

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast  
What Did Child Welfare Learn from 2020: Caseworker Care TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Andrew Winters, Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development

[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:** [00:00:31]: 2020 - arguably one of the most pivotal years we'll have experienced in our lifetimes or at least in recent memory. Centered around the coronavirus pandemic but also flanked by disruptions across politics, the economy, nature and climate. Rare was an aspect of daily living not altered during this year. And child welfare was not immune, either, and we're all still adjusting. Hello everyone, Tom Oates here and welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. It has been a time of question, reflection, innovation, and adaptation. What we do know about 2020 is that we're coming out of the year different than when we came in. So here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, we're spending a few episodes looking at what the child welfare learned from 2020.

[00:01:25]: Now, with so much swirling around our lives during the year, it's been exhausting – physically and emotionally draining – so, in this episode we're focusing on how the fog of stress, uncertainty, and fear impacted caseworkers; what those in the field can do mitigate and address the impacts of stress and trauma; and what's been learned from interventions with agencies to increase resiliency and support among managers, supervisors, and caseworkers. Now, there will be other episodes on what child welfare learned from 2020 that focus on reviewing the policies and shifting power around service delivery, and how the child welfare field can come to terms and reconcile with racism and inequities within the system.

[00:02:13]: Now, this episode, we are talking with Dr. Andrew Winters. He's an Assistant Professor at the University of Louisville Kent School of Social Work and on the Advisory Board for the Center for Family and Community Well-Being. He's also a member of the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development. So, when the pandemic first began impacting lives through lockdowns, school and office closures, and social distancing orders, the QIC for Workforce Development hosted a webinar "Coping in the Time of COVID-19. Evidence-Informed Strategies to Support You and the Child Welfare Workforce". That webinar was produced and distributed to introduce to folks the reactions to pandemics and share techniques to manage relationships with the stressors. And, we start our conversation there. I encourage you to listen and reflect on the guidance and try to incorporate some of the self-care techniques. There's plenty there for caseworkers, supervisors, and really anyone as no one's been immune to the increased stress and trauma of the past year.

[00:03:19]: Andrew Winters, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:03:23]: Thank you, it's nice to be here.

**TOM OATES:** [00:03:35]: So, let's start, I guess from the beginning - which really starts, you know, around March for a lot of folks - and start with the webinar that the QIC for Workforce Development -

the QIC - put together. What was the QIC hearing or seeing from the field that made them create and host the webinar?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:03:45]: The QIC provided a national webinar in April to address concerns of what to expect in the age of pandemics and how to cope and support the child welfare workforce, and the child welfare workforce, as we know, had to quickly adapt and adjust to working from home and we were hearing about difficulties with a work life balance and concerns of a shared traumatic stress - both the workforce and child welfare involved families were experiencing as the same external stressor of COVID.

**TOM OATES:** [00:04:19]: So, with all of that - and rightfully so, we were kind of feeling it across, you know, the planet, the country, at least - but, we were all experiencing it so fast and at the same time, I'm curious to what you found, you know, what was actually happening to us, some of those psychological reactions to a pandemic and the external trauma that's happening outside, I mean, it's 2020, so the pandemic was just part of this tumult that was rolling around. What were some of those reactions that people may have not recognized at first to what was happening?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:04:57]: Yeah, yeah, great question. Fear, indifference or fatalism, repetitive checking and reassurance seeking, clinging to conspiracy theories and even mass panic. These can lead to - and we saw that they did indeed lead to - mood disorders like depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and even substance abuse.

**TOM OATES:** [00:05:24]: So, then along with all of that, then there are the stressors that pile on, you know, with all of that. So, within just the pandemic environment, what are those stressors that you guys saw?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:05:36]: Uncertainty, confusion, a sense of urgency, severe disruptions in routines, school closures, virtual school and stressors on the healthcare system. Wage loss, the economic breakdown leading to a recession or a potential recession or depression. And, I think one of the things that we saw that, and continue to see is the separation from family, friends and co-workers and social isolation, especially when family members are sick or hospitalized or dying. And, the inability to bury and memorialize and honor those we've lost, whether it be due to the pandemic or another cause.

