

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Workforce Part 3 – Child Welfare Scholars  
TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Carenlee Barkdull, University of North Dakota School of Social Work; Vincent Roehr, MHA Nation

00:00:00 [Music Introduction]

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:00:03]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

**TOM OATES** [00:00:33]: So, here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, we're continuing our focus on workforce development and education is clearly a component that we need to take a look at. Agencies need to ensure staff coming into the workforce - or even staff that's currently in the workforce seeking, let's say a Master's Degree, for example - they want to ensure that those staff are prepared for the work that they'll need to perform.

[00:00:56]: But, if that education is given in a vacuum - actually away from what's happening in the field - how well prepared are the students really going to be? Hi, folks, Tom Oates, from Child Welfare Information Gateway here, and in this episode of our four part series on workforce development, we're gonna dive into a university-agency partnership that looks to support the student as a whole person. You'll actually hear the phrase, "never let a student fail".

[00:01:20]: And, they also look to develop a child welfare community with those students, developing contacts and working with professionals and leaders from agencies and other organizations across the state. Now, what's resulted is a network of information sharing that influences both the day to day practice of the field and the curricula that the university teaches, ensuring that those new graduates are ready to tackle the current and emerging needs of their community. Plus, we're gonna hear about this from a tribal perspective.

[00:01:50]: Now, North Dakota's need for service improvement is huge. The demographics of the state are shifting very quickly and the entire state's infrastructure is working to catch up - and that includes child welfare. Now, the University of North Dakota is partnering with the state's Department of Children and Family Services so that, plus the pressing need that the state has helped earn UND a university-agency partnership grant from the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, and that includes BSW and MSW traineeship programs, engagement with local child welfare agencies and specialized curriculum that's evidence-based and trauma informed.

[00:02:27]: So, in this episode, we talked with Carenlee Barkdull, she's the Department Chair of the University of North Dakota's School of Social Work, and Vincent Roehr, he's the current MSW student that Carenlee's advising. Now, Vinnie is a current child welfare professional for the MHA nation over in the western part of the state and his path is really, really special.

[00:02:46]: We discuss the program and how it works, but also how the real focus is on building relationships. Relationships with the university and the students, relationships with the state agency, and relationships among the students themselves. All of that creates this information sharing network that supports ongoing continuous quality improvement. There is a lot of passion in this episode and we

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really think you're going to enjoy it, so here's part three of our series on workforce development taking a look at what's going on in North Dakota with Carenlee Barkdull and Vincent Roehr.

[00:03:21]: So, Carenlee and Vinnie, let me welcome you into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:03:26]: Glad to be here, Tom.

**VINCENT ROEHR** [00:03:27]: Yes, thank for having us.

**TOM OATES** [00:03:29]: So, guys, let's start from, well, the beginning, you know, talk to me about the need, Carenlee, that prompted the development of, of the North Dakota, the Child Welfare Scholars, what, what brought all this about?

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:03:39]: Well, if anybody's been following the news about fracking in the past several years, they may know that North Dakota was, found itself, shortly after, around 2011, 2012, found itself at the beginning of a massive oil boom due to changes in fracking technology and extracting oil from oil shale, there's a huge formation that basically is the western half of the state called the Bakken Formation. And, we're a very rural state, about three quarters of a million people in a very large area.

[00:04:13]: Our largest city, which is Fargo, it's metro area if you count the side of the, the community that's also on the Minnesota side is about 100 and, 100,000 people, so that's North Dakota's largest city to give you some context about how rural this state really is. Most of our counties are frontier counties, which is a seven people per square mile density.

[00:04:37]: So, it's into the most rural part of the state that this oil boom happens and tens of thousands and some people say hundreds of thousands - it was really difficult to keep track, because of the transient nature of that workforce - came pouring into this very rural state and these every rural communities to do everything from build roads to construct oil rigs, to drive trucks. And this was at a time, too, as our country's recovering from the Great Recession when a lot of economic refugees are pouring in from other states looking for labor, looking for work. So, people are coming from, I met people during the oil boom from the southern part of Louisiana where my family has ties to Washington state to Vermont to everywhere in between.

[00:05:29]: So, we saw this massive migration of folks that completely overwhelmed our infrastructure in the state so people of course the most pressing need was housing - which got a lot of attention - is how do you deal with the housing shortage and there have been documentaries about the man camps and people, you know, squatting in tents, living in cars, and families are doing this, too.

