

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Workforce Part 4 – Creating Change at the Local Level
TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Sylvia Deporto, Family and Children Services of San Francisco County, California; Mary Beth Bonaventura, Indiana Department of Children’s Services

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]: Organizational change can be daunting, but sometimes the keys to successful change can be as simple as a pair of flip flops. In today’s episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, we’ll explain.

[00:00:46]: Hi, everyone, Tom Oates from Child Welfare Information Gateway, here, and in this, our fourth and final edition of our series on workforce development, we are gonna see how important that your staff, the frontline case workers, administrative staff and support teams can be to improving the culture of your entire agency and lead to improved practice for the children and families you serve.

[00:01:09]: We’ve spent the past few months looking at workforce development, introducing you to the Workforce Development Framework, taking a look at statewide holistic approach from Connecticut and diving into how the State of North Dakota is partnering with the University of North Dakota to boost their entire child welfare workforce. And now, today, we’re gonna look at workforce development from the individual agency level.

[00:01:32]: Now, the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, NCWWI, as part of their efforts and programs established Workforce Excellence Sites in a few jurisdictions across the nation. Now, these sites work to identify change initiatives to address critical workforce issues and they partner with NCWWI to address them by engaging in a comprehensive organizational health assessment. You’ll hear it referred to as COHAs, and I’ll also, with solution focused site or design teams, and leadership academies for supervisors and middle managers.

[00:02:03]: So, in this episode, we’re gonna hear about all of that - being a workforce excellence site - from some of those specific jurisdictions, by hearing first, from Sylvia Deporto, the Deputy Director of Family and Children Services of San Francisco County, California, and followed up by Mary Beth Bonaventura, who was the Director of the Indiana Department of Children’s Services up until last December.

[00:02:24]: You’ll hear how empowering staff with decision-making abilities and engaging them to hear their voice were key to change initiatives, where the middle managers fit within all of this change, along with the results the jurisdictions have witnessed during the past few years.

[00:02:39]: Now, while we may think that sweeping policy or structure change really lead to improvements in an entire workforce, when it comes to a local agency, some of the smallest efforts - or at least perceived as small efforts - have the most impact. Okay, here’s the fourth and final episode of our series on workforce development, and we kick it off with Sylvia Deporto from San Francisco County, California.

[00:03:05]: Sylvia Deporto, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:03:09]: Thank you very much.

TOM OATES [00:03:10]: Now you took over your position in 2013, so when you first arrived, what did you identify as the areas that you felt you needed to have the most impact?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:03:20]: Well, of course when you enter into a new position, you're really focused on just trying to get a lay of the land, understand what the staff are experiencing as challenges or barriers and what their concerns are around community partnerships and, so I really spent a lot of time around listening to the staff first and hearing what they needed to have in order to do their job well.

[00:03:50]: And I think what I was seeing was that even though we were in the Silicon Valley, and one of the most progressive areas technologically, San Francisco itself was not very advanced, and so, I had social workers who didn't have cell phones, I had, they didn't have laptops, we have a large area where kids are placed outside of San Francisco because of the cost of living, and people weren't able to be mobile in their work, so that was a challenge.

[00:04:24]: There were, practice was probably, was very, I'm gonna say old, practice was old, social workers had been here a long time and there weren't, there wasn't a lot of turnover, and so practice had not moved forward with the changes in the State of California and the, what we're seeing nationally in child welfare. And, so, we really needed to get people up to speed, in terms of their practice, we didn't have any policy that was in place, so we had to develop policies to guide that practice, we needed to get social workers feeling supported enough to do the practices that they should've been doing.

[00:05:08]: The morale was not really good because the facilities that people worked in were not up to standards, and, there was just a lack of supportive services for the staff, and then a lack of real clear leadership, in terms of moving the agency forward in order to meet the needs.

TOM OATES [00:05:30]: Okay, so, Sylvia, you're hitting on three key areas of change that we're hearing across the board - it's, again, people, processes and tools. So, San Francisco County became a workforce excellence site with NCWWI. Now, what did that look like, at your level, at the agency level, regarding you and all the agency staff?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:05:48]: Well, I think what it allowed for us to be able to do is to have a really, the organizational health assessment really helped us to look at what were the staff feeling about the work they were doing, what were they feeling about the challenges, what were they experiencing in terms of partnership, and what were the areas of improvement around just all those things I mentioned earlier - what were the ways that they felt those areas could be improved?

