

From Strong Communities Come Resilient Families

Key Themes from Working Session Breakouts

Introductions

What is one key takeaway from the morning session - OR - one major opportunity for improving the wellbeing of families with young children at risk of involvement with the child welfare system?

- Working from root cause & trauma-informed perspectives is crucial to meeting entire families' needs.
- Parents need more readily available resources to support reunification with their children.
- Eliminating stigma involved with support services is important to reaching & supporting families' needs.
- Affordable, quality child care is a primary prevention service.
- Early touchpoints & well-connected referral systems are crucial to strengthening families & preventing family separation.
- Incorporating parent voices & peer support is key to helping families navigate & connect to the right supports.
- Proactive cross-sector collaboration among early childhood service providers & stakeholders helps advance equity in our provision of supports.
- Leveraging technology in the right ways helps advance the overall reach of services & can also support greater equity in service provision.

Interactive Data Exercise

What stands out for you from the data, generally? Do you have input, from this data exercise or your work generally, on one or two indicators that Oklahoma could make progress on to substantially improve the wellbeing of families with young children in Oklahoma?

- The majority of children entering foster care are ages five & under, which highlights the importance of a special focus on families with young children.
- It is important to bring more parent voices & the perspectives of frontline parent support staff to the decision-making table to better inform how to strengthen families' wellbeing.
- Reducing Oklahoma's high rates of domestic violence & community violence need to be a top priority.
- Prioritizing mental health & substance use disorders from a treatment mindset (versus criminalization) is crucial to strengthening families & promoting their overall wellbeing.
- It is important to address underlying root causes that contribute to neglect representing the majority of child maltreatment cases.
- Combatting significant disparities in outcomes for families of color needs to be a top priority, & ensuring that data pertaining to Native American families is collected & accurately reported is especially important.
- Oklahoma families are facing a variety of systemic hardships, including intergenerational & cultural trauma & institutionalized racism, & we must address these hardships as interconnected co-contributors as we provide families at risk of involvement with the child welfare system with more readily available resources that promote family stabilization &/or reunification.

Breakout Session Discussion Summary

1. Reducing entries into the child welfare system (secondary prevention)

(A) Which families with young children or which types of experiences should we be identifying as we work to keep families stable, eliminate risks of neglect & abuse, & safely keep children from entering the child welfare system?

- Families seeking or receiving family support services (not necessarily child-welfare related).
- Families who are referred to child welfare but are “screened out.”
- Families with young children enrolled in early learning programs who are experiencing chronic absenteeism &/or high rates of suspensions or expulsions.
- Families who are facing stressors or special circumstances such as: young parents; kin or kin-like caregivers i.e., grandparents raising grandchildren; families & children with disabilities & other chronic health conditions; first time parents; children of parents with previous child welfare involvement; children of incarcerated parents; parents with mental health or substance use disorders or children who are substance-exposed; families facing homelessness; & families who have interactions with institutions like police or emergency rooms.
- Families experiencing significant adversity & trauma, including families of color facing intergenerational trauma & institutionalized racism, which erects barriers to accessing high-quality, vital supports.

(B) For the families identified, what do these families need most? What services do we have in Oklahoma that could be expanded or leveraged differently to better meet these needs?

- Families need their most basic needs met before anything else. Policies are needed to better support families experiencing poverty, including raising the minimum wage, refundable earned income tax credits, & creating affordable access to health care, child care, nutrition & housing.
- When families are facing crises, they need to be able to speak to someone trained & knowledgeable, & quick response systems need to be in place.
- Families need services that are available statewide (versus limited regional availability) & affordable transportation to services.
- It is important to avoid pointing families facing hardships in too many directions. Providers need to be cross-trained & equipped with resources that allow them to better assist families in acquiring helpful supports at single/fewer points of service.
- Families need trusted messengers, including those in peer support roles, to help break the stigma often involved with receiving services, to promote engagement with helpful services, & to help families successfully navigate systems of care.
- Families need to be connected with service providers (including child care professionals) who have adequate professional supports, including those that strengthen providers’ own mental & physical health, so they are fully equipped to successfully meet families’ needs.
- It is crucial to leverage successful, high-quality program models & prevention services that benefit families, such as Educare, Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships, the Pyramid Model, Circle of Security, Children First, Parents as Teachers, Sooner Start, home visiting, programs for justice-involved families, & programs & services offered by tribal governments.

2. Re-stabilizing families who become involved in the child welfare system (tertiary prevention/early intervention)

What ideas do you have, whether prompted by the meeting materials or from your own experience, that would help families with young children in the child welfare system re-stabilize & exit the child system intact as a family – particularly those families identified as having protective factors or strengths that make it likely they could safely & successfully stay together?

- Increase the number of providers who racially & ethnically represent families being served to build more trusting & responsive services.
- Ensure continuity of services while also working to increase access to services & enhanced service coordination.
- Better utilize integrated data, segmented by race, ethnicity, economic status & geography to understand & respond to families' complex needs.
- Increase access to user-friendly technology to reach families & coordinate services.
- Cultivate trusted messengers & activate peer support networks across the state to help connect families to what they need & build parents' confidence.
- Consistently use an approach that looks at deeper root causes/ACEs when assisting families involved with the child welfare system & determining how to connect them with appropriate supports & strengths-building programs & services.
- Revise policies to increase access to child care, such as enhanced subsidy rates & mental health consultation services, for children in foster care & families facing other special situations.
- Strengthen family engagement & strong relationships between the education system & families.
- Foster strong networks of early childhood programs that are holistically focused on equity, safety, quality learning, & supporting whole families (including support to kin caregivers).

3. Meeting the distinct developmental needs of young children at-risk of entering the child welfare system or involved in the child welfare system

What ideas do you have that would help Oklahoma do a better job at meeting important developmental needs of young children & their families who are facing adversities or involved with the child welfare system in Oklahoma?

- Advance stronger communication & coordination between & within agencies/service providers to support continuity of care & meet young children's developmental needs.
- Ensure that services supporting healthy child development are covered under Medicaid.
- Be mindful of how transition points impact child development, particularly in early childhood education environments, & concentrate coordinated efforts to impact healthy transitions.
- Bring quality early childhood services to scale across the entire state & ensure equitable access to high-quality services.
- Increase the utilization of centralized resource & referral services, & better connect community-based supports for families of young children.
- Utilize hospitals & pediatricians to facilitate early, meaningful connections to developmental support services.
- Cultivate & increase the use of parent mentors who can assist parents with their developmental concerns & their children's important developmental needs before families ever become involved with the child welfare system.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Systems of care need to ensure parents are better aware of, & connected to, the variety of services offered in their communities.
- Systems of care need to take intentional, measurable actions to recognize and respond to intergenerational & cultural trauma & institutionalized racism.
- Frontline workers need adequate supports & resources to be able to provide high-quality services to families from a more comprehensive, holistic perspective.
- There should be more focus on incorporating parent voices & perspectives, & increasing the capacity of, & access to, parent partners & peer support groups across the state.
- Technology needs to be thoughtfully leveraged in ways that expand the reach & availability of vital family supports.
- It is critical to enhance cross-sector coordination & service integration, including coordinated messaging, to better engage & reach families where they are.