

## **Meaningful Family Engagement: Beyond the Case Plan Webinar Transcript September 21, 2010**

### **Presenters:**

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- Judi Knittel, Family Engagement Supervisor, Children and Family Services, Contra Costa County, CA
- Cheryl Barrett, Heritage Parent Partner, Children and Family Services, Contra Costa County, CA
- Jill Duerr Berrick, Professor, U.C. Berkeley, School of Social Welfare

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**Nicole Bossard:** Wherever you are, good day to you. This is the Meaningful Family Engagement: Beyond the Case Plan Webinar Presentation sponsored by the National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care. Just a couple of logistics points, we have over 240 folks registered for today's call, and though we can mute all of the other lines except the presenters', we can't mute when people come in and off the call, so you will hear, somebody said the Las Vegas slot ring or charm throughout today's call if people come on and come off, so our apologies about that, but we are going to do the best we can. Also let me begin with this, today's Webinar will be recorded and transcribed as well as the Power Points that we are using for today will be available at the following website: <http://www.childwelfare.gov>. That's [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov). I know that there are a few folks that are not able to access the Power Points online at this time, but of course after our call today, it will take us a couple of weeks to get the transcript ready, but the audio as well as the typed transcript and the Power Point that we are using today will be available at that website.

**Aracelis Gray:** Nicole, this is Aracelis. Are you currently on your screen showing the slide with the website link?

**Nicole Bossard:** Hmm...you know, no.

**Aracelis Gray:** Okay, just double checking that it isn't an issue of the slides not moving. Good. Thank you.

**Nicole Bossard:** Human error, not technological difficulties. Thanks coach! Appreciate it.

So welcome aboard everybody. I want to thank you for your patience as we work through the technical difficulties as well as the human errors, don't want to miss that, and away we go.

So today I just want to spend a couple of minutes introducing myself, as well as talk a little bit about the center, and the Systems of Care (SOC) demonstration initiative, which is how we came to know the Contra Costa County Parent Partner Program, and the wonderful work that they have been doing with that program and of course we are absolutely certain that you all are going to enjoy what you hear, and hopefully we will be able to entertain many of your questions at the conclusion of the presentation portion. One of the treats that we have for you all today in this call is that not only do we have information from the program folks, supervisors and one of the parent partners with the Contra Costa Parent Partner Program, we also have Jill Duerr Berrick, who has done some evaluation of the Parent Partner Program, and she will be sharing information about the outcomes of the program and how it's impacting some of the child welfare outcomes in the agencies, so for all of you, hopefully we have some program evaluators and researchers on the phone, don't say that we never gave you anything. And I am also going to share a little bit about findings from the cross site evaluation, from the National cross site evaluation of the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care Demonstration Program.

So without further ado, let me go ahead and at least give you a little bit of a heads up before I go further with the slides. We have with us on the call today Judi Knittel, who is the Family Engagement Supervisor for the Contra Costa County Parent Partner Program. We also have Cheryl Barrett who is the Heritage Parent Partner with that program and has been working with the Contra Costa Parent Partner Program from its very beginning. And we also have, who I just mentioned, Jill Duerr Berrick, who is over at the University of California-Berkeley, who has evaluated the Parent Partner Program. So I'm just giving you a little snippet of who our presenters are, because of course they are going to be sharing a lot of information about who they are and what they do.

But before we proceed forward I do just want to drop one little note in about the Contra Costa Parent Partner Program, they did receive the 2010 Parent Leadership Award, this year, from Parent's Anonymous at the California Statewide Parent Leadership Meeting, so I just want to acknowledge them as well as acknowledge that great achievement in the work that they are doing.

So one of the unique features of the National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care is that unlike most technical assistance or evaluation centers, we are an integrated center, as the slide indicates, we provided technical assistance to all the grantees of the program to strengthen their implementation and capacity as well as a cross-site evaluation on their implementation of the infrastructure changes that they were making within their systems, and also we were charged with building, generating and disseminating new knowledge about systems change through shared learning and the development of a learning community.

For those of you not familiar with SOC, SOC is an initiative that incorporates a core set of principles that combine to meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families in rural, urban, suburban as well as tribal communities. The concept itself provides a principle-guided framework, and is really built on these key guiding principles of interagency collaboration, individualized, strengths-based care, cultural and linguistic competence, child, youth and family involvement, which of course is our focus today, community-based approaches and resources and accountability.

The demonstration itself started in 2003, and concluded in 2008, it was a five-year demonstration. It was operating in 9 grantees in 18 communities across the country, again in rural, urban, county and tribal communities, and unlike some other grant programs, the real

focus was infrastructure development activities to change, really targeting culture change within child welfare agencies, and really giving people the time, resources and the money they needed to focus on their conceptual framework, really helping them look at how services are being delivered, rather than just adding new services to deliver. And also the focus was on working collaboratively with partner agencies to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes as measured by the Child and Family Services Reviews and of course, improvements implemented in the statewide program improvement plan.

[7:48] And here you can see where SOC grant communities were located, you can see on the East Coast, right in the middle of the country and on the West Coast. So we had in New York, we had a community in Bedford-Stuyvesant, which is in Brooklyn, we had a couple of communities, a rural and an urban community in Pennsylvania, Dauphin County which is Harrisburg, a rural community in Northumberland County. In North Carolina we had three communities: Alamance, Bladen and Mecklenburg. In North Dakota we had four tribal communities, the four tribal communities in North Dakota participating in this demonstration initiative. In Kansas we also had two, one mid-sized community in Reno County, which is Hutchinson, and also a rural community, Cherokee County in Kansas. We had one community in Colorado, Jefferson County, Colorado. In Oregon we also had three counties that were again, a rural and urban mix there. In Nevada I heard earlier on the call today that we did have Las Vegas represented, we had Clark County in Nevada that participated in this program, and in California we had our headliners for today, Contra Costa in Martinez, California.

Just very quickly, in terms of the cross-site evaluation from the initiative overall, what we found in our evaluation was that the implementation of the child welfare led SOC initiative supported systems and organizational changes across all of the 9 grant communities. And the second point I want to underscore here is it really facilitated meaningful family involvement as well as the child welfare agencies really kind of stepping outside of the walls and engaging the community and allowing communities to come in, in really different and innovative ways as well. So we saw this not only in the lead agency for the initiative but also other provider agencies within the service array. So implying that this demonstration really does change the way that folks think about families and the roles that families can play in child welfare as well as how child welfare agencies can partner with other folks in the community, not just the agency or service provider agencies based in the community. Specifically related to family involvement, we found that family involvement really became kind of the lightning rod for this initiative, we saw a lot of activity around family involvement but we also saw a lot of enthusiasm, innovation; family involvement really kind of became the flagship or the headliner for this demonstration initiative. The implementation of family involvement was facilitated at multiple levels, so at the level of policies and procedure changes to support family centered practice, peer support program models, which you will hear a lot more about with Contra Costa today, to help families navigate the child welfare system, as well as integration of family members at the systems level, at the decision-making level with collaborative bodies and committees to inform the development of agency policies, procedures and practices. So more than being just key informants to the system, we started to see that family members really were becoming partners with the child welfare system and within the child welfare system.

And lastly, before I hand this over to our guests here, I want to shortcut my comments because we got a little bit of a late start, but I just want to highlight this piece here, what in terms of family involvement again our evaluation and data collection indicates is that families felt more supported, informed and empowered to make the necessary changes that they needed to make. We also found the peer support programs, and Jill will actually be able to speak about this as well in her work, but peer support programs can result in improved safety and

permanency for children and families. In Nevada, we saw a 9% reduction in alleged re-abuse cases of children placed with kin-caregivers, which was the focus of their demonstration initiative in Clark County, and in Contra Costa, 62% of children whose parents were served with a peer mentor reunified with their parents within 18 months of removal, compared to 37% of children whose parents did not have a mentor. And again Jill, Judi and Cheryl will be able to provide us with a lot more info and insight into that.

