Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago connects research to solutions that improve the lives of children, families, and communities. Our strategic plan describes three primary impact areas of our work over the next three years, the four strategic capabilities that we will apply to that work, and our key goals and activities. This plan will guide our work to bring research, policy, and practice together so that people’s lives change for the better, faster.
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Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center at the University of Chicago that provides public and private decision-makers with rigorous research and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of children, families and communities.

Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of applied research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families.
Chapin Hall practices applied research. We spend time in the field, using evidence and discerning the most pressing challenges that research might help address.

Many of us spent years in the field before working at Chapin Hall. This allows us to bridge gaps. We bridge a knowledge gap by creating research evidence about what works best and for whom. And we bridge the gap between research and practice by identifying the best available evidence to inform decisions about policies and services.

Chapin Hall’s history provided the seeds to this applied approach. Chapin Hall was founded in 1860 as the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan Asylum. As social policy at the federal and state levels changed, Chapin Hall’s role as a residential provider of care became less relevant.

In 1985, the organization reinvented itself as a policy research center dedicated to improving the lives of children and families — particularly those facing substantial adversity and involved in public systems. Dr. Harold Richman, the research center’s founder and first executive director, brought a unique vision of serving children and youth by conducting applied research that informs policy and practice. By partnering with public agencies, foundations, and nonprofit groups, the newly conceived Chapin Hall pioneered strategies for analyzing agency data and developed analytic tools and systems for monitoring child and youth outcomes.

Our unique history, focused mission, and close affiliation with one of the world’s leading research institutions — the University of Chicago — has created an unprecedented research center dedicated to promoting the well-being of children, youth, and families. Our work informs action through rigorous research, developed with direct engagement with partners.
Since 1985, Chapin Hall has grown from a staff of five to more than 150, working in collaborative teams on more than 120 active projects sponsored by nonprofits, foundations, and all levels of government. A quarter of Chapin Hall’s staff work remotely from multiple states and internationally. About 25% of the organization’s work is in Chicago and the state of Illinois; the remainder of our work is in other state, multistate, national, and international initiatives.

We have seen substantive change in our three impact areas of child welfare, community capacity, and youth homelessness over the last several years. The Family First Prevention Services Act passed through Congress and became law; the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program was reauthorized for five years; and our own Voices of Youth Count, the first comprehensive national research on youth homelessness, yielded rich new data that can help end youth homelessness. All of these developments represent critical opportunities for positive change.

Chapin Hall’s role is to support our partners in the public, nonprofit, and private sector with rigorous research and achievable solutions to improve families’ lives. We partner with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families.

This strategic plan clarifies how we will do that work through 2022.
This plan identifies three impact areas that we will emphasize in our research and policy initiatives. Across those three topics we’ve highlighted four core capabilities.

These are areas of staff excellence in which we will strategically invest. The foundation of our strategic plan is to grow our impact in these areas, while applying and building on these capabilities.

Taken together, our impact areas and core capabilities — as practiced by the committed people who carry out the work with our partners — make Chapin Hall exceptional. This plan describes how we will strategically increase and improve our research and policy initiatives, with the voices of our staff highlighting our strengths while describing our way forward.
IMPACT AREAS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Chapin Hall is dedicated to the idea that evidence should drive decisions. We combine rigorous research methods and policy expertise to generate evidence and support its use. We will focus our efforts on three impact areas where we can make a meaningful difference: child welfare systems; community capacity, including schools, courts, and before- and after-school programs; and youth homelessness.

1) Child Welfare
Child welfare systems serve millions of children and families around the world. Leaders, policymakers, and practitioners want to do more to use evidence to drive sustainable, improved outcomes for children and families whose lives are touched by these systems. For decades, Chapin Hall has researched the workings of these systems and their impact on the children and families they support. We apply and translate research to help child welfare jurisdictions use evidence to promote quality services and accountability. We support the translation of evidence to inform decisions about which programs and services are most effective, and for whom. We shape public policy to advance the use of evidence-based approaches across the nation and the world.

