

# **A CHILD WELFARE RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE STATE OF ILLINOIS**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Prepared by the**

**Office of the Research Director  
State of Illinois Department of Children  
and Family Services**

**and the**

**Children and Family Research Center  
School of Social Work  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

**November 1998**

The Children and Family Research Center is an independent research organization created jointly by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to provide an independent evaluation of outcomes for children who are the responsibility of the Department. Funding for this work is provided by the Department of Children and Family Services, under a cooperative agreement detailing the independent reporting responsibilities of the Center.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"A Child Welfare Research Agenda for the State of Illinois" (Illinois Child Welfare Agenda) was prepared by the Office of the Department of Children and Family Services Research Director and the Children and Family Research Center of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It is a product of many discussions with DCFS workers, supervisors, and administrators; various advisory groups; child welfare service provider agencies; advocacy groups; LANs; foster parents; researchers; and experts in the field. The participants and the process used to create the Illinois Child Welfare Research Agenda are detailed in the full report.

The DCFS Office of the Research Director and the Center have attempted to produce an agenda that incorporates the needs, concerns, and views of all of the varied respondents and contributors who participated in the agenda building process. While this has not been a simple task, we believe that the unified Illinois Child Welfare Research Agenda does reflect a consensus about the most pressing research questions for the Department's work with the children and families it serves. We would like to thank all of the individuals and groups who dedicated their time and energy to building the unified Illinois Child Welfare Research Agenda. The Department and the Center will continue dialogue with these and other interested parties to ensure that research activities are fully integrated with present and future practice and policy needs in Illinois.

*To receive "A Child Welfare Research Agenda for the State of Illinois: Final Report," which includes brief papers reviewing current issues in the field and the status of services in Illinois, please e-mail the Children and Family Research Center at [cfrc@uiuc.edu](mailto:cfrc@uiuc.edu) or call (217) 333-5837.*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The delivery of public child welfare services occurs within a legal-administrative context that requires the careful balancing of competing private interests and social values: family privacy v. child protection, family preservation v. state custody, least restrictive care v. community safety, and parental rights v. permanency planning. In pursuing goals of child safety, family permanency, and child well-being, it is essential that state officials be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of public interventions (substantive accountability) and certify that service provision occurs in a socially approved manner (procedural accountability).

The Governor, the General Assembly, the courts, federal officials, advocates, voters, and consumers all need to know that public child welfare interventions are worth the taxpayer investment and potential losses in family privacy and child developmental opportunity. They also need to be confident that the provision of services meets legal standards of adequacy and fairness. Providing these assurances must be a high administrative priority of public child welfare agencies and organizations.

## 1.1 Research Based Child Welfare Practice

There are several ways to generate knowledge about child welfare services and guide state or voluntary intervention: recognizing and upholding traditions of service, deferring to the mandates of law and policy, and evaluating our own and others' experiences with children and families. While each of these approaches are valuable for numerous reasons, these mechanisms are not sufficient to justify or defend spending of taxpayer dollars, if we are not convinced about the effectiveness of child welfare services and the outcomes they produce.

An important basis for assuring public trust in the child welfare system is the application of scientific methods to the evaluation of service effectiveness and to the monitoring of service delivery. The research method relies on collecting and analyzing information about services and sometimes using statistics to test hypotheses established at the outset of a given study. It relies on a careful sequence of activities that can be duplicated (as much as possible) by other people, thus it is a public way of knowing about service effectiveness. Research stands for: 1) reliable, valid methods of knowledge testing and 2) objectivity and impartiality of judgment. Both sets of scientific values are increasingly related to people's willingness to believe official claims.

“A Child Welfare Research Agenda for the State of Illinois” (Illinois Child Welfare Research Agenda) was created jointly by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Children and Family Research Center (Center) to set forth priorities for research in child welfare for the state of Illinois. This agenda will be used to guide state and Center research planning for the coming years. DCFS and Center resources (personnel and fiscal) will focus on the research outlined in this document. In addition, any research conducted with DCFS or the Center must address these

research priorities. The current Research Agenda will be amended periodically as needed (no more than annually) and completely revised every three to five years.

## 1.2 Creating the Research Agenda

### 1.2.1 *Consensus Building*

Many individuals and groups have been involved in discussions and requests for input on the Illinois Child Welfare Research Agenda since October 1996. Discussion participants generated nearly 150 research questions. They were categorized under headings reflecting the five service categories of child welfare intervention: child protection, family maintenance, substitute care, family reunification, and permanency planning. In addition, a specific target population was selected for attention. To be included in the Research Agenda, specific target populations must have pressing specialized needs and have current relevance to DCFS and child welfare practice generally. This Research Agenda focuses on Substance Exposed Infants.

