

UNIVERSITY of NEBRASKA-LINCOLN



Center on Children, Families, and the Law

CULTIVATING
AUTHENTIC CURIOSITY
AND CONNECTION

OLSON TRAINING CENTER



A Letter from Our Directors

CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC CURIOSITY AND CONNECTION

A medley of laughter and happy voices recently filled the Olson Training Center as smiling staff found their seats. We were attending a Wednesday Workshop at UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law (CCFL), where once a month we gather for a fun activity and then broaden our perspectives by hearing from an invited speaker.

Presenters include community partners, university faculty, and our CCFL Project Directors. No matter the speaker, these workshops always lead to thoughtful questions and provide an invaluable opportunity to get curious and connect as we learn about a topic together.

Expanding our sense of curiosity encourages us to listen and learn from those with lived experience and increases insight into how we can more effectively **help the helpers**. Strengthening our sense of connection reminds us of the transformative power of community and reaffirms that we must all work together for children and families to be able to thrive.

We are committed to cultivating authentic curiosity and connection as we grow, and we believe you will see that represented throughout the following pages. Featured projects focus on permanency, child and youth engagement, homelessness prevention, safe and healthy families, trauma-capable schools, workforce and family well-being, youth justice, court improvement, economic aid, and respite care. CCFL collaborates with exceptional partner organizations and agencies in these efforts.

We are so proud of the work our faculty, staff, and students are doing at CCFL and are pleased to share it with you in this report.

Eve Brank, JD, PhD

Director

Kathy Olson, MA, JD

Associate Director

Christine Henningsen, BSW, JD

Associate Director



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

The 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 Tribal 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 COMMITMENT

We believe that **every person and every interaction matters**. In this annual report, you will see how our various projects help support the six ambitious aims of UNL's N2025 Strategic Plan.



OUR GROWTH



1987-2023



98%
FY grant success rate



100+
collaborative partners

CCFL Awards



700+
years of combined experience at CCFL

28
employees have worked 10+ years at CCFL

20
employees have worked 15+ years at CCFL

13
employees have worked 20+ years at CCFL

OUR WORK

We are excited to share a few project highlights on the following pages. With more than 30 collaborative projects, sub-projects, programs, and initiatives, this annual report only features a limited sampling of CCFL's work. We invite you to scan the QR code for a more in-depth look at the scope of CCFL's services, projects, training, and publications.





TEAM: Dawn Davis, Eve Brank, Brittany Brakenhoff, Spencer Gowin, Michelle Graef, Megan Paul, not pictured: Sara Ibrahim

NEW: National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative



The National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI), led by the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), began in 2017 and is an online training designed to support child welfare and mental health professionals to address the mental health needs of children and families in adoption, guardianship, or kinship care.

Traumatic experiences and early losses contribute to developmental and emotional challenges that may be inadequately addressed because professionals do not receive specialized training. NTI aims to improve collaboration between services and to improve permanency, child and family well-being, and stability through enhanced casework and clinical practice.

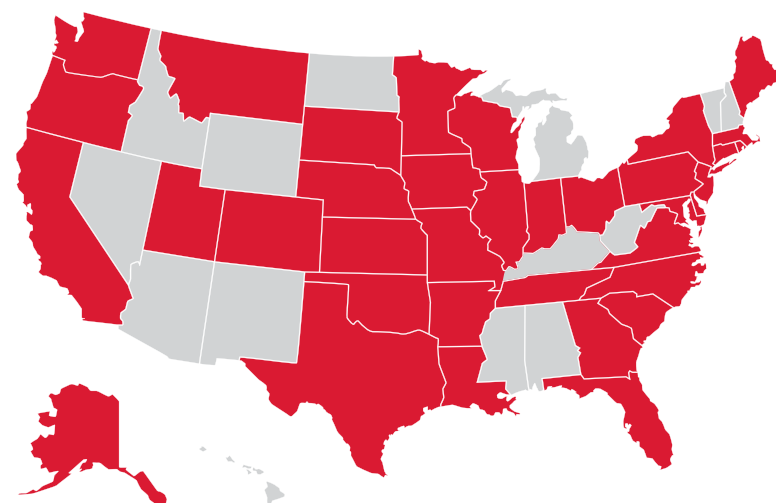
Starting in 2022, CCFL has led the evaluation of NTI by assessing the outreach and promotion of NTI; training implementation and utilization; participant experiences, knowledge, and case practice; and collaboration between professionals. These evaluation data are integral to demonstrating C.A.S.E.'s progress toward NTI's goals and its impact.

