

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast
Engaging Fathers – Putting Lessons into Practice Part 3 TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Amy Rosengrants-Smith, Prowers County Department of Human Services; Courtney Holt-Rogers, Prowers County Department of Human Services; Laine Meyers-Mireles, Prowers County Department of Human Services

[00:00:00]: Music Introduction

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:02]: 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 [00:00:31]: Well, we are wrapping up our series, looking into the strategies different agencies have taken that have improved how child welfare practice incorporates, engages and really just thinks about fathers and paternal families. We've heard from an extremely large jurisdiction, Los Angeles County, California, and a mid-sized one in Hartford, Connecticut. And now we get to focus on a smaller rural child welfare jurisdiction in Prowers County, Colorado. Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, everyone. Tom Oates here with you again. Now, these agencies were all part of the fathers and continuous learning in child welfare project. This brought together a collection of agencies from across the county for a Breakthrough Series Collaborative, otherwise known BSC. It's a method intended to support continuous learning by testing through a plan, do, study, act approach those promising practices to improve outcomes on a specific topic.

[00:01:35]: Now, here's the thing. Besides learning what each agency did to improve processes, partnerships, or mindsets, what I want you to listen to - and this really false, true for each of the three episodes in this series - is that there wasn't a one size fits all approach to the strategies and how these Child Welfare leaders incorporated their partners, either partners from the community and father centric organizations or those other human service agencies child welfare works with every day. So, in this episode, we chatted with Laine Meyers-Mireles, the director of the County's Department of Human Services, along with Courtney Holt-Rogers, an Adult and Family Services Manager and Amy Rosengrants-Smith, a therapist with Prowers County DHS. Now, first off, what you'll really learn really quickly is when it comes to an agency, bigger doesn't always mean better and smaller doesn't mean disadvantaged. The team in Prowers County were able to be very flexible and innovative. Plus, they were able to leverage already existing relationships to make progress.

[00:02:44]: Now, you'll hear the energy in their voices about being able to try new ways to improve how fathers were viewed and engaged. It also helps that the county's DHS already had male caseworkers on their staff, plus the level of group accountability shared by child welfare and their Human Services partners, that all helped to drive progress that you'll hear Laine, Courtney, and Amy talk about. Now, after you listen to this episode, I encourage you to listen to the other episodes in this series to compare the similarities and the differences in how the agencies implemented their strategies and helped create change within their agencies and their partners cultures. Okay, wrapping up our series on engaging fathers, putting lessons into practice with Laine Meyers-Mireles, Courtney Holt-Rogers and Amy Rosengrants-Smith from Prowers County, Colorado. And it's all right here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

[00:03:44]: Courtney, Laine, Amy, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. And let's just start right from the beginning. Take me back before the BSC and give me a sense if you can, of how you and how Prowers County were addressing father and paternal family engagement.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:04:05]: I think we were in the beginning we were addressing it in a rather informally, we have really amazing workers who always are asking about fathers and families. We just probably didn't dig deeper into things. And so, you know, it might have been kind of first-hand knowledge, second-hand knowledge, third-hand knowledge, but we really needed to find the formal process.

LAINÉ MEYERS-MIRELES [00:04:28]: I would also just add to that and say that although the child welfare unit had kind of their own process in place, Prowers County has had a fatherhood program for about 12 years prior to this. And so we had been doing some fatherhood work through just a fatherhood grant and then it moved into a program within our child support services unit where we were working with non-custodial parents, primarily fathers to get them over barriers. So, although the fatherhood work with this particular project was kind of brand new to the child welfare unit, the agency as a whole had what we considered a special program that had fatherhood work and advocacy within that going on for several years in it. And it had kind of peaks and valleys where we did a lot more targeted work and then due to staff changes, maybe we didn't do as much, but this particular project provided us an opportunity to expand some of the existing work that we were doing across a different unit within the agency.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:05:33]: With that we had the opportunity to teach classes to engage fathers. We worked on access and visitation on the child support side so that fathers had parenting time and the ability to see their children and gave as much support as we can. It did kind of change depending on the grant that we had or the, or where we worked on things that offered, like I said, fatherhood classes, access visitations, and employment assistance, being able to get dads employed so that they can work with their child support. And just kind of like Laine said, we moved into some of the other programs that we had.

