



Volume 30, No. 1

# Children's **VOICE**

## **Supporting Permanency** *through Adoption-Competent Mental Health Services*

Research, Agency, and  
Governmental Organizations  
**Working Together  
for Kids**

**School-Centered  
Housing Response:**  
Connecting Students and their  
Families to Affordable Housing

New from CWLA Press:



# Systems Consultation When Trauma Strikes

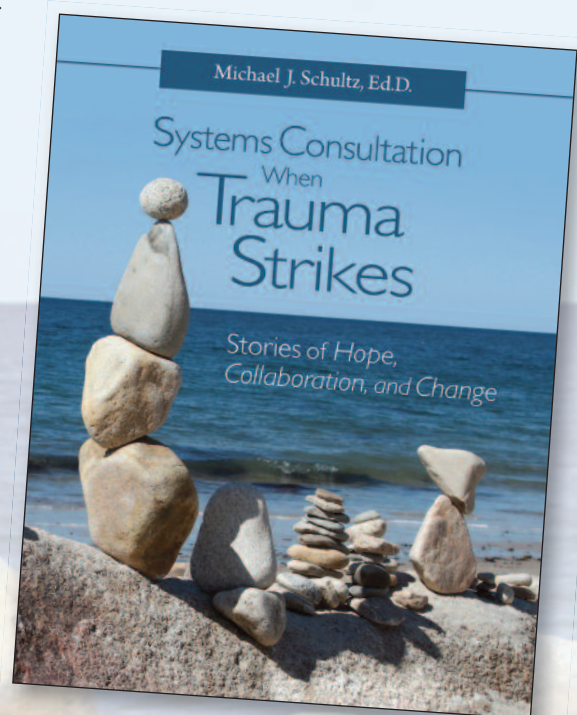
*Stories of Hope, Collaboration, and Change*

CWLA Press is pleased to announce the publication of ***Systems Consultation When Trauma Strikes: Stories of Hope, Collaboration, and Change***, by family therapist, psychologist, systems consultant, and CWLA Senior Fellow Michael Schultz, Ed.D. Using a collaborative, information-sharing approach, this book guides helping professionals in using systemic assessment and intervention with groups experiencing crisis, trauma, and serious interpersonal conflict.

*Systems Consultation When Trauma Strikes* takes an “empowering approach to organizational crisis intervention and group facilitation [that] is creative and experiential .... [T]his book is an essential guide for organizations that strive to foster a culture of resiliency, even in the midst of a crisis, by way of hope, collaboration, and change.”

— Christine Lynn Norton, Ph.D.,

LCSW Professor School of Social Work, Texas State University.



Michael J. Schultz, Ed.D.

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### Children's Voice Magazine

By publishing a diverse range of views on a wide array of topics, since 1991, Children's Voice seeks to encourage public discussion and debate among those who are committed to helping children and families. Articles and advertising published in Children's Voice do not necessarily reflect the views of the Child Welfare League of America or its member agencies and do not represent an endorsement of opinions, products, or services.

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# Leadership Lens

Christine James-Brown



## Improving Services and Supports for Children and Families who are Vulnerable

When I sit down to write this column, I always read the articles in *Children's Voice* to see if there is a common theme or something I want to call out. Since *Children's Voice* issues typically are not themed like some of our other publications, finding this can sometimes be a challenge. This time, though, as I read, the theme became very clear: Despite the turmoil and justified calls for change that surrounds child welfare, there are tens of thousands of workers, administrators, researchers, and advocates who are diligently working to improve services and supports for children and families who are vulnerable. These efforts are detailed in this and other issues of *Children's Voice*.

The articles in this issue describe many efforts: ensuring that dads and other male-identifying individuals in child welfare, including dads, workers, and others, are appropriately used to support

improved child outcomes; the challenge to listen to children with autism—and all children—in order to more effectively address their needs; better addressing the specialized needs of girls, especially girls at risk of sexual exploitation; addressing youth homelessness through a partnership between education and affordable housing providers; and “village approaches” between universities, agencies, and other entities to improve outcomes for children. Each of these articles in some way underscores the importance of listening more intently and being more intentional in addressing the specialized needs of children and families before they come into contact with the child welfare

system. They also reconfirm the CWLA *National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare* position that it takes the combined efforts of everyone to address the welfare of children.

I hope that, like me, you are inspired by the level and diversity of efforts to improve the life chances of children and the recognition that child welfare cannot achieve its mission without the wisdom and support of children,

families, communities, and other systems. This type of approach will increase understanding and support for our work and allow us to make greater progress in improving child outcomes. ■

*“It takes the combined efforts of everyone to address the welfare of children.”*

*Christine James-Brown*

# Applying a Universal Precautions Approach to Residential Programs for Girls:

## *The My Life My Choice Prevention Solution Model*

By Lisa Goldblatt Grace



Girls in communities across the United States, growing up in a variety of life circumstances, are at risk of being commercially sexually exploited. This vulnerability most frequently comes at the crossroads of racism, sexism, and classism. Often, transnegativity or heterosexism play a major role, as well. Though there are many differences in each young person's story, their vulnerabilities often are quite uniform: The majority of young survivors who we see in our Survivor Empowerment Program at My Life My Choice, based in Boston, are in the care and custody of the child welfare system, meaning they have experienced prior abuse or neglect and have lived in foster care or a congregate care facility. Exploiters systematically target adolescent girls who have experienced trauma and are living in these facilities.

There is a tremendous amount of dialogue in the anti-trafficking field about the need for specialized housing for girls who are commercially sexually exploited. (Groton & Gomory, 2021) Service providers have posited that these girls, due to their specific type of trauma, can benefit from a specific type of program. A program in which all girls have experienced the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) would decrease stigma and shame, thus creating a

stronger environment in which to heal, grow, and take on leadership roles. Something profound can happen when youth who have been exploited support each other in the context of a warm, compassionate, and normalizing residential program. Specialized housing programs serve an important purpose; My Life My Choice's Survivor Empowerment service model has shown that when survivors help survivors, a powerful model for recovery is created.

At My Life My Choice, we feel strongly about supporting the development of these programs nationwide. However, there is simply not enough funding to create all of the specialized beds that are needed. Further, and perhaps most important, we would never reach every girl who needs it. The process of parsing out those who have been exploited from those who are so very close to this happening is important but may not be necessary to get the services and supports needed to all of those vulnerable. Within our program, 67% of the youth referred to My Life My Choice as "high risk" or for "suspected history of exploitation" (those who have not yet been confirmed as being exploited) disclose that they were indeed exploited once they establish a relationship with their survivor mentor (My Life My Choice, 2019). Given the secrecy and subversiveness inherent in commercial

sexual exploitation, there are inherent challenges in trying to identify every girl in need of specialized housing in advance of the establishment of a relationship.

Those in the public health field will remember the enormous national shift that came with the adoption of Universal Precautions guidelines in the mid-1980s—particularly around blood spills and the risk of HIV transmission (Broussard & Khawaji, 2020). Rather than examining each blood spill to determine its likelihood of carrying HIV, health care workers adopted a process by which they assumed that *all* blood spills were infectious and treated them accordingly. This assured that health care workers and others were safe: Each situation was met with the care that it deserved. Similarly, what if we assumed that every girl who has entered into a residential program is vulnerable to being exploited? Could we create programs that expertly wrap specialized care around *all* girls, ensuring that no youth who has been exploited or is high-risk slips through the cracks? This is the ethos of the My Life My Choice Prevention Solution Model.

The model is survivor-led, survivor-informed, and survivor-delivered, and takes a public health approach to prevention. It provides a blueprint for service providers working with youth who are vulnerable or exploited in an effort to prevent commercial sexual exploitation and re-victimization. The model is predicated on three primary means of creating systemic and systematic prevention within congregate care facilities:

***Our first goal is to shift behavior among those who are at highest risk.*** We feel strongly that it is not the responsibility of girls who are vulnerable to prevent their own exploitation. That responsibility lies within the greater community, and targeted efforts need to focus on raising young men who don't sell or buy human beings. However, research conducted on our model supports the efficacy of a comprehensive psychoeducational program that pushes girls to examine their own vulnerabilities while shifting attitudes, knowledge, and skills. This type of prevention education works: A recent National Institute of Justice study (Rothman et al., 2019) found that the My Life My Choice Exploitation Prevention Curriculum decreases incidence of sexual exploitation by 50 percent. Participants reported experiencing two times less incidents of dating violence. This was shown to be true with girls who had never been exploited as well as with those who had. A universal precautions approach in which all participants are in essence inoculated against the threat of exploitation is a key facet of a comprehensive prevention plan for either a specialized or general congregate care facility.

***Our second goal is to shift practice and policy within the congregate care facility to be able to most effectively reduce the risk of primary victimization or re-victimization.***

The objectives here are to ensure that every child is served by trained adults who are expert in at minimum the following:

- how to talk about exploitation;
- how to execute run prevention plans;
- how to support youth after they have been missing from care; and
- how to spot and respond to recruitment on site.

To do this, programs need to develop appropriate, thoughtful policies that both support this specialized approach and dovetail effectively with federal, state, and local statutes. They need to connect with community-based agencies—ideally those that are survivor-led—to bring expert services onsite. This kind of practice and policy shift weaves an effective safety net for those most vulnerable.

***Our third goal is sustained, program-wide change.***

To accomplish this, facilities should partner with local anti-trafficking experts—again, ideally, survivor-led programs—that can support them in their ongoing work. Most effectively, these residential treatment centers and group homes become connected to each other for practice support and would be buttressed by their larger state child welfare system.

Specialized services are critical for youth who are exploited. However, as a field we must step up to ensure that all girls about whom we are concerned—and all girls with disproportionate vulnerabilities whose lives hang in the balance between high-risk and confirmed exploited—are offered the best possible safety net. Just like shifting our thinking about blood spills and HIV, we can make lasting, systemic change on behalf of the most marginalized through a universal precautions approach. ■

*Lisa Goldblatt Grace is the co-founder and executive director of My Life My Choice, a program of JRI. Founded in 2002, My Life My Choice is a groundbreaking, nationally recognized leader in the fight to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children. My Life My Choice offers a unique continuum of evidence-informed, survivor-led services spanning service provider training, exploitation prevention programming for adolescent girls at disproportionate risk, survivor mentoring to young survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, and advocacy and leadership development.*

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## Future Focus: Supporting Education & Career Development in the Era of COVID-19

By Lan To

It's currently the fall of 2021 and young people and families are facing so many questions about the future—for which answers are few and ever-changing. A season often full of excitement and anticipation for the new academic year is instead riddled with the fears of being back to in-person learning amidst a daunting, continuing public health crisis. In this context of uncertainty, it feels inconceivable yet crucial to write about how youth practitioners are supporting post-secondary success.

We are in the midst of reimagining education and the workforce at every level. The playing field is on fire, and a redesign—not a reconstruction—is underway. By the time you read

this, at the end of 2021, our lives will have undoubtedly changed as we continue to experience a three-fold public health, economic, and political crisis ridden by racial strife and injustice. How do we help young people and families prepare for a future with so much trauma and uncertainty? Moreover, how do we uplift their voices and experiences knowing the policies and outcomes of these crises will impact their lives significantly?

During these historic times, our guiding question at Good Shepherd Services—a community-based organization partnering with youth, families, and communities in New York City—has remained the same: What can we do to level the playing field

to increase access to educational attainment and meaningful work for all youth and families? In addition, we are asking: How will we help youth and families understand, navigate, and succeed during this time of great uncertainty? How do we level this new playing field when the field is still trying to establish what the rules will be?

The Future Focus program was designed 15 years ago to combat these inequities in education and employment for the most vulnerable youth and families in New York City, and the challenges presented during COVID-19 are yet another battle testing our foundational framework and approach. By focusing on individual counseling practices, programmatic



culture and supports, partnerships, and city-wide advocacy, we tackle the key areas that will have the highest degrees of impact in our participants' lives. We recognize that when youth and families come to us, the context in which they live their lives already has changed immensely. Family loss and separation—for a multitude of reasons, many of which are couched in systems of poverty and oppression—limit the resources a young person has personally and socially to access their full educational capacities and interests. The scale of change youth and families are experiencing now during the COVID-19 era is like no other, and the restraints we have as human services providers in which to conduct our services and supports are a challenge we have faced like no other. We have tested our commitment and creativity by counseling remotely, conducting cohorts of youth internships through online learning, transformed our offices to remind ourselves of social distancing measures, taken more care that our expressions and tone of voice convey our regards to balance the lack of warmth from a mask or a screen, and constrained our physical connection with a wave or an elbow bump even in times of immense loss and pain. And our participants have adjusted with us. The degree of empathy we all share for these unprecedented times has engendered a level of gratitude and collaborative spirit in our partnerships to help each other maintain, sustain, and thrive.

