

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Andrew Dietz, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning; Ashley Mensch, Columbia County (PA) Family Center; Laura Bosnak-Thompson, McKeesport (PA) Family Center; Larry Klinger, Allegheny Intermediate Unit

00:00:00 [Music Introduction]

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:03]: 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]: So, when we talk about primary prevention of child maltreatment in the child welfare sense, we are really talking about taking the steps to make sure children and families avoid coming into contact with the child welfare system in the first place. So, we're not talking about Child Protective Services as much as we're talking about family strengthening and stabilization.

[00:00:53]: Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, I'm Tom Oates, and really glad you could join us for today's episode. Now, strengthening families to create a safe and stable home for children can mean a number of things - from parenting skills, a stable environment, to financial management and more - so, with all of these needs communities are working to connect families with local resources that provide support. And there are community-based centers where all of this collaboration and organization happens all across the country.

[00:01:25]: However, as we just mentioned, we're not specifically talking about Child Protective Services. These prevention efforts can and are being organized and managed by various state and county agencies and that's because the benefits that children and families are seeing through these collaborative support centers, they span well beyond child welfare and impact things like health, family stabilization and education. And that's what we're going to be talking about in today's episode - delivering prevention services through education.

[00:01:56]: See, Pennsylvania's community collaborations come in the form of what are called Family Centers. Now, this network of Family Centers has been in place for a number of years and spans across an entire state, however, recently, the Family Centers Network's management and operations was recently moved to under the state's Office of Child Development and Early Learning. Again, strong and stable families not only lead to reduction of child maltreatment, but also support other positive outcomes - including stronger learning and development in young children.

[00:02:30]: Now, what is interesting is not only how the Office of Child Development and Early Learning organizes and manages all of this - and you're gonna hear the, the acronym OCDEL, that's what the Office Child Development and Early Learning stands for - not only are you gonna hear about how they support the state's Family Center Network, but also how Family Centers work together.

[00:02:51]: So, we're able to bring a handful of folks together to talk about the actual networking within the Family Center Network. So, we're gonna be joined by Andrew Dietz, from the state's Office of Child Development and Early Learning to talk about the statewide support of the Family Centers; Ashley Mensch is the director of the Columbia County Family Center, and that's in a much more rural part of

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

Pennsylvania; Laura Bosnak-Thompson, she's the director of the McKeesport Family Center - now that is one of a series of Family Centers in Allegheny County and that includes Pittsburgh and is the state's second most populated county. So, that series of Family Centers in Allegheny County is coordinated within a region-wide education service agency called the Allegheny Intermediate Unit - so there's a specific coordination and collaboration within those Family Centers and Larry Klinger, he is from the Allegheny Intermediate Unit and so he will be joining us, as well.

[00:03:49]: So, we will talk about how the state supports the Family Center Network, how a rural Family Center maintains its partnerships and collaboration to provide services to families and we'll dive into a network within a network - in looking how each of the Family Centers within Allegheny County share services with each other.

[00:04:08]: Now, again, these prevention services are all operated under the state's Office of Child Development and Early Learning, but it opens us up to thinking about prevention in the wider scope outside of Child Protective Services and how so many systems are interrelated and how dealing with the root causes of prevention are actually the same root causes of so many other factors that put stress on children and families. Lots to dive into, so let's dive in - to talk prevention, community collaboration and education.

[00:04:42]: Alright, well let's get right into it and what's going on in Pennsylvania and, Andrew Dietz, let me bring you in first, here - talk to me about what the state's objectives were when they shifted the entire Family Center Network and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood, as well, into OCDEL, into the Office of Child Development and Early Learning - What were they really looking for here?

ANDREW DIETZ [00:05:03]: Sure, so, it is actual part of the governor, the current Governor Wolf's proposal, a part of his Government That Works goal, it was decided through that to shift the Family Centers and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood from the Office of Children, Youth and Families, OCYF, to the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, which we refer to as OCDEL.

