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# Moving Away from Family Separation: Cross-systems Strategies to Support Young Children and Families at Risk of Child Welfare Involvement

How to Build a Bridge: Policy, Practice, and Relationships in Cross-Systems Collaboration

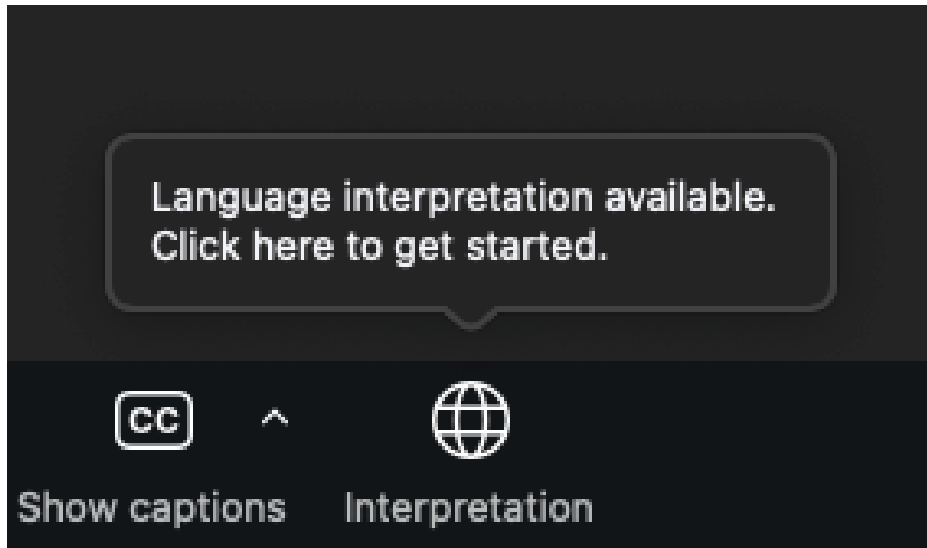
Moderator: Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D., BUILD Initiative

Monday, March 17, 2025

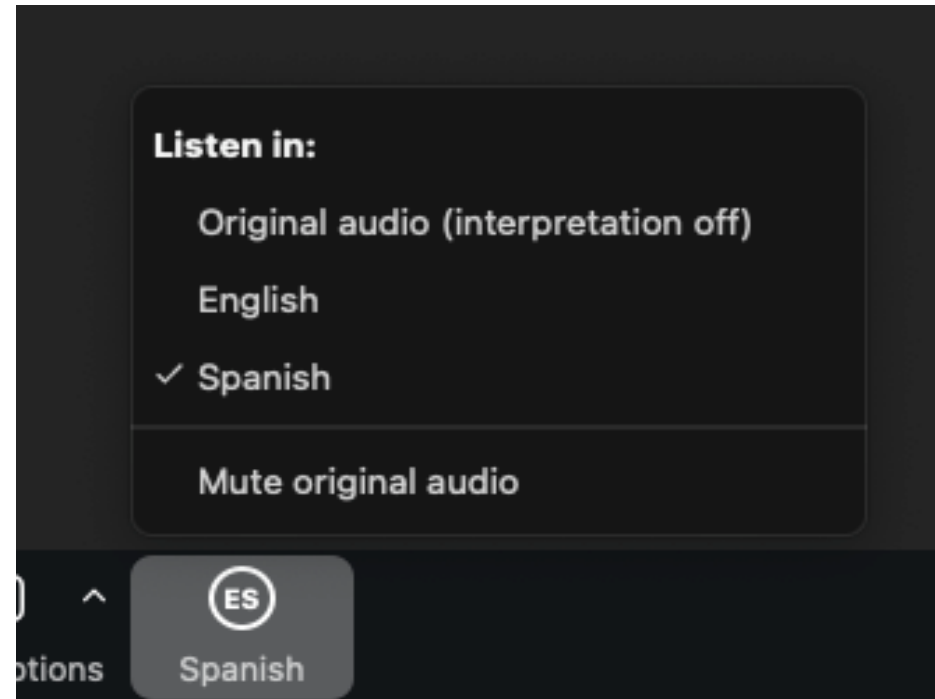


# Language Interpretation

Once the interpretation function is activated, click the globe icon at the bottom of your screen.



Then click Spanish to listen in that language.  
(To turn off interpretation, click "Original audio.")



