

# Honoring family:

## Engaging parent partners in strengthening a child welfare coaching program

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### BACKGROUND

- Coaching programs are becoming an increasingly common element of child welfare practice to strengthen casework skills (Das et al., 2020).
- Engaging voices of individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system can be a powerful strategy for program development and improvement (Children's Bureau, 2019).
- Parent partners, individuals who have personal experience in the child welfare system and are now in a mentoring role with child welfare-involved parents, may offer a distinct perspective for program development.
- There is limited knowledge on how parent partners can provide critical input to coaching programs that focus on improving practice with children and families.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do shared principles of the skills-based coaching program reflect the perspectives of parents? How do they not reflect parents' perspectives?
2. How might the shared principles be changed to reflect parents' perspectives?
3. What would it look like to see the shared principles in practice?

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### COACHING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

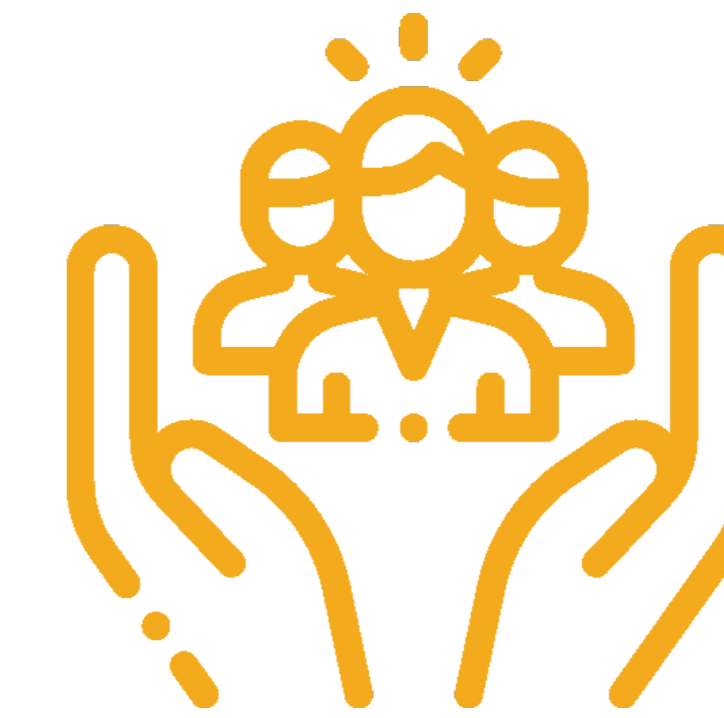
KanCoach is a skills-based coaching program for child welfare supervisors based on the Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center (ACCWIC) coaching model. KanCoach seeks to strengthen child welfare supervisor coaching skills so they may use coaching strategies in supervision with their staff to enhance caseworker knowledge and skills and improve outcomes for children and families.

KanCoach also incorporates four **priority topics** into the coaching program to improve casework practice:

- (1) Parent and youth engagement**
- (2) Assessment and case planning (including risk and safety assessment)**
- (3) Relative/kin connections**
- (4) Secondary traumatic stress\*

**Shared principles** were developed for each priority topic with the coaching program subcommittee. The three bolded priority topics and their respective shared principles were presented to the parent partners in focus groups for their feedback.

\* An additional priority topic of anti-racist practice was added to KanCoach after the parent partner focus groups were conducted.



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Using Knowledge to Inspire Action

### METHODS

This study's sample included individuals who are parent partners in multiple locations at three organizations across the state. A purposive sampling approach was used to engage study participants. Parent partners who were part of the project steering committee were used as gatekeepers to recruit parent partners from their organizations to participate in the study. A semi-structured interview guide was developed and two focus groups were held with parent partners. The first focus group ( $N = 17$ ) focused on the initial input of parent partners regarding the shared principles developed to inform the coaching program. The second focus group ( $N = 14$ ) served as a member checking session where initial themes from the original focus group were shared and parent partners provided feedback on whether those themes accurately portrayed their input and offered additional comments. Trustworthiness and rigor were increased through the use of multiple coders, peer debriefing, and member checking (Padgett, 2017). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze data.

**Thank you to the parent partners for generously sharing their time and feedback!**

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### FINDINGS

1

#### Understanding parent context

- Parent partners emphasized the importance of understanding individual families' context, such as culture, family dynamics, parent circumstances, and parents' feelings in assessment, case planning, and throughout the families' involvement in child welfare services.

*"...I think a lot of workers are biased because they have their own opinions of what is safe, but they don't take into consideration what that family, how that family lives, what their culture is, what their beliefs are, things like that."*

*"How are we going to honor this family? Not the bad things that have happened or the things that the parents need to change or any of that, I'm just talking about them as people and as a family."*

2

#### Bridging shared principles and practice

- Parent partners described the gap between the shared principles for the priority topics and what they observe in practice. They discussed ways in which the shared principles could be put into practice, such as agencies addressing caseworker bias and purposefully using assessment and case planning processes to engage and support parents.

*"So, having the parents be able to participate in the whole process, having the parents being able to take ownership...Assessments are a perfect way to have parents have some type of ownership because you let them answer these questions, you let them dig deep into what's going on to the root of the problem. And then you help [them] be part of that solution, but you leave the ownership with them."*

*"...the other thing that I feel like I have encountered is kind of that bias that I feel case teams sometimes show... not meaning to because they're not bad people, but just almost assuming that the parents aren't going to be trying hard enough, almost assuming that they have all these barriers that they'll never overcome..."*

3

#### Activating parent & relative/kin engagement

- Parent partners identified strategies that would aid in parent and relative/kin engagement, such as clear communication and a nonjudgmental approach with families.

*"You have to be shoulder to shoulder with these people and say, 'Hey, what can we do together to get through this?' Let them be active participants on that."*

*"...as a case team, if they could reach out more to the aunts and uncles and the grandmas and grandpas, they would get a more big picture idea of what the family is like. Not just listening to the parents but listening to others as well."*

### REFERENCES

### DISCUSSION

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- Parent partners identified discrepancies in shared principles of the priority topics in the coaching program and what parent partners observed in practice with families.
- Parent partners were able to draw on their own experiences with the child welfare system and their work with parents to offer critical input to inform the coaching program.
- Findings support prior research that communication, nonjudgmental attitudes and support are important to improve parent engagement in child welfare services (Schreiber et al., 2013).
- Findings from the parent partner focus groups were shared with the project steering committee and incorporated into coaching program training and ongoing Coaching Collaborative meetings with child welfare supervisors.