[00:05:54]: So, it put an enormous strain on infrastructure, if you think of social infrastructure of communities, it put a strain on schools, it put a strain on medical services, it put an enormous strain on social services. We have very small rural child welfare agencies in the western part of the state all of a sudden dealing with a massive population influx and very complex and novel child welfare situations.

[00:06:24]: What do you do when the kids aren't in school, but they're actually living in the car, in the school parking lot? What do you do when you have an influx of people into the state and you're getting reports that the kids are living in what may not be safe conditions and that there may be criminal

backgrounds involved, but it's very difficult to track people down to find them and you have a serious workforce shortage?

[00:06:48]: And you're already in a county that maybe has struggled to keep its workforce up to where it needs to be because rural child welfare systems historically - and in our state, that's true, too - often have a difficult time attracting and retaining qualified child welfare workforce.

[00:07:06]: So, it's into that context that we found out about the opportunity to apply to the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, the NCWWI grant for a phase II of its grant program and we were absolutely thrilled, we thought we were able to demonstrate a high need that we could really because of our distance program, which has a statewide reach, that we could really support people where they live getting into social work education and support them to then be placed in - and we made that a condition of the grant, that students had to agree as part of their, their payback for the support they received for their educations - that they would need to agree to be placed in the highest priority areas, which included the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, where Vinnie works, which is a sovereign tribal nation right in the heart of the oil boom and one of the most deeply impacted communities.

[00:08:10]: So, we worked with several counties and with MHA Nation, and so those are our highest priority areas for students to be, do their internships and then commit to work afterwards. So, that was the genesis of - this is a crisis, there's a severe social work and child welfare workforce shortage, can this grant help us recruit talented students and get them through the program quickly and get them placed in these critical roles during this incredible strain on the child welfare system out west.

**TOM OATES** [00:08:46]: And you brought up something in this, about, it's not necessarily the classroom, because distance learning is such a big thing and it is such a large state and it is such a, you know, like you mentioned the frontier counties out there. So, you've got that distance aspect to it, and also, from, from what, you know, in the reading I've done on this, we're not talking about full-time students, these are not your, your twenty two, twenty three year olds looking to get their MSW, you've got a lot of components here of current professionals looking to advance their career and trying to add to the influx of the need that you've got in these communities. So, talk to me a little bit about, like, the various class components that you've got to put it all together.

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:09:29]: We were very fortunate in that we already - so I should, I should step back a moment and say the University of North Dakota has long had a distance education, been dedicated to that, and if you've been to our state - which is a very rural state, it's kind of famously bad weather, you kind of understand why we've always ventured into that territory to be able to serve our people.

[00:09:50]: The distance program, and the social work program launched the first distance program using the old IVAN technology, the interactive television where people had to drive to a distant classroom, but there was a TV in it and that was a little clunky and I taught over that many years ago in another state. But it was a first foray into distance education and this social work program here at UND was the first to deliver a Bachelor's program using IVAN, so we've got a long tradition - that was back in the 90's.

[00:10:22]: We launched the distance MSW program and that was when I was a new faculty here in 2006, so we had some long experience with delivering Master's education that way and our niche has been we're really interested in access - especially in rural and remote communities - to, back to Master's

of Social Work Education and now Bachelor's of Social Work Education - that's an additional story that kind of came out of, of the successes with this program.

[00:10:52]: So, what we wanted to do was, we surveyed students and prospective students and said what would really work for you - if you're already in the field, if you're a paraprofessional, if you have another degree and you want to advance and you want to stay in place you can't afford to uproot your family, move all the way to the eastern border of the state and come to our program - what students told us is "I have to keep my job if I'm gonna be able to do this."

[00:11:19]: So we structured a part-time program - they sign up for about six credit hours each semester and the classes are in the evenings. They're live and structured and use web video conferencing technology and they also have to come to campus periodically which is a big expense and a challenge for the students but that's required for some intensive face to face labs, as well.

[00:11:44]: So, there's a lot of demands on them, they're with us for some time, depending on what degree level they hold, they could be with us for two years or three and a half years to get their Master's. But we were, we already had these components in place, we were known what students really needed was some scholarship support to be able to, we're, we're a good bargain, and, and a good value, but it was out of reach for many students in rural communities to be able to come without the tuition support that that NCWWI grant provided.