# Objectives of the Webinar Series

- Raise awareness about young children and their families involved or at risk for involvement with the child welfare system
- Educate participants about the racial disparities in family separation from child welfare involvement
- Promote opportunities and upstream strategies for prevention for families and communities
- Provide examples of cross-systems collaboration on behalf of our youngest children

# Objectives for Webinar 5

- Learn what Illinois found out from two communities about barriers and challenges to enrolling children in foster care into early care and education programs.
- Understand how Washington State's CWELN program (Child Welfare Early Learning Navigator) uses a team approach to help families navigate both systems to get their children the services they need.
- Hear how Kansas created institutional linkages with the input of those with lived experience in their "KAN-LINK" program.



# Presenters



Amy Dworsky  
Chapin Hall  
Illinois



Jon Korfmacher  
Chapin Hall  
Illinois



Jennifer Welch-Buller  
KU-CPPR  
Kansas



Erin Moutain  
WA-DCYF  
Washington



Regan Pierce  
WA-DCYF  
Washington



Shelby Yada  
WA-DCYF  
Washington

# Who is represented here?

- Nearly 650 registrants
- 48 states and the District of Columbia

## You are from...

- State agencies: Children, Youth and Families; Health and Human Services; Public Instruction; Early Learning and Care; Education
- City and county government, including juvenile court
- Colleges and universities
- Center-based and home-based child care providers
- Community-based, regional, national, tribal organizations/nonprofits
- Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
- Children's museums
- Foundations and philanthropy

# You are...



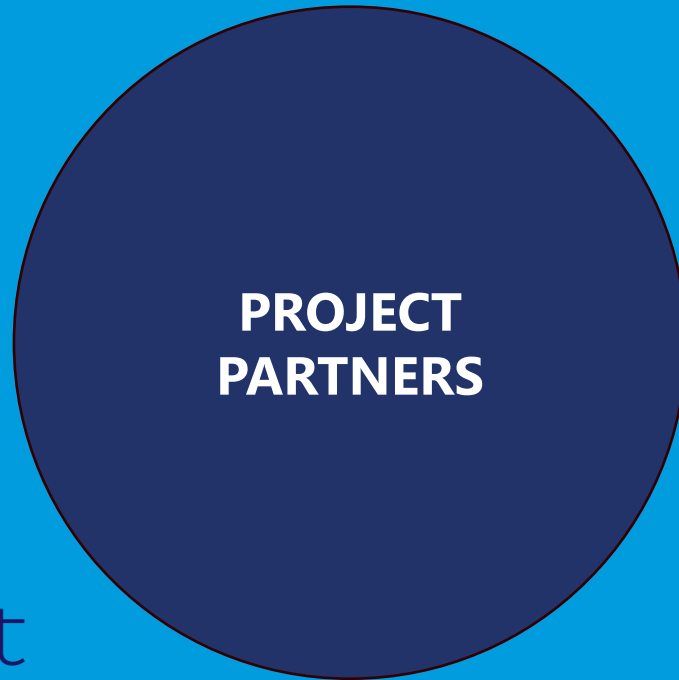


# How to Participate

1. Introduce yourself in the chat
2. Put your questions for the panelists in the chat or Q&A
3. Complete the survey at the end



# ILLINOIS EARLY LEARNING ACCESS PROJECT (IL ELAP)



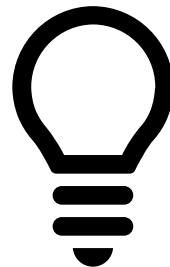
**Goal is to increase participation early care and education (ECE) programs among children in traditional or kinship foster care and whose families receive intact family services**



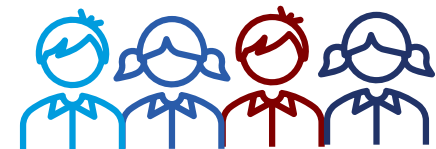
**Enhancing coordination  
& communication  
among CW workers ECE  
providers, & caregivers**



