

Session 5b: Building Community Partnerships to Sustain Program Progress

Jolefre Grant: Welcome everybody. Good morning, good afternoon – I guess it'll be almost afternoon for everyone probably at this point. We're so excited to welcome you to the intermediate session of "Building Community Partnerships to Sustain Program Progress." That's session 5b. We're glad you're here with us today, and my name is, Joelfre Grant. I work in our professional development, particularly with our tribal programs, at the Brazelton Touchpoints Center, and I also have the good fortune of, sometimes, getting to work with my colleagues and friends in the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. And so, I'm so excited to be here today, and I'm sure the person with me today needs no introduction probably to most of you, but I'm going to let her go ahead and share a little bit about herself and why she's here today.

Brandi Black Thacker: Thank you so much, Joelfre. I completely share your excitement and your enthusiasm, and I am really – really tickled that I get to be here with you today because it is a treat and also with each of you. I mean, goodness, you have taken two whole days out of your whole wide schedule to come on over and, you know, listen and learn and contribute and we're just so grateful for each of you. With all of that, my name is Brandi Black Thacker. I'm the Director of Training Technical Assistance and Collaboration for the National Center on Parent, Family, Community Engagement, and we're just so grateful to have this time with you, and we can't wait to just jump right on in today.

Joelfre: Thanks, Brandi. So, before we move into what we really want to talk about, there is some housekeeping things that we wanted to make sure and take care of. I'm sure this will be repetitive for most of you because you've been in other sessions, but I just want to walk you through quickly the console. The first piece ... is the ... You'll see the tools, and the one on the top left is the media player. So, that's where you'll see the presenters, if there's any video shared, that's probably where you're seeing me now. The next piece is the Q&A, this is an important one. We want you to participate, we want to hear your voices and hear your questions, so please use that yellow widget. And that's currently probably at the lower left side of your screen. Right in the center is where you'll see the slides. So, those slides for today will be in the center. And the next widget, is the resource widget. That's up on the upper right side. So, there's some resources for today's presentation, and you can go there and download those. And that includes the slide deck from today. You'll be able to download that as well. On the bottom right side, there are some short bios of the panelists, so you can learn a little bit more about us there. And then, one other thing I want to mention is the knowledge check. So, at the end of our time today, as you have with the other sessions, there's a brief three question survey that is a knowledge check. Once you answer that, then you can continue on to the pink widget. Pink widget, and that is where you'll get your certificate. So, we do recommend actually downloading that certificate. You can print it as well, but we want you to be able to have it and refer to it later if you need to for your records. So, we recommend downloading that. There's a

"Help" widget is the ... sorry, on the yellow question widget that is for if you need help kind of with the technical pieces of this platform.

So, now let's get to the good stuff. There we go. We want to start hearing your voices right away in this session. So, we have a couple of reflection questions. What are your community's strengths? When you think about where your community sits and what's happening right now, what are the strengths that you see? And how can you work with community partners to build on those strengths to benefit children and families? So, please, let's see what you're putting in that Q&A. What are some of the strengths that you're thinking about?

Brandi: Joelfre, I really love these questions because, I guess both of these questions, but I'm actually drawn to that first one so deeply because when have we ever really stopped to think about our community's strengths? I mean, I know at Head Start we do, because we have to do the community assessments, and that's just a part of who we are and our regulatory body. But when you really stop in times like now, and you're thinking about what great things are happening in communities when we need each other the most, I think that, and this is just me speaking, so you tell me if you agree or if it's coming up in chat for anybody, but I'm finding deep gratitude for so many of the things that are coming forth. How people are banding together to really be fluid and responsive in these uncertain times, and I've just really been humbled, really. I guess that's the word that comes to mind. Not only to see what's been happening in the community where I live, and this is clearly outside of the context of a program anymore, but I just have been hearing so many of you say this, like that we have a foot in deep gratitude, and we have a foot in wondering, we're being real, and that's real. But together, I really feel like the phrase that keeps coming back, Joelfre, is, "Together we're better." And let's see what came up for you in the chat. What do you see over there?

