# Health and Human Science Matters Season 4, Episode 3: Marc Winokur

Marc Winokur We have to understand that when we do research, it's not about subjects and participants, it's about collaboration and partnerships. That's what we do at the Social Work Research Center, it's collaborations, partnership, it's not participant subjects. The people we work with are active collaborators and partners in the research we do. If they weren't, we couldn't do what we do. You can't do applied research without the community being engaged, without them being partners in helping drive the agenda, identify where the data's coming from, help you make sense of the data and help you disseminate the work.

Avery Martin: Welcome to Health and Human Science Matters, a podcast by Colorado State University's College of Health and Human Sciences. I'm your co-host and digital media strategist, Avery Martin.

Matt Hickey: And I'm Matt Hickey, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate studies. At our college, we make it our mission to optimize human health and wellbeing through discovery and innovation. Don't just take our word for it; each episode, we sit down with people who fulfill that mission, our college faculty and staff. And today we've got a friend from social work, Dr. Marc Winokur. Marc, welcome.

Marc Winokur Thank you guys. Great to be here.

Matt Hickey: Well, we're glad to have you. It's always fun because we chat before we get on air here, and so you've already peaked our interest about some tales.

Avery Martin: Plenty.

Matt Hickey: But I'm going to start with the big things that occupy your time that you pursue as a professional. Talk to us about big questions, big problems, things that you and the Social Work Research Center that you lead work on on a daily basis.

Marc Winokur Yeah, great question. I think we have a mission for family strengthening, child and youth wellbeing, enhancing community protective factors. It's all within a preventing child maltreatment lens, so all of our work has that umbrella. But those are the key things: family, community and youth wellbeing, and trying to use research and evaluation to enhance all of those things and to really make a difference. Our tagline is research for results. And I've been doing this long enough where if we're not making a difference, if we're not making an impact, then what are we doing? This is what the work is, it's to really make a difference in the community with families, and really, all of our research and evaluation work is focused on that.

Matt Hickey: That's great. This is a classic example of what we now call engaged scholarship. People and policy are the outcome you're interested in, Right?

Marc Winokur Yes. Practice, people, and policies. I throw a third P in there. It's an applied research center, so we've always been embedded in the community and partnering with practitioners because they can make the true difference. I got my degrees here in education, and I know we'll talk more about that probably, but I was a little concerned when I got through my PhD that education had just a lot more layers of bureaucracy as far as federal policy, state policies, districts, superintendent, principal, teacher. To get to that student level, I just felt like is my work going to really make a difference at the level of where the learning happens?

And then on a lark, I ended up in social work, and what I realized quickly is you have a much better opportunity to actually work with the professionals who make the decisions, who interact with families on a day-to-day basis so the research goes right to them and they could integrate that into what they do. And as an academic, that's what I wanted to do. I love the higher level stuff of conferences and presentations and publications and a life of the mind, but really, it's to me about making a difference, improving people's lives through research and evaluation. I felt like social work, and in particular child maltreatment prevention, gave me the best chance to do that.

Matt Hickey: These contacts are city, county, state, social workers themselves, right?

Marc Winokur Yeah. It's county and state. Colorado has a state supervised, county administered child welfare system. What that means is the counties really have the ability to innovate and to really drive their own practice to meet the specific needs of their communities. So we get to work with county practitioners. A lot of them are social workers; not all, but they're all child welfare practitioners. And they either have the frontline staff or the supervisors, the administrative levels, so we get to work with all the different levels and layers of the work.

And then also, through our state contacts, they are the decision makers. They help drive the policy, make the rules and regulations, deal with the budgeting and the financial aspects. We have our fingers in all those different areas so we can really help translate what we do to the information that they need to really change their practice or enhance their practice to stay up with the current trends in research and just make sure that they're data driven, outcome focused while doing all the social work skills to engage families and provide the services and resources people need.

Matt Hickey: Among the many things that would be covered here, I'm assuming things like foster care are part of the umbrella of services that are in your portfolio.

Marc Winokur Yeah, absolutely. I think if I'm known for anything more internationally, nationally, it's the work we've done on kinship care. Kinship care is the placement of children and youth who have been removed from the home for a safety concern to their kin; kin broadly defined. Could be a family friend, but usually relatives, grandparents.