**Building  
infrastructure  
capacity**

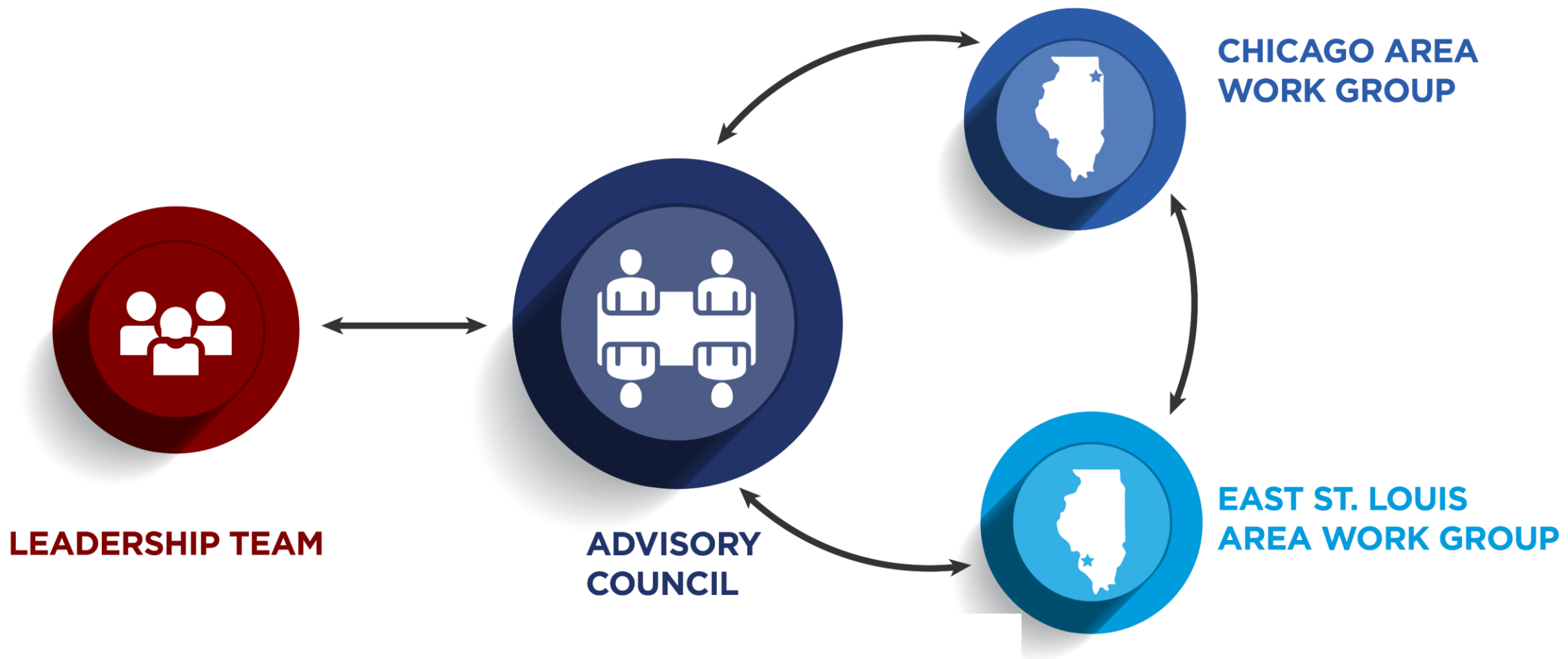


**Disseminating  
knowledge**



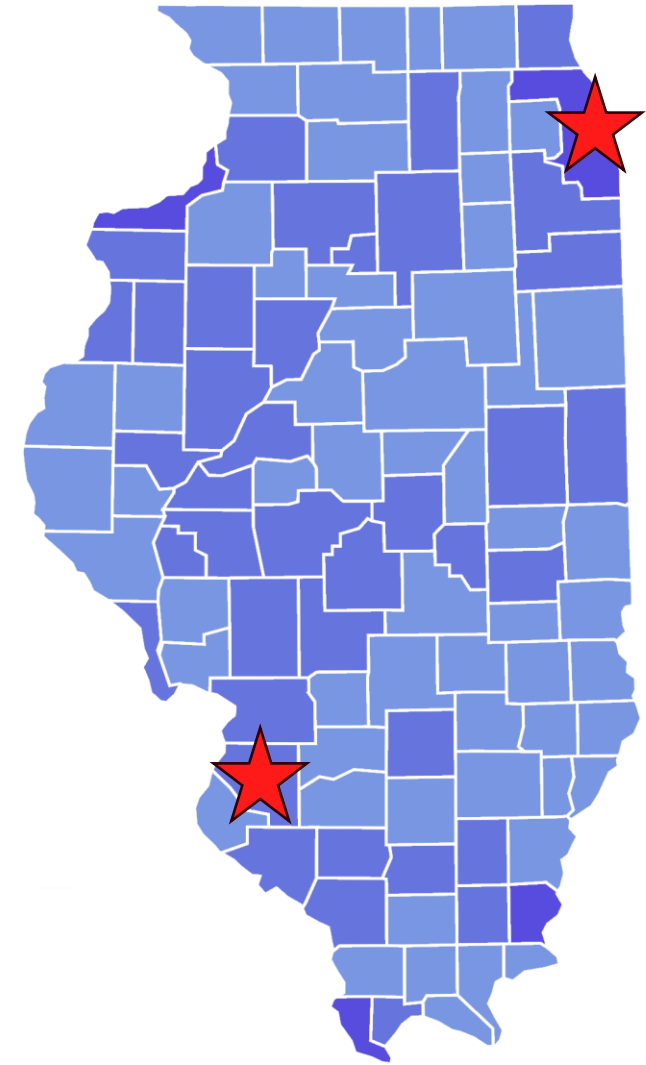
**Advancing access  
across groups**





## PROJECT COMPONENTS

- Key informant interviews and policy & practice scan ✓
- Human centered design (HCD) process involving caregivers, ECE providers, and CW caseworkers in Chicago and East St. Louis ✓
- Testing of “solutions” that emerged from HCD process in Chicago and East St. Louis
- Elicitation of feedback on the solutions in other communities



## FINDINGS FROM POLICY & PRACTICE SCAN

- 3 state agencies administer **ECE programs**
  - State Board of Education (Preschool for All & Early Childhood Special Education)
  - Department of Human Services (Childcare Assistance Program & Head Start Collaboration Office)
  - Department of Children & Family Services (childcare licensing)
- Rules & procedures to facilitate ECE enrollment of CW-system involved children vary by type of involvement & often misaligned with CCAP
- Data collection and reporting are inadequate
- Cross-system support is lacking
- New **Department of Early Childhood** will consolidate most programs in FY27

## FINDINGS FROM KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

- Enrolling children involved with the CW system in ECE programs can be difficult due to complex eligibility criteria and funding mechanisms as well as a lack of knowledge of policies and procedures among ECE providers and CW caseworkers
- Access to ECE programs is adversely affected by the limited availability, documentation requirements, and caregiver attitudes towards and experiences with ECE providers
- Consistent cross-system collaboration is lacking at both provider and system levels.



## HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN PROCESS

- Identified problems/pain points
  - Complex eligibility and funding rules are unclear to caregivers, ECE providers and CW workers
  - Distrust of systems/fear of being reported to CPS prevents caregivers from enrolling children in ECE programs
