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

Peer-To-Peer Learning Opportunity: Coaching Within a Two-Generation Context

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RUTHIE LIBERMAN: This is Ruthie Liberman from EMPath, part of the IIEESS coaching team. And again, very sorry for the delays, but we will jump into our presentation today. Today we are really excited to be talking about how to integrate Two-Gen strategies into the TANF coaching environment. We have some presenters here today from EMPath, my organization, as well as from the Washington, D.C. TANF office, and they're each going to share a bit about what their Two-Gens program looks like and how it's delivered within a coaching context. But the real purpose of today's call is to have a conversation. This is not supposed to be a traditional webinar. We aren't going to have lots and lots of slides, but we really want to have some comments from all of you who are on the call, share with us what you're thinking about, what you're doing, what you're planning, even if you are not already doing Two-Gen, we really would love some feedback and give and take.

So without further ado, I'm going to introduce my two colleagues. Yeah, please back up. I'm going to introduce my two colleagues from EMPath. First, we're going to have Stephanie Brueck, who is a Director of Curriculum & Instruction and one of the creators of our Intergen program here at EMPath. And with her will be Sarah Bellemore, who is a Director of our Career Family Opportunity (CFO) and Intergen Program and who has been delivering direct services in a coaching context for quite some time—very seasoned.

The purpose of today's call is to have a conversation with anyone who's thinking about using a coaching approach in a Two-Generation model. So even if your TANF coaching program is not yet up and running, please, we're glad that you're part of this conversation. It's not a linear process. One doesn't need to happen before the other. This is just an informal exchange of ideas today. And so without further ado, I'm going to turn the microphone over to Stephanie. Thank you.

STEPHANIE BRUECK: Hi everyone, this is Stephanie. It's really nice to be on the phone with you today and hopefully this will provide you some good context for thinking about what Two-Generation work can look like within your TANF program. So as Ruthie mentioned, I came to EMPath right when our multi-generational work was getting off the ground, and we were operating in an adult coaching context. So we thought if our adults are noticing that their kids are doing better because they're working on goals and they're thinking about what the future means for themselves, then what would it mean if we intentionally started including the children in our programming. What kind of results could we be seeing? So that's the context behind why we started doing this effort. So what we commonly refer our Two-Generation work to as is the Intergenerational Mobility Project, Intergen for short. Sarah and I are going to try really hard to say Two-Generation, but in case Intergen slips out, that's why.

So to get us started to just think about how we define Two-Generation work as within our service delivery and why we started getting into this work. This image is one that's really grounded our series to think about the different levels of impact that poverty has on families—individuals and families—and what that means for our service delivery. What you see at the top is outcomes, which is the most popularly reported impact that poverty can have on children and families. And so if we think about rates of school achievement and levels of income and how much that level of income a parent has—how that affects the child's ability to move forward in life later on and bi-directionally. So if a child has significant mental health or physical needs, how challenging it can then be for the parent to be able to pursue their own education or job-related dreams.

Then when we go down to the next level, we call that the inner-self level. And you'll notice that the parent and the child have this inner-self brain on the inside of this image. And the idea is that we're talking about sense of self and mindsets that people have when they're in poverty. So what are the messages that they're getting from society, from their community, from their family, from their friends about what is possible for them and how they should be behaving with their children. Am I someone who can break out of this generation of poverty that I've been living in and go and become a nurse and provide for my family in that way, or is that not something that my community thinks I'm capable of doing or is it not something that society thinks that I should be doing? And because a child's inner self is really built through that co-regulation—so what are the messages I'm getting from my parents? What am I seeing my mom or my dad doing and how does that impact what I decide is possible for me as a child?

We then start thinking about this family level in the middle, that little heart you see, and that's what we've really been focusing on at EMPath. And our theory is just that: if we intentionally work towards family alignment so parents and children communicating and talking about—what dreams do they have for themselves? How can they support each other? How can they grow individually without growing apart?—then we think that the journey towards moving out of poverty can be more sustainable. Because life happens and if your family is aware of how they can support each other, then they're building those skills over time, and continue to do that work without a mentor or a coach present. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Sarah, just to give a little bit more Intergen at EMPath or Two-Generation work at EMPath context.

