

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes

April 25, 2019 | 10:00 a.m.

In Attendance, Welcome, Approval of Minutes

Present: Heather Freilinger, Judi Mahoney, Shawn Lybarger, Abby Drummond, Kathryn Garland, Kendra Bickham, Alexis Millett, Danielle McKiddy, Heidi McGowan, Juliet Rutter, Cliff Jones, Rob McAdam

Staff Present: Gillian Wesenberg, Susan Stiles-Sumstine, Cynthia Hurkes, Cory Ortega, Danielle Walker, Julie Hurley, Analicia Nicholson, Athena Wikstrom

Early Learning Hub collective action during COVID-19

Heidi explained her role as a consultant with the Early Learning Hub (Hub) is to support bringing groups together and take collective action. The Hub supports children and families so that children are ready to start school and experience success. She then provided the three goals of the Hub's upcoming meetings:

1. Stay connected to leverage everyone's work and have a greater impact
2. Plan around potential future COVID-19 waves, and
3. Center equity in the core of our planning.

Heidi posed the questions, "What is happening with children and families?" and "What are you hearing?"

Dani from the Family Development Center (FDC) shared that families have been stating that they are needing and desiring human interaction. Families are still needing basic need items, but generally there are ways for them to get their basic needs met. Social interaction is weighing more on families than other needs. Families are feeling isolated.

Julie from Take Root Parenting Connection is having a lot of parents sign up for virtual parenting classes, but then not showing up. There is more interaction with the Facebook Live posts when families can watch at their convenience, but it seems like families are burned out.

Judi from Healthy Families shared that home visitors are meeting on a regular basis to discuss how best to support families right now. People are really struggling; it's been hard for home visitors and others to connect with families if they are not able to do a video call, which is how home visits are currently being conducted. Due to rural locations, some families are not able to get good phone reception and are not being met with as often as they should. Mental Health support is the biggest concern being seen right now. Some families are able to do telehealth visits, while others have not been able to. If families work, juggling homeschooling, even when working from home, is another concern. Summer will not be a relief for working families because there are not the same options for child care as there has been in the past. Parents are expressing increased stress right now.

Juliet from Health Care Coalition of Southern Oregon (HCCSO) shared that they have started a diaper distribution program through the Perinatal Task Force, for which there is high demand. Diapers have been a concern as families are not able to purchase them with SNAP benefits and the supply is diminished right now.

Heather with Care Connections and Education stated that there will be challenges with child care as parents start to go back to work. Some of the facilities that opened as emergency providers are having to close due to the expiration of emergency licenses. While the communication went out that child care was reopening, there are a lot of restrictions with reopening and many sites will not be able to reopen due to increased regulations, loss of profits during the closure, and other circumstances. There are financial supports for providers through the Federal CARES program administered by the Early Learning Division. Currently, licensing is being done virtually for existing programs, but there are stricter sanitation regulations and other challenges in general.

Heidi asked the group to brainstorm, "What ideas do you have that you could collectively respond to family needs and can leverage each other's work over the next three to six months?"

Communication is key, making sure we are letting partners know who has what resources. Most of the communication is going out one-on-one.

Relationships with our families and community is vitally important. We need to incorporate relational outreach into our plan to support families as a second wave may come.

Judi observed that Shawn was in the middle of a Head Start parade during the last PAC meeting, which allowed families to connect with the people they have missed seeing on a daily basis. It would be amazing if we could bring more of this type of outreach to our community.

Supporting children and families with an equity lens during COVID-19

Alexis directed the group to the handout that provides a full definition of equity and explained equity as situations where social identity and the disparity an individual experiences does not determine the family or individual's outcome. She asked the group "What would happen if you treated all the families the same?"

Answers included:

- This would upset families, and we would lose a lot of clients.
- It would offend their values and beliefs.
- Not all families start at the same place, and it's important to meet families where they are.
- If you don't consider where a family is starting from, you cannot effectively assist them.
- We would be a burden to some families and barely help others.
- There would be families who fell through the cracks and were left behind, as each person and each family have unique needs.
- Cookie cutter models would leave a lot of people behind.

