

# Build

INITIATIVE

Strong Foundations For  
Our Youngest Children

## Moving Away from Family Separation:

Cross-Systems Strategies  
to Support Young Children  
at Risk of Child Welfare  
Involvement

March 2026



## Introduction

Children who are involved in the child welfare system, especially those under the age of five, are among the most vulnerable. Research has shown that access to high-quality early childhood programs and services, along with coordination between families and staff in both the child welfare and early childhood systems, is crucial for the future success of these young children.

Since 2020, BUILD Initiative has explored how the child welfare system and other early childhood systems (i.e., health, mental health, housing, early intervention, transportation, economic support, early care, and education and all the child-and-family serving systems) can align and work together to achieve better outcomes and families. In the process, BUILD has identified several states that have developed promising programs, policies, and strategies that can inspire other states to act.

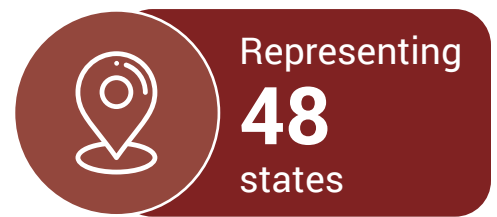
A six-part webinar series, offered through BUILD's Prenatal-to-Three Capacity-Building Hub between October 2024 and April 2025, continued to highlight successful state strategies.

## Webinar Series Goals

- 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.

## Reach and Impact

Much like our first webinar series in 2022, this series offered some of BUILD's best attended webinars. More than 2,400 people participated in the six webinars, representing 48 states, District of Columbia, and Virgin Islands.



Based on positive post-session evaluations and the high levels of activity and engagement in the chat box, we feel confident that these issues resonate with state, local, and national leaders.

The webinar series provided an opportunity to highlight innovative strategies, policies, and initiatives from nine states. We featured presenters from Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Washington.

We also highlighted the work of several national partner organizations, academic institutions, foundations, and research organizations providing support to the states doing this important work. We heard from leaders representing the Center for the Study of Social Policy, Chapin Hall, Chicago State University, Erikson Institute, Linchpin Strategies, National Center for Children in Poverty, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, SRI Education, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, and ZERO TO THREE.

## Webinars



### Two Systems, One Vision:

### Quality Early Care and Education for Children in Foster Care

*Presenters: Nikki Edge, Ph.D., University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences; Sheila Smith, Ph.D., National Center for Children in Poverty; Todd Grindal, E.D., SRI Education; and Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D., BUILD (moderator).*

Research shows that young children involved in the child welfare system face significant risks related to their social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health development. However, when these children have access to high-quality early care and education (ECE), they experience improved developmental outcomes and greater school readiness. Despite this, data from 2019 indicates that only 43.7 percent of young children in foster care are enrolled in ECE programs. Why is this the case, and what can be done to change it? Researchers in Arkansas are actively seeking to answer these questions.

In Arkansas, a “learn, innovate, and improve” model is helping researchers understand the barriers to and facilitators of access to high-quality early childhood programs and help the workforce care for children who demonstrate signs of trauma. And we learned that Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation is an important support in classrooms for improving outcomes for children in foster care.

[View webinar resources.](#)

NOV  
24  
2024

## Building Upstream Support Strategies for PN-3 Child Welfare Prevention

*Presenters: Shadi Houshyar, Center for the Study of Social Policy; Mary E. Coogan, Esq., Advocates for Children of New Jersey; Jennifer Skala, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation; and Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D., BUILD (moderator).*

Thriving Families Safer Children (TFSC) is a national public, private, and philanthropic partnership established to assist jurisdictions in creating a more just and equitable system that benefits all children and families and breaks harmful intergenerational cycles of trauma and poverty by focusing the child welfare system on primary prevention. With funding from the Pritzker Children's Initiative, PN-3 coalitions in New Jersey, New Mexico, and Nebraska are working with TFSC to bring the PN-3 perspective to state and community child welfare system reform efforts and explore prevention strategies.

