



FLORIDA INSTITUTE  
for CHILD WELFARE

# **Revised 2015-2020 Strategic Plan**

**October 1, 2017**

# The Florida Institute for Child Welfare 2015-2020 Strategic Plan

## Message from the Director



**Jessica A. Pryce, Ph.D., MSW**  
*Director*

The Florida Institute for Child Welfare has worked diligently over the past two years at permeating the child welfare community with relevant research findings that inform legislative policy. The purpose of the Institute is to prioritize the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children and families. As the new director, I am looking forward to continuing the great work of the Institute and our statewide partners. It is my goal to consistently collect data on longstanding challenges from the child welfare community and create opportunities for subject matter experts statewide to investigate and recommend solutions. The strategic plan that was executed in 2015 was well written and thoughtful. I offer a revised strategic plan and the additions are meant to complement the initial plan, not replace. Within every partnership and research endeavor, the Institute aims to be strategic. The four foundational pillars, Collaborative Partnerships, Research, Policy Analysis and Technical Assistance/Training have been an effective guide in our work. We are extending our research agenda to a directed focus on evaluation of promising practices. In prioritizing evaluation research, the Institute can begin to foster replication of those efforts. Additionally, I am broadening our partnerships to subject matter experts in varying academic programs to bolster our Institute's interdisciplinary contributions. I am committed to continuing to keep the Institute at the forefront of child welfare research and aim to use strategic decision making as we move into this next fiscal year.



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## **Mission**

The Florida Institute for Child Welfare seeks to promote safety, permanency, and well-being among the children and families of Florida that are involved with the child welfare system. To accomplish this mission, the Institute will sponsor and support interdisciplinary research projects and program evaluation initiatives that will contribute to a dynamic knowledge base relevant for enhancing Florida's child welfare outcomes. The Institute will collaborate with community agencies across all sectors and other important organizations in order to translate relevant knowledge generated through ecologically-valid research, policy analysis, and program evaluation. This will be best achieved through the design and implementation of developmentally-targeted and trauma-informed strategies for children and families involved in the child welfare system.

## **Vision**

To provide nationally acclaimed child welfare research, training services, and policy and practice implementation guidance with our partner organizations in support of the children and families in Florida's child welfare system.

## **Guiding Principles**

- Strive for Research and Training Excellence – we will continually strive to develop research projects that are based in sound translational scientific research methods and principles.
  - Commitment – we will exhibit commitment and dedication to the Institute's mission and always prioritize the needs of children and families in Florida's child welfare system.
  - Collaboration – we will collaborate within and across disciplines and professions to identify research priorities, apply evidence-based and evidence-informed solutions, and to translate research findings into effective practice and policy.
  - Effective Communication – we will continuously share knowledge and information within the Institute to achieve organizational success.
  - Respect – we will value everyone's contribution to the mission, treating everyone with dignity.
  - Diversity— we will encourage and support robust and pluralistic approaches to the mission, knowing that intellectual diversity contributes to innovation, creativity, and fresh approaches to difficult problems.
  - Integrity— while the Institute exists in a challenging political, economic, and cultural environment, its staff and researchers will work to protect the intellectual independence and integrity of its initiatives.
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## The Institute's Environment

In 2014, the Florida Legislature passed comprehensive child welfare legislation (Senate Bill 1666) in response to media reports of almost 500 children known to Florida's child welfare system who had died in the previous five years. This legislation established the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (Institute) at the Florida State University College of Social Work under s. 1004.615, Florida Statutes.

The purpose of the Institute is to advance the well-being of children and families by improving the performance of child protection and child welfare services through research, policy analysis, evaluation, and leadership development. The Institute consists of a consortium of public and private universities throughout Florida that offer accredited degree programs in social work. Under new leadership, in January 2017 the Institute prioritized expanding the consortium's interdisciplinary acumen by engaging universities that do not have a Social Work program. They must have a program where research is being done that is impacting the lives of children and families. The statute also requires the Institute to work with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), sheriffs that provide child protective investigative services, Community-Based Care (CBC) lead agencies, CBC provider organizations, the court system, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV), and other partners who contribute to and participate in providing child protection and child welfare services.

