



CENTER ON
CHILDREN, FAMILIES,
AND THE LAW

THE COLLECTIVE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

A letter from our Directors



At the Center on Children, Families, and the Law (CCFL), we firmly believe in the collective power of partnership. As Booker T. Washington wisely said, “If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.” This philosophy drives our collaborative approach to **helping the helpers**.

Do you remember looking in a kaleidoscope—that simple cardboard tube that made beautiful, changing images with a twist of your wrist? Just like that childhood toy made intricate designs with colored fragments and mirrors, effective partnerships bring together diverse perspectives and skills to form innovative solutions. Each turn of the kaleidoscope brings a new possibility. Similarly, as CCFL works with our partners, the collective vision evolves, producing outcomes that are more comprehensive and impactful than any individual or organization could achieve alone. We would like to share a few of those beautiful partnerships with you in the following pages.

From transformative training advances to groundbreaking evaluation initiatives, our collective efforts have made a powerful difference in the lives of children and families. As we look ahead, our focus is on expanding these partnerships, utilizing our shared strengths to address emerging challenges and create new opportunities. The path forward is clear: by continuing to work together, we amplify our advocacy and create lasting, positive change in the communities we serve.

Eve Brank, JD, PhD

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eve Brank".

Director

Kathy Olson, MA, JD

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Olson".

Associate Director

Christine Henningsen, BSW, JD

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Henningsen".

Associate Director

THE COLLECTIVE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP



HELPING THE HELPERS

We provide an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to improve systems and outcomes for children and families.

CENTER ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND THE LAW

UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law is one of 57 departments, centers, programs, and institutes located within the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. CCFL was established in 1987 to serve as a home for research and public service on child and family policy issues. The knowledge of child and family issues we gain is used to educate policymakers, scholars, service providers, and the public. Our work serves as the primary basis for local, state, and national policies and has been cited in court rulings, including the U.S. Supreme Court. We **help the helpers** by providing training, resources, and expertise to helping professionals.

THE HELPERS

- Child Welfare Practitioners
- School Personnel
- Community Leaders
- Homeless Service System Providers
- Policymakers
- Respite Coordinators
- Service Providers
- Mental Health Practitioners
- Indigenous Leaders
- Local, State, and Federal Agencies
- Probation Officers
- Volunteers
- Judges and Attorneys
- Law Enforcement
- Community Health Workers
- Basic and Emergency Needs Providers

THOSE HELPED

- Neglected and Maltreated Children
- Vulnerable Infants and Toddlers
- Parents and Families
- Service Professionals
- Older Adults
- The Community
- Foster and Adoptive Parents
- Populations at Increased Risk
- Individuals Impacted by Health Disparities
- Youth Impacted by the Justice System
- Caregivers and Care Recipients
- Individuals with Disabilities
- Survivors of Trafficking
- Children and Youth in Foster Care
- Individuals Experiencing Homelessness
- Families Impacted by Domestic Violence