I've already really mentioned that through the grant program families and communities really found bridges to one another and found other ways of working together. But without further ado, what I'd like to do is to really give the mike now to the folks who we really came here to hear from and learn from and learn with, and that's Judi Knittel, Cheryl Barrett and Jill Duerr Berrick to really talk about, "so meaningful family engagement, we kind of get what that means, but beyond the case plan, what could you really be talking about, so let me hand it over to Judi so she can give us a closer look into this Contra Costa Parent Partner Program. Judi? It's all yours and you just let me know when you want me to switch slides.

[13:30] **Judi Knittel:** Thank you Nicole. First of all I just want to say that I am really very honored to have this opportunity to talk to you all today and really excited to talk about our program because this is something that we really have a lot of ourselves invested in, something we are very proud of, and something we are always very happy to share. With me today is Cheryl Barrett, who is our probably longest on staff parent partner, and she'll have a lot to offer to this conversation as well. Cheryl and I are together, Jill is probably in her office at Berkeley, so we may stumble over ourselves a little bit passing things back and forth, so just be patient with us as we try to do the smooth hand off here.

But I wanted to give you, as we started talking today, a little bit, not a lot, but a little bit of the history of the parent partner program. And really what it was an interest on the part of our director in the early part of 2000 in involving parents in a meaningful way in the child welfare process. Now, it was sort of unclear what that meaningful way was going to look like. We knew we wanted parents to participate in leadership roles, so we would have the parents' voice in pre-designed meeting and [inaudible] and bringing parents to the table to see what they thought. In the past we'd been very good about bringing independent living [inaudible] and foster parents and community partners to the table, but we had never involved parents, and so this was a new undertaking for us. And the one thing that I will say that made all the difference for our program was that we had absolute administrative support from the very beginning. There was a line in the SOC grant that raised the issue of involving parents, and it kind of took on a life of its own. So we wanted parent leaders, we also wanted parents who would mentor families that were currently involved in the child welfare system. That is pretty much all we knew in the beginning. We had to make some decisions.

Now, we were well positioned to do that because there had been a Federal [SAMHSA] SOC project in this county so we could look to them for some of their experiences. Mental health became a key partner in figuring out how to put all of this together and also to draw on their experiences because they also had parent partners, family advocates as part of their SOC. And so we could draw on some of their experiences, but we also knew that child welfare, working with families, was quite different than a parent advocate working with the mental health system because generally in the mental health system, parents really wanted to help. They really appreciated someone to help them navigate what can be quite a complicated system. Child welfare is a little bit different. Pretty much no one wants us involved in their lives, so we knew that we had a special extra challenge that we needed to try to figure out. We also had the SOC planning and policy council, so being part of that policy council we could go into the community,

get input and also share what we were doing with them, so it was a nice opportunity to get a feel for what we were doing and how it was working.

First of all they hired me, I guess it was in June or July of 2004, and my charge was to figure out a child welfare model for involving parents in the child welfare system. And it was pretty much that open. So I looked at a whole lot of different models for mentoring. I didn't know a lot about mentoring and I certainly couldn't find anything that had to do with mentoring in child welfare at that point, so I looked at a lot of different models and what really opened my thinking was looking at a business model, and how mentoring works in business, rather than restricting ourselves to all those time honored child welfare mandated visit kind of restrictions that...look at a business model and see if that can offer to us, more flexibility and more opportunity to think outside the box. We also had a SOC grant coordinator who was sort of the backbone of everything, helped put everything together, helped keep me in line, and did all those kind of background things that are so important when you are putting together and implementing a new project.

We hired our first parent partners and they came on board in March of 2005, and we got to work right away, we trained them, we did a lot of talking, we did a lot of listening. And one of the things I would really point out to you is, we really had to make a decision about, are we going to have parent partners as parent leaders in name only or are we going to embrace them and bring them to the table as full partners. Listen to what they say. Figure out what we can do to respond to the things that need to be responded to. Are we going to listen to them or are they just going to be, kind of token, and we just go ahead and do what we [inaudible]. And we decided that we really wanted the parent's voice, and we really wanted to hear what they had to say, even though sometimes it really pinched a little. Sometimes they were telling us what we thought was working really well, not so good. Sometimes we resisted things that they said, like oh you must have misunderstood, we had to get past that and say, yeah that is happening. So it was a growing experience for all of us, maybe more of a growing experience than we expected in the beginning.

One of the things that we wanted to do, was by bringing parents on board, we wanted to de-mystify the whole concept of parents. Sometimes foster parents think of parents as being kind of scary people that, "you better not leave your purse in the room, because they'll steal it." Sometimes, social workers think of the parents as kind of bad people. Sometimes we don't listen to parents when they tell us things we probably needed to hear. We wanted to de-mystify the parent, we wanted to humanize the parent in the eyes of all the parties. We wanted to build bridges between child welfare and the families and how do you do that? Well one thing that you do is you have to be positive, you have to try to engage families. You have to be careful of the language that you use and the attitude that you have. We knew that when we brought parents on board there would be, by necessity, there would be a change in the culture. But we had no idea of what that was going to look like. We had no idea that social workers were going to be resistant to having parents co-located with them. We had no idea of the kinds of petty things that the parent partners that we brought on board would be criticized for. It's a shift, it's a different way of looking at parents, it's a different way of looking at the system and there was some resistance. Now I'll say our SOC coordinator and our director really made every effort to let people know that the parents would be on the floor co-located, to let them know what their role would be, to let them know they would be attending meetings, to do a little back work like whoever was chairing the meeting letting them know, don't put the parents on the spot. If there is something you want the parents to do, give them a little heads up so they are prepared to do this. That was all part of the professional development that we tried to do with the parents. We also tried to connect with the community by having the parent partners involved in community

partnership meetings and in re-designs, and in going out and meeting people and finding what resources were available in the community, making connections, using those resources. And we also, as we had this whole partnership with the parents, we also had to draw on the strengths of experts from child welfare as well, to make strategic decisions and help keep us from going too far off the path. By the very nature of inviting parents to participate, you're in kind of uncharted territory, but you can't go too far off the path or you'll lose all credibility and you find yourself in a position that could be dangerous. Dangerous for the program.

One of the questions that always comes up, and we aren't going to spend a lot of time on, but, "who are these people that we've brought on board as parent partners?" Well, we made a decision that we wanted people who had been through the child welfare system and if you'll go to the next slide, 'What Are Parent Partners?', maybe that will help, that we wanted people who had experience with the system but we wanted people whose lives were stable, and who got it.

So what we did, because we didn't really know any other way to do it, we went to the staff, and said "can you tell us who you've had on your case load that might make a good parent partner? Now we aren't asking you to give us a 100% good housekeeping guarantee that this is a person that will never mess up, but we are asking for people who really understood that the intervention of child welfare played a positive difference in their lives. And if we can get those people, then we can work with them and give them everything else that they need." We wanted to make sure that the people who were working as parent partners had children removed, were in foster care, so that they could understand at a very organic level, what it was like to lose your child and not know where your child was and maybe not be getting visits, and all of the confusion and chaos that surrounds that point of crisis. We wanted people who were required to do services and have a service plan and have to follow that service plan. We wanted people who were reunified with their children, people who were successes.