2) Community Capacity
Community efforts are critical to reducing risk and promoting resiliency among children and families. Chapin Hall helps communities leverage assets toward sustainable change. We collaborate with those who lead outreach and intervention programs, early education, before- and after-school programs, and other initiatives for young people who need them most. We translate evidence to guide practice, promote new community capacity, and study outcomes to learn the best ways to help children and families thrive in spite of adversity.

3) Youth Homelessness
Ending youth homelessness is a national goal. Since launching Voices of Youth Count, Chapin Hall has stepped into a leadership role on how to get there. Our integrated, multicomponent research provides a nuanced understanding of the conditions that lead to homelessness for young people. Our partners range from government agencies, to local service providers, to the affected youth themselves.

The three impact areas are complementary and interactive: what we learn in one setting can be translated and transferred to another. As we work across these impact areas, Chapin Hall will conduct and synthesize research, evaluate what works for whom and in what settings, and help partners transform knowledge into sustainable, positive change.
KEY CAPABILITIES: RAISING THE BAR

Connecting rigorous research to everyday practice means that Chapin Hall works with providers, practitioners, and policy makers to apply knowledge for lasting results for children and families. Our ability to meet high standards, to build on our staff expertise, and to grow, rests on four key strategic capabilities:

**Rigor**
Chapin Hall designs and conducts research that is theoretically informed, precisely conducted, and effectively translated to organizations and people who can make a difference.

**Integration**
Chapin Hall provides an interdisciplinary approach to identify and change the conditions that constrain well-being for children, youth, and families, and to identify and support factors that promote resilience.

**Innovation**
Chapin Hall informs human services policy and practice through a unique combination of approaches, including mixed methods research, predictive analytics, geospatial analysis, and participatory action research.

**Influence**
Chapin Hall produces findings that point to actionable solutions to the challenges our partners and colleagues face, and communicates these solutions through appropriate channels to targeted audiences to accelerate positive change.
Prior to coming to Chapin Hall, I worked with children who were abused and neglected. As I was working with them, I always had the question of why these kids were where they were. How did they get there? Why were they still there after getting treatment, sometimes for many years? Can we serve them better? I came here to answer those questions.

ROBERT GOERGE, PHD
Senior Research Fellow
Child welfare systems serve millions of children and families around the world. Chapin Hall researchers draw on billions of records from administrative data and other sources to research those systems’ workings and impact. We use that research to help child welfare jurisdictions improve performance, and to shape public policy to advance the use of evidence-based approaches across the child welfare field.

The 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act enshrined in law requirements for evidence-based approaches to services for families at risk of entering the child welfare system. Chapin Hall is uniquely positioned to do applied research that adds to the evidence base and to work with child welfare systems to implement approaches to ensure improved outcomes for children and families.

Chapin Hall has conducted seminal research on how child welfare workers use their time and how evidence-based decision making affects child outcomes. Our foster care data archive, an active data stream, serves as a source of rich information that can help understand and improve decision making on behalf of families in the child welfare system. Our longitudinal studies of Midwestern foster youth, which used some of the same questions as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, allowed us to compare this sample of former foster youth and a nationally representative sample of young people in the general population. We found that young people who have aged out of foster care are faring poorly compared to their peers in a number of areas, including education, employment, and housing. This applied research provides critical information on which to build effective policy to improve youth outcomes.

Because Chapin Hall researchers have practical experience—including research and policy fellows who have joined us from notable careers in the public sector—we understand the need to apply evidence in actionable ways. Sometimes we can apply lessons learned in one part of the country to another jurisdiction. In one agency, for example, we developed a process to help leaders gather feedback from staff at all levels as well as clients. Another public agency partner, a state-level child and family service agency, partnered with Chapin Hall to build out their own, similar feedback system.

As new public policy requires the field of child welfare to be more evidence-based, Chapin Hall is positioned to apply our well-established approach to a broader number of systems, leading to greater impact. Child welfare systems, domestically and internationally, are facing demands to improve outcomes. It is a demand that Chapin Hall is ready to help systems meet.