[00:05:22]: Family Centers already aligned with the other home visiting and family support programs we housed within OCDEL - which included early intervention sometimes as a home visiting component, our Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Grant, our Interfamily Partnership and our Children Trust Fund were the other programs we already housed. The Family Centers and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood moved into OCDEL under the Bureau of Early Intervention Services and Family Supports. All state family, all state funded Family Centers in Pennsylvania use evidence-based home visiting programs, Parents As Teachers, and the leadership at OCDEL and OCYF felt that the Family Centers and Fatherhood Programs would be a better fit and have better access to supports being a part of OCDEL's suite of family support programs.

[00:06:09]: And it's also possible that some of the families may be receiving multiple services through the programs OCDEL offers - OCDEL also oversees Early Childhood childcare centers and subsidy in some other, others, so they may be receiving services through those, as well. And they felt that it would be better integration amongst all of those services for Early Childhood and families who need access to those types of services and also that was to share information, if needed.

TOM OATES [00:06:39]: So, it's clearly a sense, you know, let's get the right staff, the right infrastructure to support this and if, and if you're able to really handle a number of different services for families - and

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

OCDEL has those kind of abilities and that past history - you can make, make sense of let's make sure these services are being delivered in a method and in a way that's gonna be feasible and that's gonna be efficient, and that's, you know, that's you've got some history in. So, that makes complete sense, you know, where it's not necessarily an education-based initiative, but it's a family support services need and that, you know, system-wide can affect, in terms of outcome, positive outcomes, you know, across the board for a family.

[00:07:19]: So, let's dive into a little bit more of the actual management, so in terms of supporting the entire Family Center Network, what's the role that OCDEL then plays in support for each of these Family Centers?

ANDREW DIETZ [00:07:32]: Sure. So, our role really, I think, is to help facilitate and integrate the Family Centers and Fatherhood Programs into our existing suite of programs, which I alluded to earlier. Just to make a brief mention, OCDEL is both the Department of Education and Human Services in Pennsylvania, so it's overseen by both, it's a unique agency amongst states - I think there's only two or three other states that have that situation.

[00:07:55]: So, really for the Family Centers and Fatherhood Programs, going back a little bit before they even came to OCDEL, myself and some of the other staff from OCDEL and the Pennsylvania Key, who is one of our partners, went out and did a tour of almost all of the Family Centers and Fatherhood Programs over the summer to see what they really needed and understand the services they were provided and how we can help them moving forward. And also to see what work they were offering beyond the work that's supported through the state to get an idea of what other services were available to our families in other, receiving other OCDEL services, as well.

[00:08:33]: So, I mentioned OCDEL uses a business partner, the PA Key to provide monitoring and implementation oversight for many of the, the Family Centers and the Fatherhood programs - for all of them. After the tour we worked with those two - we have two specialists through the Key - Ashley and Heather - to develop the monitoring processes for the Family Centers and Fatherhood programs and we're still, to this day, tweaking them as we learn more and as we get feedback from the Family Centers and Fatherhood.

[00:09:01]: OCDEL also serves, now, all of the Family Centers and Fatherhood programs have a direct point of contact with Ashley and/or Heather, so they're able to reach out to them if they have any concerns or any questions and get direct feedback from the state, which is something I don't believe they had access to before. So, it gives them always one point of contact.

[00:09:23]: And in addition, additionally, they will receive, eventually, a fiscal and audit, which will help them, as well, it's something we do for all of our programs. They haven't received those yet, that's also through our partner at the Key does that, as well for us.

[00:09:40]: And then I want to make a brief note that our partnership with EITA - which is Early Intervention Technical Assistance in Pennsylvania - through the Family Centers and Fatherhood programs moving over, we've actually been able to provide trainings on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, trainings through partnerships with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, trainings on home visitor safety, various trainings to the Family Centers and various topics that they've requested through the, since they came over in last July.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

TOM OATES [00:10:11]: So, yeah, give me a sense of a timeframe - when did OCDEL actually take over - so how, you know, how new has this process been?

