

Integrating Innovative Employment & Economic Stability Strategies (IIEESS) Webinar Transcript

Integrating Innovative Employment & Economic
Stability Strategies into TANF Programs

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Emerging Practice Series: Webinar #2 – Building Social Capital

JACK MYRICK: Welcome, everyone, to Session Two of our Social Capital Series, and we're talking about building social capital today. And this is Jack Myrick with Public Strategies in Oklahoma City, and I'm a career and development specialist and co-developer of the *WorkForward* curriculum, which is our 40-hour career and transition curriculum. I also helped develop the *Winning the Workplace Challenge*, which is a relationship education curriculum that we use and a lot of people around the country use that integrated with their workforce programs.

But today I'm excited because I get to introduce Marlo Fox, who's going to be our presenter today, and she's a co-founder of Think Tank. Started it back in 2006 with the purpose of building awareness and facilitating collaboration among organizations seeking to promote a more thriving community. And so for the last 18 years she's served in various leadership capacities in the nonprofit sector. Marlo has a BA with Social Work from Anderson University, a Masters of Nonprofit Management, and a Certification in Capacity Building from Regis University. She has helped lead the development of various curriculum and resources for churches, community groups that want to become more effective at fighting poverty through relationally based strategies. So welcome, Marlo. I'm excited about our topic today and I'm sure you're going to give us some great insights and some great strategies.

MARLO FOX: Well, thank you. I had shared with Jack it's a pleasure to be with you all, in particular because I have a personal connection. The first about 8-9 years of my career I worked hand in hand with Job and Family Services in the State of Ohio in my own community and actually TANF caseworkers to support individuals that were making the transition from public assistance to work or other individuals that had barriers to gaining meaningful, self-sufficient employment to be able to do that. And so what you do is at the center of my heart, and so I am just honored to be here and to be sharing with you a little bit about what we have learned over the years as it relates to social capital and utilizing social capital as a strategy to support people that are journeying out of poverty or to support people in achieving their goals.

I just want to kind of give you an overarching sense of where we're going to be camping out today in relation to social capital and what we want to be able to accomplish. Here are the three P's that we're going to be honing in on. The first is pretty intuitive. So when we think about social capital we think about people. And so what we want to do today more specifically is we want to give you some tools first for evaluating your own social capital. As much as we can, if we're in a position to coach or help others that are developing their social capital, then we need to have taken that journey ourselves. So we're going to give you some tools to again be thinking about, reflecting about, reflecting on your own social capital because then that gives you credibility to be able to walk alongside someone else as they evaluate their social capital and think about ways to develop relationships that can help them get ahead. So that's the first thing.

The second P is places, and so when we think about places, how do we get proximate to people that can help us grow? And so what we're going to be doing there is looking at the places where we live, work, and socialize and consider how we might get close to people that can help us grow. And then last, we want to make sure that this is very practical, and so we want to offer some practices to help you leverage your social capital to be a change maker. So what we want to do there is equip you with some tools that you can

use as you work with your clients. So that's what we want to do during our time together today.

In preparation for that, I also want to reference that we will be joined by another speaker that I'm going to introduce later in the webinar. Her name is Andrea Carter, and she brings with her a wealth of experience and actually has some lived experience in situational poverty, and so she can speak from the perspective of someone that has utilized the formal support system to be able to get resources to get ahead. And she offers her wisdom with us today in thinking about how to partner well with your clients to help them grow their social capital. So I'm really looking forward to you meeting Andrea.

On this next slide, I just want to start from a foundation of common understanding again. In the first webinar we introduced you to some terms, social network and social capital, that provide the foundation of what we're going to be discussing. Social network: I know a lot of us, probably when we hear that term, we may even think about our online community that we're a part of, so our social media and online communities that we plug into. But broadly speaking, social network is an interconnected group or association of people and organizations. So these are our social ties. We may think specifically about colleagues, families, friends, other associations. And so when I describe social capital to people, I say, "So social capital is basically the idea that our relationships have value and they have value in numerous ways. They offer us information, they link us to opportunity, they provide trust, and they also create conditions where we can share in reciprocal values. We can do favors for one another. We can offer goodwill and other things that extend value to our relationships."

And so there a couple different types of relationships that we're going to unpack under the banner of social capital. One of those is bridging capital, and I'll get into that in a minute, but bridging capital there again is relationships that connect us externally to resources. And then bonding capital, and these are relationships that give us meaning. These are intimate. These relationships give us emotional support. Here in a minute we will be kind of diving in to those two subsets of social capital.