Recommendations for research have been collected through ongoing meetings with child welfare professionals and advocates in Illinois since October 1996. A formal solicitation process, conducted during the spring and summer of 1998, included the DCFS Office of the Director, DCFS Deputy Directors and Executive Staff, the DCFS Advisory Committee, the Center's Advisory Board, and members of the Child Care Association of Illinois.

After questions were identified, respondents were asked to prioritize research questions pertaining to outcomes and service delivery within the identified categories of service. Questions developed about "Outcomes," which refers to case status and/or well-being issues, may also address explanations of and trends related to these outcomes. The "Service Delivery" questions defined generally pertain to evaluation of practice, specific programs, and policy initiatives.

During the prioritization process, respondents were also asked to identify any additional research questions that were important and not already included in the list. The additional questions received were then reviewed and integrated, as appropriate, into the agenda.

In the final review, where there were gaps between the priorities selected and the DCFS or Center mission, a few items were added to bridge these gaps. Most often, the additions include questions about the link of the research question to DCFS practice and to identifying effectiveness of DCFS interventions. Questions identified and prioritized for the report may also have been elaborated with examples of how larger research questions could be broken down into smaller, more specific inquiries.

### ***1.2.2 Cultural Competence and Child Welfare Research in Illinois***

An underlying theme of all of these research priorities is the importance of cultural competence. The children and families served are diverse in many ways (for example, in race/ethnicity, geography, and the types of problems requiring resolution). Cultural relevance and competence must be integral to DCFS and Center research. This requires particular attention to the impact of race, ethnicity, geography, and Departmental regions in all child welfare research studies.

Cultural relevance and competence will be ensured through an ongoing review of research design, instruments, and research findings. Principal reviewers will be persons of the particular culture, race, or ethnicity most likely to be affected by the research findings. Sensitivity to cultural differences will be built into research designs by integrating recommendations of the reviewers in the planning, method, instrumentation, implementation, analysis and reporting of the work.

## **1.3 Organization of the Executive Summary**

The Illinois Child Welfare Research Agenda lists the state's top research priorities as determined through the prioritization process described above. The complete list of suggested items and topics entitled "Research Questions and Prioritization Results" can be found in Appendix B of the full report.

The research priorities in this report are organized by "Outcomes" and "Service Delivery" as described above. Italics in the prioritized lists indicate where selected items were elaborated or clarified. "Current Related Projects" represents both research projects approved by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Institutional Review Board between 1995 and 1998 and Children and Family Research Center research projects, 1997–99.

The project descriptions provided reflect information that was available at the time of publication, therefore some projects are described more fully than others. DCFS and the Center are currently in the process of completing automated tracking systems that will provide easier access to this data in the future.

Some of the Center's outcomes reports and projects are not listed under a specific service category as they cross all DCFS services. Three of these are: "Report on Outcomes for Children Who Are the Responsibility of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services," "Determining the Accuracy of Data in the Administrative Database," and "National Study of Outcome Measurement in Public Child Welfare Services." These and all other Center projects and products to date are outlined in "Integrating Research and Practice: Mission and Work 1997–99." Reports on Center projects, including the outcomes papers, are available from the Center by calling or e-mailing the contacts listed in the front of this document.



## 2 CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES (CPS) RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Members of the DCFS Advisory Committee, the Children and Family Research Center's Advisory Board, Child Care Association, and the DCFS Deputy Directors and Executive Staff ranked the following areas as the state's top research priorities. Staff of the Office of the Research Director of DCFS and the Center compiled and edited these final priorities. Originally, there were seven child protective services (CPS) outcomes questions and ten service delivery questions presented for prioritization and comment. As noted in the Introduction, in some cases additional questions were developed to elaborate the selected research priorities.

### 2.1 CPS Outcomes for Children and Families

#### 2.1.1 *Domestic Violence And Child Maltreatment*

##### **Research Priorities**

- What is the relationship between domestic violence and child maltreatment in Illinois?

*The following questions are an elaboration of this priority.*

- How many children who come to the attention of the Department come from domestically abusive environments?
- How does ongoing domestic violence affect SORs? Indicated SORs?
- In what ways do we currently respond to domestic violence and how effective is this response?

#### 2.1.2 *Welfare Reform*

##### **Research Priorities**

- How will Illinois' changes in welfare policy impact DCFS caseload dynamics?

*For example:*

- Is income loss due to TANF sanctions associated with increased reporting of child maltreatment? Increased investigations? Higher rates of indicated reports? Increased SORs? Indicated SORs?

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## Current Related Projects

### Does Income Loss Increase the Risk of Involvement With the Child Welfare System for Families on Welfare? (CFRC)

Kristen Shook, Doctoral Student, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

This study evaluates whether a family's decrease in AFDC income due to sanctioning places the children in the family at a greater risk for substantiated reports of maltreatment.

