



Keeping Families Together

Co-Design Report



Introduction

CSH (Corporation for Supportive Housing) recognizes that meaningful changes to decrease the disproportionate representation of families of color in child welfare and homelessness must be led by the people most impacted by these systems. CSH hired a part-time Keeping Families Together (KFT) Fellow to work with CSH staff in a one-year project to co-design CSH strategy and approach to engaging parents disproportionately impacted by child welfare and housing instability. The KFT co-design team approached their work in a relational way, co-creating every aspect of the work: from team meeting structure to determining final deliverables. The KFT co-design team conducted a landscape analysis by interviewing organizations and parents with lived expertise of housing instability and child welfare involvement. The landscape analysis helped the KFT co-design team better understand the role CSH and KFT partners could play at the intersection of parents, child welfare, and housing. The team also wanted to better understand how other organizations approach their own work to center parents in housing and systems transformation work. Below is a summary of major themes and recommendations from these interviews and other experiments implemented by the KFT co-design team. These recommendations are relevant to CSH and partners involved with CSH's signature initiative, **Keeping Families Together**. KFT is an approach that uses supportive housing and whole family wraparound services to bring stability to families with children at risk of recurring involvement in the child welfare system. Services available through the KFT model can help parents that are struggling with the overwhelming burdens of

poverty and complex health needs to improve their lives, family stability, and overall well-being. KFT brings together the partners and interested parties to increase access to affordable housing and essential wrap-around services for the whole family, improving overall outcomes for families, children, programs, and systems.

Terminology

In this report, the co-design team frequently refers to people with **lived expertise (PLE)**. For the purposes of this report, "people with lived expertise" specifically refers to parents with lived experiences of housing instability and involvement with the child welfare system who are intentionally applying their system-experiences toward system and program improvements, unless otherwise stated. While the term '**parents**' is often used, CSH recognizes that families take up many forms, and caregivers of children may include others such as birth parents, adopted parents, grandparents, partners, adult siblings, etc. In this report "**co-design**" refers to a participatory process that centers and promotes lived expertise as an equal collaborator in the design process. For the co-design team the term "**relational**" means interconnected and interdependent relationships between team members that benefit from mutual support and authenticity. Lastly, the word '**partnership**' is used to refer to the values, approach, and process of co-design as it centers lived experience of the systems of focus in KFT work, as described in subsequent sections of this report.

Guiding Hypotheses for KFT Co-Design Work

A series of four hypotheses guided the KFT co-design project. Each hypothesis builds upon the next. The co-design process is experimental and focuses on centering and partnering with parents and families. Rooted in the scientific method, the nested hypotheses are a series of 'if-then' statements that help tell the overall story of the work. They provide clarity on the thinking that underlies the project, guide sequencing of proposed strategies to test the hypotheses, and align the assumptions and strategies to the desired long-term results. The four nested hypotheses presented to the co-design team at project onset were:

1 If CSH creates a time-limited position for a parent with lived experience, and forms an internal co-design team, then this team can create recommendations for organizational and partner capacity, structure and culture, and operating procedures and practices for our work in partnership with parents with lived experience of child welfare and housing instability.

2 If CSH adopts recommendations and creates capacity, structure, and culture that centers and embeds partnership with parents having lived expertise with child welfare and housing instability, then staff and partners will shift power dynamics by partnering with families to ensure authentic and meaningful representation and diverse voices and perspectives in process and decision making in all aspects of our work.

3 If CSH staff and partners shift power dynamics by partnering with families to ensure authentic and meaningful representation and diverse voices and perspectives in process and decision making, then CSH and partners will make family-centered decisions, and policies, strategies, and solutions will be better directed to the needs of the most burdened families.

4 If CSH and partners make family-centered decisions, and policies, strategies and solutions are better directed to the needs of the most burdened families, then families will experience more equitable connections to appropriate housing and services, resulting in a reduction of children in out of home placements and a reduction in disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families due to separations through out of home placements of children.



“The downside of add-on diversity projects is that they are not embedded into the organization. The projects can just as easily be removed, and the organization will continue to function as it was before, much to the detriment of the communities the project was serving.”

