Capturing the Day...

A Child’s Well-Being...It Takes a Family

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Hilton Sacramento Arden West
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About CSDA:

The Child Support Directors Association (CSDA) was established in 2000 as a non-profit association to represent the local child support agencies of California’s 58 counties. CSDA’s mission is to educate, collaborate, and advocate in support of California’s families. As a coalition of experts, CSDA’s core purpose is to collaborate as a unified voice in an effort to transform the lives of children.

About the Symposium:

For the 2017 Children & Families Policy Symposium, CSDA sought to join together cross sections of various disciplines and invite them to share, advocate, and think about the world differently. During opening remarks, CSDA President Natalie Dillon noted that the 2017 Policy Symposium, although hosted by a child support directors association, was not solely a child support event. This notion was reflected throughout the day – both by the dynamic makeup of the attendees and the array of topics discussed. Nearly half of the Symposium attendees were from agencies outside of child support; these stakeholders included state and local government, social advocacy groups, non-profit organizations, child welfare and TANF-affiliated agencies, California State Legislature, and academia. All came together in an effort to reflect on this year’s theme, “A Child’s Well-Being…It Takes a Family,” and examine the core issues surrounding family self-sufficiency. Just some of the topics presented at the Symposium were the systemic causes of poverty, the family unit and family instability, the meaning of fatherhood, and the ways in which policies affect family health and safety.
About the “Capturing the Day…” Report:

The 2017 Policy Symposium was encapsulated by
Four Themes of the Day.
These four themes are presented as sections of the report,
highlighting the Symposium presenters and ideas that
advanced each theme:

Theme #1 - The Power of Visual Storytelling.............Pages 5-6

Filmmaker Emily Abt and community leader/author Kenneth Braswell
presented powerful imagery on the role of fathers.

Theme #2 - Research Into Action....................................Pages 7-8

Social science researchers Dr. Kathryn Edin and Dr. Marcella Wilson tackled
the challenges of poverty and family formation, and explored how service
delivery within organizations can meet those challenges.

Theme #3 - Policy: Child Support & Beyond...............Pages 9-10

Policy experts Dr. Olivia Golden and Assemblymember Tony Thurmond
discussed the threats to family health and safety, and highlighted
legislation that will promote family self-sufficiency.

Theme #4 - Collaborative Missions.........................Pages 11-15

Director of California Department of Child Support Services, Alisha Griffin,
shared perspective on partnerships and the future of the child support
program. PLUS:

• Excerpts from the panel discussions
• Stakeholder contributions
• The Top 12 Action Items from the day
CSDA not only wants to capture the day; the Association wants to capture the momentum of information sharing and collaboration! As a result, stakeholders will find this report in an interactive format – filled with links to all the great work highlighted at the 2017 Policy Symposium, so don’t forget to click on images and text within the report!

At the end of each section, check out the caption *Educate – Collaborate – Advocate* to learn more about how the work of CSDA intertwines with each theme.

Check out the TOP 12 ACTION ITEMS from the 2017 Symposium
Meet Our Moderators:

Dr. Sherri Heller, Director of Sacramento County Health and Human Services, served as Symposium moderator and “provocateur.” Dr. Heller led lively panel discussions with the distinguished presenters; the questions she posed during the panel discussions and her closing statements teased out the themes and action items presented in this report.

Dr. Steven J. Golightly, Director of Los Angeles County Child Support Services, moderated a Q&A discussion with Dr. Olivia Golden to share her insights on policy threats and opportunities at both the state and federal levels.
Ms. Abt also spoke about the experiences these fathers had during her two years of filming – battles with homelessness and incarceration, and rough encounters with the mental health and court systems. She shared that some of the fathers were taking on children that weren’t their own and struggling to keep their children out of foster care. Ms. Abt recounted how she witnessed both positive and negative interactions between her documentary subjects and social services agencies, as well as between the fathers and the criminal justice system. She disclosed that some of the interactions these men had with the court system were “brutal.” She felt that many working within the court system do care, but “the daily grind can take its toll,” and leaves many unsympathetic. Ms. Abt concluded by stating that her film could be used as an educational tool to improve the tone within client-centered agencies.
Kenneth Braswell provided context on fatherhood “from a man’s perspective,” and pleaded to view fathers more as an asset than a liability. Mr. Braswell argued that if a man does not perceive his own value, it may be easy for him to flee fatherhood, and that “the better man they are, the better father they will be.” He challenged organizations to establish a framework for how to be a man and father, and noted that programs addressing this challenge should take a “heart-centered approach.”

Mr. Braswell utilized the image of a pyramid to show how social services agencies often focus on the behaviors of their clients without taking into consideration the clients’ thought processes, and without going even deeper into how they feel. When programs focus on this lowest level of the pyramid, programs can begin to address emotions, morals, culture, and mental health, thus taking a more holistic and empathetic approach. Mr. Braswell also pointed out the shifting roles within the family, and subsequently within child support, in which many single dads are acting as the custodial parent. He encouraged programs to “pull fathers into the conversation,” and to develop trust with local judges so that those working within the court system can refer fathers to valuable program resources.