TOM OATES [00:06:11]: So, with all of the work that you guys were doing as you were entering into the to the BSC clearly with the assessment that was done at those initial stages, what did that assessment tell you or did it tell you anything different than what you had assumed from all the work that you were doing?

LAINÉ MEYERS-MIRELES [00:06:30]: I think that it's provided an opportunity because we had assessed within some of the other programs. But the work that's done on child welfare is very different, and kind of specific, especially as it relates to permanency for children. And so, as we moved into this particular pilot, it provided us an opportunity to look specifically at our child welfare data and see how we were doing. And I know that Courtney can add to the information that we found with that.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:06:59]: Initially, we didn't think that we were doing a great job at locating fathers and paternal family members. And then once we started filling out the data, it turned out that we really were doing a good job at it. We have amazing, remarkable staff, that's the first question and it helps now we have four male caseworkers on our staff. And so, and they're really good fathers. And so, I think asking about fathers in their families just kind of second-hand nature. So, we were able to really kinda look at that and then dive a little deeper and help find resources for fathers so they were able to get their children back or have the family members participate more in the services. One of the things

that we did find though, is that our, once children were in the court system, it took a long time to achieve permanency.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:07:45]: I also think that it helped give us the opportunity to look at our partnerships. And we looked at like, the agencies that we're involved with and their father friendliness and some of the language that was used and that sort of thing, so it kinda gave us the opportunity to kind of broaden our view a little bit and, and kind of really focus on those things that helped be more welcoming and helped partner a little bit better.

LAINÉ MEYERS-MIRELES [00:08:14]: I think it also gave us a chance to think about how can we spread the message of the importance of dads into the community with our stakeholders. And so, although we were, as we mentioned, in doing an internal assessment within our agency, it gave us this chance to start thinking about how can we expand this work so that it reaches beyond the walls of the child welfare unit.

TOM OATES [00:08:39]: You know, it's, it's interesting to hear your perspectives compared to some of the other agencies that we've talked about who were involved in the BSC. Because it sounds like you guys already had that presence of mind, at least, and the male caseworkers that you have clearly helped bring that into the forefront of thinking about dads where some other agencies had to really make that shift. And so, as we start to think about the differences between agencies and working with their communities and the mindsets and you realize every agency, every jurisdictions a little different. One of the things that Prowers County is in compared to some of the other agencies that we talked to, is clearly you have a big footprint geographically, but a smaller staff, clearly. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's a disadvantage. So, I'd love for you to explain to the, to the folks who are listening about those kind of advantages or the benefits that you felt in what a smaller staff actually offered you in participating in the BSC.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:09:46]: Some of the first advantages were we could walk to each other's offices and get information, we could walk to our child support unit or eligibility units. We're all, you know the families that you're working with, too. And a lot of our families are generational and we have a lot of longevity with workers. And so, we were able to, if we couldn't identify somebody right away, we could say, wait a minute, let's think back and we would go through and talk about how they were related to so and so and we could kind of back our way into things. But also, just having the openness to be able to coordinate with other workers in our department was really nice and some of our other partners, as well.

LAINÉ MEYERS-MIRELES [00:10:22]: I think it also helps that we don't have layer upon layer upon layer of management and so if staff thought of an idea that would help move the needle on engaging dads or paternal relatives, it didn't take weeks or months of an approval process. They were able to stop by and visit with Courtney and implement something or if it needed to come to my level and get something implemented. It was just a more expeditious process because we're smaller and we didn't have to go through layers of management and approval.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:10:58]: I also think it helps that Laine is very collaborative minded. And so, we already had established a lot of relationships within our agencies and other agencies of collaboration. And so, having those relations, being small, knowing each other, having those relationships already, having that expectation of collaboration really, really helped with the process.