[00:06:19]: And I think the opportunity to be a workforce excellence site really allowed us to have their voice involved in the change as we moved forward. So, the opportunity to have the leadership academies for managers and supervisors and the opportunities for the site teams that we had really gave the staff and voice to really contribute to what changes needed to happen in order for them to feel like they were supported and they had the resources that they needed to do their jobs effectively and the level of development we needed to engage our partners in in order to support their work in that way, as well. So, it really gave us an opportunity to get staff voice and staff input to move the organization forward.

TOM OATES [00:07:13]: There you go, you get buy-in and empowerment when staff feel that their voice is being heard. So, let's talk about those design teams - how many, who made up the teams and what did those design teams do?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:07:26]: Well, luckily, for our design teams we were able to get facilitators who would facilitate those discussions, but we have three, we had three different sites where we had site teams at each site and all staff were invited to participate in the site team, so it wasn't just social workers, it was any staff person, clerical staff, support staff, supervisors, our managers were invited to attend at the desire of the site team, so every once in a while, the managers would attend to hear what the concerns were around the sites.

[00:08:04]: But, it was all levels of staff who participated and with the facilitators that the workforce excellence project provided, they were able to guide the discussion and these discussions were really focused around what the results of our organizational health assessment was, so, whatever issues that each site had different results from the organizational health assessment, and as a result of that they got to focus specifically on addressing the issues that were prevalent at their site and the ability for the staff who worked in that site every day at all levels to really contribute to how they wanted to make a difference in their site, how they wanted to change what was going on in their site really made a big difference.

TOM OATES [00:08:54]: And so, what were the changes and those ideas that bubbled up from the design teams?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:08:59]: So, that, that's what I was just gonna say is that we had some really great stuff, I mean from just the basics of worker morale, so things like in one office the, the staff there really wanted to feel healthier about their work environment, they were gonna, we had a projected remodel going on in that office, so they wanted to prepare for that remodel that was gonna happen, because the place was in pretty bad shape. They asked for a change in their vending machines to move away from junk food to more healthy food, and so we helped them do that, they started walking clubs, where they would get out and take their regular breaks and walk every day to get, to really focus on self-[care].

[00:09:49]: We developed some healing circles for our staff out of these, the discussions for the site teams, where we had people coming in on a regular basis providing opportunities for staff to debrief around the work that they're doing and to really, just kind of share what they're experiencing in their daily work.

[00:10:09]: Another site focused on worker safety and what is that the workers need in order to be safe while they're doing their job, because they were experiencing issues around their safety and so that was important. And we had another site who really focused on professional development of staff and providing opportunities for staff to role play the interview process in order to really develop their professional, professional interviewing skills so that they would be more prepared for opportunities for promotion or for new jobs.

[00:10:46]: And so, we had a lot of really good stuff that came out of the site teams that really was essential to supporting staff in their work in many different ways.

TOM OATES [00:10:56]: So, how did you and the rest of senior management react to these changes and innovations, I mean from the surface they seem very small.

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SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:11:04]: Yeah, I think at first people were a little shocked, that they felt like something so little could make such a big difference for people, but I think as a, as a leadership team discussed it, it really was something that we felt that was important to acknowledge that it was coming from the staff and that this is what would make them feel better about their work environment and to really kind of take a different approach to how we address the concerns that staff have.

[00:11:35]: The, the concerns don't always have to be about the, the higher-level issues or the bigger barriers and challenges that you might experience in your workforce around partnerships or services - but that the very small things that makes somebody feel good about their environment, their safety, their health are really the key to them feeling good about the work that they do - and then begin to address those bigger challenges, like services and partnerships and supports.

TOM OATES [00:12:09]: So while the teams were meeting - and you mentioned this earlier - managers were invited, at times. So, how were the managers, who you know, again, a little removed from this process - how were they involved in your workforce initiatives?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:12:23]: So, yeah the, the site teams were really staff-led and so the managers were went through the leadership academy for middle managers and had their own coaching around issues that they felt were important to them in relation to the work that they're doing and the results of the organizational health assessment at their particular site. So, they were very focused on, the managers were really focused on the organizational health assessment results and what could we do at our level to really support the staff.