Joelfre: Yeah, that's so nice, Brandi. I think that, that is a piece of it. Like how humbling this has been for many of us as we think about all of the incredible partnerships and all of the strengths that are already happening in the community, and some, of course, that came about because of the situation that we're going through right now. One person wrote that their program is part of a multi-service agency so that parents are able to take advantage of services within the same building, so that referrals are seamless for them. I think that anytime that can happen, where Head Start and Early Head Start are part of a larger agency that has many services, that's amazing. And sometimes, they're standalone, and that's when we have to really think about how can we be creative in building those bridges and partnerships with other agencies? Another person put that, sort of like where you said, you know, we're better together, that these critical partnerships – these community partnerships are so important for all of our families. Someone else wrote that they were able to partner with their local food bank to provide food and supplies at more accessible drop-off locations for families, especially those with transportation issues. So, families could come to some centralized locations within their neighborhoods or communities where they could pick up and have that sort of contactless, as much as possible, food resources available for them. So, that's amazing. Thanks everybody.

Oh, we have one more. That's great. I think we're good on that. Thanks so much, everyone. So, as we move forward, we want to share with you our learning objectives. So, some of the things that we're thinking will be some of the takeaways for you today. We want to explore a pathway for active collaboration today. And then, we want to think about, as we've already done, as you've already been doing in the chat, sort of those "outside of the box", those innovative ideas for partnering in new and innovative ways. So, what can we do that's a little bit different than maybe what we did before? And it can be in part because of thinking about the issues surrounding the pandemic, but it can also be because we just want to try something different. There might be something new; a new community partner in our community that we haven't even met before or didn't exist before. So, we want to think of new ways to partner. The key messages today are that we're creating a shared vision between engaged community partners that fosters and strengthens family well-being, and that strong and sustained partnerships require ongoing engagement between all stakeholders. So, it's not one of those one and done type situations, but it's where we want to think about how can we build this and then sustain it over time. Because we know that those systemic partnerships, those are the ones that create change that's long lasting and have the longer impacts for children, families, and the community. We're going to turn it over to Brandi now, and she's going to share a model for community engagement with us.

Brandi: Well guys, I really think that this model speaks to our five-plus decades of history. It is a model that you might be familiar with. It comes from some work, gosh now, probably 20 plus years ago, in something called the "Quilt Project," when Head Start and child care came together. So, we've adapted that because we all loved it so much, and it's so valuable. We've adapted it a little bit and enhanced it with some of the language that we bring into the conversation in current day. But we think it's critically important to revisit and apply, in the context of this conversation today, Joelfre, and really reassessing where we are. And not only where we are as a program but where we are in our connections to community. So, that's a little bit of a tease of where we're going to go with what we call the "Developmental Continuum of Collaboration." And so, I want to show you the whole scene, right here, because this is what I was alluding to in the work from the "Quilt Project." If you've seen it in the past, you might have seen it represented in pyramid form. That was the original formation. And what we've learned, and what we really want to illustrate, is this notion of, well, I'm just going to straight say it: messiness. [Laughter] That you can go within, and through, and forward, and back. So, you'll see those arrows as layers in each of these, but also, you'll likely see the bi-directional arrow in the background, because these sometimes overlap. You go forwards, you go back ... It really depends on what's happening in your community, and what kind of relationship or level, you know, along this developmental continuum that you might need, and how we adapt to really stand in that space. So, I just kind of wanted to show you the whole thing, and now we're going to unpack each piece, one by one.

So, let's start with networking. Now, this, as you can see, is the first of the four layers, and if I were to give you a couple of real-life examples, I mean, you can see what we have on the screen. This is when exchange information about community programs and services. If I were to break it on down and make that real, in my past life as a Head Start director, this would be one

of the things that we would kind of call a "meet and greet." You know, where you exchange a business card, where you might offer a brochure to somebody, where you're maybe putting your materials in the lobby of somebody's office and vice versa. So, for instance, if it's in the health department, and we have some Head Start brochures there, it's like one of the ways we recruit and ultimately enroll. This is just the first level of exchange. Just like this reciprocity, you know, I think Joelfre mentioned that word a little earlier. So, this is the baseline level, this networking piece. If we look over at the next layer, which is coordination, this is when we work together with other community agencies to avoid duplication or fill gaps. So, Joelfre, there are a couple of things I want to do here. I want to give you like a regular day example. [Laughter] I want to give you maybe some examples that we've collected over time with COVID in mind because so many of you, as you've come back in to your programming, whether that is in person, whether that's virtual, whether it's a hybrid of sorts, these are some of the things that you have been doing alongside community partners, for instance, to make sure that – that duplication is minimal and that if a service is needed and if we can fill it, that we do that.

