

Interviewing Strategies to Hire Relationship-Ready Staff
Webinar D8: Management and Professional Development
17th Annual Virtual Birth to Three Institute

Operator: Good day and welcome to the Virtual Birth to Three Institute Interviewing Strategies to Hire Relationship-Ready Staff webinar. Today's webinar is being recorded. At this time I'd like to turn the conference to Mr. Kelly Clair. Please go ahead.

Kelly Clair: Hello everyone and welcome to today's conference. Before we get started we want to go over a few housekeeping items. For today, we'll be taking questions via the Private Chat tab. If you look down towards the lower left you will see a tab marked Private. Click the tab. Choose Leaders and Assistants and ask your questions that way. If you're also – if you're having any technical issues and you need some help please use the same method of clicking on the Private Chat tab and choosing Leaders and Assistants. That will ensure that it will be presented to everyone today.

We will do a question and answer at the end. But please don't wait to put your questions in till then. Go ahead and put them in as you think of them. With that I would like to turn the conference over to Jennifer Boss. Jennifer, go ahead.

Jennifer Boss: Thank you, Kelly. Hello everybody. My name is Jennifer Boss and I'm the director of the Early Head Start National Resource Center. And I'm your moderator for today's virtual Birth to Three webinar. I am so pleased to welcome you to this webinar, Interviewing Strategies to Hire Relationship-Ready Staff.

This is the second webinar for Track D: Management and Professional Development for Virtual Birth to Three. So if you've been tuning into the conference over the past few weeks you might have noticed a common theme emerging through all of the presentations. And that theme really is the centrality of relationships in this work. Through meaningful relationships we understand, support and nurture infants and toddlers' healthy growth, development and readiness for school and beyond. And through meaningful relationships we can fully engage and partner with families, colleagues and others in the program.

If you had the chance to hear Dr. Jerlean Daniel present earlier this week you heard her talk about cultivating excellence in early Head Start. She said program leaders have to be highly intentional in their efforts to cultivate excellence in their programs. And she talked about the importance of relationships as the foundation for cultivating excellence in programs. So if

relationships are so important and central to the work, how do you ensure that the staff who are caring out the work have the dispositions or the characteristics for developing and in growing these relationships?

For those of you who are listening who've had the experience of going through the process of recruiting and interviewing and hiring staff, have you ever thought to yourself, did we choose the right person? or I wish we had some way of figuring out how this person might be in relationship with families and children. If you've had those questions I think we have a real treat in store for you today.

Our next two presenters have been giving a lot of thought to those questions for many years now and have developed a process to actually answer the questions. Before I introduce our presenters, I want to call your attention to the Viewer's Guide that was sent with your reminder email for the webinar.

The presentation today will refer heavily to the Viewer's Guide and the included handout so please make sure you have it with you as you listen to the presentation. We'll be asking you at times to chime in with your thoughts so you want to make sure that you can follow along with the materials. If you don't know how to access the Viewer's Guide, the EHSNRC staff will put a note in the chat box with the link so you can download it. Okay, so now let me introduce our wonderful presenters.

Dr. Redmond Reams joins us from Oregon. He's a licensed Psychologist. And in addition to his private practice he teaches at the Division of Child Psychiatry at Oregon State Health Sciences University and at Portland State University for the post-graduate certificate in Infant and Toddler Mental Health. And Redmond is joined by Blair Johnson. Blair also joins us from Oregon. She's the – Early Head Start Director for Southern Oregon Child and Family Council.

And Blair and Redmond actually began working together back in 2002 when Southern Oregon Early Head Start Program participated in an Office of Head Start Special Initiative focused on infant mental health called Pathways to Prevention. So what you're about to hear today are the results of that effort Okay so now let's get to it. Redmond why don't you get us started.

Redmond Reams: Thank you very much Jennifer. So I'd like to start by going over the learning objectives that Blair and I are going to be covering today. So first, we want to help you really hone in on who are Relationship-Ready Staff and what are their characteristics so that you can identify them more easily. Secondly, we want to talk about the HR practices that support a

relationship-based organization, you know, system of relationship-based work with kids and families and communities.

And finally we want to get very concrete and specific and identify questions that can be used when interviewing and assessing job applicants for their relationship readiness. So Early Head Starts are all about using relationships to better the lives of young children and their parents. These relationships may be between staff and children, staff and parents, between staff and other staff and also between staff and supervisors.

The higher quality these relationships, the higher quality the program thus Early Head Starts are relationship-based organizations.

Jennifer: Redmond, can you tell us a little bit more about what you mean by relationship-based organization?

Redmond: Sure Jennifer. Some organizations focus around action like a restaurant preparing and delivering food. Other organizations focus around information like an accounting firm. All organizations have relationships but Judith Bertacchi in a classic Zero to Three article defined a relationship-based organization as one in which "The quality of the relationships among all the people involved in an infant family service is key to its effectiveness." She listed seven characteristics of effective relationship-based organization. These are on handout number one in the Viewer's Guide.

I'm not going to talk about all of them. But just as an example this first one is very important. Respect for the person implies really getting to know your staff in a deep way. You communicate that the way they might be different from you are a plus rather than a minus. When you talk with them about a struggle they're having, you place it in the context of their value more generally and how all of us have struggles.

Jennifer: Redmond this is Jennifer again. I'm curious about what you mean in the second one, sensitivity to context and that seems a little bit more abstract than the other ones. Can you say a little bit more about that?

Redmond: Sure. An example might help Jennifer. At the beginning of a new program year there may be lots of kids new to group care and also new staff. A lead teacher's steadiness might be challenged by the relative chaos. Yet that same lead teacher's steadiness will also be an important factor in helping the environment to stabilize sooner rather than later.

Jennifer: Okay, thank you. So I'm getting the lead teacher's both being influenced by her classroom's environment. And she's also influencing the environment through her steadiness. So given these characteristics of relationship-based organizations I'm wondering now what our audience would say about how their organizations are doing. So let's ask them the first question.

So here's the question for you. My organization is as relationship-based as it needs to be. It's a yes or no question. So Kelly, can we bring up the poll please?... So we want you to – for our audience we want you to think here about your own programs in places of work and know that there's no right or wrong answer.

This is just to get you thinking about where you see your program or your organization based on the characteristics that Redmond described and that are listed in handout number one. So go ahead and vote yes or no. And I'll give you all just a couple of seconds. And then I'm going to ask Kelly if we can start pulling up the results of the question...

So while we're waiting for – oh, here they come. So it looks like – if you can't see the results on your screen, the majority of the respondents said that they do not believe that their organization is as relationship-based as it needs to be. So it sounds like, to me, that many of our audience are thinking about what is it. How can they make their – how can they try to figure out how to make their organization more relationship-based.

So Redmond – so Kelly, thank you. You can close that poll. And Redmond now that folks have thought about their own organizations and how relationship-based they think their organizations are, help us now to sort of take the next step and talk about why hiring is so important.

