complement our workforce projects with research and evaluation that focuses on child welfare-involved family members, including parents, foster parents, kinship caregivers, and others. In this section, we detail our current and recently completed family-oriented research and evaluation, providing recommendations, where appropriate, based on the stage of the research.

Planned Work

In addition to the studies summarized below in this section, the Institute has several family-oriented research projects planned or under consideration:

- ❖ **Aging Caregivers.** Currently, FICW researcher Kasey Longley, Ph.D., is refining a research proposal to examine the support needs of older adult kinship caregivers and identify the age range when they require the most assistance. This information can inform the development of interventions and outreach efforts aimed at older adults who may have specific stressors that impact their caregiving (e.g., chronic health conditions). In addition, the project aims to explore how age at the time of caregiving impacts the mental and physical health of older adult kinship caregivers, and how formal and informal support influences that relationship.
- ❖ **Photovoice Study on the Intersection of Substance Use, Child Welfare, and Family Preservation to Improve Understanding and Support of Mothers and Children.** The incidences of substance use during pregnancy and 12 months postpartum have increased in the last decade. One of the many consequences

mothers may experience is the separation from their infants through child welfare and criminal justice systems. More research is needed to better understand effective family preservation strategies that align with the experiences and recommendations of mothers in substance use recovery who have had child welfare involvement. This photovoice research project, led by Ellen Piekalkiewicz, MA, Director and Savannah Smith, Assistant Director at the Stoops Center for the Study & Promotion of Communities, Families, and Children at FSU and Heather Thompson, Ph.D., Director, and Associate Professor at FAU, will explore these mothers' experiences and solicit their recommendations regarding family preservation policies and practices as it relates to their recovery.

- ❖ **Untitled Fatherhood Project.** The Institute supported several studies related to mothers involved in child welfare (*e.g., Maternity Group Homes for Young Mothers: A Mixed Methods Evaluation*). While necessary, less attention was paid to the role of fathers, and we are interested in expanding our research agenda to include such a project. This priority aligns with recent legislation aimed at providing additional supports to fathers (HB7065, 2022). Planning will occur in fall 2023, with an anticipated request for research proposals to be released in early 2024.

Resources

[HB 7065: Child Welfare](#)

Power of Parents in Child Protection

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POWER OF
PARENTS
IN CHILD PROTECTION

Overview

Families involved in the child welfare system (CWS) are susceptible to economic, social, and health disadvantages. Compared to non-CWS involved families, they face increased risk of family dysfunction and separation in part due to higher rates of mental health problems, substance abuse, social isolation, domestic violence, and neglectful or punitive parenting strategies. These conditions contribute to poorer child health and development (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2015). Despite parents' formidable challenges, interventions can improve parents' conditions and parenting strategies (Chaffin & Friedrich, 2004). Yet, low program participation, engagement, and retention result in a small number of families fully capitalizing on the value of intervention services and programs (Thompson et al., 2006).

The timing, scope, and impact of many public support interventions rely on the incorporation of private safety nets (Thompson et al., 2006). Although there is clear evidence on the protective value of safety nets for vulnerable families, very little is known about the safety nets of families involved with the CWS. Gaining parents' perspectives about their needs and public and private safety nets, or support networks, can inform the development of context-relevant, culturally sensitive case plans.

The central goal of this study is to understand safety nets, including public and private sources and programs, to inform strategies to provide effective CWS services and interventions responsive to the context of parents' lives.

The researchers will determine:

- ❖ **1. How safety nets operate**
- ❖ **2. Parents' decision-making processes in engaging with informal and formal resources**
- ❖ **3. How safety nets contribute to family outcomes**

In addition to preliminary focus groups and interviews with key child welfare leaders, the researchers will collect survey and interview data from parents with open, substantiated CWS cases in urban and rural counties in Florida.



Current Status

The study began in early 2023. An advisory panel of professionals and individuals with lived experience was established and met three times. The team finalized a study name and created branding for promotional materials. Five agencies agreed to partner with the researchers on the study: Safe Children Coalition, Heartland for Children, Citrus Family Care Network, Northwest Florida Health Network, and Partnership for Strong Families. Children's Home Society (CHS) is also considering participation. The parent survey and interview guide were finalized with input from the CBC lead agencies and the advisory board, and data collection began in late summer 2023. Initial respondents are enthusiastic about the study and eager for changes in the child welfare system. All survey participants were interested in an interview.

Notably, although CBC lead agency executives strongly endorse the study, the researchers are concerned that the study is not known by the case managers. They are busy and are not in the routine of inviting parents to participate in the study. To this end, the team is considering potential incentives and outreach based on expert consultation. Further, they devised additional recruitment materials for case managers who meet with clients remotely.

Next Steps

The team will continue hosting advisory panel meetings, encouraging CBC lead agencies to promote the study with parents, and having conversations with CHS to provide case managers with what they need to collaborate on this study. Wave one data collection will continue. The principal investigators conducted the first four interviews to get a sense of the interview content, flow, and length. With these experiences, they will conduct interview training and allow team members to begin conducting interviews. A team member will also translate the interview guide into Spanish. Finally, researchers will develop the wave two data collection instruments.

Inclusive Nurturing through Elevating Relationship Programming for Incarcerated Parents and Community Caregivers (INTER)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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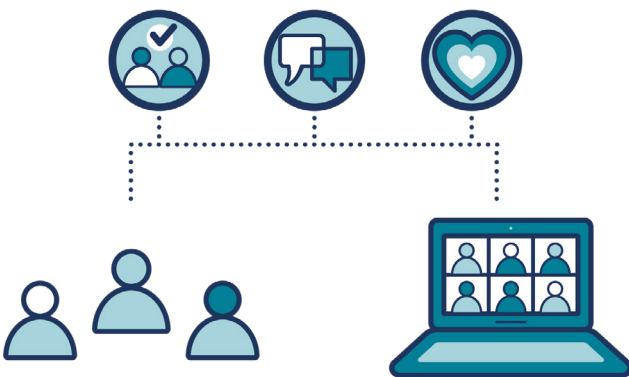
PROJECT TEAM

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These groups receive the same information and programming, and participants develop skills necessary for healthy relationships and co-parenting such as conflict identification and resolution, communication skills, and empathy. The principal investigator is piloting the INTER programming in collaboration with the Leon County Correctional Facility by implementing a randomized control trial of parent-caregiver dyads (i.e., participating in INTER or visitation as usual) and will employ a qualitative component in alignment with implementation research to evaluate outcomes of feasibility, acceptability, and appropriateness.

Overview

The justice-involved family system is at high-risk for child welfare needs not only due to related pre-existing issues but also the cumulative effect of these risks being magnified by the incarceration circumstances. Many children with incarcerated parents reside with relative caregivers. Inclusive Nurturing Through Elevating Relationship (INTER) programming is designed to target the co-parenting alliance of the parent-caregiver relationship to create immediate change for the participants through an eight-week psychoeducation and skills-training intervention. INTER programming is designed to be conducted with two parallel groups: one for parents in the jail setting, and one in the community or digitally for the caregivers.



Current Status

This project commenced in May 2023. Since then, the principal investigator worked to refine the recruitment plan and secure IRB approval, as well as hiring the interventionist. Wave one participant enrollment is scheduled to begin this fall.

Next Steps

The principal investigator will submit their first progress report on or before October 31, 2023, and quarterly thereafter, which will include initial enrollment rates and preliminary baseline data collection findings if available. A final report is anticipated in July 2024.

Conceptualizing, Planning, and Implementing a Co-constructed Approach to Justice-Centered Child Welfare Practice

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The final deliverables include:



A conceptual article on justice-centered child welfare practice. The manuscript will use prior research and theory to define and describe characteristics and the need for a justice-centered lens to child welfare practice. The research team will serve as authors, a group comprised of social work researchers with child welfare practice experience and macro social work experience in community practice; criminal justice researchers with relevant expertise in families impacted by justice, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems; and a nationally recognized parent advocate and racial justice consultant, Corey Best.

Overview

Originally proposed as *A Mixed Methods Evaluation of the Authentic Family Engagement and Strengthening (AFES) Approach* the researchers provided the Institute with an updated proposal, in October 2022, due to systemic barriers in successful execution of the original plan. The AFES project was renamed as *Conceptualizing, Planning, and Implementing a Co-constructed Approach to Justice-Centered Child Welfare Practice (JCCWP)*.



A participatory action qualitative research study. The study includes parents and adults with lived expertise with the child welfare system (e.g., impacted by child maltreatment investigation or foster care), child welfare professionals, and allied human service professionals who work with families impacted by child welfare. Analysis will focus on parents' rights and family engagement.



Evidence of submission for funding.

The research team will submit evidence of submission for additional funding.

Resources

[Justice Center Project Page](#)

Following the award period, the research team agreed to participate in a FICW-hosted event to disseminate the findings and process of these efforts.

Current Status

A mini-report on cultural competence regarding racial justice and evidence of submission for future funding was submitted in June 2023.

Next Steps

The team is finalizing the JCCWP conceptual manuscript and is analyzing the qualitative data. A copy of the manuscript submitted for peer-review and a report of the qualitative findings will be submitted in October 2023.

Evaluation of Kids Central, Inc.'s Kinship Navigator Program

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Overview

Since 2018, the DCF received funding the Administration for Children and Families to support ongoing kinship efforts throughout the state. The funding allocated for fiscal year 2022-2023 focused on continuing the evaluation efforts of the process and outcome evaluation of Kids Central, Inc.'s Kinship Navigator Program (KNP).

Kinship care arrangements are one of the fastest growing families in the U.S. (Jackson, 2011), with estimates suggesting 1 in 11 children under 18 live in a kinship arrangement at some point (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). According to the most recent Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), 32 percent of children in out-of-home care were placed with a relative caregiver and approximately 3 percent have a permanency plan of living with a relative. Kinship care emphasizes keeping the child or children connected to their extended family, and, if possible, out of the child welfare system. KNPs were initiated to provide information regarding benefits, services, supports, and programs available to kinship care families to provide a safety net for kinship caregivers who may be unfamiliar with or unable to access the appropriate services to maintain a strong placement. Kids Central, Inc.'s KNP provides several services for kinship care families, according to the

inventory study conducted by the Institute in 2019. These services included kinship caregiver-specific services such as peer support, mental health services, childcare support, support groups, and peer-to-peer navigation, as well as programmatic support services such as family-finding, collaborating with community agencies, a dedicated kinship navigator, legal services, information about services, and intake and needs assessments.

During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Institute continued recruitment and data collection to complete the process and outcome evaluation of Kids Central, Inc.'s kinship program. Recruitment ended in June 2023 resulting in 104 kinship caregivers recruited into the evaluation since March 2021. During this project period, the Institute renewed the IRB application, completed final follow-up interviews with Kids Central, Inc.'s staff, recruited additional kinship caregivers to the outcome evaluation, and collected 70 baseline data files and 43 follow-up data files. In addition, during this project period, the Institute evaluation research team sent surveys out to 65 kinship caregivers to record their perspective and satisfaction of services received from Kids Central, Inc. Approximately 29 percent of kinship caregivers responded to the survey within the set recruitment window ($n = 19$).

Preliminary Findings

PROCESS EVALUATION

Staff were interviewed three times since the inception of the evaluation: the initial interview ($n = 8$), which took place during the first year of the evaluation in March and April of 2021; the follow-up interview ($n = 5$), which took place during the second year of the evaluation in March and April 2022; and the final follow-up interview ($n = 8$), which took place during this year of the evaluation in March and April of 2023.

Several themes emerged during data analysis including organization structure and leadership, staffing concerns, retention of caregivers, and gaps in services.

- ❖ There is a disconnect between leadership and frontline staff with respect to needed resources. The findings point to a potential disconnect between leadership and frontline staff, in which leadership view the needs of the staff as being sufficiently and adequately addressed. However, frontline staff reported that increasing the number of staff by even one could help to alleviate the stress, particularly felt in the larger counties. In addition, throughout the interviews, staff seemed unclear about the roles and responsibilities of the peer navigator.
- ❖ Turnover is particularly impactful given the small staff size. Despite several staff having an over five-year tenure with KCI, there were three staff members who either left the organization or shifted roles since the beginning of the evaluation. Given the agency's small size, it is likely this turnover is impactful in multiple ways. For example, it led to a gap in case management support for several months in which the supervisor needed to fulfill the role of both case manager and supervisor. It was also noted that it was difficult to hire on new staff.
- ❖ Services may not be meeting the needs of caregivers in the context of their lives. Approximately 40 percent of kinship caregivers who initially agreed to services when talking to the navigators either declined services or were unable to be contacted when the case manager contacted them to set up an initial visit. Staff shared that some caregivers instead seek out community resources or material items rather than needing comprehensive support at KCI or, after discussing KCI's available resources, no longer needed comprehensive support. Other factors noted as impacting service utilization include caregivers' full-time work status, health-related issues, or existing supports available to them.
- ❖ Services may not be meeting the needs of caregivers based on changing demographics. Many staff noted that kinship caregivers are now younger and more

likely to be working and maintaining family households compared to caregivers in the past. Staff shared concerns about current caregivers' ability to engage given their other time demands. For example, to get into the continuation support group, which is a more traditional support group setting that offers support and camaraderie, kinship caregivers must first attend a nine-week prescriptive support group. Staff noted that kinship caregivers may not see the benefit in this type of support group or may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of having to complete all nine weeks of the support group to be able to move onto the continuation support group. Moreover, staff noted that the materials used within the nine-week support group are geared towards grandparents raising grandchildren, while a number of kinship caregivers within the Kids Central, Inc. kinship program are not grandparents.

OUTCOME EVALUATION

There were 104 kinship caregivers recruited into the evaluation, of which 78 have recorded baseline data. Of these 78 baseline measures, 55 percent ($n = 43$) have case closure data. Caregivers identified as primarily White (65%) and female (91%). A majority of kinship caregivers were between 41 and 60 years of age (61%), though just under a third were under 40 years of age (30%). Of the kinship caregivers who reported their education level (80%), 50 percent reported having a high school diploma or GED certification. Just over one-third of kinship caregivers reported being married, 12 percent identified as being a widow, 22 percent identified as being divorced, and 25 percent identified as being single-never married. Although nearly 40 percent of kinship caregivers reported receiving benefits but not employed, more than 85 percent reported having health insurance for themselves and their relative children. Finally, less than 10 percent of kinship caregivers reported an income greater than \$50,000 per year.

Preliminary analyses from caregiver data suggest:



Nearly all kinship caregivers feel unsure of what services to use. This suggests a need for more refined guidance from case managers or kinship care navigators.



All interviewed kinship caregivers reported having a good relationship with their relative child. The majority felt that it was rewarding to raise their relative child and they were able to cope with the stress and responsibilities of their role as kinship caregivers.



Most caregivers reported having support in their personal networks. The majority of participants had at least one other adult who lived in the home and at least one person they can rely on for some form of support. However, only half of the caregivers noted that the other adult in the home assisted in the care of the relative child.



Most kinship caregivers reported feeling like they were doing a good job of raising their relative child. Each of the nine kinship caregivers reported feeling like they were doing what is in the best interest of their relative child and that they looked forward to spending time with their relative child.



Most kinship caregivers were concerned for their well-being in the last year. About half of the kinship caregivers felt frustrated because they did not know how to work within the systems (i.e., medical care, insurance, assistance with utility bills).

CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

As part of the current kinship project phase, a client satisfaction survey was sent out to those kinship caregivers enrolled in the outcome evaluation. The outcome evaluation randomly assigned kinship caregivers to either Tier 1 services—services as usual that includes a copy of the handbook and access to the website—or Tier 2 services—the enhanced kinship care services that includes one-on-one case management services and hands-on resource direction. Currently, there are 104 kinship caregivers enrolled into the outcome evaluation; however,

at the time the surveys were distributed, only 65 kinship caregivers completed their baseline data, indicating that they started receiving services. Of the 65 surveys sent to kinship caregivers, 19 were completed, approximately a 29 percent response rate. Many participants identified as a grandparent (58%); cousin, aunt, or uncle (21%); or family friend/other (10%). Fifty-three percent are still receiving services from Kids Central, Inc. Most responses came from Lake (37%), Marion (26%), and Sumter (21%) counties, with fewer from Citrus (10%) and Hernando (5%) counties. Caregivers reported overall satisfaction with services received from KCI and their case manager.

- ❖ **The majority of caregivers (58%) do not attend the support groups.** Of these, 36 percent noted that they did not know about the support groups or were not offered the support groups. This could be due to the fact that these individuals received Tier 1 services. However, other kinship caregivers reported that they could not attend because of work or that, due to COVID, the support groups were unavailable. Notably, of those who did attend support groups, all respondents indicated that the support groups were a helpful and needed resource.
- ❖ **Caregivers identified tangible resources offered by KCI as most helpful.** This included supports such as daycare services, financial support for the holidays, support groups, and assistance with ACCESS benefits.
- ❖ **Though case managers are extremely helpful, caregivers identified several areas for improvement.** Specifically, caregivers noted a need for increased communication, additional tangible supports (e.g., respite care), and assistance with Medicaid/Medicare. Two kinship caregivers noted that they would have appreciated more support and assistance in getting services such as ACCESS benefits. Of note, these individuals received Tier 1 services, suggesting the utility of directed and consistent case management is a benefit for kinship caregivers.

Next Steps

The Institute is committed to finalizing the evaluation of the Kids Central, Inc. Kinship Navigator Program. Therefore, the recommended next steps include: 1) ongoing data collection through June 2024, so that baseline, case closure, and 6-month follow-up data can be collected on all kinship caregivers; and 2) reports examining the effectiveness of Kids Central, Inc.'s kinship program from baseline to case closure and 6-months post-case closure. The former would include an analysis of those receiving Tier 1 services—services as usual without hands-on resource direction from a case manager— compared to those receiving Tier 2 services—enhanced kinship services with one-on-one case management services and hands-on resource direction. In addition, as part of the FICW's contract with the DCF, the principal investigator submitted a manuscript detailing these findings in more depth for peer review in an academic journal. Publications can later be used for the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse's review of KCI as an evidence-based program.

Resources

[FICW Kinship Page](#)

[Title IV-E Clearinghouse](#)

Supports for Caregivers in Strengthening Protective Factors for Foster Parenting

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Considering the state of Florida emphasizes the important roles of caregivers in child welfare practices, it is critical to understand the caregivers' needs from their perspectives. This entails providing them with more effective services and training opportunities that improve their competence in parenting and providing appropriate care according to the stages of development of children and youth. Though there are some studies that examine caregivers' needs for trainings and supports (Cooley & Petren, 2011; Kaasboll et al., 2019) and certain factors influencing foster parenting (Sharda, 2022), there is a dearth of research investigating multi-level factors that are associated with caregivers' parenting competence. Particularly, research on the support needs of caregivers of transition age youth is significantly scant. Given that existing research in this area has primarily used secondary data (e.g., National Youth Transition Database data) or focused on perspectives of child welfare professionals or youth (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Lemon et al., 2005), more research should be conducted to gain perspectives of caregivers.

The primary aims of the current study are to:

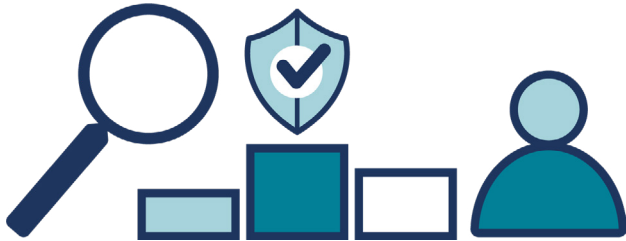
1. Assess foster parents' needs for support and trainings.



Overview

From 2021 to 2022, the Institute conducted mandated evaluations of [permanency outcomes](#) and Florida's approach to independent life skills development among youth in foster care. Florida's current approach to [independent life skills development](#) is implemented based on the caregiver-centered model, which requires caregivers to take primary responsibility for assisting youth in developing life skills. However, most caregivers reported they lack resources and support for assisting foster youth in developing independent life skills and self-sufficiency. According to the DCF's CF Operating Procedure 170-17 (2019), the development of life skills begins at age 13. Thus, it is important to identify the needs of caregivers early and provide them with sufficient resources and supports so they can be prepared to assist their youth's development of life skills.

2. Explore protective factors at multiple levels that significantly influence foster parents' perceived parenting competence.



3. Provide recommendations for more concrete strategies for strengthening protective factors that improve competence in parenting and providing care.



Particularly, driven by the findings from the Institute's evaluation of independent life skills development, the current study will also examine whether caregivers of youth ages 13 or older have specific needs for additional trainings and support in this area.

Current Status

The Florida State University IRB approved the study in March 2023. The research team started collecting online survey data from foster parents residing in Florida in June 2023. In a collaborative partnership with the former president of the Florida Foster and Adoptive Parent

Association (FAPA), the research team received ongoing consultation regarding the recruitment process, research design, and data collection. A convenience sampling method was used to recruit the study participants. The research team implemented several recruitment strategies. First, the research team requested that the Florida FAPA send out the survey flyer to foster parents via newsletters. Second, the survey flyer was posted on the Florida FAPA's social media sites (i.e., Facebook) and the Institute's social media sites. Third, foster parents were asked to post the survey flyer on their social media and disseminate it to other foster parents.

Next Steps

The research team will clean and analyze data in fall 2023. Univariate and bivariate analyses will be conducted to identify the needs of foster parents and significant relationships among study variables. Specific tests will be identified based on levels of measurements. Multivariate analyses will be performed to identify relationships between significant factors at multiple levels and how these multi-level factors are associated with caregivers' parenting competence. Results will be interpreted in the context of the primary research questions. The final report and executive summary will be provided in spring 2024.

Resources

[Project Website Page](#)

[Project Report](#)

CHANGING SYSTEMS



Overview

Alongside the Institute's youth- and family-focused work, researchers continue to conduct projects that can inform systemic change. Building on the Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF), the Institute is committed to regularly checking in with the workforce on their needs to help inform Institute research and programs. In addition, the Institute conducts or funds research and evaluation focused on novel programs and interventions that could result in improved processes for how Florida supports its child welfare workforce and serves vulnerable children and families. In this section, we detail our current and recently completed systems-oriented research and evaluation, providing recommendations, where appropriate, based on the stage of the research.

