

Building and Sustaining Quality Systems: Cultivating Excellence in Early Head Start

Track D – Management and Professional Development 17th Annual Virtual Birth to Three Institute

Angie Godfrey: Hello. I'm Angie Godfrey, Infant and Toddler Program Specialist at the Office of Head Start.

Jennifer Boss: And I'm Jennifer Boss, Director of the Early Head Start National Resource Center. Welcome to week four of our virtual Birth to Three Institute. Before we dive into the content for this week, let's briefly review what happened in Track C last week. For me, the sessions in Track C reinforced the important work that we do with infants and toddlers and our families, and how our relationships with families are truly the core of the services we provide.

Angie: Absolutely, Jennifer. And I learned so much from each training event. First, last week's plenary presentation provided great insight into how adverse childhood experiences can have a negative impact on children in later life. It also taught us that there are effective strategies we can implement during the first years of life that can offset any potential adverse impacts.

In short, Early Head Start can, and does, make a difference. The motivational interviewing webinar provided perspectives on interviewing that can support our daily interactions with families, and support us in fully engaging families with their child, the Early Head Start program, and the community.

And finally, the webinar Partnering with Families Who Are coping with Adversity made such a good point about the importance of honoring and celebrating families small achievements at all times, but particularly during times of adversity. Even the smallest achievements can be celebrated and lead to sustained success.

Jennifer: this week is Track D, Management and Professional Development. I expect this track to be just as engaging as last week's. We'll begin, as we have each week, with a plenary presentation. This week's plenary, Building and Sustaining Quality Systems in Early Head Start, is presented by Dr. Jerlean Daniel.

Jerlean is the Executive Director of the National Association for the Education of Young Children – NAEYC – the nation's largest organization of early childhood educational professionals working with and on behalf of children ages birth through 8.

The webcast will focus on quality systems and services that reflect the needs of individual children, families, and communities, and ensure that the Head Start Program Performance Standards are met and exceeded. As with other plenary presentations we have featured as part of this year's vBTT, the format for this webcast will be a 30- to 40-minute address by Dr. Daniel, followed by a 30-minute panel

discussion with respondents. Then, you're invited to join us for a live Question and Answer audio call with Dr. Daniel.

The call-in number for the Q&A will be given at the end of this webcast, so be sure to take notes while you watch, and jot down any questions you may have.

Angie: Then, we'll have three webinars for you, also focused on management and professional development. The first webinar is, Invest in People: The Use of Coaching in Professional Development and Continuous Learning. This webinar will be presented by Nancy Seibel and Dathan Rush, both of whom have a wealth of experience in coaching and professional development, and are published authors on this important topic.

Nancy's experience includes mental health counseling, home visiting, directing and supervising child maltreatment prevention programs, and senior nonprofit management. Nancy is also a widely respected trainer on the topic of reflective supervision.

Dathan is the Associate Director of the Family, Infant and Preschool program, or FIP, in Morgantown, North Carolina. In 2010 FIP was recognized as one of the top 10 early childhood organizations in the nation, and designated as a National Center of Excellence in early childhood.

Jennifer: The second webinar, Interviewing Strategies to Hire Relationship-Ready Staff, will provide strategies for interviewing job applicants and tools to help identify candidates who are more likely to start the job relationship ready. This webinar will be presented by Redmond Reams and Blair Johnson. Redmond has consulted with Head Start and Early Head Start programs to develop systems to support the hiring of relationship-ready staff. He's presented on this topic at various national conferences.

Blair is the Early Head Start Director for Southern Oregon Child and Family Council. From 2002 to 2004, she coordinated the Pathways to Prevention Infant Mental Health Grant, which included focus on hiring attachment-ready staff. This week's third webinar, Growing Programs, Growing People: Reflective Leadership in Early Head Start will explain the core practices, processes, and traits of being a successful leader. This webinar will be presented by Lee Turney and Ellen Farrar.

Lee, is the Youth and Early Childhood Development Director at the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in Northern Minnesota. He has worked in the early childhood field for the past 19 years, including serving as a Head Start Director.

Ellen is the Early Childhood Program Executive Director at the Westchester Community Opportunity Program in Westchester County, New York. Certified as a New York State teacher, Ellen has reviewed both Head Start and Early Head Start grants, as well as other innovative Federal grants for the past 25 years.

Angie: We hope you enjoy the rich content presented this week in Track D and that you join us again next week for the final installment of vBTT, which will feature a parent plenary as a conclusion to this exciting virtual institute. Now let's hear from Dr. Daniel.

Dr. Jerlean Daniel: Hello. I'm Jerlean Daniel, and the purpose of our conversation today is talk – to talk about cultivating and sustaining excellence in Early Head Start programs. I'm pleased to be here with you today. You may not know it, but I served some 18 years administering, early childhood programs, primarily child care. And some of those programs included infants and toddlers. And I have to tell you that being an administrator of an early childhood program is really a difficult job.

There are so many balls to keep in the air, so many systems to manage and manage well. And I think administrators of Early Head Start programs really have a – a heavy responsibility in terms of managing so many elements of a program. So, today we're going to talk about how to cultivate excellence and maintain it. How to build it, keep it, and sustain a high quality delivery system. Let's start by acknowledging one thing. There are no short cuts.

There's no easy way to do this. It's done day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, and most importantly, relationship by relationship. As the administrator, you have responsibility for all those complex relationships and helping everyone involved be the best that they can be.

This means that we've got to be highly intentional. There's lots of talk about teachers being intentional about their work. I would proffer that as an administrator, the same is true of your role. You have to be highly intentional.

The notion of cultivating excellence reminds me of Gwen Morgan from Wheelock, who many years ago, in talking about a child care delivery system, said that it was like a 3-legged stool. And the three legs she used were: accessibility, you had to have enough of it all over the country for parents to use. It needed to be affordable so that working parents could manage the payments for child care. And the third leg of the stool was quality. That is, what was accessible and what was affordable needed to be of the highest quality.

And we know of course, that for young children and particularly low-income children, high-quality early childhood education allows those children to soar, to better become who they are, to be able to express themselves, and to learn at their peak. I like to say to be at the top of their game. Well, if we keep with that stool metaphor and think about cultivating excellence, I'd like to suggest to you that perhaps the – our stool, overall, the whole composite of the stool, is really a system of program components.

Early Head Start is a comprehensive delivery system, and so our stool is a comprehensive delivery system. We have to be able to recognize that system as our stool in order to gather all of the right pieces to put in the room, to assemble so that we can put our stool together.

So, my suggestion to you is, that our 3-legged stool for Early Head Start is, first of all, a seat. The seat of that stool, the foundation if you will, that's the individuals that – that we're working with, those staff and parents and families and children.

That seat represents the relationships, all of the relationships. Our three legs, these places where we have to be highly intentional, one leg is that we have to have clearly defined standards. In Head Start and Early Head Start, you do have clearly defined standards. You have the Performance Standards and depending upon what states you're in, you also have Early Learning Standards.