**Our anticipated impact:**

1. Child welfare systems and providers will adopt a greater number of evidence-based programs and further incorporate rigorous data analysis into decision making.
2. Agencies will take advantage of resources and incentives to use research evidence for decision making authorized in the Family First Prevention Services Act.
3. Child welfare system leaders will gain fluency and confidence in their ability to use research and implement evidence-based interventions with fidelity.
4. Partners will sustain system reforms by becoming increasingly outcomes-oriented and adapting to changing policy contexts.
Community is defined not only by geography, but also by the social connections and the formal and informal resources available to community members experiencing adversity. Chapin Hall’s approach to communities incorporates the understanding that community members and providers are optimally equipped to articulate their strengths and needs. They are agents of change. We bring more than 30 years of experience working alongside communities to support the use of research evidence and build collective competence to improve lives of people in their communities.

A case in point is our work to develop evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of home visiting as a way to engage parents in their child’s early learning, to insure new mothers and infants have access to high-quality health care, and to reduce the risk of maltreatment or poor developmental outcomes. This evidence supported the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, a $1.5 billion investment as part of the Affordable Care Act, reauthorized for an additional five years in 2018. Another is the growing number of providers who use person-centered care and other components of the Transformational Collaborative Outcomes Management (TCOM) model, to help people achieve their health and wellness goals as they navigate healthcare, child welfare, justice, behavioral health, education, and other complex systems.

Our strategic approach includes a renewed dedication to codesign and co-interpretation of research to increase its relevance, encourage shared responsibility, and augment community capacity. That means direct engagement with children, youth, and families to ensure research that is community friendly, feasible, capitalizes on diversity, and is relevant to change efforts.

Chapin Hall helps communities build capacity and assets to drive effective, sustainable programs and practices. Together, we will identify gaps in knowledge, and determine how to fill those gaps. We will translate research and support implementation of programs and policies contoured to community priorities. As service providers face a growing mandate to use evidence-based interventions, Chapin Hall will help them do so.

Our anticipated impact:

1. Stakeholders, including young people, families, and community leaders, will participate in collaborative planning and decision making related to the introduction and implementation of change efforts.

2. Interventions will contribute to the knowledge base and be tailored to community in ways that promote shared responsibility and collective competence, resulting in long-term, sustainable change.

3. Community engagement and participation will result in new capacities, supporting sustainable change that will improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

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You change policy because you spend time studying the problem, learning from your experiences, and then going forward in a better, more productive way. You work at the policy and the practice levels. You have to constantly realize that families are changing, communities are changing, context is changing, and you’ve got to be there to make your programs fit the moment. Our ability to use data to make us fit the moment is what, I think, sets us apart.

DEBORAH DARO, PHD
Senior Research Fellow
Chapin Hall’s applied research has helped clarify the risk and protective factors that shape youth homelessness. In our inaugural Voices of Youth Count research in 2017, we found that one in 10 young adults ages 18 to 25 experienced housing instability in the United States over the course of a year. For teens aged 13 to 17, one in 30 were homeless. We learned rural youth experience homelessness at the same rate as those in urban areas. We learned that African-American, LGBTQ, and pregnant and parenting youth are over-represented among youth experiencing homelessness.

New opportunities to expand this body of research include the upcoming reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and federal investments in demonstration projects to prevent and reduce youth homelessness. To promote service innovation, we also will engage more directly with philanthropy, local governments, and providers.

Chapin Hall’s future research agenda includes longitudinal studies of youth exits from homelessness; understanding equity issues and subgroup experiences among youth experiencing homelessness; policy analysis; and replication of our 2017 national estimate. This aggressive research agenda will provide the knowledge needed to effectively address youth homelessness.

Our anticipated impact:

1. Federal policy on services, eligibility and resource allocations will change to better prevent and address youth homelessness.
2. State and local governments will use the evidence base in resource planning to address and prevent youth homelessness.
3. Directors of programs that serve youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness will use research to understand how to best address the needs of youth at the local, state, and federal levels.