The job of preparing for the future has always been cast with uncertainty, but that precariousness

was projected into a world where we had some security in knowing the rules, processes, policies, and protocols with which to guide and advocate for our young people and families. These actions now occur in a world with a drastically different backdrop. The mechanics of these processes are modifying in ways that our programs at Good Shepherd Services have needed to address in order to support our participants' ability to maintain a future focus.

At the Chelsea Foyer, our residence for youth experiencing homelessness and young adults aging out of foster care, we have seen an increase in youth unemployment correlate with an increased focus on career development and educational pursuits among our youth residents. The decreased competition for their interests and time outside of the Foyer, due to social distancing and closed businesses, increased participation in our Future Focus program services. Internship opportunities and entry level positions were limited through most of 2020 because businesses were trying to focus on their existing employees or simply closed. Residents used their time to shore up their marketability and self-awareness through career development and educational exploration and opportunities. Widespread online learning opportunities have diversified choices and removed commuting challenges and transportation costs that were a burden before the pandemic, paving the way for more residents to learn new skills.

Our staff at McLaughlin East Harlem Residence, a supportive housing program for young families and singles who have aged out of foster care or juvenile justice, transformed their multipurpose room to meet the needs and demands for both remote work and remote learning for the working parents and their children in the building. More than 85 percent of the families in the building chose remote learning for their child for the 2020-2021 school year, an option most often only possible for more privileged families. As a result, we improved Wi-fi and hotspot access throughout the building to better serve these technological needs in order to support tech equity and create an additional space for learning that they would not have in their individual apartments. By providing resources and supports to bridge the digital divide and by creating safe learning spaces while “working and learning from home,” our staff were able to level the playing field in this respect and provide more options to our young families in the building.

We have been able to apply our Future Focus approach to address the challenges presented during the COVID-19 era, using youth and family development practices that are trauma-informed, contextual, and relational. *Programmatic models that embrace this kind of responsive and developmentally grounded approach*

*Continued on page 18*

# Supporting Permanency through Adoption-Competent Mental Health Services:

## The National NTI Free Interactive Web-Based Training

By Edna Davis-Brown and Lisa Maynard

Family relationships in today's world can be complicated. Families who come together through foster care, guardianship, and adoption often experience added layers of complexity due to trauma, abuse, and neglect that the COVID-19 pandemic has been shown to intensify even more. The combination of these complex experiences can lead to behavioral and mental health difficulties and compromise well-being in the family system. Infusing adoption competency in the provision of casework and clinical practice is essential to keeping children, youth, and families strong.

A variety of adoption-competent supports can help and greatly assist in creating a holistic environment in which families can thrive. When children have support and services that help them process their past traumatic experiences, they are better able to develop healthy and appropriate coping skills. Similarly, when parents are provided with tools and strategies that make sense based on their adoption experiences, they are better able to provide support and stability for their children.

Studies indicate (Atkinson et al., 2013) that adoptive parents often must extensively search and endure multiple providers before finding a therapist who truly understands issues and experiences relevant to adoption. For a variety of reasons, clinicians and caseworkers often lack

training specific to the adoption experience; this limits their ability to practice effectively with this population. Adoption-competent practices can spare families the stress of implementing tools and responses in their homes that are often ineffective and sometimes cause additional distress or trauma.

### The Need for Adoption Competency Training

Training is needed to ensure that mental health and child welfare professionals are well prepared to expertly support foster and adoptive families. When professionals have the right training to respond effectively to the myriad issues that may arise, children and their families can flourish. The National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI) is an effective solution to meet this critical need.



### What Is NTI?

NTI is a state-of-the-art, web-based training developed by the Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE), funded by the Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NTI is designed to ensure that mental health and child welfare professionals are better able to effectively respond to the needs of foster and adoptive families. The training, offered free of charge, is available for all U.S. states, Tribes, and Territories.

## Catch a Glimpse

NTI Training for Child Welfare Professionals consists of an eight-module, 20-hour curriculum, with an additional five hours for supervisors to support transfer of learning in day-to-day practice. Modules address topics including attachment, race, ethnicity, issues facing youth and families who are LGBTQ+, loss and grief, trauma, identity formation, and permanency. A 30-hour training for mental health professionals includes two additional modules addressing assessment and treatment planning and therapeutic parenting strategies.

## Participants Gain Best Practices from Aligned Trainings and Resources

The modules have been informed by experts in the fields of adoption, mental health, and child welfare. Participants gain best practices and effective strategies for working with children, youth, and families. These two aligned, web-based trainings use adult learning principles to actively engage the user through completion. Each self-directed module includes a mix of text, video, and audio and includes links to resources, activities, and opportunities for reflection using examples and stories from adoptive parents, youth and children, and experts for each content area. Resource materials included with each learning module provide tips and tools that enable professionals to seamlessly transfer their learning into the real practice setting.

## Findings from the Pilot and Evaluation of NTI Trainings

NTI was piloted in nine sites across the United States, with more than 9,000 individuals

participating. Researchers with the University of Maryland School of Social Work evaluated the user experience, including satisfaction, relevance, ease of use, and infusion of adoption mental health competency in practice. At the systems level, researchers evaluated the implementation and integration experience. The evaluation found that NTI participants attained *significant knowledge gains* and reported specific ways in which they improved their practice as a result of NTI.

Knowledge gains were revealed through comparisons of pre- and post-tests. The findings showed gaps in knowledge and subsequent gains after the training

around grief and loss for child welfare professionals, and around attachment, the impact of diversity, and identity formation for mental health providers. These findings are concerning considering the experience families have when professionals do not understand the impact of loss and grief on the

children they are serving. Often, families are referred to mental health providers who don't have the expertise to support attachment and address challenges faced by youth and families, with unfortunate results that are more harmful than helpful.

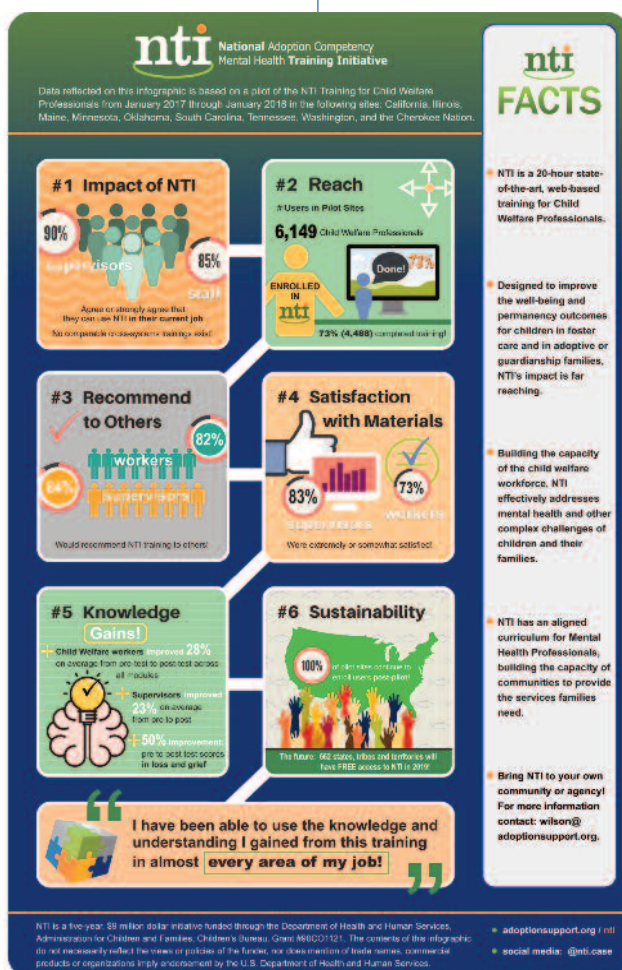
The evaluators also found high satisfaction and usage of NTI from those who took the training. Among users who completed the full training, more than 82 percent said they would recommend NTI to others. More than 85 percent agreed that they could use NTI in their current job, and 57 percent reported that they had already applied what they learned in practice.

(For complete NTI evaluation results, visit <https://adoption-support.org/nti/evaluation-overview/>.)

*“Adoption competence has been a rare find among providers. Wide use of this mental health curriculum will touch thousands of lives and help reduce unnecessary emotional pain that can grow and fester when the underlying issues are missed or ignored.”*

**Terry Cross**

Founder and Senior Advisor,  
National Indian Child Welfare Association



NTI Child Welfare Pilot Training Infographic

Continued on page 12

## Supporting Permanency through Adoption-Competent Mental Health Services

Continued from page 11

Children and youth who have experienced trauma and loss need a team of competent professionals with the knowledge and skills to help them heal and thrive in their families. Those professionals must understand that adoption is complicated—the grief experienced through adoption is different from the grief that follows the death of a loved one, and attachment is impacted by the child’s specific family history and experiences. NTI aims to help individuals, organizations, and systems to enhance competency and capacity to improve permanency and well-being for these children and their families.

For more information or implementation support, contact [info@adoptionssupport.org](mailto:info@adoptionssupport.org) and see [www.adoptionssupport.org/nti](http://www.adoptionssupport.org/nti). ■



### Reference

Atkinson, A.J., Gonet, P.A., Freundlich, M.R., & Riley, D.B. Adoption competent clinical practice: Defining its meaning and development. *Adoption Quarterly*, 16(3-4), 156–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2013.844215>

**Edna Davis-Brown, MPH**, currently serves as an Implementation Specialist with the federally funded National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI). Ms. Davis-Brown has more than 25 years of experience in program development, management and implementation, program monitoring and evaluation, group facilitation, and training/technical assistance development and delivery. She has supported and managed numerous federal and non-federal projects for health care management firms and national organizations in areas such as health equity and disparities, substance abuse prevention and treatment, HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, emergency mental health disaster response and coordination, and child welfare mental health training. Ms. Davis-Brown is also co-founder of the Gregory B. Davis Foundation, a small nonprofit formed to preserve the legacy of her youngest sibling, Gregory, who died of AIDS in March 2000. She holds a graduate degree in Public Health Education from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

**Lisa D. Maynard, LMSW**, currently serves as an Implementation Specialist with for the federally funded National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI), and as a trainer for Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) with the Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE). Ms. Maynard has more than 30 years of experience working in child welfare and mental health, and holds certificates in administrative management, adoption therapy, traumatic stress studies, trauma counseling, and trauma-sensitive yoga.

Ms. Maynard is a certified yoga and meditation teacher and maintains a private therapy practice in Upstate New York, integrating yoga philosophy, meditation, and mindfulness in her work with clients, guiding them to explore life challenges in a safe, supportive environment. She holds a graduate degree in social work from the University at Buffalo, State University of New York.

National Adoption Competency  
Mental Health Training Initiative

Advancing Practice for Permanency & Well-Being™

Accessing NTI Training and Available CEUs NTI participants receive a certificate of completion upon successful completion of the entire training and CEUs are available.

### There are three ways to access NTI:

1. NTI Implementation Specialists are available to support state agencies or national organizations interested in hosting/integrating NTI on their learning management systems for free access by employees/members. For more information go to: <https://adoptionssupport.org/nti/access/access-for-organizations/> or contact us at [info@adoptionssupport.org](mailto:info@adoptionssupport.org).
2. NTI is available for individuals to enroll free through C.A.S.E. A certificate of completion and NASW approved CEUs are available to participants upon successful completion of the entire training. Additional CEUs are available for purchase for multiple disciplines through R. Cassidy Seminars. To enroll in the training, go to: <https://adoptionssupport.org/nti/access/access-for-individuals/>.
3. NTI is available on the federally funded CapLEARN online training center where access will always be free (<https://learn.childwelfare.gov/>.) A certificate of completion is available upon successful completion of the entire training. Additional CEUs are available to purchase for multiple disciplines through R. Cassidy Seminars.

# Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare

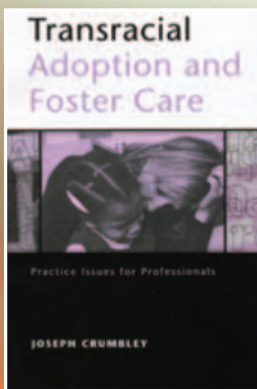


## Race Matters in Child Welfare: The Overrepresentation of African American Children in the System

*Edited by Mark F. Testa  
and John Poertner*

Several studies show that children of different ethnic or racial backgrounds receive dissimilar treatment by the child welfare system, but little is known about the appropriateness of the treatment. This compilation of papers critically examines child welfare policy and practice, the causes of child maltreatment, and how each impacts the disproportionate representation of African American children in the system.

**Item #: 8746 • Price: \$24.95**



## Transracial Adoption and Foster Care: Practice Issues for Professionals

*By Joseph Crumbley*

Author Joseph Crumbley, a well-respected authority on transracial adoption and foster care, describes specific ways that practitioners can work with transracial families to ensure that children develop positive racial and cultural identities. Crumbley also addresses professional concerns of cultural competency and recruitment of minority adoptive and foster parents.