Now, in most states with Early Learning Standards, they tend to focus primarily on children 3 to 5, but there are some states with Early Learning Standards for infants and toddlers. And in those – in those instances, the way you know that those clearly defined standards are really good or not, is whether they're developmental. When you look at those standards, do you recognize the developmental progression of young children from birth through 5?

Can you see real children in those standards across their developmental areas? So, do you see how they develop in terms of their social and emotional, learning? Can you see their language acquisition and literacy? Can you see those early elements of math development and so forth? So, we're – we're looking at – looking for clearly defined standards that are in and of themselves of high-quality because they are developmental in nature.

The second leg of our stool is planning. Before you even open the door, you have to have a plan. And throughout the – the operation of the program, planning has to take place. And in that cycle of planning, you plan, you implement, and you move to the third leg of our stool, which is to assess or evaluate, how did that plan turn out? Because you know, there are often unintended consequences, some for the good and some for ill, that you need to fix. And so, we have now a 3-legged stool with relationships at its heart or base.

That's the sturdy place where we're all going to – to rest if you will. And the 3 legs of clearly defined standards, planning, and evaluation. The Performance Standards – the Head Start Performance Standard 1304.51, is specifically about management systems.

It offers a clear recognition that there must be a dynamic and cohesive management system. It is here that intentionality is highlighted. The standard does not ask or suggest planning. No, it demands planning from the outset through implementation, it demands planning. The requirement for continuous improvement completes the planning cycle with continuous re-evaluation. As I've indicated the best-laid plan sometimes can run amuck.

Sometimes our plans need to be tweaked when we evaluate what's happened, and sometimes we just need to start over. Embedded in this continuous cycle of improvement is where programs find and sustain high quality across a set of comprehensive services, such as health and nutrition, education,

family engagement, transportation, and so on. So, again, intentionality is seen in the planning, the implementing, and the re-evaluating.

When we talk about cultivating excellence, the notion of relationships are very high-value in Early Head Start programs, and I dare say, in early childhood programs in general. In terms of relationships, what is key here, is that we operate from a – from a strength-based perspective.

Now, what does that mean? It means that we look for people's strengths, whether we're talking about children or families, or staff, we look to see what are those individuals strongest points. We don't start looking for deficits, looking for oh, that child's never going to make it for X, Y or Z reason. Or, oh, that parent, or, oh, that staff member, but rather to look to see: who is this person? Who is this other person or set of people who care about children?

How can we work together to pool our strengths to make for the best program possible? And so relationships always – I'd like you to translate that, or put some adjectives before it that say, it must be strength-based. You are required to do a community assessment in Early Head Start and Head Start in general.

This is really, really important. Because the programs that are designed, really need to build on the communities' needs. To build on those community perspectives, the values that those communities hold high. You know, there is no one set of values for everybody in the world. Our values are colored by our cultural perspectives, are colored by our life experiences.

And if a community looks at an Early Head Start program in its midst, and cannot find or relate to any of the values that are there, they can't find any of their own values, and can't relate to the values that are there, if there's no bridge, then that is not a program that is of high enough quality for that community. I'd like that to sink in a minute, because often we, as professionals, think sometimes, that there is only one brand of quality and it's in a textbook or in a research study.

In reality, quality is a very tenuous thing, and it is tenuous because it so depends on who's being served and how – how the service that's being provided is meeting the needs of the people being served.

There is a woman in – in Minneapolis, I believe, a program that, – it wasn't an Early Head Start program or Head Start program, these were researchers, I believe, who took the Early Learning Standards for the state of Minnesota, and they went out to various, racial and ethnic communities. And they said to them, here are the Early Learning Standards for our state.

Tell us, how do these jive with your culture, with your values? What would these elements look like in your culture? And my understanding was that these focus groups were very lively groups, because they sat and they looked at each element in the Early Learning Standards and they were able to describe how they would know from their cultural perspective, from their value system, whether the child, had attained that benchmark.

That's really important information that those of us who have run, and do run programs, need to know in order to be sure that we are truly meeting the needs in a high-quality way of any given community, and then of course, families live within communities.

And now you've got another whole set of values potentially, because passed through generations are various interpretations of culture and value systems, that each family, lives on a day-to-day basis. And so, there again, is another set of relationships that we must, cultivate if you will.

There are the children, the children for whom families and whole communities have large dreams and want so much for them, so much for their achievement. And so in the end, the programs we design, run, and sustain, must have a design that is relationship-ready.

I think you're going to hear in some future webinars that notion of – of relationship-ready, but I would – I would define it for now as the element of being open to hearing from and incorporating the ideas of the communities and families you serve. And clearly Head Start and Early Head Start, because you're required to do a community assessment in the first place, and because you specifically have people who engage families throughout the life of the program.

You are in a place to continually work on being relationship-ready. Well, if we're going to talk about being relationship-ready, I would like to suggest to you five principles of family-centered early childhood programming that I think will leave you in good stead in terms of being relationship ready. A family-centered early childhood program is one in which both the programs and the families have knowledge and expertise, that is, both the professionals and the families have something to contribute to this enterprise that is Early Head Start. Each has an area of expertise. Each has a place of strength to come from to contribute to a child's growth and development.

A place of strength to come from to contribute to the running of the program. We often talk in early childhood education about reciprocal relationships, and reciprocal relationships are relationships built on trust, built on respect, open and free-flowing back and forth kinds of communication.

And that's another trait of a family-centered early care and education program. That the communication is a two-way form for communication. Now, in some ways, that's one of those concepts that people say, well, of course it's two-way. I talk, she talks, I talk, he talks, that's two-way, isn't it? Well, but let's pause a moment. Have you ever heard the term, sometimes people "talk at" each other? If they're talking at each other, then that's not two-way communication.

Each one is having their own one-way communication. But if you've got genuine two-way communication, that – that means there's not only talking, but there's listening. There's a back and forth that absorbs, responds to, thinks about an exchange of ideas. So, in a two-way conversation, the threads kind of begin to blend together into a woven piece that make for a whole cloth, a true conversation about whatever the issues may be.

One of the things that – that we, who communicate regularly with an array of people, have to remember is that – is that not only do people pay attention to what we say, but they pay attention to the nonverbal communication, and that too has cultural implications. And so, that's a place where you could get information from communities and from families. What's important in your culture in terms of the nonverbal communication?

How do you have a two-way flow of conversation? One way to do that is to ask some open-ended questions, not to presume. So, if one asks, for example, "What time does your child go to bed?" That can be read that you must be looking for a certain answer and that can be off-putting, as general and innocent as that sounds.