So, let's look at this. This is when we come together around a common goal or interest. And what I really love about this example, there are a couple that we've collected over time. For instance, if you create a single point of entry at your program. Like, it's time to enroll for early childhood services, and you might have other early childhood providers in your community. So, you ban together with them, and your LEA, your local education agency, and you've created a single point of entry so that families can apply in one place. And behind the scenes, in that connection too and with your community partners, you guys have devised a criteria that honors everybody's regulations, so that you can connect families to the service that they need, so everybody gets something, and that you guys aren't duplicating what might be happening in your local community. So, this has been something that we've seen over time in a way that's really wonderful as you're working with your communities to see, like specifically, to make sure that we can serve all of the families that are ready for us and for all the families that deserve to have a service so we can capitalize on making those connections in ways that are meaningful for everybody.

Now, another thing that ... Joelfre, now, I'm thinking a little bit about you know, the pandemic days. One of the things that we heard you guys doing, and it came up already in a comment here about connections to the food bank. But, through food banks, through faith-based communities, through other, for instance, like families experiencing homelessness often have connections to certain shelters or certain food closets. And so many of you have made connections, and here we would say through coordination, with those kinds of entities so that you can continue, for instance, especially in the early months of COVID, providing food for family members. And you guys not only were able to do that for our Head Start little ones, but if a family had siblings where they had other kids in the house, we were able to connect with those other community partners so that we had enough food for the family, including the adults. So, Joelfre, I don't know if there's anything that you would like to add there, but that was something that was really just heartening to see, especially in the beginning when we just had no idea, you know, sort of how to wrap our minds and our hearts around what was happening.

Joelfre: Well, I think you're right, Brandi. I think that coordination is a really key effort, and I think we did see, as we've mentioned, some really powerful things happen. In one community that I work with, they worked between their early childhood services program which had mostly closed, and with the Boys and Girls club and with some other agencies, and so, they were using the Head Start busses and taking food – meals around to all children in the community locations from birth to age 18. So, all the siblings, all the children in that area, whether they were Head Start families or not, they could really get involved in that. And so, it was, I mean there were times where they were serving, I think it was 1,200 meals – taking busses around and serving 1,200 meals in these neighborhoods. So, it was a pretty powerful time, and they did that for about the first two months of the pandemic. So, powerful things like that really, I think, help us – remind us. They're good reminders to us of what incredible partnerships can be there and that coordination, so that services – so that those children are still receiving such important services.

Brandi: Joelfre, I appreciate that addition, and it's, you know, one of the thousands of reasons I love this community so much. That we have the true honor to be part of in our Head Start world. It's just, I guess the word that comes to mind, it's just startling in the best possible way, how we continue to stand in a space that our forefathers and foremothers built for us over five decades ago, and how we are able to continue forward movement together. And I really think that's the other word that keeps coming to mind, you know, is together. So, those are the first two of the layers. So, we've been to networking. So, kind of like the business card exchange. We've now touched coordination. Everything from that single point of entry model, to what you've been doing during the pandemic. So, let's go ahead and look at the third part which is cooperation. Now, cooperation is where we come together to conduct a joint activity that meets the individual program goals. So, let me break down an example of this because so many of you are doing super creative things around this one, and we want to share just a couple. One of the stories that we've heard over time is, for instance, that Head Start programs, in normal days, offered GED classes on-site at the Head Start program. So, let's look back at what cooperation says. When we come together, two or more programs to conduct joint activities to meet our individual program goals. So, just like we want to make sure that we have full enrollment, right? I mean, this is a huge priority of Dr. Bergeron's, and for each of us, it always has been, but making sure that all of our chairs are full. The GED programs are very similar. They have certain requirements that they need to meet as well. and so, working together, and doing a model that includes shared space is one of many ways that we've learned to cooperate. So, we heard one program model where there was, of course, all the classrooms for the kids, but there was a dedicated space for adult learning, and it was scheduled several times a week, so when parents either drop off or right before pick up, they are able to take part in GED classes right there on site at the Head Start program. So, it's a bit of a one-stop shop. And we know those of you, like when I was a Head Start director, I grew up in a community action agency, and so many of you have some of those services in your own organization which is amazing. And even fostering those kinds of things for seamlessness, for and with our families, is just such an important contribution. So, that's cooperation.

