Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Melissa Merrick, Prevent Child Abuse America; Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez, Annie E. Casey Foundation; Frank Alexander, Casey Family Programs

[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** [00:00:34]: Welcome again to the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Tom Oates here and glad to be with you once again as we share some of the insights, innovations and lessons learned across the child welfare field. You know, in some way, shape, or form, many within the child welfare field and those who partner – or see a need to partner – with child welfare agencies, have started to take steps to shift the approach in strengthening families and protecting children. Now, these shifts – anything from conversations, how we evaluate programs, policy reviews, to who sits at the table when decisions are being made and more - they’re all part of a migration from traditional, reactive child protective systems to those designed to support child and family well-being through a primary prevention approach to prevent child maltreatment and unnecessary family separations.

[00:01:29]: Right, now, that shouldn’t sound new to anybody, right? The ideas and concepts they’ve been discussed for a while and many agencies are working toward action, such as those implementing prevention plans to align to the Family First Prevention Services Act. But we’re now seeing a collective, national effort. A partnership with the Children’s Bureau and three national organizations working across the public, private and philanthropic sectors to assist jurisdictions in this migration. Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being is a joint effort of the Children’s Bureau, Prevent Child Abuse America, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Casey Family Programs. Now, the goal is to assist those local jurisdictions with their efforts to develop just and equitable systems that bring communities together to leverage resources and information sharing to reduce the need for foster care and support families, ideally before they’d come in contact with child protective services. Now, the effort is working with jurisdictions in specific tiers – or as you’ll hear, rounds – and these serve to either, as full demonstration sites with intensive technical assistance and that’s round 1, or they’ll work to focus on policy and system reform at the local level, that’s round 2. Or in a broader sense to share the lessons and best practices – including those that have been learned from rounds 1 and 2 - and that is round 3.

[00:02:59]: Well, we’re going to spend two episodes here at Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast diving into the Thriving Families effort. We were lucky enough to bring together Dr. Melissa Merrick, President and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America, Frank Alexander, Managing Director of Judicial and National Engagement Systems Improvement from Casey Family Programs, and Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez, Vice President, Center for Systems Innovation with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. So, this is part 1, where we discuss this first-of-its kind effort, and how the partnership formed with these organizations and the Children’s Bureau, and how this effort is viewed – and implemented – as a public health approach, and what states and jurisdictions and their partners can do to help ensure the effort bears fruit and leads to – as the name indicates – families that thrive. So, in part 2, we will actually dive into executing the National Commitment to Well-Being, both in terms of new approaches to emphasize and suggestions of what agencies may want to consider de-emphasizing as we continue this migration in
working with – and for – the children and families in our communities. Alright, let’s get to it – our conversation with Melissa Merrick from Prevent Child Abuse America, Frank Alexander from Casey Family Programs, and Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

[00:04:23]: Sandra, Melissa and Frank, I welcome you guys into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. And, Frank, let me start with you, really from the beginning - I’d be interested to know, kind of, the seeds that were planted to lead to this really unique partnership with PCA, Annie E. Casey, Casey Family Programs and the Children’s Bureau. How did this come about?

FRANK ALEXANDER [00:04:46]: Well, thanks, Tom, first of all for having us all. We’re really glad to be here. It’s one of our favorite topics to talk about and I’m really glad to be here to talk with you. So, I think first I just want to acknowledge that I think a lot of our systems have been working for some time to determine how to move forward in a way that’s really gonna strengthen families and communities and really build the conditions for thriving families moving forward. And, partly what we’ve done between the four organizations is really capitalize on that momentum that multiple systems have been grappling with. And, as the Children’s Bureau was leading its effort to sort of focus on primary prevention and recenter back on community well-being, Casey Family Programs was also working on 21st Century Child and Family Well-Being System effort. PCA was doing its own work, Annie E. was doing its work, as well. And all of us really turned our lens inward and determined that our organizations are some of the most important efforts in the country where we can lock arms and really recenter together in a way that’s going to be very supportive of transformational efforts across the country.