  - Lack of transportation limits access to ECE programs
- 2 of the 4 potential solutions will be tested in Chicago and East St. Louis
  - Increasing visibility and connection with DCFS School Readiness Teams
  - Helping families more easily identify local ECE programs for which they are eligible
- Currently working with DCFS to determine what will be feasible.

# NEXT STEPS



Piloting & testing proposed solutions



Evaluating HCD process and strategy development



Analyzing state administrative data to establish benchmarks against which future progress can be measured



Determining what can be scaled up to state level

This project is supported by the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families - Children's Bureau (ACYF-CB) within the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by the ACYF-CB, or the U.S. Government

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# KAN-LINK

KANSAS LINKING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR NURTURING KIDS

JENNY WELCH BULLER, KU-CPPR, MARCH 13, 2025





# PARTNERS



Center for Public  
Partnerships and Research

*Building Early Childhood-Child Welfare Partnerships to Support the Well-Being of Young Children, Families, and Caregivers projects are supported by Grant Number HHS-2023-ACF-ACYF-CA-0011 from the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families/Children's Bureau within the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Neither the Administration for Children and Families nor any of its components operate, control, are responsible for, or necessarily endorse this website (including, without limitation, its content, technical infrastructure, and policies, and any services or tools provided). The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Administration for Children and Families and the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families/Children's Bureau.*

# KAN-LINK VISION, AIM, AND FOCUS

## VISION

Ensure Kansas families can connect to the services they need to thrive safely in their communities.