Now, if we're thinking about COVID times, there are a couple of things that have come up here not only connected to health and safety. Like we know that many of you have been trying very hard to, of course, have deep and wide connections with your health departments, with your WIC offices, with your community hospitals. There are just so many things that you've been doing to make sure that our families are aware, that they're informed, that they have, I love this part, the two-way communication channel, so that not only are we giving them information but we are creating the space to receive information from them, especially as it relates to community. And so, we've heard all of these incredible things like, you know, even back to the food distribution. How you've been creating a drive through space, so that families could come to the Head Start program, do the drive through and pick up food for their family. Some of you did that with packets, and if you were giving families activities to take home, so that they could help with virtual learning. Many of you were working with your health department to put things like masks in the packets or little sample sizes of hand sanitizer. It's just incredible to see. So, it really supported, for instance, the health department in being able to get messaging out on physical distancing, or all of the things that we've learned together. But it also really helped us to make sure our families had all the information that they needed so that they could have that real time. And, side note, I don't think this part can be underscored. From a trusted source, and that's you guys. You are the literal heartbeat of your communities, and as family managers, I mean, you guys really hold, not only all of your family workers, many of you are the ones that navigate and get in those memorandum of understanding, sign, expanded, extended, enhanced. You really are the ambassador and liaison for your program and to so many of those community spaces.

So, Joelfre, I think I just have to pause there for one more second and just offer deep gratitude for who each of you are and what you're doing every day to support all of the families you have the honor to serve. All right, let's look at the last piece here, one of the last pieces. There's a little bit of a surprise capstone but the fourth layer here is collaboration. Now, this one is similar to what we said before on the third level but it's different because we differentiate in working toward that common goal, which is the same, but that we could not accomplish by ourselves. And you know how we do in Head Start. We have a lot of expertise, talent, and competence right within our own program and the professionals that live within it. But we are not expected to do everything all by ourselves. So, one of the things that we try to lean in to for this one, in the collaboration layer, is how we work together to accomplish something that we could not do by ourselves. So, one of my favorite examples that we've ever collected is an Early Head Start program pretty close to my hometown who does services – home visiting services within the prison system. It's incredible what happens. Not only do they really make connections to and through pregnant mamas, or recently delivered mamas, who might be incarcerated, they have worked with the prison system to be able to do home visits and to be able to do socializations in the prison so that we can continue with secure attachments; so that we can value mom's connection, mom's expertise about her child, and so that we can really stand in that space of honoring who she is, where she is in her journey. There are similar programs that we've heard over time also that really connect to father's in this similar way.

So, Joelfre, this is certainly not something we could do by ourselves. I mean, we have to have of course, the prisons cooperation, we have to build within their system. And side note, they were so excited because they're saying things like early childhood is not really our zone. You know, like, we would love to have ... [Inaudible] And they believe in the connection to family. And what they love about this, and what we love about working with the prison system is that we know that when the family constellation can be as connected as possible, that families come through what they're experiencing more quickly and then they have that support network maintained when they transition, for instance, out of the prison systems. So, it really is just a beautiful model. And of course, you know you guys have been the drivers in our Head Start community of what has been happening out there.

If we think about this for even the COVID situation, Joelfre, like one of the things that we've heard many of you doing is, of course, applying for the money that the Office of Head Start made available for you. In terms of quality funding, you had the CARES funding, you had a bunch of opportunities, but what I love about what you did was there was this one little bullet in there that said that you could actually improve the communitywide strategic planning by, you know, building out some infrastructure. So, so many of you went into things like, "Well, OK, for a long time we've needed mental health professionals that can deliver their services in a telehealth kind of way." You guys were making that happen. You were actually like working with your local mental health providers, and other entities who made equipment available for families, who made internet service available for families. You worked within these constructs of these macro systems where you were making sure that families had what they needed to access what they needed in times where we couldn't be together face to face. So, Joelfre, internet, telehealth, routers ... I mean, these guys were mobilizing in ways that they couldn't do alone to just really make it happen for and with our families. Which, you know, again, is wildly humbling. One last thing from me, Joelfre, and then, believe it or not, I am going to hush. [Inaudible]

Joelfre: I think the stories of ...