[00:06:06]: So, we took the chance to sort of head the call that we had heard from families and communities for quite some time to focus on ourselves and our partnerships and really lock arms in a different way. Because, we know that none of our entities can do this work alone and frankly that there are far more partners beyond the four of us that are needed and involved in the effort moving forward and that’s going to be what brings us to the work in a new way that really, ultimately, is responsive to the families and communities.

TOM OATES [00:06:41]: So, continuing that, where did, you know, kind of the four organizations, kind of, decide, hey, one’s gotta reach out to another or everybody comes together. Just, where did the actual decision to partner come about?

FRANK ALEXANDER [00:06:57]: I think some of the first conversations - well, Melissa and I were both on detail in the Children’s Bureau together and Melissa was working at the CDC at the time. I was working in Boulder County, Colorado at the local government. And we were becoming involved really early on and so the prevention work and I had the good fortune to meet Sandra in the Children’s Bureau offices, as well. So, we were able to have some pretty intimate conversations at the time around what our organizational work was focused on. And I think some of the first effort happened between an outreach between the Children’s Bureau and Casey Family about how can we lock the focus around primary prevention and the 21st Century Child and Family Well-Being together in a way that’s gonna bring philanthropy jurisdictions across the country together. So, I think that was really some of the initial conversations that led to this effort.

TOM OATES [00:07:50]: It’s interesting you brought up where each of you were at points in your history, because Melissa - if folks were listening - I heard CDC. And so, I want to actually touch base on the actual public health aspect of this in a little bit, but first, Melissa, really and when we were talking before we recorded, the name itself, Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being -
there was some serious thought that actually went into the name into positioning this. And, I’m curious, why this name? Why did that come about?

**MELISSA MERRICK** [00:08:26]: Yeah. Thanks, Tom. It’s a really difficult exercise to try and communicate this energizing, intentionally different effort to really work across sector, across silo to partner with families and communities, with philanthropy, with non-profit, with government. It’s really hard to encapsulate all of that in a name. And so, backing up a little to something that Frank shared - while we were sort of brainstorming what this commitment could be even before it became what it is and what it’s, you know, turning into be, we thought a lot of shared visioning around what this will be was important. So, together across Health and Human Service agencies in government and other partners, we kind of came up with sort of a shared vision, which was creating the conditions for strong, thriving families and communities where children are free from harm.

[00:09:26]: Obviously, super a mouthful and quite a lot in there. And so, you know, just anecdotally and internally we kind of called it the proof of concept. We knew that prevention was happening in communities, we knew that some were really leading the way and others were wanting to learn from other communities. So, we knew all of these things were happening and there were these seeds. So, this proof of concept internally kind of helped us to encapsulate what this was. But of course, externally, what does that mean, I mean really for some of us internally we don’t know what that means. So, really it was well how do we really, again, put words to really capture the breadth and wealth of things that we were trying to do differently in partnership for prevention. And so, really, Thriving Families, I mean the word thriving I think is so salient, it’s not that we want families and children to just get by, we want them to thrive. So, that was really important.

[00:10:30]: The Safer Children secondary kind of title really came from the idea that we are and have been a very reactionary system, right? So, we really help families once they find themselves in crisis to keep kids safe, to keep families strong. And we wanted to really say no, but when we push for thriving families and communities, we will be keeping kids safer. Right, so it was important to kind of meet the field where it is, as Frank says - and you’ll hear throughout this conversation, I’m sure - many, many, many of us and many others have been pushing for this, kind of, transformed system and really a new way of looking at prevention. But still our systems are situated and funded and supported in this very reactionary, child protection focus. So, we really wanted to show the field how we are balancing these two concepts, it’s not doing away with child protection in support of thriving families, it’s thriving families will have safer children. And, it’s really this national commitment to child and family well-being that we think all of us need to get on board with and to really ascribe to and partner with to actually change outcomes for children and families to really help children and families reach their maximum health, life and prosperity outcomes. So, really, that’s why this name now - I will say, again, I said so much in there, but, you know, names are iterative. Maybe at some point it will change with the movement and then energy behind this national commitment to child and family well-being.

