

Rewiring Frequently Asked Questions

I. WHAT PROBLEM ARE YOU TRYING TO SOLVE?

The current child welfare system is not solving the problem of child neglect and abuse, despite the best efforts of the men and women working within the system. The flawed system design and misaligned incentives have led to wasted resources and poor outcomes for children and families. Interventions come too late, amplifying the trauma to these children and families. Children and families must essentially “get worse” to get the support they need to stabilize and heal from the impacts of trauma – often multigenerational – due to neglect, abuse, and maltreatment. Furthermore, youth engaged in the child welfare system transition into adulthood disproportionately unemployed,¹ undereducated,² incarcerated,³ homeless,⁴ addicted,⁵ suicidal,⁶ and traumatized.⁷

Tragically, in many cases the trauma that children endure could have been prevented or mitigated. The total economic burden of child maltreatment in the United States is estimated to be between \$400 billion and \$2 trillion annually.⁸ We can do better. We *must* do better. We need to design a more effective system, and Tennyson Center for Children is actively working toward that end.

There is an emerging initiative to improve outcomes through collaboration, aligned incentives, and reallocation of existing public funding. The initiative – called **Rewiring** – builds upon landmark federal legislation designed to advance child welfare reform⁹: the Family First Preservation Services Act. The implementation of **Rewiring** will produce radically improved results by:

- Reducing the number of children (and families) who become child welfare involved;
- Improving the experience for those who do become child welfare involved so that their involvement is short-term and transformative; and
- Reallocating existing resources to provide the right services at the right time.

II. HOW DO YOU DO IT?

Within the current child welfare system, families are required to “get worse” before they get the support they need. This dynamic is both costly and harmful. We believe we can prevent much of this trauma and significantly improve outcomes for children and families if resources are allocated differently to ensure that children and families are provided with the right services and supports, by the right provider, at the right point in time. We call this approach **Rewiring**.

1 <https://www.childrensrights.org/unemployment-rampant-among-former-foster-youth/>

2 <https://cdn.fc2success.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/National-Fact-Sheet-on-the-Educational-Outcomes-of-Children-in-Foster-Care-Jan-2014.pdf>

3 <https://nationswell.com/first-place-for-youth-foster-care-transitional-support/>

4 <https://www.fosterfocusmag.com/articles/foster-care-and-homelessness>

5 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3596821/>

6 <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/featured/suicide-and-the-foster-child>

7 <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2005/4/11/study-finds-foster-kids-suffer-ptsd/>

8 [The economic burden of child maltreatment in the United States, 2015](#)

9 <https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/family-first-prevention-services-act-ffpsa.aspx>



Tennyson Center for Children began implementing **Rewiring**, a collaborative, county-led initiative, in 2019. Rewiring will shift dollars from high-cost, late-stage interventions - when kids are already burdened with layers of trauma - to lower-cost, preventative supports that improve outcomes for kids and families. **Rewiring** accomplishes this by:

- Tackling the arbitrary and harmful system constraints of “medical necessity” and “imminent risk”;
- Affording child welfare actors the degrees of freedom to operate more collaboratively; and
- Providing the right services at the right point in time.

Rewiring will demonstrate how removing poorly designed constraints can create a system that improves lives more effectively and efficiently.¹⁰

While the need to innovate and realign incentives and market drivers in support of positive outcomes is clear, we understand that it is not possible to simply stop funding the existing child welfare system and reallocate dollars. To remain compliant with government statutes and avoid harming kids and families, we will operate within parallel systems (i.e., the current and future states). We will achieve this by:

- Investing in early stage/pre-child welfare interventions to reduce the number of children and families becoming child welfare involved;
- Building broad ecosystems of support for children and families that transcend narrow, service-focused continuums of care;
- Utilizing data to guide decisions and ensure constant improvement across all sector actors; and
- Sharing our results with public and private payers to **Rewire** their funding for improved impact.

We have started the process by piloting these changes - in partnership with public, private, and other non-profit stakeholders - in ten counties across Colorado. This pilot program will prove the concept’s validity in different contexts and will inspire others to replicate. We plan to develop shared metrics, measure results, support appropriate contextual modifications, and enable the rollout of these changes across all 64 counties in Colorado and beyond. We will “open source” all methodologies, lessons learned, and data so that others can adopt, adapt, and scale appropriately.