**TOM OATES:** [00:06:20]: Yeah, I personally can recall attending a funeral via a streaming service, which was surreal and watching that and just, you know as we go through our normal lives and you say that kind of in quotations, I remember a lot of folks talking about, you know, if you were still working, it wasn't just adjusting to working at home, but we always found ourselves working with home, where, you know, you're your own employee, but at the same time you are a parent or you are a teacher and there's no, there's no commute to kind of take one hat off and put a new hat on and okay, now you're at home and now you're a parent or now you're a spouse and you are everything all at once and everything blurred together. As we dive, you know, a little bit more specific into, you know, the child welfare workforce - and you talked about some of the big picture stressors that were really happening, that, you know, lingered and effected so many across the country, specifically to the child welfare workforce - what were some of those stressors unique to case workers?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:07:29]: Yes. The difficulty in keeping up with children and out of home care, the difficulty of keeping children in touch with their families and the difficulty in investigating child abuse and neglect. Knowing that child abuse and neglect will increase, potentially, and be more severe in light of the stress on families and knowing that intimate partner violence can also increase. You know, children will potentially and are potentially still concerned about incarcerated parents dying or parents, or their parents could die while they're in out of home care and similarly parents worrying that their children could die while in out of home care.

**TOM OATES:** [00:08:13]: This falls under the big picture - and for really in the child welfare workforce, their jobs are to be connected to their clients or to their families - and so, it falls under the big picture of trying to react to the unknown. Especially when you are supposed to have the answers or be that person to connect somebody to the resources or whatever it is that somebody needs, not knowing, not having a real good insight on what's happening, those stressors that just kind of fit with this profession and others that are involved in human services. So, then the psychological stressors or burdens that caseworkers are dealing with, not only with those stressors and the unknowns of the work - what kind of, what are those other burdens that they're dealing with on top of the other stressors that we all face?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:09:04]: Yeah, yeah. So, as we know, child welfare workers are not classified as essential workers, however, they have the mandate to continue to work with families without any additional pay or protection such as high-level PPE. And, this can cause a heightened risk of personal infection, sickness, or death, or even worry that they will inadvertently spread infection to others that they're close to. Child welfare workers risk double exposure of being both a citizen where the event occurs and working with the individuals within the same community. Concerns about funding, agency funding cuts and job security and having to work in this new virtual setting without the needed tools or supports to do so.

**TOM OATES:** [00:09:51]: I mean, there's enough stress in the work itself but as we start to add all of these other factors, what's piling on to, for caseworkers and how did they find themselves reacting? I mean, things were happening so quickly in March and April and May that we felt something, but we weren't sure what it was and people would say, oh no, it's grief or it's just a malaise or it's just a depression or it's just, nobody has control. What did you find all of that, you know, when it comes to caseworkers, you know, how could you identify or are you able to identify here is what you're feeling and here's why.

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:10:35]: Mhmm. Yeah, that's a great question. What we saw was the child welfare workforce, as I mentioned earlier, they're not essential workers and yet, they had the mandate to do this work, so there was this movement forward one way or the other. So, what does that do to the individual - well, there's the potential for secondary traumatic stress to occur. You had mentioned earlier, it's the confounding effects of home life mixed with work life mixed with family life - all of those things are occurring at the same time and now there's no boundary there. So, how do I as a child welfare worker create those boundaries, how do I create that so that I'm not taking the stress that I'm feeling at work that now is also in my home environment that I'm trying to do, how do I not project that onto family, how do I not project that onto, you know, loved ones, those that I'm with?

**TOM OATES:** [00:11:42]: So, with that, I guess the idea is now how do you manage it, right, 'cause there's only so much you can control, but you can control yourself and your reactions. But, it is difficult when you actually can't separate yourself, as you were mentioning, you know, kind of put the work hat off and put the new hat on. So, then for those individuals - because, you know, this is also the thing,

we're separated from our co-workers, as well - how can an individual kind of reduce that stress that's coming into their lives?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:12:14]: Yeah, so you had mentioned access to co-workers - so, there's really two components there. One is when we talk about the child welfare workforce, we talk about the individual child welfare worker and we also talk about the organization that the child, that the worker works in. So, they had to in some ways manage that themselves because they were at home. So, they were no longer within the organization in which they, one would hope that they could find support in, that they would be able to tap into a supervisor or a co-worker to assist with how they're feeling if they have an adverse experience with a client or the client has an adverse experience and the worker is then trying to help them with that. So, they don't have anywhere to go with that. So, it's really a two-fold component as how does a child welfare worker as an individual manage this and then knowing that they also cannot access the organization in which they work. So, it was really a two-fold component as you're talking about.

