Building UnSystems Across the Country
THE MISSION OF ALIA:
To inspire and drive transformative change for the people and systems entrusted with the welfare and wellbeing of children.

THE VISION OF ALIA:
Families are upheld as the foundation of lifelong wellbeing for children.

FEARLESS INNOVATION
We take strategic risks to build a better way.

COURAGEOUS PARTNERSHIPS
We share knowledge and form deep, trusting collaborations believing that everyone has a part of the solution to share and everyone is a changemaker.

AUDACIOUS OPTIMISM
We hold a bold belief in the human capacity to transform and heal.

A SENSE OF URGENCY
We understand how brief childhood is and what is at stake for our youth.

RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF EVIDENCE
We are committed to learning from each other and our youth and adjusting practices; when we know better, we do better.
Dear Friends of Alia,

We are delighted to share another year in the story of Alia. Every day we team up with child welfare innovators, building a new way of work we call an UnSystem. Our partnerships are built on the shared vision that we must keep children safely with their families, not from their families.

Collectively we can and must transition our current child protection system to one of primary prevention – we can’t wait for abuse or neglect to happen before providing support! Alongside child welfare leaders, families, and communities, we are building a proof of concept. Our mission is to demonstrate that this transition is just, equitable, necessary, and possible.

The research is clear: children thrive when they experience an uninterrupted sense of belonging. This means we must commit to doing whatever it takes to safely preserve and strengthen family connections.

Building on this evidence, Alia commissioned two reports this year. A Social Return on Investment Study\(^1\) performed by Ecotone Analytics shows that foster care offers a negative return on investment – between $3.64 and $9.55 lost for every dollar spent. Our second commissioned piece is a Research Brief\(^2\) consolidating the current academic evidence for keeping families safely together. We now know that when we separate families and punish parents, it also punishes children.

The great news is that the tide is shifting and a national movement is gaining momentum! Passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act, messaging out of the Federal Children’s Bureau, and state and local efforts to increase primary prevention and obsolete the need for out-of-home care make us more hopeful than ever that transformation is on the horizon.

Our deep belief in family preservation must never devalue the courage and commitment of loving foster parents; that is not what we mean to do. Recruiting more foster parents treats our challenge as a supply problem and that’s not how we see it. Why are there so many children at risk of not living safely at home? Why is there so much demand for out-of-family placements? That’s the problem we want to solve.

As we work with our partners to build UnSystems across the country, we gain momentum, recognition, and co-creators who believe we must treat relational connections as sacred. “Do what love would do” is our living motto, and what that looks like is dismantling systemic racism and building equitable practice both at Alia and with partnering agencies so that all families will thrive.

Families are not the problem; they are the solution! We know better and we must do better – our future depends on it.

As hopeful as ever,

Amelia Franck Meyer, CEO

Rachel Zahn, Board Chair

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1 https://hiddencostsoffostercare.aliainnovations.org/
2 https://researchbrief.aliainnovations.org/
Alia Milestones

DECEMBER 2015
• Alia incorporates

MARCH 2017
• Added Chief Learning Officer

JULY 2016
• Alia’s founder started as the full-time CEO
• Launched Heartshare St. Vincent’s Intensive Permanence Services Partnership

AUGUST 2016
• Added Chief Innovation Officer

OCTOBER 2016
• Launched partnership with IDEO to design 10 of 10 For Kids national convening
• Alia became an independent 501(c)(3)

HOW WE CAME TO BE ALIA
With roots in therapeutic foster care and a history of record-setting, award-winning outcomes for youth permanence, Alia’s work is in movement-building. It is our goal to convene, support, challenge, and nurture leaders in child welfare to design and implement system changes needed for every child to have an uninterrupted sense of belonging.

Alia incorporated in 2015 and started practice in 2016. Alongside convening the UnSystem Innovation Cohort, Alia publishes materials and offers fee-for-service training and coaching projects on understanding trauma, leadership fortitude, and workforce wellbeing.

We are supporting and convening innovators in public and private child welfare agencies to transform the child welfare system. Alia has set out to obsolete child welfare as we know it by creating and supporting new approaches and environments where youth and their caregivers can thrive. There is an overwhelming amount of new information available to us that those who created our current child welfare system did not have. We know better about attachment, trauma, and healing, and it is our responsibility to do better. Author, philosopher, poet, and scientist, Dr. Margaret Wheatley has influenced how we understand systems behavior and evolution. This has helped us frame our approach toward building something new: UnSystems.

