



Within Our Reach

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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\*\*\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\*\*\*\*

## **CHILD SAFETY FORWARD INDIANA RELEASES FINAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTING FINDINGS IN MULTI-YEAR EFFORT TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO REDUCE CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN FOUR INDIANA COUNTIES**

**Indianapolis, IN** – The final evaluation report for the [Child Safety Forward](#) Indiana was released today. Child Safety Forward is a multi-year demonstration initiative, launched in October 2019 with funding from the Department of Justice (DOJ) Office for Victims of Crime, and technical assistance led by Social Current. This initiative engaged five sites across the United States in research, planning and implementation of strategies aimed at reducing child injury and fatality from abuse and neglect.

“Findings from a five-year retrospective review of child fatality data indicated that 27 percent were sleep-related infant deaths (Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths, SUIDs) and children of color were overrepresented in 38 percent of these deaths. Findings also revealed inconsistent and incomplete SUID documentation, limiting our understanding of SUID prevalence and risk factors,” noted Bryan Victor, with the Wayne State University School of Social Work and one of Child Safety Forward Indiana project’s evaluators. “Interviews with child-serving professionals across systems revealed the need to change the child fatality review (CFR) process through better cross-system collaboration.”

The Child Safety Forward Indiana initiative involved a collaborative partnership with broad range of cross-system partners, including Indiana Department of Health Fatality Review and Prevention Division (grantee), Indiana University School of Social Work (IUSSW), parent advocates, CFR Teams in Clark, Grant, Delaware, and Madison Counties, Indiana CFR Team, the Indiana Department of Child Services, the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana, Prevent Child Abuse Indiana, Firefly Children and Family Alliance, Indiana Criminal Justice Institute, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Courts, Indiana Pro-Bono, and many other stakeholders, such as [Strengthening Indiana Families](#) that is implementing Family Resource Centers.

“While we cannot make direct causal inferences given multiple factors, our collaborative impact has been significant, resulting in greater cross-system collaboration, improved CFR process, a data-informed statewide [infant safe sleep campaign](#) with over 1.5 million views” added Susana Mariscal, the Child Safety Forward Indiana Lead Evaluator with the Indiana University School of Social Work. “Our findings informed two policy changes around CFR teams ([IC-16-49-2-2](#), 2021) and SUID investigations ([Indiana House Enrolled Act No. 1169](#) in 2022) in Indiana.”

Child Safety Forward Indiana target area included Clark, Delaware, Grant, and Madison Counties. Key elements of the project strategy included:

- Improving the quality and sustainability of the CFR process through access to better data, key policy changes and updated guidelines and training.
- Improving cross-system collaboration by convening a multi-disciplinary steering committee, in partnership with Strengthening Indiana Families (SIF), that is implementing Family Resource Centers.
- Creating Community Action Teams to implement CFR team recommendations with an outcomes-focused approach to building healthy communities.
- Including the voices and representation of parents in shaping prevention programs, by collaborating with a Parent Advisory Council.

“The lessons learned around how the CFR process across various counties differed, led to the Child Safety Forward Indiana team identifying the need for specific policy changes to streamline and improve the process,” noted Amy Templeman, senior director of the Within Our Reach team and child and family well-being at Social Current. “They provided evidence to inform legislative and policy changes that were subsequently passed into law and have already had a noticeable impact on CFR teams.”

“Child Safety Forward Indiana developed and implemented a true cross-system, multi-disciplinary approach to the work of reducing child fatalities,” noted Stacy Phillips, Victim Justice Program Specialist with the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) within the U.S. Department of Justice. “The impact of this work cannot be overstated: in just four years, there were decreases in SUID rates and child fatalities due to external injuries in the target area. Their work offers a playbook for system and practice improvement across the child welfare workforce.”

“While these improvements are encouraging, there is still more to do to prevent child fatalities. Findings also revealed incomplete data around youth suicide and gun-related death scene investigations, which have increased after the pandemic. Complete death scene investigations data would enable us to provide proactive community, system, and structural level responses,” noted Mariscal. “We need everyone’s support to reduce child abuse and neglect fatalities in Indiana, so that all children and youth can reach their full potential.”

In addition to the Indiana Department of Health, the other Child Safety Forward demonstration sites include St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut; Cook County Health in Illinois; Sacramento County CA’s Child Abuse Prevention Council; and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Final reports from St. Francis Hospital and Cook County Health are available [here](#). The remaining final reports will be issued in the fall of 2023. The technical assistance team is led by Within Our Reach, an office at Social Current.

### **About the Within Our Reach Office**

[Within Our Reach](#) is an office established within Social Current (formerly the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities) to further the recommendations of the federal [Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities](#). The goal of Within Our Reach is to equip policymakers, practitioners, and advocates with the tools they need to fundamentally reform child welfare. Based on the commission’s national strategy, desired reform includes a proactive public health approach—a shared family and community responsibility to keep children safe. Within Our Reach is made possible through collaboration with Casey Family Programs, whose mission is to provide, improve, and prevent the need for foster care.

## **About Social Current**

Social Current activates the power of the social sector by bringing together a dynamic network of human/social service organizations and partners. Leveraging the collective experience of the field and research, we energize and activate the sector and drive continuous evolution and improvement. Social Current amplifies the work of the social sector through collaboration, innovation, policy, and practice excellence. We offer access to intellectual capital of thousands of professionals within our network through peer groups, learning opportunities, collective advocacy, individualized consultation, tools, and resources that address the sector's most critical challenges.

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