And when I first started here, there was the apple doesn't fall far from the tree mentality in child welfare that if a family was struggling and there was a safety concern, the last thing you want to do was bring that child to someone else in the family because it seemed to be multi-generational. We looked at the research and we did what's called a systematic review, which is a very involved literature review funded by the Campbell and Cochrane collaborations. Those are the two big clearinghouses for evidence-based research in the social science and medical science fields. And did a systematic review that looked at all the literature to date on kinship care and found that it had better or as good outcomes as foster care, and so demystified this myth around apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

And that's really changed practice. Here in Colorado now, the first option is always kin for placements. And this is really in line with both European policy and then US policy around kin first. That particular systematic review and its update are the most cited work that I've ever done. Any study on kinship care references that, and I know that because I get to review all of the kinship care research in the four or five journals where I'm a manuscript reviewer. I always check to see if our study's in there just because it's the gold standards. Systematic review is at the top of the evidence chain for research because of its rigor and comprehensiveness.

Matt Hickey: That has to be doubly gratifying, at least. Your peers recognize the quality of the scholarship, but it has a direct impact on practice again.

Marc Winokur Yeah, this study has got me around the world too. I've been able to present in Oslo, Copenhagen, Australia, London, Chicago. I've gotten just so many opportunities to meet with international researchers. Because that's not something we always get to do here at CSU is have that international frame and to have contacts and colleagues. We co-authored this with a researcher from University of Tromso in Norway. It just was a great initial opportunity for me to be known a little bit in the field. But really, the bigger pleasure of it all is that it's impacted policy and it's changed trajectories of children, youth and families here in Colorado as far as keeping kids safe, enhancing their wellbeing, and having them have permanency, which are the three tenets of child maltreatment prevention.

Matt Hickey: That's right.

Avery Martin: That's incredible.

Matt Hickey: Tell us a little bit about the history of the Social Work Research Center for those that don't know much about that.

Marc Winokur Thank you for asking that because I love talking about this. This is our 19th year. We're the little center that could. We're much more well known actually at the state and county level. People know Mark from CSU and the Social Work Research Center. We're honestly less known within the university.

Matt Hickey: That's interesting, isn't it?

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Marc Winokur Yeah, it's an interesting dynamic. We are a six person center. We have anywhere 13 to 15 projects. But started in 2004. This was the brainchild of Deborah Valentine, who was the director of the school social work at the time, and Jim Drendel, who was the division manager here in Larimer County DHS for Children, Youth and Families. They came up with an idea of we need more research. We need a partnership. And it's really a research practice partnership, an, RPP. It's the longest standing RPP, this project that launched Social Work Research Center called the Applied Research and Child Welfare Project Arch. That was the genesis of the center was that one project.

I was hired as a postdoc in a one year flyer position to get this off the ground. And 19 years later, I'm still the director of the center. But it was started on a very small budget and one project, and it's grown to be a million dollar a year center. We're a hundred percent externally funded. We don't get any funding from the university. It's all soft money, grants, competitive grants, and contract funding.

And it's like a small business. It's an entrepreneurial venture. We have to deliver. That was what Jim Drendel, who was one of my mentors, said to me, he's like, "Listen, you have to deliver." Because back then, and even now, higher ed has a reputation, at least in the community, as being you're doing high level stuff, you're writing manuscripts. Are you down at the community level? And can you deliver for the community? That was always the mantra for me, deliver, deliver, deliver. And that's just a matter of that collaboration and partnership, making sure that you're listening to the community, listening to your partners and doing what they need while bringing your own flair and background methodological chops to the table.

Yeah, we're in the school social work. We're over in Alder Hall right now, so it's a fantastic space. We've been very fortunate to be able to secure good space throughout the years at the university. I know it's very challenging for centers to have that space, so it shows the commitment of the university and the college to the work we do.

Yeah, my dad was a small business owner, and he wanted me to take over his business. It was in the hotel supply field. And when I got my PhD, he still thought I was coming back to take over the business. It was a tough conversation that, no, I chose a different path. But I use so much of what he taught me. Because of course I worked for my dad for many years in his business. He taught me it's all about relationships. That's the cornerstone of life and business.

This center is all about long-term relationships that I still have with people because we deliver and because we're good partners and we have our heart in the right place. And that's what I'm best at is that relationship building and sustaining. Without that, it's really hard to do the work we do. And in all the years I've been here, I haven't really burned any bridges with people because you just never know when that relationship is going to be important to you.