How about instead, as you're gathering information about families so that you can better serve them, how about a question like, "Tell me about how the flow of your day goes and how does – how does – how does coming to the program and – and dealing with dinner and bedtime, how does that work for you guys, because I know every family has different routines?" Now, it's a bit more open-end. Now, there's room for a parent to give you their particular set of answers.

A third element of family-centered early childhood programs is that the power and decision making are shared. That is, parents and the program staff share in the important decisions. I remember back in the day when – when I was in grade school, the only time, for example grade school, I actually did attend an early childhood program, but I don't remember it right now. But in grade school, I remember, we only saw our parents in the classroom when they were bringing brownies and candy for whatever the party was.

We've evolved as a culture and as an early childhood community, to know the value of having parents involved in much more significant ways. And so there are some really important decisions that have to be made in the running of a program, in the intentional planning of a program, and the intentional assessing as to how things went – how they're working. And I'm proud to say that in Early Head Start and Head Start, you have built in that component.

You have the parent policy council, and you have numerous ways for families and parents to be involved in some of the key decisions that have to be made. And one of the things that happens in Head Start programs is – is takes it beyond where most people go and that is, some people will involve families and communities in the conversation and then turn around do what they want to do, ignoring what the families have said.

In your programs, one of the high points that you have is that, and it's a point of – of – of true quality, is that not only do you listen, but there are times, plenty of times, that you can clearly see that parents had a hand in the decision that was made.

I want to go back a minute at this point to the notion of strength space, because you know, whether it's staff or families or just individuals in general, people have a – have very different ways of expressing themselves, and sometimes, and particularly when – when folks are agitated, it's hard to see through to their good intentions. Does that make sense?

Hard to see through to a good intentions. Particularly if they're angry or disappointed, and think about yourself and how do you respond when you're angry or disappointed? It's – people have to cut through a lot of that anger and disappointment to try to find that nugget of the good impulse behind the point you're trying to make.

I think it happens to all of us. In a family-centered program that operates in a strength-based way, we have to be – I will call it overly intentional, how's that's for a word? We have to really work hard at seeing through to that nugget of good intention in what all of us are trying to express to each other. It's a heavy dose of patience and it is operating from a strength-based perspective.

The fourth element of a family-centered early education program, is one in which diversity is acknowledged and actively respected – acknowledged and actively respected. Now, that's a phrase that, you know, when you talk about respecting diversity, in some ways, it's a phrase that almost become a throw away because we can all recite it so, in almost in rote fashion.

But let me read you an example of two different ways of talking about respecting diversity and – and see if you can hear the difference in the two. This is from a book, – called Parents as Partners, by, Janice Keyser. And I think, if you – at the – at the end of this presentation there are some, resources and references, and – and this book is listed.

So, what's important when you're talking about respecting diversity is, what's the tone? What – what does a respectful tone look and sound like? So, here's one statement about diversity. And this is a statement that a program could write or say to a parent, a set of families.

"We welcome all families regardless of race, religion, cultural heritage, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status or different ability." Okay. That sounds as though they intend to respect, right? But here's another statement around the same kinds of things and see if this doesn't set the tone just a little better, sound a little less matter-of-fact, a little less like, this is a statement we have to stamp on the bottom of all – all of our documents.

This one says: "We welcome all families and know that the inclusion of families from many different ethnicities, religions, cultures, sexual orientations, abilities, political affiliations, and family structures will each enrich our program."

So, this is more than saying, we know you're here, we're going to tolerate you, which is kind of what the first one sounded like. The second one says, we're so glad you're here. We not only want you here, but we're looking forward to you enriching our program. We're looking forward to learning something from

you. That's going back to that very first principle which says that families and programs have areas of expertise that can raise the level of the program's operation.

The fifth principle I'd like to share with you about family-centered early childhood programs, says that together families and programs create networks of support. And what that means is, if we are all genuinely open to the expertise each brings, and if we truly have two-way communication and a reciprocal – engaging kind of relationship, then at varying times whenever it's needed, we're going to make the kind of connections that offer everyone involved, in one form or another, some support.

So, let me give you an example. And sometimes those networks of support are not – they're not official. So, here's my example. When I was running a child care program with the University of Pittsburgh, we cared, for instance, toddlers and preschoolers. It was very hard often for the parents, but particularly the mothers of infants, to leave their children with us that very first time or two.

Even though these were people who planned ahead and they visited any number of programs, and they had made a conscious choice to use our services. There was something about that very first day of leaving the infant even though they visited often. When that mother went out of that door and closed it, she often burst into tears.

Well, easily one of the professional staff could go up to her and comfort her, and certainly they did when they saw that happen. But you know what the most meaningful support was? The most meaningful network, an informal one, was when another parent, whether mother or father, came up to that – that – that mom, put their arm around her and said, "I know it's really hard. It's going to be okay." And kind of talked her through it, talked her down the hall or helped her peep into the room a little later on to see that her baby was really doing quite well.

There are all kinds of networks of support that we work together to – to –to establish, that helps make this program a strong one. Well, now I'd like you to look at a graphic that is a graphic really of a – of a family-centered program. And on one side of the graphic, it talks about program resources and on another side of the graphic, it talks about family resources. It's a way of codifying the expertise that each set of individuals brings to this endeavor. And so on a parent side, the family side, it says that the families communicate knowledge about their communities, their families, with the teachers/caregivers.

They can reinforce the learning and create new learning environments at home. They can volunteer and participate in governance in early childhood programs. So, they bring some expertise to the enterprise. The program, on the other hand, can provide a welcome safe environment. They can interact with the community.

They make home visits, they intentionally are sure that there are two-way communications going on. They're happy to share the decision making and they offer opportunities for parents to enhance their skills, whether it's job related or – or related to their interactions with their children, and so on.

This particular graphic comes from a paper written by, Linda Halgunseth and some of her associates and it is entitled, Family Engagement: Diverse Families and Early Childhood Education Programs. It's a lit review, that I think you will find, helpful, and it's – it's available, as I say, you'll – you can find it, in the resources in – at the end of this presentation.

When families and – and programs work together in using the principles of – of family-centered, early childhood programming, such as Early Head Start is in a position to offer, now you have the possibility of a vibrant community, a vibrant program, where there is intentional planning.

Where relationships are the center and where the Head Start Performance Standards serve to bolster the framework that provides opportunities for the highest level of services for children, families, and communities. Thank you, so much.

Terra Bonds Clark: Good afternoon. I'm Terra Bonds Clark, Director of Special Initiatives at the Early Head Start National Resource Center. Thank you for joining us for today's webcast. We just heard an enlightening and informative presentation from Dr. Daniel about building and sustaining quality systems in Early Head Start. This presentation focused on the importance of quality systems and services that reflect the needs of individual children, families, and communities, and ensure that the Head Start Program Performance Standards are not only met, but exceeded.

Now, it's my great pleasure to welcome three panelists who are here to share their reflections on this presentation. First, we have Larissa Zoot, Federal Head Start Specialist in the Quality Assurance Division at the Office of Head Start.