ANDREW DIETZ [00:10:18]: July 2017 is when the programs were officially transferred over, and prior to that is when I did the tour, in the summer, for the most part.

TOM OATES [00:10:26]: So we're really looking at, you know, just about a year from, from now. And so, from your take, from the state's perspective, what's that first year been like in terms of, you know, necessarily, the outcomes or what you're hearing back from the Family Center Networks - from the entire Network?

ANDREW DIETZ [00:10:42]: I think it's been positive, I mean, we definitely have more work to do and to listen and to, to further refine some of our processes - such as our site visit processes and other stuff - but I think, overall, we've had a positive first year. They appreciated that me, as a representative of the state and some of my other staff were able to come out and visit them, appreciate that we attend their steering meetings - which I believe you're discussing a little later with some of the Family Centers on - and been able to provide those, those trainings, which a lot of them have attended and utilized.

TOM OATES [00:11:18]: Alright. And so, Ashley and Laurie, I want to bring you in, you guys are kind of on the other end of that equation as Family Center directors - explain to me a little bit about where the change has been, what's it been like over this past year in terms of now being under OCDEL and working with Andrew and his team?

LAURA BOSNAK-THOMPSON [00:11:35]: The benefit of being able to network with programs like ours is, is, is been great because we all share the same goal in prevention piece - you know, with the child abuse cycle, neglect, kids getting an early head start in life so they become successful adults - and incorporating OCDEL has a variety, you know, with diversity of the family support centers, with the rural areas and the city. So we're, we, and we all share the same common struggles, so I enjoy OCDEL has provided us with opportunities, with trainings, with the webinars that we can all relate to and they've ensured our support and our connections - we have a name and a face, now. They've welcomed us in, the transition went well.

[00:12:33]: Like I was telling my supervisor, whenever I was doing my other reports to the state, I didn't know who they went to, I never received any feedback, I did so much work on that to share what we were doing in our Family Center and the community, never heard anything. So now, Andrew and Ashley, they've come to our center, they met our staff, they met our families and that makes a huge difference, you know, in that welcoming piece.

[00:13:03]: And, again, reading our reports, actually calling us and talking about, "wow, I like what you wrote about this or that" - and you know, having interest and investment in that - and that, that's important to me. I have a connection now where I had a disconnect with the other, when we were reporting back to our state.

[00:13:25]: So, that's what I like, they care about what we're doing. We give our newsletters to them, they read our newsletters, so that's good, and the reporting is great. I really enjoy - well not enjoy - the reporting, the quarterly reports, the monthly reports, it's, it's, you know, it's simple and it's, you know, accessible and it's going really well and I'm glad to be under OCDEL.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

TOM OATES [00:13:51]: So, what are those reports telling you, then? What are you getting out of that that helps you in your day to day work?

LAURA BOSNAK-THOMPSON [00:13:57]: It keeps us on task about the families that we serve and what's going on and how we can improve, as well - like serving families more with disabilities, where we've always struggled, so now we're going to incorporate, maybe more parent support groups for families that have children with disabilities or, you know, cognitive delays, mental health issues, where they need more, more support - so, I did find that out because we have to report on that, so, and that's one area where I'm lacking that we are going to work on and do more.

[00:14:35]: And then giving our narrative pieces of our family success, successes where I can share that and reflect back, you know, and share it with my staff to see how we're doing and how we're improving, progressing - or areas what we need to, to work on, you know, so that's very valuable.

TOM OATES [00:14:56]: And so, Ashley, does this sound familiar, is it, is it something that you could - what Laurie's saying - does that resonate with you in Columbia County?

