

# Shifting Mindsets: How Understanding the Need for Parent Voice and Network Principles Shapes Perspective of a Social Science Research Analyst

## National Home Visiting Network Network Principles in Action

OCTOBER 2020

“I was in a meeting recently where we were talking about how to help improve situations for families in rural areas. It occurred to me that a lot of the discussion was about what the families lack and what we can do for them,” said Nancy Geyelin Margie, Home Visiting Research Team Lead and Senior Social Science Research Analyst, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Being part of the home visiting field, which has over the years increasingly focused on “with” not “for,” meant that Margie was particularly sensitive to the direction of the conversation, maybe more so than some of the other meeting participants who were from other fields and had not had the opportunity to benefit from this mindset shift within the home visiting field.

Margie acknowledges that the National Home Visiting Network has helped to reinforce the importance of parent voice, and has challenged her thinking even beyond a deficit versus strengths-based approach. For example, now she is thinking more concretely about who should be at the table, and how people at the table should be brought in and supported. She believes this is especially important in her field of research, because parent voice has to date not typically been part of the evaluation design, data collection, and analysis process.

But how to raise this with a group where she was the new person at the meeting and feeling her way? She just spoke up. “I was able to say a few times that we need to consider what families bring to the table and design things that build on their strengths. A few others also raised this point and we were able to reinforce each other on this [during the meeting],” said Margie. They did not get as far as talking about concrete strategies, but the door was opened.

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On applying the network principles to her work as a federal staff person who works on research and evaluation of human services programs, Margie points out, “It is easy to get caught up in what your agency or office needs to be doing and to forget about larger interactions. The principles remind me to not be so territorial, and to make sure to maintain strong collaborative relationships.” Though the practicalities of conducting large research studies can be a barrier to uplifting parent voice and realizing the network principles, Margie points to her colleagues in the tribal home visiting space. They invested time, effort, and money in the design of a multi-site implementation study (MUSE) to ensure that the process was participatory. “It took an extra year, but the MUSE design is better off because of that,” reflects Margie. Work that her colleagues at HRSA have also done to engage stakeholders, such as around the redesign of the performance measurement system, also ensured that the new system worked for both federal and state MIECHV staff.

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