

In Our Own Words: Honoring Our Family Services Impact and Legacy

[Song plays]

And I know when I need it, I can count on you, like 4, 3, 2. You'll be there.

Cause that's what friends are supposed to do, oh yeah. Ooooooh. Ooooooh. Yeah, yeah.

If you're tossing and you're turning, and you just can't fall asleep. I'll sing a song. Beside you.

And if you ever forget how much you really mean to me.

Every day I will remind you. Oooooh.

To find out what we're made of.

[Song ends]

Brandi Black Thacker: Hello, everybody. Come on in and get comfortable. We cannot tell you how excited we are to be with you today. We are about to embark upon something that is unprecedented. We're so happy that you're here to share in this moment with us, that you are able to spend any time out of your busy schedules today. But this webinar is for you and about you. We're so grateful that you came in to spend a little moment of your day with all of us.

Speaking of the all of us, we are going to get to those introductions here in just a second. But if you came today to think with us about prioritizing staff wellness in these unprecedented times, you are in the right place. More specifically, if you came to think together and share your voices – you guys get to come off mute today, so be thinking about your stories. We're ready for them. We're going to tell you how to bring them forward. We want you to tell us about your own experiences, in your own words, honoring our impact and our legacy.

Alright, let's just jump in. There's so many good things that we can talk about together. The first thing that we would like to do is make sure that you have instructions if you'd like to join us on the Spanish channel. My good friend and colleague Nina Zumpalova is going to give you guys those instructions on where to go and how to join our other friend and colleague Guillermo on the Spanish Channel.

Nina Zumpalova: [Speaking Spanish] Hello everyone. Click on the Interpretation icon. Select your preferred language to hear the webinar. To hear the interpreted language only, click Mute Original Audio.

Brandi: Thank you so much, Nina. We'll leave these instructions on the screen just one more second. If you're still making your way to the other channel, you'll have a second to do that.

To start off, I am happy to report we are the bearers of gifts for you today. You might have noticed that many of us have a Zoom background that is in service of all of our family service professional colleagues across this country. Everything that you've been doing and holding, not only in these past couple years, but for – let's just call it out – over 50 years, you all. We want you to know that this is one way we want to say, "Thank you."

You are going to have in your chat – yes, I said “in your chat” – the opportunity to download these backgrounds. I want you guys to pay attention to the phrase that we have right here on the screen in the background. It says, “When compassion meets action, lives change.” How many ways can we resonate and relate to that statement in our Head Start communities across the country? “When compassion meets action, lives change.”

Feel free to download those backgrounds. My colleague Maureen Gomes has put it into the larger chat for you. It’s a Box folder that you can go to. As you see on the screen here, we have those available for you in English and in Spanish. This isn’t the last gift we’re going to offer you today. Stay tuned and hang out with us to see what comes next a little later in our discussion.

Without further ado, I want to invite you to meet the incredible colleagues I have on this line today. I’m going to start off with my National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement colleagues, and turn it over to Dana first to say a little hello so you can meet everybody, and we’ll jump on in.

Dana Winters: Hey, everyone. I’m Dana Winters. I am the executive director of the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning in Children’s Media and so honored to be partnering with the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, especially for today. I’m joined today by my friend and partner in the work that we do, Dr. Junlei Li. Junlei?

Junlei Li: Hello everyone, a pleasure to join you. I am Junlei Li. I’m a faculty in early childhood from Harvard University.

Brandi: I can’t tell you guys how honored we are to have Dana and Junlei here with us today. I can’t wait for you to get to know them as I have. You’re going to fall in love as quickly as I did. I can’t wait for you to jump into this experience – and, most importantly, for them to get to meet you. But so you don’t have stranger danger, if I haven’t had the honor to share time with you before, my name is Brandi Black Thacker. I’m the director of T and TA Development and Strategy at the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. You guys are some of my most favorite folks to think and talk with. Every time we get to share time we learn so much. I’m just humbly and incredibly moved by everything that you do every day on behalf of all of us across the country.

I feel like we need a drum roll moment. See if you guys could like do a little drumroll sound in the chat. Let me see what you got. Let me see what you got today, because I have the distinct honor of bringing forward our leader, our director, and Head Start alum, Dr. Bernadine Futrell. Come on in.

Dr. Bernadine Futrell: Thank you so much, Brandi. Hello everybody. Thank you to our wonderful OHS team and the National Center for pulling together this moment to just pause and say we know we are in the midst of challenging times, and it’s more important today than ever for us to come together and build strength with each other. I’m very pleased and honored to be a part, like everyone, of this webinar, to hear your voices, to hear from you.

I will tell you my life was saved by the family service team members in the Head Start program that I went to as a child. My family got enrolled in a Head Start – I always tell the story. I went to Head Start, but it was really my family that really was impacted. It’s the four-year-old me

that got enrolled. But it was a family service team member who reached out to my sister who was a teenager to say, “What are you thinking about? What are your goals? How can I help you get to what you would like to do?” And my sister Bernadette – yes, names are very close – she tells this story with such pride every time she thinks about Head Start. I know now more than ever that your work is so important in the lives of so many families across our nation. I thank you for that. We want to do what we can from here, from Zoom, to invest in that, to say, “thank you,” and to encourage you to pause and invest in yourself as we are doing these Head Start Forward Staff Wellness webinars.

