

The Child Welfare Advocate newsletter



Upcoming Events:

Feb 13

9:00a-11:00a

Applied Learning Series: Trauma in Children & Adolescents
South Campus, Room 132

Feb 13

12:30p-2:30p

Applied Learning Series: Trauma in Adults
South Campus, Room 132

April 2

5:00p-7:30p

Child Welfare Expo,
Knicely Conference Center
Rooms: 208 A-J



Quarterly Recap

- Organized and led community engagement meetings, partnering with Vision teams, Hope House initiatives, DCBS staffings, schools, and faith-based organizations.
- LCCWEAR is proud to partner with World Wide Technology and Kentucky DCBS
- Staff attended the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) 71st Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado
- Featured in the WKU Office of Research and Creative Activity's 2024 Annual Report
- Welcomed two new team members for 2025-2026: Ashley Barnes, MSW, LCSW (Integration Specialist) and Bibiana Lechler, MSW, LCSW (Clinician)
- Heather Webb and Alma Smajlovic completed the Training for Adoption Competency (TAC)



A Note from the Director

As Director of the LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education and Research (LCCWEAR), I'm pleased to welcome you to the inaugural issue of The Child Welfare Advocate, our quarterly newsletter designed to share our work, progress, and partnerships with the broader community.

Established in July 2019 within Western Kentucky University's College of Health and Human Services, the Center strengthens child welfare systems through research, training, and data-informed practice. Our work is grounded in strong partnerships with LifeSkills, Inc. and Kentucky's Cabinet for Health and Family Services and guided by a commitment to multidisciplinary collaboration that improves outcomes for children and families.



This Newsletter highlights the people, programs, and initiatives that move this work forward, including the Integrated Family Trauma Treatment Clinic, the Training Resource Center, and the Child Welfare Analytics Collaborative. We invite you to learn more about our efforts, share this newsletter with colleagues, and partner with us as we advance child and family well-being across Kentucky.

Austin Griffiths, Ph.D., CSW; LCCWEAR Director

Child Welfare Analytics Collaborative

The Child Welfare Analytics Collaborative (CWAC) is a partnership between Kentucky's Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), its Division of Prevention and Community-Based Services, the Department of Community-Based Services, and LCCWEAR.

CWAC staff lead projects that provide the state with actionable data insights across key child welfare areas, including adoption, out-of-home care, protective services, clinical and prevention services, and quality assurance. In addition to project leadership, the team supports CHFS through ongoing assistance with federal submissions, reporting, and other data-driven requirements.

By connecting agency staff with research expertise, the Collaborative translates data into practical tools that support frontline decision-making. This work helps address system challenges, strengthen services, and improve outcomes for children and families across Kentucky.

Emily Lyons, MBA, MA
Senior Data & Quality Control Analyst



Integrated Family Trauma Treatment Clinic

The Integrated Family Trauma Treatment Clinic (IFITTC), launched in 2024, is a collaborative effort between LCCWEAR and the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. With a team of four full-time therapists, the clinic provides trauma-informed services to diverse families who are involved in, or at risk of involvement with, the child welfare system.



Through evidence-based treatment and rigorous evaluation, IFITTC supports family reunification, placement stability, and the prevention of placement in out-of-home care. The clinic also works to reduce the impact of intergenerational trauma, strengthen caregiver-child relationships, and promote long-term safety and resilience for families across south-central Kentucky and beyond.

Heather Webb, MSW, LCSW;
IFITTC Manager

CW PREP

Child Welfare Prepare, Retain, Engage, and Partner Program

The Child Welfare Preparation Program (CW-PREP) is a statewide, grant-funded partnership between Kentucky's Cabinet for Health and Family Services and participating universities that prepares undergraduate social work students for careers in public child welfare. Through specialized coursework, immersive field placements, and structured professional development, the program strengthens workforce readiness and supports long-term retention within the child welfare system.

At Western Kentucky University, CW-PREP coordination focuses on recruiting and advising students, monitoring academic and field milestones, and supporting students' transition into Cabinet employment. Program outcomes include sustained student engagement, timely completion of requirements, and graduates who enter the workforce with practical, job-aligned experience and a clear understanding of agency expectations. By aligning education, field practice, and workforce needs, CW-PREP contributes to increased capacity and stability across Kentucky's child welfare system.



