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Connecting child-serving professionals
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In this Issue

- Training Opportunity
- Leadership Assessment
- Parent Leaders
- Good News
- Medicaid Renewals
- School Segregation
- Dog Days of Summer

New Training Series!

Fostering School Success: How Caregivers and Social Workers Can Support the Educational Needs of Children

September 26 & 27 and October 3 & 4, 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm ET

This skill-building virtual training will share how to improve school experiences and long-term outcomes for children who have experienced trauma. Using case examples, discussion, skill-building exercises, and opportunities for Q&A, the training will draw on the latest research in trauma and learning.

Presenter: Dr. Gwen Bass, Trainer and Educator

[Learn More and Register Here](#)

Leadership Self-Assessment

CWLA partner NCWWI has developed an online leadership self-assessment to help child welfare workers discover their strengths & areas for growth. Topics include: leadership fundamentals, leading change, leading in context, leading for results, and leading people.

[Take the Assessment](#)

[Explore Their Leadership Toolkit](#)

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Parent Leaders and Their Impact on Children and Families

By Amanda Klessig, CWLA Practice Excellence Intern

Upon first hearing the term “parent leader” I was puzzled regarding its actual meaning. Who is a parent leader, and what are the qualifications to become one? What do these individuals do? Are they parents who lead and inspire other parents? Are they humans who exceed the conventional standards of “good” parenting? Or are they community members who teach exceptional parenting techniques? Through a webinar hosted by the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) and the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC), I discovered the answer is incredibly simple. Although the term can have different meanings in different contexts, parent leaders are parents who desire change for their children and take steps to pilot that change. Across the country, groups of parent leaders advocate on behalf of their children to improve systems and break down systematic barriers. They collaborate and support one another to benefit their communities by addressing key issues such as inequities in education, racial and economic justice, LGBTQ+ rights, access to resources, and more.

Parent leaders are important to child welfare for a variety of reasons. First, they have a unique perspective on welfare issues. They know the needs of their children better than anyone and directly experience what barriers their children face daily. Parents can use that knowledge to offer key solutions. For example, those in positions of power who want to promote change may have great ideas, but having the perspective of a parent leader allows others to address the issues appropriately. Indirectly, parent leaders also have a major impact on future generations. Through modeling, children have a parent leader to teach them that they too can advocate for themselves and their needs. Children start to recognize that their voice matters and have the courage to speak up on issues that affect them. Lastly, children tend to thrive in communities where they receive ample support, not just from their own parents, but from a collective group.

Once I understood what being a parent leader entailed and the impact they have on families, I found myself asking how these parents operate. Do parent leader organizations exist? Are they only based in local schools? Interestingly, the NYU Metropolitan Center for

Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools conducted a study on parent leadership and organization groups to learn more about their landscape (Geller et al., 2023). Over the course of two years, they received survey responses from 180 organizations that identified themselves as “family and community engagement, advocacy, leadership development, and community organizing groups” (Geller et al., 2023). However, this does not mean that a parent leader must be part of an organized group. Any parent who advocates for educational, social, economic, or racial justice for their children can be a parent leader. In fact, the study found that 104 of the organizations were originally founded by parents.

Throughout their study, they discovered some interesting findings that highlight the work parent leaders are doing for children. Out of all the issues parent leaders could address, the leading three were K-12 education, early childhood education, and racial equity. More specifically, examples included removing police officers from school campuses, expanding bilingual policies in school districts, and strengthening the availability of mental health services in schools (Geller et al., 2023). While some organizations focused on directly tackling the issues at hand, others focused on teaching parents the skills needed to organize as a collective unit and promote leadership.

If you would like to know more about the study conducted by the NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, you can find a detailed report here. For those who are interested in getting involved as a parent partner or want specific details on organizations operating in communities near to you, there is a

Parent Power Map and Directory that serves as an interactive tool. Using this link, you can find organizations operating across the United States, identify their primary issues, and the general demographics of the group. Lastly, if you are involved in a parent leadership organization that has not already completed the study survey, you can share this link to be added to the directory.

Resources:

Geller, J.D., Cossyleon, J.E, Foster, P., McAlister, S., & Perez, W.Y. (2023). Parent Power and Leadership for Justice: A Landscape Analysis. Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University

Parent Power Map and Directory (n.d.). Parent Power and Leadership Project. Retrieved July 6, 2023 from <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/parentpower/parent-power-directory?authuser=0>



Amanda started interning as a CWLA Practice Excellence Intern in May of this year. She is a master’s student studying Forensic Psychology at George Washington University. She enjoys researching various topics related to child welfare and making connections with her personal experiences and what she has learned academically.