Our goal is really to come together, to share stories, to share triumphs, to share even hurdles that we are experiencing so that we can come together and do more than what we could do on our own, and you, the family service team members in the Head Start programs. I know everybody’s job changed in March 2020, when the pandemic hit. But it is my experience and my understanding from listening and hearing from many of you that the role of the family service team member looks nothing like probably what it looked like on February of 2020, and it probably looks completely different day to day because we continue to navigate this pandemic.

I encourage you to take a moment, plug in or plug out, whatever you need to do, but just find the time and the space in this webinar to share with each other, to grow together, connect together, and be part of a community, because we’re all navigating this together and we can’t do it without you.

I welcome you to the webinar on behalf of the Office of Head Start. I don’t know if I said, I’m Dr. Futrell. I’m the director of the Office of Head Start, and we’re very pleased to welcome you and to be able to host this space specifically for you. With that, it’s my pleasure to turn it over to the awesome Sangeeta and Kiersten who are going to continue the conversation, as well as Brandi. Thank you.

Sangeeta Parikshak: Thank you so much, Dr. Futrell, I love – I know you say that you tell that story all the time – but I love hearing that story. It’s especially relevant for today’s webinar, so thanks for your comments and thoughts. My name is Sangeeta Parikshak. I’m a clinical psychologist, and I lead the behavioral health work for the Office of Head Start. I’m joined today by Kiersten Beigel. She leads our family engagement work and is the federal project officer for the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.

Today is the second webinar in our series on addressing staff wellness during unprecedented times. In order to deliver the highest quality services to children and families, and – as I heard, Dr. Futrell say, just yesterday, I believe, in a meeting we were having – to keep the light shining bright in our children so they continue to thrive, we have to take care of our staff.

We have to remember, and you have to remember that you are essential, and your physical and mental wellness is vitally important. We understand, and we’ve heard, it’s more than just telling you to take a deep breath, right? Although that can help, but it’s more than that. We have developed a series across the national centers to provide an in-depth look at staff wellness and hopefully provide some strategies that resonate with you to improve wellness for yourself and those around you.

The first webinar in the series was held in December of last year, and it focused on ways to prioritize staff wellness within programs. We heard from two Head Start directors on ways that they have worked to improve staff wellness in their programs since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. You can find this webinar – I'm not going to go into all the details of it. I loved it – but you can find it on the Office of Head Start COVID-19 page on the ECLKC. I love many of the strategies that they shared with us, but the main takeaways I've been thinking a lot about, kind of what were the main messages? They talked about it is not just about wellness for a single individual staff member. It is about all staff – the teacher, the bus driver, the family service worker, you all were lifted up in that webinar as well and were highlighted as vitally important.

Also, taking care of each other and creating opportunities for staff to feel a sense of belonging and connection to one another is really crucial to one's wellness, and maybe something that we don't think about all the time when we think about wellness. But we're going to hear much more about that perspective in today's webinar with a special focus on celebrating family service workers. Thanks to my colleague and friend, Kiersten Beigel, she continues to lift up the important work that you all do for families. With that, I'll turn it over to Kiersten.

Kiersten Beigel: Thank you, Sangeeta and Dr. Futrell. Oh, my goodness, my heart. I'm so glad you all are here. "Why don't we do this more often?" is what I'm thinking. Man, it's been a rough couple of years, I know. And I know that at this point in time that a lot of family services staff are stretched really thin in terms of – and you all are team players and your programs but with this great resignation and the changes in staffing, I know you're all out there doing a lot more than you even normally would do.

I just really appreciate what it takes to do what you do. I'm excited that we're here today to really honor your legacy and the work. Some of you may be new to Family Services, and so welcome, welcome, welcome. Others of you may be quite seasoned and really need a time to connect with your national community. There are 22,000 plus of you doing this work, and we really need to be able to come together.

You know the COVID impacts have really affected compassion fatigue and burnout for folks who are in helping professions like ours and like in Head Start. That's very real. We're seeing that. We need to take these times to – yes, we know. You don't want to hear about the baths that you need to take or the breaths, as Sangeeta mentioned. But what is more powerful than coming together as a big, beautiful family services workforce, if only for an hour, from communities all over to really lift each other up by the power of your good work.

This is our humble offering, our humble time. We need to be quiet and get on over to Brandi and let you guys take it from here. Thank you so much. Thank you for being here, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Brandi: Thank you for that, Kiersten. There is one more layer that we're going to offer in terms of connection, and we are going to open the gates, so you guys get ready. We're going to talk through a process of how you can let us know that you want to come off mute and share out loud. Sangeeta, if you would make this connection for us in terms of the work and the Information Memorandum, that would be incredible. Then we will just jump right in.

