



Prevention Mindset Institute: *Embracing Prevention Across Systems*

Three Key Ingredients to Building Communities of Support and Well-Being

The PMI 3-2-1 newsletter shares three ideas, two quotes, and one question to ponder. This issue focuses on advancing our efforts to Build Communities of Well-Being and Support. We thank Alex Morales, Child Welfare League of America, Board Member; Retired CEO of Children's Bureau of Southern California; founding spark to the Magnolia Community Initiative in Los Angeles, for editing this fall 2023 issue.

FRIENDS and our PMI partners rotate editing each edition. The format, 3-2-1, is based on James Clear's newsletter that shares ideas related to developing effective habits, drawing from his book, Atomic Habits.

We are in a wonderful and much needed era of awareness after the 60+ year journey since the Battered Child Syndrome was identified by David Kempt, M.D. in the 1960's. Kempt's call shocked society into the recognition and commitment to intervene to protect children from child abuse within their own family. Today we are aware of the value of a child abuse surveillance system, and we are also aware of some significant limitations of that system. Now we are boldly moving forward to build communities of support and well-being versus communities of surveillance across our country that can be present BEFORE a child and family encounter our formal public child welfare system. Here are three important ideas that need to be front and center in our efforts.



Three Ideas:

Idea #1

Recognize, stimulate, and harness natural helping community systems as the cornerstone for building communities of support and well-being. Family, relatives, friends, neighbors, caring co-workers, faith community, parent and adult groups, teachers, recreational activities, family daycare providers, after school activities, school-parent groups, community activities, parent and neighborhood associations, and the high trust local community organizations where neighbors come for information, support and collective action are just some wonderful examples. Natural helping systems are where the powerful regenerative wellness forces of supportive relationships are unleashed. Public services are important, but they can never substitute for a lack of natural helping community activities, systems, and organizations. We must make sure that our building of public and community services and community pathways does not overlook the first essential task of stimulating and supporting the building block of natural helping community systems. Engage and fund trusted community organizations with neighborhood voices to lead the way in building and stimulating these vital natural helping systems.

Idea #2

Invest in concrete and economic supports as an essential and impactful strategy for the primary and secondary prevention of neglect. We now know that most child maltreatment reports are due to child neglect rather than abuse. Our efforts to build supportive communities must intentionally include targeted strategies to address child neglect. Research is pointing to the dynamic of poverty as a significant contributor to the problem of neglect as well as its exacerbation. Communities of support must incorporate the targeted strategy of concrete and financial support in their model design. This includes increasing availability of public benefits in their state; assessing family's financial needs, helping families navigate access to public benefits and services they need and are entitled to, and providing flexible funds for families to address economic crisis events.

Idea #3

Reduce stigma & build trust in the community. To build communities of support, we must take on the transformational challenge of developing activities and services that families know about and are attracted to versus coerced into. The strength of the family's attraction is directly proportional to the building of trust in the community with the organizations that offer support, as well as the degree that stigma is minimized. Families will be attracted to participate and work to improve their own community/neighborhood at the rate that people feel a sense of belonging in their community. Harnessing the community organizations that have high trust in the community is an effective way to increase family participation. And we must acknowledge that there is a high degree of stigma in our society related to people who are economically poor. Our society often judges economically poor people as lazy, undeserving of help, and causing their own plight (addiction, mental health, poverty, substance abuse, joblessness, homelessness, etc.) Furthermore, people who experience discrimination based on who they are adds a significant trust barrier and stigma. Strategies for building trust and reducing stigma need to be specifically addressed in the partnerships we bring together and in our planning designs for communities of support.



Quotes:

"I went there seeking help from those who worked there. But ultimately it was the women beside me who gave me the strength, emotional support, and resources to make it through that experience."

~ Experience at a women's shelter. Jennifer De Rosa; *I'm a Single Mom: Changing the Stigma*, April 10, 2022, fargomom.com

"Our policy framework in child welfare has never taken on the support of family economic needs, and there really is a new opportunity for a policy framework that is nuanced and that tackles the reasons why families are coming to our attention."

~Weiner, D. A., Anderson, C., & Thomas, K. (2021). *System transformation to support child and family well-being: The central role of economic and concrete supports*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Retrieved 11.20.23: <https://www.chapinhall.org/research/economic-supports-child-welfare/>



One Question:

Imagine you are sent to an alternate universe where there are NO MANDATED CHILD NEGLECT REPORTING LAWS. You are asked how to create community solutions to prevent child neglect, and to strengthen family and community support and well-being. What would it look like?