ASHLEY MENSCH [00:15:04]: Absolutely. It's been wonderful having - so Heather is my TA, so we have, we started out with monthly calls and now bi-monthly calls, so she just checks in to see if we have any training needs, to explain the reports, if she had a question about something that we put on our quarterly report, she will ask me to get more information.

[00:15:26]: So, again, I totally agree with Laura in that, you know, before you never heard anything, you didn't know if you were giving the right information, you didn't know if you were reporting the same thing as other Family Centers and it's just nice that someone's reading them, someone's caring and there to offer support.

[00:15:41]: In addition to that, I have multiple grants funds from OCDEL, so I receive Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation grant, we get a Children's Trust Fund Grant and now the Family Centers grant through them, as well as Fatherhood, and it's just nice that we have one point of contact, I don't need to tell my story ten times to ten different people, have ten site visits, ten people calling asking for the same information - and, you know, that was feedback that we gave to OCDEL and they listened to us and that's just a good feeling that, you know, our voice was heard and that they appreciate the time that we take and know that our time is precious.

TOM OATES [00:16:22]: From my vantage point, it clearly sounds like that the actual part of the network in Family Center Network is really coming into play and if you've got an organization within a state that's got that sort of infrastructure where they're used to supporting various communities and used to having those communities kind of, you know, working amongst each other and share best practices, being able to then transfer something like the Family Center Network under that similar organization - you know, in Pennsylvania's case, that happens to be OCDEL - but then, you can kind of see the support for each of those individual, you know, Family Centers across a state - no matter how diverse the regions may be - just getting that support that, that understanding, that information sharing.

[00:17:04]: It sounds like that even though it hasn't necessarily changed, you know, the day to day work you do, but it then supports it across the way a lot more that you may have had before. Am I reading that right?

LAURA BOSNAK-THOMPSON [00:17:17]: Yes.

ASHLEY MENSCH [00:17:18]: Absolutely.

TOM OATES [00:17:09]: So, let me now move this a little bit more into, specifically toward Pennsylvania, and so what I want to do is kind of give the audience a little sense of the network within a network. And so, Laurie is in Allegheny County, the second most populated county in the state, it encompasses Pittsburgh and it's, it's, you know, more than a million people live in the county and so, Laurie's Family Center is McKeesport Family Center and it's one of many in Allegheny County, and that's a network in amongst itself.

[00:17:51]: And when we talk about education, we talk about OCDEL - and yes, we're talking about, you know, childhood development and early learning - but, within Allegheny County and just because Allegheny County has what's called an intermediate, you know, intermediate unit - an Allegheny Intermediate Unit - is one of like 29 intermediate units across the state - we're diving into how Pennsylvania operates, here - that intermediate unit is an educational support service array.

[00:18:19]: And underneath that intermediate unit are all the Family Centers within Allegheny County. Now, I've done a pretty bad job kind of butchering that explanation, which is why Larry Klinger is here with us. And so, you know, Larry, give me a sense from your position within the AIU - how is that Allegheny Intermediate Unit connecting with, with all the Family Centers within Allegheny County?

LARRY KLINGER [00:18:42]: Okay, thanks, Tom. Yes, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit - or as we refer it to as the AIU3 - is just part, or one part of the Pennsylvania public education system, like you said, one of 29 intermediate units across the state. Our organization provides specialized educational services to the Allegheny County's 42 suburban school districts, five career technical centers. We employ approximately 1,500 educators at 420 sites and operate 11 Family Centers and three schools for exceptional children.

[00:19:21]: We offer about 130 to 140 different programs and services for infants, young children, students and adults and many of our programs go to other counties. I know that we touch at least 13 other counties with some of the different programs that we offer. So, we are the lead agency for 11 state-funded Family Centers - there's actually 26 Family Centers in Allegheny County, the other ones being funded by The Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

[00:20:02]: And really, how we interact with them is that as a lead agency listening to the Family Centers and the parents and the families that are involved with the Family Centers is finding out what they need. I mean the good news, if you would - or the bad news - is that we're a large organization. But, we're an umbrella organization with 130 different programs that we have, it's allowing us to connect families, connect children, connect parents, if you would, with the other programs that we have.