Collaborate – Educate – Advocate...county agencies continue to identify new and innovative ways to implement the child support program, including outreach using visual communication. CSDA has been inventive in its own right, utilizing visual storytelling to capture the work of child support professionals. One example is CSDA’s 2016 publication, The Face of Child Support.
Dr. Kathryn Edin presented both her qualitative and mix-method research, and shared her thought-provoking conclusion – “there are no single mothers, only unstable, complex families.” How this instability occurs, Edin stated, is that when two parents of a focal child break up a degree of complexity happens within the family unit, including new parental relationships and the introduction of half and step-siblings. Based on Edin’s quantitative research, she asserted that 80% of children are experiencing some sort of instability and complexity. This percentage can be calcified within the poverty spectrum, due to the manner in which childbearing occurs among social divides. Dr. Edin argued that those within the bottom one-third of the total economic spectrum mainly practice accidental childbearing that is ill-timed and occurs before the parental relationship is fully formed. Meanwhile, those within the top one-third economically mostly practice the notion of prepared parenting, characterized by highly-planned childbearing.

Dr. Edin also shared some qualitative research from her book, Doing the Best I Can, including questions posed to low-income fathers regarding their reaction to the news of having their first child. The sentiment among the men was captured in quotes like:

“‘I thought, ‘Aw, sweetie, I’m going to be a daddy.’ That was my feeling.... if I could [have] bottled it and keep it, I would have.”

In examining the quality of the responses, Dr. Edin concluded, “young men want to embrace fatherhood; it is a key source of identity for them.”

Dr. Kathryn Edin is a Sociologist and Bloomberg Distinguished Professor at Johns Hopkins University. Read Full Bio
Dr. Marcella Wilson is the President and Founder of Transition to Success (TTS), a standard of care to treat poverty which has been recognized as a Clinton Global Initiative. Learn more about Dr. Marcella Wilson and TTS

Dr. Wilson presented a contrast between the medical model of understanding and treating disease and the current model of treating poverty in America. Under the medical model, science and data drive specific standards of care. The model operates in a cyclical fashion where practices continue to be reevaluated against new research that is collected. On the other hand, the poverty model has no standards of care, just a myriad of self-navigation practices and treatments based on the preferences of individual practitioners and organizations. Dr. Wilson asserted that without any kind of comprehensive, uniform, and cross-industry practices the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) used under the medical model cannot be achieved under the poverty model, leading to a dead end for the treatment of poverty.

Dr. Wilson argued since poverty is recognized as a medical condition, noting that there is even a code for the condition of poverty used within healthcare, why shouldn’t we be treating poverty using a model similar to other medical conditions? Dr. Wilson then segued to how the Transition to Success model can standardize treatment of poverty over the industries of healthcare, social services, faith-based organizations, government, and education by creating cross-industry standards. The TTS model would give those affected by poverty a CARE (Coordinating All Resources Effectively) plan, and facilitate a research and data-driven approach to treatment.

Educate – Collaborate – Advocate…CSDA advocates for the use of social sciences research as a means to improve child support programs. Check out CSDA’s March 2017 Newsletter One Voice and to learn more about featured analytical projects.
Dr. Olivia Golden is the Executive Director for the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Learn More about Dr. Golden and CLASP

Dr. Olivia Golden participated in a discussion with moderator Dr. Steven J. Golightly; in it she outlined what she described as the three most significant threats to children and families in the current political climate. The first was the possible destruction of safety net programs such as the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid. Dr. Golden shared that, in her opinion, such legislative changes would not only be detrimental to families’ access to care and quality of care, but would also potentially destabilize families financially. The second threat, Dr. Golden stated, are policies surrounding immigration and the impact on immigrant families. She pointed out that possible parent deportation could lead to family stress and ultimately community stress. Lastly, policy changes that may affect the “health and safety of people of color,” was the third most significant threat Dr. Golden cited including criminal justice reforms, as well as limitations to mental health services and job programs.

Dr. Golightly then asked Dr. Golden a “child support-centric question,” regarding child support law and upcoming changes to provisions of the final rule. Dr. Golden shared some concerns and some suggestions:
1) States should examine the amount of time for calculating the incarceration credit.
2) States should question and evaluate what is the correct amount of child support to plead for.
3) New consideration for federal funding for employment services should be considered and not forgotten.

The lively session concluded with an overview of the Center for Law & Social Policy (CLASP), the legal advocacy organization where Dr. Golden now acts as Executive Director. CLASP is a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty organization that advocates for state and federal policies that reduce poverty.
Like filmmaker Emily Abt, Assemblymember Tony Thurmond shared that he also started his career in a social services program as a caseworker. In this position, Assemblymember Thurmond learned that many of the problems his clients faced were systemic, and could be attributed to issues such as lack of access to housing and education, drug addiction, and incarceration. It is the reason that many of the legislative bills he puts forth are focused on social issues, such as keeping kids in school and out of the prison system.