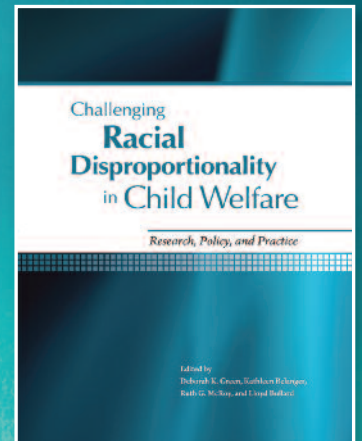
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## Challenging Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare: Research, Policy, and Practice

*Edited by Deborah Green,  
Kathleen Belanger, Ruth  
G. McRoy, & Lloyd Bullard*

Why are African Americans overrepresented in out-of-home care compared to their representation in the general population? How can it be prevented? This textbook seeks to answer these questions. Child welfare workers—as well as practitioners from other social services fields—can explore nuances within the far-reaching issue of disproportionality.

**Item #: 1446 • Price: \$69.95**



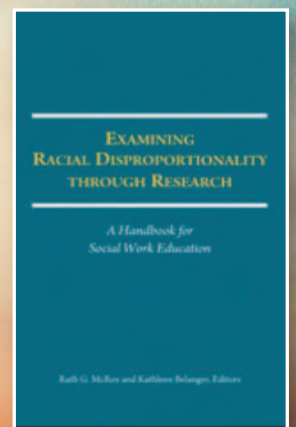
## Examining Racial Disproportionality through Research: A Handbook for Social Work Education

*Edited by Ruth G. McRoy  
and Kathleen Belanger*

Racial disproportionality and disparate outcomes for people of color are of great importance and concern in social work education, research, and practice.

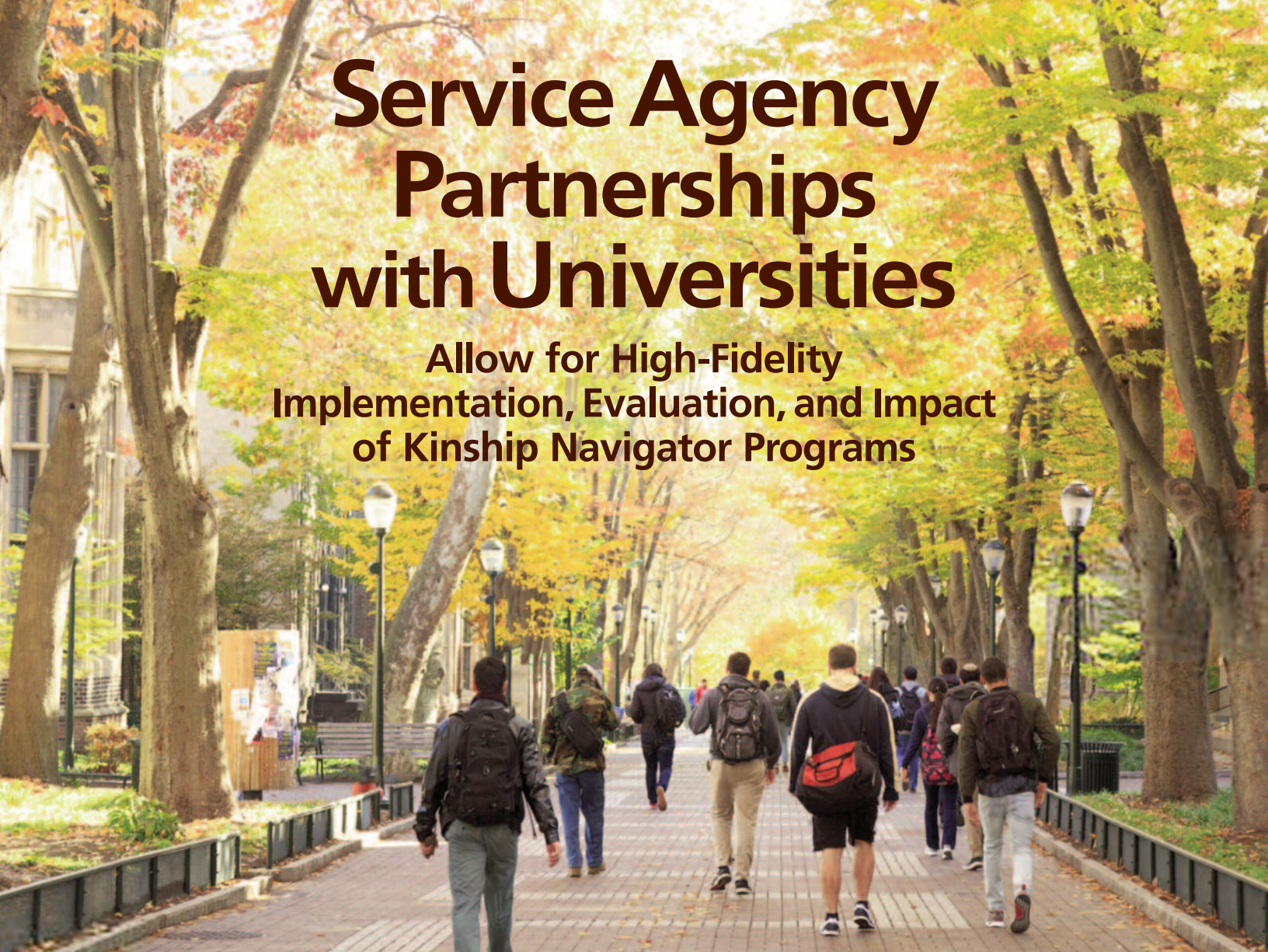
This handbook specifically focuses on the following competencies: understanding oppression and discrimination; advocating for human rights; engaging in practice-informed research and research-informed practice; and addressing social and economic justice.

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# Service Agency Partnerships with Universities

## Allow for High-Fidelity Implementation, Evaluation, and Impact of Kinship Navigator Programs



*By Lori Vanderwill, Sierra Wollen, Angelique Day, Rosalyn Alber, and Gene Delaplane*

In 2018, Washington State’s child welfare authority chose to prioritize evaluating the impact of Washington State’s Kinship Navigator program on children in kinship care. The authority partnered with the University of Washington (UW) for evaluation support and with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long-Term Supports Administration (DSHS-AL TSA), which has operated Kinship Navigator programs in Washington State since 2005. The three agencies have developed a process for working together around the common goal of providing evidence for or against the effectiveness of Kinship Navigator programs in Washington State.

It is estimated that at least 51,000 children are living with non-parent relatives in the state of Washington

(Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018). Caregivers raising children outside of the foster care system do not receive the same benefits or support that foster parents do, and Kinship Navigators are often the primary resource that caregivers have to navigate their situation and get needed help. It is assumed that these programs are beneficial to the caregivers and children who receive services, but Kinship Navigator programs cannot receive federal funds unless they are deemed to be evidence-based. This means that the Kinship Navigator program must be identified in the Family First Prevention Services Clearinghouse as meeting the minimum requirement for “promising” evidence of the program’s effectiveness in order to receive Title IV-E Prevention funds. To date, no Kinship Navigator program has received an evidence-based rating. The strength of the partnership between the state child welfare authority, UW, and AL TSA has been instrumental in organizing and implementing the required Clearinghouse

evaluation elements. Here, we offer recommendations for how other service agencies can partner with universities to implement high fidelity program evaluations and improve outcomes for children and families.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

#### **Respect and utilize each partner's unique expertise.**

It's important for each partner to bring their wisdom and historical knowledge of what has and hasn't worked in the past in order to inform best steps moving forward. In our project, the child welfare authority brings expertise in the formal kinship system and project management, AL TSA has expertise in Kinship Navigator program implementation, and the UW team has expertise in research design, implementation, and lived experience in kinship or foster care placements. When service agencies seek out university partnerships, they should consider both the university partner's analytic expertise as well as their personal and professional experiences with the population being served. In order to fully utilize each partner's expertise, we created a "Roles & Responsibilities" document detailing the responsibility of each partner in the project in accomplishing the mission of the project. This document is revisited periodically to ensure that it accurately reflects the roles, responsibilities, and needs of each partner and the project goals.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

#### **Keep the focus on the purpose of the partnership.**

Staying focused on the reason the group was formed is crucial in order to process through early group dynamics. In the early stages of group formation, it is normal for there to be tension and conflict as each of the partners determine their role within and clearly define the purpose of the group (Toseland & Rivas, 2016). It is important early on for service agencies, when in collaboration with community and university partners, to have formalized structures in place for everyone in the partnership to have equal voice to share their ideas and grievances. To build this trust, our group took time for ice-breakers and personal check-ins at the beginning of our meetings, which allowed us to learn more about each other and find commonalities that build group cohesion. Revisiting agendas and timelines at every meeting was essential to remain focused on the purpose of the group, which also helped group members focus on the goal rather than individual goals and egos. Adhering to these recommendations allows the project to stay on track rather than placing the project at risk of mission drift.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

#### **To ensure fidelity, stay in frequent communication with those on the front lines of program implementation.**

AL TSA has been a critical partner for maintaining connection with the navigators delivering the intervention. For one, AL TSA has been a continued advocate for the Kinship Navigators to ensure the pilot project remains grounded in the reality of what navigators and caregivers actually experience and need. AL TSA also helps obtain buy-in from the navigators to implement the pilot study by acting as the intermediary between the UW team and navigators. To maintain fidelity to the program model, AL TSA trains navigators and consistently monitors their performance. As part of program implementation, a fidelity checklist was developed and implemented to ensure services were provided as documented in the program manual in a comprehensive and timely way. Another tool developed to ensure fidelity was the implementation of bi-weekly calls with the navigators and grant partners. During these calls, navigators share information and ask questions about implementing the intervention or evaluation requirements. The research team is then able to understand how the evaluation requirements are impacting navigators and make changes as needed.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

#### **Reevaluate essential programmatic requirements in a rapidly changing environment.**

The COVID-19 pandemic required significant changes to program implementation and our evaluation plan. At the beginning of the pandemic, the navigators experienced a reduction in available resources as agencies worked to determine how best to serve this population during a pandemic. Agencies were forced to move support groups from face to face to remote, and there were reductions in agencies making referrals for resources due to agency closures. In the past several months, many service agencies reopened and are now providing similar levels of service for kinship caregivers, with some modifications. In order to understand the research implications, we needed to communicate effectively with our partners on how COVID-19 was impacting the navigators and what adjustments were being/able to be made to ensure services continue. Partners had to agree to adjust the timeline of the evaluation requirements. This is a reciprocal relationship: The partners provide a clear understanding of how implementation of

*Continued on page 16*

# Service Agency Partnerships with Universities

Continued from page 15

services changed, and the UW team provides a clear understanding of how those changes impact our design. We are then able to determine if adjustments to either component are needed and adopt the best solution.

## RECOMMENDATION 5: Service agencies who partner with universities can benefit from student interns.

The UW research team hosts practicum students from the Masters of Social Work program each year. These students provide fresh perspectives, cost benefit to agencies, and increase program capacity while learning the inner workings of how universities and state service agencies work together. The benefit of this partnership can be observed in the implementation of Title IV-E traineeships (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2019), which increase the capacity of agencies to carry out their missions. While these traineeships are usually direct practice, there is great value in utilizing students for research placements as well.

Due to COVID-19, practicum experiences have been virtual. Virtual learning has been very successful because many research activities can be done from any location with equivalent impact. UW has now placed two interns with AL TSA with the express purpose of supporting the evaluation. Practicum students from the UW research team and the AL TSA team are able to connect with one another to share their unique perspectives and inform the successful implementation of the evaluation.

## RECOMMENDATION 6: Use the reach and power of each partner organization to gather information to advocate for policy improvements.

All of the project partners collaboratively participate in a Kinship Navigator Legislative Taskforce to bring data-informed recommendations to the Washington State legislature. As an example of this work, UW collaborated with the child welfare authority, AL TSA, and the DSHS

Economic Services Administration (the agency that distributes TANF grants) to send surveys out to formal and informal kinship caregivers who were receiving public benefits. More than 800 relative caregivers across the state shared their experiences, and this information has been extremely valuable in evaluating kinship families' unmet needs and identifying the systemic barriers relatives in the kinship system experience. This analysis, along with other research activities, are then used to inform program implementation and to support appropriations allocations by the state legislature.

## RECOMMENDATION 7: Plan for sustainability.

Throughout the entire process, continued communication from each partner has provided opportunities to plan for sustainability of the kinship navigator program. Each of the program elements was researched and thor-

oughly discussed with the key stakeholders to determine the program design that best meets the needs of the kinship caregivers and sets the navigators up for drawing down Title IV-E funding in the event that an evidence-based rating is received. It is important that AL TSA



continues with fidelity monitoring systems that were set up during this evaluation project even after the evaluation is complete to maintain the program's effectiveness over time.

Multi-agency partnerships are more sustainable because they can lead to braided funding models and thus increase the capacity of all partnering organizations. In our case, having two state agencies co-own the program has great strengths from a sustainability standpoint. Only about 25 percent of the total budget for the Kinship Navigator program is from federal sources, the rest is from state and private funds. These additional funds provide capacity for partners to enhance service delivery and evaluation. For example, AL TSA procured funding for UW to implement and test culturally responsive adaptations and to build pilot site's capacity for data entry.