Matt Hickey: Well said.

Marc Winokur And so I've always valued just other individuals and their roles. And yeah, that's how that's still here. It's relationships, it's the great talented people we brought in, it's a fantastic partners we've had, and it's just the importance of the work in making those differences. Yeah, 19 years and counting.

Matt Hickey: And counting. Well said.

Matt Hickey: That's really cool. Let's push this personal history. You've opened the door to dad here a little bit, and I want to talk about you're childhood. Where'd you grow up? And family influences. And then of course, particularly for our listeners, as we talked about before we got on the air, the educational trajectories are not cookie cutters by any stretch of the imagination; they can vary widely. Talk to us about your history.

Marc Winokur Yeah, absolutely. No, this is the fun part is the personal aspect of the work we do and just getting to know people on that level here. I was born in Brooklyn, lived there till I was four, and I grew up in New Jersey. Child of the '70s and the '80s. I still love that, being a Gen X-er and just having that time before technology took over.

Yeah, I was a good student. It's funny, I was much more math inclined. But I went to University of Michigan for my undergrad and I was an English major, which again, my dad was questioning, "Not pre-business?" I'm like, "No." I think English to me... And it was more on poetry, beat poetry, African American poetry focus. And it was just the ability to critically think, be able to communicate your opinions and your feelings with evidence. And I ended up moving Hawaii for a year after college.

Matt Hickey: Jersey to Ann Arbor to Hawaii. All right.

Marc Winokur Yeah. It's not the typical trajectory. Actually, my brother's best friend from New Jersey lived on Kauai, so I figured better now than later, or maybe never later if you don't do it now. Moved there. I lived there for a year, and I was an organic farmer. And this is important because that is the key to my career, organic farming in Hawaii.

Avery Martin: I'm interested.

Marc Winokur Okay. I lived there for a year. I loved it. It's expensive, though. And even 87 and breezy can get a little boring growing up on the east coast with the seasons. I figured, you know what? I'm going to move back to the States, to the mainland, as we said back then and see what happened.

I actually moved back to New Jersey and I found a position at Rutgers University, actually Cook College, Department of Nutritional Sciences to develop and coordinate a community gardening and nutrition program in the public housing communities in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I just said, "Hey, I'm an organic farmer." I had no community organizing experience, wasn't a social worker, but we basically took some empty lots in the public housing communities; we turned them into gardens. A lot of the residents were from the south, so it really aligned with their history, their interest, their background. And we created some really successful community gardens in New Jersey.

And this is a foreshadow to the rest of my career, but the community members said, "We need something for the kids. This is great for us, but the kids need something." We developed a youth farm stand project. We created an entrepreneurial curriculum. We got funding from JTPA, Job Training Partnership Act. And it was, from my understanding, the first ever JTPA funding that allowed for an entrepreneurial component where we were able to pay the kids a stipend, but also they kept the profits from the farm stand. This was a rural urban relationship.

Jersey's the garden state, so there were farms very close to the city. Partnered with the farmers to purchase the produce and then sell them at farm stands in the public housing and created a curriculum around accounting and marketing and sales and just other elements of entrepreneurship. And it was amazing. It was just incredible to see the youth have something that they could apply their interest and abilities to and have it be just more of a holistic community approach with the gardens and the farm stand. And I love CSU. I love everything I've done, but that's still probably my favorite job I've ever had just from the ability to make those connections with families and with communities.

I had met my now wife, but then girlfriend there. She was just finishing up her natural resource degree at Cook College, and she wanted to get out of New Jersey. She was from Alexandria, Virginia. And I'm like, "All right, let's do it." We hopped in our Chevy van. There's a song, I think, about that. But did a four month trip around the country, 17,000 miles, 35 states, 35 national parks to try to find our landing spot.

We spent one day in Fort Collins, went to Avo's, and we're like, "We're moving here." Now, I did have another friend from where I grew up in New Jersey who did live here so there was a slight connection. And actually Heather, my wife, was going to go back to school here for natural resource management. And we're still here. That's almost 28 years ago when we moved here.