And these are our life-trained, paraprofessionals. People who have gone through this ordeal, this journey, and have come out in a way that has been successful for them and very helpful for our program. So we did. We had case workers and administrators identify child welfare staff who understood it, who got it. We picked people who had been able to reunify with their children, who understood what their actions were that got them in trouble, and that the role of the agency was to help them make the changes they needed to make in their life and they were better off for it. Most of the parent partners that we've hired, and quite frankly most of them [inaudible] deal with, have struggled with issues of substance abuse in some form. Now the family that they work with, they might come in because of domestic violence, they might come in because of dirty house, but the underlying issue almost always is substance abuse, to some degree or another.

We, at first, brought the coordinator position, which is what I was when I started out, I coordinated the program and the parent partners, worked with contract position, but then after some negotiating and some fast talking and trying to figure things out, we were able to become employees of the Child Abuse Prevention Council. The money went from the county to the Child Abuse Prevention Council, so technically we work for the Child Abuse Prevention Council, but we are housed in the county building, we can use county cars, county facilities, so it's sort of like no one really knows unless we point out that we work for the Child Abuse Prevention Council, and they became the fiscal agent. Now what's really good about that is we talk about helping people rise out of poverty, well now we were able to let them have the benefits and to give them vacation time and sick time and all of that stuff that we have become so accustomed to, they weren't getting as contract employees, and that personally made me feel really good that we could do that for our parent partners.

[27:57] We don't work with children at all. Sometimes we see the children, but we really have very little to do with the children. We work with the parent and really, from our point of view, what our role is, in addition to being parent leaders, which is a separate job function, is to work with the parent as a parent advocate, but not a blind advocate. If what the parent wants is just child welfare to be out of their life, get rid of that social worker and just give me my kid back, we can't advocate for that. We are advocates for the cases, because we know that that's what needs to happen for people to get their children back. So we advocate for the case plan in order to help the parents achieve what they are professing they want to achieve. So, finally we really try to draw on the strength of the family. And we also try to meet parents where they are at. So if they are at a place where maybe they have just gotten out of a treatment program and they need to find housing, we will help them with housing. If they need to find a treatment program, well we will work with the resources we have available to us to get them into a treatment program. Maybe what they need right at this particular moment is some clothing. Well, we will figure out a way to get them clothing. We can really go outside of the normal kind of child welfare expectations and parameters to work with people right at the place where they are. And that has seemed to work for us really well. We try to recognize their strengths, and if we could go to the next slide please, we try to also recognize that parents are also experts at what they need and who they are and what their family needs. Sometimes it takes a little teasing out, sometimes it takes a little coaxing, sometimes you know, we just need to have those conversations with parents. Sometimes, although our stated goal is reunification, sometimes what we need to do is have a conversation about, "is this really something that you think you want to do?" That's a hard conversation, but in many cases it's very liberating for our parents because it gives them an opportunity to think it through and maybe say, you know, I don't think I do want this.

Our working mission, and I bring this up because we really hold very firmly to this, is to help families to develop supportive relationships that will strengthen and support parents and families involved in the child welfare system.

**Nicole Bossard:** Hey Judi could you read that again, more slowly please so people can hear those pieces in there?

**Judi Knittel:** The mission of the parent partner program is to help families develop supportive relationships that will strengthen and support parents and families involved in the child welfare system, and to honor their ability to draw on family strength and resources in order to facilitate timely permanency for their children and we will honor whatever permanency looks like for them. We try to help parents develop social support because we feel that many times the parents we are working with have become very isolated. So we try to help them become reintegrated into their community so that now they have other friends and other supports and other people, and sometimes it's really, you know, helping them rebuild bridges with family members, because maybe things fell apart, maybe they burned those bridges in the past, and now it's time to start rebuilding and, we try to be a peer support and a mutual aid to the families, and there is a lot of overlap in all of this. But sort of going against the common wisdom of not living in the same community as the people that you're working with, I really try to assign my parent partners to their own communities because they know their community, and I'd like Cheryl for just a minute to talk about the benefit of working in your own community. And you'll hear a lot more from her later.

[32:42] **Cheryl Barrett:** Good morning or afternoon or whatever it is in your part of the country. I am Cheryl Barrett and I am the Heritage Parent Partner, I am also the senior parent partner.

The benefit of working in our own community...I work, I live, I shop, my community is where I do everything. The families that I work with, their children may go to school with my children. I live on the bus line so they know where I live, however they don't come by for dinner, I kind of put my boundaries up there, but we shop in the same shopping center, and I know the WIC<sup>1</sup> office and I know the principals at the school and I'm in my community, I know my community. And it's very helpful to then teach the parents who have been very isolated, to go and reach out and figure out how they are getting uniforms for the children at school, who is the person they are going to talk to, where the best place to shop is when they get their kids home and they are working on a really minimal budget or food stamps mostly, where the best places to shop are, sometimes taking them shopping, because as Judi said, sometimes they are very isolated, they burned their bridges with their family members and the friends they had when they came into child welfare aren't the kind of friends they want to leave child welfare for. So that's our primary goal, to get them re-hooked up with their own community, with the solid supports including their families, building the relationships back with their families, so they can be productive members of society in their own community.

**Judi Knittel:** And one of the things we've found is when they sort of don't need us anymore, they start kind of separating from us because they do have other supports. And if things get going and they hit a bump in the road or something, now they have somebody in their community that they can go to, that's Cheryl. And they may run into her at the grocery store, or they may run into her at a Walk for Recovery<sup>2</sup> or something like that, but they keep those connections and so we have found that to be very helpful and very beneficial.

If we could go to the slide that says 'Role of Parent Partners'...Parent partners are mentors, they are advocates, they are coaches, and to some degree cultural brokers. And I'm going to talk about all four of these at one time. You know, we like to believe, and this is a choice that we've made, but we like to believe that parents do things incorrectly because they don't know the right way to do them. So we spend a lot of time telling them, coaching them, working with them on the right way to do things. As an example, sometimes people get real frustrated and they get real loud, or maybe they think if they get two inches from your face and scream at you that somehow you are going to hear them and they are going to get what they want. So we spend a lot of time coaching them on ways to handle frustration or anger in adult ways. We spend time coaching them on how to behave in court or how to talk to their attorney or their social worker, on, "okay, you may think you look really hot, but hot is not the look we are going for in court, so let's talk about what appropriate attire for court might be." And sometimes we have to be cultural brokers because people just are not understanding each other. We choose to believe that everyone is well intended, but that sometimes we make assumptions or we simply don't understand. I'll give you an example of that. One of the things that we will do when maybe a parent is afraid to talk to their social worker, they are intimidated by their social worker or their social worker just plain makes them mad, but yet they have to have some communication, so what to do? We will role play with them. We will talk to them about how they want to get their message across, how they might need to make a list, so they get everything covered they want to cover. That if they are a little bit afraid to talk to their social worker, they could call the social worker's desk when they know the social worker is not going to be there, and leave a voice mail, and then the parent partner will let the social worker know, kind of give them a heads up, that this is a process, we are starting with calling the voicemail and eventually getting the courage to call you and talk to you. So we are cultural brokers in that way, helping

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<sup>1</sup> The speaker is referring to the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.

<sup>2</sup> Walk for Recovery is an annual event held by treatment programs for past and present alumni as well as community members.

people to understand each other and understand each other's limitations. And so that seems to have worked for us very well. Again, we try to de-mystify the system but we also try to, as we try to de-mystify parents, we are also trying to de-mystify the system for the families that we are working with.

One thing that we have done is provide families, and this is kind of like a reward when we get one of these, kind of build it up that this is a reward, is the parent handbook. And the parent handbook is nothing more than a three ring binder that we put a lot of stuff in to help them organize their lives. There is a list of important telephone numbers, there is a place to keep business cards that are so important. I'm going to ask Cheryl to just explain a little bit about the handbook, because it was her idea, and it really came to fruition and has turned out to be a helpful tool.