Having an attitude of curiosity is a must at nearly every stage of evaluation, from seeking to understand the program, to developing measures, identifying information sources, analyzing data, and interpreting results. The CCFL team is passionate about using effective methods and trust-based connections to ensure the success of this nationwide initiative.

“ We have been building authentic connections as we work closely with C.A.S.E. to ensure that our evaluation contributes to NTI's success. It is exciting that this Web-based training addresses a national need by supporting the child welfare and mental health workforce and the children and families they serve. ”

- Dawn Davis,
Research Assistant Professor

The NTI directory lists NTI-trained Mental Health Providers in 34 states.



153

Child Welfare Professionals

20

Child Welfare Supervisors

41

Mental Health Professionals

COMPLETED NTI TRAINING
(October 2022 – March 2023)

Over

90%

of participants were satisfied with the training.



Participants reported significant increases in **ADOPTION MENTAL HEALTH COMPETENCE** in both knowledge and ability.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau; Center for Adoption Support and Education; Family Equality; FosterClub; PolicyWorks, Ltd; University of Connecticut School of Social Work, Innovations Institute



TEAM: Megan Paul, Michelle Graef, not pictured: Penny Putnam Collins (consultant)

NEW: Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency



The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency (QIC-EY) is charged with advancing child welfare programs and practice to ensure that they are authentically engaging and empowering children and youth in child welfare throughout the U.S., especially in relation to permanency decisions. Spaulding for Children leads the QIC-EY, and CCFL is one of four collaborative partners. CCFL's primary role is to help child welfare agencies make systemic changes to improve child and youth engagement.

This process is all about being curious. Exploring current practice, assessing organizational functioning, identifying facilitators and barriers, analyzing root causes, and generating solutions all involve an iterative process of

questions and answers. This work is done with surveys and facilitated discussions and activities with subject matter experts.

The team has also provided input on the eight pilot sites, supported the design and development of the training and coaching model, delivered technical assistance, and offered sustainability planning.

CCFL is proud to be a part of the QIC-EY and transformative child welfare change that authentically engages with children and youth and amplifies their voices.

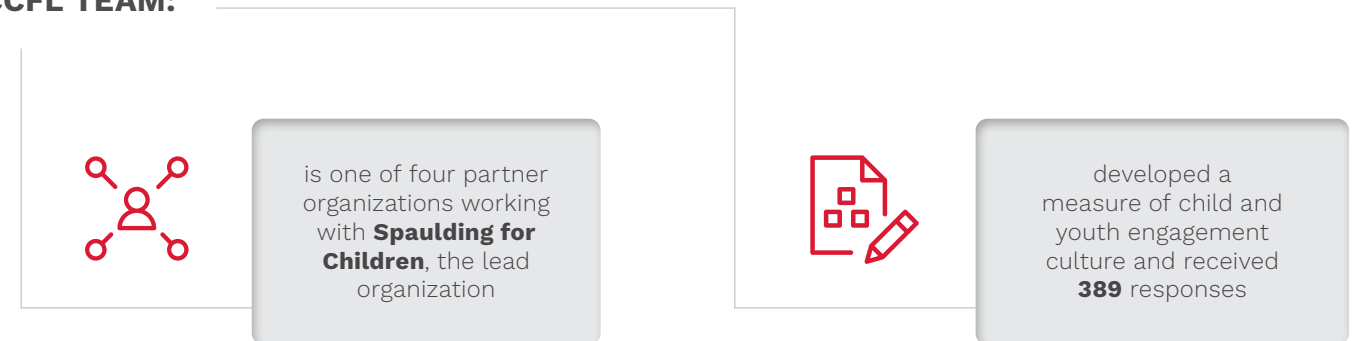
“ Youth are the experts on their own lives and must be heard. We seek to connect with and learn from subject matter experts with diverse backgrounds, including youth and young adults with lived expertise, workers, supervisors, managers, trainers, administrators, and our project partners. ”

- Megan Paul,
Research Associate Professor

8 public and Tribal child welfare jurisdictions are participating in the QIC-EY.