Next, we have Stacy Dimino, Co-Project Director of the Office of Head Start's National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations. And last but not least, we have Margaret Mascarenaz, the Early Head Start Director at the Division of Early Childhood Center in the Pueblo of Laguna, New Mexico.

I want to start us off by recalling some of Dr. Daniel's key points. First, she emphasized the need for programs to be highly intentional in their work with children and families. She discussed the 3-legged stool metaphor, where the seat of the stool is relationships, and the three legs of the stool are made up of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, planning, and ongoing monitoring.

She also highlighted the importance of family-centered practice, a model of practice that recognizes that both programs and families have knowledge and expertise. It's one that fosters open communication and shared decision-making, and that acknowledges and actively respects the diversity of the families within the program. We know that Early Head Start and Head Start programs strive to welcome all families into the program, and to reinforce that they are their child's first and most important teachers.

Program staff also seek to engage families in meaningful ways to support the healthy growth and development of their child. So, how do programs accomplish this? As Dr. Daniel reminded us, they do it

through relationships. Because as we all know so well, relationships truly are at the heart of everything we do in Early Head Start and Head Start.

By building and maintaining strong relationships with babies, with families, with each other, and with community partners, caregivers and programs are better able to do the important work entrusted to them. Relationships are essential to having strong management systems in place so that programs can fully implement the Head Start Pro – Program Performance Standards.

Because, as we know from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation project, implementing the Head Start Program Performance Standards early and fully is important for maximizing positive program impacts on children and families. As we reflect on what Dr. Daniel said and how it relates to day-to-day program operations, I'd like to ask the panel, what exactly do we mean by the term, "management systems?" Larissa, would you like to start us off?

Larissa Zoot: Sure, Terra, thank you, you know, I find that it can be hard to define management systems in a formal way and have people really understand what you mean and what to do about them. So, what I like to, is I break it down a little bit into some of the component pieces. And so first what I would say, is that all of the management systems really are about a couple of things.

They're about gathering information, they're about sharing information, and they're about applying that information in a way that enhances the program. They – it can be really hard to define, but another way that I break it down is to think about the component parts in terms of – a system's basically made up of – there are mechanisms.

There are mechanisms in place for how you gather or share that information. For example, you might have checklists, policies and procedures, protocols for doing different things. The next element would be that the roles and responsibilities within that system are clearly defined.

Everyone knows what they're responsible for in terms of the gathering, the community – communicating the different elements. The third thing is the analysis. You've gathered the information and you actually look at it to understand what it means, how it applies to your program, how you might use it.

And then the fourth step, which I think is really the most crucial, is the action. What you do with that information. Without the action piece that brings it together, you really don't have a functioning system.

Terra: All right. Absolutely.

Stacey Dimino: Good. So I – I thought it might help us, to think about how this gets operationalized. How we actually see it happen in programs. So, if we think about what Dr. Daniel said in that family-centered practice and that relational focus that we really want to have happen in our programs for our – for the babies and – and parents that we serve and families, we think about how we welcome them into our

program, and how Early Head Start has a respectful culturally sensitive and – and empathetic way of starting out the families, engaging in that two-way conversation that we heard Dr. Daniel speak of.

So, that beginning important relationship in walking through the systems, and then eventually, hoping that through those systems you're creating not just a beginning relationship but a beginning partnership of really that voice of parents and families, and what they have – what their hopes are for their children.

So, we could think about the – the, ten management systems and we have a – a constellation web that puts the children and family outcomes in the center, and really has the systems supporting that – that goal that we have for children and families.

And I thought if we thought about that welcoming goal, we could think about HR and how Human Resources, the system, helps support that. And that would like, you know, how do we want that first impression to happen in the family, when the parent comes through the door?

You know, what does that mean? How does that feel? How does the staff prepare for that? What is the orientation that we're giving to staff? Who are you looking to hire? Should it reflect our community and the – and the languages and the cultures of our community and that local knowledge that I think Margaret's going to speak of.

And then, how do our facilities look? Do our facilities give us space enough for parents to come together and support each other as Dr. Daniel spoke of when a parent is saying goodbye to their child for the first time and turning them over to us? So, how does that space let that happen? and that is being intentional with our space, and then communication which is vital. How do we communicate to our parents? How do they want us to? And what ways really work for our families?

And so I thought those three systems, if you really break them down and look at what – what the elements that Larissa talked about in terms of policies, procedures, and then action, would really help to think about that. And then I think we should focus on the three management systems that are ensuring that we are doing what we said we're going to do.

We have these policies and procedures, but we're actually implementing them and checking on them. And I would say that those systems are: ongoing monitoring, self-assessment, and planning, because that's how we can be intentional. Does that make sense, Margaret?

Margaret Mascarenaz: That makes a lot of sense, and I think for our level and our local programs that we just really look at those and – and they mean – ongoing monitoring means something different to anybody. Programs – all have lots of staff in place, but it also involves families.

How does that look? What's the focus for – for our programs? Are they, you know, are we really focusing on children and families, and if we are, you know, how do we – you know, focus can be for our

health coordinator, can be about health records and for our R.C. Coordinator, you know, can we get the – the families in? What is – what are the point system?

So, we all got to focus, but if you really look at it as a whole, it's all about children and families and just doing the best for them. So – so, monitoring can be in – inclusive for people, but it's actually overall. And we really in – you know, look at that in – in the local level, because we include, as you said, the culture, you know?

We include families. We include the community. Our community partners are vital in any community, so – so we want to make sure when we talk about those systems that we – all those people are – are part of the planning, a part of the monitoring, a part of, just utilizing, you know, how we – how we put our systems together. So, I just want to make sure that we know at the local level just, really – the more you include families, the more you can be partners, the richer your program will be.

Stacey: And I would say that – how connected the systems are, you know? They're very... And so when you really think about that, that if you just look at something in one isolated place, you might not be able to strengthen it as you would if you looked at the entire s – the ten systems and see how what we want to do is strengthen through the system.

Yes, it's over – it's overlapping and – and kind of a layering – you – you have them – they're all interconnecting in their rights, so I like that.

Larissa: I appreciate what you said, Margaret, about how different people see them different ways, because I think staff can tend of focus on their systems and what's their part. And it – it brings me back to, acting as a team leader for monitoring reviews in trying to help programs prepare for how they could communicate with a team about what their systems are and in a way that – which really easy for them to understand and feel comfortable with.

I would talk to them about just telling their stories and that whatever content area or whatever part of the program they were responsible for, if they could talk to us about something that they noticed, maybe about how something was fun – functioning in a part of their program, and they could describe to us, what were the actions you took or the mechanisms that you use that helped you to notice that this thing was happening?