[38:40] **Cheryl Barrett:** This is based on my own experience with my own children and going through child welfare, because when, with my own case I started out in custody, so when I got out of jail I had nothing, but I was able to obtain a three ring binder, and in that binder I started keeping paper trails of everything that I was doing, because I realized that I cannot just assume my social worker knows all the good things I'm doing, that I needed to provide her with some paper trail. So based on that, we developed a parent handbook, and on the very front of the handbook, it has a place for your child's picture, because you always want the parents to know what's in it for them. Also inside there we have calendars, we have some papers on what the [inaudible] office is, we have papers to put your social worker's number, we have a brief outline of maybe your parent partner's story so you can see that connection. We have an extendable file inside there for court reports so that way when they carry this binder to court, everything they need is right there. There is a place in it to put in their sign options and their certificates from the programs they completed, everything designed to carry with them in this one binder throughout their case. And if they need a larger binder, we will get them a bigger binder to put their stuff in. We have a calendar in there so that way if they need to do a case plan and they need parenting and counseling we are helping them figure out what days of the week they can do this, so by looking at their calendar they can't go to parenting on one side of town on a Wednesday afternoon and then get to counseling that same afternoon on the other side of town because they are on the bus, so we kind of, we are able to look at their schedules and kind of really make choices about where their resources are going to be or their service is going to be so that way they will be more successful in getting their case plan, as well as in the binder there is a place where they can hold their pens and their pencils and their bus tickets and a bus schedule and a place to put their AA or NA sign-off sheet. Often times the worker will call up and ask or let me know a parent is having difficulties making it to her program and it could be something as simple as going over the bus schedule with her to make sure she is getting on the right bus. So we try to keep that all in one spot, and it is, it's a reward for the parent, let's see how motivated you are, let's jump into services, because we don't want to find those lying around the court bench or the bus, just not appreciating it. And it's really worked well in our community.

[41:50] **Judi Knittel:** And if we could go to, I think one last slide, and that is about parent empowerment. And we really believe that parents should be given the opportunity to have power. We take a lot of power away from them just by the way the system works. And maybe they deserve to have the power taken away from them, that's a different discussion. But the parent partner program is a totally voluntary program. Nobody orders them to have a parent partner. I don't even take referrals from attorneys or judges or social workers or well-meaning mothers-in-law. Once people say, okay I want a parent partner, now we can have a reasonable expectation that they will work with that parent partner. So we are kind of letting them make that

decision. And they may tell us in the beginning, “nuh uh, I’m going to lawyer up, I don’t need you people, go away, I don’t want to talk to you.” And maybe in 6 weeks or 8 weeks or a couple months, they may decide, well I could really use that help. And if they ask us for the help, we will immediately start working with them. But it needs to be their decision; we need to honor them just like our vision talks about. Our mission talks about, we believe in their ability to make good decisions for themselves and we honor that. And then our vision is to match families with parent mentors who will provide them with information, support and guidance as they negotiate through the child welfare system.

And this is really a very relationship-based approach. This is an approach to child welfare based on whatever relationship that we can develop with the parent, carving it out in a system where there really is no place for us. We have to carve it out ourselves. It’s really free of bureaucracy and paperwork in that there are no job descriptions or expectations of what a parent partner has to do. I ask my parents not to keep a lot of paperwork, not to keep a lot of notes. I do all the record keeping, all the paperwork, so I liberate them from that, giving them more time to work with the families.

As I said it is a voluntary position, which empowers parents. We do no fault matches. Quite different in regular child welfare. If I match somebody with a parent partner and that family doesn’t get along with the parent partner, somebody said that she used to know your cousin, that kind of thing, ask for a different parent partner. I’ll give you another parent partner. Again, empowering the parent and also not giving them the excuse-that parent partner was no good, that’s why I didn’t do well. I’ll give you a different one. We really try to include fathers. And we choose to believe that it is a child’s right to have both parents if we can give them two parents. By doing so we give them a whole half a family they maybe didn’t have before.

We don’t close cases. What we do is we put cases on inactive status and if it so happens that, the parent doesn’t need us, they kind of go away, we don’t hear from them for six months or two years, and then all of a sudden they have a problem, they’ve lost their daycare, they are losing their housing, they lost a job, we will reopen the case, no waiting list, no paperwork to fill out, and we will work with them, usually at that point it’s short-term solution-focused and hopefully we will keep the child from reentering foster care. We try to help connect them with formal and informal services or activities or good things in their life. We won’t even close a case; I mean put it on inactive status, unless we can identify 3 unpaid supports in that person’s life. And if we can’t identify 3 unpaid supports, then we better be working on helping them find three unpaid supports.

And as I mentioned before, we live and work in the community. We really are interested in moving on to the goals of the approach, with safe reunification, figuring out what parents’ interpersonal barriers might be, collaborating with anybody and everybody we might need to collaborate with, and to help people pull themselves out of social isolation. The parent client, if you’ll look at the next frame, the parent client are people that all we know about them we get a petition saying that either their children have been detained or are going to be detained, we meet them right at the courthouse and basically offer to help them. The parent partners usually will tell the parents at that point, you know I went through the system myself; my kids were in foster care. In the beginning we kind of have like a little pitch that we would give to them, a little bit of history. At that point parents don’t want that. They got their own story to tell, they aren’t interested in the parent partners’ story. At some point in time they’ll come around and show some interest, but right now all they really want is that offer of help. And then wherever the parent is, wherever the parent needs to go that’s where we’ll start. At lot of times they need to get into treatment programs, we will work with other resources in our community to make that

happen, and once they are in a treatment program, a lot of our work is kind of done. The program takes it over. We will become more involved at the courthouse and we will become more involved at the time of getting out of the program and making some decisions about what is next. Now if we talk about all the stuff that we have done and maybe our lessons learned, legitimately your question might be, is how effective is it? Can you prove that this is better than the way we have been doing work in the past? What kind of data do you have? And I'm going to turn this over to Jill Duerr Berrick who is one of my very favorite people in the world, and she is going to tell you a little bit about a study that Berkeley did that showed that we are getting some pretty good outcomes. Jill?

Okay we've lost Jill.

**Nicole Bossard:** I'm going to ask you all to hold on just one sec and I'm going to shoot her a quick message, but in the meantime I do want to let you all know that one of the things that I did forget to put on the slides that you have here is the actual website address for the report that Judi just mentioned, but we will make sure that before these slides go up on the [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov) website, that you all know where to go to find the report that Jill Duerr Berrick and her team did on the Contra Costa Parent Partner Program.<sup>3</sup>

**Judi Knittel:** While they are working frantically trying to find Jill, I will say that the full report, which is fairly lengthy and there is also an executive summary. So you might want to take a look at the executive summary and make a decision about whether or not you want to dive into that full report.

[Discussion of technical difficulties]

**Judi Knittel:** Maybe we could take some questions; if anyone has anything burning they would like to ask while we are waiting for Jill.

**Nicole Bossard:** There are a couple of ways you can submit questions, you can email them to [agray@icfi.com](mailto:agray@icfi.com) or if you have access online to the go-to webinar panel you can go ahead and type your questions into the little box on the right that says questions. It will say question and asker and I'll read it off from there, or Renee will read it off, whichever one of us gets it first.

