

The Child Welfare Advocate newsletter



Upcoming Events:

08-31-26

Community Leadership Collaborative I Orientation

10-14-26

Applied Learning Series I 1 day - 3 sessions I CEUs available

11-12-26

Unity in Action I Topic: Substance Use and Child Welfare

Quarterly Recap

- LCCWEAR held its annual Child Welfare Expo at the Knicely Conference Center. Approximately 29 community organizations were represented this year, and our guest speaker was Ariana Rodriguez, Miss Kentucky 2025.
- The IFTTC presented their *Trauma-Informed Skills to Improve Behavior Management Effectiveness in the Classroom and Beyond* training. Over 120 participants were in attendance. See page 3 for additional information about this training.
- To support the Pinwheels for Prevention campaign, WKU students and members of the LCCWEAR team blanketed WKU's campus with blue pinwheels. To learn more about this campaign go to www.preventchildabuse.org.
- The Bowling Green Board of City Commissioners and the Warren County Fiscal Court jointly issued a reading proclaiming April 2026 as National Child Abuse Prevention Month. The proclamation highlighted the need to protect vulnerable children and support families across the region.



A Note from the Director

As we close out April, May, and June, I want to take a moment to check in and share a brief update from the LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education and Research. This has been a busy and meaningful season for our team, and we are grateful for the continued opportunity to support child welfare education, research, training, and partnership across Kentucky and beyond.

April was especially meaningful as we recognized National Child Abuse Prevention Month and hosted our annual Child Welfare Expo. The Expo brought together professionals, students, community partners, and advocates committed to strengthening the lives of children and families. Events like this remind us why this work matters and that progress in child welfare is built through relationships, shared learning, and the dedication of people working to improve systems and outcomes.



In May, members of our team attended the National Title IV-E Roundtable in Denver, Colorado, where they presented scholarship, connected with national partners, and explored the future of child welfare education, workforce development, and innovation. We left inspired by the work happening across the country and motivated to strengthen partnerships that support students, professionals, agencies, and the communities they serve. As we move through the summer, we are taking time to reflect, recharge, and prepare for the fall semester. Thank you for continuing to partner with us in this important work.

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

Child Welfare Analytics Collaborative

Olivia Dick, MA, is a Quality Control Analyst with the Child Welfare Analytics Collaborative (CWAC) at LCCWEAR. She is also pursuing a Masters Degree in Social Work at WKU. Olivia works with the Information Quality Improvement (IQI) team in partnership with DCBS and the Division of Protection and Permanency. This team uses child welfare data to support quality improvement, informed decision-making, and transparency across Kentucky. During this quarter, IQI responded to data requests from internal and external partners, maintained public resources such as Kentucky's monthly Child Protective Services and Foster Care Fact Sheets, and provided data support for agency initiatives, public reporting, and community programs.

The CWAC also supports statewide partners, including Kentucky Youth Advocates, Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky, HANDS, and Kentucky CASA, while contributing to NCANDS reporting and Program Improvement Plan (PIP) efforts. Through data analysis and reporting, Olivia and the IQI team help child welfare professionals, policymakers, and community partners strengthen services and outcomes for Kentucky's children and families.



Integrated Family Trauma Treatment Clinic

Alma Smajlovic, LCSW, is a trauma-specific clinician at WKU's Integrated Family Trauma Treatment Clinic (IFTTC). She has six years of experience providing trauma-specific therapeutic services to children and adults.



In April, Alma, along with colleague Katherine Walsh, LCSW, facilitated the Trauma-Informed Skills to Improve Behavior Management Effectiveness in the Classroom and Beyond training. Drawing on Parent-Child Care (PC-CARE) interventions, this training focused on teaching providers how to use positive parenting skills and behavior management strategies. Participants learned how trauma impacts behavior, how it may present in classroom settings, and ways to respond using PC-CARE techniques. PC-CARE is an evidence-based intervention that aims to improve child-caregiver relationships and behavioral outcomes.



Child Welfare Preparation

Spring 2026 was filled with meaningful opportunities for growth, connection, and celebration within CW-PREP. In April, students and university representatives gathered in Hebron, Kentucky for the Spring 2026 Retreat, where they participated in professional development activities, connected with peers from across the state, and strengthened their commitment to serving children and families through child welfare and social work practice.

May brought another exciting milestone as nine Western Kentucky University CW-PREP students graduated, completing their academic journeys and preparation for their next chapter. We are incredibly proud of their hard work, dedication, and perseverance. We extend our sincere gratitude to the LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education and Research (LCCWEAR), the CW-PREP leadership team, the Western Kentucky University Department of Social Work, and faculty and staff for their support. Their commitment, along with the investment of our community partners and supporters, has provided meaningful opportunities for student growth, learning, and professional development.