- Hawaii
- Michigan
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Oklahoma Southern Plains
- Rhode Island
- Yakama Nation

THE CCFL TEAM:



COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau; Spaulding for Children; New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors; North American Council on Adoptable Children; University of Washington School of Social Work

Community Services Division



Safe and Healthy Families Initiative



TEAM: Jay Schalk, Skye Windle, Brittany Brakenhoff, Jeff M. Chambers, Danell McCoy Vaughan, Sally Buchholz

The Community Services Division helps the helpers by developing systems and programs that serve those needing basic and emergency assistance, including housing, food, and financial support. Ending Homelessness Planning and Development is one component of Community Services. Hearing directly from those who have experienced homelessness is vital to planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of homeless systems and programs. Cultivating trusting relationships with homeless service providers and those with lived experience is crucial to address the housing crisis and meet real needs with real solutions.



TEAM: Dayna Goff, Angela Gebhardt, Jamie Bahm, not pictured: Pamela Jordan

CCFL is part of the Family Violence Council's Safe and Healthy Families Initiative (SAHFI), which provides a coordinated response to child maltreatment cases related to domestic violence (DV) in Lancaster County. SAHFI seeks to develop a DV-informed workforce to improve professional practice within the intersection of DV and child welfare. This goal requires meeting professionals where they are, setting aside assumptions, and approaching professional development training open-mindedly. SAHFI is dedicated to bringing together community partners, Department of Health and Human Services caseworkers, therapists, law enforcement, county attorneys, private attorneys, judges, and other practitioners to help families experiencing DV receive the support and services they need.

“Engaging with those who are experiencing homelessness is essential to meet housing needs. Listening helps everyone to more fully understand and address systemic barriers, which is crucial in the fight to end homelessness for all.”

- Jeff M. Chambers, Senior Project Director



HUD FUNDING INCREASED 121%

In the past five years annual HUD funding to the Lincoln and Nebraska Balance of State Continuums of Care has increased.

HOMELESSNESS DECREASED 41%

In the past ten years, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Lincoln and the Nebraska Balance of State has decreased.

\$48M

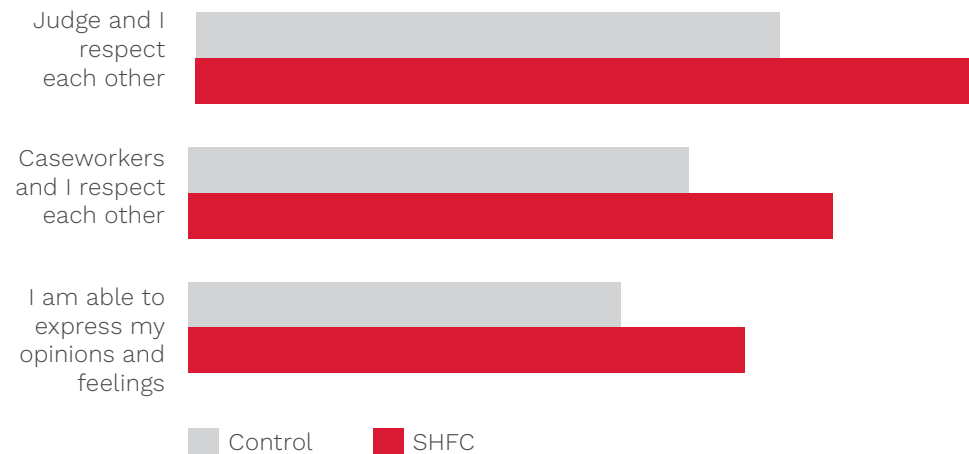
Since 2020, Community Services has helped distribute \$48 million in emergency rent and utility assistance to prevent homelessness in Lincoln and Lancaster County.



“Relationships create change, and healthy ones happen through connection, not control. SAHFI aims to cultivate respectful and reciprocal relationships with multidisciplinary professionals, assisting them with the resources they need to be relationally safe and responsive for families experiencing DV.”