So I wanted to tell you just a quick story to put some flesh on that. I live in a mid-century modern home, which is... I feel really blessed with a beautiful home and I love living there, but it's a lot to maintain. It requires a lot of upkeep and I feel like I constantly have something that we're working on. And so we've had this chronic issue that we've been dealing with. Our soffits are in need of repair, and so we have kind of a long flat roof and long soffits, and it's been a bit of a mystery as I've invited different professionals in to give me an estimate of a diagnosis of what needs to happen and estimate of what the repair's going to cost. And so as I've done that, I've connected with a couple different people that I didn't really know, that I just kind of found online, and I had some guests that I was hosting this week from California. We live in the Midwest, we live in Ohio, and had some guests coming in from California. And one of the gentlemen that was staying with us, actually, his career was in construction. And he was able to take a look at our issue and he was able to spend some time diagnosing our issue, and he actually provided us with a third alternative that it looks like is going to save us anywhere from five to ten thousand dollars on the repair of our home.

Now that is social capital. So I have a trusted person that has expertise in a particular field that I can bring into my home and I can ask for advice, I could ask for information, I can ask for a connection, and he's able to provide us value. And so we are constantly extending our social capital and using social capital in our life and experiencing great value from that. And so I think it's important first to be able to kind of take a snapshot of where social capital is having that meaning in our life to begin to think about where we may be able to help others.

But before we do that, I want to talk a little bit about what are some barriers to developing social capital or to having a rich social fabric in our life? And so one of the barriers that we look at is the kinds of things that cause us that cause people to become socially isolated. Why is social isolation bad? Well, there's a whole host of reasons. We've got more and more studies these days on the impact of loneliness in our life, impact on mental health, impact on ability to access resources that keep us healthy in a whole variety of ways, economically, physically, emotionally. And so when you think about social isolation and the connection to communities that are impacted by poverty, you oftentimes see a particular vulnerability to social isolation, and that's for a lot of different reasons. The experience of poverty itself can erode trust, so we talked about trust earlier on. But trust is so critical, and when I live in a situation where I'm having to maybe be mobile because I'm having to move from place to place because I'm unable to pay my rent 'cause I don't have enough economic stability to stay in

one place, if I find myself in a situation where I'm having to go to agencies or institutions to get support for my basic needs, sometimes I have to give up my dignity to do that. Sometimes I feel like a number. Sometimes I don't trust institutions 'cause they give me confusing information or maybe I've felt like I've been discriminated against. And so there's this experience of isolation that can occur, and it has particular impact on communities impacted by poverty.

A quote I wanted to share with you by David Halpern. He's a researcher on social capital and a psychologist. And he says that, "Feeling that other people can be trusted or having people you can rely on in your life is worth a great deal. It has roughly the same positive health effect as shown in a series of studies as giving up smoking." And so there again, think about that. Think about your own relationships and the amount of trust that you have in those and how critical that is to have that sense of bonding capital of not being isolated but actually having a network of people that you can rely upon. The medical community's actually taking note of this. In fact, now when they look at all of the kinds of things that drive health outcomes for people in America, one of the things that they're looking at as a key social driver of health outcomes is this idea of social isolation, and so how do we help people not become isolated, get out of isolation, so they can have what they need to be healthy.

One of the things, last thing on social trust and social isolation, and the other thing I thought at a higher level that was interesting that David Halpern says is that a more powerful predictor of future national growth rates, so when you look at even our economy and the growth rates there, social trust is even more important than human capital. Jack, I know, is familiar with human capital. He said he spent his career in workforce, and so many of you are doing that. You're investing and helping people develop their skills and their education to be successful in their career. But what this research says that having trust and trusted relationships is as vital as that.

We want to then move on and talk a little bit more about this idea of people and how we develop a social network because one thing that I guess is positive and encouraging is that none of us have to stay isolated, is that social capital development is fluid. It's not static. It's always moving and it evolves over time. What I've done here is tried to paint a picture here thinking about various life stages, and again, you can take a minute and just kind of reflect upon your own experience because there's a cumulative effect of social capital. So for instance, I know my situation's rare. I actually still live and work in the community or close to the community where I grew up. That's rare these days. Most of the time you find people that are more mobile. And so what that means for me particularly is that I'm still benefiting from the social capital of my youth. So I have people in my life that were coaches or teachers or faith leaders, family members, neighbors, that I still have access to. I may not always access them. In fact, I may go years without accessing them. However, I know that if I need something, that I do have them there to call upon.

There's social capital that you can draw upon from your youth and young adulthood, and then as you move into adulthood you continue to develop that. That could be through career mentors. That could be networks that you establish through your colleagues, through your education, through church and civic groups or other types of affinity groups that you're a part of, clubs and interests that you have. Again, I think that's a very positive thing that there spaces and places where we can continue to develop our social capital and draw upon that.

Mobility does have an impact, and it can have a negative impact on this. And so we already talked about for low-income families, there's a negative impact because I move maybe into a neighborhood I'm unfamiliar with and I don't have trust or I move away from people I had been connected to and so I don't have proximity to them anymore. We find this to be true, though, in middle and upper income folks that maybe are moving out of a city to another city, or out of a state to another state, is those ties become more difficult to maintain. So that's why nowadays researchers are actually looking at not only the relationships that we have physical proximity to but the relationships that we actually can establish online. I know we're seeing this as a significant part of our own lives, of our clients' lives, is that they're developing online, and that's a resource.

We just did a series of focus groups with some mothers and many of them were low-income single mothers and one of the things that a group of them said, "We're parenting children with disabilities. It can be a very isolating experience. What we've done is we've turned to online support groups, online Facebook groups

where we can connect with others to share an experience." And so that is a form of social capital that can be developed.

And then the last piece of social capital I want to reference here is what I call vicarious social capital. The idea of that is there are people that I am never going to have the opportunity to get to know personally, but maybe they have information, maybe they have knowledge, maybe they have their own network that I would love to get access to. And so again, the benefit of the day and age that we live in is we can get access to people we would never have had access to before. YouTube provides us access and a window into people's lives. Podcasts and other forms of media provides us access into people's lives. I'm a big podcast listener. One story to share: I've got a lot of balls in the air at any one time, and so I've been really thoughtful lately about how I manage my time, and I appreciate the work of Michael Hyatt. He's kind of a guru when it comes to time and resource management. I listened to his podcast. He introduces me to his social network. He introduces me to his tips, and so that's a way where social capital can be developed vicariously.

Specific story: One individual that was struggling with addiction that had grown up in poverty and was trying to build his social network, he found value in developing some vicarious social capital as he learned that he had a particular gifting and skill in marketing. He wanted to learn how to really develop and hone his ability to produce marketing strategies online and through the use of Facebook and Instagram advertisement. And so he just had a huge appetite to find all the experts in the field and take advantage of all the media that he could take advantage of to get close them. And so that's a specific example of someone that had been a client in the system and had been able to take advantage of that vicarious social capital.

So now I want to give you a minute to start to reflect upon your own social capital. And so I referenced earlier there's a couple different types of capital that we look at. Bonding capital being the intimates in my life that I can call upon for emotional support. I want you to take a minute. I'm going to ask you here in just a second to hit pause on this webinar and pull out a piece of paper and a pen or a pencil and go down through each of these questions. The first question prompts us "If I need an emergency loan of 500 bucks, I know somebody I can turn to." And so think about that. Do I have somebody in my life if I need some quick cash or a quick loan, do I have somebody there that I can turn to? Go ahead and hit pause and go through these questions and see how many check marks you have—there are 10 here—in relation to your bonding capital.

All right, so next we're going to look at bridging capital. Again, bridging capital links us to opportunity. The thing about bonding capital that I referenced before is it's really important to have a place where we feel like we can belong. We all have a human need to belong. And so we need bonding relationships for trust and reciprocity. But we also need bridging relationships. If we didn't have bridging relationships, we'd never grow. Bridging relationships expose us to diversity. They lead us into places that we wouldn't have gone into otherwise. What you have here on this screen is a similar set of questions but geared towards your bridging capital. So if you want to just take a minute, the first question has a series of kind of sub questions. "I interact with people who are..." and then it asks you a set of questions that get at how diverse a network do you have in terms of people's life experience.

And so the other thing, just as kind of a tip here as well, if you want to look at how isolating am I or how diverse are my relationships, one of the things that I like to do is pull out my social media, look at my friends on Facebook or Instagram and, again, see how many of them have similar or different maybe political views or religious views or racial and ethnic backgrounds, and that'll give you a clue too. Am I connecting with people that can stretch me and grow me because they have different perspectives and different life experiences? Take a minute there and take a look down through those questions and see where you're at as well with your bridging capital.

Okay, so before I introduce you to our guest just one other thing I wanted to mention. Our first P was people, our second P is places, and so as you think about the people in your life, those from your youth and those relationships that you've developed into adulthood, it causes us to really think about where are the places that I get access to people that I need to develop my bonding and bridging capital? This gives you a chance to kind of transition, too, in thinking about the clients that you work with. Where are some of the common places that they may go to access and grow their social capital?

Here's some common places where your clients might be able to grow their bridging capital. Certainly you are a tremendous resource for them, and it's likely that they have other caseworkers that they're working with that can be a resource for them. Bridging capital: We're looking at caseworkers, teachers and professors, possibly mentoring groups that they're a part of, and if you're not aware of groups in your community that help to grow either mentors or allies or informal support networks, we can link you to some resources and good models for developing those kinds of groups. We know that people's faith community is really important to them. Many people are able to access both bridging and bonding capital through their faith community. I already referenced social media groups. Neighborhoods. We know that neighbors oftentimes are really coming to bat for one another and helping each other out and filling in a gap and providing transportation and many other things, and so that's a place where capital can be built. Bonding capital: The other thing that I've not referenced is where are there places where people that have similar interests or similar goals are hanging out. We have clubs and associations for just about everything in America, so look in your community and find out where might be there people that have a similar concern or similar identity where I can develop relationships.

All right, so now I would like to transition and do an introduction. Andrea Carter is a member of our team here at Think Tank. She's been with our team for about 2½ years now, going on three years. And I'd like her just to take a minute to introduce herself. If you would, Andrea, in your introduction, tell us a little bit about your background and maybe a time in your life when social capital played a big role in helping you to move forward.

ANDREA CARTER: Thank you for having me today. It's an honor to be able to share my experience, strength, and hope with social capital. I'll tell you a little bit about my background. I graduated from college at 20 and started teaching for the Springfield City Schools for about 10 years, and then life showed up and I became very ill. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and a nasty addiction took off, and I lost everything and was thrust into situational poverty, and went from making 36.50 an hour to making 7.50 an hour doing surveys over the phone. I was forced to go from using no benefits or assistance in my life to being able to have to rely on every benefit possible, from food stamps to Medicaid to a check to gas cards to you name it, PIPP, all of the above.

I'm also a returning citizen, and I can share one experience of many where social capital has played a positive role in my life. I had a probation officer who, when I first met him, I felt that it was going to be like every other interaction that I had, and it was going to be very transactional and he was going to just give me a list of things to do and make sure that I stayed out of trouble. But instead he asked me, he looked at me, he said, "Andrea, you have something that we need. You're an asset to us. I see here you used to be a teacher. How do you feel about teaching a GED class to some felons that I have on my docket that don't have a high school diploma?" And this was an opportunity for me to build self-esteem and worth and to feel like a productive member of society and like a professional again. He had something that I needed and I had something that he needed, and we helped each other through this relationship, build each other up. That was one positive experience I had with social capital, Marlo.

MARLO: That's awesome, and one of the things that I think we just mentioned briefly but we didn't go into, and I think Andrea's story that she just shared is a really great example of that, is the importance of reciprocity in relationship. And so you referenced that he had something, your probation officer had something that you needed and you had something that he needed. I think that's an important part of building trust, is thinking about where is there an opportunity to develop reciprocity, and how does that add value to everybody in this equation?

I can remember when I was doing workforce development work and helping to place people into job opportunities, and we would get to know one another 'cause I really needed to understand their interests and what was going on in their life. And oftentimes, even though I was in the position of caseworker, I found myself really learning and needing to learn a ton from the people that I was working with. Many of them were parents and they had a lot more experience than I did, and so I found myself asking them questions about their experience with parenting or their experience with utilizing certain resources in the community that I was unfamiliar with. That idea of reciprocity, I think, is really important in building social capital and building that mutual value, so thank you for calling that out and sharing your experience.

Specifically, Andrea, I know you referenced your interaction with Job and Family Services, as it's called in Ohio, so TANF and TANF caseworkers. Can you think about your experience there and where you might have

been able to receive help and connection that helped you get ahead, and where maybe there was a missed opportunity or an opportunity that caseworkers could've had to help you to kind of grow your social capital and kind of help you in a direction where you wanted to head?