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## 2.1.3 *Subsequent Indicated Reports*

### Research Priorities

- What factors are associated with subsequent indicated reports after case opening?
- Do children with indicated reports subsequent to case opening differ by type of living arrangement: in their families of origin, in home of relative, in foster care, in adoptive homes, in specialized foster care, in group homes, in institutions?

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## Current Related Projects

### Child Safety in Intact Families (CFRC)

Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

As part of outcomes reporting, the Center is planning a study of child safety in families receiving intact family services from DCFS.

### Reporting Frequencies of Child Abuse Events (CFRC)

Douglas G. Simpson, Professor, Department of Statistics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Peter Imrey, Professor, Department of Statistics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Olga Geling, Graduate Assistant, Department of Statistics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Susan Butkus, Graduate Assistant, Department of Statistics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The investigators developed statistical approaches for monitoring and evaluating child welfare outcomes in foster care programs.

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## 2.2 CPS Service Delivery

### 2.2.1 *Reasonable Efforts*

#### Research Priorities

- How are “reasonable efforts” to prevent placement defined in the field?
- What do “reasonable efforts” mean to workers on the front lines?

### 2.2.2 *Defining Maltreatment and Injury*

#### Research Priorities

- Are there specific definitions of child maltreatment and injury that can be used uniformly in the field?

*and*

- Are there standards for determining these definitions?

### 2.2.3 *Factors Affecting Reporting and Placement*

#### Research Priorities

- What social, cultural, and economic factors account for racial and ethnic disparities in the population rates at which children are reported to the Department and later removed from their families and placed into substitute care?

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## Current Related Projects

### Decision Making in Foster Care Placements (CFRC)

Gardenia Harris, Doctoral Student, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

John Poertner, Professor and Director of Outcomes Reporting, Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This study will focus on factors caseworkers use in making the decision to place a child. Data drawn from case files and the DCFS Integrated Database will be used to compare decisions to place a child in substitute care versus to leave a child in an intact family.

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## 2.2.4 *Decision Making in Child Protective Services*

### Research Priorities

- What factors best predict the safety of a child, in each type of living arrangement?
- Did the implementation of the CERAP protocol result in reduced rates of recurrence of abuse and neglect within 60 days of child protective investigation for families diverted from DCFS involvement?
- Do CERAP safety plans address safety factors checked?
- What interventions are most effective in ensuring child safety in different types of family circumstances?

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### Current Related Projects

#### CERAP Evaluation Project: FY 1997–1998 (CFRC)

Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Office of the Research Director, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Office of Quality Assurance, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

This evaluation project replicated the prior year's study and conducted an additional study on the impact of using the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol with intact families where children are not placed outside the home.

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## 2.2.5 *Effectiveness of Service Delivery*

### Research Priorities

- How will Front-End Redesign impact service delivery and child safety?

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### Current Related Projects

#### Front End Redesign Evaluation Plan (DCFS)

Helaine Hornby, Hornby, Zeller & Associates, Inc., Troy, New York

Dennis Zeller, Hornby, Zeller & Associates, Inc., Troy, New York

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### **3 FAMILY MAINTENANCE RESEARCH PRIORITIES**

Members of the DCFS Advisory Committee, the Children and Family Research Center's Advisory Board, Child Care Association, and the DCFS Deputy Directors and Executive Staff, ranked the following areas as the state's top research priorities. Staff of the office of the Research Director of DCFS and the Center compiled and edited these final priorities. Originally, there were two family maintenance outcomes questions and eighteen service delivery questions presented for prioritization. As noted in the introduction, in some cases additional questions were developed to elaborate the selected research priorities.

#### **3.1 Family Maintenance Outcomes for Children and Families**

##### **3.1.1 *Intact Family Services***

###### **Research Priorities**

- What is the average length of time from intact case closure to subsequent oral report? Indicated subsequent oral report? Child's re-entry into care?

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###### **Current Related Projects**

See "CPS-Subsequent Indicated Reports" projects in Section 2.1.3.

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#### **3.2 Family Maintenance Service Delivery**

##### **3.2.1 *Effectiveness of Department Interventions***

###### **Research Priorities**

- What is the effectiveness of specific interventions used in intact family services?  
*This priority is elaborated below.*
- How do the structure and delivery of specific interventions affect case outcomes?
- Do outcomes differ for cases receiving different types and intensities of services?
- What is the effectiveness of specific interventions used in intact family service?