Redmond: Sure Jennifer. Hiring relationship-based staff is an essential condition for implementing a high quality relationship-based organization. A person's relationship capacity can change over time but it tends to be stable. If you want a relationship-based organization, you need people who can do the high quality interactions that form the basis for it. To have a relationship-based organization you need relationship-ready staff.

Jennifer: Okay, so that makes sense. This is Jennifer again. So Redmond, you just mentioned relationship-ready staff. Who are relationship-ready staff and what do they look like?

Redmond: You know, I think all of us know these folks. They're the team players. They get along with most folks. They talk in positives. Compliment other people. They can bring up hard

feelings in a way that doesn't seem to set folks on edge. They're the glue that hold programs together. I've listed their characteristics on handout number two in the Viewer's Guide.

I'm going to go through them and, as I do, I would like all of you to think about which characteristic is most important to your organization's success because we're going to ask you about that at the end. So first, we want them to have a balanced and realistic view of relationships so they can see both the positive and negative aspects of them and not be sort of on just one side or the other.

We want them to consistently think about other people's internal world, what their feelings are like, their wants, state of mind and not only think about other people's internal life but to take that into account in their action while still also thinking about their own interests.

We want them to have a generally positive approach to other people, themselves, to the world but not be rigid about that. We want them to value relationships that when they think about where they really get their enjoyment in life, where the meaning is, we want it to be from relationships and how well they're going. Continuing, we want them to assume relationships are sturdy, that they can survive negative feelings.

And so when negative feelings come up, we want them to communicate about them appropriately rather than withdrawing or acting out. We want them to see other people as a resource who can help them, who aren't negative, – who are – somebody that can be a resource rather than be a competitor or critic. We want them to put effort into helping relationships work.

We've all heard about, you know, it takes work to make a marriage. That's true in work relationships also. To think about the other person, you know, I'm going to get something from the break room. Can I – anything I can get for you? You know, to think about the other person and how you can reach out.

In addition, thinking and talking about relationships should be fairly comfortable for them. Not necessarily there's never any nervousness or worry but that generally relationships are something that they feel comfortable about. And finally, when there are just tough situations, they think about them. They think about their own role and they try to identify how they may have contributed. And once they have, they take responsibility for that and they work to repair any way that they may have contributed to the difficult situation.

Jennifer: Okay. So audience, we're coming back to you again. We have another poll question for you. Here we want you to think about the nine characteristics that Redmond just reviewed and that are listed in handout two. And – Kelly already pulled up the poll. Thank you, Kelly. So you see the characteristics also on your screen.

Among your coworkers which of these nine characteristics is the most important to your organization's success. So choose just one. And go ahead and make your choice now. And again no right or wrong answers here. This is really intended to help you begin to reflect on the characteristics that you think are important for staff and your programs. In order to hire staff that bring the kind of characteristics that you really want, you first have to identify what characteristics you think are important.

So take your time here and choose one of those. And I'm going to ask Kelly if he can start to pull up the results of the poll and see what you all said... Okay, so the results are up and in case you can't see them on your screen, it's fairly evenly distributed across all nine of the characteristics and – with the exception of one. But we generally thought that you all would probably fall across all of these nine characteristics.

Again no right or wrong answer here. It's really just to get you to reflect about what you think is most important. And so you've all sort of checked each of the nine characteristics, some more than others. Thank you, Kelly. We can close that poll now.

Okay, Redmond so we thought about the characteristics of our organization and how relationship-based we think our organization is. And we thought about characteristics that we think are important in relationship-ready staff. And now we're ready to hire somebody. And we want to know if they bring those characteristics that we think are so critical. So what is our first step?

Redmond: So our first step is to attract relationship-ready job applicants. And that starts with your job announcement. Let's look at two of them. This is a less relational job announcement because it focuses on background characteristics, documentation skills and organizational abilities and does not mention relationships.

You certainly do want applicants who are organized and can document. But our focus is on relationship skills. And so we might re-write this advertisement. Make it look more like this. Here's a job announcement that emphasizes relationship characteristics of both the applicant and the organization.

Words like caring, supportive, commitment to others, relate well, indicate the value placed on relationship skills. It sets a tone at the beginning of the hiring process for what is important.

Jennifer: So Redmond, I love that you start not at the point of the person showing up for the interview but even before that point where you're trying to really be thoughtful about how you announce what it is that you're looking for in a staff person. So Redmond let's say we get some applicants and we're inviting them in for an interview. What am I generally looking for regarding relationship readiness?

Redmond: Well there are a number of behaviors you can observe for. And they're listed on handout number three in the Viewer's Guide. They come down to the person demonstrating a consideration for other people and an awareness of social rules. That observation should start at the very first phone call and include the applicant's interactions with everybody they come into contact with. The receptionist, the teacher they chat with, the kids they interact with in a classroom as well as the interviewer. You want a whole wrap around sort of assessment there.

Jennifer: So Redmond, this is Jennifer again. How do we take into account if the person is really just anxious when they come in for the interview?

Redmond: Sure. You know, I know I've been anxious in job interviews. Many folks have some level of anxiety in a job interview. That's totally natural. And this may interfere with some of the usual social skills. If they seem to get more comfortable as the interview progresses which happens for some folks, then I'll look more at the [inaudible] later in the interview as a better indication of their relationship readiness.

If they're a really strong candidate I might invite them back again and hopefully they'll be more comfortable then in the second interview as the setting and the people are more familiar.

Jennifer: Okay. So what do we ask in the interview to evaluate relationship readiness?

Redmond: Well in addition to all the other questions you're going to have in the interview there are two crucial parts of the interview in assessing relationship readiness. First is asking them about a past relationship with a child they've worked with.

Secondly, inquiring about a difficulty they've had with a colleague or a supervisor. I thought I might demonstrate a few of the questions by role playing two job applicants, one more relational and one less so.

Jennifer: Okay, that sounds good. I think role play is a great idea. How will our audience know what to listen for?

Redmond: Well there's a set of rating scales to grade the applicant on handout number four in the Viewer's Guide. After each of the two role plays we can have audience members maybe do just the first two ratings as a practice. Jennifer, would you be willing to be my job interviewer?

Jennifer: I would love to be your job interviewer Redmond.

Redmond: Oh great! I'll do the more relational job applicant first. Audience you can follow along with the questions Jennifer will be asking on handout number five in the Viewer's Guide.

Jennifer: Okay. So audience, don't forget to pay attention to what you're hearing and seeing so you can rate Redmond's performance at the end of the interview. So let's get started.

Hi Redmond, I'm glad you can come in...

Redmond: Hi.

Jennifer: ...for this job interview; I'd like to start off by having you talk about a child you developed a relationship with as part of your past work.

Redmond: Okay, sounds fine.

Jennifer Boss: Great. Have you picked out a child to talk about?

Redmond: Yes.

She's a 15 month-old girl, Sarah, who lives with her mom and grandparents and attends the childcare where I used to work.

Jennifer: Okay, so tell me about your relationship with Sarah.

Redmond: Well, Sarah is a really exuberant child. I mean whenever she arrived for her day of school she would just burst in the classroom and run over to me and say hi. And she'd run back to her mom or dad, whoever is dropping her off and they'd do their goodbye ritual. But she'd always come in with lots of feeling and, you know, that would basically extend through the day when, you know, she was interacting with me. It would be with lots of enthusiasm.

