

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast
Supporting Expectant and Parenting Teens in Foster Care –TRANSCRIPT

Speakers: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Alex Citrin, Center for the Study of Social Policy; Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, National Crittenton

[00:00:00]: Music Introduction

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

TOM OATES [00:00:32]: Hello, everyone and welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. So glad to have you joining in this growing community. You know, to say teens in foster care who are pregnant or expecting, along with those who are already parents are an overlooked group, well that would be a false statement. To say there's an opportunity and even a pressing need to serve them better is arguably more accurate and that's what this episode of the Information Gateway Podcast focuses on. Tom Oates with you once again, and with states and jurisdictions developing their Title IV-E prevention plans to take advantage of the Family First Prevention Services Act, there's a bit more attention being paid to older youth in foster care who are either parents or expecting - and that includes fathers, too.

[00:01:18]: Now, to some agencies that means trying to get a grasp on where to even begin. For others, it's how to improve services or leverage evidence-based programs. There's a lot to unpack because you're dealing with all the challenges about being a parent and all the challenges about being a young person navigating the foster care system and facing life beyond it. So, today we're talking with Alexandra Citrin, a senior associate with the Center for the Study of Social Policy. She focuses on child welfare, finance reform, healthcare and immigration policy. And also, Jeannette Pai-Espinosa - she is the president of National Crittenton, which works via advocacy and capacity building to create systemic change that improve the lives of young women.

[00:02:04]: Both contributed to the specific provisions in the Family First law about pregnant, expecting and parenting teens in foster care. So, we talk about the two-fold impact working specifically with this group can have, the initial approaches states and jurisdictions can take to assess their current environment and how they can improve their support to these young people, the challenges of selecting programs that show promise but may not be included in the Title IV-E clearinghouse and maybe most important, how to shift away from the labels or stigma that caseworkers and even foster parents may bring with them when working with pregnant, expecting or parenting teens. It's a great conversation, we're glad to be able to share this with you, lots of resources to follow, as well, and we'll point you to those at the end of the episode - but right now, Alex Citrin, Jeannette Pai-Espinosa right here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

[00:03:01]: Alex and Jeannette, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:03:05]: Thank you, Tom.

ALEX CITRIN [00:03:06]: Thanks for having us!

TOM OATES [00:03:07]: Well, I appreciate this because at least for those who are maybe on the outside of child welfare or have a connection to it, the thought of expecting and parenting teens appears to be kind of a small group amongst the children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system. So, I'd like you to just kind of bring us all back and explain the crucial need and value for supporting this group, the expecting and parenting teens that are in foster care.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:03:39]: Well, I think to start out, I think I would say I'm not sure that we know the actual numbers, right, of expecting and parenting youth that are in foster care. I also think we've never really asked how many of the youth that end up, the children and youth that end up in the system come from families where parents were young when they were born. I think we'd likely find that they are higher than we think and so, I think just getting a good grasp on the data and working hard to disrupt those cycles will help reduce the number of children coming into the system.

ALEX CITRIN [00:04:14]: Yeah, I think that's a really good point, you know, many systems actually don't track this data very well, so while we have anecdotal research that shows us that the proportion of teen pregnancy in foster care is disproportionately high compared to the normal population, we don't do a great job of tracking it and that includes tracking fathers, young fathers in care. But, I think also, just to add onto this, or that, I think an important reason we need to really focus on this group is that these are young people who are at a critical point in their life in terms of their adolescent development. We know that this time period of adolescence is critical for their development, their healthy development, their long-term success in their future and really laying some of that groundwork.

[00:04:58]: It's also an important time for them as parents for their young children. Right, early childhood and adolescence are those two really critical periods for development. So, by focusing on this group, we're really getting to support these young people as they develop in their adolescence but also as they develop as parents and begin to think about how do we break this cycle of intergenerational foster care for families.

TOM OATES [00:05:23]: You know, you also mentioned it's a critical period right now where we are because of the Family First Prevention Services Act has added in provisions specifically for this group. And, I know your organizations were part of the teams that were helping draft the provision surrounding expecting and parenting teens. What did you guys really want to see included in the act?