TOM OATES [00:11:20]: The relationships that you have with your partners because they're right down the hall or maybe you went to school with folks and just having that and you mentioned the, maybe the lack of turnover over time, folks just start to work together more and more. But that also means if you've got a smaller staff then folks may be wearing more than one hat in their job. So, what about the idea that anything would have been overwhelming? Was there any concern that some of the work and the effort involved would have been overwhelming to your staff?

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:11:52]: I always approach pilots from the perspective of this is the exciting work we get to do, right? Not the day-to-day check-off box stuff. And so for us, I think that we approach these type of projects from the perspective of, let's try something different. Let's try something new. Let's think about what partners we can bring in. I think that we also worked very much as a team. And so, when we went to Washington, D.C. and we processed and we thought about different ways, we weren't just saying, okay, now frontline staff, you have to accomplish all of these things. We were trying to divvy it up and say, Okay, what can the staff do, what can supervisors do, what can managers do, and what can the director do? And so, it wasn't as if we were creating a lot of tasks. It was more about brainstorming and thinking about engaging partners and also spreading the work in a way that was meaningful and doable by all staff.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:12:52]: I think, like you said, it just was more purposeful, maybe whenever we approached because we were already doing a lot of the work, like Courtney said, the assessment showed that we were already doing a lot of the work. It just kind of opened our eyes to many different directions or a little more purposeful with the tasks that we're doing.

TOM OATES [00:13:12]: So, let me get into the actual steps, an implementation that you, that you guys executed. Could you talk to me a little bit about some of those strategies that you implemented? And at least from when we were talking earlier, the importance of really working - and the term you guys used, and it's a common term but really working upstream. Why was it so important? What, you know, what were you doing and why was it so important to address them at an upstream point of view?

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:13:42]: One of the biggest things is that we equally held each other accountable. And so, when we're gathering and discussing cases or just reviewing our referrals and assessments, there's always somebody that's asking about the father and the paternal families and the person who normally does it is gone or they forget to mention it then that next person backs everybody up and asks. And so, it really is, fathers are really in the forefront of our conversations just as the rest of the family would be. And so, that accountability, I think, was huge and the communication and just ongoing partnerships with each other.

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:14:18]: I would also, as it relates to your comment about being upstream, upstream and using specific strategies, we thought about ways we could engage our community partners that might see families before a family gets referred to the child welfare system. And thinking about ways to get them to start asking about dads. So that if there was a concern at a school, maybe the principal who would normally just call the mom might also reach out to the dad or the medical provider who is in the room with a mom, might also say, you know, it looks like you're struggling. Where's Dad, how can we get him involved? How can we support him in helping to parent this child, too? So, we did some specific strategies with some of our community partners to open that conversation and get them involved in educating dads in passing out information related to dads and to building really father friendly environments so that dads felt comfortable going into these different agencies and participating in pieces of their children's lives, whether it was school conferences or a well-child check or any kind of

thing that maybe a mom might more traditionally do. The providers and our stakeholders were going to be trying to engage dads in that process as well so that we could really be thinking about ways that children can be supported by both parents.

TOM OATES [00:15:48]: I'm curious - Go ahead.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:15:50]: Well also with that, tried to educate as well with statistics about the importance of dads involvement with kids and what that looked like. And also with that collaboration, helping people to understand if we have a child, a dad involved in a child's life actively, what that does to our systems, what that does to our eligibility, what that does to our child welfare, what that does to a child within the school setting to understand that impact across so many agencies and so many, judicial and involvement with mental health and everything and using statistics that help try to educate what that impact can have across so many agencies with the child throughout their lifetime.