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## **Current Related Projects**

### **Illinois Family Conference Model, Innovations in Practice: The Application of Task-Centered and Mediation Methodologies to Family Group Conferences (DCFS)**

Denise Kane, Inspector General, Office of the Inspector General, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and Doctoral Student, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

### **The Use of Wraparound Planning Will Reduce the Number of Children Who Enter Residential Care (DCFS)**

Joel Lamz, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **The Relationship Between Social Support and Successful Community Treatment in Adolescents at Risk for Psychiatric Hospitalization (DCFS)**

Sheryl Phyllips, Master's Student, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

### **Court Interventions in Child Neglect Cases (DCFS)**

Katherine Robinson, Master's Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **What Works Best for Whom? A Closer Look at Intensive Family Preservation Services (DCFS)**

Julia Littell, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research, Bryn Mawr College

The purpose of this study is to determine whether anything can be learned from the Family First experience regarding the types of services that are most likely to be effective in certain kinds of cases.

### **The Family Centered Services Initiative in Illinois: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Implementation, Process, and Impact (DCFS and CFRC)**

Doug Thomson, Research Affiliate, Children and Family Research Center

Susan Wells, Professor and Director, Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This evaluation examines the implementation and impact of the Family Centered Services Initiative. Researchers are examining how the effort has worked at the statewide, local, and children/family levels.

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### 3.2.2 *Client Need and Service Provisions*

#### **Research Priorities**

- What is the relationship of service provision to client needs?

*This priority is elaborated below.*

- What services are provided?
- Who receives what services?

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#### **Current Related Projects**

##### **Comprehensive Care Services Model for Infants With Sickle Cell Disease Identified by Newborn Screening (DCFS)**

Sudha Rao, Vice Chairman, Department of Pediatrics, Cook County Children's Hospital

##### **Training Rural Child Welfare Workers for Service to Families With Maternal Mental Illness (CFRC)**

Martha Raske, Professor of Social Work, Southern Illinois University

Because mental illness is a significant problem in DCFS families, and represents a serious threat to children's safety, this study was supported to examine what DCFS workers know about mental illness. The researcher proposes a series of training objectives to increase worker effectiveness in providing services to mentally-ill mothers.

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## 4 SUBSTITUTE CARE RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Members of the DCFS Advisory Committee, the Children and Family Research Center's Advisory Board, Child Care Association, and the DCFS Deputy Directors and Executive Staff, ranked the following areas as the state's top research priorities. Staff of the office of the Research Director of DCFS and the Center compiled and edited these final priorities. Originally, there were twenty-three substitute care outcomes questions and thirty-seven service delivery questions presented for prioritization and comment. As noted in the introduction, in some cases additional questions were developed to elaborate the selected research priorities.

### 4.1 Substitute Care Outcomes for Children and Families

#### 4.1.1 *Well-being*

##### Research Priorities

- What is the general well-being of children in substitute care and how does well-being vary by living arrangement?
- What accounts for well-being deficits of children in care?

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### Current Related Projects

#### Depressed Children's Friendships (DCFS)

Carol Rockhill, Doctoral Student, Department of Human and Community Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

#### Coping Mechanisms Associated With Sexual Abuse: Psychological, Developmental, and Behavioral Factors (DCFS)

Cassandra Kisiel, Doctoral Student, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Mental Health Services and Policy Programs, Northwestern University Medical School

The purpose of this research is to explore the psychological and behavioral impact of sexual abuse, including maladaptive and more adaptive coping mechanisms, among children and adolescents and their relationship to the degree of conflict or cohesiveness in the family system.

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**Current Related Projects (continued)****Comparing Adolescent Health and Well-being Across Populations in Care: Family Preservation, Family Foster Care, and Group Home/Institutional Care (CFRC)**

Sandra Altshuler, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The purpose of this study is to compare adolescent health and well-being across populations in various types of care using a standardized instrument from public health.

**Comparing Measures of Health and Well-being in Foster Care: The Child Health and Illness Profile vs. the Child and Family Assessment Scale (CFRC)**

Sandra Altshuler, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This study draws on Altshuler's study comparing adolescent health and well-being across populations in care by comparing standardized measures used in the first project with caseworker administered assessments to develop a valid and expedient way of measuring child well-being in practice.

**The Educational Experiences and Outcomes of Children and Youth in Foster Care Receiving Educational Services From Chicago Public Schools (CFRC)**

Stephen Haymes, Associate Professor, School of Education, DePaul University

The investigator will analyze school level information available through the Chicago Public School Office of Accountability to identify and examine problems that may be school-based, rather than ward or DCFS-based. Study plans also include exploration of significant school characteristics that possibly contribute to academic problems experienced by DCFS wards.

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## **Current Related Projects (continued)**

### **Children of Color in Foster Care (CFRC)**

Maria Vidal de Haymes, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Loyola University

Jerome Blakemore, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Loyola University

Shirley Simon, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Loyola University

The researchers will identify and review the current experiences of children and families in transracial placements and will define potential services to enhance transracial placements.