Sangeeta: Thank you, Brandi. I wanted to just take a moment to ground us in what we mean by staff wellness. I spoke about it a little bit earlier, but as you are probably aware, the Office of Head Start rolled out an Information Memorandum on supporting the wellness of all staff in the Head Start workforce in September of last year. The graphic here demonstrates the pieces that are highlighted in the IM. You know, wellness is a really complex topic. For staff wellness to be effective, it needs to be integrated into programs at all levels – classrooms, staff meetings, supervision, etc. One way to think about wellness is that there's not just one aspect that we need to target. Right? But many dimensions that we can target to achieve wellness.

We need to think about physical wellness. You have here, you know, achieving this, you need, at a basic level, opportunities for physical wellness during the day. We think about emotional wellness. And here you see, we have lifted up adult mental health. We also know that adult mental health and child mental health are very much linked. You see, we have a section in the IM on child mental health as well and making sure that we address children social and emotional development.

Environmental wellness is another dimension that we talk about. At a basic level, everyone needs to feel safe in the program, so you see safety for all. And they need to have the resources that they need to be well, so adult-size chairs to sit in, for example, one of the things that we've been hearing that programs are investing in. And we need to think about financial wellness, such as incentives for staff retention, which you can see in this graphic. Finally, social wellness, which I feel like we're really talking about today. Making sure there is mutual respect and teamwork. Like I said earlier, just focusing on that sense of belonging and relationship building amongst our staff. Thank you, Brandi, for allowing me the time to ground us a little bit in the Information Memorandum.

Brandi: Absolutely, Sangeeta. Thank you for the context. I really want to connect also not only what we know in the realm of what we've done for all these decades in Head Start, but, you guys, this is something that has never been more present than today. Many of you have told us as we talked to you across the country that what we've discovered as you've continued to be the heartbeats of your communities, that helping others has helped us, too, as we've stayed connected, as we've shared openly.

I am so grateful for our leaders at OHS – each of the three women we see before us today, and so many others – for creating this space for us to acknowledge the real, the wonderful, the hard, the all of it, because it's brought us to exactly where we are today. It's also what's going to bring us together. [Dog barking] One of the pieces that I wanted to offer to this, that actually. . . I know, are you all smiling? It's virtual. I mean. . . [Laughter] it's the human element. [Dog barking] Helping others helps us, too. What I want to say about that is we know what we have been doing together in the real, but we also know that this is proven in science.

There are so many things that have taught us over time that, as we help others, our own well-being is lifted. Not only do we know that helping others can inspire our lifespan to be a bit longer, we also know that it's contagious. Altruism, this connection to each other, is the best kind of a ripple-out effect. Also with the helping others it makes us happy. It shifts our mood. It changes our acknowledgment in our interactions during the day. It can even help do things related to our physical health, like lower blood pressure.

I only offer these things because not only do we know what we've experienced through our lived pathway and journey, but we also know what happens, not only as the gift to others and what you guys offer folks in terms of your wisdom and your time and your connection, but then how that can impact us. We just wanted to give credence to all of those things and what's been happening for you over these past months and years.

With that, as promised, we're going to go right to some conversations to get you inspired to how we're going to share stories together. Now, Dana and Junlei have for us a story of their own, so we're going to start with them. They're going to bring into the space somebody I know that you know of, so get ready for that. But we just put a few icons here for you to peep at as we're coming into the Zoom space together.

You guys have the functionality, of course, of your mute and unmute, but the most important piece that we want you to take from the icons of this lab is, if you'd like to talk to us, raise your virtual hand. We have folks in the background who are watching and waiting to see you raise your hand and offer your story. They are going to put into queue those of you who would like to share.

Now, don't be worried because if we don't get to your voice today, we have many other opportunities to lift those up. We want to make sure that those of you who are feeling excited get the chance to speak today, and if we don't get to you, given the short amount of time we have together, we're going to create additional spaces. I'll tell you a little bit about that as we get closer to the end of our time together.

As you're ready, you can raise your virtual hand. We have folks in the background taking note of that. They'll let me know, and I'll give you a cue when to be ready to speak. You found already – thank you so much – the chat feature, which you see in the chat icon. If you have any technical questions or anything that you would like support with, you also have our Q&A feature. Same setup as usual. If you need anything we're happy to support you. Just let us know. But Dana, with all of that, you have a little something to share with us today. Yes?

Dana: I do have a little something to share. Thank you, Brandi. I mentioned earlier that I come to you from the Fred Rogers' Center for Early Learning in Children's Media. Fred Rogers is that Mr. Rogers from Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. You might be familiar with Fred, he was a children's television host for over 30 years, 895 episodes, to be exact. I'm coming to you today from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, outside of Pittsburgh, which is Mr. Rogers' original neighborhood. When Brandi and Junlei and the NCPFCE team, we were all talking about this webinar and something that is a little new for all of us, and the sharing of stories, I started to reflect a bit about what we've learned from Fred about sharing stories.