Partnerships between service agencies and universities are mutually beneficial. Both entities offer the resources and expertise of their respective institutions, leading to more comprehensive and effective service delivery (Hardin et al., 2020). These partnerships can also result in high-quality research that influences policy and provides support for community-level practice. The success of the partnership hinges on not only the knowledge and expertise that each of member brings, but also the establishment of productive and collaborative group dynamics with the expectation of inclusion of all members. Additionally, partnerships with service agencies allow for service provider buy-in such that programs can be implemented with fidelity long term. They also provide the foundation for continued support to the community through policy change, sustainable funding structures, and/or deliverable materials that contribute to direct service. Service agencies and universities need each other—not only to fulfill the requirements of a grant, but to make a positive impact in the communities they serve. ■

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- Lori A. Vanderwill** is a research scientist at the University of Washington, Seattle. Dr. Vanderwill's area of expertise includes trauma-informed practices for children and youth across systems. She is particularly interested in expanding evidence for interventions that target caregivers' and teachers' ability to care for children and youth who are impacted by trauma. Other research interests include social and emotional learning, youth and adolescent mental health, child well-being, and kinship, foster and adoptive outcomes.
- Sierra Wollen, MSW**, is a Research Coordinator at Partners for Our Children at the University of Washington. Sierra acts as a liaison between frontline kinship navigation staff and evaluation staff. Sierra provides research, communications, and policy assistance on a variety of projects related to kinship navigation, foster parent training, and foster alumni in higher education. Previously, Sierra provided direct services for young adults seeking first-time employment, youth experiencing homelessness, and adults with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders who were exiting jail and prison.

**Angelique Day** is an associate professor at the University of Washington and a faculty affiliate of Partners for Our Children, a child welfare research a policy think tank housed in the UW School of Social Work. She is the lead evaluator of the State of Washington's Kinship Navigator Program as well as Casey Family Programs' Kinship Navigator Collaborative. Dr. Day's area of scholarly expertise spans from analyzing the impact of policy decisions to developing and testing interventions for children and youth with or at risk of child welfare system involvement. She is particularly interested in expanding the evidence base for interventions designed to support the education well-being of youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

**Rosalyn Alber** has over 25 years' experience working in social services. For 11 years, she worked with relatives raising their kinship children as the Kinship Navigator and Kinship Program Manager at HopeSparks in Pierce County, Washington State. In 2019, she began working at the Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA) at DSHS as the Kinship Navigator Fidelity Analyst Project Manager. In this position she has worked in partnership with the University of Washington and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families on a research project to help the Kinship Navigator Program reach evidence-based status. She recently changed positions at AL TSA and is now the Kinship and Lifespan Respite Program Manager for Washington State and continues to work with partners on the Kinship Navigator Program research project.

**Geene Delaplane, PhD, MA**, is currently the Kinship Care and Guardianship Program Manager for the Washington state Department of Children, Youth, and Families. In her new role, Ms. Delaplane is the chair of the Kinship Care Oversight Committee. Prior, she served as Kinship Care and Lifespan Respite Program Manager for the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. Ms. Delaplane has worked for over two decades in the social services field in the beginning as a frontline worker. Ms. Delaplane brings extensive experience working with multiple tribal nations throughout the country by providing technical assistance, policy development, and program evaluations. Ms. Delaplane's purpose is to develop and employ strategies to address issues relevant to kinship care (i.e., parenting, relationships, the importance of self-care when caring for family). She is a true advocate of kinship caregivers.

We would like to offer our thanks to the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) for their recognition of the value of relatives raising children. We would like to thank Barb Geiger, Assistant Director of the Division of Child Welfare Program DCYF, for her leadership and belief in this project. Additional appreciation to Bill Moss, Assistant Secretary at the Aging and Long-term Support Administration (AL TSA), Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Bea Rector, Director, Home and Community Services Division AL TSA, and Susan Engels, Office Chief, State Unit on Aging AL TSA for their dedication and innovation in serving kinship caregivers in the state of Washington. Lastly, a thank you to the kinship navigator, advocates, and kinship staff who, over the past years, have worked so hard to assist kinship families. We could not succeed in this great work without all of your dedication to children and families in Washington.

# Spotlight On

Continued from page 11

*are needed now more than ever.*

At the same time, our Executive Director and key staff are seated at crucial town halls, city-wide task forces and collective action groups like #DegreesNYC to help change the institutional challenges and barriers that face our youth and families in their pursuit of economic and social mobility.

The need for human development through education and work does not cease in times of crisis. If anything, a hopeful sense of the future becomes even more important for the healing process. What's clear is the disproportionate degree of resilience required amongst different populations in times of crisis. The youth and families with whom we work do not have the safety net that comes with a greater degree of privilege. That's why an education and workforce development model that centers trauma-informed practice, youth and family development principles, and the importance of advocacy is so relevant and critical—even more so now in the era of COVID-19. ■

*Lan To is the former Director of Post-Secondary Initiatives at Good Shepherd Services and Associate Director for Programs in Social Enterprise at Columbia Business School Executive Education. Lan serves on the Stewardship Council for #DegreesNYC, a collective action initiative of over organizations and youth across the city working to achieve equity in post-secondary access and completion in New York City.*

## Put the Spotlight on Your Program

Want your agency's work with children and families highlighted in *Children's Voice*?  
E-mail [voice@cwla.org](mailto:voice@cwla.org).

## FUTURE FOCUS

We describe Future Focus as an approach to postsecondary planning that aims to help staff help others “manage their lives from the future,” and develop skills and knowledge that will aid in a lifetime of growth and change through educational opportunities and career development. We believe deeply that education is key to economic mobility and systems change.

Each of our foster care, supportive housing, and residential programs operates in a different context, and therefore, applies the design elements to their context and audience. The uniqueness of each program and their participants' challenges called for a tailored program based on a framework and the freedom to choose the implementation design and factors that worked best for their population, their program capacities and their organizational structure.

There are three main areas in which we apply Good Shepherd's Future Focus approach to support a focus on the future:

### 1. Nurturing Personal Growth with Self and Others through Career Development

We help individuals reflect and develop a stronger self-awareness in the context of their contributions in the world through service, work and community.

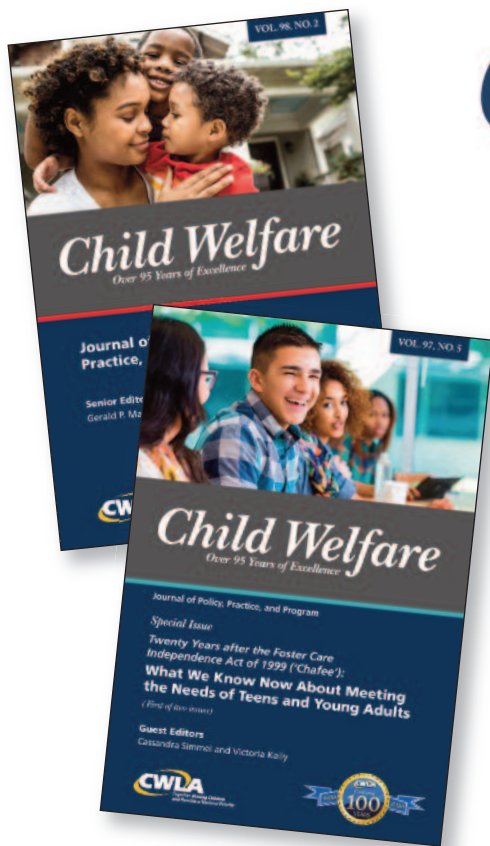
### 2. Creating a Safe Passage to Pursue Education and/or Training

We help staff create access points that lead to viable opportunities and success factors for a safe passage to and through multiple postsecondary pathways, including K-12, college, vocational/technical trainings, apprenticeships, military and work.

### 3. Developing Universal Life Skills and Supports

We recognize the importance of social capital and mentoring and presenting opportunities for learning about universal independent living and financial skills that are important in every path in life.

Each of these areas is developed through a collaborative effort with the participant, their loved ones, the program staff and key external partners like mentors, schools, colleges and workforce program staff. Guided by a Future Focus coach, each participants' journey is viewed through our youth and family development principles, trauma-informed practice and an understanding of the stages of change within the motivational interviewing model.



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# Let's Make 2022 a Better Year for Children!



***Please Donate Today to Give Children a Voice that's Heard and Heeded.***

## **For the last two years, children have had to confront:**

- Social distancing
- Disruptions in learning
- Social unrest
- The devastation of climate change
- Growing inequities in income, health care, education, housing, and social justice
- Increasing poverty, homelessness, and hunger

## **Your end-of-the-year donation will help CWLA to extend its reach and amplify its voice on behalf of all children. With your help, CWLA will ramp up its efforts to:**

- Make children a priority from County Commission to the State House, from Capitol Hill to the White House.
- Stand up for policies and legislation that lead to a "new normal" that is safer, fairer, and more secure for all children.

- Give child and family-serving agencies the knowledge and tools needed to deliver more effective programs and better outcomes.
- Help communities understand their role and responsibility in keeping children safe and helping them to flourish.

CWLA believes in the wisdom and strength of families and communities. Collaborating with our members, allied organizations, donors, and friends, we can make 2022 a better year for children.

## **A century of leadership, a catalyst for change:**

A century ago, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) was founded to protect and improve the lives of children facing poverty, discrimination, dislocation, and family distress. Today, CWLA is the hub for a national coalition made up of hundreds of public and private agencies and organizations, serving millions of children and families who are the most vulnerable. CWLA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.



# Down to Earth Dad

*Patrick Mitchell*



## Doubling Down on Dads

**M**y teenage daughter beats me at bumper pool about once every three games, so I eagerly accept her double-or-nothing wagers when she offers them. However, she's pulled off enough games to lighten my wallet by more than \$20.

I know I shouldn't wager against my own child, but I've admonished her for getting too enthusiastic about betting. "Gambling doesn't pay," I've told her, to which she's replied, "Actually it does pay for me, dad, obviously." She's got me there.

I've worked with thousands of educators, child and family advocates, practitioners, policy-makers, parents, and students over the past 22 years who've split aces, pushed chips onto the poker table, and doubled down (metaphorically speaking), betting alongside me that by showing up to work tomorrow they'll have at least as much positive impact on children and families as they did today.

My wager in founding the Down To Earth Dad organization more than two decades ago was that I could help programs and schools optimize male engagement to boost cognitive, social,

and emotional development in the early years, reduce the risk for negative outcomes associated with father absence, and help programs enhance early literacy and parent-child bonding through storytelling. That bet has paid off. My rewards have been largely intangible, but I'm too hooked to turn back now anyway.

There's always a new generation of parents enrolling new children in schools and programs, and because I've been doing family events for so long—repeating visits to many Head Start programs over the years—some of the new parents I meet today are among the children who attended my Family Storytelling Nights with *their* parents 20 years ago! These new parents view father engagement as a valuable thing, and that makes my job and yours easier—which means we can concentrate our efforts on maximizing the number of fathers we educate and invite to participate in our events. For instance, many dads at programs I visit today, upon learning that their child can get the equivalent of a full letter grade higher in every subject in the school years by being visibly present at their child's

school at least four times a year—volunteering, grading papers, or what have you—are truly eager to actually *go and make that happen*. And educators are ready to encourage dads to do that.

I'm doubling down again—redoubling my efforts might be a better way to put it—and I hope you will too. Father involvement in children's lives is too important for us to ignore. I encourage you to roll up your sleeves tomorrow and the next day, and continue to push the chips out onto the table because getting men optimally engaged is one of the best bets in town. ■

**A** regular contributor to *Children's Voice*, Patrick Mitchell publishes a monthly newsletter, *The Down to Earth Dad*, and facilitates the *Dads Matter!*™ Project for early childhood programs, schools, and child- and family-serving organizations. He conducts keynote addresses, workshops, and inservice and preservice trainings. To reserve Patrick Mitchell for speaking engagements, or to implement the *Dads Matter!*™ Project for your families and community partners, call him toll-free at 877/282-DADS, or e-mail him at [patrick@downtoearthdad.org](mailto:patrick@downtoearthdad.org). Website: [www.DownToEarthDad.org](http://www.DownToEarthDad.org).

# Research + Government =

## Increased Collaboration and Capacity to Reach Better Child Welfare Outcomes

By Elisabeth S. Wilson, Terry J. Stigdon,  
and Heather H. Kestian

In 2018, the child welfare field drastically changed with the passing of Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) (2018). This new law not only dictated how federal Title IV-E funds can be used in child welfare, which fundamentally changed the billing process, but set a precedent on the value of research within child welfare. In order to draw IV-E prevention services funding, a program provided to the family must be rated as at least “Promising” by the Prevention Services Clearinghouse (FFPSA, 2018). As part of supporting and building the evidence base of interventions and programs within child welfare, each jurisdiction must include a well-designed and rigorous evaluation strategy for each service if the state intends to draw Title IV-E prevention funds. What is approved as a well-designed and rigorous evaluation strategy is dictated within the context of law, even going so far as to require Randomized Control Trials (RCT) or Quasi-experimental designs (QED), setting the tone for the type of research that must be conducted in order to pull federal funding (Wilson et al., 2019).