**TOM OATES** [00:12:18]: Well, it’s the first step to creating an identity to the movement itself. You brought up a phrase that we’ve heard over and over and over again - and rightfully so - of meeting the field where it is and that is applied, you know, at a national level, at a state level, at a local level, at door-to-door level. But, when it comes to a lot of the efforts towards prevention, there is this, you know, kind of shift in identity or reaffirmation of an effort. And, Sandra, this really gets to when you talk about meeting the field where it is, meeting the families where they are. And so, I understand that there was really an investment to gather and to listen to the parents and youth with lived experience. And so, in doing so, what did they tell you that helped influence where this effort wants to go?
SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ [00:13:11]: Thanks, Tom. Yeah, you know, all the partners have been involved in one or another for years. So, not just around this effort, but for years - hearing from families, hearing from parents, hearing from young people about what works for them and it just really has been striking to hear what - especially in the work that we do - from young people themselves directly, young people who are transitioning out of foster care and sort of have the system in a rearview mirror to be able to tell us what could have helped them, what could have been different. The young people that we work with are the older version of the younger children in the child welfare system that can’t speak for themselves because they just don’t have the words. And, these older youth are the voices for them, that’s how we see it. They have their own experiences to add.

[00:14:09]: So, things that I know we learned from them is that their parents need help way before that first hotline call. And when they get to that first hotline call, it’s hit or miss whether they’ll get the help that they need or if they’ll be offered a service that kind of meets their needs but they really don’t have what’s gonna address that for them. And, the biggest issue we hear is that too often systems just wait ‘til the third or fourth hotline call when it’s a major crisis before reacting to the family and at that point, it requires a separation because they never got what they needed in community when the first call, second call or third call happened. And so, what really influenced us is that they told us we needed to see them for their strength and hear them for their solutions. And that’s really, the time is now. It was sort of this enough is enough, we’ve been knowing this for a long time. I think that the pandemic and the focus that we’ve all had working from home has really changed the way that we all are behaving and also the racial injustice and the racial tensions over the last year have really led us to be more focused on a lot of these families, the black and brown families are overrepresented in the system and it’s time to hear them and see them. And that’s really what led us to this point.

TOM OATES [00:15:42]: There is this, you know, undercurrent conversation that’s always been happening and now it gets a chance to kind of come up to the surface in an actual practical application of, okay, what does change look like? And it’s a change in how, you know, a change in our thoughts, a change in our actions and a change in the system because if you don’t change any of those, you’re gonna be left with the outcomes you currently have, right. And so, we are talking about these changes, so to speak, or how things are going to be applied differently and so, when it comes to you know, Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being, the way at least we’re starting with implementation is various sites and jurisdictions at various levels. And, Frank, I know there is this larger group of tier one sites and jurisdictions - could you walk me through the characteristics of these kind of, of these demonstrations or these tier one sites.

FRANK ALEXANDER [00:16:42]: Absolutely. And, I’d say just to kind of dovetail on what Sandra’s saying, I’d say the first characteristic without question that’s across all four of the initial round one sites is lifting the voice of community, family, parent, youth experts in driving the transformation that they seek. And, I think that is the commonality, really that’s sort of ground one starting point one in every one of the round one sites, which is a fantastic place to begin to deepen the work and approach it very differently. Our systems historically have in their silos have reacted to crises and sort of responded by and been driven by crises. But as we want to move to well-being and thriving communities, we have to fundamentally approach the work differently, which is to not have the silos and the systems drive all the work but have the communities and families drive the work. I think that is the first thing.

