

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast
Birth-Foster Mentoring Teams –TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Robyn Robbins, Foster Parent Mentor; Rose Eshe, Family Youth and Children’s Division, Sonoma County, CA; Jody Rodgers, Birth Parent Mentor; Katie Luciana, Child Parent Institute

[00:00:00]: Music Introduction

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:02]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You’ll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

TOM OATES [00:00:33]: Today, we are talking reunification - which is the primary goal of foster care - but we’re looking at supporting reunification by creating relationships. Specific mentoring relationships to guide foster caregivers and birth families, and also creating a direct relationship between foster and birth parents focused on what is best for the children.

[00:00:56]: Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, everyone. Tom Oates here with you again. Now, many times these relationships we're talking about just aren't created. Sometimes, it's because of processes and systems that just don't bring foster parents and birth parents together, while other times it's because of myths or stigmas that foster parents and birth parents have about the other, or about the system in general.

[00:01:21]: Now, there's a great deal of information on this in an Information Gateway factsheet for families titled Partnering with Birth Parents to Promote Reunification and you can find that over on www.childwelfare.gov. Now, in Sonoma County, California, there is ongoing work using mentors for both birth parents and foster parents to provide support, encouragement and perspective to support reunification, but also to help develop relationships between birth and foster families to help establish a common focus on doing what is best for the children involved, maintaining key connections for the children and dispelling some of those myths that birth families and foster parents may have about the other.

[00:02:05]: So, joining us to talk deeper about the birth-foster parent mentoring teams are Katie Luciana, she leads the parent mentor program for the Child Parent Institute, and they are a parent education and children’s mental health agency serving Sonoma County, California for more than 40 years. Jody Rodgers supports birth parents as a mentor and a parent navigator. She brings her experience as a single mother of three, a recovering addict and a domestic violence survivor and she’s a former recipient of child welfare services.

[00:02:37]: Robyn Robbins is also part of this crew and she’ll be talking to us, as well. She and her family have fostered and supported the families of more than 40 children for more than 15 years. And Robyn is a foster family trainer and a foster parent mentor. And Rose Eshe, a social worker with Sonoma County’s Family, Youth and Children’s Division, who just happens to have been the 2018 Social Worker of the Year by the California Department of Social Services.

[00:03:07]: Now, the group was also featured in a webinar produced by the Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for States titled “It’s All Relative: Fostering Relationships Through Visitation”. We will point you to the webinar on this podcast’s webpage over at www.acf.hhs.gov/cb, just search ‘podcasts’.

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Now, in our conversation, we dive into how everyone partners together and specifically for social workers, how these relationships are folded into a social worker's daily work. We talk about the structure of the relationships and how they are getting buy-in from the agencies along with the birth and foster parents.

[00:03:46]: Now, there's a bit of a perspective change here among the parents who form these relationships and how they help birth parents see the foster parent as a support or an advocate, not as an adversary, while foster parents see their role differently - being there for the birth parent during a difficult time in their lives to help them reunify with their children. Alright, time to take a look into developing partnerships between birth and foster parents with Katie Luciana, Jody Rodgers, Robyn Robbins and Rose Eshe.

[00:04:20]: So, Robyn, Rose, Jody and Katie, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast and folks, we were talking before we even started and as the four of them were getting ready and were all kind of chatting, they just mentioned that the group just got back from reunifying a family. So, walk me through that and take me through what was that moment like and what brought about that moment.

ROSE ESHE [00:04:48]: So, through partnership, we had a social worker approach us to say that we are looking at transitioning a child home to her mom and asked us to be a part of that transition meeting to facilitate it and to give expert advice, like, so Robyn, who transitions, has transitioned many babies, so we wanted her in the room because that's her area of expertise. Parent mentor, being, Jody was there to help support the birth parent and then I facilitated just to keep things on track and so that we could schedule what that was gonna look like. So, that's what we were doing, it worked out really, really well and I think that we were able to really support the baby and the mom, and the foster parent.

TOM OATES [00:05:34]: How often are you guys experiencing a moment like that through a month, through a year - so how often are you guys having moments like this?

