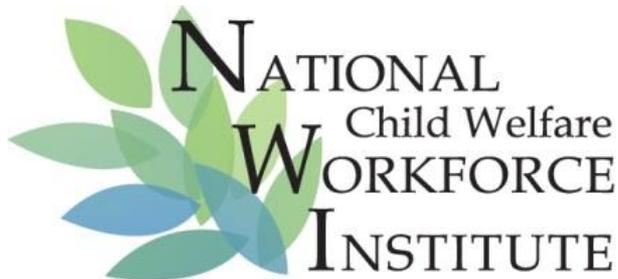# Building a Professional Workforce—To Do What?

Interrupt poor practices that lead to fatal and severe maltreatment of very young children

Nancy S. Dickinson & Emily Putnam-Hornstein

NHSTES, Berkeley, CA, May 21, 2014

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute

Changing . . .

Leading . . .

Learning . . .

Children's Bureau

Presentation Agenda

- Current focus of the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI)

- Impetus for this topic
- Compelling research: Emily Putnam-Hornstein

- A conversation
  - Child protection skills
  - Systems approaches

NCWWI's Purpose

- To increase child welfare practice effectiveness through:
  - Diverse partnerships that focus on workforce systems development
  - Organizational interventions
  - Change leadership
- Using
  - Data-driven capacity building
  - Education
  - Professional development

NCWWI 2013-2018

- 11University-agency Partnerships (UPs)
- Leadership Academies:
  - SSW Deans & CW Agency Directors (LADD)
  - Middle Managers (LAMM)
  - Supervisors (LAS)
- Organizational Intervention
- Targeted Technical Assistance
- Information-sharing Networks, Knowledge-management & Dissemination (LINKD)
- Evaluation

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University-agency Partnerships

Region 1
1. University of New Hampshire (combined BSW/MSW)
2. University of Connecticut (MSW)

Regions 5 & 6
1. University of Indiana (MSW)
2. Wayne State University, Michigan (combined)
3. University of Minnesota-Duluth (Tribal)
4. Northeastern State University, Oklahoma (Tribal)

Regions 7 & 8
1. University of Missouri, Kansas City (MSW)
2. Missouri State University (BSW)
3. University of North Dakota (combined)

