Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Maya Pendleton, Center for the Study of Social Policy; Shadi Houshyar, Center for the Study of Social Policy

[00:00:00]: [Music Introduction]

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:03]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

TOM OATES [00:00:32]: 2020 may be over, but the effects of perhaps the most tumultuous year in most of our lifetimes will linger. The coronavirus pandemic, along with economic and political turmoil, were some of the events we found – and in many ways continue to find – shaping our lives. But also during 2020 we began to shed a greater light on the systemic racism and social inequities that nearly every aspect of our national framework is built upon. The calls, screams, really, for justice after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery and countless others, the shooting of Jacob Blake, all of this skyrocketed the conversation and drive for change in the way communities of color are disproportionately viewed and unfairly treated. And child welfare is in the middle of all of this. Black and Native children are over-surveilled, over-policed, and over-removed by the child welfare system.

[00:01:33]: Thank you so much for joining in this episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I'm Tom Oates. We continue looking at what child welfare learned from 2020, and this episode explores systemic racism. Currently, public systems by design hyper-surveil Black, Native, and in many jurisdictions, Latinx families; community-based supports and basic safety net supports are minimal; and child welfare's response to "helping" families in need results in high rates of removal for Black and Native children. We spoke with Maya Pendleton and Shadi Houshyar from the Center for the Study of Social Policy. CSSP has joined with the University of Houston Graduate College for Social Work for the upEND Movement. upEND seeks to end the practice of state sanctioned separation of children from their families as a response to social problems like food insecurity, poverty, lack of affordable and safe housing, and lack of meaningful prevention services. upEND also seeks to reimagine how we support and serve families and eliminate the root causes that create conditions for harm to occur.

[00:02:45]: In this conversation, we dive into how agencies can help drive their own change to effectively and objectively recognize the inequities within their policies, procedures, and actions. We talk more about the upEND Movement and what abolishing the current child welfare system looks like and why it's so important that we look at this not merely from a child welfare perspective, but pulling back and reviewing the inequities across our entire society. This may be one of the most important episodes we've brought to you so far. I thank you for taking the time to listen, and hopefully this can spark you toward conversations, inquiries, and actions to honestly review your work. Okay, let's get to it. Our conversation with Maya Pendleton and Shadi Houshyar from the Center for the Study of Social Policy, here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

[00:03:45]: Maya and Shadi, thank you guys so much for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. And, let me start by really thinking about the agencies themselves because when we talk about the shift or really unveiling the racist past or tendencies that agencies have, there's got to be a willingness to change. And so, Shadi, let me start with you - how are agencies actually raising the questions to themselves about their own racist past?

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:04:19]: Yeah, sure. So, I think, you know, there's a movement in the field - although I think some are further along than others - to really start to consider and to implement these equity-driven and antiracist policies and practices. So, some of this has been motivated by the wave of systemic racism - which has been alive and well since the very founding of our country but has been forced to the forefront of our collective consciousness in recent months by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many others - has really sort of driven a lot of us to really start to think about this. And, I think for some, data has been and can be a big driver of these conversations because it can make the case clearly that there are inequities, gaps and disparities, that these are real, that they exist and it can help us both evaluate and measure our progress in tackling these issues.

[00:05:12]: I also think that the pandemic has brought into sharper focus the deep-rooted inequities both the persistent structural and system inequities in our institutions, in our systems, in our society. And, it's really brought into clear view that white supremacy and racism often deny Black people and other communities of color most protections and that the pandemic is no different. So, we're seeing a clearly disproportionate toll of the pandemic on communities of color. And I think that's been a driver. And I think for child welfare systems this is really an opportunity to make some meaningful changes.

TOM OATES [00:05:49]: You touched on a keyword there - meaningful change. Because, having the difficult conversation is one thing, but finding out where change can be implemented and actually driving that forward is, that's the real difficulty. The conversations are only the first, very first step. To actually tackle the issue, Maya, what is it that an agency really, really needs if they're going to, like Shadi said, have meaningful change?

