

Cecilia Rivas:

Welcome to today's session on case management connections to quality parenting. I'm Cecilia Rivas and I'm the national implementation director for QPI at the Youth Law Center. But I first got involved with QPI when I was a case management supervisor in Philadelphia, so the subject of engaging child welfare case managers and child protection workers in QPI is very near and dear to my heart. So I've assembled a rockstar group of QPI leaders and advocates from four different states who will talk to us about why it's critical to engage them in QPI, how to engage them in QPI, and what it looks like to give case managers the tools and the support that they need to serve children and families in a way that's really relationship based.

Cecilia Rivas:

So we'll hear from Carleen Chisholm who is a program supervisor for Ongoing Services in the Waterbury office in Connecticut. We'll hear from Nereida Builes, who is a social work supervisor in the permanency unit of the Norwalk office in Connecticut. We'll have Kellee Butler who is a child welfare trainer for Citrus Family Care Network in Miami, Florida. We'll have Shaneka Joseph from Louisiana who's a child welfare specialist. And last but not least, we will have Kacie Schwin who is the assessment supervisor in Washo County, Nevada. An assessment in Nevada is akin to child protective investigations or intake but I've asked Kacie to join us because I want to talk about engaging, broadly, the social workers who work with both families and children.

Cecilia Rivas:

So Kacie, we'll start with you. I'd like to hear about the impact of QPI, both to you personally and to your system. What does QPI mean to you as a child welfare professional? Looking at QPI as implementation in Washo County, what are the challenges to engaging the child protection and case management staff and what has your site done to overcome those challenges? And lastly, if you can share some strategies or tips or lessons learned about successful engagement of the child protection staff. Kacie?

Kacie Schwin:

Thank you, Cecilia. Thanks for having me. QPI means, to me, building relationships and improving communication and all for the purpose of how we get case workers involved is it's going to be less work for you. I'm going to say it again, if you didn't hear me, turn up your cameras. Case workers, QPI means less work for you. And I'm going to give you an example of something that happened to me before I knew about QPI because when I think about how different the situation could've been, had I known then what I know now about QPI.

Kacie Schwin:

We have a six story building and as a case worker I worked on the fourth floor and there were also visitation rooms on the fourth floor. And a pretty common practice was a foster parent would bring the child and someone would go downstairs to get them and bring them up to the fourth floor for the visit, probably one of our support staff. Sometimes a runner, who would actually have driven the child here. So there wasn't any contact between the foster parent and the parent and the child to facilitate that visit, not regularly anyway. And one particular day, I got paged by our front desk, mom's out here, she's pretty mad. Okay.

Kacie Schwin:

So I go out to the lobby, talk with mom. She tells me, "I just started my visit with my daughter, Haley." Haley is four. And she tells me that foster mom pulled her hair and mom is mad because she thinks we took her daughter and put her somewhere where they pulled her daughter's hair. And I said, "Well, okay. I know foster mom pretty well, I don't know how that would happen, let me find out." So I go back to my desk, call foster mom, find out where she is, talk to her about the concerns and it turns out that Haley doesn't like to have her hair brushed. And foster mom has tried everything to make it a more pleasant experience but she hates it and she cries and it's awful for her. So I take that information back to mom and there's a lot of back and forth, foster mom said this, mom said this. And I spent a good hour working on that situation and when I think about it now, it wouldn't have happened because foster mom would have been talking with mom this whole time through QPI and she would've been the one to bring it up and say, "Haley doesn't like to have her hair brushed. What tips do you have for me? How can we make this a more pleasant experience for her?"

Kacie Schwin:

And that would've saved me an hour of going back and forth where I could've gotten caught up on case notes or written a court report, whatever was on my plate that day. And I'm sure everyone can think of examples like that where you've spent so much time being the go between. QPI takes you out of that role if you facilitate the relationship early on. And that can be a challenge for a lot of workers to adjust the way they talk to the people they're involved with, both the parents and the foster parents. Walking around the office I hear a lot of workers say things like, "Well, foster mom, I know you're really busy so I'll just get a runner to bring this child to the visitation." Or, "I don't want you to have to come all the way to court so just don't worry about coming to the hearing." And that's a big assumption, that makes people think it must not be important or you'd really ask me to be there. We can change our language when we're talking to people about what we want them to do.

Kacie Schwin:

Don't ask your foster parents if they're willing to do a phone call with the child's family or parent. Say, "Hey, we really want them to have a phone call, how can we make this work? What would be good for you to make this happen for this child? Hey, we really want you at court, can you make it?" Just thinking about changing the way that you ask people to do things so that they know how important it is to you and to the child.

Kacie Schwin:

Something else I wanted to say about language that just makes me cringe is the way we talk about the families that we work with. How many people, you can even raise your hand even though we can't see you, how many people have said to someone, "I'm going to transfer the case next week?" Or, "I got the court report done for the case." When you're talking to a parent, how does that feel for them when they hear the case? Especially the transfer thing. The first thing I think of when I hear, "I'm going to transfer the case," is like you called in to one of those customer service things and you waited on hold forever and you finally get to a person and they're like oh I'm not the right person for you, I'm going to have to transfer you. And you're going, no, but wait. I just want to talk to a person and there you go again.