This webinar presented the experiences of two states participating in this effort, New Jersey and Nebraska, as they work to build a continuum of prevention to strengthen families and reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment while also working on programmatic and policy transformations of their child welfare system that directly affect the PN-3 population.

The webinar also included information from partners at the Center for the Study of Social Policy about their blueprint for equity-centered, anti-racist policies that support the health and wellbeing of children and families, and their partnership with states engaged in efforts to develop a continuum of supports for young children and families.

[View webinar resources.](#)

JAN  
17  
2025

## From Mandated Reporting to Mandated Supporting: What Will It Take?

*Presenters: Darneshia Allen, ZERO TO THREE; Dr. Tamara Hunter, DSW, Family First Prevention Services, Mandated Supporting Initiative, LA County DCFS; Dr. Susan Savage, Child Care Resource Center California; Cynthia Verdugo, Child Care Resource Center California; and Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D., BUILD (moderator).*

Most of us have come to accept a narrative about mandated reporting – although it may be flawed, the status quo is a necessary evil to keep certain children safe. Presenters on this webinar believe this narrative needs to shift and that there is a better way. They provided a national perspective on why reform of the mandated reporting system matters and the importance of different pathways to assessing risk. They presented an alternative model, the Mandated Supporting Initiative currently underway in Los Angeles County, California.

[View webinar resources.](#)

FEB  
13  
2025

## Home Visiting and Child Welfare: From Policy to Nuts and Bolts

*Presenters: Cat MacDonald, Linchpin Strategies, LLC; Kimberly A. Mann, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., Chicago State University; David Reed, MSW, LCSW, CSAYC, Consultant | Human Services Group; Pfeffer Eisen, Erikson Institute; and Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D., BUILD (moderator).*

This webinar discussed how states can provide home visits to families before they come to the attention of the child welfare system, and to families in the system whose children are still at home. Participants heard “on-the-ground” perspectives from two states, Indiana and Illinois, about how they reach out to and engage families in home visiting and the effectiveness of home visiting for preventing child welfare involvement. They also heard from a national organization leader about barriers to cross-systems partnerships and how states can overcome these challenges.

[View webinar resources.](#)

MAR  
17  
2025

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

*Presenters: Amy Dworsky, Chapin Hall, Illinois; Jon Korfmacher, Chapin Hall, Illinois; Jennifer Welch-Buller, KU-CPPR, Kansas; Erin Moutin, WA-DCYF, Washington; Regan Pierce, WA-DCYF, Washington; Shelby Yada, WA-DCYF, Washington; and Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D., BUILD (moderator).*

Traditionally, the early childhood and the child welfare systems have operated in silos, with little alignment of programs, services, and even communications. This webinar offers some examples of how three states – Illinois, Washington, and Kansas - are working to build bridges between the two systems and build the cross-systems collaboration that will ensure that families get the support they need and reduce the risks of family separation.

[View webinar resources.](#)

APR  
3  
2025

## Plan of Safe Care: Making Safety Policy a Strategy for Child and Family Well-Being

*Presenters: Erin Having, ZERO TO THREE; Maria Zdieblowski, LICSW, Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Kate Agyei Yeboah, MPH, Help Me Grow WA; Alysia Chang, Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare; Kelli Sutton, Illuminate CO; and Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D., BUILD (moderator).*

Most new parents leave the hospital and enter the sometimes-scary world of being responsible for the safety and well-being of an infant. For parents who struggle with substance abuse and addiction, underlying stressors can make an already challenging time more difficult. A Plan of Safe Care is a family-centered plan designed to promote the safety and well-being of birthing parents and their infants with prenatal substance exposure.

Participants in this webinar learned how two states, Washington and Colorado, designed preventive strategies for their Plans of Safe Care through public-private partnerships and the input of parent voices.

[View webinar resources.](#)