Sabah Choudrey, Supporting Trans People of Color: How to Make Your Practice Inclusive, pg. 19-20

The CSH KFT Co-Design Team

People are central to CSH’s work in supportive housing and families are central to CSH’s work in KFT. In 2020 and 2021, three CSH staff members collaborated to update and further develop CSH’s core curriculum for the KFT Training Academy. The purpose was to adapt the curriculum to reflect emergent learning and insights from the field. The updates also included additional training components in preparation for CSH support for a new cohort of jurisdictions implementing KFT supportive housing. These updates and additions were intended to enhance how KFT training materials addressed systematic racial and social inequities, were inclusive to intersectional identities, and explore how CSH materials could better center the lived experience of those most impacted by child welfare involvement and homelessness, including parents of color. CSH engaged three parents with lived expertise as consultants who partnered with staff to build out the updated KFT Training Academy series. This allowed for parents to voice important considerations and impacts that were integrated into this series, including incorporation of video

and audio clips to truly capture powerful discussions between the consultants. Drawing upon a background in equity and inclusive engagement, CSH staff participated in a facilitated team review after this experience to reflect on the process, identity, and experiences of team members. The team explored ideas for other strategies that could be experimented with to build from this partnership with the three consultants. Team members were drawn to the idea of creating a fellowship to embed a parent into the team, received organizational approval, and renegotiated a project budget with a key KFT funder to include this time limited position.

In May 2022, Andrew Johnson assembled three CSH staff, Leah Lindstrom Rhea, Rae Trotta, and Maya Saxena, who were deeply involved in KFT, to co-create a job description to hire for a part-time, time-limited KFT Fellow. In July 2022, Danielle Goodwin, KFT Fellow, was hired to support ongoing KFT and co-design work. From July 2022 through July 2023, Danielle, Leah, Rae, and Maya worked together as the co-design team. Andrew provided project support and oversight through the lifespan of the co-design project and provided direct supervision and coaching for Danielle.

Andrew Johnson

(he/him)

Director, Systems Transformation Family and Youth, Strategy and External Affairs Team

Andrew serves as national strategic and programmatic lead for CSH efforts to transform the family and youth sector, advancing multi-sector collaborative strategies to shift public and community responses to more integrated and equitable systems that centers housing

and supports which help families, young people, and communities thrive. Andrew's experience includes programmatic and leadership roles within non-profit and government agencies spanning housing, homelessness, and public child welfare systems where he has focused his passion for systems transformation and multi-sector alignment that both benefits and includes the voices of children, youth, and families. Andrew serves as a Children and Family Fellow with the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2022-24). Andrew joined CSH in 2016, shortly after relocating from Colorado to San Diego, California where he is a pet parent to two spirited chihuahuas.

Danielle Goodwin

(she/her)

KFT Fellow, Strategy and External Affairs Team

Danielle is a BIPOC mother of five children based in the Seattle, Washington area and has navigated the child welfare system.

"I am exceptionally grateful to have the opportunity to reunify with my three youngest children, especially since I had lost parental rights for my first two children. All I know is that, despite the experiences of my children being ripped away from me, participating in their daily lives, I am grateful that they grew into incredible young adults that have not experienced the world in the way I did."

Danielle's professional roles started in peer support direct services, walking alongside parents as well as providing reflections and feedback from observations that should be brought into systems families are involved with, such as: child welfare, criminal and juvenile

justice, homelessness, and public health. She has worked for both non-profit and government agencies in community programs related to child and maternal health, mental health and substance use recovery, and homelessness, providing direct services, peer support, and advocacy for system changes at the intersection of child welfare and homelessness. In 2008, she reunified with her children and has since used those life experiences to heal and help other parents where she feels it would have helped her.

Leah Lindstrom Rhea

(she/her)

Senior Program Manager, Upper Midwest Team

Leah is a leading expert in advancing CSH's One Roof initiative, providing technical support and guidance to supportive housing partnerships as they develop and implement new, multi-sector responses for families at risk of long-term public system engagement. She guides CSH strategic efforts in the Upper Midwest and across the country. She has provided technical and financial assistance to non-profit and public organizations as the principal staff working on KFT and American Indian Supportive Housing initiatives. She has extensive experience with supportive housing and homeless prevention programs, including expertise with tribal partnerships, family and youth homelessness, training design and delivery, and technical assistance and capacity building to support developing and implementing supportive housing projects. Leah is based in Minnesota and joined CSH in 2005.