Planned Work

In addition to the studies summarized below in this section, the Institute has several systems-oriented research projects planned or under consideration:

- ❖ **Transformational Supervisors in Child Welfare Agencies.** In 2023, the Institute competitively solicited proposals for research focused on transformational leadership. Although transformational leadership theory argues its benefits for both employees and leaders themselves, little research has been conducted to examine to what extent the leadership style benefits leaders. The selected proposal, led by Tae Kyung Park, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, is a cross sectional survey study that examines the transformational leadership of child welfare supervisors and its impact on their own well-being and work attitudes including turnover intent, perception of organizational culture and climate, and those of their supervisees in Florida. The findings of this project will inform child welfare agencies in Florida of the benefits of transformational leadership for both supervisors and supervisees, as well as identify ways to reduce turnover intent and work-related stress in the child welfare workforce. The Institute is currently assisting Dr. Park to secure a Florida-based co-investigator to carry out this work.
- ❖ **Unnamed Hurricane Project.** The Florida child welfare workforce faces unique challenges with respect to the impact of hurricanes on their life and work. The Institute is considering exploring what hurricane preparedness and response efforts currently look like in Florida's child welfare system in an effort to identify potential gaps in best supporting both workers and the children and families they serve. The FICW Director had initial conversations with the Stoops Center for Communities, Families, and Children at FSU to potentially lead this work.
- ❖ **Unnamed Criminal Justice Trauma-Treatment Study.** Stephen Tripodi, Ph.D., MSSW, Associate Professor of Social Work at Florida State University and Faculty Director of Academic Dissemination at the Institute for Justice Research and Development, is leading the development of a proposal for evaluation of a trauma intervention for youth incarcerated in adult facilities, many of whom have a history of child welfare involvement. The proposal will be reviewed by a committee of FICW researchers and affiliates to determine appropriateness for funding.

Annual Child Welfare Workforce Survey

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Next Steps

Data are currently being analyzed, with preliminary findings expected to be reported in late October 2023. Data analysis will primarily consist of descriptive statistics. Relationships between risk and protective factors will be analyzed, and if the sample size allows, the researchers will compare differences between different groups of child welfare workers.

Overview

As indicated in the strategic plan, the Institute established an annual workforce survey to remain empirically attuned to the experiences of the workforce and to promote voices from the field at all levels of practice. This effort is inspired by the [Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families \(FSPSF\)](#) which was conducted between September 2015 and May 2020, and the recognition of the importance of collecting timely and relevant data from those in the field. Resultant findings, in conjunction with other data sources, will inform near-term Institute priorities for the [Greater Resilience of the Workforce \(GROW\) Center](#).

Current Status

Following review of the initial FSPSF study measures and others that capture outcomes of interest, the survey was developed to prioritize both methodological rigor and brevity to increase participation of busy child welfare workers. The study was approved by the Florida State University Institutional Review Board in June 2023. Data collection began in July 2023, with initial recruitment activities taking place at the Florida Coalition for Children Conference. The survey information was also circulated using the Institute’s affiliate and workforce networks. Data collection closed in September 2023.



Resources
Florida Study of Professionals for Families (FSPSF)
Greater Resilience of the Workforce (GROW) Center
Strategic Plan

Sexual Safety Programming and Evaluation for Youth and Foster Families in Florida

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Overview

The purpose of this project is to examine evidence-based programming and strategies for promoting sexual safety among youth in foster care and evaluate the existence of current sexual safety programming for youth and foster families in the state of Florida. This two-year multi-phase investigation will broadly include three phases of work:

- ❖ A systematic and/or scoping review of (a) evidence-informed and evidenced-based sexual safety programming and strategies for youth in foster care and foster families and (b) youth, caregiver, and child welfare worker perceptions of sexual safety for youth in foster care.
- ❖ A needs assessment of sexual safety programming for youth in the state of Florida
- ❖ An agency case study and qualitative case review of an agency with advanced screening and programming options available to youth and foster families



Phase 1



Phase 2



Phase 3

Importantly, the study includes paid consultation of two individuals with lived expertise in the child welfare system, as well as two researchers with expertise in prevention of child sexual abuse, sexual safety intervention and development, and sexual safety needs of children and families impacted by child welfare services.

Current Status

Since the project began in May 2023, the principal investigator has met with the graduate assistant to explore the nuance in definitions of sexual safety; worked with consultants on their ideas for the search terms; and helped the consultants get their university contracts/invoices set up. Following confirmation of search terms for the scoping review, the search process began in Summer 2023. A final phase one report will be provided in October 2023.

Notably, the community-based care lead agency partner in this evaluation, Heartland for Children, experienced a change in executive leadership at the onset of this contract. The FICW Director met with the new Heartland for Children CEO, Kim Daugherty, who confirmed continued interest in serving as a community partner for the case study.

Next Steps

The research team will continue to refine plans for Phases Two and Three, expected to commence in Fall 2023 and early 2024, respectively. A final report is expected in July 2024.

Translational Research of Fort Lauderdale Independence & Education (FLITE) Center in Broward County, Florida

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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CO-INVESTIGATOR

Stephen Ferrante, Ph.D., MSW
Group Victory, LLC

Overview

This translational research project assessed the Fort Lauderdale Independence Training & Education (FLITE) Center's program model. The research aimed to assist the State's child welfare system to improve its service delivery to some of Florida's most vulnerable youth, those aging out of foster care. As Barry University and the FLITE Center serve the most racially, ethnically, and economically diverse Florida counties, this project sought to provide cultural implications in the provision of services. All study protocols were approved by the Barry University IRB.

The research objectives included: (1) knowledge dissemination regarding promising practices with youth transitioning from the child welfare system, (2) translation of policy and replication implications of the FLITE Center program model, and (3) building a foundation for more rigorous research on the FLITE Center model and similar service approaches.

Methodology

The investigators employed a mixed methods research design to assess the FLITE Center's program model. The quantitative data (consisting of service output and client outcomes) was collected by the FLITE Center for each of

its six main programs: Education, Housing, Employment, Resources/Navigation, Health/Wellness, and System of Care Coordination. Data were obtained from the FLITE Center's data collection system and consisted of both raw and aggregated figures. Each investigator reviewed the quantitative data individually and met in person to discuss their initial findings. Together, they analyzed the FLITE Center's quantitative service output and client outcome variables for each of its programs/services. Due to the amount of available secondary quantitative data, the research team investigated the FLITE Center program model through a longitudinal review of the past three years (2020, 2021, and 2022).

The qualitative component included primary collection and analysis of focus groups data with FLITE Center transition-age youth clients, staff, and system of care partners, including community life coaches. Research activities and the protocols were informed by the logic models and determined in partnership with the FLITE Center. A consistent focus group protocol was utilized to conduct all focus groups. Focus group questions were compiled with the FLITE Center input, with unique questions tailored to each role. The data were then aggregated and grouped using thematic analysis. The investigators conducted a total of 8 focus groups that included 43 individuals.

Key Findings

Analyses of both the quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of the successes of the FLITE Center's programmatic model and of the challenges the organization faces administratively. The following qualitative findings are categorized into two groups of informants (Staff/System professionals and Youth/Clients) and within these groups, two distinct categories (Programmatic Model and Administrative Issues), and displayed as follows:

PROGRAM MODEL

Table 1: Staff/System Professionals Findings

Program Model Area	Findings Under Programmatic Model
Centralized Intake and Triage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative and qualitative data suggest the FLITE model works well. FLITE’s intake and service provision data are unevenly entered into the centralized system. FLITE should standardize its enrollment process, including data entry and required paperwork. Use of the TIL database should be mandatory. Staff should be trained in this process, as well as using the group application, Group Meet. Youth should be active participants in improving these processes. While there is now efficient and facilitated connection of youth to one or more programmatic components (housing, employment, education, health & wellness), the work to improve is not finished.
Service Integration Occurring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is widespread agreement among FLITE Center’s community partners and stakeholders that the Program Model works well. The one-stop shop nature of the FLITE Center Model is seen as effective. FLITE Center’s role as a resource hub is acknowledged and well regarded by community partners and stakeholders. While some program staff understand the connection between system integration and the effectiveness of the FLITE Center Model, this must be explicitly included in the orientation and training process for all staff. Service integration works well or better among some departments/programs, but not all.
Collaborative, Inter-departmental Youth Staffings are Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple respondents stated that there is a lack of communication among departments and program areas, which impacts service coordination and collaboration.
TIL Database Underutilized and Under-maximized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TIL database can serve as a case management and case record tool. Several focus group participants asserted that everyone needs to understand the value and benefits of the TIL database, and all FLITE employees working with youth need to read the notes in the TIL database. It was emphasized by some participants that not all life coaches are entering activity and service notes in the TIL database, this must change. Therapists should also put notes in the TIL database without confidential information.

Program Model Area	Findings Under Programmatic Model
<p>Varied Staff Perception of Youth Success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was consensus that youth transitioning to independence need more and longer-term supports than the systems or programs are designed to offer/provide.
<p>Prevalence of Behavioral Health Needs (mental health and substance abuse) among Youth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current client/youth populations need more mental health and substance abuse reduction and prevention services. • In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased isolation, youth in need of TIL services are also facing growing mental health challenges.
<p>Lessons Learned and Opportunities for Program Model Enhancement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since its inception, the FLITE Center’s systems and structures improved. • Though there is consensus that the FLITE Center Model works well, there is also concern that the collaboration cannot rest on its laurels. • Life coaching must be expanded and strengthened. • Youth would benefit from increased household budgeting and money management supports. • Employment readiness and retention supports also need to be increased. • The transition to independent living requires individualized and very uniquely tailored attention and long-term supports to each youth. • The FLITE Program Model has the potential to create prevention programs that anticipate needs or challenges.

Table 2: Youth/Clients Findings

Program Model Area	Findings Under Programmatic Model
<p>Basic Needs are Essential/critical to Youth Success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key to youth success are FLITE’s concrete resources, services, and training (skill-building).
<p>Soft Skills are also Important to Youth’s Self-sufficiency and Independence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth were aware of the importance of many of the soft skills gained by other youth in most families and are clear that they deserve no less. • Youth transitioning to independence need more and longer-term supports.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Table 3: Staff/System Professionals Findings

Administrative Area	Findings Under Administrative Issues
Staff Professional Development Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and system professionals were very clear about their job-related developmental/ training needs. Topics included: the TIL database, trauma-informed care, crisis de-escalation and intervention, implicit biases, and cultural sensitivity and cross-sectional sensitivity. • One stakeholder pointed out that FLITE Center’s administrative and managerial structure is far from top-heavy, asserting that the opposite is true as it needs to increase the Center’s “financial and administrative capacity.”
Client Accountability Needs Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth interns do not receive enough help to learn professional workplace standards, nor are they counseled on workplace etiquette and professionalism (e.g., no-show, spending too much time on their personal phones, dress code, sleeping on the job, not working)
Agency Communication Needs Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the FLITE Center Model to be effective, better communication is necessary to improve service delivery. • Communication across programs is key to effective service provision. • Improved horizontal and vertical communication is a recurring theme. Both from the top to the bottom and vice versa, and across programs, this is seen as key to effective service coordination and provision/delivery. • Some departments/programs developed more efficient and effective service delivery systems—with sound communication channels—than others. • Improved and more timely communication was identified as a goal. • Internal and external communication need improvement.

Table 4: Youth/Clients Findings

Program Model Area	Findings Under Programmatic Model
FLITE Center’s Best Practices and Experiences and Opportunities for Program/ service Improvement or Enhancements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth can and are eager to suggest administrative changes/improvements, which could have very practical implications for the FLITE Center as an organization, its programs, its program model, and for other agencies and services across the state.

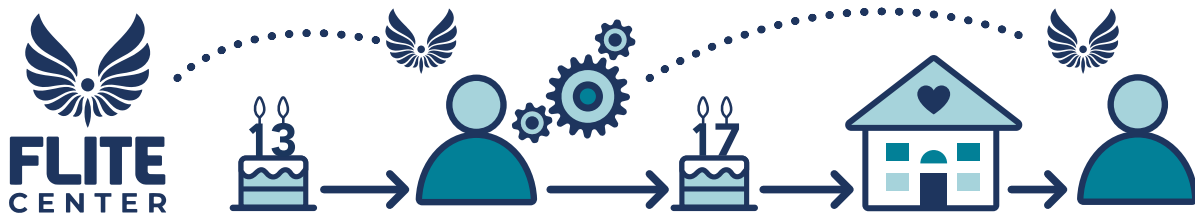
Recommendations

The researchers and FLITE Center sought evidence of the FLITE Center program model’s effectiveness and impact with transitional youth, particularly those aging out of the foster care system. The researchers identified several implications and recommendations for both the FLITE Center and the larger child welfare community.

TABLE 5: FLITE CENTER AND ITS PROGRAMMATIC MODEL

The researchers offer the FLITE Center the following recommendations for consideration related to its functioning and programmatic model:

Recommendation Focus	Recommendation(s)
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal communication (within the FLITE Center) and service coordination, though seen as a strength of the FLITE Program Model, appears to need improvements across the board, as some programs work more seamlessly with others. Staff recognized that internal organizational communication is key to successful service delivery.
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The addition of an associate director position may be warranted, to take on the functions of a chief operating officer. Individual and team capacity building was also connected to the need for related activities and trainings. A yearly staff retreat, team-building activities, employee appreciation celebrations, and other celebratory/fun events should be implemented to support employee/ staff morale and increase buy-in with the FLITE Center’s Program Model. Many staff seemed eager to improve the service delivery system (Model) at the FLITE Center.
Training and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orientation and ongoing training appear to be badly needed and are necessary for team building. Staff would appreciate organizational efforts to secure resources for staff development. Several participants were very clear that there was a need for staff training, particularly from outside providers, in areas such as how to work with/handle youth exhibiting symptoms of trauma.
Program Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized service or progress plans for clients that must be regularly updated to represent timely assessments of the youth’s status. Program/service integration must be seen by all staff and stakeholders as key to FLITE Center Model effectiveness. Role clarity and maintenance would improve service coordination and integration. Staff and other stakeholders believe the Programmatic Model may be poised for replication, expansion, and that the FLITE Center Model should use the addition of preventive services or programs rather than continually focusing on remedial approaches to the many challenges youth face.



LARGER POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND/OR PROGRAMMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

The researchers offer the following recommendations for larger policy and program considerations:

- ❖ The FLITE Center’s Programmatic Model was successful, and it merits replication in other counties or regions of the state.
- ❖ Increased service coordination is essential to prevent or help transitioning youth overcome challenges.
- ❖ FLITE, other providers, and policymakers must work on improving or enhancing concrete resources, services, and training (skill-building) that make it possible for youth to succeed.
- ❖ Social and legislative policy expectations must be reset to meet the reality that youth self-sufficiency and independence goes well beyond 18-21 years of age.
- ❖ Behavioral health screenings should be incorporated as a practice standard for all youth transitioning to adulthood. Current client/youth populations need more mental health and substance abuse reduction and prevention services.
- ❖ Expanding mental health services and programs would help youth navigate other life challenges and increase their chances to reach self-sufficiency and independence.

Resources

[FLITE Center](#)

Empowering Child Welfare Workforce: Supporting Child Welfare Student Interns and Agency Supervisors through Group Supervision, Tuition Sponsorship, and Stipend

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2. What are the child welfare student interns' experiences with group supervision?
3. What are the agency supervisors' experiences with group supervision?
4. Are project participants' experiences with the ECW project associated with their 1) levels of stigma toward child welfare involved parents, 2) secondary traumatic stress, 3) self-efficacy, 4) empowerment, and 5) intention to stay in child welfare?

Overview

Turnover among child welfare workers is prevalent and can negatively affect the outcomes of children and families in the child welfare system. Existing interventions to address turnover focus on either supporting prospective child welfare workers in their post-secondary education or changing child welfare agencies through organizational interventions. The Empowering Child Welfare Workforce (ECW) project aimed to increase intention to stay in the child welfare workforce through a three-component intervention: tuition sponsorship and stipend for social work student interns in child welfare agencies, manualized biweekly group supervision for social work student interns in child welfare agencies, and manualized monthly group supervision for supervisors in child welfare agencies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The researchers examined the following questions:

1. How do the child welfare student interns perceive the tuition sponsorship and stipend?

Sample

Participants were recruited from the FIU School of Social Work and child welfare agencies in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Recruits included seven BSW student interns placed in child welfare agencies and ten supervisors from full case management child welfare agencies. The sample included all student interns and agency supervisors who participate in the ECW project.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers used a mixed-methods study design, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources. Qualitative data sources included: 1) a focus group with BSW student interns, 2) a focus group with supervisors from full case management child welfare agencies, 3) interviews with field instructors of the BSW student interns, 4) interventionist's self-reflection, and 5) supervisors' feedback on the group supervision manual. The researchers collected five waves of quantitative data in August 2022 (i.e., before the start of the ECW project); October 2022 (i.e., middle of the fall semester); December 2022 (i.e., end of the fall semester); March 2023 (i.e., middle of the spring semester); and April 2023 (i.e., end of the spring semester) for students and June 2023 for

supervisors. Data were collected online via Qualtrics and included measures for 1) perceived components of group supervision, 2) satisfaction with ECW group supervision, 3) stigma towards child welfare-involved parents, 4) secondary traumatic stress, 5) self-efficacy, 6) empowerment, 5) intent to stay in child welfare, and 6) demographics and work experience. Descriptive analyses were used to answer research questions one through three. Non-parametric tests were used to answer research question four, comparing data between waves.

Key Findings

How do the child welfare student interns perceive the tuition sponsorship and stipend?

Students expressed appreciation for the stipend and tuition assistance because it helped reduce the stress associated with financial insecurity and allowed for more financial freedom. The inclusion of the stipend and tuition assistance provided them with the opportunity to pay important bills (e.g., car payment, groceries, rent,) and increased their ambition to pursue their master's degree with the extra savings. Students also suggested that the empowering child welfare workforce project should be conducted within the earlier years of their BSW program to help prepare them for work in child welfare instead of their last year of undergraduate internship. Several themes were identified from conducting the focus groups: helpfulness of the tuition sponsorship and stipend (pursuit of the master's degree and ability to endure); and program impact (financial support and career preparation).

What are the child welfare student interns' experiences with group supervision?

Students explained that their experience in the child welfare workforce project was informative, refreshing, insightful, helpful, and valuable. Although students expressed an understanding of the current structure of the

project being virtual via zoom, they suggested that a face-to-face structure would be more beneficial than a meeting on Zoom. Students reported feeling valued as child welfare workers and increased empathy towards families moving through the child welfare system. Several themes were identified from the focus groups: perceived value in child welfare; increased value; supervision benefits (ability to network and increased empathy); and improvements to supervision (in person and over Zoom).

What are the agency supervisors' experiences with group supervision?

Supervisors discussed concerns regarding caseloads, the amount of time needed to resolve child welfare issues associated with their positions, dual roles as supervisor and case manager, feeling unsupported by upper management, dealing with recent graduates with little to no experience in child welfare, professional share and support, and the ability to practice self-care. Supervisors reported that these issues are systematic across agencies and believe this is due to a lack of communication between and across child welfare agencies. They expressed that more collaboration between agencies could help resolve some of the issues mentioned but also believe that there needs to be a deeper understanding of the limitations of workers and what could be done within a specified period. Supervisors also reported that the supervisory group is beneficial as it allows them to share ideas and concerns across agencies and discuss ways to resolve issues they experience. They also expressed a strong desire to continue cross-agency supervision since it was beneficial in understanding other agency functions and provides supervisors an outlet to vent and connect with one another. In the focus groups with the supervisors, several themes were identified: feelings of togetherness promoted by supervision; practicing self-care; professional share and support; the disconnect of upper management; lack of consideration; and improved ability to supervise.

Are project participants' experiences with the ECW project associated with the outcomes of interest?

The researchers found the following statistically significant findings:

Students

- ❖ Perceived a greater level of modeling family-centered practice at waves two and five compared to wave one.
- ❖ Reported lower attitudinal stigma toward clients at wave three than at wave two; but increased at wave four compared to wave three.
- ❖ Perceived impact on the child welfare field decreased between waves two and three.
- ❖ Reported less intent to stay in child welfare at wave two compared to wave one. These results indicated that students' intention to stay in child welfare did not increase, and although there was a decrease between waves one and two, the intention remained unchanged throughout the remainder of the project.

Supervisors

- ❖ Reported increases in reflective supervision between waves one and two, waves four and five, and waves one and five.
- ❖ Perceived a greater level of educational supervision over time.
- ❖ Perceived a greater level of supportive supervision by wave five as compared with waves one and four.
- ❖ Perceived a greater level of modeling family-centered practice at wave five than wave one.
- ❖ Felt more confident in their work at wave two than wave one.

- ❖ Reported less intention to stay in child welfare at wave five than wave one. These results indicate that supervisors perceived the growing quality of the group supervision; however, this did not increase their intention to stay in child welfare. Rather, for some, their intention to stay in child welfare decreased by the end of the project.

Discussion

The ECW project aimed to increase the intention to stay in child welfare for students interning in child welfare; however, students' intention to stay in child welfare did not increase throughout the project's duration. Between waves one and two, significance was recorded for reduced intention to stay in child welfare, but this was not observed during any other survey wave comparison. The researchers suggest this could be due to several factors including 1) the "great resignation" and its acute impacts on younger workers; 2) initial lack of interest in child welfare due to internship placement by availability vs. interest; and 3) students' intent to pursue a master's degree instead of remaining in the field. Supervisors' intent to stay also decreased during the study period. The researchers suggest possible reasons for this including the stress of implementing the Family First Prevention Services Act and peer group information sharing inadvertently reinforcing feelings of hopelessness and negative perceptions or attitudes about working in child welfare.

In terms of the supportive group supervision for students, the students were cooperative, but some had to be prompted to participate. They seemed to lack motivation and interest in child welfare work. It is possible that in-person compared to virtual groups would have increased the level of participation and interaction. During one in-person group, students were energetic and responded positively. It is also possible students participated solely for the financial benefit. Still, the supportive group supervision had several benefits for students:

- ❖ Increased their knowledge of child welfare, its goals, and expectations.
- ❖ Gained the ability to learn and practice skills and strategies from trauma-informed care, solution-focused, strengths-based, motivational interviewing, and culturally responsive lenses to develop trusting relationships and rapport with clients to understand clients' behaviors and to problem-solve.
- ❖ All the students did well on their field placement evaluations by the University and were offered or invited to apply for job positions at their respective field agencies.

Notably, most students did not decide to apply for these jobs or remain in child welfare. Some students decided to attend graduate school, while others sought employment working with children and youth in other fields. Several students reported that child welfare work is overwhelming, and they did not feel that it aligned with their current career goals.

Field instructors were contacted twice a semester to discuss students' progress; however, more engagement from field instructors could have increased students' engagement and interaction. Field instructors reported having limited information about the ECW program and felt like an initial introductory meeting (at the start of the semester) would have provided more guidance on the program's goals and expectations. In addition, it would have been useful to include field instructors in some of the groups, which may have allowed for skills to be practiced or transferred to agency cases outside of supervision. Overall, more collaboration with the Empowering Child Welfare Workforce program and agency field instructors could have increased students' participation and interest in child welfare.

The supportive peer supervision group had several benefits for supervisors:

- ❖ Allowed for a safe space for emotional release while feeling validated and normalized.
- ❖ Provided an opportunity to improve supervisory

skills and explore problem-solving strategies to address difficult clients and staff-related issues.

- ❖ Expanded the supervisors' support network outside of their agency.

Supervisors expressed interest in ongoing groups after the completion of the project, suggesting they be two hours in length instead of ninety minutes. Group discussions indicated common supervisor-reported challenges, such as feelings of constant overwhelm and stress, which stem from a variety of sources (e.g., understaffing, unrealistic expectations, managing work-life balance).

