



Radical Strategies for Creating Parent Partnerships

Radical parent engagement, in my opinion, is when two complete strangers work together to parent a child for the betterment of the child. The adults learn from one another, encourage each other, and they parent the child(ren) in question together.

My name is Melissa and I had a case with the Department of Child Safety. Taylor was in care for several years. The thing that made my Taylor's time in care easier on her was that she had a great caregiver, finally. I say finally because with the first caregiver, I had no idea who she was or what she was like with my child. Taylor's second caregiver was considered family and had never had any children of her own, so she did not know how kids, especially a three-year-old was going to behave. Her third and final caregiver was Laura. I did not know much about her at first and that was ok but I was still unsure if I could trust her or not. I did not know who she was when she came to court and I did not speak to her because I was shy. What makes her different is that without hesitation she brought Taylor to see me when I was in inpatient substance abuse treatment. She drove once a week from Avondale, AZ to central Phoenix. Although we still did not talk much and I still did not know much about her, I could tell that Taylor was being well-cared for. Eventually, I gave her my phone number and she would call me once a week so that I could talk to Taylor. Laura not only took in Taylor once, she did it twice, without hesitation; and even today, she would take Taylor if it needed to happen.

Prior to Taylor coming home, Laura invited Taylor's dad and myself to her home. She welcomed us as if we were part of her family. I can't say that there was no tension or nervousness because there was, and it was expected. Laura gave me her phone number before Taylor came home and said if I ever needed anything to call, which I did. Whenever I had problems getting Taylor to bed or just doing a simple request like picking up her toys, and she would throw



Melissa and Taylor Zimmerman

a fit, I called. At first, I was scared because I was not sure how Laura would react, but she answered. Then, I would explain to her what was going on to her and in turn she would talk to Taylor. I don't know if I would have ever gotten through those first couple of months without Laura. I am so thankful for her. Our first Thanksgiving after Taylor came home was at Laura's home. It was unexpected but worth it. Again, she treated us as family. Today, Laura and I are friends. We show Taylor that we will continue to work together for her. Taylor will spend time at Laura's home on her school breaks and during the summer and we attend the birthdays of each other's children.

Taylor is an only child, so with Laura being in her life, she also has two brothers. Children do better when there are many caring adults in their lives. Since I have no family out here, having Laura as part of our family, gives Taylor many more people to love and care for her.

I had never heard of any caregiver doing these things while my child was in care. In the line of work that I'm in now, I encourage parents that I work with to share their phone numbers when possible, so they can make that connection and work together for the

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Radical Family Engagement

Our functional mission at ACF's Office of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is to act as a catalyst to create collective impact and support the early learning and care of our nation's children and their families. One of the critical ingredients for creating collective impact and improving outcomes for young children and their families is something that ECD has focused on in the last few months - Radical Family Engagement. We know it is important to do more than just say parents are partners - we have to listen to parents and involve them from the beginning. The CBCAP community, through their partnership with parent leaders, has been successful in thinking about different ways to engage families to prevent child maltreatment, and ensure that parents are at the center of decision making, program planning and evaluation, which is needed to move the work forward. Parent leadership is also included in the CBCAP Program Instruction and CBCAP authorizing legislation.

Many CBCAP leads work with lo-

cal Head Start programs, who have been successful because of how they work with families - they embrace families and bring them into the process every step of the way. More information about how Head Start can help guide the conversation on family engagement can be found in an article that was released last month titled "What Head Start Can Teach Us About Engaging Families" (Read the full article here - <https://www.pageturnpro.com/AASA/98036-January-2021/sdefault.html#page/40>).

In October, 2020, ECD hosted a series of conversations with over 1,000 key cross-sector partners to bring new insights for how radical family engagement could change the landscape of education and early childhood systems, starting in the early years. ECD used the definition for radical, "as a change or action; relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough." The event was designed to get people to think differently about family engagement - what is truly work-

ing and what is not. There was an emphasis to think "outside the box" when it comes to engaging families and including them in the work for which they are the direct recipients.

Throughout the 5-day event we wanted to:

- Explore what parents want
- Explore what schools think
- Bring our federal partners together
- Look at philanthropy
- Bring all of these different cross-sector partners together to see what we can do better together.