Rae Trotta

(they/them)

Senior Program Manager, Pacific Northwest Team

Rae's experience spans direct social service and systems change work at the intersections of health, housing, and homelessness. As a facilitator and trainer, Rae advocates for and helps the systems they work with actualize steps toward diversified decision making and shared power. Rae encourages community partnerships and projects across the field of supportive housing to embed those impacted by system harm in their work from project concept through program design, implementation, and evaluation. Last, but certainly not least, Rae is a partner, dog, cat, and chicken owner, and parent to two young children and is grateful to call Portland, Oregon their home.

Maya Saxena

(she/her)

Program Manager, National Consulting Team

Maya joined CSH in January 2022 and is based in Atlanta, Georgia. She works on projects throughout the nation as a part of CSH's National Consulting Team. Maya is trained as a social worker and has direct service experience from her time working at a youth drop-in center and an adult emergency shelter in Florida. While at CSH, Maya has deepened her expertise in training development and facilitation, providing technical assistance to communities, and family and youth systems work. She is passionate about quality supportive housing that is accessible to all, believes that systems transformation must be led by those with lived expertise, and has so many houseplants that tending to them could be a part-time job.



Team Values

1. We believe that embedding lived expertise **is the** work; partnerships go beyond surveys, focus groups, or advisory boards; embedding lived expertise includes access to decision-makers, budget transparency, and ensuring choice and autonomy are prioritized in agenda setting.
2. We know that relational work is different and requires building trust and having experiences together.
3. We identify when, where, and how white dominant culture is hindering growth or preventing the centering the voice of lived expertise in order to dismantle inequitable systems; we look for words, practices, and spaces to promote systems change.
4. We choose to engage in self-reflection and authenticity in how we come into the co-design space.

"The unlearning is just an important as the learning...we are all doing this."

LaRae Cantley, Professional Lived Experience Consultant

The KFT co-design project was based on strong relational work. KFT's co-design team recognized that, first and foremost, each member of the team has their own diverse experiences that fundamentally impact how they collaborate. Their various roles, teams, and tenure at CSH, combined with personal identities and geographies, influence how each person enters the work and contributes. Several co-design team members previously held roles providing direct service to individuals and families that were involved in multiple systems. This type of work is, and benefits from, being inherently relational, authentic, and vulnerable. KFT's co-design team desired to build relational trust amongst the group members prior to developing project logistics, workplans, and deliverables. The co-design team's first step was to learn more about each other as whole individuals.

The co-design team was intentional in their language when speaking to work done with people with lived expertise. The team recognized that, often, when this work is done, the experience is described as "consultation with" or "incorporation." The co-design team challenged that framing by shifting their language to "embedding" and "partnering" with people with lived expertise. Through this shift, the co-design team wanted to emphasize that people with lived expertise have navigated complicated systems and, as a result, have firsthand expertise of where our systems fail and where systems can be improved. This expertise is critical in thinking through systems transformation. Therefore, this expertise must be embedded and partnered with throughout the process, rather than merely consulted or incorporated at certain points.

Team Approach

- Relationship-driven work versus deliverable-driven work
- Center partnership and embed parent voices and lived expertise, rather than just incorporate
- Develop relational trust to fuel meaningful co-creation
- Center work-life balance

The co-design team met on a weekly basis. During these meetings, the co-design team intentionally created space to build their relationships by sharing updates and progress on life outside of work and taking time to "just be people" together. Beyond the standard small talk of, "How are you?" or "How was your weekend?"—they chose to share updates on family members' and pets' health, daycare schedules, their latest professional and personal successes and hurdles, and how they were coming into the space on that day and why. Meeting to meeting, not only did the co-design team get to know each other, but they deepened their understanding of one another. This deliberate focus on genuine human connection impacted their relationships with one another both within the KFT co-design project and other CSH projects. As they created a space for their relationships to grow, they nourished their excitement for the co-design work as whole.