**TOM OATES** [00:12:15]: So, with all of this you've got that set up and then you've gotta get some, some, some infrastructure along the way in terms of developing the curriculum, so we know there's gonna be a Title IV-E component, and when people think about North Dakota, at least, it, you know, if you've got your East Coast biased hat on, like, like I do, because I'm from the East Coast, you may assume North Dakota, rural, okay, it's pretty simple - it's a diverse state and you brought it in there because of the huge tribal component to it and because you've got all of these, you know, new workforce coming in, like you mentioned, from the West Coast, from the South, from all over the place.

[00:12:51]: So, you've got the title IV-E, but there's gotta be a NICWA component to this - am I right here, where do you fit all of this in?

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:12:58]: We have, for a long time, had Title IV-E, it's been relatively limited and fairly static over a period of time, nor had we done a really good job, I'll be honest about that, in really ensuring that we were connecting students desires and workforce needs out in the more remote parts of our state.

[00:13:22]: A lot of times in the past, having students go to the rural communities was a little bit harder sell, however, what we, what we did with the, the NCWWI grant and stipends was say you, you have to work in one of these workforce shortage areas, that's not a choice, but we knew that to have students want to take advantage of that, we also had to recruit from the western part of the state.

[00:13:49]: So, our cat... traditional Catchment area has been the more populous eastern part of the state, but, some of those students were willing to make a commitment with the NCWWI funds to relocate and with, because the stipends were fairly generous and provided for some paid internships when students needed to relocate, we were able to make that possible for a select few students we were convinced could actually access housing in the western part of the state and make that work.

[00:14:18]: But, we were really careful about that. If they weren't already there, we wanted to make sure of their commitment, but it was also really challenging to live in the western part of the state. For a time, Williston, North Dakota - which I'm sure you've never heard of - had more expensive housing than Hawaii or San Francisco, imagine that. For a period of time during the housing boom, it was the most expensive place to live in the country.

[00:14:41]: So, people were paying, sometimes, eighteen hundred dollars a month just to get a cot that was swapped out with others during their shift. So, there was incre-, because of the demand, and because, of course, there's also opportunities that arrive for exploitation in such a situation, we had to make sure that, that no matter how heartfelt people's desire was to live in the western part of the state and to say oh yes, I want to go help. Because that was the impetus of some of our students on this side of the state, yes I want to go out there and help.

[00:15:11]: We had a couple who did and were extremely successful. One who actually was able to live in an old FEMA trailer from Katrina days when they were shipped up to her tiny northwestern corner of the state. She lived there for several months before she was able to get into more permanent housing. But, that was the exception rather than rule.

[00:15:31]: Primarily, where we were most successful was being able to recruit students like Vinnie who were in place, had housing, were located in western North Dakota, wanted to stay in western North Dakota. And that meant that we had to get out of our offices in into our cars and go build some relationships with counties and with folks in MHA Nation and say "We're here, we care about you, we want to help, here's the resources that we have to do that, can we work together and do something to ameliorate the workforce shortage out here."

[00:16:07]: And we had, we've had a terrific response, I think, for every single targeted county, I can with confidence say that everybody - as well as MHA Nation - has participated in those high need counties and that community in the grant. So, it, it's, it's been a very exciting and challenging ride because also, some great distances were involved for us to bridge, and while we have technology - which we're using wonderfully for this podcast - there's nothing that replaces a relationship, an understanding of who these people are, building some trust relationships with folks and understanding we're here for the long-term.

[00:16:51]: So, we have this grant opportunity, but we're, we, we're making a commitment as a department of social work to be engaged in supporting the rural workforce across the state for the long-term. And, that's been part of the transformational aspect of this grant for us, it's made us make that commitment to do that work, and we're still doing that work.

**TOM OATES** [00:17:11]: So, then, that leads us to the other side of the state, and that's where Vinnie is. And, so, Vinnie, so, we clearly understand that this is more than just distance learning classes. There is a full relationship and a full support that goes along with this. Now taking it from your perspective, here, what is your involvement, because you're, you know, you're still full-time working and you're involved in the classes, but there's more to that. So, give me your perspective on being one of the North Dakota Child Welfare Scholars.