Kacie Schwin:

These are families. Use family friendly language. An easy shift for me in the beginning was instead of saying the case, I said your family's case and then I dropped the case all together and just said your family. "Hey, your family is going to get a new worker next week." And do a warm handoff.

Kacie Schwin:

These are all really easy things that we have started doing here at Washo County to transition the relationships as the family's case moves through the system. It's really hard to get workers to think in this new way and one of the things they really hold onto is that worst case scenario thinking. As a supervisor I'm huge on making sure my workers are getting parents to appointments that children have. And we just had a conversation a couple of weeks ago about a dad who had spanked a child and left a mark and the child had a doctor's appointment. We can't let dad go to the doctor's appointment. And I said, "Why not?" We're going to take out the what's the worst thing that could happen, and think more of what's likely to happen and what is the benefit for this child and this parent to be at this doctor's appointment.

Kacie Schwin:

It is highly unlikely that this parent will physically abuse a child during a doctor's appointment in a public place where there's a professional and lots of people. And it's more likely that the parent will get information about the child's needs, that they can ask questions, that they'll feel involved and more connected to the child's needs. And that's a really easy thing to do and the foster parent and the parent could communicate together about, "Hey, here's when the appointment is. Hey, meet me there." We've even had foster parents pick up the parent if they don't have a ride and they all go together. These are really easy things if you take out that worst case scenario thinking and just go with what's likely to happen and what is the benefit of doing it this way?

Kacie Schwin:

Getting people involved, Washo has been doing QPI for a really long time and in the beginning, a lot of us case workers thought, that's for foster parents. That's for licensing. It doesn't involve us. We had a site meeting years ago, I couldn't even tell you when it was, and we talked about comfort calls. If you're not doing comfort calls, if you don't know what they are, it's a great place to start, especially for your assessment or investigative staff or for your permanency staff when kids move. It builds that relationship from day one and it was like a light bulb when I heard that. Why haven't we been doing this this whole time? And again, I'm going back to, it makes things so much easier. I can't tell you how many times parents would call me upset about their case. In the past, they also said, "I don't know who's taking care of my kid. I don't know where they are, I don't know what's going on." Now it's, "I really hate that the department is involved and I really don't like the things you said in my court report, but please don't move my child from Mary because she's a great foster parent and she loves my child and she's helping me a lot."

Kacie Schwin:

And I'm okay with being the bad guy who wrote the things in the court report about them if they love Mary and they're working together with her for the best needs of their child. So comfort calls, a big thing you can do to engage your staff and, when I talk with my staff about the families they're working with, I always ask, "How'd the comfort calls go? Did you do one?" We can't do one with a mom because she's in jail, who can we do one with? What about grandma? What about dad? What about a sibling? Someone they're close to?

Kacie Schwin:

We just wrapped QPI Bingo here in Washo and even though we're all working virtually had a phenomenal response to that. You can check out the QPI website, a sample of the bingo card is there

and we all rallied together to have prizes donated. So people looked at the card and there are things they're already doing but they just doing think about QPI. That's what we need to do, point out when people are doing QPI and just get them to think in that mindset. I asked about visitation and how we could improve that, that's QPI. I gave some encouraging words to a child, that's QPI. I did a comfort call, all those things. We can point those out.

Kacie Schwin:

We also recently switched our ... Now I can't think of the word, our committee that meets to be called the Be In The Loop Group. You don't have to be there every time, you can pop in when you can and get the information about QPI, ask questions, share what you need. We're trying to share more stories in meetings to jump things off. "Hey, who has a QPI story that you can share so that other people can hear it?"

Kacie Schwin:

And the last one that I always go to is how can we get QPI into policy? Was have a normalcy policy here in Washo that foster parents and workers can reference if they're not sure. Gosh, I don't know if this child can spend the night at a friend's house from the foster home? How do I address that? The normalcy policy helps workers make those decisions without just saying no. Don't say no until you know.

Cecilia Rivas:

Kacie, thank you so much and I love hearing you talk about QPI because when you describe it, and I imagine myself hearing about it as a case manager who's new to it, it just sounds like common sense. And so that really takes away the fear. So Kellee Butler, we will go to you in Florida and your perspective is interesting because you're actually training the child welfare staff who are going out and working with the families. So I'd like to hear from you about QPI impacts you as a trainer and looking at QPI's implementation at Citrus Family Care. What are the challenges to engaging case management staff? What has your site done to overcome those challenges? And what would be your strategies or tips or lessons learned? Kellee?

Kellee Butler:

Hi. Thank you for having me. So I recently came into the QPI champion program about eight months ago. Eight, nine months ago. And I must admit that when I came into the QPI champion program, I did not know much about what QPI entailed and everything that surrounded QPI, which, I think, is a general challenge for us in Miami-Dade County with our case managers and our foster parents and our partners. That a lot of people just don't have a lot of information about what QPI is, how to do it, how to implement it and what it stands for.

Kellee Butler:

So in training for me, one of our goals is to now take QPI and to implement it into our training and to disseminate that information to our case managers from the minute that they come into the doors as case management staff training to work with our families. Because a lot of times, our case managers are doing things that are considered QPI and they don't even know it because they're just not using the specific language but they are actually doing things that would be considered QPI.