Joelfre: Oh no, I was just going to say I think those stories of collaboration are so powerful. Where there are goals that may be common, but that haven't been, that neither party could do on their own, and at this time, even though it was obviously, nobody wished for a pandemic, but because of that we have these programs had opportunities that they wouldn't have had to maybe think, "Ok, this is something our community wants, they aren't able to do it, haven't been able to do it. We want it to support our children and family's mental health, now's the opportunity." So, I think taking advantage of some of those incredible opportunities just makes great sense. And I think there are other things, certainly, some of the examples that you mentioned that any time I think the prison and when there are incarcerated family – parents, and we think about what that shared vision is, that this family will continue to be a family. And for as long as the people are the incarcerated adults, and then, when they are hopefully out and they will be reunited perhaps, that there are ways that those relationships can be maintained. And we know that when children have those relationships – meaningful relationships that their outcomes are better. And so, if there are ways that we can partner and

really truly collaborate on efforts like that, those are long-term outcomes that we'll see, that we may not see even in the next few years, but 20 years down the line, or 30 years down the line we know that those adults, who are Head Start children now, will have better outcomes if they have those relationships. So, to me, that's like a vision that if that vision can be shared between partners and Head Start, it's just an amazing, amazing thing.

Brandi: I am so grateful you took it right on to the shout outcomes Joelfre because you're so right. I mean, that ripple out effect is real. And I love that you guys get to operate in that space every single day, and I hope, if nothing else for you comes from these discussions, that you feel valued, you feel revered, and that you have confirmation of just the power of what you do every day and how that really impacts all of us. And Joelfre, I think that might actually even be a good segue to this next slide because, you know, where we've been to kind of wrap this all up. Now, if you let me say it like I want to, Joelfre, can I get a little Appalachian on you? [Laughter]

Joelfre: You can do it, yes.

Brandi: Like I usually ask permission. What we would say is, if you want to put the unity in community, honey, [Laughter] here's what you would be looking at. It's taking those four layers and adding in what we would call this engaged space that's very parallel to how we do family engagement. Same kind of process. What I love about this is it's next level. It's like people benefit from your services that never have even walked into a Head Start building. I mean that happens. It happens all the time. We have these stories, you know, like Ms. Johnson who lives on the corner who gets meals-on-wheels. Wouldn't come out of her house because she didn't feel safe when the driver dropped off food, but then a Head Start program put a playground on the corner, because families were moving into that area, which meant now we have street lights, now we may have police presence, now we've cleaned up that corner, and now Ms. Johnson comes out of her house and has a connection to her driver and eats with them. Because we've made a space because of how we do what we do that allowed her to feel safe to come outside. I mean, it's really leaning into not only the reciprocity and all the things about the levels and layers from micro to macro that you see on the screen, but the social capital piece of how we know each other in the context of our community and how we honor each other in all of those ways. So, it's all of those four layers Joelfre, but then it's that next level of how do we continue to enhance how we do what we do in communities so that folks like Ms. Johnson continue to benefit from our presence, which is so cool to think about. And Joelfre, with that, let's check in with our friends. I know you want to do a little pop quiz.

Joelfre: Yeah, I'm so excited about this. So, we're going to have a little pop quiz. You can put your responses, again, in the Q&A. So, we have some questions for you. The potential answers are on the right side of your screen in that sort of mauve box. Networking, coordinating, cooperating, or collaborating. So, we're thinking about those layers that Brandi just described of community engagement. So, the first one: Program A and Agency B work together to support children with disabilities. Number two, that you're thinking about, and you can start responding in the Q&A if you're ready: When parents need job training or placement, Program A reaches out to Agency C to fill a gap. Number three, in order to increase safety of the neighboring park,

Head Start staff partner with the police and other agencies. And number four, Head Start staff post flyers at the new laundromat to share information about the program with families in the community.