[00:20:44]: Just within our division - and there's six divisions at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, from early childhood to family and community services, teaching and learning programs that focuses more on K-12 special education and pupil services, informational technology that work with the school districts, as well as human resources and labor relationships and finance and business offices - but within just our division, which is early childhood, family and community education services, some of the other programs that we can connect the families, the children with include DART, which is our early intervention services.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

[00:21:24]: So, if a family development specialist is doing a screening on one of the children and a developmental delay is identified, it's a natural connection to move them into the DART program, or another program. We have Early Head Start and Head Start, Pre-K Counts. We have the Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness - so if a family is identified as couch-surfing or living with another family, we want to make sure that those children are ensured that they have access to the same free and appropriate public education and we have staff there that make those connection with all the different school districts.

TOM OATES [00:22:12]: You know...

LARRY KLINGER [00:22:13]: If you wanna take, go ahead, sorry...

TOM OATES [00:22:14]: Well no, I mean, you are, you're listing all of these various services and, you know, I just wanna stress to the audience, again, when we start talking about prevention, we are talking about, you know, before a family gets involved in the Child Welfare System and we know there are so many factors that can lead to, you know, negative outcomes and so, all of the things that are happening through the Allegheny Intermediate Unit or through these Family Centers are to support and stabilize and strengthen the family - whether it's job training, or whether it's, you know, dealing with home, dealing with a housing issue, or dealing with parenting skills - they all support a student, but yet at the same time, this promotes a great deal of prevention.

[00:22:57]: You know, you kind of see how all of these root causes deal with all of these other negative outcomes and so if you're able to deal with the root cause and you're, you know, you may focus on one area - be it healthcare or be it education or be it job training - but it seems to have this cascading effect across the, kind of, human services spectrum because, you know, a family isn't just about a house, a family isn't just about a job, and so you know, Larry, what you guys are doing is trying to, kind of, pair up - if I'm hearing you right - you pair up the family with whatever need you can, you know, meet, knowing that it's gonna have positive outcomes across the board.

LARRY KLINGER [00:23:34]: And, that is correct, I mean that doesn't include the adult education we have in the Fatherhood program, but it's making those connections - even outside of the intermediate unit with other Social Services agencies so that there's a coordinated care, if you would, for those families so that we're all not trying to do the same thing. Some agencies do things better than the other ones and it's really having those open lines of communications so we find out what's best for that child, what's best for that family.

TOM OATES [00:24:04]: And so, Andrew talked about how the state, how OCDEL works with the entire Family Center Network - how is that similar, or even different from how, you know, AIU3 is working with the Family Centers within Allegheny County?

LARRY KLINGER [00:24:18]: Again, that comes down to, really, leadership and listening to the needs of the individuals that we're working with at the Family Centers. If you think about, you know, going back to the leadership, we have open communications - not just within the intermediate unit - but with the other agencies that we work with. We have the opportunity to play in a great sandbox and we don't want to throw sand at other people, so it's really just being able to work together - not having any hidden agendas, if you would.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

[00:24:51]: How we support them - and, you know, maybe I'm getting ahead of myself - but if you look at Allegheny County as a whole and all the different players in there, first off, at the intermediate unit, all of our program directors get together on a monthly basis and talk about highlights that are going on and address any needs or any concerns that they're having and if there's an opportunity to cross over, we put it on the table and we generate ideas.

[00:25:20]: In the same manner, with all the Family Centers that we have, the 11 Family Centers, we get together with them on a monthly basis and pretty much do the same thing because it's a little bit more grassroots - it's them working directly with the children as well as the families - and then, looking at what Allegheny County Family Support System has put together through the department of, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

[00:25:48]: But, there's just so much opportunity to connect - such as with the Family Support Policy Board, which is made up of parents from all 26 Family Centers, and they get together on a, on a regular basis and discuss issues; to talking about Community Voices, Roundtable, which is all the lead agencies coming together, the site directors networking meeting, family development specialist networking meetings and partnering with the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development to do training when it's identified as a deficit so we can address it to better serve the families that we have at the Family Center.

