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A Legacy of Reform and Innovation: Celebrating the Children's Bureau Centennial

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This special issue of the *Journal of Family Strengths* commemorates the centennial of the Children Bureau. While the century old legacy and impacts of the Children's Bureau are defining for the nation's policies and practices, few are as penetrating as the role the Children's Bureau has played in capacity building to support families so that at risk children are protected. Given that families do 90% of all the child rearing, counseling, teaching, caregiving and norm enforcement in the nation, it is fortuitous that the US has an agency that has spearheaded family-centered supports since its inception. This strategic leadership role is reinforced by the fact that, over the decades, we have learned that the state does not constitute a good "substitute" parent. Thus family supports and capacity building are essential so that children can be raised in nurturing environments which provide safety, permanence and wellbeing. **Melissa Brodowski and Liliana Hernandez of the Children's Bureau, and Angelique Brown and Christine Lamble of ICF International** eloquently provide the historical and current efforts of activities and concepts that determine the Children's Bureau parent engagement and family support promotions. They begin by identifying legislation that promoted safe and stable families and mandated awards to support states, tribes and territories in developing effective child welfare services. Discussions of discretionary grant programs underscore the Children's Bureau's commitment to competitive awards that demonstrate and test new, unique or distinctive approaches for programs designed to improve services and service delivery. The article concludes with information regarding the Children's Bureau's critical relationship to parent engagement and family support and new opportunities for systems change through the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration projects.

Given that many are unprepared for the rigors of parenting, the Children's Bureau has played a major role in helping to ensure that while safety is critical for children so too is the family environment in which they are raised, be it their own biological family, kin care, guardianship or adoptive family. Even more, the Children's Bureau could have easily acquiesced to the "rescue and place" orientation that has often dominated the public's expectations for child welfare practice. Instead, from the outset 100 years ago, the Children Bureau highlighted the risk factors and basic human needs facing families. These have included poverty, absence of income supports, and co-occurring issues such as addictions, domestic violence, mental health, and disabilities. As a change agent the Children's Bureau has generated policies and practices that address these. In fact, in the past three decades, the Children's Bureau helped to usher in practices, models and programs that built families' strengths and

capacities to parent, averting out of home placement and unnecessary rupturing of the family.

The Children's Bureau has been a vanguard for supporting innovative program development and evaluation for successfully improving the lives of children, youth and families. Four of these programs are presented in this issue. **Sandra Edmonds Crewe** links historical grandmother safety net parenting of grandchildren to the growing numbers of grandparent head of household families resulting from the HIV/AIDS public health challenge. She advocates a model that strengthens the Children's Bureau kinship care policies in which the child welfare system provides informal and formal support to grandparent caregivers. **Jacquelyn McCroskey, Peter J. Pecora, Todd Franke, Christina Christie, and Jaymie Lorthridge** describe an innovative community-specific systems change approach by a far reaching collaboration of public and community entities providing family-centered services. The results of this ambitious initiative, Los Angeles County Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP), are initially presented as improvements in protective factors, economic development and family self-sufficiency, and changes in re-referrals and reunification for families. Community specific analyses highlight promising results. **Robin Leake, Laricia Longworth-Reed, Natalie Williams and Cathryn Potter** present a successful program that used the Children's Bureau Systems of Care model to engage families as partners with a child welfare agency. Discussions include the Parent Partner model and implementation challenges. The evaluation uses a mixed method that provides considerable information of the program outcomes, parent partners' perspectives, and agency stakeholder's understandings in fostering positive and effective relationships. **Mark Trahan and Monit Cheung** provide a conceptual framework for studying an under examined aspect in families, specifically the role of fathering. An in-depth review of familial relationships literature informed their variable selections, resulting in two comprehensive questions that challenge researchers to focus on perceptions of fathering roles and actual behavior, and partner satisfaction. They contend that developing interventions based on findings from this research directive will result in increased partnership satisfaction and fathering participation.

The Children's Bureau has more recently become concerned with workforce issues ranging from supporting caseworkers and supervisors in professional development and obtaining skills for dealing with their own reactions to this difficult work, as well as addressing organizational culture and climate to improve the agency environment. Four articles highlight this ongoing important work. **Tracy Whitaker's** article derived from two

National Association of Social Workers studies demonstrates the contribution and commitment that professional social workers have in improving the lives of children and their families. However, she also contributes professional shortages, low salaries, and factors associated to low retention as being related to a workforce comprised of less than half having social work degrees. “The Impact of Title IV-E Training on Case Outcomes for Children Serviced by CPS”, by **Patrick Leung and Nicole Willis**, provides insight into policies and workforce trends leading to the Children’s Bureau Title IV-E Training. Their meticulous study determines the impact degreed social workers and Title IV-E recipients have on Child Protective Services meeting the needs of vulnerable children and their families. **Miriam Landsman and Lisa D’Aunno** describe a framework for supervision that was developed from a Children’s Bureau grant to improve recruitment and retention in public child welfare. This remarkable work, centered in strength-based, family-centered child welfare practice, provides us with the detailed operationalized curriculum. A solid evaluation is centered on changes in supervisor behavior and retention. **James Caringi, Hal Lawson and Mary Devlin** extend our understanding of traumatic informed child welfare systems by embedding it within the concept of emotional labor. They provide a framework directed to policy and agency leaders to address practice, workforce and workplace conditions. The framework, established on findings derived from three Children’s Bureau initiatives, presents a compelling multilayered agency intervention to prevent secondary traumatic stress among child welfare professionals and to sustain positive emotional labor conditions.

Rather than focus on services alone, the Children’s Bureau has also been the vanguard for poor families whose income supports have been critical to their capacity to parent. It is not surprising that it was the Children’s Bureau that advocated for Mothers Pensions a century ago and then later Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) to especially help impoverished, single-parent families. Now as the Children’s Bureau advances child well-being as a national policy agenda, the additional barriers vulnerable children endure will move to center stage. Moreover, given the challenges their families and communities face in ensuring desired health, mental health and lives enfranchised by critical supports for efficacy as an individual, citizen and wage earner, we can be sure that family and community supports will be seen as key to children’s well-being. Such well-being supports are especially critical to our children of color. When futures are secured for vulnerable youth for their personal welfare as well as their smooth transitions to effective adulthood, then

more life sustaining benefits are ensured given their interactions with the child welfare system.