ROBYN ROBBINS [00:05:45]: This is Robyn, foster parent mentor. What was exciting about this for me was that we don't always have transition meeting supported by partnership when a child is going home, when a child is being, or children are being reunified. So, often times, there are loose ends that really don't make it a supportive situation and relationships are left undone between the foster caregivers and the birth families. But we were all in the same room, everybody had support - the social worker was there, everybody was on board with the exact plan and available to help out when things work or don't work. So, this was new for us. It's happened a few times. We often do transition meetings when children are being adopted, but to support a birth family like this was just fabulous. And that's what was so exciting about it.

TOM OATES [00:06:32]: That's great news. Thank you guys so much for sharing, Rose and Robyn. Katie, I really now wanna start this off with you because a moment like this has to come from a lot of different actions, both in terms of process, but also in terms of people and emotion. And when you're doing that, you're trying to drive culture change. So, talk to me about the culture change that you're seeking through these birth fostering mentoring teams?

KATIE LUCIANA [00:06:59]: Yeah, well, the biggest culture change that we're seeking is how we team and how we work as a team. And instead of separating groups of people, having the foster parents in one area, the birth parents in one area and then child welfare, we're trying to team together and the

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birth parent and the foster parent can have a relationship and be a team for the child and really focusing on the child's best interest in everything that we do. And, I would also say we're trying to redefine permanency, so, permanency might not be, permanency is where a child can keep all their connections no matter which way the case goes. So, if they reunify they can still keep the connection with their foster parent and if they don't reunify, there's still some connection with their birth parent.

TOM OATES [00:07:56]: So, you've got mentors now that are part of this partnership and so Jody and Robyn, as the mentors, I kinda wanna ask you - and it's something that, Robyn, you just mentioned a few minutes ago, you started talking about relationships. So, the difference as opposed to filling out a case plan, there's a value that you guys are bringing in on focusing on relationships, what's kinda the return on investment that you're looking to in focusing on relationships?

JODY RODGERS [00:08:23]: So, this is Jody, and I wanted to say, I think that the value in focusing on relationships is often times when you have the birth parent and the foster parent separated, it causes children to have almost a split loyalty and the impact on that is horrible for a child. And so when a child is able to see their birth parent, their foster parent working together, it really allows them to just be themselves. Like, being able to tell their bio parent, I had a great time, I went to swimming lessons - and you know, like, so, being able to build those connections is crucial for a child and I would also say that it gives them a peace of mind, for the birth parent and the child and the foster parent, as well. So, it really helps connect all of those dots together.

TOM OATES [00:09:19]: The emotional connection that you guys are able to establish, I think, sometime sit may go, you know, unrecognized or looked over the fact that, you know, you're trying to place, you know, deal with placements, you're trying to deal with, you know, like I said before, a case plan. But, there's this emotional undertow with everything and everyone involved. So, in that, kind of, Robyn, in that relationship that you are supporting, talk to me about the roles in terms of what is, you know, like in your case, a foster parent mentor - what are you asked to do in this partnership and in this relationship, gosh, what do you bring to the table that's so necessary?

ROBYN ROBBINS [00:10:01]: This is Robyn and you know, we, with this big culture change, we're actually doing a culture change that incorporates moving from fear and caution to support and relationship. And all human beings, and especially children, needs a relationship to grow and thrive. And it just turns out it happens to be rewarding for everybody in the situation, it's just been amazing. But, what I need to bring to the table and what I model for foster parents - and many foster parents and caregivers and relative caregivers already have these attributes - is flexibility, being open-minded and being compassionate. But what this particular model has brought to me after 15 years of doing this work is the opportunity to get a very clear perspective of what's going on for the birth family.

[00:10:46]: So, the ability to put on their shoes and imagine what's going on in their lives as they walk through this process has been very, very important for me personally and it's what I'm working on passing on to the foster parents that I work with.

TOM OATES [00:11:00]: So, what, during your relationship, what are you looking out for, what are those, kind of key things from the foster parent side that you wanna be able to make sure that they're able to bring to the table? I mean, what makes you an effective mentor when you see that, you know, the foster parent engaging in the relationship in a certain way?

