

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast  
Thriving Families, Safer Children – Part 2 TRANSCRIPT

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** [00:00:03]: 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** [00:00:32]: This episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast continues a conversation on a national effort to assist jurisdictions in evolving to more just and equitable child welfare systems. The effort "Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being" is unique in that it's nationwide and a partnership between the Children's Bureau, Prevent Child Abuse America, Casey Family Programs, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. So we're talking public-private-philanthropic entities all coming together – and not to parachute into jurisdictions and take over implementing a single broad approach, but to help build the community partnerships and incorporate the lived experiences unique to the jurisdictions.

[00:01:18]: Hello everyone, Tom Oates here. Glad you've chosen to join us as we continue this conversation. So, this is part 2 of our focus on the Thriving Families, Safer Children effort. In part 1, we discussed the partnership between these national organizations and how applying a public health approach – especially in our current environment - is so important. So, I urge you to take a listen to part 1 if you have not yet. Now, here in part 2, we get into executing this commitment to well-being, including what it takes for agencies to be a good partner with the community organizations and non-profit groups necessary to be at the table to drive system change that helps reduce the need for foster care and strengthen families to ideally never come into contact with child welfare and child protective services agencies. So, we also discuss some of the shifts that may be necessary to build more equitable and just systems – emphasizing new approaches and questions to ask while de-emphasizing some traditional thinking.

[00:02:20]: We're joined again by Dr. Melissa Merrick, President and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America, Frank Alexander, Managing Director, Judicial and National Engagement Systems Improvement for Casey Family Programs, and Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez, Vice President, Center for Systems Innovation with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Now, I offer to you to pay a bit of attention to the thought and approach of turning the lens on ourselves and truly unpacking our traditional or instinctive thinking as a necessary component of change. Alright, let's jump back into the conversation. We pick it back up talking about executing the commitment, and I asked Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez about the roles that the national organizations have in this effort "Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being."

**SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ** [00:03:14]: I think we have a number of roles, but our biggest role really is to spur and expand innovative partnerships that really focus on addressing structural and social determinants of health, like systemic racism, what we've been talking about. But there's one thing that I, you know Frank talked about that we've all looked inward and I want to give credit where it's due, too, because that's the right thing to do. There are so many community members and organizers that have

come way before us working on supporting families and stopping harm for families. And we're now joining them. And I think that sometimes we take credit for things that we don't necessarily or should not necessarily do so. So, we have to be honest about that. And that's why a primary value of Thriving Families is about sharing power with families, young people, and communities. And it's our role to build a bridge so that these folks and system leaders can come together for transformative change. We're the connector, you know, we're the ones who have access - the Casey's, I should say - have access to public agency leaders who are instrumental in helping to build out these, these systems. And we have Prevent Child Abuse America that has this phenomenal network across the country and then the Children's Bureau who's responsible for everything. And so, we are all connectors in different ways and that's our role is to bring the strength of each one of our organizations so that we can connect the people who have really been in the trenches doing this work already to connect it with the system leaders so that we can meet in the middle and have transformative change. So that's really how I see our role in this effort.

**TOM OATES** [00:05:10]: So, on the flip side then as agencies in jurisdictions are recognizing the need, talking about starting to move forward - what can they best do to prepare to continue to set the stage for commitment?

**SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ** [00:05:25]: Yeah. So, the first thing I would say - Melissa and I were talking about this last Friday or last week some time - and it's really not about how you write your interest letter or how you submit your application. The first thing that jurisdictions and agencies can do to prepare is to be honest with themselves about whether they want to work on building out prevention efforts that are directly linked to a reactive child protection response. Some agencies don't want to do that. Some communities - for whatever reason, I'm not saying it as a criticism - there, there are reasons that prohibit them or they're not in a place to do that. But even those places should keep putting one foot in front of the other to prepare themselves for that. And then I would just say, you know, challenge their own mental models about families who need help and why they need help. See them as families of strength and not weakness. See them as people that can thrive if provided the right type of assistance when they need it. And if you don't know what that is, I'm going to sound like a broken record. They can prepare by inviting people they normally don't work with, like members of the community who have been investigated. Young people who have aged out of foster care, families who have been reunified with their children.

