

# The Center for State Child Welfare Data

20 Years of Rigor, Innovation, and Impact

December 2024

## Perspectives

Bonnie Hommrich  
Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Children's Services  
Retired

When I was Commissioner, we invested substantial sums in our electronic case management system with the expectation that doing so would strengthen the services provided. The Data Center's work shows how those investments paid off. The balance achieved between rigor and relevance helped Tennessee work its way through the *Bryan A. Lawsuit* sooner than it would have otherwise. When the states started the Data Center in 2004, it was important to have a source of multistate data outside the federal framework. The Data Center's work shows why that is still important today.

Robert D. Gibbons, Ph.D.  
Blum-Riese Professor of Statistics  
University of Chicago

For over a decade, I have had the privilege of working with members of the Center for State Child Welfare Data at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Their work provides an elegant blend of substantive scholarship and quantitative thinking to their research into one of our nation's most pressing social problems - our child welfare system. Early in our dialogue, I was impressed with their desire to pursue the most quantitatively rigorous and conceptually and mathematically demanding statistical solutions. The result is their ability to answer complex questions regarding inequities in the social welfare system, with widespread application to similar problems throughout the world. The Data Center is a national treasure and brings continued national and international distinction to both Chapin Hall and the University of Chicago.

Tiffany Perrin  
Child and Family Well-being  
Stand Together

I find myself frequently coming back to the truism that "what gets measured, matters." Through its work, the Data Center makes clear that children matter. I am grateful that, for two decades, the Data Center has empowered the field to hold itself accountable and to continuously pursue better on behalf of kids and families. Critically, the Data Center has helped serve as a bridge between federal policy and implementation in communities, ensuring that policy reaches beyond words on paper.

## Recognition

Innovation In Government Award, Harvard University and the Ford Foundation, 2007

Academic Excellence Award, American Public Human Services Association, 2013

## Introduction

Twenty years ago, Chapin Hall director Mark Courtney and Senior Research Fellow Fred Wulczyn started the Center for State Child Welfare Data at Chapin Hall and the University of Chicago (aka the Data Center) in partnership with state child welfare agencies and the American Public Human Services Association's National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators. At the time, state agencies struggled to use their administrative data to monitor the children and families they served. Building on nearly 25 years of research tracking the well-being of children (1980-2004), the Data Center had two goals: expand access to state administrative data and conduct rigorous, innovative, and policy-relevant research. Today, with the records of more than 4.5 million children placed away from their parents, the Data Center's Foster Care Data Archive (FCDA) is the oldest and largest continuously updated database of its kind in the world thanks to the work of Kristen Hislop and others. Reflecting on the Data Center's impact on the child welfare field, Professor Courtney, the Samuel Deutsch Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago's Crown School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, had this to say:

“Over the past two decades, the Data Center has been the single most important contributor in the United States to public child welfare agency capacity to productively use state administrative data to inform policy, administration, and practice. Moreover, the partnerships between the University of Chicago and child welfare agencies that were initiated and nurtured by the Data Center, combined with the methodological expertise, theoretical insights, and deep knowledge of the child welfare system possessed by its leadership and staff, have led to some of the most influential research on child welfare services conducted anywhere in the world over that period.”

On the list of achievements, Data Center researchers designed the first Online Analytical Processing Platform (OLAP) for analyzing state longitudinal data. Accessible to anyone with an authorized password issued by state administrators, the OLAP has had as many as 1,500 users from 30 states. To support end users, Data Center staff then developed *Advanced Analytics for Child Welfare Administrators*, a week-long class devoted to teaching state analysts the art and science of administrative data analysis. To date, more than 400 administrators from public and private child welfare agencies and advocates have participated, bringing a fresh skill set with them back to their offices. The most recent iteration of *Advanced Analytics* is known as *EDGE: Evidence-Driven Growth & Excellence*. With support from the W.T. Grant Foundation and led by Lily Alpert, *EDGE* is one of the few theoretically rigorous, evidence-based interventions that target the skills agency administrators apply when using evidence to inform their decisions. Today, because of the Data Center's contributions to research, policy, and practice, there are few people in child welfare agencies who do not appreciate the value of longitudinal data as the basis for understanding how well children are doing.