MAYA PENDLETON [00:06:19]: So, I think that we've seen some agencies make concerted efforts to one, yes look at the data, which is always a good starting point; two, changing their practice, but also having new families. You know, I think that agency have said, you know, we haven't really named that family preservation, for example is a real priority. So, shifting those types of changes, looking at practice, looking at policies, looking at what workers are mandated to do with families and how do we shift that? Looking at how often the agency is involving law enforcement in their work with families. I think that those are all meaningful shifts that agencies can make. Internally, looking at their workforce. Are there certain neighborhoods that are targeted? And again, a lot of this goes back to data, but I think that it's also a mix of, it's data but it's also policy, it's practice, it's the mission and thinking about what is driving the work. And, I think another big thing is we, so often child welfare, I think a lot of agencies have the mission of protecting children - which, we all here want to protect children. But, I think also thinking about shifting that focus to what makes families safe, what makes families whole. I think that when we start with families and thinking about the whole ecosystem that surrounds children - separation from children and things that you might do in the name of protecting children, but that are actually traumatizing parents - I think that makes it more clear, right, if we're thinking about how do we support families, how do we support communities. So, I know that in our work, you know, sort of across the country we have seen agencies take up that work and start to make those shifts and those are real meaningful changes that they can do now.

TOM OATES [00:08:15]: Yeah, it really gets into the definition of what does protecting children look like. Because it doesn't necessarily always look like removing children from the home. What does strengthening families look like - and it's not exactly a, you know, check this box, take this training and come back and then you'll get your children back. So, it's an execution of what does this look like. You know, when we had talked before recording, a lot of the conversation, you know, centers at the policy

level, at the execution of the procedures - but there's the behaviors and the individuals that are involved just as much. And, three things that were brought up in that conversation - and I'd love for you to expound on these, if you can, guys - is will, resources, and time and what kind of those three entities have and why they are so crucial to change. What are, again, walk me through will, resources, and time.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:09:17]: I can start. I think, you know, we have to recognize that the bulk of child welfare system's resources are now dedicated to deep-end interventions like foster care or congregate care or residential treatment and far fewer resources to meeting place of point in families. So, until that changes, I think child welfare's response will be inadequate and beyond that, often harmful to families. So, there's opportunities. So, Family First is one, it's really helping to shift some of our focus here into prevention of entry into care. But, we need much more and much further upstream. We need consistent leadership and a sustained commitment to racial equity and that's hard because we have turnover in child welfare, we have very few initiatives that are sustained, but this work really requires leadership and a sustained commitment. And, I think at the leadership level we need leaders of color in child welfare and this really requires a shift in our resources and our priorities and in our power. It requires a commitment to anti-racist, equity driven decision making and part of that, again, goes back to our commitment to data. And when we talk about data, we're talking about are you disaggregating your data? Are you integrating community voices into your research? Are you looking at developing survey data that's really looking at dimensions of intersectionality? Are you using data to look at the racial impact of your work in the communities you're serving? Are you looking to see if you're making improvements and having positive impacts for communities of color?

[00:10:42]: It also means that we have to be investing in training and capacity building. I think often around capacity building, we see that it's just, that equity or racial equity sits with just one person but we have to be creating a workforce that's culturally responsive and equity driven. And I think we have to be bringing in culturally responsive services and supports. And again, Family First here can help us by helping us build out the prevention services array. But we have to be investing in building the evidence for culturally responsive services so that we can move them into the IV-E clearinghouse. And we have to be partnering with agencies, with community partners, with parents and working in different way. And I think that all takes time and resources and intentionality, as well.

TOM OATES [00:11:28]: There's a big question of where does somebody start, right? And, you know, just a few minutes ago, we started talking about an agency's willingness to change. And, data - as you guys have mentioned a couple of times - is a great receipt on what have your actions provided, right, where are you. The data provides objectively, you know, what have the results been of the system you've been implementing? But, when an agency now wants to take a look and say, okay, how did we get here, they're looking to unpack those process and tools and how their staff actually implements those processes and tools - but to look at your own system objectively can be difficult. Where would you advise an agency on how to start to look at their people, processes and tools as objectively as possible, knowing that they've gotta kind of turn the lens on themselves?