Limitations

Several limitations were present during the process of conducting this study, including slight shifts to the sampling plan due to student eligibility; issues potentially impacting participant engagement, including a delayed start date, a necessary change to virtual (vs. in-person) supervision, and supervisors' busy schedules; and lack of timely response from some participants, resulting in inconsistent timing of data collection (i.e., some participants completed waves two and three just days apart despite multiple reminders). In addition, the supervision sessions presented challenges.

During group supervision, students and supervisors expressed that the group duration is too short to cover manual material and allow for practicing skills, especially for supervisors who meet once monthly. Although the material in the manual was completed for both supervisory groups, the content was often rushed due to the limited time allocated for supervision. This limited the participants' ability to discuss examples and thoroughly review the material. Moreover, at times, the supervisors and interns were distracted with work and other tasks (they may be driving or participating in other matters), which reduces their ability to engage and be fully attentive in the sessions.

Lastly, the supervision sessions did not align with the fall and spring semesters resulting in fewer than expected

supervision sessions. Future studies should seek to align supervision sessions based on an expected amount rather than offering services bi-weekly and should consider winter and spring break interruptions.

Recommendations

The researchers made the following recommendations to those considering similar initiatives or should the ECW be replicated in the future:

- ❖ **Future programs should consider including student application and admission in the program procedure.** The current project started after the student interns were already assigned to their field placements. Therefore, the project team was not involved in selecting students for this project. Instead, all student interns placed in child welfare agencies automatically (with consent) became participants in this project. As stated earlier, although students identified their areas of interest in their application for field placement, their final assignment also depends on the availability of placements. Therefore, students placed in child welfare agencies are not necessarily interested in practicing in the child welfare field, which might have comprised the effects of this program on increasing their intent to stay in child welfare. Future programs should consider targeting students with an interest in child welfare, especially the ones with an interest in child welfare casework.
- ❖ **There is a need for cross-agency peer groups for supervisors, improved supervisor-administration relationships, and workplace wellness programs that could promote a positive organizational culture and job satisfaction for supervisors.** Lead agencies should consider implementing a cross-agency peer group program to support supervisors in fulfilling their job responsibilities.
- ❖ **Full case management agencies should implement workplace wellness programs to help supervisors and other workers manage job-related stress.** Supervisors commonly face work conditions characterized by high standard performance measures, unpredictable and difficult case situations, long work hours, short-staffing problems, criticism and scrutiny by the public, risky and unpredictable case situations, changing policies and procedures, and the anxiety of making abrupt decisions to ensure the safety of a child. Workplace wellness programs that include training about stress, trauma, stress management, workspaces to de-stress, and wellness practices like yoga could be beneficial to address job-related stress.

The full Empowering Child Welfare Workforce report will be available in late 2023.

Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF)

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Florida Institute for Child Welfare



Overview

The Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF) findings serve as a cornerstone of the GROW Center. The FSPSF principal investigators continue to perform analyses to inform GROW Center operations, disseminate knowledge relevant to child welfare workforce issues, and are working with the [National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect \(NDACAN\)](#) to disseminate FSPSF data files for public use.

Current Status

The researchers continue to leverage FSPSF data to respond to Institute-identified emerging issues. FSPSF analyses allowed for dissemination of findings related to experiencing harassment in the workplace, employment destinations of workers leaving child welfare, identification of particularly difficult cases, work-related trauma exposure, and presenteeism in the workplace. Further FSPSF analyses allow for continued dissemination of findings through Institute research briefs and peer-reviewed publications and presentations, which bring visibility to the Institute as a leader in child welfare workforce reform.

Data availability also provided collaboration opportunities among child welfare scholars to advance knowledge about the workforce. The researchers worked closely with

NDACAN to prepare datasets for public dissemination. NDACAN released Waves One and Two of the FSPSF data in July 2023 and already received licensing requests for use of the data. Waves Three and Four are in review with an anticipated dissemination date of September 2023. The remaining waves are in the final stages of editing with plans to disseminate by December 2023.

Next Steps

FSPSF researchers currently have projects underway focusing on worker burnout, client violence over time, and self-care impacts on employment outcomes such as psychological distress and work self-efficacy. Additional analyses will be conducted at the request of the Institute. Finally, the researchers will continue to work with NDACAN for FSPSF data dissemination.

Resources

[FSPSF Project Page](#)

[FSPSF News Story](#)

[FSPSF Dataset](#)

The Effectiveness of Children's Home Societies' CaseAIM Program

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CaseAIM Hub). Each component is designed to support case managers in completing their responsibilities effectively and efficiently. CaseAIM specialists, the first CaseAIM component, are senior, certified case managers with extensive knowledge of child welfare system operations who provide administrative support to case managers on the frontlines. Administrative support includes service referrals, workload mapping, transportation coordination, collateral contacts, appointment coordination, funding authorizations, and electronic documentation of activities in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN). In addition, CaseAIM specialists are available to answer questions and mentor frontline workers. CaseAIM's second component, transportation support, are drivers who are available to assist case managers with the transportation needs of their caseloads (e.g., transporting children to doctor's appointments, visitations). The last component, the CaseAIM Hub, allows case managers to review current case information and document their activities on a phone app while out in the field.

CHS requested support from the Institute to evaluate the effectiveness of CaseAIM's three components on three broad outcomes: case manager care coordination, client engagement, and child outcomes. The evaluators completed a mixed methods evaluation using (a) quantitative data provided by CHS and (b) qualitative interview data collected from case managers using CaseAIM. The mixed methods evaluation considered both the areas in which CaseAIM services impacted case manager outcomes (quantitative) and how case managers perceived CaseAIM services to impact their work (qualitative). The evaluation included two overarching research questions:

1. Do CaseAIM services improve case manager outcomes?
2. How do case managers describe the impact of CaseAIM on their work?

Overview

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the CaseAIM program on caseworker care coordination, engagement, and facilitation of positive child outcomes. Case managers face limited contact with clients due to high caseloads and job demands (Gallagher et al., 2011). In addition, due to the nature of the work, policies and procedures place high priority on administrative tasks (Gallagher et al., 2011) that workers often must complete in high pressure, time-sensitive environments (Turney, 2012). According to Children's Home Society (CHS) administrators, case workers spend 75 percent of their time completing administrative tasks. The central purpose of the CaseAIM program is to increase case managers' direct contact with caregivers and their children by providing support for administrative tasks.

The CaseAIM program started in Orange and Seminole Counties in December 2015. The program has three components: 1) the support team (referred to as CaseAIM specialists), 2) transportation support, and 3) the CaseAIM mobile phone-based application (referred to as the



SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

Quantitative Methods

Sample

The sample includes 13 operating sites and locations and consists of all children and Dependency Case Managers (DCMs) entered into the CHS personnel record system within the following time periods: (Time 1) September 2016-November 2016; (Time 2) September 2018-December 2018; (Time 3) September 2020-December 2020; and (Time 4) January 2022-June 2022. The time 1 period was prior to CaseAIM implementation and served as the baseline.

CHS provided CaseAIM services in phases across several of their operating regions. Regions could receive full CaseAIM services which included all three components or CaseAIM without either specialists or transportation support. CaseAIM was piloted in one county in the Central Florida region in 2015 with full implementation starting in December 2016 for the entire region. Table 6 indicates the CaseAIM services available to DCMs in each region for each time period.

Analysis

The researchers employed a quasi-experimental, multiple time-series study design. This design provides the opportunity to differentiate between DCMs before and after CaseAIM service implementation and between areas with access to different configurations of CaseAIM services. Due to limited data on the same individuals over time, the analysis treated each year as an individual group (i.e., CHS DCMs and children in out-of-home placements). We used descriptive statistics to compare the CaseAIM intervention groups to two comparison groups: (a) themselves prior to CaseAIM intervention and (b) those without access to CaseAIM services. CaseAIM participants were separated into samples by year. The samples were then compared by demographic characteristics and the outcome variables. In total, the data included information on 393 DCMs and 17,323 child cases across all years. The DCM dataset declined in number over time: 193 (2016), 168 (2018), 114 (2020), and 61 (2022). The size of the child dataset also declined over time: 6,870 (2016), 6,819 (2018), 3,334 (2020), and 3,520 (2022). Data from DCMs and children were included from multiple time periods; therefore, the samples overlapped year to year. Data for the separate CaseAIM regions in each selected year were analyzed by the following outcome variables: 1) DCM turnover, 2) home visits completed per child, 3) telephone contacts completed per child, 4) service provider contacts made per child, and 5) length of stay in foster care for children.

TABLE 7: CASEAIM SERVICES UTILIZED BY DCMS BY REGION FOR EACH TIME PERIOD OF DATA.

Region	2016	2018	2020	2022
Central Florida	None	Full CaseAIM	Full CaseAIM	CaseAIM without Transport
Greater Lakeland	None	Full CaseAIM	Full CaseAIM	Full CaseAIM
Miami/Dade	None	Full CaseAIM	CaseAIM without Transport	Full CaseAIM
Panama City	None	Full CaseAIM	No data	No data
Palm Beach	None	None	None	None
Suncoast	None	None	None	None
Greater Northeast Florida	None	None	None	None
Treasure Coast	None	None	None	None
Western	None	None	None	None

Qualitative Methods

Sample

Researchers interviewed 11 DCMS. Most DCMS were female ($n = 9$). Per job requirements, all DCMS held at least a bachelor’s degree. Child welfare case management experience ranged from 4 months to 17 years, with a mean of 5.3 years. Specifically, 4 DCMS had more than 5 years of experience in case management while the remaining 7 DCMS had 2 years or less. DCMS’ experience using CaseAIM ranged from 4 months to approximately 2 years ($M = 9.8$ months). Six DCMS had only worked with access to CaseAIM, and the remaining 5 had experience working before and after implementation of CaseAIM.

Analysis

Interview content included their tasks as DCMS, experiences with CaseAIM training, use of various CaseAIM components, and CaseAIM’s impact on the ability to complete job tasks. Interviews averaged about 45 minutes in length (range: 20-52). To capture CaseAIM training experiences, participants were asked, “Tell me about any training that you received for CaseAIM services.”

To learn other CaseAIM experiences, participants were asked to, “Walk me through an example from your caseload when CaseAIM was helpful,” “Tell me about a time when CaseAIM was problematic,” and “Tell me how CaseAIM impacts your ability to engage with clients and families on your caseload.” Interviewers also gave participants the opportunity to share anything else about their experiences using (or not using) CaseAIM for case management tasks. Interviews were digitally recorded and professional transcriptionists transcribed the interviews verbatim. The Florida State University Institutional Review Board declared the study as exempt from the review process.

The PI followed coding guidelines for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). A priori coding was established based on the interview guide and research questions. Codes and definitions were documented in a codebook. The PI familiarized herself with the data and coded three randomly selected interviews. Additional codes were added to the codebook as needed. Next, the PI coded all interviews according to the codebook. If additional codes were created, interviews were re-reviewed to include the new codes. A trained graduate assistant reviewed the

coding structure and offered feedback on codes. The PI examined the data within the codes and identified emerging themes, or potentially meaningful patterns in the data, among the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Through discussion with the study team, emerging themes were named and defined, then illustrative examples were extracted from the data for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In addition, to consider how CaseAIM perceptions and experiences may have differed among participants, we compared DCMs who only had experience with CaseAIM to those who had experience both with and without CaseAIM.

Preliminary Findings

QUANTITATIVE

Preliminary quantitative analyses revealed more differences than similarities among CaseAIM regions across time periods when compared to their 2016 baseline measures before CaseAIM implementation. The researchers selected two outcomes—DCM turnover rates and home visits per child—for this report.

Turnover

Frequencies were used to assess turnover, or whether a DCM remained in their position, from one time period to the next. We examined turnover from 2016 to 2018, 2018 to 2020, and 2020 to 2022. Overall, turnover rates were high for all regions across years (50% to 100%; see Figure 4). The two-year turnover rates of roughly 60 percent and 80 percent in the Central Florida and Miami Dade regions, respectively, remained stable over time. However, for Greater Lakeland, turnover rates were 100 percent for 2018 and 2020 with a decrease to roughly 75 percent in 2022. Of note, the indicator of turnover does not differentiate between positive (e.g., promotions) and negative turnover (e.g., quitting due to job responsibilities) which is important when considering retention strategies.

Percent of Workers who Left their Positions from Previous Time Frame

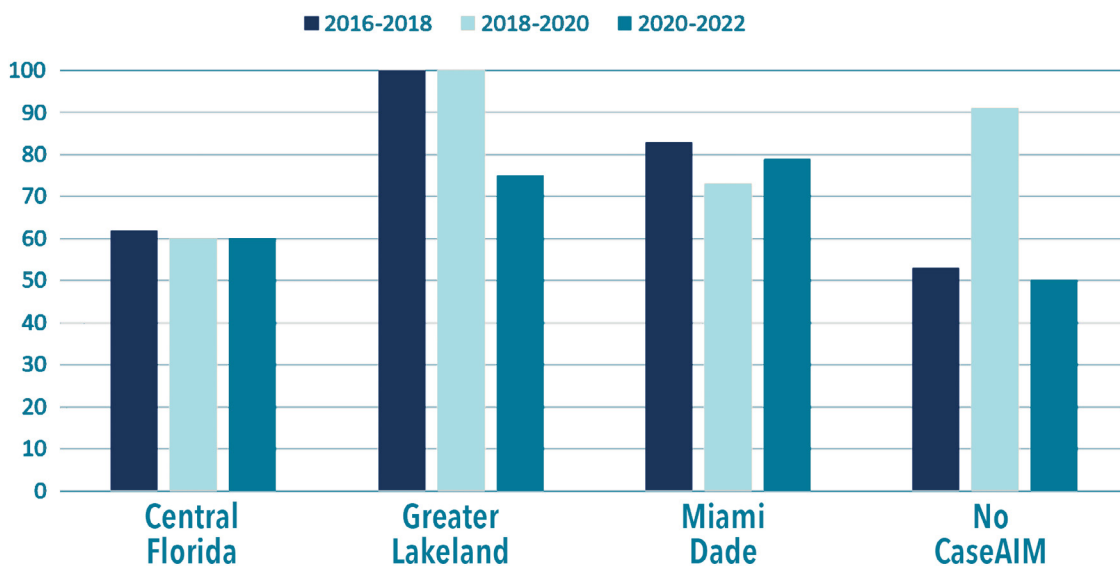


FIGURE 4: PERCENT OF DCMS FROM PREVIOUS TIME PERIOD THAT WERE NO LONGER EMPLOYED AS A DCM IN THE CURRENT YEAR

Home Visits

Means were used to assess home visits conducted by DCMs per child in 2018, 2020, and 2022 compared to 2016 baseline values by CaseAIM region. Figure 5 illustrates the percent change in home visits for each region compared to 2016 prior to CaseAIM implementation. Compared to 2016, mean home visits were relatively stable immediately post-CaseAIM implementation (the lack of light blue bar on the Central FL and Miami Dade plots indicate no change). Relative to 2016, home visits in 2020 (teal bars) decreased in all areas except Miami Dade with the steepest decline

in areas without CaseAIM. By 2022, home visits increased by 50 percent or more compared to 2016 with a slightly smaller increase among areas without CaseAIM. The inconsistency in change in the number of home visits after 2018 suggests that factors outside of CaseAIM may have contributed to these changes. The fact that visits dropped more in 2020 and increased less in 2022 relative to 2016 in counties without CaseAIM provides support for additional inquiry into the effects of CaseAIM on the number of DCM completed home visits.

Percent Change from 2016: Home Visits

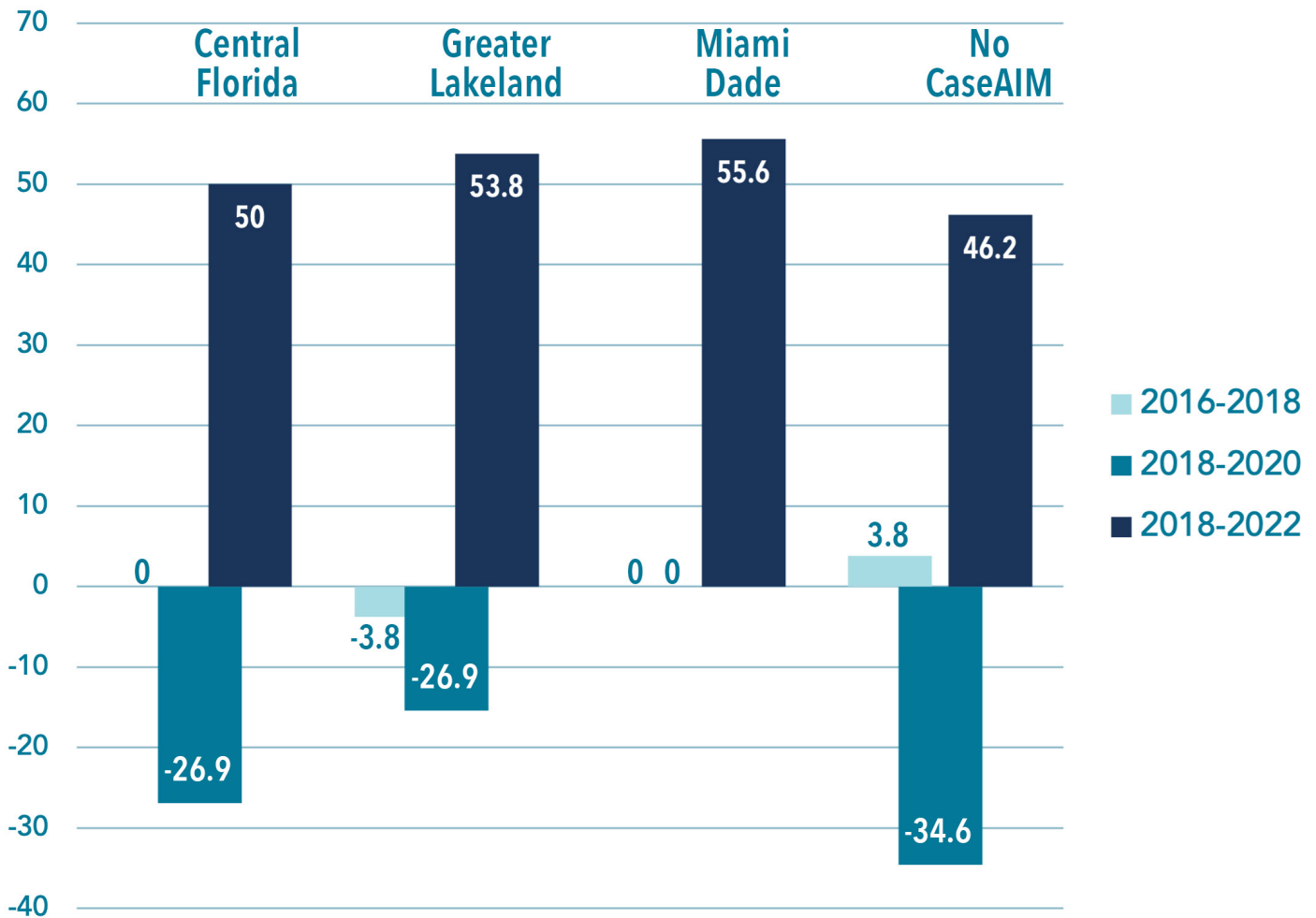


FIGURE 5: PERCENT CHANGE FROM 2016 FOR HOME VISITS PER CHILD

QUALITATIVE

The study focused on DCMs’ CaseAIM experiences and the conditions they felt facilitated (and did not facilitate) meaningful engagement with families on their caseloads. DCMs expressed a range of experiences with CaseAIM. Most workers described their overall experiences in positive terms ($n = 9$), and nearly all DCMs ($n = 10$) also identified at least one frustration with the service. Although many DCMs described their day-to-day responsibilities as case managers as “overwhelming” and likened these experiences to “riding a rollercoaster,” they also expressed it would be impossible to do their job without CaseAIM services, particularly the access to CaseAIM specialists and transportation services.

Workers’ experiences as DCMs contributed to their level of CaseAIM satisfaction. Generally, those who had DCM experience prior to CaseAIM implementation were the strongest endorsers of it. The two participants who expressed overall negative CaseAIM experiences had less than two years of DCM experience and had no experience operating without it. The more experienced workers’ positivity may reflect a comparison between CaseAIM and the “old way” of documenting visits taking “way more time” without CaseAIM.

Themes related to DCM CaseAIM experiences included: a tool for time management, increased engagement with children and families, increased case management support, and challenges (see Table 8).

Next Steps

CaseAIM’s goal is to lessen the burden of administrative and transportation tasks allowing DCMs to spend more time in the field engaging caregivers and children to promote positive outcomes (e.g., quicker time to permanency, reunification). Preliminary quantitative findings suggest that many factors outside of CaseAIM may contribute to DCM turnover and the number of children’s home visits. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, is one of these factors (e.g., the Great Resignation, lockdowns). Qualitative findings underscore the importance of CaseAIM for service delivery. In particular, DCMs with experience before and after CaseAIM implementation suggested that CaseAIM increased their efficiency in providing referrals and transport to clients, thus, allowing more time for engagement with children and families. Final analyses and a report are expected in fall 2023.

Resources

[CaseAIM Project Page](#)

TABLE 8: THEMES RELATED TO DEPENDENCY CASE MANAGERS’ EXPERIENCES WITH CASEAIM.

Domain	Domain definition
Tool for effective time management	Efficient training Organizational tool
Increased engagement with children and families	Beneficial transport services Coordinated care Increased face-to-face contact with children and families
Increased case management support	CaseAIM specialist referral support CaseAIM specialist effective communication CaseAIM specialist support in system navigation
Challenges	Technology glitches Unrealistic expectations of DCMs

Evaluation of Early Childhood Courts

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Katie Ropes Berry, Ph.D.

Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Overview

Early Childhood Court (ECC) is a problem-solving court that takes a multidisciplinary team approach to child dependency cases for families with children ages zero to five. ECCs offer evidence-based treatment, judicial supervision, and accountability. Children and families in ECCs are provided individualized treatment plans that reflect the needs of the children and families served to instill confidence and promote satisfaction with the justice system.

In November 2019, the Florida Supreme Court adopted standards of best practices for Early Childhood Courts with the primary goals of:

- ❖ “Improving child safety and well-being
- ❖ Health trauma and repair the parent/child relationship
- ❖ Promote timely permanency
- ❖ Stop the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment” (“Early Childhood Courts”, FLCourts.gov)

Florida’s ECC initiative grew in the ten years since inception from a few sites in 2013 to 32 sites in 2022. This evaluation provides an update to a report of preliminary outcomes published in 2020.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The Institute was approached to help support an updated evaluation using administrative court data on ECC dependency cases closed between January 1, 2020, and June 29, 2022. Evaluation questions were developed by a group of ECC stakeholders. The questions in this evaluation report included many questions addressed in the [previous report published in 2020](#) as well as emergent questions

brought forth by the group, including:

- ❖ Who did ECC serve between 2020 to 2022?
- ❖ How did dependency outcomes differ between this time period (2020-2022) and the subsequent evaluation period 2018-2020?
- ❖ Are there areas for improvement that can be identified from the existing data?