In this retrospective, we look back at the body of work the Data Center created over the past twenty years. We categorize the portfolio roughly by topic, even though most projects pertain to more than one research domain. That integration was and continues to be intentional.

The collection documents the process of service improvement by showcasing the many ways theoretical expertise, research design, analytical precision, and practical experience in the field converge to reveal the power of science and its role in measuring child welfare outcomes, understanding causality, testing interventions designed to improve services and outcomes, and the ongoing responsibility of child welfare leaders to be scientific in their stewardship of precious resources on behalf of children and families.

## Acknowledgments

The work described here would not have been possible without the dedicated people who devoted their talent and passion to the Data Center’s mission over the past twenty years. For that reason, this retrospective is dedicated to the team of individuals, past and present, who always did what was asked of them and so much more. We also want to acknowledge, with the deepest respect and gratitude, the state and local governments that invited us to work with them. Our relationships with those agencies gave us the testing ground needed for new ideas to flourish. Last, we acknowledge our funding partners. From seed money for basic research to capacity-building investments, philanthropic and institutional support provided the time needed to innovate that we might not have had otherwise.

### Center for State Child Welfare Data Staff - Past and Present

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Lily Alpert	Lijun Chen	Linda Collins	Samantha Crockett
Sara Feldman	Rosemary Gill	Kristina Hall	Kristen Hislop
Scott Huhr	Bridgette Lery	Jamie McClanahan	Jennifer Miller Haight
Kerry Monahan Price	Nancy Neumann	Britany Orlebeke	Emily Rhodes
Laura Packard Tucker	Florie Schmits	Devon Syrjanen	Molly Van Drunen
Jianyu Wang	Fred Wulczyn	Jinjin Zhang	Xiaomeng Zhou
Eileen Sheu	Joseph Kogan	Randi Rosenblum	

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### Partner States and Localities

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Alabama	Alaska	Arizona	Arkansas
California	Colorado	Connecticut	Delaware
District of Columbia	Florida	Georgia	Hawaii
Idaho	Illinois	Indiana	Iowa
Kentucky	Louisiana	Maine	Maryland
Massachusetts	Michigan	Minnesota	Mississippi
Missouri	Nebraska	Nevada	New Hampshire
New Jersey	New Mexico	New York State	North Carolina
Ohio	Ohio – Franklin County	Oklahoma	South Carolina
Tennessee	Texas	Virginia	Washington
Wisconsin	Pennsylvania – Allegheny, Crawford, Dauphin, Lackawanna, Philadelphia, Venango Counties	New York City	

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### Philanthropic Partners

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Annie E. Casey Foundation	Casey Family Programs
David and Lucile Packard Foundation	W. T. Grant Foundation
Redlich Horwitz Foundation	Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
Hilton Foundation	Dave Thomas Foundation
Child Welfare Fund	Big Ideas Generator, University of Chicago
Joint Research Fund, University of Chicago & CH	Joint Theory Institute, University of Chicago
Innovation Fund, Chapin Hall	Robin Hood Foundation
W. K. Kellogg Foundation/New Yorkers for Children	

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## Child welfare outcomes

A cornerstone of the Data Center's work focuses on child and family outcomes. The Foster Care Data Archive (FCDA) is the bedrock of this work. With access to decades of longitudinal records of children moving through child protective services and out-of-home care, Data Center researchers have answered a wide range of questions regarding the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. In some cases, projects tackle questions at the national level, leveraging the multistate nature of the FCDA to observe how outcomes vary around the country. In the mid-2000s, that line of research, along with the work of other scientists, helped bring about a significant rewrite of the outcome measures used by the federal government to monitor state child welfare programs.