HOW WE HELP THE HELPERS

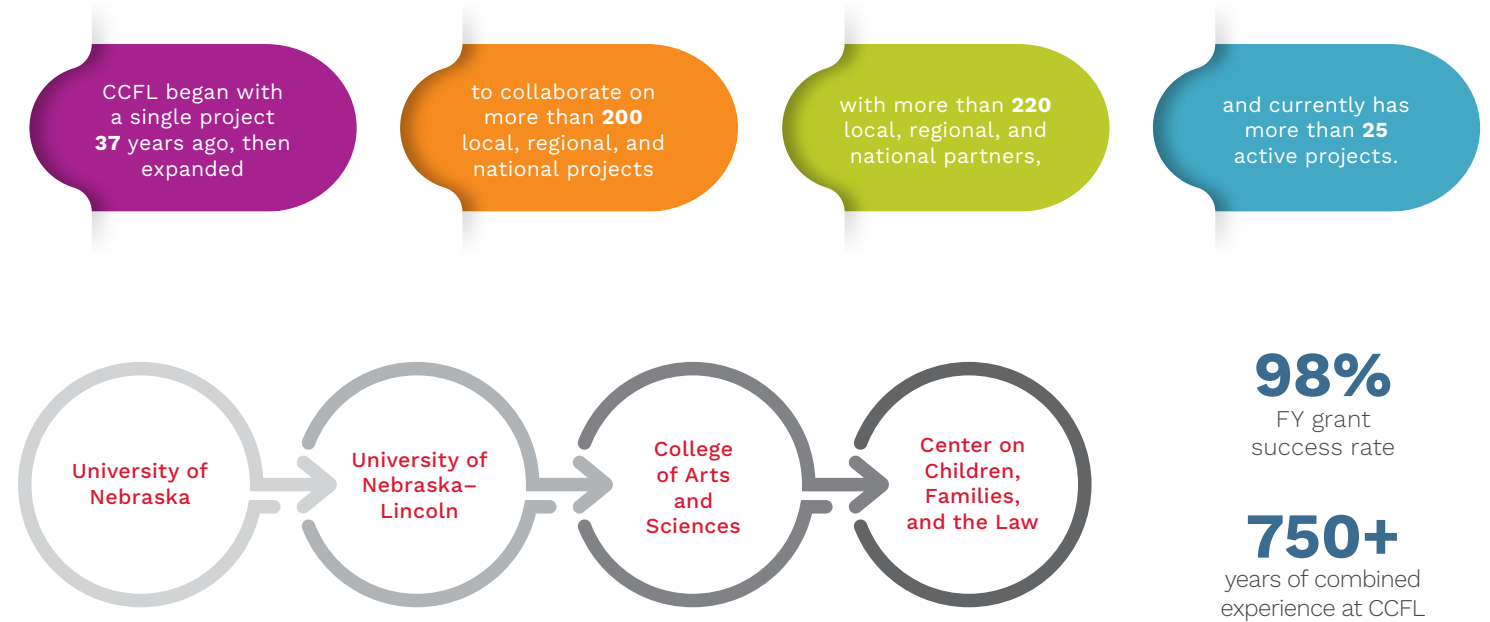
- Needs Assessment
- Training
- Research
- Legal/Policy Analysis
- Program Evaluation
- Community Services Planning
- Data Management
- Resource Information
- Technical Assistance
- Consultation and Capacity Building

OUR CAFÉ

Recently, CCFL has partnered with agencies, colleges, and universities to create a professional development platform that promotes **Child And Family Education (CAFÉ)**. Our CCFL CAFÉ provides an online forum to connect multidisciplinary professionals with the latest evidence-based academic and industry research. We look forward to working with our collaborative partners and **helping the helpers** through the CCFL CAFÉ.



OUR CENTER



OUR COMMITMENT

At CCFL, we believe that **every person and every interaction matters**. In the following pages, you will see our deep commitment to contributing to the six ambitious aims of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's N2025 Strategic Plan through our innovative and impactful work locally, regionally, and nationally.





TEAM: Stacie Vandenberg, Jessica Cook, Michelle Graef, Sarah Stepanek, Charlotte Lewis, Megan Paul, not pictured: Mark Ells

A CELEBRATION | Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development



In 2016, CCFL established the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD), funded by the Children’s Bureau. Over the next seven years, the QIC-WD leveraged the expertise of its nationally recognized team to address common child welfare workforce challenges.