HOW WE SEE THINGS: OUR ROLE
Building off of the work of Dr. Margaret Wheatley, we understand that every system follows a predictable life cycle. The child welfare system was based on a set of assumptions we now understand to be false. However, once a system is established it becomes everyone’s job to maintain the status quo of that system. This is when we begin to see innovators, pioneers, and trailblazers of a new and different way of thinking and operating begin to pop up. In order to more fully transition to a new way of work, we need to connect, align, and support people and organizations in shifting mindset to a new understanding of the core set of assumptions on which a new system is built.

This is where Alia comes in
We see our role at Alia as supporting and connecting the current changemakers in child welfare to help build a new just and equitable system. In order to more fully transition to a new way of work, Alia connects, aligns, and supports people and organizations in shifting mindset to a new understanding of the core set of assumptions on which a new system is built. It is Alia’s goal – with humility and a pioneering spirit – to support leaders with everything we have and all that we can leverage, in order to prove that in a vast majority of situations, children can stay safely with their loved ones.
MARCH 2018
• UnSystem Innovation Cohort kick-off
JULY 2018
• Staff grows by 80%
NOVEMBER 2018
• Moved into new office space, “Alia Innovation Hub”
• Alia’s CEO named “One of 25 Women Changing the World”

JANUARY 2019
• Launched Next-Level Summit Series
• Released “The Unseen Costs of Foster Care: Ecotone Social Return on Investment Study”
• Released “The Innovation Cohort Case Studies and Early Data”

OCTOBER 2019
• Released “Evidence Base for Avoiding Family Separation in Child Welfare Practice”

DECEMBER 2019
• Staff grows by 122%

Visit www.aliainnovations.org for more about An UnSystem
OUTCOMES, SCOPE, TESTIMONIALS

“I can’t thank you and the Intensive Permanence Services (IPS) team enough for their amazing commitment to these young people. The impact of the IPS model on the staff, young people, extended families and the agency as a whole is so evident when listening to the team talk about the meaning they have found in this approach and the connections they’ve forged with and for these youth. I feel emotional about the potential for IPS to really transform child welfare practice and the system.”

-Sarah Kroon Chiles, Executive Director, Redlich Horwitz Foundation

It is moments like these and people like you, that are a constant reminder of not only why this work is so crucial but that I am doing something right. These are the same moments that teach me how to take a break and process and then show up with humility, grace and genuineness. I am forever grateful to be working with you because you are a perfect example of what Alia exemplifies.

-Marlene Spence, Intensive Permanency Specialist, HeartShare St. Vincent’s, New York

IMPACT 2018-2019
Projects, Trainings & Keynotes
Total people impacted = 3,500
REDLICH HORWITZ PARTNERSHIP STORY

Many youth at HeartShare St. Vincent’s Services (HSVS) are long-term residents with tenures of over three years living in foster and/or group homes. Their challenges are multi-faceted and begin with a goal of independent living. Many of the youth residing at HSVS’ foster and/or group homes find that the lack of affordable housing is a significant barrier in youth seeking independent living. They rely on housing assistance provided by HSVS to navigate the housing market in New York City. To reunify youth with family members or permanent connections requires a culture shift in their case plans. If the youth desire independent living and proceed with this after discharge, significant work around finding and building permanent connections is done with them prior to their discharge. HSVS, partnering with Alia, is helping youth to build tethers to permanent connections.

The partnership between the Redlich Horwitz Foundation, HSVS, and Alia focuses on finding permanent resources for all youth. These resources are built and nurtured so that they can show up for the youth in a way that supports them as they grow and heal their trauma histories.

Youth demonstrated true healing by successfully reconnecting with family members, living with relatives, and using their voice in various situations. Through intensive healing and connection, youth were able to sustain living with great aunts, mothers, and in one case a school para-professional with whom the youth had a special connection.

With stability in their living situation, youth remained connected to their IPS worker for ongoing support as they entered college, gained employment, and began to advocate for themselves in a variety of situations.