## AIM

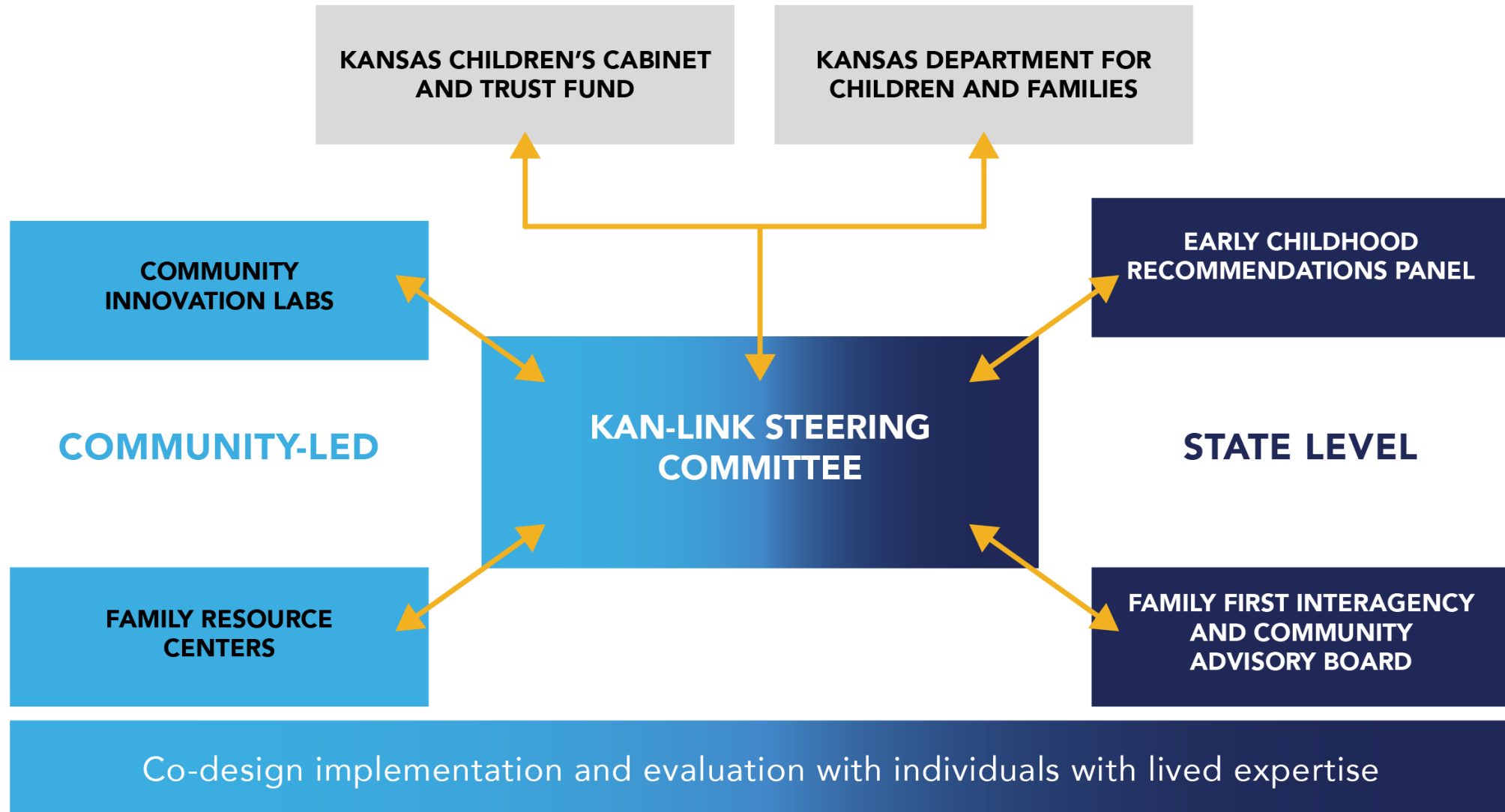
Increase access to early childhood ecosystem supports for all Kansas families to reduce the need for child welfare system intervention.

## FOCUS

Family-led policy scan and pilot design to:

- Identify and introduce opportunities to support family linkage to early childhood ecosystem.
- Test small practice changes in local contexts.

# SHARED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



# LIVED EXPERTS

- Six Lived Experts – compensated
- Quarterly cohort & monthly Steering Committee meetings
- Review date and set priorities
- Impact/findings
  - Gaps in policy intent vs. practice and family experiences
  - Where are gaps in intent/impact?