ALEX CITRIN [00:05:47]: That's a great question, you know, and we really I think we worked with a lot of great partners drafting the legislation - advocates, young people themselves - but, we really wanted to help call attention to these young people as a real opportunity, again, to support them as adolescents and as parents and really thinking about how do you support them in this role without their child needing to come into foster care, right, unless, right there are safety concerns. But, really providing ways to support these young people as parents, direct targeted supports and services to them and prevent their children from having to enter care, taking that sort of targeted approach.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:06:28]: I think to, I think that Alex makes a great point, I think to add onto that, I think even before there was legislation, we're really talking about just conceptualization and priorities, I think it was important to us that we just ensure that they, the young parents and their children in the system are not invisible anymore - they've been invisible as we both said earlier for so long. And also because it's a wise investment. Dual development, two generations you can do prevention and intervention at the same time, it just makes sense.

ALEX CITRIN [00:06:58]: And the systems currently aren't serving these young people well, right? We know that the systems are failing to meet the unique needs of these young parents and their children, so we really wanted to, as Jeannette was saying, draw attention to this population and support the system in changing its practice to better support these young people and their children in positive outcomes.

TOM OATES [00:07:21]: So, for those states that like, as you mentioned, are trying to improve how their systems are addressing this and they start to take a look at Family First, are you guys seeing any, sort of, common questions from those jurisdictions when they're trying to meet the requirements or trying to improve their services in alignment with Family First?

ALEX CITRIN [00:07:42]: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, you know - back to Jeannette's point that we made, that she made at the very beginning - it's about understanding who these young people are. Many states don't even know how many expecting and parenting youth they have in care. So, trying to sort of right size the services and how much of the service they may need to contract for, there's even a big question there. But I do think that, you know, as states are trying to identify who those young people are - and again, some states do that really well and some states have a sense of who those young people are - they're thinking about well, what are the specific programs that are really targeted at an integrated developmental approach, right?

[00:08:21]: So, you can have a parenting class, but is that parenting class really developmentally appropriate for young people and how do we make sure that the evidence-based programs that we're putting in place to support these young people are appropriate? And I think in some places there are a couple of programs in the clearinghouse that do meet that targeted developmental approach for adolescents but there are, there's a big gap there. There's a gap for evidence-based services that are in the clearinghouse and therefore eligible for IV-E reimbursement under Family First. So, there's a gap there and a need to start building that evidence. And just one other gap that I really want to point out there is around fathers and young fathers. There's really a gap of evidence-based services around what supports young fathers in their parenting or in their mental health services.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:09:16]: I think just, I think in addition to what Alex has mentioned, I think there's a huge sort of invisible gap, I would say, which is really the sort of introspective analysis and the implicit bias that comes out in folks working in the system both, you know, public and private side. There's still a lot of implicit bias about young parents, right? And I think it is very gendered, I think there's different expectations and norms for mothers and fathers and I think that's why we see the gap in services for fathers and some of the stigmatization that we see is very moralistically based around young moms and the systems really do not support young fathers and mothers in trying to parent together. Whether they're together or not, right, whether they're living together or not, the system really drives them apart in ways that are really destructive to the family unit and certainly to the child's, to all of their developments, the parents and the children.

TOM OATES [00:10:16]: Yeah, I'm actually gonna wanna touch base on that a little bit more as we continue on about connecting and engaging with this group. But, you guys brought up something, you know, early on about the states having to, kind of understand what's in their own backyard of getting the data and understanding the, you know, just the volume and the differences, right, when we talk about how many but it's also who and everybody has got some sort of, you know, everybody's different, we all are. At the same time, you know, states can kind of get, we're hearing as they're developing their prevention plans some are trying to fit within evidence-based programs, some are trying to say, hey I've

got something that I know works and I'm gonna try to maybe get this approved and they're balancing with this, you know, leveraging of something I know works versus something that's evidence-based. But you talked about the gap in terms of building evidence. Any guidance you would give for some of these states on maybe potentially how to build or how to really, you know sponsor or fund the ability to gather evidence to maybe get some of those programs that they know work to actually get looked at as approved within the clearinghouse?