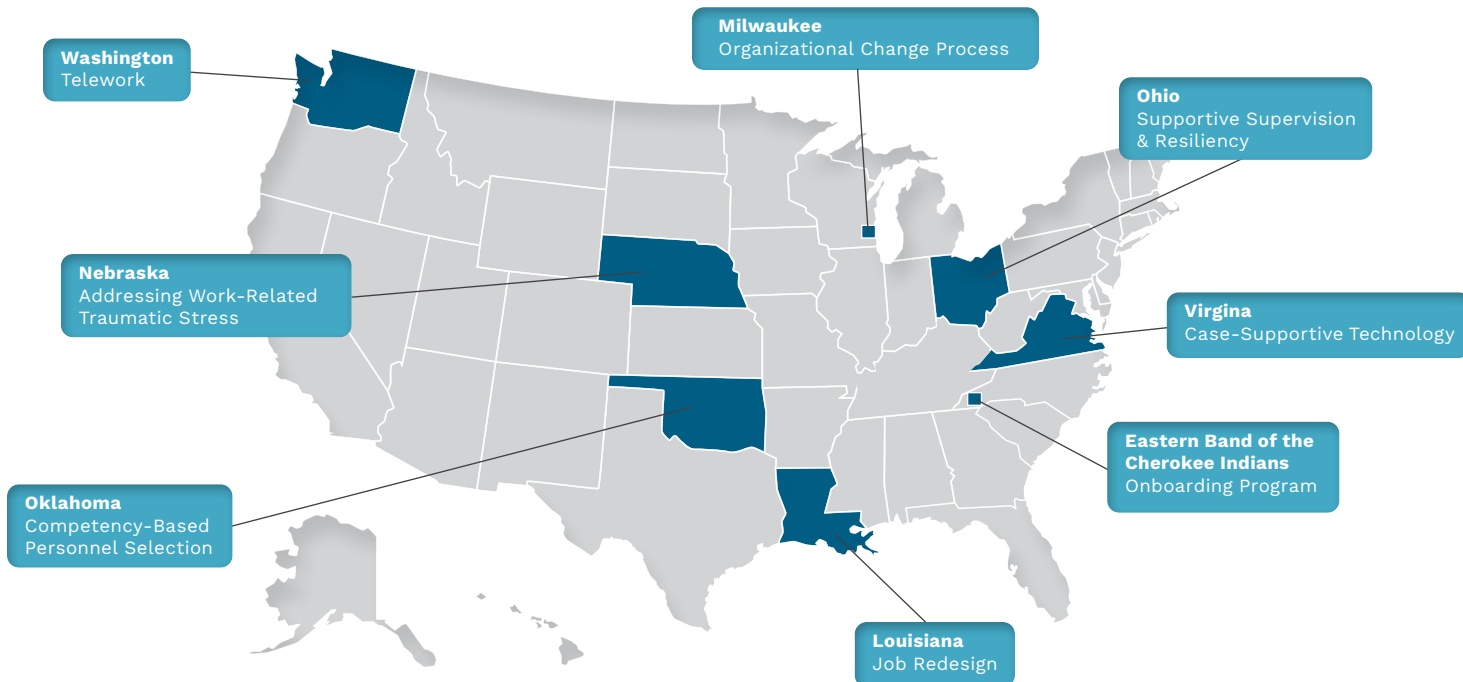
Under the leadership of Project Director Michelle Graef, PhD, the QIC-WD designed, implemented, and rigorously evaluated evidence-informed workforce strategies and interventions at eight state, county, and Tribal child welfare agencies across the nation.

The QIC-WD also:

- Provided long- and short-term consultation to over 54 agencies nationwide

- Created an innovative workforce research catalog
- Supported agencies to develop workforce analytics dashboards
- Built capacity in jurisdictions to use data and evidence to inform workforce decision making

This pivotal national project was completed in the fall of 2023, providing a wealth of resources to help agencies address staff performance, retention, and well-being. CCFL is thrilled that child welfare leaders, professionals, and researchers are using the QIC-WD’s work to make data-driven decisions that strengthen the child welfare workforce.



I think the emphasis on interdisciplinary teams right from the beginning was powerful.

– **Randi Walters**
Division Director, Children’s Bureau



The QIC-WD brought us such a tremendous amount of value and expertise.

– **Marcos Rodriguez**
Director of Human Resources, Washington Department of Children, Youth & Families



We are truly grateful for the QIC-WD, for the partnership, for the education, for this job redesign, and the difference that we are able to make for children and families.

– **Leslie Calloway**
Executive Management Advisor, Louisiana Department of Children & Family Services

PARTNERS: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau; University of Colorado, Denver; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Louisville; University of Tennessee, Knoxville; C.F. Parry Associates; CLH Strategies & Solutions; Penny P Collins Consulting

A THANK YOU | Training for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services



TEAM: Cheryl Turner, Allison Jones, Mitchell Hesseltine, Mindy Liebelt, Sarah Melichar, John Turner, Bob Hock, Alissa Bankson, Paulette Sombke-Hansen, Angie Graham, Cody Struss, Kathy Olson, Christine Henningsen, Audine Oehm, Charlotte Lewis, Wendy Kahland, Eve Brank, Mel Bauer, Chad Gressley, Shelly Egge, Rachel Kloke, Sarah Birnie, Shelly Johnson, Jill Knox, Megan Paul, Barb Sturgis, Krista Roebke, Cheryl Yoder, Teri Bougger, Angela Gebhardt, Joyce Starke, Amelia Feit, Rebecca Wilson, Kristin Adkins, not pictured: Amy Peters, Hicham Mahir, Jessica Cook, Justine Fiscus, Kenya Faith, Laura Cable, Laurie Voelker, Mark Ells, Michael Rumbaugh

Over the last 36 years, UNL’s Center on Children, Families, and the Law has been honored to partner with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services–Division of Children and Family Services to provide comprehensive Child Protection and Safety training for Child and Family Services Specialists. Led by multidisciplinary experts, this powerful collaborative partnership has delivered award-winning training and experiential learning to countless new workers serving children and families throughout the state. As the Department transitions training in-house in 2025, CCFL looks back in gratitude over the many years spent **helping the helpers** by preparing the child welfare workforce, and looks forward to all the ways we will continue to support child and family well-being across Nebraska.