Alexis then asked, "Is there an example of an outcome and how you identified what was needed to get to the outcome?"

Answers included:

- Grant applications for providers were online; individuals who were not tech savvy had to be walked through the process very intimately, where others only needed a brief e-mail to let them know the process.
- There are some families who have barriers that make it difficult to get to appointments, when individuals show up late, Umpqua Health still works them into the schedule with no penalties. Sometimes making it to an appointment is a huge win regardless of when they made it.

The Hub is working really hard to address diversity, equity, and inclusion and reach families who are geographically isolated or experiencing disparities. Many acknowledge that families have needs, but the way the system works does not allow for these needs to be addressed.

Cliff expressed that it is interesting how much the Hub identified culture as a central piece of the equity journey. It gets more complex as we move outside of the culture that we are a part of and are familiar with. As we are reaching out to individuals who are outside of the cultures we are familiar with, it makes it difficult to even see the needs. Acknowledging an individual's need and structuring a process to show that you really understand him/her raises trust and assists in helping one move forward equitably.

Alexis described the difference of looking through an equity lens versus using an equity lens as a tool to help make decisions or in planning. An equity lens is often used as a way of saying "putting equity glasses on so we are viewing it equitably." An equity lens tool should be used every time we plan or make decisions, to ensure equitable outcomes. Decisions and projects are put through the lens to ensure they are equitable. For our purpose, it is best to have a shorter equity lens, as it is more sustainable and easier to implement. Alexis provided a sample equity lens and reviewed it with the group. An additional question that may make sense in our equity lens is, "What assumptions are we making?" Our assumptions may be correct, but need to have supporting data around them. The equity lens slows us down to allow us to use our skills to have a more equitable outcome.

Cliff recommends having an equity lens include less than six questions, if possible, so that the lens can be completed quickly and utilized often. For large projects, there may be a longer list, but for everyday items, one would want to be able to complete it in 40 to 60 minutes.

The group broke up into small groups to discuss three questions:

1. How might an equity lens be useful to you and your organization?
2. What challenges might you face?
3. Are these the right questions? How might you tailor this tool to fit your needs as a PAC?

The groups shared their discussions back with the collective.

1. How might an equity lens be useful to you and your organization?
 - It makes you slow down and look at the plan or decisions from different angles.
 - There can be unintentional consequences and implicit biases if we go too fast.

- Some tend to think of how it will affect the majority; this allows us to look at those who are less obvious up front but may also be impacted, or impacted more.
 - This allows us to identify the impacted groups.
- Creates a focus on desired outcomes.
- Brings to light what assumptions are being made, and allows the narratives to be examined to determine if they are based on our experiences or data.
- Allows us to look at how to offer services differently.
- Allows us to identify if existing gaps (i.e. clients on the edge of services) are exacerbated by programs or decisions.
- Will be helpful when functioning as a region, to consider unique needs of families based on their geographic location, among other details.
- Systems, policies, and other related processes can all benefit from an equity lens.
- Could help expose our own vices, so that these can be challenged and possibly change.

2. What challenges might you face?

- Relationship building to get to the true inequity being faced, as clients will not provide a full view of their needs without a personal relationship.
- Need to gain credibility and really show that we are responding to community and individual needs.
- It's hard to get everyone on the same page and get everyone's input.
- Need to be aware of personal biases and understandings to address equity.
- Need to get buy-in from everyone to be effective.
- Need multiple perspectives.
- We get busy or have compressed timelines. Sometime we have to make quick decisions.
- Making utilizing the lens a priority.
- Opportunity to meet virtually.
- With prescriptive measures and outside policies, directives may not align with what we discover through the equity lens process.
- We may, at times, be afraid to ask families what they need because they might communicate something we are unable to provide or possibly might be in conflict with the agency values or other similar reasons.
- We need insight on how to engage/reach individuals who aren't presently engaging.
- Each county within the Hub is large and includes many diverse communities within them. We may be challenged to figure out how to function as a region, while moving towards a more equitable system. Our structure may make this work difficult.
- There are many different cultures within the region presenting many varied needs and perspectives.
- Engaging families in the discussion would be helpful. Families would need a safe space, and we may need training to create that space.