MAYA PENDLETON [00:12:25]: Well, I mean, I would say that it can be hard, but I also think that sometimes we overcomplicate things. If our goal is to serve children and families and make sure that they're safe and supported at home, and those goals are not being met, you know, I think it becomes almost very simple. I think that most people who work with children and families, work with child welfare, you know, they have the intention of serving children and families well. So, I think, you know, that's a realistic place to start. Are we doing the work well? And I think that because child welfare moves fast, there's timelines, there's checkboxes, you know, all these things that workers have to do - if they have time to slow down and really think about what would the children and families that we're serving

say about our work, you know, it might be a hard look but I think that a lot of children and families, especially in Black and brown communities would say they aren't happy, they're living in fear that their kids are gonna be taken away. And, if agencies are to start there and work out from there, I think that they would be in a better place.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:13:34]: Yeah, I'm gonna add - I think that's totally right, Maya - I think centering, what it means to sort of center our work on families means that we really have to bring them into the work and understanding what do they need, how do we meaningfully meet their needs. I think there's a couple other approaches - and we use a few of these at CSSP - one is an institutional analysis, which is really a qualitative approach that we take often in child welfare systems where we're looking at things like case processing maps, doing interviews, observations, case reviews. And, the whole idea is to help uncover those problematic assumptions, the policies, the practices and really focus on the factors that lead to racial disparities in services and outcomes.

[00:14:17]: And, by asking how something comes about, the idea really helps us reveal the systemic problems and help identify the ways of working better. But, there's also tools like race equity impact assessments and so those literally look at how a proposed action or a decision is really gonna affect different racial and ethnic groups. And, it can help us unpack those actual and anticipated and even unanticipated effects of policies, institutional practices, programs, decisions. And the idea is we're taking an intentional look and thinking about the impact of something that we're proposing or doing on different populations. And, again, to Maya's point about engaging and hearing from families, really understanding and capturing the experiences of children and youth and families of color in systems and asking the questions about what are their needs, how can we support them - to make sure that we're better aligning what the system does with what families need.

TOM OATES [00:15:13]: You know, Shadi, you had mentioned something earlier about making sure that there are leaders of color within these agencies - when CSSP is working with an agency to unpack things, you talked about the unintentional consequences that happen. Are you finding that agencies are almost surprised - while the data may show the disproportionality, the data may show the systemic racism - that when it comes to the individual leaders or even down to the caseworker level, folks are shocked that the data tells them something that they may have not felt and then turn to you and say, well, I'm not racist. No, but the data in the system is giving you, you know, complete inequities across the board. Are you seeing kind of the light come on for people, for people to realize my gosh, this is really how we are acting.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:16:13]: I think in some ways. And that's, that's really a starting point, is just acknowledging the harms that are coming to children and families of color in child welfare and that these harms are being produced and maintained through the policies and practices of our system. So, this is hard for a lot of people, right, because as Maya said, too, people are coming into child welfare with good intentions, they want to help families. So, seeing that and acknowledging it, that we're often harming families, is really tough. But I think it's part of how we get to that commitment to doing this work. I mean, there's other shifts that I think really need to happen in policies and we can talk more about those, but I think, you know, it's a little bit of a reckoning, right, in terms of what is the data telling us, what are we seeing in our systems. We're intending to do good things, are we doing those good things?

TOM OATES [00:16:59]: So, we've gotten here, alright, this is where we are, this is what the data is telling us. And so, Maya, we see the data, we see the poor outcomes for children and families involved

in child welfare, especially for Black and Native children and families. So, asking the big picture question - how is it that the system is producing these kind of outcomes?

MAYA PENDLETON [00:17:20]: Well, I think that if you were to look at the history and the formation of the child welfare system, that the child welfare system's primary intervention has always been separating children from their families. That has been the intervention. And we know that separating children from their families - even if it is a day - you know, the research shows that that is painful and that is traumatic for children and it is traumatic for families. So, I think that the history of the child welfare system has been one of pain and trauma for the families that it's interacted with. And, I think that when you think about the racism that Black children have experienced, the way that in so many ways that Black mothers are criminalized by the system, the worst assumptions are made about their ability to care for their children. The way that Native families, Native children have almost seemed to be better off in white households by the system - that is the operating assumption of the system. So, when you take the history and pile it on with the assumptions that the system is operating on, it's honestly not surprising that Black and Native children and families have worse outcomes, because that is how - back to the institutional analysis, if we think about how a system is organized, and the child welfare system is organized to have these very harsh, punishment-oriented interventions with children and families with racist beliefs about Black and Native and Latino families. And so, we see that they don't fare well when the system is involved.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:19:09]: I think Maya, you pointed out the racist roots of the system. So, if we really look back at what we really should be talking about is a family regulation system, that really took shape as that system began to serve fewer and fewer white children and more children of color. And, as this happened, our federal and state dollars shifted to paying for out of home care and much less investments in families and in-home services. So, that is the, that is the history of the system and as Maya said, it's not designed to promote family unity, health and well-being. So, it's doing what it's intended to do. It's putting the responsibility of caring for children on parents, solely on parents and it's not acknowledging that there are broader, sort of systemic issues and needs that families have. So, most children and families of color, again, as Maya said, are coming into child welfare because all of those other systems - because our safety net - has failed them. And, often for reasons of poverty. And so, what does child welfare do - we force them to take parenting class or to participate in a program they don't really need. When what they really need is stable housing or food assistance or access to childcare while they work. And so, child welfare piles on the requirements, it surveils and punishes them, it brings them deeper and deeper into the system with each decision point. And, it's really based in that faulty premise that there's something wrong with these families rather than looking at social conditions and inequities that both bring children and families into child welfare's attention and then deeper into the system. And so, that, you know, I think we're getting exactly what we paid for, and that's the, that's the challenge with child welfare.