Regions 9 & 10
1. University of California, Berkeley (MSW)
2. University of Alaska-Anchorage (combined)
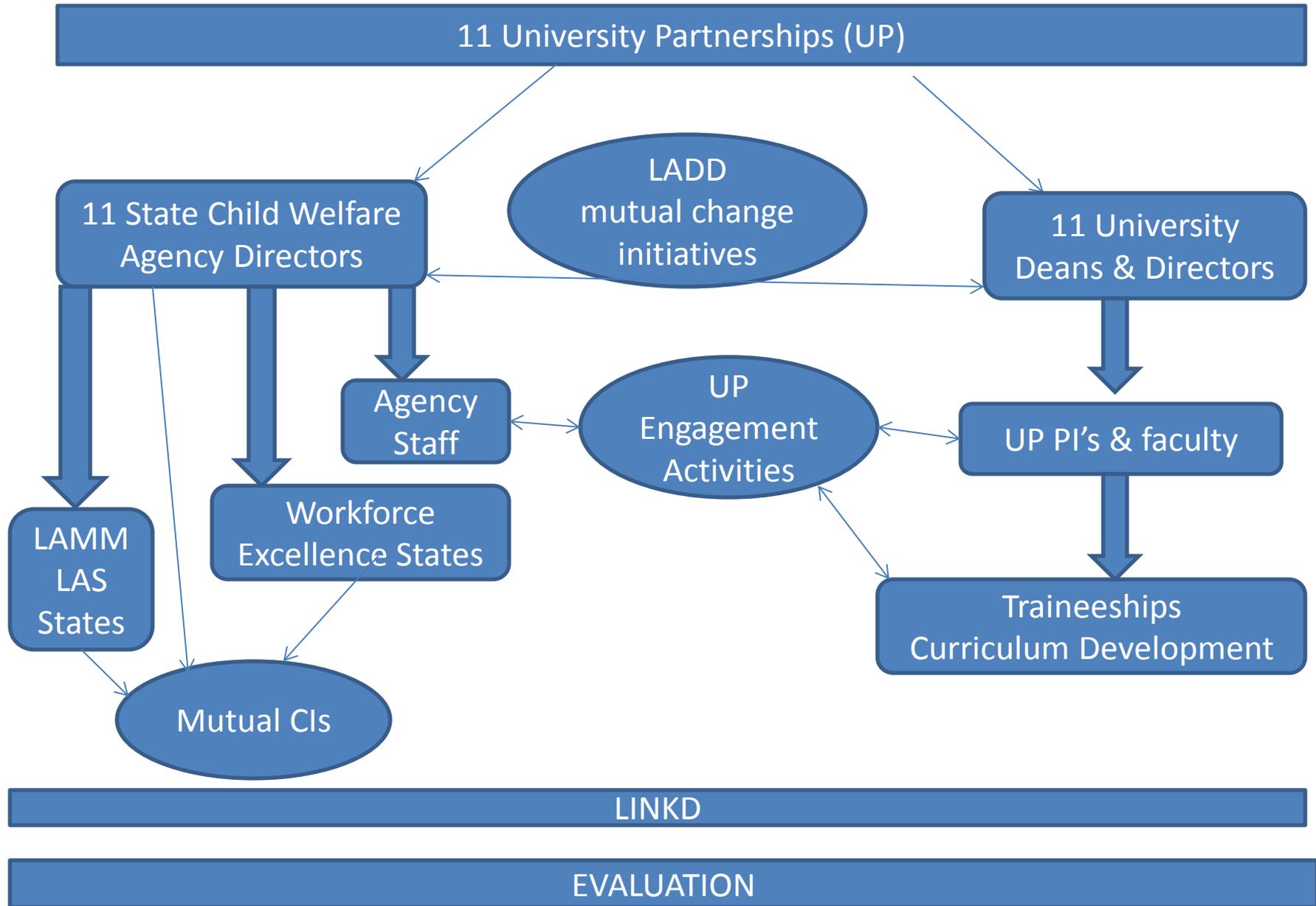
Building a Professional Workforce—To Do what?

Interrupt poor practices that lead to fatal and severe maltreatment of very young children

Impetus for this Topic

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A Letter to BreAnna

Fatal Maltreatment of Children

- In 2012, 1,640 children died from child abuse and neglect at a rate of 2.20 per 100,000 children in the population, an increase since 2010.
  - 70% of victims were younger than 3 years old
  - Victims younger than 1 died at a rate of 18.83 per 100,000 children or 3 times the rate of children in the population of 1 year olds

- Significant undercounting of maltreatment deaths
  - Conservative estimate = 2,500+ child abuse and neglect deaths in U.S. every year
  - 7-8 children are killed every day

Compelling Research

Emily Putnam-Hornstein's presentation on Non-Fatal and Fatal Maltreatment of Infants and Young Children: Lessons for Practice, Programs, Policy

http://calswec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/uploads/infant_research_5_18_14.pdf

Fatal and Severe Maltreatment: Areas We Miss

- Neglect

- Poor supervision

- Drug-exposed or FAS infants

- Failure to thrive

- Allowing developmentally inappropriate activities

- Suffocation by overlay

- Deaths occurring while caregiver is intoxicated

- Caregivers with disabilities, impairments

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Why They are Missed

- Lack of knowledge

- Poor practices

- Limited investigations

- Failure to report

- Different definitions and standards in states

- Lack of communication (CPS, law enforcement, medical examiner/coroner)

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Child Fatalities: Poor Practices

- **Screening/Assignment Issues**
  - Inappropriate screening out of complaints
  - Delay in accepting complaints and assigning cases
  - Unacceptable time lapses between assignment and contact with families

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Poor Practices, continued

- **Policy/Compliance Issues**
  - Failure of CPS supervisor to sign off on CAN assessments and/or to review the case materials in accordance with established procedures
  - Failure to perform complete investigations
  - Failure to comply with policy regarding positive drug screen in newborn
  - Failure to follow due diligence in contacting parents regarding complaints
  - Criminal history check incomplete or not done at all