Kellee Butler:

So one of the challenges that we have working with our case management staff is getting them to understand that implementing QPI is not necessarily new responsibilities, but it's a better way to do our same responsibilities that we have to our families in a more effective way. And a lot of times, most times, when new policies and practices are introduced, very rarely does it result in a case manager having less work to do. So immediately when you tell a case manager, "Hey, we have new policies, we have new procedures that we're going to be introducing to you," they are automatically a little bit concerned because they are scared, this means more work for us. And so one of the challenges is for us to get them to understand that once it's implemented, and if it's done the right way, it's going to end up in less work because we want to cultivate relationships between care givers and biological, legal guardians. And that way it's going to take case managers out of the mix as that middle person going back and forth between the caregiver and the foster parent, as Kacie described earlier. And it will free up a lot of time. So that's one of the first challenges is just getting our case managers to understand that and getting some buy in.

Kellee Butler:

Second is we're going to have to have entire culture shifts for our system of care because currently we have foster parents who are involved, or who want to be involved, but they may come to court and they may not be called on, they may not get a chance to express what they want to say so maybe they won't come back to court next time because they were not utilized in the way that they should have been utilized. Or you may have foster parents who don't come to court but case managers don't encourage them to come to court because they are not really heard in court or in staffings or anything like that. A lot of times the case managers are looked to to answer questions on children and to have the answers on children for children's day to day lives and things that a caregiver would be more well versed to answer. And so we're going to have to have an entire cultural shift so that when we're having these court hearings, these staffings and these meetings, that our judges and our permanency specialists and our leaders of these meetings and hearings and staffings are looking to caregivers to ask about the child's day to day life, day to day function and not to the case manager.

Kellee Butler:

If something is going on with the child's education or even just if they aren't feeling well, how they're doing on their medication, that guardian items, attorneys are immediately calling the caregivers first for this information without the case manager first. Because we need for our case managers to manage the case and then our caregivers to be the caregivers and be in full command of that child's day to day life and how that child is doing and be prepared and capable of disseminating that information throughout the system of care as needed. So empowering our caregivers to be able to do that, which our caregivers are capable. But when you're not utilized in that way, it's natural for you to not really step up to the forefront. But I really believe that people do rise to the occasion when it is expected of them. So I think our whole entire culture is going to have to shift to engaging our caregivers and treating them just like you would treat your biological parents. They're caregivers, we're going to look to our biological parents and our caregivers for our answers on our children.

Kellee Butler:

Another thing that we're doing at Citrus to work on QPI is we're training. So we're training QPI so we're going to be starting that soon and we're training everyone in our system of care through cross training. So there's no training just for foster parents or just for CPI, or just for case managers or just for attorneys, just for guardian lives. Everybody is invited to the same set of trainings and everybody will be

trained together that way everybody is going to receive the same exact information at the same exact time and also so that everyone understands that yes, you all are working a very different role, but no, we only have one training because everybody has a responsibility for QPI.

Kellee Butler:

So QPI is not just about the foster parent and the child or the bio parent and the foster parent. QPI encompasses everybody who works within the system of care, has a responsibility to be making decisions that are in the best interest of that child all the time, regardless of how inconvenient it may be, regardless of how difficult it may be. That every decision we make is always, we're keeping it at the forefront of our thoughts, is this in the best interest of the child? How will this affect the child? And are we doing our very best to maintain a relationship for this child throughout these decisions? So we're going to be cross training everyone together so that they understand that we are one system. We have different roles, we may work for different agencies, but we're one system and we have to work together if we're going to make this cultural shift and put relationships at the forefront, put our children at the forefront. We're going to have to work together to get that done. So that's another strategy that we are going to be doing at Citrus with our training.

Kellee Butler:

We are also going to have to be working with our case management staff to debunk a lot of myths. A lot of times everybody is very focused on, I call it the CYB culture, the cover your butt culture. Everybody is very concerned with, am I going to get in trouble? What's going to happen? And we have to stop being so focused on adverse risk. Everybody's focused on high risk, adverse outcomes rather than is this in the best interest of the child and instead of focusing on relationships. So we're going to have to make that shift and debunk a lot of myths.

Kellee Butler:

A lot of times case managers are thinking that they need to be the ones to make decisions about if a child can stay overnight or if a child can go to a party or if a child can go to a friend's house and those are all caregiver decisions. And so those decisions have to lie with the caregivers. If we're trusting our caregivers to be caregivers, then we have to know that they are capable of vetting and analyzing situations for child safety and making sure that children are in safe situations, the same that they would if it was their biological child that they were allowing to go out into the community to spend time with family or friends outside of their home. And we have to know that there has to be normalcy.

Kellee Butler:

In order to maintain relationships, we have to have normalcy. And that sometimes things do go bad but we cannot strong arm every situation with the worst case scenario because we're so scared that there's a possibility that something might go bad that we're literally making the situation so much more strenuous or adverse to our children out of our overabundance of caution because we're scared at what could possibly happen in a million possibilities. Which is not going to be conducive to our children having normalcy and being able to maintain relationships and their attachments. Because we have to realize that our children have attachments to their caregivers, yes, but they also have attachments to their community, to their home schools, to their friends, to their extended relatives and we want to be able to maintain those relationships and those attachments. We're trying to make sure that the child never leaves the foster home and they're underneath that foster parent's eye every second. Yes, we want to make sure that they're safe, but we can also make sure they're safe while they're in the community with

responsible individuals so long as the caregiver has made that determination that the situation is safe for the child.