While we are waiting for some questions to come through, Judi I did want to ask you to speak about, to just underscore this point, when you were speaking earlier about the initial decisions the agency has to go through, and Cheryl or Judi, whoever wants to field this, talking about the decision to have the birth parents be tokens and just kind of coming to the meetings to say we have parents at the meetings or at the table, or true partners, if you could give us a little background, a little more information on what that was like on the side of the agency, but also Cheryl I'd love to hear from you in terms of what kind of preparation did you need to feel comfortable going into those meetings for the first time, so that you could be there not just to say what you thought and to talk but also to be a working partner in those collaboratives, what kind of supports, what kind of guidance and preparation did you need to be a full working partner of that committee, or those committees that you are a part of?

**Judi Knittel:** Let me set the stage while Cheryl is thinking about that, remember all of this is a process. This was an idea about something that we wanted to do, and we were trying to figure out how to make it work, how to be effective and how could we do this in a meaningful way. So

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<sup>3</sup> See web link at conclusion of the transcript on page 21.

part of the process was maybe a few false steps, you know where we would bring the parents into a meeting and be gathering some information and maybe one of the parents would say, well wait a minute that isn't how it works for me. One good example was, and I am going to let Cheryl talk about this, when she was in jail and they would bring her to the courthouse because there was a hearing of some sort and what happened after they brought her from the jail into the courthouse.

**Cheryl Barrett:** I'm going to move back a little bit. My very first meeting on my very first day of work, before we even figured out what it would look like for parents to go to the meetings, I was just put in a meeting and inquiring minds wanted to know how my visits went and what that was like for me while I was in jail, incarcerated, and I had to tell them well I didn't have visits, number one, and number two I had to point out to them that I never even got into the courtroom, I never even got to see the judge, and I said they were making decisions about my family without me, which they were, so I would be brought over from one part of the county to be put in this little 12x12 holding cell with maybe 45 other women to stand there all day long while my kids were in court hearings. Or maybe they would bring me over in a bus, but forget to take me out of the bus and immediately one of our managers said, "please tell me this is not Contra Costa County you are from" and I said, "no it is", and at first they didn't want to believe what had happened, they are going, "oh no, that doesn't happen in our county", and after a couple months and few questions to other people, now they were inquisitive to know whether it really happens, and about three months into it they realized, yes that really does happen. Now parents get into every one of their court hearings, if they are in custody, they are brought over, their court hearing is postponed until that parent can come over. These are the little tiny internal changes that we've found that have really been helpful for parents as we've gone through this.

[55:14] **Judi Knittel:** And one of the lessons learned is, if you are unused to this kind of approach of working with parents, if you are going to learn anything from us it's don't get defensive, don't try to make excuses, say well you misunderstood, or that was that one time, but really listen and do a little homework and figure out if the concern is a valid concern. If it is not a valid concern, okay fine. If it is a valid concern it behooves us to take a look at that and do something about it. But being defensive or arguing the point really doesn't get us anywhere.

**Jill Duerr Berrick:** Hi folks can you hear me alright? My apologies, I've been listening to this wonderful conversation for the past little while but then when I spoke I was met with silence. So my apologies - who knows what happened with technology.

Let me just give everyone a big picture story of what we were trying to do and what we found out when we looked at this wonderful Contra Costa program. UC Berkeley researchers were brought in to take a look at this program and to do both a process and an outcomes study. So we were interested in the parent's experiences of working with a parent partner. We were interested in allied professional's experiences in working with parent partners. What did judges think? What about social workers? What about lawyers, what about mental health therapists? And then we were also interested in talking with the parent partners themselves to see whether or not participating in this program as an employee has any beneficial effects for them as well. In addition, everybody wants to look at data and we were no different, we wanted to look at the data to figure out whether or not pairing with a parent partner might have any marginal benefits to parents, particularly in terms of reunification. So, if you wouldn't mind going onto the next slide -that would be helpful. And the next slide after that.

So we did a survey of the clients, just a paper survey, to find out a little bit more about their experiences with the program. And we certainly found out that clients were experiencing this

program in a way that was constant and was what the program designers had intended. In other words, they were experiencing this as an empowering program, they were experiencing this as a relationship-based program, they were experiencing the program that gave them an overall sense of support, information and power, and overall the degree of satisfaction among birth parents with this program was exceptionally high. They were very eager to tell us that this was extremely beneficial to them and to their families.

We then did focus groups with our parent clients and found out that, again, it had echoed what we heard on the paper survey, in that parents were very satisfied with the experience. But in the focus groups we learned more about the nature of their satisfaction. What was it about participating with a parent partner that was a unique experience, that was a valuable experience? And here we found three things come out really loudly, loud and clear. The first was that it was important for them to join with another individual in child welfare who had shared a common background. Parent clients told us over and over again, as much as social workers tend to be helpful, and as much as they might appreciate the support and education, the information that social workers provide, there is often a social distance between a parent client and a social worker. And the parent partners can reduce that social distance, can offer a similar perspective. "I've been there, I went through it, I came out on the other side, look how much better things can be if you too go on this journey." So parent clients were very articulate about the importance of having someone in child welfare who had a shared experience but who is now in a very different place in their life. They also communicated to us, and here is an example, "the parent partner is more...they are on your level and they've experienced what they have experienced; they went through what you went through. And the CPS workers haven't went through it; they just went through the school. Most of the CPS workers are just school smart-they're not experienced and went through it." So this really is a comment from a parent client that epitomizes the essential feature that is so important to them-that they need...it doesn't minimize the importance of social workers but what the parent partner can do is expand the experience for parent clients so they can feel as though they have connected with someone who understand their experience.

[1:00:14] They all spoke with us at length about the importance of communication. Parent partners were frequently in conversation with them, they were readily available to them, and they would talk with them in a language that was different from the language used in social work. Not necessarily professional language in the sense of not filled with jargon and filled with a language intended for the court system, that as we all know can be dizzying because of the requirements of the court system, but instead was very plain and very straight. Parent clients told us that parent partners told them things they otherwise didn't hear from other actors in the child welfare system in the sense that people were direct and honest, direct and honest about what parent clients were doing and direct and honest about the implications of their actions and behaviors for the future of their families. Things that were hard to hear but important to hear. Parent partners were also very frequently in contact. Parent partners told us that they gave out their cell phone numbers, that they told clients they were available 24/7, 365 days a year, and what is interesting is the parent clients told us how much they appreciated knowing that their parent partners was available. Of course as researchers, we then came back to the parent partners and said, "oh my goodness, don't you have a personal life? Do these people ever let you alone, can you ever have dinner with your family, what do you do about holidays when people call?" And they indicated that the remarkable aspect of giving parent clients the permission to call is what is important because the vast majority of parent clients are very respectful of parent partners and their time, and didn't necessarily push those boundaries too far into the personal life. They appreciated that parent partners acted as role model, as I said that they were available all the time and accessible during nights and weekends. Sometimes parent

clients indicated that when they most needed to talk to a parent partner was very early in the morning when they were just waking up, and they knew that it was going to be hours before a service agency was going to be open and they knew they could call and just get some advice and some assistance.

The third component part that seems to be especially important to the effectiveness of this program is the sense that parent partners feel supported. This seems to be an important feature because if you look at the research on birth parents in the child welfare system, and admittedly it's a fairly thin research base, because most researchers don't spend a lot of time talking with parents about their experience in the child welfare system. What research does exist tells us the parent clients feel seemingly isolated when they are in the child welfare system, they feel as though they are walking on a path all by themselves, that they are doing it alone and that there is no one else who has experienced anything like this. The fact that parent partners can offer a sense of support to them, emotional support, material support, support developing self-reliance and importantly support regarding substance abuse is a really critical key feature that appears to have a different tone and nature, this aspect of support is somewhat different when it comes from a parent partner than it appears to be when it comes from any other professional in the child welfare system. And so it's this very different, very fundamental emotional support that makes people who are parent clients feel as though their experience is not an isolated one, it is not a lonely one, it is one that they can walk on this path and they can walk on this path with the hand of someone who has been there before.