## Process & Principles





# LOCAL INNOVATION LABS

Family Resource Center (FRC) pilots for small tests of local practice change for connecting families to ECE services:

**Health  
Insurance  
Navigation  
Screening**

**Perinatal Care  
Linkage**

**K-12 Enrollment  
ECE Screening**

**WIC ECE  
Screening**

**Test, iterate, scale**



# EMERGENT FINDINGS

## Process

- Sequencing activities with lived experts ensure family perspective is centered in interpretation, actions, and recommendations

## Policy

- Formal processes connecting families to ECE in state and organizational policy are largely absent
- Technical and adaptive support are required for translating policy to practice
- DCF policy recommendation example: Resource sharing with individuals making reports of concern

## Practice

- Small adjustments in workflows that support cross-system connections are easily adopted and sustained (i.e., hotline training, resource letter, addition of checkbox)

Impact to Date



# QUESTIONS & CONTACT INFORMATION



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# Child Welfare Early Learning Navigator (CWELN) Program



Washington State Department of Social & Health Services  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**



# Linking CPS involved families to Early Learning and Family Support Programs

23,500 families with children under five become involved with CPS, fewer than half of these children were engaged in early learning services

Caseworkers' primary role is ensuring the physical safety of children, early learning services are not the focus during an assessment.

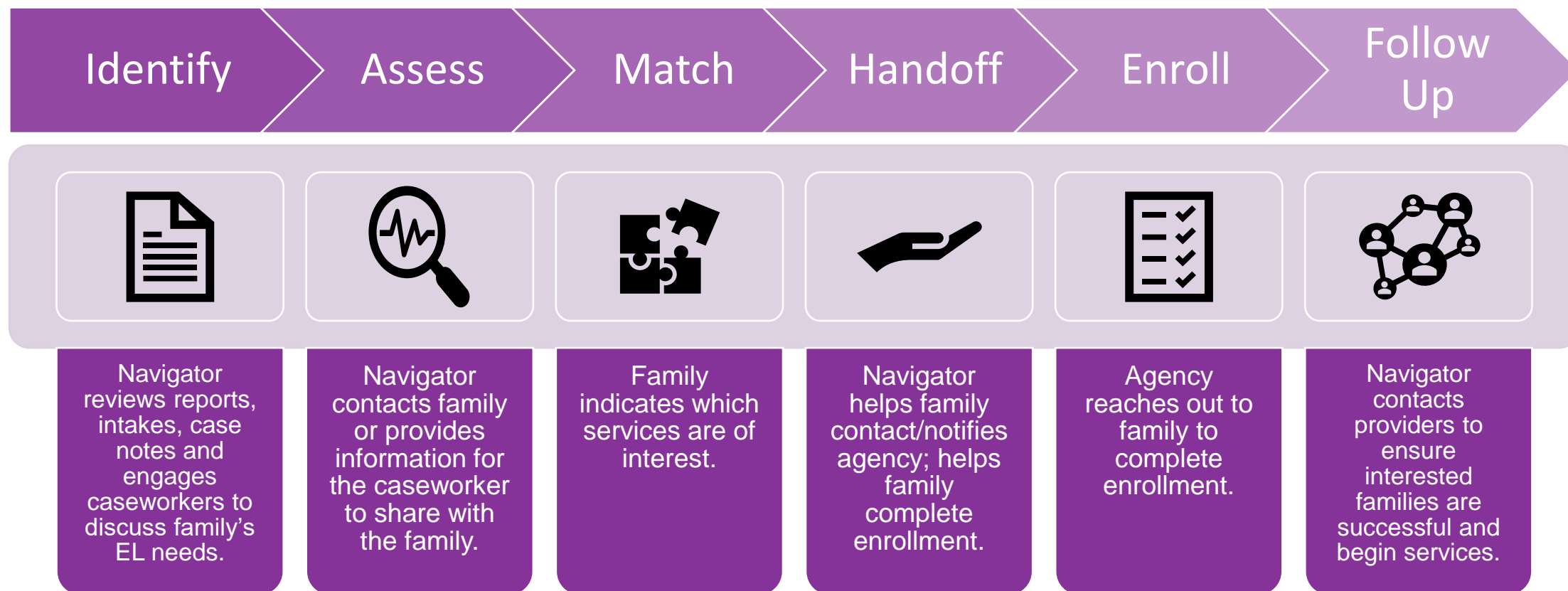
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# Who are the Navigators?

- They have expertise in both the child welfare and early learning systems – address this service referral gap by working alongside families and caseworkers to ensure interested families successfully start in services.
- They proactively identify and reach out to eligible families, assess early learning needs, and then match them with a service in their community.