**VINCENT ROEHR** [00:17:43]: Alright, well just to kind of begin, when I first got started working with Carenlee and the program, it was kind of a, a surprise to me. I actually started working up here back in 2014 because of the shortage of workers and I actually had a degree in social work, I used to live in

Florida for a short period of time, but this is my home, and I actually got a phone call saying, Vinnie, come back home, we need you to work and I was like, no way I want to stay in Florida, I'm doing fine and they said, no but we really need you to come home just and do it.

[00:18:14]: So, I made the decision, I came back home and started working - it was shortly after that one of my coworkers had asked me if I was ever interested in getting my Master's degree in social work and I, I said, well, yeah of course, you know, but I can't afford that, I'm working full-time, there isn't a university around here, I didn't think of, and, and it was, that was the conversation.

[00:18:33]: And then, it was a few short months later, I actually received a phone call from Carenlee and she said, "Hey, are you interested in getting your Master's degree?", and I'm like, why am I getting this phone call, it's, it was, it was kind of a lot, so I was like, "alright, well, yeah", and she says, "I'm in your area, I'll be in your office tomorrow if you want to meet and talk about it," I'm like, woah, that's kind of like, "yeah, of course."

[00:18:53]: So, she showed up the next day like she said, she was there first thing in the morning. She met with myself, our director and my direct supervisor, and we, she told us about the program, what they were doing with NCWWI, trying to improve the workforce out here and giving students, or workers a chance to get their degrees and enhance their professional careers, so I said, yes of course, let's go for it.

[00:19:17]: But I still had to apply for the program just like anyone else, and I applied and they said I'd be a great candidate so I felt pretty confident going in. I applied and I got it and I started the following summer, I want to say. And it's been great - the relationships with the advisers has been good, they, they really kind of set you up for what you need and the aspect of being on a video conference call in the evenings and a set classroom from the comfort of your own home is a lot easier, as well.

[00:19:45]: Now, I wouldn't say that it was been the easiest thing in the world, to kind of, try to figure out and navigate, but it has been, it has been good. It's been good to kind of work during the day, kind of focus on work and then in the evenings be able to like, then I can do the classroom time, then I can devote some of that time there.

[00:20:01]: And it wasn't the most demanding thing in the world, you know, and it was, it was workable, it was, it was, it was fun, I would say. We did experience some changes in my office, so I did have to take a small break from the program, we had like a few people pass away, which was really unfortunate, and it caused a big rift in our office, which then my supervisor pushed me in a direction take a, a different position in our office and I actually moved up into the ICWA department, where I'm at now and I, with that learning curve and needing to devote that time into my job, I had to actually step away from the program for a short period of time, but even, just as I stepped away for a short period of time, I never lost connection with Carenlee, she kept in contact with me, and when I was ready to, kind of, get back into the groove, it was just as easy as, kind of like, okay I want to do this again, let's get started, I'm ready to roll and there we go.

**TOM OATES** [00:20:56]: So, Vinnie, you talked about that this is clearly more than just taking classes, and you pointed towards the relationship with, with your adviser, who is Carenlee - so talk to me about that relationship, Carenlee, what are you there to provide, besides just kind of, you know, making sure that the, that the work gets done and the, and the grades are satisfactory, what are you there to provide, that advice, that guidance to Vinnie for?

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:21:19]: Well, I, you know, advisement does have its practical elements and, and a lot of us play a role in that - especially in the distance program, so Vinnie's had support from our wonderful distance program coordinator, from our Title IV-E coordinator, at the time, who has since left the position and gone to another state, as well as from me in my role. So, it's not be one person's job, I'd say it's been multi-pronged, but in, in, in the way that we think about this, and I'm really passionate about this is, kind of have a, you know, once, once you're part of our family, once, once we're on this journey together, we don't want to see anyone fall.

[00:22:02]: We want to let students know, look we understand life happens for you. You're in very stressful jobs. Vinnie's role - which, maybe he'll have a little bit of chance to share what a typical day in caseload, and the travel and some of the stresses of his work out at MHA Nation - what is, what does that look like, and what does dealing with the rest of the state system and counties, what are some of the stresses around that.

[00:22:30]: So, Vinnie has a very difficult position to navigate as a full-time job without anything layered on top of that. Our faculty understand that and so it's, it's beyond just an advisement role - it's that faculty understand that they need to be flexible with students, in terms of homework deadlines, in terms of making up classes - how do we maintain our standards, ensure the students are getting what they need, demonstrating the competencies that they must to graduate, growing and developing, feeling supported and encouraged, yet, we have to acknowledge and deal with the realities of their lives in their roles.