And then I started working for the Pony Express. I was delivering packages in that same Chevy van. And then I, one day, opened The Colorado and saw a position for a entrepreneurial specialist. I was like, "Huh, all right. I can do that." I did that at Cook College. So this was in the OT department. They had gotten a grant to develop a curriculum for the youth at risk programs in the high school. I applied for that position and just talked my way into it. And I got hired.

And that was a fantastic job. We basically developed curricula for youth to run their own businesses as part of the PACE and ACE programs at the high schools. And these were youth who had some behavioral challenges, and they were on certain models around their behavior management. But one thing I realized was give them something that they want to do that they have skills to do and that will keep them focused. And we just had the greatest time; doghouse, Christmas ornaments, all kinds of businesses that they designed, they developed and they did. And this is, again, foreshadowing to the work we do where the community is the one driving our research agenda. What do they need? What do they want to do?

I took that job and did that for a couple years here in the OT department. It was a Center for Community Participation at the time, now Center for Community Partnerships. And the amazing thing is they're also in Alder Hall with us now, so it's just come full circle for me to be back in the same building where I started.

And then I said, "You know what? Let me see about taking some courses." Because I needed some additional training like teaching and learning methodology to do a curriculum, so I started a master's in education. And the beauty of working full-time at CSU was you get tuition benefits. And it took me several years to get the master's degree. And at the time, I was also working for Bill Timson in education. He's one of my big mentors and helping facilitate a first year seminar at the time.

And I got my M.Ed, and then I said, "Okay, what can I do?" And they're like, "Well, do you have a teacher license?" I'm like, "No." They're like, "That M.Ed Isn't really worth much." I'm like, "Oh, I should have probably asked that before." This is literally how things go. There was no plan here, from organic farming to now I have an M.Ed That I can't really use. I said, "Well, what can I do?" They're like, "Well, you can get a PhD." I'm like, "Okay, let's do that." That was literally what it was like.

Started the PhD in education and human resource studies. And this is where I made my shift from the teaching and learning side into the research and evaluation side. I went to work for the R and D center, Research and Development for Advancement of Student Learning, which was a center at the time, which was a collaboration with Puter School District and CSU. And my two big mentors were Anne Foster and Brian Cobb.

Matt Hickey: [inaudible 00:20:10]. Oh, okay.

Marc Winokur Yep, yep. And they took me in. I had no research and evaluation experience at all. But this is when I started to realize this is where I see an opportunity, and frankly, where I could have employment for a long time. Because it started to become clear that without research and evaluation, a lot of the work cannot be done.

Worked at the R and D Center as a GRA. I got my PhD. And it was more of an emphasis in research and evaluation that really wasn't a specialization at the time. They ended up creating a program or a specialization for that after we left, because there was a lot of us in that cohort who really were pushing the envelope taking classes in psychology and all across the university to get that methodological training. Got that degree in 2004. And then brings me to the Social Work Research Center, taking that one year post doc.

I'll just say one more thing is I was literally on a plane at DIA headed to Logan Airport in Boston to interview at University of New Hampshire for a faculty position in an education. It was the day of that massive blizzard in 2004. I'm on the plane, they then say, the flight's been canceled. Logan Airport is closed. I got off that plane, I never made the trip, and I'm here 19 years later because of that snowstorm.

Matt Hickey: What a story.

Marc Winokur And even my wife's like, "Yeah, I don't know if we'd be married or you'd have kids with me right now if you had gotten on that plane." My whole life literally changed because of that blizzard in Boston. Everything could have been different.

Matt Hickey: That is wild, isn't it?

Avery Martin: Wow, that is so cool how so much was almost chance, to a degree, but also you finding your way and finding your niche in everything. That's really cool and important for the younger listeners to know.

Marc Winokur Yeah. And I have two kids; I have a 12 year old and almost 17 year old now. And that probably informs my parenting style. Trying to let them find their way. You try to provide some guardrails and some of your experience, but I think you have to find your own way and you have to find what your passion is and what drives you and give them the opportunities. We're fortunate and blessed to have those opportunities to provide them with the option to do theater and play sports and the other things that the kids can do now. I think my life lesson is just create your future, develop your skills. You need skills, you need to have your talent develop and tested, but don't have a preconceived notion of where everything is going to end up, and just be open to the opportunities and the possibilities that life brings you. And a lot of times, it is chance and a lot of times it is random and fate. And just trust, I guess.