With research and high-level evaluation now being the epicenter of child welfare, jurisdictions must evaluate how to undergo a rigorous evaluation, on multiple programs, all while operating under normal agency procedure. The evaluations required by FFPSA are highly technical and the techniques often taught in graduate level research programs, making the overlap of professionals working within child welfare jurisdictions and individuals with the skills to run an extensive evaluation very small. Instead, agencies often rely on external collaborations with universities, nonprofits, and consulting firms. These external collaborators are invaluable to the agencies and jurisdictions in

which they serve; however, the singular model of contracting for research outside of the agency will soon become unsustainable under FFPSA.

Historically, child welfare agencies have been decentralized nationally and run according to individual state or county guidelines. This means that each program, from each jurisdiction, will need a rigorous evaluation in order to pull federal funding. Thus, the need for research within these agencies will quickly outpace the capacity of not only internal implementers, but external evaluators, with the law offering little relief on how to fund these changes. Title IV-E prevention services reimbursements are designed to cover a portion of the costs of providing the prevention service and administrative costs (FFPSA, 2018). However, full cost is not covered, which leaves agencies with a choice: spending money on research, finding external funders for research, or funding service programs.

Many disciplines already have provided the framework that promotes expedited research and increased ability to collaborate across disciplines, and that is building internal research capacity. In 1976, Congress passed the National Science and Technology Policy, Organization, and Priorities Act, which set up the Office of Science and Technology



Policy (OSTP) under the executive branch (National Science and Technology Policy, Organization, and Priorities Act, 1976). This task of placing research positions within government agencies is continuing to extend to local levels, with several fellowships opening to place scientists in state agencies to inform policy and directives at organizations including the Missouri Science and Technology Policy Fellows Program (MOST) (MOST Policy Initiative, 2020), the California Council on Science and Technology (CCST) (CCST Science Fellows, 2019), and the North Carolina STEM Policy Fellowship (NC STEM Policy Fellowship, 2020).

At the discipline level, agencies are hiring internal research teams. In the health care industry, collaboration among different industries and specialties is commonplace. Manufacturing and engineering consistently have contributed to the advancement of the practice of medicine to promote both prolonged quantity and quality of life. There is a science that is fundamental to caring for the physical needs of others. In order to know what may or may not work requires the analysis of data. It is not just the nurses, paramedics, physicians, among others who spend the majority of their time evaluating the data outside of the vital signs, laboratory, and pathology results. Stepping back and finding connections between data points and supporting those who can evaluate such data is what leads to breakthroughs in patient care.

The Indiana Department of Child Services has taken a similar position and built an internal research team within the department that not only increases the capacity of internal stakeholders to run their own rigorous evaluations but increases the collaborative capacity across agency implementers and external evaluators. While it takes someone who understands the work to interpret the data at a primary level, a data analytics team with researchers is necessary to arm an organization with information that leads to positive change.

While you may think it is counterintuitive to argue for increasing collaboration by bringing in a team with similar expertise, research takes a village, and pulling data from state repositories—well, that takes two villages. The need for multiple individuals is evident when looking

at any academic publication; rarely do we see only one researcher gracing the byline, but anyone involved with this final product knows that the names on the byline scratch the surface of those involved.

The historical barriers between implementers (CPS agencies) and evaluators are language differences. Those who are trained in evaluations have immersed themselves in the technical language of their field. For example, p-value, power analysis, and statistical design easily roll off the tongue in casual conversation. Implementers are trained in the language of their individual data systems—a truly unique language—and navigating red tape. An internal research team can serve as the liaison that assists both parties in navigating the differences and propels a project forward. With these internal liaisons we begin to shorten the barriers between disciplines and allows for the flow of knowledge both ways. Child welfare sits on a mountain of data so vast that no one person, team, organization, university, or partner could ever comb through alone. Bringing more researchers into the fold strengthens the community, collaborative capacity, and amount of

learning that can be done. Child welfare has much to learn, increasing the number of eyes on the data truly gets us closer to the vision of FFPSA to promote the evidence based programs in child welfare (Wilson et al., 2019).

## Limitations

Due to the complexity of state budgets, size of the child welfare agency, and research priority an internal team may not be feasible for every agency. Smaller CPS agencies may not be able to create internal research positions, nor may there be a need if only a few projects are needed. In early 2018, Director Stigdon was hired, and made research a key priority of the agency, changing the priority of the past administration. A thorough review of the Indiana Department of Child Services completed by the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (CWPPG) in 2018 suggested investing in an internal data team in order to understand performance and outcome based-issues (Baker et al., 2018). This environment of heavy



*Continued on page 26*



# Working with the PRIDE Model of Practice

Marcus Stallworth, LMSW

## Sharing Strategies on How to Embrace Technology in the Preparation, Development, and Support of Resource Families

During this time of social distancing, virtual meetings have become standard practice at most agencies. This mode of communication has created opportunities to stay connected, share information, and assess perspective foster, adoptive, and kinship families in a safe and resourceful way. But meeting virtually has created challenges, as well. For some, virtual learning was new and using technology in this way was foreign. Similarly, this also has been true for some recruiters, facilitators, and support staff. Some have leaned on colleagues for support, others have learned by doing, and some have utilized video tutorials to educate themselves on how to effectively use digital platforms.

The CWLA Training Team has developed the PRIDE Learning Collaborative as a resource for agencies who are utilizing the PRIDE Model of Practice. This bimonthly (virtual) meeting creates the opportunity for CWLA to share updates, offer examples how mutual assessment tools can be used, and hear about staff observations and needs for support. On average, we have between 20 and 30 attendees at each meeting, representing both public and private agencies. Participants join from all over the country—as do international colleagues who navigate time zones and adjust their schedules to join in. It is truly refreshing to work with such a diverse group, separated by geography but connected, aligned in their commitment to ensure that the fidelity of the PRIDE Model of Practice is at the core of their recruitment, preparation, and implementation processes.

During our last Learning Collaborative meeting we spent time discussing creative strategies and techniques to effectively engage families virtually while making sure that the assessment component was not lost in the process. Here are five areas that we highlighted:

1. **Know your equipment.** Working with technology requires knowledge and preparation. Some

facilitators can use their verbal skills to capture and maintain the attention of their audience. The same can be done virtually, but it requires a different level of planning. It is helpful to learn in advance which standard and advanced settings you have to work with. Remember: Failing to prepare is preparing to fail. So be prepared! Most online platforms offer the opportunity to see your participants, share PowerPoint slides, and even play videos. Every platform is different and the placement and location of buttons will vary for each one. Consider working with your co-facilitator, ahead of time, to explore how the features work. Please keep in mind that background apps and open tabs can slow down performance and create technology challenges.

2. **Set clear expectations and lead by example.**

Many adult learners respond well to having an idea of what to anticipate. This can be as simple as establishing start and end times along with laying out participant expectations and facilitator commitments. In the virtual learning environment, team agreements are critical to overall participation. For example, most facilitators will ask that each person has their screens “open.” If there are allowances where that is not required, let the facilitators know that in advance. During our PRIDE pre-service training, we discuss many areas that may bring back memories that may serve as trauma reminders. There are times, even during in-person trainings, where someone may have to take a moment to step away to take care of themselves. With remote learning, the assessment piece is still a major part of our decision to select families in our out of the



program. If a participant needs to step away, we want to support them—in words and through action. Some facilitators will inform them, early on, that there will be periodical check-ins throughout the trainings. It has been reported this can be a great way to offer one-on-one support and strengthen relationship building. Please keep in mind that some participants may need to step away for life situations happening in real time: meeting the needs of children, accounting for unexpected visitors, and responding to barking or interrupting pets.

Facilitators also must lead by example. We cannot ask participants to commit to being present if we are not doing the same. This includes making the commitments not to hop on and off screen, sending texts or sending emails, or having screensavers up while the other presenter is sharing information.

**3. Use technology to promote engagement and group interaction.** Contrary to popular belief, virtual learning can be fun! There are ways that you can include participants in open discussion, work together in small groups, and even facilitate live demonstrations. As we reflect on the Core Principles of Adult Learning, we know that it is important to include opportunities to share lived experiences, hear ways in which others have responded to challenging scenarios, and learn new approaches that can be directly applied to the work we do. “Breakout sessions” are a great example of this approach: Members are randomly—or intentionally—broken into sub-groups to address a task specific task. Facilitators can ask the group to nominate who will report their findings/assessments to the larger group. This also can be a great way to give experienced facilitators and current supervisors an opportunity to play a leadership role in this activity, to help the group to get to know each other, to work together, and to maximize time during the session. Facilitators can select the timeframe and can be available to check in on each group to measure progress and offer support.

**4. Make breaks work to your advantage.** We send and receive information at an accelerated pace on a day-to-day basis. Over time, our brains begin to expect and anticipate new information to arrive in a consistent way. After a period of time,

when new content is not delivered, it is not uncommon for attention spans to decrease. When presenting virtually, providing shorter, more frequent breaks can be a good way to break up the monotony for participants and keep facilitators on task. Many have reported offering 50 minutes of content followed by a short 10-minute break. They have found that this helps with positive engagement and the need for a chance to rinse the mental palate.

**5. Ask for feedback.** Each group dynamic will be different and will have its own identity. As facilitators, it is important to develop a sense of safety and trust so that this parallel process can be incorporated into how we work with families. Creating a Daily Feedback Form can give participants a chance to share their experience and provide feedback to the presenters.

These are just a few examples of how the Learning Collaborative has worked together to support one another. Our theme changes for each gathering based on need or request. Virtual meetings offer an opportunity to ask PRIDE-related questions, receive feedback from the CWLA Training Team, and hear about positive experiences from colleagues from around the globe. I would like to thank those who continuously participate and would like to personally extend the invitation to you, the *Children’s Voice* reader.

For more information on our next PRIDE Learning Collaborative meeting, please contact Marcus Stallworth, LMSW, Director of Training and Implementation (mstallworth@cwla.org) or Samantha Carter, MSW, Training and Implementation Associate (scarter@cwla.org).

Thank you for what you do for children and families in your communities. I look forward to working with you soon! ■

**Marcus Stallworth, LMSW**, operates with a strength-based, hands-on approach. Spending close to 20 years providing Child Protective Services, he is recognized by the State of Connecticut as an expert witness for providing testimony for Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. He has spearheaded several initiatives to promote the engagement of fathers, the prevention of abuse and neglect, and the dangers of social media. He has direct experience educating and supporting human trafficking and those who have been sexually exploited, training staff on sexual orientation and gender identity, and advocating for those in foster care. Marcus is the Director of Training and Implementation for the Child Welfare League of America, whose primary role is to assist agencies with developing best practice strategies how to utilize a Model of Practice framework with fidelity throughout their organization.

# Research + Government = Increased Collaboration and Capacity to Reach Better Child Welfare Outcomes

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research support from top agencies officials, coupled with the need to understand the environment of child welfare in Indiana, along with federal promotion of research created the perfect set up to promote an internal research team. As child welfare wades into the research domain, it is imperative that agencies have the flexibility on how and what to research, which is pivotal to the success of each individual agency.

## Internal Team in Action

Two years into the “experiment” of an internal team within child welfare, Indiana has used data to inform practice throughout the agency, from FFPSA implementation to understanding the impact of race in child welfare to workforce development. It may seem that having an internal team is a costly option, but the benefits are many and far outweigh the costs. The internal team was prepared to write the rigorous evaluations required by FFPSA, as well as explore questions pertinent to the agency. In child welfare, agencies have access to a plethora of data some that can be helpful towards federal evaluations, but the majority can be used to explore the individual policies of an agency. This allows the data to be analyzed in various ways to create a complete picture. It is, however, possible to make data tell the story that one wishes to tell, which can change the meaning of what is seen. In order to get the root of the issue and present a more comprehensive, objective view of the truth, having an internal data team with expertise in research is extremely helpful. The value of having a full-time research team dedicated to evaluating information and producing results in a timely manner is incalculable. Having an internal research and evaluation team has given the Indiana Department of Child Services the gift of answers to questions that we’ve been asking for over a year. The team has explored questions relating to: the length of cases by permanency outcome, disproportionate minority contact in assessment and cases, and exploring racial disparities in hotline calls by report sources. While none of these projects fall under the guidelines set by FFPSA, they are instrumental in making evidence-based change to Indiana DCS policy.