Monica Hines, EdD, MSW | CW PREP Coordinator

Training Resource Center



No one understands the journey of a foster or adoptive parent quite like another foster or adoptive parent. Lori Dowdy is the network Coordinator for the Kentucky Foster & Adoptive Parent Training Support Network. The Network consists of 15 regional teams staffed by experienced foster and adoptive parents who share their knowledge, skills, and encouragement with other families. Lori is a 32 year veterine of DCBS and has been with the TRC for the last 4 years.



The Network focuses on three key areas: Support, Training, and Recruitment. Network members provide knowledgeable, compassionate support to foster and adoptive families by drawing on their lived experiences and crisis intervention training. They offer practical training and guidance from a parent's perspective to help families meet the needs of children in their care. Members also recruit new foster and adoptive families through community outreach, public speaking, social media, and personal connections, using their experiences to inspire others.



Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Cassity-Caywood became involved with LCCWEAR in 2021 as an external research affiliate, collaborating on research focused on adverse childhood experiences, maltreatment, and the use of telehealth in KY advocacy centers. Her work resulted in two published manuscripts and presentations at both state and national conferences. Her involvement has reflected a strong commitment to advancing child welfare research and strengthening support systems for vulnerable children and families.

In 2024, Dr. Cassity-Caywood joined the social work faculty at Western Kentucky University and was selected as the LCCWEAR Faculty Fellow for Service. She has contributed to training initiatives, community programming, and research efforts, including presentations at the 2026 Title IV-E Roundtable and a collaborative study examining child welfare system cultures across the United States. She has also been actively engaged in efforts to connect research, education, and community practice to improve outcomes within child welfare systems.

Dr. Cassity-Caywood is especially enthusiastic about the Community Leadership Collaborative (CLC), launching in August 2026, which will enhance services for children and families while providing meaningful professional development opportunities for students. Thank you Dr. Cassity-Caywood for this exciting opportunity to foster community partnerships while preparing the next generation of social work professionals.

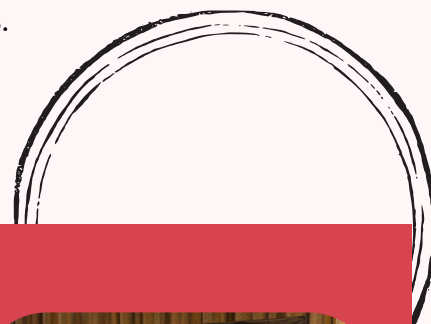


Staff Spotlight

Austin Weiler, MSW, LCSW, is the Grants & Contracts Specialist for LCCWEAR. He also maintains a part-time clinical caseload at a local group practice, is an instructor in the Department of Social Work, and is pursuing a master's degree in accounting. Austin has been with LCCWEAR for over two years.



Austin provides administrative support to LCCWEAR team members and partners to advance the organization's mission and child welfare efforts. He processes payments, oversees budgets, and prepares documentation that supports LCCWEAR initiatives. He also assists with payroll and logistical needs.



Highlight

In May 2026, MSU Denver hosted the yearly Title IV-E Roundtable Conference.

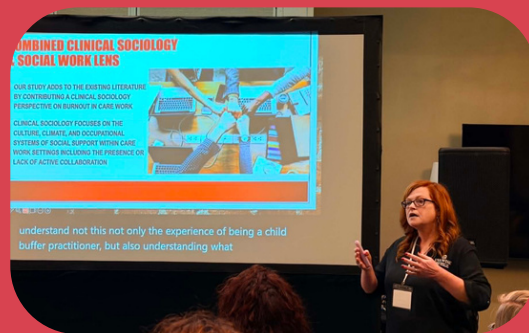
The conference is an annual gathering of public and tribal child welfare agencies and their university partners dedicated to strengthening the child welfare workforce through training, education, and shared resources.

Several LCCWEAR faculty and staff attended the conference.

Drs. Griffiths, Cassity-Caywood, Warfel, Boamah, and Moore delivered presentations focusing on the improvements to community responsiveness, perspectives to barriers and practices within child welfare.



2026 Title IV-E Roundtable for Child Welfare Training and Education



Child Welfare Expo 2026



Each April, during National Child Abuse Prevention Month, LCCWEAR hosts the Child Welfare Expo, bringing together students, community partners, and child-serving professionals to network, explore resources, and build partnerships.



Thank you to all who attended and explored ways we can collaborate to make a meaningful difference for children and families!



The Expo honors individuals making a positive impact on children and families across Kentucky.



Sarah Andrus received the Angela Lane Community Award for Outstanding Leadership in Child Welfare.

Caroline Watts received the Student Award for Child Welfare Advocacy.

Misti Carrigan received the Dr. Austin Griffiths Service Before Self Award.