Matt Hickey: Well, life is full of surprises too, and that can be part of the fun, right?

Marc Winokur Yes.

Matt Hickey: You mentioned your dad, you mentioned Brian and Anne, I want you to talk a little bit about lessons learned or we often use the metaphor of people whose fingerprints we still carry with us as professionals and scholars. Talk a little bit about mentoring influences on how you go about the day-to-day conduct of your professional duties.

Marc Winokur Yeah, it's so influenced by these mentors. Bill Timson, he really taught me about the heart. The work we do is about your heart and it's about connection, it's about doing the right thing, it's about trying to make the human condition better. And that's why I went to university. When we were teaching that first year seminar, it was about sustainability. Oh goodness, we're talking early 2000s, so this is back before there had been an environmental movement. But this is still before it was more mainstream and more accepted, so teaching students at university about sustainability was innovative at the time. But there was some pushback about was this academic? How is this preparing them for their future?

And Bill was always just high integrity, high character, always willing to push back and challenge authority. I think that really resonated with me. I don't know if we'll get into it. I'll just say it, back in the '80s at Ann Arbor, I was a hippie. A lot of Grateful Dead shows during my college years. And I was a hippie. And I still have the hippie ethos. My hair isn't as long anymore. But that community, that feeling of poking authority in the eye a little bit and doing what we think is right, that's what I learned from Bill.

Anne and Brian taught me how to run a center. Just to observe them running this research center and learning how to do it, how to be a good partner, how to treat people well. I think that the one thing that's underrated about these centers is it's not just like the researchers doing work, it's an entire true university effort. The teams we work with, from our fiscal officer to sponsored programs to IRB to IT, communications, this is what makes the center work. And it's those relationships and it's how you treat people and it's how you bring value to what they do and let them bring value to what you do. That's what I learned from them. And it's not just the research. That's a big part of it, but you don't have a center without everything else. And so I think it's that holistic idea of what the work we do is that I definitely learn from them.

And then Deb Valentine and Jim Drendel in getting this off the ground, I mentioned delivering... It's honoring the practitioners. They are doing the work. I'm doing some interviews now with caseworkers. They have the hardest job in the world, I think. This is just the hardest job to help families provide for their families, to help them keep their kids safe with all the pressures they're under, the time restrictions, the lack of resources, the high accountability, the low public esteem for the work they do. I always came in very humble, not being a social worker or a practitioner. I always say I'm a social worker in the heart, but not by training. But then just having that respect for the field and for the profession, that's what I learned from them, that they're doing such a hard job, can we make it a little easier by providing them with research and evaluation that they can integrate into what they do, give them that additional tool in their tool belts? Yeah, I think those are some imprints. Obviously I mentioned my dad and just that relationship piece. And, yeah, I think those are my major influences and how I still hold myself today as a professional.

Matt Hickey: That's great. I want you to tell us a little bit about a day in the life of business at the Social Work Research Center. And I'm interested in what does a day look like for the Social Work Research Center team? Not just you.

Marc Winokur Yeah. It's a team-based science approach, I think, which I love. And that's been another journey for me is going from the sole proprietors, so to speak, of the center, to being a leader and to understanding how to have a team and to invest in them the professional development, the trust, the skills, the responsibility to do their work but also for them to grow. And definitely started out as I have to be involved in every aspect, I have to know exactly what's going on in every project, and that stifles people's creativity, it stifles their ability to grow. And, yeah, you might get a good product, but at what cost?

I'm about developing the team that I'm with. And I'm under no illusion that they're all going to stay at the center forever, but when they leave, I want them to do bigger and better things. Take the train they had, take the confidence they gained and the skills that they learned and really go out in the world and just crush it. And that's where I get the most pleasure from this is when... And I have people out there doing just unbelievable things out there. And frankly, they've gone well beyond me methodologically. And I'm good with that. I want them to go past me. Just like you want your kids to do better than you did, I want my team to do better than I'm doing. I'm okay being the rock here and being that hub.

But the day-to-day is we have a team of between five and six. And being a soft money center, that's a balancing act. Having the right personnel to meet the projects, but not over committing where you'd have to let someone go from not having the funding. We've never let anyone go ever from not having funding to support them.

Matt Hickey: [inaudible 00:29:10]. That's great.