[00:06:45]: So that they can learn about what works and what doesn't, and put this responsibility to solve the issues by all members, by the community, the public agencies. Much like how Frank talked about the four partners, the foreign national partners locking arms - that's what needs to happen in community, too, being able to lock arms together. And that's a lot easier said than done because you have to build trust. We've all been building trust with each other. And so, we, we have a sense of what that is, but that's how I would say they need to start by preparing themselves.

**TOM OATES** [00:07:21]: And there's an aspect of - as we've been talking about - it's like changing the questions that you ask. Right, recognizing where, where are the supports and, and we find this when, if you have that opportunity and you are inviting folks that you mentioned that you don't normally work with, but maybe you work around. Right? Or if, as you come to the table and you're looking to get that conversation started, asking what they're, what you're missing and say, hey, what am I missing? You'll get answers. And, and it's not - I think and correct me if I'm wrong - but a lot of the times it's not going to be up to the agency to find the solution, but the solution will be suggested back to them of I can remember what was missing or what would have helped along the way. So, getting the ideas, getting

the understanding - that may be the easiest part. Because if you're engaging those families, guys, I think they're going to tell you what they're missing.

**SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ** [00:08:20]: That's right. They're going to tell you exactly what they're missing. And then to your point, they, then there's implementation of that and how there's an entire workforce out there that then will deliver on what those solutions are. That's exactly right.

[00:08:37]: And then this gets back into Frank, kind of the strength in the diversity of your relationships, of your partners. And so, I'm curious then for agencies to recognize who's in their backyard, you know, what exactly will they need from their community partners? I should turn around and say what makes a good partner for an agency.

**FRANK ALEXANDER** [00:09:00]: And I think, you know, what, what makes, what makes the agency a good partner for the community partner is a good question, as well. And, and I think, partly I think what Sandra really kind of hit the nail on the head - and it really is beginning the process of building trust and shared, shared accountability toward a collective outcome in the community or the jurisdiction or the state that you're, the tribe that you're serving. And I think from a, from a partner perspective, I think, I think for the child protection agency, some of what the child protection agency needs from a partner is an opportunity to kind of be a bit more vulnerable than maybe the child protection agency has in the past. So, child protection agencies are notoriously sort of under assault, oftentimes, because of the role that they've played in communities. And yet, the workforce is so deeply committed to transforming families and strengthening families. The systems themselves are often a huge impediment to that. So, some shared vulnerability, some shared accountability with a focus on really, but the north star recentering around well-being and Thriving Families is, is really essential. Which means building teams and structures for discomfort, right? Where we can actually have shared conversations around what do we see? What are the outcomes that are actually being achieved or not being achieved in the community? And how, how might we develop some shared interests?

[00:10:40]: I think from our experience thus far, there's a lot that the agency can do to strengthen the community, strengthen community voice, strengthen community partners, seeing the organizations that are sort of center points, access points, and the community has an opportunity to strengthen. So, you know, really fantastic example of that is, is family resource centers across the, across the country are, are really stepping up. And there are huge opportunities for states and localities to build support within family resource centers and have that connection grow strongly between the partner agency and the child welfare agency. And for some of the, some of the data and some of the outcomes within child protection helping support the focus of where those family resource centers might grow. And I think the other thing is really getting, using this window, community partners often have a, such a pulse on root cause solutions, root cause activities that are really going to help families, individuals, youth in their community and lifting those up to the child welfare system. Right now, at this time - because we know if we focus on root cause policy solutions, economic supports, you know, protective factors together - we have shared interests that will, that will be advanced. And so, I think those are just some characteristics.