[00:12:59]: And knowing that these were the things that the staff were working on, these are the things that we want to support, so, so really supporting the staff to make changes that were really site-based changes and then, but also at the management level to begin to focus on the organizational health assessment and using the tools that they got out of the middle managers academy to really look at what are the bigger issues that we need to address in order for staff to feel good and, and to have the support and services they need to do their jobs well.

[00:13:36]: And, I think as managers, they became a much more cohesive team in trying to make sure that they were allowing for the staff to move forward with the changes they wanted to make and at the same time addressing those barriers at a higher level.

TOM OATES [00:13:54]: And how did that impact the manager-staff relationships - each were involved in separate actions, so when they came together, what did you see?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:14:02]: I think the biggest change was really in the communication, and, and staff felt like they were being heard, they were being listened to and that things, they began to see things that they were suggesting go into place. For our leadership academy for supervisors, all of the supervisors were required to do a theory of change and a logic model around some element of change that they could do within their sphere of influence. And they got to choose the topic and then the university really supported them in developing their theory of change and their logic model.

[00:14:40]: And then, but they actually got to move those theories of change forward and so, the change really was happening at all levels - supervisors were able to say, hey, I think I would like to see more, so we're, we're implementing science of safety and one supervisor really wanted to include language of science of safety in the hotline questioning that we do at the hotline. And so, she developed questions that were specifically focused around science of safety at the hotline and she was allow-, she was

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supported to do that by her manager and by the rest of the management team and she was able to come and ask for feedback and get input about her project and really move it forward.

[00:15:31]: And so, the communication between supervisors and, I think, management and staff really improved because they got to see that their ideas were listened to and supported and moved forward in the organization.

TOM OATES [00:15:43]: And that builds this cycle of value from top to bottom, this sense of value. Leadership recognizes the value in their staff, staff feel valued, because their voice and opinion are taken to heart. So, so, Sylvia, what have you seen from all this, what are some of the results that the agency is witnessing?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:16:00]: Well, we've made some major, I think there've been some major changes in how we do our work and our performance since going through this process. Since implementing leadership academy for managers, our leadership academy for supervisors we're gonna do for all our new supervisors, we're gonna continue to do that, because it was so valuable.

[00:16:22]: But we saw really large-scale changes. We have one supervisor who did her project around the Indian Child Welfare Act and we had, probably over 900 cases pending eligibility for the Indian Child Welfare Act over, you know. And we were able to clean up that data, where we went from, like, eight pages of kids who were pending in eligibility to now we have, like, a handful on one page - maybe, at the most, ten - because she set up a system in place to track and monitor that data and stay on top of it.

[00:17:05]: And so, that's just one example of how as an agency, our performance around the Indian Child Welfare Act has just changed drastically and improved for the better for children that we're serving who happen to be Native American. So, we have, we have lots of things like that that we're seeing put into place that are really changing the culture. We had, we used our core practice model to develop our performance evaluations and really went from a performance evaluation that was based on how somebody's been performing, to really a professional development tool, where the worker and the supervisor actually look at how is the working doing, you know, what are the worker's strengths and what are the areas they want to develop and then developing a professional development plan that they can work on over the next year. So, we really changed that focus, too. So, I think we saw some big changes in our division.

TOM OATES [00:18:07]: Alright, I'll ask what so many who come on the podcast, I ask this question routinely - looking back on when you started - what were the key aspects, those must haves, that were necessary for success?

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:18:19]: I think that first and foremost is, you have to have a management team that's willing to hear the things that they do well, but the things that they don't do well. And, they need to be willing to hear the challenges that, that the staff are having and be open to making change around that. And that, that change has to come from the staff. It can't come from a management team alone, the staff has to be engaged in that change, in that process.

[00:18:50]: And, and that you need a, a constant feedback process to ensure that the changes that you're moving forward, the dialogue, the communication continues, so you have to constantly be searching out for the feedback to make sure that what you're doing is working and what you're doing is making a difference with your staff.

[00:19:16]: I think the other thing that you need to have is a willingness to really advocate for the resources that you need in order to make those changes happen, and, and really work hard to get the resources that the staff need to move those, those changes that they wanna do forward.