ROBYN ROBBINS [00:11:20]: Well, I think you have to be careful not to have expectations in place and let people be people and see how different folks are gonna react to different situations. Every family is different, every family is individual, every set of parents and foster parents and children come with their own concerns and their own needs. So, to watch, what we used to do is be careful not to have emotions get involved. Now, I look for emotions, I want there to be emotions involved, that's how we create relationships. So, folks need to be willing to look at what their feelings are in the moment.

TOM OATES [00:11:52]: And, Jody, on your side then, for the same thing in working with the birth parent and the bio parent, you know, what are, what's your mentorship role and what are kind of those skills that you need to be cognizant of that you're applying to helps this birth parent along the way?

JODY RODGERS [00:12:09]: So, I meet with birth parents right away at their detention hearing and so what I have found working with birth parents is they, they kind of come in with an attitude of gratitude, especially once they're allowed to be able to know where their child is and to be able to have that interaction and a say in, like, conversating about little things like diet or bedtime. And just to be able to have that conversation, it allows the birth parent to feel human again and like they get to be an active part in their child's life.

[00:12:45]: But, I will say qualities I look for is - and I try to instill - is gratitude, and that could be the little things like just to say thank you to the foster parent, like thank you for caring for my child now, or, but to really look for strengths and so I try to stay strength-based. It's just really about, like, the child and building those relationships and so I, immediately, I haven't had a lot of pushback from the birth parents and because this is such a big change and there's just so many things to look back on when it wasn't this way and how horrible it was and it also helps birth parents to really make a shift to move forward at a quicker time, so it's people are changing their lives sooner because they're allowed to be a part of their children's lives.

TOM OATES [00:13:37]: Yeah, I'm gonna wanna pull on both the structure of these relationships of, you know, how frequent you guys communicate and how do you work together as a group, but then there's also the social work component of this and so, Rose, where does that social worker fit in and how do they incorporate into their reports and their case plan and their jobs - how do you fold this, these mentors and these relationships, into your day to day?

ROSE ESHE [00:14:05]: So, I think what we're really trying to get across to the social workers is that this is actually gonna make your life easier and make your job easier to have these two mentors who are coming together and helping work with both families, the foster parent and birth parent. It's about normalizing the process of partnership, so, putting it out there to my building in particular of "here's this great new program that we can build in and it's all about the children" and so pulling together the foster parent, pulling together the birth parent and having everybody on the same team all working together for the safety and permanency of that child and the happiness of that child is where the social worker comes in.

[00:14:47]: And, so when you're talking about reports and case planning, you're always thinking with that lens of partnership. And so, in like what we just did now with our transition plan, that social worker can take that to court and say, "so, we had this transition meeting to partnership and foster mom and birth mom are gonna work together to bring this child home to mom". So, it really, you know, throughout all aspects in the very beginning stages when a child is separated from their family, having that lens of partnership, it helps everyone on the team.

TOM OATES [00:15:20]: So, let's walk through the structure here. You know, Katie, you've got a role in this, Rose, you guys have a role clearly in making sure this happens, 'cause without the social worker, you're just not gonna get that, kind of, structure to the partnership here. How do all of these components work together? Katie, what does this look like in terms of frequency of communication and then what happens when folks are coming together?

KATIE LUCIANA [00:15:46]: Well, we meet as a core group, the four of us, about once a month to communicate about cases, how they're going, what needs to be happening and also any new referrals that we've gotten from social workers. So, we meet as a core group pretty frequently and communicate as needed and then we'll invite partners in as needed. So, if there's another foster parent that wants to collaborate on a case or social worker, they'll join our meetings as well.

TOM OATES [00:16:18]: So, how much contact is there with each of, you know, how much contact, you know, Jody, do you have with the bio parent and how much contact, Robyn, do you have, then, with the foster parent? What is that relationship like in terms of the four of you guys coming together, but then what are you doing for the other, you know, 29 days out of that month?