[00:12:10]: And the other thing, you know, I just take some staying power through the discomfort. I don't mean to repeat myself, but I think it's going to be essential that when things get tougher in the conversations, things get tougher in activity - that people see that as progress and see that as we are really making moves now. So, let's stay here. Let's, let's figure out how we can have this conversation that has been impossible to have, a little bit deeper. Figure out how we talk about race, how we talk about equity, how we talk about disparity, how we talk about community conditions now when we

haven't been able to and what do we need to do to do that. I think that's a huge support that a community partner agency can give to a child protection or child welfare agency that they often haven't had in the past.

**TOM OATES** [00:13:03]: And recognizing that it's okay to get comfortable with the uncomfortable and that growth kind of comes out of that. And so, recognizing the partnerships is key. And there have been many other conversations we've had in many other episodes where partnerships and the trust is, is huge and the developing the relationships with, you know, with those neighbor organizations is paramount. But then there's the actual practicality of getting everybody at the table and then getting to yes - Melissa, when you get everybody together and the narratives people may approach when they come to the table may be a little different. And everybody's version of success may be a little different. How do you get to yes with so many seats at the table?

**MELISSA MERRICK** [00:13:53]: You know, in the spirit of recognizing the transformation and the new way of kind of working together, I would challenge that question and say maybe we're not trying to get to yes, right? That's maybe by old model or a mental model of, you know, implement this program or do this thing, evaluate it, get these outcomes. This, as you can tell, is very different. We're talking about something that is going to look really different in all of our jurisdictions that we partner with. This is not a top-down approach where the national partners have the answers and we want, you know, to quiz you. And when you say the right thing, like ding, ding, ding you win, like best community award - this is nothing like that. This is about partnering, listening, learning together. I mean, to echo what Frank has shared about, you know, working together about how we talk about systemic racism, inequity, how, how we challenge ourselves, but then how we move from talking about it ad nauseum, and recognizing it to how can we actually be about it, how can we actually be about Thriving Families, Safer Children? How can we be about our north star being about child and family wellbeing as, as we said, as opposed to this reactionary thing.

[00:15:14]: So I think, you know, ensuring progress and measuring progress is going to also be new and different along with the new questions we have to ask and answer. It's going to be a new way of measuring, of understanding of, of getting sort of the movement tracked and gauged, right, this is something - we have site support teams nationally that work together in communities with our various jurisdictions with their, our many, many, many partners. So, when you talk about seats at the table, we could be talking about 20, 40, 100 seats. So, at some point - you're right - we need to coalesce and learn and, and recognize and identify some priorities. I think that that is all embedded in this national commitment on how we're going to ensure progress to really bring our communities, our jurisdictions together, you know, as, as learning collaborative, learning communities to really understand, are there key themes across the jurisdictions and localities that are similar, right? Are there similar challenges that people have identified. And then how can we then leverage our networks and resources and efforts to really achieve those? But there could be, in some of our tribal partners, tribal nation partners, or, or some communities, there could be different goals, right? So, it's really, again, kind of understanding where people are, where they want to go, and then figuring out how we can best support them in partnership to really achieve those schools that they prioritize for themselves. Again, this is not a, we at the national level need you to do X, Y, and Z. We, we've been doing that for decades. And again, if we do what we've always done, we're going to have what we, what we have. So, I think this is kind of the, the really interesting and exciting part. It's also pretty much of the messy, difficult part. How are we going to prioritize what is going to emanate organically from these partnerships? And again, partnership across immunity, but also with us partnering with these communities.

[00:17:31]: You guys have all brought up the idea of - and I liked the phrase of kind of changing the north star, right, and the well-being of children and families as that maybe the north star you thought you had, but really focusing on, alright, let's put that Families First sort of approach. And this is where the, the, lived experience of talking and engaging with your clients or those who have been through the child welfare system, kind of recenter folks to where they should go. As the partnerships can be developed and as that kind of like, let us move forward, let us really put the lens on ourselves - if you are an agency, what would you guys recommend in terms of continuing or being able to continue to have that family expertise sprinkled in or, you know, or brought in at every stage of the work? Where's the best approach for an agency that says, you know what, we like it, we talk with folks and then we kind of go our own way. So how do you kind of, kind of always circle back into being able to bring that lived experience, to kind of always make sure that you are putting the north star first front-and-center?