[00:17:52]: So, what you’re, what we’re experiencing already - and it’s not just with the four jurisdictions, but it’s among the four partners and our other partners - is how are we going to strengthen the way that we do that. So, Sandra named quite a few ways that we’re really contemplating that we all
have a much deeper commitment around it, I think we’ve always been committed to it, but I think in this year and in this effort, we know that we have to really redouble our efforts and recenter and strengthen and lead from that place in a different way. So, I think that is for sure one of the top characteristics.

[00:18:30]: The other is really centering the work on equity. And, I’d say race equity in particular. Which is also has been a goal from the beginning, you know, thriving families as a concept was born long before the pandemic began and long before the calls for racial justice that we have seen ringing really loudly across the country this year. And, race equity has always been a significant component of recentering work in communities. But I think the thriving families partnership is bringing that to the forefront. And, in particular, I think we’ve been really encouraged by that across the jurisdictions which have very different demographics in their sites, right, so we have very different states, we have very different localities.

[00:19:20]: The other thing that I think has been characteristic is a really strong desire to lift tribal leadership and tribal connections while we center on race equity and many of our jurisdictions have large tribal populations or tribal nations within their jurisdictions that are becoming engaged and helping lead the work in a different way. And, I’d say even more strongly than we had imagined a year ago. Other components I think of the round one demonstrations is really focusing on how systems are siloed in the states and localities in the government - so across governmental systems - but also across philanthropic and non-profit community-based agencies and how we might recenter that work. So, as our federal partners - you know, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Resource Services Administration, the Children’s Bureau, Housing and Urban Development and others - begin sort of recentering the work back on strengthening families, states and localities and tribes also have to begin to think about that.

[00:20:31]: So, we’re seeing a lot of focus on bringing the systems to the table and coming at it with a different value, which is the future is not ever going to occur in a siloed system, it isn’t going to be driven by one system or the other. The power is in the nexus of systems and the collaboration across systems and the integration of systems because families don’t live in silos, youth don’t live in silos, communities are not silos, they’re dynamic ecosystems and we have to begin the long, hard work, I think, across sectors to recenter and break those pieces apart so that we can reconstruct around strengthening families and communities. Because, you know, resiliency and wholeness and well-being are centered in communities and families and neighborhoods and the conditions within which they exist and are built. And our separate silos have exacerbated that challenge for families. And so, we - when I say turn the lens back on ourselves - we are trying to be really rigorous about that and we are still in our infancy about what that actually means, but that is a very, very centered characteristic for each of the round one jurisdictions.

**TOM OATES [00:21:55]:** I’m curious to, you know, when you address, you know, it’s the change at the systems and the systems that work together but those systems are executed and applied by individuals, right, and so it’s at the execution level as you talk about turning the lens on yourself. How does something like this change the questions that caseworkers, that administrators, that, you know, that even leaders ask? Because if we go back to the, like traditional or the reactive approach, the questions that were asked in those systems or the way those systems were applied - how different are the new questions that we should be asking when we’re executing, maybe this shift?

**FRANK ALEXANDER [00:22:44]:** I think they’re completely different because it’s flipping the model upside down on the focus and I think Sandra gave a good example of that, of just when you speak to
youth and parents and families about the trauma that they’ve experienced in the separation of their families over their life course, they always ask why did it take separation for me to get help? Why did it take my removal from my family to access support. So, I think what agencies can do, child protection agencies can do, the hard questions they can ask themselves are what would it look like if solving this problem was easier? What would it look like if solving this problem happened much sooner? What would it look like if this family never needed the child protection hotline and what kind of relationships do I as a child protection worker, as an agency leader do I need to build in my community with families, with other partners, with non-traditional players to strengthen families and communities so that what I know are precursors to families becoming deeply involved in my agency are actually addressed sooner, more rapidly with strength and centered on what families, youth and parents are asking of us. And it’s, once you ask the hard question, the answers I think begin to be easier and we don’t simply look for very deep-end, institutional solutions that are complicated, that are costly and that often times are adding additional trauma to the experience that a family or a youth or a parent has in the crisis that they’re experiencing.