METHODOLOGY

A de-identified dataset was shared with the Institute in October 2022 with select variables required to answer the evaluation questions described above. In addition to ECC data, data from traditional family courts was included for comparison.

A series of non-parametric analyses were used to explore differences between case demographics and outcomes between ECC and traditional family court sites. The median was used to estimate average time to case closure and nonparametric tests were used to explore differences in outcomes between and within ECC and traditional family court sites.

Key Findings

Descriptive analyses of child and family demographic characteristics between ECC and traditional family courts were similar. The distribution of gender designation across cases was similar across ECC and non-ECC courts; wherein there was almost an even split between males and females (51% vs. 49% in ECC; 52% vs. 48% in non-ECC). Categorical race distribution was similar across sites such that both ECC and traditional court sites served children who were predominately single-race White (54% vs. 66%) and Black (33% vs. 32%).

One of the primary interests of the stakeholder group was answering the question: Is ECC delivering on its promise

of improved outcomes relative to traditional family courts? Like what was found in the 2020 report, the average time to closure in ECCs was significantly less compared to traditional family courts (median = 772 days [about 2 years] vs. 853 days [about 2 and a half years]: $U = 581660, z = -2.58, p = .01$). An upward trend in days to permanency was anecdotally noted during this process, wherein stakeholders identified numerous systemic issues that impacted child welfare, system-wide, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another interest of the stakeholder group was assessing whether there were disparities in outcomes based on a set of known risk factors for which administrative data was available: parents' history of child welfare involvement (as a child) and parents' categorical race designation. The findings of this evaluation suggest that there are no significant differences in outcome likelihood between ECC cases with mothers and fathers who had and did not have child welfare involvement. However, a deeper investigation into racial outcomes by county revealed a subset of counties where racial differences on outcomes were observed (albeit using small samples).

Finally, the stakeholder group wanted to test a process outcome of ECCs – the association of hearings attended per month and time to permanency. One of the hallmark components of ECCs is that parents are engaged at a higher frequency in the courts. Across both ECC and traditional family court sites, children with one or more hearings per month had significantly fewer days to closure on all outcomes compared to children with less than one hearing per month. On all permanency outcomes, ECC children had a significantly higher number of hearings per month compared to non-ECC children.

In general, the findings indicate that ECC cases close sooner on adoption and reunification cases, and that permanency outcomes are not significantly influenced by parents' history of child welfare dependency as children.



Early Childhood Court



Adoption and reunification cases

While there were no significant racial differences in outcomes across sites, at the county/circuit-level there are racial differences that warrant further investigation. In aggregate, the findings suggest that ECC sites are continuing to show gains for families and children relative to non-ECC courts; however, more intentional data collection and research must be done to better understand where ECC sites can improve from here.

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to relying solely on administrative data. First, manual data entry poses a risk to the integrity of the data. Further, this evaluation omitted any family-reported outcomes, limiting the scope of this evaluation to just what is available in the administrative data. Future investigations would be strengthened by included quantitative and/or qualitative insights from direct service providers and families with system involvement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report and the preceding report (2020), ECCs appear to provide equitable outcomes and fewer days to case closure. However, this evaluation is limited by the data available. As the team continues to work on improving ECC outcomes, it is important that additive data sources be explored. As such, the following recommendations are being made based on the findings of this report:

- ❖ Continue to research and better understand racial inequities in permanency outcomes at the county/circuit level in ECC courts.
- ❖ Leverage the Early Childhood Court Statewide Advisory Group to design collaborative research across actors within the child welfare system in Florida with the aim of improving data collection:
 - Identify common research goals and questions to relevant stakeholders (e.g., ECC court administrators, parent attorneys, etc.)
 - Identify and implement strategies to solicit the input of families with lived experience on all strategic initiatives (beyond the current advisory group).

- Enlist the support of a third-party entity to conduct research and to be accountable to this group for reporting on progress made, barriers encountered, and insights surfaced.
 - Collaboratively write recommendations that reflect the concerns and interests of all stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of any change initiatives agreed upon.
- ❖ Create and implement a fidelity monitoring tool that can be used to identify sites that may not be facilitating the ECC model as designed, offering technical assistance and support to ensure that families are receiving the services they are intended to.

Next Steps

The ECC stakeholder group created a second work group to continue this evaluation to identify opportunities for improvement in ECCs. This work is detailed later in this report.

Resources

[ECC Project Page](#)

[ECC Executive Summary](#)

[2023 ECC Report](#)

Young Adults' Experiences with the Guardian ad Litem Program

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Amy Nourie, MS

University of South Florida

Current Status

The current working title for this study is *Aged Out: The Lived Experiences of Young Adults Who were Formerly in Florida Foster Care and Appointed a Guardian ad Litem*. Since May 2023 the principal investigator is recruiting participants and conducting interviews.

Overview

Initially titled *Surviving Good Intentions: A Retrospective Examination of the Florida Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program*, year one of this study was supported as one of two FICW Dissertation Fellowship Awards for the 2022-2023 academic year. Although the principal investigator initially hoped to conduct interviews with GAL program volunteers and staff, she was unable to do so due to lack of agency support for the project. Following revisions to the dissertation—both in name and plan—the study will now focus solely on the lived experiences of young adults formerly in foster care who were also appointed a Guardian ad Litem. Narrative analysis will be used to understand how the participants construct their own stories and then the principal investigator will reconstruct their stories based on these personal experiences.

Next Steps

Data analysis will begin and follow-up interviews will be using narrative analysis. Follow-up interviews will be conducted with the participants as needed to gather the most comprehensive and rich stories. Additional interviews will be considered if necessary.

Currently, the Institute is considering an additional year of dissertation funding to support the completion of this work, which is anticipated in spring 2024.





Technical Assistance and Training

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & TRAINING

The provision of technical assistance and training to state partners is one of our foundational pillars. Institute staff serve in a variety of capacities to assist entities as requested or required.

Workgroups

DCF Preservice Redesign | The Academy

The Institute's support of the Department's preservice redesign (i.e., The Academy) is ongoing, including through staff participation in workgroups. The Capacity Building Center for States is supporting implementation readiness for the Department and hosted multiple workgroups to help facilitate a successful rollout of The Academy. Associate Director of Professional Development Kristina Finch sits on both the communication and implementation sub-group meetings, while Director Lisa Magruder sits on the evaluation sub-group. As the evaluation of The Academy is outsourced to affiliates, those affiliates will be expected to sit on relevant evaluation workgroups as appropriate.

State Interagency Workgroup

Associate Director for Administration Marianna Tutwiler continues to sit on the Statewide Interagency Workgroup and attends the meetings monthly. This Workgroup reports to the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet and operates under the Cabinet Interagency Agreement to Coordinate Services for Children Served by More Than One Agency. This Agreement is a multi-level approach to resolve complex needs of children that are unable to be resolved by traditional multidisciplinary teams. The Agreement focuses on children who are involved, or at risk of becoming involved, in more than one agency system and utilizes Local, Regional and State Review Teams to assess and resolve needs. The Statewide Interagency Workgroup is comprised of state-level representatives from eight child serving agencies that could be involved in a dependent or delinquent child's care and provision of services. Additional representatives include the SEDNET and the Office of the

State Courts Administrator. Monthly trainings are offered for workgroup members to learn about services offered or about particular issues (e.g., human trafficking). Each quarter, a data report reflecting the number and types of cases that are staffed at the local, regional, and state levels is provided.

Critical Incident Rapid Response Team

The Director of the Institute continues to serve on the Critical Incident Rapid Response Team (CIRRT) Advisory Committee and attends quarterly meetings. The CIRRT reports provide an immediate, multiagency investigation of child deaths that meet the statutory criteria for review. Investigations are conducted to identify root causes and rapidly determine the need to change policies and practices related to child protection and improve Florida's child welfare system. The CIRRT reviews consider the family's entire child welfare history, with specific attention to the most recent child welfare involvement and events surrounding the fatality. The Institute's role on the CIRRT Advisory Committee has been centered on providing relevant research and identifying areas of potential research that could prevent and mitigate the risk of child fatalities. Since assuming the role of FICW Director, Dr. Magruder sat in on two CIRRT meetings.

Early Childhood Court

An Early Childhood Court (ECC) task group was formed in July 2023 to strategize ways to improve and evaluate time to permanency for cases in ECCs. Dr. Katie Berry serves as a member of this group, on behalf of the FICW, to provide research and evaluation support.

Children's Home Society

In early 2023, Children's Home Society (CHS) requested the Institute's support in exploring the availability of post-adoption non-clinical supports for families. FICW faculty Dr. Katie Ropes Berry assisted CHS in developing a steering committee for the initiative and is currently conducting an inventory of existing supports to identify true gaps in programming to inform next steps.

Department of Children and Families: The Academy

The Institute supports the Department's preservice overhaul through participation in workgroups, the procurement of virtual REALity software and equipment for CBC lead agency and Department training purposes, curriculum alignment, and training. This assistance has primarily included exploration and implementation support, including evaluation of preservice component pilots. In addition, the GROW Center supports the Department in the statewide implementation of customized simulation training, content development, and evaluation of the preservice training overhaul. The GROW Center continues to work collaboratively with the Department to identify areas of opportunity for the development of new supportive learning tracks specifically designed for child welfare professionals.

The Institute plans to contract with affiliates Drs. Morgan Cooley (Florida Atlantic University) and April Steen (Warner University) to lead the development of an evaluation plan for the Academy, including specific attention to the virtual REALity and simulation components noted below. Following receipt of an evaluation plan in November 2023, the Institute will contract with the proposed lead researcher to execute the evaluation. At the time of this writing, the Department indicated the first group of workers will participate in The Academy in January 2023, which will coincide with commencement of the evaluation.

Virtual REALity

Since April of 2022, the Associate Director of Professional Development has been a member of a group of training and supervisory representatives from the DCF and CBC lead agencies tasked with creating a plan of action to drastically overhaul the current child protective investigator and case manager preservice curriculum and training structure. In response to needs determined by this workgroup, the GROW Center explored the implementation of virtual REALity (VR) for the preservice curriculum redesign, now formally known as [The DCF Academy for Child Protection and Family Resilience](#), where child protective investigators and case managers receive quality training before entering the child welfare workforce.

On January 11, 2023, the GROW Center successfully procured virtual REALity software through Accenture, including 10 VR headsets, 2 VR scenarios, and 2 Train-the-Trainer sessions.

In March 2023, the GROW Center began collaborating with the Department and Accenture's software experts to schedule the first virtual REALity training experience, AVeNueS, which is a virtual experience solution designed to accelerate the pace at which child welfare professionals engage in training and skill development. The GROW Center and the Department coordinated the VR experiences and Train-the-Trainer (TTT) facilitation seminar sessions to kick off AVeNueS debut in northwest Florida. The initial cohort of 17 DCF CPI trainers, and case management trainers participated in two, one-day TTT sessions held on March 20 and March 27, 2023, at the DCF's headquarters in Tallahassee. The second VR experience and TTT session was held on July 12, 2023, in Ocala, FL with a cohort of 12 CPI's and case manager trainers from the DCF, Kids Central Inc., and Pasco Sherriff's Office representing central Florida.

In August 2023, the GROW Center procured additional products and services from Accenture's AVeNueS subscription, including 130 VR headsets, 3 Train-the-Trainer sessions, and ad hoc enablement services to ensure the DCF master trainers are sufficiently equipped to provide additional training as needed.

The GROW center is targeting CBC lead agencies case managers and the Department's investigative staff to experience the VR scenarios and facilitation seminars in preparation for statewide region/circuit distribution for CPI and case manager specialty tracks of the Academy's curriculum.

On August 15, 2023, the GROW Center met with Accenture's software experts, trainers from DCF's headquarters, and Northwest Florida Health Network case manager trainers to explore additional virtual REALity scenarios. In response to the recommendations from our initial evaluation of the VR TTT, the FICW will extend a variety of experiences to the workforce to provide opportunities for more robust training.

INITIAL EVALUATION OF THE USE OF SIMULATION IN CHILD WELFARE PRESERVICE TRAINING

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Melissa Murphy, Ph.D., LCSW
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

PROJECT TEAM

Michae' Cain
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Preliminary Findings

Survey participants described their experience with the VR headset device and simulation, seminar debrief discussions, and implementation supports and resources.

Trainers found the VR simulation experience to be relevant to their training needs, engaging, and stimulating, REAListic, and representative of child welfare practice. Nearly all trainers in the sample agreed or strongly agreed that new child welfare workers would benefit from the interactive nature of the VR simulations that encourage critical thinking, reflection, and decision-making skills. Trainers perceived that the VR simulation experience could be used to demonstrate a variety of skills, especially related to safety planning, decision-making, assessment, and case feedback. Trainers also shared their perceptions of the variety of ways that the VR simulation scenarios can be used to assess and develop new workers' skills and readiness for the field. Some trainers suggested that the VR simulation scenario could be further used to support the new worker hiring process, in lieu of written case scenarios. Notably, several participants suggested that this VR

simulation be used in trainings with a wider child welfare-oriented audience, including top-level leadership at the Department.

Overall, the trainers found the seminar discussion to be relevant to their needs as preservice trainers, with nearly all trainers noting that the seminar discussion would help prepare new child welfare workers to develop the necessary skills and competencies. Trainers felt that the seminar debrief discussion would be advantageous for new child welfare works in preservice. In addition, most participants indicated that they had some degree of confidence in facilitating the seminar discussion as part of the preservice curricula. Critiques of the seminar debrief discussion highlighted the importance of timing when it comes to viewing the VR scenario and participating in the seminar debrief discussion.

Trainers frequently highlighted the perceived need for technical support available in REAL-time to preservice trainers and trainees, while other trainers reported that having an adequate number of VR headsets would be very important to the success of implementation. Moreover, trainers explained that depending on how VR simulations will be incorporated into preservice curricula, training participants indicated that preservice trainers should be able to edit simulation and debriefing content to align the experience with the current preservice practice model. Other participants recommended that training mentors and technology supports should be readily available to preservice trainers who are implementing VR into the curricula statewide.

Feedback from participants across sessions ranged from excitement to readiness to expose new workers to the complexities and challenges of everyday child welfare practice through new VR technology in preservice curricula. Report findings and recommendations were provided to the DCF and Accenture to support the wider implementation of VR into preservice curricula for new workers.

Simulation

In addition to VR, the Department decided to incorporate simulation into its new preservice curriculum, specifically collaborating with REAL Academy to bring their model to Florida. The Department funded a pilot train-the-trainer simulation program through REAL Academy. To support the DCF in thoughtful programmatic decision-making, the Institute conducted an initial evaluation of REAL Academy's simulation implementation as piloted with trainers. To begin integration into Florida preservice training, REAL Academy implemented its "See One, Do One, Teach One" train-the-trainer approach with trainers across Florida.

There are four sessions, each with a specific focus. The Institute focused its work on the first two cadres of trainers, with partial data from the third cadre.

In March 2023, the Institute provided the Department with four draft reports, detailing evaluation findings of the Real Academy simulation program, which was piloted with a group of trainers for later use in the upcoming revised preservice curriculum. In general, trainers reported positive perceptions of the trainings, though the evaluators made several recommendations to the Department for future implementation. Notably, the Department needs to ensure adequate trainer capacity to run simulations (e.g., securing space, actors). A second cohort of trainers recently completed the Real Academy simulation program, and evaluation reports are in development. Importantly, this second cohort experienced a hybrid program (i.e., a combination of virtual and in-person training). With that, evaluation results may differ from the first cohort. See below for a summary of initial evaluation findings.

INITIAL EVALUATION OF THE USE OF SIMULATION IN CHILD WELFARE PRESERVICE TRAINING

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Sophia Lutz, BS

Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Lisa Magruder, Ph.D., MSW

Florida Institute for Child Welfare

Preliminary Findings

Overall, participants shared a positive perception of simulation training and the REAL Academy. Most participants agreed they would recommend this experience to others, with short responses often praising the efforts of the Real team. Participants indicated that the experience offered them valuable knowledge/skills and was a good use of their time. In addition, participants appeared to appreciate the simulations presented by the REAL Academy, with most agreeing they were accurate representations of fieldwork, realistic, and would increase workers' 1) preparedness, 2) feelings of safety, and 3) competency. Participants indicated a positive experience with the simulations and training as both a trainer and trainee. A majority of responses demonstrated positive perception of the Department's support. Notably, satisfaction with the training and short response comments on preparedness of the REAL Academy's team increased throughout cadres, showing a positive trend.

In addition to assessing participant perception of Real Academy, Department support, and simulation training, the Institute asked a series of questions regarding participants' perceptions of potential barriers and facilitators to statewide rollout. Primarily, participants voiced concerns over logistics of simulation implementation (location, space, cost, actors, trainers, time/scheduling). On the other hand, participants offered perceived facilitators for implementation which often included ensuring processes were in place for disseminating the Critical Thinking Tools and simulation teachings throughout all levels of workers (including leadership and seasoned colleagues).

Although responses were overwhelmingly positive, response rates dwindled as cohort progressed throughout the sessions and by cohort. Small response rates on the post-session surveys administered by the Institute presented the potential for selection bias, particularly in the in the second and third cohorts. That is, trainers opted into participating in the current evaluation and not all trainers completed the evaluation. At each juncture, those who responded may have had particularly positive experiences. The Institute believes understanding how

these changes influence initial evaluation findings is important for the Department's short- and long-term planning for statewide rollout. The Institute believes the data offers significant insight into the usefulness/perception of simulation training, perceptions of Real Academy and the Department's involvement in said training, and perceived barriers and facilitators to successful simulation implementation. The Institute offered several recommendations to the Department to improve service delivery, which were integrated into their ongoing work and evident in their proposal for funding to support initial implementation of the work begun by the REAL Academy in FY2023-2024.

Resource

[Evaluation of the Florida child welfare preservice training](#)

Human Trafficking Screening

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Joan Reid, Ph.D., LMHC, CRC
University of South Florida

Overview

The Institute continues to support research on human trafficking screening. Following multiple meetings with the Department, including one with Secretary Harris, the Institute agreed to continue to support the validation attempts of the Department's Human Trafficking Screening Tool (HTST), and identify or develop a short form tool that can be used as a screener for all youth ages ten and older. The Institute contracted with Dr. Joan Reid, Associate Professor of Criminology and Director of the USF Trafficking in Persons Risk to Resilience Research Lab, to lead the next phase of this work.

Human Trafficking Screening Tool

In spring 2023, the Department requested assistance identifying, from a short list of validated tools, a potential replacement screening tool for the existing HTST. An Institute researcher with human trafficking expertise and an affiliate with psychometric expertise both reviewed the list. Separately, they concluded there is lack of validation evidence of these alternative tools with child welfare-specific samples; however, if the Department were to select an alternative instrument, the TVIT and HTIAM-14 had the strongest evidence. This, coupled with fact that the HTST—prior to revisions—did show promise toward future validation, the Institute continues to recommend that the Department carry out revised training with current screeners and attempt re-validation of the Florida HTST.

During the 2023 legislative session, the FICW director contacted Senate staff liaisons to voice concern about the timeline of SB1634, which would have mandated the Department to either validate the Tool or choose an alternative by June 1, 2023. Namely, given that the Department had only recently approved the revised Tool language, the Department would need more time to identify an electronic way to capture the data, update designated screeners with training on the revised tool, and deploy the tool in the field for at least six months to obtain adequate data needed for another validation attempt. While, ultimately, SB1634 did not pass in the 2023 session, the FICW and the Department continued communication, which resulted in the contract with Dr. Reid.

Short Form Screener

In addition to Dr. Reid's work on the existing HTST, at the request of Secretary Harris and her team, the Institute requested Dr. Reid continue to search for and identify possible short-form screening tools for Department's use with all child welfare-involved youth ages 10 and older. Dr. Reid reviewed 40 existing tools, documenting their name, developers, service delivery sector, targeted population, exploitation type, number of items, strengths, and weaknesses. There was great variability in the tools, and Dr. Reid summarized—similar to the two aforementioned researchers—that several existing tools have not been validated or normed with youth populations.

At a minimum, Dr. Reid recommended:

- ❖ **Disentangling the terms “screener” and “assessment.”** Where screeners tend to be brief and focus on confirmation of trafficking, assessments work to both identify victims and differentiate youth at high and low risk of being trafficked. The latter tends to include a focus on risk factors that may not be directly related to trafficking.

- ❖ **Utilize a process that screens or assesses for both labor and sex trafficking.** Few existing tools incorporate items about both labor and sex trafficking. While potentially more time consuming, having two separate tools may be warranted.
- ❖ **Personnel who administer tools should be adequately trained to work with traumatized, trafficked youth.** Ensuring personnel not only know how to administer the tools, but administer them in a trauma-informed way, is essential. Close supervision of new screening personnel is recommended.

In addition, Dr. Reid drafted a sample prototype for the short-form tool. This report was shared with the Department in September 2023 and will be debriefed with Dr. Reid as next steps are defined.

Next Steps

Currently, Dr. Reid is in a planning period, where she is establishing a regular meeting cadence with relevant DCF representatives to ensure collaborative progress toward meeting the Department's needs regarding HTST validation. She is developing a research proposal for the next validation attempt of the tools, to include plans for both the HTST and short-form tool. Following receipt of an acceptable proposal, the FICW can execute a second contract with Dr. Reid's team to carry out the plan. The Institute projects this work will continue through the end of the fiscal year, though the timeline of that will be dependent on the Department's timeline, primarily, how quickly they re-train screeners on the Tool since amendments were made in spring 2023. The Department indicated they were working to get the HTST included in the first phase of the new Child Welfare Information Systems database, which would significantly reduce data entry time from the last validation attempt, when FICW staff were working with redacted hardcopy tools.

Webinars

PROGRAMMING

Samantha Schoenberger, MS
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

EVALUATION

Sophia Lutz, BS
Florida Institute for Child Welfare

- ❖ Identify appropriate strategies promoting trauma-informed practices during removal
- ❖ Describe practical tools for increasing best practices in dependency
- ❖ Develop goals to implement trauma-informed practices in their own work

Further, nearly all participants agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding webinar logistics (e.g., provided relevant information, well-prepared and engaging speakers, sufficient time for questions). Eighty-three (75%) participants responded to the matrix on the webinar. Only a few decided to provide additional, free response feedback; therefore, evaluation findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

Attending to Trauma During Child Welfare Removal

Presented by: Dr. Beverly Jean-Jacques

Even the most well-meaning child welfare professionals can get swept up in the intense multi-tasking required during child removals. With so much happening so fast, it can be easy to forget the enduring trauma children and families experience at these moments. Webinar hosts reviewed the impact of child welfare involvement on family members through a trauma-informed lens. Child welfare professionals learned about innovation in practice and strategies to effectively manage stressors of the removal for the child, parent, and the child welfare professionals involved during this critical time.