SARAH BELLEMORE: So our Two-Gen program at EMPath has gone through a bit of an evolution. It originally started, I think, back in 2014 with a small group of CFO [Career Family Opportunity] families. So that program that I oversee just started with five families there and it has since grown, but it was piloted as a bit of an add-on for families that are participating in existing EMPath programs. So for example, if a family was in one of our shelter programs and wanted to participate in our Two-Gen program, they would continue working with their case manager in shelter, working on goals related to securing permanent housing and then they would additionally work with a family coach as part of the whole family coaching, so they would have two coaches that they would work with on different things. And it became pretty cumbersome for families, a little confusing for families, and a little unsustainable. What we learned is that this can really be done by one coach, and that would kind of take the burden off of families, off of having two coaches working with one family, and it just seems more sustainable.

So the way our Two-Gen program works today is that it's an embedded part of programming in three of our different EMPath programs. We have three family coaches that work with whole families and existing and past programming. We add participants who are interested to commit to at least one year of whole family coaching. Participants can extend up to three years. But the average length of time that families participate has been about two years. We use tools for the whole family. So adults, we have tools for each child in the home, and we have whole family tools. And something that's a little bit different is that we ask the families to identify for themselves who is part of their family and who they want to participate in the program. So sometimes this includes aunts or grandparents or cousins, but we really allow the families themselves to define who is part of their family that they want to participate. And the main focus remains around self-assessment and school setting, is the big chunk of the work that we do. And our visits take place sometimes in the office, sometimes in the community and sometimes in the family's home, which is a little different than we had done before.

Because we've gone through a number of changes over the years, we are continually learning lessons about how Two-Gen works here at EMPath. One of the biggest changes for the coaches was that each coach went from working primarily with the adult head of household to working with whole families, which was a bit of a change. Many of the families who are participating in Two-Gen were originally just working with one, just had the adult working with the coach. So the participants also had to get used to this kind of change in structure. So what some staff have done—have tried splitting up the meeting, so that half the time is spent on family-focused work and the other half is spent on just the head of household and ... You have to account for the visits and meetings taking longer. So we've had to incorporate new tools. There are more tools than were previously used; more voices that are expressing their thoughts and opinions in each meeting. So meetings take more time, especially with bigger families. We went from working sometimes with one individual to seven. And so that's a big shift. We want to make sure that we meet families where they're most comfortable. So previously we had participants come to our office for meetings, because that seemed like the most productive way to really focus on what the adult wanted to pursue and the goals of the adult. But when you're working with whole families, sometimes that doesn't always work—you know, bringing little ones to an office isn't maybe the best setting. So we offer availability and flexibility to have them still come to office, to go their home or a community setting like a library. We've had meetings take place at McDonald's, kind of making it work.

Another change for our participants is parents sometimes have a harder time with the children identifying their own goals. So we've had to explain to parents that while you may have goals for your children and I want to hear them, what we really want to focus on, too, is what are the children's goals for themselves and let's have a conversation about that. So that's been a bit of a difference, too. Breaking down goals into very small actionable steps to ensure success early on and build momentum is really important when working with kids and a little bit of a shift because a lot of the adults have already been part of a coaching programming and part of a goal-setting program, so they were used to the process. So kind of slowing down and remembering that other members of the family are new to that.

And because we have three family coaches working in different programs, they're the only ones doing whole family work within their programs. And so what we've heard from staff was that it felt a little bit isolating because they felt like they were operating a little bit on their own. Because of that, we have started implementing quarterly meetings, with the staff who are doing this work to kind of just check on things, see how things are going, what's working well, bounce ideas off of each other and any input about how to make the embedded Two-Gen model easier for everybody and better for everybody. And additionally, with families—so when we first started back in 2014, the tools were entirely informed by those families that were participating. So we continually ask the families the same thing: what's working for you, how could this work better? We really value feedback from staff and from the families because we want to make sure that—is what we're doing working for everybody, and if not, how can we get better.

STEPHANIE: As you can hear from Sarah, there's been a lot of changes over the last—can't believe it's almost been four years—or it has been four years now. And so as we think about what that means for moving forward or what that means for other organizations interested or agencies interested in Two-Generational work, we also expanded our Intergenerational Mobility Project, so our Two-Generation work, to two organizations within our learning network. EMPath operates the learning network and two organizations were interested in doing that work as well. So we were partnering with them to figure out how would this look within their different settings because we wanted to see where this worked other than just within our own programming. In reflecting on that experience, too—one of the things that I want to spend some time with all of you today is thinking about: what is my organizational or my agency capacity for doing some of the changes that Sarah just talked through? What is the purpose for wanting to do Two-Generational work, what kind of things do I already have, what kind of tools and self-assessments do I already have in my programming, and what does that mean for any changes that need to come? So just spending a little bit more time upfront on reflecting regarding what my capacity is and what would need to change for this to come into place.

