

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Housing’s Critical Connection to Child Welfare – Part 2
TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Jocelyn Everroad, San Francisco Human Services Agency; Kylie Woodall, Homeless Prenatal Program

[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]: Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, and particular welcome into part two of an important conversation about the critical connection housing has to Child Welfare. I’m Tom Oates from Information Gateway and so glad to have you with us.

[00:00:47]: According to the Administration for Children and Families - which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - approximately 27,000 children entering foster care in 2015 were removed from their families, at least in part, due to inadequate housing. And when we say inadequate, we mean housing that is unsafe or unstable or unaffordable - so it’s not purely homeless, living on the street, but it’s also a family paying an unsustainable portion of their income to rent or facing eviction, or living in cramped or doubled up conditions with friends or family, or continuously in hotels.

[00:01:25]: Now, research clearly points to homeless families being at a higher risk for involvement in Child Welfare System and a combination of homelessness or near homelessness and involvement in Child Welfare places a huge challenge on Child Welfare and housing systems. So, in today’s episode, we’re continuing a conversation featuring a partnership in - of all places to talk about housing challenges - San Francisco. And this partnership is between Child Welfare, the San Francisco Housing Authority and the Homeless Prenatal Program - which provides housing specialists and supports to help young families prepare, apply, locate and secure stable and affordable housing.

[00:02:04]: Together, as part of a Children’s Bureau grant, the partnership formed works with families involved in Child Welfare and who are homeless to navigate the Housing Authority and obtain housing vouchers - working with landlords and to complete their case plans. We’re talking with Kylie Woodall, a housing specialist with the Homeless Prenatal Program and Jocelyn Everroad from the San Francisco Human Services Agency about their program, Families Moving Forward - which, after the Children’s Bureau grant ended became the current program called Bringing Families Home.

[00:02:36]: Now, in part one, we explored how each group works to identify, support and partner with families to manage both their Child Welfare case plan and the steps and requirements to obtain housing vouchers and secure an affordable home and how vital transitional housing is to their success. Again, we’re talking about doing all of this in San Francisco - one of the nation’s costliest places to live.

[00:03:00]: So, here in part two, we pick up the conversation with Kylie and Jocelyn about the relationship between the Homeless Prenatal Program, the San Francisco Human Services Agency and the San Francisco Housing Authority. And, I asked Jocelyn how decisions between those three are made and how they overcome the barriers between the agencies.

JOCELYN EVERROAD [00:03:21]: That’s a lot of what we feel proud of on this project and it was very much an intentional, it was something that we set out to do intentionally and something that I think others could replicate. I think the answer to your question is really two-fold and I touched on this a little bit earlier, but I think, you know, it was both organic and it was structured.

[00:03:45]: So, in terms of, in terms of collaborating in sort of innovative ways, one of the things that was really beneficial that we had on this project was that there was an annual meeting that the Children’s Bureau hosted where these five grantees went and spoke with each other and exchanged ideas. And as in so often the case in the lives of busy professionals, one of the biggest benefits of that program was in enabling us to talk to each other in a less formal setting. So, you know, some of the innovations that I’m most proud of on this project, and some of our, you know, at this point in time, I think both HSA and HPP have a phenomenal relationship with the San Francisco Housing Authority, they’ve just gone above and beyond.

[00:04:35]: Their attitude is basically as long as we don’t have to say no, we’re gonna try to find a way to say yes in working with you to really accommodate your families’ needs and that is just stellar, like, I can’t speak highly enough of how important that is. But many of those innovations came over breakfast, you know, we all sat down and had salads for lunch and somebody said hey I really need this, why don’t we do this.

[00:05:00]: So, I think in many ways what this project did for us is it brought us all together, both in formal and informal ways over the course of five years and we really all learned together, I mean, what this, what this model is now is not what we started out with. And, I think, you know, we’re gonna talk about advice later on, but I think any community trying this, it’s really important to understand that you need to build in the flexibility to change your model and to fail at some things. Like, we definitely had ideas that were not what we ended up with. But, having those informal spaces to work with each other really helped that process and really kind of helped the attitude that the Housing Authority would embody, which is if I don’t have to say no, I’ll figure out a way to say yes.

