

Building Evidence for Family First Programs and Services: Fostering Healthy Futures for Preteens (FHF-P)



Background

The [Family First Prevention Services Act](#) incentivizes child welfare approaches that prioritize keeping kids safe and families together. This legislation authorizes federal reimbursement to states for the delivery of evidence-based programs and services that prevent the need for foster care. In October 2022, the Administration for Children and Families approved Colorado's bold [Five-Year Family First Prevention Services Plan](#) (Colorado's Plan) to maximize prevention investments in child welfare that help Colorado's children, youth, and families thrive, together.

The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) to serve as the [Family First Evidence-Building Hub](#). In this role, the Colorado Lab ensures strategic investments in evidence building for Family First programs and services. The Hub coordinates evaluations that are designed to both meet Colorado-specific learning goals and advance [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#) (Clearinghouse) evidence designations.

Why FHF-P?

[FHF-P](#) is a nine-month, community-based mentoring and skills group program designed for children ages 9–11 with current or prior child welfare involvement due to one or more adverse childhood experiences. It uses a positive youth development approach to build competencies in emotional and social functioning, improve mental health and quality of life, and reduce problem behaviors and adverse life outcomes. Stakeholders identified FHF-P as a complementary service within Colorado's [mental health service array](#) positioned to meet the needs of preteens using a strengths-based approach. FHF-P is currently being offered in eight Colorado counties with plans for expansion to more rural areas.

Evidence Building for FHF-P

FHF-P has received a “supported” evidence designation from the Clearinghouse and is included in Colorado's Plan. Aligned with Step 5 on the [Steps to Building Evidence, two 5-year randomized controlled trials](#) (RCTs) of FHF-P demonstrated favorable impacts on child permanency, delinquency, and well-being. [Dr. Heather Taussig](#) at the University of Denver's (DU's) Graduate School of Social Work is conducting follow-up RCT analyses with the goal of building evidence toward a “well-supported” designation.



The analyses explore FHF-P's impact on child well-being (behavioral and emotional functioning and substance use or misuse) outcomes, such as affiliation with positive and deviant peers, and attitudes and appraisals regarding substance use. They also explore the effect of FHF-P on young adult well-being outcomes, such as suicide related thoughts and behaviors.

These analyses began in July 2022 and will be completed in 2025.

The evaluation is being conducted by DU on behalf of CDHS, under the coordination of the Colorado Lab's Family First Evidence-Building Hub.