What we're going to go with here is: why Two-Generation? Why now? And the reason that question is up there is, I think, Two-Generation has become such an exciting concept for so many organizations, agencies, and it's truly exciting for me as someone who has really believed in whole family work that we're moving our program delivery models to focusing more on a whole family work. We're recognizing that families are so interdependent on each other, and that that is what we can expect and how we can best impact changes long-term. And so then because everyone is talking about Two-Gen now, what does that really mean for you? Everyone identifies it differently. So for some folks, Two-Generation programs mean that a child is in a child care setting, which is attached to a building in which mom or dad or caregiver are also enrolled in some kind of training program. What Sarah and I have been talking about today is this really whole family coaching model, which is different from that other commonly used Two-Generation program. And thinking about those two differences, what kind of staff do you need to be hiring to make sure that that new programming come into play? Do you need to change the hours that staff come to work? Do your staff need to have cars because they need to be traveling to different places to visit them? All of those things come into play when you think about what kind of Two-Generational work are you interested in doing.

So this slide is meant to be a place for you to just do a little bit of an agency self-reflection. Why do you want to have more of a Two-Generation approach to your work? What kind of Two-Generation work are you potentially already doing? Are there tools that could already be used in a way to further that effort or are there things that you need to be replacing, and why do you think that increasing a Two-Generation approach would impact your outcomes? My guess is that a positive way. And how is it a value add to what you're trying to do? So we're all talking about TANF programs. And obviously those are for the hopes of improving families' life in the way that they have identified for themselves. A lot of us are focused on generational poverty. So are you thinking that a Two-Generation approach would allow you to break the cycle of poverty? Wouldn't that be a great day? And what you really need to access for having a Two-Generation approach.

If anybody has any thoughts right now or questions, we welcome those. The next part is going to be Kandis talking about the efforts in Washington, D.C. So we're going to switch gears slightly and we will have time for questions and answers at the end, but in case this is a part that's particularly leaving some thoughts and questions or statements for those…

RUTHIE: Do you want people to ask questions or just go along?

At this time, we are happy to turn the program over to our friends in Washington, D.C., and we will maybe bring up those questions again later on for all of us to discuss. But thank you so much, Stephanie and Sarah.

KANDIS DRISCOLL: Thank you. So this is Kandis Driscoll, and I work for the D.C. Department of Human Services. My colleague Agnes Venson and I have been a part of the learning community that ACF [Administration for Children and Families] is sponsoring, and we have learned a lot throughout this process. I was just asked to talk a little bit about how we use coaching in our TANF program. We have a program called Targeted Mobility Coaching that is about two years old at this point. I just want to talk a little bit about our program, how we got started, and how we use the Two-Generational framework to really help serve our families.

So the theory of our Targeted Mobility Coaching program, or TMC, as we refer to it, is really to empower our customers to change their own situation. One of the values our agency is really believing in is the inherent potential of every human being, and so our job is really to help empower customers to make the change that they want to see for themselves and their families, and that is the theory that we use in our TMC program. It's a family-centered approach and customers self-identify their own needs when they develop a plan and identify goals for their life.

I wanted to give a little bit of background on how the TMC program came about. TMC began as a pilot project in 2016, and it focused on customers who had a history of being unengaged with us here at DHS for a long time. Since that time, the program has expanded to serve new customers entering the TANF program as opposed to those who had a history of being unengaged. The goal of TMC is really to assist customers with achieving their employment, education, or occupational training goals by utilizing the mentoring/coaching model. At DHS, we have an office known as the Office of Work Opportunity (OWO), and this is really the space that we use to pilot a lot of our new programs that we are thinking about and do some national best practices. This is how the TMC program started and became a pilot, and it was operated out of OWO. So it was first piloted in OWO with customers who would do better with a coach rather than going to one of our traditional employment providers.

The good thing about our program is that—I think what really helps it to be successful is that from the very beginning we had a lot of support from our leadership here at DHS, including the Director and the Administrator of the division and the Deputy Administrator. So really from the top level of management all the way down. They really championed using the coaching model from the very beginning, because they believed in the individualized approach and the personalized support that the model really—that's really the foundation of the model. So they were in agreement about serving customers in a different way, in hopes that we would get a different result and some of the positive outcomes that were previously mentioned by my friends at EMPath.