ANDREA: I can remember early on in my recovery when I first started my journey with Job and Family Services and getting resources, I used to have a caseworker, an individual caseworker that I met with every so often every few months to help me on my road to self-sufficiency and getting out of poverty. And it was very helpful to build that one-on-one relationship with her and to know her by name and face and have a phone number that I could call. If I had questions or there were issues with my case, it was a go-to person that I knew I would be able to get solutions and help with, and she got to know me over time and my needs. And so that was a very positive experience.

But with the Medicaid expansion and later on as I was working my 10-year journey out of poverty, the format of Job and Family Services changed, and now we can only reach individuals by email and it was group re-certifications and a team was working on your case and there was never a number you could call. It was always meeting the front caseworker and them sending emails back and forth, and so it really lost that relational touch, and so if there's any possibility that a county could have individual caseworkers working with individuals again, that was a much better option.

MARLO: Yeah, so there's certain structures inside the agency can help contribute to that or be a barrier for that as well. If you could talk a little bit, even maybe outside the formal system where you access resources to get ahead, what were some things that you did to build your social capital and maybe who helped with that? And then after you talk about that, if you could just kind of share any last advice that you would give to caseworkers that are walking alongside people.

ANDREA: There were many opportunities for social capital in my life, especially in my recovery community. The 12 Step Fellowships that I belong to, that I still use today with my journey from addiction. Having that loving, caring support network of sponsorship and women who are on the same journey as myself. Circles was a community that I became a part of, and we had allies that we were with that were intentional relationships that were built across class and economic and race lines. And my husband and I were the first time exposed to the arts, Springfield Arts Fellowship and the theater, and that was a new social capital adventure that we went on and enriched our lives and our family's life. And I also had a spiritual mentor that I was able to be aligned with to help me grow spiritually along those lines and physically with my health and getting better that way. Also in my re-entry community, social capital has helped me there as well. If I could say anything for advice is: As much relationship building that you can do with an individual, the better. If you allow yourself to become part of someone's social capital, and helping them have access to your network and asking them for access to their network and having that reciprocal relationship, makes all the difference.

MARLO: All right, well, thank you so much, Andrea. That is really great advice, and I hope that all of you participating in this webinar would find both inspiration and application for what Andrea shared. Just some tools that you can take to use. We wanted to introduce you to a couple things that would be takeaways. The first is the Weave: Social Fabric Project by the Aspen Institute. You can Google that and take a look at their project. What they've done is they've highlighted numerous communities around the United States that are really looking at creative ways to develop and foster social capital. And so Andrea referenced Circles as a way that she grew both her bonding and bridging capital and how she was, through that, her and her husband's life were enriched by being exposed to the arts. On this website you'll see those kinds of expressions of community building that helps connect your clients potentially to informal social networks. If you don't already have some of those in your community, perhaps it would inspire and ignite some of that in your local area.

The second resource we want to reference is Mentoring.org, and you'll see on the slide a Social Capital Mapping Exercise. That's a way for you to really kind of walk through with your clients what's the current reality as it pertains to your own social capital? And how they can continue to grow that, where they may be strong or where they may be weak and need access to ties that deepen their social capital.

The other thing I'd like to reference is an Eco Map. That's kind of a bigger picture view. Many of you may be familiar with this. A lot of social workers and sociologists have used Eco Maps over the years as a way to,

again, create a visual of a support network for any given individual. This allows you to kind of map that, and so what you'll find is this gives a holistic view, and so maybe someone's really strong in terms of educational and social service and they could really link to those resources well, but maybe they have stressful relationships in terms of family and community support and could use stronger ties there. These two resources are great to just walk people through an exercise. Again, to both map the current reality as well as start to plan for where social capital could be developed in order to achieve their goals and experience a higher quality of life. Thank you, on behalf of Andrea and I, for the opportunity to be with you today. At this point, I'd like to turn things back over to Jack.

JACK: Well, thank you, Marlo. We really appreciate your time and your effort on this project and got some great content today and some useful strategies from you, Marlo, so thank you so much. Andrea, I want to thank you. I was certainly blessed by your story and the wisdom you got on your journey. I'm sure it's going to be very helpful to others, so thank you again for sharing that with us.

Our next Webinar #3 is going to be about how we can support our customers in actually building some social capital through some social networks. And so we're going to kind of get down into the trenches and give you some tools on how to help your clients actually build their social capital and social networks. So that will be in our next session and look forward to seeing you there.