## Conclusion

Child welfare recently has experienced a fundamental shift in how we want to interact with families in the future and

how we provide them with high-quality services. Evidence-based practices and programs are becoming common language around child welfare agencies, not only with those in administrative positions, but with our frontline staff. Bringing in internal research teams will help inform policy, and bridge connections between our frontline staff, external evaluators, and internal implementers. The more individuals we have sharing resources, data, and experience, the better the care we give to children and families. ■

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**Elisabeth S. Wilson** is an interdisciplinary researcher with experience in both natural and social sciences. She has worked to understand how policies and practices impact agriculture, child welfare, and human subjects research. Elisabeth specializes in building research capacity within state governments and nonprofit agencies.

**Terry J. Stigdon** is the director of the Indiana Department of Child Services. In her first year in her new position, Stigdon has implemented changes aimed at offering the best service to Hoosier children and families. As a result of her efforts to provide the right care to the right child at the right time, the state has seen a decrease in children in residential treatment and foster care. Her leadership has also led to decreased staff turnover, resulting in better continuity of care for families involved in the child welfare system.

**Heather H. Kestian** is the Deputy Director for Strategic Solutions and Agency Transformation (SSAT). In this role, she works with quality service assurance, continuous quality improvement using Lean and Six Sigma principles, research and evaluation efforts, policy development, child welfare permanency initiatives, the Birth Parent and Shared Parent Advisory Boards, real estate, cultural affairs, and federal compliance, as well as safe system implementation. She graduated cum laude from the University of Toledo College of Law in May 2008 and is licensed to practice law in Indiana.

# Keeping SCHORE:

## UPD Consulting Helps Connect Baltimore Students to Affordable Housing

By Ann Willemsen



At the end of most school days, Joe Manko, the principal of Liberty Elementary School in West Baltimore, would place students into taxis waiting to drive them to their temporary resting spots across the city. These were Manko's students experiencing homelessness, heading "home" to sleep on the floors and couches of friends and relatives, on motel room beds, or in family shelters. And every day when he'd shut the taxi doors, Manko would look across the street at the many vacant row houses and think about how those buildings could be put to better use.

Across the United States, children identified by school districts as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which is the primary piece of federal legislation related to educating children experiencing homelessness and includes both a definition and reporting requirements on identifying these students, are spending countless hours in traffic to stay in suboptimal housing conditions—but these inefficiencies and associated transportation costs pale in comparison to the toxic stress experienced by children and their families who are housing-unstable. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's 2005 publication *Facts on Trauma and Homeless Children* identified several alarming statistics. Compared to children who are

housing-stable, children experiencing homelessness are twice as likely to repeat a grade, have twice the rate of learning disabilities, and have three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems. One third of children who have experienced homelessness before they turn eight have a major mental health disorder.

Hiring cabs is like placing a very well-meaning bucket under the faucet of an overflowing sink when the real solution is to turn the faucet off. And to turn off that faucet means helping families find safe, stable housing before they become homeless. It is clear that more needs to be done to connect and align the investments that governments and foundations make in affordable housing with the investments that those same entities make in education.

Manko brought his concern about the underuse of vacant properties in his school's neighborhood to the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), and DHCD in turn brought the idea to UPD Consulting, a Baltimore-based firm focusing on social equity efforts. With the support of a one-time Fannie Mae challenge initiative to support

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# Kinship Care:

## Continuing the Tradition of Caring, Collaborating, Navigating, and Advocating

By Eileen Mayers Pasztor and Leandrea Romero-Lucero

CWLA and its member agencies and organizations share a vision that all children will grow up in safe, loving, and stable families, with nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime. We work together with practical, management-focused, practice-oriented consultation and training to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and all their families—birth, kinship, foster, and adoptive. In honor of September’s Kinship Care Month and National Grandparents Day, this article highlights how CWLA staff and colleagues across the country continue to collaborate in support of kinship families.

### History of a Name

The informal care of children by kin, especially for families of color, has existed for centuries, long before the formal child welfare system was established. Tired parents could get a rest when grandparents would take youngsters and teens for a few hours or days. Relatives stepped in when parents faced financial, medical, or other crises. Children would live with grandparents, aunts and uncles, or extended family members when parents needed to find employment in another locale and couldn’t take the children with them—or when parents in the military were deployed.

It was only 30 years ago that relatives raising younger family members were identified as needing a specific child welfare program name. For example, “family preservation” was coined in the 1970s and “foster care” and “adoption” programs originated in the previous century. But there was no nationally recognized, consistent name for the

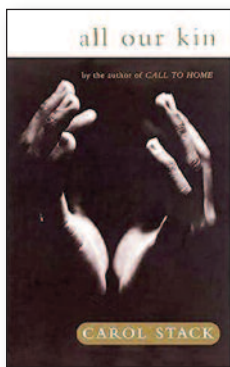
policies, programs, and practices connected with relatives raising children.

The name “kinship care” is attributed to the National Commission on Family Foster Care, convened in 1990 by CWLA in collaboration with the National Foster Parent Association. The Commission’s mandate was to address growing concerns about the need for improved outcomes for children in foster care. However, in its research and deliberations, the commissioners recognized significant legislative, economic, and social factors connected to the care of children by kin—with compelling, commensurate challenges.

For example, in 1979, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the *Miller v. Youakim* case, which originated in Illinois and provided benefits for relatives equal to those of foster parents, enabling more kin to care for the children in their families. In the 1980s, the tragedies of the crack cocaine epidemic, HIV/AIDS, and poverty propelled more children into the care of relatives; at the same time, the foster parent population decreased because of the economy, housing, and affordable, accessible child care.

The Commission recognized the need for a name that would differentiate between care by relatives and care by foster parents. They looked for a name that would respect and reflect the significance of family relationships—variously described as relative care, extended family care, home of relative care, and foster care with relatives. The strength of kinship systems among diverse cultural and ethnic groups had long been documented—for example, in the acclaimed 1974 book by Carol Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a*

*Black Community* (Stack, 1974). The term “kinship care” eventually was selected, defined as the full-time protection and nurture of children by relatives, members of their Tribes



or clans, or anyone to whom the family relationship is ascribed. This also can include non-related extended family members. The definition aimed to be inclusive, respectful of cultural values and ties of affection. Whether formally through child protective services or informally through family arrangements, kinship care could help reduce the trauma of family separation and provide cultural and community ties.

In 1991, CWLA published *A Blueprint for Fostering Infants, Children, and Youths in the 1990s* (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991), with a special chapter titled “The Significance of Kinship Care.” Based on CWLA’s publishing reach and reputation, the term “kinship care” has prevailed.

## Policy and Practice Choices and Challenges

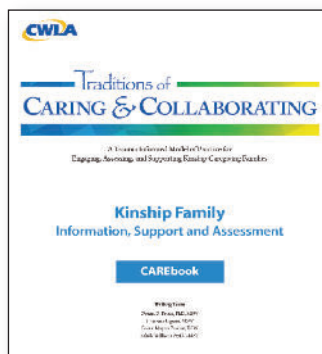
For three decades, CWLA has continued to shine a light on the strengths and needs of kinship families with books, a special double issue of the CWLA academic journal *Child Welfare*, national conferences, and a Kinship Care Summit. Recognizing the need for supportive legislation, CWLA and partners advocated for the Kinship Caregiver Support Act in 2004 and again in 2007 to assist millions of children being raised by grandparents and other relatives, with support from bipartisan Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and Thad Cochran (R-MS). But it was not until 2008 that Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (H.R. 6893), allowing states to extend federal Title IV-E funding to kinship care families through the use of subsidized guardianships.

## Navigator Programs and a Model of Practice

With the commitment to raise children safely and prevent the unnecessary separation of families, many relatives faced significant challenges and barriers accessing resources. As a result, CWLA members and staff worked together to promote Kinship Navigator Programs. Gerard Wallace, Esq., a nationally recognized champion of such efforts, led the development of a New York State model that was

adapted across the country. Key components included how to access resources for information, referral, and education; stabilization and permanency services; specialized supports for trauma-informed care; outreach with other systems and education for professionals; and the need for collaboration with immigration, corrections, and child welfare.

While navigator programs have been essential, CWLA also has recognized the need to train agency staff in a kinship care “model of practice.” CWLA’s *Traditions of Caring and Collaborating: Kinship Family Engaging, Assessing, and Supporting — A Trauma-Informed Model of Practice*. The model identifies major issues of concern for kinship families, whether formal or informal: legal, financial, health,



and mental health for children and kinship caregivers; family relationships; school; children’s behavior; supports; fair and equal treatment; and the opportunity to make recommendations for improved services and supports. A model of practice helps ensure that all staff—direct service, super-

visors, and managers—are working toward the same goal and using the same strength-based approaches.

As part of efforts to support kinship caregivers, the Southwest Family Guidance Center & Institute (SWFGC), a statewide child welfare and mental health agency in New Mexico, currently is part of their state’s Children, Youth, and Families Department’s Kinship Navigator Grant. SWFGC’s mission, as indicated on the website, is “to provide extraordinary service, aspiring for excellence in everything we do. At the core of the programming is a commitment to equity, bridging gaps of social, emotional, and educational disparity.”

The agency staff, under the leadership of President and CEO Dr. Craig Pierce, initially believed the navigator role would be an “easy start up” because of work already underway with children and families. But they were in for a surprise when inundated with hundreds of requests across the state. Identifying, accessing, and connecting various types of resources and services required filling a gap between the expertise of individual agency staff members and working as a team with kinship families. After many hours of research on kinship navigator programs in other states to put theory into practice, SWFGC found CWLA’s kinship care resources. A curriculum that featured essential concepts—including

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# Exceptional Children

*Navigating Learning Disabilities & Special Education*

*Ellen Notbohm*

## Not Gibberish: What a Toddler Teaches Us About Communicating with All Children

By the time my granddaughter was 16 months old, I vowed never again use the words “babble” or “gibberish” to describe baby talk. She came to our house every week and talked nonstop. Words, phrases, sentences, songs (yes, she carried a tune). Not only that, but she used the most mature inflections and facial expressions I’d ever seen from a one-year-old. We could tell when she was asking a question and when she was excited to tell us something. She looked us directly in the eye, waiting for a response after she’d spoken. There’s no denying that she knew exactly what she was saying and the fact that we couldn’t yet decode most of her words in no way negated or diminished how adeptly she was communicating.

Consider: If a wise, educated, and articulate person spoke to you in language not familiar to you, you wouldn’t denigrate it by calling it babbling or gibberish. You’d look for ways to find common ground in your two modes of communication. Then and now, as our little grandie continues to learn language, I love listening to her talk, can’t get enough of it, and acknowledge and encourage every word that comes out of her mouth, usually ending with “Tell me more!”

Too many problems in our world stem from various persons and populations not feeling heard. It’s too convenient to simply ignore or brush off those who don’t communicate in our personal chosen mode—and too often, those with whom we grow frustrated are children, even as they are doing their level best to communicate with the limited tools they’ve mastered in the handful of years they’ve been on the planet. Chapter Five of my book *Ten Things Every Child with Autism*

*Wishes You Knew*, titled “Listen to All the Ways I’m Trying to Communicate,” offers this advice from our speech therapist:

“Look at your child when you speak to him, and answer him every time he speaks to you or otherwise attempts to communicate, letting him know you value everything he has to say, regardless of whether you understand him.”

How beautifully this has come back to me, beyond the boundaries of the spectrum. The longer I live, the more I think that those boundaries are porous, open, and welcoming for all who care about human interaction and interdependence.

The same chapter bids us to further contemplate how we can expand those boundaries:

“Use your words.”

As you push your child or student toward verbal communication, how many times have you prompted them to do this, and with how many different inflections? One day, encouraging, gently coaxing; the next day, stern, with a shot of frustration; another day, weary and pleading. All the words that your child has may not be enough to make their needs, wants, thoughts, and ideas known. They may have learned a word, but producing it requires added layers of processing and skill. Articulating their thoughts and feelings may be easy one day and impossible the next when sensory issues amplify and interfere—or when your expectation that she maintain certain behaviors depletes all the energy that your child can muster. Think you know how it feels to be forced to multitask under pressure? Your child or student’s list includes

trying to self-regulate multiple hyper- or hypoactive senses simultaneously, intercept and interpret visual and auditory clues and cues, use social observation and interpretation to problem solve what to say and do, and then produce language.

“Use your words” is a worthy goal, as so many cultures consider speech to be the ultimate portable, stand-alone, all-terrain, all-hours, all-weather communication device. But on the way to achieving any degree of that goal, it’s compulsory that we acknowledge and facilitate all our child’s or student’s attempts to communicate, in whatever form the message comes.

Acknowledge and accept that those attempts that don’t include words, that come from behavior or silence, are rich in communication. None of us get through life without our moments of “being at a loss for words.” So even when a child has words to use, honor their behavior as an attempt to communicate in the only way they may be able to at that moment. Likewise, a child’s silence can be eloquent communication. Consider the directive, “Answer me!,” so often uttered in frustration, exasperation, or anger when a child’s response doesn’t come in the words and manner we expect. When silence is the response, consider the many possible perspectives the child may harbor but can’t articulate:

- I didn’t understand you. Try a different way.
- Your words hurt me.
- You made me angry.
- I don’t have a response.