**TOM OATES:** [00:13:11]: So, how does first off, the individual, how do they maybe reduce the stress that's coming into their lives?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:13:16]: Yeah, so there's some key components to how we reduce stress, right? And one is we critically evaluate the information that we are receiving, so that can be the news source in which we're, we evaluate the news sources in which we're receiving the information, we limit the amount that we are consuming and we tailor what we are consuming to our needs. For example, if we only receive our news from one particular news outlet and that one news outlet could be biased, we are receiving not only the news, but news that is biased. So, we are taking all of that in and taking it in as fact and not critically evaluating whether or not it's fact or whether or not it's fiction and that can create additional stressors for us. So, critically evaluating the information that we receive.

[00:14:12]: Rejecting the principle of scarcity, so making a rational plan for ourselves of what we need and how we're gonna get it. And, don't be swayed, again, by media influences that suggest we will not have enough. Set and reach goals that may not be possible due to lack of time. We can put off things because we don't have enough time and, you know, one way to look at this pandemic is let one positive outcome of this be that we accomplish something that we were potentially putting off. And, I can't stress this one enough and I'm sure I'll say it again as we're together here, but - live in the present by appreciating the small daily pleasures that we usually don't have time to notice and focus on what we're thankful for, what went well, what is enjoyable in the moment for each day.

[00:15:11]: That's really a critical way for how we as individuals can manage our own stress, because when we talk about the child welfare workforce and the additional stressors that they have not being essential workers and, you know, having to go out and work without the additional pay or without feeling the support of a nation saying you are not essential and not being connected to an organization, not being able to go into an organization for support from a supervisor or from their peers. So, managing all of this individually, you know, being able to live in the present, being able to embrace time to build relationships and, again, critically evaluating the information you're receiving and really being judicious in how we, what we take in and how and which we take in.

**TOM OATES:** [00:16:01]: Yeah, there is an aspect of taking back control, you know, we feel like everything is just piling on us, everywhere you turn, you know everywhere you turn, you know like turning on your TV or turning on your email, it's just coming at you and coming at you. You bring up

some good points of kind of being your own filter and, you know, let's make sure we take time to, you know, manage our own, be it energy or where am I spending my attention and what am I letting that do or not do to me. So, kind of being cognizant of your own kind of filter that you can add to the information that's coming outside, or the clock to say nope, now's the time that I put this down or now's the time that I do something else, to have a little bit of control.

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:16:50]: It is about that, it is about this idea of like, as you've used the reference of multiple hats, so at any given point, a child welfare worker is going to have four hats on at the same time as they're trying to help their children with virtual school and manage their job and manage home life. So, a number of different things and it's what do I have in my control and how do I create those boundaries and how do I create those separations because if not, the worker is only as good to - any, all of us are, but specifically a child welfare worker - is only as good to all of those external things that we're talking about - work and children and family - as they are to themselves. So, by us creating those boundaries, by us creating those parameters for ourselves we are only, we are being, by doing that we are saying we are wanting to be the best parent, we are wanting to be the best child welfare worker, we are wanting to be the best spouse - whatever that may be.