3. Are these the right questions? How might you tailor this tool to fit your needs as a PAC?

- "Based on the above responses, what are possible revisions to the policy, program, practice and/or decision under review?" may need to be updated to, "What are we going to do based on the analysis?" If it's a policy we don't have control over, maybe the action is that advocacy needs to be made.
- The questions look and sound good, but they may be too complex for what we are doing.
- We should have a small group translate them into practical, usable language.
- Would want to modify the questions over time, so the lens would be relevant and not stagnant.
- "What assumptions are we making?" was suggested by Alexis and may be useful to add into the questions.
- The right questions are there, but it feels like there are too many questions. Starting with two or three questions may be a better route.
- There may be questions that we can start with that may create early wins and address low-hanging fruit.
- Two questions that seem relevant to our current work, include: 1) "What groups experiencing disparities based on social identity are affected by this policy, program, practice and/or decision, and are they at the table?" 2) "Does the policy, program, practice, and/or decision ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences?"
- It would be beneficial if there was a one-pager to use in streamlining the process.

Alexis recommended creating an equity lens work group to refine the questions. Cynthia, Kendra, Shawn, Gillian, Juliet, and Abby volunteered to be part of the work group.

Updates / Partner Updates / Reflections

Gillian provided an update on the Preschool Promise Request for Application (RFA) process. During a public meeting, a panel reviewed RFAs, prioritized Preschool Promise applications, and provided their recommendations about grantees to Miriam Calderon, the Early Learning Systems Director of the Early Learning Division (ELD), for her final decisions. The ELD will be contracting directly with providers for the 2020-2021 school year. The Hubs are tasked with doing coordinated enrollment. We don't have guidelines yet, the original timeline estimated guidelines to be released in May and are now expected in mid-June. The sites the ELD has an intent to contract with are set to be released June 4. The ELD does not yet know what the current funding deficits mean for Preschool Promise. There is a minimum four percent general fund reduction, per year, expected going forward, and it could potentially be more. This is the deepest recession since 1939.

Heather shared that Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRRs), who will be providing technical assistance to Preschool Promise sites, have not yet received hiring information from the ELD. Currently, Care Connections and Education has an employee working closely with the sites, and another working on coordinating technical assistance between sites. They have been overseeing the Pre-K Network with our current sites for a couple of years. There has been an increase in early learning support staff going to college for Early Care and Education degrees and certifications. The CCRR is hosting webinars each Tuesday and also has a four-week summer class for behavior supports.

Shawn Lybarger - Head Starts are being told the same thing as the Hubs and CCRRs around funds. As Head Start is not involved in coordinated enrollment yet, they are currently enrolling students for next year. They are providing emergency care, but will be ending June 10 for school-aged children. In-person Early Head Start will begin operating under emergency child care starting June 15. Virtually-led Head Start classes are wrapping up June 10. Classes are already sixty percent full for next year.

Cory Ortega with the South-Central Early Learning Hub and Community UPLiFT is the lead Coordinated Enrollment Specialist and is keeping a Preschool Promise interest list for next year which includes the child's information and parent contact information. Once additional guidance is received from the ELD, Cory will call families who are on the list to gather interest and enrollment application details. The interest list does not guarantee a spot for next year, it only indicates interest in Preschool Promise.

Abby Drummond from DHS shared that she and Kathryn are point persons for COVID tracing in Douglas County. If anyone is diagnosed with COVID, Abby and Kathryn will provide information to the individual on how to maintain quarantine. Pandemic EBT will be provided to families receiving food benefits in an amount up to \$380 per child. If families are currently receiving SNAP benefits, Pandemic EBT funds will be received in June with the normal SNAP benefits. If a child is receiving free/reduced lunch or enrolled in a school that has all free/reduced lunches, and is not currently receiving benefits, families will receive an EBT card in the mail.

Juliet Rutter with HCCSO shared that there are diapers and wipes available for clients with a need for diapering supplies. Information can be found at <https://hccso.org/>.

Next Meeting Date: June 25, 2020 @ 10:00 am