Kellee Butler:

Another thing that we're doing, we're expanding our QPI champions. So currently all of our agencies, we have four community based care agencies, they all have a QPI champion, however we had about maybe six or eight people go through the last QPI champion program so now we're going to have more QPI champions to be out there to spread the word about QPI, what QPI is and to answer the questions and to help get the word out. We are initiating the steering committee. The steering committee is going to be working together with the agencies to figure out what type of things that we can do to make sure that all of our work is always continuing to have the spirit of QPI, that we are maintaining the principles of QPI in our decision making, in our daily work with our children, our caregivers and our parents.

Kellee Butler:

One of the first tasks of our steering committee is we are collecting positive stories of QPI. Just positive stories of caregivers, birth parents, children who are already involved in QPI and things have worked out well. Caregivers and birth parents who work together and things have led to reunifications or extended relationships even past reunification or even if there was no reunification, continued relationships beyond permanent guardianship or adoption or whatever the outcome was of that case, just so people can see that QPI works. So we're not asking you to do your responsibilities in a new way just because we're asking you to do it. We're asking you to do it because it's beneficial and it works. So that's one of the first goals of our steering committee, we're going to be pulling in our champions from our other agencies and they're going to be responsible for pulling in case managers and maybe some other staff that they know that are already embracing the spirit of QPI to be a part of the steering committee so we can come together and create additional goals for our committee and have additional people who are committed to going back to our agencies and in our community to spread the word of QPI and also to help hold their agencies and communities responsible for continuously embracing the spirit of QPI.

Kellee Butler:

I think that some of the lessons that I personally have learned from being able to successfully engage case management staff is by pointing out to them the QPI that they're already doing. And I think that when people realize the QPI that they're already doing and that has already worked well, you move away from that foster parent is different, that bio parent is different. That aunt is different to okay, it's not that they are different, it's that we're practicing QPI, we're practicing these policies, we are using these skills and it's these skills that are helping the situation to be different and we can use these same skills with all of our other caregivers, all of our birth parents, for the benefit of all of our children. So to not assign these situations that have turned out to be good situations, that foster parent is just different. No, you have just happened to initiate QPI with that foster parent and did not realize it. So just pointing that out to them to let them know that they're already doing it so that they know they can continue to spread that to all of their caregivers and that once we get this off the ground and it becomes a part of our system, that it's going to make such a better change for all of our caregivers and most of our families. But most importantly, for our children.

Cecilia Rivas:

Kellee, thank you so much for those remarks and I love that you and Kacie both spoke about moving away from such a focus on risk management that you don't give children childhoods. I really love that that point was made by both of you so thank you for that.

Cecilia Rivas:

And so we will, on that note, take it to Connecticut where Carleen and Nereida, you have been on the forefront of bringing QPI to Connecticut. You're our newest site so what does QPI mean to you as child welfare professionals and looking at the early implementation of QPI in Connecticut, what have been the early challenges to engaging case management staff? And what are you doing to overcome those challenges? Carleen, why don't we start with you?

Carleen Chisholm:

Thank you, Cecilia. Yes, we are champions in the making, yes. So Connecticut is just piloting this program, this initiative now. And we say initiative but I say movement. What I first want to say, it's nice to hear from my panel colleagues in terms of just hearing the common theme, which it's resonated with me right now. QPI, for me, has always been my vision at the department of children and families. That's where my vision has been. Coming through the door as a social worker, as a supervisor, working with my staff and the passion that I bring was identified and that's why I was identified to be a champion. This is my vision.

Carleen Chisholm:

It's my vision but there's challenges. There's challenges when it comes to our agency, there's challenges when it comes to our resource parents. Because the mindset is not embraced. It's simple. It's a no-brainer, as Kacie said. Children need to feel loved. They need to feel a sense of belonging and when and if they have to be separated from their homes of origin, they should feel comforted. And that's basically what QPI means to me. As a role of a case manager, as I was one and as I supervise and now I have a larger staff that I supervise, the role of the case manager is very instrumental, given their relationship that they have with the biological family, with the resource family, with the foster care licensing. They service a bridge in bringing everyone to the table and at the forefront of all of this. Because a child is placed at the center of all of this. Best case practice is there to ensure that the child's emotional and physical needs are met, and as a result they have long lasting and nurturing relationships that are developed.

Carleen Chisholm:

And that's what it is and I've heard my colleagues say, that's what you want. We want our families to come together in the very beginning. We certainly have distinct roles within the department. We're trying to, in Connecticut, get all the different roles to the table. We are a child protective service agency, however we do operate in silos, as you know. We work in the sculp of our job but we're all ... Our mission is child protective services. We have to work together. That also includes stakeholders, as Kellee said. Everyone that's a part of the system of care needs to be a part of this because we're trying to achieve permanency. What that looks like, that could look like reunification. But everyone has to be at the forefront.