**TOM OATES:** [00:17:53]: Of course, that doesn't mean we're invincible, right, it doesn't mean, you know the stress will never come in because I'm able to, you know, will it away - no, that's not true, we're able to kind of reduce the stress, but stress still happens, the trauma that we're still feeling is there. So, knowing that that stress is gonna occur, what are you guys suggesting or what are you finding the best for child welfare workers to mitigate the impacts of those stress. You brought up earlier about what does this do to us. Well, if you can limit the stress, that's one thing but that doesn't mean that all of the stress is gonna, you know, magically go away. So, once you are in those peaks and valleys, what are you guys suggesting in terms of, you know, an individual caseworker or a person trying to mitigate the impacts of that stress and trauma that they're feeling?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:18:46]: Yeah. So, yeah, we can mitigate the impacts of stress and trauma by addressing our physical, psychological and social health. And, some of the things that I'm gonna talk about here are not new and they are not intended to be new, they are intended to be a reminder for us that, oh, these are things that we have in our control, these are things that I can do to directly help me and the families I serve and my own family. And, from a physical health perspective, there are three main categories of diet, exercise and sleep. So, from a diet perspective, you know - I mean, these are, again are not new and they are not intended to be, they are intended to be reminders - but, eat a balanced diet, drink eight glasses of water a day, avoid inflammatory foods and limit the amount of alcohol we consume. From an exercise perspective - with, you know, in a lot of states gyms are closed or gyms are limited - develop an exercise routine for ourselves. Exercise is really important for our physical and emotional help and keeping our bodies active in some sort of way.

[00:19:57]: And, sleep. So, we know, sleep is a critical component to our health and mental health but may be difficult due to anxiety, disrupted schedules or routines or other barriers, and as I was saying earlier, this idea of like taking in information and having nowhere to go. If the four walls of my home are all I have seen since March, perhaps, with very little outside activity, it can start to feel like they are closing in on me. So, really having some, developing a healthy sleep routine can be important. And, there's some best practices there - those include going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, having a bedtime routine that starts 30-60 minutes out each night and includes the same series of steps or sort of telling our body it's time to relax, it's time to go to bed. Sleep in a cool, dark room - best practices, the optimal temperature is 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Limit blue light technology in our rooms

and stop using technology 30-minutes before bed. Avoiding alcohol and exercise before bed because they can both wake us up. So, again, not intended to be new, intended to be a reminder of things that we can do to create a healthy sleep cycle because we are our best, our health and our mental health are best when we can get sleep.

**TOM OATES:** [00:21:27]: Well, you bring up a point similar to what you said earlier in terms of mitigating our information, you know, how much are we gonna absorb, how are we, how much are we gonna let come in to us. And, a lot of that is, you know, you may look at that as dealing with the mental part of stress - what is this doing and now I'm starting to think more and learn about the world outside because I'm watching this. Well, you just brought up three areas about the physical side of stress, of, you know eating things that aren't gonna upset my stomach or things that aren't gonna cause me to toss and turn at night. Or, you know, doing things that actually help reduce the stress that maybe I'm putting on myself physically or getting a chance to exert some of that stress, be it just, you know, outside walking or it's every, you know, whatever you know your routine is, if it's you know, 10-minutes of pushups or stretching or whatever it is to kind of help your body get rid of some of that stress or prevent that stress coming in, just as you had mentioned earlier, the mental side as well.

[00:22:33]: So, there are these various aspects that we can do to kind of - and it is, it's defending ourselves against, you know, the impacts of that stress and trauma. But everything we've talked about right now is about the individual, which is great, it arms those caseworkers, it arms all of us on what we can do on a day to day basis. But you did touch base and we kind of talked about the lack of connection with our co-workers, but we still do connect. Those meetings still happen, they may not be walking right down the hall to, you know, somebody else's cube or somebody else's office and saying, hey, got a quick moment? Those, "oh, by the way" meetings may not happen as much, but if a supervisor and supervisee will do a weekly tag up or if there's, you know, those things are still scheduled, there's the opportunity there for those supervisors and managers and co-workers to help play a role. So, ideally, what would be that role that a supervisor or a manager can play in helping their staff kind of recover and mitigate from this secondary traumatic stress?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:23:39]: Yeah, so, I'll start with something that I'll also end with here and that is consistency from the perspective of the supervisor. Consistency is just so critical and being - to address the point you made about our current environment - being really intentional about reaching out to workers, being intentional with addressing how the worker is feeling and how the worker is managing these multiple, again, the hat reference that these multiple hats that they are wearing. There is a process that I would like to talk about here that could be helpful for supervisors and that is this idea of like how do I provide solace and then how do I help them move towards solving a problem, whatever that problem may be.