Fred was the ultimate storyteller, across many years in service of children and families and also in service of what he would call "children's helpers." All of you – those who show up every single day to support children and families in their learning and growing. I went to the Fred Rogers archive, which is directly underneath me right now, and found a speech from Fred that he gave in 1983 to the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

We have just a little bit of that speech we'd like to play for you today. It starts with Fred entering into the room, and you can hear everybody singing "It's a Beautiful Day in the

Neighborhood.” I thought, “Wow, what a great way to start today.” Brandi, are you ready? “It’s a ...” No, I’m kidding. We’re not going to sing. We’re not really going to sing. It’s not the song that is the important part of this, although it’s still pretty fun. It’s the question that Fred poses to everybody in the audience as he opens his speech. My guess is it’s a question that we ask ourselves often. Without further ado, here’s a little bit of Fred.

[Audio recording begins]

Fred Rogers: [Singing begins] Let’s make the most of this beautiful day.

Since we’re together we might as well say, would you be mine? Would you be mine?

Won’t you be my neighbor? Won’t you be, won’t you please?

Please won’t you be my neighbor? [Singing ends]

Good for you! Thank you! Thank you for doing that. That really makes me feel at home. Dr. Ward said to me a little earlier, “You know, I think everybody is going to change into tennis shoes.”[Laughter]

I’m mighty glad that you would sing. What I’d like to call this is “The Past and the Present Is Now.” Do you ever wonder if you’ve made a difference in this life? Whether any of those children who have come to your care have remembered anything that you did for them? Any ways you cared for them?

[Audio recording ends]

Dana: As you can imagine, it was pretty quiet after that question was posed. And it’s because it’s a question that we ask ourselves as helpers a lot. Do you ever wonder if you’ve made a difference in this life? Whether any of the children or families who have come to your care have remembered anything you did for them, any ways that you cared for them? Well, today is about those moments. It’s about those stories that we can tell of the ways that we know you make a difference. From the grand moments to the itty-bitty small ones that it might be surprising that we remember.

All of those moments show us the incredible difference that we’re making every single day in the lives of Head Start families. Today, we want to hear those stories from you. We want to hear the ways that you know you make a difference, to show us how proud you are to be a part of this family. We know we’re certainly proud to be a part of this family with you. We’ve got some stories, but we really want to hear from you.

Tell us about the big and small moments where you know you’ve made a difference. This is where your little hand gets to raise. If you can, if you want to share, you want to think about a little bit some of the stories that you would share if Fred Rogers were here to ask you, “How do you know you make a difference?” We’d love to hear just right from you. How do you know that you’re making a difference?

Brandi: It looks like we do have a hand up already. Dana, thank you for the inspiration, and thank you for sharing Mr. Rogers with us today. I can’t tell you the flood of emotion that comes back in just getting to see and hear him again. It looks like by the chat that I’m not alone. It looks like, first up, I’m going to give folks a moment to our technology team to get to their

unmute features. It looks like that we have with Patricia from Puerto Rico who is coming into the mic cue first. [Pause] Late-breaking news, it looks like Astrid is ready. Patricia, we'll come right back to you. Hi, Astrid.

Astrid: Hi, my name is Astrid. I'm from Seattle. For me, it's really interesting because my family was a Head Start family. My brother was in a Head Start program, and I think he was in it for two years. I remember, even now, I think I was maybe 7 or 6, 7 probably, when I remember this incident – and I'm 21 now, so it's been 14–15 years.

But I remember one year when we first came to Seattle, and we had just recently moved here from El Salvador. We were immigrants. My mom was working as a janitor. It was a lot. We didn't have clothes for winter. We didn't have mittens, anything, coats. We're from the tropics, so we didn't even know that was a requirement. We'd never seen snow before. My brother's family service worker basically just put us on this random list of these women that were just giving away coats.

I remember that year my mom just received a bunch of clothes for both me and my brother, and for herself, too. I still remember, because my mom talks to me one time, even as I was 7 years old and she was like, "I have no idea how we're going to be able to do that. How we're going to make it through winter." It was really impactful for my family. Now, I am a family service specialist. I helped a parent get clothes for her new baby. We're helping another parent get clothes for his child – just these little things, clothing especially, food. Even hanging out with the kids. I'm low-key kind of scared of kids, but being able to give back what was given to me, it was really profound to be able to have this job. Yeah, that's it.

Brandi: Astrid. There are no words to convey the gratitude. Thank you for your story. Thank you for sharing your family with us, and thank you for being part of our community and offering the gifts that you do every day. What a powerful testament. I have to be honest with you guys. I have threatened for about four days now, I don't know if I'll be able to keep my emotions intact because anybody who knows me knows that I'm the emotional one. I'm going to do my best to honor your words and honor your sentiments. But if I do start to show emotion, just know it's authentic, and it's genuine. We're just so grateful for each of you.

Alright, I know that my friend Patricia is on the line. I'm so excited to see and hear you today. It's been too long. Let's see if she can come off mute.

Patricia: Hi, everyone. Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

Brandi: Yes, hi.