TOM OATES [00:20:47]: And, I'm actually gonna wanna go down that path a little bit further in a little bit to talk about maybe the larger societal changes that need to occur, because child welfare is a system that does not operate alone, it is amongst the human service, you know, continuum that involves everything and more that Shadi had just mentioned. But, let's talk about change, and the upEND Movement that the Center for Study of Social Policy is partnering with the University of Houston's Graduate School of Social Work - guys, can you explain to me a little bit, take me back and walk me through the upEND Movement?

MAYA PENDLETON [00:21:28]: Sure. So, the upEND Movement put plainly is a movement to abolish the child welfare system. It is a partnership between the Center for the Study of Social Policy - CSSP - and

University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work. But, even within that partnership, this is really meant to be a movement that is collaborative but collaborative with families and communities who have been saying for a long time now that the child welfare system has been harmful. It functions as a surveillance and policing system and it needs to end and this is not the support that families want.

[00:20:05]: So, with upEND, we are really looking at how do we move towards abolishing the child welfare system. And, what that means is, you know, we recognize that there will be reforms for the child welfare system as we are working to abolish it, but we want to make sure that those reforms are reforms that are shrinking the system. Joyce McMillan who is a mother and an activist with experience in the child welfare system always says shrink, shrink, shrink, gone. So, that is our goal. So, shrinking the system, shoring up supports for families outside of the system - you know, as we've talked about housing, work support, childcare, healthcare - all the supports that families need, and then returning power back to communities, which I think is really important. How the child welfare system functions now is that families are told what they need to do in order to be in compliance, right. But, there's not that much room, even if families are asking for supports, you know, child welfare sort of has a number of supports that they can give families but there's not that much room for families to make decisions about their families - where their children should go, what they need, what services are useful for them.

[00:23:15]: So, it's really about returning that power and understanding that one, children are safer and healthy and happier at home with their families and their communities, so making sure that's possible; but also making sure that we are trusting families and parents, you know, child welfare sets up a relationship of distrust, that's why we have to watch families in child welfare, right? We don't trust them to do the right thing. But we're saying no - families should be and are the first responders, they know what's best for their families, they know what they need and how do we create a world where we don't need child welfare anymore. Where families have the resources, have the supports and are able to be autonomous and make decisions about their families and where we're no longer seeing Black and Native families and communities really torn apart and separated and surveilled by the child welfare system.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:24:08]: Yeah, and I would say that I agree with all of that, that's right. I think in terms of what we're needing to invest in, we have to be thinking about cash assistance, healthcare, housing - safe and affordable housing - food assistance, universal healthcare, a child allowance, jobs with sustainable wages. So, these are all the kinds of things that we need to be building out outside of child welfare. And, as I think Maya said, we can still strategize about changes that need to be made within child welfare, right, while we do that, but all those changes have to be directed towards dismantling the whole thing. So, I think some of the examples of some of those other things are, you know, I think the use of congregate care placements for children and youth, really thinking about eliminating policies that use arbitrary timelines to terminate parental rights. Thinking about, really rethinking mandatory reporting, right. So, over 50% of Black children in the U.S. are gonna be investigated by the time they're 18 for potential child abuse. So, what does that tell us? It tells us that we're really good at surveilling and racism drives reporting. But, we're not good at predicting maltreatment.