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Good News in Child Welfare

At times, the news media's bad news bias towards child welfare can lead us to feel disheartened, dispirited, and discouraged. But we know the truth – that all over the country dedicated child-serving professionals are having an immense positive impact on the lives of children and families.

In partnership with the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, & Research, each month we highlight one inspiring, joyful news story from the child welfare system. We hope this segment brings joy and delight into your day.

[A New Guaranteed Income Pilot Launches in DC](#)

Mother Up is a community-funded cash assistance program managed by a Washington, DC nonprofit, Mother's Outreach Network. In May of this year, they began a pilot of a guaranteed income program for mothers who are Black and have children involved in the child welfare system.

Help People Retain Coverage as States Restart Medicaid Renewals

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) temporarily waived certain Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) requirements and conditions. Now that the public health emergency has ended, states have restarted Medicaid and CHIP eligibility reviews. This means that over the next 12 months, everyone with Medicaid coverage will need to renew it.

According to some estimates, up to 15 million people could lose their current Medicaid or CHIP coverage through the Medicaid and CHIP eligibility renewal process. Using the toolkits below, you can help inform people about renewing their coverage and exploring other available health insurance options if they no longer qualify for Medicaid or CHIP.

[Learn More About Medicaid Renewals](#)

[Toolkit \(in English\)](#)

[Toolkit \(en Español\)](#)

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School Integration and its Direct Impact on Child Well-being

By Amanda Klessig, CWLA Practice Excellence Intern

The Century Foundation's Bridges Collaborative recently hosted a webinar focused on school integration. Speakers from different educational arenas discussed the importance of school integration, its history, and ways the federal government can help assist programs as they develop. Throughout the webinar, it became evermore apparent that school integration is not only a social justice issue, but a child welfare one as well. If, as a collective, we want to do better by children and their families, we must invest our attention and energy towards diversifying schools.

In the United States in the 1800s, segregated schools were commonplace. Students considered to be minorities could not legally attend public school with those who were white. This issue persisted and became a major aspect of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. Eventually in 1954, school segregation was outlawed by the Supreme Court in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case (The Library of Congress, n.d.). This supposedly marked history, as schools were no longer permitted to openly segregate.

Yet, school segregation is an enduring issue that continues to plague the United States. Students who attend schools just miles apart in different districts experience vast differences in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and other characteristics (Boterman et al, 2019). Although progress has been made since the 1950s, integration efforts require a deeper look at all societal inequities. This includes issues such as residential options, income status, food availability, and reliable/affordable transportation. The lack of equity in all of these factors puts children who already struggle at a further disadvantage.

One of the key points discussed during the webinar was how school integration impacts students' development. Interestingly, research evidence suggests that the outcomes for students' cognitive and social success are better when they are exposed to school and classroom diversity. From a cognitive perspective, integrated schools promote academic achievement for all students. Students in these environments have higher test scores, are

more likely to enroll in college, and are less likely to drop out (The Century Foundation, 2019). In terms of social well-being, research indicates a reduction in racial bias, an increase in self-confidence, an enhancement in leadership skills, and an increased willingness to seek out integrated environments all occur when students are in diverse settings (The Century Foundation, 2019). Given that students spend most of their time in an educational setting, it is important to consider these factors from a well-being perspective. If we want children to grow up in the best environments that allow them and their communities to thrive and flourish, more effort needs to be given towards integrating schools.

Fortunately, since *Brown v. Board*, attention has been devoted to ways in which the federal government can help encourage and assist with systemic changes to promote integration. For instance, a program recently became available for communities who are trying to integrate their school districts but need financial assistance to do so. This program, called the Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grants Program, will allocate \$10 million towards helping educational institutes/agencies further develop their integration plans.

Despite the challenges of promoting integration, these efforts are indispensable. If we want all children to excel, they need opportunities. It seems like such a simple solution – if research demonstrates that students thrive in diverse environments, then we must create diverse environments. We cannot accept that the students who are at the most disadvantage are the ones who will suffer if we do not intervene. It is important to encourage agencies that provide schooling to consider applying for programs to better their systems as the evidence suggests a much-needed call to action to help fulfill the promise made 65 years ago in *Brown v. Board*.

References

Boterman, Musterd, S., Pacchi, C., & Ranci, C. (2019). School segregation in contemporary cities: Socio-spatial dynamics, institutional context and urban outcomes. *Urban Studies* (Edinburgh, Scotland), 56(15), 3055–3073. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019868377>

Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grants Program (FDS). (2023, May 10). Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/school-choice-improvement-programs/fostering-diverse-schools-program-fdsp/>

School Segregation and Integration. (n.d.) The Library of Congress.