[00:05:49]: So, I think that that’s sort of the organic part. The formal part, I think was equally important. So, we had two meetings that we set up from the get-go, one was a steering committee meeting with sort of the more senior folks who came to the table to make big picture programmatic decisions and that has actually evolved over time. And then we had - and I can talk a little bit more about that in a minute - but, we also had a CQI committee, so a continuous quality improvement. We were lucky enough to have a really talented team of data specialists, both in-house with Brigette Larry and sort of a policy research team, but then, or sorry, I should say that differently, a really, an in-house evaluation team, but then we had Chapin Hall and Jennifer Hayes, who were our external evaluators.

[00:06:45]: And so, we were really lucky enough to have really strong data power that we were able to use in ways that normally you could only dream of in this kind of work - and I’ll give you some examples of that. So, so basically, we created dashboards and said these are the key operational components that we dreamed up when we set this model into place, we thought that this was how it was supposed to work, you know, we had our logic model. And then we were able on a monthly basis to see how what we were actually doing measured up to that logic model and I think one thing that was really important is we didn’t, we thought about using data as a way to improve, not to prove. So, we weren’t using our dashboard to hold anyone’s feet to the fire, we were using it as a starting point for a discussion. So, if we had data that looked like we weren’t conforming to our model, that was, you know, in some cases, a place to learn more, like why is this data showing us this and are we really getting the full story.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Housing’s Critical Connection to Child Welfare – Part 2
TRANSCRIPT

[00:07:47]: And then, in some cases, you know, kind of understanding that everyone was operating with their best intentions and we - this only works if you’re giving everyone the benefit of the doubt, otherwise it kind of can feel really punitive - but you know, one of the things that we learned in some cases was hey, our model is not working and so these data are showing us that what we originally thought isn’t possible, for whatever reason, and so, that became sort of, that became a venue then to take that to the steering committee and say, this is what the data is showing us, we can’t sustain this particular thing in the way that it was envisioned, so we need to make changes.

[00:08:25]: And then it also helped us validate assumptions when we did tweak our model, it helped us validate whether or not our new solution was working the way that we hoped. And just to bring that into a more tangible realm because that all sounds wonderful and geeky, but, you know, one example of that is when we started the project, one of the things that we really underestimated is the amount of time that we needed to work with families. So, I think we’d modeled our program on sort of more traditional projects and thought that we would probably need to work with families for a year, maybe a year and a bit and that then they would be, they’d be on their way.

[00:09:05]: And you know, as some of the detail that Kylie has provided shows that just turned out not to be the case. We needed, we needed a heavier touch in families lives for a longer time and then we actually had a step-down phase where after they’d met all their goals we still worked with them for another six months to make sure that they were well on their way.

[00:09:25]: So, obviously, if you’ve done the math on how many case workers you need based on a one to two-year case, case assumption, that ends up, you end up working with families for much longer, you’re gonna run into trouble pretty fast. And so, something that was really nice is that we were able to use our dashboard and say, hey, we’re not, we’re not meeting with families in the way that we’d hoped but we were able to actually, rather than make it personal, turn it into a numbers situation where we were just saying this is what the data shows us, let’s, let’s try to investigate what’s happening here and, you know, that ultimately led us to the conclusion that we needed more case workers because we were asking more of the case workers we’d assigned.

[00:10:04]: So, that’s just one, one example of sort of how that committee was able to be very powerful and, you know, the steering committee - at the outset it was a lot of leadership support and we really needed people to bring resources to the table, we really needed to make big, sort of agen-, big decisions with agency-wide impact - as we’ve gone on, you know, we’ve gained the trust of leadership and we’ve also, relationships don’t need to be as formal anymore. So, we actually, at this point in the steering committee meeting is sort of and overflow from the CQI meeting, the continuous quality improvement meeting, where, if we don’t get to everything in two hours, we’re gonna continue it the next week for another two hours and that definitely happens.

[00:10:50]: So, yeah, it’s been a really, it’s been a privilege to do this because it has been a marrying of the practical and the academic - we’re bringing a lot of data, we’re bringing a lot of theory, we’re bringing a lot of here’s what we think will work - but the CQI committee is also, you know, practitioners come and sometimes we get it wrong, you know, sometimes we’re like well the data and the theory tells us that we should be doing this and then we have Joy Cordero who’s like, no that’s not gonna work with our families. And it’s really, it’s really rich to get both of those.