[00:23:14]: And so, from an advisement perspective, thinking about a professional advisement, is one of the things that I recognized with Vinnie from my first conversation, so, he may blush, but Vinnie is, is on a leadership track in this profession. And, I believe he's absolutely going to end up, if he stays where he's at, in charge of that program at some point. I think Vinnie has the opportunity to be a state leader, I think Vinnie has the opportunity to maybe go on for his doctorate and look at some national leadership roles, so he has amazing talent and attributes of leadership already that it's so exciting to see how he's developed those in this program.

[00:23:58]: So, that's the workforce and leadership development part of this piece that's been so exciting in getting to work with him, but also, our commitment is really heartfelt to our students. We know that students sometimes, you know, life does happen to them and we have to be able to figure out, not only we know that a lot of times, especially to American Indian students have to stop out because they have a lot of responsibilities aside from at work, for often family and extended family. So, we want to be able to support any student who needs to stop out and take care of things and assure them, you're always our student, we know that you may be needing to take a break, I'm here for you.

[00:24:45]: If you want to talk to me about some concerns you have, some worries you have about the path you're on, about any doubts you may be having about this - I will be here to listen, I will be non-judgmental, I'll help you reflect. My concern about you is about the person first and that, that has privacy over everything else and if I can be a sounding board to help you think about decisions, think about future planning, think about how to make all of this work, problem solve so that we can remove some stress - maybe we extend this piece, maybe we put this over here, maybe we find a creative way to deal with that issue, so that you can return, or make up something or be successful long-term, you know, whatever it is, that we're just present with that student, caring about the whole person.

[00:25:36]: And that's just basic good social work skills and, and, and I want to emphasize that, you know, of course I have an agenda, I care about building the child welfare workforce, making things better for kids and families, supporting talented professionals, but I also care about the individual people, helping them connect with resources that will support them in their journey - whatever it is.

[00:26:01]: And sometimes maybe it will be a diversion out of this path, but a lot of times, the bumps that students encounter along the road are just temporary bumps and we can really help smooth away, and we want the students to know you can call me, you can talk to me about anything, I will listen, I will hear you, I'm here for you and that that's genuine and that that's authentic.

**TOM OATES** [00:26:25]: And there's this theme as, as you know, we've been talking about workforce here on the podcast for a couple of episodes, there is this overarching theme about supporting the human, supporting the person, supporting the environment and, and you can see how this is, this is trickling through, it's not just about the classes, it's not just about quote unquote training, it's about supporting the, the culture, the person, their life and putting that work together, you know.

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:26:52]: Well, I think that's just living social work values, if that, if we are about person and environment, as social work educators, we can't make that translation to working with students, then we've really missed the boat somewhere and we've lost who we are in the process, and this grant has reminded me about those fundamentals in some really beautiful and profound ways.

**TOM OATES** [00:27:13]: So, Vinnie, you know, Carenlee sung your praises and so, you know, talk to me, specifically when she started talking about leadership and how that training has come in, because this, again, this grants comes from, from NCWWI and building leaders is a huge part of that. So, talk to me about beyond, you know, let's go beyond the classes and when we talk about North Dakota Child Welfare Scholars, there's a leadership building component. What are you receiving as part of that?

**VINCENT ROEHR** [00:27:39]: Well, I guess when you think about leadership and how this grant has helped me excel and how I've been growing, recently in the past couple years, I have been working as a Indian Child Welfare representative for three affiliated tribes. This job, what was, for me, was a huge step, I was you know, almost pushed into it, but I was supported, the position needed filled and my supervisor said, Vinnie, you should go for it and I applied for it and I got it and it was such a huge step and such a big opportunity for me to have such a big job, to be one of the four ICWA representatives in the state, you know, one of the four tribes, it's a huge undertaking to be responsible in such a huge aspect in child welfare, and specifically Indian child welfare.

[00:28:27]: I was able to take some time to develop skills and learn my job and then at the same time, be able to return to school when I was like, "okay, I have a grasp on my position, I feel more comfortable, let's give this a go". And since then, the past few years, I've been able to have dual relationships now, at University of North Dakota and on a state level, working with the Native American Training Institute that, you know, coordinates between the four tribal nations in our state. Doing projects that, you know, are helping me graduate in the long run, but they're also projects that I'm wanting to do on a professional level, things that I saw a need for.