ALEX CITRIN [00:11:31]: Yeah, I'm so glad you asked that question, 'cause this is a, a really a hot topic for us and for states and something we're talking to states about all the time, almost daily, I would say. Because, I think it's really, it's that intersection between what are the unique needs of families in their community and what are the evidence-based practices and how do you make sure that you're really meeting the needs of families and that means that your programs are culturally responsive, they're developmentally targeted and appropriate, right? They fit within your state's environment. And, that doesn't always match with what services are in the evidence-based clearinghouse. So, I think for many states, they're trying to think about how to finance a comprehensive system where some of our programs are eligible for IV-E reimbursement and some of them might not be right now, but they're the right match. And then how do we plan five years down the road to get those services in the clearinghouse?

[00:12:32]: So, I think one strategy that we're seeing many states explore is financing through the Family First Transition Act, which was passed, oh goodness, last December - it's hard to keep track these days. But, it provides funding to states to be able to prepare for implementation of Family First and those dollars can be spent rather flexibly and so we're seeing states start to explore using those dollars to build the evidence for programs that they know work in their communities and meet the needs of their unique families and youth. So, I think that's one really good opportunity and financing stream, honestly, that's available for states as they move towards financing and building the system that is comprehensive and meets all of the unique needs of their families.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:13:25]: I think just to add to what Alex has said, because I think what she describes is what I was also gonna say is I think we're in a little bit of a transition period where there's a higher level of, sort of awareness about the needs of and the gaps in - and you have, you know, non-profit private funders that have been doing this for some time but haven't been able to invest in having their programs and services evaluated. So, a call for some public-private partnerships and engaging the philanthropic community in working with these organizations and with states and jurisdictions to elevate sort of the evidence that surrounds programs and services that work based on history, anecdotal information and talking to former clients and consumers. But I think where, I think it has been such an invisible population in so many ways, it's gonna take some collaborative work to get the, to get the sort of bench strength of the services that Alex was just describing that is specific and effective - it's gonna take some time to get that up and running.

ALEX CITRIN [00:14:25]: Yeah, absolutely and the only one thing that you said I just want to build off is around hearing the voices of clients who have experienced these services. I think one thing we're seeing states do that we would wanna lift up and share for other states to sort of take advantage of is they're having focus groups with youth who have experienced the system and said what were services that were helpful and what were services that weren't. It's helping states to also identify some of those really community-based, grassroots organizations that may not have - and I'm using quotes here, air quotes - the "evidence" behind them that would get them into the clearinghouse, but youth will tell you what works. Right, they know what works and what was supportive and helpful for them, so I think, when

we're seeing states have these focus groups where they're really asking for the expertise from youth, they're learning really important information that can help guide them in developing their comprehensive service array.

TOM OATES [00:15:40]: You know, part of this is, you know, we started to talk about Family First and we started to talk about trying to find the evidence or using programs that work. And so, that's asking states to kind of look around and say alright, what's out there, who can we partner with, let's say, to help build or demonstrate evidence. But, this entire process also should make states and jurisdictions and agencies look at themselves. Kind of reviewing their own capabilities, as well, because there are programs that are out there that's great - but where are you culturally, where are you in terms of your staff? So, if a state or agency wants to spend a little bit more time and energy supporting this group, supporting expecting and parenting teens, you know, first let's start back and if you guys are able to give some overarching guidance, you know, where would you want states and agencies to kind of start?

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:16:18]: Well, one of the things that I would say, you know a number of years ago we did an analysis of state practices in terms of placing children with parents who were in care and asked them, quite frankly, you know, what is the law and what is practice around separating or, you know, really placing a priority on keeping children and their parents together. And, the vast majority of states, they really believed and were practicing - and this has changed quite a bit in some states, but not in all states - they really were standing in the position of young parents needing to sign their children into care to be placed together, right? Which is, which is, as the act says is not the law, right, those children are in the custody of their parents, even if their parents are in foster care.

[00:17:11]: So, I think one is for states to back up a little bit and look at what is their policy but also what is the practice as a starting point. And I think sometimes states forget, because you know, it's just the crush of the work, right, that young parents want the same thing that every parent wants for their children and I think somehow, we get, we forget that, right, because we see them as a youth in care rather than a parent, right? They're both. Going back to what Alex said about dual development, I think it's really complex, but I think states ought to start with what is their existing practice and move forward from there.