Month/Year	Attendees	Requested CEU	Views
October 2022	110	61	66

Of those who provided feedback through the evaluation, the majority agreed or strongly agreed that the learning objectives were met, including that, following the webinar, they felt they were better able to:

- ❖ Understand the trauma of removal and its enduring impact on children and families
- ❖ Recognize signs of trauma during child removal, particularly with dependency cases

Family Engagement in the Dependency System

Presented by: Judge Anthony Miller

Dependency courts in Florida, like state court systems around the country, are family-centered and strive to achieve outcomes in the best interest of the children and families involved in the process. This means particular attention is paid to timely permanency and improving the safety and well-being of children through collaboration between the courts and the Department of Children and Families. In this webinar, participants learned about the role of the dependency court when it comes to working with families. Presented by Judge Anthony Miller, who currently serves as a Circuit Judge in the Second Judicial Circuit, discussed the authority of the court, termination of parental rights, and understanding of trauma from the judicial perspective.

Month/Year	Attendees	Requested CEU	Views
December 2022	172	62	109

Of those who provided feedback through the evaluation, the majority agreed or strongly agreed that the learning objectives were met, including that, following the webinar, they felt they were better able to:

- ❖ Understand the functions of dependency court in relation to the different parties and participants involved in child welfare
- ❖ Understand the goals of dependency court in relation to the safety and welfare of children and timely permanency
- ❖ Identify statutory grounds for terminating a parent's rights
- ❖ Identify key terms and strategies of dependency courts
- ❖ Understand the authority of the dependency courts in regard to State Police Power, Parens Patriae Doctrine, legislative intent, discretion, and duty to the child
- ❖ Demonstrate an understanding of how to be more trauma-informed when engaging families in the dependency system

Further, nearly all participants agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding webinar logistics. Importantly, only 64 of the participants (37%) responded to the survey. Evaluation findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

Nonviolent Communication: Part 1- Using Empathy

Presented by: Janelle King, Subject Matter Expert, and A'Miracle Smith, Lived Expert

Communication skills are fundamental to social work practice. Nonviolent Communication (NVC), sometimes referred to as Compassionate Communication, offers a powerful tool for positive social change. According to its creator, psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, NVC is effective in relationships among families, colleagues, and in conflicts of any nature as it encourages empathic communication. For child welfare professionals, compassion and empathy are cornerstones to building trust among families, as well as within interprofessional relationships. In this webinar, the hosts discussed the connection between trauma and adverse experiences, the brain, and NVC. Participants reflected on how they typically respond to conflict situations, both personally and professionally.

Month/Year	Attendees	Requested CEU	Views
March 2023	96	37	293

Of those who provided feedback through the evaluation, the majority agreed or strongly agreed that the learning objectives were met, including that, following the webinar, they felt they were better able to:

- ❖ Explain the connection between trauma/adverse childhood experiences (ACES), the brain, and NVC
- ❖ Reflect on how they typically respond to conflict situations, both personally and professionally
- ❖ Understand and explain Other Conversational Responses
- ❖ Understand and explain how to “give empathy”

- ❖ Understand and explain the three components of empathy
- ❖ Understand the difference between feelings vs. thought-feelings
- ❖ Understand the difference between needs vs. strategies.

Further, nearly all participants agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding webinar logistics. Importantly, only 36 of the participants (37.5%) provided any feedback on the webinar. Evaluation findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

Nonviolent Communication: Part 2- Using Expression

Presented by: Janelle King, Subject Matter Expert, and A’Miracle Smith, Lived Expert

In this webinar, hosts continued to discuss the connection between trauma and adverse experiences, the brain, and NVC. Participants reflected on how they typically respond to conflict situations, both personally and professionally. Through the NVC model, participants learned other conversational responses and how to implement NVC expressions through identifying the difference between observations vs. evaluations, thought feelings vs. feelings, needs vs. strategies, and requests vs. demands. Due to a very small sample size, no evaluation report was developed for this webinar.

Month/Year	Attendees	Requested CEU	Views
May 2023	24	4	76

The Importance of Mentoring, Safety, and Boundaries with Child Welfare Professionals

Presented by: Stoops Center for Communities, Families and Children

Child welfare professionals face challenging situations every day. Therefore, it is important to find support and use best practices. By taking time to recognize and align these practices, professionals optimize their skills to engage and support children and families. In this webinar, participants learned how child welfare professionals set healthy boundaries, keep situations safe, and find support through mentoring. These strategies were explored from the perspective of an experienced professional who has worked with the Department of Children and Families in various positions throughout the system.

Month/Year	Attendees	Requested CEU	Views
March 2023	188	48	77

Of those who provided feedback through the evaluation, the majority agreed or strongly agreed that the learning objectives were met, including that, following the webinar, they felt they were better able to:

- ❖ Understand the importance of mentoring
- ❖ Create safe environment
- ❖ Learn to set healthy boundaries

Further, nearly all participants agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding webinar logistics. Importantly, only 50 participants (27%) provided any feedback on the webinar. Evaluation findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

Support of Substance Use Interventions: Debuting a New Approach to Best Practices with Families

Presented by: Jennifer Luther and Jane Dwyer Lee

Experts in the fields of substance use, child welfare, and behavior change, Jennifer Luther and Jane Dwyer Lee presented fresh, practical strategies designed for child welfare professionals to enhance contact sessions with family members. By exploring innovative approaches and best practices, professionals expanded their toolkit and gained skills to facilitate positive changes with families. The presenters introduced a new Protective Factors model to promote resilience, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for families. The webinar served as a comprehensive preview for the FICW advanced certification course SOS Interventions in Family Systems, which opened August 2023.

Month/Year	Attendees
July 2023	327



Communications and Dissemination

COMMUNICATIONS AND DISSEMINATION

The Institute's communications team is tasked with disseminating information to our various networks on topics and opportunities related to the child welfare workforce, working with families, and youth in care. Clear and effective communication is essential to the Institute's mission and the communications staff collaborates with all the Institute's programs and teams to support and promote Institute initiatives.

When finalizing and beginning to implement the 2023-2028 strategic plan, the communications team spent time going through each goal, objective, and strategy to identify the areas in which we would be involved. The majority of strategies require communication team support and involvement, and several explicitly reference the communications team's direct responsibilities. The most obvious is **Goal 2: Increase the statewide and national visibility of the Institute toward becoming a model for collaborative research and programming for the child welfare community.**

As the Institute's various teams expanded their focus to meet the goals outlined in the strategic plan, the communications team grew to meet the increasing needs. Over the past year, the communications team continued to fulfill longstanding roles (i.e., preparing documents—including reports—for publication and coordinating outreach to all the Institute's networks) but also broadened the scope of our work in new areas. Activities such as paid marketing, exploring additional opportunities for brand development, and continuing expansion of the Institute's website are advancements to existing responsibilities, while

assisting in resource development and content creation to be used by frontline professionals in the major initiatives under the ALIGN program—both in the Advanced Certification courses and the MyALIGN platform—was an exciting new opportunity.

In addition to diversifying the types of projects the communications team took on, we also made significant gains in the success of our outreach by expanding our audiences and increasing our engagement. Of particular note is the increased ability to directly reach the frontline professionals involved in the GROW Center programs over social media on LinkedIn, as well as the reach of our organic and paid marketing initiatives. Prioritizing accessibility of our dissemination and professional development materials has also made a positive difference in the Institute's ability to support usability and comprehension for our networks.

The following section explores the communications activities and outcomes from email campaigns, publications, social media, marketing, podcast series, video content, branding initiatives, website, and events.

-  **2,238** Email subscribers
-  **17,943** Facebook page reach
-  **4,219** Instagram page reach
-  **8,215** Twitter page impressions
-  **70,856** LinkedIn page impressions
-  **53,340** Emails sent
-  **2,862** Issuu document reads
-  **3,938** Podcast listens
-  **14,030** YouTube views

Resources
Florida Institute for Child Welfare Website
LinkedIn
Facebook
Instagram
X (Twitter)
YouTube
Soundcloud
Apple Podcasts
Spotify
Issuu
Podcast
Resource Library

Email Campaigns

The Institute communicates major updates, monthly theme, resources, and hiring opportunities to our mailing list subscribers. Utilizing Constant Contact, an email marketing platform, content is planned, created, and sent to specialized distribution lists in email campaign. Email outreach generally falls into the following broad categories: monthly newsletters, marketing materials, event invitations, and specialized targeted messaging.

In the period from October 1, 2022 to September 14, 2023, the Institute:

- ❖ Created and sent **66 email campaigns**
- ❖ Sent **53,304 total emails**
- ❖ Organized **2,238 contacts**
- ❖ Added **377 new contacts**
- ❖ Had an increased average open rate from 28 percent to **31 percent this year**

Monthly Matters

Monthly Matters is an e-mail newsletter distributed each month to the Institute's subscribers. The newsletter communicates the monthly theme or topic of awareness in the child welfare system and offers relevant resources, updates from the Institute, our programs, and our partners.

The following information was compiled for October 1, 2022 to September 14, 2023:

- ❖ Total Issues Sent: **8**
- ❖ Total number of Monthly Matters emails sent: **14,649**
- ❖ Total number of opens: **3,681**
- ❖ Total number of clicks: **546**
- ❖ Average Open Rate: **25%**
- ❖ Average Click Rate: **40%**

Institute Insights

To direct more traffic to our redesigned website while also acquainting audiences who may not already be part of our mailing list with our project updates, the Institute transitioned away from using the quarterly newsletter format of Institute Insights. Instead, the Institute publishes content at a greater frequency in the Featured News section of the website and highlights project and programs updates, as well as news stories. Current and past news stories are also archived on the website within the Institute's growing resource library.

Affiliate Advisor

The Affiliate Advisor is a monthly e-newsletter that is distributed directly to our 39 Institute affiliate members. This communication offers information on opportunities, upcoming affiliate meetings, as well as summaries of recent events and other pertinent news.

The following information was compiled for October 1, 2022, to September 14, 2023:

- ❖ Total Issues Sent: **11**
- ❖ Total number of Affiliate Advisor emails sent: **425**
- ❖ Total number of opens: **259**
- ❖ Total number of clicks: **73**
- ❖ Average Open Rate: **61%**
- ❖ Average Click Rate: **20%**

Publications and Presentations

To translate information generated by in-house research, as well as to provide in-depth details about the Institute's initiatives and other resources, the communications team regularly publishes a variety of documents: reports, executive summaries, handouts, briefs, 1-pagers, graphics, news stories, etc.

In the past, the Institute posted and disseminated documents on [Issuu](#), a publishing social media platform. This year, on the Institute's improved website, the communications team also published documents in our [resource library](#). The library, which is a searchable database that can be filtered by resource topic, resource type, the project it is related to, and date range, now houses all our publicly released documents. In addition to the standalone resource library tab, the same document database is used to showcase relevant published material on individual project pages (e.g., all FSPSF documents are available at the [bottom of the page in the project's resource library](#)). These features were implemented with the intention of making the Institute's content accessible, easily shared, and searchable.

While the resource library is now live and functioning, the communications team does not currently have access to analytic and data reports on engagement with the documents (i.e., number of reads, number of downloads, where the documents were accessed from, etc.). As specified in the FY2023-2024 contract with the Florida Center for Interactive Media, the website developers, the communications team will begin to receive analytic updates in fall 2023.

In-house Publications

The following analytic data are from the Institute's published documents on Issuu.com. Several documents were published only on the website resource library, not on Issuu.com, so the results are not complete.

The following information was compiled for October 1, 2022, to September 14, 2023:

- ❖ **162 published documents** (spanning lifetime of account)
- ❖ **2,862 reads**
- ❖ **37,328 impressions** (the number of times our publications were linked to on the Issuu network)
- ❖ **170 downloads**
- ❖ **43%** of reads were from embedded documents while **57%** were accessed through traffic driven from Issuu.com (i.e., our articles were recommended by Issuu or appeared in searches)
- ❖ As the communications team moved away from using embedded Issuu documents and began to rely on the website resource library, these statistics demonstrate the usefulness of utilizing both platforms to share documents. Last year, only 31% of reads were through Issuu; the increase to 57% indicates we are gaining additional engagement we would not otherwise receive on the platform.

Academic Publications

The following are citations of peer-reviewed journal articles authored by FICW faculty, staff, and affiliates (**bolded**) between October 2022 and September 2023 that focus on FICW-conducted or -funded projects.

- Boel-Studt, S.**, & Dowdy-Hazlett, T. (in press). Reflections on care experiences among early, middle, and late adolescents in residential care. *Developmental Child Welfare*.
- Boel-Studt, S.**, M., Huang, H., & Collins, C. (2023). "I hope my voice is heard.": A mixed-methods study of youths' perceptions of residential care. *Children and Youth Services Review*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740923002293>
- Henson, M., Schelbe, L., & Lee, H.** (2023). Helping youth in foster care develop life skills: Perspectives from caregivers, child welfare professionals, and agency representatives. *Child & Youth Care Forum*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-023-09766-5>
- Henson, M., Cain, M. D., Wilke, D. J., & Radey, M.** (2023). What makes a case difficult: Definitions from child welfare workers and implications for workload and caseload management. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2023.2219649>
- Radey, M., Wilke, D. J., Stanley, L. H., & Sabuncu, B. C.** (2023). Independent and combined effects of workplace harassment among child welfare workers. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 1-21. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2022.2164536>
- Radey, M., Wilke, D.J., Zhang, X., & Randolph, K.** (in press). Timing and predictors of frontline worker departures from child welfare: A survival analysis. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/721663>
- Rakes, S., **Radey, M., & Wilke, D.** (in press). Recently-hired, older workers in the child welfare workforce: An examination of employment outcomes. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*.
- Radey, M., & Wilke, D.** (2023). The importance of job demands and supports: Promoting retention among child welfare workers. *Child & Adolescent Social Work*, 40(1), 57-69.
- Schelbe, L., Lee, H., & Henson, M.** (2023). Independent living skills program use and outcomes of youth in and aging out of foster care in Florida. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2023.2240246>

Academic Presentations

The following are citations of invited and peer-refereed presentations given by FICW faculty, staff, and affiliates (**bolded**) between October 2022 and September 2023 that focus on FICW-conducted or -funded projects.

- Boel-Studt, S.**, Dowdy-Hazlett, T., & Collins, C. (2023, January). *Exploring the impacts and responses to COVID-19 in youth residential care programs: A qualitative content analysis*. Paper presented at 27th Annual Conference, Society for Social Work and Research, Phoenix, AZ.
- Boel-Studt, S.**, Dowdy-Hazlett, T., & **Mills, V.** (2023, May). *Care experiences among early, middle, and late adolescents in residential group care*. Poster presentation at the Association for Children's Residential & Community Services Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

- Caines, K.** (2023, April). *Risk and protective factors for educational achievement in foster care*. Workshop presentation at Safe Children's Coalition Annual Conference. Sarasota, FL.
- Caines, K.** (2023, June). *Risk & protective factors impacting educational enrollment for youth in foster care*. Workshop presentation at NASW-FL Annual Conference. Orlando, FL.
- Colvin, M., Cooley, M. E., Thompson, H. M., & Howard, H.** (2023, May). *A photovoice study of youth in residential foster care: Youths' perceptions of self-determination*. Presentation at the annual conference of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, Denver, CO.
- Cooley, M. E., Gillen, M., & Garrison, S.** (2023, January). *Child welfare administrators' perspectives of early implementation of the Florida Guardianship Assistance Program*. Presentation at the annual conference of the Society for Social Work and Research, Phoenix, AZ.
- Cooley, M. E., Thompson, H. M., Colvin, M., & Howard, H.** (2023, May). *Implementing policy related to shared parenting: Perspectives of child welfare administrators and frontline workers*. Presentation at the annual conference of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, Denver, CO.
- Henson, M., & Lee, H.** (2023, April). *Assisting youth in foster care in developing life skills to become self-sufficient adults: Evaluating Florida's efforts*. Paper presented at the Safe Children Coalition' 12th Annual Conference.
- Huefner, J. C., & **Boel-Studt, S.** (2023, May). *Quality standards for residential care: An applied framework*. Poster presented at the European Scientific Association on Residential and Family Care for Children and Adolescents 2023 Meeting. Brighton, England.
- Huefner, J., Howry, S., & **Mills, V.** (2023, May). *How higher program quality impacts employee retention and youth elopement*. Presentation at the Association for Children's Residential & Community Services Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.
- Langenderfer-Magruder, L., & Finch, K.** (2023, July). *GROWing Together: The Florida Institute for Child Welfare's approach to innovative workforce programming*. Workshop presentation at the Florida Coalition for Children 23rd Annual Conference, Bonita Springs, FL.
- Langenderfer-Magruder, L., Finch, K., Pryce, J., Wilke, D. J., & Schelbe, L.** (2023, May). *Thriving workers for thriving families: The Florida Institute for Child Welfare's approach to enhancing outcomes*. Roundtable discussion at the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children's 30th Annual Colloquium, Denver, CO.
- Radey, M., & Boel-Studt, S.** (2022, November). *Safety nets among mothers aging out of foster care and maternity group homes: Who steps in when mothers age out?* Poster at the 2022 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN.
- Radey, M., & Boel-Studt, S.** (2023, April). *The experience of maternity group homes for youth aging out*. Poster at the 23rd National Conference on Child Abuse & Neglect, Virtual.
- Rhoden Neita, M., Huang, H., & **Wilson, C.** (2023, June). *Providing supportive virtual supervision to empower child welfare workforce through a university-community agency collaboration*. International Association for Social Work with Groups, Inc. 2023 Virtual Symposium.

Social Media

Over the last year, the Institute’s social media presence has been consistent on major social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). These platforms serve as a channel to share our resources (such as podcast, research reports, newsletters); communicate the Institute’s activities (events, webinars, milestones); engage the child welfare workforce and leadership; and build a reputable presence among the child welfare professionals in Florida and nationally.

We experienced growth on all our social media platforms, most notably on LinkedIn, which is becoming our most reliant way to directly contact the child welfare workforce. As a result, the communications team is focusing efforts on creating content and marketing initiatives on LinkedIn, while decreasing the time we spend creating content for our least engaging account—X (Twitter).

As the communications team expands its marketing activities to paid social media marketing for the GROW Center programming, the use of social media to engage new audiences, specifically frontline workers, will become increasingly important to the strategic communications plan and activities.

The analytics in the following sections represent social media activity on the Institute’s accounts between October 1, 2022 to September 14, 2023.

*Follow the Institute
@FSUChildWelfare*

Analytics

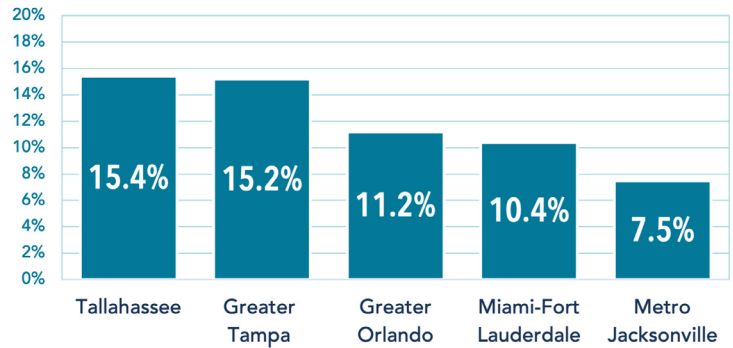


LINKEDIN

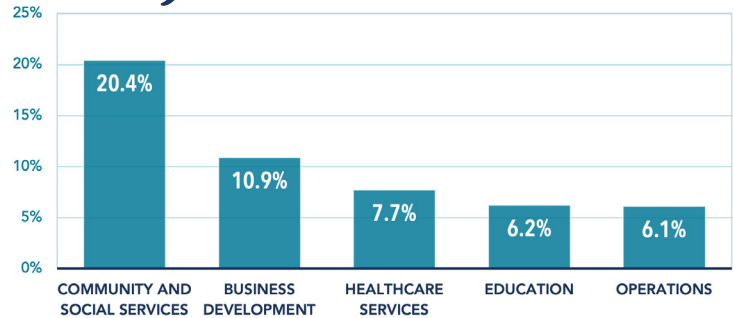
- ❖ Total number of posts: **141**
- ❖ Total followers: **1,280**
Gained **1,163 new followers**
- ❖ Page views: **1,591**
- ❖ Page Impressions: **27,549** (organic) and **43,307** (sponsored)
- ❖ Page visits: **1,380**

LINKEDIN FOLLOWER DEMOGRAPHICS

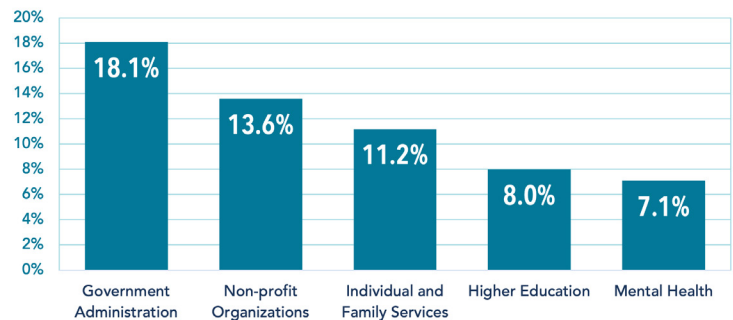
Top Locations



Job Functions



Industries



f FACEBOOK

- ❖ Total number of posts: **184**
- ❖ Total followers: **1,025**
- ❖ Page reach: **17,943**
- ❖ Page likes: **889**
- ❖ Page visits: **3,480**

ig INSTAGRAM

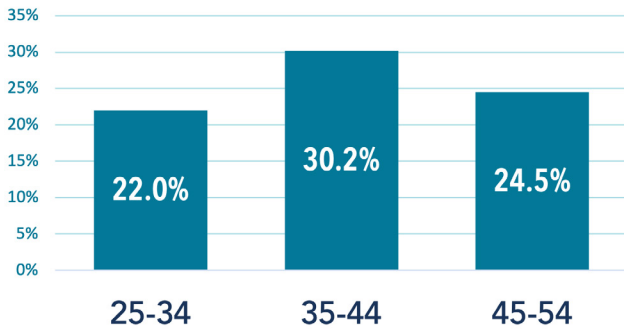
- ❖ Total number of posts: **152**
- ❖ Total followers: **503**
- ❖ Page reach: **4,219**
- ❖ Profile visits: **1,338**

tw TWITTER

- ❖ Total number of posts: **173**
- ❖ Total followers: **296**
Gained **31 new followers**
- ❖ Page Impressions: **8,215**
- ❖ Total Engagement on post: **321**
- ❖ Total Tweet Impressions: **557,075**
- ❖ Profile visits: **380**

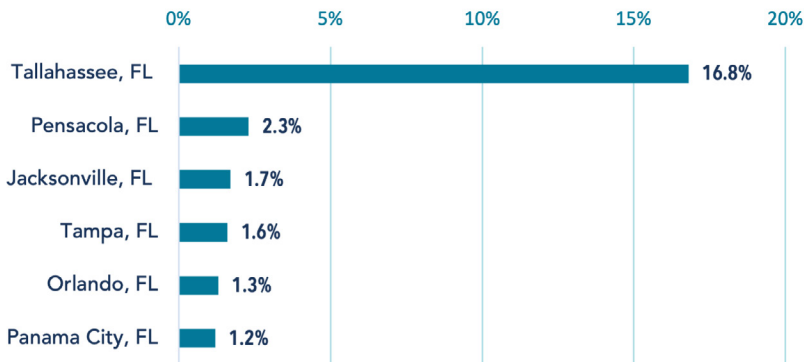
FACEBOOK FOLLOWER DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

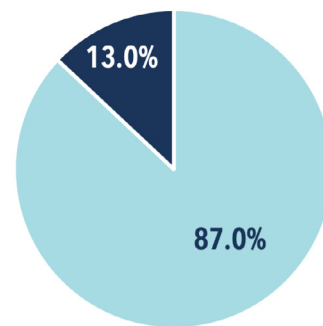


United States 97.3% Nigeria 1.3% United Kingdom 0.6%
Kenya 0.4% New Zealand 0.4%

Top Cities



Gender



Women Men

Content

Each month the Institute joins the national child welfare field to explore themes that address areas vital for the development and betterment of the child welfare system. We post so our followers (child welfare workforce, students, partners, affiliates etc.) can stay abreast of the research findings, tips helpful for the field, and statistics about certain subjects in the different themes pertinent to the Florida child welfare system.