In other cases, Data Center staff work directly with state and local leaders to generate the evidence needed to fuel organization-specific improvement processes. Although we have delivered this type of technical assistance around the country, our longstanding partnership with Tennessee's Department of Children's Services (TNDCS) is the most comprehensive example. There, we used the Data Center's Baseline-Target-Actual (BTA) framework to guide leaders' use of evidence taken from historical performance to shape policy and practice. We used the same set of tools with the state's network of social service providers as the foundation for a performance-based contract, a project that changed congregate care use and improved time to permanency within a reinvestment framework (see Fiscal Studies). We also developed the outcome reporting structure—the Tennessee Accountability Center—that enabled the state to exit from a federal class action lawsuit after fifteen years of court oversight. In Illinois, working with the Early Childhood Court Team, we are using the very same ideas.

In our work to explore population-level outcomes, we have carried out research using traditional indicators of safety and permanency: maltreatment and maltreatment recurrence, admissions to foster care, time to permanency, level of care, placement stability, and reentry. We have, as well, extended the definition of child well-being to include human capital, allowing us to study the effect of placement on skill formation and success later in life, ideas that are foundational to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### Representative publications:

- Courtney, M. E., Needell, B., & Wulczyn, F. (2004). Unintended consequences of the push for accountability: The case of national child welfare performance standards. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26(12), 1141-1154.
- Wulczyn, F., Barth, R. P., Yuan, Y. Y. T., Harden, B. J., & Landsverk, J. (2005). *Beyond common sense: Child welfare, child well-being, and the evidence for policy reform*. New York: Routledge.
- Wulczyn, F., Chen, L., & Hislop, K. (2007). *Foster Care Dynamics, 2000-2005: A Report from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Wulczyn, F., Chen, L., & Orlebeke, B. (2009). Evaluating contract agency performance in achieving reunification. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(5), 506-512.
- Center for State Child Welfare Data. (2017). *Tennessee Accountability Center: Reports 1 through 5*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Wulczyn, F., & Huhr, S. (2018). *Human Capital Formation During Childhood: Foundations of the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study. Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Technical Report Number 13*. Sydney: NSW Department of Family and Community Services.

Wulczyn, F., Parolini, A., & Huhr, S. (2021). Human capital and child protection: A research framework in the CRC context. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 119*, 104610. (Written in commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.)

Cashmore, J., & Wulczyn, F. (2024). Pathways of Care: A longitudinal study of children in care in Australia: introductory article for the special issue on Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 149*, 106586.

## Racial disparity and foster care admissions

The right of a parent to raise their children is a fundamental human right. That is why it is important to understand how much foster care we use in the United States and why. Though communities should act compassionately when families need the help of others, when we use too much foster care, it signals a breakdown in how well we uphold our basic commitments to children and families as a community in pursuit of a just society.

Over the last twenty years, scholars have established that BIPOC children use more foster care than White children. Our contribution to that body of research has focused both on documenting those differences and using the differences to understand the reasons why we turn to foster care more often in some communities than others. We have done this primarily by focusing on disparity and social disadvantage at the county level. We find the interplay between race, social disadvantage, and other characteristics of the communities in which people live to be linked closely to the disparities we observe. Most importantly, within that variation lies tax dollar investments that tell us whether investments in families and communities are equitable.

### Representative publications:

Wulczyn, F., Zhou, X., McClanahan, J., Huhr, S., Hislop, K., Moore, F., & Rhodes, E. (2023). Race, poverty, and foster care placement in the United States: Longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20*(16), 6572.

Wulczyn, F., Gibbons, R., Snowden, L., & Lery, B. (2013). Poverty, social disadvantage, and the Black/White placement gap. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(1), 65-74.

Wulczyn, F., Lery, B., & Snowden, L. (2014). Poverty and the Black/White Placement Gap: Using Context to Understand the Role of Evidence-Based Interventions. In A. Shlonsky & R. Benbenishty (Eds.), *From Evidence to Outcomes in Child Welfare*. Springer Netherlands.

Wulczyn, F., Huhr, S., Hislop, K., Schmits, F., Dworsky, A., & Halloran, J. (2020). Does context matter? Differences in the use of congregate care by Black, White, and Hispanic youth. *Advance.Sagepub.Com*, 1–33.

