

## Closing Plenary: *Current Perspectives on Critical Research Gaps and Needs*

Thursday, February 8, 2018

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | *Adams/Morgan*

### 1. Descriptive Information

<b>Closing Plenary: <i>Current Perspectives on Critical Research Gaps and Needs</i></b>  Closing remarks will be provided by ACF program leadership.	<b>Leadership</b>  <b>Shannon Christian</b> , Director of the Office of Child Care  <b>Clarence Carter</b> , Director of the Office of Family Assistance  <b>Jerry Milner</b> , Associate Commissioner at the Children’s Bureau, and the Acting Commissioner for the Administration on Children, Youth and Families  <b>Ann Linehan</b> , Deputy Director for the Office of Head Start  <b>Scribe</b> <b>Sarah Kowiak</b> , ICF
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### 2. Documents Available on Website

N/A

### 3. Brief Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Shannon Christian *[introduction]*
  - Shannon opened the session by sharing from her perspective as a Consortium member for the past 16 years.
  - She spoke to the new goal of ACF to reimagine how we shape and deliver services to make them less siloed and more integrated. ACF is committed to an enterprise approach to better integrate programs where it makes sense.
  - The new ACF leadership has set out to streamline and reduce barriers/burdens on states and grantees.
  - Shannon introduced the panelists and shared that they would be talking about their vision and research needs, what they would like to know around children and families for services, and potential research strategies.
- **Summary of Presentation #2:** Clarence Carter
  - Clarence spoke from the perspective of the Office of Family Assistance, TANF administration, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood
  - He asked us to think about the questions: “How do we as a society organize ourselves to support vulnerable families and communities?”
  - He shared his view that the design of a safety net is flawed by design. We (ACF) are operating in all different directions with our initiatives.
  - Wherever possible, we (ACF) want to take an enterprise approach to the challenges we are looking to address.

- Support has to be connected to broader networks and a set of intentions to reduce dependency, or else we operate in silos.
- Hope to foster more comprehensive dialogue and architecture for how we address the issues of vulnerable individuals, families and communities
- We have to measure the well-being of humans in society and collectively grow the capacity of vulnerable populations to reduce their dependency.
- Our shared intention has to be helping as many people as possible to grow beyond their circumstances.
- We want people to walk out the door because we have addressed their needs for support.
- He also shared a few research questions:
  - How can we measure the degree to which early intervention systems have helped a family grow their capacity and reduce their dependency?
  - Does your work lead to capacity growth to decrease dependency?
- **Summary of Presentation #3: Ann Linehan**
  - Ann started by stating that these are challenging times for us. The landscape of how and who we serve is really changing.
  - Head Start shares in the commitment to growing the capacity of every individual to be less dependent. There is an absence of sufficient mental health services for care takers (parents, Head Start teachers).
  - She challenged the audience to think about: “How are we caring for people who have these very challenging jobs?”
  - With the current salary structure, staff are providing incredible services but we want to build capacity, but also build on the workforce.
  - We also have challenges with the increase in the minimum wage. Some minimum wage-earning families are no longer eligible for HS or EHS because of the wage increase. We don’t want to penalize parents who are doing better, but are not yet stable enough.
  - One of our challenges is that we only have children and families for 5 years. We want to co-opt public schools to be more family centered. We need everyone bought in to building a family’s capacity. We need to value K-12 parental engagement to better serve families who are trying to get out of being dependent.
  - HS programs are not in competition with PreK programs; parental choice has to be acknowledged, and there are plenty of children to serve through both programs.
  - We have a struggle with turnover- 87% of teachers have college degrees and we are losing them at a rapid pace. Is it competencies or degrees that matter? Who really is best to care for our children?
- **Summary of Presentation #4: Jerry Milner**
  - We all have a sincere desire to strengthen families
  - The Federal government sometimes loses sight of that fundamental mission. We can confuse client/customer with states, grantees, bureaucratic rules and regulations. Our core has to be strengthening families.
  - We know a lot about what families and children need to thrive and those are the things in child welfare though that we struggle with the most.
  - Research priority: focus efforts on primary prevention of child maltreatment. The issue is that there are no interventions unless a child has already been harmed. We only respond in a reactive manner. We have to move services upstream towards primary prevention.
  - Prevention: May have to give up certain policies or funding, but we have to look at primary prevention to get realistic outcomes for children and families
  - Components to keep in mind: 1) universal, 2) community based, and 3) has to be integrated across systems in communities that can make a difference in lives of children and families
  - We need to understand more about the effectiveness of prevention programs, but it is hard to measure something that never happened. If we keep a child from being maltreated, we need to understand how that happened.

- Goal to understand how effective programs actually work and how they can be sustained over time to keep vision of serving child and families alive.
- Successful programs should cease being the exception. That should grow into norms for what we should expect.
- **OCC Vision: Shannon Christian**
  - Leverage grants to help states build early childhood systems that make the best possible use of funding streams.
  - Look at money that is already being spent and help to point in the right direction. There is a wide range of quality settings that meet needs and preferences.
  - We can utilize a mix of subsidy and tax policy that support parent choice.
  - We want to build ECE that is an intentional component of supports across domains.
  - Ratios: What is the relationship between appropriate ratios and the training/competency of staff? If training were better, could providers handle 1-2 more kids? Would it be possible then to pay providers more?
  - How can research help us meet some of the collaborative cross-agency goals?

#### **4. Brief Summary of Discussion – Question and Answer from the Audience**

- a. Audience Question: How to break down barriers related to different policies, requirements, and eligibility?
  - i. [Panelist Response] It has to begin with intention. Our categorical approach is a fundamental barrier. We don't have enterprise vision. We need to push the envelope across agencies, and we need to partner better with big health agencies across HHS.
- b. Audience Question: How should we approach the question of primary prevention?
  - i. [Panelist Response – Jerry Milner] CB is trying to align policy and grants around these common themes. Over 90% of Children's Bureau funding is tied up in foster care and we can't use that money for other kinds of services. That is a major barrier for us. We also may latch onto a practice that may not be a fit to solve the problem, so being open to moving beyond those practices. Try to go through the problem solving process that is using data before it goes to the solution.
- c. Audience Question: How do we build capacity and work with the difficulties families face in terms of work schedules?
  - i. [Panelist Response] It may not be a reality to have that implemented in our work and programs. Families are working three jobs, and are more stressed and are not a good parent. Work has been a primary goal and can also have a destructive capacity. Just-in-time work scheduling makes it hard to schedule center-based care. We need to shift emphasis to family centered approach. Cookie cutter approaches don't work. We cannot back away from the significance of work as a pathway to freedom, and cannot have blinders to the challenges it creates.

#### **5. Summary of Key issues raised**

- a. We should work with an enterprise vision to strengthen families and communities and lift them out of dependence.