KATIE LUCIANA [00:16:38]: Well - this is Katie - we're all doing, this is a piece of our job. We're all doing full-time jobs and partnership is something we're incorporating into our jobs. So, I supervise the Parent Mentor Program and Jody is mentoring parents full-time. And so, this is something that we realized early on really benefits our birth parents, so, we are folding these practices into the daily work. Do you wanna answer about how much contact you have with birth parents?

JODY RODGERS [00:17:15]: Yeah. This is Jody. So, I have, I have my contact with birth parents quite frequently, I would say several times a week. I try to do face to face weekly, but we do check in sometimes through text message, sometimes a quick phone call, usually before a visit or after a visit. Robyn and myself, we do get together and we check in usually about once a week on a Friday and we kind of collaborate and check in and sometimes we need to do a little extra, like her and I, foster parent and birth parent, we pull together and we all meet at times if it's needed and we have, like, just a little powwow where get together and we can all speak freely. And, so what we had found in that is that often times, it's really about just getting the two together, and we kind of back off, like we just kind of sit in the shadows and look at each other and smile, like, this is something that happens very naturally and we just let that happen.

TOM OATES [00:18:17]: How important is that moment, that connection, 'cause, geeze, Jody, you mentioned something earlier about, just, for a birth parent to have, kind of, the knowledge of what's going on and to be able to communicate a little bit about their child that they know is gonna reach that foster parent. You know, kind of closing the loop to where, you know, and Rose mentioned, it's about the children involved, but kind of closing the loop to make sure what's happening is the best for the children. What are those kind of meetings like?

JODY RODGERS [00:18:52]: I would say that they're very meaningful, like heartfelt, right? So, often times when this is not happening, you'll find that the birth parent is, looks at the foster parent as if they are CPS, they think that they're a monster, they think, they have all of these stigmas built up in their mind and so when you bring people together in these kinds of meetings, it's genuine and heartfelt and it's critical because at that moment, they become human to each other. And so, a birth parent is able to say, like, "this is what I'm feeling" and the foster parent is able to say "you've done a wonderful job,

your child is so loving”, and it really removes that unhuman feeling from the room and they begin to wrap their hands - like, it’s just a full support around this child in working together.

ROBYN ROBBINS [00:19:51]: And this is Robyn, if I can add as a foster parent mentor, I’m often working with brand new families in the system and they come in with their ideas and many folks are here because they want to grow their family and they want to adopt children and so a quick example is a family that started that way, they couldn’t have their own children, they’d like some children, they came into the system and with spending a little bit of time with the first few cases, Jody and I working together and working with this foster parent and two or three different birth families, the shift in this family’s attention is totally to reunification and really, all it took - Jody’s right, we called it, it looked like magic, it felt like magic - but it’s just human. We put these two moms in a room and we had a whole agenda planned and we had prepared them ahead of time and all’s we had to do is let these two moms sit there and talk about the child and they created their own process and their own relationship. So, the word humanized is huge there, all’s we had to do is get face to face and relationships happen.

TOM OATES [00:20:49]: And so, when that first face to face happens, you know, Katie, you guys were talking about, you know, what you guys go through, you used the term ice breakers - can you explain that to me?

KATIE LUCIANA [00:21:02]: Yeah, so, we, so an ice breaker in our county originally was created for sharing information between birth parent and foster parent. So, what would happen is, usually it’s a social worker, will facilitate the first meeting between those two parents. And like I said, the goal was to just share information about the child. But, we are doing what, I guess we’re calling ice breaker 2.0, where it’s more about building a connection between the two people and, yeah, we can share information to benefit the child, but we also want them to have, start building a relationship. And, so, Jody, why don’t you share what that’s been like to have.

JODY RODGERS [00:21:48]: Yeah, so, I would say, so I’ll just give you an example of one of mine, one of my favorite ones. And so, we had a birth mom who just had a lot of aggression build up towards the foster mom and it was just very negative, like the drop offs with this child was the birth mom, “Why does my son have a mark on his face? Why is he like this? Oh my gosh, his shorts don’t look like, this isn’t how I would’ve dressed him.” And, you know, like, literally picking this foster parent apart. And, so, partnership got involved and so what had happened was I met with birth mom one on one a couple times a week and Robyn met with the foster mom and so, we decided to do our ice breaker 2.0 where we got them all together in a room.

