

# Reaching Further & Connecting Bridges: Lessons from Within Our Reach



A policy education and communications toolkit  
for preventing child fatalities from maltreatment



August 21, 2025

# Agreements

Use your active listening skills – listen to learn and understand not just to respond.

Use “I” statements – speak for yourself, not for others.

Be honest in your personal reflections – share as much as you feel comfortable with.

Be respectful – each person has a unique experience.

Be open-minded – suspend judgment of others.

Ask questions.

Assume good intention.

# Goals for This Presentation

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- Introduce the team and provide background information on Within Our Reach and why the policy education and communications toolkit is needed. And what can we include.
- Share what we are learning more about family strengthening policies and how building protective factors reduces child abuse and neglect fatalities
- Describe elements of the toolkit that we need to elevate:
  - Promoting self-care and wellness for staff & organizations
  - Engaging fathers, grandparents and others. (expand family definition)
  - Value of community voice and expertise
  - Purposeful collaboration amongst family serving systems

# Introducing our team

## Romero Davis

Senior Director of Child and Family Well-Being, Social Current

## Kara Georgi\*

NYS Parent Leader and Lead Senior Associate of Parent Partnerships, Children's Trust Fund Alliance

## Churmell Mitchell\*

Parent and Fatherhood Engagement Advocate, A Father's Voice Matters, Pain to Parenting, Children's Trust Fund Alliance

## Delmarys Serrano\*

Child and Families Consultant and Advocate, Pain to Parenting, Hartford Parent University, Voices of Women of Color

## Kimberly Heard

Director of Practice Excellence, Social Current

*\*Steering Committee members*

# Within Our Reach Report

*“One need only read the Within Our Reach report issued several years ago; the most poignant findings are that investment in upstream prevention and a true investment in familial supports are the best ways to prevent serious child injury and fatalities.”*

**Jerry Milner and David Kelly,**  
*Family Integrity and Justice Quarterly*  
Spring 2022



**Reminder: Three things we've learned about child fatalities from maltreatment**

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Child fatalities and serious injuries from maltreatment are preventable

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We know what works to prevent them

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Child protective services cannot do this work on their own

# Defining Five Protective Factors



## Parental Resilience

Managing stress and functioning well—facilitated by individual, relational, community, or societal factors—when faced with stressors, adversity, or trauma

## Social Connections

Healthy, meaningful, trusting, and sustained relationships with people, institutions, communities, or a higher power that promote a sense of connectedness, belonging, and mattering



## Social & Emotional Competence of Children

Providing environments and experiences—grounded in early relational health—that build positive social skills; enable children to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; and promote effective communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills

## Knowledge of Parenting & Child Development

Learning about prenatal, infant, and child development, and using developmentally and contextually appropriate parenting practices

## Concrete Support

Identifying, accessing, advocating for, and receiving high quality and equitable support including the basic necessities everyone deserves and specialized services to address specific needs

# What we know:

## **Finding from NPCS fatality reviews:**

The most common systems issue is **teamwork and coordination with external agencies** (such as law enforcement). Narrative data points to underlying challenges with **culture, communication, and interpersonal dynamics** that impact effective collaboration.

# Workforce Challenges Across Sectors

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- High levels of burnout and unmanaged stress
- Recruitment and retention difficulties
- Shared struggles across child welfare, social work, education, healthcare, law enforcement, and community advocacy
- Difficulty sustaining both workforce well-being and organizational missions

# Workforce Challenges Across Sectors

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Most frequent systems issue: **coordination with external agencies** (e.g., law enforcement)

Narrative data highlights:

- Cultural differences between agencies
- Communication gaps and breakdowns
- Interpersonal challenges impacting collaboration

# How to Talk About Preventing Family Stress

Use The “Overloaded” Metaphor



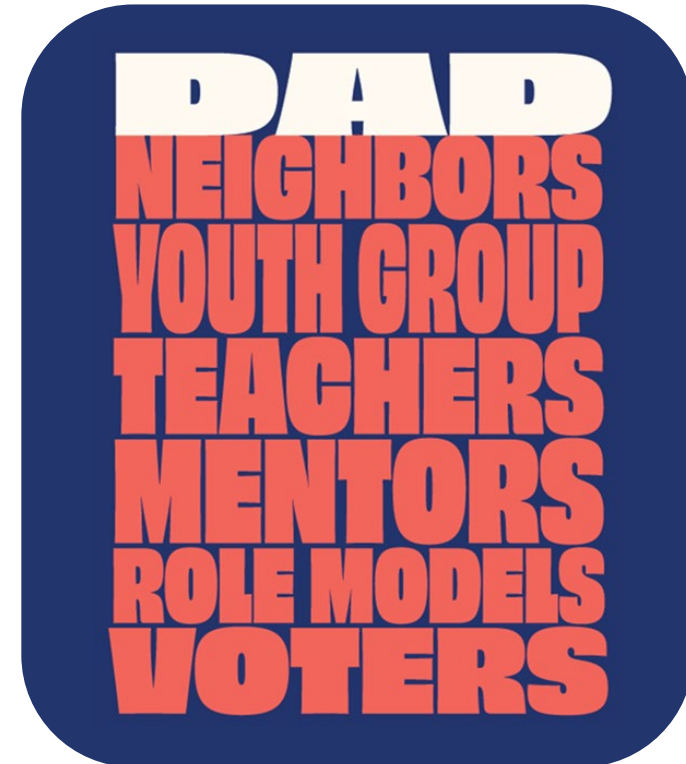
“Just as a vehicle can bear only so much weight before it stops moving forward, challenging life circumstances can overload or overburden parents, making it hard for them to provide the best kinds of care and support.