"Co-creation work with parents is the best part, the most meaningful part of my job at CSH."

Leah Lindstrom Rhea, CSH

Our Process

As the co-design team created their vision for this work, they established what mattered to each team member, how they preferred to work together, and what types of supports they favor. Early conversations, which allowed the co-design team to begin understanding each other, included the following questions:

- Why is this work important to us?
- What matters to us in this work?
- How do we like to work?
- What are our individual learning styles?
- What are our individual and collective strengths?
- What do we want this work to be?

The team explored multiple potential paths to developing strategies and approaches to engage parents that are disproportionately impacted by child welfare and housing instability. With the goal of understanding what authentic partnership with parents with lived expertise looks and feels like, the team conducted a landscape analysis of how various organizations, including CSH, currently partner with parents and how those organizations interact with the child welfare and housing systems. The landscape analysis also included informational interviews with parents with their own system experiences who are now working at the intersection of housing and child welfare.

For each team member, this KFT co-design project was the first-ever project where guiding hypotheses drove the work, instead of specified deliverables and tasks. The team was also encouraged to experiment and test approaches, practices, and leadership. The team occasionally felt ungrounded in process

and when it seemed that the flexibility was impeding decision making, the co-design team often re-visited the guiding hypotheses. Charting this project's course took nearly six months as the co-design team thought through desired outcomes and worked through ample flexibility. The team was able to identify next steps while, at the same time, reinforcing the relationship-driven nature of the work and acknowledging the complexities and uncertainties of trying something new. The co-design team recognized that deep relational work in the consulting world was uncommon. The flexibility of the KFT co-design project allowed for experimentation and testing. Some of the experiments included adding parent voice to CSH-led meetings such as the One Roof Advisory board, the Housing Stability Screening Workgroup, and other CSH projects and learning communities. The group also explored designing training and technical assistance with parent consultants and then delivering the support to KFT communities.



Early Learnings



Building Community

As the co-design team established what supports were needed from each other to successfully move through the project, they recognized that, in hiring only one KFT Fellow with lived expertise, the KFT Fellow had limited opportunities for engaging with peer support and building community. An early co-design project component consisted of partnering with three lived expertise consultants to re-design and re-deliver KFT training. Through this project component, the KFT Fellow was able to engage with peer support and building community amongst fellow lived expertise peers, which contributed to a higher level of comfort and safety.



Travel Policies

Early in the co-design project, there was an opportunity to bring the KFT Fellow to Oregon for in-person work with the Marion County KFT project. Marion County KFT prioritized bringing parents with lived expertise to the table prior to engaging additional stakeholders; the KFT Fellow was invited to work with these parents. The co-design team encountered multiple logistical and legal challenges when navigating both internal CSH policies and national labor laws when attempting to quickly arrange travel for the KFT Fellow. These conflicts prompted the co-design team, with human

resources support, to proactively plan through any anticipated barriers to travel for future in-person work. The co-design team was able to identify specific CSH policy barriers and alerted CSH senior leadership to the identified barriers associated with part-time employment.



Ample and Flexible Support

Within the first three months of working together, the KFT Fellow voiced that she would benefit from additional time with and support from co-design team members. The KFT Fellow was simultaneously starting the co-design work and being onboarded to CSH. A fellow co-design team member spent additional time, as needed, with the KFT Fellow. They met to work through various tasks, orient to CSH, support skill building with administrative tools (such as Excel), and provide emotional support. A fundamental component of co-design and partnership with lived expertise is preparing each team member to meaningfully participate. The KFT Fellow shared that it is important not to assume all parents have college level education, despite having work experience in direct service.

“I often struggled with feeling I wasn’t doing enough by just sharing and offering feedback and consulting work due to not being familiar with that style of work. Even though I have provided direct service, providing consulting is a style of work that was new to me. I appreciated the team sharing their insight and validating from their own experiences of transitioning from direct

services to technical assistance work, [that consulting work] felt different. Having the additional support without being ashamed or seen as a disappointment felt supportive, genuine, and so helpful in getting over some academic challenges I faced as a team member. That level of layered support is critical. I have not, and still do not, experience that in my work with other organizations. A lot of assumptions can be made, and every parents' level of knowledge will vary except for that lived expertise. That is why the ability to have this type of support and flexibility is so important."