TOM OATES [00:26:29]: So, in all of this coordination and collaboration and, and just, kind of, the deep Rolodex - and I don't know if people still use Rolodexes anymore but, I mean, this deep contact list that you have - if you were to start from scratch and start all over again, because there may be other jurisdictions or other, you know, other communities that think, hey we need to kind of get all our, all of our neighbor partners together, what's the biggest key that you would tell somebody for success to mimic something like this?

LARRY KLINGER [00:27:01]: Definitely come to the table willing to partner, don't have hidden agendas - again, it's what's best for the families that we serve, we all serve a lot of the same families, but what's best for the families, don't come with a hidden agenda. Have open communications and be willing to give up some things to get more. I think that was, those are about the three big tips that I would, I would talk to people about.

TOM OATES [00:27:28]: And so, Laurie, you are actually, you know on boots on the ground, you know, one of the Family Centers underneath the, the AIU3 and so explain to me, for you, at McKeesport, so how are you working together as part of this network with those other Family Centers?

LAURA BOSNAK-THOMPSON [00:27:44]: As, I didn't repeat what Larry says, but coordinating with the, the Office of Child Development for the, the meetings there, our leadership meetings at the AIU. We also coordinate, I'm the lead for the Southwestern region, that's under the Family Center Network, so we get together every other month and meet with the AIU Family Centers, as well as Family Centers from Somerset County, Bedford, the southwest region - but, we coordinate there and we share ideas and programming.

[00:28:23]: We're always in constant communication for if we're referring a family, if a family moves out of our service area going to Clarion, Duquesne, we always do a warm hand-off, we connect with the director, we give a name for them. But, also what we do differently in McKeesport is I belong to Mon River Fleet Lions Club and we service not only McKeesport, but Braddock, Duquesne and Clarion, so we

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

at the end of the year, we have money that we fundraise, so we get \$1,000 from the Mon River Fleet Lions Club and we distribute gift cards for Barnes and Nobles to the Family Centers and the Head Starts in that Mon Valley area.

[00:29:12]: And we also, with our SHIP - our State Helped Improvement Plans - we have events, we lead the youth logic model, so we do a Pop-Up and Play event, we have a Spring Around Storytime, which is a literacy event, so, again, I incorporate the other Family Centers and invite them to partner with our events that we do in the community.

TOM OATES [00:29:37]: Yeah, I was gonna, I was gonna actually ask about that, you know, inter-Family Center partnership, where you may have services and partnerships and collaboratives in your own backyard - are you sharing those along the way, because is it one of those, where my strengths are shared with the other Family Centers and you're able to, kind of, be efficient with the services you provide?

LAURA BOSNAK-THOMPSON [00:29:57]: Yes, because we, it's not like, when we have our events and collaboration, I don't want to say oh, this is only geared for McKeesport, McKeesport families only, you live in Duquesne, you live in Clarion, you live in Elizabeth, no you're not invited - we encompass, we invite all, you know, for our, for our community things like that, yeah.

TOM OATES [00:30:15]: Yeah, there's a strength in that network that you guys have, not as individuals, but really -

LAURA BOSNAK-THOMPSON [00:30:18]: Exactly, it's not all selfish. McKeesport only, you know, we, we share.

TOM OATES [00:30:25]: You know, here's this big theme that's coming out here from this conversation - be it with Andrew and OCDEL, or what Larry just talked about and you've just brought in, as well - about, you know, it's not necessarily a neat tool, or it's not necessarily a different process, but it's the commitment to each other, it's the commitment to staying alert, staying engaged, staying informed and sharing, not only with yourselves, but then clearly, with the families as it, as it just moves right down to, to those you serve.