**TOM OATES [00:24:36]:** And this is a lot were that diversity of your partners and the strength of your partners and your relationships come into play because a lot of times, the answers that come from those questions may not be in your own wheelhouse, but they may be in somebody else’s but if you’ve got that relationship, then everybody is offering something and bringing something to the table. And, it kind of leans towards something we hinted a little bit earlier of this public health approach. And, Melissa, with your background and connection in working with the CDC and now with PCAA, I’m curious to how a public health approach - and I put that in quotes - of a public health approach is applied and defined when it comes to this particular prevention effort.

**MELISSA MERRICK [00:25:24]:** Sure. I think what you’ve been hearing from Frank and Sandra and I is all about a public health approach and I really like a definition that the Institutes of Medicine put out in the early 90’s that really defines public health as what we as a society do collectively to assure the conditions in which all people can be healthy. So, when you see there, it’s what we as a society do collectively, not one silo, one organization, one professional at a time but all of us together. Right, I think the pandemic allows us to see public health in action - many of us for the very first time - but it’s likening it to, you know, if I wear a mask, but my neighbor doesn’t, it’s not as effective as if we all do it together so that we can all thrive, right? So, it’s that approach that’s needed in child abuse and neglect prevention, always, and that’s what this effort really embodies.

[00:26:23]: So, it’s what we do as a society collectively to assure the condition. So, I think you’ve heard conditions form each of us now. This is not just - and you know, reflecting on your last question to Frank - this is not just of, you know, the questions being oh, what does this family need now in crisis. It’s what do all families need all the time to keep them strong, to keep their community strong, to keep them safe and nurtured and thriving before crisis. That’s gonna help them actually be able to cope with crisis better, to be able to be resilient after a crisis better, it just keeps everything forward moving. That’s what we mean in prevention.

[00:27:06]: And, you know, to assure the conditions in which all people can be healthy and thrive - again, public health I think is about everyone, it doesn’t, it is not meant, though to disappear the groups and communities that we know experience a disproportionate amount of the burden of adversity, of child abuse and neglect, of poverty, of all these other conditions that really interconnect and intersect, right? It’s what, it’s all of that. And so, I think the decision, you know, that this commitment would be around applying a public health approach really came from the fact that public health requires a comprehensive
Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast
Thriving Families, Safer Children – Part 1 TRANSCRIPT

approach, it requires all sectors, all people. It really lifts up the fact that we all have a role to play in keeping all children safe and nurtured and secure. And that means keeping families strong, keeping communities strong and thriving. It means commitments and efforts at every level of the social ecology. It means individual families, you know, yes, the parenting skills, the coping with trauma, addressing trauma in families, yes. But it also means at a community, having community supports. Family resource centers, evidence-based home visiting, services that families can access.

[00:28:27]: It also means efforts at the societal level, right? Livable wage, minimum wage. These are processes that, or policies even, that you know, provide economic supports to families. That helps to reduce some of the parental and community stress that’s on families which we know are risk factors for child abuse and neglect. So, it’s really honoring the fact that no one system, no one entity, no one organization can take this on alone. Prevention can only happen in partnership. And we are so thrilled to have these four national partners at the helm of really trying to operationalize what this commitment needs to look like. But it’s also there is room at the table for many, many other partners because we need all of us working together creatively, differently, transformationally if we really expect that children and families will thrive.

TOM OATES [00:29:30]: So, you’ve painted the picture, Melissa, of where, you know, what it looks like when everybody is at the table and getting the partners and creating that kind of community, that public health approach and the strength in numbers and all the various partners to recognize, hey what is it that all families need and are we providing that at an equitable level for our community. So, that’s point B. Many jurisdictions, Frank, however, are still at point A. What does it look like in helping those jurisdictions kind of move from that traditional reactive system to one that really supports child and family well-being and prevention? And that’s a tough question because it really is, okay, we’ve all got the goal posts in mind, but how do we march it down the field, what does this look like in terms of transforming either an agency or a jurisdiction?