We would have lots of back and forth play. She loved to do art. She loved to do manipulatives. And so I could see her interactions with me, with other kids, even with materials that she would really wear her heart on her sleeve.

Now sometimes, you know, if she got hurt or she had a – was frustrated with another kid or with materials, I mean she would show really hard feelings too and, you know, I would help her with that. There'd be lots of ways that she would come to me with those feelings as I was her primary. And so we would work through them. You know she was just, if I had to characterize her, I'd say she was a really passionate child that just was really engaged with the world.

Jennifer: Okay. So what do you think was going on inside Sarah when she was upset?

Redmond: Wow. You know I think she really would get overwhelmed with her feelings. She would be just so caught up. I think she would stop hearing and seeing what was going on around her and on the inside she would just have all this upset and would just be sort of swimming in it and very overwhelmed with, you know, all the feelings.

I don't think she really could formulate any ideas or plans. I think it was just sort of all emotion. And, you know, her body would – she would lose some control of her body in terms of she might be on the floor and she just would be – she'd be really, really upset [inaudible]. And I really feel bad for her when she was in that state.

Jennifer: So how did you respond when Sarah would get upset?

Redmond: Well what I learned was that I needed to start with just a small physical touch, like maybe a hand on her back or rubbing her arm a little bit. And that would gradually register for her. She would register I was there. And then she would want a lot more physical contact.

She'd want me to pick her up or have her on my lap. But I learned that if I started with that bigger physical contact that was over – that was destabilizing for her. She didn't like that. It was too much. She needed to first just sort of register I was there. And then she wanted a lot of physical contact, a lot of soothing. And I would do that certainly. And then as I was holding her I would be talking with her.

And it seemed like then she could start to let my words in. And I would talk to her about, you know, you're really upset. And, you know, I'm going to help you and we're going to get through

this. I'll be here with you. And I really, you know, started to talk about where the upset feelings came from depending on the situation.

But I first needed to get connected with her, with her feelings so that she could feel enough pull together to start to be able to use my words. And, you know, she would actually calm down fairly quickly for given how intensely upset she was and then she would see what was going on out, you know, in the world with what other kids were doing. And she quickly would want to get reengaged with the world and would then move on out. So I – it felt like it worked well.

Jennifer: Okay, thank you Redmond. All right, audience it's your turn to rate this job applicant on the two scales, – these two scales here. So Kelly can we pull up the poll? So you can see the two questions. And based on what you heard and saw, how would you rate this applicant? How rich and elaborate were his descriptions of Sarah? And the second question, how much did Redmond seem emotionally connected to Sarah when he was talking about her?

So we'll give you a few seconds to answer these questions. Don't take too long. – And then we're going to see how well he did, how you rated him on this first interview.

So Kelly, can we start to pull up the – results of the survey? And we'll just wait a second and let those results come up... And okay, so it looks like, in case you can't see them on your screen, that the first question, how rich and elaborate are the descriptions of the other people, the vast majority of you rated Redmond as a four or a five. So pretty vivid; no one rated him as unclear.

Very small percentage were closer to unclear, a little bit larger in the middle but the vast majority thought that he was pretty vivid in his descriptions. And how much does the interviewee seem emotionally connected to people they're talking about, the vast majority again felt like he was pretty well connected to – emotionally connected to Sarah.

So we can see how you rated this first applicant so thank you, Kelly. We can close that poll now.

So Redmond that was the first applicant. What do you want to do now?

Redmond: Yes. Now I'd like to role play a less relational job applicant.

Jennifer: Okay. That sounds good. Should we start the same way?

Redmond: Yes. That sounds good.

Jennifer: Okay. Okay. Okay, so hi Redmond. I'm glad you could come into this...

Redmond: Hi.

Jennifer: ...job interview. I'd like to start off by having you talk about a child you've developed a relationship with as part of your past work.

Redmond: Okay, sounds fine.

Jennifer: Okay, great. Have you picked out a child to talk about?

Redmond: – Yes. She's a 15 month-old girl, Sarah, who lives with her mom and grandparents and attends the childcare where I used to work.

Jennifer: Okay, so tell me about your relationship with Sarah.

Redmond: Well, Sarah is a kid with a ton of feelings, you know. So whenever she arrived, you know, it would always, you know, you always knew she was there. I mean it would interrupt whatever I was doing. You had to know she had arrived. She sort of demanded that. You know she was always very active in the room doing lots of – activities with other kids.

And, you know, she would get upset at times, really upset. And I would try to help her with that as her primary. And, you know, she would also be positive at times. You know, she was definitely, you know, probably one of the more emotional kids in the room. But, you know, she liked to do, you know, she was engaged with the classroom. You know at times she was a lot of work but, you know, she's a good kid.

Jennifer: Okay, so tell me what do you think was going on inside Sarah when she was upset?

Redmond: Oh well she was, you know, when she was upset she was really, you know, upset. I mean she would, you know, cry and carry on and, you know, fall to the ground and, you know, it was – it was loud. You know you couldn't ignore it. You know she just – she needed a bunch. I mean I – you know, she just was very upset and, you know, just was totally into her feelings.

Jennifer: Okay. Well how did you respond when Sarah was upset?

Redmond: Well, I'd – I'd be trying to help her. You know I'd go over to her and, you know, try to figure out what was wrong. You know usually we were, you know, if we were trying

to do a transition, I'd be trying to get her back on track. And, you know, I know, you know, I can't get too tied up with one kid. The other staff in the room are counting on me to be available. So I'd just – you know, would try to help her move on and say it's going to be okay. Come on Sarah. And, you know, Sarah was sort of hard with that.

She couldn't seem to hear my words. I don't, you know – she obviously could still hear. But she would just be really upset and would just be stuck in that and gradually over time, you know, she would make it through that.

Jennifer: Okay, thank you Redmond.

Redmond: You're welcome.

Jennifer: All right audience, second applicant. Let's see how you rate this one on the same two scales. Kelly, can you pull up that poll again? There we are. So the same question for you to consider for this applicant and again remember think about what you saw and what you heard. And rate the – second applicant on the same two questions.

How rich and elaborate were his descriptions? And how much did he seem emotionally connected to the person, to the child he was talking about? And then I'm going to ask Kelly if we can start to pull up the results now. And we'll give you just a second for those results to come up. So here they come.

So how rich and elaborate were his descriptions. The majority of you thought that he was – rated him a number two. So nine percent said he was unclear, 29 percent said he was number – sort of two on that scale. And not as many people felt like his description of Sarah was as vivid as in the first interview. And then how much does he seem emotionally connected to the – to Sarah? And the vast majority of you thought that he was on this scale closer to the distant side, not nearly as connected as you heard in the first interview.

So thank you Kelly. We can close that poll. Redmond, I also wanted to say that it felt different for me as an interviewer in those two role plays.

Redmond: Oh, how so?