More Poor Practices

Covington, T. & Petit, M. (2013)

- **Assessment Issues**
  - Inaccurate assessment
  - Failure to properly assess well-being of children in the home or recognize imminent danger
  - Safety and/or risk assessments completed incorrectly or not at all
  - Failure to remove subsequent child(ren) after a finding of terminations or deaths with other children
  - Unaddressed mental health needs of parent(s)
  - Failure to recognize and respond to parents' repeated and clear indications that they do not want the child(ren)

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Implications for Child Protection Workers

- Meet community medical examiners, coroners and homicide or child abuse detectives
- Pay attention to children who die in accidents and from unexpected medical complications
- Be persistent in locating the histories of families of fatality victims
- Pay attention to the co-occurence of DV, animal abuse, physical abuse, and poor supervision and other forms of neglect
- Follow up service plans for caregivers to ensure caregiver compliance
- Take care of yourself and seek help when overwhelmed

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Child Protection Skills

- What is the most critical skill related to keeping very young children safe?

- What's the best way to train that skill?

- How can the outcomes of that preparation be evaluated so we know what works?

Child Protection Skills

- Engagement to bring about change
- Think through family strengths and dangers, enabling explicit risk assessments
- Make complex interpretations of information about a child's needs and circumstances
- Willingness to make decisions in conditions of uncertainty
- Curious, compassionate, and courageous

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Key Child Protection Skills

"Our capacity to prevent severe child maltreatment depends above everything on building and sustaining intelligent, compassionate and imaginative staff who have the courage to engage with the complex circumstances our societies' most vulnerable children live in. What makes the task harder is that these practitioners must do this work within risky environments and (often) fearful organizations." (Turnell et al., 2013, p. 213)

Systems Changes

Is there a better way to do business?

- A system that values professional expertise supports effective social work practice

- Benchmarking performance facilitates improvement and promotes accountability

- An organizational culture that sustains and deepens critical reflection and continual learning (Munro, 2011)

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Foundation for Developing a Strong Workforce Expertise (Turnell et al., 2013)

- Courageous and purposeful leadership for learning (risk sensible learning not risk aversive)

- Staff feel supported and able to be open about their work, willing to expose, explore and think through their practice

- Willingness to explore with the whole agency what is going well and badly

- Key leadership task is to set up strategies and structures to elicit and grow practice wisdom

Some Approaches to Delivering Children's Services

- ChildStat

- Teaming

- Systemic Units

ChildStat: Leading Systems-level Improvements based on Case-Level Experiences

- Weekly meeting with senior NY ACS management and Child Protective Borough offices staff to look at data indicators & practice, learn what areas need to strengthen, and to hold all agency leaders accountable for making necessary changes

- Makes use of various data indicators and individual cases to review and monitor child protective work with managers, supervisors and line staff to ensure high-quality, comprehensive investigations of abuse/neglect, appropriate safety/risk decisions and provision of services required to reduce risk of abuse or neglect

Casework Team to Enhance Effectiveness

- Assigning more than 1 worker to a case (a primary and a secondary)

- Using group supervision & teamwork to promote best thinking on how to serve a family, provide support to each other, get all the work done and share responsibility for the results

  - Weekly team meeting for group supervision & to review cases, systems issues or barriers to services

Systemic Units as an Approach to Delivering Children's Services (Forrester, et al., 2013)

- Consultant social worker
  - Leads a small unit that collectively works the case
  - Ultimate responsibility for case decision-making
  - Provides expertise and leadership

- Qualified social worker

- Child practitioner

- Unit coordinator

- Clinician at 50%

Unit Model Characteristics

Unit/Team Level

- Shared work
- Case discussion
- Unit coordinator
- Systemic approach
- Skills development

Features of Practice

- More work with clients
- Better work with clients
- Better assessment

Important Impact of Developing Different Approaches to CW

- How do we want a professional workforce to help people?

- How should the organization support workers to do these things?

Opportunity to think and debate more deeply about what is needed to prepare and allow social work professionals to deliver child welfare services in an effective and humane way. (Forrester et al., 2013)

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Resources

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Questions/Comments

Thank You

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