Carleen Chisholm:

QPI came to Connecticut several years ago. The initiative was brought to the table several years ago, and for whatever reason, it did not take off. We now have executive leadership in Connecticut and

Connecticut is pushing this statewide, office wide, region wide because it's important, it's valued. And so there wasn't much prodding for me to jump on the bandwagon. But it's going to take the buy in of our folks here. And that's basically where we are here. And that is the barrier, right? Because it's a new way of thinking. And I've heard this said from my colleagues, there's a culture shift. It's a shift. And who is accepting of that. And the messaging is critical when we're talking about the buy in and this change initiative. Because that's basically what it is, folks. It's a change initiative. It seems simple but when you have resource families that have been doing this for decades, case management staff that has been doing it for decades, those are the folks that you have to convince. You have to convince the attorneys, you have to convince the judges, you have to convince every one that is a part of this system of care. And it's being done.

Carleen Chisholm:

Certainly, when I think about those resource families, and I would not coin the phrase but just say diamond in the rough. I could sit with my staff and I can remember those resource families that got QPI. I had a case where we had two children, two little boys, that were separated. And when we talk about language, I'm going to say language in terms of separated because as an agency in Connecticut, we use removal. And one of our colleagues made mention that a biological parent said, "The word removal, to me that means someone's coming to remove trash from my home. My kids were separated from me." So that changed the language. That one word is precedented. So I'm using the word separated.

Carleen Chisholm:

So these boys were separated from their families, from their mother due to substance abuse and mental health. She reunified with those boys but then she relapsed and a second time around those young boys were placed in the same home with their resource mother, resource parent. That relationship, the first time around, started from point A. That foster mother really made the biological mother feel comforted. You have your struggles, Mom, I have your boys. You don't worry about them. Worry about what you need to do to get them back. And she embraced that mindset in terms of always engaging the biological mom, making sure that Mom knew that her kids needs were met. Including Mom, sending videos, phone calls, going to appointments together. The case manager really didn't have much to do in that aspect because that's what we're looking for our families to do. Taking these kids into your home and they're a part of your family.

Carleen Chisholm:

And so in actuality what happened, she was able to, with the team, so it's the case manager, it's the therapist, it's the mother's support team all on board in terms of those children returning home. And what was the nuance about this was that the second time around we were dealing with COVID. So what we're dealing with is with providers that are really concerned about can we move forward with reunification when we really can't do in person? Well, we're going to have to move forward folks because we're living in a virtual world now so we really can't hold up what mom's progress is. And so there was a little uneasiness in terms of how do we get these kids home virtually when we really can't do that, the breakdown of the two months where you're a visit there, then it turns into a longer visit then an overnight and then we do the reunification. So we had to be very thinking outside of the box because there were some nervous folks at the table.

Carleen Chisholm:

And we did. We got those kids home, that relationship is still going on, long lasting. Those kids go to her home every weekend. When mother is feeling kind of overwhelmed, she can pick up the phone and call that foster mother and say, "Listen, do you mind taking the boys this weekend? Do you mind taking these boys today? Do you mind dropping them off or picking them up?" No problem. That's what quality parenting looks like, folks. And I'm going to allow Nereida to talk about some strategies that Connecticut is doing. Thank you.

Nereida Builes:

Thank you, Carleen. Thank you. So I have been a part of QPI for about eight months now. And what QPI has meant to me is it's something that is common sense. It's like this is what we should be doing and we have this great curriculum and this initiative now where it's putting at the forefront for all of our staff to really follow. In terms of some of the strategies that we've been doing in Connecticut and our region is, in terms of trying to recruit staff, making sure that we have a really diverse group of staff from the office. Everyone from each discipline so that their lens and their voice and their experiences can really be heard and brought to the table. This is especially when we are developing our steering committees. Also, our leadership has been amazing in terms of supporting QPI, wanting to hear about this, understanding it and really being so supportive of us. Since I've been on the champions panel, there has not been a meeting in my office that I have not sat in on where they haven't asked me to talk about QPI, even if it's a minute or two, what's new with QPI? What's going on? What are you guys doing?

Nereida Builes:

And we've talked about infusing QPI into what we've already been doing in the office. Different practices that we have, different reviews, whether they be case reviews or whether we're monitoring permanency. So really just trying to infuse it into what we're already doing. I think you guys have all said that there's a lot of this being done already. A lot of our staff that are doing this and they don't even realize that they're doing it. So like I said, just infusing it into the work that we're doing. Making this a really natural process. While this is something new, because so many people are doing it, just continuing to make it be this natural process. And using, sometimes, those natural experiences to plug QPI in.

Nereida Builes:

I know when we were trying to develop our steering committee, there was a time when I was just talking to one of the staff members and was just talking to me about an experience they had and something that had been going on and I said, "Oh wow. You really should be part of this steering committee, you bring up some really valid points." That's what QPI is, that's what the steering committee is all about. We're trying to get this work going and implement some changes. So I think the message of empowerment to our staff. Instead of talking about what all the issues are, what all the barriers are, and you have to be part of this so that you can be that change, you can be part of that change. So that really got a message of empowerment.

Nereida Builes:

We've talked about utilizing different focus groups. So even if, let's say staff are on the steering committee, just getting that message of QPI out there, having it just resonate with them on an ongoing basis and discussing through focus groups, getting staff to think about the values of QPI and how it resonates with them. This staff has been really, really receptive of QPI, and like I said, we've had so much support in our office, like I said, from leadership and the staff has really, they're open to this. I think that they're ready for this work and this change. So I've just taken different opportunities.