[00:29:13]: Being able to work with UND, they have been able to sit me at the table with some of the biggest names in our state, Shari Doe, just like a few of them, like Don Schmidt with the Title IV-E, we got to meet with him, I just met with him again last week, I mean, sitting at state director's meetings. So, it's...it's been such a good opportunity to get my foot in the door to meet everybody on this professional

level, not just on a county level, but on a regional level, being asked to come speak at different regional conferences in our state. And then, being able to fall back and say I'm also a student, you know, I also work with these people as a student level, but also on a professional level.

[00:29:56]: Even on this grant, this new grant that UND has been working on to implement ICWA in our state, I've been working with them, sitting at the same conversations as a student, but then also as an Indian Child Welfare representative that has a vested interest, a stakeholder in this, this grant that we've been working on.

[00:30:14]: So, I would say that the leadership aspect completely falls on this dual relationships that I've been able to build with everybody, it's been interesting.

**TOM OATES** [00:30:23]: You know, you bring up something really unique here, and that's extremely valuable about creating this, you know, we're not just talking about the pipeline between you or other students at UND, we're talking about this, and I get the sense it's this community that's being created, this child welfare community of having, you know, really bringing everybody together at the table to have these kind of interactions and discussions. Carenlee, there's gotta be a huge benefit for the state itself, you know, separate from the program, just in terms of North Dakota and its ability to, to serve the children and families of having this kind of leadership, this community being formed.

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:31:02]: I think that's been one of the most profound aspects of this grant, for me, because over the arc of, you know, we're in our fourth year, now, or four and a half years, I guess is for when it actually started - that's sufficient time to really be able to have an impact on systems and that's what I've been really grateful about this grant - there's no way you can, a three year arc of time is no way that this could've happened, this really just took all of this time to build the partnership. Shari Doe, who Vinnie referenced is the director of the Division of Children and Family Services for North Dakota and she's my sister, I mean that's truly, she came into her job the exact same time I became the chair of the department, so we kind of both went, alright, let's go for it.

[00:31:45]: We want to, we want to do something, we want to, we want to work more closely together, we want to revitalize this partnership. There's been a long standing partnership with the state with UND social work department, we have the Children and Family Services Training Center that trains, certifies all the child welfare workers and trains all the foster parents in the state. That's been housed in our department for 33 years and that's a model and that's a contract through DCFS, so that's long standing partnership, but partnerships frequently need to be renewed because they can kind of get into their own, you know, tracks and just get rolling along and when Shari said, "I'm in for the NCWWI grant," - because it required us to have a jurisdictional partner in child welfare, we couldn't launch into this as a university alone.

[00:32:28]: We, we, we, the end commitment meant that we figure out how we were going to develop our own partnership in a specific project. So, what we decided to do together was work on a program to institute the leadership, the Leadership Academy for Supervisors, 'cause this state's never had any systematic supervisory training for child welfare ever.

[00:32:54]: So, we decided we'll take advantage of this wonderful resource that NCWWI brings us, we're gonna make this happen statewide and that's gonna be the essence of our partnership together. So, in that process of figuring out how in a county-administered system that you're going to with 53 counties get everybody on board, with the state and the university to make this happen - we've worked very

closely together, we've had some wonderful times, we've had some knocks and we've developed real trust in that relationship, a real sense of support for each other and an appreciation that we're about transforming the workforce, supporting the workforce, 'cause that means transforming practice for kids and families and their outcomes and that's what drives us. So, that's really sustained us through this, Shari has been through that work, Shari's gotten to meet many of the students. She's been as excited about the students' progress through that as she has about developing this and sustaining this training for our state that we've never been able to mount and sustain before. So, through, through that work and that exposure to each other through these different programmatic aspects, we've embarked on some other partnerships, you know, Vinnie talked briefly about the new ICWA grant and the stages involved in that and that's really at the beginning stages.

[00:34:23]: But we also just received - and we're just the second state to do that, Hawaii was the first - a contract from DCFS to conduct children and family services reviews for the state, so that function is housed, now, at the training center, that means an even deepening partnership, it means we'll be having a treasure trove of data and working closely with the state to generate research questions that nobody's had the capacity to answer before and that partnering with our academic faculty and students - talented students like Vinnie - to say would you like to be part of this, would you like, you know, this might be part of an interesting research project for you, this is real, this impacts practice in our state, these are important questions.

