Twenty Years of Research-Informed Practice through the Child Abuse Library Online (CALiO™)

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Abstract

The Child Abuse Library Online (CALiO™) was established in 2004 to address a gap in child abuse professionals' access to high-quality research needed to inform the multidisciplinary, coordinated response to child maltreatment. Over the past 20 years, CALiO™ has evolved from a small in-house resource into a globally recognized hub accessed by child maltreatment professionals and researchers worldwide. By providing evidence-based research, CALiO™ has significantly enhanced professionals' ability to deliver direct services to child victims of maltreatment and their families, including investigations, forensic interviews, medical examinations, mental health therapy, prosecution, advocacy, and more. Beyond direct-service delivery, CALiO™ also supports strengthening program development by providing the research needed to advance and sustain the work of child abuse professionals.

Keywords: *research, digital research library, evidence-based practice, child abuse professionals*

"Where can I access the latest research on normal findings in medical examinations when abuse is suspected?" "What are the most promising school-based abuse prevention programs?" "How can I locate economic impact data on child abuse to present to my state legislature when requesting additional funding?" "I need research about interviewing children who are reluctant disclosers." These are just a few examples of the many information challenges faced by professionals working with victims of child maltreatment and their families. Professionals need access to evidence-based research to help make decisions at critical points during a child maltreatment case: the timing of a forensic interview, whether to proceed with a prosecution, the type of treatment to pursue, how to work effectively with a caregiver, and numerous other areas of concern. While the importance of accessing valuable research is undeniable, studies have shown that professionals often turn to colleagues for information rather than utilizing online resources like such as libraries (Andrews et al., 2005; Gannon-Leary, 2006; Harrison et al., 2004; Wells, 2016). In a survey of practitioners, Preddie (2007) found the main barriers to information-

seeking were lack of time (76%), cost (33%), skills (25%), and format of information sources (22%). How can this need be filled when most research is subscription-based and available only to those who have access to university libraries or can afford personal subscriptions? Furthermore, professionals in the field of child maltreatment face intense, competing demands on their time, leaving little capacity to locate often difficult-to-find resources.

The Solution

The National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC) is a global leader in the fight against child abuse and neglect. Since its founding in 1985, NCAC has strengthened and championed the global response to child abuse. The agency has transformed how communities respond to child abuse through its innovative multidisciplinary approach, prevention and intervention programs, and training services.

In 2003, NCAC recognized the critical need to bridge the access-to-information gap for professionals working in child maltreatment. To address this, NCAC began developing a print and digital research library tailored to local professionals' informational needs. David King, MSLS, PhD, was hired as a consultant to identify efficient and effective solutions for filling this gap. From its inception, Dr. King developed the digital library with three assumptions regarding its potential users:

1. Users are smart, educated, and committed to providing the best services possible.
2. Users seek information for decision-making, problem-solving, and improving services in cases of child abuse and neglect; not research, personal edification, or entertainment.
3. Users function under tight time constraints and with limited funding. Therefore, they do not have easy access to professional libraries or personal subscriptions to professional journals (National Children's Advocacy Center, 2015).

These basic assumptions differentiated CALiO™ from all other university, research, and public libraries (National Children's Advocacy Center, 2015). The core principles of the library would be

- quality vs. quantity: subscriptions to targeted research that would be meaningful to the users;
- full-text access to publications rather than lists of citations that would require the user to track down the source document; and
- ease of site navigation and access.

These guiding principles served as the basis for the development of the NCAC Research Library, which was launched in 2004 via an intranet for NCAC staff. Over the following two years, the library expanded and improved its collections, including bibliographies, resources for Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) management, and several peer-reviewed journals. By 2005, NCAC had expanded access to the library, at no cost, to multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) at CACs nationwide, as well as to Accredited and Associate member CACs of the National Children's Alliance (NCA)—, the national association and accrediting body for CACs.

Growth and Evolution

With the additional funding it received through a Victims of Child Abuse Act (VOCAA) grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, NCAC purchased additional journal subscriptions. In 2007, the library was renamed the Child Abuse Library Online (CALiO™) and made accessible through NCAC's website, significantly increasing its reach to a larger national audience.

By early 2009, as the library's collections expanded and professionals from various organizations increasingly accessed its resources, Muriel K. Wells, M.Ed., MLIS, was hired as the library's first full-time research librarian. She was tasked with maintaining the collections and assisting professionals with their research needs. CALiO™'s collection of 300 peer-reviewed journals soon grew to 1,500, while and three bibliographic databases containing millions of publications were added. An institutional repository was also established to

include open-access research publications and NCAC resources for professionals outside of CACs. While the library collections have grown exponentially over time, NCAC remains committed to its founding principles: ensuring ease of access and providing full-text publications with a focus on quality, not quantity, to support professionals in the field.