Wulczyn, F. (2020). Race/ethnicity and running away from foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 119*, 105504.

Brewsaugh, K., Lery, B., Gedo, S., Bose, S., Ross, E., Zhou, X., Huhr, S., McClanahan, J., & Wulczyn, F. (2023). *Prevention Services Availability and Black-White Placement Disparity: Contextualizing Structural Racism in Child Welfare*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Wulczyn, F. (2023). On causal inference and the limits of disproportionality as a construct: The case of foster care placement. *Social Service Review, 97*(2), 362-397.

## Fiscal studies

In child protection systems, a fundamental tension exists between social policies that favor keeping children at home with their families and fiscal policies that underwrite the placement of children away from home.

Although this dynamic plays a powerful role in shaping the use of foster care, the subject receives almost no attention in the social work literature.

Our body of work in public finance illuminates the underlying forces and reimagines resource allocation practices that are more aligned with the child and family outcomes states want to promote. In practice, this has meant helping states shift from per diem funding models to a prospective payment approach that emphasizes outcomes over the purchase of services.

In Tennessee, we designed the performance-based contract model for children placed in out-of-home care. Based on work done in the early 1990s, the model has been used to disburse more than \$1 billion in payments to providers of foster care through an outcome rather than services lens. In Texas, we are working on a similar fiscal model, one that will eventually guide the expenditure of \$300 million in foster care maintenance payments each year. In Canada, under the settlement between the federal government of Canada and the First Nations of Canada, the Data Center's data-gathering approach and outcome framework are central pillars of the plan that, if implemented, will measure the return on the \$20 billion investment being made in First Nation's child welfare programs.

### **Representative publications:**

Wulczyn, F., & Orlebeke, B. (2006). *Getting What We Pay For: Do Expenditures Align with Outcomes in the Child Welfare System?* Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Wulczyn, F. H., Orlebeke, B., & Haight, J. (2009). *Finding the Return on Investment: A Framework for Monitoring Local Child Welfare Agencies.* Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Goldhaber-Fiebert, J. D., Snowden, L. R., Wulczyn, F., Landsverk, J., & Horwitz, S. M. (2011). Economic evaluation research in the context of child welfare policy: A structured literature review and recommendations. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35(9), 722-740.

Wulczyn, F., Feldman, S., Alpert, L., & Horwitz, S. M. (2013). Maltreatment Prevention and the Science of Resource Allocation. In J. E. Korbin and R. Krugman (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Maltreatment*. Springer.

Goldhaber-Fiebert, J. D., Babiarz, K. S., Garfield, R. L., Wulczyn, F., Landsverk, J., & Horwitz, S. M. (2014). Explaining variations in state foster care maintenance rates and the implications for implementing new evidence-based programs. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 39, 183-206.

### **System science**

System, system reform, system change – these are words used frequently when discussing how we might rearrange the work that falls into the realm of child protection. Though the study of how systems work has permeated virtually every academic discipline, child protection research has yet to be influenced by the insights system science brings. Our policy and practice options are limited as a result.

At the Data Center, our work in the realm of system science is divided into the conceptual and the practical. On the theoretical side, our article for the Encyclopedia of Social Work places system science within the larger framework of social work research. Our simulation models are based on the idea that system simulation is an untapped source of evidence for decision-makers looking to make evidence-based decisions. All of our work in performance-based contracts is based on systems science methods as is our research into the effects of resource constraints on what happens to children. The link connecting bed supply and congregate care

placement disparities is among the first to isolate, empirically, a system structure and its role in reproducing racial/ethnic disparity.

### **Representative publications:**

- Wulczyn, F., Daro, D., Fluke, J., Feldman, S., Glodek, C., & Lifanda, K. (2010). *Adapting a systems approach to child protection: Key concepts and considerations*. New York: UNICEF.
- Halloran, J., & Wulczyn, F. (2013). Complex Systems Science and Social Work. In *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. Oxford University Press.
- Wulczyn, F., & Halloran, J. (2017). Foster care dynamics and system science: Implications for research and policy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(10), 1181.
- Wulczyn, F., Hummel, J., Kaligotla, C., Chen, L., Wagner, A., & Wang, J. (2020). *What is OSPEDALE? User Guide and Reference Manual*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Wulczyn, F., Kaligotla, C., Hummel, J., Wagner, A., & MacLeod, A. (2024). Agent-based simulation and child protection systems: rationale, implementation, and verification. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 147, 106578.