Furthermore, Assemblymember Thurmond took the opportunity to highlight bills passed by the Legislature as well as upcoming legislation. These bills included AB43, a bill to increase funding to education in an effort to decrease the prison population. Other bills included programs aimed at preventing incarceration, improving access to housing and higher education, reducing truancy and absenteeism, and increasing funding for preschool/early education.

To learn more about upcoming legislative bills, follow Assemblymember Tony Thurmond on Twitter
Collaborative Missions

Additionally, Director Griffin highlighted the idea of procedural justice. A concept first used in the legal system as a call for fairness within the justice process, Director Griffin interpreted this notion through the lens of client-centered services as a way to promote respect, understanding, and neutral decision making. Director Griffin concluded her presentation by providing a framework for the future of child support, which included strengthening new and old stakeholder partnerships, as well as creating more flexibility for clients within the child support system.

Explore more of Alisha Griffin’s presentation “Our Children, What’s Next?”
Collaborative Missions

Connecting Stakeholders:

The 2017 Policy Symposium featured the many contributions being made, not only by the presenters, but by other stakeholders across the country. Here are some of the programs highlighted at the Symposium - so attendees and beyond can connect:

- The Bronx Defenders
- Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix
- CalFresh/SNAP
- Transition to Success
- Fathers Incorporated
- First Five
- Dads Read
- TANF Block Grants
- Workforce Investment
- San Francisco Collaborative Courts
Dr. Sherri Heller: “We’ve heard many statements today prefaced with ‘this could be me...’, ‘this happened to a neighbor of mine...’, ‘this could be my family...’ how do we get the general public to adopt this kind of attitude?”

Dr. Golden: “It’s all about storytelling. You can see how it is being done in grassroots movements, in which storytelling is helping to more effectively deliver messages.”

Dr. Edin: “There is growing research that if you teach people respect and autonomy in their lives, they are more likely to give when they have ‘opted-in.’ An excellent example of this idea is the parenting time agreements that child support programs have implemented.”

Mr. Braswell: “The first point is pain cannot be a motivator. Secondly, researchers like Kathy (Edin) have done a great job of taking complex numbers and weaving them into a story that audiences can empathize with.”

Audience Question: “What are your thoughts on how drug and alcohol addictions are precipitating the family issues we see today?”

Dr. Golden: “We have no evidence that drug and alcohol abuse is linked to those in poverty over other groups. That being said, when it comes to overcoming addiction, we need to consider both the parent and the child when addressing the issue.”

Mr. Braswell: “We have to think about why people are sedating themselves...it’s a conversation we definitely need to start having in our society.”
Educate – Collaborate – Advocate...many outstanding ideas were shared at the 2017 Policy Symposium. At the conclusion of the Symposium, Dr. Sherri Heller summarized the 12 most poignant action items derived from the day.

Here are the Top 12 Action Items to consider for the upcoming year:

1) Promote the idea of **My Background - My Family - My Neighbor**.
   - Based on a question posed by Sherri Heller in the panel discussions, communicating the idea that some kind of social instability has touched us, or our family, or a neighbor can help the general public adopt a more empathetic viewpoint of poverty.

2) Create opportunities for current and future parents to learn parenting skills.
   - A reoccurring point made among the day’s speakers was that it is very difficult to be a good father when you have limited role models.

3) Incorporate visual storytelling.
   - Whether it be books or film, the Symposium was filled with powerful imagery that helped get the presenters’ messages across...how can organizations better utilize visual communication to deliver their messages to clients?

4) Prevent burnout in casework.
   - Both filmmaker Emily Abt and Assemblymember Tony Thurmond shared that their careers started in casework and were honest about the overwhelming challenges of the job.

5) Facilitate the goal of strengthening parental ties.
   - Strengthening of parental ties was urged by many of the presenters. Sherri Heller shared the idea of involving stakeholders from the family court systems at the next policy symposium.

6) Endorse fathers as an asset, not a liability.
   - A valuable point made by Kenneth Braswell, as he urged child support programs and other stakeholders to examine their views of the father role.

7) Learn about proposed legislation and how programs can guide clients.
   - Dr. Golden highlighted some possible pivotal changes to legislation and urged stakeholders to arm themselves with information for their clients.
Educate – Collaborate – Advocate... Top 12 Action Items to consider for the upcoming year…continued:

8) Understand shifting gender roles in the family unit.
   • Many presenters noted, in more and more instances, fathers are the custodial parent.

9) Practice choice framework, so that clients opt-in rather than feel forced.
   • An idea posed by Dr. Kathryn Edin during a panel discussion as an avenue for greater client engagement.

10) Encourage prepared parenting.
    • A concept brought forth by Dr. Kathryn Edin when she presented the societal benefits of highly planned childbearing.

11) Get familiar with procedural justice.
    • The idea of procedural justice was presented by DCSS Director Alisha Griffin when she pondered how client-centered programs can improve service delivery by being respectful, fair, and neutral.

12) Develop Collaborative Missions.
    • A term coined during the panel discussions; it is something that was practiced at the Symposium. Now, CSDA encourages stakeholders to continue the effort. Connect with each other. Think collectively. Develop Collaborative Missions!