We did interviews with the parent partners themselves and one of the nice things that I really enjoy about this program is that it appears that participating in this program as an employee has these resounding effects back on the employees themselves. Judi certainly talked about how they handpicked their parent partners to be in this program and what key personality characteristics that they are looking for. What is interesting is that the folks who become parent partners have made enormous changes, fundamental changes in their lives since the time they were involved in child welfare, and then becoming a parent partner continued that evolution and that transformation and that they have a better understanding of themselves as parents. And so what is very nice is that participating as an employee has this special effect of not only affecting parent clients but continuing to bolster and embolden parenting skills and make parent partners feel as though they continue to improve and to understand their own parenting. And I don't know about the rest of you, but as a parent myself I think that if I had barely experienced where I was coming home saying, "I am more reflective tonight than I was this morning about the way I am going to parent my children" that my kids would be better off every single day of their lives. So that's a lovely extra component of the program.

The professionals who are involved in this program also have very positive views. Judi indicated that in the beginning when they started the parent partner program there were wrinkles that they needed to figure out with regard to social workers accepting parent partners, judges understanding the role of parent partners, lawyers understanding that they could ally with parent partners and could use them to the benefit of clients. What we found when we talked with allied professionals a couple years into the program that all the initial hesitation had really evened out and there was uniformly a tremendous sense that parent partners provide an enormous benefit not only to parent clients but to the system as a whole.

So then we are looking at some outcomes here. In order to understand this graph let me just tell you what is behind it. We looked at families who had been paired with a parent partner and who had received parent partner services. We then looked at them in comparison to a historical cohort, people who, three years previously, did not have access to a parent partner because the

program did not yet exist. We then matched clients to the best of our ability on a variety of characteristics, that in the research literature, are associated with reunification-the age of the child, the ethnicity of the child, the reason for removal, and I came up analysis to look at what happened after 18 months of participating with a parent partner. Which families reunify and what is the rate of reunification for families who utilize the parent partner program compared to parents who from a previous era but a similar child welfare system who did not have access to a parent partner. And there you can see that the difference is certainly significant. So you have over 60% of families who had paired with a parent partner reunify within 18 months, and that is comparing to 40% of the families who did not have a parent partner. Now saying that, I'm excited about those data, those data are incredibly promising, but there is an underlying problem that we have to recognize which is what data we didn't have available to us was the circumstances and the characteristics of the families who were offered a parent partner but who declined a parent partner. And so part of when we look at that blue line and we see that very high reunification rate, which is substantially higher than the 50% that you typically see across most jurisdictions, the question that has to be raised is: to what extent can these very positive findings related to having a parent partner be attributed to participation in the parent partner program, and to what extent are these attributed to the fact that these parents who said yes I want you in my life, to what extent these parents are different parents. Are they more motivated, are they more interested in change, are they more motivated to change, are they more ready to change? We don't have data on that, so the next stage that really needs to happen in order to understand the underlying characteristics of the benefits of the parent partner program and the marginal benefits to families is to conduct a random assignment clinical trial. Then we can really understand the families who accept parent partners, the families who don't accept parent partners, and the families who simply weren't offered parent partners. So one of these days we are hoping to switch studies and role that out.

So my concluding comments are just this lovely quote from one of the parents who participated in the program. She says, "There are many people with so many problems, problems like our problems...and they need the support. They [the County] need more people like her [the parent partner]." So those are the end of my comments, I'm trying to think do we have another slide here?

**Nicole Bossard:** We have one more Jill, and I think this one is all three of you all were going to jump in on this one, but the practical consideration slide?

**Judi Knittel:** Well, we are sort of in the second generation now of this parent partner idea, and one of the questions that I was kind of asked to take a look at today is, "how do we train parent partners, what kind of supports are available to them", and we did talk about this before, the cultural shift within the agency, and keeping a clear vision of what the parent partner's role is, and I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that, but I will tell you we have a professional development plan that includes everything from mandated reporter training to county org chart, which is they need to know that there is a bureaucracy that they are working for and that there is a hierarchy and a chain of command. This is a TDM<sup>4</sup> county, so we give them training in TDM readiness, there's a training at UC Davis on strength-based family engagement, we do another training...we bring in someone from San Diego who does a training on establishing effective boundaries for paraprofessional staff, as I'm sure you understand, are different than boundaries for regular professional staff. We make sure they have a training in CalWorks<sup>5</sup>, so they know

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<sup>4</sup> The speaker is referring to Team Decision-Making meetings.

<sup>5</sup> The CalWorks program provides temporary financial assistance and employment focused services to families with minor children that meet the State's income eligibility requirements.

how to navigate the CalWorks system, and I know there is a lot of interest from the Linkages<sup>6</sup> people looking at how paraprofessional staff can be helpful in implementing linkages, and recently Cheryl and I were at the Linkages conference and it talked about how really it's a no brainer, because paraprofessional staff can be right in there working with people and helping to streamline the system. We also do a training on presentation skills, how to tell your story, how to decide what story you want to tell. Also with the presentation skills we do sort of a sub-topic of going to meetings-having a professional appearance, knowing why you've been invited to the meeting, are you supposed to make a presentation or are you supposed to bring something back from the meeting? So we try to identify in this county what the role, the function is of the parent partners, what we think they need. We will give them other training as necessary or as identified.

One of the things we try to do and is very effective is doing the Annie E. Casey *Building a Better Future* training where we have parent partners and social work staff, all in the same room for about two and half, three days, to talk about a bunch of issues relative to handling someone with an adult attitude or grief and loss. But where the real magic happens in that curriculum is when the social workers begin to connect with the parent partners and the parent partners begin to connect with the social workers and they realize they have an awful lot of similarities and in many cases not a lot of differences. And they begin to really respect and appreciate each other as human beings.

Supports available to do them, very quickly, I do individual supervision with them. At one point in time we had a parent partner where we thought there was a problem, we thought there was some problem, maybe a relapse or where something was not going right. And frankly I didn't know how to handle it. So I brought it up in our group supervision and I said, "You know when there is trouble, maybe a relapse or something, how would you want me to handle that?, because I really don't know how to do it" And they said to me, what we want you to do is in our individual supervision, ask us how we are doing in our own recovery, which is something that would have never occurred to me, it seemed so intrusive. So I now take that as permission, and every time when we have an individual supervision, I ask people, how are they doing in their own recovery? What are their supports, what can I do to help them? And truly I mentor the mentors, it's a parallel process. We have sort of a policy in Contra Costa County where in a very natural way people form their own associations and their own friendships and there is a lot of relationships between the parent partners and the staff in the building where they are located, they can go to administrators if they feel they need to go to administrators, and there are lots of funny stories about Cheryl getting Dana [inaudible] trapped in an elevator making a pitch for whatever Cheryl felt one of her families might need. And that has worked for us. That simply has worked for us. We have prepared staff that we were bringing parent partners on board, and mostly they were enthusiastic and interested and they wanted to know the story and sometimes they said, "we just don't feel like we can be as open on the floor when parents are around, and we don't like this idea" and the caravan moved on and we continued with the program and we didn't let the naysayers hold us back.