TOM OATES [00:19:35]: Well, what you've got, the communication cycle of listening and engaging from leadership, management and staff has proven to deliver some great dividends. 2013, man that must seem like a long time away.

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:19:47]: It does, 2013 seems like a long time away, and we still have, you know, a number of areas that we need to work on, but what's exciting is that, we're, we're getting ready to have our organizational health assessment, it's just been redone and we're getting ready to talk about the results and we'll have more results to focus on for continual progress and continual improvements that we can make, and once again we'll, you know, the staff will be engaged in that process.

[00:20:17]: And so, it's a continuing cycle of just always looking at what are the areas we need to improve, getting everybody's voice, making those changes and making sure that they're included in that, in that discussion and in that process and in that opportunity. And as long as we have, I think, the process of, of that cycle of always doing it and implementing and evaluating is something that we hit at and we're starting to do that with every change that we implement in child welfare and I think people. We're making sure that we're getting staff's voice all the time and I think it, it really makes a difference in how things move forward in the agency.

TOM OATES [00:21:05]: Sylvia, the best of luck in what you're doing now and in looking forward to the next round of your organizational assessment out there in San Francisco County, and thanks again for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:21:18]: You're welcome, thank you very much.

TOM OATES [00:21:21]: So, we just heard from Sylvia about what's going on in San Francisco County, now we're gonna move to Indiana, and so, Mary Beth Bonaventura is with us. And, so, while we're hearing a lot of the same things, Mary Beth, from understanding the engagement of staff at all levels and how important that is to improve the entire workforce, every situation and every state at every locality is gonna be a little different.

[00:21:47]: So, if it's okay, we want to spend a little time to find out what you were learning in Indiana and maybe we'll start, if it's okay, from the organizational assessment. What did that tell you about where your workforce needed maybe the most attention?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:22:02]: I think that what we learned from the assessment, it was, it was devastating to listen to - or read - because, when you think you're doing everything to the best of your ability and you find out, you know, I didn't think about that, it's a little, you know, disheartening. But, what it really showed was that some of the workers - and enough for us to really try to, you know, do something different - felt a disconnect to our central office.

[00:22:28]: So, Indiana, unlike San Francisco - San Francisco is county-based, the State of California is county-based, and I think they might have under 300 employees - Indiana is a state-run child welfare system. So, we have 92 counties and we have, so that means we have 92 offices and we have right around 4,000 employees and around 2,200 of them are family case managers. So, that's a lot of people to connect with on a personal level, and so we found that they felt disconnected from central office,

which is in the center of the state, Indianapolis and then, so we've got, you know, a couple hundred of miles to the North, couple hundred miles to the South and then, you know, East and West, as well, and it's just hard to get out there and to hear everybody's concerns.

[00:23:13]: And, so, that was a way for us to learn that they felt like they didn't take part enough in decision making as it relates to the job itself. Even things like, you know, dress code - which seems simple from a, you know, leadership point of view, it's like oh, come on, you know, you don't get to wear flip-flops, it's okay. But when it matters to people and, and the work that we do in child welfare is so, you know, stress-provoking, that if little things like letting them wear flip-flops on Friday helps, then we should do that.

[00:23:45]: And, so they just didn't feel like they had a voice in the way that they should. And then, in these agencies where you're, you know, you're a cabinet-level agency, the directors come and go and that's, that's upsetting to the staff, as well. So, when leadership styles change, you know, they have to readjust and I don't think that at the leadership level, we think about that enough, so, so the organizational assessment really gave us a way to see what they were thinking and even though it hurt, it was very, very helpful.

TOM OATES [00:24:15]: So, based on that, you become a workforce excellence site and if you've realized from what the assessment tells you, it kind of says, okay, maybe we, we understand what we want out of all of this, what our end goal is gonna be, but how do you execute all of that, for, like you mentioned, you know, a staff of 4,000 and you've also got different, you know you've got rural, you've got urban, you've got everything in between - where's that first step, what does that look like?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:24:41]: So, what we did was we, as an executive team, we assembled, we decided to pick, so we have 18 regions in Indiana, and, so that we can kind of manage, you know, the masses - and so we, we picked based on turnover where we should focus our attention, so I guess I should back up and say to you that we decided, as our change initiative, we would look at recruitment and retention. And, and because of that, then, we looked at where we had our highest turnover rates and where we thought we could get, you know, our best results.