### **Innovative methodologies**

The work of tracking children who are living away from their parents has changed a lot in the last half-century, from filing cards to large-scale computer databases. What we know and what we do with what we know has never been more important, a transformation rooted in information technology. The Data Center was established to better understand child protection systems using administrative data.

Our work is organized around longitudinal data, a core asset that computer technology provides. Though we are interested in the young people who use foster care, we are also interested in the system that serves young people. Through our work in longitudinal database design, we have explored private agency and caseworker effects on child and family outcomes. Our longitudinal research on placement bed capacity has led to capacity planning models that take clinical acuity into account. Taken together, we have merged the study of child outcomes with the elements of agency process, quality, and capacity, which are at the heart of service improvement.

In addition to the Center's applied work, we have introduced new ways to study historical problems. Our disparity work is influenced by bio-statistical and econometric innovations. Simulation models play a central role in our fiscal work; our approach to system science led us to explore how caseworkers use their time doing the work we have organized under the child protection function. We are also looking at ways to precision target prevention service investments within states.

### **Representative publications:**

- Holmes, L., Landsverk, J., Ward, H., Rolls-Reutz, J., Saldana, L., Wulczyn, F., & Chamberlain, P. (2014). Cost calculator methods for estimating casework time in child welfare services: A promising approach for use in the implementation of evidence-based practices and other service innovations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 39, 169-176.
- Feldman, S., Monahan-Price, K., Walker, T., & Wulczyn, F. (2016). *How Do Caseworkers Spend Their Time: A Comparative Study of Time Use Inside the Child Welfare System: Report to New York City Council*.



Cosgrove, J. A., Rose, R. A., Lee, B. R., Huhr, S., & Wulczyn, F. (2022). Reducing confounding bias in non-experimental evaluation: an application of empirical Bayes residuals. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, doi:10.1086/719038.

Wulczyn F., & Halloran, J. (in press). Emerging Models, Research Designs, and Outcome Analyses in Child and Family Social Work. In E. Fernandez, P. Welbourne, B. Lee, & J. Ma (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Child and Family Social Work Research: Knowledge, Application, and Impact*.

## Program evaluation

What works? In today's social policy environment, it is among the most important research questions on people's minds. It is also one of the most difficult questions to answer. Randomized clinical trials provide an answer but don't fill in all the blanks. Observational studies built on the evidence that agencies generate themselves is an emergent approach to program evaluation that more easily fits with the learning organization model, a point of view the Data Center has been supporting since its inception. Our background includes randomized trials involving legal representation and a randomized trial of a kinship navigator program. Using observational data, we evaluated many of the reforms undertaken by New York City, including Child Success NYC (the City's IV-E Waiver program) and Fair Futures, a comprehensive intervention that targets youth in foster care and their life course outcomes. Our most recent evaluation, done in collaboration with the state of Tennessee and Youth Villages, moved the Intercept® program to the well-supported rung of the evidence ladder, the first observational study to go through the federal government's evidence process. We are currently in the middle of an evaluation of Hello Baby, Allegheny County's ambitious plan to reduce foster care utilization by looking at the issue systemically.

### Representative publications:

Orlebeke, B., Zhou, X., Skyles, A., & Zinn, A. (2016). *Evaluation of the QIC-ChildRep Best Practices Model Training for Attorneys Representing Children in the Child Welfare System*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Wheeler, C. B., Newton-Curtis, L. ... Orlebeke, B., Wulczyn, F., Huhr, S., & Zhou, X. (2016). *ProtectOHIO Final Evaluation Report: Ohio's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project Covering the Third Waiver Period, 2010-2015*. Oregon: HSRI.