So, I'm going to look, see if Q&A, we have some responses. Yay! For number one, we have a few responses. Program A and Agency B work together to support children with disabilities. And that one, we said was C. You're correct if you said C. Let's look at number two. When parents need job training placement, Program A reaches out to Agency C to fill a gap. That's B. Yes. And in order to increase safety of the neighboring park, Head Start staff partner with the police and other agencies. That's D, collaboration. And finally, four. You might be able to take a guess. Head Start staff post flyers at the new laundromat to share information about the Head Start program with families in the community. That is A, networking. So, this is fantastic. Thank you for participating, and we're going to move forward because all of this is an effort to thinking about what are benefits of community engagement for children and families? So, when you're considering where we are, where we might like to be, and how we get there, it can sometimes feel a bit overwhelming and daunting, but let's remember the goal. Those benefits. So, they are: increasing access, reducing confusion, creating learning environments, and finally, increasing community safety and responsiveness. There are also benefits for program staff. It's about working and making sure your work is effective for children and their families, and it's also reminding us that staff well-being is important. We want staff to be motivated, renewed, and feeling valued and cared for. Those are the things we're asking them to give to families, and so, we want them to feel those same things. So, some of the benefits of community engagement for our program staff: assist with community assessments, manage resources, enhance program planning, feel renewed in their work, acquire new, and I would say different viewpoints or perspectives, reduce risks, and they contribute to the community that they're a part of.

And finally, of course, we are thinking about the benefits of community engagement for communities. This is where we see community solutions created. There's a decrease in duplication of effort, and there's more efficiency. When we're all working with the same families, if we can work together, it's better. Expand benefits to other families, maybe some of the families that aren't a part of the Head Start program, specifically. And finally, our ultimate goal, to strengthen communities. Wrapping up today, we just want to remind you that community engagement requires shared vision, commitment, and intentional planning. We need to be mindful about it. And building relationships with community partners is a flexible process. It mirrors the involvement to engagement journey that we travel with families. So, we've been hearing about that for the last two days. That move and that journey from involvement to engagement. This really mirrors or parallels that process for us. There are some resources, again, on the widget up on the upper right side of your screen, and so, you can check those out and download those. Finally, again, there's the widgets where you'll need to do your knowledge check. Answer those three questions and complete that, and then the certificate next to that, you can get that and download that. And I think, Brandi, are you taking the reflection question? And are you going to wrap us up for the whole today?

Brandi: I feel like we need a drumroll. [Drumroll] [Laughter]

Joelfre: [Drumroll] That's my best, Brandi.

Brandi: Well, that was pretty good. That's working it. I like it. We always leave you with these reflection questions because we know if you want to extend or expand the content when you get back to your program, the reflection and planning form that Joelfre showed you in the resource widget is there, and these questions live there. So, if you want to take these back, and use them to really connect with your colleagues and build out more, where you find yourself on these levels and where you want to go, you can do that partner by partner. So, that's a really cool strategy that we found holds a lot of power over time. But Joelfre, what I do what to do before we leave each other, is just celebrate where we've been together in these past two days. We kicked off with a big welcome. We're so excited to have had Dr. Bergeron and Kiersten Beigel from the Office of Head Start with us. We got to hear very early on from Dr. Kathy Ahube, who is one of our dear colleagues who just was inspirational and grounding and who kicked us off in the opening planery. Then we got to hang out with Dr. Richard in sessions one A and B on leadership. And then you got to hear from Dr. Jennifer Olson and Nancy Darlington around the relationship-based competencies. For session three, you heard from Dr. Richard again and Serita about a little bit of engagement, but a whole lot of goal setting, which is such a big part of who we are in our work as family managers and family workers. In session four, we brought it around again to Dr. Richard and Dr. Brown to think with us about data and how it, specifically, as managers you guys apply this on that more macro level. And then, last but not least, Joelfre, hey. [Laughter] We got to come and think with you about community, and it's been a true honor. Now, don't leave us yet because the next session, we are so happy to be able to share with you that Dr. Joshua Sparrow, who is one of our co-principal investigators at the National Center on Parent, Family, Community Engagement, is going to wrap us up with some words of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance as only he can do. So, if you haven't ever heard him speak, please come over and join us for that final connection.

So, Joelfre, thank you so much for being here today. It's been an honor and a pleasure and a whole lot of fun.

Joelfre: It's been so fun. Thanks everybody. We hope you have a good rest of your conference.

Brandi: Thanks guys! See you soon!

Joelfre: Take care!