I've said before that our target population, our customers who are receiving TANF—the program started with those who were hard to engage, but we have since expanded to serving new customers. We did see some positive results from the first cutting year of the pilot, so our director really wanted to shift our energy and see if we had been targeting customers who were being unengaged, what would our results look like if we started with customers who were just entering the TANF program. I just, also on this slide, wanted to give folks a sense of our case load size, which has since gone up since these numbers, but we are serving about 11,000 families in our TANF program. That includes 20,000 children.

Also, before going over this slide, which is just a depiction of our service delivery in our TANF program, I wanted to talk about what the model looks like for TMC. So the model uses a principle of individualization and teaming. Through the principle of individualization, which recognizes that customer's individual strengths and needs, and teaming, which promotes the integration of silos within health and human services, DHS has seen improved engagement with customers who have gone through the TMC program. For example, few customers in TMC are sanctioned due to non-participation, and more customers are meeting their hourly participation requirements, which is very promising. We have also seen more consistent engagement such as our customers attending their GED classes consistently for three months and keeping a lot of different appointments with other providers such as their mental health providers. So we are very excited for what we've been able to see so far in the two years that the program has been in existence.

With this slide, I thought that it would be helpful to just give some context about where TMC fits within our broader service delivery model. When a customer enters the TANF program, it starts with an application, and then we do an assessment and orientation, which you can see on your left-hand side of this chart. The introduction to the TANF program starts within upfront comprehensive assessment that determines the customer's employability, and it screens for barriers to employment. The results of the assessment are then used to refer customers to services that are tailored to their needs, their strengths, their preferences, and their circumstances. The TMC team was developed intentionally to target services, resources, education, family development, and career pathways for customers receiving TANF.

From the application and assessment phase, we use that information to develop an individualized responsibility plan (IRP), and so TMC is really categorized in our service delivery as a barrier remediation service, because it's there to help customers who, like I said before, may not be ready to go to one of our traditional employment providers, but that they would really do well with the coaching model in order to address some barriers that they may be experiencing. So with the help of their coach, customers develop their IRP, and TMC focuses on not only identifying any barriers that the customer may face—like I said before, just like a mental health disorder, a substance use disorder, any literacy issues—but they also really talk about the strengths and supports that the customers come with and that they may have access to. From the application and assessment phase, they then go into developing their individual responsibility plan, and once in the program, they have access to some of the supports and services listed on this slide. We really serve our customers through contracts, through partnerships with our sister agencies, and through our Office of Work Opportunity, like I mentioned before.

And so this slide, I wanted to spend a little bit more time on—now that you guys have a better sense of how we started TMC and kind of what our service delivery model is—I wanted to spend some time talking about how it fits into the Two-Generational framework since that's a topic of discussion today. When we got into the learning community, one of our goals was really to think about how we could incorporate a Two-Gen approach into TMC. And as an agency ourselves, we are thinking about how we can really bolster our Two-Generation approach, not only in our TANF program but agency-wide. So this chart was developed to really help the coaches within the program see that the work that they have already been doing with a lot of our customers already fits into the Two-Gen framework. What you will see in the middle is the five core components of the Two-Generation approach, and this was actually developed by Ascend. The theory is that families need access to these five core components really in order to be able to thrive and break the cycle of generational poverty. So this slide depicts how TMC fits into each of these five components. I'll start by going over one component, one by one, and I'll start with early childhood development.

Our coaches in TMC really help to connect our parents in TANF to any child care services that they might need and our goal is always to connect our customers to the highest quality child care that is available. So we have strong partnerships with our sister agency, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, who is in charge of the child care services for the city. So when a coach works with a parent, they really start by asking questions about their family and their children and find out what is going there. Similar to EMPath, the sessions do take place in a variety of settings. Our coaches do home visits, customers can come to the office or they can also do meetings within a community setting. As it relates to the post-secondary education and employment part of the Two-Generational approach, TMC uses various assessments to really help customers think about what employment goals they have for themselves and where they want that to lead for their families. For example, they do an assessment called My Next Move online assessment, and it's a career assessment to help a parent identify where they want to go. We are very intentional about having conversations about career pathways, and also linking our customers to other CBOs [community-based organizations] and sister agencies that also offer employment services that might be beneficial or classes. We have partnerships with our Office of Employment Services and local colleges in the community.