Jennifer: Well in the first interview I certainly felt more connected to – to you and to that applicant. There was more eye contact, more effective expression. And the second interview felt more distant. It felt like the experience of how we related to each other kind of gave me a glimpse into how you might be with others, with the children and parents and coworkers.

It was like a little doorway was open and you were showing me some of who you are and how I might anticipate you would be with others.

Redmond: You know I think the feelings you're talking about Jennifer are very important. You know there's a relationship created in the interview. And there's more than just facts being communicated. When a person is talking about a relationship to another person it tends to set up an emotional resonance.

That relational sense you get about the interviewee when they're talking about the child or about the work incident is valuable information. I think we want to capture that as part of the evaluation of an applicant.

Jennifer: Yes. And I certainly get that. Is there any way to capture relational information about the applicant when you're talking to the person's references?

Redmond: Yes. I described some possible questions for references on handout number six in the Viewer's Guide. Ideally you'd be able to talk with both a supervisor of the applicant as well as a colleague. I'll go through each of these questions and talk about what I'm listening for when I'm interviewing. One thing I would point out is that I often ask for a comparison with other staff.

Thus if a reference says the applicant is good at something I want to know whether they're better than other staff at that quality or maybe just as good. So first one is compared to other staff how is this person at handling differences between themselves and other staff. Here I'm listening for flexibility. The ability to see the other person's point of view, whether they can own their own contribution to differences and take responsibility for that.

Next, compared to other staff, how much would this person think about how they could do their job better. Here I'm really hoping to hear that they're reflective, that they think about their job and I'm also curious in supervision. Does that reflectiveness show up? Are they open to suggestions? And when they're thinking about their – how to do their job better, are those improvements relational improvements or do they just think about how to do paperwork better? I want to – I hope to hear about relational improvements that they're thinking about.

So the next one, does this person seem to work better with a certain sort of child or parent? How could you tell? And obviously I'd like to hear they work well. But it's really in that how could you tell where I want to see the specifics. What are the relational skills that this person

brings up, what the reference brings up? And then in the next one, it's about whether this staff – how responsive, how productive they are at responding to frustrated or upset clients especially the specific skills.

So obviously it's nice to hear they're better than average of dealing with upset clients. But I especially am interested in what skills are mentioned, things like communication, empathy, respect, emotional regulation. If the reference is big about the skills then I'm not as impressed.

Jennifer: So Redmond that's a really interesting point. And how do you sort out if a reference is vague about an applicant, because of the reference or because of the applicant?

Redmond: Well, I think all of us in talking to references make an informal assessment of how well the reference seems to know the applicant and frankly how sharp the reference is. I also listen for how well the reference shows good relationship readiness with me in setting up the call and during the conversation. I take that into account too in evaluating their answers.

The next question is what do you think was the hardest part of the day-to-day aspect of doing their job for this person and how come? Here I listen for the hardest part being something relational versus non-relational and whether the basis for that difficulty is one that would interfere with relationship readiness. For example, if documentation is the difficulty that's not relational.

But if the reason they struggled was that it was very hard for them to find words to describe conflicts between kids or between them and other people, that's more of a relational reason. So the next one is over time how did this person's relationship with coworkers change? Here I'm listening for how relationships hopefully deepened over time. If there was a growth in supportiveness and evolution in a relationship, you know, trust was built.

And next one is was this person a worker who would use you for support and advice, if you ask do you have an example so I'm hoping that this worker is someone that can use other people for support, shows that they view other people as safe and as a resource. And I listen carefully for the example. If the example of the support they're getting involves relationships. And I really want to see if the advice they were given made a difference whether they actually implemented anything, changed any behavior. That's really impressive if they do that.

And the last question is to describe how the person would react if you offer a suggestion they had not asked for. Certainly in supervisions sometimes we need to make suggestions to our staff. And so I'm listening for is this person open to suggestions. Do they get defensive? And if

they do have a different idea than their supervisor can they communicate about that in a productive way?

Jennifer: Okay. So clearly you try to get a lot of information from these reference calls. And I'm sure some of our audience members are thinking, you know, that if they can't necessarily get this level of information from references because sometimes references are restricted to just confirming dates of employment, what can you do then?

Redmond: Well, one thing you can try, I had the applicant sign a very detailed permission form that spells out what they're releasing. What kind of information that's the whole range of job abilities and performance. And then I fax that to the reference with plenty of time before the phone call so that I know they've gotten it. And that's a way to try to gain more information. It helps sometimes.

Jennifer: Okay, that's a great idea to try. Okay, so you have given us, Redmond, a lot to think about with regards to relationship-based organizations and characteristics of relationship-based staff and recruiting and interviewing and checking references and so much great information in the handouts too. Thank you for that.

So now...

Redmond: You're welcome

Jennifer: ...let's turn to Blair, so she can tell us how in her program they took this theory-based information and put it into actual practice. And this is the point in the webinar where we're going to get even more concrete and practical. So Blair I'm going to turn it over to you.

Blair Johnson: Well, hello Jennifer. I'm really delighted to be part of this webinar today. Our Early Head Start program in Southern Oregon has been implementing Redmond's approach to hiring relationship-ready staff and building a relationship-ready program since 2004.

At that time our program received a Pathways to Prevention Grant to strengthen our infant mental health approach. And we were very lucky to have Redmond be our assigned infant mental health consultant. So through that process we implemented Redmond's process of hiring relationship-ready staff and increasing our staff skills and knowledge around infant mental health in order to improve high quality service delivery to parents, pregnant women, infants and toddlers.

Over time we have built a solid relationship-rich program. Even through a recent ARRA expansion which increased our enrollment by 38 percent and brought a whole new group of staff to our program. Along the way of course we have made some hiring mistakes. We have had to respond to resolving situations where we hired staff who were less than relationship-ready.

We found this occurred when we were faced with the stress of filling staff vacancies quickly. We were concerned about continuity of services to families. We were concerned too about our center staff teams. We all know too well how stressful it is to the entire center team when staff vacancies occur and other staff are stretched in to fill in the gaps. And we all know too that a stressed staff team is challenged to provide high quality relational services to children and family.

We agree with Jerry Paul, programs are only as good as the people who staff them. We found out that hiring staff who are not relationship-ready takes a big toll on quality service provisions and staff morale. It demands extra time and energy for managers to provide additional supervisory oversight onto disciplinary issues, that kind of thing.

Families also pick up on that negative energy in the center. We have learned that the outcome is so far better when we take the time to hire well. So fully implementing Redmond's approaches has resulted in consistently great hires. This means we can direct our time and energy towards building and supporting a high quality, responsive and relationship-based staff team rather than putting energy responding to problematic issues.

Jennifer: Okay, so thank you for that Blair. So let's get our audience back in here again. We have another question for you. And Kelly, can we bring up the poll question?

So what we want to know from you now is if any of you have ever hired staff who are not relationship-ready. So just a simple yes or no answer here, we'll give you a second to answer. And then I'm going to ask if – Kelly you can give us the results. That was a pretty quick question. And... just a second to pull the results together, it takes a couple of seconds when we have so many people voting at the same time.

