

2013-02-21 Taking Risks with Risk - Balancing Child Safety with Family Engagement

Presenters: New Hampshire Team -- Tammy Chambers, Parent Leader; Brenda Plante, Parent Consultant; Geraldo Pilarski, Program Specialist; Athena Cote, Field Supervisor; Ben Yolda, Assessment Child Protective Service Worker.

Coordinator: [00:00:01] Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the tenth of twelve monthly webinars celebrating the Children's Bureau's centennial year. Today's webinar, "Taking Risks with Risk: Balancing Child Safety with Family Engagement," is the seventh of eight topical webinars running between April, 2012 and April, 2013. Today's discussion will focus on the balance between ensuring safety and appropriate family engagement.

Before we start, just a few housekeeping items. First, please note that we have muted all telephone lines to minimize background noise. We will open the lines at the conclusion of the presentation to allow questions and comments from our audience. Also, your feedback on these webinars is very important to us. We will be asking for your comments at the conclusion of today's presentation and ask that you take a few minutes to share them with us.

Finally, the slides and a recording of today's presentation will be available at the Children's Bureau Centennial Website at <https://cb100.acf.hhs.gov>. We will share that website with you again at the conclusion of today's webinar.

Now I'd like to introduce today's speakers. We are fortunate to have a team from New Hampshire for today's discussion. They include Tammy Chambers, Parent Leader; Brenda Plante, Parent Consultant; Geraldo Pilarski, Program Specialist; Athena Cote, Field Supervisor; and Ben Yolda, Assessment Child Protective Service Worker. Thank you to all of our speakers for agreeing to participate in today's discussion.

At this point I'd like to turn things over to the New Hampshire team to start our discussion.

Geraldo Pilarski: [00:01:29] Good afternoon everybody, this is Geraldo Pilarski, I'm the Program Specialist, and my role is, I oversee the program design and development of the Parent Partner Program here in New Hampshire. We are delighted to be here and to share a little bit of our experiences on this very important hot topic -- Balancing Safety of Children and Family Engagement.

We are a public agency here, so I just wanted people to know that, so we're responsible for assessment and intervention when there is a... *[20 second interruption, off-conference caller]* ...New Hampshire, and we'll be sharing a little bit of that; and then the highlight of today is really the focusing on voices from the field and also parent voices. We have two parents and two field staff who will be sharing real stories of how challenging this is, and some of the experiences that we've had so far in promoting parent engagement, and at the same time ensuring the safety of children.

And then we will be introducing to you to the Better Together methodology, which is the methodology that New Hampshire is utilizing to promote parent voice and parent engagement; and we're hoping all of that will lead to a good dialogue and conversation around this hot topic.

I'm going to now turn to Athena and Ben.

Ben Yolda: [00:03:30] My name is Ben Yolda and I'm an Assessment Worker for the State of New Hampshire Division for Children and Families; and just to start off, so everybody has a baseline, I'm going to go over some basic definitions of safety and risk, just so everybody has a general understanding of where we're coming from on that.

So as a child protection agency our main goal is child safety. For our framework of safeties, we have to have some basic definitions. Being safe is a condition in which the threat of serious harm is not present or imminent, or the protective capacities of the families are sufficient to protect the children.

When we look at an unsafe situation, we're looking at the harm of serious threat or the imminence of harm; and also, what are the protective factors that the parents have or do not have moving forward.

So the safety assessment is something that we do every day, and we are analyzing individual and family conditions, behavior, perceptions, attitudes, motives, emotions and situations to determine whether threats to safety exist.

And now I'm going to turn it over to Athena.

Athena Cote: [00:04:48] Hello. My name is Athena Cote, and I am a Supervisor for the Division for Children, Youth and Families, and I'm going to go over the definition for child maltreatment. A definition we want to work from is that maltreatment is an act, failure to act, or pattern of behavior on the part of the caregiver that results in death, of physical, medical, sexual, or emotional harm. Essentially, it's what we look into when we get a report and what we assess.

Some of the things that we're going to talk about are a lot of situations of risk. And with risk, there is the chance that a child will be abused or neglected, but it doesn't necessarily mean that a child has been abused or neglected. And so a real difference between risk and safety is that when we do a risk assessment we're looking at the potential for a child to be abused or neglected in the future. But with a safety assessment, it's deciding if there's an immediate danger of the child, is there a child being hurt right now.

So as we move forward, we just want to keep in mind that there really is a distinction between safety and risk.

Geraldo, I'm going to turn it over to you now.

Geraldo: [00:06:12] So let me just give a little bit of context as to practice changes in New Hampshire. In 2009 and 2010 New Hampshire participated in the New England Breakthrough Series Collaborative on safety and risk assessment. That was the first time that New Hampshire really invited parents that have been through the system, through services, and asked them to give us feedback and to be part of small practice change team.

So it was really an eye opener for us, and following that Breakthrough Series Initiative, New Hampshire began to really rebuild the foundations of our practice, and we've begun to work on our practice model. So we created a Design Team, and for a full year we worked on designing our practice model. We created beliefs and principles as well as strategies. And so I want to give that larger context.

The focus of our whole design process was really to include parent voice as well as voices from the field. So we really had a goal with our practice model, and that was to increase family engagement and practice consistency. In order to do that we developed some strategies. The New Hampshire Integrated Assessment Model; we also adopted solution-based casework; we also adopted family team meetings, and we are designing a Parent Partner program. So that is the larger context.

I would like to go to the next slide of Solution-based Casework. So the New Hampshire Practice Model has partnership with families as a core principle, and when we adopted Solution-based Casework, that also has building partnerships with family as one of the core tenets. The other two are focusing on a pragmatic every-day event and targeting measurable prevention skills. It's really focusing on building trust with families, and so for New Hampshire this really meant a shift in the way we do assessment. We used to be very confrontational, we used to really put a focus on investigation, and we have been shifting. And so this is a major change for New Hampshire.

Solution-based Casework does require staff to be skilled in partnering with families. But what does partnership with families look like? It's really a challenge in the context of child welfare and we are constantly challenged with ensuring the safety of children, and there is pressures from community, as you all know, and at the same time we want to be able to work in collaboration with families. So what does partnership look like. We needed to find a way for our staff to learn how to truly authentically partner with families.

And so one of the ways that we understood we could do that was really to invite the veteran parents. That is the parents that have been through the system, and really find a way to engage them. It is a challenge -- how do you get parents to the table? It is difficult, so if you can go to the next slide...

There are many, many strategies that you can use. In New Hampshire we adopted the Better Together methodology. And so today we will feature a little bit in a review of that, it's going to come next; but since we were talking about listening to parents and listening to the field, really getting those real stories from real people that are doing this work every day, I am glad now to turn this to our next speaker, and that is a parent. I'm going to invite Tammy to share her experience.

Tammy Chambers: [00:10:43] Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Tammy, and I'm going to touch upon a little bit of my story and what it was like for me to be involved. I first got involved in July of 2001 with DCYF. It was I feel at the time not warranted for my children to get taken away, I was a victim of domestic violence. When the staff came to my door, I was very scared. I didn't know what to expect, what did I do -- I felt so many different emotions that I went through.

At the time of the services that I had, I felt some were not so useful to me. Now this is awhile ago, so in 2001 I was given a lot of things to do that I didn't feel really was going to benefit myself. I did not feel that the worker at the time was really invested or really even wanted to get to help my family as a whole, so that was very difficult for me to try to change when I was in a negative situation. I definitely felt like the worker had made up her mind when they had come to my house.

I had a case opened for my stepdaughter, so when it came time for my case to open up I had the same worker, I had the same class of worker, so I definitely felt that because they had had that information already, that they had already formed an opinion on me. So I really just kind of felt helpless.

Did I have much hope during my involvement? No. I referred to it as literally jumping through hula hoops, because I really sometimes felt like I was in a circus. And I would do anything they asked me to do as long as it meant that I would be reunited with my children. My children were removed out of the home, like I did say, because I was a victim of domestic violence, I was married to my batterer.

What I would tell parents in my situation is, I would tell them now that obviously the system, thank God, has changed to embrace the process, to really just partner with your worker. And workers, the advice I can give you is to really just be there for that family, ask those open questions, ask "How can I help your family," explain to them that you're not here to hurt them and their family, that you're here to help their family. And I think that by doing that, that's going to definitely help a lot of the families.

Unfortunately, my story did end up in TPR. My children were put up for adoption; I did not see them for seven years. It was very difficult. When my children were taken away, I just want to leave it with this -- it was heart-wrenching not to know where my children were for 30 days. As a parent, that is the most difficult thing to not know where your children are, and I just wished that I could go back in time. But things are the way they are, things have worked out, I do see my children today, they are in my life, I have beautiful children that I'm so grateful for.

And do I feel that the division is going soft on safety? I do not feel like the division's going soft on safety. I feel that they are shifting in their partnering with families better now than they ever have, they're doing safety planning; I feel that they are taking the precautions that they need to, and by doing this, families are more likely to open up and not to have that stigma of: oh my God, DCYF, or Juvenile Justice is here, and my family... what am I going to do?

I hope that they will see this as these are services that can help them change their life, because it has changed my life. I have been part of this process, I have done the Better Together, I am a facilitator; I love when I hear parent's stories, it really touches me; and I am so grateful that the division is taking part and changing their practice. And I'm just really, really pleased to be part of this today.

And with that, I am going to turn it over to Brenda.

Brenda Plante: [00:16:07] Thanks, Tammy. Good afternoon, everyone, my name is Brenda Plante, and I'm going to be talking about my family's experience. Throughout my story I do use my husband and my daughter's name, I think it makes it real, and they do know that I share this information because we do feel that everyone can learn from our experience.

So in 1992 my husband Steve and I were blessed with our beautiful daughter Amanda. The next fifteen years brought us happiness and joy as we watched her grow, we attended dance recitals, violin recitals, drove to hockey and volleyball games, and of course we had to help sell Girl Scout cookies to family and friends.

At around 15-1/2 Amanda started to make some poor decisions, which included not coming home at night, marijuana use, and school truancy. Our friends told us about a petition that we could file, it was a Child in Need of Services petition, and we were told by our local child services department that if we would keep a log for 60 days they'd be able to help us.

Well, after that 60 days, we were told, quote, "Your daughter's not bad enough," and no services were offered. As parents, we felt like failures, and we felt very alone, because we didn't think there was anybody else going through this, or anyone else we could talk to about what we were going through with our daughter.

A few months later I received that phone call that no mom wants to receive, from the police station. Our daughter had been arrested. On a dare from a friend, Amanda shoplifted a shirt from a local department store, she was arrested and put on probation. At that point, having no involvement with DCYF or the probation department, we got introduced to a juvenile probation officer. Luckily, this probation officer communicated well, and really talked us through all of the steps that were going to happen with our daughter and the court system.

Following that shoplifting incident and while she was still on probation, her school actually filed the Child in Need of Services on her because of all of her truancy. And in the state of New Hampshire at the time, a few years ago, when a child missed so many days of school, the school could file that petition.

We had to go to court for that and Amanda was put on house arrest. After several conversations with the probation officer and discussing her safety, we really wanted to parent, and we wanted Amanda to be at home. But after several attempts of that and that not working, we had to have a very frank discussion about safety with the probation officer, and we went to court and she was placed in residential care.

We had no idea that our child could be removed from our home because of truancy, because that was the main issue at that point. We again felt very alone; we lost friends over this. When our friends found out that our daughter was in placement, they just stopped associating with us, and we just felt like we were being judged.

Amanda spent about 2-1/2 months in that placement, and we were reunified, because everybody felt that she was making progress; but unfortunately she came home and continued to make poor decisions and she was placed in a second residential facility. She was there for about three months, but after getting her GED we were reunited.

Amanda is now 20, and she still struggles with everyday life decisions, but there is hope; she is a very strong independent young lady and she will be successful, I know that. I also know that the state of New Hampshire is embracing parents and youth voice so that nobody feels alone like we did.

As I reflect on telling my story and how it relates to safety and family engagement, I am just still so amazed by the actions of the juvenile probation officer in our case. My husband and I really wanted to keep Amanda at home, as I said, but there were definite safety concerns. And after much dialogue, we had to keep the safety of our home in mind, the safety of ourselves, and the safety of the community; so that we all decided that a residential care facility was the right place,

and we trusted his recommendation due to his effective communication and genuine concern for our daughter's safety.

So to answer the question: do I think the state of New Hampshire is going soft on safety? Absolutely not. And as I've given a couple of examples, it was because of that great communication and partnership with the juvenile probation officer and our family, and we made decisions together.

A little later on I will be speaking about how I became a Parent Consultant and discussing the Better Together workshop, and that's how I got started, and about peer to peer support.

I would now like to turn it over to the Assessment Worker, Ben Yolda.

Ben: [00:20:56] Hi, this is Ben Yolda again, and as you know my role as Assessment Worker, some states use Investigator, as my role is that front line field staff that goes into the home to assess the safety and risk of every child on our workload. And the way we do that, is that we have to engage in basic planning when maltreatment is found. In New Hampshire we cannot leave a residence without a written basic plan if we do find maltreatment.

Some of the things I have to do is really engage with those parents to find ways to get the information I need, but also in an effective manner, so I don't break that- hopefully that bond that I'm creating with the family, to be able to get that information that I need.

Some ways that we do that, is that we let them tell their stories. We call that sequencing events. The parent's voice is so important in this process, because if we don't hear from the parents we're not going to be able to really get the information that we need. Breaking through those angers and fears that they have, we need to humanize them. We need to let them know that others have been in their shoes. We're looking for exceptions to the rule.

Some of the tools that we use is that we use an actual safety plan, a written safety plan. We don't write down what they need to do on paper, the parents write down what they need to do on paper, it's their plan. They set the bar. We need to guide them to where the bar should be, but we're going to have the family create that plan, it's *their* plan, they can own it. They can put it on their kitchen counter, on their refrigerator. We're going to let them decide what is in the best interest of their children, within reason, and making sure that they're keeping their kids safe.

We would have to recognize that every parent wants their children to be safe. There isn't a parent out there that doesn't want their children to be safe. So how do we build consensus with that. Those are the big kind of... the word here in New Hampshire is, we build consensus with families. We need to get to the same level with them to be able to analyze where they're at, what their protective factors are, and how can we utilize those in keeping their children safe.

Now, sometimes we do find maltreatment and sometimes we do remove children. So what are some ways to engage parents after that process has occurred. Well, we do 24-hour visits in New Hampshire, so after removal a parent has visits, a face-to-face visit with the child within 24 hours; we do phone calls with the children that night; we also have -- and in my experience I've used it multiple times -- actually having the parent bring the children with me to the foster home so they can meet the foster parents that are going to be caring for the children, so they can start building that bond with the foster parent.

It's all about measurable goals, specific timeframes, and being open and honest with the families. There's no secrets. There's not a, you know: we're going to tell you what to do; it's: we're going to create a plan together. And if we don't have that, then we're not able to engage them.

As far as I'm concerned, we're not soft on safety. Effective parent engagement leads to better information sharing and allows them to create a plan to empower them using different safety resources and other family members, or connections that they may have to make sure their children are safe. We have to have attainable goals set by us, but also by the parents. Because if they're not attainable, like if we decide what the goals are, then we're maybe setting the bar too high.

And having this, in my experience, is really empowering for the parents; yes, there's going to be that push-back -- every parent, it's their worst nightmare having us come to their home. And there's anger and there's fear. But like I said before, we need to humanize them and we need to say that others have been in your shoes. This isn't the end of the world. We're going to give you the tools, connect with the resources to be able to figure out whatever the maltreatment or situation was, how do we change that. Look for that exception.

Because if they haven't been causing that maltreatment, then hopefully, the whole time the child has been a lie. Maybe something has changed, and we need to sequence that event. So I don't feel that this process is making us soft on safety at all. I actually think it's increasing our safety, and I think with engagement with these parents we're getting more information than we probably ever did when we did have that confrontation type of setting, moving forward.

I am now going to turn it over to Athena.

Athena: [00:25:34] Thank you Ben. My name is Athena again, and I am a Child Protection Supervisor. My role has been to supervise staff that conduct assessments as well as manage ongoing cases. And currently, primarily I am supervising ongoing cases. And as Ben said, as an Assessment Worker his role has been to investigate whether concerns of maltreatment have occurred and how to move forward from there. And with the ongoing cases it's already been established that maltreatment has occurred, and a lot of the time that would involve the court system.

My role as a supervisor really has been to guide staff decision-making, and ensuring that staff responds to safety through removal, if that's what's needed; but as well as managing risk and supporting the family so that the child can remain in their own home. And when I support staff through that supervision, they're assessing a parent's protective capacity and whether or not the child can remain at home, but always it's under the guise that they're doing that and remaining in the home in a safe way.

So another way that I am also supporting staff is through engaging families. This includes parents as well as fathers. Sometimes we think of families as just a mom, but really pushing forward with trying to do a better job at engaging with fathers as well. We've supported situations where we've actually not had to become more involved with the court system because we've engaged with the father, for him to assume custody of the child in some situations, while mom has to work on some other goals. So that has prevented removal for a child to go either into foster care or into a relative's care.

And through utilizing supervision I've been able to support staff in understanding that when we engage with parents and integrate a parent voice into our safety and risk assessments we do so, and especially do so in situations when danger and maltreatment has been identified.

As an agency we really try to identify supports and strengths and distinguish between safety and risk; and again, as I stated earlier, if there's imminent safety, we do assess for the need to remove a child. But if there isn't an imminent safety issue and we're looking at risk, we try to really work hard with the family on coming up with a plan on their own, with the support of a worker, that would remedy that situation.

I think that this has been effective. One of the things that I needed to do when I supported with [unclear-dog barks] change with staff was to really look at my own biases and my own perspective around better engaging with dads, or just better engaging with parents and what that meant, because I can't really support staff to be better at engaging with families if I don't believe in doing that myself. And so I really needed to model that buy-in for them.

So through all of this, a huge change that I've seen in the work that I do is just the staff being more effective at assessing safety by utilizing natural resources, supporting parents, listening, being respectful, and really being open to the ideas and plans that parents come up with. And staff are really doing a better job at building consensus with families, and really just figuring out: okay, what can we agree on are the court issues. What can we agree on as the actual maltreatment concerns that need to be addressed. And when there is consensus, a family is better able to work out a plan and to address the safety issues that led to our involvement. And it ends up being their primary focus and objective that they're able to create.

And parents are supported to come up with a plan, and we have found that actually when they come up with those plans they're actually more vested into achieving those goals, and we've actually seen a lot more success with those type of plans, when we're better engaging and to bring the families to come up with them. So just more reunification. Better able to maintain children in their own home, and not needing to remove.

We also do come up with some challenges, and at times, some of those challenges may come from the community, it may come from a court system, or from other family or relatives. So that certainly it does still happen, and we do our best to try to educate the community and others in understanding that although we really feel that we need to work towards preserving families whenever we can, that ultimately, safety is the paramount. So we're not going to negotiate that, and ultimately if we need to remove temporarily, then that's something that we'll do as an agency. But ultimately, even when there is a removal that we're going to work with a family to really come up with a plan to get that child home as soon as possible.

And Ben talked about the 48-hour visit and telephone, and we also have a meeting that follows a removal within ten days of placement, and that happens again a four months and again at ten months. And part of that is to come back to the table around: okay, what was the reason why your child was removed, and what still needs to happen to get that child home.

So ultimately, I've just seen an improved capacity to do the work that we do. As stated earlier, just increased reunifications, we've reduced a lot of the removals, and we're doing a lot better

planning because we have the parent at the table with us. And the parent is really working with us to come up with that plan.

So ultimately, I wouldn't say that we are soft on safety; I'd say that we're actually stronger on safety, because we have the parents at the table with us.

With that, I am going to change over to Geraldo.

Geraldo: [00:32:57] Thank you, Athena. So we're going to move next to a bit of a review as to how New Hampshire went about implementing what we're calling the Parent Partner strategy. If you recall, I mentioned that we design a practice model, and the Parent Partner program was one of the strategies that we selected to help us improve parent engagement, family engagement.

So with the Parent Partner strategy there are some core elements. It's about recruiting parents that have been through the system, and engagement and mobilization; providing those parents with some training so that they can be comfortable in their roles and be able to help us, and so that's the capacity building; and then it's important to have clear roles. And in New Hampshire we've created an involvement continuum, so we're able to offer opportunities.

There are opportunities for parents. Parents can be involved and sharing their story, and they can be involved at a higher level, like for example Brenda and Tammy, who are helping us with training of our staff as well as other parents, and also taking on parent consultant roles. So that's the review of the Parent Partner strategy, if you'd like to go to the next slide.

So very quickly we recognized that what we needed really was a program structure that would support the effective design, development, and implementation of this strategy. So we decided that we would actually build a Parent Partner program. So who are we. Parent leaders. Lots of parent leaders. We are really committed to this notion that the more parents we invite back and ask for their feedback to what happened when you were involved, parents like Brenda and Tammy, the more the better.

Also staff, the field staff. So we are a partnership between parent, staff, and community allies. And we promote that parent voice, the value of collaborative work, and the importance of shared decision making.

The biggest value that this program is bringing to the division, to the table, is the parent voice. After one year of implementing this, we conducted an agency readiness survey. We wanted to know, what were the field staff saying? What was their experience like with the Parent Partner strategy, as well as listening from parents. We conducted focus groups, and there were two findings that were quite fascinating.

One of them was that there was a strong support for the direction that we were taking in inviting parents and getting the feedback from parents and including the parent voice. But the other finding was that a lot of our staff were very concerned about having Parent Partners sitting side by side with them in the local offices. So there was quite a bit of push-back, and so we needed to deal with that.