THANK YOU



NEW | National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services



TEAM: Dawn Davis, Aditi Poudel, Spencer Gowin, Michelle Graef, Sarah Stepanek, Eve Brank, Brittany Brakenhoff, Megan Paul, Sara Ibrahim

The first-ever National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services was created in 2023, led by the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) and funded by the Children’s Bureau. CCFL was chosen to conduct the evaluation by C.A.S.E., who has partnered with national subject matter experts and other leading organizations to ensure the National Center’s success. This is CCFL’s second collaboration with C.A.S.E. The team also evaluates the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative. The National Center is deeply committed to building bridges between child welfare and mental health systems to improve mental health outcomes for children and families.

The need:

Up to **80%** of children in foster care have experienced significant mental health issues

Approximately **60%** of children who have experienced foster care have lifelong mental health disorders

CCFL provides evaluation in five areas:

- 1 Center Operations
- 2 On-Site Technical Assistance
- 3 Sustainability
- 4 Knowledge Hub
- 5 Dissemination



Our team is incredibly gratified to investigate the implementation and effectiveness of the Center’s operations and technical assistance services to support C.A.S.E. and its national partners in pioneering a new path between child welfare and mental health services.

– **Michelle Graef**
Research Professor

PARTNERS: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau; Center for Adoption Support and Education; the Baker Center for Children and Families; Family-Run Executive Director Leadership Association; FosterClub; National Adoption Association; National Foster Parent Association; PolicyWorks

NEW | Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Analytics



TEAM: Sarah Stepanek, Michelle Graef, Megan Paul

The Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Analytics (QIC-WA) began in 2023 to increase capacity in public and Tribal child welfare agencies and to develop tools that improve the usefulness of workforce data. Funded by the Children’s Bureau and led by the University of California–Los Angeles, the national team includes workforce; child welfare; diversity, equity, and inclusion; implementation; and evaluation experts. The QIC-WA builds upon the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development’s previous work, utilizing its findings to empower organizations to determine effective workforce strategies. CCFL serves on the project leadership team and participates in the planning and implementation of many QIC-WA activities.

The QIC-WA has six sites:

- 1 California Department of Social Services
- 2 Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes
- 3 Maryland Department of Human Services
- 4 Red Lake Nation Ombimindwaa Gidinawemaaganinaadog
- 5 Vermont Family Services Division, Department for Children and Families
- 6 Fairfax County (VA) Department of Family Services

The national project team includes:

30 Site Consultants **11** Tribal Advisory Board Members **11** Workforce Champions

PARTNERS: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau; University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA) Agile Visual Analytics Lab at the Luskin School of Public Affairs; University of Pittsburgh’s Child Welfare Education and Research Programs in the School of Social Work; University of Washington Indigenous Wellness Research Institute; CLH Strategies & Solutions; Insights OD Group; Mattingly Solutions; Michigan Public Health Institute; Penny P Collins Consulting, LLC; Stabio Productions

NEW | Bridging the Gap for Native American Children



TEAM: Eve Brank, Sarah Melichar

Bridging the Gap for Native American Children is a collaborative project between the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska and CCFL that provides new, culturally-informed training to Child and Family Services (CFS) Specialists and community workers serving Native American children and families. Joe Fleming, director of Omaha Tribe Children and Family Services/ICWA, emphasizes that “understanding Tribal culture is key to understanding Tribal communities.” The project received seed funding from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s N2025 Strategic Plan to expand community engagement. CCFL is grateful for the opportunity to partner with Omaha Nation to offer training and resources that support increased cultural awareness and advocacy.

The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska is located in northeastern Nebraska and western Iowa.



CFS Specialists serve a limited number of Native American children, which can lead to less experience in providing culturally informed support.

In 2022 there were:

1,741 substantiated cases of child maltreatment in Nebraska.

only **7%** of these cases were Native American children.