ALEX CITRIN [00:17:51]: Yeah, I think that's right, you know, starting with what's your existing practice, how are you currently serving youth, understanding what your policies and procedures, that, you know, understanding what your form says when you have an expecting or parenting youth in care. What does your form say, what kinds of questions are on that form, that placement form about that person's child are really important to think about? And, what's your data? Do you have data? Do you have a way of collecting data, is there a way of both having that conversation between a worker and a young person but also, how are you collecting it in your state data system? I think those are also really key, key pieces. And when we think about the training for frontline staff, how are staff supported in having conversations around healthy development, healthy sexual development, parenting with young people? What does that look like? Is that part of the pre-service or in-service curriculum even? So, I think there's a piece about getting just a baseline organizational assessment that's really critical for states as they move forward.

TOM OATES [00:19:03]: What would be some of those key data points that you'd stress the most that a state should, if they're not collecting now or not looking at now that they should?

ALEX CITRIN [00:19:15]: I mean, I think I would start with the basic is, you know, are these young people, are they pregnant or are they parenting. And when we talk about pregnant, I also mean expectant, so are these fathers expectant. And, but to collect that data, you've gotta go back to having conversations around healthy sexual development and understanding if these young people are sexually active, how do they identify, what is their sexual orientation and gender identity, and how do you support these young people more broadly in that development. And, I'm certainly not suggesting that you should be collecting data right now around if a youth is sexually active. Should workers be having those conversations? Absolutely. And we would say you should be collecting data around youth's SOGIE, their sexual orientation and gender identity and expression if that youth is comfortable sharing that and there are the right safety protections in place. But -

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:20:12]: Definitely. I'm exclamation-ing point what Alex just said. I think the other thing that always confounded me a little bit is, you know, if we're talking about young parents, mothers and fathers who are in care, right, so, when you become a parent, whether you're young or you're not, bonding and attachment is critical, right? It's absolutely huge. Well, I think it's fair to assume that a good proportion of - I'm being generous - a good proportion of those young parents have their own bonding and attachment issues with their family, with their parents, right, so to not be sort of way ahead of the curve in understanding that young parents who are in care may have difficulty bonding and attachment to their children is a mistake and I think, I think people don't really think about that because they assume that because it's "child welfare" - using air quotes - again, that that's implicit and there's an understanding of the level of trauma, what did it look like, what was the impact, how did it affect their bonding and attachment that would create a barrier to their ability to even understand the importance of bonding and attachment in that sort of visceral way that I don't you can know if you don't have it, right?

[00:21:29]: And being ahead of that, I think that that's oftentimes completely missing from case planning, from just the conversations like, the kinds that Alex was talking about that we have with young parents. And, to expect them to ask those questions when they don't know they don't have it, I think is a mistake and I think we need to figure out how to fill that gap, 'cause otherwise I think we're missing the boat. And it may be one of the most simple things to call for, right?

TOM OATES [00:22:03]: Yeah, I mean these are basic demographic, basic questions. But, there's that barrier of should I move forward and ask, because I think we're also getting back to - and a question I want to really hone in on - a stigma. Because, you're not looking, or they may not be looking at, alright, this is a pregnant young person or they're expecting, this is a father to be - well, let's back up, they're a human being first. And just like you would, you know, deal with any child in the system, let's stop back and let's start treating the human first as opposed to, okay, there's a label on you, so now that's the one thing and let's just focus on that part now as opposed to the holistic, you know, a view of a young person entering life. Sticking with the states for a second - are you seeing any kind of common strengths or common weaknesses across states?

ALEX CITRIN [00:23:04]: So, I think, you know, one of the things we're seeing across states is, as a strength, is the understanding of the need to focus here. And, you know, states may be in different places in terms of taking action on that and what they do about it, but I do think that there is, there's been a shift over the last few years around the need to focus on this group and their unique, and that they have unique needs and that they serve in that different, in that role of adolescent and parent. So, I think that that's a strength, even just acknowledging the needs of, as Jeannette said earlier, this population that has been invisible for a very long time. I think that's a big strength across states.