Patricia: Hola. Buenas tardes. I'm really excited to be part of this meeting, gathering. I'm not a Head Start ... I didn't grow up in Head Start, but I do remember and I grew up with Mr. Rogers, so this has been really emotional for me. [Inaudible] [Pause]

Brandi: [Inaudible] [Pause]

Tech support: Hello? [Pause]

Brandi: We stand with you and your emotion. [Pause]

Tech support: Hi. Are we waiting for Patricia?

Brandi: We are.

Tech support: OK.

Brandi: I'll make sure she didn't accidentally get connected, or disconnected or muted accidentally. We'll pause here. OK, well let's – Jacqueline, I'd love to hear your story and because I have a deep relationship with Patricia, I know I can check back in on her. She's a friend and a colleague of long time. Let's come to you so that you can tell us your story while we wait on her. We'll welcome her back in as she's ready.

Jacqueline: Definitely. I definitely could relate to Patricia as well. I also wanted to share, like Astrid, I am also a Head Start parent. I actually had a family service worker myself when I was younger, when I had my first child at 18. I could see that she would always provide me resources nonjudgmentally. She would help me with all the paperwork, anything that I had to do. She was always available. And at very hard time she was, they were also there.

I could honestly say they would go above and beyond from just the regular duties. I am happy to see that I do that now myself, and I totally understand the parents. I'm so grateful for the treatment that I got from an FSW. I just wanted to share that. It's such an awesome job. Thank you. I just wanted to acknowledge that as well.

Brandi: This cycle of connection and gifting – I hear it already in the voices that we've heard and Jacqueline, thank you so much for your story and for the impact that you make every day and for the inspiration that you are going to bring forward for the little ones that come behind you, and their families, of course. All right. It looks like we are going to bring into this space Daphne.

Daphne: Hello, everyone. Hopefully you can see ... Can you see this certificate?

Brandi: No. Describe it for us, Daphne. What do you have?

Daphne: The certificate of participation. It was from when I was from Head Start family – my son was in Head Start, and it's from May 23rd, 1986, in Portland, Oregon. I now live in Anchorage, Alaska, and of course I'm a family advocate. I found this one day going through my things. It actually made me drop to my knees and in tears to see that. It took me back to that day that the Head Start teacher saw me looking through the window at my son in class, and she invited me in – to become a parent volunteer. I did not realize how much that had an impact on me. I'm 60 years old now. I ultimately went back to school at 40 and became an elementary school teacher. I taught for 19 years, but to have this full circle back to Head Start.

I come to this position, and I'm working with families who were – their lives were not so different than my own. I was a young parent. I work with young parents. I work with parents who need reminders. I know their space. I was in their space, and I know what it did for my life to have a person that would step out and say, "Hey. I need you to do this. I need this. I need I need this form. I need you to remember to do these things." Out of love, and I do it out of out of empathy and love and knowing that it all pays off in the end because it has in my life. I love what I do.

Brandi: We can hear it in your voice. It shines through. We can't see you, but we can absolutely see your spirit.

Daphne: I wish you could see this certificate. I did make a copy and sent it to my boss, Freddy here at KCI in Anchorage, Alaska, Head Start. It hangs down next to my desk so parents coming in to see that. We are all the same. I am you. You are me. That's great. Thank you!

Brandi: OK. I'm going to figure out a way for you to send us that picture so we can feature it. [Laughter] Let us get our contact information to you because we would be honored to see it.

Daphne: I would love it. I would love it. I mean, I'm trying not to cry. But I'm telling you truly, what we do makes a big difference.

Brandi: Huge difference. Daphne, I'm grateful for those words because in all of the things that we've travelled through together, it can get lost a little, in the heart and in the wonderful and in the focus. We all come to this work with that heart to serve. We wanted to bring forward the space for you to remember. I'm so grateful you're helping us.

Alright Becky, I better mind my P's and Q's because I can feel it coming. Alright. Let me wait for my colleagues over here to see who is next. Thank you, Daphne, so much. We will find a way to bring that forward for everybody to see. Looks like Britney. Britney, are you coming to the front? Let's hear what you have to share today.

Britney: Oh, me. Hi.

Brandi: Hello.

Britney: I'm a family service worker, and I work through partnership in Columbus, Ohio. I think how I know that the parents are receiving or have gratitude is their feedback, especially when they receive a useful connect of resource to community from me, or we set a goal that is successful, or I help bring a different perspective to an issue that they're facing. I enjoy hearing, "That Miss Britney. I love you. You saved my life. I love you." Even though I know essentially what they mean. I always love hearing that, "Oh, you saved my life. I love you. Oh, I love you." I like hearing that.

Then essentially, I know for me as a family service worker, how I believe they show gratitude is once you start working with them, they start to continue to remain, have that contact with you. They continue to continue to open up and tell you about different issues and things that are going on that they could help use assistance with. That's my perspective.