- Angela Gebhardt, Training Specialist II

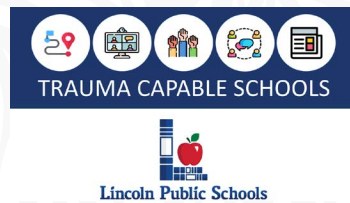
PARENTS FEEL MORE RESPECTED AND HEARD IN THE LANCASTER SAFE AND HEALTHY FAMILIES COURT (SHFC)



COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: Balance of State Continuum of Care (60 community-based organizations serving 89 counties), Lincoln Continuum of Care, City of Lincoln, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Department of Economic Development, Nebraska Department of Education, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: Lancaster County Safe and Healthy Families Court, Family Violence Council, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Voices of Hope, Friendship Home, CASA of Lancaster County, Lancaster County Attorney’s Office, BraveBe

Trauma Capable Schools



Training for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services



TEAM: Cheryl Turner, not pictured: Jessica Cook, Shelly Johnson, Allison Jones, Charlie Lewis, Megan Paul, Laurie Voelker

Trauma Capable Schools includes an online training library developed by CCFL that offers stand-alone courses for Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) personnel. In addition, the project utilizes surveys, workgroups, and evaluations to understand how various parts of the school system impact students, including how to respond to educator experiences, values, attitudes, barriers, and successes. The project has increased trust and decreased suspensions, expulsions, and out-of-classroom time by applying evidence-based promising practices and a healing-centered approach. Trauma Capable Schools helps students and educators to grow emotionally, behaviorally, and academically by supporting school personnel as they integrate trauma-sensitive solutions into the school system.



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

CCFL's training team delivers comprehensive New Worker Training to Child and Family Services (CFS) Specialists and Nebraska Tribal staff. CCFL's multidisciplinary team invites input from CFS trainees, experienced workers, supervisors, administrators, and families with lived experience, which helps to expand perspectives and grounds training curricula in genuine practice. Research suggests that workers and families are experiencing increased stress. Raising mental and physical well-being awareness, education, and support is crucial to staff retention. When CFS staff feel empowered in self-care, they become better equipped to support child and family well-being.

“ When we foster authentic curiosity and connection between educators and their students, everyone benefits. A school system that focuses on relationship building, cultural humility, and trauma-informed education practices empowers students to succeed. ”

- Cheryl Turner, Training Specialist II

DURING THE 2023 FY:

54

social workers completed a three-year training to be self-sustainable in Trauma Informed and Restorative Practices (TIRP) assessments

150

school counselors were trained in providing observation data for TIRP assessments

Three new mental health courses were developed and launched online:

- 1 Anxiety or Behavior: What Comes First?
- 2 Psychotropic Medications
- 3 Bringing Equity into the Classroom

“ By hearing, respecting, and honestly addressing the needs of workers, we remain true to our mission to help the helpers and improve the lives of children and families. ”

- Shelly Johnson, Training Administrator

NEW WORKER TRAINING HAS:



19

courses with mental and physical well-being resources for workers and families



Children's Justice Clinic



Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children



TEAM: Sabina Hardesty, Michelle Paxton, Terra Garay

The Children's Justice Clinic (CJC) was created by CCFL and Nebraska Law and offers experiential learning for third-year law students to serve as guardians ad litem (GALs) in the juvenile court system. The CJC has transformed the legal landscape of child welfare in Nebraska by providing high-quality representation to maltreated and neglected children. Despite overwhelming success since launching in 2017, the clinic continues to look for innovative ways to enhance the student and client experience. In 2023, the CJC was pleased to expand expert consultation by hiring a part-time social worker. Students report that meeting with an in-house social worker has increased their confidence, advocacy, and overall understanding of their cases.

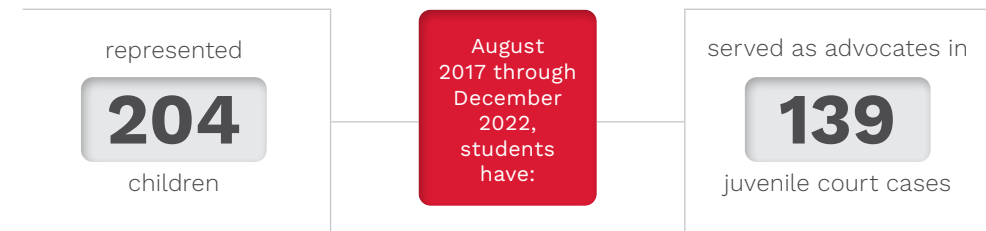


TEAM: Tracey Kock, Haifaa Al-saadi, Ashtyn Beck, Melissa Villarreal, Kelli Hauptman, Dayna Goff, Jamie Bahm, not pictured: Sarah Brown, Samantha Byrns, Pamela Jordan, Lindsey Ondrak, Cassandra Roberts

The Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children (NRPVYC) improves the well-being of young children by strengthening the professionals who serve them. One area of focus is Court Infusion, which introduces therapeutic principles to juvenile and problem-solving courts. During 2022-2023, NRPVYC supported two problem-solving court projects, provided a needs assessment to a third court, and offered reflective practice Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) training and ongoing reflective consultation to judges, attorneys, and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) caseworkers involved in juvenile court. Through Court Infusion, NRPVYC connects court professionals with evidence-based, trauma-informed practice, leading to improved outcomes for children and families.

“GALs indicate that talking with our CJC social worker has helped them to more fully connect with the parents’ perspectives, get curious about their own unconscious biases, and become even better advocates for the children they represent.”

- Michelle Paxton, Director, Children's Justice Clinic

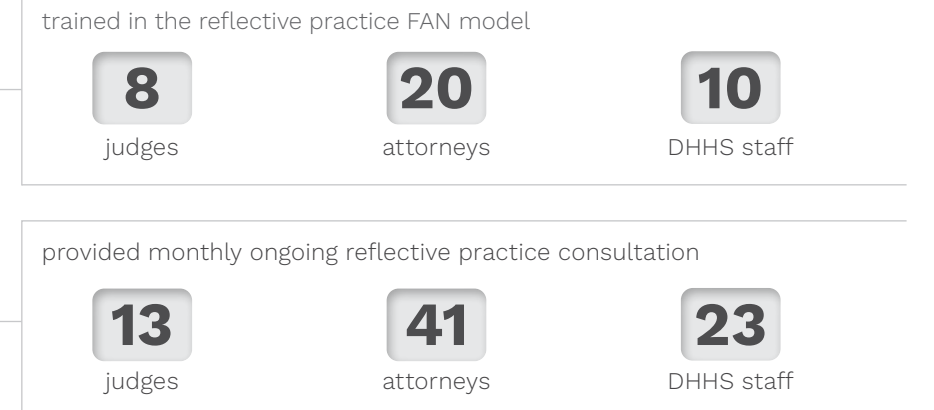


In 2023, the Acklie Charitable Foundation made a landmark gift to the University of Nebraska College of Law, part of which was a permanent endowment of the Children's Justice Clinic.

“A large part of NRPVYC’s work is centered around attunement. Attunement between parent and baby. Attunement in interactions with others. In our work with courts, we offer reflective practice training programs and ongoing reflective consultation to help support court professionals’ interactions with colleagues, co-workers, clients, and others.”

- Kelli Hauptman, Project Director

IN 2022, NRPVYC:



Managed **549** completed evaluation surveys through its court projects

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: Nebraska Law, Case Consultants Elizabeth Eynon-Kokrda and Lauren Micek Vargas (Education Rights Counsel)

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: Lancaster County (OJJDP grant), Lancaster County Family Treatment Drug Court, Lancaster County Safe and Healthy Families Court, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation

Tax Credit Alliance of Nebraska



Tax Credit Alliance
OF NEBRASKA

Answers4Families

Answers **4** Families



TEAM: Linda Moody, Kyla McGregor, Ana Mora-Becerra

The Tax Credit Alliance of Nebraska (TCAN) offers free federal and state income tax preparation to populations currently underserved across the state. TCAN is sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service and is part of CCFL. The team keeps busy year-round, informing individuals about their tax credit eligibility by conducting educational clinics across Nebraska. Preparing a return can involve multiple tax codes and statutes. During training, various case studies are used to pique curiosity and assist preparers in understanding and applying tax law correctly. The TCAN team enjoys working collaboratively to solve complex returns while ensuring individuals, children, and families receive the tax assistance and returns they deserve.



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

Answers4Families (A4F) is a dynamic multi-platform information hub connecting Nebraskans with special needs to resources and support. One aspect of A4F's work is a partnership with the Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network (NLRN), a resource for family caregivers. A4F administers NLRN's website and database, which offers training, caregiver events, a provider directory, and a data dashboard. NLRN's innovative respite program consistently garners national recognition for its impactful contributions to caregivers. By conducting evaluations and embracing diverse viewpoints, A4F is helping NLRN foster open feedback and facilitate responsive, reciprocal relationships with respite providers and the family caregivers they serve.