Nereida Builes:

I was asked by leadership to speak at a community collaborative event that we have. It's within Fairfield county where my office is from and it's a group of different providers from our area and they get together, I want to say, on a monthly basis and they just discuss what's going on within their agencies, different programs they have, and they share information and programs. And I was asked to speak at that and I discussed QPI, what it is, where we are, where we're going and it was so well received. They were so excited about it. Some people were ready to join the steering committee just in that little presentation that we I did. So that's what we've been doing to really get the word out there and tackle any barriers that we've had. But it's really been so well received.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thank you so much, Nereida and Carleen for that. And what really shined from all of you was that behind a great resource parent and a successful birth family, you're going to find a case manager giving them the support that they need to make sure that the child has excellent parenting every day. So I really appreciate all of you for sharing your time and your wisdom.

Cecilia Rivas:

And lastly, we will hear from Shaneka Joseph. And Shaneka, I know that you're someone who is living and breathing QPI values in your work every day. I know it because of Pascal, who shared in the chat that she's looking forward to hearing from her real life case worker who really changed her life. So I want to ask you to discuss your experiences surveying children and families in a relationship based way and what it meant to you to be doing that within a system in Louisiana that really supports you in taking that approach.

Cecilia Rivas:

But let me lead into you with Pascal's quote here. She said, "Let's talk about how we are all not perfect. Let's talk about how we all, at some point in our lives, could easily have been in their shoes. Let's talk about supporting everyone and let's talk about second chances." So I think her intro was better than mine so go ahead.

Shaneka Joseph:

Yes. Pascal is one of my success stories. I started working with the department of children and family services in 2012. I have a passion to work with families. When I first meet my parents, I try to build a relationship with them. I let them know a little bit about me and they tell me their story. When I meet the parents, I ask them, "What can I do to help you? What do you need?" Instead of telling them what they need. I let them know where their children are, where they're placed at, I introduce the foster parents. We all do FaceTime. Foster parents tell them a little bit about their background, where they're from. And we start to build a bond and a relationship. I'm always honest with the parents, I always let them know ahead of time what they have to look forward to in regards to court, in regards to family visits with their children, in regards to their interaction with the foster parents. And I also do that with the foster parents. We do referrals for providers. We introduce the providers to the parents and the foster parents and this is all building a relationship.

Shaneka Joseph:

I've seen throughout my time working with this faith that most parents are able to care for their children, they just need a support system and that's what I do. I build a support system to where, when I am not involved with them anymore, they still have that system to assist them when needed. But of course, my parents, even foster parents can call me when they have concerns. I remember a case I had, mom called me 3:00 in the morning. "I had a bad dream about my child." Okay, so I called foster parents. I drove to foster parent's house. We Face Timed with mom to let mom see the baby is fine.

Shaneka Joseph:

I'm mindful of their feelings, their concerns. I'm a parent first. I understand that they're human and I show them my human side. And I try to tell them I understand their struggles, although I'm not in their shoes. And I get them. I get their mindsets. I get their way of thinking. And once they see that I'm just here to help them get their children back and they're able to build a trust with me, that we start pursuing the goals they need to reunify with their children.

Shaneka Joseph:

Pascal did approach me earlier this year and asked me if I would participate in the QPI conference. I was scared. I've never been on a panel but I told her I would and I was excited. We maintained a relationship, we talk on a weekly basis. I have a concern, I might call her. As a parent, how do you feel about this? I have a parent that feels this way. Help me think this out, what could I possibly do to make this better? I have a foster parent right now, an older foster parent, that's not used to the new QPI initiative so we do conference calls a lot, me, the parent and the foster parent, to where we all discuss our concerns. Mom is able to help the foster parent with child's behavior. She's doing this, she's doing that. Oh well she did that with me, maybe you should try this. This is what I did at my house and it worked. It's a learning process for us all. And building support is, I think, one of the most important things that we can do for the parent.

Shaneka Joseph:

The children, I'm mindful of the children. When we go to school, we use rental vehicles. The children don't want to be known that they're in foster care. I'm mindful of those kind of things. Especially for the teenagers. The teenagers, that's who I have a heart for. They're the ones that are misunderstood. They're the ones that are hard to place. They are the ones that are overlooked sometimes and feels like they are in prison and not free. So I try to spend a lot of time with them and their parents. And I try to help the parents understand where the child is, mindset wise. They're 16 years old, they're probably liking boys or girls right now. You're going to go through this. And they're understanding of it. Sometimes it just takes someone to show them a different perspective for them to get what's going on and to allow the parents and children, the providers, the foster parents to all get together and come up with goals to help the parents succeed.

Shaneka Joseph:

In regards to Pascal, she had her three first boys all had autistic spectrum syndromes. So what I did was I made sure all the providers were in place, she had providers come into the home to assist her. It was doable but she needed the assistance. No one can do it on their own. No one is a perfect parent. There's not a book to tell you how to be a perfect parent, everyone's situation is different. And I try to express that to the parents too. You can only do what you can do with what you have.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thank you, Shaneka. Really appreciate your remarks and when I hear you speak about how you practice I feel like I wish that I had had you to show me how it was done when I was 22. I don't know if I'm the only one that feels that way or if we have any other case managers out there in the audience feeling that way too.