And, you know, maybe it wasn't quite the way that you thought it was or the way you wanted it to be, and so, how did you discover that and then what did you about it? How did you look at that information? And tell us about what did you do in the short-term in order to address it right away to ensure that services were as you intended them to be and the interactions with families and children, and then also, how did you take that information and think about it in a long-term way?

What might you need to change in a systematic way to ensure that if this was something that was a concern, that it didn't keep cropping up in your program, but that you address something in the short-

term and also for the long-term? And I – I found that it really made people feel a lot more comfortable and helped them to understand that systems piece to say, you know, if you can just tell that kind of story about whatever your content is, then you're articulating that you have functioning systems in your program. Absolutely.

Stacy: Yeah. Great. And I – absolutely. So, I think that in addition to the stories, and maybe it's explicit in the fact that we're saying that we're going to have policies and procedures as part of systems, but I really want to emphasize the idea that – that something that we think works well, we need to have in writing, and we need to be really – really, clear with our staff of what their roles and responsibilities are within those.

Because we have seen before, unfortunately, that sometimes someone who's really good at their job has left, and all of a sudden that's not happening anymore, and people are surprised because that – it all stayed with that one person. And so when you have systems, something like that won't happen.

It – it really is integral to the program and how the program runs. And so, you know, I – it's writing but also practice and discussion, you know? Like how – how do we make sure staff know?

Margaret: That's right. I the – I – I really agree with you Stacy, that we really – the systems really have to ensure that any new people know what's happening. And if you sustain that in – in your program, that you not only develop people – we always call it "grow your own." Because within a system you just kind of "grow your own." But, you know, and have people comfortable and – and respect that they're going to be in a place – but you'd really want it – work that as a – as cohesive management within your systems because you really do want people that understand and care for their job to be the leaders.

Not everybody stays there forever and so, yes, and so I believe that that – that just really makes – make your system sustainable.

Terra: Thank you, all, for those thoughts about management systems. As some of you just mentioned, programs often have to deal with a lot of change. Unexpected events can occur with families or programs may experience changes in staffing or changes within the community they serve, and as Dr. Daniel said during her presentation, planning is one of the three essential components of the Early Head Start program, one of the legs of the stool.

So, I'd like to talk for a little bit about how programs can use planning, program systems, and processes to cultivate and sustain quality program services. What exactly is involved in the planning cycle and how can programs plan for change? Stacy?

Stacy: Thanks, Terra. Okay. So, we have, at the National Center for Program Management and Fiscal Operations, have a planning cycle that is a Head Start planning cycle that we're very proud of. Because it shows visually how you can walk through the planning cycle, and how your program can actually start its self-assessment where you're really saying, you know, what do we do well? where – celebrate our

successes, but also be able to have that critical eye on challenges and then recommendations of what should happen next.

And then enter that planning cycle along with the community assessment that Dr. Daniel spoke of and making sure that we are, meeting the needs of community, and the changes in community, and bring those two big resources, rich data sources into the planning and say, okay, now that we know that, we know about our community and we know about our program strengths and our program areas of growth, what can we accomplish?

And we start to identify there our goals, our short-term goals, our long-term goals, and then those objectives that make them "SMART," you know? That – that make them more specific and measurable and attainable. So, then we follow the planning cycle to that – then develop the plan of action, right? Where then we say, okay, when we want to do this, we're going to put money to that, we're going to have intentionality and focus and – and make sure our staff understand what those goals are, and then we're going to implement.

And those are the service plans that really start to take the goals and make them happen within the services of Early Head Start. And then we go into this inner circle, which I think we really want to spend some time on, I think, all of us, is just that's where we see that our best laid plans sometimes, you know, don't materialize. And we need to be able to take a breath and look back and say, okay, you know, what happened there? How – you know, how can we fix it and how can we just not just put, you know, just fix it in the short-term, but fix it in the long-term?

And then that long-term fix, you might go through that inner circle multiple times, and that's the nature of it, and then we move up and we go back to self-assessment and we say, okay, let's bring that to a longer term fix. And I just think for – for us in terms of understanding planning for our staff and for our families that it's a natural part of life, planning. And then, often times, families need some help in planning.

I know I had the – the, really wonderful experience of working with families that experienced homelessness, and that those families often times were not successful in planning or had in – inability to plan. And so when we talked about planning with those families, there was real anxiousness and the feeling like, I can't do this. And, and I think this graphic shows that all of us have setbacks, and that setbacks are part of planning, but that setbacks are an opportunity to think about it in a different way or try something different. And so I think this is an opportunity for us to use with our and staff and with our families.

Margaret: And I can give an example for that, and thank you for the graphic, because I think that kind of centers us not really realizing that we did all those steps. But a very quick example of, you know, in our program we had a – a – some needs around dentals that we had to relook at – relook at and refocus. So, as we just stepped back and that's really a good word, step back, you might have to stop and kind of start reflecting.

So, as we looking we're ref – refocusing and the lens was getting bigger, we included a lot more people. And I think for your systems you need to include a lot more people sometimes, because if you're focus is one thing, it's almost that throw a pebble in the water and the – and the ripple effect. We brought a lot more people in.

As we brought more people in, a lot of our different staff, our family support staff, our – our health coordinator, the teachers, the family visitors, we noticed that our – our system for getting our dentals in just grew and flourished because everybody was involved, but we had to stop and reflect on that. We had to say, this isn't working, let's do something different, but everybody involved, and so we just brought everybody in.

So – you know, that is just a very quick example of sometimes you do have to stop and reflect and then you just kind of – that process almost starts over. This didn't work the way we wanted, let's reshift. And it's okay to reshift a lot of times, but we noticed and now – and now we're at a place so we saw with our lens – with a different lens, wow, this is what's happening. And guess what? It really worked.

But we were able to give up that and get out of our saddles, I guess so to speak, and just bring everybody in. And everybody with a rich conversation was able to to help us out. So, just a really quick example of how that really works.

And I really appreciate the visual, because that's what we did without realizing it and give ourselves credit, But – but that can really happen.

Larissa: I think that's – it just makes me think one of the things I think is so magical about what happens in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

You're talking about, you know, the more that people come into whatever the effort is through relationships, things just really sort of blossom in ways that you don't even expect. So, you end up addressing something or achieving an outcome that you're looking at, but then also these other things tend to happen.

Terra: Thank you, guys. So thank you, for sharing your reflections on planning with us. I'm sure our audience appreciates some of the very helpful concrete examples you've provided. Now, I'd like to turn our conversation to the topic of ongoing assessment and monitoring.

How can programs identify and correct things that perhaps aren't working within their management systems, and just as importantly, how can they maintain and replicate systems that are the highest quality? Larissa, I would like for you to take a stab at this one first.

Larissa: Sure. And I'll just point out, I think, you know, we brought a graphic with us that was about how systems function, sort of like cogs in a machine. But we talk about how, you know, all of them have to

work in concert and really, if one stops working the others can kind of get stuck. And so it's – it's important to think about systems and the ongoing monitoring and being aware of everything that's happening at once. Nothing is really static.