KYLIE WOODALL [00:11:26]: So, one of the key things that has made my work easier in helping families with Section 8 is learning as much about Section 8 as I can and developing relationships among different

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Housing’s Critical Connection to Child Welfare – Part 2
TRANSCRIPT

departments within San Francisco Housing Authority and point of contact there. So, as I mentioned before, we have a point person, an eligibility worker who is able to work with families right when they’re getting the application, making sure that it’s issued as fast as possible. There’s a multi-step process with leasing with Section 8.

[00:11:56]: So, you have submitting a request for tenancy approval and then you have an inspection and then you have getting the housing system’s payment contract done - so over my time of working at HPP I’ve been able to find a point person within all of those departments in case any issues arose with making sure the inspection passes or making sure the landlord gets the rent that they want, making sure that the tenant understands their portion of rent. And, we’ve been able to also be a part of reviewing the Housing Authority’s admin plan and making public comment and really having that public comment heard, which has been wonderful.

[00:12:32]: And also having higher connections up at the housing authority in case any problems arise with the families with getting any of the paperwork done, being able to be like, hey, this isn’t working, I’m wondering why it’s not working and having them to be able to look and make sure that it’s following the process that it should be has been huge. Being able to call Dar (Dariush Kayhan) or Sarah Ramler at the Housing Authority and have them answer questions is, is a wonderful thing that we have at our disposal. Really from learning more about the Housing Authority and how they function, too, I’ve able to, kind of, try to find any ways that I can be supportive of the process to make leasing faster.

[00:13:12]: For instance, with like, inspections of units I have the ability - which case managers don’t have and child welfare workers don’t really have - to go to the units and do a pre-inspection based off of my experiences going through multiple inspections with Housing Authority and doing things like check all the outlets and make sure that they’re ground properly and make sure that the window locks are working so that there’s less of a delay then, too, between the unit potentially failing, the landlord needing to make repairs and the effort to reschedule another inspection with the inspections department.

[00:13:44]: From working with multiple Housing Authorities, too - because a lot of our families did have to go out of county - we were able to develop relationships with point people at other Housing Authorities, which was huge because if we had a family that moved to Oakland or Contra Costa or Alameda or in the North Bay, we had someone at other Housing Authorities, too, that we could call and we could have conversations with about any of the, any issue that the family might have with leasing at that Housing Authority.

[00:14:16]: From engaging a lot in the reporting process, too, we were able to come together first at CQI and steering and realizing that there’s some issues with families having to move out of county with that causing more time delays and from that, we are currently doing housing work at the regional level where we’re trying to have San Francisco Housing Authority and multiple Housing Authorities in the Bay area come together and find ways that we can help families who are in tight rental markets be able to move more fluidly between Housing Authorities and be able to be housed faster.

[00:14:50]: So, that’s a partnership that stemmed and came from this little partnership that we had at HPP and HSA and with San Francisco Housing Authority, we’ve taken that and we’re now trying to go further and work with Housing Authorities at a regional level which is a really wonderful opportunity.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Housing’s Critical Connection to Child Welfare – Part 2
TRANSCRIPT

JOCELYN EVERROAD [00:15:10]: Part of why this has been successful is because we were connected at, we had connections at both the senior level and the ground roots level, and I just wanna - or the grassroots level - I just want to really highlight that because this work has, senior folks can call each other and also the folks on the ground doing the hard work, you know, Kylie can pick up the phone and call the child welfare worker, she can pick up the phone and call the Housing Authority, and I think that’s, you need both, I honestly don’t think we would have succeeded if either of those had been missing, so I just really wanna highlight that.

TOM OATES [00:15:43]: You know, you talked about the education aspect that you have to go through, you know, and learning and picking up just on your expertise - I’d be curious to think about, you know, and when you talk about those, that education, for child welfare workers, for social workers who work in child welfare, what would be the types of resources you would recommend that they go and investigate to maybe educate themselves about the relationships, or about the needs when it comes to housing?