The event focused on how to engage with families authentically in schools and other child and family systems. Some ideas included:

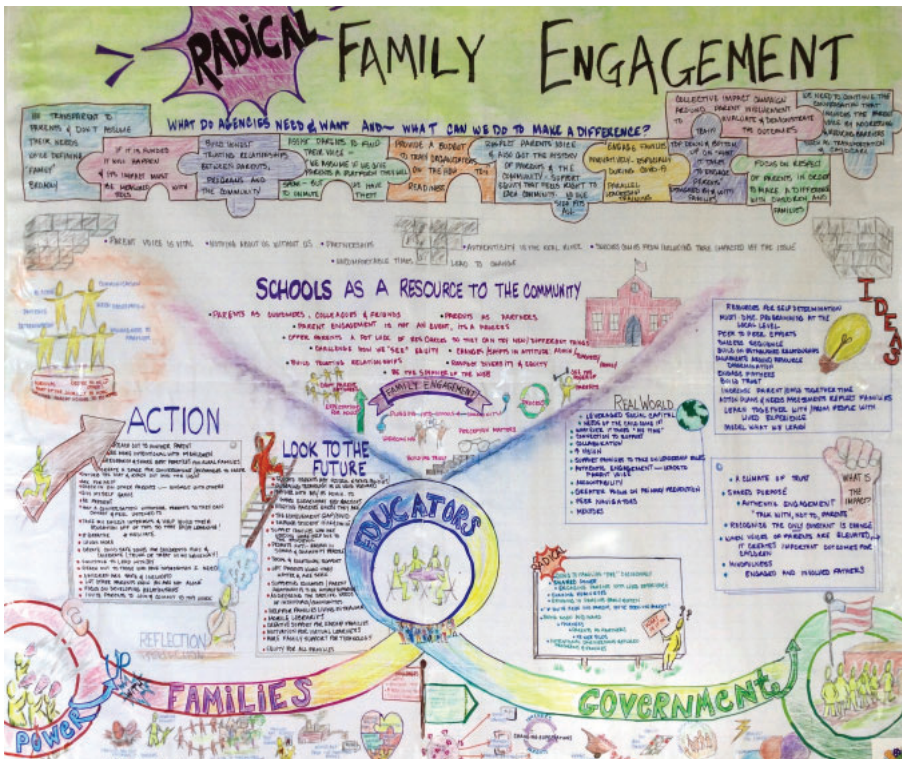
- Ask families if systems/services/programs are working for them and listen to the answers; if the answer is no, find out why
- Be self-reflective and evaluate barriers within your own organization
- Utilize the individual and institutional networks of parents to bring in new and diverse voices
- Train staff, parents, and community members on how to partner together
- Actively build the capacity of parents and families by providing leadership training, skill-development, access to resources, and support in navigating different systems

ECD has compiled a summary of the event, which is available to view and download [here](#). MaryJo Caruso attended each day of the event and created a graphic to represent the discussions from each day (see picture). As parent leaders, we know you will continue to inspire the important conversation of radical family engagement.

by Rosie Gomez,

Senior Program Specialist

Office of Early Childhood Development Administration for Children and Families U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Graphic Recording of Radical Family Engagement Event



Ronee: A Native American Woman's Story

American Indian disparities are shaped by social inequality, historical trauma, and discrimination. Most American Indians live in chronic poverty, with limited access to health care, adequate housing, quality education and adequate law enforcement services. (Paradies, Yin, 2016)

In relationship to indigenous peoples, colonial practices are closely intertwined with racism. These include ecological damage; displacement; (un)intentional transmission of disease; forced labor; removal of children; violence; massacres; the banning of indigenous languages; the regulation of movement and marriage; assimilation; and the suppression of social, cultural and spiritual practices. (Paradies, 2016)

Ronee's Story

Ronee Martin was born June 15, 1988 in Ronan, MT on the Confederate Salish & Kootenai Reservation. Ronee's mother is from the Chipewa Cree Tribe and her birth father is from the Kootenai tribe.

Both of Ronee's parents grew up in foster care on the reservation from an early age. Her father was constantly in and out of tribal jail and had served prison time before she was even born. When Ronee was 8-months old, her mother married a wonderful man who lovingly helped raise her. They lived in poverty because of a lack of good paying jobs on the reservation. At age 8, Ronee started to help provide for her family by chopping wood, cooking, and cleaning. At the age of 13, Ronee started using and selling marijuana that she had stolen, to make money. "There were no good paying jobs and there were no taxes taken out of drug money, so that is what I did for a while," recalled Ronee.