Brandi: Thank youm Britney. It really, sometimes I think – and you guys tell me if you agree – it can feel like almost lip service when we say that we're in the business of changing lives. Then you hear a story like Britney's. And the love, the literal love, it sounds like you collect on a daily basis. Then we know, we just know, we know in our bones, that how we do what we do does make a difference. I want to have this submit right here in front of everybody that we do it better than anybody else. [Laughter] Alright, who is next? To my friends Rita and Maureen, who do we have in the queue? Brittany, thank you so much for bringing that forward for us.

There's so many things happening in the chat. I hope you guys are seeing everything. We're going to save everything so that we can move them back to this, because again, this won't be the only time that we're going to lift your voices. I'm already so deeply enamored with this opportunity and experience that my mind is working on when we can do something else.

But it looks like we have Charlene, who's ready to come forward. [Pause] Charlene, if you haven't unmuted, you feel free to do that. For those of our colleagues and friends who have spoken, if you can mute yourselves, that would be perfect. We want to check in on Charlene again and see if you can unmute. [Pause]

I'm going to go to the chat real quick while we're waiting to see if Charlene – you just jump right on in and interrupt me if and when you're ready. It looks like there's so many things happening in the chat. Natasha, "I was a Head Start parent representative on the [Inaudible]. It's our Policy Council. I was grateful for the experience as a parent there. It empowered me with a special perspective when I was serving families as their family service specialist. I truly love what I do."

[Pause] Alright. Charlene, you let us know if you're ready, and we will create space. I am going to go back and check on Patricia again. But let's talk to Robin. Are you ready to come forth and tell us your story?

Robin: Hello. Can you hear me?

Brandi: I can. Hello!

Robin: I believe that I make a difference with the Head Start families because I was a parent of Head Start. My youngest three went through it, so I know what it's like to be the parent of three Head Start students. I know what it's like to be hungry. I know what it's like for my family service worker to offer me food, milk, invite me in to come to parent meetings. I then became on Policy Council. The resources and everything that I've been given from Head Start has basically made me walking proof that Head Start works.

I've instilled everything that they've taught me. I went to school. I got my associates, my bachelors. Then I became a teacher for Head Start. And then now, I'm fortunate enough to be a family service worker. I believe that I make a difference in the stories and the thank-you's that I get from my family, but just because I can really relate to my families in a different way as I am just like them. And I can just ... That's how I feel I make a difference because I'm instilling into them what has been instilled into me.

Brandi: Robin, I don't know if you can see all of the love that you're collecting from the chat, but we are seeing a lot of "Head Start works." "I'm a proud product of Head Start." "So proud of you." "Beautiful." "Thank you for sharing."

I'm often just so stunned in the best possible way at the testament that is our work and the question of how we are able to continue 50-plus years later to have this kind of connection and impact to individuals, to our communities, and how it continues to ripple out years later. You guys are telling us stories from the eighties. [Laughter] This is clearly, clearly important. Clearly important.

OK. Let me check and see if we can take one more, because ... And we're going to open the mic up again. I'm checking. My friends are telling me how much time we're already spending together. It's flown, I have to say. Let me check and see if we can take one more out-loud story before we move on to something else. Then we'll check back in with you guys, too.

OK. I'm seeing that let's keep going at this moment, but we're going to open up the mic at least one more time before we leave each other today. But I know, Dana and Junlei, you may want to help us – based on the stories that we've heard right here in real time – we want you to help us make some connections to and through how we've come together in these moments. Talk to us a little bit about what you've been hearing, and how it's sitting with you in this moment.

Dana: Brandi, it's almost hard to put into words. I've been reading the chat and listening and – what beautiful moments and beautiful stories – and again, the big grand moments and the ones in between, too. When we were thinking about how we support one another during just really uncertain, challenging times. We talk a lot about how we're going through a collective experience, but certainly not one that is common. We're all experiencing the world very differently right now. The way that we navigate and support conversations with families, but navigate and support conversations with one another, we can pull on the stories and the celebration of times past to think about how we push forward in the future.

I think overwhelmingly, across all of these stories, are stories of being able to listen. Of being there to listen, not to respond and serve, but to listen to understand first. Junlei, I wonder if I can get your thoughts a little bit, especially Daphne's story, and the time when she said, "I work with parents who need reminders." What struck you from that story in particular?

Junlei: As soon as Daphne was saying that, I was just thinking about two things, which is that, what are the reminders that the families needed? And in parallel, I was also thinking that what reminders that Head Start staff and family services professionals needed themselves, which is, I think, why we're here today. Perhaps the first and foremost thing that I can think of – and Dana, it's related so closely to the work of Fred Rogers – which is encouragement. Encouragement meaning quite literally to feel that we can have courage to face the challenges and difficulties we have. To have the courage to receive and the courage to give.

I'm just so struck by each of the stories. I feel, similar to you, that I'm not quite sure what to say. I noticed that, from Astrid, from Jacqueline, Daphne and Britney and Robin, every one of their stories began with receiving. To understand ... We are here to talk about making a difference, and every single one of the stories is about receiving graciously. Then from that receiving comes giving. Sometimes right away, sometimes many years later – and that is just so powerful.