# A Day in the Life of a Navigator



# Prioritizing Child Safety & Well-being through Policy



- CPS Investigations/FAR:
  - The assigned caseworker must complete a referral to Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) within **two business days** of identifying a child younger than three years old with a possible developmental delay.
  - Refer children to preschool, licensed childcare or home visiting services.
- CFWS:
  - Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET) will complete assessment for out of home placement and case worker is to follow recommendations and complete referrals.
  - Utilize protective language as a condition for return home.

# How we support case management with an Early Learning Lens

## Prevention

- Voluntary for parents and caregivers
- Respect the parents' choices
- Connection to services
- Provide protective factors for families
- Harm reduction

## Life of a case

- Supports active efforts
- CWELNS can help after case closure
- Support family wellbeing throughout the case
- Create natural supports and healthy communities
- Prevention services and additional safety plan participants



# Implementation Strategies in each Region



Tribal: Works on relationships with federally recognized tribes and early learning services to ensure families are receiving culturally appropriate services. Positioned in Office of Tribal Relations



Region 1: Provides field focused work, primarily in preventative services (CPS/FAR/In home) to Spokane County. Positioned on Regional Programs Team.



Region 2\*: Provides support for all case workers and children in out of home placement. Positioned on Regional Programs Team. \*2nd CWELN initially hired, funding through DCYF



Region 3: Working closely with the SEAS Program of Whatcom County, a newly developed referral system



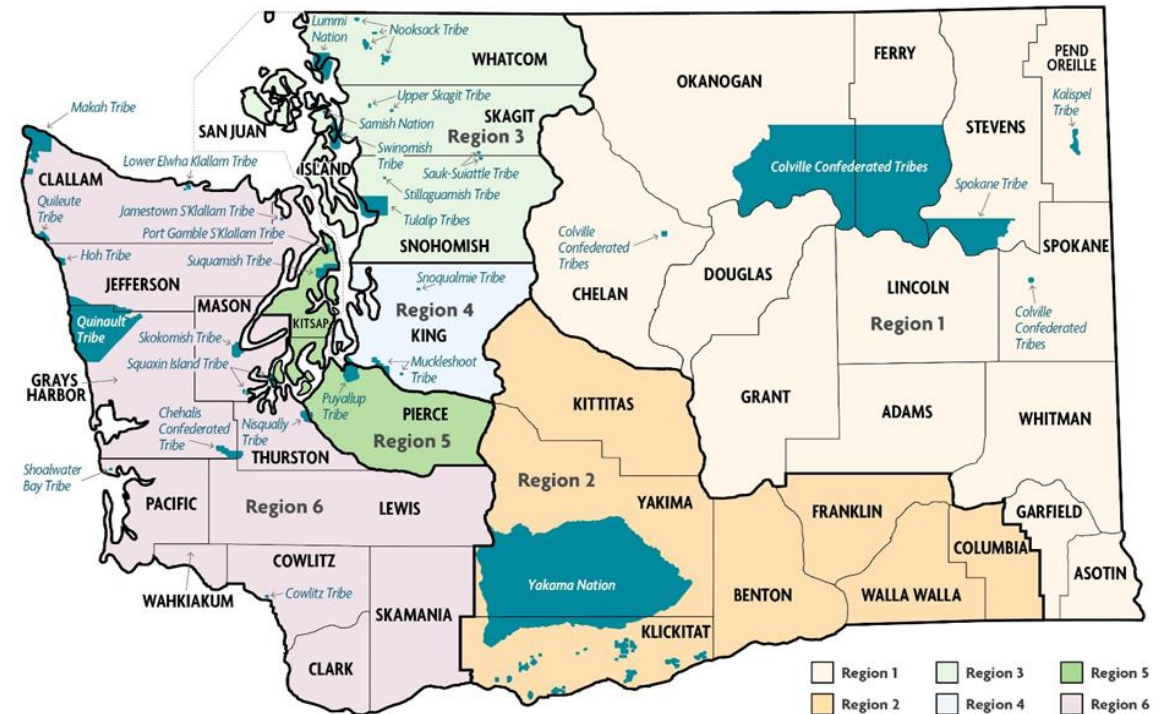
Region 4\*: Provides case consultations through mandatory case staffing's. Positioned in Partnership, Prevention and Services Unit within Head Quarters.



Region 5: Provides support for preventative services. Positioned in Partnership, Prevention and Services Unit within Head Quarters.