[00:24:33]: So, solace, there's sort of some steps in the process there. Solace itself provides nurturance and tends to the person's emotional state, especially after trauma exposure by showing compassion. So, we want to start by just checking in with the worker to make sure they are okay - how are you doing today, how are you managing things? If there's an emotion that needs to be attended to about a client, make sure that they attend to the emotion before the worker sort of takes that in, can become hardened towards the client or their secondary traumatic stress response come up, start to emote. If they need encouragement, give it to them, if they need a break or time off, find out a way to make that happen. And, modeling vulnerability. So, the supervisor letting the worker know I, too, am wearing multiple hats, I, too, am having problems here, I, too, am trying to balance out all of these things in a virtual world, in a world that doesn't feel safe to me right now and I'm also going through some very

similar experiences. So, modeling that vulnerability to let workers know they are not in this by themselves.

[00:25:44]: And once we have established that the worker is okay, then we can move towards solving behaviors. And this is all about how does the supervisor know and understand their workers. Some workers may do better if you engage them in questions and they can come up with the solution themselves, where as others may need more tangible support, such as helping them with work tasks like safety plans or time management. Also, you know, getting them a coach if they need that. The supervisor can give really specific feedback about what it is you will need to move this problem forward. And, again, I said I would end with where I started and that is consistency above all is really critical here, in part because if I am a child welfare worker and you, Tom, were my supervisor, if you become upset or frustrated with me about paperwork, I may be scared to tell you about big issues that happened with the families. So, just that consistency of interaction that we have, letting me know that, okay, yes, I'm behind on my paperwork and you will, you're checking in with me and we're gonna develop a plan for this, we're gonna solve this. So, I feel safe, so that now that I'm trying to manage this world virtually or going out and potentially, you know, feeling anxiety about the pandemic and whether or not I am going to get COVID, the virus, or whether or not I'm going to give the virus and have a negative interaction with a family feeling safe enough to be able to come to you and talk about that. So, consistency.

**TOM OATES:** [00:27:27]: Yeah, and this could sound different for a manager or a supervisor in terms of their normal how do I approach my staff, how do I approach, you know, the work engaging them? Because, sometimes it is about hey, managing the cases, what do you need, has this been done has that been done to how are you and, you know, what can I take off your plate or what's bugging you? You know, and this may cause some of the supervisors, managers to look at their world, their role a little differently, won't it?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:28:01]: Yes. And, you know, as we see it, it's really a dual process here. It is how does the supervisor take care of the worker and then how does the supervisor take care of themselves. Because, as I said to you earlier, we are only as good to our family and friends - if we are wearing the multiple hats - we are only as good to all of those as we are to ourselves. And, the same dynamic is present in child welfare - we are only as good to our workers as we are to ourselves. So, if I'm encouraging my worker to take care of themselves and I'm gonna be consistent in my interactions with them and I'm going to help them develop plans - whatever that looks like for that particular worker - then I need to do all of that for myself. I need to seek support for myself. I need to find new ways to connect with staff virtually on a regular basis, I need to find ways that I can - where am I going to receive solace and where am I going for my own, to help me solve problems. Because, it all can pile on, but we have to be able to manage that as well, as supervisors.

**TOM OATES:** [00:29:07]: And part of that actually goes back to the little bit of vulnerability you talked about, of expressing that even to your own staff and, you know, we're not all made of stone. And, being able to vent a little bit back and forth to have that dialogue can build a little bit more trust and also gives, can give that manager or that caseworker a sense of maybe somebody to at least alleviate some of that stress for themselves. You know, the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development has clearly been working with agencies and jurisdictions - I'm curious to the interventions that have been applied and the lessons that have been learned from what the QIC for Workforce Development's been up to.