Ronee is the fourth oldest of 9 children. Five of the siblings, including Ronee have either served or are currently serving prison sentences. Their sentences and offenses range from 3 year to 30 years for assault to drug-related crimes. Ronee's brother Jacob, died at the age of 21 due to either suicide or murder. Ronee's family does not believe that Jacob committed suicide but was murdered. Three of Ronee's siblings did graduate from high school.

When Ronee was nine years old she was sent to live with her Auntie because she knew that when she was there, her Auntie would not be beaten by her husband. Ronee's Auntie died at age 42, from alcohol-

ism, when Ronee was 16 years old. Ronee believes that her family has always blamed her for her Auntie's death because she was supposed to take care of her. Within months of her Auntie's death, Ronee's beloved stepfather also died.

This is when Ronee's life takes a drastic turn. Ronee dropped out of school in the 11th grade. She started partying all the time and began using street drugs. This destructive behavior continued for five years until she realized that she was pregnant with her meth dealer/boyfriend's baby. Ronee was physically and emotionally abused throughout their entire relationship. When Ronee's daughter was six months old, the father was sentenced to 40 years in prison for vehicular homicide. Ronee said, "The day that he went to jail was the happiest day of my life."

A couple of years later Ronee met Angelo with whom she had three babies. She also bought her first home, worked for the tribe, and stayed clean. While working for the tribe, they would continuously lose Federal funding and she would have to try to find another job that would pay a decent wage. Here again is where Ronee started using and selling drugs, eventually ending up in the prison system.

When Ronee was sent to prison, she finally received the resources and treatment that she so desperately needed her entire life. She went through drug rehab, earned her HiSet [high school equivalency], started smudging (which is a process of cleansing and purifying of the soul) and began going to church.

Ronee's story could have been



Ronee Martin

so different if she'd had access to resources such as mental health counseling, home visiting, pregnancy classes, drug treatment, steady employment, battered woman resources, and many more. Ronee said, "If I weren't Native American, I would still have a chance to get my children back after prison. If I had received a lawyer, resources, and help, I think things would have turned out differently for me. Everybody let me down, I let myself down. All I need is just one more chance and I will do whatever it takes to get my babies back home with me."

With the resources Ronee now has in place, there is nothing standing in her way of achieving her goals and living her life to the fullest.

by Heather Stenson, FRIENDS PAC member

Paradies, Yin 2016. Colonisation, racism and indigenous health, *Journal of population research*, vol.33, no. 1, pp. 83-96, doi: 10.1007/s12546-016-9159-y.

CAPTA reserves 1 percent of the CBCAP appropriation for Tribes, Tribal organizations, and migrant programs. For more information on a current funding opportunity announcement, please go [here](#). For more information on opportunities for state CBCAP programs to partner with diverse groups, such as Tribes, please go [here](#).

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Radical Strategies

betterment of the child(ren) who are placed with them. Hopefully, after the case is closed, the child and the caregiver where the child was placed can still have a relationship. The connection between the adults is more for the child than the adults, but if you become friends like Laura and I have, it is then better for everyone.

by Melissa Zimmerman
FRIENDS PAC member



From A Clueless New Father to a National Parent Leader: How Inequities Fueled Passion for Change

It is no secret that there are barriers that fathers face when gender expectations fuel inequities in providing parental support to single fathers. In an interview with Anthony Queen, of Kent County, Michigan, light was shed on this barrier through his eyes.

From a clueless new dad to a national parent leader, Anthony shared how parent engagement has changed his life tremendously. Anthony was faced with so many challenges, not knowing that he would become a single father just 30 days after the birth of his son. He only had one cousin, who was a nurse, that he could turn to with parenting issues he was facing. He had no knowledge of any local programs he could have tapped into for parenting tips. Anthony was still determined to “soak in knowledge” no matter what he faced as a single father.

One day, as he attended a routine wellness checkup for his son, Anthony was approached by one of the nurses in the office. She started off by telling him that he had a very “inviting laugh.” Then she went on to share information about their home visiting program. Anthony was very apprehensive about “people coming into his home” but he knew that he could use the extra help, being a new father and all. He decided to say “yes” and started to learn all he could about parenting.

Two nurses were involved in the home visits. One of the nurses was for his son and the other nurse was a healthcare social worker with whom he was able to share any parenting issues. After rapport was built, Anthony was asked if he ever considered becoming a parent representative. Not knowing what his role would be, Anthony was enticed by the stipend that would help bring in extra income, so he agreed to an interview. The social worker set up an interview with Family Futures in Kent County, Michigan. Anthony

did not realize that as an African American single father, he would have a profound impact on the structure of their fatherhood programs.