FRANK ALEXANDER [00:30:30]: Well, I think the first thing is that we are also - the four national partners and the partners that we work with - we are also doing this work. So, we are committed to doing this work with jurisdictions with families and communities because we know that we have to operate differently if we want to see transformation, then we have to operate transformationally. And, I think although that sounds relatively basic, it’s very complicated and it’s one of the most important things that we can do if we wanna shift reactivity to proactivity and strengthening families and communities. And it’s two stay together, to lock arms and actually to relish the discomfort that we’re starting to experience because it is discomfort that has been necessary for quite some time and we have to own it.

[00:31:32]: And so, one of the most important things I think that we will see in the round one jurisdictions and with the four partners and frankly, with the round two jurisdictions of which we have an enormous desire to join the Thriving Families, Safer Children momentum is continuing to support each other, to be uncomfortable, to have hard conversations, to stay at the table, to roll up our sleeves and to work together, because collaboration is the beginning but then we must develop shared vision, shared strategy. And, those shared efforts require us to begin sort of the difficult process of disassembling our work and reconstructing it with families and communities at the center. And, I think subtle things like when we focus, when we say child protection is our north star, right, then we focus on protecting children and we end up unfortunately protecting children from their families, we don’t actually strengthen families and keep children safe with their families.
So, recentering on child and family well-being is a fundamental shift of our north star. So, moving from reactivity to proactivity means understanding that we do have a different north star. It’s not simply protecting a child, it’s building thriving families and communities and centering child and family well-being together. And, once we see that that north star is shifting, then our over reliance on the child protection system to really solve these root problems, these community problems, these population level problems will begin to shrink and our focus will rightly move to where it needs to be. And, I think we, once we can commit to that collective discomfort - and I think this is gonna be one of the biggest things that all of us on the four partners on the call, you know, have to stay centered on is we want to encourage our teams, our people, our partners to relish the discomfort and not run from it, because silos are built often times when people run from each other because the discomfort of working together, facing difficult issues like racial injustice, race and equity, egregious disparities, egregious levels of poverty, community conditions that are causing the disparities that we see. When we run back to our silos and then sort of build reactive systems where we can quote control the outcome within those systems, we will never, ever achieve what families and communities and youth and parents have been asking of us for so, so long. So, I see that as one of our most critical steps in this work right now.

TOM OATES [00:34:27]: There’s an aspect of asking questions, right, but it’s very, very difficult when you ask the questions of yourself to challenge yourself and, Frank, you brought up of turning the lens on yourself because it’s very easy to point out things you think are wrong over there, it’s very difficult to recognize when things are wrong when you’re looking in the mirror and that’s, kind of the place to start with everything and question everything. You guys had mentioned that clearly the pandemic and everything that 2020 brought us, you know, kind of brought a lot of this to light but that the effort itself, there had been the groundswell and the seeds beforehand. But I am curious of how the pandemic itself may have shifted and influenced the effort as the momentum was really building over the past number of months.

FRANK ALEXANDER [00:35:23]: I’m gonna kick that to Sandra to start and then I can follow up.

SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ [00:35:27]: I would just say that, you know, we, there was a lot of groundswell from the beginning and it was the pandemic that caused us to think a lot about what we should be concerned, worried about in terms of child protection. And, there was a lot of talk about what does it mean when we’re not laying eyes on children, what does it mean in terms of their safety, what are some of the things that we should be concerned about and there was an assumption that was made that, you know, children are in harms’ way. And, there were also issues related to budgetary cuts for the states. There were a number of technical issues just transpiring around the pandemic and it was us really thinking about is this the moment for us to think about how to do our work differently. Is this the time to actually walk our talk and do differently and behave differently and we thought, you know what there is no better time to do this than right now. And, I have to be honest and say it’s not just the pandemic, it’s the racial injustice, it’s all of the murders that we saw of black men and women that we were zoned in on in this time of loss in this country from all the deaths in the pandemic and the fear of what is going on with our families and our communities and what’s available. So, it was a lot of that that really led us to think about - despite this, many people would’ve said this isn’t the time, this isn’t the time. But we found there was no better time than right now to launch.