Because IPS workers never gave up on the youth they served in some of the most discouraging circumstances, the Redlich Horwitz Foundation/HSVS/Alia partnership made it possible for youth to trust, connect, grieve, heal, and make lifelong connections to adults.

OUTCOMES

67% of youth advanced their permanency goals; they were reunified, adopted, placed with kin, secured relational permanency or stepped down.
We believe child welfare agencies can function primarily to prevent child abuse and neglect (primary prevention) rather than intervening to prevent continued maltreatment once child abuse and neglect has occurred (secondary prevention). The Alia UnSystem Innovation Cohort is identifying what steps it will take to make this systemic shift.

Through our work with this group of deeply caring and tenacious people, we are developing the process it takes to shift from business as usual in child welfare (classic case management, investigation, removals, court hearing, paperwork, etc.), to a new way of work which meets our aspiration to “Always preserve and strengthen family connections.”

HOW DID THE COHORT COME TO BE?
Based on Ten of Ten for Kids, a 3 ½-day human-centered design event we held in May 2017, a broad and deep cross-section of those who care about and are affected by the child welfare system were asked to answer the question, “How might we build a child welfare system that actually works for children and families?” In fact, they answered this more poignant query: “When families struggle, how can we best help keep them safely together?” When they work well, Families are the perfect design of a “child welfare system,” and we see now that our job as a community is to support the systems children are already born into – their families.

Out of Ten of Ten for Kids’ resounding theme of strengthening families, the concept of an UnSystem was developed with these characteristics as Guiding Principles:
HOW DOES THE COHORT WORK?
Guiding Principles in hand, Alia issued a Request for Innovators to fully implement these concepts – no pilots, just leaders wanting to fully transform their systems. Five of the agencies that applied and were selected: Eau Claire County, WI; Cass County, ND; Waupaca County, WI; Washington County, MD; and the Eastern Iowa Service Area.

The Cohort meets 10 times per year, 5 of which are in person, and is comprised of 10 child welfare leaders representing 4 states, 5 jurisdictions, and 14 counties. Each of the 5 jurisdictions in the Cohort includes the Director and Deputy Directors (or equivalents) from each of the 5 jurisdictions plus lived experience and professional guides to offer ongoing constituent voice and veteran child welfare wisdom. Each Cohort agency has received the blessing of their state child welfare leadership to participate, which we believe has contributed to leader stability and greater traction in practice change.

We see this as 5 simultaneous experiments in creating and discovering the concrete steps it takes to becoming an UnSystem. Overlapping themes have emerged in the first year of the Cohort, and one of the most profound is the power of shifting mindsets. Each of the 5 Cohort agencies spent countless hours the past year with their staff and leadership teams collectively challenging their assumptions about birth families, considering the harm of removal and benefits of family, and questioning all assumptions about what’s possible.

Alia’s role
It is Alia’s goal – with humility and a pioneering spirit – to support leaders with everything we have and all that we can leverage, in order to prove that in a vast majority of situations, children can stay safely with their loved ones and avoid stranger care. It is our charge and deep responsibility to ensure, to the extent humanly and systemically possible, that every child is safe in their home and safe in their heart.

Part of our commitment to the Cohort and to the child welfare industry is capturing what we’ve done and what we’ve accomplished. The outcomes we see are signals that we’re moving in the right direction, and there is still so much more work to do. We will continue to convene and support this group of changemakers as long as they will have us.

“Being involved with the Cohort has restored my faith in the system and in humanity. I could see so many ways that the system was broken and I didn’t know how to fix it or whether it could even be fixed – now I see people with forward thinking get out-of-the-box to fix things.”

AMANDA BROWN, Lived Experience Guide for Eastern Iowa Service Region
Lead Parent Partner for the Cedar Rapids Service Area, managed by Department of Iowa Children & Families

READ THE FULL CASE STUDY FOR DETAILS
https://www.aliainnovations.org/unsystemcohortyearone
TOP FIVE KEY INSIGHTS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

1. Prepare and take care of yourself and your team
2. Think differently about the work
3. Make the old way harder
4. Trust families as the safe bet
5. Expand the group of helpers

COHORT OUTCOMES

- 12% total decrease of youth in foster care
- 37% decrease of youth in residential care

CASS COUNTY
The number of youth in stranger foster care decreased by 43% in the past year.