“Everyone's story matters. Our team strives to prepare taxpayers' returns ethically and responsibly by maximizing credits. We build connections with humility, empathy, clarifying questions, and active listening. TCAN is committed to creating a learning community that serves, educates, and relieves taxpayer stress.”

- Linda Moody,
Project Director

DURING THE 2023 TAX SEASON, TCAN PREPARED AND E-FILED 2,082 RETURNS.



“Caregivers need support. Answers4Families is deeply committed to working with the Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network to connect family caregivers to respite services and enhance statewide efforts to strengthen family well-being.”

- Charlotte Lewis,
Project Director



FAMILY CAREGIVER:

A person who provides ongoing care for an individual unable to care for themselves due to age, physical or mental disability, or illness.

There are over **179,000** identified family caregivers in Nebraska.

(source: AARP: Valuing the Invaluable 2023)

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: American Jobs Center, Asian Community and Culture Center, Beyond School Bells, Center for People, Dawson County Economic Development, F Street Community Center, Good Neighbor Center, Ho Chunk Inc., Indian Center, IRS SPEC, Lincoln VITA, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Nebraska Law, Nebraska Unions, Omaha South Library, Southeast Community College, Union College, UNL Honors Program, Veteran Affairs, Washington Public Library, Wilson Public Library

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS: Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network, Nebraska Caregiver Coalition, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Respite Service Providers across Nebraska, ARCH National Respite Network, Area Agencies on Aging, Centers for Independent Living, Early Development Network



HOW CAN WE CONTINUE TO CULTIVATE AUTHENTIC CURIOSITY AND CONNECTION?

By listening and learning open-mindedly, we commit to rooting out reductive beliefs and biases and expanding equity and inclusion. By building community open-heartedly, we commit to breaking down barriers and increasing well-being and belonging.

There may be moments when authenticity feels absent, crises seem to diminish the capacity for curiosity, and some use differences to drive disconnection. That is when we must choose to dig deep. Disconnection harms. Connection heals.

At UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law, we are grounded and growing in our mission of **helping the helpers** to improve the lives of children and families.

Relationships are the greatest resource for working toward real solutions. CCFL is deeply grateful for our collaborative partners—the extraordinary changemakers working alongside us.

We look forward to cultivating authentic curiosity and connection with you and all the children and families we serve this coming year.

CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC CURIOSITY AND CONNECTION

CONNECT WITH US

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

Simply scan the QR code and tell us a little about yourself. You will be entered into a drawing to receive one of a dozen CCFL mugs or sweatshirts as a thank-you!



ENTER THE DRAWING



CONNECT

@UNLCCFL



CONTRIBUTE

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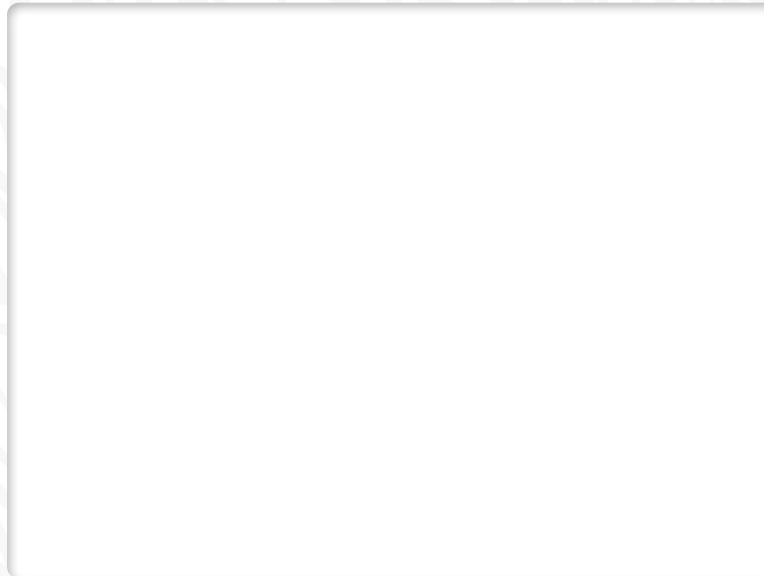


COLLABORATE

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