[00:22:35]: And so, before we had did that, I was, we went to a meeting and we like, talked about it as partnership and so everybody was there except for the birth mom. Even the foster mom, just so I can get an idea of what’s going on and how she’s feeling and really be able to work with the birth mom. And, it had come out that this foster mom was really advocating, like, “this little boy, he needs more time with his mom, like, I pick him up from visits, he’s so upset, he throws shoes at my head crying for his mom.” So, I heard this foster parent really advocating for this little boy needing more time and so that really helped me, like, hearing the different opinions of what’s going on, I was able to go back to birth mom and be like, “look this is the deal, you know, I’ve heard this foster parent advocate for you, I’ve heard what she has to say” and I remember she looked at me and she said, “Really? she doesn’t think I’m a monster?” And what she was doing - and she was able to recognize - is she was putting her own stigma onto that relationship with the foster parent, so she was in her sense, she was protecting herself by the fight method.

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[00:23:52]: And so, once we got them into a room and they were able to just talk to each other, the foster parent was able to say, “I will admit, like, at first I was terrified to work with parents in recovery with addiction” and birth mom was able to say, like “I just feel threatened, my motherhood feels threatened”, like, they were able to get to the core of, like, what’s going on and how can we build from here and hearing the foster parent say, like, “your son loves you so much” and hearing this mom be able to look at her and say, “thank you so much for caring for my child, I know you’re taking good care of him it’s just me reflecting on, like, my own guilt, I guess you could say”. They really worked it, by the end of the meeting, they were both crying and hugging and we ended up having a beautiful transition plan with this family to where in the transition plan, this birth mom looked at the foster mom and said, “I would like to give her more time with him”, like, ‘cause she wanted to make sure that this foster mom got more time with this little boy, rather than just give me my child back. And today, they’re still working together really well and the child is home and this is one of the birth mom’s main supports.

ROBYN ROBBINS [00:25:11]: And this is Robyn, if I can add to that, Jody, I think the key for us in this situation and many of our situations is that the mentors, the birth parent and the foster parent mentor were in the room with the birth parent and the foster parent. There weren’t social workers there, we’re all peers, and I believe that gave just the right amount of structure that they felt comfortable not being on their own, but they were also with people who had lived experiences in both of their situations and it just takes a lot of the tension and the stress out of the situation and allows things to grow more normally and in a positive direction. So, yeah, it definitely made a difference that it was just the four of us.

TOM OATES [00:25:50]: As you’re walking through this as much as the connections and the emotion that is shared and the relationship that’s built, it’s not necessarily something that you can just check on the box and say, yup relationship formed we’re good to go to stage two. But, it sounds so successful from hearing that in your voice, so I’d like to get all of your sense of because this is different than, let’s say a plan, or a structure, but it does sound, you know, from what I’m hearing from you guys that this is so successful in terms of this relationship being developed - how are you guys measuring, what does success look like in terms of, you know, these relationships and your roles as mentors?

ROBYN ROBBINS [00:26:38]: So, I would say the measure of success, right, it doesn’t matter how a case ends, I would say, as long as it’s safe, no matter how a case ends every child deserves to keep everybody in their life that they love. And so, the ultimate measure of success is this child getting to keep all of the people in their life and all of those connections in their life where they have built and just to me, that’s the ultimate measure.

TOM OATES [00:27:08]: So, there’s some other factors here at play and all of the systems that help support this and so, this is a little bit of a change from what maybe have been done in years past, so, clearly, there’s some buy-in that has to happen and, Rose, let me start with you - how do you kind of get, not only those individual social workers who’ve been in the industry for so much time, but then the agency and agency leaders itself to buy into and eventually utilize the, you know, birth-foster mentors?

ROSE ESHE [00:27:29]: So, we’ve been really lucky because we are a QPI county and so we already had some manager and some supervisor buy-in, they actually sat down with Robyn and Jody in the very beginning when we were talking about forming partnership, but the ongoing is like I said earlier just letting social workers know that this actually can benefit everyone, it isn’t some additional thing that we have to do, because social workers, you know, we’re already overwhelmed enough so it’s you know, it’s

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not something additional that we have to do but this is for the welfare of the child and creating that partnership with birth parents and foster parents just makes everything go so much smoothly, more smoothly.