I like to say that the only thing that is really constant in Head Start programs is change. And yet we know, Dr. Daniel's message about cultivating and sustaining excellence, one of the things that we know contributes to excellence is that continuity is really important for children and for families and for nurturing the kinds of outcomes we want, including school readiness for the kids.

And, so it's important to be really aware, for a whole, you know, management team, for everybody in a program to realize that nothing is static. That we have to really be able to adapt to change and to see what's coming.

And the best way for us to be able to do that, is that you really have to be constantly scanning the environment, looking at all the different systems. If you have information and awareness about what's working and what's not working, then you can make change and keep up with those shifts in the environment.

The other thing is that, you know, we have multiple systems. It's a huge task for folks in programs to manage everything at once. Head Start has a lot of expectations and there's a lot of areas we focus on, and you have to be really careful that when something needs some enhanced focus, that you don't let other things fall through the cracks.

You have to be able to sort of monitor all those different things at once. And that's where having those quality systems is really crucial, because then you have, if you have those mechanisms that we talked about, and people know what their roles and responsibilities are, then you've always got that analysis and action happening on an ongoing basis and it helps ensure that while one thing really comes to the surface, something else isn't falling apart.

Terra: Right. Absolutely.

Margaret: Be ever vigilant I think is it.

Stacy: That's right. Not sitting on your laurels or – or just, yeah, thinking that you – everything's fine. Right? There's always change. Yeah.

Terra: Absolutely. Did you want to add anything to that? I think Larissa stated it so beautifully. What more can we say on that?

Stacy: And I would just say, in terms of having programs really think of what – what is their focus, because we can't do it all. We know we can't do it all. But there is, you know, as you described Margaret, you really are tackling the dentals because is this what your family and your communities

need and so you have that specific focus. And when people have that focus, it sounds like everyone's rallying, right?

It's – it's coming out of their silos, it rallying around it, they're really going to get it done. And parents might feel that too. Do you think they might feel that?

Margaret: I really think so. I think the focus is – is about the parents, is about the children in the community. So, I think, you know, as – as we're talking about that, that we keep that – you know, kept that in mind. That the really – the end for all of this hard work and rewarding work is that healthy families, healthy babies within a healthy community. And so – and partnerships within the community.

So, I think, you know, with me that's – resonates, but with – I think the team. And we call ourselves a team now because we really came together. People were able to shine and, and come forward. So, we're – we're real excited about that.

Stacy: That's great. So, what I hear is that there is new energy, right? There's excitement about goals, and then you're really putting your time and effort where you say it matters and I think that's really important for programs to think about.

Terra: And I think there are op – learning opportunities that lie there at every step, like you talked about. If there's a challenge that then becomes a learning opportunity to then say, well what was working well over here, how did we implement these systems to support these things over here. But something may have felt – fallen through the cracks at whatever point. So, what was good about what we've been doing. How can we apply it over here and how can we maintain that consistency across the board?

And I think that's really important as we think about adaptability to change and things that we have to maintain in terms of quality in our programs. So, thank you, all three, this has all been very helpful, I think for programs.

Before we end our discussion, I'd like to revisit a few of the key points, made today. First, it's important to remember that program leaders are responsible for building and sustaining management systems that support high-quality comprehensive services. This can sometimes be challenging, but is extremely important and rewarding work, especially when we keep in mind that everything we do in our programs is designed to lead to the best possible outcomes for the children and families we serve.

Strong systems, such as ongoing monitoring and a continuous cycle of planning, policies, and procedures, create a framework that allows program staff to fully understand the values, goals, and results the program is striving to achieve. And of course, we can't forget that relationships are the basis for all we can accomplish in our programs.

It's also important to remember just how critical it is for programs to be learning organizations. Organizations that encourage an interconnected way of thinking, help staff assess their program by looking at the whole and the various components, and offer a safe environment for reflection, new ideas, and adaptability to change.

Programs also must remember the importance of valuing staff, nurturing the caregivers, so that they can in turn nurture the children and families. And it is so important for program leaders and staff to accept the reality that no one can do this extremely challenging and demanding work alone. Program administrators must ensure that there are well-constructed systems in place so that staff members never feel that they are working in isolation or that they don't have the support they need.

And finally, we need to remember that systems are ultimately about children and families. As Dr. Daniel explained, high quality programs are ones that emphasize two-way communication and shared power and decision making. They celebrate and honor diverse backgrounds and perspectives and create rich networks of support.

All of these things, when done with careful planning and intentionality, cultivate the families' natural strengths and build on them so that they can nurture their children and help guide them on a path to success.

As we conclude, I want to thank Larissa, Stacy, and Margaret for being here with me in the studio today. And I also want to thank all of you for joining us for today's plenary webcast. As a reminder, the live audio call question and answer session with Dr. Daniel is about to begin.

If you have a question for Dr. Daniel, you can access the call internationally by dialing 719-325-4861. In the United States, you can call toll free at 888-287-5534. For both numbers, the participant passcode is 469603. The audio for the question and answer session will be broadcast right here.

So, if you don't have a question yourself but want to hear what others have to say, you can simply stay right here and listen in. I hope you've enjoyed today's discussion as much as I have, and that you have your questions ready for Dr. Daniel. Thank you, and we look forward to seeing you again next week for our final sessions of virtual Birth to Three.

Terra: Good afternoon and welcome to the virtual Birth to Three Institute live question and answer session with Dr. Daniel for her presentation, "Building and Sustaining Quality Systems, Cultivating Excellence in Early Head Start."

I'm Terra Bonds Clark. While we're waiting for our first caller, I'd like to thank Dr. Daniel for that wonderful presentation and for joining us for this live question and answer session. I would also like to thank our panelists who have joined us on the phone today. We have with us Larissa Zoot from the Office of Head Start and Stacy Dimino from the National Center for Program Management and Fiscal Operations.

Dr. Daniel, they – I'm sorry, operator do we have our first call yet?

Operator: Yes. we do have a caller on the line. If you could state your first name and the state you're calling from.

Ed: Hello, this is Ed from Virginia. I've never been really clear how cultural implications impact systems planning. To me, I mean, systems were always just systems. Can you give some, you know, additional context around culture and how systems are impacted by culture?

Dr Daniel: Well perhaps the best way to explain this might be to go to another field all together. And if you think about hospitals and women going to hospitals to give birth, one of the things that the hospital industry realized several years ago was that different cultures had different birthing traditions. And so, they – many hospitals have moved from the rather sterile delivery room where, you know, in some places, dad would be lucky to get in and other places he would not be in there.

To real – what they've given way to, in many places, is what they call "birthing rooms" where, dependent upon a family's traditions, several family members are in the room and encouraging the mom and are all part of that process. That's something that hospitals, which certainly thought that delivery was delivery, came to learn as they served a greater variety of people, people with diverse values and – yes – and traditions.