[00:35:13]: So, again, kind of thinking about the synergies between how all of these things inform the academic part, enrich the opportunities that students have, and enmesh us more deeply as real partners and our identity, really, our university, I mean, our department and I came here, cared deeply about child welfare, it always has. So, that's been a strong foundation upon which to build.

[00:35:42]: I think the transformation that's happened for faculty - even those that don't directly work in the child welfare system, or have had experience there - that our identity as a department now is not just about we're trying to get students across the finish line - we're about workforce development and we care deeply how our students are, and NCWWI forces us to track them, we've decided we're gonna do that anyway, when NCWWI goes away, we're gonna track our students for the long-term.

[00:36:12]: We wanna know are they being retained in the workforce, how are they doing in the workforce, are they getting into leadership roles in the workforce, and what do we need to do differently and better that would've prepared them better for those who...who aren't sustained or retained in the child welfare workforce. So, this has changed who we are.

**TOM OATES** [00:36:29]: And, and you know, I hear that and I'm thinking really, two things where, where you're bridging the gap between data and practice, and that's for you know, what are, what are we doing well to, to train these new leaders, to, to train the new professionals and how are they actually implementing all that. So, you're starting to see, is it really working, how do we change what we need to change - but at the same time, you talked about, you know, in, in taking a look from the, from the state perspective, from, from Shari's point of view, it's where are we doing well as a system, where are we doing well in terms of our outcomes, what do we need to improve and then, that shapes how you're educating along the way, so you're training your future workforce to deal with the problems they're going to deal with today and in the future, versus problems that may have been identified ten, fifteen, twenty years ago.

[00:37:17]: So it's this cycle that kind of supports itself, it's that continuous quality improvement from the education aspect, and then from the actual direct practice aspect, that's a, that's a...

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:37:27]: And that we all own that together.

**TOM OATES** [00:37:30]: Yeah, it's not your responsibility and I'm just waiting for it, it's this partnership along the way and then...

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:37:36]: You're articulating that very well.

**TOM OATES** [00:37:38]: Well, we, we, we try, like I said earlier, I never met a microphone I didn't like. So, Vinnie you're, you're at the crux of this, so talk to me about the professional you were, you know, when you first came back coming back from Florida to the professional you are now and having not only the education support, with the advisement along the way, but then being part of this new child welfare community, you know, talk to me about you and your career from then to now.

**VINCENT ROEHR** [00:38:09]: Oh, yeah, just springboard off of that, my career has definitely springboarded and I have went from working in a completely medical setting of social work and hospitals and hospices to being told, "hey get your butt up here and work in North Dakota, we need your help."

[00:38:29]: And getting up here and getting the full child welfare experience, it was definitely a learning curve for me, my, I would say learning curve, but at the same time I think I've been along social work for a long time, both my parents were social workers and both my parents got their degree at the University of North Dakota - that's where they met, so, just a nod off to UND, I've always been a fan, I've always wanted to go there, so there's that - but, I've always know, you know, like, what's been going on up here, I didn't realize how tough the job was gonna be.

[00:39:03]: When I first came back up here to start working in foster care, I took a foster care case management position, and they gave me the position strictly on the basis that I had a Bachelor's in social work. And I said okay, well let's do this, let's get started and I had a great team that was already here doing the work and they were able to kind of, help me navigate how child welfare works and I had a crash course that ended up, you know, excelling me to where I'm at now.

[00:39:29]: It, it was a pretty stressful at first to kind of get into a new system and then figure things out, especially coming back home and realizing how huge the need is, but then realizing that okay, I'm able to do this, this is, this is working and then excelling in that and then throwing one more thing in, and boom, Carenlee calls, guess what you're gonna try to go to school now, and we want to help you out and I'm like, alright, cool let's do this.

[00:39:56]: The professional I was then was kind of still doing case management, I was all over the state, visiting children all over that, you know, could be placed in different homes and I, I had a pretty high caseload and so, the, the aspect of the classes being in the evening was very helpful and kind of, various certain times - I definitely changed my schedule and how I traveled, I was all over all the time, I, I think I probably have anywhere between fifteen to twenty hours overtime every week just traveling, just constantly busy.