[00:28:16]: And so, once we'd done a couple presentations at our all staff and then we did a QPI panel where we talked about what does that mean for a child and, you know, after that is when people started coming up to us going, okay, how do I do this? How do I utilize the partnership because I've got this client who just is having a hard time with a foster parent or vice versa, foster parent, you know not really buying into reunification, how do we bring them together? And so, from there we just have just gone with it and it's working out really well with each successful reunification and in each successful relationship more and more social workers are realizing this is a good thing.

TOM OATES [00:28:54]: And then for, you know, for Jody and Robyn, you guys both mentioned, kind of, breaking an initial stigma that somebody may bring on the first few days of being involved - what are you doing to get those parents, both birth parents and foster parents to, kind of, accept and see the value of bringing in a mentoring team, when somebody could say, you know, this is my business and let me just handle my business?

ROBYN ROBBINS [00:29:19]: Well, this is a huge barrier that we've been up against because there is a way of being for foster parents that, like I said is about fear and caution and there've been all of these boundaries in place, sometimes against our will, we prefer to have more relationship but we're told we can't. So, we really have to work on that still, this is a work in progress. But, having your mentor with you, I think, as a new foster family has really modeling the way that it works and the benefits that we can get is huge, we don't have a large mentor program yet, you know, in a perfect world we would have the funding and the staffing for every single case to have partnerships be involved from the beginning to the end, but instead, what we tend to do is be referred when there's a problem.

[00:30:04]: But, in every single situation, my experience with the foster family is they've been relieved to have the support and they want things to go well and they want those children to feel comfortable when they bring them back home after the visit. So, all that it has taken so far is just a little bit of experience from partnership support for most foster families to get on board. And we are also working in pre-service trainings and all sorts of beginning trainings to spread this idea and we've had wonderful trainings with birth parent mentor Jody showing up and talking to the new families and just really humanizing the process, remembering that we're all humans to begin with, foster families start this way and we're all parenting and it's a very human process. We're getting there, we're getting closer to it all the time.

JODY RODGERS [00:30:52]: I would say that so, my work with birth parents starts right away at the detention hearing and something that, like, I build our relationship on trust and me, I'm a peer, right, I'm somebody who can look at these birth parents and tell them, "I've been through this, I've sat right where you're sitting, I've been in your shoes". There's an immediate connection that happens right there at the detention hearing and so, we're already working and we already have trust, I'm already advocating for them and so up until now, so far, it has been really, it's been easy for parents to want to do this and it's been a natural thing for the birth parent to want to do this and a lot of this could be because that is where their child is. You know, it could be very different if they had their child and they wanted a foster parent to come in and have a relationship, that might be different, but just because of the circumstances, it is happening very naturally.

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TOM OATES [00:31:58]: So, someone has seen, you know, if they see the success, like Rose had just mentioned and they come up to you and they say, “my gosh, how do I get started, how do I take advantage of this?” And so there’s two, you know, there’s two sides of this, there is that agency side of how they would develop something like this, but then, Katie, there’s also the overarching partnership side, you know, from you over at CalParents, let me ask you and Rose both the same question and, Katie, I’ll start with you, you know, if there’s another organization or there’s another community group out there that wants to develop something like what you guys have out there, where do they begin?

KATIE LUCIANA [00:32:54]: Well, it might look different for each region, but in our county, we have a good relationship with the county agencies, so we were able to collaborate between ourselves. So, I think you begin having those conversations with the key players and you begin by collaborating.

TOM OATES [00:32:58]: Where do you go or what makes you, I’m sorry, let me backtrack on this, what makes a good birth mentor, you know, what are you looking for for your birth mentor teams?