Each theme was strategically selected, and priority was given to certain monthly themes due to their relevance to our audiences.

Month	Theme
October 2022	Bullying Prevention Month, Inter-partner Violence Awareness Month
November	Adoption Month
December	Highlights from 2022/Looking Ahead to 2023
January 2023	Human Trafficking Month
February	Black History Month
March	Social Work Month
April	Child Abuse Awareness Month
May	Mental Health Awareness and Resilience Month, National Foster Care Month
June	Reunification Month
July	Minority Mental Health Month
August	None
September	Child Welfare Workforce Development Month, Self-care September

Beyond the monthly theme, the Institute shares content about a wide range of subjects related to our current focus, opportunities we are providing, and Institute-created resources. Major campaigns over the past year include:

Subject	Number of Posts	Reach / Impressions	Engagement
2022 Recap	40	2,965	155
Podcast (Season 5 & 6)	42	3,396	221
Symposium	78	15,152	939
Institute Research Resources	7	1,093	50
Institute Webinars/Lunch and Learn	57	6,719	421
STARS Campaign	5	940	50
SOS Interventions Campaign	24	2,481	185
Institute Director Transition and Appointment	17	3,544	330
Child Welfare Professional Award	12	2,950	366

Marketing

Previously, the Institute’s marketing efforts were exclusively performed through organic and earned media. Marketing campaigns generally focus on promoting opportunities, events, or resources created or distributed by the Institute, such as webinars, Advanced Certifications, the Symposium, and calls for proposals. Organic approaches included social media and email outreach utilizing a variety of media—including text, graphics, and video. The communications team also maintains curated distribution lists of contacts who would be appropriate for direct email messaging about different marketing endeavors.

In summer 2023, the Institute began integrating paid marketing strategies to assist in expanding reach to Florida’s frontline workers. This audience is difficult to meaningfully contact through organic approaches, so to ensure successful marketing and recruitment for the GROW Center programs (specifically, ALIGN initiatives), the communications team began using targeted ads on LinkedIn and Facebook. With an approved budget by the leadership team, the communications team ran two paid campaigns for the SOS Interventions Advanced Certification and the SAFER Advanced Certification.

Results and analytics for the paid marketing campaigns are below. Based on the data, the campaigns had a positive impact on recruitment, resulting in 30 enrolled learners for the SOS Interventions AdCert. The paid ads increased our reach to the workforce and helped position the Institute as a credible resource portal in Florida.

Campaign		LinkedIn	Facebook
Support of Substance Use (SOS) Interventions in Family Systems Advanced Certification Audience: child welfare case managers and child protective investigators in Florida.	Total Reach	8,958	566
	Total Engagement Rate	38.46%	2.82%
	Total Link Clicks	552	13
	Total Amount Spent	\$1,077	\$4
Strategies for Addressing Family Violence and Enhancing Resilience Audience: child welfare case managers, child protective investigators, and child welfare leadership in Florida.	Total Reach	135,192	3,866
	Total Engagement Rate	0.21%	1.84%
	Total Link Clicks	620	64
	Total Amount Spent	\$2,998	\$50

Podcast

Since the launch of the Institute’s child welfare [podcast](#) in 2019, the series has continued to appeal to our listeners by offering resources and interesting discussion about topics important in child welfare. In past seasons, the podcast explored themes relevant to youth, frontline professionals, and researchers. This year, the communications team premiered Season 6. Planning for Season 7 is underway, set to launch in winter 2024.

Season 6

[Season 6, Elevating Lived Experience: Co-Creating Knowledge through Partnership in Child Welfare Research](#), explores how child welfare researchers can uplift the voices of those with lived experience. This season was hosted by our then Research Director and now Institute Director, Dr. Lisa Magruder, making it uniquely representative of the Institute’s “voice.”

All six episodes of Elevating Lived Experience provided an in-depth look at five of the Institute’s research projects, with one episode focusing on the ethics and best practices of utilizing lived expertise in child welfare research. Guests include child welfare researchers, Institute affiliates, and study participants, all of whom gave a unique perspective of their involvement in research; they brought the data to life through recounting firsthand experience.

While this season was primarily oriented toward our audience of researchers and research participants, it also had valuable information about many initiatives and resources for the families we serve, including HOPE (Helping Older Teens Powerfully Engage) Court and Maternity Homes. There was a conscious effort throughout the production process to make language and content accessible to any listener, avoiding jargon and explaining new concepts clearly. Despite it being research-focused, the conversations do not read like an academic report—they are lively and informative. This season remains a useful resource for our diverse audiences and could be shared with anyone regardless of their knowledge of research or child welfare.

- ❖ Host: Lisa Magruder, Ph.D.
- ❖ Producer: Isabella Cring
- ❖ Sound Engineer: Ari Ryan Rezaian
- ❖ Description: Researchers, practitioners, youth, and adults with lived experience from across Florida’s child welfare system discussed the ethics, challenges, and impact of incorporating lived experience in child welfare research. This season hosted more expert guests than ever before, and each episode focused on a research study conducted by the Institute on different aspects of child welfare, including Maternity Homes, HOPE Court, Independent Living Services, and more.

Episode	Guests	Plays
1 – Participatory Research and Evaluation: What is it and why is it Important in Child Welfare?	Peter Pecora Jess Hanak-Coulter Pasqueal Nguyen	293
2 – Maternity Homes	Melissa Radey Shamra Boel-Studt Mary Darrow Diane Schofield	194
3 – Follow the Love: Fostering Relational Permanency	Annette Semanchin Jones Lisa Shelbe	188
4 – Florida’s Approach to Independent Life Skills Development (Senate Bill 80)	Michael Henson Hyunji Lee Diamond Whitley	212
5 – Hope Court	Melissa Green Angela Yehl Alyia Fitzgerald	179
6 – Supporting the Voice of Youth in Foster Care Receiving Independent Living Services	Marianna Colvin Jill Carr	330



CHILD WELFARE

Upcoming Seasons

The Institute has two seasons in pre-production that will be released in 2024. Current plans are for Season 7 to focus on the GROW Center and the issues in child welfare that led to its creation, hosted by Kristina Finch, while Season 8 will provide useful and practical tips for social workers and other partners in child welfare.

Past Seasons

Past seasons of the Institute's podcast series continue to engage listeners. Analytic information from over the past year shows that previous seasons continue to regularly gain additional listeners, with the first season receiving a lot of attention.

Season	Additional Listens Over the Past Year	Current Total Listens
Season 1: Child Protection Caseworker Support	+988	5,544
Season 2: Re-Imagining Child Welfare through Technology and Innovation	+378	3,334
Season 3: Perspectives on the Family First Prevention Services Act	+219	1,365
Season 4: Transition-Age Foster Youth Get Plugged Into Resources	+417	1,690
Season 5: Child Welfare Technology Solutions: Saving Time Where It Matters Most	+540	1,156
Season 6: Elevating Lived Experience: Co-Creating Knowledge through Partnership in Child Welfare Research	+1,396	1,396

Video

Over the past year, the communications team began utilizing video in different ways, focusing efforts on creating videos as a more engaging form of marketing, to be used on social media, and as practical resources for the various ALIGN platforms. The communications team hosts the majority of our video content on our [YouTube channel](#), but recently created a [Vimeo](#) account where we post content related to the ALIGN initiatives (i.e., marketing videos for Advanced Certifications). Moving forward, we plan to utilize Vimeo as the video platform for any content embedded in the AdCerts or Learning on Demand courses.

The following data summarizes analytics from the Institute's YouTube channel:

- ❖ Overall Views: **14,030**
- ❖ Impressions: **315,851** (the number of times our video thumbnails were shown to viewers)
- ❖ Current Subscribers: **394**
Gained 137 subscribers since October 2022
- ❖ Watch Time: **1,236 hours**

Additional video content was shared on the Institute's social media platforms.

Platform	Number of Videos	Views
Facebook	25	927
Instagram	30	5,161
Twitter	11	94
LinkedIn	18	3,381

ALIGN Video Content

LEARNING ON DEMAND: NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

The Nonviolent Communication Learning on Demand course is available on an ongoing basis through the ALIGN program. The course has learning tracks designed for child welfare professionals, foster parents, and group home staff members. A total of 15 videos were produced with subject matter expert Janelle King, Restorative Practices Coordinator at Boulder Valley School District, and A'miracle Smith, a lived experience expert. These videos are not public and can only be accessed through the ALIGN Learning Portal.

ADVANCED CERTIFICATION PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS

STARS

The Strength, Trauma and Resilience Studies course is an advanced certificate from the ALIGN program. It is aimed at providing social work professionals with knowledge and skills that will benefit the participant beyond the focus of the course. This is a marketing video for STARS made in collaboration with the Institute for Family Violence Studies.

[Watch the STARS Video](#) 

SOS Interventions

Under the ALIGN program, the Support of Substance Use (SOS) Interventions in Family Systems course is an Advanced Certification designed for child welfare case managers and investigators in Florida. The course was designed using a protective model approach that will recognize strengths and areas of improvement in families. This is a marketing video created by the communications team used to promote the application period for the SOS Interventions 2023 cohort.

[Watch the SOS Interventions Video](#)



SAFER

The Strategies for Addressing Family Violence and Enhancing Resilience (SAFER) Advanced Certification course is offered under the ALIGN program. The course bridges the gap between child welfare professionals who work with families exposed to domestic violence. This is a marketing video created by the communications team for the SAFER 2023 application period.

[Watch the SAFER Video](#)



MYALIGN VIDEO RESOURCES

MyALIGN, a customized digital platform for child welfare professionals, aims to provide support by leveraging technology to create streamlined access to resources, establishing a networking and coaching community, and providing real-time data on worker well-being (see the MyALIGN section for additional details). As part of the resource library, the communications and MyALIGN teams collaborated to create a series of short videos offering tools and tips for child welfare professionals. The videos will be available to all MyALIGN users and, when appropriate, will be pushed to users based on their assessments. These videos currently are not available to the public outside of the MyALIGN resource library.

Other Key Video Projects

TEACHING TRANSFORMATION: AWE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The Leadership Academy was created under the Alliance for Workforce Enhancement (AWE) and aims to enhance the existing leadership through training, support, and coaching. It is a hybrid course with both in-person and online learning. In this mini documentary, the Institute's communications team sat down with several Leadership Academy participants and mentors to discuss their experiences.

[Watch the Leadership Academy Video](#)



2023 CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR AWARD ANNOUNCEMENT

The Institute seeks to recognize child welfare professionals for the important, yet often challenging, work that they do every day to help children and families thrive. This year, to adhere to the symposium's theme of Transformative Leadership: Leaders at all levels, we accepted nominations from colleagues, supervisors, partner providers, and family members for child welfare professionals who accomplish organizational change due to their ability to motivate and garner trust, commitment, and loyalty from others. This video announces and celebrates the winners and nominees of the 2023 award.

[Watch the CWP Award Announcement Video](#)



Branding

As the Institute’s mission and programs have expanded, the communications team has established separate brand identities, beyond our main identity and that of Florida State University, to create program awareness and recognition across our distinct audiences in Florida and across the field of child welfare. Each brand identity is intentionally crafted through a process of first conducting research and market analysis, brainstorming and ideation using data-informed strategy, developing concepts for stakeholder review and assessment, and packaging guidelines and finalized concepts for publication and use.

Our branding efforts seek to build trust, support engagement, and facilitate promotion of our initiatives with partners and other networks. By strategically developing custom branded materials, while still maintaining cohesion and connection to our main brand identity, the Institute hopes to amplify the impact and memorability of our collective work.

The use of branding outlines and demonstrates a distinct identity and voice for the organization and supports our ability to create clarity and consistency across communications while resonating with target audiences. Brand guidelines include both visual and voice elements to represent the values of the organization as a whole. These guidelines serve to unify designers, writers, other team members, and partners in upholding the Institute’s values and reflecting the standard of communication for the organization.

The following sections provide background and branding examples of the Institute’s programs and select projects.

In-house Design

The Institute’s present brand identity was first developed in 2016, in consultation with the FSU University Communications, to more directly convey our mission and include our four foundational pillars: partnerships, technical assistance and training, policy analysis, and research and evaluation. The use of a color scheme separate from the FSU brand palette seeks to create greater state-wide appeal, be inclusive of other university affiliates, and resonate with partners like the DCF and community-based care lead agencies.

The Institute opted for blue hues in its brand identity based on principles in color psychology, such as blue supporting feelings of trust, dependability, harmony, as well as promoting focus and problem-solving. In addition, as the Institute aims to serve a wide range of users and audiences, the use of a blue color palette aids color blind individuals. The Institute’s primary navy brand color remains distinct and notable across all types of color blindness, providing enough color variance among the other components of the Institute’s brand palette. In FY2021-2022, during the Institute’s website redesign with the Florida Center for Interactive Media, a third blue and its tints were added to the brand color palette.



**FLORIDA
INSTITUTE
FOR CHILD
WELFARE**

AT FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Color Blindness Simulation

Institute Brand Colors			No Color Deficit	
			Deuteranomaly	
			♂ 5.0%	♀ 0.35%
			Deuternanopia	
			♂ 1.2%	♀ 0.01%
			Protanomaly	
			♂ 1.3%	♀ 0.02%
			Protanopia	
			♂ 1.3%	♀ 0.02%

In addition to the Institute’s main brand identity, the communications team maintains several other brand identities to coincide with major programs within the Institute. The GROW Center has its own unique branding developed to support its training initiatives and platforms. It incorporates the Institute’s main navy color, while expanding to include a palette of bright, engaging colors inspired by nature and themes of growth. The GROW Center logo features a floral symbol created from repeated and overlapping circles to represent the network of support systems available to improve workforce well-being and resilience.

This floral symbol is repeated across the GROW Center’s three main programs: Academic Innovation, ALIGN, and the Alliance for Workforce Enhancement. Each program also utilizes a unique combination of two colors from the full GROW Center color palette plus the Institute’s navy blue from the main brand identity.

The Institute elected to create secondary logomarks for initiatives under its programs to support recognition and distinction, while still remaining connected to the overarching brand.

Logomarks have been developed for the following initiatives that adhere to the parent brand's color palette:

Academic Innovation

- ❖ Child Welfare Immersive Collaboration Simulations

ALIGN

- ❖ MyALIGN
- ❖ Learning on Demand
- ❖ STARS Advanced Certification
- ❖ SOS Interventions Advanced Certification
- ❖ SAFER Advanced Certification

Alliance for Workforce Enhancement

- ❖ Leadership Academy

FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE



FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE



In addition to the branding established for the GROW Center and its programs, the Institute also created branding for its Child Welfare podcast, the 2023 Symposium on Transformational Leadership, as well as a logomark for its Lunch and Learn series to help promote awareness and engagement.



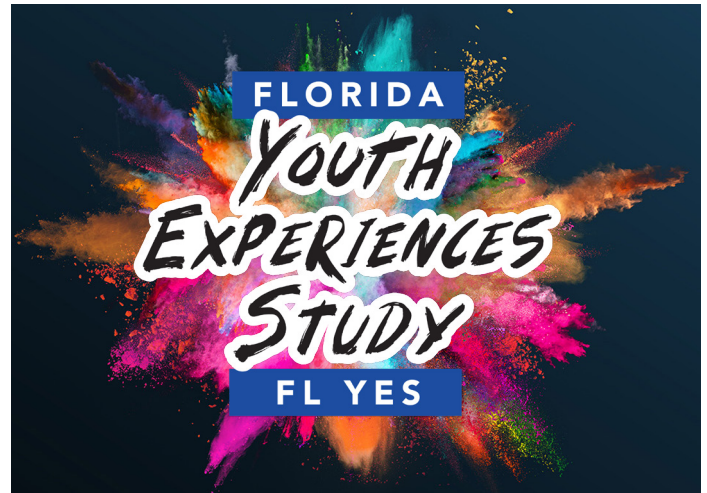
Project Logos

Research suggests branded longitudinal studies may benefit from greater participation (Estrada, Woodcock, & Schultz, 2014; Wilke, Radey, & Langenderfer-Magruder, 2017). The Institute elected to create a comprehensive brand identity to support its new five-year longitudinal study, the Florida Youth Experiences Study (FL YES), to support recruitment efforts and research materials for the project's duration.



As part of the project's branding, staff and youth at the Selfless Love Foundation were involved in the design review process to provide insights on behalf of the study's target population. The resulting visual identity for FL YES aims to promote freedom of expression, and both resonate with and reflect the values of its youth base. The primary

logo for the brand utilizes typography in a handwritten style rendered in a wide color palette to represent the spectrum of voices and experiences. This brand identity pushes boundaries on color usage by promoting multicolor textures and patterns across its materials and in marketing items. In instances where full-color distribution is not feasible, mono-color and duo-color logomarks are also provided as part of the project's brand kit.



In coordination with our research partners, the Institute's communications team also developed a brand identity for the Power of Parents in Child Protection project in an effort to create more appeal and interest from the project's target population. The logo symbol features parent and child figures in a configuration reminiscent of the trunks of the tree, with leaves overhead to signify growth and possibility. The research team requested peaceful tones and a combination of blues and calming greens were selected for the project's color palette.



POWER OF PARENTS
IN CHILD PROTECTION

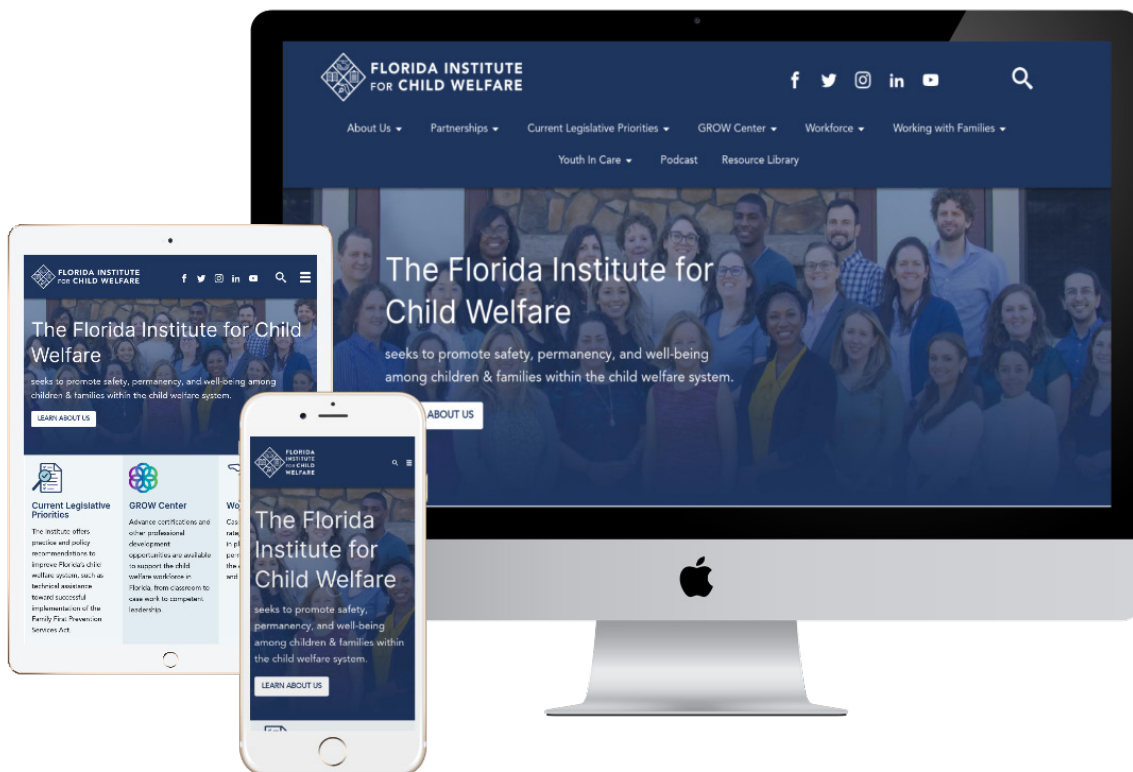
Website

As mentioned previously, the Institute's website went through a redesign process with the Florida Center for Interactive Media that culminated in an improved site that launched in January 2023. This revitalization was a multi-year process that was completed to provide a much more user-friendly experience that enhances the Institute's mission, vision, and resources. The new website was built from the ground up and features an improved organizational system to promote ease of finding information, a resource library, and extensive use of graphic and interactive elements.

Highlights of the new website include: interactive elements on many pages to encourage engagement and help the user manage the amount of information displayed, an emphasis on easily understood graphic materials that appeal to a broad audience, a simplified navigational system, a web-based Affiliate Directory that is searchable and filterable by the affiliates' interests and institution, and easy access to resources that promotes exploration of the Institute's work.

Over the next year, the communications team plans to complete a thorough evaluation of the website so improvements can be made where necessary. As part of that initiative, the Florida Center for Interactive Media will begin to provide the communications team with analytic reports. More detailed information about the website will be provided in forthcoming reports to the legislature.

Visit the website at
FICW.FSU.EDU



Events

2023 Symposium Transformational Leadership: Leading at All Levels

This year’s annual symposium was held on May 2 and 3, 2023 in Tallahassee. Our largest attended symposium to date brought 200 child welfare professionals from around the state to learn about transformational leadership and network with experts. Workshops were geared toward current and emerging leaders and participants engaged in interactive sessions on topics that included passion-driven leadership, diversity in leadership, creating a culture of learning and growth, and skill-building for transformational change.

