

Notes from Judge's panel Shoulder to Shoulder

1. Audience definitions of emotional well-being:
 - a. Stability/structure
 - b. Feeling safe
 - c. Confidence
 - d. Overcoming trauma
 - e. Empowerment
 - f. Feeling like you belong
 - g. Safely express emotions
 - h. Predictability
 - i. Sense of family connection
 - j. Ability to trust
 - k. Feeling love
 - l. Sense of self
 - m. Hopefulness
 - n. Consistency
 - o. Self-respect
 - p. Supported
 - q. Not being defined by what you've gone through
 - r. Someone to care for
 - s. Belonging
2. What should the system provide?
 - a. Education
 - b. Understanding
 - c. Open mindedness
 - d. Compassion
 - e. Knowledge of the child (foster parent not given information like CASAs – need information as simple as “is giving a bath going to be traumatic to this child”?)
 - f. “If you get breast cancer you get a navigator to help you through the system, why don't our kids get this?” “Foster care doesn't have someone to steer it – there's no point person.”
 - g. Sometimes agencies are in competition with each other.
 - h. Psychological evaluations are “jumped to too quickly” as the tool for child assessment. It produces a diagnosis that defines the child in a limiting way. Need to be more trauma informed and broad minded about how we figure out who the kids are and who they can be.
 - i. “Need to look away from medication. Don't just look at the diagnoses on the psychological. What's behind the behaviors? Where are they in their trauma and its process? Their diagnosis is only giving a snapshot.”
 - j. “There's a lack of support for parents in the way of prevention” There are insufficient resources and supports to help parents address issues before removal.

- k. "DD is not invited to play in the sandbox. They have lots of services they can provide. Child welfare workers don't know DD services or the history DD may have had with the family. DD has special foster homes caseworkers could be using. Would like to see better collaboration with the DD side of the system. Kids are not in services, who qualify for DD services."
- l. "Need to know what the child's big picture is. They need to be empowered to talk about their parents and their foster care experience. You need to take time to listen and check in."
- m. Kids need to have a vote in the decisions that impact their lives. They need to be asked how they identify, what they want and need, who they love and don't love. Anyone asking needs to be sure to make time to listen and learn from the child. It's important to check in along the way. Anyone who is going to vote on behalf of the child needs to ask the child.
- n. "There's a lack of qualified counselors in the schools. They aren't adequately trauma focused. They end up putting bandages on behavioral problems. School counselors are available on "their" schedule (too limiting) Behavioral specialists should support more broadly, beyond the kids. Counselors focus on academics."
- o. "Need family resource people to help them through the system – those who have been through the system themselves to guide them, connect them with resources. Need parent support groups, involvement in peer partnerships and in the development of policy and practice. We need to come together regionally and work on policy
- p. Peer support for foster parents, teens
- q. "Foster parents and biological parents need to have joint training and communication. They can learn together, share information about what the child is working on, how they're doing – beyond the surface. We need to encourage more collaboration between the parents and foster parents."
- r. We need the "forever home" system – foster parents move into the home and if it disrupts the parents leave and the children stay in the home, not the other way around. Need in home parent trainers.
- s. Need permanency in a timely way. A child can be making good progress in care, then return to a poor situation. There is no transition. They return to chaos. There are too many court delays
- t. Lack of transition services
- u. Need to follow ICWA. It is often disregarded.
- v. "The number of placements and school moves has more of an impact on foster children than foster care itself. It impacts/hurts their self-esteem."
- w. CASA reports are not being accepted as evidence (Judge followed up with an explanation of when the rules of evidence apply)
- x. Everything takes too much time. The bench could help by setting specific time lines. Put timelines on things liked the home study, reports, referrals, etc. Hold DHS accountable for meeting them

- y. Have timelines for parents – no more extensions. Hold people to court orders, there's no consequences.
 - z. CPS workers stay with DHS an average of less than two years. This contributes to the lack of knowledge of services and interferes with the development of relationships and connections with other supports, etc. DHS needs constant training and updating for workers. A worker may be being trained by someone who has been there only 6 months. (Judge Hill followed by saying CPS are first responders and need respect. Saying they are on vacation, during transfers etc., doesn't cut it.)
 - aa. Lack of services and providers in rural areas.
3. Judge Hill said that Judges have to look at well-being. He asked how they do that and if cw are inquiring about that prior to court. Most said no.
- a. Foster parents and CASAs are not asked enough about how the child is doing, when they may be in the best position to know what's going on with a child. Invite foster parents to sit at counsel table.
 - b. It's hard for foster parents to know when court is and to feel heard and respected.
 - c. Child care is a barrier to FP going to court
 - d. The caseworker makes it sound like FP don't need to go to court
 - e. FP feel heard at CRB. Invite foster parents to the table
 - f. SNAC can do home studies. DHS is territorial.
 - g. Foster parents are recognized at CRB
 - h. Pressure from the bench can give them the oomph!
 - i. There is a breakdown for kids in multiple systems. There are challenges when DHS has custody of older kids who have behavioral issues. There is a push pull between OYA and DHS. There are lots of placement disruptions. (Judge Holmes Hehn said the judge is looking for the best fit for the kid)
 - j. A mother said she needed to make sure her kids were safe. She knows her kids better than anyone. A parent should be included in all meetings and decisions about their children. Parents view DHS not as a partner but rather as a barrier. She said having a Family Partner helped her.
 - k. The system is fear based – Parents are afraid to reach out for fear of being judged. Need to work harder to understand who parents are and why they are where they are. Need to create safe spaces to express authentically who they are and what they need to reach their goals. You need to know their culture
 - l. The bench needs to engage in more of a dialogue. Parents need to be listened to and heard even in their worse moments. Developing relationships with the judges and others in the procedural justice concept is important. Understand why the parent is doing what they are. Judges need to hear what they are saying, be authentic, and hear why they are doing what they are doing.
 - m. Sometimes when a judge asks a question I'll say I'll do whatever I need to get my kids back. Parents need to know they have a voice. Judge needs to know whether services are right for them.
 - n. Need to treat parents as a human and listen through a trauma informed lens

- o. Partnership/Collaboration
- p. Procedural justice – need to be heard and understood – need to respect and support
- q. You need to be for us with us and cheer us on. Praise positive steps even if they are small ones. Encouraging parents to feel that the work they are doing has meaning, gives them hope.
- r. In family court there is a relationship with the judge and the caseworker and I felt was heard
- s. Need to feel they have some power.
- t. Kids transitioning need connection with family and connection with foster parents
- u. Aging kinship providers are scared of the court and the system; they just want to stay under the radar. Important to support grandparents who are fostering or who have grandkids in the system. Expanding the Bridge Meadows concept – shared supported housing for kids and families.
- v. It's important for foster parents to support and maintain connections to bio family members, in part because they will need those connections after they leave/age out of care.
- w. Permanency is important but having a little extra time can be important too. The system should be flexible to give “that little bit of extra time” to do what they need to do.
- x. Staying in the same school
- y. Thanked judges for respect
- z. Attorneys schedules delaying permanency
- aa. Some parents don't know how, need to be respected, reduce intimidation and fear
- bb. Thanks for listening.