(source: Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services)



We are excited to leverage the success of the QIC-WD through the new QIC-WA to address persistent child welfare workforce challenges with data-driven solutions that focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, recruitment, performance, retention, and well-being.

– **Megan Paul**
Research Associate Professor



This project will focus on expanding collaborative relationships and enhancing understanding. When workers receive the opportunity to learn about Tribal customs, support networks, and communities, their ability to serve Native American children and families is strengthened.

– **Sarah Melichar**
Field Training Specialist

PARTNERS: Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, Nebraska Extension, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children



TEAM: Cassandra Roberts, Lindsey Ondrak, Lily Lagerman, Jamie Bahm, Tracey Kock, Kelli Hauptman, Dayna Goff, Ashtyn Beck, Samantha Byrns, Melissa Villarreal, Emily Starr, Pamela Jordan, not pictured: Haifaa Al-saadi, Meredith Cartwright, Yanelli Guzman

The Nebraska Center on Reflective Practice (NCRP) is part of CCFL's Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children. It provides training, mentoring, consultation, and evaluation to individuals and organizations. Reflective practice is relationship-based and assists human service professionals in easing the effects of emotionally intrusive work, vicarious trauma, stress, and burnout. NCRP offers three areas of service: Reflective Practice Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) Training, a Reflective Practice Community of Practice, and Reflective Consultation. The NCRP is passionate about working with its collaborative partners to help the helpers and strengthen the workforce with reflective practice skills and resources.

Evaluation data from over

2,800

surveys since 2018 show that FAN training

decreases personal distress and

increases emotional regulation.

In 2023, the NCRP provided:

- ✓ FAN training for 446 professionals.
- ✓ Ongoing Reflective Consultation for 201 professionals.

PARTNERS: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Department of Education, Erikson Institute, UNL Extension, UNMC Munroe Meyer Institute

Answers4Families



TEAM: Stacie Vandenberg, Allison Jones, Mitchell Hesseltine, Kyle Brown, Charlotte Lewis, Jessica Cook, not pictured: Josh Rice

CCFL's Answers4Families works with many partner agencies to offer resources and support to families with special needs. One aspect of Answers4Families' work is managing the Nebraska Transition website for the Nebraska Department of Education. The Nebraska Transition program assists educators and families by empowering students in special education to explore post-secondary opportunities in employment, education, independent living, and community involvement. Creating a transition plan with students should start early and requires teamwork. Answers4Families administers the Nebraska Transition website to assist professionals in collaborating with youth as they develop individualized plans that can set them up for a lifetime of success.

In 2022-2023:

16% of Nebraska students were in Special Education.

18,923 students qualified for a transition plan.

Nebraska Transition helps with:

- 1 Conducting Age-Appropriate Transition Assessments
- 2 Writing Measurable Postsecondary Goals
- 3 Identifying Transition Services
- 4 Writing a Course of Study
- 5 Writing Annual Individualized Education Program Goals
- 6 Coordinating Services with Adult Agencies
- 7 Exiting Secondary and Special Education

PARTNER: Nebraska Department of Education: Office of Special Education



The Nebraska Center on Reflective Practice has grown significantly in the last few years due to our exceptional partners. Thanks to their development, infrastructure, and sustainability support, we have provided reflective practice services to thousands of professionals across the state.

– Kelli Hauptman
Project Director



Answers4Families' work is all about finding answers together. Our team is grateful for the opportunity to partner with the Office of Special Education on the Nebraska Transition project to support students in successfully transitioning into adulthood.

– Charlotte Lewis
Project Director

Children's Justice Attorney Education Program



Safe and Healthy Families Initiative



TEAM: Lori Miller, Terra Garay, Michelle Paxton, Megan Harris, not pictured: Kayla Sircy

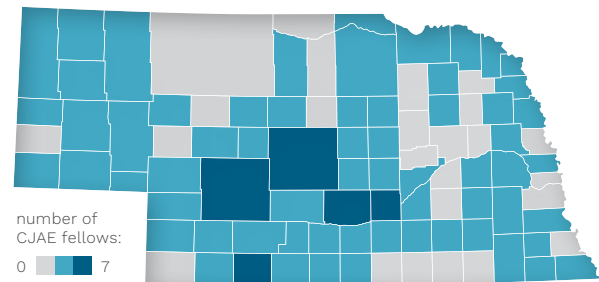
The Children's Justice Attorney Education program (CJAE) is a partner project of CCFL and Nebraska Law that strengthens legal representation in juvenile court. Over the last three years, the CJAE has expanded the availability of high-quality advocates across the state. This unique fellowship program empowers attorneys to work with experts one-on-one and in multidisciplinary teams. Through consultation with CJAE partners, fellows gain knowledge in trauma, child development, substance use, domestic violence, mental health, and complex family dynamics. The CJAE's distinctive approach of partnering attorneys with interdisciplinary experts has led to increased advocacy for children, youth, and families.