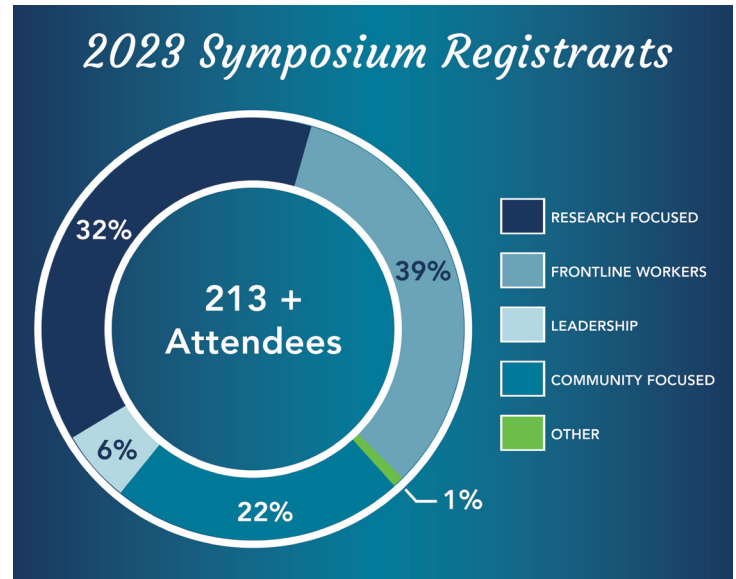
KEYNOTES

Christine Norbut Beyer, MSW has been Commissioner of the NJ Department of Children and Families since 2018. She is redefining the agency as a prevention-focused, child and family serving department, with a vision to help keep all New Jerseyans safe, healthy, and connected.

Some of her initiatives include: preventing maltreatment and promoting strong families; increasing kinship and familial placements; supporting evidence-based, data-driven contracting; reducing staff safety incidents; and transforming child welfare.

Dr. Ken Kilian believes that education is instrumental in growth and development. This passion for education led him to earn a Master of Science in Criminal Justice (Critical Incident Management) as well as his Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. He is active in the Pasco County community and has served in leadership roles at various agencies. In 2011, he began his current role in leading the Pasco Sheriff’s Office Child Protective Investigations Division.

Dr. Kilian is an adjunct professor at Saint Leo University and the University of South Florida where he teaches a self-designed child welfare curriculum as well as criminal justice and leadership courses.



OTHER WORKSHOPS

Twenty-one presenters facilitated eight workshops and a panel over the course of two days. These presenters included Institute staff and affiliates, DCF leadership, and state and national experts.

[Visit the Symposium Webpage to learn more](#) >>

SERVICE INITIATIVE

A core tenant of the Institute is service to children and families in Florida; as such, the Institute engages in service initiatives throughout the year. During the symposium, staff and attendees donated toiletries and household items to benefit Brehon Family Services. Brehon Family Services provides resources to pregnant, at-risk women, and new parents to prevent child abuse and neglect through education.

Affiliate and GCAC Meeting

The Institute's fourth quarterly Affiliate meeting is an annual in-person meeting, with the objective of creating dialogue, identifying gaps in research, disseminating research findings, and proposing future research priorities in areas mutually agreed upon by the Affiliates. This year's annual meeting was held in Tallahassee in May 2023, and for the first time, was a joint meeting with the GROW Center Advisory Council (GCAC). Affiliates and GCAC members participated in an open forum with the Institute's director and discussed the importance of connecting community organizations with university partners. The discussions led to the formal announcement of the Community-University Partnership (CUP) Award. The meeting concluded with presentations from the Project WAKE-UP and FL YES teams, as well as an open mic for any Affiliate or GCAC member to share news with the groups.



Staff Retreat

2022

The Institute organized its first annual staff retreat on October 26-27, 2022. Tallahassee-based and non-local staff came together at the Wakulla Environmental Institute to focus on team building activities as well as discuss the Institute's 2023-2028 strategic plan and the future vision with its upcoming leadership transition. Retreat facilitator Joanne Gallagher offered brainstorming activities and well-being practices to infuse the Institute's values for collaboration and self-reflection.

As a service project, staff volunteers provided assistance to our host location with gardening tasks and indoor organization duties.

2023

Our second annual staff retreat was held at the Tallahassee Community College Center for Innovation on August 24 and 25, 2023. This year's theme was "Pause, Breathe, Collaborate, and Flourish." Staff explored their personal and team strengths through the Gallup Clifton Strengths Assessment, discussed organizational well-being and supporting employee wellness, as well as engaged in team-building activities.

As part of the retreat activities, the Institute collected donations and supplies for Capital City Youth Services (CCYS). CCYS provides guidance, shelter, and support to youth and families in the Big Bend. When youth or families have a problem, CCYS works to understand their needs to develop a plan where they can do their best to serve them.

Our goal in bringing the staff together for retreat activities is to foster an environment that encourages reflection, collaboration, and personal growth.

Administation

ADMINISTRATION

Staffing

At the time of the FY2021-2022 Annual Report, the Institute employed 20 full-time and 17 part-time staff. Since October 2022, an additional six full-time and three part-time staff were hired. For Administration, two full-time positions were hired in May 2023: a business manager and the vacant administrative specialist position. To disseminate the additional research findings, expand our social media outreach, and create branding for the GROW Center initiatives and marketing activities, three full-time media specialists were hired to write, oversee all social media activities, create graphics, and format documents. For Research, two new faculty assistant directors were hired to oversee research and evaluation related to professional development and well-being programs (e.g., ALIGN) and organizational programs (e.g., AWE), with a third assistant director currently being sought for work related to academic innovation. The Professional Development team now has ten full-time and two part-time staff to ensure that the GROW Center programs are fully developed and implemented and to seek out new innovations.

Importantly, in April 2023, the Institute experienced a transition in leadership, with former Associate Director of Research Dr. Lisa Magruder assuming the position of FICW Director following a nationwide search. Dr. Magruder continues to serve as interim Associate Director of Research, with a search for that position expected to begin in Fall 2023. The Institute is grateful to former Director Dr. Jessica Pryce for her leadership over the past six years.

LEADERSHIP

Kristina Finch, MS, Associate Director of Professional Development

Lisa Magruder, Ph.D., MSW, Director (*current*), Associate Director of Research and Evaluation (*through April 2023*)

Jessica Pryce, Ph.D., MSW, Director (*through April 2023*)

Marianna Tutwiler, MSW, MPA, Associate Director of Administration

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GROW Center

Marcia Hently, Program Director of Administration

Taylor Watson, Program Coordinator*

AWE

Kimberly Harvey, MSW, CWCM, CWT, Training Specialist

Lindsey Harris, Program Coordinator

Jessica Pryce, Ph.D., MSW, Project Director

Kristyn Sherrod, MSW, CWCM, CWT, Program Manager

ALIGN

Zoe Leonarczyk, MA, Training Specialist

Katerina Manias, MyALIGN Program Manager

Nicolas Sanchez, MBA, MyALIGN Project Support

Samantha Schoenberger, MS, Lead Instructional Designer

John Sheetz, MSW, Virtual Engagement & Learning Coach

Derrick Stephens, MBA, LCSW, Innovation & Immersive Learning Manager (*visiting faculty*)

* This employee is no longer with the FICW.

We appreciate the contributions they made to our work during FY2022-2023.

RESEARCH

Research

Devin D. Coleman, Fatherhood Engagement Consultant
 Amanda Cruce, MSW, Research Assistant
 Michael Henson, Ph.D., MSW, Postdoctoral Scholar*
 Lauren Herod, MSW, Graduate Assistant
 Nadia Kamal, MSW, Graduate Assistant*
 Elizabeth Keating-Mathews, Program Director of Research Administration
 Ali Korber, MSW, Graduate Assistant*
 Hyunji Lee, Ph.D., MSW, Postdoctoral Scholar*
 Kasey Longley, Ph.D., MS, Professional Research Assistant
 Elisa Martinez Cancino, MSW, Graduate Assistant*
 Daniella Pinard, Graduate Assistant
 Kristine Posada, MSW, Professional Research Assistant
 Katie Ropes-Berry, Ph.D., MSW, Special Projects
(visiting faculty)
 Anna Yelick, Ph.D., MSW, Professional Research Assistant

Academic Innovation

Melissa Murphy, Ph.D., LCSW, Postdoctoral Scholar
 Michae' Cain, MSW, Graduate Assistant

Professional Development and Well-being

Vivian Mills, Ph.D., MSW, Assistant Director of Professional Development and Worker Well-being Research & Evaluation

Rachel Tullius, Graduate Assistant

Organizational Development

Lauren Stanley, Ph.D., LCSW, ACSW, Assistant Director of Organizational Development Research & Evaluation

Karen Randolph, Ph.D., MSW, Professor Emeritus, Evaluator

Sophia Lutz, MSW, Professional Research Assistant

ADMINISTRATION

Administration

Lucy Bastidas, Administrative Specialist*
 Gabe Diaz, IT Specialist
 Lauren Henry, Business Manager
 Kaley Krick, Events Manager & Special Projects*
 Kristopher Long, Accounting Specialist
 Antwonnie McCloud, IT Support Specialist*
 Ashe Planner, Administrative Specialist
 Allyn Roa, Contract Manager

Communications

Alina Bachmann, Creative Director
 Isabella Cring, Media Technician
 Emily Joyce, MS, Program Director of Communications
 Rose Kim, MS, Editor
 Oluwabusayo Oyeniya, MS, Social Media Specialist
 Ari Ryan Rezaian, Media Technician
 Benay Stein, MFA, Editor
 Marie-Anne Verougstraete, MFA, Graphic Artist
 Glenn Whittington, Communications Specialist

* This employee is no longer with the FICW.

We appreciate the contributions they made to our work during FY2022-2023.

Financial Summary

Fiscal Year 2022-2023 E&G Operating Budget

The Institute began the 2022-2023 fiscal year with a budget of \$10,756,081. In September 2023, the approved carry forward monies (\$5,219,884) were applied to the budget for a total of \$15,975,965. Over \$8.5 million was spent during the fiscal year; with nearly \$6.3 million being spent on contracts related to research and evaluation and GROW Center programs and initiatives. See [Appendix F](#) for an overview of all contract expenditures.

TABLE 9: FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023 E&G OPERATING BUDGET

General Operating Budget	Budget	Available Balance at End of FY2022-2023
Expenses	\$6,998,838	\$1,993,560
OPS	\$1,140,003	\$246,148
Other	\$75,025	\$67,672
Salaries	\$2,542,215	\$1,068,341
Total	\$10,756,081	\$3,375,721
FY2021-2022 Carry Forward	\$5,219,884	\$4,043,968
Total	\$15,975,965	\$7,419,689**

**This number does not account for invoices paid after June 30, 2023.

Projected Fiscal Year 2023-2024 E&G Operating Budget

The FY2023-2024 operating budget is \$11,058,805. The initial FSU budget allocations are displayed in Table 10. Monies will be moved in the next quarter from the expense line to salaries and OPS categories. Last fiscal year, three working teams were established—Administration, Professional Development, and Research—each with an associate director and staff. A spending plan was developed for this fiscal year; see Table 11 for internal budget allocations. The final amount of carry forward monies is being determined and will be applied to the budget after the Board of Governors approves our spending plan.

Administration has a budget of just over \$2.2 million to cover personnel costs for leadership, administration, and communication staff. This budget also includes funding for general administration expenses such as computers, software and licenses, the annual symposium, conferences, travel, and professional development expenses for staff.

Professional Development, which encompasses the GROW Center and its programs and initiatives, has a budget of just over \$5.4 million.

The **Research** department plans to spend approximately \$3.3 million for personnel, general research, legislative mandates, and all GROW Center related research and evaluation activities.

TABLE 10: FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024
GENERAL OPERATING BUDGET

General Operating Budget		\$11,058,805
Salaries		\$3,029,408
OPS		\$684,487
Other		\$300,000
Expense		\$7,044,910
Total		\$11,058,805
FY2022-2023 Carry Forward		\$6,799,920
Total FY2023-2024 Budget		\$17,858,725

FY2022-2023 Carry Forward

As of September 15, the Institute has \$6.8 million remaining in unspent FY2022-2023 E&G funds. This includes the carry forward funds from FY2021-2022. A spending plan was submitted to the Board of Governors in August 2023 for \$6,856,406, and we are awaiting approval at the time of this report. This amount allocates slightly over \$4 million for research and startup funding. Over \$2.5 million was set aside for a 2-year period (through FY2024-2025) to contract for research and professional development related initiatives, including a proposal for \$2 million to contract for the DCF’s preservice training design. To be expended by June 30, 2024, \$242,000 is allocated for administrative activities (equipment, staff development, conferences, bonuses for staff ineligible for across-the-board increases (e.g., due to employee type, start date), and marketing for the ALIGN initiatives).

TABLE 11: INTERNAL DEPARTMENT BUDGETS FY2023-2024

Department	Total Budget	Personnel General Expenses	Distribution of Budget Items			
			General Research	AI	ALIGN	AWE
Administration	\$2,274,999	\$1,886,949				
Research	\$3,276,956	\$1,611,265	\$1,188,691	\$75,000	\$297,000	\$105,000
Professional Development	\$5,506,850	\$1,735,115		\$968,839	\$2,092,381	\$595,000

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Appendix

APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2015, the Institute developed our first strategic plan and objectives covering the years 2015-2020. Due to the unfunded legislative changes mandated in Senate Bill 1326, and uncertainty of future funding, the decision was made to not make updates to the strategic plan. The strategic planning process was again delayed in 2021, after the Institute received a legislative appropriation of recurring 10 million dollars to meet the requirements set in Senate Bill 1326, as previously mandated. The impact of this new legislation compelled Institute Leadership to reevaluate the Institute's goals and priorities and to map out a strategic planning process made of careful and deliberate steps. Leadership worked to identify specific goals and objectives that would define the vision for our priorities and way of work, as well as measurable strategies to guide our activities and decision-making.

To support us in this endeavor, in 2022 the Institute hired an external consultant to develop a comprehensive approach to strategic plan development. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted, and interviews were held with external and internal stakeholders. In addition, at an Institute retreat in the fall of 2022, staff engaged in a review of the draft 2023-2028 Strategic Plan to ensure the Institute had insight and input from all perspectives. The contributions from these activities allowed Institute Leadership to finalize a strategic plan framework that includes guiding principles, goals and objectives, and specific strategies. The resulting plan is designed to incorporate our expanded emphasis on the workforce, while maintaining our position as a research-based institute.

[Read the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan](#) 

APPENDIX B: GROW CENTER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDAS



GCAC Meeting Agenda

Thursday, October 13, 2022

10:00am – 1:00pm

10:00am – 10:15am	Welcome and Introductions	Kristina Finch
10:15am – 10:45am	GROW Program Updates	Kristina Finch
10:45am-11:15am	MyALIGN Digital Platform	Derrick Stephens
11:15am – 11:30am	Break	
11:30am – 12:45pm	Workgroup Overviews, Feedback & Next Steps	Kristina Finch & Workgroup Leads
12:45pm – 1:00pm	Expectations for Next Meeting & Closing	Kristina Finch & Taylor Watson

Meeting minutes are available upon request.



GCAC Virtual Meeting Agenda

Thursday, February 16, 2023

10:00am – 12:00pm

10:00am - 10:10am	Welcome/Introductions
10:10am – 10:30am	Streamline Program Updates
10:30am – 11:00am	Affiliate Network and GCAC
11:00am – 11:30am	Symposium Travel
11:30am – 11:45am	CWP Award Committee
11:45am – 12:00pm	Questions

Meeting minutes are available upon request.

GCAC virtual session/orientation

August 1, 2023

- **Introductions (10mins)**
- **Background of 1326, Development of GROW Center and GCAC mission and expectations (Kristina) (15mins)**
Overview of GROW Center long-term goals and objectives, Logic Model, discuss in-development projects/initiatives and how they tie into outcomes.
- **Establishing Communication and Information Sharing Protocols (Kristina) (5mins)**
Expectations, sharing of documents, requests.
- **Clarify the extent and limits of authority (Kristina) (5mins)**
Appropriately reiterate that an advisory committee can make recommendations or give opinions but has no true decision-making authority. Make sure that members know what decisions they can make on their own, how their advice is used, and how final decisions are made by the Institute.
- **Discuss protocols for potential conflicts of interest (Kristina) (5mins)**
Voting recusal, identification, etc.
- **Travel Reimbursement overview (Program Coordinator) (10mins)**
For in-person meetings or member requests that require travel on behalf of FICW.
- **Meeting Locations (Program Coordinator) (5mins)**
3 mandatory virtual meetings and 1 mandatory in-person meeting. A virtual option may be available, but physical presence is highly encouraged.
- **Expectations for next meeting & Closing (Kristina) (5mins)**
Bio & Headshots

Meeting minutes are available upon request.



GCAC Virtual Meeting Agenda

Tuesday, August 15, 2023

10:00am – 12:00pm

10:00am - 10:10am	Welcome/Introductions: New Members
10:10am – 10:30am	Programmatic Updates
10:30am – 11:00am	Programmatic Leads
11:00am – 11:30am	Exploration for Future Programming
11:30am – 11:45am	Cup Award, Upcoming Events and Save the Date
11:45am – 12:00pm	Wrap Up

Meeting minutes are available upon request.

APPENDIX C: AFFILIATE NETWORK QUARTERLY MEETING AGENDAS

FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE 2nd Quarter Affiliate Meeting

LOCATION: ZOOM
DATE: November 3, 2022
TIME: 10:00 AM

AGENDA

10:00 am - Welcome	Elizabeth Keating-Mathews
10: 05 am - Affiliate Award <i>Deadline is December 15!</i>	Elizabeth Keating-Mathews
10: 15am - Project Wake Up Status	Lisa Schelbe
10:30am - Faculty Positions and Guiding Principles updates	Lisa Magruder
10:45 am - AWE Sites	Jessica Pryce
11:00 am - Affiliate Open Mic Updates	Affiliates
Closing Remarks	Jessica Pryce

The next affiliate meeting will be February 2, 2022, at 10am

Meeting minutes are available upon request.

FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE

3rd Quarter Affiliate Meeting

LOCATION: <https://fsu.zoom.us/j/9117829242>

DATE: February 3, 2023

TIME: 10:00 AM

AGENDA

Welcome	Elizabeth Keating-Mathews
Director Search Update	Jessica Pryce
Open Faculty Positions	Lisa Magruder
Annual Meeting and Symposium	Elizabeth Keating-Mathews
Affiliate Award (Spring Round)	Elizabeth Keating-Mathews
Open Mic Updates or Requests	Affiliates
Closing Remarks	Lisa Magruder/Jessica Pryce

*The next affiliate meeting will be May 1, 2023,
Turnbull Conference Center, Tallahassee, Florida*

Meeting minutes are available upon request.



1st Quarter Affiliate Meeting Agenda

LOCATION: [Meeting Registration](#)

DATE: August 18, 2023

TIME: 10:00 AM

Welcome

Institute Updates, Open Faculty Positions, Unfunded Contributions, Purpose of Quarterly Meetings, Calendar of Events

Upcoming Funding Opportunities:

CUP Award – Proposals due September 15th

Affiliate Award - Fall Round opens in late September

Affiliate Updates with a short Q&A

Courtney Wilson - Priority Research Awardee (2022-2023) “Empowering Child Welfare Workforce”

Maxine McGregor - Affiliate Awardee (Spring Round) “Youth Who Die by Suicide in the Child Welfare System: Improving Suicide Prevention Standards and Efforts for High-Risk Youth”

Melissa Radey and Lenore McWey – “Understanding Safety Nets & Service Use Among Child Welfare System (CWS)-Involved Caregivers to Improve Service Provision: A Mixed Methods Examination”

Martie Gillen – “Florida Youth Experiences Study”

Other Affiliate Updates or Requests

Final Reminders and Closing Remarks

The next affiliate meeting will be November 17, 2023 via Zoom

Meeting minutes are available upon request.

APPENDIX D: AFFILIATE NETWORK AND GCAC MEETING



First Annual Affiliate Network and GCAC Meeting



**FLORIDA
INSTITUTE
FOR CHILD
WELFARE**

AT FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

LOCATION: Turnbull Conference Center, Room 103, Tallahassee Florida
DATE: May 1st
TIME: 12:00 - 5:00

AGENDA

12:00 - 1:00 *Check in at Registration Desk and Lunch in Room 103*

1:00 - 1:30	Welcome and Year in Review	Elizabeth Keating Mathews and Marcia Hently
1:30 - 2:00	Open Forum with the Institute New Director	Dr. Lisa Magruder
2:00 - 2:45	Turning Connections into Collaborations	Dr. Lisa Magruder and Kristina Finch
2:45 - 3:00	Break - Affiliates move to room #214	
3:00 - 3:45	What is Project WAKE UP? Faculty and University Partnerships	Interim Dean Dr. Craig Stanley, Dr. Melissa Murphy, and Dr. Machel Madsen Thompon
	What is Project WAKE UP? Community Partnerships	Dr. Lisa Schelbe and John Sheetz
3:45 - 4:00	Break - Affiliates return to room #103	
4:00 - 4:30	FL YES	Dr. Martie Gillen
4:30 - 4:50	Open Mic	Elizabeth Keating-Mathews and Marcia Hently
4:50 - 5:00	Closing Remarks	Dr. Lisa Magruder

*Thank you all for being active and hard-working members.
The Institute is proud to have your support!*

Meeting minutes are available upon request.

APPENDIX E: AFFILIATE CONTRIBUTIONS

- ❖ **Shamra Boel-Studt, Ph.D., MSW, Florida State University**, leads the Evaluation of Advanced Certification Trainings for Child Welfare Professionals for the GROW Center and provides technical support to the FICW Assistant Director of Professional Development Research and Evaluation as that position assumes the lead evaluator role. She was also a guest on the Institute's podcast series, season 6 episode 2.
- ❖ **Marianna Colvin, Ph.D., Florida Atlantic University**, is a co-investigator for Conceptualizing, Planning, and Implementing a Co-constructed Approach to Justice-Centered Child Welfare Practice (JCCWP) and Sexual Safety Programming and Evaluation for Youth and Foster Families in Florida (Sexual Safety) and was a guest on the Institute's podcast series, season 6 episode 6.
- ❖ **Morgan Cooley, Ph.D., MSW, Florida Atlantic University**, was awarded the Affiliate Award for Translational Research (2021-2022) for her project A Mixed Methods Examination of Comfort Call Implementation in South Florida. In addition, she leads two studies (JCCWP, Sexual Safety) and has contributed to two others (SB204, Supports for Caregivers in Strengthening Protective Factors for Foster Parenting). Dr. Cooley also contributed to the Institute by leading two Lunch and Learn virtual sessions and serves as a reviewer for unsolicited proposals.
- ❖ **Cristy Cummings, Ph.D., MSW, University of North Florida**, reviewed applications for new Affiliate members.
- ❖ **Sarah Dickinson, Ph.D., University of South Florida**, is a reviewer of unsolicited proposals received by the Institute.
- ❖ **Jessica Felix-Jager de Weaver, DSW, MSW, Southeastern University**, reviewed applications for new Affiliate members.
- ❖ **Martie Gillen, Ph.D., MBA, University of Florida**, is the Principal Investigator for the Florida Youth Experiences (FL YES) longitudinal study. She also was a member of the Youth Transitioning Out of Care and is on the Sexual Safety project team.
- ❖ **Michael Killian, Ph.D., MSW, Florida State University**, served as a statistical consultant to the supplementary analyses of permanency outcomes of Florida's foster care youth as mandated by Chapter Number 2021-169 (Senate Bill 80, 2021) and provided expert review of human trafficking screening tools.
- ❖ **Erin King, Ph.D., University of West Florida**, serves as an evaluation consultant for the development and evaluation of the MyALIGN platform.
- ❖ **Rene' Ledford, Children's Home Society of Florida**, was a member of the Youth Transitioning Out of Care workgroup.
- ❖ **Khalilah Louis Caines, MSW, Saint Leo University**, was a 2022-2023 Dissertation Fellow for her project titled It Takes a Village: An Examination of Education Enrollment Among Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care. She also served as a member of the Youth Transitioning Out of Care workgroup.