Dana: That's a great observation, Junlei. It's true, and we know that giving and receiving are braided together. We don't do one without the other, and we certainly don't do one well without the other. I agree with you that that seems to be this underlying sentiment of being able to receive and give. I was also struck by the way that they were able to deeply understand, acknowledge, reflect the needs of others.

From the chat, we saw stories from Charlene and Maria and Sandra, and they were all telling the stories about understanding and being able to acknowledge the inner needs of families, being able to sometimes meet those needs and sometimes just come alongside and be together as they address and reflect and manage those needs together.

Of course, the final part – and then we'll turn it back over to everyone else's voices – is I know I'm struck, and my guess is you are, too, by the helpers. About how the helpers, they show up.

It doesn't matter the circumstances, they show up to not only look for, but be the helpers that everyone needs. And we know, of course, the "look for the helpers" quote from Fred Rogers. In times of trouble, what do you do? We look for the helpers. Junlei, remind us why we look for the helpers.

Junlei: I think there's at least two things that for those of us who need help, looking to the helpers give us a sense of hope that we're not alone in our struggles. But more recently, Dana, you and I have been talking a lot about what about the helpers? What about all the helpers who are out there helping? Why do they need to look to the helpers? I think in a way it's the same: to know that we're not alone out there trying to help, and feel sometimes that our time, our resources, are outmatched by the challenges and needs there. But we keep trying.

It's difficult to always try just by yourself. And when we look to other helpers, we realize that we're part of this much larger community. And early on, just when everyone was saying "hello," I was just looking at all the communities, all the places where everyone is from, from places I couldn't even pronounce. I'm just amazed about this community of helpers that are gathered just even right now on this Zoom call.

Dana: We can see it in the chat, uplifting one another, showing up, looking for and being the helpers. Brandi? Thank you.

Brandi: I'm learning with you, Dana and Junlei, that I need to have myself prepared for the journey that you bring me through and that you bring others through and just the acknowledgement of our process. And thinking that I want to harken back to the wheel that you brought us forward from the beginning and the pieces that we've experienced even today in what brings us toward wellness. It's each other, and it's all the things that have come forth from your voices in the connections. It's the mutual respect. All these pieces are present, and I think that sometimes we forget to give ourselves the credit that we deserve that really speaks to how we navigate all these spaces and places, not only in service of each other, but in service of, of course, the families and their little ones that we have the honor to serve every day.

Well, I know that we are going to first thank Dana and Junlei for bringing their voices forward. I'm going to look to my colleagues to see if there are other stories to bring forward, and as I do that, I'd also like to share with you in the PowerPoint – we have [Inaudible] saw that question come forward a little earlier because you always excited about slides. Of course we have them ready for you to take with you.

My friend and colleague Jackie Muniz has put together for us some of your words that you shared with us from MyPeers. As part of this experience, we've integrated so much of what we've collected from you to honor what you're feeling and the things that you want to lift up right here on the slides. We have a few of these examples that you're going to be able to take with you today. I just wanted to call attention to those. There are four different slides in here that talk about [Inaudible] the helpers and why it's so important to find each other, to bring us forward, and to hold each other as we travel together along those journeys. But I wanted to just honor that. Then I hear from Nina that Arthur is going to come off mute and tell us his story too. [Pause] If you can unmute, Arthur, let's see if we can hear you. [Pause]

As we wait, I want to make sure that you see Rebecca. I see she's given us some voice into the chat. She says she was "recently contacted by a parent that was served four years ago. She started with us having difficulties understanding her child's special needs. She was overwhelmed and stressed. She would stay at the center to be present in case staff needed her assistance with her child. He was nonverbal and he was aggressive due to being unable to communicate. She stayed with us, and we snagged her as a volunteer.

"We loved on her to our best ability. She moved to become a Policy Council rep and then to community Policy Council rep after her child left Head Start. She contacted Rebecca to let her know that ... He was graduating from college, you all, [Laughter] and wanted me to join his graduation virtually. Her child communicates appropriately now."

Rebecca, I think you did it. You did me in. That might have been the last straw. Wow! Unbelievable. Well, how was the graduation, Rebecca? [Laughter] What an honor that you got to be there and what an honor that she remembered you – and that impact that stays with us. My son also has special needs, and I can't tell you how lonely that can be. For you to extend a hand and arm and a hug and a smile and connection. Rebecca, I hear that you're unmuted now, so let me hush so you can come forward.

Rebecca: [Inaudible] Actually, today I was super blessed. In our Policy Council, I had to share that story because that was just a few months ago. And then today [Inaudible] our Policy Council reps, and she just blows me away. There is the same type story. I was really just super blessed today to just hear some super messages. Know that that story came from another county that we serve, so I just [Inaudible] the counties, but we all [Inaudible]. I was just feeling super blessed today. I just wanted to share.

Brandi: Rebecca, thank you so much for taking the time to share and for bringing your actual voice forward. We are so thankful to have any moments with you today. Thank you so much.

Rebecca: Sure.