- You misjudged me.
- You taught me to ignore people who speak to me disrespectfully.



Getting into the practice of communicating with your child on their custom wavelength is excellent preparation for those teen years, when your child will treat you to typical teen behaviors alongside any special needs-influenced ones. Starting now, listen to everything your child wants to tell you, in whatever form those messages come. Look at them when they speak or otherwise attempt to communicate with you. Answer them every time in a manner that is meaningful to them. Setting up that reciprocal exchange (they hear you, you hear them) that gives them the

confidence in the value of their message, whatever it may be and however it may be delivered. That confidence will become the motivation that moves your child beyond concrete responses to spontaneous offerings, and on to initiating thoughtful, thought-filled conversation—something parents and teachers of language-challenged children yearn for. ■

*Ellen Notbohm is an internationally known author whose work has informed, delighted, and guided readers in more than twenty languages. The latest edition of her perennially best-selling book, Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew (2019), won the Chanticleer International Book Awards Grand Prize.*

## Kinship Care: Continuing the Tradition of Caring, Collaborating, Navigating, and Advocating

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a trauma-informed model of practice for education, support, and assessment—also connected with key words such as “traditions” and “caring and collaborating,” seemed to be the missing link.

Training staff in a model of practice made an immediate difference in their level of confidence, ability, and trust in themselves. For example, relying on a set of tools to help assess a family’s strengths and needs was empowering for the staff. The agency soon realized that what families thought they needed was mostly short-term crisis response. But CWLA’s work tools also helped focus on meeting longer-term needs and aided staff in learning new skills.

This included using the same strength-based language among staff, children and families, and community partners, focusing, for example, on families instead of homes, respecting kinship caregivers instead of caretakers, and replacing the term “biopsychosocial” with “Collaboration Strength-Needs Assessment,” which achieves the same purpose but is more person- and family-friendly.

Identifying kinship family strengths and needs based on the model of practice helps identify what is going well with kinship families and what supports they need. Using CWLA’s trauma-informed model of practice to collaborate with kinship caregiving families helps ensure equality in services and supports.

Another dynamic in providing and advocating for kinship care services has shined a light on how many agency staff, caregivers, and public leaders have been personally involved with kinship care—either being raised by kin or raising younger family members.

Being both a professional and a caregiver poses unique challenges. As one kinship caregiver and agency manager explains, “I should know what I’m doing all the time, so I don’t give myself a break when I don’t always do the right thing as a parent or advocate.” Many dozens of personal and professional achievements, challenges, and insights sharing historical and current perspectives are detailed in CWLA’s 2020 book *Reflections on Kinship Care: Learning from the Past, Implications for the Future* (CWLA, 2020).

### **National Kinship Care Month**

Before the inspiration for the name “kinship care” and commensurate policies, programs, publications, and

practices, there has been a National Grandparents Day. Established in 1978 by President Jimmy Carter, it is celebrated on the first Sunday after Labor Day to “give grandparents an opportunity to show love for their children’s children, and to help children become aware of strength, information, and guidance older people can offer” (American Presidency Project, n.d.).

CWLA colleague and advocate, Gerard Wallace from New York, began working some years ago with members of Congress to draft resolutions for National Kinship Care Month with the aim of making it both celebratory and strategic. The challenge continues and, during this past year, CWLA’s Public Policy Team—Vice President John Sciamanna, Policy Associate Shaquita Ogletree, and intern Sophie Greenberg—surveyed states regarding interest in and support for Kinship Care Month. Overwhelmingly, states were eager to learn more about taking steps to pass proclamations, as well as finding unique and impactful ways to celebrate kinship families during September. Three main challenges consistently were identified:

- improving the slow pace of background checks and removing those barriers to connecting children with safe and caring kin;
- streamlining services among agencies; and
- removing stigma and biases regarding the benefits of kinship families, especially in smaller communities.

Overall, states agreed that celebrating national Kinship Care Month would enhance community support and promote positive changes in federal and local policy. While a national Kinship Care Month has yet to be achieved, agencies and organizations around the country are championing their own efforts. New York State’s KinCare Coalition marked its eighth celebration of Kinship Care Month, presenting awards to outstanding caregivers, organizations, professionals, and champions around the state. The Coalition proclaimed, “We’ll celebrate the treasured natural resource of kinship caregivers statewide, and highlight the important contribution that kin play in supporting and raising children, along with the advocates who fight so fiercely for them.” In honor of champions who have devoted decades to their work, the New York State KinCare Coalition presented a Lifetime Achievement Award for Kinship Care to Gerard Wallace.

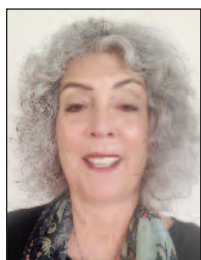
Whether it is National Grandparents Day or National Kinship Care Month, CWLA advocates for the support of all children, youth, parents, and families every day. This commitment perhaps was best explained by Maya



Angelou: “Each family is so complex as to be known and understood only in part even by its own members. Families struggle with contradictions as massive as Everest, as fluid and changing as the Mississippi... Yet, when practical, the preference should be for family” (Angelou, 1985).

For more on CWLA’s role in kinship care, see <https://www.cwla.org/celebrating-cwlas-kinship-care-history/> “Celebrating CWLA’s Kinship Care History: 30 Years of Caring, Collaborating, and Advocacy.”

For information about CWLA’s *Traditions of Caring & Collaborating Kinship Family Trauma Informed Model of Practice*, please contact: [mstallworth@cwla.org](mailto:mstallworth@cwla.org).



**Eileen Mayers Pasztor, DSW**, was staff director for the National Commission on Family Foster Care, and became CWLA’s first national Kinship Care Program Director. She is a co-developer of CWLA’s *Traditions of Caring and Collaborating: A Trauma Informed Model of Practice for Engaging, Assessing, and Supporting Kinship Caregiving Families*. Over the years she has had the privilege of working with the individuals named in this article.



**Leandrea Romero-Lucero, PhD**, served as the Program Director for the Fostering Family Program at Southwest Family Guidance Center & Institute in New Mexico, and now is an Assistant Professor in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program at Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania. She continues to be a kinship caregiver for a niece and two nephews ranging in ages from 5 to 16 years. Dr. Romero-Lucero recognizes the chal-

lenges kinship families face and how often they are left to struggle alone, resulting in her advocacy for navigator services and implementation of CWLA’s *Traditions of Caring & Collaborating: Kinship Family Information, Support, and Assessment—Trauma-Informed Model of Practice*.

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# CWLA Celebrates Kinship Care

## Special Issue

### Kinship Care and Child Welfare: New Directions for Policy and Practice

Guest Editors: Mark Testa, Eunju Lee, and Charlene Ingram

This two-part special issue focuses on children in kinship care—those who are being raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and non-related extended family members. *Child Welfare* journal brings attention to this less visible area of public child welfare, by featuring policy-based and empirical research on kinship families.



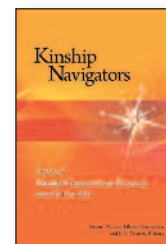
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Emphasis on kinship care policy, practice, and research is necessary to continue to enhance services and supports for kinship caregivers and families.

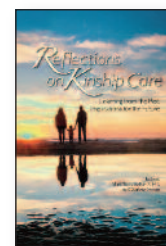


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Edited by Mark Testa, Robert Hill and Charlene Ingram

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# InstruMENTal:

## Recognizing the Importance of the Male Role in Child Welfare—An Open Invitation to Participate

By Marcus Stallworth

The Child Welfare League of America is the longest-serving child welfare organization in the United States. With over 100 years of documented efforts to guide policy and practice, CWLA's commitment to children, families, and communities remains our top priority. In 2020, CWLA developed a Fatherhood Leadership Council. We assembled a cadre of national champions in child welfare and began our quest to identify and address ongoing challenges with the engagement of fathers. After some information gathering and further consideration, we recognized the need to expand our area of focus—we saw that improved engagement and support efforts were not just needed for birth fathers, but for all male-identifying individuals involved in child welfare, including social work professionals, resource/adoptive fathers, and kinship providers. We offered male-specific workshops at national conferences, hoping to create a safe place for male-identifying individuals in child welfare to congregate, network, and share their experiences. Over time, we shared major themes from participants and challenged agencies to evaluate how they were checking in with their male-identifying colleagues. The meetings, starting out as *Calling All Males*, became

*InstruMENTal: Recognizing the Importance of the Male Role in Child Welfare.*

These learning opportunities began to spark attention over the last few years. Even during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we have received emails from individuals in search of more information—to our pleasant surprise. Therefore, we decided it would

make sense to host an information session to provide clarity on InstruMENTal and its purpose. In June 2021, we hosted more than 200 registrants, representing public and private agencies across the country. During the meeting, we:

- Explained how InstruMENTal was developed.
- Shared the national and international feedback regarding the need to recognize the importance of the male role in child welfare.
- Identified the benefits of recruiting, engaging, and supporting male-identifying individuals throughout child welfare.
- Highlighted the ways in which InstruMENTal can make contributions to the field, recognize agencies who are making positive strides toward inclusion,



and offer strategies and suggestions to incorporate this approach into agency and organizational culture.

The feedback was positive, reinforcing the need to put energy into developing and expanding InstruMENTal. It is clear that the program has surpassed its identity as a workshop at conferences and has evolved into a platform for shared learning, resource development, and overall networking.

InstruMENTal now has been transitioned to a virtual meeting that is held bimonthly. CWLA's 4 A's approach to influence personal and organizational development—**Awareness, Acknowledgement, Action, and Accountability**—will guide how we structure and organize our collaboration. For example:

1. **Awareness.** Identify and discuss ways to raise awareness regarding the importance of the male role in child welfare with your agency. Being responsive to this can impact service delivery, strengthen diversity efforts, increase staff retention, and boost overall morale.
2. **Acknowledgement.** Recognize that identifying flaws can be an opportunity for growth. Once you are able to see that there are areas for development, own and acknowledge this without self-judgment, blame, or shame. Once you become aware of the areas that need improvement, you will be moving in the right direction. What happens next is what is most important.
3. **Action.** Transferring observations into action requires more than just words. It requires leadership, patience, and the willingness to learn from others. Sometimes, those making decisions on implementation strategies are far removed from the day-to-day work. To see action, you must show action and lead by example. Consider seeking feedback from staff (and from the families you support) so that their voices can be included in response efforts. For example, a common theme from male-identifying resource parents was they often felt overlooked and underutilized. Armed with this information, one agency took immediate steps to develop an internal system to ensure that all resource parents were recognized as members of their professional team.
4. **Accountability.** It is natural to have a knee-jerk reaction when you come across a new approach that you find valuable. You may feel inspired to

want to make a change. For instance, have you ever attended a great conference and left highly enthused and motivated—but then, once you returned to the office and your day-to-day responsibilities, those good intentions were put on the back burner? Developing ways that measure progress can be a great way to promote accountability. Create a committee that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion—including male-identifying staff. Offer ongoing open forum discussions focused on strength-based conversations to identify needs and ways to support each other. Set up a suggestion box for those who have additional ideas for inclusion. Find creative ways to highlight agency shifts in policy and practice.

Recognizing the importance of the male role in child welfare is not a conversation specific to the United States. In 2017, CWLA was invited to send a delegate of child welfare staff to represent the United States at the PRIDE International conference in Prague, Czech Republic. More than 20 countries were present at this conference, and with translators, the InstruMENTal workshop was delivered. The response was overwhelming—so much so that CWLA will return to the Czech Republic (virtually) to facilitate the InstruMENTal workshop again. This time, we will be able to share how the United States has moved from discussion to action. It will be great to reconnect with our international colleagues from across the globe and share and receive information with each other. And I look forward to the experience at our next InstruMENTal meeting. ■

So how about you? Are you interested in learning more about InstruMENTal? Is your agency using practices and approaches you would like to share? Perhaps co-authoring an upcoming *Children's Voice* article? If so, please contact Marcus Stallworth, LMSW, Director of Training and Implementation: [mstallworth@cwla.org](mailto:mstallworth@cwla.org).



**Marcus Stallworth, LMSW**, is a Training and Development Specialist at CWLA and a Board Member of the National Foster Parent Association. He is co-owner of Welcome 2 Reality, LLC, which provides legislative advocacy in support of media literacy education for students. He has also taught courses at Post University, the University of Connecticut, and is currently teaching in the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College in Manhattan.

