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

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 be 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. Can you talk a little bit about kinda that process of, it sounds like having to pump the brakes a little bit and shift from what was maybe first on your initial agenda to backing up a little bit.

Mark Lapiz ([00:54](#)):

Yeah. I think it was this idea that, you know, when I reflect back, there was a lot of this idea of what partnership truly meant, and up until that point, partnership really kind of meant we were gonna be controlling everything and it really kind of was just, they were just a seat at the table without really a voice. And so these were kind of these, you know, aha moments we were having in terms of what we kind of coined the term business unusual. That anytime we did a strategy or an engagement strategy that resulted in, in a way that we didn't anticipate we tried to do our best to take a step back and, and realize maybe it's something we're doing versus something that, you know, our partners are just exhibiting for, for some random explanation. And so this kind of pumping the brakes business unusual, going slow to go fast, help us to understand that there was a, a dance to this. It was almost like it was not one strategy that was just gonna kind of unlock everything. It was gonna take an enormous amount of time, energy, and effort focused on our own behaviors and our own, you know, how do we become a little bit more humble around this? So, you know, this, these aha moments didn't happen in what at one time I think it was over time we started to realize what are these qualities that we're really trying to continuously practice that seemed to be helping us move the needle.

Alexis Kirk ([02:40](#)):

Yeah, that's really interesting to hear you talk about that. A couple phrases that you used it made me think of, of something we talk about a lot in our work, which is co-creation. It really sounds like with these partnerships you were trying to lean into a process of co-creation. And when we talk about that, so you mentioned kind of giving people a seat at the table. One of my favorite ways of thinking about co-creation is not just giving people a seat at the table who haven't historically had one, but also figuring out ways that once they have a seat at the table, how can you help meaningfully involve them? How can you lift up their voices so that they can really be kind of in partnership with you making meaningful contributions to the work and helping set the agenda. I'm curious if you could elaborate a little more on the relationship you were starting to develop with these communities in the context of co-creation and, and who you started to involve and how they started to come together.

Mark Lapiz ([03:41](#)):

Well, I think the project itself really started looking at partners or representatives from these communities that have also had an experience with our system. So there was this wide casted net regarding folks from community-based organizations, foster parents birth parents that had been involved in this system or former foster youth. So there was this kind of broad recruitment of consumers of our, our system, but from different kind of areas. And so there was this common, these common themes of mistrust and these common themes of your, you know, you feel like you're engaging us by putting us all

in the room, but we can come up with decisions and in the end you have the ultimate yay or nay on those decisions. And so these were all themes that came out loud and clear and part of the project where we did an institutional analysis of really understanding from those different perspectives what their experiences were like with our system, and then comparing those to our own perceptions around those same areas and seeing that big huge disconnect.

Mark Lapiz ([05:00](#)):

So that was where the initial kind of engagement began. I think where the real transformation started happening was when these same community partners and the project teams from the different sites all got together and started diving into what would make good social work practice mm-hmm. <Affirmative> and you know, and I believe there was something like 500 different behaviors that were identified and put up on you know, the walls in this room in, in Sacramento. And then through a lot of exploration and discussion, it got narrowed down to 23 that really kind of set the tone for this. And I think it's something that, you know, myself and those folks that were a part of this always really highlight that this practice model was designed with the community and by the community. And therefore anything around that practice model almost has to have kind of like a copyright...

Mark Lapiz ([06:05](#)):

...Has To have their permission as to what we do with it. Both in terms of their, the training of it and assessing it with fidelity and coaching to it, to even marketing it. I think there has to be some, you know, because again, we would be practicing, what systems often do is steal ideas from other folks and make it ours. It takes a conscientious effort and a group of folks who are willing to really keep their foot grounded in that idea of, of the partnership and the ownership that the community has with this.

Alexis Kirk ([06:43](#)):

I love how you described that as kind of once he took the time to really delve into some of those issues of mistrust and moved on to the next phase of the work of really figuring out what do we want this practice model to be really having it be not just made in partnership with the community, but by the community. And I love that concept of like a copyright of, you know, the community has made this, it's truly community owned and what we do with it from here on now, you know, the community's gonna have a say in that.

Mark Lapiz ([07:18](#)):

I think we look at our experience with this implementation science and co-creation and kind of put academic terms, these theoretical frameworks to them. But I think one of the things that we really understood through this project around working with diverse communities was understanding that communities themselves have answers to these questions based on the fact of how they behave, that we have totally disregarded for in these larger systems. Communities that we worked with are all based on relationships. They are very self-reliant and very open with each other about when they have problems and struggles and find ways to make that happen. And I think that was always kind of part of this, this kind of focus on co-creation was let's look to them to guide us through this process, especially these four implementation team members who were kind of just brought together to do this without really anybody else understanding in our system how to do it.

Mark Lapiz ([08:25](#)):

So we really took it upon ourselves to exhibit humility and come alongside our community partners and say, How would you have done it in your community? And how can we apply it in this, in this framework or in this, in this system too. So what we were really trying to do in a lot of ways around co-creation was may have been new to a system such as child welfare, but it's not new to the way communities operate. And so I think for many of us, there was, for my own self and transformation, there was like a liberating moment to say there's much of who I am as a person in my community that now is really being integrated and intersecting with who I am as a professional and being recognized and celebrated.