Marc Winokur People who have left have had just other great opportunities. That's huge to me. I don't want to bring someone in and then we can't keep them. A day in the life is... It's changed after COVID, you know?

Matt Hickey: Sure.

Marc Winokur It felt like it used to be a lot more analysis writing time and some meeting time. It feels like that's flipped a little bit. We just have a lot more meetings than we've ever had. Unfortunately, a lot of our partners haven't yet gone back to in-person. I used to be in Denver once or twice a week for meetings, for 15 years going down there. But now it's Zoom, it's Teams, it's WebEx, it's Google, it's all the meeting apps.

But the meetings are productive. They are with our partners. They're co-generating the research. It's partnering with them on... I think we're much more communicative now than we've ever been, and it's much more of a partnership than before. They would hire us, we'd go do our work and then we'd present it to them. It's much more of an iterative process now where we're working together and using the meetings as that means.

Otherwise, like a research center, we have qualitative and quantitative data, a lot of mixed method research, so it's a lot of data collection, a lot of survey research. We have surveys out in the field all the time, so it's processing that data, it's analyzing focus groups, interviews that we're doing, secondary administrative data sets is a lot of our work that we get for the Child Welfare System, analyzing that data. Spend a lot of time on writing reports. And now we've moved into better data visualization and more consumable dissemination tactics, so briefs, infographics. A lot of time spent working on that.

And then also presenting and being with the community. We just had a meeting last week as part of our Larimer County Collaboration Grant where we're meeting with agency partners. And it's so amazing because we're starting with numbers of referrals and things like that, but it goes into a much deeper conversation about how do we better serve the community? How do we better partner with the community? You see in real time the processing of the evaluation information and how it turns into a real discussion about the practice. That's the beauty of the work. And we get to do that on a monthly or quarterly basis with a lot of our projects.

We're working right now on two human trafficking prevention grants, which is huge work. That's partnering with other new partners like law enforcement, district attorney offices. We're getting out of the social worker realm into different practice partners, understanding where they're coming from; having amazing meetings with them, hearing their perspective on the work and how it intersects with what we do. Basically, a day in the life is a lot of interaction with the partners. Our own internal work, try to minimize those internal meetings because you have so many external. But a lot of Teams. "Hey Mark, what do you think about this?"

And I love to be the consultant on the projects, but our model is a strength-based model of people assign themselves to the projects that they have expertise in or want to learn more about and they have interest in. It used to be I would say, "Okay, fill this gap. We have this here. Can you do this?" Now it's more people decide what they want to do. That's much better approach because people are more invested in the work and they don't get burned out on one particular project. I'm a support on a lot of projects, and then I manage a lot of projects. All of our team either manages or supports projects. And I think that's a good mix because they get their own accountability and outcomes, and then they get to support other people.

Avery Martin: Cool.

Matt Hickey: A lot going on, right?

Avery Martin: Yes.

Matt Hickey: You can almost feel the hum in just listening to him talk.

Avery Martin: Absolutely. One thing that I want to circle back to real quick is I know you alluded to earlier results and how are we truly enriching the community? Can you think back to a couple of projects where you saw a true impact through the work that the Social Work Research Center has done?

Marc Winokur Yeah, I love that. Yeah, that research results is not just a tagline, it's really our philosophy and it's what drives us. I mentioned the kinship care work, that to me is still our most important. And interestingly, we've followed that through. We recently did a randomized controlled trial for what's called kinship navigation. We started where apple doesn't fall far from the tree; can we even place kids with their kin? We did the System Act review, we debunked that. We created the evidence base that allowed for the policy and practice change.

But what we also found at the time was kin caregivers, and especially in Colorado, are not certified like foster parents are. They're doing this because they want to help their kin. And they don't really want to be system involved, so they have traditionally a lack of resources, of financial and otherwise. When you're a certified foster parent, you get monthly payments, you get other resources and services provided. These kin caregivers really weren't getting that.