### **Development of a Statewide System of Assessment and Review for Foster Children With Special Needs (CFRC)**

Mary Ann Hartnett, Research Associate, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

The investigator is conducting research that will assist in the establishment of a statewide assessment and review system for children in specialized foster care. The goal of the system will be to provide DCFS with uniform, reliable, and valid information on the needs of individual children placed in specialized foster care, the intensity of their needs, and the level of care that is required to meet their exceptional needs.

### **An Evaluation of Mentoring Relationships Among Foster Youth**

Wendy Haight, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Jean E. Rhodes, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The findings of this project described the role of positive mentoring relationships in the development of youth who live in foster care.

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### 4.1.2 *Long Term Outcomes for Wards*

#### **Research Priorities**

- What are the long-term outcomes for wards after they leave Department care?
- What would a longitudinal study of wards leaving care demonstrate?

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#### **Current Related Projects**

##### **Assessment of Post Care Experiences of Youth Exiting DCFS Care Due to Age (CFRC)**

Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The goal of this project is to explore the post care experiences of children aging out of DCFS care. It is a companion project to another study conducted in Wisconsin at the Institute for Research on Poverty by Mark Courtney and Irv Piliavin.

##### **Ready or Not Here They Come: Are Foster Youth Adequately Prepared for Independence? (DCFS)**

Lana West, Master's Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

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### 4.1.3 *Mental Health*

#### **Research Priorities**

- What are the types of medications wards are taking, the behaviors for which they are prescribed, and the effectiveness of those medications?
- Do the number of wards prescribed psychotropic medications differ by region and ethnicity?
- What number of wards are prescribed and taking psychotropic medications?

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#### **Current Related Projects**

##### **Prevalence of Medication Therapy in Children (DCFS)**

Judith Stoewe, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Institute for Juvenile Research, University of Illinois at Chicago

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#### 4.1.4 *Delinquency and Violent Offenses*

##### **Research Priorities**

- How many wards have delinquency charges and are later charged (after the age of 13) with serious violent felonies? How much later? In what statuses? How do these numbers compare with the general child population?

#### 4.1.5 *Client Perspectives and Outcomes for Children*

##### **Research Priorities**

- How do parents with children in state custody experience their involvement with DCFS?
- How do their perspectives affect their children?
- How do foster parents experience their involvement with DCFS?

*In addition:*

- How do children experience their living situations and their involvement with DCFS?

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### **Current Related Projects**

#### **Foster Care Parent Survey (DCFS)**

Bill McCready, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Northern Illinois University

Foster Centola, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Mark Testa, Associate Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago and Research Director, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

#### **Parents With Children in Care: Assessment of Service Satisfaction (CFRC)**

John Poertner, Professor and Director of Outcomes Reporting, Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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## 4.2 Substitute Care Service Delivery

### 4.2.1 *Assessment*

#### **Research Priorities**

- What methods exist for helping workers evaluate the needs of children in care and how can their assessments be assembled into service plans and tracked for progress?

*The following questions provide an example of specific elaboration of the larger question above.*

- To what extent does the assessment address the issues that result in involuntary DCFS involvement or placement?
- To what extent do goals and plans target the issues identified in the assessment?
- To what extent do workers follow the service plan or explain deviations from it?
- Do goals and plans that “track” from first referral to current interventions result in greater case “success?”
- How does this differ by type of case?

### 4.2.2 *Adjunct Service Delivery*

#### **Research Priorities**

- How can children be better linked to service delivery (health, behavioral health, education, developmental disabilities)?

*The following questions elaborate this priority.*

- What is the current status of linkage to service, follow up, and actual service delivery by team?
- What practices or situations are not effective in ensuring successful linkages?
- What DCFS practices create a supportive environment for ensuring linkages?

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## Current Related Projects

### **The Family Centered Services Initiative in Illinois: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Implementation, Process, and Impact (DCFS and CFRC)**

Doug Thomson, Research Affiliate, Children and Family Research Center

Susan Wells, Professor and Director, Children and Family Research Center,  
School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This evaluation is of the Family Centered Services initiative and focuses on the implementation, process and impacts of the initiative. Researchers are examining how the effort has worked at the statewide, local, and children/family levels.

### **Health Care Use by Foster Children (DCFS)**

Darlene Turner, Doctoral Student

### **Fillmore Center DCFS Program Needs Assessment (DCFS)**

Laura Mick, Mental Health Practitioner, Fillmore Center for Human Services

The proposed study is designed to assess the degree of effectiveness of service provision by DCFS, with special attention to services provided by the Fillmore Center.

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## 4.2.3 *Effectiveness of Residential and Foster Care*

### **Research Priorities**

- How effective is residential care/residential treatment in addressing children's presenting problems?
- How effective is foster care in addressing children's problems?

*This priority is elaborated below.*

- How does the effectiveness of different types of care compare?
- What accounts for effectiveness?
- What steps can DCFS take to ensure quality and effectiveness of substitute care?