To prevent a breakdown in care, we can focus on services and resources that can help lighten the load on families.”

# Fatherhood Engagement

## Everyone has a role to play in promoting fatherhood engagement:

- Child welfare leaders are encouraged to implement supportive policies, training, and collaborative projects.
- Policymakers can champion legislative changes, fund fatherhood programs, and ensure policies are inclusive of fathers' needs.
- Establish father-focused support groups, father-friendly accreditations, and policies that facilitate non-resident father involvement.



# Fatherhood Engagement

## Everyone has a role to play in promoting fatherhood engagement:



- Develop training programs and resources on the importance of father engagement and the unique contributions fathers make.
- Work with academic institutions, community organizations, and other child welfare agencies to enhance fatherhood programs and college enhancement in a trade or degree.
- Advocate for laws and policies that facilitate father engagement

# Where to Find Us

**Full toolkit will be posted at**

[bit.ly/WOR-Toolkit](https://bit.ly/WOR-Toolkit)

**\*\*subscribe to Social Current newsletter for updates**

**Within Our Reach report**

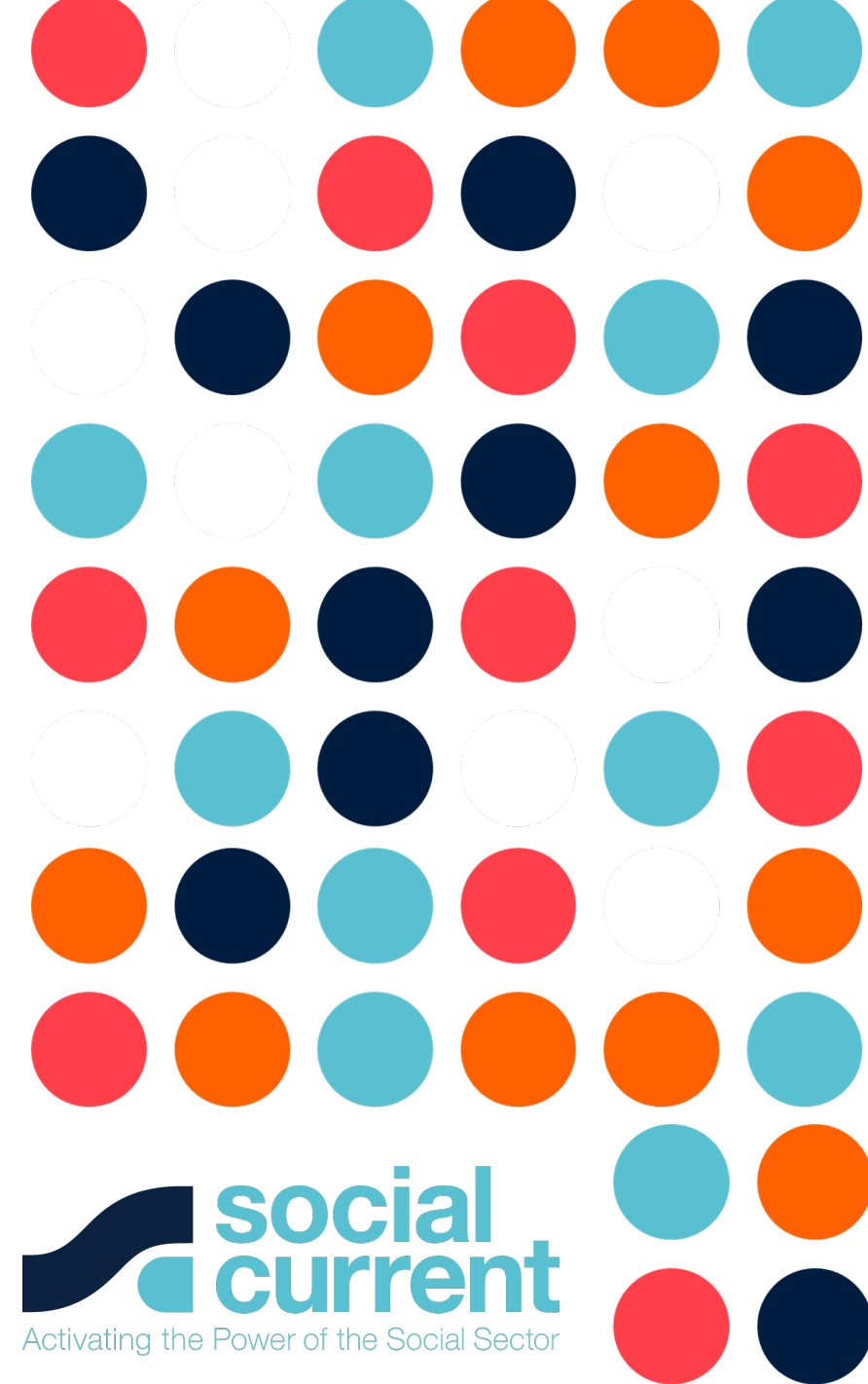
[bit.ly/WOR-Report](https://bit.ly/WOR-Report)