As it relates to building economic assets, our coaches also do a financial assessment with our families. It's called Your Money, Your Goals. This really is just help have a conversation about where our families are financially—what their credit score might be, what their savings goal might be for themselves, if they've established a bank account—really so that they can start to think about how they can be even more resourceful than they already are with the assets that they have available to them, and also so that they can begin to pass these good habits down to their children, so that as children see their parents spending money and being responsible they also will build that same habit as they grow.

Under the health and well-being component, our coaches again make linkages to other services that DHS might not offer ourselves, but that we know our customers could use and they will be very supportive to their journey. So for example, for any customer that may be struggling with a mental health condition, we have partnerships with our Department of Behavioral Health. We have connections to D.C. State for customers who may be experiencing domestic violence. So we just make sure that we are also intentional about looking at the full picture that our families are coming to the table with, and that definitely includes health and well-being.

Then finally, under the social capital part of this Two-Generational approach, we find out a lot through the TANF comprehensive assessments, which I talked about earlier when customers initially come into the TANF program. But once the customer sits down with a coach, they do something called ECO mapping, and this really helps a customer for them to self-identify what their support network looks like and how this network can be supportive for them as they identify their goals and identify the small steps that it’s going to take to get them there.

So a lot of the activities that happen in TMC fit very well into the Two-Generational concept. I think right now as an agency we are looking at what additional partnerships we might need to strengthen this approach and what other techniques and practices we may need to put into place to make sure that we’re continuing along the same. The learning community has been very helpful in that for us.

I want to end with just a few lessons that we've learned in the time that we've been operating TMC, the first being that Two-Gen is important in supporting the needs of the whole family. That we know when parents are worried about their kids and kind of aware they have different circumstances going on with their family, it's really hard for them and any of us to focus on any goals we have for ourselves. So the Two-Generational approach really helped in serving the needs of the whole family. We have learned that it is important to support staff who are utilizing a coaching model because sometimes customers present with multiple barriers and we have to make sure that our staff are also taking care of themselves, so that they can be effective coaches for our customers. We have learned to be strategic about when we want to expand the program and to which target population. So like I said before, we started with one target population, and now we are at the point where we are thinking about what other target population within our customer base it would also be beneficial to. And finally just that the coaching approach may take more time, like EMPath mentioned before, but often have stronger and more lasting outcomes, which is very important for us here at DHS. With that, I think that I will hand it back over for the discussion portion of this webinar.

RUTHIE: Great, thank you so much, Kandis. We learned a lot over here, and I'm sure everybody else on the call found your presentation so informative. At this point, we are going to invite you to ask your questions or comments. Folks at Public Strategies, if people want to actually speak, can you instruct them on how to do that?

TINA SMITH: Sure. Yes, if you want to ask any questions for the panelists to answer, remember at the bottom right you will see an icon of a hand. Just select that hand and we will know to call on you. We'll go in the order of whoever selected first, okay?

RUTHIE: Thank you so much. And you also, if you don't want to say your question out loud to everyone, you can use the question box as well to type in your question, and we will keep an eye out for it. I'm also going to go back to this slide of the questions that we were asking you to think about in your subconscious and hope that some of you will be willing to share with us your thoughts on these.

But before that, I actually have one question I want to ask Kandis because you are doing the Two-Gen work in the TANF setting. As we've gone around and worked with a lot of states, one of the issues that comes up all the time is the very large case loads in a TANF program. So how did you deal with that in D.C.? What are the case load sizes for your coaches that are doing the Two-Gen work in [TMC] and what kinds of changes did you make, beyond the case load even, to be able to offer this kind of service?

KANDIS: Sure. I will start by answering that question with what I know, and I have my colleague Agnes Venson, who is also on the line. She is the supervisor of the TMC program. So I'll let her add anything that I may be missing or misinterpreting. Because it started as a pilot program, I think we didn't want to have the case load be too large, and again we've only been at this for two years so we are constantly thinking of how and when it is appropriate to expand the program. I think at any one time there is a case load of 20 to 30 customers that participate in TMC. And I believe that may be per coach. Agnes, you can correct me if I'm wrong.

AGNES VENSON: Sure. That is roughly correct. But the case loads are broken down as active and inactive customers. And as we enter into this Two-Gen approach, it is more work because you have the family with the individual that applied for TANF. So one of the things that we're going to do in the immediate future is to have someone deal with the inactive customers, which is an administrative portion, so our coaches will only deal with active customers. We want to bring the case load down but as it stands right now, it's inactive and active customers. But our plan moving forward is to give the inactive customers to someone that would maintain that and outreach to them till that we can get them active.

RUTHIE: Thank you. I've had a question come in for both organizations, and that is: how often do you meet with the whole family? So EMPath, do you want to start first?

SARAH: Yeah, sure. This is Sarah, I can speak to that. When new families come on board for Two-Gen work, we are meeting with them pretty often. I mentioned before we have a number of self-assessment and tools that we use with each individual that is participating in the Two-Gen model. So in the beginning we are meeting with families about weekly or every other week, and then as their time with us progresses, that number can go down to about once a month. But initially, as we are getting to know each other and learning about each family member and what their goals are, we are meeting weekly.

RUTHIE: Thanks. How about…

AGNES: This is Agnes from DHS. For us, where we are now, the customer applies for TANF, so we start with the customer. So upon their request, is when we bring the family in. So like next week we are meeting with the family in here in D.C., and for us we call it D.C. Cross Connect, which is teaming, where we bring in the family and/or other vendors that's connected to them. We do it upon the individual person that applied for TANF, their request, and we've seen it increase. So it's happening maybe three to four families a month. The biggest one—we're going back to school so we know that's going to increase as we have children with IEPs [Individualized Education Plans] and behavioral issues, and then we partner with them to help with that process.

RUTHIE: Yeah, that leads to one of the questions I think that is a follow-up to what Kandis talked about, is that sometimes when you—not sometimes but really always—when you develop a whole family or Two-Gen approach, you find that you need to bring in resources that you didn't have before, because now you're dealing with children and they have different needs and different institutions that they work with. I'm curious to know what kinds of additional resources have you had to develop and did you have any challenges with that? Why don't we start with D.C., Agnes and Kandis?

AGNES: So additional resources for the families, we do cash and non-cash incentives. When we meet with families, one particular family, if the child continues on this behavioral plan, then we start giving them stickers, so supplies like that. We are looking at in October, something that we are rolling out is increasing the cash incentive for various things that they do. Additional resources as non-cash incentive are definitely more time for the staff and more training for the staff. So basically those things like that.

KANDIS: Yeah, I just wanted to add to that because I think one thing that we have done in the process of even continuing now is looking at the current partnerships, for example, that we have with sister agencies, and looking at if those are still a good fit in the way that they are designed now and how we need to potentially expand those partnerships and what that would look like. So for example, we have a partnership with the agency that is in charge of the early childhood development in all of the early learning for the district. And we are in conversations with them about how we can really bolster that partnership so that we know that all of our families who are receiving TANF and all of the children are really in the highest quality of child care that is available in this city. We know that child care is a really big support for a lot of our families in order to help them achieve their goals. So I think that's one thing that was important for us that could be important for other TANF offices around the country.

RUTHIE: Thanks. Agnes, you had mentioned needing additional training. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the training that you've arranged for your staff?

AGNES: One training that we did most recently was customer service, so trying to infuse the coaching model even in our customer service. And also when the customers come in, we talk to them about of course motivational interviewing, especially if we don't have the individual customer and we may have someone in their family member. For example, we have one family—this family's home schooling the 16/17-year-olds, preparing for college. So we teach the coaches: not only do you speak to the customer, but you've got to be ready to speak to that child, too, because they're there as well. So come to the table prepared with resources of what you talked about you're going to have. So motivational interviewing, customer engagement, really family engagement, and good customer service.

RUTHIE: Great. EMPath, do you have something?

STEPHANIE: At EMPath, we really were shifting with this new—this is Stephanie, sorry—with our new model we were shifting to doing service delivery that included children, which is definitely new for us, so most of the staff here at EMPath work with adults and are used to working with adults. So looking at credit reports and doing financial coaching, which looks different than getting a little kiddo ready to go to school and looking at their IEPs. When we first started, we needed to make sure we had someone who had some child development background as well as had experience working in the public schools in the area, had connections to understand what the IEP process looked like, what kind of resources are available for children in public schools or non-public schools, what are the rights that children have if they're homeless versus if they're not homeless. So thinking through all of these pieces that weren't as much of our service delivery—we have them a little bit, but we were really referring out—calling schools to ask rather than having someone in-house, I would say we were continually looking to expand the pool of child and family specialists in-house to be asking more of those specific needs. In addition, we were creating a lot more tip sheets for staff to be aware of, so what is the process for applying for child care, what is the process for or what resources exist for certain behavioral issues, and what are some strategies that you can be using with children in the home.