Terra: All right, thank you, Dr. Daniel. Would either of our panelists like to add to that – add to the response?

Larissa: Yes, actually, this is Larissa and I would love to add a couple of pieces of perspective. Some examples that come to mind right away is that we really need to think about all the different systems in terms of, as Dr. Daniel talked about, how do they work for the family and what is acceptable and accessible.

So, for example, and when we talk about communication systems, we have a variety of options available to us for communicating with families. And depending on culture, some might be more or less receptive to face-to-face conversation versus receiving phone calls, versus there are some areas where folks might really be tuned into email and other social media and applications and things like that.

So figuring out what works best in any community and doing our best to meet families where they are in terms of what works for them.

Another I would talk about is – sometimes just what we call things. I remember being on review in Puerto Rico and someone explaining to me that it can be very threatening to talk about a Policy Council or a board or a junta. But that if you called the group something that is a little less official sounding, more like a parent group, even though in Head Start we know it's something else, it could be less threatening for parents and folks might be more likely to participate.

And one last example that I would just throw in is that when we talk about our systems for self-assessment, this can be very tricky in terms of involving families from different cultures, especially if you have a program that really has some work to do and there are some concerns that pop up through self-assessment.

So, for example, you may have cultures where people really are – it's taboo to criticize or to point out something that's wrong, and so you might really have to think about the avenues that you create for people to respond so that it's meaningful but they're comfortably able to give honest feedback.

Terra: Thank you for those practical examples, Larissa. Stacy, did you have anything you wanted to add?

Stacy: Thanks, Terra. The only thing I would add – to what's already been discussed is the importance of human resources and that that system really is there so that we can support our – our staff and make sure that we hire staff that are reflective of the community, the languages that we serve. And then once they're hired, how we orient our staff and how we then provide professional development so that staff understand the cultural differences of the families and the children that we serve.

Terra: Great, thanks all of you. Operator, are there any other questions waiting?

Operator: There are no questions at this time.

Terra: Well I have a question for you, Dr. Daniel. Many programs work very hard to develop and maintain their quality systems and we know that in Head Start, things change so rapidly. Can you talk a little bit about how programs might continually adjust in a timely and organized way to ensure ongoing quality?

Dr. Daniel: Well, I think that being able to kind of keep up, if you will, with an ever-changing environment, I mean, Head Start itself, in terms of a regulatory sense, may change. The guidance may change and so forth. But I suspect that the communities that programs are in probably change more quickly than the regulatory structure. And that's – where the importance of that assessment – community assessment – that's where that's really important.

And having a staff that has its ear to the ground, if you will. A few minutes ago, we were talking about the human resources element and hiring people who are of the community and – who then have, I would say, more immediate access to what's happening in the community.

I think that you keep up with things by continually asking questions of yourselves and of community folks. That's how we end up being highly intentional and planful. You really have to keep your tentacles in the community and be willing to listen and to change if that's what's necessary. But if we just keep rolling along, you miss the changes that are happening and next thing you know you're out of sync.

Terra: Absolutely, I think that makes lots of sense, Dr. Daniel. Before I give Stacy and Larissa an opportunity to also tag on to what you just said, Dr. Daniel, I want to remind the audience that if you have a question, you have the call-in number in front of you. So please call in, but remember to press "star one" to let the operator know that you are waiting to ask your question. Remember, press "star one." So Larissa or Stacy, would you like to jump in and add to what Dr. Daniel just said?

Larissa: Sure, this is Larissa again and I would love to just sort of echo and piggy back a little bit on what Dr. Daniel said about really paying attention to things that might be changing in the environment.

I think that leadership really need to set a tone and an expectation among staff that we are, Terra, as you talked about, "learning organizations." And that we are all works in progress, there's always room for improvement and adaptation. And having an environment where it's safe for staff to provide feedback and input about things that aren't working. Granted, there are some things where leadership has to set very clear and inflexible expectations around things like children's safety and supervision of children.

Things like, you know, at a higher level of management, appropriate management of funds. But in terms of the day-to-day, setting an expectation that everyone in the organization is learning and that when there are, you know, thoughts about some things that could be done better or something that's changing in the community and therefore requires some adaptation from the program, being able to share those up and down the chain without fear of repercussion is really important.

Dr. Daniel: You know, this is Jerlean Daniel, I was just thinking of an I heard from a parent – who was a participant in a Head Start program. This happened several years ago, but the community where the program was situated initially was an African American community and this parent was African American. And gradually the community began to change as more and more Latino families moved into the community. And this particular mother had several children but her youngest was still in the Head Start program.

And as she was engaged in the program, as she had always been over the years, volunteering and doing all kind of work with the Policy Council, she began to notice that the new parents, the immigrant parents, were not getting the same use out of the program she thought that she had gotten. There was something missing. And what she did was to step out of her comfort zone and try to learn some basic Spanish so that she could begin to communicate with the parents, the new parents, and to try to reach out to them and help them settle in more to the program.

And she learned enough Spanish, and yes, people laughed at her, the parents chuckled at her trying to learn it, but what they appreciated was that she was trying. And she was able to do enough to stumble through a Parent Council meeting with some of those parents, got them more fully engaged, connected to staff. I mean, in this instance, it was a parent who recognized the change and kind of insisted that everybody respond so that the new families coming in could get the full value of the Head Start program.

Terra: Wow, that's a wonderful example, Dr. Daniel, thanks for sharing that. Stacy did you want to add to this conversation?

Stacy: Yes, thank you, Terra. What a great example Dr. Daniel. I – and that's why we share the planning cycle, because in their best intentions, the programs, you know, know what they know when they're doing their planning, but then as the year unfolds or new families join the program or the community itself has a change in the program, the program needs to adjust.

And the planning cycle really helps programs who are tuned into those changes to go into that inner cycle and really work at doing the changes that need to happen and make those course corrections so that all children and families get the services they need that year and that it doesn't need to wait until a self-assessment and next year's planning to make those adjustments.

Terra: Right, absolutely. Operator, do we have a question from the audience?

Operator: Yes, and caller please state your name and the state you're calling from.

Mary: ...Hi, this is Mary from Delaware and the program I work in is large and I feel really disconnected from the central office. What communication recommendations would you make?

Dr. Daniel: – Well, – let me first offer empathy for both the administration and the folks out in the – what might be satellite locations – because I think it's really hard in a day-to-day when everybody's kind of on their treadmill kind of get done what they have to get done to either think they have communicated and they haven't, or to have the communication not be as frequent as often as it need to be.

I guess I would suggest to you that you express to the administration that you're feeling disconnected because that could be a surprise to them. They could think that they're communicating regularly and thoroughly and, – you know, and maybe they – whatever they send out, if they don't get a response back they think okay, well that's taken care of.