MELISSA MERRICK [00:37:19]: And, if I may just jump in, too, here to just echo what Sandra is sharing and just to share personally as a mom of two young kids. I’m very fortunate to be able to work from home and have internet connection and have two employed parents, you know. The stress is so high even in my own family, but when we add on and layer on child loss, housing instability, childcare
unaffordability, unavailability and all the other things - the loss, the grief, the trauma that we are all experiencing - this is a time that we all as national partners but just as citizens and as humans in this country and in this world recognize that the moment has to be now for us to do differently and to support families differently than we ever have. There’s a fierce urgency in this moment to not wait until we have all of the funding and appropriations and all of that figured out. Yes, we need resources. We need financial resources and people resources and all the resources to help this really thrive, but we cannot wait to figure that all out, we are so, I think all of us used to it taking a whole long, a lot of time to figure out those things before anything happens. So, for many of us, we’ve already been talking about this, the field has been talking about this for years. So, if not now, then when? When we know that our families are under tremendous, tremendous stress.

[00:39:04]: And, I’d just like to add, though, that you know, I think there is a lot of concern about children safety in this time where they are not in school in the traditional way, right. We don’t have those kind of protective eyes on children and families. But we know surely that most families are not hurting their children. They are just trying to do the very best they can do in the very best ways and using the very best tools that they have. It then has to become our charge to help support those conditions, help to support the tools that all families and communities have in their toolbox to really, again, be able to weather this and future storms. So, I just think that there’s fierce urgency in this moment and that’s why now

FRANK ALEXANDER [00:39:55]: And, I would just add, Tom, the one thing that I think is, I’m incredibly grateful to the partners for the work that preceded this year with the COVID pandemic and the calls for racial justice, because those issues, those calls have only clarified our commitment, have only doubled us down on the commitment to move forward in a different way. And, I think disasters do this, you know, disasters bring out what’s always been underneath the surface to the surface and they provide an opportunity for us to really think about broad-based solutions in a different way. Having been involved in a number of huge environmental and economic disasters in the past and having to do community work in the context there, you see communities can either come together and rebuild better, rebuild differently and recenter on strengthening families or they fall apart and coming out of the disaster takes, sometimes, decades. So, I think one commitment that we all need to kind of double down on is that moving through this pandemic and the subsequent economic repercussions of it and the burden and the stress that it’s bringing to communities and families requires us to seize this opportunity and move this work forward at the accelerated pace that this window does give us. This is a once in a generation opportunity for us to really move systems forward at rapid speed and I think the pandemic has given us that not only urgency but desire and opportunity.

TOM OATES [00:41:44]: So that’s just half of the conversation. In part 2, we discuss the roles of the national organizations and how agencies and caseworkers can best prepare. And with partnerships such a critical element, we also discuss what makes a good partner – and that goes for those in the child welfare field as well – what agencies should be doing to be good partners themselves. Plus, how to keep families and the lived experience as a continuous influence in the work and the plans moving forward. It’s a great continuation of the conversation. So, now if you head to this episode’s webpage on Childwelfare.gov, we’ll have links to each of the organizations and other resources supporting the shift toward primary prevention, along with materials that support transforming systems to become more equitable and just. Again, my thanks to Melissa Merrick from Prevent Child Abuse America, Frank Alexander from Casey Family Programs, and Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Hey, so, look out for our next episodes, of course, you can find the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast on Apple Podcasts, Google, Stitcher, SoundCloud, and Spotify. Subscribe
and get all of our episodes sent right to you. Thanks again for your time and being part of this community on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I’m Tom Oates. Have a great day!