JOCELYN EVERROAD [00:16:12]: I think that one of the things to know is because of the way that Housing Authorities are structured - it’s interesting, when we were starting the regional initiative that Kylie was talking about, one of our, one of our first things that we did is we actually hosted a meeting to get all of the Housing authorities in the room and we gave a presentation on our program, and their number one concern the first time around was how do we get someone like this, how do we get a housing specialist to be part of our mix. And, the reason that I highlight that is because I think in many cases what feels daunting to, maybe a child welfare program trying to undertake something like this is understanding how to get the bricks and mortar housing resources.

[00:17:00]: My guess, based on our experiences, is that in many communities, there are Housing Authorities who are crying out for this sort of social services piece that Kylie and her crew bring to the table. And, you know, there is this formalized relationship where you could use, where certain agencies do have these, these FUP vouchers, these Family Unification Program vouchers - but even without that, many, many Housing Authorities, come Housing Authorities are able to be creative with their funding to actually have a resource person like this in-house, most are not.

[00:17:36]: And, because of that, I think what I would say to other agencies trying this, is you possibly have more leverage than you think. And, if you’re able to be, you know, especially in the child welfare world, if you have a waiver that allows some flexibility with the way the dollars are spent, or if you have other city money, or if you have anything else that you’re bringing, or if you can create a partnership with your local agencies, your local welfare agencies.

[00:18:02]: You know, if you’re able to bring to the table a housing specialist, you might surprised, in terms of the voucher, you know, the financial resources for the actual housing that are out there, I think similarly like, many, Kylie referenced that deposit assistance is key for this, as much as it is important to give the family month to month rent, just actually handling the moving cost is equally important. And, one additional thing that we were able to do is we created, basically, a bridge subsidy, which meant that if we found a, you know, again, we’re dealing with San Francisco, it’s a super-heated housing market, no one’s gonna wait a month to see whether or not they can, can rent to this tenant.

[00:18:47]: So, one of the things that we were able to do is, kind of - and Kylie has really honed this method over time - but one of the things that we were able to do is really say we can fund this unit, hold it for a month, have the tenant in the unit and then, you know, have had basically inspect that unit with

the tenant in place. And, that was something that was clunky at first and we sort of worked through, but it is another resource that we bring to the table.

[00:19:13]: But, you know, we were lucky to have it all in one package and that we had some, some great funding, you know, the Children’s Bureau also really helped with that. But, there are deposit assistance, you know, agencies out there in many communities. There are other community agencies that can probably provide some of the auxiliary supports that we were able to provide with this money. I think, also, just, just start. I think, you know, if we’d known up front how much work this was gonna be, like, I don’t know if any of us would’ve done it, honestly, I mean, the number of - you know, I mentioned the CQI committee - the number of things that we’ve iterated on and learned and, you know, it’s daunting, but I wouldn’t change it for the world, and I think, you know, I would say that to other communities.

[00:20:03]: Even if you can get, even if you can’t get the perfect model, if you can get a start-up partnership, you know, give it a whirl and, and see how things evolve as they go on. I was the project manager for this and I really wanted all the boxes checked before we started the project and we didn’t have them in every case, and I was very nervous about that, and four years on I know that I didn’t even have the right boxes. So, it wouldn’t have mattered if they’d been checked or not. So, I just think, you know, I think, I would say to FCS workers, you probably can’t do it alone, you probably need a dedicated person to do the housing search - I think it would be very, very challenging for our child welfare workers to be doing this - but it also doesn’t take, perhaps as much as you think to get it off the ground. And I don’t know, Kylie if you have anything to add.

KYLIE WOODALL [00:20:58]: In thinking about what resources I would want child welfare workers to be aware of and know, I think one of the things Jocelyn mentioned is community agencies that are able to help with deposit assistance and the steps of how the deposit assistance works. For me, I think one of the biggest things is just helping everyone realize all the steps of a process is so important. Like, the leasing process with Section 8 has multiple steps to it and there’s many different ways in which one of those steps can potentially have a pause that needs to have an issue resolved or something like that.