By early 2023, the number of CACs with access to CALiO™ subscription content had grown to over 900, and the number of individual users from over 150 countries had grown to over 30,000 annually. In response to CALiO™'s continued growth, both in terms of curating content and assisting a growing user base, NCAC hired a second full-time research librarian, Laura Spurigo, MSLS. With the addition of a second librarian, NCAC's capacity to provide user assistance to a broader professional community, both nationally and internationally, has been significantly enhanced. Moreover, the librarians have undertaken numerous contracted research projects in addition to VOCAA-funded initiatives, extending their impact beyond the scope of the VOCAA grant. These projects include collaborations with the Office for Victims of Crime, the National Children's Alliance, the Justice Information Resource Network, the PROMISE Elpis Project funded by the European Union, and many others.

In early 2024, as CALiO™ celebrated 20 years of service to professionals serving victims of child abuse and their families, several new milestones were reached. NCAC collaborated with EBSCO Information Services, the primary content provider of the library, to modernize the website using their platform, Stacks—described as "the world's most powerful and accessible library website builder" (EBSCO, 2024). The EBSCO Stacks development team created a fresh, modern interface for CALiO™ to maximize resource accessibility and enhance the user experience. The updated platform features a simplified keyword search and one-click access to the most popular library sections, including bibliographies, fact sheets, and journals.

Additionally, CALiO™'s open-access institutional repository grew from 500 publications at its inception to over 6,800 publications today. Subscription offerings now include access to 2,000 journals including the complete American Psychological Association collection, the HeinOnline Law Library, and the Foundation Directory.

This wealth of resources has proven invaluable to CALiO™ users, who consistently praise its impact on their work. Recently, a frequent CALiO™ user shared that the library saves the most valuable resource, which is time hunting down research needed to help fuel their efforts and programming. Another user reflected that CALiO™ has helped her on so many occasions as both a learner and trainer, in preparing for court, and in many other ways (National Children's Advocacy Center, 2024).

Accessing CALiO™

Professionals in the field of child maltreatment and allied disciplines can access CALiO™ at https://www.calio.org. Used annually by tens of thousands of professionals from over 150 countries, the library provides access to over 6,800 full-text, open access research publications via its search function. Other sections of the site provide links to other publications from a variety of professional organizations and links to open access journals and community resources and agencies.

Professionals at any of the over 900+ U.S.-based Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs), State CAC Membership Chapters, and the VOCAA Partnership—including the Regional Children's Advocacy Centers—have access to both open access resources and the registered users' sections. With expanded access to over 2,000 peer-reviewed journals, the HeinOnline Law Library, CANDID (The Foundation Directory), and millions of full-text publications within three EBSCO bibliographic databases, professionals can access these resources using the login credentials assigned to each eligible agency.

The Future

CALiO™ has proven to be an essential resource, equipping professionals with the knowledge and tools to prevent child abuse, provide treatment to children and families, and support the prosecution of offenders. The CALiO™ website will continue transforming how users access the highest quality research and best practice information to enhance their knowledge and inform their work. With the addition of new tools like research guides, an event calendar, video tutorials, and other upcoming features, the possibilities for growth and impact are limitless. NCAC is actively exploring new opportunities to expand both the library's content and access to subscription-based resources, training, and technical assistance. While the CALiO™ team remains committed to providing cutting-edge research and resources, one constant will be the exceptional research support offered by its dedicated librarians. Looking ahead, NCAC's CALiO™ team is excited to build on this foundation, delivering unparalleled research, resources, and service for the next 20 years and beyond.

About the Author



Muriel K. Wells, M.Ed., MLIS *serves as Senior Digital Information Librarian at the National Children's Advocacy Center in Huntsville, Alabama. For over 16 years, she has maintained and guided the growth of the digital Child Abuse Library Online (CALiO™). As a retired first grade teacher Muriel earned her master's degree in library and information studies from the University of Alabama in 2008. Her doctoral research included numerous research publications and conference presentations on library services to special populations and on digital library initiatives. Currently, Muriel supervises a research librarian, continues to build the library's collections, and provides reference services to professionals across many disciplines who serve child victims and their families. Muriel frequently conducts workshops, webinars, and conference presentations on conducting effective searches using CALiO™ and other online digital repositories.*



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