- ❖ **Maxine McGregor, MS, MSW, University of Central Florida**, is the award winner of the 2023-2024 Affiliate Award for Translational Research for her project titled Youth Who Die by Suicide in the Child Welfare System: Improving Suicide Prevention Standards and Efforts for High-Risk Youth.
- ❖ **Lenore McWey, Ph.D., LMFT, Florida State University**, joined the Affiliate Network in the summer of 2023. She is co-principal investigator of the Power of Parents in Child Welfare study.
- ❖ **Fabio Naranjo, Ph.D., MSW, Barry University**, was awarded the Affiliate Award for Translational Research (2022-2023) for his project Translational Research of Fort Lauderdale Independence Training & Education (FLITE) Center in Broward County. He stepped down from the Affiliate Network in the Spring of 2023.
- ❖ **Karen Oehme, JD, Florida State University**, led the creation of two GROW Center Advanced Certifications: STARS: Strength, Trauma, and Resilience Studies and SAFER: Strategies for Addressing Family Violence and Enhancing Resilience.
- ❖ **Ellen Piekalkiewicz, MA, Florida State University**, joined the Affiliate Network in spring of 2023. She is leading creation of the GROW Center Advanced Certification: Support of Substance Use (SOS) Interventions in Family Systems.
- ❖ **Melissa Radey, Ph.D., MSSW, MA, Florida State University**, is the Principal Investigator of the Power of Parents in Child Protection study, and was a guest on the Institute's podcast series, season 6 episode 2. She continues to co-lead the Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families activities and supports the CaseAim evaluation.
- ❖ **Lisa Schelbe, Ph.D., MSW, Florida State University**, is the Co-Principal Investigator for Project WAKE UP in the GROW Center's Academic Innovation program, and was a guest on season 6 episode 3 of the Institute's podcast series. She also served as a co-investigator on the Follow the Love pilot.
- ❖ **Stephanie Scott, United Way of Broward County**, served as an Affiliate Application reviewer.
- ❖ **April Steen, Ph.D., LCSW, Warner University**, served as an Affiliate Application reviewer.
- ❖ **Kenisha Thompson, Ph.D., MSW, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University**, is an early adopter of Project WAKE UP.
- ❖ **Heather Thompson, Ph.D., LCSW, Florida Atlantic University**, served as a Child Welfare Professional of the Year Award application reviewer. She is also on the JCCWP and Sexual Safety studies teams.
- ❖ **James Weaver, Partnership for Strong Families**, joined the Affiliate Network in fall 2023.
- ❖ **Dina Wilke, Ph.D., MSW, Florida State University**, leads the initial outcome evaluation for the Institute's Alliance for Workforce Enhancement (AWE) initiative and provides technical support to the FICW Assistant Director of Organizational Development Research and Evaluation as that position assumes lead evaluator role over AWE. She continues to lead the FSPSF activities and supports the CaseAim evaluation.
- ❖ **Courtney Wilson, Ph.D., MSW, Florida International University**, was awarded the Priority Research Award for his project Empowering Child Welfare Workforce: Supporting Child Welfare Student Interns and Agency Supervisors through Group Supervision, Tuition Sponsorship, and Stipend.

APPENDIX F: CONTRACTS RECEIVED AND AWARDED IN FY2022-2023

Externally Funded Research and Evaluation Projects

During this reporting period, the Institute received \$197,362 in contracts from outside entities. The DCF provided continued funding for ongoing research projects related to kinship navigation programs and residential group home quality standards.

TABLE 1: FY2022-2023 EXTERNALLY FUNDED RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PROJECTS

Project Name	Project Period	Total Award	Principal Investigator	Funding Entity
Inventory of Kinship Practices	7/1/2022 to 9/30/2022	\$34,989.00	Anna Yelick	Florida Department of Children and Families
Inventory of Kinship Practices	4/17/2023 to 9/30/2023	\$66,593.00	Anna Yelick	Florida Department of Children and Families
An Assessment of Quality Standards for Florida's DCF Licensed Residential Group Homes	7/1/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$95,780.00	Shamra Boel-Studt	Florida Department of Children and Families
Total		\$197,362.00		

Projects Funded by the Institute in FY2022-2023

During FY2022-2023, the Institute funded 19 research projects (\$1,200,279.53), 15 GROW Center projects (\$5,032,646.72), and 2 administrative projects (\$42,945.00).

TABLE 2A: FY2022-2023 PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE INSTITUTE – RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION						
Project Name	Project Period	Expenditures	Encumbrances	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
A Mixed Methods Examination of Comfort Call Implementation in South Florida ¹	6/1/2021 to 10/28/2022	\$5,999.00	\$0.00	\$5,999.00	Morgan Cooley	Florida Atlantic University
A Platform for Social Action: Engaging and Supporting the Voice of Youth in Foster Care Receiving Independent Living Services ²	6/1/2021 to 8/15/2022	\$18,000.00	\$0.00	\$18,000.00	Marianna Colvin	Florida Atlantic University
Assisting Youth in Foster Care in Developing Life Skills to Become Self-Sufficient Adults: Plan for Evaluating Florida's Efforts	7/21/2022 to 10/31/2022	\$15,234.00	\$0.00	\$15,234.00	Martie Gillen	University of Florida
A Mixed Methods Evaluation of the Authentic Family Engagement and Strengthening Approach	7/1/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$41,697.00	\$0.00	\$41,697.00	Morgan Cooley	Florida Atlantic University
Follow the Love Pilot Project – Strengthening Relational Permanency for Foster Youth in Florida Child Welfare Systems	8/23/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$140,402.00	\$0.00	\$140,402.00	Annette Semanchin-Jones	The Research Foundation for SUNY on behalf of the University at Buffalo
HOPE Court: An Explanatory Case Study of Restorative Practices in Child Welfare	7/21/2022 to 10/1/2023	\$149,550.00	\$5,000.00 ³	\$154,550.00	Melissa Green	FLITE Center
Translational Research of Fort Lauderdale Independence Training & Education (FLITE) Center	6/8/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$50,000.00 ⁴	\$0.00	\$50,000.00	Fabio Naranjo	Barry University
SB80 Skills Evaluation Consultant	7/7/2022 to 10/31/2022	\$450.00	\$2,250.00 ⁵	\$2,700.00	Elizabeth Wynter	Elizabeth Wynter

- 1 Project originated in FY22 and was extended through FY23 due to a no-cost time extension. The cost shown in the graph only details costs allocated and expended in FY23, not the total cost of the project.
- 2 Project originated in FY22 and was extended through FY23 due to a no-cost time extension. The cost shown in the graph only details costs allocated and expended in FY23, not the total cost of the project.
- 3 Encumbrance will be expended in FY24.
- 4 \$16,678.00 expended in FY22.
- 5 Consultant did not require full compensation based on actual hours worked.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION						
Project Name	Project Period	Expenditures	Encumbrances	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
SB80 Skills Evaluation Consultant	7/7/2022 to 10/31/2022	\$0.00	\$2,700.00 ⁶	\$2,700.00	Brandie McCabe	Brandie McCabe
SB80 Skills Evaluation Consultant	7/7/2022 to 10/31/2022	\$1,800.00	\$0.00	\$1,800.00	Diamond Whitley	Diamond Whitley
An Evaluation of AdCert Trainings for Child Welfare Professionals	7/1/2022 to 8/18/2023	\$186,084.00	\$0.00	\$186,084.00	Shamra Boel-Studt	Florida State University
MyALIGN Development and Evaluation Planning – Fall	8/2/2022 to 12/1/2022	\$10,694.00	\$0.00	\$10,694.00	Erin King	University of West Florida
MyALIGN Development and Evaluation Planning – Spring	2/23/2023 to 6/30/2023	\$14,022.53	\$0.00	\$14,022.53	Erin King	University of West Florida
Empowering Child Welfare Workforce: Supporting Child Welfare Student Interns and Agency Supervisors through Group Supervision, Tuition Sponsorship, and Stipend	9/15/2022 to 8/31/2023	\$200,648.00 ⁷	\$0.00	\$200,648.00	Courtney Wilson	Florida International University
Florida Youth Experiences Study (FLYES) Phase 1	1/1/2023 to 6/30/2023	\$132,340.00	\$0.00	\$132,340.00	Martie Gillen	University of Florida
Trauma Treatment for Youth Residing in Residential Treatment	1/1/2023 to 6/30/2023	\$62,261.00	\$0.00	\$62,261.00	Tanya Renn	Florida State University
Understanding Safety Nets & Service Use Among Child Welfare System (CWS)-Involved Caregivers	1/1/2023 to 6/30/2023	\$106,150.00	\$0.00	\$106,150.00	Melissa Radey	Florida State University
Perceptions and Experiences of Support While in Care among LGBTQ Former Foster Youth	3/14/2023 to 6/30/2023	\$5,000.00	\$0.00	\$5,000.00	Joshua Mincey	Joshua Mincey
Sexual Safety Programming and Evaluation for Youth and Foster Families in Florida	5/1/2023 to 6/30/2023	\$49,998.00	\$0.00	\$49,998.00	Morgan Cooley	Florida Atlantic University
Total Research and Evaluation Cost FY22-23		\$1,200,279.53				

6 Consultant did not invoice because their services were not provided.

7 \$7,217 expended in FY24 due to no-cost time extension.

TABLE 2B: FY2022-2023 PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE INSTITUTE – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT						
Project Name	Project Period	Expenditures	Encumbrances	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
MyALIGN eCare Vault Collaboration	7/12/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$1,657,381.00	\$0.00	\$1,657,381.00	Heather Zacker	eCare Vault
Project WAKE-UP: A Combined Problem-Case-Based Curriculum Innovation and Redesign	7/12/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$1,163,099.00	\$0.00	\$1,163,099.00	Craig Stanley	Florida State University
Strength, Trauma, and Resilience Studies Professional Certification (STARS) Advanced Certification	7/1/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$170,592.00	\$0.00	\$170,592.00	Karen Oehme	Florida State University: Institute for Family Violence Studies
Domestic Violence Child Welfare Advanced Certification Program	7/1/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$592,560.00	\$0.00	\$592,560.00	Karen Oehme	Florida State University: Institute for Family Violence Studies
Child Welfare SUDs Systems Support and Training	7/1/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$244,370.00	\$0.00	\$244,370.00	Ellen Piekalkiewicz	Florida State University: Center for the Study and Promotion of Communities, Families, and Children
AWE Leadership Academy Development and Facilitation	7/25/2022 to 12/31/2023	\$49,400.00	\$25,480.00 ¹	\$74,880.00	Patricia Mosher	Tricia Mosher Consulting, Inc.
Alliance for Workforce Enhancement (AWE): 360° Assessments and Feedback – Cohort 1	10/25/2022 to 3/27/2023	\$9,750.00	\$0.00	\$9,750.00	Shauna Rienks	The Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver
Nonviolent Communication Training Sessions	1/1/2023 to 5/30/2023	\$5,850.00	\$0.00	\$5,850.00	Janelle King	Janelle King
Virtual Reality Headset Subscription Service	1/11/2023 to 9/30/2023	\$169,695.72	\$0.00	\$169,695.72	Shireen Sackreiter	Accenture, LLP/Insight
Workforce Well-being and Resiliency Consultation Services	1/6/2023 to 12/15/2023	\$152,500.00	\$152,500.00 ²	\$305,000.00	Amelia Franck Meyer	ALIA Innovations

1 Remaining encumbrance will be expended in FY24.

2 Remaining encumbrance will be expended in FY24.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Project Name	Project Period	Expenditures	Encumbrances	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
Workforce Well-being and Resiliency Consultation Services	12/12/2022 to 12/29/2023	\$186,667.00	\$163,333.00 ³	\$350,000.00	Zuleka Henderson	The Center for Black WellBEing
Virtual Training Series: Introduction to Neurodiversity in Child Welfare	4/1/2023 to 3/31/2024	\$40,409.00	\$115,017.00	\$155,426.00	Karen Oehme	Florida State University: Institute for Family Violence Studies
Asynchronous Child Welfare Training Series	3/1/2023 to 8/31/2023	\$70,000.00	\$40,743.00	\$110,743.00	Mimi Graham	Florida State University: Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy
AWE Leadership Academy Coaching	2/14/2023 to 6/30/2023	\$2,812.50	\$187.50 ⁴	\$3,000.00	Henry Pennypacker	Henry Pennypacker
Alliance for Workforce Enhancement (AWE): 360° Assessments and Feedback - Cohort 2	5/16/2023 to 10/31/2023	\$0.00	\$20,300.00 ⁵	\$20,300.00	Shauna Rienks	The Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver
Total Professional Development Cost FY22-23		\$5,032,646.72				

3 Remaining encumbrance will be expended in FY24.
 4 Consultant did not require full compensation based on actual hours worked.
 5 The agreement was executed in FY23 and will be expended throughout FY24.

TABLE 2C: FY2022-2023 PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE INSTITUTE – ADMINISTRATION

ADMINISTRATION						
Project Name	Project Period	Expenditures	Encumbrances	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
Florida Institute for Child Welfare Website Management	9/14/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$35,445.00	\$0.00	\$35,445.00	Tara Orłowski	Florida State University: Florida Center for Interactive Media
Parent Advocate Consultant	7/12/2022 to 6/30/2023	\$4,200.00	\$3,300.00	\$7,500.00	Devin Coleman	Devin D. Coleman & Associates, LLC.
Total Administration Cost FY22-23		\$42,945.00				
OVERALL INSTITUTE: TOTAL COST FY22-23		\$6,275,871.25				

FY2023-2024 Projects Funded by the Department of Children and Families

The Institute currently has a contract with the Department of Children and Families to fund the kinship navigator program research project through September 30, 2023 (noted in “Contracts Received and Awarded in FY 2022-2023” section). The Department finds Dr. Boel-Studt’s work on the quality standards invaluable and continues to support our work on this project.

TABLE 3: FY2022-2024 RESEARCH FUNDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Project Name	Project Period	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
An Assessment of Quality Standards for Florida’s DCF Licensed Residential Group Homes	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$99,195.00	Shamra Boel-Studt	Florida Department of Children and Families
Total		\$99,195.00		

Projects Funded by the Institute in FY2023-2024

Since July 1, 2023, the Institute entered sixteen contracts with entities to conduct research and evaluation activities and carry out the GROW Center initiatives. In addition, we are currently negotiating and executing seven additional contracts throughout the Institute.

TABLE 4A: FY2023-2024 PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE INSTITUTE – RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION				
Project Name	Project Period	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
An Evaluation of AdCert Trainings for Child Welfare Professionals	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$191,928.00	Shamra Boel-Studt	Florida State University
Trauma Treatment for Youth Residing in Residential Treatment	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$100,806.00	Tanya Renn	Florida State University
Understanding Safety Nets & Service Use Among Child Welfare System (CWS)-Involved Caregivers	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$362,531.00	Melissa Radey	Florida State University
Inclusive Nurturing Through Elevating Relationship (INTER) Programming for Incarcerated Youth	7/21/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$66,932.78	Elizabeth Curley	Florida State University
Florida Youth Experiences Study (FLYES) Phase 2	7/10/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$288,692.00	Martie Gillen	University of Florida
Sexual Safety Programming and Evaluation for Youth and Foster Families in Florida	7/10/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$100,000.00	Morgan Cooley	Florida Atlantic University
Youth Who Die by Suicide in the Child Welfare System: Improving Suicide Prevention Standards and Efforts for High-Risk Youth	Execution date TBD	\$50,000.00	Maxine McGregor	University of Central Florida
Human Trafficking Screening Tool Evaluation	Execution date TBD	\$11,608.01	Joan Reid	University of South Florida

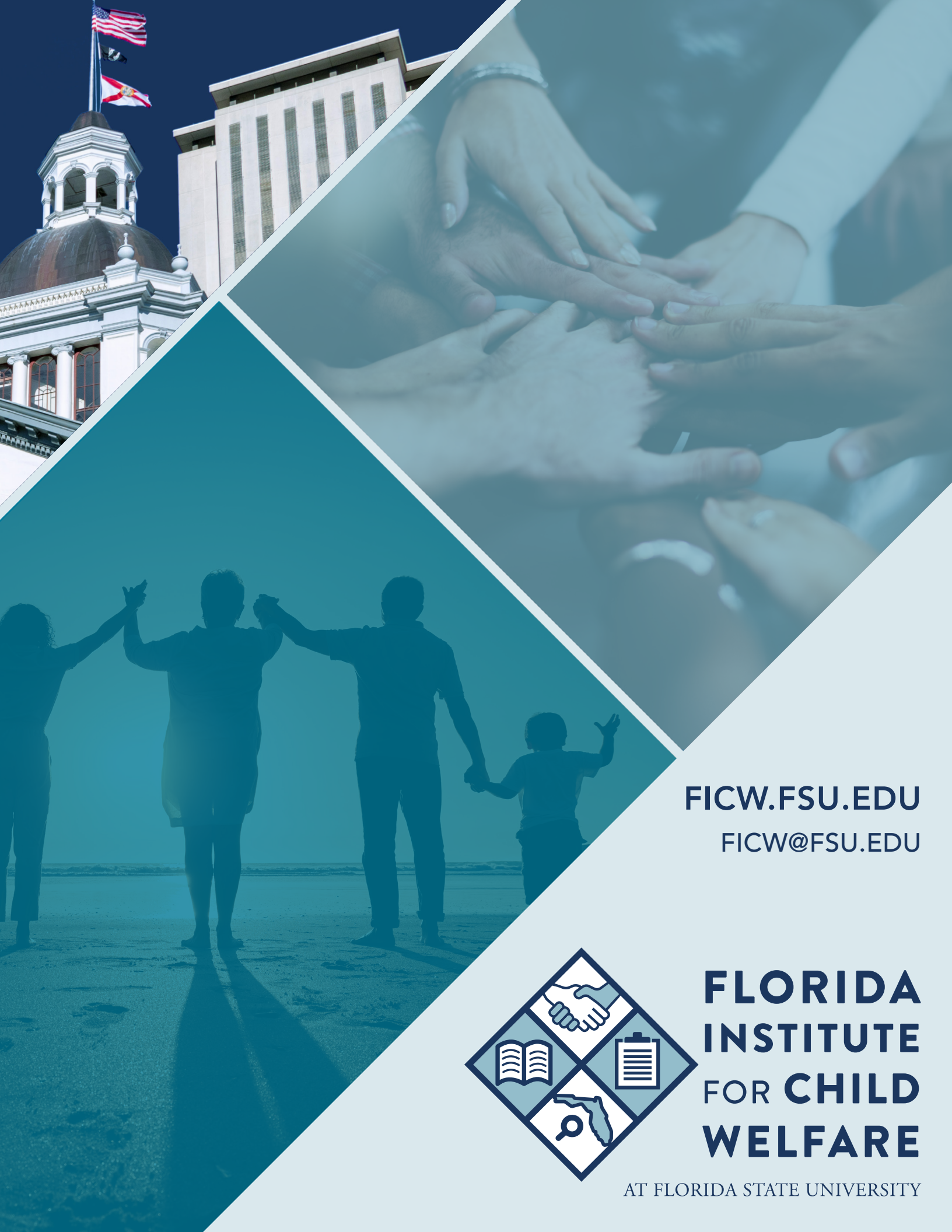
RESEARCH AND EVALUATION				
Project Name	Project Period	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
Transition-Age Youth Connect (TAY-Connect): A Mixed Methods-Exploration of the Relationships Between Social Support and Well-being Outcomes among Youth Transitioning from Foster Care	Execution date TBD	\$74,873.00	Shelby L. Clark	University of Kentucky
Parent, Child, and Family Rights within the Florida Child Welfare System	Execution date TBD	\$74,704.00	Morgan Cooley	Florida Atlantic University
Transformational Supervisors in Child Welfare Agencies Planning Period	Execution date TBD	\$201,980.00	Tae Kyung Park	University of Colorado -Colorado Springs
Total Research and Evaluation Cost FY23-24		\$1,524,054.79		

TABLE 4B: FY2023-2024 PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE INSTITUTE – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT				
Project Name	Project Period	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
MyALIGN eCare Vault Collaboration	7/25/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$1,657,792.50	Heather Zacker	eCare Vault
A Combined Problem-Case-Based Curriculum Innovation and Redesign	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$943,839.00	Lisa Schelbe	Florida State University
Strength, Trauma, and Resilience Studies (STARS) Advanced Certification	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$0.00 ¹	Karen Oehme	Florida State University: Institute for Family Violence Studies
Domestic Violence Child Welfare Advanced Certification Program	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$68,396.00	Karen Oehme	Florida State University: Institute for Family Violence Studies
Child Welfare SUDs Systems Support and Training	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$373,697.00	Ellen Piekalkiewicz	Florida State University: Center for the Study and Promotion of Communities, Families, and Children
AWE Leadership Academy Coaching	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$7,200.00	Henry Pennypacker	Henry Pennypacker
AWE Leadership Academy Coaching	7/10/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$6,000.00	Alissa Kraman	Kraman Consulting Inc.
AWE Leadership Academy Coaching	7/1/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$6,000.00	Heidy Diaz	Heidy Diaz Consulting Services, Inc.
AWE Leadership Academy Coaching	7/11/2023 to 6/30/2024	\$6,000.00	Sonia Lynch-Dillard	Hope Connection Unlimited, LLC.
Virtual Reality Headset Subscription Service - Amendment 1	7/10/2023 to 7/31/2024	\$208,500.00	Michelle McGinley	Accenture

¹ Project will be using their leftover funds from FY23 to continue project activities.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT				
Project Name	Project Period	Total Award	Principal Investigator/Contact	Entity
Virtual Reality Headset Subscription Service - Amendment 2	Execution date TBD	\$25,000.00	Michelle McGinley	Accenture
Statewide Implementation of Critical Reasoning and Simulation Training and Evaluation of the Florida Academy for Child Protection and Family Resiliency	Execution date TBD	\$2,035,280.00	Amy Hines	Florida Department of Children and Families
Total Research and Evaluation Cost FY23-24		\$5,337,704.50		
OVERALL INSTITUTE: TOTAL FOR CONTRACTED EXPENSES		\$6,275,871.25		



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AT FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY