



**Building Connections in Child Welfare - A Statewide Approach**  
Hosted by the Children's Advocacy Alliance on September 26, 2013  
**Summary of Facilitator Notes**

The second Building Connections in Child Welfare event convened on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013 to continue the discussion on child welfare reform in the State of Nevada. There were 53 individuals in attendance which comprised of service providers representing agencies such as Clark County Department of Family Services, Washoe County Social Services, State of Nevada Division of Child & Family Services, Clark County District Attorney's Office, mental health counseling centers, foster care agencies, and child welfare nonprofit organizations.

Julie Collins from The Children's Welfare League of America (CWLA) was the guest speaker for September 26, 2013 Building Connections Event. Julie presented on the CWLA's National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare. A summary of the blueprint can be found here: <http://www.cffutures.org/files/CWLA.pdf>. The Blueprint is intended to be a catalyst of change by outlining eight guiding principles to structure reform efforts.

These principles include:

1. Rights of Children
2. Shared Responsibility and Leadership
3. Engagement/Participation
4. Supports and Services
5. Quality Improvement
6. Workforce
7. Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

A survey was administered prior to the Building Connections event to assess the child welfare community's perception on these eight principles. It was found that respondents were least satisfied with the following three principles, as they pertain to Nevada: Engagement/Participation, Quality Improvement, and Funding & Resources.

These three principles were chosen as the focus of the Building Connections event. There were three groups of participants and each group was given 30 minutes to discuss each principle. The information below is a summary of the feedback given from each group.

Principles:

1. Engagement/Participation  
Facilitators: André Wade & Jim Raffel
2. Quality Improvement  
Facilitators: Christina Vela & Ken Lange
3. Funding & Resources  
Facilitators: Denise Tanata Ashby & Howard Olshansky

**Engagement/Participation**  
**Facilitators: André Wade & Jim Raffel**

**Principle Summary:** Children, youth, and families are engaged and empowered to promote family success and build community capacity. Service providers and organizations acknowledge, appreciate, and validate the voices and experiences of those whose lives they touch, so that responsive, community-based resources and services are developed, nurtured, and sustained.

**Overall summary of shared themes communicated by each of the three breakout groups:**

All three groups acknowledged:

- Historically, insufficient effort was put forth to engage children, youth and families in shaping responsive, community-based resources and services (e.g., group team decision making meetings, mediation, peer mentoring, etc.)
- Historically, little organized effort was put forward to encourage the voices and experiences of those touched by the child welfare system for the benefit of others entering or navigating the system (e.g., parent and youth mentors, quality improvement, procedures, etc.)
- That there has been little organized communication outside of those directly involved in child welfare to further educate and engage the broader community/public (i.e., legislators, business leaders, funders, etc.)
- Establishing trust and an environment of psychological safety for those experiencing the system is essential to gaining their full engagement in aspects of program, policy and procedural development, and quality improvement
- More intentional effort is underway to gain feedback using a variety of techniques to inform positive change (personal interviews, surveys, etc.)
- Formal advisory groups, including foster parent and foster youth representation, were rare if nonexistent years ago
- Negative statistics and data have dominated the headlines as opposed to sharing data demonstrating positive trends (e.g., statistics related to reunification, etc.)
- Valuable data has not been expressed so that the broader community not directly involved in child welfare (individuals, businesses, foundations, organizations) can be supportive and see how and where they can respectively get involved
- Historically, there has been little attention directed toward the necessary informal community supports for families and youth after leaving the formal system

## **Summary by specific question for all three groups:**

**Question 1:** What is currently being done to engage children, youth and families so that their voices are heard and their feedback is used to improve the child welfare system?

- Safety meetings including a team approach with a strong family voice (family group decision-making model)
- Parent mentoring programs (e.g., East Valley Family Services)
- The use of mediation as a technique to engage members of the family to move toward an early resolution
- Peer mentoring programs for parents
- Foster and Adopted Youth Together (FAAYT) program, which is comprised of foster and adoptive youth who are engaged in legislative action, and the overall improvement of children's experience while in and after foster care
- Agency advisory councils with foster parents and foster youth representation
- The participation of caregivers (foster, adoptive, kin) in DFS' Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)
- Current foster parents leading foster and adoptive parent information sessions for those interested in becoming foster and/or adoptive parents
- Independent Living (IL) classes with opportunities for constructive feedback
- Moving from the concept of advisory groups to "stakeholder" groups

**Question 2:** What efforts are made to involve parents and extended family members in all aspects of planning and decision-making regarding them and their children?

- Encouraging and facilitating parent and extended family member outreach to their elected officials
- Setting and communicating expectations for parents and family members as they enter the system
- A recommendation was made to have parents and family members involved with designing strategies rather than only leaving it to the professional staff
- Become a learning organization constantly seeking feedback
- Make use an anonymous suggestion box and surveys
- Create an environment of psychological safety, to build trust between parents/families and child welfare, if we hope to have involvement in planning
- Child and family team meetings
- Intentional efforts, when appropriate, to bring biological family members together with foster parents to serve the best interest of the child
- Opportunities exist for foster parents and natural parents to share information about the children in foster care to improve relationships to ensure children's well-being while in out of home care

**Question 3:** How is data used to engage the public, specifically stakeholders, in discussions to enhance service delivery to improve outcomes?

- We have not used data effectively to inform and educate stakeholders in discussions to enhance service delivery; we must first exhibit the data in a concise and easily understood format
- A data book was developed specifically for the legislators this past session, but the data would need to be reformatted specifically for other target audiences
- Data we collect for internal purposes is not readily useful in its original format for the general public
- Typically, the data that is compiled has a negative connotation, therefore, there must be an effort to make data available that is positive and promising, especially as it relates to youth
- Former recipients of child welfare services may not be interested in obtaining child welfare data

**Question 4:** Is the data provided to the public easily obtainable, digestible, and useful to encourage a discourse on the status of child welfare at the state and local level?

- No
- There is a need to package/express data in such a way to show where additional investment needs to be made
- Packaged and displayed effectively, data could be used to show a positive return on additional investment
- We have not asked former and/or current recipients of child welfare services what sort of data they might be interested in seeing on a regular basis

**Question 5:** Do you believe it is important for **parents** who were recipients of child welfare services, and were successfully reunified, to be engaged in advocacy to enhance policy and service delivery?

- Yes
- Parents who have received services can be effective spokespeople
- Parents who have received services can offer valuable insights to process/policy improvements
- We cannot assume parents understand how to engage and serve as advocates; conscious effort must be made to train/teach effective engagement and advocacy work

**Question 6:** Do you believe it is important for **youth** who were recipients of child welfare services to be engaged in advocacy to enhance policy and service delivery?

- Yes
- Children and youth can more easily sway/compel legislators to consider policy changes
- Children and youth can be effectively used as advocates to tell the story and raise awareness with those outside of the child welfare system
- We need to make a more concerted effort to keep connected and engage youth once they leave the system

**Question 7:** What strategies and efforts are to include **fathers** throughout their child's involvement with support and services?

- We have not done a good job of engaging the fathers throughout their child's involvement
- We need to engage fathers as positive role models
- We need to involve fathers and provide training designed specifically for them to be effective members of the team
- From the court's perspective, it is necessary to first ask the question, "Where is the dad?"

**Question 8:** What are ways we can gain feedback from children, youth and families regarding the child welfare system that we are not already doing?

- Personal interviews
- Anonymous suggestion box
- Surveys

## **Quality Improvement**

### **Facilitators: Christina Vela & Ken Lange**

**Principle Summary:** Supports and services are designed and implemented based on evidence and knowledge; data collection is focused on measuring outcomes and achieving success; continuous quality improvement is emphasized and supported; and innovation practices and programs are encouraged.

#### **Overall summary of shared themes communicated by each of the three breakout groups:**

All three groups acknowledged:

- Shared vision and aligned collective will. That child welfare and family safety does not belong only to government services but there is a community component and responsibility
- Shared accountability across parts of the system-what is working-what is not and how to make improvements
- Data driven-with shared measurement of outcomes and success. Then use the data to inform decision makers and to improve the system and outcomes. There needs to be education about why data is important and how it can help the system-future funding opportunities
- Technology-need systems that allow technology to be used in meaningful ways. Possibly ways to follow a family/child through multiple systems. Also discussion related to use of social media for connectivity but what does that look like for child welfare services and supports to families.
- Effective resources-what is available in the community, what is needed and how to leverage partnerships. To have a system flexible enough to evolve to meet needs of community and families which changes over time.
- The desire to have a system built on the prevention of abuse and neglect and less reactionary. To have a strong assessment process that can be shared with different providers, to meet families where they are, to help and prevent the abuse from occurring in the first place when at all possible.
- A system flexible to meet families where they are. Use of non-traditional service providers and safety nets in the community. i.e. faith based, schools, other social services and supports, community centers. Mental health and substance abuse services must be invested in for real change related to areas of concern in this community.
- Strong community partnerships-no wrong door for entry to services and supports for families in need. Need consistency with vision and service delivery
- Quality services so kids get what they need!!
- Focus on customer service-respect for families, kids and partners. Service providers to share information

## Summary by specific question for all three groups:

**Question 1:** What does a quality system look like to you? What outcomes are a priority?

- Improved communication-specifically between County and State and then out to partners, providers etc
- Outcomes discussed:
  - More children growing up with their own families
  - Quality of life improved for kids and families
  - Sense of urgency for support to families and kids in crisis
  - Cooperation between all parties-mutual understanding about roles, respect
  - System of care-clear standards, consistency, accountability
- Mapping of services available in the community and review of what is needed. Focus on areas where there are no services or more is needed. Stronger alignment between system providers
- Public/private partnerships-need good, solid partnerships to break down system silos
- Empowering families to understand their rights, purpose of services and to be empowered to make authentic changes
- Community capacity building, acceptance and use of non-traditional service providers. Allowing people to be served where they are.
- Quality and decisions based on data-need true data tracking, shared data points. How to deal with fears of providers to share data for potential mis-understandings.
- The need for checks and balances- professionally, contractually, ethically
- Use of best practice programs. That there is data, clear expectations and goals set. Fidelity to models that demonstrate positive outcomes and the system flexible enough to align with changing practice and needs of families.
- Information sharing-how to share info across the system to caregivers, families, system partners in a way that is meaningful
- Competent staff at all levels-developed workforce from top to bottom

**Question 2:** What measures should the State of Nevada be using to measure success, on an overall scale, for child welfare in Nevada?

- System that is proactive, provides prevention services
- Resources for fragile families-wraparound model
- Paradigm shift-child welfare a community issues with various entities responsible for certain parts but the collective of the well-being of children and families is a community, county, state issue.
- Children's success-define educational goals, areas of well-being
- Preferred provider list-reward [providers that are achieving positive outcomes and assist as possible those that are not. Sharing of training resources, evidenced based models
- Accountability-tool to evaluate effectiveness-efficacy of programs. Review of provider expertise and focus. Some system to benchmark progress, to match clients to providers
- Training of providers, accountability, consistency

- A system that uses common language
- Funding-great training costs money. Resources need to be allocated to training of a system in shared approach, goals etc.
- appropriate resources are important

**Question 3:** How can we hold agencies accountable for measuring the effectiveness of their programs? Such as, a county government refers their parents to either three different agencies for drug rehabilitation. Are these programs effective? Which agency is more effective? Do the agencies track data to evaluate their effectiveness?

- There needs to be a way where there is no wrong door for a family to enter supportive services that are proactive. Goal is people get what they need when they need it.
- If moving to a prevention model focus then funding needs to shift to support that approach
- The use of technology to become more effective and has a huge role in a quality system. Different parties are tracking measures, information about families etc and often times do not share the info and are duplication the information collection process.
- Agencies across the system to agree to shared gals, outcomes and accountability. Ok to have agency individualization but need to have shared goals that guide service provisions
- All leaders have a responsibility to communicate, share info, provide feedback in order to create a stronger system that achieve positive outcomes
- How to manage conflict-how to prime and have meaningful conversations
- How to learn from other communities-not having to reinvent
- How to create a system nimble enough, flexible enough to adjust to changing needs of the community
- Use of data demonstrations-show what works, work to replicate, celebrate success

**Question 4:** Do agencies share data with other stakeholders (excluding confidential information regarding recipients' identities) that is collected within their organizations? How can we improve transparency of data?

- How to collect information, share data collection points to solicit feedback while recognizing some parties may worry about being open and sharing data.
- Avoid only sharing info driven on complaints but rather identify strengths, successes while still addressing the areas needing improvement
- Agreement that not one program can serve all needs therefore need to build complementary partners across the system. This builds unity and vision, respect
- Customer service- how to ensure as much information is shared as possible before judgments are made
- Create points of feedback closer to the provision of service
- Important for clients to feel safe in order to share information
- To collect data to teach, learn and improve-to even define what data driven means
- Review of cost of care vs. prevention services

- The need to educate the broader community and gain political support to support families and reduce child abuse.
- Collect data but also do research about what data means and how to make improvements as needed.
- Create a shared will in the community- where the value of the data is shared
- Not everyone agrees that data is important so how to increase this understanding
- Need to define what success is and then back into that with outcomes and data points

**Funding & Resources**  
**Facilitators: Denise Tanata Ashby & Howard Olshansky**

**Principle Summary:** In Nevada, funding decisions in the private sector and at federal, state, local, and tribal levels are informed by the certainty that the well-being of children, families, and communities are interconnected and that sufficient and equitable funding is essential to the well-being of all of them.

**Overall summary of shared themes communicated by each of the three breakout groups:**

All three groups acknowledged:

- There are a multitude of dollars that support services within the Child Welfare arena including federal, state, local and philanthropic dollars. It would be important to understand the varying sources to have a true knowledge of what the system really costs to support children and families.
- Child Welfare funding is very complicated. It is important to understand the multiple nuances of these dollars. For instance, some funding sources have flexibility while others such as IV-E are very restrictive and can only be used for specific purposes. This knowledge would need to be used when thinking about how to use what dollars to fund what parts of the system.
- There are many opportunities to leverage different types of funds in non-traditional structures, ex. IV-E waiver.
- Lots of discussion around working as a true collaborative community where we talk about collaborative fund raising, agreeing who should go after what funds, possibly giving something up or being willing to shift roles within the system.
- There needs to be state-wide coordinated efforts as some funders will not allow multiple applications.
- As a community we need to build infrastructure capacity to manage increased funding opportunities.

**Next Steps**  
**Presented by Ken Lange**

**Question 1:** What are we doing well?

- Open to change
- Keeps families' wellbeing as a primary goal
- We're reaching towards the same vision
- We've had success (legislative wins) when groups work together and we get outcomes
- Our numbers our good for reunification- 68% reunified within a year
- People are committed in their work and are invested to make lives better
- Good response time
- We are good at working together
- We have lots of knowledge among the groups that work together and we are effective at using that knowledge
- We are not afraid to look at shortcomings so we can find solutions
- We do a good job at engaging the community
- We are good at convening

**Question 2:** What are our top priorities to change?

- Expand successful pilot program (ex: the program to reduce meds for children)
- Build broader constituency
- Empower recipients to be a part of the team
- Engage parents and youth- get their feedback to improve services
- The system would be more effective if it didn't view parents as adversarial, we have an adversarial system
- Create psychological safety within system

**Question 3:** How comfortable are we with where we are and where do we need to be?

- There is a sense of urgency because we need to build a foundation- not sure if the politicians have the same sense of urgency
- There seems to be a sense of disconnect
- We are not at rock bottom, but not far along
- Don't have support of community at large
- The larger policy piece isn't where it needs to be
- We're at the start of the middle stage, we have started the discussions, now we need to continue to progress

**Question 4:** Who else needs to be in the room to help us move forward?

- Representatives of the court- need a judge or hearing master- they are very important leaders to any change
- Power people “power players” who have the ear of the legislators and the money. We need to educate the legislators so they are invested in the area.
- School district
- Parent partners and youth advocates
- Philanthropic folks, foundations, business folk. What solutions do they have? They need to know how they can help. They can help fund the evaluation piece.
- Law enforcement