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:29:52]: Yeah, so, in one of our sites, the needs assessment conducted back in 2018, actually - it was a year-long needs assessment - indicated the culture of the child welfare organization was not flexible and staff was resistant to change, which created an unhealthy work environment, as I was talking about earlier. Staff are less engaged and showed signs of high burnout and secondary traumatic stress. So, the needs assessment was showing us all of these things. And the solution agreed upon with child welfare and the interventionist was aimed at three levels. Engaged top leadership and administrators and becoming more trauma informed to increase organizational flexibility by engaging in coaching and supportive supervision. Provide frontline supervisors with coaching and supportive supervision skills while also providing the opportunity to build a support network among themselves. So, I had mentioned earlier supervisors taking care of themselves - so, not relying on workers, our workers to take care of us but us seeking that out with our own peer group is really a critical component there. And, the aim was to increase resiliency skills and manage the supervisors' own burnout and secondary stress.

[00:31:13]: And, the third was to provide an opportunity for frontline staff to form support networks and gain resiliency skills. And the aim here was to change the way workers react to stress in the building and in the field, sort of create a calmer work environment. And by them creating support networks for themselves as frontline workers, they could also hold each other accountable in using resiliency skills. For instance, if I come back to the office and I'm flustered, if you and I are, if we know these behaviors, if we know these resiliency skills, you can say hey, how about you do this, how about you take a timeout, how about you take some deep breaths, let's actually you know, relax a bit before we get into talking about what's going on. Let's take care of you and then let's talk about what's going on. So, we can all hold each other accountable.

**TOM OATES:** [00:32:04]: So, in this environment - and clearly, you know, it's a culture, it is a culture of how are we going to be maybe reacting to this together because then that breeds acceptance of I'm in this, I'm gonna change, you're changing with me, okay we can do this together, I don't feel like I'm gonna get any pushback, maybe there's some reinforcement and you can start to build that culture. Right now, at least in this now virtual world that we, you know, come to at the end of 2020, how can a manager then really ensure that they have the capacity to handle the needs of their caseworkers, knowing we are still, you know, in various stages of this remote work, underlying fear, the, you know, just the tumult, again, that's happening around us. What can a manager do right now to kind of ensure that they at least start to have or maybe can build that capacity?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:33:01]: So, there's really, when we think about that, there's sort of three components. One is for the supervisor or manager to be aware of their own barriers to being supportive and acknowledging those and then seeking support for how do I manage those. So, high levels of anxiety are one that we see and focusing on pressures of the job and meeting timelines. So, being aware of our own barriers for being supportive. If you are my supervisor, again, and I am the worker and you are focusing on anxiety or you're focusing on the job needs, I may not even feel like you are approachable. So, me being aware of that and being intentional about my interactions with you. And then, seeking support - as a supervisor, in this scenario, you - seeking support and relying on your peers when needed. So, really, those are some critical components there and how we can ensure that we have the capacity to do that. We are only as good to our caseworkers as we are to ourselves.

**TOM OATES:** [00:34:04]: Yeah, there's an element of actually proactively reaching out, right, reaching out to your friends, reaching out to your co-workers -

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:34:10]: Being intentional.

**TOM OATES:** [00:34:11]: Yeah, right? 'Cause, you can't just have that walking down the hallway and you come across somebody and just kind of vent. You know, have those hallway meetings, those "oh by the way" meetings, which really, which really work in an office setting, but when you don't have that, you have to kind of, you know, knock on their door via that Zoom call or via that IM or that email or, you know, hey if you guys are old enough, maybe you remember the phone which is actually to talk to people. So, we talk about climate and culture as you've mentioned. I'm curious to get a sense of the elements of an agency's culture and climate that can maybe best support this healthy stress management - because, we can talk about whatever the new normal is but we know it will be different from the past. And so, knowing that this is going to be some semblance of a transition that dealing with whenever we hit stability again. But, what are those kind of elements of culture and climate that you'd like to see that can maybe, again, support that healthy stress management?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:35:18]: Yeah, so within the organization, the organization is only as healthy as the people who work within it. So, the components really to create a healthy organization are all about the people. So, an agency's culture and climate are heavily influenced by leaders and includes behaviors, reactions to behaviors and stress within the organization. The more people emote loudly when disappointments or frustrations are encountered, the more this sets others in the workplace on edge and can create this contagion effect. So, being aware of one's own stress reactions, working to regulate emotions and working to view the work with families and children as well as internal and external colleagues through an optimistic, hopeful or resilient lens, can also help create more psychological safety and health within the organization.