# Keeping SCHORE:

## UPD Consulting Helps and Connect Baltimore Students to Affordable Housing

*Continued from page 27*

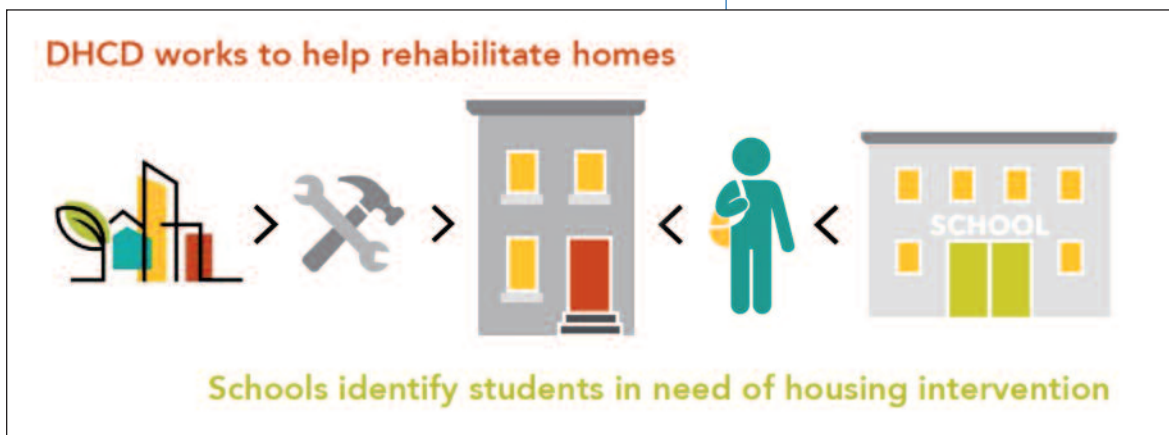
innovations in housing and education, and in concert with Baltimore City Schools and an immensely dedicated steering committee of Baltimore leaders across the field (including Manko), UPD designed a model program that connects affordable housing opportunities to elementary school families—and will pilot the model in three Baltimore City elementary schools. Housing rehabilitation is about to begin, and the program expects to start placing families in homes in the spring of 2022.

The premise of the model is simple: We can achieve better outcomes for students if we more specifically connect the city’s affordable housing efforts to the

we recognize the benefits of community support provided through the school environment, and Baltimore City Schools already funds a dedicated community schools coordinator at each school to support that work. In our model, the community school coordinator fosters a relationship with enrolled families who are housing-unstable and serves as the connection point between the family, the school, and the housing provider. Families are selected by first applying a set of prioritizing criteria. If there are more families meeting all of these criteria than there is housing available, the school leadership team will make a recommendation to the housing provider about the family(ies) they think would most benefit from the program. The housing provider will, in turn, make a final decision.

Families participating in the SCHORE program will work with a dedicated caseworker to create an individualized plan that supports the family and connect

them to the right resources. Each family will have access to a dedicated pool of funds that supports the plan—whether it be to buy furniture for their new home, find clothes for a job interview, access transporta-



educational institutions that know these children best. The DHCD will partner with affordable housing providers to facilitate the rehabilitation and maintenance of a selection of properties within the neighborhood of each pilot school. What is unique about this model is that the properties will be under the purview of the neighborhood elementary school; this allows school leadership teams to place families who are housing-unstable and have children in those schools directly into those properties. We call the model School-Centered Housing Response (SCHORE). Because the model centers around the relationship between the family and school, “school” gets top billing in this acronym.

A key feature of the SCHORE program is the role of the community school coordinator. While we do not believe that community schools are the only way to go,

tion to mental health counseling, or fulfill some other need. The success of this piece of the model is contingent upon the quality of the relationship between the caseworker and the family, and upon the individualization of the supports to meet each family’s needs. Under the SCHORE model, no family member will be required to receive any support other than to meet with their caseworker to discuss a plan. This is a departure from some similar programs which require specific obligations from the family heads of household, such as attendance in a money management class or participation at the school’s parent association meetings. But we believe in our families’ ability to make the right decisions for their own needs in collaboration with their caseworkers, and we hypothesize that this strategic decision to not heap on additional, generalized requirements will prove

## THE THEORY OF ACTION

If we provide long-term affordable housing with intensive, case management services, then we will improve the lifetime prospects for the children and families who participate in the program, as well as the stability of the school.

### INTENDED OUTCOMES

#### MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

+ Improve school to housing linkage

#### PROGRAMMATIC OUTCOMES

+ Improve economic mobility

+ Buffer against the effects of toxic stress for children

+ Reduce student mobility

+ Improve attendance rates

+ Improve block revitalization

#### EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

+ Improve academic achievement

correct as we collect data after families begin living in their new homes.

SCHORE highlights the advantages of Baltimore’s strong community school system and the abundance of vacant properties under the city’s control. But these two elements are not absolute “must haves” for the model to work in other cities. The housing could be new construction. Or the schools could rely on a counselor or other school role to support this work. Variations abound. The most important feature of the model is that it builds a coordinated, shared governance between government agencies and funding stakeholders to solve a challenge that no one agency is able to solve on its own.

We intend to use a robust continuous improvement process to bring these collaborators together during the pilot phase. We anticipate meeting approximately every two months to look at short-cycle data measuring not only the implementation of each aspect of the model, but also tracking progress toward the larger outcomes identified in the model’s theory of action. The continuous

improvement process will support us in making improvements to the model on an ongoing basis rather than waiting until the end of the pilot to understand what worked and what did not. In addition, the continuous improvement process strengthens the shared governance across the multiple collaborating organizations, setting the program up for what we intend will be a fully scaled program in the future.

You can learn more about the SCHORE program and download the white paper at <https://www.updconsulting.com/recent-work/schore/>. UPD will continue to update the community about the program’s progress—with the hope that Baltimore’s efforts will provide helpful information to other cities making connections between housing and education. ■

*Ann Willemssen is a director at UPD Consulting, and led the development of the SCHORE model. She would love to talk with anyone wanting to know more about SCHORE. Contact her at: [awillemssen@updconsulting.com](mailto:awillemssen@updconsulting.com).*



## Child Welfare Policy: 2021 in Review

By John Sciamanna

The past legislative year has been focused on addressing the ongoing challenge of COVID-19 and its various strains as well as President Biden's new agenda, which has come in two parts: (1) a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package, enacted by Congress in November 2021; and (2) legislation related to human services, which has been a much bigger congressional challenge.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act deals with road and bridges but also takes on some other needed improvements that have human service components. Approximately half of the \$1.2 trillion in funding will go toward ongoing infrastructure needs. Parts of the new investments of \$550 billion would include extending internet services to some rural and urban centers that lack access to broadband. Another important funding focus would be on clean water, with more than \$10 billion to be spent on addressing the presence of lead in drinking water—a concern so significant that some cities (such as Flint and Benton Harbor, both in Michigan) have faced serious child health issues because of lead exposure.

### The Child Tax Credit and Child Poverty Relief

The other major piece of legislation, the American Families Plan, deals with a host of important human service priorities that CWLA has long supported: the Child Tax Credit (CTC), designed to reduce child poverty in half; and a comprehensive child care plan, to extend both quality pre-K and child care to families ranging from middle to lower income.

In 2019, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine identified strategies to reduce the number

of children in poverty in the United States by half in 10 years in a report, *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. In that report, the National Academies concluded: "Some children are resilient to a number of the adverse impacts of poverty, but many studies show significant associations between poverty and child maltreatment, adverse childhood experiences, increased material hardship, worse physical health, low birth weight, structural changes in brain development, mental health problems, decreased educational attainment, and increased risky behaviors, delinquency, and criminal behavior in adolescence and adulthood. As for the timing and severity of poverty, the literature documents that poverty in early childhood, prolonged poverty, and deep poverty are all associated with worse child and adult outcomes" (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). As part of the March 2021 COVID-19 relief package, Congress passed a one-year expansion of the CTC. The Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University estimates that this expansion could cut child poverty overall by almost 45 percent and reduce racial disparities in child poverty—cutting Black child poverty by 52 percent, Hispanic child poverty by 45 percent, Native American child poverty by 62 percent, Asian American and Pacific Islander child poverty by 37 percent, and White child poverty by 39 percent (Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2021).

The current Child Tax Credit expansion began in July 2021, and by making it "refundable" it has provided \$300 a month (\$3,600 annually) for children ages 0-5, and \$250 a month (\$3,000 annually) for children ages 6-17. One half of it goes out monthly with fami-

lies able to claim the other half when they file returns next year. Children aged 17 are a new addition to the credit. The benefit has been distributed through the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The debate now is how long to extend it, with advocates such as CWLA wanting to make it permanent.

### Expanding Access to Child Care

There are several other key priorities that CWLA supports, including providing family and medical leave, addressing the ongoing housing crisis, and expanding access to health care and child care.

Under the new proposal, families making up to 250% of a state's median income will have child care costs capped at 7 percent of income (approximately \$300,000 per year for family of four). For families making less than that, quality care costs will be based on a sliding scale. This means that child care could be provided to about 20 million children per year—covering nine out of 10 families across the country.

The new proposal also will include universal and free preschool for all three- and four-year-olds—the largest expansion of universal and free education since states and communities across the country established public high schools. Parents would be able to send children to high-quality preschool in the setting of their choice, from public schools to child care providers to Head Start.

As CWLA noted in a joint October 2021 letter to congressional leadership, signed by more than 300 other organizations, "The historic investment and policies outlined in the framework would support the transformative work of building a strong, stable early childhood education system that is

affordable and accessible to families in new and critical ways... Fifty years after President Nixon's veto of comprehensive child care reform, we are at the cusp of a turning point for a just and equitable child care and early learning system... It's time to set families up for success and set up early care and education to be a valued and highly desired, long-term career path—our economic prosperity depends on it" (National Women's Law Center, 2021).

## Mental and Behavioral Health

This fall, CWLA also focused on addressing what is needed to better address behavioral health issues. The Senate Finance Committee asked for input on how to make the nation's mental health and substance use health care systems more effective.

In a November 1, 2021, letter (CWLA, 2021) to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Mike Crapo (R-ID), we said that addressing mental health services is a significant need and challenge within child welfare (including child protection). It points out that primary prevention efforts, family preservation, reunification, adoption, and all forms of permanence requires addressing barriers created by behavioral health needs.

The tone of the letter is how vital it is for the behavioral health system of mental health and substance use to helping families, pointing out that, child welfare and juvenile justice, "were not created to provide vital behavioral health services and it is inevitable they will be held accountable for the failures in the provision and quality of any treatment. In addition, families struggling with these issues should not have to turn to these systems as their only option to accessing critical services." The letter highlights past evidence that some families have turned to these two systems in a desperate attempt to get the services they need for their children because they don't have another point of access.

The CWLA recommendations highlight the need for greater attention to maternal health, the needs of adolescents and youth, Medicaid reforms, telehealth improvements, enforcement of the 2008 parity law, assisting the workforce within

behavioral health, and the need to strengthen substance use treatment.

The letter, from CWLA President and CEO Christine James-Brown, concludes with, "Effective mental health and substance use services will reduce the number of children and families that come to the attention of child protection or child welfare. We appreciate the committee's outreach, and we look forward to continuing our efforts to help you address this problem in a strong bipartisan manner."

## More Upcoming Legislation

Other items for December 2021, and perhaps for 2022, include the final appropriations for FY 2022. Congress passed a continuing resolution on October 1, 2021, that extends temporary funds through December 3, 2021. The Administration's budget and the House version of appropriations include significant increases within the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment (CAPTA) law and Title II, Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CB-CAP) state grants, a new \$100 million through Child Welfare Services to address racial inequity in child welfare and a significant increase of \$9 million for the Family First Act Clearinghouse (up from \$2 million).

Finally, as an item for 2022, in June the Senate HELP Committee acted on their version of a CAPTA reauthorization, S 1927, the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2021. The legislation had been drafted by Committee members in a bipartisan manner. The legislation redesigns the existing statute to streamline some of the language around definitions, research and encourage states and child protection systems to examine or develop "alternate pathways" to help families. The Senate bill creates a new title III on child fatalities that would create a new federal work group through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and some other departments to examine and collect data on child fatalities and to issue an annual report to Congress. In addition, it authorizes up to \$20 million a year to fund state projects to conduct some of the same work at the state and local level. The legislation also separates out the current "plans of safe care" and renames them "Family Care Plans."

In January, the lead Democrat (Rep. Bobby Scott) and lead Republican (Rep. Virginia Foxx) on the House committee with jurisdiction over the law reintroduced The Stronger Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act legislation, which reauthorizes CAPTA and includes many reforms advocated for by the National Child Abuse Coalition. This same bill passed the House during the 116th Congress, but progress stalled in the Senate. The House re-passed their legislation on March 16, 2021.

The next steps are likely to include direct conversations between both the House and Senate Committees to determine if they can compromise on a final bill. If they can do that, it is likely the Senate bill would be modified to include compromise language and would then be approved by the Senate. That version would go to the House for a final approval. At this point the CAPTA reauthorization bills include just CAPTA and the Adoption Opportunities Act. It is unclear how quickly an agreement on one final CAPTA reauthorization will take to complete. ■

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**John Sciamanna** is CWLA's Vice President of Public Policy. He has worked in Washington, DC, since 1993 when he worked in the United States Senate. He has also worked with non-profit organizations including the American Public Human Services Association and the American Humane Association. He has worked for CWLA since 2001.

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