Colorado Lab Newsletter
August 2022

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Prioritizing a Strengths-based Approach to Child Welfare

A strengths-based approach is a critical frame for our work together with government and community partners to increase the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families involved with child welfare. In this month's newsletter, we provide brief updates on efforts underway that prioritize this approach, including: directly engaging the voices of children, youth, and caregivers to inform needs and solutions; fostering supportive relationships and opportunities for self-empowerment; and ensuring that policies, programs, and services are evidence-based.

Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel: Promoting Steps 1 and 2 of Building Evidence

The Colorado Lab is partnering with the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC) to build evidence for their model of interdisciplinary team representation.

Interdisciplinary team representation pairs an attorney with a social worker or parent advocate to address root causes of child welfare involvement, promote long-term family strengthening, and protect the fundamental right to parent. Interdisciplinary representation is part of a continuum of legal advocacy efforts used to support child and family well-being through high-quality legal representation.

> "[We] bridge the gap to the attorney, whose job needs to be that litigation piece. A lot of the time attorneys don't have the flexibility that we do. They don't have the availability that we do. It's really easy for a client to feel like they're on an island alone. So if they've got a parent advocate or social worker that's helping them feel like they're not alone, then that bridges the gap."
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> **Social worker participating in interdisciplinary team**

The Colorado Lab is supporting the ORPC in building capacity for this model and advancing its impact by first focusing on Steps 1 and 2 of evidence-building—program design and identifying outputs. Through a "numbers and narratives" mixed methods approach, the what, how, and who of interdisciplinary representation was explored and synthesized, using a combination of data indicators, qualitative narratives, and visuals. Further defining the model in clear and transparent ways is critical to further strengthening the approach, communicating how the model is positioned to drive outcomes, and contributing to state and national field-building on client-centered representation. Model definition is also foundational to a rigorous outcomes evaluation using cross-systems data, which the Colorado Lab and the ORPC will prioritize next in this ongoing evidence-building partnership intended to drive sustained change.

For more information, contact Dr. Courtney Everson.

Family First Annual Strategy Report

The aim of Family First in Colorado is to support child welfare-involved families receiving evidence-based services and support that help to keep children safe and more families together. Our new *Evidence-building for Family First: Rigorous Evaluation Annual Report* provides ongoing guidance to ensure strategic investments in evidence-building for services and programs positioned to meet the needs of Colorado's children, youth, and families. The Colorado Lab serves as the coordinator of Family First rigorous evaluation efforts on behalf of the Colorado Department of Human Services and this report was developed as part of that role.

To learn more about our work for Family First in Colorado, reach out to Dr. Elysia Clemens.

Early Childhood Stabilization Grant

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) received over $465 million in American Rescue Plan Act and Child Care Development Fund funds to strengthen and expand the early childhood sector in Colorado and ensure all children have access to high-quality child care. CDEC is partnering with the Colorado Lab to build data collection and evaluation strategies for these stimulus-funded activities to ensure CDEC can track progress and assess the influence of funds on providers, families, and the workforce supporting young children. CDEC committed $281 million (over 60 percent of the child care stimulus funding) to child care stabilization and sustainability grants to help programs remain open and operating for families and to improve the conditions of their workforce. The Colorado Lab and CDEC have released the **first in a series of data briefs** on the progress of these grants. Future briefs will cover program enrollment and workforce in programs receiving grant funding.

Please reach out to **Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf** with questions or to learn more.

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