Cecilia Rivas:

So let's go to some questions. And for anybody in the audience who thought that this was going to be an hour, we did decide to lengthen it an extra 15 minutes because we have so much great content and so many great questions so we will be going for another, about 20 minutes. So the question that seems to be the most resounding and has been asked in a few different ways is what to do about situations where the foster parent or the birth parent is resisting engaging with the other party. So the foster parent says, "I don't want them to have my phone number or to know where I live." Or the birth parent says, "I don't want to talk to those people, they're trying to take my children." Those kind of fears, how do you break that down, both with foster parents who are coming into the system for the first time, maybe, and then for people who've been doing this a long time for whom QPI might be a different way of approaching the work?

Cecilia Rivas:

So Kacie, can we start with you since you're on the front end of the case process?

Kacie Schwin:

Yes, thank you, Cecilia. We've seen in Washo here that, as we transition into a QPI mindset, it's the workers and the foster parents who were here before QPI that can sometimes be the most resistant. New people coming in get trained in QPI and this is the way we've always done it to them. And then we hope relatives and kin who are coming in who don't know anything about the system so they don't know either. And for those who are resistant, whether it's because they've been here a long time or because they're new and they don't know anything about the system, would be to start small. We found through the pandemic that there are lots of apps you can make phone calls on or video chat and not give out your phone number. Some people are resistant to give out their phone number and that's okay. You can chat with a parent through Google Duo or any of those other things, I don't know what they're all called. That's a really small start to facilitating the relationship with the child. Always bring it back to the child because that's who it's really all about.

Kacie Schwin:

The reason that the parent and the foster parent need to communicate and have some form of relationship is about the child. And maybe foster parents get scared when they hear stories about foster parents who invite birth parents over for dinner or for holidays or accept them in as part of the family. And in the beginning that's like whoa. I don't know anything about this person, it's pretty scary. And that's not the expectation right away and it's okay to say there are different types of relationships. What kind of relationship does this child need you to have with their parent so that they can get the best care that they possibly can?

Kacie Schwin:

I talked about attending doctor's appointments together, including foster parents in team meetings so they feel like part of the team. These are things that are going to bring them closer together so that they can all feel like a group. And one more thing that we do here at Washo as much as possible is involve

foster parents in the very first visitations and we base that off of attachment research. We want children to feel a secure attachment to their foster parent and having that foster parent in the room when they go back and forth for visitation with their parent can help them feel more at ease. And we explain that to all parties, it's about the child. It's not about you. It's not about monitoring the parent, it's just about making the child feel more comfortable and know, here's my parent, here's my foster parent/caregiver. They both care about me, I don't feel abandoned. And the relationship is going to build the more contact that they have with each other. So just be real about those expectations and start small.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thanks, Kacie. And Carleen, do you want to speak a little bit about how you're working on this in Connecticut?

Carleen Chisholm:

Yes, I do. Thank you, Cecilia. Well, as I had stated earlier, that QPI is in it's infancy here in Connecticut. We're about seven months in and so we look in terms of, when I hear in terms of fear factors in terms of our foster parents, the only one out of that whole equation that is fearful should be the child. The child is the one that has been separated from their families and they're going into a home and that's the spin that I would put on it because some of the seeds have been planted with our resource families from our own staff. And that has been the culture that there is a line and division between our resource families and our biological family. And that line is drawn clear. And that's when I talk about the buy in and the shifting the culture.

Carleen Chisholm:

We have identified areas in Connecticut, we have 14 offices so we're looking in terms of what do we see as things we can change? And we can only change little things at a change. So we are looking at ... We've pulled together steering committees and task forces to look at certain things that we can change office wide, region wide and statewide. Keeping that permanency is the main focus because, if we can't keep a child home with their family, which is number one in the state of Connecticut, and we have to place a child hopefully with a relative, number two, that we are joining forces with the families from the onset.

Carleen Chisholm:

And so how do we do that? We bring folks to the table and start having these conversations. Who is a key player at the table? Number one, the biological family should be at the table. When we're talking about things we can shift, because we're shifting a department in terms of how we think, how we work together, how we partner, how we teamwork, because everyone has a shared responsibility, we're not looking to knock our biological families down. They're already down trodden because we've had to separate them from their child. We need to lift them up. So we need to hear their voices at the table along with adolescents or children. They need to be able to verbalize how their experiences have been presently or how it has been.

Carleen Chisholm:

And so when we look at Connecticut, we're looking at bringing folks to the table in terms of steering committees, identifying some changes that we can make. It takes a small change first for a big change to occur. And so for example, in terms of my region, we're looking at three different initiatives, and I spoke about it early, just in terms of our language. How we throw words around as a systems of care and how that is resonated and received by folks that don't work with us. That's one change we're looking at. And

we've heard, over the last couple of days, in terms of comfort calls. Being able to have a biological parent and a foster parent be able to talk and share some things that that foster parent is not going to get from the case worker that's dropping off that child, unfortunately, because some of these events happen and it's fast and it's swooping and we don't get to have that exchange of information.

Carleen Chisholm:

And then after that, we're looking at the ice breakers. We're bringing folks to the table to have further and deeper discussions about who this child is, who this family is. How can we help you, mom and dad. I don't want to forget about dads because we talked about the parent. Dads also, when we look at the state of Connecticut, we are interweaving and in our work we're talking about fathered engagement, we're talking about racial justice because Connecticut is moving towards anti-racial agency in terms of the department of children and families. So we want to just tie all that in as we're bringing folks to the table and having these discussions in how we could move forward. And again, as I said before, we have foster parents that have been doing this for decades and our staff that has been doing it for decades. And those are the folks that we have to convince.