Chapin Hall isn’t done when the research is done. We help translate and apply the research. One partner I’m working with in the field said to me: ‘You’re the person they hire to help us understand what the research says.’

BETH HORWITZ, MSW
Policy Analyst
We at Chapin Hall believe that rigorous applied research is a critical step to a more positive future for children and families. That means that our research can be verified, translated, and replicated. We conduct research that is theoretically informed, precisely conducted, and clearly communicated across a range of platforms. We ensure adherence to professional standards for research methods, ethics, and data security, and promote quality improvement processes.

**RIGOR**
Reaffirming our commitment to the highest standards of rigor

Our expected outcome:
Chapin Hall will produce measurable change and sustained improvements for children, families, and communities by providing our partners the highest-quality applied research methods to understand and test what conditions are necessary to produce positive change.

**Our planned activities include:**
1. Refine tools and processes, including peer review and continuous quality improvement, to ensure and incentivize our application of agreed-upon standards for rigor throughout the course of each research project.
2. Monitor and track Chapin Hall citations in peer-reviewed publications, and take steps to increase those citations.
3. Deliver the necessary research, expertise, diversity of perspective, and experience in public systems, program implementation, and communities that our partners need to make change.
4. Increase the number of active partnerships between Chapin Hall and academic and applied research centers, including the University of Chicago, that are positioned to match and enhance the quality of our work.

Chapin Hall is one the few organizations that local, state, and national partners consistently turn to for rigorous research on child well-being, and then to apply that research to solve a problem. They can count on us to both create and translate knowledge.

BRIAN CHOR, PHD
Senior Researcher
At Chapin Hall, it is common for a project team to draft a glossary that defines project-specific key terms. That’s because disciplines each have their own “insider” language or jargon. Interdisciplinary work means that everyone on a team communicates clearly outside their own specialty as well as within their own research area. Our commitment to a broad analysis of systems that affect children, families, and communities goes back to our founding in 1985 and remains an important element of our success.

Our interdisciplinary approach goes beyond academics: it combines research with practice and policy expertise. This combination leads to highly actionable solutions.

Our research, evaluation, implementation, and policy efforts will continue to blend academic and practice approaches. This, in turn, will allow us to bolster protective factors and identify, define, and change conditions that prevent children, youth, and families from achieving well-being.

**Our expected outcome:**
Chapin Hall applied research and policy analyses will be informed by all appropriate disciplines and methods to understand and highlight actionable solutions across policy, regulatory, and practice environments.

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**INTEGRATION**
Deploying an interdisciplinary approach for broad understanding and application

Chapin Hall has experts from different disciplines, training, and perspectives — social workers, psychologists, economists, public health. Being able to go down the hall and say, “What do you think about this?” and get a truly expert answer is invaluable. The variety of theoretical perspectives here can inspire a thought and help you operationalize your work in new ways.

**KAELA BYERS, PHD**
Researcher

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**Our planned activities include:**

1. Implement systems, processes, and incentives that promote integration of content, policy, and research.
2. Blend qualitative and quantitative research methods to ensure both rigor and contextual clarity throughout our work.
3. Increase the number of cross-disciplinary teams of research and policy staff who field proposals and handle research projects.
4. Facilitate cross-organizational review sessions of ongoing projects to leverage staff members’ multidisciplinary expertise.
5. Recruit and retain staff by fostering a workplace environment characterized by shared commitment to learning and contributing to meaningful work across academic disciplines, professional backgrounds, and institutional roles.
INNOVATION
Exploring new strategies to build knowledge

Chapin Hall’s impact depends on our ability to develop innovative methods and approaches to data analysis and synthesis. One recent success with this was the first-ever national incidence and prevalence study on youth homelessness, accompanied by in-depth qualitative research that told the stories of the youth. Another was work on the NowPow app, which enables frontline workers to locate service providers in real time.

Chapin Hall’s research and policy staff will use a continuous quality improvement cycle as they build and evaluate new solutions. Approaches include mixed methods research, participatory action research, collective impact, predictive analytics, geospatial analyses, and implementation supports.

