January 11th is Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, especially children connected to the child welfare system. In the U.S., 60 percent of domestic child trafficking victims come from foster care and group homes. Florida ranks third in the U.S. for human trafficking prevalence, and over one-fifth of the allegations investigated in Florida were for children in out-of-home care.

The Institute is collaborating with its affiliates, the Florida Department for Children and Families, and other stakeholders to help better identify and work with survivors. In this issue of Institute Insights, we will highlight research and opportunities related to human trafficking.

The theme of the January Infographic is human trafficking awareness. Please share on your social media accounts!

Click here to download the infographic.
NEW INSTITUTE STAFF

The Institute welcomes our first social leadership intern, Kayla Towle, to complete her master’s internship requirement. Ms. Towle will assist Dr. Magruder and Ms. Tutwiler with research and evaluation activities as well as work with our stakeholders on collaboration and policy projects. She will also have the opportunity to join Dr. Pryce, FICW director, at legislative meetings. See Ms. Towle’s bio on the Institute Staff Directory.

To assist with the kinship care navigator project and the ECC evaluation, three new staff members have been hired. Colleen McBride will join the team as a full-time professional research associate and will transition to other projects as warranted. A graduate of George Washington University, she comes with research experience at the Education Testing Center and American Institutes for Research. Taylor Dowdy, PhD candidate, and doctoral student Michael Cain will serve as research assistants.

AFFILIATE SPOTLIGHT: KAREN OEHME

Karen Oehme, J.D., director

Prevention & Intervention with the College of Social Work, the FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights, and the Center on Academic and Professional Advancement.

Using a multidisciplinary approach, the certification focuses on human trafficking dynamics, prevention strategies, and evidence-based, trauma-informed intervention. Information on protections and services for at-risk youth and child victims is included. The self-paced curriculum with twelve hours of content is appropriate for a range of professionals, with several roles eligible for Continuing Education Credits. It provides participants confidence that they can incorporate knowledge of trauma-informed human trafficking prevention and intervention into their service and practice.

Click here to learn more about the Certification and how to enroll.

CONTRACT WITH ZERO TO THREE

ZERO TO THREE is contracting with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare to evaluate Florida’s Early Childhood Court (ECC). Continuing the work completed in 2018, the Institute will conduct a mixed-methods evaluation of the effectiveness of therapeutic modalities; and a qualitative exploration of the perspectives of ECC-involved caregivers and providers regarding the therapeutic services and benefits of Early Childhood Court.

WEBINAR OPPORTUNITY

The Institute for Family Violence Studies, led by Institute affiliate Karen Oehme of Florida State University, co-developed the Professional Certification in Human Trafficking.

The Whole Child Professional Network assembled an expert panel to discuss youth trafficking. Speakers from Voices for Florida, the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence, and the Survive & Thrive Advocacy Center will discuss incidence rates, identification, resources, gaps that exist in our service system, and how to help prevent youth trafficking. This webinar, entitled Stolen Childhoods, will take place January 25th at 12:00 pm. Click here to register.

CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITY

The Florida Network of Children’s Advocacy Center is holding its 2021 Florida Crimes Against Kids Conference July 21-23. They are now accepting speaker proposals, through January 25th. Click here for additional information.

To fulfill the objectives of Florida Statute (F.S.) 39.6225, the Institute contracted with affiliate Dr. Martie Gillen (University of Florida) to evaluate the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP). Dr. Gillen and her team (Dr. Morgan Cooley, Florida Atlantic University; Selena Garrison, University of Florida) explored the experiences of program participants, potential participants, and staff; analyzed the program’s impact on caregivers and children; assessed programmatic communication procedures and marketing materials; and made recommendations to maximize participation.

Surveys were distributed to caregivers as well as various staff roles, including those from the Department of Children and Families regional and Office of Child Welfare headquarters; child protective investigations; case management; and licensing and program administration. In addition, listening sessions were conducted with Level 1 licensed caregivers and caregivers who had cases close to permanent guardianship under the GAP.

Similar key findings were noted across the different groups of participants. Perceived strengths of the GAP include resources for the caregiver and child (e.g., financial assistance, medical benefits for the child, tuition for the child), Staff also identified strengths regarding process and policy, including the availability of licensing waivers for greater flexibility, specifically for minor non-safety waivers; the simplicity of the Level 1 licensing process compared to other licensing levels; and the availability of funding to caregivers prior to adjudication of the child by the court.

Participants also spoke about the challenges of the GAP such as lack of statewide guidelines on the GAP referral processes, confusion regarding waivers, and lack of support for tangible resources (e.g., fire extinguishers, second story home ladders) for caregivers. To promote consistent and effective messaging around the GAP, the researchers recommend message testing of marketing materials.

The full report detailing the findings of the GAP evaluation is available to read and download; click here.