Huhr, S., & Wulczyn, F. (2022). Do intensive in-home services prevent placement? A case study of Youth Villages' Intercept® program. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 132, 106294.

Chamberlain, P., Feldman, S. W., Wulczyn, F., Saldana, L., & Forgatch, M. (2016). Implementation and evaluation of linked parenting models in a large urban child welfare system. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 53, 27-39.

Feldman, S., Packard Tucker, L., Schmits, F., Van Drunen, M., & Wulczyn, F. (2019). *Strong Families New York City: Final Title IV-E Waiver evaluation report*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Haight, J. M., Wulczyn, F., Rhodes, E., & Mayer, M. (2019). *A study of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services placement processes*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

## International studies

One way to understand a child protection system is by studying how other countries approach the same question – how should we respond if a child needs to be cared for by someone else? The Data Center's international work, which includes Tanzania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Romania, Cambodia, Italy, and

Germany, is grounded in Australia. There, we were involved in designing the first and largest prospective longitudinal study of children placed in out-of-home care. The study, which started in 2010/11 and is now in its 6<sup>th</sup> wave, was organized around the human capital framework highlighted in our work on outcomes. China has also served as a focal interest. In addition to holding policy briefings, our *Report on the State of Children in China* helped frame the national dialogue about left-behind children. Our later work examined the effect of parental absence on human capital formation measured as reading ability. With scholars from Oxford University, we started the International Research Network on Infants and Child Protection Systems ([www.irnicp.org](http://www.irnicp.org)). The network joins 100 international scholars, practitioners, and policymakers around the common problem of contact with child protection systems early in the life course. In Canada, our approach to child well-being, public finances, and outcome monitoring has shaped a conversation that involves the disbursement of \$20 billion to rectify a history of underinvestment in First Nations' child protection systems by the national government of Canada.

### **Representative publications:**

Wulczyn, F., & Huhr, S. (2018). *Human Capital Formation During Childhood: Foundations of the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study. Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Technical Report Number 13*. Sydney: NSW Department of Family and Community Services.

Wulczyn, F., Parolini, A., & Huhr, S. (2021). Human capital and child protection: A research framework in the CRC context. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 119*, 104610. (Written in commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.)

Chen, L. J., Yang, D. L., & Ren, Q. (2015). *Report on the state of children in China*. Chicago: The Center for Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Wulczyn, F., & Huhr, S. (2018). *Human Capital Formation During Childhood: Foundations of the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study*. NSW Department of Family and Community Services: Sydney, AU.

Chen, L., Wulczyn, F., & Huhr, S. (2023). Parental absence, early reading, and human capital formation for rural children in China. *Journal of Community Psychology, 51*(2), 662-675.

### **Policy research and analysis**

Child welfare policies thread a particular needle, aiming to keep children and youth with their parents and safe at the same time. In this context, research into the effects of policy on child and family outcomes is essential. Our work on the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) suggests that more can be done to promote permanency. For the Dave Thomas Foundation's Wendy's Wonderful Kids program, we piloted new methods for identifying children who languish in care. Our policy work on congregate care use suggests that having an assessment may help states control the use of congregate care. That same project suggests that bed supply is an even more important determinant of congregate care utilization. Our work on capacity planning models affirms the supply/demand link. Finally, we are working with states (Kentucky, Arkansas, and Mississippi) on precision targeting of prevention services, work that complements what we have done looking at other provisions of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) such as congregate care use for New York City and foster care reentry for Tennessee.

### **Representative publications:**

Barth, R. P., Wulczyn, F., & Crea, T. (2004). From anticipation to evidence: Research on the Adoption and Safe Families Act. *Va. J. Soc. Pol'y & L., 12*, 371.

Wulczyn, F. H., Chen, L., & Hislop, K. B. (2006). Adoption Dynamics and the Adoption and Safe Families Act. *Social Service Review, 80*(4), 584-608.