So the – results are 47 percent of you said yes, you have hired staff who are not relationship-ready and a very small percentage said no, that that's not something that you've ever done before. So we can actually close that poll now. Thanks, Kelly.

So Blair I think you can relate to the poll results here.

Blair: Very much so. That is very true. So it sounds like you all have had the same kind of experience. And so what we found in Southern Oregon is that when you do take that time to fully implement Redmond's strategy and include many touch points to assess how relationship-ready our applicants are, we hire great staff.

And the more great staff we hire the stronger our staff team becomes. And the more relational our entire Early Head Start culture becomes. And this creates the caring, responsive climate that effectively facilitates healthy relationship development between infants, toddlers, parents and caregivers. And in that environment children and families just thrive.

Jennifer: Absolutely. So Blair can you share some specifics with us of the hiring approaches and processes that you've used in Southern Oregon Early Head Start?

Blair: Yes Jennifer. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the obvious that we all have in programs, that we all must meet all the Head Start Program Performance Standards related to hiring qualified staff. Many of these are found in Part 1304.52 under Human Resources Management. Others are embedded in the 2007 Head Start Reauthorization and still others in Information Memorandum and Program Instructions.

We see a few of them on this slide, educational qualification, criminal background check, health assessment and of course Policy Council approval just to name a few. The hiring processes I am going to describe today combine education [inaudible] experience requirements with others that help us determine how relationship-ready our applicants are.

In our agency we have a list of contingencies that include all items that need to be successfully completed once an applicant is offered a position. Until all of these are successfully completed the applicant is not officially hired. The very last contingency is Policy Council approval.

These processes in our program are wrapped around the comprehensive procedures we follow to ensure that all Head Start Program Performance Standards are met and all state and federal regulations are followed.

Jennifer: Okay, so Blair how have you incorporated relational expectations into your program's job description?

Blair: Well Jennifer, we've incorporated relational expectations into several areas. You can refer to handout seven in your Viewer's Guide. This is a job description sample for our Toddler

Specialist position, which is a position that provides both center-based and home-based services in our combination option.

So you'll notice under essential job duties we incorporate infant mental health guidelines with families. And the bullets that follow that item identify the areas that staff need to facilitate with families and include many relational areas such as establishing responsive caregiving routines, educating parents in infant massage to increase parent/child bonding and positive touch, and supporting discussions with parents viewing videotape interactions of themselves with their children to learn more about their child's needs and their relationship.

Here we include the expectation that staff participate in mental health consultation sessions which are regular times that staff reflect and discuss together issues, thoughts and feelings related to their work with families. It is a heavily relational context. It requires staff to be able to share vulnerabilities in their work with others on their team and be sensitive and responsive to the feelings of others.

You'll notice then in section six, Interactions with Children, Parents and Staff, they also relate relational expectations to relate in positive nurturing ways both verbally and physically and be sensitive to the needs of children, parents and coworkers. Another area under Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Physical Requirements, talks about the ability to work with parents and their children warmly, calmly, respectfully and in an encouraging and unhurried manner.

In that same area under Essential Mental Abilities, there's the other quality we look for which is the ability to work independently and part of a team and to demonstrate flexibility, openness to change, and an understanding and acceptance of staff, child and family diversity.

We also emphasize another expectation of staff in our coaching approach which is not cited here and which we think is extremely important. And that's the ability to accept, reflect and act upon feedback. We find that the ability of our staff to listen to feedback and be reflective on their strengths and areas of growth are important relational skills.

Staff who can then act upon this information and reflect upon their experiences provide quality services. Staff who are unable to listen well, become defensive around feedback and are not generally reflective in their work do not provide the quality of services that we need. They often become stuck in their work with families. They see challenges as great stressors rather than a learning opportunity. They also are less likely to seek supervisory support to reflect and grow from their experience but rather use supervisors more as a sounding board for complaining.

Jennifer: Okay, wow, this is really helpful Blair. It's helpful to see that – in – on paper in the handout. So going back to Jerlean Daniels' use of the words highly intentional, it sounds like you and the leadership in your program have been highly intentional about incorporating many relational traits into your job descriptions. So how do you assess relationship readiness in your hiring process?

Blair: Well Jennifer at the very beginning our HR department initially screens the applications to be sure that those we review in more depth meet the minimum educational and experience requirements.

Once we have a set of screened applications we review them closely and determine who we will interview. And we look at a variety of things in that process. We look at the level of education they have in early childhood. We look at their experience with pregnant women, infants and toddlers. How much do they have? In what context is that experience? We look at language whether they're bilingual, which is a quality that we need in many of our services.

We also look carefully at job history. Where have they worked? Have there been frequent job changes? Do they give realistic reasons for leaving a position? And then we also have a general first impression we gather which is, is the application fully completed? Is there a cover letter or references attached? So that we get a sense the applicant has really wanted to present themselves in a way that shows they're really interested in having this job... [Silence]

So next – we form our Hiring Committee. We have a fairly large Hiring Committee, which I'm sure many of your programs do as well. We do value multiple perspectives in the hiring process. Our core team includes myself, the Program Manager for Early Head Start, our Education Supervisor and the Center Supervisor of the center with the staff opening as well as a Policy Council representative.

As part of our initial meeting we review all the elements of our hiring process with the committee both as a refresher and for the benefit of our Policy Council representative who may not have had as much experience on Hiring Committees. There are several key components to the hiring process in determining education, experience and relational abilities of the applicant.

They include the following. And you'll see those in your Viewer's Guide, the Infant/Toddler Questionnaire which is handout eight, our interview itself, the classroom observation which is handout nine in your Viewer's Guide, the Specialist Hiring Rating Scale which is handout 10 in your Viewer's Guide, and then of course the important part of getting references and looking at that information as well.

So I'm going to start talking first about the Infant/Toddler Questionnaire that we use. This was developed in partnership with our colleagues, Mary Foltz and Stephan Safer at Portland State University's Early Childhood Training Center when we first began Early Head Start services back in 1996.

This questionnaire is completed prior to the actual interview by the applicant and its purpose is to get a sense of the following kinds of things. There's no right or wrong answer to the Infant/Toddler Questionnaire. But it gives the applicants a chance to look at a variety of scenarios and then respond to what they think might be going on.

Its purpose is to give us a sense of an applicant's approach to responding to challenging interactions between parents and children, a sense of their ability to reflect upon and value both a point of view of the child and the adult, a sense of their biases and judgments or lack of, a sense of their compassion towards families or lack of, and a sense of their values about staff teams and their own contribution to teamwork...

Then we go to the interview. The interview itself includes three major components that we assess for each applicant. The first is the quality of the applicant's responses to the interview questions. These include both concrete questions related to the applicant's education and experience as well as relational questions. We also look at the quality of the responses to the relationship ready interview described earlier by Redmond which we do as the very last part of our interview process.

And then the Interview Team after that, the interview is concluded, looks at the Infant/Toddler Questionnaire responses of the applicant and evaluates the quality of those. Next, vision to the classroom observation, so once we determine which applicants will progress to the next stage of the hiring process we schedule them for a classroom observation at the center in which they might ultimately be placed. And we observe them using a process which evaluates some concrete items as well as many relational aspects. So you can again refer to handout nine in your Viewer's Guide.