Our expected outcome:
In addition to continuing rigorous research, Chapin Hall will pilot new research and implementation strategies that make effective use of original and administrative data and other sources of information to illuminate opportunities for change within our key impact areas.

Our planned activities include:

1. Engage systems leaders, policymakers, practitioners, other researchers, and community leaders in opportunities to codesign research and policy studies.

2. Hold periodic convenings and use surveys to engage partners in assessing quality, relevance, and applicability of Chapin Hall’s range of methods, analyses, tools, and findings.

3. Offer employees professional development and engagement opportunities, including incentives, to design, evaluate, and work in and across dynamic teams built to meet project objectives.

4. Recruit emerging scholars, as well as innovative decision makers and practitioners from human service agencies, to ensure capacity, agility, and innovation.

5. Increase the number of projects that test innovations and bring to scale successful approaches, using a stepwise, contextualized approach.

My work primarily focuses on youth participatory action research: how do we engage and activate young people so they aren’t just the recipient of services, but become a participant? How do youth help providers think differently about the services that they’re delivering?

FORREST MOORE, PHD
Policy Fellow
In addition to reflecting our other core competencies, findings must be accessible and actionable. We provide research and policy analyses that orient decision-makers toward relevant and timely options to strengthen child welfare, build community capacity, and protect youth who are homeless or at risk. As we innovate in research methods, we also will develop and test new methods to share what we are learning.

Our expected outcome:
Chapin Hall will produce materials attuned to the needs of and used by those best positioned to make change in our impact areas. The accessibility of Chapin Hall evidence, and the effective delivery of that evidence to target audiences, will accelerate policy and practice change that improves outcomes for children.

The variety of evaluations, research, and at-the-elbow work of our teams, including getting out into the community, is amazing. We are coaching and modeling and mentoring people at different levels within organizations, from commissioners all the way to front-line staff.

YOLANDA GREEN-ROGERS, MSW
Senior Policy Analyst

Our planned activities include:

1. Improve reach into federal, state, and local policymaking, as evidenced by citations of partnership with Chapin Hall as a factor in policy, program, and practice change.

2. Elevate communications and translation of complex concepts within our three impact areas.

3. Foster partner engagement throughout each project’s life cycle to guarantee our methods, work plans, and products incorporate input from partners, their clients, and constituents.

4. Undertake research to better understand target audiences and best channels to reach them, such as digital communications and earned media coverage, and use indicated channels.

5. Leverage new and emerging digital platforms and other networks to facilitate dissemination in ways that accelerate policy change.
Chapin Hall measures its performance by how well our work informs systems change and impacts practice to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

As this strategic plan outlines, the hallmark of Chapin Hall’s work is the organization’s core experience working in child welfare, community capacity, and youth homelessness, to which we bring the core capabilities of rigor, integration, innovation, and influence. We will capitalize on our assets and invest further in our capabilities with the end goal of filling critical gaps in knowledge. And we will focus on increasing the speed at which positive change can happen so that more families benefit sooner.
An important aspect of our work is the high caliber and strong commitment of our partners to their often difficult and challenging tasks. The scarcity of resources available for some children and families means that there will always be hard decisions to make. This challenge underlines the importance of our mission to provide actionable knowledge that will lead to the best possible decisions to support positive change.

Underpinning the work and the successes on which we will build in coming years are the researchers, policy analysts, and others who make up the organization. Their intellectual openness to and respect for each other’s judgment and insights, capacity to identify knowledge gaps, and commitment to design and subsequently translate research into action will drive the progress of the organization in the coming years. And that progress, ultimately, will be measured by our nation’s progress in meeting the needs of children and families.

We all need data to make decisions about how to make lives better, yet there’s a long road between the data that people see every day and how they make those decisions. Our job is to walk with them on that journey, to help people apply the knowledge and experience they need to understand and act. Chapin Hall’s applied research agenda draws from the best science to solve the practical problems facing families, communities, and systems.

ANNE FARRELL, PHD
Director of Research