Weaving Family Engagement into Child Welfare Agency Culture

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INNOVATIONS IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
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WHAT WE PLAN TO TALK ABOUT TODAY

• Introduce ourselves and our community

• Tell Elliott’s story about weaving family engagement into our child welfare practice

• Unpack Elliott’s story using concepts of climate, culture and leadership
INTRODUCING OURSELVES
NORTH AMERICAN CHILD WELFARE CONTEXT

• Separation creates safety paradigm
• Protect the child
• Expert driven & individual focus
• Liability and accountability
• Risk assessment
• Non-kin foster care system
• Over-representation of Native and African Canadian children in foster care in Canada
BRANT FAMILY & CHILDREN’S SERVICES’ STORY

• Urban and rural community
• Increasing racial and linguistic diversity from non-European countries
• Two First Nations communities (Six Nations of the Grand River and Mississauga of New Credit)
• Resource poor
• Brant FACS largest social service agency in the community
Our Ten Year Vision

All children, youth and families are valued.

Together, with the entire community, we share the responsibility of nurturing, protecting, educating and guiding all children, youth and their families.

Families possess the wisdom, abilities and resources to build a successful family plan. We support their journey toward self-determination, safety and care.

Children and youth have a voice and are involved in decision-making; we ensure they have the necessary resources to be well supported for success.

Mutual trust and understanding is built through listening and communicating with respect and compassion.

Hope replaces fear and families are open to receive help early.
OUR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT JOURNEY: Safety is created through inclusion

- Community based child welfare model
- Many collaborative relationships within the community
- Influence of our First Nations staff and community members
- FGC/FGDM started in 2002
- Trained staff in Signs of Safety tools starting in 2008
- Differential Response implementation started in 2006
Elliott’s Story

Direct Practice

- Early Help
- FGC/FGDM
- Clinical Counselling
- Community Based
- Signs of Safety Tools
Families, along with their support network, craft initial plans that are subsequently shared with the professionals who work collaboratively with the family to ensure it is attainable and meets the highest standards for achieving the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.

Families are part of the decision making team. In these instances, families partner with professionals to create consensual decisions acceptable to all parties.

Families have a genuine voice at the meetings. Their ideas, needs, perspectives, and other inputs are sought at the meetings, but the decision making rests with professionals.

Families are present at meetings where decisions will be made about their children.

Families are not included in meetings or other forums where decisions are made about their children.

*See Merkel-Holguin, L. & Wilmot L. reference
CULTURE

• Culture captures the behavioral expectations and norms that characterize the way work is done in an organization or work unit (Glisson 2009 cited in Maksymyk & Caslor 2014)
  
  • **Proficient**: The organization has an emphasis on investing and supporting intelligence, critical thinking, and practice depth
  
  • **Rigid**: The organization is pleased when the ‘conveyor belt’ system runs on time
  
  • **Resistant**: The organization maintains the status-quo since it is the way it has always been dong

* With thanks to Maksymyk & Caslor, 2014 for the culture, climate & leadership concepts
CLIMATE

• Climate is the psychological impact of the work environment on his or her individual well-being
  • Engagement: The organization fosters worker engagement and invests and supports good work.
  • Functional: The organization creates a shared vision and workers have clear expectations and roles within the team.
  • Stress: The organization is overwhelmed by crisis and risk avoidance; everyone is trying to ‘cover their ass’.

* With thanks to Maksymyk & Caslor, 2014 for the culture, climate & leadership concepts
CLIMATE

• Primary influencer of organizational climate is directed from leadership
  
• A mirror, with workers reflecting strengths and weaknesses set forth from leadership and their ability to support the work that workers do

* With thanks to Maksymyk & Caslor, 2014 for the culture, climate & leadership concepts
LEADERSHIP

• Casting an inspiring shared vision
• Modeling compassionate and critical self-awareness
• Fostering a learning organization
• Promoting reflective accountability

* With thanks to Maksymyk & Caslor, 2014 for the culture, climate & leadership concepts
CULTURE, CLIMATE & LEADERSHIP IMPACT ON OUTCOMES

- Organizations that have a **proficient** culture, combined with a **functional and engaged** climate are the healthiest and have shown the best outcomes.
  - **Morale:** Job satisfaction, commitment, job retention
  - **Service Outcomes:** Better service outcomes for children and families, more comprehensive services, improved functioning for children and families

* With thanks to Maksymyk & Caslor, 2014 for the culture, climate & leadership concepts
CULTURE, CLIMATE & LEADERSHIP IMPACT ON OUTCOMES

• Leaders work to provide the collaboration, role clarity, and cooperation necessary to support the caseworkers’ effort

• Caseworkers are given greater flexibility through greater involvement in decision-making and less procedural restrictiveness

• Caseworkers are provided with the opportunity to provide individualized care based on the strengths and needs of the family

• Leaders embrace and model proper teaching in a blame-free environment

*With thanks to Maksymyk & Caslor, 2014 for the culture, climate & leadership concepts
LEADERSHIP SETS THE TONE

• “You are not to blame”
• Develop a learning culture
• Being comfortable with uncertainty. Otherwise we live in a “culture of fear”, become overly focused on compliance, and “blame the worker”.
• Appealing but false charm of hindsight bias
• Change does not happen overnight

*With thanks to Eileen Munro (London School of Economics and Political Science)
WHAT TO AIM FOR

• A system that learns whether children are being helped and how they have experienced the help

• A system free from all but essential central prescription over professional practice but with clear rules about where and how to coordinate to protect children and young people

• A system where professional practice is informed by research and evidence, competent judgement informing action when the work is too varied for rules

• A system that expects errors and so tries to catch them quickly

• A system that is sophisticated about risk

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CLOSING

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