[00:21:35]: And having case workers aware of all of those different steps in the process, that it’s not a very, it’s not always a very quick process, is super important, too, because I think it can shift the thinking of the families causing this delay versus this delay is part of a process, and understanding, like, where the delay is being caused is, like, such a huge important thing, where making sure that you are able to be an advocate for the family at any of those moments - you can only do that if you know what step you’re at in the process.

[00:22:16]: And, being aware of steps involved in housing leasing, being aware of community agencies that can provide auxiliary support with housing search, seeing if there are partnerships that you can make with people to help with that work - even if it’s with stuff like credit counseling and doing a credit report, or providing like, making sure families have professional wear that they can do to, professional wear that they can wear for unit viewings, like making sure that you are aware of the resources available in the community to support families with finding housing and all the steps that it takes.

JOCELYN EVERROAD [00:22:54]: I think just two things to add to that - one is just again, encouraging people to think outside of the box. So, you know, I think Kylie mentioned in passing - she’s going out with an outlet checker to check all of the outlets in houses before folks move in - you know, that, we did a lot on this project where we sort of broke our roles and just had the attitude of we’re gonna get it

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Housing’s Critical Connection to Child Welfare – Part 2
TRANSCRIPT

done and then we’ll figure out, and many of those things have since become part of our process and part of our system and part of our routine, but they never would have if we weren’t just, kind of, a little creative at the start.

[00:23:31]: I think, I just also want to say I do believe there are formal resources available for this. I think CSH actually has a, an academy that helps folks who are thinking about doing something like this - and I’m sure others, I’m sure Dory and others can probably give more coherent information on that - but, I do believe that there’s a community of practice that’s evolving around this kind of work and, you know, although, although we’ve been talking about how we were scrappy, we’ve also learned a lot the hard way, and I know the Human Services Agency, you know, we’re super willing to share, but also, you know, I think there are other people out there that are trying to create a more formalized body of knowledge around this.

TOM OATES [00:24:16]: That is an impressive array of collaboration, of coordination, of processes that you guys have put together. But, with all of that, what I take away from that, the number one is something that you guys have said a couple of times - if we don’t have to say no, we’ll find a way to say yes. So, it gets down to the idea that there’s a way to make this happen, let’s find that way and working together, and if there’s a lot of stuff that I learned over the past number of years in watching agencies succeed, it’s succeed through partnerships and how do you bridge that gap? You bridge that gap by walking the bridge and so, I congratulate you guys for an amazing effort and just in talking with you, I can hear the effort that went into it, the struggle, I’m sure the frustration, I’m sure the questions that continue - but then you guys continue. So, Kylie Woodall, Jocelyn Everroad, I thank you guys so much and your team so much for sharing your story and also for spending some time with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

KYLIE WOODALL [00:25:27]: Thank you, Tom.

TOM OATES [00:25:31]: Now, following up on the resources question, one of the resources I know you should check out is Partnering with Housing Providers in Your Community - it’s a new bulletin for professionals just released by Information Gateway. It describes barriers to stable housing, tips on collaboration and provides additional housing-related resources for child welfare agencies to explore. We’ll have a link to the publication on this episode’s webpage over at www.acf.hhs.gov/cb, just search ‘podcasts’.

[00:26:02]: Also, to follow up on one of Jocelyn’s last comments, we’ll also point you to the Corporation for Supportive Housing. She referred to is as CSH, and they’ve been in existence since 1991 and we’ll point you to their site, as well, you can check out their supportive housing facts, some case studies and tools, as well. Now, if you didn’t get a chance to listen to part one, go ahead and check it out, it provides a detailed look at how housing specialists and child welfare agencies work together in support of families and in particular, the differences in how they engage families and how much time that each is involved.

[00:26:36]: Such a great conversation on a topic that requires a lot of attention. So, my thanks to Kylie Woodall and Jocelyn Everroad for the thought and the energy they brought to the conversation in sharing what and how they’re working together and with the San Francisco Housing Authority and all the Housing Authorities around the Bay area. And, as always, a thanks to you for joining us and spending your time to be part of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. Until next time, I’m Tom Oates, have a great day!

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Housing’s Critical Connection to Child Welfare – Part 2
TRANSCRIPT

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:27:08]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at 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.