So the relational areas we assess include a few that I'm going to mention here. One is the degree to which an applicant enters the room and interacts responsively with staff and children. Are they warm, calm, respectful of the children's responses? Because they know – we know the applicant is a new and unfamiliar person in that room.

We look for whether they have a warm and calm tone and that their voice is nicely modulated. We wonder are they going to follow the children's lead. Do we see them allowing children to initiate interactions with them and not the applicant forcing interactions with other children. We also look at whether the applicant can maintain reciprocal interaction demonstrating a respect and a responsiveness to the children in the room.

Finally, let's look at the hiring rating scale. This is an important step that we go through as well. So once we have all this information we then use the Specialist Hiring Rating Scale which is handout 10 in your Viewer's Guide. And we rate where the applicant level of skill, experience and relational ability is using this tool.

You'll note that the first five items on the tool are concrete items and the last four are more relational items. Please know this is not a valid measure. This tool was simply developed by our program to help us provide an objective approach to determining how each applicant may be evaluated against another applicant. This gives us a way to clearly define why one applicant was hired over another.

Our goal is to select the applicant with the very best qualifications who has the strongest relational qualities and skills. So these areas include, the first five being very concrete, education level, early childhood experience, infant/toddler prenatal experience, home visiting experience, and then more relational aspects. How did they do in the relationship-ready interview? Did we see a high level of relational skills from that process?

We also rate their interpersonal skills from the interview itself. How connected did we feel with the applicant in terms of that interview process? We look at the Infant/Toddler Questionnaire responses. And finally we look at the classroom observation rating scale as well. And we put all of these pieces together.

Jennifer: Wow Blair. That is – that's a comprehensive and again intentional process. You know, I think it would be really helpful for all of us if you gave us an example of a staff person that you hired and how the process helped you select that person.

Blair: That's a great idea. Well I'm going to spend a few minutes talking about how we hire a specialist that I'll call Amanda. You'll see how this process helped us get a good sense of her qualities and relational skills.

So the first step was to review her application. Amanda's application showed she was a recent graduate with an AAS Degree in Early Childhood Education. And with practicum experience in

Head Start. She also had some limited experience teaching toddler age children compared to the other applicants we were interviewing, her education level was strong and her experience level was less strong. Her application though was thoroughly completed and she included a letter expressing her heartfelt desire and love of working with toddlers.

We had the initial impression that she had a passion for toddlers, which is something we like to see, believe me. We chose to consider her with other applicants with similar education and more experience.

Jennifer: So can you tell us about your experience interviewing Amanda?

Blair: Yes, Jennifer. Well, we greeted Amanda in the office lobby. And we welcomed her into the interview room. We know that our large Hiring Committee is sometimes overwhelming for applicants. So we try to take the time to introduce ourselves, smile and be warm, offer a drink of water, those kinds of things to help put people a little more at ease. Amanda introduced herself but she definitely seemed nervous.

We proceeded through the interview questions. And Amanda gave fairly brief but knowledgeable answers, but she continued to be pretty ill at ease. Her eye contact with us was okay but not great. And her responsiveness to the committee was adequate but a bit lacking. She just seemed nervous as many applicants, as we talked about earlier, do feel in a hiring interview. So then, towards the end we got to the part of the interview where we asked a series of relationship-ready questions that Redmond demonstrated earlier.

We always select only one of the committee members, usually the Center Supervisor, to lead the applicant through these questions. When asked to think of a child to talk about Amanda's face literally lit up and a big smile spread across her face. She wanted to talk about her 3-year-old daughter. As Amanda answered the series of questions she just opened up.

She gave a vivid picture of the little girl, her thoughts, interests, and personality. We felt a vivid description of this child and her internal world. Amanda also showed empathy for her daughter's times of upset and a clear sense of what her daughter was feeling during those times. She talked about how she soothed her daughter and we were left with a clear sense of this little girl's emotional needs.

When she asked – when we asked Amanda why she chose her daughter to talk about, Amanda said because she's the most wonderful part of my life and every day with her is a special

adventure. At that point you could almost feel the emotional connection between the committee members and Amanda.

The nervousness we had felt initially from her had really vanished. At this point Amanda told us, "You know I'm feeling pretty nervous and my mind just went blank on some of those questions you asked earlier." She smiled. We expressed our understanding of how the formal interview is not an easy process. And we were pleased to see Amanda be able to open up with her own feelings about how she was doing. Amanda thanked us. Her warmth and eye contact with us showed a connection and a responsiveness that impressed us as to her honesty and her relational ability. We were interested.

Without conducting a relationship-ready questioning process we may have missed an opportunity to really consider an applicant like Amanda whose nervousness in the interview kind of masked her relational ability.

Jennifer: I love that. That is really so important to hear. It's such a helpful real life example of how Redmond's relationship ready questions work in the hiring interview. So what was the next step in your hiring process?

Blair: Well, at the end of the interviews our Hiring Committee reviewed the Infant/Toddler Questionnaire answers. Amanda's answers reflected a real understanding of the importance of both child and parent perspectives, a real lack of judgment, a sense of passion for the feelings of both the child and the parent, and a reflective sense of exploring what might be going on for each of them without judging what that might be. And this is the kind of response that we were really looking for.

So at the end of the interview we selected three of the top applicants to go onto the classroom observation step. And Amanda was one of them.

Jennifer: Okay. So, you know, I think what we're hearing here from you Blair is the real clear sense of how you have multiple avenues to help you identify staff who are relationship ready. So tell us what you learned about Amanda from her classroom observation.

Blair: Yes, Jennifer. I'd love to do that. So when Amanda came to the center for her observation she was very relaxed and happy to be there. It was clear she was in her element at the center. She warmly greeted the staff and she didn't have any trace of nervousness. As she entered the classroom the children immediately were aware of this new person in their midst. They stayed

close to their specialist and watched Amanda. Amanda smiled at them and gently greeted the specialists.

She found a spot to sit on the floor that was nearby the children but not very close to them. She waited and she watched and the children watched her too. After a while a child cautiously approached her and offered her a block. Amanda accepted it and they began to interact. Amanda responded warmly and calmly and supported the child's interest in playing with blocks together. Soon another child came over to join the play. As time passed Amanda became a part of the classroom. Children and specialists gravitated to her. And she really followed their lead.

Amanda's classroom observation ratings were high in the areas assessed. She was very responsive to children and – staff. She showed a high degree of warmth and a calm tone of voice talking with children. She consistently followed the children's lead. And she was able to maintain enjoyable reciprocal interactions with children.

After Amanda left, the Center Supervisor completing the observation spoke with the specialists about their impressions of Amanda. They were very positive. They felt comfortable with Amanda and found her style to be responsive and warm and thought she'd be a really great part of their team. We could clearly see that Amanda would be a good fit for Early Head Start.

Jennifer: Great. And, you know, we can see that the classroom observation really provided you with some rich information about how this applicant interacted with children and staff. So this is kind of exciting. What happened next?