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[00:23:52]: You know, I think some states have taken it further and, as I said before, there, some states are collecting data, some states have developed and integrated training around the unique needs of these populations, some states have they might call it an expectant or pregnant and parenting unit of workers who work specifically with this population or they might have a sort of an in-house expert, if you will that other workers can go to to seek advice. So, I think there's a number of strategies that states are trying right now. Again, though, some more so than others and some more effectively than others.

TOM OATES [00:24:35]: So, we moved about state's capabilities, what's in their backyard, programs to align with Family First. Let's actually talk about the expecting and parenting teens themselves when it comes to working within the system. First off do you see any, you know, going back to some of the programs, however, in terms of their effectiveness with this group - have you seen any types of programs or approaches that maybe across the board have had a little bit more success than others in reaching and engaging this group? Because you mentioned they're also adolescents first and that's a tough group to reach.

ALEX CITRIN [00:25:09]: Mhmm.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:25:11]: Yeah, Alex talked earlier about, you know, talking to young parents and I think that programs that engage - I guess I'd call new parents or young parents who are a little bit older, right or even folks that are in their early 30's but who were young parents - I think there's a great deal of success in, you know, connecting them to each other. So, what did they learn, retrospectively as older parents but who were young parents when they had their children, I think there's a, there's just more openness to that sort of coaching and mentorship, I think that's true. So I think that's one of the things. And, I think starting the bonding and attachment work really young. We have an agency that has a program called Loving Your Baby from the Inside Out - they start at once they find out they're pregnant - just to help moms and expectant dads to attach to the babies, I mean understanding, building a relationship, which sounds really basic, but I think is not always so, if you, you know, if you're living in very stressful times, it's just harder to make that a priority, right?

ALEX CITRIN [00:26:23]: Yeah, I think that peer to peer support is really important for young people, we hear that over and over again and, you know, the support of peers who have been through the experience and have, is really an important support, as Jeannette was saying. A couple of other programs that I'll just mention that are really designed and targeted to young people are the Adolescent Parenting Program, the Young Parenthood Program and Parenting Together Project. And again, those three programs, just as examples, all really focus on the developmental, meeting youth where they are developmentally and having a more targeted approach to adolescence. So, I think that that's just another, those are a couple of other programs that I would just highlight that have taken that approach into their, into their model.

TOM OATES [00:27:15]: For those listening, we'll make sure if you head to this episode's webpage, what we will do is we will put links to those programs on that site so you can go and take a look at them for yourself. We talked about this, we've danced around it a little bit, but I now want to dive into it about the stigmas and maybe avoiding the stigmas and the labels about expecting and parenting teens. So, let's talk to those caseworkers or those supervisors who have those new caseworkers that are coming in - what should those caseworkers keep in mind when working with these young people when it comes to being more than just an expecting or parenting young person, because they are more than that, there's a holistic view. What are you, what would you want caseworkers to keep in mind?

ALEX CITRIN [00:28:07]: I think as you just said, really thinking about these young people and their entire identities. Right, these aren't just young people who are expecting or parenting, right? They're a lot more and they've got a lot more to them and to their identities and how that, those identities intersect to create the person that they are, right and how they show up and understanding that how they show up is all of that together, right. Thinking about their race, their sexual orientation, their gender identity, their culture, how they identify as a student, how they identify as a parent, as a young person - all of that together is shaping how this young person shows up. And so, recognizing that they have, also that means, needs along all of those different aspects of their identity. They don't just have needs around them as a parent, right, they have needs as an adolescent, they have needs across the board. So, I think understanding that would be number one, right, understanding how these young people show up.