Region 6\*: Provides field focused work, primarily with preventative services (CPS/FAR/In home) to 7 of the 11 counties. Positioned with Regional Programs Team.





# Our Success Strategies

- Relationships with case workers and providing guides
- Connections with community partners and involvement in local early learning coalitions
- Expertise in Early Learning and Child Welfare
- Client engagement as a neutral party
- Implementing trainings with community agencies and case workers
- Consultations on difficult cases

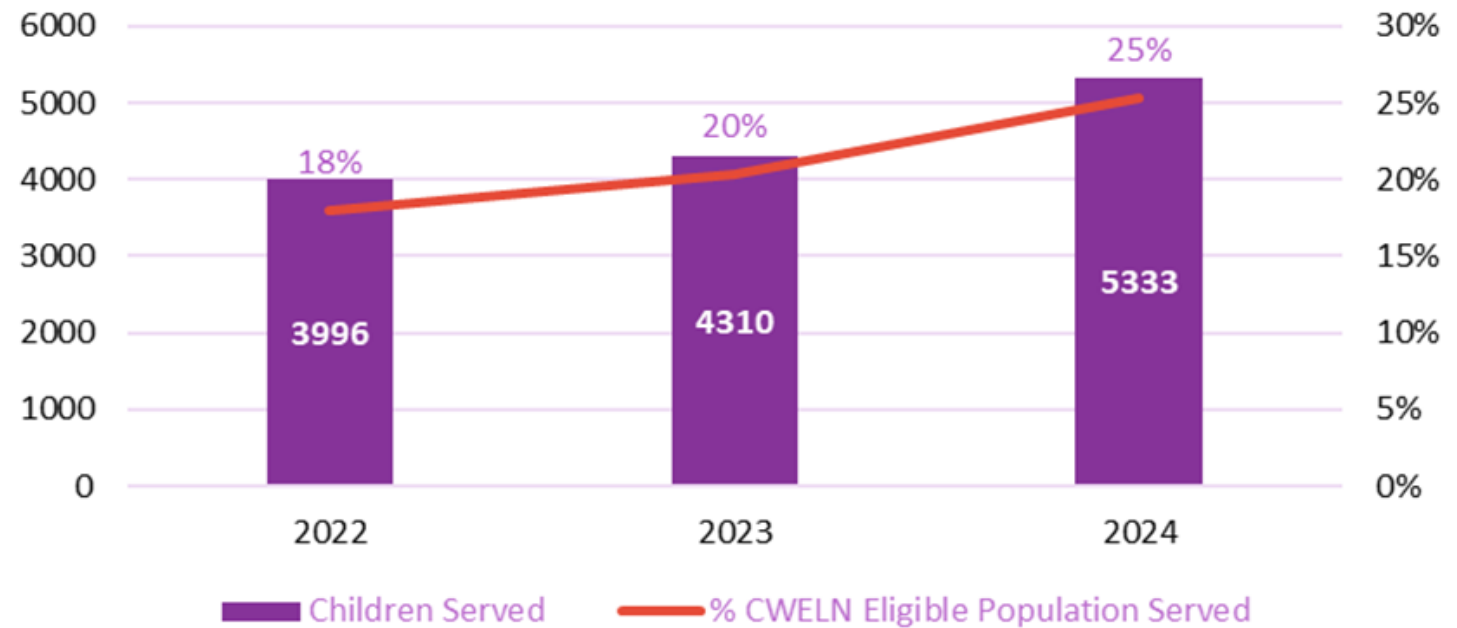


# Our Impact

The CWELN team has assessed and connected with over 5,000 child welfare involved families 2024.

- Childcare – 12 months of free childcare through working connections
- ECEAP / Head Start / Early Head Start
- ESIT / Child Find
- Home visiting

CY2022-2024: Eligible Children Served by the Child Welfare Early Learning Navigators (CWELN)



*Note: Eligible children are any child aged 0-5 with an active child welfare intake. Served children represent families contacted by a navigator. Although this graph represents statewide eligibility, navigators only provide support in assigned child welfare offices.*



# What is next?

- Collect and analyze data that informs next locations for NEW navigator positions throughout Washington State
- Gain access to more early learning systems to streamline enrollment and reduce barriers (Immunization records, childcare licensing information, etc.)
- Continuing to highlight navigator value and support further implementation across systems

Thank you for joining us today.

Save the date for the final webinar  
in the Child Welfare series:  
April 3, 2025

Be sure to complete the survey!



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