**MELISSA MERRICK** [00:18:45]: Yeah, I can start and then I would love to invite Sandra to give her thoughts. But I think you hit it on the head, Tom, where, you know, all too often we engage people maybe early in a process, whether that's families or, or people with lived expertise or just a particular community partner or a particular agency. We may engage them once or twice and then we go on and we kind of do it however we want, right? And we kind of fall back on what we're used to. And so, this is something very different, this is about engaging with everyone. All of these partners have equal power, they share the power and the decision-making in the solutions. Certainly, the brainstorming solutions, but then the ultimate implementation of solutions. They share that from the beginning, early and often and continuously throughout process. So, this is not a, you know, let's involve some key stakeholders at one point in time or maybe a pre-post or something like that. But it really is around building that trust, keeping the trust and then really having these difficult conversations, this, you know, being comfortable with discomfort, that that has been a theme throughout this. That's what it's going to take, but it has to take that in partnership throughout the whole process. I think that's what I wanted to highlight.

**SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ** [00:20:06]: I'll build on that, Melissa, based on what you're saying. I, you know, we are always in agreement about how families should be embedded and young people should be embedded. They should actually be seen as architects, chief architects of the solutions that are being designed. And they should be paid for their efforts. Just like every other professional that is coming to the table to work on, you know, we're all being paid to be here. They should be paid to sit at the table and be allowed to have the freedom to not worry about, you know, taking time off from work, very practical things. They should be a part of the design of the agenda for the meeting. They should be a part of the design of the work plan. All of, all of these activities are changes in behavior which builds trust, and that's really how you get to, how you get to a different place. Because we talk a lot in the work that we do. And communities need to see action and they're watching, they're watching us to see how, how we show up, how we behave and how, how we treat them, how included they are. I would also add that I think one - we're not there yet - but I think one eye we should have towards is how we measure participation and engagement of family and young people in the design. So, I, I think that we're, I know we're committed to making sure all about happens. It's one thing to have a value around it, it's another thing to actually implement that value.

**TOM OATES** [00:21:49]: We've been able to talk about a lot of the new approaches, or at least what, you know, turning the lens on ourselves, and the questions we should ask and the way we shift forward in, in looking toward that future. But a lot of turning the lens and asking the new questions means there are things we won't be doing. And so, I'd be curious now, as we talk about moving forward, what would you suggest that, where agencies at least start when they investigate things that maybe they should de-emphasize as they start to move forward.

**MELISSA MERRICK** [00:22:26]: There's probably so many here. And I'll just get us started. I bet Frank has a lot of concrete examples to share with our listeners. But, you know, for me it's always interesting to hear of an organization of any, of any type that says, okay, we do x, right, and we squarely, this is our lane, let's say. But then these initiatives come to be or this commitment and, and, you know, maybe they want to be part of this initiative or commitment and maybe they're not really there. But so, they think that they could simply sort of tack on the word prevention to what they're doing and that that makes it so. And obviously what we're talking about - and I think Frank really already kind of said this and I totally agree - is we're talking about doing things differently. So, it may not be things that people already have the bandwidth, the expertise, the training to do, right? So, it's about then providing the training, the cultural shift. Again, we are, I mean, at a, at a, you know, 50,000-foot view as a nation, we are about the, you know, sort of the dominant narrative has always been in this area that, you know, it's a bad mom or poor mom who mal treats her children, right? Versus the narrative that we need where we all have a role to play in keeping families strong and keeping kids thriving and supported, right? And really highlighting the strong evidence that that really confirms that my children will actually do better and will thrive if all children are doing better and are thriving.