TOM OATES [00:16:34]: I'm sorry, I interrupted you but you actually answered where I was going. I was going to ask, how did you get all of these other agencies to kinda buy-in along with it. But if you're showing the numbers and showing the importance, you get back to the term that, Courtney, you had mentioned earlier about accountability and I wrote down group accountability. So, it wasn't just someone feeling accountable or your neighbor making you accountable, but a collective we are all responsible here and we're all going to play, play a role. Well, speaking of at least data or information, how are you guys able to identify it, though, if your strategies, really these behavior changes were actually taking hold across the county, what did you notice to tell you that, you know, that you were succeeding?

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:17:20]: To go back to kind of what you were saying as far as collaboration and group accountability, some of that stuff was already built in with the idea of some of the partnerships and some of the programs that have already been put in place. Laine introduced the collaborative management, how long ago have we been working on the collaborative management program which already had those stakeholders at the table. You know, Courtney sits on, you know, we sit on a number of boards that, and committees that involved those partners. You know, Courtney sits on the Early Childhood and Counseling and runs, there so many, so many. We already had a bunch of those stakeholders at the table with that and then the maltreatment work, which, Laine can speak more to that.

LAINÉ MEYERS-MIRELES [00:18:07]: Well, I think the other piece though is the way we were able to see if there was a foothold is that we got our partners to start talking about dads. And that was the most important piece. We got people to start thinking about dads before they automatically called the child welfare system to start making a report. Now, do we have hardcore data on that? No. But as Amy was mentioning, we sit on multiple committees and groups. And the spread of our fatherhood program into our local resource center is just one of those pieces, right? Because they, once we started talking about it, they were interested in learning more about what it is that we're doing. We got office hours for our father advocate within the resource center. And so, then it just starts spreading that message a little bit further and a little bit further. And so, once we start getting our mental health providers and our medical providers and some of the different folks in our community just asking about dads, that's that foothold that you talked about.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:19:10]: Sorry, Amy. For me, one of the biggest things with having and dads be reunited with some of their children. And I think right at the beginning and through this process, we had about four dads where the children were returned to the fathers. And to me that's pretty incredible.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:19:27]: I also think we saw that change, as far as data. You see a change in language, we've seen a change in language and the way we refer to fathers in the judicial system. And also where our referrals are coming from for our fatherhood program and the different places, and you can tell that's where we see the spread is the number of places that those, and the number of referrals.

TOM OATES [00:19:50]: So it all sounds like everything's just kinda fell into plan and culture just kind of shifted. I know that while it sounds pretty easy, or at least it sounds like everything just kind of fell into place, we know it couldn't have been easy. So, I'm going to switch a little bit and talk about maybe some of the challenges that you guys had to face in this. So, first off, give me a sense for just the team itself, your child welfare agency, Laine, what were the most challenging aspects of this for your team?

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:20:24]: I would say that - Courtney, she'll clear this up if I'm wrong - but just carving out the time, right. And so, it's an exciting initiative, it's something fun and new but also managing that within the day-to-day grind of everything else that has to be done. The partnerships are there, the relationships are there. We worked on the spread, but just finding the little bit of time to, for them to sit and meet and be really like intent around, okay, now let's pull our data, let's analyze it, let's see where we need to go next. And so I think that process was probably, it wasn't a barrier in any way, it's just kind of one more thing that has to get done in addition to investigating, in doing ongoing and all the other pieces that are important to child welfare.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:21:14]: It was almost kind of not shifting their mindset because fathers were always part of our mindset, but it was just kind of encouraging everybody, it's not something additional, it's what we're doing, but you're going to document anymore.

TOM OATES [00:21:24]: So the flip side of that is your team is obviously involved. But, if we talked about this whole group accountability and entire, you know, a culture shift across you and your partner agencies - what did you find from your, from those partners that may have been the most challenging for them?