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## **Current Related Projects**

### **National Study of Residential Care for Children (DCFS)**

Jean Cohen, EMPRISE Designs, Inc.

### **Evaluation of the Southside Respite Care (DCFS)**

Bobby Hall, Chief, Office of Demonstrations, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **The Odyssey Project: A Descriptive and Prospective Study of Children and Youth in Residential Treatment, Group Homes, and Therapeutic Foster Care (DCFS)**

Patrick Curtis, Research Director, Child Welfare League of America

Sharon Solomon, Research Coordinator, The Youth Campus

The Odyssey Project is the largest national study of out-of-home care in the history of child welfare. Subjects include children and youth who enter residential treatment, group homes, or therapeutic foster care during the first two years of data collection. All subjects are assessed as they enter service, reassessed at one-year intervals, and when they end service. They are followed-up at six months, one year, and two years. Twenty-eight CWLA member agencies have participated in the project.

### **Placement and Service History for DCFS Southern Region Wards After Successful Completion of Sex Offender Treatment at CCBC and Onarga (DCFS)**

Doris Telford, Master's Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **Study Outcomes for Children Placed in Foster Care With Relatives (DCFS)**

Judith Jones, Project Director, TransAmerica Systems Incorporated (TSI)

The purpose of the study is to describe policies, practices, and characteristics regarding the placement of children in relative foster care; examine outcomes of children placed in relative foster care compared to children placed in non-relative care; and examine the costs of relative foster care compared to non-relative foster care.

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## **Current Related Projects (continued)**

### **The Treatment of Children With Sexually Problematic and Aggressive Behavior: A Preliminary Program Evaluation (CFRC)**

Connie Horton, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Illinois State University

This study will be a preliminary evaluation of an Illinois residential treatment center with one of the first programs to treat children under 12 with sexually problematic and aggressive behaviors (SPAB) under DCFS' new SACY/SPAB guidelines.

### **Preparing Foster Adolescents for Independent Living: A Comparison of Disabled and Non-Disabled Youth (CFRC)**

Edmund Mech, Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The research investigates the extent to which Illinois' adolescent wards with disabilities are prepared for independent living when they leave the child welfare system. The study focuses on the degree to which foster adolescents with disabilities require special preparation for self-sufficiency and independent living.

### **An Examination of Illinois' Standards for the Treatment of Sexually Aggressive Youth: The Relationship Between Agency Organizational Structure and Level of Compliance (CFRC)**

Therese Wrona, Doctoral Student, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

The project purpose is to evaluate the implementation of DCFS standards and procedures for the treatment of sexually aggressive youth by Illinois agencies.

### **Kinship Foster Care: Instruments for Evaluation (CFRC)**

Susan Wells, Professor and Director, Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The purpose of this project is to promote the well-being of children who have been placed in kinship foster care by developing assessment instruments that will be used by child welfare agencies to evaluate the quality of care provided (funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services).

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## **Current Related Projects (continued)**

### **Kinship Foster Care: Focus Group Report (CFRC)**

Susan Wells, Professor and Director, Children and Family Research Center,  
School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The purpose of this project is to promote the well-being of children who have been placed in kinship foster care by examining data from focus groups. Focus groups are composed of kinship caregivers, children (aged 10 and over) and caseworkers (funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services).

### **Caregiver Burden in Kinship Foster Care: Impact of Social Support on Caregiver Emotional Distress (CFRC)**

Rocco A. Cimmarusti, Coordinator of Evaluation, Family Institute,  
Northwestern University

This study examines the relationship between kinship caregivers' perceived caregiving burden, social support, and emotional distress. Assessment and practice implications are discussed.

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## **4.2.4 *Enhancing Practice and Performance***

### **Research Priorities**

- What changes in MIS, ACR, and QA management systems can be implemented to enhance practice and performance at all system levels to improve child welfare outcomes?

## **4.2.5 *Performance Contracting***

### **Research Priorities**

- How does performance contracting impact quality of care and long term outcomes?

*This priority is elaborated below.*

- What agency practices contribute to success of performance contracting?

## 5 FAMILY REUNIFICATION RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Members of the DCFS Advisory Committee, the Children and Family Research Center's Advisory Board, Child Care Association, and the DCFS Deputy Directors and Executive Staff, ranked the following areas as the state's top research priorities. Staff of the office of the Research Director of DCFS and the Center compiled and edited these final priorities. Originally, there were five family reunification outcomes questions and three service delivery questions presented for prioritization and comment. As noted in the introduction, in some cases additional questions were developed to elaborate the selected research priorities.

### 5.1 Family Reunification Outcomes for Children and Families

#### 5.1.1 *Timeliness of Services*

##### Research Priorities

- Do delays in receiving services impact outcomes in a way that is different from cases receiving timely service provision?