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/school-segregation-and-integration/#:~:text=These%20lawsuits%20were%20combined%20into,integrated%20until%20many%20years%20later>

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Staying Diligent During the Dog Days of Summer

By Marcus Stallworth, LMSW, CWLA Director of Training and Implementation

As we enter the summer months, many of us are participating in multiple events: weddings, graduations, and family reunions. These gatherings can serve as opportunities to connect with loved ones and friends. Although these activities can create a sense of connection for some, these invitations – or lack thereof – can conjure up many ranges of emotions for those who have recently experienced loss and separation. Research has shown that the break in structured routines can be a good time to reset ourselves, but it can also exacerbate existing and unresolved issues. If we are not careful, we can find ourselves in a place of indifference, isolation, or worse. There are many groups within child welfare that have overlapping needs. Here are a few tips and suggestions that may be worthy of consideration along your journey as a birth parent, resource parent, staff, or a co-worker.

Safeguarding Children:

During the summer, many children enjoy a level of freedom and independence. No classes, no more homework, and lots of idle time. Having an abundance of downtime can also be a time of increased risk. Many children spend more time online and using technology during these months due to their fluid schedules. Screen time, social media use, and gaming have a place in recreation, but overuse can impact overall physical and emotional well-being. For some children in foster care, social media and technology can be a way for them to seek attachments and connections with others. Although this can be an asset, this can also be an area of concern considering there are others online with adverse intentions for children – particularly vulnerable or unsupervised ones.

Tips/Suggestions:

There are many ways technology can be used meaningfully. Essentially, devices should be primarily used as an asset, not a babysitter. Find proactive ways to establish healthy guidelines regarding what daily use should look like – before an issue takes place. Take time to educate them on accepting “friend requests” from strangers and discuss what they should do if they encounter an inappropriate or questionable scenario. One of the main

reasons kids hesitate to involve adults is because they are afraid the adults will restrict them from having access to all technology immediately. For some, they would rather try to contend with the issue alone than involve an adult for that exact reason. Social media is a form of social capital, particularly for young ones who are digital natives. However, before we can inform them, we need to educate ourselves. These conversations can promote critical thinking, sound reasoning, and reaffirm the role of parents/caregivers.

Resource Parents:

This group of individuals, in my humble opinion, is one of the most undervalued members of our professional team. They volunteer to open their hearts and homes to children who are not their own, support them in their healing process, and often participate in the reunification process. Resource Parents do not have paid state and federal days off, built in sick days, and do not have a time clock to punch in and out of each day. Their role and responsibilities are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Granted, they can request respite, but invested families rarely use this option for recreational purposes. Although making positive connections with children (and their families) can be rewarding, it comes with many stress points and challenges. Over time, without proper support, frustration can build up which impacts the entire family dynamic – including adult relationships and with their own children. It is also worth emphasizing that the people in their natural support network may not be able to identify with the ask and task of what their role requires, making it difficult for them to be available in a way that is needed.

Tips/Suggestions:

Due to the commitment Resource Parents have to the children who have joined their family, they often hesitate to reach out to us for support. Some don't want to burden the worker, others don't want to be viewed as incompetent, and a handful believe they will be put on some "list" that will prevent other children from joining their family in the future. As we learned from the Stages of Disruption in the PRIDE Model of Practice Pre-service training curriculum, Diminishing Pleasure can be part of the overall experience. Remind them that asking for help is not a sign of failure, and work alongside them to apply what they have learned in real time. Lastly, instead of waiting for them to reach out to us, we should be proactively checking in on them periodically. Due to the nature of the role, many of our communication is crisis driven. Taking a few moments to genuinely call and ask how they are doing will aid in relationship building and establishing rapport.

Tips/Suggestions for Child Welfare Staff and for Ourselves:

We would be remis if we did not take a minute to highlight the importance of agency staff and fellow co-workers. We have all chosen to work and serve as agents of support and change. Statistically, many of us spend more awake time with our colleagues than we do with our own family members in any given week. Check in with them, ask them how they are doing, wait for an answer, be committed to supporting them while also holding them accountable for their own overall wellness. So be kind to others, hydrate, ask for support if needed, and continue to lean on the resources you have built over time.

CWLA offers training and consultation services to agencies regarding social media, self-care, and how to support members of our professional team. For more information, please contact Marcus Stallworth at mstallworth@cwla.org.