That evolved into a kinship supports approach, and now kinship navigation, we were able to do a randomized control trial that just got submitted to the Family First Prevention Services Clearing House and got a promising rating from the clearing house, which is a huge accomplishment for the center and for the state partnership in that the new model for the federal government is states and child welfare have to utilize evidence-based programs and practices now to get reimbursement. It used to be that it was all based on foster care numbers. That's changed. And as we talked about, with the move towards kinship care, that needed to change. Now you have to have evidence-based practices. The fact that we were able to get the... Colorado Connected, it's called, into the clearing house, that will now allow that practice to be reimbursed from a funding perspective from the feds, which is what will keep the practice sustainable and keep kinship caregivers viable in the care that they provide. That's another big impact. The other one is-

Matt Hickey: I have to say congratulations. I think that merit's a way to go.

Avery Martin: Yes, absolutely. That's awesome.

Matt Hickey: High impact stuff.

Marc Winokur That really is high impact because that's now in the clearing house and when people will see that we were a part of it. But again, it's that research practice partnership. When you do an RCT, it's not like you just wave a wand and it happens, you need the practitioners on the ground to agree to it. There's always ethical concerns. Practitioners are like, "I don't want to withhold something that we know is beneficial." And we always say, "Well, we don't quite know it's beneficial yet. That's why we're doing this." Once we know it's beneficial, yes, then everyone should get it. Absolutely. And they have to have fidelity to the model.

And so I think that's so overlooked. And it's not something I want to talk about just as a quick digression is we have to understand that when we do research, it's not about subjects and participants, it's about collaboration and partnerships. That's what we do at the Social Work Research Center. It's collaborations, partnership, it's not participants, subjects. The people we work with are active collaborators and partners in the research we do. If they weren't, we couldn't do what we do. You can't do applied research without the community being engaged, without them being partners in helping drive the agenda, identify where the data's coming from, help you make sense of the data, and help you disseminate the work. I think that's probably our biggest impact is changing that paradigm a little bit. Because higher ed isn't always viewed like that, right?

Matt Hickey: Right.

Marc Winokur They view us as partners, as collaborators, as go-to resources for them. They don't just think of us as researchers, they think of us as active partners with what they do. The other one is called differential response. And we did another RCT back in 2010 to 2012 on this. That's a shift in Child Protective Services towards a helping agency. Instead of doing an investigation on whether child abuse or neglect happen and having a finding, it's going to the family and doing a holistic assessment with them. What's going on in your lives? Where do you need resources? Where do you need support? Instead of a system that's more punitive or oppositional, it's again more of a partnership with families. And we did the RCT on that. We showed that it was an effective practice. And that has now gone from five counties to I think over 40 and going to the whole state.

And our biggest finding there, I always call it the canary in the coal mine, was people who were randomly assigned to get what's called family assessment response instead of high risk assessment were more likely to say they would go back and ask for help from Child Protective Services in the future. That's what it's about, it's that they trust that CPS workers are there to help them ,not to take their kids away. Because when you see media depictions of child welfare, it's of the child welfare case worker taking your kids away. And it's changing that dynamic through research and evaluation. I think those are some of the bigger impacts we've had.

Last one I'll say is just having a local impact, the work we do here in Larimer County in Fort Collins. Larimer County has been our biggest partner since we started this work back from the days of Jim Drendel.

And we're currently doing a five year Children's Bureau grant called Supported Family, Stronger Community. And it's creating an integrated prevention services system in here in Larimer County, a no wrong door approach. If a family goes to an agency for services and they don't have that service, they know who does; they will refer that family to the agency that does, and they will be able to get their services. At the agency level, it's the no wrong door approach and it's that referral sharing collaboration piece.

At the community level, there are community navigators, individuals with live expertise who are helping families navigate the very Byzantine service system. We're very fortunate in Larimer County to be well resourced compared to a lot of counties and other jurisdictions probably across the country. But it's getting families to the right services at the time they need the service. We have individuals who have navigated the system previously now working with families to provide case management and service navigation so they can get the services they need. And this is all voluntary for the families, but the need right now is concrete supports: it's financial, it's rent, it's car payments. Those are the things that families really need now. It's helping them connect to those services and using our evaluation and research as a resource to understand how the referrals are being shared. We have this awesome referral mapping project or software so agencies can see all the connections that are being made here in Larimer County. It's making that difference.

We've done homelessness prevention work here in Larimer County and Fort Collins. I'm really keen on the local impact. I honestly don't think we do enough of that. I'm at the table sometimes. I'm the only CSU person that they've seen in a while, and that does raise my eyebrows, Matt. It does concern me. I think we do a lot of amazing work here, but I think that local impact work I think is something we should really be focusing on.

