

Alexis Kirk ([00:00](#)):

So I know you were involved in a multi-year process to make a major change to the foster care system in California, and this process ended up leading to a new practice model that's still in place today. Could you start out telling us a little bit about the foster care system and explain to us exactly what practice model is and why it's important?

Mark Lapiz ([00:19](#)):

Sure, I'd be glad to. The child welfare system are also known as the foster care system is really what historically has been thought of as child protective services. So we're really talking about children and families who need the intervention due to allegations of child abuse or neglect. In this case, we're talking about children and families who need our services and therefore enter the child welfare system. So for child welfare practice model provides detailed description that includes values, principles, and behaviors that guides social workers and their agencies on how to support implementing a theory towards change or improved outcomes. A frontline practice approach includes core elements and practice behaviors that kind of guide all interactions with children, families, communities, tribes. So this also includes leadership behaviors that ensures that the model is demonstrated and reflected all at all levels of the organization and system.

Alexis Kirk ([01:27](#)):

It almost sounds like a practice model is a master blueprint of sorts for social workers and their agencies outlining core values of social workers and how they should operationalize those values when working with kids and families. And I'm curious, what made you guys prioritize the development of a practice model for California? What really sparked that interest?

Mark Lapiz ([01:49](#)):

This all kind of started with an initiative from the federal government designed to improve the outcomes for children in foster care. So these outcomes are really around permanency and that would be defined as children returning to the care of their biological parents or their parents or finding adoptive placements or legal guardianship. So again, these are outcomes regarding putting a child in a permanent home versus stories around children languishing in foster care from one foster home to another until they age out of this system at the age of 18. So the state of California applied for this grant with the idea of really looking at their own system issues around institutional bias and racism and so how those could possibly impact the outcomes we're seeing. So this is how the practice model in California kind of started from.

Alexis Kirk ([02:50](#)):

Can you talk a little bit about your use of evidence in building this model in community context?

Mark Lapiz ([02:56](#)):

Yeah, so in child welfare at the time this grant came to us, there wasn't an evidence-based practice model out there. There was best practices that inform how to interact with families and children, but nothing evidence-based. And so, you know, there was four counties that were chosen to participate in this initiative and that was kind of what first bubbled up for the project, that there wasn't any evidence-based practice models out there.

Alexis Kirk ([03:29](#)):

So it sounds like if you had this grant funding that you wanted to use to develop a practice model that would improve permanency, and it sounds like your first bump in the road that you hit was the stack of evidence to draw from. So our task then became creating your own practice model instead of implementing an existing evidence-based one. So it sounds like the focus of your work shifted a little bit. And what was the first step you took to really start that design process for your practice model?

Mark Lapiz ([03:57](#)):

Absolutely the first step was looking at which communities were experiencing the worst outcomes regarding permanency. And statistically we were able, it was identified that African ancestry communities as well as our Native American communities, once they entered the child welfare system, were not having the best outcomes. So from an evaluation standpoint, the project looked at those communities being the focal point. The first step was really identifying leaders in those communities and engaging them in that process to be partners in this grant. And so you know, through that, through that kind of process of engaging these communities, I think is where the project really encountered their first aha moment. We encountered a lot of resistance, a lot of misunderstanding, a lot of kind of in, in so many ways kind of defiance towards wanting to partner with us. And it wasn't until we really took a step back and really heard from these communities as to what was getting in the way that we really started to unpack the historical trauma that systems such as child welfare have played in these communities.

Mark Lapiz ([05:24](#)):

And so these were emergent issues that really started us going down that road of how do we and I don't think we had the correct terms academic terms at the time, but it really highlighted the role of adaptive leadership that had to come into play with, you know, acknowledging historical trauma, trying to understand the impact of our systems that go back generations you know, to a time where many of us social workers weren't a part of, but we've inherited this and we've in not only inherited what we've done to these communities, but also inherited those practices. And again, really got back to the whole idea of what the goal was around institutional bias that was, was impacting us. So that's where we really got kind of started understanding what was kind of getting in the way.

Alexis Kirk ([06:23](#)):

Yeah, that's real interesting, Mark. We started out with this goal of wanting to create this practice model and since one didn't exist, like let's partner with the community and see where we can make the most impact, kind of where outcomes may lagging behind and really partner with those communities. And it sounds like in setting up that way of working together, that even just that initial step kind of caused you guys to take pause based on where the community was at and really back up even further from the practice model, which was kind of that first goal you set out to tackle together and really think about some of these really complex historical trauma issues that you were seeing in your community.