[00:24:14]: So it really then requires a real narrative and cultural shift, which I think, is one of the most exciting parts about Thriving Families, Safer Children. It's that so many partners - here you can see four of our key national partners, but there's many others, and then of course, all of the community partners - that are really calling for this new narrative, this new shift, this understanding that actually what we need to be about as a country, as a collective across agency is supporting children and families before they find themselves in crisis so that they are set on these trajectories toward health, well-being, and prosperity, right? So, it's then going to require de-emphasizing that mental model that keeps us quote in our lanes, right? And, and again, that's not to suggest that then they have to do everything they're doing and then tack on these other kinds of prevention ideas. It's about really restructuring what we all do. And that is why - to Sandra's point earlier - not every community is in the place where that is politically achievable in this moment, that's maybe not even a vision for, for a state at this moment. But for so many communities, it is, this moment gives them sort of the nudge to continue the great work in prevention, in community partners, in engaging and empowering families and others with lived expertise to really catapult this kind of movement, this kind of energy. So, I would say it really starts with sort of our mental frameworks and mental models from a national perspective and then, of course, organizationally in community and in family.

**FRANK ALEXANDER** [00:26:08]: And, you know, Tom, the only thing I would add to that - which was, which was fantastic - is just, I think in precisely where you need to emphasize, is precisely where the answer to what you should be de-emphasizing exists. So, so for example, if in your community right now, you, you, let's just say you have a, an unfortunately high number of kids living in congregate facilities, or you have an, a disturbingly high number of children in placement that are under the age of one, or you see a certain level of inequity or disparity in, in your data - the thing you want to de-emphasize is that that is going to continue. So, so if, if instead we kind of focus the question on what it is we want to emphasize, which is, for example, we don't want young people growing up in institutional facilities serving as their, their family when we haven't provided support that they've asked us earlier in life to strengthen their family where they do not need to reside in an institutional, in an institutional setting.

[00:27:24]: So I think, I think by asking the question differently, it sort of raises the I'm not going to operate my agency anymore in a silo, in a siloed way that achieves these negative outcomes that families and young people have been asking of me for quite some time. So, I'm going to, to rigorously

build new relationships and partnerships and collaborations to, to get better outcomes that are centered on family and child well-being. And I'll be able to begin to de-emphasize the work if I, if I think about that and I built a wholly different way of operating and, and you don't have to do this work alone. There's no one that has to do and can do or should do this work alone. There are many hands in a community that want things to be different. There are young people ready to lead, there are families ready to lead. And I think once we, once we break that sense of the CPS system is completely overwhelmed and inundated with all of this work and can't possibly keep up with what we're already doing, we breakthrough that, that sort of artificial glass barrier to, to community conditions and community well-being, we'll actually find that there is, the works a lot lighter and it's a lot more recentered back on why we got in social work in the first place. Why we decided to dedicate our lives to helping families and communities to be part of the world, and focus on conditions. And it's ultimately more rewarding. And I think the energy, the creativity, the solutions are right there. And they kind of move in, they kind of move in tandem. But you need to know your system and your community really, really well to be able to diagnose what to emphasize and what to de-emphasize. And I think those are flip sides of the same coin.

**SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ** [00:29:18]: And if I can just jump in here about how important the relationships that you develop matter. Because a specific example related to what we're talking about right now is the relationship that Annie E. Casey has developed with Prevent Child Abuse America. Now, I didn't know Melissa before this effort, we've gotten to know each other. And my perspective, perception of Prevent Child Abuse America has been that they're focused on 0 to five-year-olds. And the Annie E. Casey Foundation wants to end the pipeline of youth aging out of foster care system to support systems, to do that for a whole host of reasons because of the negative outcomes that they experience and they don't get a forever family typically. And there's about 20-23,000 who are aging out of foster care every year. By coming together and talking with Melissa about what all of the chapters of Prevent Child Abuse America do across the country, we learned that there are actually some chapters that are working across the developmental lifespan, the teen lifespan. And one of the things we want to focus on is teen entry prevention. And so, we have now developed a partnership to figure out, to do a landscape assessment of how we might pull those strategies together so that teens aren't entering the system. And, and so when you think about what to de-emphasize, what to emphasize, it all gets wrapped up in these relationships that you form and how you start to build trust to get to a different outcome.