[00:25:16]: So, we, as a leadership team, identified three regions and then one local office, or one county, to take part in actual doing, kind of the work, to see how we could do better. So we called them our design teams. And, we had a facilitator provided by, through the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, NCWWI, and that person kind of help us on those local levels walk through different things to identify areas that, that we could do better in.

TOM OATES [00:25:47]: And so, you've got those teams together, those, those, those design teams and I know I'm, I think I know the answer to this, but also along the lines of what Sylvia had just mentioned about getting the folks on those teams. Who are those that you're bringing in that kind of help chart that path - so who made up your design teams?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:26:07]: Family case managers, we asked for volunteers, we didn't want to draft anybody that didn't want to be a part of it, so we asked for volunteers, and frankly, you know, social workers are, are joiners anyway, you know, we're people that wanna fix things and so, it wasn't like we didn't have enough people that wanted to do it. So, we allowed people that wanted to take part, take part in it, so we asked for volunteers, we had family case managers, supervisors, local office directors - so, it was the whole gamut of the spectrum of, you know, different levels of, of employees.

TOM OATES [00:26:38]: What does this tell you about, just from a management perspective - as much as we value our employees - but, how much that communication aspect, that getting buy-in, that hearing their voice, really does such a difference to, like you mentioned, morale and retention, you know, and not only recruitment when other staff can, kind of, be the advocate, to kind of, hey, come join us, because I feel like I've got a say in what I'm doing. How, it may seem like a low hanging fruit, it may be, you know, it's, it, the communication version of flip-flops on Friday - but it's got such a value, doesn't it?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:27:13]: It really does, I think, you know, just, just, you know, just living and being a human being, to be able to be part of, being a part of doing something, even if that something isn't something you really like, it's better that you're a part of it, than having something done to you, you know, and, or a decision being made for you, and then you have to follow along.

[00:27:32]: So, even like I said, you might have a difference in what, ultimately, is the decision, you knew that your voice was heard, you were a part of it, and then it feels like, okay, well I'm part of this, too, so it's being done, you know, with us, instead of to us.

TOM OATES [00:27:44]: Yeah, there, you've got a, you've got a say, you've got a little skin, skin in the game. So, what were those design teams coming up with, what were the kind of, results of those teams and the facilitation that happened?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:27:55]: So, it was a little struggle in the beginning, one of, some of the things that we thought about what we would do differently is first, you know, to set out what the, what we can do, so there were things that we, that some of the teams would come up with that statutorily under Indiana law, just couldn't happen, you know, like changes in, in policy and things like that, there were certain things that we just couldn't change. And then the things, so to identify, first and foremost what we could change, what was, sort of, you know, fair game, and what wasn't.

[00:28:24]: And so, some of the things they came up with, or you know, dress code issues, working, say from home, at times, you know four day work weeks for people that were on call - there's a variety of things - the mentor issues we have, which we're so lucky to do, we have a mentor program, for like a seasoned worker, somebody who really knows the field and the practice to mentor the younger workers. Knowing that we needed to, you know, maybe pay them money instead of giving them accolades, because you know, we can always use the extra money, especially when we wanna give them extra time, because that takes away from the job place.

[00:29:03]: So, things like that, just ideas on how we can support the staff in ways that we weren't to do things like mentoring.

TOM OATES [00:29:10]: You know, in child welfare, especially for those folks that are out in the field, and they're, and they're working with families, or going case to case or at times, at court, a lot of times the job can be individual and what I mean by that is you may be part of a team but you may not work as a team. When you did have those groups together, in terms of those design teams, where they actually did get a chance to talk to their neighbor and work with them, did that do anything amongst those different regions about getting a chance to actually sit and talk with your neighbor as opposed to the times when just we're just full-tilt boogie, going out to, to do those, do our job?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:29:43]: Yes, absolutely, so, what we learned from that is that we really need to, we needed to change the culture, so to speak, because we're all so busy and have individual

cases, we forgot that not only should we be kind to families and be responsive to their needs, that we needed to be kind and responsive to each other, and that gave us an opportunity to do that.