EAU CLAIRE COUNTY
The number of youth in residential care dropped 40%.

EASTERN IOWA SERVICE AREA
Child Safety Conferences avoid removal for 94% of the youth involved.

WAUPACA COUNTY
3 full-time prevention social workers were hired through decreasing deep-end services, focusing on permanency, and shifting funds toward up-front work.

WASHINGTON COUNTY
Compared to FY18, in FY19 the number of children removed dropped 61% - from 96 to 37.
One of the UnSystem Guiding Principles is, “racial equity and radical inclusion,” and as we shared in a Special Newsletter in April 2019, we are deliberately examining our own biases and candid missteps as we strive to embody an identity of anti-racism and systemic equity for all people. We are committed to sharing our process with vulnerability and transparency in the hopes that our work can inspire courageous conversations across the field and that others can learn from both our stumbles and our triumphs.

We are moving forward with an internal effort to create a culture of self-reflection, organizational improvement, and dedication to confronting and dismantling white supremacy and valuing inclusion. Recently, it came to our attention at a Board meeting that not all of our team understood why we believe our internal work is necessary for rebuilding a just and loving system of child and family wellbeing.

Our Board and staff reacted in different ways to the question posed and some excerpts from those reflections are included here.

**OUR “WHY”:** Child welfare was based on the assumption that if a system removes children from “bad families” and places them with “better families,” they will thrive, do better and have a better life. Over time, implicit in this assumption is that “bad families” are often black, brown, indigenous and poor. The system is embedded in implicit bias and historical policies of explicit racism. We believe it is our moral and ethical obligation to put racism and discrimination as a central focus of our work, because *once we know better, we must do better.*

It was powerful to experience how ‘whiteness’ manifests itself in a real life conversation in a way, which under normal circumstances I would not have registered. Thanks to [a Board member’s] thoughtful deconstruction I really understood, perhaps for the first time since I have been in the US, why anti-racism work includes deep and intentional work on oneself. I loved that the conversation demonstrated how we can be mirrors to each other in order to make the subconscious conscious and evolve as individuals and as a group. To continue the work we will have to have courage - courage to ask for help, courage to share how words and actions show up and affect others, courage to name what we perceived whether it is articulated directly or between the lines. Thank you ALIA for doing the real work.

Elena Imaretska, Board Member

Racist ideas churn racist ideology and policies. They are not micro by any stretch of the imagination. They’re abusive. The power (dynamic) and oppressive practices are what we’re attempting to unravel and rid ourselves of. In an anti-racist world, there are no grey areas. It is or it isn’t. Alia must begin to understand, and tackle head on, these racist ideas that are embedded in our nation’s child welfare systems and to work to discontinue perpetuating white supremacy. We have no other choice.

Corey Best, Board Member

What I am learning at Alia through our endeavors to bring race equity to the forefront of our vision is that this journey is messy, full of tension, and that the human capacity for taking a step towards someone for reconciliation is astounding.

Laura Witham, Staff Member

It was powerful to experience how ‘whiteness’ manifests itself in a real life conversation in a way, which under normal circumstances I would not have registered. Thanks to [a Board member’s] thoughtful deconstruction I really understood, perhaps for the first time since I have been in the US, why anti-racism work includes deep and intentional work on oneself. I loved that the conversation demonstrated how we can be mirrors to each other in order to make the subconscious conscious and evolve as individuals and as a group. To continue the work we will have to have courage - courage to ask for help, courage to share how words and actions show up and affect others, courage to name what we perceived whether it is articulated directly or between the lines. Thank you ALIA for doing the real work.

Elena Imaretska, Board Member
ALIA SERVICES, RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

At Alia, we are laser-focused on building a body of evidence that demonstrates that the prevention of child abuse and neglect can be the primary role of child welfare. This bold vision to keep children safely with their families, not from their families, requires a new way of work. We offer a variety of services, materials and resources to shift mindsets, impact practice and support transformational systems change across the field.