TEAM: Pamela Jordon, Angela Gebhardt, Dayna Goff, Jamie Bahm

The Safe and Healthy Families Initiative (SAHFI) has helped unite two systems that once diverged—domestic violence (DV) advocacy and child protection. Led by CCFL, this collaborative effort has improved Lancaster County's response to families within the intersection of domestic violence and child welfare. Among other project activities, SAHFI works with a multidisciplinary team to provide case mapping, which empowers caseworkers to understand interconnected elements of power and control while navigating the complexities of the family system. By offering tools that help to explain the dynamics of DV and how they intersect with child maltreatment, SAHFI is working to support safer, healthier families.

Over the last three years, the CJAE has trained attorneys who represent children and families in **58%** of Nebraska counties, a **26%** increase from last year.



- Fellows' post-assessment knowledge scores significantly increased, with the greatest areas of improvement in court advocacy, child welfare, and trauma-informed care.
- After participation in the CJAE, fellows increased their weekly average work in juvenile court by 10 hours and reported wanting to do more.

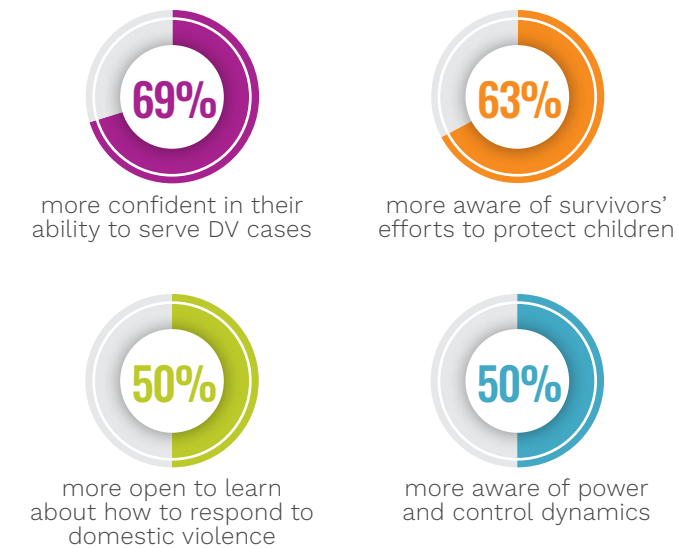


Attorneys working in juvenile court have a tremendous impact on the outcomes for the children and families they serve. Our program partners with multidisciplinary experts to support fellows in becoming powerful advocates.

– **Michelle Paxton**

Director, Children's Justice Clinic and Children's Justice Attorney Education Program

22 caseworkers who participated in case mapping shared that they were:



System change happens in partnership, as no entity operates in isolation. To transform the system, we must all work collectively. SAHFI has improved the system's response by bringing us together to prioritize the safety of children and survivors.

– **Jamie Bahm**
Project Lead

PARTNERS: Nebraska Law, ABA Center on Children and the Law, Education Rights Council, National Association of Counsel for Children, Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Act Coalition, Nebraska State Bar Association, Nebraska State Juvenile Probation, Volunteer Lawyers Project, individuals with lived experience, mental health professionals, attorneys and judges in rural Nebraska

PARTNERS: BraveBe Child Advocacy Center, CASA for Lancaster County, Family Violence Council, Voices of Hope, Friendship Home, Lancaster County Attorney's Office, Lincoln Police Department, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children



TEAM: Caleb Welsh, Chris Carpenter, Katharina Stokes, not pictured: Allison Jones, Beth Hardy, Jessica Cook, Mel Bauer

CCFL's Tax Credit Alliance of Nebraska (TCAN) is volunteer based and provides free tax preparation and education clinics. Thirty-one Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service are part of TCAN, creating the infrastructure to offer tax assistance across the state. CCFL is pleased to share that Katharina Stokes became TCAN's project director this spring. Stokes is CCFL's business manager and is thankful for how TCAN serves Nebraska's families. Through collaboration with extraordinary partners and volunteers, TCAN ensures that individuals and families who would otherwise be underserved receive personal tax assistance and the vital economic support they deserve.