**Child Safety Forward**

[bit.ly/WOR-ChildSafety](https://bit.ly/WOR-ChildSafety)

**Building Better Childhoods**

[buildingbetterchildhoods.org](https://buildingbetterchildhoods.org)



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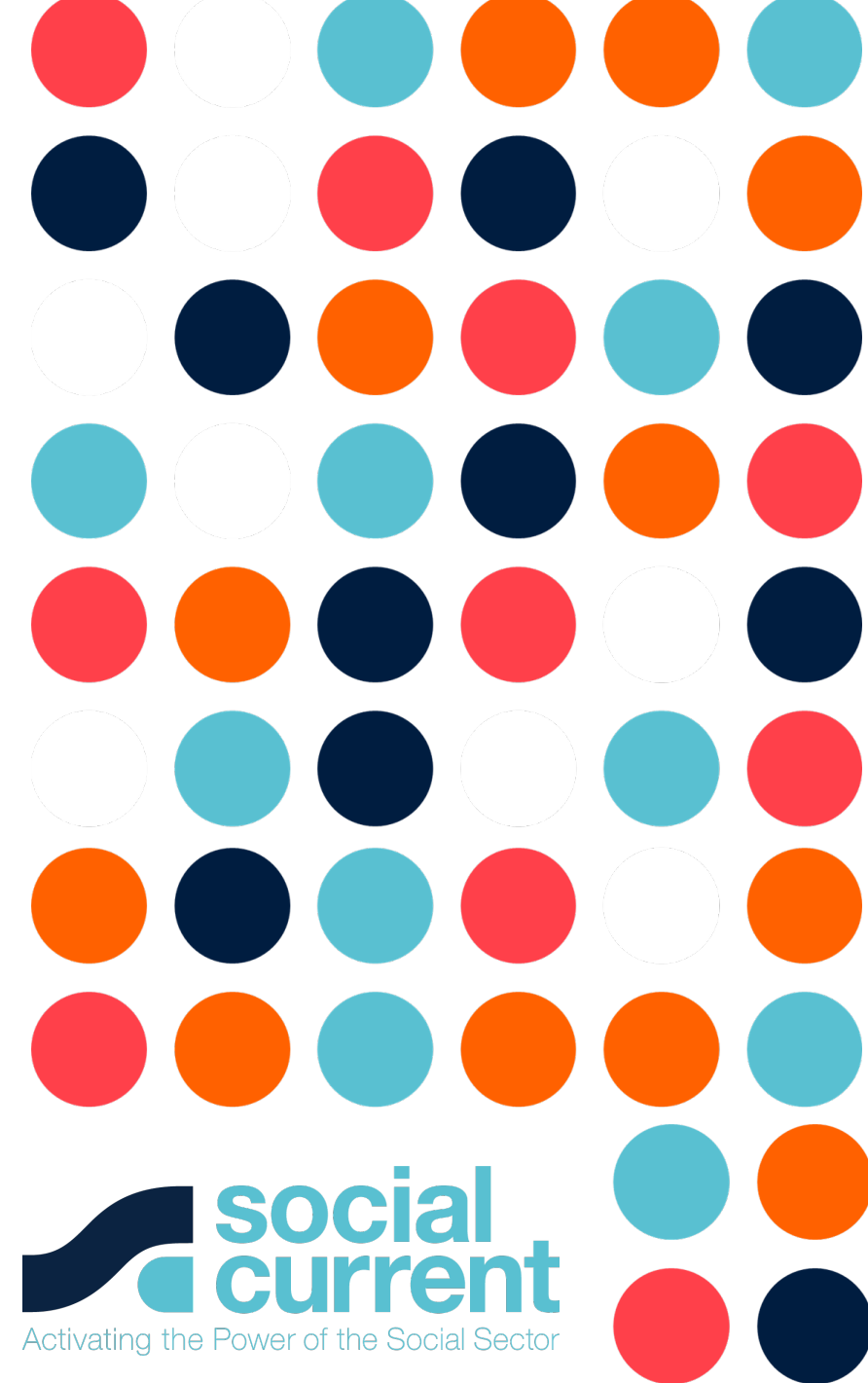
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**Thank you!  
Let's discuss.**

