



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

COLORADO EVALUATION
AND ACTION LAB



COLORADO

Office of Children,
Youth & Families

Division of Child Welfare



Building Evidence for Practices that Matter to Colorado's Children, Youth, and Families – *Spotlight on Child First*

Background

The [Family First Prevention Services Act](#) incentivizes state systems and local agencies to move intentionally toward child welfare approaches that prioritize keeping kids safe and families together. This legislation authorizes federal reimbursement to states for the delivery of evidence-based services aimed at preventing the need for foster care. Colorado has put together a bold [Prevention Services Plan](#) for realizing this vision and maximizing prevention investments in child welfare that help Colorado's children, youth, and families to thrive, together.

The Colorado Department of Human Services has partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (“Colorado Lab”) to coordinate rigorous evaluations necessary to meet the evidence-based aspects of Family First requirements and facilitate evidence-building for services/programs positioned to meet the needs of Colorado's families. Programs included in Colorado's 5-Year Prevention Services Plan that are rated as “promising” or “supported” by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#) require ongoing rigorous evaluation to build evidence towards a “well-supported” designation.

Why Child First

Child First was identified by stakeholders as a complementary service within the [in-home parent skill-based domain and mental health domain](#) positioned to meet the more intensive needs of Colorado's youngest children and their families. The practice is being launched in four agencies serving thirteen Colorado counties. Child First targets children prenatal through 5 years of age who have experienced disruption in secure attachment with their caregiver and provides support to families most impacted by systemic and structural inequities.

- Child First is rated by the Title IV-E Clearinghouse as a **supported** practice.
- A Colorado-based ongoing rigorous evaluation of Child First is among the federal requirements that are necessary to be met before Colorado can consider including this program in the state's Prevention Services Plan.

To build evidence towards a well-supported designation, MDRC is conducting a randomized controlled trial of Child First that will help Colorado meet Family First rigorous evaluation requirements, identify what outcomes are best driven by this practice, and build capacity to scale, sustain, and lift this service in areas of need in Colorado.

The evaluation is being conducted on behalf of the State of Colorado, Colorado Department of Human Services, under the coordination of the Colorado Lab.