Danielle Goodwin, KFT Fellow



Safety and Space to Disclose Experiences

By embedding the KFT Fellow and other lived experience consultants in CSH's KFT work, the co-design team observed a fascinating finding – people felt more *comfortable*. The presence and engagement of project members with lived experience of the systems of focus, who were self-identifying and sharing their own lived experiences as it relates to KFT materials and project processes, normalized engaging and sharing experiences in a more personal manner. This effect was observed in other staff members, internal and external, at various levels in their organizations. For example, in a CSH internal team meeting that the KFT Fellow began actively participating in, other staff members began to disclose aspects of their own lived experiences with the child welfare system that had not been shared previously. This seemed to

correlate with a deepening of team relationships and more dynamic discussions.



Landscape Analysis and Informational Interviews

The co-design team pursued a series of informational interviews with child welfare-focused organizations that partner or collaborate in different ways with parents who have experiences with the child welfare system. Additionally, the team interviewed five individuals who have their own experience with the child welfare system and who are advising on supportive housing projects as peer professionals. The co-design team, in their own effort to identify what meaningful partnerships with parents with lived expertise look like, were curious how organizations and individuals were already doing the work.

The KFT Fellow participated in all interviews alongside one additional co-design staff member. Each interview was one hour long with an established list of questions to guide the conversation.

Each interview attempted to capture the following information from organizations and individuals:

- What is important to them and their work around housing and supportive housing?
- How do they work with people with lived expertise and how do they share power?
- What work, if any, are they doing around housing and housing instability?
- What does their work look like with

fathers, specific cultures, and other and populations?

- What recommendations do they have for CSH as the organization explores our intermediary role at the intersection of parents, child welfare, and housing?

The co-design team reviewed, discussed, and synthesized notes from the 13 interviews and identified three common themes:

1. Cross-sector work is necessary for transformational systems change
2. True partnership and power sharing with parents with lived expertise requires organizations to think and work differently
3. Focusing on the well-being of the whole family inherently centers equity

1. Cross-sector work is necessary for transformational systems change.

From the 13 interviews, CSH found that organizations and individuals agreed that bringing systems and sectors together is important and difficult work. Systems are steeped in their own priorities, processes, and language, and are therefore operating in silos. The child welfare system, housing system, and homelessness system often operate independently, not recognizing the potential for partnership in creating safe and stable outcomes for families. Disparities within these systems mirror each other; black and brown families experience a higher rate of child welfare involvement and a higher rate of housing instability. To work toward meaningful systems transformation, these systems must identify common ground. One interviewee identified the well-being of families as common ground for these systems. The child welfare, housing, and

homelessness systems work to ensure families are protected and provided the security they need to thrive. With the well-being of families as common ground, there is opportunity for the child welfare, housing, and homelessness systems to learn from each other, understand each other, and create partnership that evolves into transformational systems change.

2. True partnership and power sharing with parents with lived expertise of housing instability and involvement in the child welfare system requires organizations to think and work differently.

All organizations and individuals interviewed responded passionately to the co-design team's questions around partnering with people with lived expertise. Organizations had multiple examples of how they form and maintain these partnerships, including but not limited to:

- Creating an organizational arm specifically dedicated to partnering with people with lived expertise
- Having staff solely dedicated to coordinating with people with lived expertise on conducting research, working on projects, and participating in speaking engagements
- Having committees and workgroups for people with lived expertise to participate in projects in the capacities of their choosing

“There is no good work without people with lived expertise!”

Organization that participated in informational interviews

Both individuals and organizational representatives interviewed emphasized the difference between “including” and “partnering” with people with lived expertise.

They voiced that, without people with lived expertise at the table, there is no table. In true partnership, lived experience integration is crucial at all levels: from project concept to program design to implementation.

Organizations also shared that the journey of thoughtfully partnering with people with lived expertise is ever evolving. Often, organizational processes and policies hinder true partnership and power sharing. Organizational leaders have, and continue to, critically assess their ways of operating to ensure people with lived expertise are central to their work. This continuous assessment requires organizations to creatively engage in different ways of working.