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:21:39]: I think just sustaining that. And you talk about culture shift, but culture shift takes a long time, right? You do one step forward and then something else comes up and you do two steps back and then you do two steps forward and so on. And so, the sustainability of keeping the partners talking about dads and in keeping the data alive. And the reason why we want to keep pushing this alive - that was, I think is just one of those things that is tough because every time we turn around there's a different initiative, right? And so for, for example, in our community, our resource center has applied for grant funding for what they call Grannyng. They were interested in a Granny Army. So, it would be grandma coming in and providing mentorship, right. And so, as we're sitting in these meetings, we say, well, what about the grandpas, right? So, the resource center is there, they understand the importance of dads, they're handing out information. They're doing great things. But sometimes we can still forget. So, I think that goes back to sustaining that change. And I, I envision that a true cultural change in our community will, that is, sticks will take a few years, right? And so, our agency just has to be there pushing and pushing.

[00:22:59]: And so, we also did some work around trying to spread this through a social media campaign and getting different local dads, whether they were teachers, pastors, bankers. We got, I don't know, maybe 30 to 50, I can't even remember the number - several dads to record a video to say, what's my favorite thing about being a dad? What's my best memory with my kids or my own dad. And so, we were able to share that on our social media account so that it very much humanized the father experience and it also provided an opportunity for other dads to say, Oh, that's an area that dad struggles with, that's an area I struggle with too. And it also gave those dads who provided a video the opportunity to say, you know, might I have a chance to reach out to a dad who's struggling in this community. And so, I think to reiterate, I just think getting that culture shift stick because it's easy to take a step back.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:24:01]: I also think one of the challenges with that was staff, like our staff. We had, we had a couple of father advocates and then we've trained a lot of father advocates, trained a lot of facilitators for teaching classes. And it's been hard to get them to maintain and engage. And we luckily now have a fantastic facilitator who's been in for a while. And then when we didn't have a father advocate having to step in and do that until we then got the grant to hire a father advocate who now is fantastic. And so, I think that's a little bit of a challenge is maintaining that through the little hiccups or maintaining that through a little bit of staff change or getting the facilitators we have to plug in and stay, and stay plugged in.

TOM OATES [00:24:48]: You mentioned that culture has to stick, but it's still almost success by hero at the beginning, where you're counting on someone to kind of remind themselves and take that lead. But sooner or later you've got to wait and start to get that momentum to where it's almost instinctual. And yeah, you're right. You hit it on the head about staff changes means there's somebody that you kinda need to start all over again and maintain that. So, once it becomes common language. But it's interesting that you brought up the social media campaign is that we are seeing through, as much as the jurisdictions are different and the issues may be different and the approaches are different, there has been this underlying marketing campaign for all of the agencies that we're seeing throughout the BSC - executed completely different. But it is to kind of sow the seeds of understanding the, the empowerment and the value of, of fathers. Not only through the agency but through the community itself and even from the fathers to kind of say we're all joining into rather the value, and so I'm trying to get this clear of understanding the value, the importance internally and externally within the system and within, within families themselves. Curious about the biggest lessons that you and your teams learned through this process.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:26:22]: I think one of the hardest that we did was the facing our bias and looking at some of the policies and some of the history of child welfare and some of the, some of the things we really have taken the time to look at. Some of the diversity, racial equity, and those kinds of things I think were some of the biggest lessons. Like stepping back and paying attention.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:26:45]: If I were to look back, I would think that some of our biggest wins and the lesson was having the right people at the table. We were the only jurisdiction, I believe, that brought judicial into our team. And so we had a guardian ad litem participate on their team and that was really important. It's important from the perspective of she's just a really key advocate. But when we started looking at data and were seeing that permanency was potentially delayed, that provided a great opportunity to have discussions at the judicial level around how, how families are impacted by decision making. And so, I think that, that's one of the biggest lessons I would take away from this is really just having key stakeholders at the table.

TOM OATES [00:27:37]: Would that be kind of the key - and let me follow up on that - it sounds like that would be something if you were to start all over again, that would be a must-have, you know. What else would you, if you're going to advise another jurisdiction or appear somewhere and saying if they were at kind of step one, what would you advise them, things that they would, must have to see some kind of success.