[00:40:25]: But, they were able to, kind of, support me and make sure that whatever I needed was good. Later down the road, I was, like I said, pushed into this supervisory role of this ICWA department and that was huge, kind of, a step for me and I needed to take a step back from school, but at the same time, they were still there, the dual relationship, like I said, was still there. They were able to help me, kind of, grow into that role and when I was able to take on the classes again, they were there the whole step, sometimes, I wasn't even doing anything, they were making sure I got the program in there.

[00:41:00]: As far as the leadership role goes, from who I was before to who I am now is two different people, I would say. I started off as a lowly case manager that was highly stressed out, and kind of and huge caseload, as try to, just keeping floating above water there to now actually being able to work on projects that are gonna affect the state. I'm working on different things with another fellow classmate of mine, Stephanie DeCoteau, who's a director of the Native American Training Institute on implementing Indian Child Welfare notices in our state, and we were really excited about that - Carenlee says it's too big of a project, sometimes, but we're definitely going for it.

[00:41:44]: But, who I was before to who I am now is definitely completely different. I, I am able to make phone calls and be at meetings and have emails from people that are actually making differences in our state and it's been such a good experience to kind of, sit at the table, like we said earlier, having those conversations that are continuously affecting how we practice in North Dakota.

**TOM OATES** [00:42:07]: Wow. And just listening to this, Vinnie, you can hear that, you know, we were talking before we were recording that this has been a journey, and it's an ongoing journey. So, Carenlee and Vinnie, gosh, thank you for, for, for giving me a little bit of the insight, both on the personal journey that Vinnie is on and that you're sharing with Carenlee, but then where North Dakota's journey is going and we appreciate your time, appreciate the work that you're putting in and thank you guys for, for spending time to talk to us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:42:40]: Thank y'all, it's been a pleasure, and Vinnie, I know how hard it is for you to fit one more thing into your schedule, very grateful for this and we'll connect soon. Yes, it's an ambitious project, I know you guys are gonna do it I just don't want you to like say that that's your, you set that bar for graduation to have all that done. We'll carve out the piece of the project that counts for graduation. I know you're gonna get the whole notice thing done. I'm behind ya, every step.

**VINCENT ROEHR** [00:43:03]: Oh, that project's gonna get done and we have meetings all the next few months, it's all getting started, we'll have it done in the next month or so, I, it's gonna be done.

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:43:10]: Just make sure that we don't make it too big for you to write up for, I'll help you with the writing up piece, we'll get there.

**TOM OATES** [00:43:17]: And, so, for, so for our listeners, you're getting a sense of what that guidance and advice looks like and, frankly, they take every opportunity they can to get it in, so we appreciate being able to facilitate some of that. Guys, thanks so much for your time.

**VINCENT ROEHR** [00:43:30]: Thanks, Tom.

**CARENLEE BARKDULL** [00:43:30]: Yes, nice to meet you all, thanks so much everybody.

**TOM OATES** [00:43:37]: So, if you've listened to the first two episodes of this series, you'll notice a theme of developing leaders across child welfare. And Carenlee's endorsement of Vinnie as a future and really a current leader really speaks to that.

[00:43:50]: Now, if you haven't listened to the first two, I suggest you go back and listen. A breakdown of the workforce development framework and our second podcast takes a deep dive into how the state of Connecticut took a holistic approach to change. Just go to [acf.hhs.gov/cb](https://acf.hhs.gov/cb) and search 'podcasts'.

[00:44:08]: Now, coming up in part four, we're gonna look at how specific agencies in Northern California and in Indiana empowered their staff to be engaged in the solution development process to improve their culture and leading to improved outcomes and greater staff retention, so stay tuned for that.

[00:44:26]: Of course, if you're looking for more information on workforce development, we've linked to some great resources on the page for, for this podcast, including the workforce development framework. Or, you can visit Child Welfare Information Gateway, over at [childwelfare.gov](https://childwelfare.gov). My thanks to both Carenlee Barkdull and Vinnie Roehr for their dedication and time they spent with us to take a look into how distance, or resources don't always have to be barriers to improving staff performance or how an entire state can deal with emerging child welfare needs. And my thanks to you for listening and joining us each month here, on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. For now, I'm Tom Oates. Have a great day.

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:45:09]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [childwelfare.gov](https://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.