I would recommend any state, any jurisdiction wanting to implement this, that you really find a way to do surveys and to really get the field staff to be involved, as well as the parents. But there was a strong endorsement of the inclusion of parents and in bringing parents to the table.

I'm just going to read this quote: "Parent involvement has been the catalyst for the fastest, most useful, most sustainable change in practice I have ever seen... and the biggest bang for the buck." This is actually an anonymous quote that came to that survey, really highlighting that we were building strong foundations, we had a strategic direction, and we were moving in the right direction.

So the second year of us implementing the Parent Partner strategy, we began to build the program, and that was last year. So we spent the year working with our steering committee, which is made out of parents and also staff, to really work on our vision. And you can see our vision: The vision of this program is that fathers and mothers are included and valued as partners in our day to day work with families in New Hampshire.

So that is our assessment practice that is informing our ongoing work with families. There is a second part of the vision, and that is that parent leaders are visibly present serving as resources to other parents and to staff supporting the mission of the division. So this is a powerful vision that is kind of moving us, and it was built together, parents and staff came together and decided that this is what we wanted.

I also want to point out that it says there fathers and mothers. So very early on we understood the power of language, and we didn't want to use the word family, which many times can be very general and can mean mainly mothers. We wanted to right there and then begin to deal with the legacy in child welfare as well as juvenile justice, where we mainly work with mom and children and youth. So we wanted to really include the fathers and include the dads. So that is really part of our vision.

So the mission: In partnership we plan, design, create, and sustain programs and strategies to bring fathers and mothers to create positive change in child welfare practices and policies to improve the lives of children and youth, increase reunification, and support and strengthen New Hampshire families.

So that's our mission. It is really about creating strategies, creating programs, creating opportunities for fathers and mothers to be with us at the table to help us create those positive changes. I also want to emphasize the importance of increasing reunifications, as well as really improving the lives of children and strengthening families. So a clear focus on that parent voice in bringing parents to the table.

We have embraced the principles and beliefs that are a part of the practice model that the division has designed and embraced; we also adopted some core values: partnerships for safety -- so a strong focus on partnership, and helping our staff and our parents to learn how to partner effectively.

Promoting parent leadership. A strong focus on developing opportunities for parents to become leaders, and the strong leaders that they want it to be. And again, a strong focus on engaging fathers. Our beliefs are that fathers are really important to the wellbeing of their children. And

when they are involved in a positive and consistent way, there are long benefits for kids. So we promote that and we educate our staff, our community members, and others who may be pushing back and wanting us to perhaps go back to the old, old style where we would quickly remove kids for safety and place them in foster care, and we thought we were doing what our mission was. And so at this point we are really focusing on promoting partnership all around.

Also, partnership between parents. Fathers and mothers many times are not on good terms, they're fighting, and so then the kids are unsafe, they're in the middle of that; and so we promote parents as partners in raising their children, even if they don't live in the same household. And again, we believe that it is our collective responsibility to engage fathers. All of us are responsible for that, so we are promoting that also with our community partners as well as providers, and inviting everybody to really pay attention to both fathers and mothers.

We just recently had a planning day where we developed a strategic plan for our Parent Partner program for the next two years, and these are the goals for the next couple of years.

Build agency capacity to partner with families; continue to build parent capacity to partner with the division; and take our work to the next level by systematically integrating parent voice in all the work that we do with families in New Hampshire. And of course we're a child welfare agency, we are a merged agency where we have child protection and juvenile justice services. So improve outcomes for children, and those being good safety, permanency, as well as wellbeing. So those are the program goals.

Program pillars include the Better Together workshop, it's a workshop that has been so, so impactful, and Brenda will provide a review of that. I mentioned the father engagement; also Reunification Mentoring program, and Parents as Partners. Those are the program pillars. You can see that they touch on all the key relationships in child welfare.

Better Together promotes better relationships between staff and parents; will also promote us working better with fathers; reunification mentoring focus on identifying foster parents and helping foster parents building better relationships with the families, as well as utilizing trained foster parents to mentor birth parents. And then of course Parent Partners is utilization of parent leaders like Brenda and Tammy to provide peer to peer support to parents new to this system. So those are the program pillars.

I'm going to turn it over to Brenda, and she's going to walk us through the Better Together workshop. This is really the methodology that we are promoting, and Brenda will provide details on how we have implemented it in New Hampshire.

Brenda: [00:44:55] Thanks, Geraldo. And I don't know about the participants, and we'll be getting to your questions in just a few minutes. But I'm just really energized and excited about what I've been hearing, because I have seen the changes within New Hampshire, so just really exciting.

The Better Together workshop is how I got involved. After our case was closed, about a year after the case was closed, I received a phone call from that juvenile probation officer. And the first thing I saw when I looked at that caller ID was panic, "Why is he calling me?" but I did answer the phone and he invited me to participate in this workshop. I didn't know a lot about it,

but it sounded like something I wanted to be involved with. So I'd like to share with you what this workshop is.

This workshop was created by Casey Family Programs, and the philosophy here is that Better Together fosters equal and mutually respectful partnerships between birth parents, child welfare agency staff, and community allies. Please keep in mind that the term "birth parent" can mean so much more. In this day and age that role of mother and father is being fulfilled by grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters... and so although you will hear me use the word birth parent, that is the term that Casey Family Programs adopted in this program, however, we realize it's much, much more than that.

Again, this workshop is focused on bringing staff and parents together in a partnership with the goal of keeping children safe in loving and permanent homes.

So how does this all work? How does this come together. We first started out by having regional workshops, and that's where our local district offices would invite approximately six to eight parents and approximately six to eight staff to attend this very powerful two-day workshop. It's a curriculum-based workshop, but it's very much interactive. So we try to explain: you're not going to a training, you are definitely going to a workshop that you're going to be involved in.

Very unique to this curriculum is that it's facilitated by one birth parent -- such as Tammy or myself, we're both trained as facilitators -- and then also one staff, and that we model how to partner together. And we're just there to be facilitators. The participants are the ones that are truly creating the curriculum.

Some of the activities that are involved in the workshop address the power differential that sometimes parents feel with staff -- gender issues, race and culture issues -- we also try to help participants understand how those perceptions happen, and how we can avoid those in the future.

We try to create opportunities where parents feel comfortable to share their experiences with the Division of Children, Youth and Families. I call it "the good, the bad, and the ugly," because there are parents that get invited, that they may have had a great experience like I did, or you may have a family that did not have a good experience. Maybe that juvenile protection officer or that assessment worker wasn't as engaging as they could have been, and we're talking years ago. You know, New Hampshire has come a long way with the practice model and solution-based casework.

One thing I did want to mention is one of our lessons learned on inviting parents and staff to these workshops, one of the lessons learned is preparation. We found that the first couple of workshops I think there was animosity, maybe the feeling in the room wasn't so great; but by making some phone calls ahead of time and preparing staff and the parents for what they're about to experience, especially the staff, hearing very real, lost stories from the parents can be very emotional. So again, that lesson learned is really taking the time to prepare folks what they're going to be involved in, because it can be an emotional two days.

So this slide here just talks about the numbers -- I'm not going to read it all to you, you will get a copy of the presentation and it will be available online -- but so far we've had 16 regional

workshops, over 260 parents and staff have attended. And again, the goal here is to improve reunifications, improve relationship building for both staff, parents, and allies.