TEAM: Jay Schalk, Mark Fowler, Betty Chebitok, Alejandra Vasquez Gutierrez, Ciara Orr, Brooke McBride, Chad Gressley, Sarah Cruz, Jeff Chambers, Danell McCoy Vaughan, Brittany Brakenhoff, Karla Galvan Cabrera, Andrew Ritta, not pictured: Ryan Sullivan

Agencies that partner with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development must maintain client information in a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). One aspect of the Community Services Division's work is to oversee the HMIS for the Nebraska Balance of State and Lincoln Continuums of Care. The statewide system uses Clarity software to collect client and housing services data for individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The HMIS provides the Continuums, individual agencies, and the State of Nebraska with critical data to assess needs, identify gaps, and evaluate the effectiveness of systems and programs with the goal of ending homelessness in Nebraska.

During the 2024 tax season:

TCAN prepared and e-filed

2,252

returns, resulting in

\$2,228,482

in total refunds.

✓ **\$823,362** in Child Tax Credits

✓ **\$629,681** in Earned Income Credits

✓ **\$237,262** in Education Credits



Tax refunds help people to pay bills and meet essential needs like childcare, clothing, food, and shelter. We are so grateful for our volunteers and site partners, such as public libraries, who are invaluable in connecting us with those who would benefit from TCAN's services the most.

– **Katharina Stokes**

Business Manager and Project Director

The number of households and people served in the 2023 Homeless System and Performance Overview:

Nebraska Balance of State:

2,365

Households

3,340

People

836

Children

City of Lincoln:

1,836

Households

2,382

People

519

Children



The Nebraska HMIS is a shared data system that supports a collaborative approach to serving people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and enables ongoing system evaluation. We are grateful for all the partner agencies who contribute to the HMIS as we work together to end homelessness.

– **Jeff M. Chambers**

Senior Project Director

UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law FACULTY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM



CCFL's faculty fellowship program launched in the spring of 2024 to facilitate creative activity and partnership between Center projects and campus faculty. The Center was pleased to select Ryan Sullivan, Robert J. Kutak Distinguished Professor of Law, as the first faculty fellow.

Sullivan has been working closely with CCFL's Community Services Division to help develop and advance research evidence that informs practice to prevent and end homelessness. His focus is specifically on the impact of eviction prevention interventions on the inflow into homelessness.

CCFL serves as the lead agency for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuums of Care with the City of Lincoln and the State of Nebraska. The Center's Community Services Division provides planning, development, evaluation, research, data collection and management, and training for the homeless service system.

Sullivan, former director of the Housing Justice Clinic and founder of the Tenant Assistance Project, brings a wide range of professional expertise and research to this work. He has conducted extensive research in housing justice and homelessness prevention.

The faculty fellowship program will involve various projects and open each spring to all University of Nebraska faculty outside the Center, emphasizing CCFL's deep commitment to creative collaboration, multidisciplinary perspectives, and inclusive excellence.



We are thankful that this fellowship provides an opportunity to partner with Professor Sullivan to address the urgent issue of homelessness and to expand policies and practices that can help ensure everyone has a home.

– **Brittany Brakenhoff**
Research Assistant Professor

THE COLLECTIVE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

Let's stay in touch. Join CCFL's email list to receive news about upcoming projects and services.

Sign up by February 14, 2025, and you'll be entered into a drawing to receive a \$100 credit toward any professional development courses of your choice offered through our new CCFL CAFÉ.

Scan the QR code for details and join our community!



JOIN NOW

We believe in the collective power of partnership, and we would love to connect with you.



CONNECT

@UNLCCFL



CONTRIBUTE

ccfl.unl.edu/about/giving



COLLABORATE

ccfl.unl.edu/about/contact



University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Center on Children, Families, and the Law
206 S. 13th Street, Suite 1000 | P.O. Box 880227
Lincoln, NE 68588-0227



Center on Children, Families, and the Law

206 S. 13th Street, Suite 1000 | Lincoln, NE 68588-0227
402-472-3479 | ccfl.unl.edu

     | @UNLCCFL