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:28:00]: I think another piece is having as many of your staff at the table as possible. I don't know, if it would have been Courtney, Amy, and I only participating in going to Washington, D.C. and learning all of the information and interacting with all the teams, we wouldn't have made the movement that we had. We needed staff who was interacting with families on a day-to-day basis to be there and to be learning the lessons and to be sharing the information and to be taking information from LA County and North Carolina, and all of the different places across the United States. And again, sharing what we learned from our jurisdiction, as well. I just think that it's really important that you can't just have agency, the county leaders participating in this, you have to have your frontline staff helping to guide the process as much as any of your leaders.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:29:00]: I think it would've been good to even have a little bit more diversity at the tables or being able to bring the school board where that would've been fantastic to have some of those partnerships on board.

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:29:13]: And we tried to bring judicial, we tried to have a judge join us and just scheduling-wise, he couldn't.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:29:18]: The other thing that we really worked hard at and we couldn't get the traction that we needed was bringing some dads on board with lived experience. I think that there was concern about oh, if I didn't think the process went so good, am I safe to say that. And just dads who are busy, right? Getting away to go to Washington, D.C. to go to these meetings or to have multiple meetings in our own office - we even offered to pay them to be part of the process, but they were just busy. So, I think that that was one of the areas that felt like a bit of a hole for me is that we didn't necessarily have somebody with lived experience. Now, those dads are sharing their experience with staff who can then bring it forward. But for them to have felt safe to come to this process and share the perspective firsthand, I think would've been very powerful for people who don't get to speak with them every day.

TOM OATES [00:30:12]: And building on those conversations, as you may not know what to add on a point blank slate. But then after somebody brings a comment, you can add to it and just having that kind of the different perspectives of either the client or a father or like you guys mentioned, judicial. You guys were just leading into, you moved into what else I would ask you - what would you have considered doing differently? And so, you kind of listed some of the folks that you'd have loved to have been involved. But what else comes to mind on something that maybe you did that you wouldn't have done earlier or something that you would have done maybe a little differently?

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:30:51]: That's a tough one. I don't, I don't know what we would've done differently other than what we had talked about.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:30:58]: I wonder if maybe we wouldn't have challenged some of the thinking that came up later on earlier process.

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:31:07]: I also wonder if - because everyone in the jurisdictions have different data, right and it kind of created where they needed to go from. It'd be interesting to, if we would have known really clearly about our data at the onset, could that have taken us a different direction, right? Because we were doing, after we got into this and Courtney had the ability to pull all of this information and really evaluated over the course of multiple months and just be checking in on it and checking back on it just to make sure we were doing well. Had we know that we were doing so well there might we have taken another path and said, Okay, great, LA County's going to do their thing, but Prowers County maybe needs to think about something even more outside of the box than some of the other jurisdictions. And I don't have an answer on what that would have been, but it would be interesting to think about it.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:31:57]: Would it have been possibly looking at those domains that we, that we challenged. Because it felt like some of those at the end were kind of like hurried, where we could've been like, oh, we could've shifted that thinking a little more at the beginning and it might have shifted, not necessarily changed the data - because that was doing, you know, you guys were doing well - but kind of shifted some of the approach, maybe?

TOM OATES [00:32:24]: Interesting that you guys, as we wrap this up, as much as each jurisdiction ends up going on their own journey, the ability to come together, bounce ideas off each other, build across each other, but then apply it to your own situations, your own communities. It's just an interesting aspect about the BSC that I'd like to - before we wrap up - get into this, because I asked about the challenges right, of the BSC that you guys were able to a few minutes ago. But I'm curious to how you and your team may have been just impacted by the BSC itself, by having that ability to be kind of amongst others in a cohort to kind of see the different perspectives and see the different applications and implementations. And what you may take away from this experience moving forward.