LAURA BOSNAK-THOMPSON [00:30:55]: Absolutely, and I think a lot of our leadership, leaders, site directors, we've been together for over ten years, so we have relationships built in, in staff and, you know, that makes a difference, too in working together. It's more easily to work together, yeah.

TOM OATES [00:31:16]: And it breaks down silos, it breaks down barriers. So, Ashley, of course is not in Allegheny County, but as part of the Family Center Network, Ashley, you are now in Columbia County. Give us a sense of the difference between, you know, Allegheny County, the second largest populated county in the state to where you are and how the needs for your families may be different and how you guys go about it in terms of providing services.

ASHLEY MENSCH [00:31:42]: Yeah, so we're not housed under an intermediate unit, the county is the agency that runs us, but, we pretty much operate on our own, we are the only Family Center here in Columbia County. But the avenue that we take to collaborate with other partners in the community is our Columbia County Human Services Coalition and way back in 1992 the Columbia County Human Services Coalition started the Family Center here in Columbia County, it was one of their priority areas

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

that we needed to get services out to those families who might not have the access to early childhood education, who don't have the ability to travel somewhere to get help.

[00:32:24]: So, they saw this as a need and our services started in one of the small rural counties, or school districts, Benton School District in 1992 and we were one of the original pilot programs in the state. Since then, we have grown to cover all six Columbia County school districts and we still utilize the Columbia County Human Services Coalition to identify needs, to share programs that we're offering and just, again, to find out what the needs are in the community and how we can work together to solve them.

[00:33:00]: We've all found that, you know, funding is cut and we have to be creative in how we can still provide the best services to the families that we are serving. And so, our coalition meets every month and everyone's given the opportunity to give updates around the table, so it's nice that you can share information and then we get information from those other agencies to take back and share with all of our staff so that everybody is kept up to date in what's happening in the community.

[00:33:29]: And it seems like, you know you've been part of this community, you know, I've worked here for ten years and you think, oh I, there's nothing I don't know, and it's just amazing how you walk away from those meetings always having new information. So, again, I just, you know, want to highlight what Larry and Laurie said that, you know, staying active and being willing to sit at the table and talk to other people is the best way to serve families and figure out what is needed.

TOM OATES [00:33:55]: Yeah, from what Laurie was describing in terms of the partnerships in her own backyard and in, with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit you get the sense that there's this big network of people all working together and it's hustle and bustle because there's so much and there's so, you know, the resources must be abundant in such a large county, of course that's not the case.

[00:34:14]: But then in hearing from where you are, in a much more rural part of the state, you know, my first thought was, well there wouldn't be as many services and you're gonna have to maintain these partnerships and try to find where they are - but in you talking about this coalition, does that remind you of the same things that you're hearing from Laurie and Larry about what's happening in Allegheny County, about just getting enough folks in the room and being effective partners?

ASHLEY MENSCH [00:34:43]: Absolutely, as they were talking, I was like, well that's the exact same thing we do here in our county, it's just run through the intermediate unit here, it's just a group of Human Service Coalition partners that get together, you know, that have an interest in finding out what's going on in the community and how we can work better together.

[00:35:01]: It, it is, it's just amazing, I've worked in other counties in Pennsylvania and just to see how well the agencies work together in this community, it really makes a difference in the services that you can provide to families. It helps us because Nurse Family Partnerships sits at the table, Head Start and some other programs, early intervention, so when we're sitting at a meeting and hearing about services, those connections automatically happen - like oh, I have a family that would be perfect - and those transitions happen naturally because, you know, we're aware of what's going on with other agencies.