[00:29:04]: And then, I think though, to be a little bit more targeted and understanding that these young people are both adolescents and parents and what does that mean developmentally for them, how are youth developing and adolescents, how can you integrate and support protective factors, how can you promote those promotive factors that help youth thrive. And, how do you help them develop those skills as a parent? As Jeannette said earlier, you know, many of these youth in foster care have experienced trauma at some point in their life, some of them may not have had those relationships with their own parents that were nurturing - that's not saying, most have, I'm saying just some may not, right? So, really understanding how these youth are showing up and how to support them in this moment as a young person and as a parent, I think is important.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:29:59]: And I think, in some ways we're saying the same thing, but I think that we tend to, we tend to place, we tend to judge the choices and decisions that folks make and I think when we do that without doing what Alex said - which is understanding the full context of their lives - we place, you know, it then becomes evaluative and judgmental rather than supportive and nurturing, right? So, if I, I think that, I think that young parents - I think people in general - but I certainly think young parents, you know, they want the best for their children and they make the best choice they can. But it's the best choice they can make of the choices that are available to them. So, they could make the best choice that's available to them and those of us here will think well that wasn't a very good choice, 'cause we have a lot more choices. They don't. So, they make the best choice they can, they work really hard at it, they struggle over it and then we judge that choice without understanding that they are going through the same process that we are, they just don't have as many options. And, we can help them increase those options rather than judge the choices that they're making by doing what Alex was describing.

TOM OATES [00:31:08]: You know, I'd kick myself if I'd only focus on the caseworkers and not also pay a little attention to the guidance or advice or specific trainings, if there are some, for the foster parents and the resource parents and their ability to support this group. Anything - I mean clearly if you're, if you've been a parent before and now you have a young person in your home and they are going through, kind of, everything that goes through being an expecting parent - is there anything specific that you would want to make sure that those foster parents are ready for, prepared for or trained for that may be different than what they'd normally go through in their routine training?

ALEX CITRIN [00:31:52]: Yeah, that's a great question. You know, I think for those foster parents, really understanding the youth's development as an adolescent and as a parent and understanding their experiences and how they may be entering into this time in their life differently than the foster parent would have because of a number of circumstances is really important. And having a foster parent who wants to affirm that young person in their own adolescent development and as a parent, right, and

really be a support to them. In some states, what they have done is develop some sort of special recruitment and criteria for foster parents of expecting and parenting youth so that those foster parents are really dedicated to supporting young parents, which is great. And, they do have some additional training to support them in that way. So, I think that those are really, those examples where states have been able to target and really support foster parents and then place those youths with those foster parents is great.

[00:32:54]: Obviously, there's always a question about do you have enough foster parents for the number of youth or what if you don't know a youth is pregnant or a youth becomes pregnant in a foster home and you want to keep them stable, you want to make sure that that foster parent gets the training at that point to be able to support that young person as they enter into parenthood.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:33:14]: I really, and I really think everything we said for caseworkers goes for foster parents, perhaps even more so because of their proximity and their relationship. I also think it's important for foster parents to understand their own motivation, right, for wanting to parent a young parent and their child or children. Just to ensure that it's really a commitment to building the strength of the parent-child unit because I think, you know, a lot of people want to work with babies, right, not adolescents and so there can sometimes be this dynamic that happens when a young parent, I think, enters a foster placement with their child. It could be shortcut by the types of trainings and the certifications that Alex was talking about but also just some introspection around, alright what I really want to do is support this parent to be the best parent they can be. And, sometimes I think the focus is on the child and that's not necessarily positive for the parent-child unit.

TOM OATES [00:34:20]: So, we started this talking about the awareness. The awareness of this population and the need to focus on it so that at least it gets the conversation moving maybe with a lot more momentum. So, let's talk about maybe what's next - what do you see as maybe the next steps in evolution of services to support expecting and parenting teens?

ALEX CITRIN [00:34:48]: Good question.

TOM OATES [00:34:51]: Alright, let's focus it this way - you have your druthers. The big blank check, blue sky, you know, all the barriers are gone - what would you want to see in terms of improvement for either services or just maybe the structural or mental approach that agencies may take?

ALEX CITRIN [00:35:14]: So, I think I would start off by going back to that organizational assessment that we talked about and thinking about how do you use that organizational assessment to change the way that your system is organized to serving expecting and parenting youth, right? So, if your trainings are not, do not include adolescent development and, you know, supporting the unique needs of expectant and parenting youth, how do you integrate that, right, how do you change that into all of your trainings, not just one course that you offer that some workers might attend, right? How do you really integrate it and embed it into all your training for your front-line workers and for your foster parents? When you look at taking a look at your policies that you're reviewing and saying what are our policies actually saying and how do we support those policies and practices enough to think what do our policies around placing a young person and their child? What do our policies say and what does our practice say and how do we align practice and policy with best practice nationally, right, and what we know the research tells us young people and their children need to thrive?