Anthony took pride in his role as a parent leader. He was asked for his input during committee meetings as well as his outlook on how to retain and recruit fathers, especially African American fathers in local neighborhoods. Using this platform, Anthony was able to share the barriers and challenges most single fathers face, especially when it comes to the accessibility of parenting programs. He was able to share that in his experience, most advertisements exclude fathers in pictures, which deters fathers from engaging in programs.

As Anthony attended committee meetings, he realized that his voice made a difference in the way programs were being structured and that his voice was valued, partly because often he would be in a room of about 35 women and 3 men, who were all program staff.

Not being intimidated as “just a parent,” Anthony took his role to bigger heights. He was later asked to become the Parent Representative for First Steps of Kent County, Michigan, and to use his voice on the state level. While serving as the state of Michigan’s Parent Representative, Anthony was approached about an opportunity to apply for a Parent Liaison position with First Steps’ Great Start Program. Anthony turned this opportunity down several times because he was concerned that his voice might be stifled. As demands for Anthony to speak throughout Michigan grew, he took a leap of faith and quit his job to grow as a Parent Representative and decided to take the position as Parent Liaison. Little did he know that he would be approached to do national work as a parent leader. Anthony now travels



Anthony and his son

nationally as a parent consultant. He uses his voice, on behalf of fathers, by helping community agencies to better understand racial and gender disparities in literature and pictures, as well as in advertisements in at-risk neighborhoods. Anthony is extremely passionate about helping other fathers conquer challenges he faced, such as, “fathers not being included and only being put in one category.” He is adamant about helping agencies to understand that all fathers are not the same and the same effort to appeal to mothers needs to be put in practice to appeal to fathers.

While serving on the FRIENDS’ Parent Advisory Council, Anthony now realizes that making sure fathers are included is not just a local problem for Kent County, but a nationwide problem that has been ingrained. Anthony is now using his platform to bridge the gap with those fathers who might not have access to the wealth of knowledge he has obtained. He has devoted himself to going into at-risk neighborhoods to share information with fathers about the different opportunities

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Sharing Is Caring

We teach our children that sharing is caring. Sharing is caring because it is relational. It forms a connection. Sharing roots trust in the manner it is given. Wholehearted sharing creates vibrant relationships.

Wholehearted represents the ability to give and receive equally. This should sound familiar; it is a true statement. People can be in wholehearted relationships in everything we do in life. Agencies can too, by giving to and receiving from families.

Agency-giving is usually a significant part of the mission. There are grants, service contracts, scholarships, endowments, stipends and concrete needs. Agency-receiving is most commonly donors who are often spotlighted and celebrated. However, the agency mission is not to give to donors. Agencies give to communities.

Receiving community perspective focuses investments. Community perspective minimizes waste of funding and time. Community perspective transitions power when agencies recognize the need for help in creating services to meet families where families are. Families deserve to share in the responsibility; it builds strengths and resiliency.

Parent and community engagement clears the path and sustains the progress. Parent and community leaders have engaged with an ill-designed system and found the experience to be valuable enough to cultivate it, to care for and improve it as necessary.

With intentionally directed, wholehearted sharing, agencies can help

themselves in achieving service objectives and communities can grow and support strong families.

Authentic parent and community engagement work is happening. Casey Family Programs began its work 55 years ago. Established by Jim Casey, the founder of the United Parcel Service, building hope for children, families and communities has long been the mission at Casey Family Programs. Casey Family Programs partners with the Children's Trust Fund Alliance (the Alliance). The Alliance focuses on prevention and one area within this work is network-building with parents with lived experience. I am a member of the Birth Parent National Network (the BPNN).

BPNN member Tiffany Csonka recently wrote about her engagement with the social services system in Broward County, FL. "Those experiences led me to greater advocacy opportunities where I now support systemic change. I can say that hearing child welfare system professionals actively try to fix and engage problems that I went through personally gives me hope." The advocacy and support of parent leaders can provide resources, guidance, and encouragement to agency representatives. The hope necessary for parents to successfully engage and navigate the system can be shared authentically by parent leaders.