[00:25:15]: So, I think we have to be thinking about all those things. There are other pieces that are - so, strategies like blind removals, right, the idea that you, because racism inherently derives child welfare decision making, can we sort of think about how we reduce the elements of bias. But then I question that because I think should we even be making decisions about removals when we can't do them without bias. So, I think those questions about some of those, you know, strategies, but I think the attempt is to try to get at some of these issues. I think we also have to be thinking about informal kin

supports for kids and how we better support them outside of child welfare. So, I think these are just some of the ways in which we can think about shrinking and, you know, improving the existing system at the same time.

TOM OATES [00:26:00]: So, you just were able to identify a number of areas where - and I like the term shrinking, right, reducing or abolishing or getting rid of things within the child welfare system itself. But, as we had just mentioned a little but ago - and you guys had pointed to a number of these areas - I'd like to get a sense of what about the society at large, what about our society would really have to change to be able to implement all of those areas that you'd like to shrink? Right, to execute that way and really upend the child welfare system.

MAYA PENDLETON [00:26:37]: Well, you know, upEND is focused on child welfare, but, you know, abolition is a big movement, right and it's a big movement to abolish what many abolitionists are saying we live in a carceral state, we live in a state where Black communities especially are surveilled, they're policed and they're punished and hurt by it. So, it's child welfare, but it's also thinking about how do we, how do we live in a society where this no longer occurs, where we no longer think that this is okay. So, it's part of that, it's challenging the carceral state, the prison industrial complex, the policing in Black communities and families, but as Shadi said, it is also living in a society where we say it is not acceptable that families are homeless. We have plenty of housing, we can do something about it, it's not acceptable. It is not acceptable that kids go to bed hungry in this country, that's not okay. So, it's really challenging the root causes, again, getting back to why are children coming into this system and why do we live in a society where these things are said to be okay? But, we know that they're not, because people are suffering, right. So, it's really about changing how we think about what it means to also be in community with each other, but really challenging racism and white supremacy and all these systems that are disproportionately hurting and have always been hurting Black families. It's really rethinking and reshaping society and what we're okay with and thinking about how we want to live and the society that we want to live in.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:28:16]: I think part of that reimagining is really thinking about what do all children and families need, right, to thrive and, you know, at CSSP we have developed an antiracist early childhood platform and it's really about policies that are going to help support all children and families. Like Maya said, you know, a healthy housing guarantee, a national child allowance, healthcare for all. Really, the types of policies that we need - access to justice, living wages for people, childcare and early learning for everyone. And, if we truly have these meaningful supports for families in our safety net and that we're focused on bringing sort of the power back to families and to communities and supporting them there, I think we will see that systems like child welfare won't really have a meaningful role in that society. I think the challenge is we're not very comfortable in doing that work of really supporting the whole family, thinking about, you know, meeting the needs of kids and families of color, really being intentional about dismantling some of these injustices and wrongs and creating meaningful safety net that really supports families rather than creating these restrictions that are really tied to racism and other issues. I think, you know, really building out that safety net is a big part of this.

TOM OATES [00:29:36]: And with so many components of that safety net and they all need to work in conjunction together with the same goals and purposes in mind, I think it makes everybody kind of take a step back and say, listen, if we're talking about ending the systemic racism of the child welfare system, you need to pull back even further to recognize the child welfare system isn't the only systemic racist system because you can point to everything child welfare touches and realize that it's not just child welfare - though we're talking, at least with the upEND Movement of where we can focus it. But, it is, as Maya mentioned, it is an overarching society, globally systemic in terms of like housing, education, the

criminal justice system, child welfare and, you know, law enforcement. Everything from food deserts to, you know, how kids are treated in various school districts and that, and we can go down the list.

[00:30:33]: And so, that kind of gets this big 50,000-foot view across how we deliver services, you know, across the nation. But, when we start talking about the individual within the child welfare system, when it comes to upending an entire system we're talking about processes and policies and tools - what about the individual case workers and the individual trainers and managers? Somebody can look at this and say, well I'm only one person within the large system. Where do they, where does an individual who is a professional in this field, who wants to see change, where do they fit in within driving a change for the better?