Immediate impact -- some of the quotes we've received, two in particular that I just love from a seasoned supervisor, "I will never approach a removal the same way." And I know a couple of the workshops that I went to, you hear parents talking about -- in abuse and neglect cases when their kids were removed and they were doing paperwork on the trunk of their car, telling the agent of that. And I think it was real eye-opening for some of staff to hear those types of stories and how those parents felt when those kids were removed.

Another very powerful quote: "My casework changed that day; it was not profound. I learned what I could do differently." And that was from a seasoned child protective worker.

The lasting impact of these workshops is that we have strong parent leaders all over the state. So as I said, I was invited to one of these workshops. And at the end of the workshop we talk about next steps. And we ask the parents: How do you want to be involved. Do you want to stay involved with the Division of Children, Youth and Families and help us partner and grow. I said I would, and next thing I knew I was involved in staff meetings sharing my experiences with staff, I was involved in policy writing. How can we incorporate family engagement, safety, partnership into some of our policies. And then I was trained, as Tammy was, as a facilitator for Better Together.

A couple of things I would like to point out that were unique to 2012 is we did integrate the Better Together workshop into what we call our Core Training. This is the initial training that new assessment workers and child protective workers go to, so they get this workshop right off the bat, and they get those tools and strategies on how to partner with parents.

We also piloted the Better Together workshop at one of our residential treatment facilities, and that was Easter Seals. Unique to this was the parents that were involved with that residential facility, their kids were still in placement at that facility; whereas prior to this, the parents that came to our regional workshops all had to have their cases closed. So I think a lesson learned there was, I think you can tap into the resource of a parent's opinion and what they've experienced regardless if the case is open or closed. You can always learn from the parents.

Finally, we offered the Better Together workshop -- that SYSC initial is the Sununu Youth Service Center, the Youth Detention Center, and that is the first time we piloted that workshop there. And again, the parents that were invited still had their kids in placement at the Youth Detention Center.

One of the lessons learned on that, which I find very unique to Easter Seals, is a parent had said they just wanted to see where their child was going to sleep at that residential care facility. And that was a big concern for several parents. I've heard that through different workshops. And some of our residential providers were saying, "No, you can't go to the sleeping areas." So what Easter Seals agreed to do at this workshop as an action plan and as a follow-up to the workshop, was to create a video that parents could watch upon intake to see where their kids would be sleeping while they're there. So just powerful changes, immediate changes, just by attending these workshops and talking about the experience.

So the Better Together workshop -- safety is a shared goal, and most parents want to and can provide a safe and nurturing home. Reunification is always the goal, and by partnering with parents and learning how to, especially for staff, we feel that that goal of reunification is going to increase throughout the state.

We're getting a little short on time, so I'm going to go through the next couple of slides fairly quickly. I think I have spoken to most of the highlights of that workshop. One story I would like to share with you, if we could just advance one more slide, is on the practice improvement.

At my local office, I would go into staff meetings there when I would first arrive at the office, they would say, "Oh, yep, have a seat, someone will be right with you," and I would wait in the lobby. And about nine to twelve months after that, I would show up for staff meetings, meetings with staff, and I would walk in and they be like, "Oh, hi, Brenda, come on in!" I have a desk there now, so you really have to look at the office culture.

It's definitely a journey for staff to go from being in their cubicles or their offices in their safe place, to all of a sudden having a parent working right next to them. So please keep that in mind, that was one of our lessons learned, but it was nice to see the journey that that office went on.

So what I've just spoke about is what I talk about, is practice improvement -- there are parent engagement action teams that are created from each of the regional workshops, and that is where the staff and the parents from that region get together either on a monthly or quarterly basis. And they talk about the tools and strategies that they've discussed at that workshop and how they can implement them at that local office, and they try to come up with some planning of what they can do to make some changes in that local area, that small tested change or that PBSA -- Plan, Do, Study, Act methodology.

Parent voice and parent leadership is definitely finding a natural place in our practice, and Better Together has created that environment to recruiting those parents, and it's such a great methodology to get parent leaders involved.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to Geraldo so he can talk about next steps.

Geraldo: [00:55:17] So, what comes next. I hope we have inspired you and given you some ideas. I completely recommend looking into the Better Together methodology. It is very clear that when involved, the people mostly impacted by our programs and policies, then real changes can occur. We have set it up here in New Hampshire so that these workshops have been systematically integrating our court training and are really part of our division. They have become our way to get ongoing feedback from both our parents as well as our field staff as to what's happening. How can we continue to improve.

As Brenda was saying, the most empowering piece has been to give permission and empower those local office action teams to actually test, through the PDSA methodology, small tests or change, begin to test some of these ideas. And the one thing that is really fascinating is that they are not a one million dollar recommendation. Normally they are very doable.

One example that I want to give as to a particular tool that has been recommended and one office is working on it, is that in these workshops parents consistently said: You know, as a worker, you create a report to submit to the court; the court-appointed special advocates create a report; but

we parents, we never get to really have a say. And so the idea there, the team came together, talked about it, and they decided that why not have a parent report to the court. So now the team is working on that, they are going to be testing that out; and then if it works, if it really does empower parents and contribute to the process, it facilitates for parents to really have a voice in the court process, then we would go ahead and perhaps recommend that to these parents throughout the state.

So this is the methodology. This is the way that we are honoring parent voice and promoting parent engagement. It's based on simple principles. Everyone deserves respect; everyone needs to be heard, especially the parents. Everyone has friends and can contribute their ideas. Judgment can wait, but this is a really important thing that parents continue to say, that judgment, and sharing power and sharing resources, and creating partnership and understanding, that that is a process.

So again, parent involvement in New Hampshire has been the catalyst for the fastest, most useful, most sustainable change in practice. It is true. It's really, really powerful and remarkable.

We will continue to include parent voice and perspective; we're moving ahead with parent leaders as practice advisors; most recently we had our Child and Family Services review, as a result of that we have created those program improvement plans and parents have been involved in those; we also have a case practice review, which is our own internal review process that mirrors the CFSR process, and we are including parents in that process; and we will continue to ensure that parent voice and the parent leaders will find a natural place in our practice. So that's the journey.

I wanted to share this. You need a vision and you need a plan. About three years ago when I was invited to lead this process for New Hampshire, it was such an honor to be given this opportunity to design a program in partnership with parents and field staff, and this is my original design. You can see the practice model, you can see the Parent Partner strategy, you can see kind of our initial concepts where we would reach out to our field staff and invite parents that have been through the system and recruit them for Better Together, and then provide them some training and develop roles, and hopefully we would end -- this was the vision there -- we would end up with an active pool of experienced parent leaders, and that they would take action in helping us develop partnerships through safety, permanency and wellbeing.

And I'm glad to say that two years later, oh my gosh, New Hampshire really has something really, really powerful happening here. We heard over a hundred parent's stories, and a lot of those parents remain involved, actively involved, and we continue the journey, we continue to build the pool. So you need a vision and you need a plan.

So this is kind of where we are with kind of the structure of the program. You can see we have this larger planning team that includes a steering committee; all the Better Together facilitators as well as each local office now has a Parent Engagement Action Team Leader, and so every two years we're going to be bringing them together to do the strategic plan; the Better Together workshops will continue; and we are really relying on the Parent Engagement Action Team to test out the ideas and to continue to build those partnerships.

This program really has full support from our division director, I really want to give credit to Maggie Bishop. The initial idea was hers; she said: you're all by one I need to lead this project, this process, we need a program; and my visions are always at every office we'll have a Parent Partner. Can you make this happen.