And sometimes you probably have questions about some of the things they put out there. But I would really suggest stating a – you know, in a really kind of a, "Hey, we're out here feeling disconnected and here are some of the things we're wondering about." That could be helpful to the whole of the program.

Terra: Right, thank you, Dr. Daniel. Thank you. Stacy, would you like to add to that?

Stacy: Well, I echo what Dr. Daniel just said and the empathy. I ran a program with 11 sites and I tried really hard as a director to make sure that communication of the program suited everyone. But, again, it was a lot of talking and then needing to listen because, you know, what we think we're communicating,

often times is not heard in the way we intended or that it worked for some groups but not for others, or some groups of parents and not others.

And so, I see communications systems as one that's always needing revisions and we need to stay in tune with that and – as best we can, is when we are not communicating properly and when people feel like they're not being heard. So, I think it's an ongoing thing and I do think that the more that there's feedback, a feedback loop in communications, the better the communication will be.

Dr. Daniel: And through a variety of sources, you know, some oral, some written, some, you know, some face-to-face, all of that will be helpful.

Terra: Absolutely. Larissa?

Larisa: Sure, – actually I want to start by apologizing to the person who asked the question because without knowing more about the context of your program and what you already have in place, I may say some things that are redundant or, depending on resources, not feasible.

But the two things that immediately come to mind are number one, technology. And I will tell you, I am a dinosaur. I'm the first person to prefer to do things in person face-to-face, where the more we can use technology and the more types of technology that we can use to communicate, whether it be through email, whether it be Skype, whether it be, you know, staff training through webinars, all kinds of different things, all of those just serve to get the word out to more people and to get more consistent word out to more people when you are spread out.

Now depending on location and, you know, finances, there may be different accessibility. But anything that you can use is really worth thinking about.

The other thing that I would mention is I would bring us back to the system for ongoing monitoring. I've done a lot of monitoring reviews of very large programs spread out over large geographical areas and one of the things that I've seen that tends to work pretty well and really help people feel more connected is when you have a very intentional schedule for ongoing monitoring that send folks from the central office and administration and the management team out to all the centers on a rotating basis so that everybody sees everyone else, at least on occasion.

That can really help build those relationships and that feeling a better connection.

Terra: Right, that's a wonderful response because I think sometimes we forget to recognize that different people have modalities that they prefer to receive information in those various ways. And we think that technology is certainly very advanced, but a lot of times some of us aren't as up to speed with those means of communication.

So I appreciate that response, Larissa. Operator, do we have another question on the line?

Operator: At this time, there are no questions on the line.

Terra: Okay, great. Well I do have a question – and this is – we are running close on time here, but I do want to ask Dr. Daniel, if you might share with us what would be a key message and, perhaps, words of wisdom that you might want to leave with program leaders and program staff to really think about building and sustaining quality?

What might be those nuggets that you would leave with people if you could share some of the key points that you would like to reiterate for them?

Dr. Daniel: Well, I think that I would go back to the notion of relationships and when I think about the questions today that we've been responding to, they really are going back to that relationship issue. You know, kind of with the most recent question about what are vehicles you can use to build relationships and, you know, it needing to match whatever the needs of the individuals, whether it's electronic or face-to-face or whatever.

And then, I guess what I would say is maybe two other things. One is – that is really important this notion of strength-based approaches is really, really important, not only in terms of interactions with families, but interactions staff to staff. You know, if we're going to be able to collaborate together as adults to create the best environment for children and in our context with families, the best environment for family and program to work together, and as a larger community, we really have to be willing to see through to the good impulse behind people's concerns and the issues they bring to the table and really have to listen carefully to find those connecting points.

We have to be highly intentional and that would be the third point, that this just can't happen by accident. You really have to change your way of thinking about things in order to move in this way. So sometimes when you say, you know, let's do strength-based, people are – some people are always thinking, "Well, there are some people in the world that, you know, what if they're a – a you know," and they think of the worst thing they can think of in the world.

Whether it's somebody who's a molester or, you know, a murderer or something. They think of the worst kind of thing in the world, and they say such people don't have any strengths. And, – and, you know, and you can't judge anybody by one act, you know. They – all of us are very, very complex and it behooves us to really look deeper, listen harder, to find those places where an individual is really coming from a good place trying to make a difference.

And I just think we have to be intentional about that, the search for strength-based.

Terra: Yes, absolutely. Larissa, what are your thoughts?

Larissa: So many, and I really appreciate that Dr. Daniel brought it back to relationships first and foremost, because I really do think that's the core of everything we do.

What I would add is that for, you know, for folks in our audience, especially for folks in programs to remember that no matter what position or level you're at in a program, it's really hard work.

Head Start and Early Head Start expect a lot, and our children and families really need these services. They really deserve the best that you can give them. And so, even if you get worn down and even if you don't see it every day, to remember that your work has tremendous value.

Angie Godfrey would say you are a lifeline for these families and you just can't ever lose sight of that.

Terra: Definitely, I wholeheartedly agree with that. Stacy, would you like to add to that?

Stacy: Wow, that is great – great. I echo everything that was said. I would say also that, along with individual strengths, program strengths. If we start when our programs are strong, what they're doing well, if programs can look at – through a self-assessment or ongoing monitoring, where their bright spots are, then try to emulate those, programs are going to be feeling much better and the staff will be feeling much better about change.

Change is really hard, it's always coming at us, we're always trying to improve. So I would recommend that people really look to where they're strong to begin with and how they can take those strengths and really grow from there and celebrate those things because it is the hard work that we do for children and families that are going to make the difference.

Terra: Wonderful, thank you. I've really enjoyed our conversation today and I want to thank Dr. Daniel for taking time out to be with us today and for your wonderful presentation. And I thank you as well, Larissa and Stacy, for joining us on the call today.

And I hope that our participants have really appreciated and enjoyed all the wonderful information that all of you have shared around building a sustaining quality system, cultivating excellence in Early Head Start. And I know the work of Early Head Start programs is extremely difficult, as Larissa said, and it's challenging work but I think Early Head Start has both a responsibility and a privilege to serve children and families.

And I think that everyone out there listening is certainly doing a wonderful job and we want to take heed to all of the things that our panelists and Dr. Daniel have shared so that we might continue to cultivate excellence in Early Head Start.

We thank you for joining us today for this webcast and we'd like to invite you and ask that you please join us later this week. On Tuesday, we have a webinar, "Invest in People: The Use of Coaching and Professional Development and Continuous Learning."

On Wednesday, we have a webinar, "Interviewing Relationship-Ready Staff." On Thursday, we have a webinar, "Growing Programs Growing People: Reflective Leadership in Early Head Start."

Thank you so much for joining us today and, again, thank you Dr. Daniel, Larissa... Thank you... and Stacy. Have...Thank you. Yes, have a wonderful afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us for virtual Birth to Three.