Alia supports child welfare jurisdictions through long-term, in-depth projects that include:

- **Systems Redesign Supports** to bring the latest innovations in child welfare to assist leaders in day-to-day implementation, as well as the development of long-term change strategies.
- **Leadership Coaching** designed to build a leader’s capacity to drive innovation and develop agency-wide alignment by creating a culture of wellbeing for staff, the agency and families they serve.
- **Workforce Wellbeing Groups** comprised of small groups of leaders who are equipped with the tools to achieve and maintain wellbeing and to reduce turnover and burnout.
- **Micro-Learnings** designed to engage staff agency-wide in a short, Ted Talk-style format in areas related to individual and organizational health and wellbeing.

Alia also supports child welfare jurisdictions through short-term engagements, including:

- **3-day Next-Level Learning Summits** to provide hands-on, bias-toward-action immersive experiences for leaders and practitioners in areas such as Helping Your Youth Find Permanence, Innovative Leadership & Sharing Power with Families.
- **Workshops/Trainings/Retreats/Keynotes** designed to support the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to engage in transformational systems change.
- **Breakthrough Solutions Sessions** that bring together national experts with small groups of leaders as they bring forth their toughest challenges to offer breakthrough solutions and quickly identify strategies for moving forward.

Now Available! Resources and Materials
www.aliainnovations.org/resources

- **Ecotone Report** – The Unseen Cost of Foster Care: A Social Return on Investment Study
- **Alia UnSystem Innovation Cohort** – Case Studies and Early Data
- **Coming Soon! Alia UnSystem Innovation Cohort Year 1 Outcomes**
# ALIA STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
## Year Ended June 30, 2019

## REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT

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<th>Description</th>
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## CHANGE IN NET ASSETS

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## NET ASSETS – END OF YEAR

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## Graphs

### REVENUES & OTHER SUPPORT
- **Grants**: $594,216
- **Contributions**: $296,124
- **Program Service Fees**: $1,026,616

### EXPENSES
- **Management & General**: $270,192
- **Fundraising**: $100,887
- **Program Services**: $1,235,163
GRATITUDE
July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019

Team Alia is forever grateful for the support, commitment, and passion of changemakers who kick up our game and make our work possible! Your belief in Alia’s mission allows us to leverage, grow, and sustain world-changing work for children and families. We love every one of you! We make every effort to include all of our valued supporters; however, if we have inadvertently forgotten you, please forgive us and let us know at info@aliainnovations.org so we can ensure it won't happen again.

$100,000 - $499,999
Otto Bremer Trust
Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies
Redlich Horwitz Foundation

$50,000 - $99,999
Carlson Family Foundation

$25,000 - $49,999
GHR Foundation
Hubbard Broadcasting Foundation
McVay Family Foundation
Moxie Foundation

$15,000 - $24,999
Serimus Foundation

$5,000 - $14,999
Fred C. and Katherine B. Andersen Foundation
Mark Meyer & Amelia Franck Meyer Sauer Family Foundation
Todd Spichke of Riverbrand Design

$2,500 - $4,999
Debi Grebenik
Keyhubs/Vikas Narula
Medtronic Company Match

$1,000 - $2,499
Trudy Gross
Dennis & Kay Prchal Family Charitable Trust
Western Bank
Rachel & Peter Zahn

$500 - $999
Anonymous
Corey Best
Elizabeth Black
Stacie Buchanan
Mandy Ellerton
Duane & Nancy Fier
The Greg and Linda Johnson Charitable Fund
DaWayne Judd
Margo Kemp Johnson
Katie Miller

Gifts up to $499
Amazon Smile
Elizabeth Barnhart
Karen Brooker
Molly Fuller
Elena Imaretska
Nerée Jackson
Esra Kucukciftci
Anna Kytonen-Coffman
Amber Messner
Josie & Noah Meyer
Stefan Meyer
Dana Mortenson
Ramón Pastrano & Shelly Hokel Pastrano
Judy Sandler
Vicki Selmekci
Eliza Severson
Steve Smith
Laurie Tochiki
Colleen Wolak
Carol White
Laura & Micah Witham
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
The Alia Board of Directors are growing hope and bringing light into the world. Thanks to their commitment, expertise, and fortitude, we are igniting child welfare innovators to revolutionize the child welfare system.

“We are on a journey to change the world.”
Elena Imaretska, Alia Board Member
IT'S TIME TO REBUILD, TOGETHER.

Team Alia

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