So really having the full support from the leadership is really, really important. We have a management team, field administrators, view [ph] administrators -- everybody has been involved. So that's kind of the way we have structured the program.

And it is such a gift to New Hampshire. I can see a sea of children clapping their hands and their families saying: New Hampshire, finally you're getting this right, by really inviting us and giving us a voice.

Here's our contact information for those who would like to ask any questions or would like a little bit more information. I also want to highlight the contact information for those interested in the Better Together methodology. It is owned by Casey Family Programs, and so please contact Casey Family Programs Community and Constituency Engagement team, there is the email there. They are really wonderful, and I'm sure they'll be willing to work with you.

And if you want to know a little bit about the challenges and lessons learned in the implementation process, both Brenda, and I, and Tammy, Ben, and Athena would be glad to talk to you further.

We went a little bit over... sorry, folks.

Question and Answer [Note: "Speaker" is used if identity is not announced or certain.]

Coordinator: [01:03:49] That's okay. If we could go ahead, Chandra [sp], and have people queue up for questions, if you could give them the instructions how to do that.

Chandra: [01:03:57] Thank you. We will now begin the question and answer session. You will be prompted to record your name, we would like you to record your first name only. Once again, if you'd like to ask a question please record your first name only and press Star then 1. One moment please for our first question.

Coordinator: [01:04:15] And while we're getting people queued up, we did have quite a few questions coming in during the presentation. The first one that came up, and I think it's probably on everybody's mind -- how are you all funding your parent engagement work.

Geraldo: [01:04:31] I can take that question. We are using federal dollars. This is such an important work. It is probably the most important work that as a public agency we can do, is to really find a way to get that parent voice. It's going to change your culture, it's going to change your practice, it's going to change each of you.

I have been so, so privileged to hear all of the parents and to be involved in this. It does change us. It is worth every single dollar. And so we have made a decision, our division director has made a decision to allocate some of the federal dollars to support that. And so it needs to be a priority, and it needs to be in your budget.

Coordinator: Next question we have: Does New Hampshire still use the traditional investigative track in addition to the partnering track, and use findings like founded and unfounded.

Athena: [01:05:32] Yes. We still currently use founded and unfounded.

Coordinator: And are your Parent Partners compensated?

Geraldo: [01:05:45] I can take that. For most of the activities, yes, and the starting rate is \$15 and then it goes up from there depending on the activity and the level of involvement. For example, if you are facilitating a Better Together workshop it's a different rate, and that comes from the Center for Professional Excellence, University of New Hampshire. They are a partner agency that oversees and runs the training for our staff, and so they will be the ones that have a budget to compensate all of the facilitators of training.

Brenda: [01:06:25] If I can just add to that since I am one of the Parent Partners, this is Brenda. I remember when I attended Better Together and on the second day they handed me some paperwork and I said, "What's this," and they said, "Oh, you're going to get paid for this." And I thought: What? I'm going to be paid for my opinion? So I was just very surprised by that. And so I would just like to say there are so many parents out there that would do this. It's not for the money, it is definitely for the sharing and helping other parents going through situations that we went through.

Geraldo: [01:06:55] And I so appreciate that Brenda is saying that; but for the administrators and people that are wanting to set this up, I am going to say it's really, really important that you honor the parent's time. Most of our parents come from fragile families, and even though they may be willing to volunteer and maybe not get any compensation, it is really important that you establish a sense of social justice and compensation is a part of that. So honoring the parent's time is really, really important, and I really was very happy to get Maggie, our director's support on that. And that we would commit some of the funding. And like I said, we get so much from every dollar that goes to listening to our parents.

Coordinator: Chandra, do we have any questions on the phone?

Chandra: Yes. Our first question is from Martha. Your line is open.

Martha: [01:07:59] Yes. I am- I know Better Together well and I think it's a great program. I'm just... I wonder what you hear from parents about their experiences in family court and not being represented. Most jurisdictions have lawyers that represent the parents in child welfare proceedings, and I understand New Hampshire now does not. And it's hard to get a parent's voice really involved and due process rights protected without that. So I'm wondering what you hear from parents on that.

Geraldo: [01:08:42] Let me just say that that's really terrifying, and our division never supported that. What we hear from parents is that it is a... it's just a frightening process. And that is one of the reasons we have begun to work with our staff to say: you have a responsibility to provide some support to the parents. It's very challenging.

In the future when we have our Parent Partners in every office, we envision that to be perhaps a role where strong Parent Partners are trained to help. But we're also working to see if we can get that back, because it is a critical piece.

Now I want to ask the other folks, parents as well as staff, Brenda, Tammy, Athena, and Ben Yolda -- what are you hearing from parents, and any comments on that.

Ben: [01:09:47] Yes, this is Ben, I can talk pretty directly on that one. I mean, I think the loss of the attorney is-- you know, [unclear] has almost created a better bond between [unclear], because they were kind of looking for us for the answers; and there's also a kind of a barrier that's been put down. A lot of times attorney's have advised the parents not to talk with us, not to interact with us... they weren't necessarily coming from the same space as being family friendly; some of them were, but some of them weren't.

And the cases that I've been involved with since that implementation of that new law, when they are provided lawyers, I've found that my engagement at court with families has actually increased. And that we've come to better conclusions sometimes because of that. Because there isn't that barrier.

Now going to the Constitutional rights, that piece we're not able to give legal advice, so that is a barrier that's... that hinders us sometimes when they ask certain types of questions. But end of the day, I see it as some level of a positive thing for the engagement piece at this time.

Athena: [01:11:02] This is Athena. I would agree with what Ben's saying; and I think in addition to that our attorneys, but more so the court judges, have taken more time I've noticed to really explain certain processes, and also to provide an opportunity for parents to really talk and voice their concerns within the court hearings, so I've noticed that as a shift as well.

Brenda: [01:11:30] This is Brenda. I have to agree with what Ben and Athena was just saying. One of my roles as a Parent Leader is I provide peer to peer support to other parents who may need it, may need help with their communication skills, and I've recently gone to court a couple of times with families and I have seen exactly what Ben said -- that I feel if there's a caseworker and the parent has formed a better bond because they've discussed maybe more often than they have in the past with the absence of the attorney.

I've witnessed judges being very lenient with parents. Parents who have to cross examine a caseworker or an assessment worker, and they don't know how to do that; and I have witnessed the judge and the state attorney be very lenient with parents, knowing that this is not their forte. They don't know how to cross examine.

So I agree that attorneys are needed, however, there are some good stories that have come out of it.

Tammy: [01:12:22] This is Tammy. I do agree with everybody. We do definitely, I would like to see attorneys come back. And I think that it definitely, as Ben was saying, it really builds that partnering with the family from day one. And I, too, have gone to court, and I have seen the judge take the time to explain and ask the parent, "Do you understand what's going on."

So I think as important as it is to have the attorney, I think like Ben and Athena and Brenda was saying, it's very important that the worker be able to work with that family as well, and build that strong foundation.

Coordinator: Thanks. Chandra, do we have another question on the line.

Chandra: We have no other questions at this time.

Coordinator: [01:13:11] Okay. I have some more that have come in then from online. How do you work with parents or caregivers who don't acknowledge that there's a safety threat that exists. How do you engage them.