Carleen Chisholm:

And so those are some of the things that we're moving forward. And again, I say again, we have the support of our commissioner and our executive team and that's why this is going to work. And so I'll leave it there.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thank you, Carleen. We have a couple of questions that I want to address now, one about burnout and one about bias. We'll start with the bias question and I want to go to Kellee because you're a trainer so you should have an interesting perspective on this one. How does QPI address any bias that a worker or a supervisor or any other party to the case about the family?

Kellee Butler:

Well in training we always train our case managers and our staff to always say check your biases at the door. You leave your biases at the door. It's something we say, and I understand that is much easier said than accomplished, however, a lot of times our biases and our stereotypes are derived just from a lack of knowledge. We don't have enough information, we don't have true information on the person or the subject that we hold that stereotype or that bias about and literally, I believe that forming a relationship with someone is going to be the best way to overcome a bias. Because you're going to learn more about that person and it's going to counteract your preconceived notions about what you thought to be true about that person. And so I think by having that relationship and getting to know and to learn about that person, forming that relationship, it's going to help you address that bias. And then when you're working with other clients and parents in the future that may be representative of those same biases that you hold, it's going to help you overcome that a lot faster.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thanks, Kellee. And Nereida, did you have anything to add to that?

Nereida Builes:

Yeah, thank you, Cecilia. Just to add to what Kellee said, I think some of the way that QPI helps us address those barriers is biases come from sometimes a lack of understanding. This is what we think we know about someone or a family. And as you may know, sometimes there's stereotypes about the families that we work with, unfortunately. So I think with QPI, the child is at the center. So you always bring it back to the child. So forget what you think you know about a family, because you don't know this family. Every family is different. Every child's needs are different. And also, people have, I think these stereotypes are they think they know what foster care means or what foster care is like. Well, every experience is different.

Nereida Builes:

So I think that that's a really important tool that QPI, that's one of the important things about it and what sets it aside. And I think, with QPI, just educating people around the principles around QPI and just educating them in the training around the attachments and how important that is for children, I think that we can really shift people's perspective to this is what this family needs specific to them and we will see better outcomes for our children in care. They'll achieve permanency faster when you center things, individually, around that child. So kind of just forget what you think you know about a family. Just because I've seen this situation before or what someone might think they know about the foster care system. Every family is different and making that the priority and the child the priority is, I think, the most important thing and how we can all shift our biases as workers, as foster parents and educating our community as well. The providers who may have some biases and just educating them.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thank you, Nereida. And let's close out with this burnout question that I really like. I learned in grad school that burnout, the definition I was taught is it's not when people are overwhelmed with work, per se, but it's when they stop feeling like they're making a difference. That's when the burnout kicks in. So there's a question, case workers often face burnout and can often become overwhelmed with their case loads. Do you believe that QPI skills and techniques can help alleviate that burnout? Why and how?

Cecilia Rivas:

Shaneka, do you want to take that one?

Shaneka Joseph:

Yes. I believe QPI does help burnout. I, at times, feel that I don't make a difference and I don't know how to communicate to my families what I feel they need or what they feel they need. And it's important to me that they understand that I am on their team, that I am their biggest cheerleader, I always say. That I am there for them. And with burnout, sometimes I just have to take a step back and re-evaluate the situation and how we deal with certain situations that are going on. And it seems to help me in regards to burnout.

Shaneka Joseph:

Also, coworkers, having someone to talk to, that helps with burnout. QPI and talking to the foster parents and the parents about certain concerns helps. It really does help. I believe we build the relationship and the bond to where we begin to help each other. QPI does help make our jobs as case workers, case managers, easier because we learn that the parents and the foster parents and the providers are also our supports. And that also helps the case workers. And then of course our foster

parents and our parents encourage us. They show us they need us and that's always helpful and that's always beneficial. Sometimes they motivate us when we're supposed to motivate them.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thank you, Shaneka. Kacie, did you want to add anything to that?

Kacie Schwin:

Yes. Shaneka, well said. And I think one of the points you made that I really want to drive home is the case worker is part of the relationship. And what have we learned over the past year with COVID if not that we need relationships for our own mental health. Relationships are why we got into this field of work and that is what really fills us up. When you feel like you're not making a difference, you want to go talk to someone. Like Shaneka said, your coworker or whoever. And if you have a strong relationship as a case worker or as a foster parent with the other people on the child's team, then you maybe can reach out to them and say, "Gosh, I'm having a really hard time with all the barriers I'm facing getting this child what they need." And you can bounce that off of other people and they're going to tell you you're doing a good job. And when you go and see that child in that home or during that visit with the parent and you see how happy they are, you're a part of that.

Kacie Schwin:

And QPI brought that all together. You're no longer just the note taker and the go between. You are part of that relationship and you can really hold onto the times when, like Shaneka's relationship with Pascal or any other relationship, Carleen talked about one too. We all have those success stories that we can hold onto and say, "I made a difference," and go back to those relationships or those memories in those tough times.

Cecilia Rivas:

Thank you, Kacie. That's a great way to close it out here because all of you, I know, are making such a huge difference.