By statute, the Institute is required to:

- Maintain a program of research contributing to the scientific knowledge related to child safety, permanency, and child and family well-being.
- Advise DCF and other organizations about the scientific evidence regarding child welfare practice.
- Provide advice regarding management practices and administrative processes.
- Assess the performance of child welfare services based on specified outcome measures.
- Evaluate the educational/training requirements for the child welfare workforce and the effectiveness of training.
- Develop a program of training/consulting to assist organizations with employee retention.
- Identify and communicate effective policies and promising practices.
- Develop a definition of a child or family at high risk of abuse or neglect.
- Evaluate the provisions of Senate Bill 1666 and recommend improvements.
- Recommend improvements in the State's child welfare system.
- Submit an annual report to the Governor and Legislature outlining activities, significant research findings, and recommendations for improving child welfare practice.

The Institute will meet these mandates by producing high quality child welfare research that is translational and inform the development of policies that improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for the children and families in Florida's child welfare system. This approach requires the development of effective relationships and productive collaborations with government, our community-based stakeholders, and our academic partners. The main objectives of building partner capacity and enhancing collaboration are 1) to develop service interventions that result in positive outcomes; 2) to enact policies that enhance effective service delivery of child welfare services; and 3) to contribute to the development of a sustainable and highly trained child welfare professional workforce.

"We must become more adept at articulating the enhanced quality of social work research and the value of our research in the field, not only to the families served by the system and the practitioners who serve them, but also the community and society as a whole."

*Child Welfare for the Twenty-First Century: A Handbook of Practices*

The Institute is prepared to respond to the multiple requests for expertise and guidance at the local, state, and national level through building and maintaining a technical assistance program by connecting subject area experts and research findings to policy decisions. The Institute's leadership will work to align the research agenda to address stakeholders' needs and to develop relevant translational research priorities. In this light, leadership will work diligently with faculty and research affiliates across the state to respond to the critical research and technical assistance needs of the Florida Department of Children and Families, as well as the unique requirements of the legislative mandates.

The Institute's vision is to be at the forefront of child welfare practice research, advancing and advocating for changes to state and federal child welfare policies, and providing evidence-informed strategies for effective workforce recruitment, long-term retention, and professional development.

## **How the Institute Conducts Business**

The mandates set forth in the 2014 legislation require that the Institute establish working relationships with the key stakeholders in the Florida's child welfare system, specifically including DCF, CBC agencies, the Judiciary, and the fourteen accredited social work programs across the state.

The Institute is housed in the Florida State University College of Social Work (CSW). The CSW leadership is committed to establishing an environment that encourages team science and facilitates productivity. The Institute will utilize the College's child welfare experts for identified research projects that are best suited for intramural support. The Institute's leadership also recognizes the importance of establishing a statewide and national network of research and policy experts to meet Florida's legislative mandates. The Institute will actively seek to diversify its funding portfolio to supplement recurring state funding with foundation and federal sponsorships that will support its mission.

The Institute will convene and meet with significant organizations and actors across multiple, relevant fields in the public and private sectors that help shape the lives of Florida's families and children, and especially those who significantly affect and intervene with child welfare clients at practice and policy levels. The Institute will develop and use convening-and-designing processes that help "smooth the path" for translational research and consultation by establishing and clarifying the actual geographies, contours, and boundaries of the child welfare environment. These efforts can help meet a number of objectives including: 1) invite committed persons already working on children's issues to develop approaches that are coordinated and collaborative with others engaged in such work; 2) develop a usable "catalogue" of statewide assets across sectors that can be employed in the service of children and families more effectively and efficiently; 3) communicate important issues, questions, and findings among stakeholders and across sectors; 4) move forward the design of action plans and scalable "proof of concept" designs that will help address the unique and long-term needs of children in the child welfare system; and 5) enhance the probability of successful "translation" of validated child welfare knowledge and interventions into Florida systems of care; 5) create a research repository that can be accessed by statewide faculty and research affiliates.