[1:15:57] And having a clear vision, I want to talk about that for just a minute. It really means that we do have a true partnership with the parents in this agency. And what the parent partner says is absolutely as important as any social worker, or supervisor or administrator. All will be taken into consideration. Our approach is how can I be helpful to this parent, how can I be helpful to this social worker, how can I be helpful to this case plan? We do not try to assume any

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<sup>6</sup> The Linkages Program is a care management program which serves frail elderly and younger people with disabilities who are at risk of being placed in an institutional setting.

kind of role, or power or authority, we are not case managers, we are not social workers, we are not therapists, we are not attorneys. Like I said, we had to carve out a niche, and we thought the best way to do that was, how can I be helpful to the system. We have no power, but the collaboration is what makes us powerful. And I just want to end with this: because this is groundbreaking work, because this is very new to all of us, because we are trying to figure it out as we go along, if you are interested there is a quote from Emerson that I think you might find helpful—"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path, and blaze a trail." Thank you.

**Nicole Bossard:** [claps] I'm clapping for all 267 people who were on the call. Thank you, thank you thank you so very much, Judi, Cheryl, Jill, and now for folks still on the line, now it's your turn to step up and grab the proverbial mike and get your questions answered based on what is going on in your community, what is going on in your parent advocate or engagement program across the country, and really engage the folks that we have on the line in what you are doing.

So Aracelis I'm not sure if you have any questions that have been emailed to you, or Renee if you have any on your screen that we can go to.

Okay Renee why don't you go ahead.

#### **Questions:<sup>7</sup>**

**Renee:** Have you ever used parents in the program who did not reunify, but children moved to adoption or kinship care?

**Judi Knittel:** Yes, we have. And a decision that we made was that regardless of where the case was, the status of the case, we don't close cases. Because kind of what happens, and this might not happen where you are, but the case gets transferred and now all the focus is on the child, and there really is no focus on the parent anymore. The parent has either surrendered the child or they've lost their rights through the court, and there is a tremendous amount of grief and loss, so what human compassion would say this is a time when this family needs that kind of support like at no other time in their life. And one of the things we try to do is make them aware of the consent to contact so they can have information in the adoption process, and it gives them some hope that maybe their child will reconnect with them at some point in time. So we really use that as an opportunity to gather around, rally around the parent at that particular time, and actually we are going to be meeting with a representative from the adoption unit in the next couple of weeks to talk about getting more accurate information in the adoption file because sometimes that information gets lost, but the parent partner holds so much of that information. So yes, we really do stick with the families and help in whatever way makes sense to them at that point in time. Does that answer your question or were you looking for something else?

**Nicole Bossard:** Because we are doing questions that folks have submitted, if Judi's response did not answer your question submit online or email Aracelis with a follow up.

**Judi Knittel:** Okay and Cheryl told me that what the question was, was do we ever hire a parent partner that did not reunify, no. Long answer, short answer. No.

**Renee:** Okay, I have another question. I'm not sure who this was directed to, "How many families are you currently working with, how many parent partners do you have?"

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<sup>7</sup> See pages 21-22 for responses to questions not addressed during the Webinar.

**Judi Knittel:** Okay so, we had some stimulus money, and we had 9 parent partners. We lost four of them, and these were temporary positions, so the stimulus money went away and they went away on September 15<sup>th</sup>. Five of them...no...wait a second I'm trying to do the math here and Cheryl is coaching me, but right now we have four parent partners, and over the course of time we've had 1, 2, 4, 9...sometimes we have part-time parent partners that try to work this in around their waitressing jobs or going to school or whatever. At any given time a parent partner will probably have a caseload of 35 up to 60 families but they aren't really high maintenance usually because a lot of the parents are in inpatient treatment programs, they may already be reunited with their child and they need minimal attention, so it really kind of depends on what they can manage and we try to make those assignments. In the time since we've started in mid 2005, we've probably worked with 1000 families. And like I said, that's working with a staff of 1,2,3...when you consider how many social workers there are, that's pretty remarkable.

**Renee:** Have you ever had a case where the parent partner and parent's attorney disagreed as to what should happen? How was this resolved?

**Judi Knittel:** Well, first of all, we don't have an opinion about what should happen. We stay neutral. We are advocates for the case plan, but I would say in 99.99% of the time, the parent's attorney is thrilled to have a parent partner on board because we don't challenge their power or authority or knowledge, but can maybe translate what needs to be translated to the [parents] in a way they can understand and they speak a language that the parents understand better than maybe lawyer talk, and also we can give them some clear messages like we can talk to her about not coming to court looking like that, so they find us helpful in that way.

**Nicole Bossard:** Cheryl did you want to jump in on that with any personal experiences, or do we want to take a couple more questions.

**Cheryl Barrett:** Couple more questions, Judi answered that beautifully. We have a wonderful relationship with the attorneys and we work with whatever the attorneys think is best for the parent. We are trying to help them.

**Judi Knittel:** As long as we are talking about court, let me say this very quickly, when we first started, we didn't expect to go in the court room with the parent, we just never expected that the very first day the parent partner was invited into the court room but now many times the judge will say, "you see that lady over there, she is your parent partner. You listen to her. You see that man over there? He is your parent partner. You do what he tells you to do and you'll be okay." So the relationship has really come together in a way we never could have, would have expected.

**Nicole Bossard:** Let's do one more question and then I've got a couple of concluding comments, and I don't want to take us over. Renee, if you have one more let's do one more and then we will close it up.

**Renee:** What training was there? Was there a curriculum?

**Nicole Bossard:** I'm assuming that, gosh, I'm assuming that's what kind of training is available to parent partners, Judi and Cheryl, I'm thinking.

**Judi Knittel:** Well I did touch on that a little bit earlier...

**Nicole Bossard:** You did, you did the *Building a Better Future* program.

**Judi Knittel:** We have that training as well as...we can go to whatever training the county puts out.

**Cheryl Barrett:** You are invited to all staff training, whether it is motivational interviews or safety in the workplace, whatever internal training they have for staff development, we can participate in, and then Judi does have the original, the basic training plan that all parent partners have to go through before they start matching up and mentoring. I believe that is online somewhere and Judi could probably share that.

**Judi Knittel:** And the other thing that we do is we have monthly group supervision, so if I identify an area that is maybe a little bit weak or something we kind of need to brush up on, then I will do a special training during group supervision time to address that issue, so it's just a natural part of the evolving of the program and professional development.

**Nicole Bossard:** And Judi, do you know, or Aracelis maybe, in some of the other products that we have through the National Evaluation Center, I'm just not certain right this second, do we have some of their professional development materials up there already?

**Aracelis Gray:** Not specific to what is used in Contra Costa. We sort of describe, just as Judi did earlier, some of the key components of the professional development plan, but don't have the actual materials.

**Judi Knittel:** I think a lot really depends on how you are going to invite your parent partners to participate in the system. If you are going to have them mentoring child welfare clients that is sort of one skill set, if you are going to have them involved in working on linkages, that is a whole different kind of skill set. Really I would invite people to take a look at what your needs are and just tailor something to your needs. What makes sense in your county or in your agency.

**Nicole Bossard:** And I think having, you know, and I do want to underscore, Jill I don't want to put words in your mouth but certainly taking Judi's encouragement to heart, really thinking through what your individual context is based on what you want your program to do will really go very far in not only helping you develop a good program but to be able to get some good data out of the program that you end up using and ultimately evaluating. Did you want to jump in on that Jill? I was trying to open the door for you Jill.

**Jill Duerr Berrick:** I just think that with any evaluation approach you want to be very clear on what your goals are. And in this case there was a real clear goal that they were interested in changing processes and experiences of CW system, but sort of the fundamental bottom line was also does this make any adjustments to our reunification rates? Can we see kids get home more quickly, can we get kids home safely, and can we get kids home and stay home? And that was a really fundamental goal of the program, and so again, different counties, other jurisdictions may have different goals and that would be fine, but to the extent that you can identify what those goals are and then suggest a data collection strategy around that you'll be in good shape.