Well-designed, practical, county-tested pilots will demonstrate how **Rewiring** of programming, funding, and policy can improve outcomes for kids in the child welfare system and can reduce the number of children and families entering the child welfare system in the first place. By relentlessly focusing on outcomes associated with system drivers and diligently tracking system spending, **Rewiring** will provide policymakers with the appropriate data to responsibly **Rewire** the public funding of the child welfare sector.

A. How do you do it? Collaboration.

Rewiring relies on a diverse group of expert advisors to maintain focus on key data, ensure accountability, and inform strategic adaptations of the approach in real time. The effort involves authentic, trusting partnerships based on a shared vision around supporting families and preventing them from encountering the child welfare system altogether. Effective collaboration requires meaningful participation by all actors, each utilizing relevant data, driving toward shared goals, and leveraging their diverse perspectives and resources.

¹⁰ <https://coloradosun.com/2020/01/26/mental-health-treatment-teen-suicide-insurance-opinion/>



B. How do you do it? Reducing the numbers entering child welfare.

Rewiring empowers child welfare actors to activate services before children and families are in crisis, encourages new and unlikely allies to enter “the sector,” and focuses all players on keeping children with their families and out of the child welfare system whenever possible. When appropriate services are delivered earlier, the number of families becoming child welfare involved declines. This results in lower costs and greater impact. Most importantly, the emphasis on prevention helps children and family to avoid trauma altogether.

C. How do you do it? Striving for better results for those who are child welfare involved.

Rewiring works to ensure that every child and family that becomes child welfare involved successfully “exits” in ways that open doors to truly fulfilling adulthoods and strong, functioning families. We imagine a world where every child and family who experiences trauma receives the immediate and long-term support they need to fully stabilize, heal, and reintegrate into society in ways that unleash immense possibilities in their lives.

Rewiring improves outcomes for the children and families that are child welfare involved by partnering with county governments, the state, child welfare service providers, and all other child welfare system actors to:

- Hold ourselves accountable for stabilizing, healing, and reintegrating children;
- Respond immediately to crises or “red flags” and provide support in ways that addresses the trauma over time;
- Meet the comprehensive needs of children and their caregivers; and
- Stay in touch with kids and families following discharge to provide support and stability.

D. How do you do it? Policy, advocacy, and education.

Rewiring is designed to leverage policy efforts that align with the prevention of children and families becoming involved with the child welfare system. Alongside testing and replication, **Rewiring** focuses on systemic change and seeks to eliminate barriers to system improvement. Our advocacy efforts harness impact data and community needs as well as strategic communications in order to advance aligned policy and financing reforms. To bring these reforms to fruition, Tennyson has linked with an exceptional independent evaluator to translate lessons into policy and financing changes that will enable others to build off **Rewiring** nationally.



III. HOW DO YOU PAY FOR IT? PHILANTHROPY—FOR NOW.

Rewiring is designed to significantly improve child welfare outcomes without increasing the long-term public resources required to operate the child welfare system. In fact, given that the demand for public resources will continue to increase (for all social services) *and* given that states and local governments are not likely to meet these demands, **Rewiring** was designed specifically to work within current government budgetary constraints by repurposing existing public resources to generate drastically improved outcomes in the child welfare system.

In the short-term, an infusion of one-time growth and innovation capital is required to make **Rewiring** a reality. This creates a perfect opportunity for philanthropic capital to be catalytic *without creating the need for perpetual funding*. To get to this future '**Rewired**' state, Tennyson is raising private capital that will help:

- Design, implement, and assess system changes in ten counties in Colorado;
- Support service providers in their transition to providing prevention and early intervention services;
- Lead the network of efforts in Colorado to foster collaboration, share best practices, and educate policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders;
- Capture the learnings of how to implement **Rewiring** and develop a “playbook” to guide implementation in other parts of Colorado and in other states; and
- Offer this “playbook” as an open-source resource that provides strategic guidance and technical assistance to other states seeking to adopt and implement **Rewiring** in their communities.

After **Rewiring** has been fully implemented, existing public funding will be reallocated to cover the ongoing operating expenses of the **Rewired** child welfare system. Once this is in place, kids and families will experience better outcomes and, subsequently, the demand for downstream social services will decrease in the future.

It is our firm belief that when you design a better system, you get better outcomes.

REWIRING CONTACTS

Ned Breslin

President & CEO, Tennyson Center for Children
ned.breslin@tennysoncenter.org
720-855-3345

Tiffany Perrin

ZOMA Fellow, Tennyson Center for Children
tiffany.perrin@tennysoncenter.org
720-855-3448

