

Call for White Papers: Soliciting Evidence on Best Practices for Breaking the Cycle of Child Abuse

Introduction and Purpose

Upbring is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a 133-year history of providing compassionate care for children through services that include foster care, adoption, shelters, transitional youth programs and charter schools. In addition, Upbring helps families and communities facing economic hardships and provides disaster response.

Upbring has developed a new strategic plan that shifts the organization from a reactionary position to an anticipatory one. All programs going forward will support the overarching mission **to break the cycle of child abuse by empowering children, families and communities**. By some estimates, approximately one-third of abused and neglected children grow up to abuse or neglect their own children when they become parents; therefore, Upbring seeks to move from a post-abuse intervention model to a prevention model, one that builds generations of non-abusers.

Upbring is creating a bold new identity to reflect its new mission and will achieve this mission by offering a continuum of services through community partnerships that **build the protective factors needed to successfully bring up all Texas children**. This model, called the New Continuum Framework, is aimed at achieving measurable progress in key areas considered critical to preventing future child maltreatment.

Current research shows that to affect substantial change in a child's well-being, programs need to impact the following areas:

1. Family, Social, Physical and Safety Environments
2. Health and Healthcare
3. Education
4. Economic Stability

Research also indicates that within each area, programs must build five protective factors that are critical to ending the cycle of child abuse. They are:

1. Health
2. Education
3. Safety
4. Life Skills
5. Vocation

Upbring is seeking input on best practices for each of these five protective factors, with an emphasis on protective factors for children currently in the child welfare system. Case studies from Texas and other states, cost-benefit analyses of preventative measures and proposals for building the evidence base for promising programs, are all welcome. Example topics follow:

1. What promising and evidence-based health initiatives can build protective factors and help prevent child maltreatment in future generations?

- What is the impact of having a medical home for children in the welfare system, such as a primary care provider or a foster care clinic? In general, what are best practices for improving access to and optimizing utilization of health services for children in the welfare system?
- What evidence exists for the effectiveness of hospital based interventions? (Such as programs to educate parents on shaken baby syndrome.) How do these compare in effectiveness to primary care based interventions?
- How do child maltreatment rates correspond to the availability of health services in the eleven Child Protective Services regions in Texas (or in other states, ideally based on GIS analysis)?
- What prospective research designs can be proposed for evaluating the long-term health outcomes of youth who have been involved in the child welfare system? Is any survey data available on former foster children specifically?
- What are effective trauma-informed care (TIC) practices and what research exists on long-term outcomes for foster children who had access to TIC vs. those who did not?
- What foster care programs have integrated efforts to promote healthy lifestyles (nutrition, healthy eating and exercise) and what have been the outcomes?
- What special health and mental health needs are the strongest predictors for child welfare system involvement, on behalf of either the child or parent? What are empirically-tested best practices for early identification of these health needs?
- What evidence exists for non-traditional trauma therapy for youth? Examples include: Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), horseback riding therapy, music therapy, art therapy, mentoring, yoga and recreational therapy.

2. What promising and evidence-based education initiatives can build protective factors and help prevent child maltreatment in future generations?

- Which early education programs are most effective (as defined by different stakeholders)? Among various Head Start, Early Head Start and Pre-K programs, do certain models show more success than others?
- What are best practices for providing alternative educational opportunities for children in the child welfare system? (Such as virtual school networks, charter schools, etc.)
- What are best practices for minimizing the educational disruption caused by multiple foster home placements? Case studies from other states are welcome.
- What types of enhanced technology can be provided to individuals with serious emotional disabilities on psychotropic drugs to promote the retention of learning?
- Are enhanced artistic programs (such as music, art and integrated subjects) effective therapeutic tools for traumatized teens?

- What evidence exists for specialized physical education programs that teach students to apply both hemispheres of the brain?

3. What promising and evidence-based safety initiatives can build protective factors and help prevent child maltreatment in future generations?

- What role does the physical environment play in the rehabilitation of a youth in a residential treatment center or similar institution?
- What are best practices for foster care parent recruitment and retention?
- What are examples of effective management policies and procedures in the foster care system?
- What are the best ways to identify families who need preventive services?
- What are best practices for providing home-based family preservation services in Texas or other states?
- What is the tipping point at which excessive caseloads for child welfare social workers can be shown quantitatively to endanger child safety?
- What are best practices nationally for providing support to families that provide informal kinship care?

4. What promising and evidence-based life skills initiatives can build protective factors and help prevent child maltreatment in future generations?

- What are best practices for providing life skills training for youth? What effective models are available for teaching topics such as: money management, consumer education, housing, transportation, nutrition, personal health and safety? Please include information on the delivery of services as well as any evidence of success.
- What are the best ways to measure a child's competency in life skills prior to the child exiting the child welfare system? What is the appropriate role of a standardized versus an individualized life skills curriculum?
- Out of various adult living preparation programs available in Texas (such as Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) and Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood (PAYA)) which is most effective and why?
- What evidence exists for these specific programs: Nurturing Parenting Program? Skillstreaming? Aggression Replacement Training?

5. What promising and evidence-based vocational initiatives can build protective factors and help prevent child maltreatment in future generations?

- What are best practices for delivering job training to youth in the child welfare system? Please provide descriptions of successful programs nationwide.
- What are the major barriers to empowering youth in the child welfare system to gain meaningful and fulfilling employment opportunities, including alignment of skills with workforce demand and logistical considerations such as availability of transportation?
- Have there been successful public-private partnerships in the area of youth job training? Please provide case studies and cost-benefit information.

6. Other Topics

- Is the New Continuum Framework being implemented by UPBRING to break the cycle of child abuse addressing the correct program areas and protective factors? Are there other areas which need to be addressed?
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis that compares the cost of investing in child abuse prevention (such as in-home family services) to the cost of post-abuse treatment. If possible, provide an analysis of preventative programs currently active in Texas or other states.
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis that compares the cost of providing developmental services to children while in the child welfare system to the cost of addressing problems that arise after leaving.
- Survey prominent people who were formerly in the child welfare system to collect anecdotal evidence regarding their life experiences and reflections on what child welfare system features or protective factors helped them achieve success as adults.

Projected Schedule

2015
February – Release call for white papers.
March – Deadline for one page proposals for white papers.
April – Funding assigned and research partners publicly announced.
June – Submission deadline for Wave 1 of papers.
September – Submission deadline for Wave 2 of papers.
December – Submission deadline for Wave 3 of papers.
2016
March – Conference in Austin, Texas to share findings (TBA)