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:31:17]: Well, I'll talk about a little bit. I think, again, I think even at the individual level, at the caseworker level we have to be sort of willing to acknowledge what, you know the harms that have come to children and families of color in our work, we have to be able to see sort of in ourselves the implicit bias that may be driving our decision making. We have to be open to trainings and building our capacity around cultural humility, around implicit bias, around understanding both the structural racism and discrimination that are part of child welfare decision making now and making a commitment to doing our work differently.

[00:31:55]: I think ultimately leadership is a really big driver in helping sort of the frontline workers sort of be able to do this work, right, they have to be able to have the time, the resources, the ability to do trainings, all of these pieces. But, I think that at the individual level, we can all make that commitment to taking a strengths-based approach to our work with families, really seeing that we often don't see families in a very positive way, we sort of focus on or perceive deficits and really have this frame of going in and investigating and focusing just on the child and even sort of making connections, meaningful connections with families in our work and seeing them as people, as families who are just trying to do right by their families and sort of trying to take that truly like partnership, collaborative approach to our work with families can really change some of that, shift some of our, like approach to working with families and shift some of how we think about it.

[00:32:54]: I think often we're so risk averse and so focused on safety and child welfare that that sort of puts up our blinders, like, we don't see, we don't see anything else and I think that's also a bigger systemic challenge for child welfare, is because there's so much driven by sort of these awful stories that happen, these tragedies that happen, that drive practice so much more than anything else, than like some of the realities of what families are dealing with, where the majority of families are really just dealing with lack of resources, you know, lack of concrete supports, poverty. And, so, just sort of having that understanding and sort of making a commitment to going and pushing your work with families in a different way and reconciling sort of what you come to the table with and how you want to do your work I think is a part of it.

TOM OATES [00:33:44]: This also gets for that individual caseworker, or really at the manager and trainer level to stop and take a pause at times, because folks are moving so quickly and so many cases and the load kind of presses this urgency to respond. You know, everything is about putting out the immediate fire and we tend to rely on the processes and the tools at our disposal. But, to take a step back and start to ask the right question of, alright, what's best for the family versus where's the next bed. You know, and because that's the process and tool that maybe we need to take a deeper look at and - to use the term - upend. So, Maya, how do we respond to, I guess, you know, when we ask about those questions, what do we value, how do we respond to the values that are driven really by these

communities and families versus rather than what the system may value? How do we respond, how do we change?

MAYA PENDLETON [00:34:43]: Well, I think one, we have to ask and care about what the response is. So, families, I think that most families will tell you what they need. And, responding to that and, again, trusting them to know what's best for their families and believing them. I think also, you know, the nature of child welfare is like people who are not from the community are often entering the community and deciding, you know, what's going on in that community - but, again, I think it's a lot about listening, it's a lot about support and that can't happen when racism is present, when bias is present because then you're not able to listen and trust what families are saying.

[00:35:31]: So, I think, again, I think that these movements and upEND has to be led by demands. I don't know what is best for families and I think that everyone should sort of get comfortable with saying that, right, caseworkers, managers, they should get comfortable with saying I don't know. There's no way, I can't go to Shadi's house and tell her what's best for her kids. I don't know her kids, they're lovely, but I don't know them. And, I think that, you know, we do that in our personal relationships, but for some reason - and I think that we know what those reasons are - when it comes to families in child welfare, we pretend that somehow, we know. And I think that it really takes a shift and, again, those logics that are based on surveillance and policing and racism to shift and let communities tell us what they know. Again, I think that we also have to listen what's working well with families. I know that something we've been talking about is so often with our work, you know, we have already made our benchmarks for what success looks like, but I think a really interesting thing that you can do is ask a family what does success look like for you. And, go off of that. And so, success might look very different for different families, it's not always a one size fits all, it's not always one size fits all for a community. But, letting them tell you what success and what safety and what home looks like for them I think is a great place to start.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:36:55]: I agree. I think some of, you know, we have some principles around what is anti-racist, what does and anti-racist system look like and two of the pieces that we have are, one is to share power with families and the other is to implement family centered policies really that meet the need of kids and families of color. It's really hard to imagine our current child welfare system being able to do either of those things because it's not designed that way. But, to Maya's point, like that's part of the reimagining is that we need to share power with families, we need to have family centered policies, we need build on families' strengths, we need to really bring those with lived experience into our workforce and into sort of the way we work with families. There's a lot of these pieces that I think just child welfare's not structured in a way to be able to do at this point. But that, that's what makes it work for families, right, is if it's led by them, if it's, you know, envisioned by the community, it's, you know, responsive to the community. Those are the, that's what makes it work.