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#### Current Related Projects

##### The Impact of Supervisory Behavior on Permanency for Foster Children (DCFS)

Kathleen Ahern, Doctoral Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

##### How Decisions to Change Case Plan Goals Are Initiated (DCFS)

James Gleeson, Associate Professor, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago

The purpose of this study is to identify factors which delay or facilitate changing the case plan goal to permanency when children are unable to return home to their birth parents, whether those factors vary by type of placement and cohort, and who is involved in case planning and decision making.

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## 5.2 Family Reunification Service Delivery

### 5.2.1 *Understanding Family Reunification Declines*

#### Research Priorities

- What factors help explain the continuous decline in family reunification rates in Illinois in comparison with other large states?
- What interventions, for example visitation, will result in more timely and permanent reunification?
- How can DCFS ensure appropriate use of these interventions?

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#### Current Related Projects

##### Evaluating Relationships Between Biological Parents and Relative Foster Parents and the Effect on Reunification (DCFS)

Mamie Robinson, Master's Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

##### Supporting Parent-Child Attachment Relationships Through Foster Care Visits (CFRC)

Wendy Haight, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Jill Doner Kagle, Dean and Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

James Black, Assistant Professor, College of Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago

This project explored a DCFS practice that is critical for reunification planning: parent-child visitation. The authors examined the most important aspects of visitation and the circumstances under which visitation is most and least beneficial for strengthening parent-child relationships.

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## **Current Related Projects (continued)**

### **Making Visits Better: Supporting Parent-Child Relationships Through Foster Care Visitation (CFRC)**

Wendy Haight, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

James Black, Assistant Professor, College of Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago

Cindy Workman, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

In this project, the investigators observed actual visits between mothers and their children and subsequently interviewed the mothers. The researchers systematically describe how the mothers and children navigate their visits and how the mothers perceive the interactions.

### **Supporting Parents and Their Young Children During Foster Care Visits: An Intervention Study (CFRC)**

James Black, Assistant Professor, College of Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago

Sarah Mangelsdorf, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Wendy Haight, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The researchers are developing and assessing an intervention to facilitate parent-child visitation, currently an important yet little understood permanency tool in child welfare practice.

### **The Influence of Parental Visitation and Inclusive Practice on Behavioral Disturbance and Permanency Outcomes (CFRC)**

Sonya Leathers, Research Associate, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

This researcher is examining whether patterns of parental visitation while children are in placement are associated with differential reunification rates, as well as with differential levels of child behavior problems.

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## **Current Related Projects (continued)**

### **Kin Caregivers of HIV Affected Children: Identifying Services That Support Permanency (CFRC)**

Sally Mason, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago

Nathan Linsk, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago

The investigators are examining the service needs of kinship care families who have HIV-infected and –affected children. They are interested in how those needs impact on permanency.

### **Reunification in Illinois: 1990s and Beyond (CFRC)**

Susan Wells, Professor and Director, Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Angela Wiley, Assistant Director for Research and Development, Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The Center is developing a major study on reunification that will explain differences in those reunified and those not reunified and will develop recommendations for future practice.

### **Parents' Compliance With Child Welfare Service Plan Requirements: A Multi-Method Study (CFRC)**

Brenda Smith, Doctoral Student, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

The investigator is examining three assumptions that impact the conflict between permanency and reasonable efforts at family reunification in an effort to understand why permanency is so often an elusive goal.

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## **5.2.2 Parent Education**

### **Research Priorities**

- What are the functions and relevance of parent education classes in child protection cases?
- What models of parent education (“hands-on” classes, traditional formats, etc.) are most effective in child protection cases?

## **6 ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP RESEARCH PRIORITIES**

Members of the DCFS Advisory Committee, the Children and Family Research Center's Advisory Board, Child Care Association, and the DCFS Deputy Directors and Executive Staff, ranked the following areas as the state's top research priorities. Staff of the office of the Research Director of DCFS and the Center compiled and edited these final priorities. Originally, there were sixteen adoption and guardianship outcomes questions and ten service delivery questions presented for prioritization and comment. As noted in the introduction, in some cases additional questions were developed to elaborate the selected research priorities.

### **6.1 Adoption and Guardianship Outcomes for Children and Families**

#### **6.1.1 *Disruption and Dissolution***

##### **Research Priorities**

- What are the risk factors for disruption and dissolution, i.e. which characteristics of the child, family, and service either support or jeopardize adoption and guardianship stability?

#### **6.1.2 *Permanency Arrangement Outcomes***

##### **Research Priorities**

- How do outcomes differ by type of permanency arrangement (relative adoption, foster care adoption, new parent adoption and subsidized guardianship)?