- Goldhaber-Fiebert, J. D., Bailey, S. L., Hurlburt, M. S., Zhang, J., Snowden, L. R., Wulczyn, F., ... & Horwitz, S. M. (2012). Evaluating child welfare policies with decision-analytic simulation models. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 39*, 466-477.
- Wulczyn, F., Vesneski, W., Huhr, S., Monahan-Price, K., Martinez, Z., Verhulst, C., & Weiss, A. (2016). The Value-Added Impact of Fast-Track Adoption Policy on Adoption Rates. *Global Social Welfare, 3*, 97-106.
- Zhou, X., McClanahan, J., Huhr, S., & Wulczyn, F. (2021) *Using Congregate Care: What the Evidence Tells Us*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Wulczyn, F. (2020). Race/ethnicity and running away from foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 119*, 105504.
- Wulczyn, F., & Halloran, J. (2017). Foster care dynamics and system science: Implications for research and policy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14*(10), 1181.
- Wulczyn, F., Huhr, S., Hislop, K., Dworsky, A., Schmits, F., & Halloran, J. (2020). Does context matter? Differences in the use of congregate care by Black, White, and Hispanic Youth. *Authorea Preprints*.

## Research evidence use and improvement science

The rationale for evidence-based decision-making rests on the theory that if child welfare agencies use research evidence to shape policy and practice, then those policies and practices will become more targeted to the needs of the service population, a change that will improve child and family outcomes. If research evidence use (REU) is associated with improved outcomes—and the Data Center’s research suggests that it is—then it also makes sense to ask whether REU is malleable. To that end, we have worked consistently over the past twenty years to develop, refine, and test a training program designed to improve REU by the people who lead child welfare agencies. The most recent iteration of that curriculum, *EDGE: Evidence-Driven Growth & Excellence* has been shown in a randomized control trial to be effective at improving REU capability. ***Our latest research shows that agencies that participated in EDGE improved permanency outcomes*** for the children they served. In California, our longstanding partnership with the UC Davis Northern California Training Academy has put essential REU skills into the hands of county leaders throughout the state.

### Representative publications:

- Wulczyn, F., Alpert, L., Orlebeke, B., & Haight, J. (2014). *Principles, language, and shared meaning: Toward a common understanding of CQI in child welfare*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Wulczyn, F., Alpert, L., Monahan-Price, K., Huhr, S., Palinkas, L. A., & Pineseault, L. (2015). Research evidence use in the child welfare system. *Child Welfare, 94*(2), 141–165.
- Lery, B., Haight, J. M., & Alpert, L. (2016). Four principles of big data practice for effective child welfare decision making. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 10*(4), 466-474.
- Wulczyn, F., Alpert, L., Huhr, S., & Van Drunen, M. (in press). Research evidence and research evidence use. In E. Fernandez, P. Welbourne, B. Lee, and J. Ma (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Child and Family Social Work Research: Knowledge, Application, and Impact*. Routledge.
- Alpert, L. (in press). *Research Evidence, Performance Measurement, and the Process of Improvement: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Child Welfare*. Routledge.

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- Alpert, L. (2013). *Foster care utilization among school-aged children*. Chicago: Center for State Child Welfare Data, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Alpert, L. (in progress). *Research Evidence, Performance Measurement, and the Process of Improvement: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Child Welfare*. Routledge.
- Baker, A. J., Wulczyn, F., & Dale, N. (2005). Covariates of length of stay in residential treatment. *Child Welfare, 84*(3), 363-386.
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## The Center for State Child Welfare Data

The Data Center is organized around two core functions: research and technical assistance. The platform for our work is organized around the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive (FCDA) but now includes a wide array of other data used to understand how child welfare agencies operate and how their operations affect children, youth, families, and the communities where they live.

Each core area is connected to a body of work that emphasizes the evidence needed to operate more effective child protection systems. On the research side, our focus is on generating new evidence; on the TA side, our focus is on using evidence to improve outcomes, especially within the nation’s foster care system. EDGE is an evidence-based decision support that has been linked, through research, to outcomes for foster children. The link was built using all the tools available to agency and community leaders through the Data Center’s tool kit.

Center for State Child Welfare Data: Structure and Function