Athena: [01:13:26] Well, Ben can probably take some of this, too. I think our staff work very hard to try to build that consensus of what can they agree on. If there's a situation where there's a physical abuse and a parent doesn't say, "Yes, I did that to my child," and so that's still a question, at the very least we can agree that your child was hurt, and what can we do to work towards that not happening again.

Ben: [01:13:55] And I'll just jump off of that with what Athena is saying. I mean, that is- I mean, sometimes do you have to find what occurred, consensus as you can, and sometimes you have to push back. I mean, and sometimes engagement doesn't necessarily work.

You know, we can try all we want, and there are those occasions where mom and dad are still rigid in their thinking that there's no way that they're going to align themselves with us. And in those circumstances, we're still going to do that same work. We're still going to do that same engagement strategy, we're still going to have a written safety plan, it may be more of input on my side of what needs to happen, and I would say that that happening isn't that common.

I think a lot of our families want to engage with us, they just don't know how to. And it's really getting through and figuring out what that exception is and making sure that, like Athena said, your child has been hurt. All right, I don't necessarily care how at this point if you're not willing to let me know how, but how are we going to prevent it from happening again, and putting that in place. And I think that's the strategy you have to use.

In the work that I do, it does happen. Sometimes parents do not want to engage. And you keep on bringing it up and you keep on using those strategies for engagement with those families, because if you don't, then we're not doing the job that we need to be doing. And eventually, those families that don't, sometimes come around and do want to engage. So they see that you're trying to align yourself with them and you're not against them.

Geraldo: [01:15:35] I would also like to add that more and more were utilizing parent leaders from our pool of parents to reach out to their peers. And so offering that, workers will talk to a parent and say, you know: "We have a father in that region that you could talk to." Or: "We have this other parent, a mom, in the international [ph] region." And so offering that as an option.

And when parents accept that, then they're able to talk to a parent that has been through it that can say, you know: "I've been there, I kind of know your fears, and I know some of the feelings that you're having, and why. Let's talk about that." And that's been helpful.

Athena: [01:16:30] I just wanted to throw something else out, too. I think sometimes we can get stuck on the wording, and so another strategy that has been helpful is to be flexible with the wording. One thing that we're not going to budge on is: "Okay, this is the reason for our involvement." But I think sometimes we get stuck on how it's phrased, or the wording. And sometimes some words don't feel as good to hear, but those are things that we can be flexible on, so that's also a help.

Coordinator: [01:17:03] Thank you. Are the staffs that are involved in the Better Together workshop, are they there with the same staff that worked with the families when they had open cases.

Geraldo: [01:17:14] I can take that. Normally the orientation is to invite parents whose cases are closed, and that the staff coming to the workshop would not be the staff that worked with that family. And the reason for that is that because we really want to create a safe environment where we can really share stories and share experiences and not feel like: "Okay, you're talking about me now, and what I did," or it is a way to create a safe environment.

But having said that, I get a lot of calls from the field of parents and staff saying, "We want to do it together." And when that happens, I say, "Well, if both of you are comfortable, then please come; we're delighted at your comment," and that has worked well as well. Because both have chosen to be there and to do the workshop together.

Ben: [01:18:26] Just an example on that, Geraldo, is that the Better Together that I went through, actually one of the moms that I had had on a case was a participant in the Better Together. And the news was so powerful, hearing her vision and what occurred, which was my work. And we both talked beforehand and made sure that we were both comfortable about that.

As a worker, it was extremely powerful to hear her perception of the work that I was doing before really getting into the engagement piece, and where we're going now as the agency, and the direction that I've taken my own trade of craft in this work, now moving forward. It was profoundly powerful to hear that story, but it has to be in that safe environment. And both me and the mom felt that that was a safe environment to do that, and that we were both okay with that.

So it was powerful, but at the same time, if it is not a safe place, then you don't get the same bang for that buck as you would if they felt comfortable to be able to talk openly about that.

Geraldo: [01:19:40] We really focus on really listening to the actual experiences of parents. This is not a time to revisit the facts of the case or whatnot, but it's really to say what it's like for a parent to be involved, than what is their experience like.

This reminds me of another pair that attended a Better Together in one of the regions, and when it came time for the mother to share her story, she began talking about how when she got the call that there was assessment workers that were coming to her house, she would literally hide the children. So for a long time she was hiding from the worker.

And the worker is in the room and so she's talking, and then eventually she said, "Well, the one thing that I have never told anybody, is that I was in care myself." And then in tears she proceeded to say, "I was a child that was in foster care, and yes, you did keep me safe. But all

those years I never felt loved. And you know what? This really resulted in these big, huge holes in my heart. And so when I got the call, I was so afraid that you would take my kids away, and that they would go in foster care and that they would have these huge holes in their hearts as well."

So talking about safety and talking about improving the lives of our children, and our mission, and what is it that we need to do collectively. I think this is just so powerful. And for that worker to hear that, she was like, "Now it just connected all the dots. I still understand you as a mom so much better." She had no idea.

Coordinator: [01:21:41] Ben, going back to something I think you mentioned earlier, the challenges that you have of having a birth parent accompany a child to a foster home, we have a question about that.

What measures are taken regarding the child's and the foster family's safety? And about how often do you do this; how do you decide when to do this; and how have foster parents reacted to it.

Ben: [01:22:03] Well they, I mean, number one, it's extremely subjective. You know, I have done it on more than one occasion. It's something that's out there, it's not used I would say every single time, it's something that we've strived for.

If these be judged by the interaction that we're having with a parent, the reaction of the removal from the parent, and they also- the education with our foster parents, which is extremely important through our resource workers and also through the training that they take, you'd be surprised. A lot of foster parents are very open to wanting to know who the children that have been taken into care's parents are, and it starts to build that bond, that's something that's been driven through foster parents organizations here in the state, and I can tell you that it is very subjective. It's kind of that last minute call that you discuss, or that I discuss with a supervisor with the foster parent and with the parent.

Because some parents, it may not be a faith issue, but some parents may not be able to process. And once they get there may react emotionally, which is going to negatively impact their children.

But I can tell you that the times that we have done it have been phenomenal, because mom or dad have been able to say to the children, "These are the people you're staying with, it's okay," the children's reactions have not been one of... it's extremely scary for this thing to occur. And I've seen that decrease immensely, even had moms unpack the children's clothes that they've brought into the new dressers, and really created a bond.

And you know, maybe that's what's going to cause a parent to make the changes in their life to get those kids back. So it is very subjective; I can't give you a playbook on how to do it; but we definitely assess what is the risk to the child, but also the risk to the foster parent as well.

Coordinator: Chandra, do we have other callers on the line?

Chandra: We do have another question, I believe the name is Dave, your line is open if you have a question. (pause) Please check your mute button; your line is open if you have a question.

Dave: [01:24:28] Thank you. Good afternoon. Thanks for taking the question. My question to the staff is, can you speak of your reaction and your concerns when you were first introduced to the knowledge that a parent partner would be working next to you side by side, and how did you overcome those fears.

Athena: [01:24:55] I think that that's a natural reaction. This is Athena. Before I was in a supervisory role, I know just having parents that I had been involved with even just volunteering at our office, it was... it's almost you envision this as a space that no one will ever come into. And I had to really -- again, like I talked about before -- just thinking about what my values were and what my own biases were, and my own judgments were... and that that takes time; and with being a supervisor I've noticed with staff that it's something that takes time for them as well. It's not an overnight thing, it's a gradual culture shift.