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## Foundational Pillars, Goals, and Supporting Objectives

The Institute's goals and priorities were specified in Senate Bill 1666 with an overarching mandate to make practice and policy recommendations to improve Florida's child welfare system. In maintaining alignment with legislative intent and priorities, the Institute proposes "Four Pillars" to target mandated outcomes in the following research priority areas:

- Evidence-Based, Trauma-Informed Services for Children Birth to Three
- Child Welfare Workforce Recruitment and Retention
- Youth Specific Issues – Pregnancy and Parenting Teens, DJJ "Lock-Outs" and "Crossovers"
- Human Trafficking of Minors
- Trauma-Informed Diversion Services for High Risk or Very High Risk Children
- Integration and Co-location of Mental Health, Substance abuse, and/or Domestic Violence Services with Child Welfare Protective Investigations and Case Management Services
- Evidence-Based and Trauma-Informed Services for Children with Complex Behavioral Health Needs
- Quality Residential Group Homes
- Other research identified as crucial for effective child welfare practice

### 1<sup>st</sup> Pillar --- Collaborative Partnerships

**Goal:** Establish new partnerships and strengthen existing relationships with researchers and policymakers to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for families in the child welfare system.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Identify and utilize existing state and national networks to strengthen and expand the quality and depth of the partnership pool.
2. Develop collaborations that generate promising research projects and advance social policies that improve child welfare outcomes, while simultaneously extending their impacts to social service, health, and behavioral health sectors.
3. Identify, engage, affiliate, and support promising researchers to advance the Institute's mission.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Pillar --- Practice Research

**Goal 1:** Develop and support translational research projects that contribute to the scientific knowledge base related to child safety, permanency, and child and family well-being.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Recruit and retain researchers qualified to support the mission of the Institute with focus on emergent translational research priorities.
2. Conduct child welfare research in partnership with stakeholders and academic institutions that will advance child welfare scientific knowledge.
3. Develop evidence-informed and evidence-based innovative service delivery models to meet the complex needs of the populations served by the child welfare system.
4. Evaluate promising interventions to optimize child welfare outcomes and facilitate replication.

**Goal 2:** Establish an institutional culture that enables the Institute to become a national leader in child welfare research.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Develop a culture that encourages intellectual creativity, innovation, and social entrepreneurship.
  2. Maintain a culture of accountability within the Institute to assure that supported research is translational, relevant, and high-quality.
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3. Recruit and retain qualified faculty and staff who have demonstrated scholarly excellence and advance work in the practice of child welfare.
4. Provide faculty and research affiliates with opportunities to use their subject matter expertise to contribute to the mission of the Institute.

**Goal 3:** Support the development of and access to essential resources for relevant and high-quality child welfare research.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Support the development of new research resources and use of innovative technology advances.
2. Facilitate access to resources and technologies.
3. Maintain a level of fiscal stability that supports initiatives that advance the Institute's mission.
4. Demonstrate success in acquiring extramural funding for research.
5. Create and maintain partnerships with other academic or community agencies in order to be competitive with federal procurement opportunities.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Pillar --- Policy Analysis**

**Goal:** Advise stakeholder organizations about child welfare research evidence that is related to practice, training, and administrative processes in order to inform effective social policy.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Identify an effective communication strategy regarding dissemination of evidence-based, evidence-informed, and promising child welfare practices and policies.
2. Engage and collaborate with stakeholder organizations and academic institutions to strengthen the statewide child welfare policy-making infrastructure.
3. Participate in statewide and national policy forums, and when indicated develop and convene such forums.
4. Inform stakeholder organizations of emergent evidence-based and evidence-informed practices as a means to influence policy change.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Pillar --- Technical Assistance and Training**

**Goal:** Develop a program of training/consultation designed to assist organizations with aligning policy with practice.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Deliver relevant and evidence-informed continuing education programming to the child welfare workforce and other partners.
  2. Work with key stakeholders to evaluate current technical assistance and training initiatives relative to identify and address current gaps.
  3. Identify new and significant technical assistance and training initiatives as the child welfare knowledge base evolves.
  4. Develop and implement collaborative solutions for statewide child welfare technical assistance and training needs.
  5. Initiate efforts with key stakeholders to improve technical assistance and training integration into the development
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