3. Focusing on the well-being of the whole family inherently centers equity.

Organizations working with families must be intentional in their work to ensure that the needs of the whole family are prioritized. While interviewing organizations and individuals, the co-design team repeatedly heard that different individuals within a family have different barriers and needs. To promote the safety and well-being of the family, we must promote the safety and well-being of *each* family member. Different populations also have different barriers and needs. Acting with cultural humility is essential in family work. Multiple interviewees noted the perception that mothers are prioritized in family work and recognized the barriers to engaging with

fathers when partnering with parents with lived expertise. Organizations must continue enhancing their engagement with fathers to better understand fathers’ unique needs within the context of family work.

“Part of the transformation is putting all our lived experiences into context without shame or embarrassment. Including perceiving those who have not had lived experience in systems as being just as valuable to learn from - what support and protective factors prevented their involvement with systems?”

Chris James Brown, Child Welfare League of America

“Leadership and staff genuinely taking the time to get to know me during virtual coffee’s shows the value they place on new staff and PLE.”

Danielle Goodwin, KFT Fellow

KFT Fellow and Integration into Additional CSH Projects

In addition to the landscape analysis through informational interviews and analyzing learnings, the KFT Fellow actively participated in additional projects and bodies of work at CSH. She worked in multiple capacities with people from multiple CSH teams, co-design team members, external parent advocates, and KFT consultants.

Approximately halfway through the one-year fellowship, the KFT Fellow had the opportunity to attend an in-person working dinner event in Seattle with CSH

leaders. The experience of meeting leadership from across the country demonstrated the large scope of CSH as an organization.

The work dinner was an opportunity to connect with and glean from CSH staff and leadership on areas of work CSH is involved with, as well as spend in-person time with a co-design teammate. Reflecting on this group dinner, the KFT Fellow shared that she felt included, was made to feel very welcome, and appreciated the personal connections that meeting in-person creates.

“Initial feelings around imposter syndrome turned out to be larger barrier than normal. It might be a personal challenge or the fact that [CSH] is a national organization, so this was an area where I realized support was needed. Feeling comfortable in asking [for support] was key.”

Danielle Goodwin, KFT Fellow

A Co-Designed and Co-Delivered Virtual Training: KFT Services and Partnering with Parents

The KFT co-design team partnered with three external KFT consultants to create the next version of KFT services training, building on a previously developed KFT Training Academy session. The new training emphasized centering and partnering with parents in the design and delivery of whole family, wraparound services when implementing KFT supportive housing. The team updated slide decks and created new breakout activities for a 90-minute virtual training that was delivered to three KFT implementation sites receiving technical

assistance from CSH. As a group, the full team created a unique, more personal way of facilitating introductions in the context of their various identities and their own families. They did so by sharing family photos with training attendees and introducing themselves as more than their professional titles. Throughout the training, the full team modeled how to partner in a meaningful way to provide attendees with concrete examples of what partnership looks and feels like. During the breakout activities there were several powerful “aha” moments. After hearing directly from parents with system experience, attendees demonstrated having a deeper understanding of the experiences of parents involved in the child welfare system and what partnership can look and feel like. In one instance, a parent voiced that interactions with the child protection system could feel like being “hunted down.” They expressed feeling that their children and any future children would be at greater risk of removal. For some attendees, this created a new perception of what interacting with the child protection system felt like, which allowed attendees to better understand the systemic nature of child welfare involvement.

“The exposure to LaRae, Amiyoko, Alicia (KFT consultants) allowed me to witness that, in action, CSHers genuinely mean what the staff said about valuing co-design and PLE.”

Danielle Goodwin, KFT Fellow

One Roof National Advisory Board

One Roof is a national initiative launched by CSH, in collaboration with national and local organizations, systems, and communities.

One Roof aligns child welfare and housing sectors, with a significant focus on increasing equitable access to affordable housing aligned with services.

One Roof seeks to shift the trajectory for families with children, reduce unnecessary family separation, and prevent young people from languishing in and aging out of the child welfare system without the family, community supports, and housing that they need to thrive.