LAINA MEYERS-MIRELES [00:33:21]: I will start. And I think I would say that small rural districts are as positioned to embark on really innovative work as the largest district in the United States. What we learned is our ability to move the dial on things was much more expeditious than some of the larger districts. Our ability to analyze our data was much better - now our SACWIS system or the system that collects all of that isn't as robust as what we would want it to be. So, pulling pieces of data from that was a little bit harder, but because we don't have as many families that we have to work with, we were able to pull it, as well. And so, I think sometimes small rural jurisdictions are overlooked for innovative projects and it, it would appear as though there's not a lot to learn from us. And I would challenge that and say that we contributed profoundly to this process. And I think we did a great job of it, honestly.

COURTNEY HOLT-ROGERS [00:34:30]: Yeah, and I think the relationships that were made through the BSC, you know, being with the other different counties, I think that was amazing and like Laine said, we could share how we collaborate with our other agencies in our building. And just that communication was good.

AMY ROSENGRANTS-SMITH [00:34:50]: I think the process was really energizing, too. I also think it did help other people recognize we have a place at the table. But it also helped us know what, what we're doing well and also what we can learn from the others and bring back in and put into place. I think I also help everybody understand the commonalities that we have, that we - even as a small community - we still have some of the same challenges of the big communities and then to be able to process with each other and, and come up with some solutions for those initiatives that we could put into place. I always, I love coming back because there was always so much energy in the room and so much excitement and

you came back recognizing, we really are doing really good work and we really are making a difference in families' lives. And what else can we do, where else can we go with this?

TOM OATES [00:35:41]: It's great to hear about the, maybe even the speed of change that you guys are able to execute. And some of that comes from just walking down the hallway, knocking on somebody's door, leveraging the relationships that you have and not being, not being at times - while the resources may be different, the barriers of bureaucracy are not there. And so, it's something that you just mentioned about flexibility, innovation, and being able to pilot things with the level of excitement that you guys have talked about. It may be the most, out of all the other jurisdictions that I've spoken with. And then I think that's, that's probably from an idea of you're able to execute change because it's still within your power of your office to be able to get things done. And so that's fabulous to hear. And I thank you guys for, for not only demonstrating the change you've been able to implement, but also spending the time and talking with us about it as it is incredibly hard work and your times in your calendars are packed, as you guys had mentioned before, one of the biggest challenges was just the being able to dedicate the time. So, I thank you guys for dedicating the time to speak with us on your efforts with this BSC and engaging fathers and paternal family. So, Amy Rosengrants-Smith, Courtney Holt-Rogers, Laine Meyers-Mireles, thank you guys so much for spending the time with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcasts. We truly appreciate it.

ALL [00:37:18]: Thank you.

TOM OATES [00:37:22]: If you haven't heard the other parts of this series, I encourage you to listen to the other episodes featuring what occurred in Hartford, Connecticut, and Los Angeles County, California. So, if you go to childwelfare.gov and search podcasts, you can find this episode's webpage. We've posted a link to the fathers and continuous learning and child welfare projects BSC pilot study report that's titled A Seat at the Table: Piloting Continuous Learning to Engage Fathers and Paternal Relatives in Child Welfare. You can read more about how the BSC was implemented and evaluated and potential strategies for increasing father and paternal relative engagement in child welfare. We will also have links to Information Gateway resources on engaging fathers and paternal family members, a list of fatherhood organizations, along with links to the National Fatherhood Initiative and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.

[00:38:16]: Hey, please subscribe to the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. You can get new episodes every month delivered right to your device. You can find us on Apple podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher and SoundCloud. And of course, you can find us on childwelfare.gov. Hey, my thanks to the team from Prowers County, Colorado - Laine Meyers-Mireles, Courtney Holt-Rogers and Amy Rosengrants-Smith, for taking their time to share their experiences on improving how they, their team and all their partners improved how fathers and paternal families are viewed and engaged across child welfare. And of course, my thanks to you for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I'm Tom Oates. Have a great day.

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:39:07]: 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.