#### **6.1.3 *Permanency Achievement Factors***

##### **Research Priorities**

- What factors, individually and collectively, promote the timely, safe achievement of permanency for children?

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## Current Related Projects

### Supporting Families as They Adopt Children With Special Needs (CFRC)

Laurie Kramer, Associate Professor, Human and Community Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Doris Houston, Doctoral Student, Human and Community Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This study identified types of informal and formal supports desired and used by pre-adoptive families who are currently parenting a child with special medical, behavioral, or development needs.

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#### 6.1.4 *Appropriateness of Termination of Parental Rights*

##### Research Priorities

- Are parental rights being terminated when no potential permanent placement exists?

*This priority is elaborated below.*

- What are the effects on the child of termination when no other potential family connections exist?
- Should termination occur in this situation?

#### 6.1.5 *Outcomes for Siblings*

##### Research Priorities

- What is the impact on the children and on reunification of not placing siblings together for adoption?

## 6.2 Adoption and Guardianship Service Delivery

### 6.2.1 *Subsidized Guardianship v. Long Term Kinship Care*

#### Research Priorities

- Are families in subsidized guardianship arrangements more committed (for example, more ready to accept permanent responsibility for the child; more accepting of child as part of the family) to children in their care compared to those in long-term kinship foster care?
- Do children in subsidized guardianship arrangements have a greater sense of belonging compared to children in long-term kinship foster care?

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#### Current Related Projects

##### Evaluation of the Illinois Subsidized Waiver Demonstration “Illinois Family Study” (DCFS)

Ronna Cook, Senior Study Director, Westat, Inc.

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### 6.2.2 *Impact of Permanency Initiatives*

#### Research Priorities

- What impact do the new permanency initiatives and concurrent planning have on achieving permanent homes for children?

### 6.2.3 *Best Practices*

#### Research Priorities

- What is “best practice” in adoption services including post-legal services?
- What strategies result in reducing the period of time children remain in care before termination of parental rights?
- What strategies result in stabilizing adoptive placements and adoptions?
- What strategies increase the adoptive placement of minority children?



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## **Current Related Projects**

### **Factors That Influence Adoption Disruption (DCFS)**

Addie Hudson, Master's Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Foster Adopt PRIDE Training (DCFS)**

Betsy Scott, Master's Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **Adoption Preservation (DCFS)**

Jeanne Howard, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Illinois State University

Susan Smith, Field Placement Coordinator, Department of Social Work, Illinois State University

This study analyzes DCFS adoption policies and examines the problems, services, and outcomes of families served by adoption preservation programs.

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## **7 RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR TARGET POPULATIONS IN CHILD WELFARE: SUBSTANCE EXPOSED INFANTS**

Members of the DCFS Advisory Committee, the Children and Family Research Center's Advisory Board, Child Care Association, and the DCFS Deputy Directors and Executive Staff, ranked the following areas as the state's top research priorities. Staff of the office of the Research Director of DCFS and the Center compiled and edited these final priorities. Originally, there were two SEI outcomes questions and three service delivery questions presented for prioritization and comment. As noted in the introduction, in some cases additional questions were developed to elaborate the selected research priorities.

### **SEI Outcomes and Service Delivery for Children and Families**

#### ***Substance Abuse Treatment***

##### **Research Priorities**

- Do enhanced substance abuse treatment programs for drug-affected parents significantly increase rehabilitation rates over and above regular programs?
- What are the characteristics of these programs (type of program, nature and extent of participation)?
- How do these programs impact child welfare outcomes?
- What are the short and long-term results of participation in these programs for children and families?
- What is the incidence of maltreatment reports among families with substance-exposed infants in states which monitor and provide services to families with substance-exposed infants but which do not automatically open a child welfare case for substance-exposed infants?
- How do drug-testing and screening protocols and practices of welfare recipients for SEI vary among hospitals?

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## **Current Related Projects**

### **Substance Abuse and Women: Barriers to Treatment (DCFS)**

Denise Flores, Master's Student

### **A Qualitative Study of the Effectiveness of Mandated Substance Abuse Treatment for Women (DCFS)**

Anita Ray, Master's Student and Employee, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **Substance Affected Family Study (DCFS)**

Mark Testa, Associate Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago and Research Director, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

### **DASA/DCFS Initiative: Evaluation of Integrated Services for Substance Abusing Clients of the Illinois Public Child Welfare System (DCFS and CFRC)**

Jeanne Marsh, Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

Tom D'Aunno, Associate Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

Brenda Smith, Doctoral Student, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

This report provides an evaluation of the DASA/DCFS Initiative program, a cooperative program between DASA and DCFS, established in FY 95 by the Illinois legislature to provide accessible and effective services for DCFS clients with substance abuse problems. Overall, the findings indicate that the Initiative programs were successfully implemented and were successful in reducing participants' drug use.

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