[00:36:22]: Leaders at all levels of the organization can serve as a safe place for initiating and sustaining adaptive changes and can serve as a safe haven for dealing with stress of all types. So, it's all about how do I take care of me and how do I help you, or how do I help you understand how to take care of you. And that - I said it earlier, but - that vulnerability, modeling vulnerability, modeling transparency, those are some key elements to creating and sustaining a healthy organization.

**TOM OATES:** [00:36:54]: If you were to recommend to agency leaders about what's the first step to get to that future that you're describing, right - because we already know that the pace and the timing and everybody's kind of at full, they're at full-tilt boogie, right, there's just not enough time for me to compress what's going on because a bunch of stuff going on, blah, blah, blah - what would be that first step that you would recommend to an agency leader to kind of establish those skills within their staff where they can kind of manage their energy and really build resiliency?

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:37:32]: Yes, so, understanding themselves. So, if a leader is wanting to bring this into the organization, wanting to change the culture and climate of an organization, they need to start with themselves to understand their own triggers and understand from their perspective how they are leading the organization and then from there, make a plan, put a, develop a plan, a step by step plan of how they are going to then implement these changes within the organization. If I, the leader, seek out this new best practice and I'm like, oh, we're going to change the organizational culture, that's everybody below me, everybody down here is gonna have to take this training, everyone down here is gonna have to do the work, but I'm going to continue to function in this sort of chaotic way that interacts with staff where they can't trust me, they can't trust that if I come to them and present, you know, issues to them or concerns to them that I will be responsive as the leader in some sort of way, then everything I do will be for naught. So, me understanding me and what I'm bringing to this as a

leader and managing that first and then developing a successive plan of how we're going to implement that, implement these changes within the organization.

**TOM OATES:** [00:38:41]: So, it's a theme you've said throughout this conversation - I cannot be good, you know, the benefits that I am looking to provide are only gonna be as good as I can do for myself, right, and I'm totally butchering the way you put it, but I need to be at my best for others to get the best out of me. And so, if somebody's looking to change their agency or shift, you know, within their staff, they've gotta start with themselves first and it's where you have the most control and where you can have the most impact and then you have to model it and then you have to build it and grow. And, it's not exactly like the training is over and now you're fully proficient, everything's gonna be rosy come Monday. It's a continuous work in progress and it starts from within.

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:39:31]: Correct, yeah. Being intentional, I think is really a critical component there. Yeah.

**TOM OATES:** [00:39:37]: Dr. Andrew Winters, I thank you so much for your time, for your energy and for the guidance. Where some of it may seem simple or some of the stuff may have been something somebody's heard before, but maybe we need to hear it over and over again for it to stick. And, as we deal with whatever the future holds, we can start to manage today a little bit better. So, thank you so much for your time and so glad that you were able to be a part of this here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**ANDREW WINTERS:** [00:40:10]: Thank you so much. It was a pleasure.

[00:40:14]: Now I want to share some of the elements of the webinar that we talked about at the beginning of the conversation. So, if you head on over to [www.Childwelfare.gov](http://www.Childwelfare.gov) – just search podcasts – we'll have links to a few of the different parts of the webinar, including Dr. Winters specifically addressing managing stress while working from home during the pandemic and other portions of the webinar discussing what we know about pandemics and the stresses that they cause. We'll also provide links to the QIC, along with Information Gateway's resources around caseworker care and secondary traumatic stress. Again, just visit [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) for this episode's page – and the episode, of course, What did Child Welfare Learn from 2020: Caseworker Care. And to reiterate what Andrew stated a few times, we can't give our best to others unless we are at our best – and that means taking care of ourselves.

[00:41:09]: So, hey check out the other episodes of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, available on ApplePodcasts, Google, Spotify, Stitcher, and SoundCloud. And visit [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) for your informational needs surrounding best practices, contact information, state statutes, laws, policies, and resources all created to support the entire child welfare continuum. Well that is it for this episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. As always, we are grateful for your time and your willingness to be part of this community. I'm Tom Oates – have a great day!

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** [00:41:48]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [www.childwelfare.gov](http://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.