Matt Hickey: I'm going to follow up on that on and flip the script on our last two questions. We typically talk about CSU's Land Grant Mission last, but given your observations, I think this is the place to talk about that. Talk to us about what being a scholar and a community partner means for you in the context of our land Grant Mission.

Marc Winokur I feel like our center really embodies the Land grant mission.

Matt Hickey: Agree.

Avery Martin: I agree.

Marc Winokur It's community embedded, it's community engaged. It's focused on what can the university do for the community in which we live and the larger community? How can we be good stewards of the funding that comes to us? How can we meet the needs of the community while also doing our academic work? Listen, like any academic, I love to see... I work out in journals. I love to go to these conferences, but it's getting the glory part, but the glory only comes from the work that we do in the community.

And that's where I get my self-worth, so to speak, as a professional. I don't get it from being an academic, I get it from being a partner with people who do the really tough work and make the difference with families. Being a scholar to me means taking my training and my expertise that we get from going through a doctoral program and from being in a community of scholars, but it's making it pay, it's making the difference. Every day, what can we do that matters? And I think that's part of the podcast name. What matters? And how can we do it and do it better?And that's what I would love all of us to be focused on.

And when I go to the College Research Day, that's where my eyes open. I'm like, "Wow, we are making a difference, and in so many different ways." The amazing work that's being done that you don't know about until you have these opportunities to see, I'm blown away. That restores my faith that, yes, we are doing the right thing here at the college level. And it's in so many different directions and it's so many different disciplines.

But I think everyone does have that at heart, that they want to make a difference, that that's why we're here. That's what keeps me here and keeps me excited is seeing all the new scholars that have come here since I've been here and how incredibly trained and just brilliant they are. I love to be part of that community.

Matt Hickey: Amen. I'm going to use that as springboard for the last layer of this, and that's our college, right?

Marc Winokur Yep.

Matt Hickey: Health and Human Sciences, eight, at least at first glance; very different units, but woven together in a really important way that you've just really beautifully articulated today. What do you like best about being in the College of Health and Human Sciences?

Marc Winokur Yeah, as I said, I've been here the whole time, OT, education, social work. We partner a lot with Princeton Research Center, HDFS. Admittedly, I have a lot of friends in different units, but I have less professional opportunities with some of the other units in the college. Yeah, I was back when it was called a different name. It was Applied Human Sciences back then. That's one advantage of being here for a long time is just knowing the history.

We had Brad Schaffer used to talk about the days before it was Applied Human Sciences. And what does the name change mean? What does the name mean? I think it's important. I think the health centering was a very smart decision. I think that is a unifying concept for the college.

We've had some amazing deans. That's been another relationship that I've been fortunate to have with all the deans is trying to show the value that the Social Work Research Center brings to the college and the support we've received through all the different departments I mentioned earlier. Having that dean relationship's really important and having the dean understand what you do and how you do it and how they can help support you. And Dean Youngblade's been fantastic in helping us navigate the space issue for all these years and been really creative and innovative with... Now we're situated with HABIC, Human Animal Bond in Colorado, Princeton Research Center and Center for Community Partnership. Having that synergy of four different centers at the college I think is a really smart idea.

No, I think to me it's a great college because of the work we do change; things for the better to make a difference in people's lives across the continuum from birth to death, frankly, and everything in between and all the different ways. To me, it's just a dynamic place to work. There's so much potential there, as things change and our world changes, to have different disciplines really all working towards that common idea and goal. And there's a lot of heart and soul in this college, I think.

Matt Hickey: Beautifully said.

Avery Martin: Here, here. Well said.

Matt Hickey: I want to add a word. Thanks for spending some time with us. We really do appreciate it.

Avery Martin: Yes, thank you so much.

Marc Winokur Yeah, thank you two for doing this. It was really fun.

Matt Hickey: I hope you enjoyed it.

Marc Winokur I did.

Matt Hickey: Good, good.

Avery Martin: Great.

Matt Hickey: Good fun. Another great interview is into books. Thank you for listening to this episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Avery Martin: Stay tuned for the next episode. It's on the way. In the meantime, go listen to our episodes from Seasons one, two, and three. And if you want to learn more about our CSU College of Health and Human Sciences, go to www.chhs.colostate.edu.