**Judi Knittel:** I also think that one step will lead you to the next step. Like we are making a full court press right now in working with fathers and we've had focus groups and we are trying to figure out what is effective in working with fathers, what are father's perceptions of what we are

doing. We are going to be working with fathers because we think it is so important for our parent partners to reflect the rich diversity of the community that we are in. So we try to be mindful of that in everything that we do as well.

**Nicole Bossard:** Well, I know that that is certainly now the new hot button, and we are just a little bit over time, but I do just want to point you all to the slides right now, we've provided contact information for our marquee headliners, Judi, Cheryl and Jill, who have been just wonderful, and again I just want to say from the Center and speaking for all the folks that were listening in and the questions that you've answered, thanks so much for sharing your experiences and lessons that you've learned and the evidence you've created and built around this program.

One thing that I wanted to point your attention to was I mentioned earlier the National Training and Evaluation Center, one of our charge was to develop new knowledge and disseminate that information out to the field, so again at the [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) website there are a host of things that I want to point your attention to, one of which is a strategic planning guide which you could use in helping you do a kind of assessment like Judi and Jill were just talking about. If you want to learn more about the SOC demonstration initiative and its focus on infrastructure as opposed to you know, just bringing in additional services right from the start, we have a guide there that you can reference, the building infrastructure guide for SOC. As well as we have a series of short issue briefs called *A Closer Look* that are related to each of the SOC principles as well as an overview of the SOC demonstration program, and we also have, what I want to point you all to, the SOC Infrastructure Toolkits, which are some pieces that you can go to if you've done your due diligence around doing your internal assessment and figuring out what your program goals are but you are kind of at a loss in your head about whether there are things you can do immediately or whether there are tools you can use, please check out the SOC Infrastructure Toolkits, they will give you materials that these 9 grantees have created over the course of the five years and one year extension that you may be able to use and to jog your creative juices or that you can use for purposes of adaptability. Once you have consulted your local evaluation partner, which I am certain is a part of your collaborative and planning group - let me send you there.

And also in terms of the issue of meaningful family engagement, Judi is also working with me with another Children's Bureau funded technical assistance resource – the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections ([nrcpfc.org](http://nrcpfc.org)) and there are some materials there on engagement you can go to and download as well. So the last slide that I will share with you is just for contact information about the Center for SOC. Aracelis Gray who you heard from earlier, who is our fearless leader and project director, her contact information is there as well as my contact information is listed. If you have questions about the demonstration initiative, the Center or the cross-site evaluation finding you can certainly feel free to contact Aracelis or myself and we will respond promptly. So I just want to give the mike back to Judi, Jill and Cheryl if you all have any closing remarks, or Aracelis for that matter if you have any closing comments before we shut down.

**Aracelis Gray:** Thank you everybody. We really appreciate it.

**Nicole Bossard:** Thank you everybody this has really just been a joy for me and of course to my friends in Contra Costa, you guys are fantastic and it's just been a real pleasure to learn from you again.

## Additional Questions and Resources

The Contra Costa Parent Partner Program local evaluation report can be accessed at: [http://www.parentadvocacy.org/padocs/Final\\_Report\\_UC\\_Berkeley\\_2009\\_Evaluation\\_of\\_Contra\\_Costa\\_Parent\\_Partners.pdf](http://www.parentadvocacy.org/padocs/Final_Report_UC_Berkeley_2009_Evaluation_of_Contra_Costa_Parent_Partners.pdf)

**Question:** You did not address engaging the parents in the decision-making process. Can you provide advice on this subject?

**Answer:** In Contra Costa County we try to engage with parents early on and encourage them to be a part of the decision-making process. They are invited to attend TDM meetings (see above) and to be an active participant in their case plan. The parent partners coach families in the skills they may need to have these discussions with their social worker and attorney. As we help them understand the safety focus and the court process, parents begin to understand the rationale behind what is being asked of them. At that point they are far better positioned to participate in realistic discussions of their family, services, case plans, court orders, etc. When parents have parent partners, there seem to be fewer contests because the parent's voice is heard and taken into consideration earlier on and (this is very important) the parents feel heard, and so they don't have to go to contest. It takes a lot of the contention out of the dynamic.

**Question:** There was reference to 2 training curricula...Annie E. Casey and U C Davis...could you re-visit the names of these curricula for clarity?

**Answer:** Annie E. Casey has a week-long training called *Building a Better Future*. In Contra Costa County this training was co-facilitated by a staff person (social worker, supervisor, staff development) and one of our parent partners. The class was composed of an equal number (as far as possible) of agency staff and new parent partners. It is a very powerful training that explores topics like "Grief and Loss", "How to settle differences with an adult attitude", "Handling Conflict with an Adult Attitude". I understand that they have updated the curriculum, but I haven't seen the new version.

As far as the Davis curriculum, I know that they developed and field tested something, but I am not really sure what it looked like. I believe that was an attempt to develop a standardized training for all parent partners in California. We were represented on the parent's advisory board, but I never sent any of my parents through the training, preferring to train them myself.

**Question:** What additional training would be helpful?

**Answer:** Right now, our core training includes:

- ❖ Working within a county organization, chain of command, etc;
- ❖ Confidentiality and Mandated Reporter Training;
- ❖ TDM Readiness;
- ❖ Strength-based Family Engagement;
- ❖ *Building a Better Future*;
- ❖ CalWorks;
- ❖ Court Training;
- ❖ Presentation Skills (how to tell your story, which parts are appropriate for any given audience; general public speaking). This training also includes meeting etiquette including: How to behave in meetings, how to participate, generally being prepared and professional.

**Question:** Any special training in relation to fathers, (for those with domestic violence history)?

**Answer:** Right now this is under development. We have conducted staff surveys in order to determine staff perceptions on how we as an agency and they as a worker interact with fathers. Currently, we are holding focus groups with fathers and listening to their experiences. Once we can identify themes, we will be looking at developing a training (or a series of trainings) for agency staff. We do take advantage of training opportunities as they become available through UC Davis, Bay Area Academy, Strategies, etc. We may also develop some training for fathers - maybe through a father's support group.

I think that once we have gathered information we will be better positioned to make recommendations relative to additional training/services/supports. We are not there yet.

**Question:** Can you give me an idea as to how parent partners are paid? Do they receive benefits? Were all of these funds covered under the initial System of Care Grant?

**Answer:** We have actually done it a few ways. In the beginning the parent partners were full-time contract employees and were paid for out of the System of Care grant. They had no benefits. As of January 1, 2009, the money went to the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) and CAPC became the fiscal agent for the program. They get an administrative fee. This arrangement gives the parent partners the same benefits as CAPC employees, including health, dental, vacation, and retirement.

This arrangement is truly a partnership between CFS<sup>8</sup> and CAPC and works very well. Parent partners are co-located in the county buildings, and have full access to equipment and county cars.

I have also maintained a few part-time parent partners who work part-time with a small number of cases. They allow me to have some staffing flexibility. The part-time parent partners have been paid by board order.

We have another Federal grant (CAPFO<sup>9</sup>) that has paid their salaries (and their responsibilities have expanded somewhat) since SOC ended. We were also able to hire some parent partners for temporary positions through stimulus money. That money ended on September 15th, reducing the size of my staff from 10 to 5.

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<sup>8</sup> Child and Family Services (CFS) was the recipient of the Child Welfare Systems of Care grant. Under State supervision, CFS is responsible for the administration of child welfare services in the county.

<sup>9</sup> The Comprehensive Assessment for Positive Family Outcomes is a discretionary grant from the Children's Bureau.