KATIE LUCIANA [00:33:10]: Well, the first thing I look for is it’s not just a job, it’s a calling, so I want someone who feels like - it’s a hard job, so, it takes a really special person and a special heart to do the work - so, someone who’s insightful, empathetic, but also has really good boundaries and can be a self-starter to work with these families and know what their needs are. So, it does take a very special person to do the job.

TOM OATES [00:33:51]: And so, for Rose on the agency side, you know, where does an agency get started in trying to, you know, I don’t know, get something like this off the ground?

ROSE ESHE [00:34:02]: So, to mimic what Katie was saying, very much the collaboration piece, but I think finding those people in the agency who already have that heart and who believe in reunification, who believe in working with families - those are your key players, your champions, if you will, to start focusing on and say, hey, let’s, how do we get this going? Let’s start this together. But, I think also, you know, to have the management buy-in and like I said earlier, we have QPI county, so we’re very lucky in that, but you know, I think if you didn’t have that, just to really come together, find your champions and then be able to present that to management.

TOM OATES [00:34:43]: So, in your mind, as well, the same thing, you know, what makes a good foster mentor?

ROSE ESHE [00:34:48]: So, a foster parent mentor, I think those are, the great ones are the ones who believe in reunification, who are there for the kids and what’s best for that child. And not every case is gonna go to reunification but at their heart, they’re always thinking about what’s best for the child and thinking outside of the box and thinking outside of themselves.

TOM OATES [00:35:05]: So, let’s go back in time and think about this - and it’s the advice we kind of always try to look for here on the podcast is, you know, if you were to start all over again, what would you do differently? Katie, what would you do differently if you were to start from scratch, knowing then what you know now?

KATIE LUCIANA [00:35:24]: You know, maybe having these conversation sooner, ‘cause it takes a while to shift a culture and so, the sooner you start having the conversations, the more people that hear the message, the more that people get involved and wanna be involved in the work. But, we’ve been doing

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this for about two years now, so, right now, I don't know that I have a great answer for that if you ask me a couple years, I might have a different answer, but right now, I would just say, more people involved and start having those conversations as soon as possible.

TOM OATES [00:35:59]: And, Rose?

ROSE ESHE [00:36:01]: I think same thing that Katie is saying but also to have more time because when you are working a full-time job and doing partnership, especially in the very beginning, trying to get it up and running, it requires a lot more time than we are given access to. So, definitely starting earlier, having more time.

TOM OATES [00:36:18]: Guys, I really, really appreciate the time you're spending with us and the time you guys have dedicated over the last two years and beyond. So, Robyn Robbins, Rose Eshe, Jody Rodgers, Katie Luciana, thank you guys so much for spending your time here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

[00:36:36] **All**: Thank you.

TOM OATES [00:36:42]: So, as mentioned at the beginning, we want to point you to some other information for both social workers and for families, and these will be on the episode's webpage over at www.acf.hhs.gov/cb, just search 'podcasts'. Partnering with Birth Parents to Promote Reunification is a fact sheet for families, developed by Information Gateway. We'll also put up a link to Supporting Successful Reunifications and that's a bulletin for professionals, also developed by Information Gateway. We're gonna point you to the National Foster Care Month site and of course, you can find more information for supporting birth and foster parents, along with reunification tools and best practices on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website, that's www.childwelfare.gov.

[00:37:26]: There are also two podcasts we're gonna link you to. Recently, we produced two episodes surrounding Foster Care: A Path To Reunification. Now, both of these episodes profiled a collaboration that's happening between communities and organizations to support reunification. One episode takes a look at the Center for Family Life in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York and the other episode focuses on San Diego County, California. Plus, there is the Capacity Building Center for States webinar that we mentioned, featuring our guests, titled "It's All Relative: Fostering Relationships Through Visitations". So, plenty of stuff on the page for this podcast. As always, of course, if you're looking for information, data, resources, contacts, all to help you in your work, please reach out to Child Welfare Information Gateway at info@childwelfare.gov. So, my thanks to Katie Luciana, Jody Rodgers, Robyn Robbins and Rose Eshe for their time to chat with us and share their experience. And of course, thanks so much to you of listening and spending your time with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. I'm Tom Oates, have a great day.

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:38:40]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at childwelfare.gov and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.