The home piece is interesting because a lot of our programs do not do home visiting, so not only were we bringing in a whole family component, but we were also changing the environment in which the coach is working with families. And home visiting is its own, I call it like its own special beast. It's a wonderful place to be, to really get to know the family, but it also takes a different kind of training to feel comfortable to do that. So making sure we are talking about safety protocols and also how do you make sure you engage the family when you have a three-year-old running circles around everybody, or you are in the office and the same thing is happening. So talking about engagement strategies for keeping everyone engaged. I think that's the primary… Anything else you would add, Sarah?

SARAH: We did. That has been super helpful having somebody in-house that's easily accessible for tech questions about child-related things. We also had a connection with an IEP advocate, who will take on individualized education plans. So kids with special needs in schools who have an individualized education plan—sometimes the parents don't fully understand the process or understand the right steps they and their kids have within the public school system or are not happy with the services that the kiddos are getting, and so that sometimes goes beyond my capacity, for example. We are able to connect with a specialist advocate who does this in her line of work to go with the parent and talk through these issues with the parent and the families in a way that we wouldn't have been able to provide before, so that connection has been really helpful.

We also have connections to an afterschool program that is located in one of our offices, a Head Start that is located in one of our offices for those kids that are in that age range. So delving out those local resources has been really helpful because we can't do it all, either.

KANDIS: I would say to add to the training piece that Agnes brought up, we have had to do an increased amount of training for our staff. One, this is a new model, so we need to do more training to be able to use the new tools, but also training components about what are different strategies that exist for behavioral intervention with children. What are ways that we can talk about goal setting with kids? How do we adapt that language that we used to use with adults to make it more kid-friendly? I think that we've been spending a lot of time—how do we translate some of the protocols or the conversation guides we have with our tools that adapt to kids' needs? And we continue to adapt them.

RUTHIE: So we have two more questions that came in. I'm going to throw them out right now and ask each of you to answer them both, if you can, although the first question I think is directed mostly towards Agnes and Kandis in D.C. That question is: how was your staff training for customer service completed? So if you could tell us very quickly about that, and then the last question is: how have the families reacted to your Two-Generation work? So we just have about one minute. If you can quickly answer that, then we will send everyone on their way.

AGNES: Hello, this is Agnes. So our customer engagement training is a part of curriculum, which we just rolled out this year. So that we've required once a year. So we set up a curriculum at the beginning of the year and they know what date they have to attend and we sent out the SurveyMonkey for them to sign up. The families, what we're finding with the families, is they really like the Two-Gen approach because—and the way I tell the staff is—if you have children, especially, or loved one, if you deal with my loved one and help my loved one and love my loved one, then you have my attention. So we help the family, we get their attention, and they're more apt to engage.

RUTHIE: Oh, that was beautiful. I just want to say if you're part of the IIEESS project and you are interested in talking to D.C. about their customer service training, they might be willing to have a phone call with you and share more information. Let your coach from your state know and they can connect to you with Agnes to talk more about that. To conclude, EMPath, how have your participants felt about the Two-Gen work?

SARAH: They love it. I think that having intentional full family time, it can be rare in our busy world and so even just carving out time for families to get together and talk to each other about what's important for them and their dreams and what strengths they bring as a family has been really lovely and wonderful.

STEPHANIE: I have a little anecdote from a family that brings that to life a little bit. Two, actually. One that says: I love that it allowed my family members to grow individually without us as a family growing apart. And the other one was that: we never used to talk about how we were feeling at home—and I note—one mom has severe depression and her son was saying, she never told me how she was feeling and now, even if she is having a bad day, I know. And now we've noticed we don't yell at each other anymore, and we laugh 'cause we don't know what else to do because we are not yelling at each other. So it just is this slow change in the family dynamics that allows them to check in with each other and has made a lot of difference for our families.

RUTHIE: Thank you very much to the presenters and thank you to all of you on the call for being patient with our technical difficulties. We are glad to do this call, and we will talk to you again soon. So have a great afternoon. Bye-bye.

KANDIS: Thank you, bye-bye.

TINA: Thank you all again to the panelists for presenting today and once again, if you have any additional questions, please do so now.

RUTHIE: We are actually done now.

TINA: Okay, thank you, this concludes our webinar.