TOM OATES [00:37:56]: Putting children and families at the center of the system as opposed to the recipients of the system. And, it sounds so simple, but where we've got, where we've found ourselves along the way is - and Maya mentioned it - we're, the child welfare system isn't always supposed to have the answers, but should be the ones asking all of the questions. And, who are you asking the questions of, you know, tends to say where you're valuing. Are you valuing what's best for this family, what's best for this situation - well ask them and find out. And, it does, it shifts and it's a word you just brought up of power and who has the power within the system and, you know, we're not always supposed to have the answers because every family - like you guys, like Maya mentioned - every family is different.

[00:38:50]: For anyone within an agency that recognizes the data but they want to start to make that change, no matter where they would fall in the system - guys, what would you recommend, for someone who is listening to this and says, you know, I wanna make a change and I want to be able to do the best thing that I can today or tomorrow, the first piece of advice you would give them.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:39:12]: I think, from my perspective, I think you really need to bring leadership and a commitment to advancing anti-racist policies and practices. You have to sort of lead with bringing that to the table and then starting to unpack the ways in which you do the work, which includes sort of looking at your policies, looking at your practices, looking at your capacity building in your workforce. You know, asking the hard questions, doing some that, like, shared work of acknowledging what our system does and how we want to do better. I think that for me, that's one of the first places to start.

MAYA PENDLETON [00:39:52]: I agree. I also think that, you know, on a sort of macro level, I think that so often we are, you know, knee deep in the work and we don't take a step back to think about what are we really, why did we come to this work, why did I become a social worker, why am I here and then in an ideal world, what would this work look like if I was doing it well and if families were safe and protected. And again, getting back to the mission of making sure your priorities are to keep families together, to not punish parents, to reduce harm and reduce trauma to children and families and their parents. To make sure that they're in their communities, to make sure that they're with relatives, if possible. I think looking at the priorities, thinking about why you started this work, thinking about the world that you want to see and the world that you want to live in and how do you help create that world brings some really good answers.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:40:52]: Yeah, I love that, Maya. I think the idea that can we look at ourselves and say we want to promote family unity, we want to promote the health and wellbeing of children and families. If that's our goal, if we can say that, then we can really start to take a real look at the ways in which we may be failing.

MAYA PENDLETON [00:41:09]: Yeah.

TOM OATES [00:41:10]: Shadi Houshyar, Maya Pendleton - thank you guys so much for spending your time with us here and the Center for Study of Social Policy and your work not only in the upEND Movement but for spending that time and for helping us all kind of unpack where we are and get us to a point where, again, we don't have to have these child welfare conversations if we're able to abolish the system. But, recognizing that it's a societal need across the board, as well, but can be implemented at each individual level as people go about the day and go about their work. Thank you guys, so much, for your time and for your energy and joining us here on Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

SHADI HOUSHAYR [00:41:58]: Thank you, it's been a pleasure.

MAYA PENDLETON [00:42:00]: Thanks for having us.

TOM OATES [00:42:02]: Not a surprise that this conversation is really a deeper continuation of conversations that have been occurring around child welfare for a while – from the Family First Prevention Services Act and other primary-prevention related efforts, to exploring the data that demonstrates disproportionality within child welfare. Hey, head on over to www.Childwelfare.gov and on this episode's page – just search podcasts – we'll have links to a number of resources, including more information on the upEND Movement, information addressing the inequities within child welfare, along

with the Information Gateway publication on racial disproportionality. We'll also point you to other episodes looking at the Family First Prevention Services Act, and other topics we've addressed under the heading "What Did Child Welfare Learn from 2020".

[00:42:51]: Hey, please subscribe to the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. You can find us at Apple Podcasts, Google, Spotify, Stitcher, and SoundCloud. We really enjoy being able to share the insights, innovations, and perspectives surrounding child welfare practice that can hopefully aid in your work with the children and families in your community. Again, my thanks to Maya Pendleton and Shadi Houshyar from the Center for the Study of Social Policy for this important conversation. And as always, my thanks to you for joining us for this and for all the episodes of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. I'm Tom Oates. Have a great day!

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:43:35]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at www.childwelfare.gov and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.