[00:36:19]: I would think about your data system, right, thinking about is your data system designed to collect this information and building that out, as you're also building out the skills of your workers to be able to collect that data. And then thinking about do you have the right supports and services in your system that are targeted and meet the developmental and unique needs of this population and if you do, great, let's make sure the capacity matches the need. But if you don't, how do you build that, how do you build those services, how do you lure from what's working grassroots and bring that up to a point where youth can really access it and you're making those connections to support young people?

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:37:05]: I would like to see a massive investment in getting more programs and services to be considered evidence-based and so resources could be used in them. Because, I think a lot of the smaller programs are actually run by and started by former young parents or young parents. So, there, we're missing, you know, we're missing that wealth of knowledge and expertise that ought to be part of the continuum of supports and services that Alex is talking about. And, left to their own devices, it's just very, very difficult to make the kind of investment that's needed to get your program to be labeled evidenced, promised, promising - it's a long process and I think it's gonna take some, some hopefully federal leadership but also, work on the state-level probably hand in hand with philanthropy to get that done, but I think that's pretty critical because I think it has to be a private-public partnership.

[00:38:01]: And I think the other thing is that I think we also need to focus on those efforts being more comprehensive, so not just pregnant, not just parenting, right? Parenting skills, but also economic security, you know, health disparities and health outcomes, I mean, sort of the whole - we're breaking a number of cycles, we have the opportunity to break a number of cycles when we work with young parents, educational outcomes. So, not only increase sort of the more narrow focus on parenting, but broaden that to include how do you really help families get stable over the long-term versus help them through these stages of parenting - which is very critical and important, but you know, over the long-term to really break the cycles, we need to be more comprehensive, I think.

ALEX CITRIN [00:38:45]: Yeah, I think that's exactly right.

JEANNETTE PAI-ESPINOSA [00:38:47]: Right, I need a job, I need a lot of things, yeah. Stable housing, all those things.

TOM OATES [00:38:55]: Jeannette and Alex, and for everybody listening, I want to make sure that I will put links on, to for CSSP and for National Crittenton here on the web page for this episode. Jeannette and Alex, I truly appreciate your time to spend the time to dive into this, and obviously all the work that went into everything that brought us to this conversation and helping, you know, put this in the forefront for Family First and, too, as we just talked about maybe moving the resources, services mindset to the next level. Folks, I really appreciate your time, I appreciate your energy and thank you guys so much for being a part of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

BOTH: [00:39:38]: Thank you. Thanks for having us.

TOM OATES [00:39:41]: We mentioned a few times we'll post a number of resources on this episode's web page and you can find all the Information Gateway Podcast episodes on Child Welfare Information Gateway at www.childwelfare.gov. We'll have links to the programs Alex mentioned, along with links out to some additional resources from the Center for the Study of Social Policy, including an FAQ for

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pregnant and parenting youth and Family First, as well. So, that's along with their resource guide that they'll have for programs that meet the needs of expectant and parenting youth and their children. We'll also point you to the other episodes we've launched surrounding Family First, including a Family First implementation guide developed by a group of organizations, along with the episode sharing experiences and tips learned from Washington, D.C.'s Child and Family Service Agency and the Utah Division of Child and Family Services - two agencies whose Title IV-E prevention plans have already been submitted and approved by the Children's Bureau.

[00:40:41]: Hey, please subscribe to the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast - we are available on Apple Podcasts, GooglePlay, Stitcher, Spotify and SoundCloud - more than 34 hours of interviews, innovations, experiences and stories to share to help you and your team improve the lives of children, youth and families. Hey, thanks so much to Alexandra Citrin and Jeannette Pai-Espinosa for joining us and thanks to you for being a part of this community and please stay safe out there. I'm Tom Oates, have a great day!

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:41:16]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at www.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.