[00:30:05]: So I'll - we even took it to the next level - we being all those design teams - is that part of that practice model, which talks about engaging with families, we've added to it engaging with each other, so, that we can learn to do that better, and have better communication on all levels - personal levels and then professional levels, as well, which then supports the worker in the workplace, that each other are supporting each other.

TOM OATES [00:30:29]: You know, this is almost a bit of a broken record for what we've been talking about through this, this series that we're doing on workforce development is modeling the approach you take with families. In modeling the same approach, we work with our staff and managers take with their staff and, you know, both down the chain and up the chain. Where did that manager relationship, that manager training, you know, what are you seeing from, from all of these efforts about the, maybe empowerment isn't the perfect word, but about how your manager capabilities have, have enhanced?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:31:02]: So, you know, we'll know, I mean, we'll know more about that when we do our second survey to see what kind of satisfaction we have from the changes we've made, but I think that it will play out and is playing out in our retention rates, which was the whole goal, was the recruitment and then retention, and so, you know our retention certainly has gotten better. As an example, in Marion County, we had our highest turnover was at 48% and in six months went to 31%, you know, and it's, it's because of that supportive atmosphere, they feel like they're part of a team instead of working in a silo individually, so I think it's playing out, even if people aren't giving me reports every day, like well, this person said this about that and they're really happy - it's playing out in our retention numbers, and then we'll see when we do the COHA again, the organizational survey again in the Spring, what the true, you know, results of that will be.

[00:32:01]: But, I think certainly, you know, we can measure recruitment and retention and the retention numbers are showing that we're, we're successful in that.

TOM OATES [00:32:10]: To get numbers like that, in terms of your retention, would you have, if we go back in time, you know, a few years to a month to when, or a few years back, during the assessment when you were first reading that, if someone had told you that you could see the achievements that you've seen from something that may on the surface look so simple. What would've your reaction been of saying wait, I'm doing these, what, low hanging fruit, but getting the results like you're seeing now?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:32:41]: I would've never believed it. So, the reason why I say that is because I've been here almost five years and the numbers in Marion County as it relates to retention have continued to climb and directors prior to me - we found, you know, documents in the, in drawers - struggled with retention in Marion County all along. I mean, it's the biggest county in the state and it's got the most job opportunities in the state, so people you know, most of our providers are here, so it's the same kind of population of, of worker, and so if it didn't work out here they could go somewhere else, and that seemed to be the theme, but when we just changed some of that climate and culture in the office based on those organizational surveys to be more, you know, collaborative and engaging with the worker, it, it's just dramatically changed, I would've never believed it, I would've never believed it.

TOM OATES [00:33:33]: So, let's think back a little bit to where that assessment was first being done, either even, even before the assessment - for everything that you've seen now - and you know, we asked the same question, of course to, to Sylvia as we kind of do a lot here on the podcast - take me

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back to that time, and if you were to tell yourself here's, here are the things you must have, here's what you definitely need for success - what would those things you would've told yourself back then that are those must haves?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:34:01]: Based on what I know now, like what I should've had then? I guess I would say that I would've had to have an open mind, thick skin, willingness to change the way we do business, willingness to look at different ideas that hadn't been tried, because you know, we all know what the definition of insanity is, is keeping doing the same thing and you expect a different outcome. But to, you know, that's funny and that's fun to think about and we laugh about that saying, but it's a different thing to then take the other path and do something different, which takes time and effort and sometimes money, and, and risk.

[00:34:41]: And people are risk averse, especially in this business, we're all about risk here and risk with children's lives, so we really don't want to take a risk in doing something different, because then, you know, we might be the outlier and it not be successful. So, I think, you know thick skin, willing to take a chance, looking at things in a different way and really engaging and listening to the line staff as to what you, what they really need, that's probably the biggest key that I would say looking back that I, that you need to do that.

[00:35:09]: You really, really, really have to put your money where your mouth is and when you say that everybody's opinion is valued and that we value all of our employees, it's okay to say it, but to live it and do it is a different thing. And so, I think us making the changes and taking the chances and listening to the worker was really putting our money where our mouth is and I think it's paying off with our retention numbers.

TOM OATES [00:35:33]: Well, it says something about employee valuing their leadership, if their leadership hold themselves accountable, and that's you know, and you, you mentioned about risk - change is scary you know, what we've been doing over and over and over again, whether it leads to insanity or not, we're comfortable, and we kind of know the results, whether they're good or bad. So what would you have done differently?