As a component of the commitments of the Alliance and Casey Family Programs, parent leaders are identifiable and accessible. My connection with the BPNN and the agencies that support it led to

my involvement with the Administration for Children and Families, Office on Early Childhood Education Department (ACF/ECD) and Radical Family Engagement Week (RFEW). Engagement of parents and communities ensures the awesome humanity of work in human services stays visible. Through inclusion of parent leaders in RFEW planning and production, agency representatives got an opportunity to connect the urgency for transformation with a human, not only data points. Opportunities to professionally include parent and community voice increases validation for the agencies and the voices.

2020 has taught that change is necessary, it is doable and can be done with urgency. Sharing is caring. We teach it to our children. It is not a radical nor transformative idea. To create necessary and lasting change, the value of parent and community experience must factor into every practice and policy. Sharing is caring. *We teach it to our children. Let's be good stewards and role models.*

by Tecoria Jones
Parent Leader from Columbia, SC

Csonka, Tiffany: "Amplifying Parent Voices in the Child Welfare System is Essential to Family Well-Being" <https://familyvoicesunited.medium.com/amplifying-parent-voices-in-the-child-welfare-system-is-essential-to-family-well-being-303d17a21200>

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From A Clueless New Father to a National Parent Leader

and programs that are available to them locally. He also continues to share information with local agencies about how to attract and keep minority fathers, staff, and families engaged. Who would have ever thought that Anthony's "yes", as a new clueless father, would offer him an amazing journey as an advocate for all fathers?

by Vadonna Williams
FRIENDS PAC Member



Welcome New PAC Members!

The FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is excited to welcome three new members as a result of the annual nomination process.

Elizabeth Reddick (Washington, DC) is a military veteran, mother of five and Disability Rights Advocate. She is the Youth Work Group Leader of the Family and Youth Committee of the DC Coordinating Council of School Behavioral Health, where she focuses on amplifying youth voices. As a member of DC's Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council, Ms. Reddick strives to hold agencies responsible for providing equitable systems of care while creating inclusive and safe spaces. She is also a Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) Ward 7 Parent

Leaders in Education (PLE) Board Member. Ms. Reddick is trained in trauma informed care and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). As a Peer Support person she believes in sharing lived experiences, reducing stigma and fostering an environment where self-care includes mental and behavioral health resources.

Eileen Graham (GA) is a native of Rochester, NY and currently lives in GA. She is the proud parent of three children and 2 grandsons. Ms. Graham is a fearless leader but she enjoys working in roles and that involve team building and collaboration. She is a mentor, friend, and servant leader. Ms. Graham volunteers as a council member on the Georgia Parent Advisory Council. Advisor and member with ROC

(Rochester, NY) Coalition for Public Education, an honorary member with NYSAPE (New York State Allies for Public Education). She values spending time and making memories with family and friends. Eileen believes in the power of leadership and collaboration and have made a lifetime commitment to utilizing her strengths to effectively lead and bring about change.

Muzhgan Fakhri (CA) is from Afghanistan and came to USA in 2016 with her family. She is the mother of three children and an attorney. In Afghanistan, Ms. Fakhri was a fellow in an organization that supports female victims of domestic violence and an attorney and activist for women's rights and a legal advisor of the Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) in Justice Sector Support Program (JSSP). It is mentionable that cooperating with the U.S. government in a traditional society like Afghanistan to ensure women's rights was not free of threats. Ms. Fakhri experienced people's negative perceptions regarding women who work outside of the home come to know that they are working with foreign governments. Ms. Fakhri and her family came to the USA as refugees where she served as a translator for Afghan women refugees and earned her license to be a home daycare provider. She became a Family Hui Leader and created her first Afghan women family hui group in San Diego.

Elizabeth, Eileen and Muzhgan join nine parent leaders from around the country who currently serve on the FRIENDS PAC. To learn more about the FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council and the members visit: <https://friendsnrc.org/parent-leadership/parent-advisory-council/>



FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council members (from l to r, front row): Bruce Bynum, Melissa Zimmerman, Raven Sigure, Marcela Henao, Joanne Hodgeman, Vadonna Williams, Jessica Diel, Heather Stenson (from l to r, back row) Valerie Lebanion, Anthony Queen, and Fatima Gonzalez-Galindo.

About the PAC

FRIENDS has established a Parent Advisory Council to provide useful overall program direction and guidance to the activities of the National Center. Committee members share their experience and expertise in child abuse prevention and family strengthening through their active participation in FRIENDS workgroups and the annual Grantee's meeting, development/review of FRIENDS written materials, and by providing resource center staff with consultation and advice.

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Visit www.friendsnrc.org
for more information
and resources on
parent leadership.