Brandi: Of course. It looks like April is going to come forward next. I need to check in, you all. Do you realize I only have two minutes left? Nina worrying – "Can we hang out for a little bit?" If anybody needs to go at the top of the hour, of course, we know that you are incredibly busy and have lots of work to do, but it looks like if we would like to hang out with little bit we can. No worries if you need to step away. We completely understand. April, let me pause no further. Come on in.

April: Hi. I just wanted to say how amazing it is to see so many people understanding we need to meet the families where they're at, because that's how you build a solid foundation.

Brandi: That foundation is so critical, April. What I'm feeling – and tell me if you agree – is that in my mind, I see that ripple-out effect, that we honor where families are, and we open the space for us to teach and us to learn. It's that reciprocity that, I think, is striking me today.

April. Absolutely, absolutely.

Brandi: April, how long have you been in your program?

April: I've been here a little over two years.

Brandi: It sounds like you must be liking it so far. [Laughter]

April: Yes. I used to be a parent for Head Start back in the early nineties. It's been a long journey. I'm glad to be where I'm at, and I'm so thankful to be able to help my families and my community.

Brandi: We're glad you're here. I'm going to tell you, just from experience, once you're here, you don't ever want to leave. When Head Start gets into your spirit, you're ... [Barking] I'm what they call a "lifer," so that's the journey I'm on. All right, everybody.

Alright, everybody. I want to collect a couple of things here. I'm going to show you a few things in chat. Please, if you're going to hang out for a little bit, keep your stories coming there. I just wanted to say to you, we're not finished. There are many things that we're going to do to continue to lift up your voices and wanted to say that in terms of what we got to do today to honor what we've been doing together and the impacts that have been made, we're still going to be working to bring things into your space that hopefully makes your jobs a little easier as you navigate all of these incredible pieces and parts of your communities.

We have a texting service for family service folks, just for you, that if you haven't signed up for that we're going to be bringing back. Not only is it for our family service colleagues, but your supervisors. We've been working super hard on a new resource around staff wellness. I'm going to pause here because if you guys didn't know, this is part of a series. We'll have our next opportunity to come to the staff wellness discussion from our colleagues at PMFO in March, so make sure to be on the look out for that.

Next month – this is near and dear to my heart as a social worker – we have Social Worker Appreciation Month. We're going to be bringing more voices forward, not only through MyPeers but through venues like this so that we can keep the conversation going. We're going to look for other ways, if you like this that we can checkout and bring forward so that you can keep those stories coming and we can keep each other encouraged and excited to continue our work together.

We do have some resources. I see that my colleagues are putting those in the chat for you. You can download those as you wish. We also have, because you always ask, certificates of attendance that are available for you. Here's how you get it. Let me tell you about this as you're transitioning. When the webinar is closed at the end, when we close the window, a box folder is going to pop up and you can choose the certificate you'd like to download, based on your preferred language. Just wait for us to close out everything, and then it'll pop up for you.

You can also find the Zoom backgrounds that we all have to share with you today, there, as well. I believe that my colleagues are also going to be putting a link in the chat that will allow you to fill out an evaluation. If you liked today's experience and you found that you would like to have more of this kind of thing, let us know that. If you found any way that you'd like us to tinker, let us know that, too. Clearly, your voice means a lot to us, and we definitely want to honor what you have to offer us in terms of your insights and wisdoms.

You'll also get a thank-you email tomorrow. You will also have a lot of these things embedded there, just in case you don't catch everything you want to today, so no worries. We've got you covered.

Let me close this out by offering a quote. One of our colleagues said this early on in our experience together, but I want to offer it here. I'm going to leave it on the screen. I'm not going to read it to you, but I am going to leave you with a musical interlude as you go on to the rest of your afternoon.

I just want to thank you, to our leaders at the Office of Head Start, Dr. Futrell, Sangeeta, Kiersten. We can't tell you how grateful we are for you and your leadership and the opportunity to bring this chance to think together and to share forward. To my friends Dana and Sunlei, thank you for the beauty that you bring to this world and for the light that you've shined for us today. Thank you to the PFCE team. I can't say much about you all because I'm so grateful I might finally lose it. But thank you to all of you who have done so much to pull this off in such a seamless way.

Finally and most importantly, thanks to all of you for what you do every single day and for the inspiration that you've given us, not only today, but over all these years. We can't tell you how humbled we are and how grateful. With that, thank you everybody. Stay safe, stay calm, stay connected, and enjoy your afternoon.

[Song plays]

I see trees of green. Red roses, too.

I see them bloom for me and you.

And I think to myself, "What a wonderful world."

I see skies of blue and clouds of white.

The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night.

And I think to myself, "What a wonderful world."

The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky.

Are also on the faces of people going by.

I see friends shaking hands saying, "How do you do?"

There really saying, "I love you."

I hear babies crying. I watch them grow.

They'll learn much more than I'll never know.

And I think to myself, "What a wonderful world."

Yes, I think to myself, "What a wonderful world."

[Song ends]