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## Stewarding Solutions to Meet the Needs of Children Impacted by Substance Use

By **Kimberly Walsh, LSW, MPA**

Current data show that more than 8.7 million children nationwide have a parent with a substance use disorder,<sup>1</sup> 240,000 have had a parent die due to opioid overdose,<sup>2</sup> and 325,000 children have been removed from their homes due to parental opioid use.<sup>3</sup> The resulting impact of the associated exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) prevents these children from experiencing the safety and security of family, thus robbing them of their primary source of attachment, bonding, nurturing, and socialization.

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) launched the *Enhancing Community Responses to the Opioid Crisis: Serving Our Youngest Crime Victims* grant program. This multiyear initiative addresses an urgent gap in identifying and serving children and youth who, because of the opioid crisis and broader substance use, have experienced significant trauma and victimization. Since 2018, grants totaling more than thirty-eight million dollars have funded fifty-nine projects, serving children, youth, and their families in thirty-six states and communities, including several Tribes and Tribal consortiums, across the United States. These projects develop successful outreach and direct service strategies; establish or expand trauma-informed practice; utilize data to inform and guide project evolution; and engage multidisciplinary teams to guide, support, and sustain projects over time.

Together, the fifty-nine projects are innovating to prioritize the needs of children and youth. Centering on education, training, and awareness, projects develop a multi-pronged strategy to elevate local knowledge of professionals and communities with emphasis on trauma-informed care and practice. Projects establish new or expanded comprehensive services to meet the needs of children, youth, families, and caregivers within their communities. These efforts also include developing and cultivating alliances with affiliated professionals, direct services, and multi-disciplinary partners to increase the recognition that everyone has a role to play in changing the trajectory for young people affected by the drug crisis.

Each day, these diverse and multifaceted projects create thoughtful and innovative solutions to identify and serve children and youth. For instance, the Illuminate Colorado<sup>4</sup> OVC Opioid Project has engaged local leadership in four sites hard hit by the opioid crisis to comprehen-

1 Lipari, R. N., & Van Horn, S. L. (2014, August 24). Children living with parents who have a substance use disorder. *CBHSQ Report*. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report\\_3223/ShortReport-3223.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_3223/ShortReport-3223.pdf), p. 2.

2 Brundage, S.C., & Levine, C. (2019). *The ripple effect: The impact of the opioid epidemic on children and families*. United Hospital Fund and Milbank Memorial Fund. <https://addictionmedicineupdates.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/The-Ripple-Effect.pdf>, p. 4.

3 Children's Defense Fund. (2020). *The state of America's children 2020. Child welfare*. Children's Defense Fund. <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-State-Of-Americas-Children-2020.pdf>, p. 26; HHS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Underlying cause of death, 1999-2018*. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/help/ucd.html#>

4 <https://www.illuminatecolorado.org/>



sively assess the needs of each community. It also established concurrent, trauma-informed Children's Circle for Drug Endangered Children and Circle of Parents support groups serving children and families affected by substance use and trauma. In Oklahoma,<sup>5</sup> Ohio,<sup>6,7</sup> West Virginia,<sup>8</sup> and Kentucky,<sup>9,10</sup> legal service providers collaborate with schools and behavioral health services providers to deliver critical civil legal services for children and nonvictimizing caregivers, including custody, guardianship, housing, and public assistance eligibility support. In addition, there are positive efforts to support children and their caregivers in Tribal communities across the country. In north central Idaho, on the Nez Perce Reservation, the OVC-funded My Relatives ("inhimiyu"nm) program<sup>11</sup> is taking bold steps to make family-oriented recovery housing available to mothers and their children returning to the community following substance and opioid use disorder treatment. Through this project, the Nez Perce Tribe is building a new source of support from the ground up, enabling families to continue their path of recovery and healing together—an opportunity that had not previously been offered on the Nez Perce Reservation.

JBS International, Inc. (JBS) is the National Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Provider working cooperatively with OVC to meet the initial and ongoing TTA needs of grantees to implement successful projects over the three-year funding period. With more than thirty years focused on combating the impact of substance use, JBS is creating customized solutions on the ground in all fifty states and territories. JBS identifies what is working and in what environments to ensure information and practices are disseminated effectively to individuals, programs, and providers. To support the OVC-funded projects, JBS has assembled a team of experts focused on trauma, evidence-based practices, advocacy for children<sup>12</sup>, collaborative practice, and community engagement for change. With a broad range of experience, both formal and lived, this team works collectively to create real change for children (and families/caregivers) in their communities. To learn more about JBS, visit <https://www.jbsinternational.com/>.

If you would like to learn more about the impact of opioid and substance use on children, youth, and families; find the latest information about promising practices; and discover descriptions for the fifty-nine OVC-funded projects, please visit <https://www.unitedforyouth.org/>. Please watch for upcoming information in *The Guardian* highlighting various aspects of this work. Contact [OVC-TTA@jbsinternational.com](mailto:OVC-TTA@jbsinternational.com) if you have questions or would like additional information. ■

5 <https://www.legalaidok.org/>

6 <https://www.seols.org/>

7 <http://www.ablelaw.org/>

8 <https://www.lawv.net/>

9 <https://lablaw.org/>

10 <https://justice.ky.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

11 <https://nezperce.org/>

12 The National Association of Counsel for Children partners with JBS to lend its expertise and ongoing support of this important work.