Blair: Well, next the last step was to check Amanda's references [inaudible] she had practicum experience with a Head Start preschool classroom while completing her degree in Early Childhood and limited experience with infants and toddlers except for a six month teaching position with 2 year-olds prior to her move to Southern Oregon to be closer to her family.

She had also held some part-time positions in college that were unrelated to her field such as retail sales and waitressing. But we spoke with all three employers, not just the one who [inaudible] her work with toddlers. And we learned a lot of things. Her supervisor in the toddler teaching position said Amanda was a great fit with toddlers.

She genuinely enjoyed them, loved being in their environment and was always thinking of interesting and exciting ways to make that environment reflect the interest of those toddlers. She expressed sadness that Amanda had left the position.

The other references also provided some helpful feedback especially regarding things like Amanda's flexibility, her positive attitude, her good attendance and especially how well she worked in a team environment. They also said Amanda's conscientiousness was a great asset. However they did express that in the beginning it was a cause of stress for her. She was very worried about doing everything right and was hard on herself if she made a mistake which we all know is part of the learning process.

So we decided that our orientation plan of assigning a staff peer mentor to Amanda would be a good way to support her and a big learning curve of a new Early Head Start job.

Jennifer: Absolutely. That is a huge learning curve. And I think it's such an – important point that you just made that you checked all of the references and gathered relational information about the applicant's strengths and weaknesses and not just those jobs that were in the early childhood field.

So it sounds like you're about to offer Amanda the position. So we want to know what happened next. Did she get the job?

Blair: Well, she definitely did. After checking back in with the Hiring Committee about the results of all of these different processes, the classroom observation, the reference check, the committee unanimously wanted to offer Amanda the position. And when we talked with Amanda and offered her the job she was clearly thrilled and enthusiastically accepted the offer. And we love our applicants to be thrilled to work for us. It just sets such a great tone.

Amanda was also timely and responsive with our HR Department in meeting all those contingencies I mentioned earlier that are required. And once they were all met she was approved by the Policy Council, which is the last step of the process.

Jennifer: That sounds like such a great hire. Can you tell us how things have been going for Amanda, how successful has she been in her job with your Early Head Start Program?

Blair: Well, Jennifer, at this time Amanda's been with our staff team for about two years now. And her relational skills with children, parents and staff have really proven to be exactly what we anticipated giving our hiring process. Her reflective abilities and her openness to feedback has really helped tone her skills and she has demonstrated tremendous growth especially since she's had many special needs children with special emotional issues that required really careful and thoughtful strategies to interact with them.

And so that was something that she really grew in and also in her ability to work through some of the challenges faced by families of those children. So we've been very, very pleased with her progress.

Jennifer: Wow, Blair, that was really just very helpful to walk through the process like that. Thank you so much. And again...

Blair: [Inaudible]

Jennifer: ...both of you, both Redmond and Blair you've given us so much to think about. And I'm sure that – I know that our audience has some questions. We've been receiving questions throughout. So I'm going to actually read a few of the questions to you and we'll see if we can answer some of these questions.

The first one is, is it possible to hire relationship capable individuals – and train them to be relationship-ready according to definitions set – set forth by the presenters?... Do you want me to say that one again? I'm sorry.

Blair: Well...

Redmond: I think...

Jennifer: Yes.

Blair: Redmond would you like to...

Redmond: I think...

Blair: ...address that first?

Redmond: ...Sure.

I think, if I understand the question correctly, I would say yes, but it can be challenging. I mean you can get relationship. I think they used the term relationship capable. I think what matters then is the quality of the reflective supervision and how well the employee and the supervisor engage in that process because I think that's one place where you can really grow somebody's relationship readiness while they're on the job. It is through the quality of the reflective supervision. And so I think that's – where I would look at it.

Blair, do you have anything you'd add?

Blair: I guess the only thing I'd add Redmond is just in my experience of course, is that it feels to me that – it's a much harder thing to build relational skills if you don't have a certain amount there to begin with. I think and you mentioned that later. I think I would agree that reflective supervision is a wonderful mode to be able to help build that skill.

But there has to be a certain level of it, I think, present when you get people onboard. Otherwise we found it very difficult to build it in.

Redmond: I would agree.

Jennifer: Okay, thank you both for that. I have a couple of more questions that came in and Blair, I think both of these are for you, so...

Blair: Okay.

Jennifer: One is pretty – a pretty simple straightforward question. Are parents aware and notified when a candidate will be visiting the classroom that their children – their child attends?

Blair: Oh yes, absolutely. We do have processes in place where we inform parents when we bring people into the center. That's an excellent question.

Jennifer: And then the second question is do you have any suggestions for allowing a classroom observation when a program is home-based? So how – might you do this in a home-based program?

Blair: Oh that's a good question. Well we do have home-based option. And we also have a, what we call a parent-child combination option which just has a lot more socialization. Anyway, what we have done in that context is we still do that observation. But we watch how the staff person then interacts in that [inaudible].

How do they respond to the parents? How do they respond to the children? Do they seem respectful of the parent's role as the primary teacher and staff's role as the facilitator of that interaction? How do they gauge and sort of enter that room in a way that's – helps them respond and try to learn what's going on a little bit, and be aware and attentive to the kinds of interactions they're observing between staff and the family.

That kind of respectful part I think really helps. But I think it's worked very well in that venue for us.

Jennifer: Okay, Redmond did you want to add anything to that question?

Redmond: I guess I'd just would – when it's a home-based program and you have the applicant come along for a home visit to then have the home visitor and that applicant debriefed afterwards to sort of ask them, you know, what they thought about how it went, what they noticed, what they didn't notice can be another way to sort of give at the person's level of reflectiveness.

And if they did do something that you wondered about, you thought oh I think maybe they went too far in this way or that, if they notice that themselves and brought it up in the debriefing afterwards that helps to know that that person – that applicant noticed it and would probably do it differently the next time.

Jennifer: Okay, thank you both for that. Another pretty sort of straightforward question, how long does it take to complete the hiring process? I think Blair that's directed at you.

Blair: Oh boy, that's a really good question too. I'll say first, it depends on how busy your HR Department is to begin with. But pretty much what we do, let's see, we announce the job. It takes about a week. Probably ten days to process the applications once they meet a full ten days from the time that job is announced to reviewing and screening the applications and then scheduling the interview, which we do within a few days of that.

And then we set up classroom observation times for the next day at centers where services are available. And then reference checks I would say usually within two days but of course if it's a holiday period that can affect your ability to get a hold of people. And then we can make a decision about them. So what's that, about two and a half weeks, three weeks?

Jennifer: Okay. Thank you for that. I'm going to ask another question that – came in. And this person wrote: I see the value of having a comprehensive process for – hiring relationship-ready staff. However I'm struggling to hire qualified staff and feel lucky if I get one or two applications from someone with the educational requirement. So how might this information help me as I struggle to hire for open positions?

Blair, I'm sure you can relate to that.