**TOM OATES** [00:30:54]: And of course, each one of those relationships, actually at every level - the jurisdiction, the state, at the relationship, the individual, even the case worker - is going to be different from the experience somebody brings in, to the environment that they're operating in and to even to the outcomes that they're looking for. And there's a positive to that because it means there's just so much to be learned and then so much to be shared. And, but there is a challenge to that. So, I'm curious for, for, for all three of you - how do you plan or how do you manage to be able to share and implement what's being learned across the communities. Be it just round one or when you get into the multiple rounds. How do we take advantage of when progress is being made all across the efforts?

**MELISSA MERRICK** [00:31:47]: Yeah, it's such a good question and such an important priority of any effort, like this. You know, all too often there's good things happening in various communities, but really, it's not disseminated fully and we can't learn from one another. And this sort of effort has really been intentional about the learning, collaboratives, the communities of practice. You know, that among the communities in round one, round two and then ultimately nationally that will learn together and share. Now how we do that for the whole field is a huge undertaking, especially as we've already highlighted throughout this conversation, where the fierce urgency of now brought us to do it without

figuring every single thing out. But I'm thrilled that part of the role of the national organizations and the commitment that we've made is that our communications experts internally across all four of our entities are working together to figure out what is a robust kind of dissemination plan. We will surely have a website, we will surely have different modules where people come to learn about the various community efforts that have happened in the various jurisdictions and so that we can learn together as a field.

[00:33:10]: But I just think that this is a huge undertaking, but it's such an important part because each of us gets emails every single day from people who want to just know more, they want to learn, they want to be a part of it, they want to, you know, again, the momentum is so palpable right now. And so, we must make sure that it's externally available for people in digest form for folks that just need the high level, and then a more detailed form for people who really are well-prepared to kinda take some of the lessons learned and make some efforts, you know, implement some efforts in their own communities.

**TOM OATES** [00:33:51]: And of course, learning happens, you know, Frank, at all levels. So, it's not just a 50,000-foot national organization - of course, there is learning there. There's also learning boots on the ground and at the training level and with the partners if you turn around, plus those at the, those who were actually being affected. So, it's almost this, it's a great multi-level community of practice that sometimes can clearly be overwhelming. So, being able to articulate, identify, disseminate, and answer kind of the big questions that everybody has no matter what perspective they have of, well, what does this matter to me and how do I care? And that's, that, there's a big effort - well, hopefully knock on wood, it does become a big effort because that does mean that there would be a lot of lessons to be learned and to be shared across the board. Finally, for, for, for the group here - hey, this is not easy. So, I'd love to get your take from where we are right now what you anticipate the biggest challenges to be for yes, for the national organizations and for where you guys are involved but also, you know, for, for the communities and the jurisdictions themselves.

**SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ** [00:35:04]: You know, Tom, I think that so often communities are used to big organizations saying they want to follow their lead. But the organizations come in with their own visions, their own plans, and their weight is felt because they come in with money. And this is really fundamentally about putting power in the hands of those on the ground and supporting them and making the right things happen. So, like our report card for ourselves is about that, putting the power in their hands to make the changes. And trust building is key. And we do that by changing our behavior and just being consistent, especially when we are feeling uncomfortable. Because all of us here, admittedly, we have been very prescriptive in our technical assistance in how we show up. And it has been a shift for us to take a step back, allow this space, and provide the resources for communities to take this up on their own. And like I said earlier, communities have been doing this work for a very long time, so we should definitely not be taking credit for that. Our, our contribution to this work really is about how we guard rail that container so that they can do this work in a different way.