Monica Hines, EdD, MSW
CW PREP Coordinator

Training Resource Center

Western Kentucky University's Training Resource Center provides continuing education, training, and support to Kentucky's social workers, foster and adoptive caregivers, and youth in out-of-home care in partnership with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. Programming includes on-the-floor and virtual training, facilitation and coordination of conferences and events, trainer identification and support, and grant development and writing related to social services and workforce training.



Program areas include Independent Living Services, the Kentucky Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Support Network, Adoption Promotion, Resource Parent Training, and Parent Resource Trainers. Trainings and events are offered both virtually and in person across Kentucky. The Training Resource Center operates as a professional development program funded through multiple sources, including the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

Crystal Palmisano-Dillard; TRC Director



Faculty Spotlight



Dr. Matt Woodward is an Associate with LCCWEAR, a clinical psychologist, and an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Western Kentucky University. He earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Memphis and completed his clinical internship at the Medical University of South Carolina, where he worked in multiple trauma-focused settings, including the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center.

Dr. Woodward's research and clinical work focus on trauma-related mental health concerns, with particular attention to posttraumatic stress disorder. His professional experience includes working with veterans, survivors of childhood abuse, and individuals affected by intimate partner violence.

At LCCWEAR, Dr. Woodward oversees the Child and Family Well-Being pillar and serves in a leadership role at the center. One of his primary projects, developed in collaboration with Dr. Griffiths, has been the establishment and operation of the Integrated Family Trauma Treatment Clinic. The clinic provides evidence-based mental health services to children and families in the local community. This initiative represents years of planning and collaboration and continues to expand its reach, offering critical support to families in the child welfare community impacted by trauma and violence.

Welcome to the LCCWEAR Team!

Graduate Research Assistant Spotlight :

The Center is pleased to welcome Jenny Flowers and Juliana Gregory to the LCCWEAR team.

Jenny Flowers is a student in the Master of Social Work program at WKU. She earned her undergraduate degree in marketing and accounting from Baker College. With a growing interest in social work and child welfare, Jenny is eager to learn and contribute to efforts that strengthen services and supports for children and families.



Juliana Gregory is a student in Western Kentucky University's Master of Social Work program. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Family and Consumer Sciences from WKU in Spring 2025 and completed a certification in Home Visiting as an undergraduate. Juliana has a strong interest in research and is eager to continue building her skills to support improved outcomes for children and families.



Sponsor Spotlight

LifeSkills, Inc. has strengthened communities across south-central Kentucky since 1966 and now serves more than 26,000 individuals annually across 18 counties through comprehensive behavioral health, substance use, and developmental disability services. As a private nonprofit community mental health center, LifeSkills employs more than 800 team members across 26 locations and remains committed to helping children, adults, and families build meaningful and independent lives.

LifeSkills' partnership with LCCWEAR reflects a shared commitment to bringing rigorous, applied research into the communities where it can have the greatest impact. As Kentucky continues to face challenges related to child maltreatment, substance use, and access to care, this collaboration supports the translation of research into practice that improves outcomes for vulnerable children and families across the region.

LifeSkills is proud to support Dr. Griffiths and the LCCWEAR team as they build what we hope will become a national model for how community-academic partnerships can drive meaningful systems change.

Joe Dan Beavers, CPA, MHA
President/CEO at LifeSkills, Inc.



LifeSkills, Inc.
Premium Healthcare Services

Community Engagement Series

Prevention Pathways with DCBS

The Prevention Pathways initiative uniquely supports the development of child welfare professionals in Kentucky, such as employees of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. As a part of this collaborative initiative, trainings were created and facilitated by LCCWEAR professionals based on an expressed need.



Leadership for Professional Excellence

This program helped participants define and apply leadership theories while demonstrating effective communication and active listening skills to build trust and professional relationships. Interactive activities engaged participants in practical application to enhance skills and reinforce key leadership concepts.



Child Sexual Abuse: What to know and What to do

This comprehensive training equipped participants with essential knowledge and skills for child sexual abuse prevention, recognition, and response.



Unity In Action

Unity in Action is an annual interactive event that brings together diverse voices to examine critical issues affecting child welfare in our communities. The event focuses on a specific topic where expert speakers and panelists join with educators, human service and health providers, students and faculty, community members, and families to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