Blair: I certainly can. And I'm sitting here thinking oh that's so tough because it is. It's really hard when you don't have a good pool of applicants. Boy, you know, that's – it's hard to respond in some respect because I'm not sure, you know, what area of the country we're talking about. I mean we're in a fairly rural area. And we have periods of time where we get more or less applicants.

I guess I would say if there's a way to possibly put in a long term sub or somebody in that position in order to be able to buy you a little bit of time to make the right choice. I mean we struggled with that because on the one hand you don't want to put somebody else into a classroom that's new to children because it kind of can disrupt their relationships. On the other hand, I would say our experience has shown that it's better to take a little extra time to find the right person than it is to have that, you know, sort of substitute model for a period of time.

And I think the sub model in the classroom works if you have the other teacher as having a strong relational connection to the children in that classroom. So it's not a – it's a very difficult challenge. I do respect that.

Jennifer: Okay. Thank you for that Blair...

Redmond: Something I might...

Jennifer: ...Yes, go ahead Redmond.

Redmond: Something I might add there is that to use the existing staff and to really talk with them about who do they know, who can they bring in that they think would be good people that they think have the relationship qualities and maybe even if they're not great on experience because you're not getting – if you're not – if you're only getting one or two applicants you're probably not getting folks with a lot of experience anyway.

And just try to use the relationships that your staff might have. And if you're forced just to hire people that when you don't have many applicants I think it's still very valuable to do the relational assessment in the hiring process because you know better as the supervisor what you're getting and maybe you want to put more effort into the room, effective supervision early on with that person.

And really try to mentor them more intentionally around their need to grow around relationship skills. But I agree with Blair. You save yourself a lot of time and heartache if you can wait a little longer and try to get more applicants that might be a better fit.

Jennifer: Okay, thank you both. And actually what you just said Redmond reminded me of a question that I had. And Blair you were talking – when you were telling us the story of Amanda you talked about assigning a staff peer mentor as part of your orientation plan. And you didn't really talk much in the – in our webinar presentation about the staff orientation. But I know that you also looked at that as part of your work with Redmond.

Can you talk a little bit about what you do with staff once they're hired?

Blair: Yes, be happy to do that. And a lot of the strategies we use came out of our experience working with Redmond. One of the things that we really want to focus on right away is to try to infuse the culture and the values in the new staff person that we share as an Early Head Start Program. And we do that in a variety of ways.

One is that we do have a new hire orientation process. And that's really looking at all of the pieces that – of new orientation staff need to get sort of across the board in the program.

But there is a piece of time where, you know, new – the new employees meet and have lunch with the managers and supervisors. We try to get to know them a little bit in that context. And they – and that's a step there. Once they go to the center though they have an orientation with their Center Supervisor both a reflective type process as well as just the nuts and bolts of the center.

But really important next step is having the center staff team meet with the applicant and be able to really intentionally share what are the values of the program, what are the things that staff are finding most rewarding and important about the work. And we just start infusing that kind of culture with our new applicants. That's been very important.

And then of course the staff peer mentor has – is another part, which is just a big help. So whether it's for data entry of child observations to struggles on a home visit to, you know, all of the nuts and bolts of the work that we do there's a go to person that a staff person has to mentor them. So those are some of the things that we do.

Jennifer: Great, thank you so much for that. And we – are coming close to the end and I – we have so many questions that are coming in that we're not going to be able to answer them all but we certainly will take them, and archive them and try to get answers to all of them for everyone at a later time. So I'm just going to ask you one last question and you both can respond to this.

If you're considering a parent from your program for a position, do you or how do you consider skills you have seen in him or her already?

Blair: –That's a good question. Maybe I'll start by just making a comment and then I'll let Redmond weigh-in as well. I think it does weigh-in. I mean, as you observe a parent, of course in – the context of our program, we get to know that parent's relational ability and just how they operate in that kind of an environment. So that does have an important or at least it has some influence into how we look at that person. So I would say that yes, it does have an influence of course.

The other piece I can say with that is that we do take real good care that if we do hire a parent in the program and of course we love to see our parents, you know, develop and grow and be able to get positions with us, we do take extra steps to just really try to help them make that transition from being a parent in the program to being a staff person.

And, you know, how that might be similar, how that might be very different and, you know, be able to answer questions they may have around that and set some boundaries and just try to make that process work sort of in a reflective intentional way.

Jennifer: Okay, Redmond did you have any thoughts about that?

Redmond: Yes. Just, and really to reinforce what Blair has said that, you know, when you observe – when you have a parent already in the program as an applicant it gives actually a wealth of information because you will have seen how they interact not only with their own child but how they may have interacted with other parents as well as how they've interacted with the staff.

So you have a range of relationship information available. And I think it can make parents some of the best hires because you know so much more about what you're getting on a relational basis before the hire. So I think it can make them really strong applicants because you have that sense both positively as well as perhaps problematically where they're at relationally – so.

Jennifer: Okay. Yes, so I'm going to squeeze in one more question. And Redmond you can start off with this one and then maybe Blair too.

So the person wants to know has it been difficult to get references to answer relationship-based questions. And they said so often they only want to provide the basic information about

a past employee. And I'll also throw in there Redmond that someone asked if they – if you have – if they can get a copy of the form that you referenced that you sometimes send to references.

Redmond: Certainly I can get that form to you all and do that through Zero to Three. And you know it is hard. What I try to do is try to talk with the reference about, you know, the person has given permission explicitly and it's laid out on the form so there's no risk to the center.

But if the policy of the center is that they only give out dates of employment or things like that, you know, I push a little bit but if the person, you know, is trying to basically follow the policy of their center I can't really criticize them for that. It is what – their bound to do.

So I, you know, I push a little bit but, you know, I generally have found that the release helps. But it's still a challenge. Blair, do you have any tips there?

Blair: Well I would say that I concur. I mean it definitely can be a challenge. I think we've had in our program pretty good luck with getting a fair amount of information and maybe that's just, I'm thinking off of the top of my head, it's because we're in a more rural environment and so many of our staff, you know, work for little, you know, childcares or small centers and may not have that level of policy.

I mean but we have come against it for sure. I just think it's something that, you know, we just had to do the best we could with given, you know, what we get in terms of the ability of the reference to be able to respond as fully. But we do dig for sure just like you said.

Jennifer: Okay. Well thank you both. We are out of time so – we're going to stop here. And so I just want to say thank you again to our fabulous presenters both Redmond Reams and Blair Johnson. I also want to say thank you to Kelly for all of your help with the polls and Jennifer our Operator and the EHSNRC staff for all of the logistical support. And a big thank you to our audience for all of your participation in this virtual Birth to Three webinar.

We really hope that you are able to walk away from this experience with a few new ideas and some tools that can help you put those ideas into action. So we hope this was useful for you. – Excuse me.

Please, also make sure to tune in for tomorrow's webinar, Track D9 entitled Growing Programs, Growing People; Reflective Leadership in Early Head Start. And of course next week the final week of the Virtual Birth to Three Institute so make sure you tune in then too.

Thank you so much everybody. We're going to end now. Take care and have a wonderful day.

Operator: This does conclude today's webinar. We thank you for your participation.