TOM OATES [00:35:34]: You know, there's such a correlation here because when we talk about prevention and we talk about providing a variety of services to a family for strengthening and stabilization, it's almost a case of that's what makes this network effective, is strong partnerships and

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

strong services within each other and as much as we're emulating that for a family to keep them strong and stable - this is how the services are able to be strong and stable by sharing, by working together and as you walk in with that "family-first" mentality of we're doing everything for the family, no one's walking in and saying well these are my services, my services only - it sounds like from what I'm hearing that this network in amongst itself is doing the same thing of, I'm not walking in and my little fiefdom, but we're here together and we're here sharing. Does that resonate of just that wonderful structure of how you get things done, be it for a family, or be it for your own network?

ASHLEY MENSCH [00:36:32]: Yeah, absolutely, and again we've all found that when you work in a silo, you're not gonna get very far. We, as I said before, we all have limited resources, so it's really nice to have people to reach out to when you're struggling - this family has a need and we can't help them here at our agency - but I have lots of people that I can reach out to and say hey do you have something, you know, I know that I haven't heard anybody talk about this, does anybody offer this, or is the scenario where we need to focus on in our community to get services started?

[00:37:02]: So, that's really nice and in addition to the Family Center, I can just give you some examples of the other accomplishments that our coalition has made - we have developed a free dental clinic, a free volunteer and medicine clinic for those families that do not have access to health insurance, we have also put together an early childhood conference, because that was a need our local daycare providers and preschools were sharing, that you know, they're responsible for caring for these kids, but they can't travel far away to get the training hours that are required of them.

[00:37:38]: So, our coalition got a group of early childhood practitioners together and we have a conference here in Columbia County that all local people come to, so it's just really nice. Nurse Family Partnership was also developed, or kind of obtained through the coalition, as well, so it's just more than just the Family Center. Us all working together have accomplished a lot of great things.

TOM OATES [00:38:00]: There's just a great lesson here about, like Larry said, coming to the table with an open mind and a willingness to help and all of this again, like you were just talking about - those may be other or different examples - but they all support a strong and stable family, which helps, you know, as we talk about the goal in this area - be it prevention, or be it healthcare, or be it housing, or be it anything that keeps that family strong and supports those children along the way.

[00:38:38]: Hey, this has been a great example of from the state level or at the county level or at the local level - be it, be it rural or urban - of how partnerships come together and how a community comes together to support those families. So, hey, Ashley, Laurie, Larry, Andrew, I appreciate your time, appreciate the energy that you guys are sharing with the, with me and being guests here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

ASHLEY MENSCH [00:38:54]: Thank you.

TOM OATES [00:38:57]: If you want to learn a bit more about what we talked about, we've put links to the Allegheny Intermediate Unit and the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning's website on this podcast's webpage, just go to <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb> and search 'podcasts'. We'll also point you to the April issue of Children's Bureau Express - the theme for that particular issue focused on prevention and includes a passionate statement from Dr. Jerry Milner, he's the Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau, and he points to the need of greater primary prevention work across child welfare.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention – Delivering Services Through Education
TRANSCRIPT

[00:39:32]: CBX also includes a neat look at some cost benefit analysis for two primary prevention programs. So, we'll have a link to CBX to also encourage you and we'll have links to visit the National Child Abuse Prevention Month microsite and the 2018 Prevention Resource Guide. Both have a focus on building strong communities to support prevention efforts.

[00:39:53]: Now, this is one of a handful of podcasts that we're launching that dive into various examples of community collaborations. These are all recipients of community-based child abuse prevention grants, but the methods - from revising community collaborative contracts in Washington, D.C. to developing specific trainings to connect faith or business or education or the healthcare sectors all within Iowa, we explore that, we also explore how TANF is a channel to provide prevention services in Oregon and that's to provide support to families before they may even enter the Child Welfare System.

[00:40:30]: So, thanks again to Andrew Dietz, Ashley Mensch, Laura Bosnak-Thompson and Larry Klinger for joining us today on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast and my thanks to you for being a part of this, as well. I'm Tom Oates and that's today's episode and we'll talk to you next time.

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:40:48]: 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.