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:35:56]: If I would look back now, so I think some of the things I would do differently, is I, we would, I would sit longer, I think, or a more meaningful time with the facilitator from NCWWI and, and kind of the NCWWI team to really map out what we could do, what we want to do, what we can't do, so we wouldn't have wasted, maybe it's not wasted, because it was still a lesson learned, but we wouldn't have taken as much time with something that we couldn't have changed.

[00:36:23]: I guess what that lesson taught us and the things that we even couldn't change was that it was an issue for those people, do you know what I mean? And maybe us letting them know these are things we can't change, it's beyond our ability to because that's what the law is, as an example. So, I guess, there's nothing, you know, wrong in us going down that path, but if we had, it would've saved some time, because what happened as a result of that is we decided then to kind of tighten the process up a little bit and then once a month we had a phone call with everybody that was, like even leadership and not just the people locally, so that they wouldn't have taken all their time coming up with a new dress code or a new, you know, time that they could work or not work from home and then at the end say, well, we can't even do that. You know, it's frustrating.

[00:37:07]: So, we, we just tightened that process up and talked on the phone monthly to kind of set that path on, on what's, what we can do, what we can't do, so what avenue we should pursue and what

we shouldn't. So, I think that's like the biggest thing, it was, not a waste of time again, but it was, it took a lot of time to kind of weed through that to figure out what we needed to do. And I think people were frustrated and, you know, but yeah. So, we worked through it.

TOM OATES [00:37:31]: But then you have that next assessment, that next COHA coming up, so at least you know, you, everything you've said 'gee what would I tell myself back then', you can at least remind yourself when the Spring comes around.

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:37:43]: That's right, exactly. That's exactly right.

TOM OATES [00:37:46]: Mary Beth, I want to thank you so much for, for spending the time, for, for sharing this with us and joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. I, I'm personally just pleased to hear about how some of these efforts - while they may not be impactful, to let's say, the pocketbook - they're impactful to the staff, which of course, resonates throughout the, really throughout your system and, and, you know, hopefully something to replicate.

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:38:11]: But it is impactful to the pocketbook, Tom, because if we can keep our staff happy, you know, it costs money to train people, it costs money to recruit people, and, and if we can keep them, where they are, then that's money saved for the state, too, so this is, this is really money well saved.

TOM OATES [00:38:27]: A positive impact to the pocketbook.

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:38:29]: A positive impact.

TOM OATES [00:38:30]: Thank you guys so much, and I really appreciate it, and thank you for being a part of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

MARY BETH BONAVENTURA [00:38:36]: I really enjoyed it, thank you so much.

SYLVIA DEPORTO [00:38:37]: Thank you very much.

TOM OATES [00:38:41]: Now, recognize this is still an ongoing process, not only for Indiana and San Francisco County, but all jurisdictions and states embarking on workforce development. There's a need for continuous assessment and looking at all the components that support an effective workforce.

[00:38:57]: So, if you head over to this podcast's webpage, over at [acf.hhs.gov/cb](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb) and just search 'podcasts', we'll have links to the other episodes that make up our workforce development series. The deep dive we take into NCWWI's Workforce Development Framework, our discussion with key leaders from the State of Connecticut on their decade-plus effort to develop their workforce and our conversation between a local child welfare professional and his academic advisor on North Dakota's partnership with the University of North Dakota to develop their Child Welfare Scholars program.

[00:39:30]: Also on this podcast page, we'll have links to the Workforce Development Framework and a toolkit that supports the WDF. So I encourage you to also check out the rest of the Information Gateway Podcast series, they are located on the Children's Bureau's website over again at [acf.hhs.gov/cb](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb), just search 'podcasts' and if you like our workforce development series, you should check out our episode on addressing secondary trauma. My thanks again to Sylvia Deporto and Mary Beth Bonaventura for taking the time to join us here on the show, along with Sharon Kollar and Charmaine Brittian from NCWWI,

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who are instrumental in putting all of this together for us. So, from everyone here at Child Welfare Information Gateway, I'm Tom Oates, thanks for listening and have a great day.

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:40:19]: 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.