And climate change was big in the office, so I think there most definitely are initially those concerns about what does this mean; you know, is this going to open myself up at my own personal information; and ultimately working through that to get to a point where it was... well, now that really doesn't bother me. Because ultimately I want to partner with parents, and I want them to feel comfortable around me. And if I feel that way about a parent, what does that say about how I come across to them when I'm working with them.

So I absolutely think that there's a learning curve, and it takes time, and it's definitely a cultural shift.

Ben: [01:26:36] And this is that. I mean, when I got involved with this work 2-1/2 years ago with the Fatherhood Engagement Action Team beyond just my normal day to day path of being an investigator, the father that was on the team was a father who I had reviewed his children maybe a few years prior. And had such a violent reaction during that process that he made threats to my life, and threats to the agency; and he had gotten past that and he was changed.

But that was the first experience that I had in partnering with a parent, and it literally terrified me to know that I would have to do that. But at the end of the day, hearing the story of what occurred and partnering with him, it didn't really... looking back retrospectively at what had occurred and where my practice is now, it's probably the best thing that ever happened. And my colleagues [unclear], you know, it is. It's an individual... you have to look into yourself, there may be issues that have their own internal struggles, the battles that they deal with, and this is just one more thing that put on anxiety.

So it is. It's a person by person experience that I think you each have to go through, and some maybe the process may take longer than others. But at the end of the day, it's an extremely positive process, and it changed the work that I do on a daily basis. The last 2-1/2 years, the work I do now is so much better because I have that full world perspective on the work that I'm doing, and at the end of the day, what outcomes and what is it really causing these families to go through, and understanding how I think it's important.

Dave: [01:28:34] And if the parents could answer the same question?

Brenda: [01:28:38] Sure. This is Brenda, and I think as I alluded to that home office that I worked out of when I first showed up, it was, "Oh, wait in the waiting area." And it probably

took a full year. But I think Geraldo Pilarski our Program Specialist does a great job with any of the parents to let them know that this is baby steps with each of the offices. This isn't something you can do overnight. You need to build that relationship. And it starts with the Better Together workshops. And then attending a staff meeting. Meeting with staff one on one. And so it's a definite journey. It's not something you can do overnight.

And I think because I was prepared for that, at first I was offended, and I thought: what do mean, they don't want parents working in their office. Then I learned more about the division and the work that staff do. Because I'm not a social worker by trade, I worked for a utility company. So I needed an understanding of what the culture of the office was and what type of work they do, and the stress and pressure that they're under to fully understand why the journey, and why it may take a little while for that culture to change.

Tammy: [01:29:41] Hi, this is Tammy. I can remember when I first came on the practice model and I was working in the state office. There were definitely some concerns; I was literally I think the first parent to come into the office. You know, there's always the "what do you do with the confidentiality," and how we act around that parent.

And slowly it had diminished. I became part of the team, you know... I really saw that they engaged me, they embraced me as a Parent Partner; and as Brenda was talking, going to Better Together. Getting to know people. Going in the offices.

Now I can go into an office and everybody knows me. That's a great feeling to have, but of course it didn't happen overnight.

Dave: [01:30:31] Thank you. If I may, I have a second question.

Coordinator: Sure.

Dave: [01:30:37] Thank you. For the parent partners, how have you been able to build capacity. One of the challenges that we have in our state is that we keep going to the same well; the parents who have stepped forward and have become Parent Partners and attend a lot of the workshops, and lend their voices when we need to have them participate in different initiatives. The challenge we have is recruiting. Any strategy that you have implemented that has built your capacity?

Brenda: [01:31:12] Well, we have one test that we're doing in one of our local offices... well, several offices are doing different things, so I'll speak about one of them. Is that when a case closes, whether it's a juvenile justice case or an abuse and neglect case, we give a letter to the parent or parents letting them know that even though your case is closed, we still want to partner with you. We still want to work with you. And if this is something you're interested in, please contact us. And it has my name on it with my contact phone number; it also has the supervisor's name and phone number.

And we're trying to recruit people for the Better Together workshops. Because initially, that was our way of recruiting people, was the Better Together workshop, which is a great methodology. We're not putting an ad in the paper saying we're looking for parent leaders, we're using this workshop as the venue to recruit parents. Because those are the parents who experienced partnership for two days and then realized, "this is something I want to keep going with."

And we truly feel, after speaking with states such as Maine, California, Washington, this is really the methodology you should use to recruit parents, is the workshop.

But then also when a case closes, letting parents know that we have a Parent Partner program and we want them to continue to partner with us.

Dave: Thank you, that was very helpful.

Coordinator: [01:32:35] We're just about at time, I just want to close with one question because we've gotten several that sort of follow this theme. Which is: what type of evaluation are you doing, if you're doing any. Are you looking how this new model has changed maltreatment rates, recurrence... are you doing any kind of evaluation to see how this has changed your outcomes.

Geraldo: [01:32:59] New Hampshire has contracted with the University of New Hampshire, so our division is asking the university researchers to partner with us. And what they're going to do is conduct an implementation study that is of the practice model, which the Parent Partner program is one component.

So it is in the plans; and we also are doing agency climate and culture surveys annually, since we implemented the strategies of the practice model. And so we're capturing some of the changes and perceptions of staff and attitudes as well as practice through those surveys. And so that's what we have in plan at this stage.

But the other piece is, we obviously have our administrative data, and we have a data management team. And so we're continuing to generate supervisory reports so it's not so much on a study, but it's on: what are we seeing in terms of outcomes.

And we are happy to say that at the start we had over 15-hundred children in care. We're a very small state for those out there, so remember that, New Hampshire is a very small state. So maybe for you it's not a lot, but for our state it was a large number; and I'm happy to say that at this stage we have a little bit over 600 children that are currently in care and out-of-home placement. So a significant, significant change.

And I have no doubt that the Parent Engagement piece and us changing our practice is what has resulted, and also inviting our community partners to also be changing and be more family focused.

Coordinator: [01:35:24] Well, we've run a little bit long, so I want to thank our team from New Hampshire for presenting today and for hanging with us as we ran a little bit overtime. I think it was a wonderful discussion.

For those of you who would like to continue speaking about the topic we do have a Children's Bureau Centennial Webinar LinkedIn discussion group. You all have been, by virtue of registering for this webinar, you've been preapproved to join that group. If you can't find it your LinkedIn account, feel free to email me and I will give you instructions on how to do that, and the title of the group and my email address is here on the slide in front of you.

I'd also like to remind you that we have two webinars remaining in this series, both of which will be held in March. The first one is the fourth historical webinar which will cover Children's Bureau history from 1987 to the present. We also are very pleased to announce that we'll have some Children's Bureau staff members participating in that webinar and sharing their vision for the future of CB's leadership in the field of child welfare.

Our second webinar will be the last topical webinar and the topic for that one will be "Special Needs in Disabilities: Redefining Populations and Services." Both of those will be scheduled in March, and you can find more information on them at the website shown on your screens.

Finally, I'd like to put in one last plea that you please complete the evaluation form, it will pop up as you log out of "Go to Webinar." We really do take your feedback very seriously and look at it carefully, so we'd really appreciate any feedback that you have to share with us.

Again, thank you very much to our team from New Hampshire. I appreciate you sharing your expertise and your stories with us this afternoon.

[01:37:02]

[End webinar.]