**FRANK ALEXANDER** [00:36:28]: You know, I, I, think, Tom, that the, some of the biggest challenges are going to be for us not to be limited in our, in our thinking and our approaches because. as we, as we move our systems to be more responsive to actual asks from our community members, we, we have to get upstream. And as soon as we get upstream, the beauty of being upstream is, is you're actually developing solutions across multiple systems. The solutions are not isolated, we're not trying to solve the child protection agency issue, we're trying to solve inequity issues, we're trying to solve poverty issues, we're trying to solve housing instability, economic success. You know, we're trying to focus on

how, how we collectively build thriving communities. And, and so the challenge is going to be for partners across-the-board - federal, state, local, community - to keep opening up our eyes to, to different solutions and to kinda reach further upstream because that is really where we need to be. And, and fundamentally where we're going to find the greatest, the greatest support, the greatest opportunity. And, and really where, where the greatest level of equity is achievable. Health disparities are reduced at the same time that you reduce economic prosperity. Child protection disparities are reduced as soon as you reduce housing disparities and housing instabilities. And so, these, these opportunities as we move in the next few years together are going to give us an opportunity to really push and think differently together. And I think that's, that's why our hope for Thriving Families is profound and deep. And we think that the information sharing isn't as hard as the relationship building and the, and the locking arms components. Because as soon as you do those two pieces, the information is actually everywhere. Like we all know what's not working right now. We don't want to talk about it, but there's plenty of information about it. So, I think they kind of work in tandem.

**MELISSA MERRICK** [00:38:49]: And then the great challenge in all of that is that it takes time to develop relationships, to build trust, to nurture that trust and those relationships to ultimately create the conditions that we want to create for our children and for our children's children. So, I think, you know, the urgency of this moment propels us to be where we are here today to have this conversation with you. But we know that this is not an overnight kind of solution, right? We can't just fix all of the problems, you know, next week or in two months or maybe even in two years. But we can stay committed to the fact that we know we can do better than normal for children and families and that we can, working together in partnership, we can prevent child abuse and neglect, we can start families off on a road to success and thriving so that they can reach their maximum health, life and prosperity outcomes.

**TOM OATES** [00:39:52]: And as you guys mentioned earlier, what better time than now? While we're forced to do this, while the questions are, are in our minds, in our discussions and not just in the back of our heads a little bit, but actually being brought up and now it's the time to, to make that change. Melissa Merrick, Sandra Gasca-Gonzales, Frank Alexander. I cannot thank you enough for all the time you've spent with us, but also all the time that you've spent with your organizations, with the jurisdictions and with each other and the Children's Bureau, as well moving forward with this effort. Clearly the best of luck and to all of those who are striving to kind of make this difference and, and make it tangible. Thank you guys so much for being a part of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

**SANDRA GASCA-GONZALEZ** [00:40:47]: Thank you, Tom.

**MELISSA MERRICK** [00:40:48]: Thank you.

**FRANK ALEXANDER** [00:40:49]: Thank you.

**TOM OATES** [00:40:52]: More information on partnering with community organizations and implementing a primary prevention approach can be found on this episode's web page. Just head on over to [Childwelfare.gov](http://Childwelfare.gov) and search podcasts for this episode and all of the episodes of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. We'll have links to additional resources and more from the national organizations. Of course, if you are looking for publications, tools to work with families, training materials for staff, data, contact information, do not hesitate to visit Child Welfare Information Gateway at [Childwelfare.gov](http://Childwelfare.gov). If you have something specific you are looking for, you can search our library – it's the largest library dedicated solely to child welfare, with more than 110,000 titles you can search

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through – or you can reach out to our team directly at [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov) where we can help you with your information search.

[00:41:48]: Plenty of other great episodes of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast are available to you. Just subscribe to the podcast – we’re available via Apple Podcasts, Google, Stitcher, SoundCloud, and Spotify. Again, many 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. And of course, thanks you. We’re so happy you’re a part of this community and that you’ve chosen to spend your time with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I’m Tom Oates. Have a great day!

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:42:28]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [childwelfare.gov](http://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.