

Shifting Resources in Child Welfare to *Achieve Better Outcomes* for Children and Families

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Context for Reinvestment

The child welfare field currently faces significant challenges and opportunities. For example, program leaders have more clearly articulated desired goals and outcomes based on a growing set of research evidence. Simultaneously, we are facing some of the most significant fiscal and political challenges in decades. An economic downturn, however, may be an ideal time to take a proactive approach to improving operations and outcomes, and to planning for the future: “..Those who built good to great companies ... made as much use of ‘stop doing’ lists as ‘to do’ lists...”

In other fields, such as for-profit businesses, organizations will shift their mix of products or services to meet changing times and customer needs. This resource-shifting involves moving from ineffective products or services to increased investment in other key services and staff and other aspects of organizational capacity. Reinvestment occurs in government agencies, professional groups, service agencies, and communities as well as in for-profit businesses because all of these organizations seek to increase accountability to their “investors” and to achieve maximum results with unchanging or decreased resources. Change may take the form of finding greater efficiencies in operations and scaling back or eliminating services, procedures, or worker activities that are not as effective, so that more effective strategies can be initiated or increased. And as they become more sophisticated, agencies can curtail the use of blunt budget instruments and adopt more finely adapted tools, which include modeling the cost-benefit ratios of effective interventions.



¹ Collins, J. C. (2001). Good to great: Why some companies make the leap...and others don't. New York: Harper Business. <http://blog.gaiam.com/quotes/authors/jim-collins>

² For indices of worker productivity, see <http://www.bls.gov/lpc/> or <http://www.conference-board.org/data/economydatabase/> For examples of strategies for increasing innovation and efficiency, see Adams, M., & Oleksak, M. (2011). Intangible capital: Putting knowledge to work in the 21st-century organization. www.intangiblecapitalbook.com.

Challenges and Opportunities in Child Welfare

In the last few years, child welfare has made substantial progress in helping more families parent their children in safe ways. Child welfare agencies are successfully preventing children from entering foster care and facilitating exits from care to a permanent home more quickly – with more children achieving permanency through returning home and adoption than by aging out of care.³ Buoyed by these improvements, Commissioner Bryan Samuels of the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families and others have called for a new narrative about child welfare.

While some types of child maltreatment and some rates of children in foster care have decreased, many jurisdictions still face significant challenges. Whether it is the large number of infants entering care, youth in foster care with unmet behavioral health or permanency needs, or a high number of children re-entering care within 12 months of reunification, child welfare agencies are always striving to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for the children and families they serve. Agencies must do this in a dynamic environment where resources are limited and intense public scrutiny is the norm. In order to maintain the momentum regarding safety and permanency, and to improve the well-being outcomes of children placed in out-of-home care, the conversion or reinvestment of program savings from reform needs to occur.

Many agencies find that this reinvestment encourages them to revisit and clarify their values, define their destination, and “fry bigger fish.” Reform strategies in child welfare systems have contributed to the safe reduction of children in out-of-home care. A number of agencies have explored ways to redirect and reinvest the resources resulting from those reductions, but not all of those investments have proven to be effective. These agencies now need to reduce their investments in program areas and services that are less effective in helping the children and their families (i.e., de-scaling).

Similarly, investments in ineffective services year after year are a frustration voiced by many child welfare administrators and policy leaders. Maximizing the impact of services requires a coordinated effort from child mental health, healthcare, and other agencies working in concert with child welfare leaders. The Title IV-E waivers and other strategies described in the full research brief can help achieve these reforms, and a large amount of federal, state, and county funds is being invested in these programs.⁴

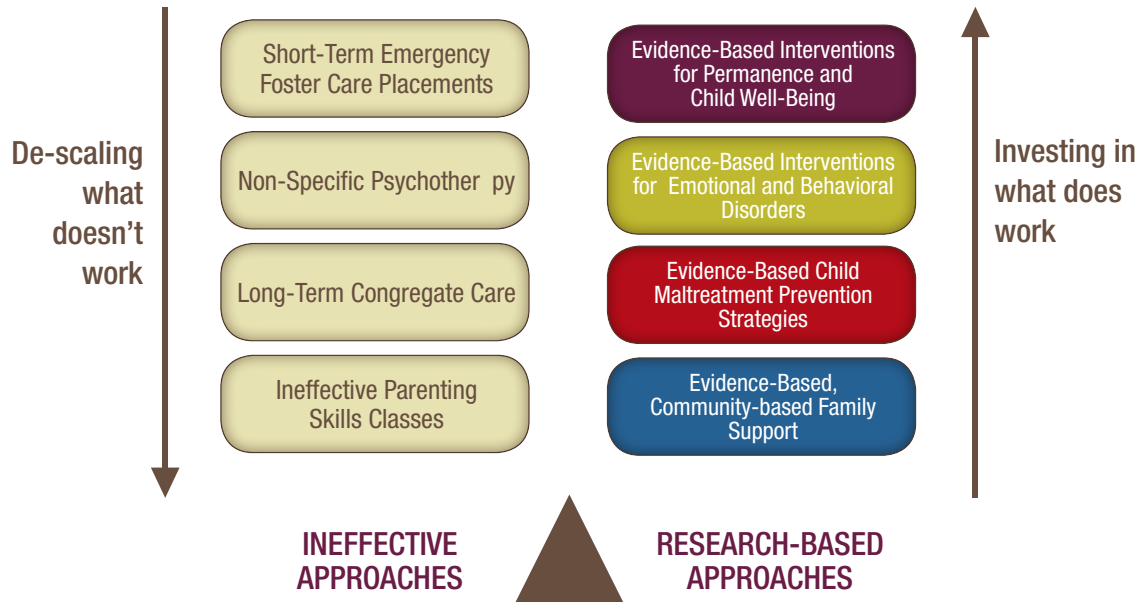
By way of a visual, the figure below provides a framework for many of the system improvement activities that have occurred and that continue to evolve in the field. This de-scaling and reinvestment model highlights the importance of evidence-based programs, the critical role of research, and the importance of program integrity. This brief also alerts the reader to the challenges of implementing these types of changes, while simultaneously managing the day-to-day operations of a busy child welfare organization. The examples of parenting programs,

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau. (2010). Child welfare outcomes 2006-2009: Report to Congress. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cwo06-09/cwo06-09.pdf#page=51>.

⁴ For a new summary of federal and state child welfare funding, see DeVooght, K., Fletcher, M., Vaughn, B., & Cooper, H. (2012). Federal, state, and local spending to address child abuse and neglect in SFYs 2008 and 2010. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

community-based family support services, and behavioral health services for children and the reduction of congregate care populations are presented as specific examples of this de-scaling and reinvestment framework.

Shifting Resources to Support What Works



Investing savings to bridge from
ineffective to effective practices

Source: Adapted from Samuels, B. (2012). *Looking to the future: An agenda for the Children's Bureau's next 100 years*. Presentation to 18th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, Washington, DC, April 18, 2012.

This strategy requires a thoughtful combination of leadership, strategic thinking, and a focus on measurable results. The full research brief describes how child welfare and other fields are using reinvestment. It identifies less effective program areas that can be scaled back to free up funds for more effective strategies that will improve outcomes for children and families. Exemplars from states that have made these reforms to support the accomplishment of organizational priorities and achieve more positive child welfare outcomes are highlighted.

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Casey Family Programs is the nation's largest operating foundation whose work is focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and building communities of hope for all of America's children and families. We work in partnership with child welfare systems, families and communities across the nation to prevent child abuse and neglect and to find safe, permanent and loving families for all children. We believe every child deserves a family of their own and a community of hope.

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