In inviting the KFT Fellow to the national One Roof Advisory Board meetings, she was the first specific lived experience parent to participate. Joining leaders from relevant national organizations and sectors, the KFT Fellow described the experience during her initial meeting as being “transformational.” Rather than being asked to re-tell her story, she was asked to provide insight and participate in power-sharing and decision-making. During the 2022 CSH All-Staff gathering, CSH’s President and CEO voiced the dramatic difference and shift of power that resulted from the KFT Fellow’s active participation with the One Roof Advisory Board. As a result of this positive step towards parent partnership, the Board is committed to continuing to have at least one or more parents with lived experience represented. The Board also wants to continue identifying national partners who bring such experiences and explore the potential for inviting them to join the Board.

“I appreciate the nuggets of wisdom One Roof Advisory Board members shared based on years of experience leading this work - which is how our realization that, for this to work the way we envision, we need more than one parent with lived expertise in child

welfare systems involvement at the table. Two are always better than one to increase the level of support and validate our lived experiences; I also appreciated the desire of leaders across the nation coming together to creatively identify ways to partner with PLE to improve our child welfare system nationally. I also made note of the multiethnic partners of the many learning communities, and it was great to listen and be heard by BIPOC leaders - that reflects who is impacted in our systems.”

Danielle Goodwin, CSH KFT Fellow

Parent Interviews, Feedback and Summary for KFT Implementation

During the year-long co-design project, three communities in Minnesota and Washington were simultaneously working with CSH to implement the KFT supportive housing model. Each of the three sites approached designing and implementing family supportive housing in a unique way to address the specific needs of their communities. As a part of implementing the KFT model, each of the sites wanted to engage parents with lived experience of housing instability and involvement in the child welfare system in various ways (e.g., forming parent advisory board, hiring parents as program staff, collecting feedback through surveys). One community in Minnesota formed a parent advisory board and engaged with parents they had served through informational interviews and surveys. This community reached out to the KFT Fellow and one additional co-design team member to conduct the surveys, hoping that neutrality from the surveyors would give space for honest feedback. The lead KFT agency in this community circulated an

email to all families served by KFT to gauge interest in participating in a survey. All interested parents were then connected to the KFT Fellow and co-design team member for scheduling.

Two parents were interested in providing feedback to the KFT implementation team through a survey. An early learning for the KFT Fellow and co-design team members was that scheduling time with working parents during their working hours was difficult. Parents were navigating childcare, school, employment, and after-school activities, making them unavailable for most of a typical workday. The KFT Fellow and co-design team member provided interested parents with evening hours to alleviate parents' need to re-arrange their schedules to accommodate the survey. The KFT Fellow and co-design team member were able to complete two parent surveys. The surveys took place through a one-hour phone call, in which the KFT Fellow led the questions and conversation. The surveyed parents were enthusiastic about their participation in the local KFT program, stating that "KFT helped me navigate and rebuild my life." The interviewed parents provided thorough feedback on both the successes and challenges they had while participating in KFT, which the KFT program will review as they plan their continued work.

Identifying Family Housing Stability Workgroup (see appendix for related nested hypotheses)

CSH leads a multi-sector group of child welfare and housing systems partners that promotes and creates guidance for communities and family-serving agencies to systematically identify family housing stability needs, prevent homelessness, improve reunification outcomes, decrease

out-of-home placements, and increase overall family stability. A smaller working group formed in 2022 that included CSH's KFT Fellow. This smaller workgroup designed an intensive work plan that would develop and refine the guidance and tools for public child welfare and community-based prevention programs to implement their own system to identify family housing stability needs. The KFT Fellow was an integral member of this workgroup, providing insight, examples, and thoughtful contributions into the guidance, ensuring that parents are empowered and centered in the implementation of a housing stability identification discussion and tool. This workgroup also met with internal and external people to discuss how similar tools work in other communities and how to promote trauma informed practices within the guide. At the end of 2022, this small workgroup shared their progress with the larger multi-sector group of child welfare and housing systems partners and discussed their feedback and next steps. CSH continues this work into 2023, building on the parent and community centered and trauma informed work generated by the workgroup.

"This work highlights the housing barriers families in child welfare face, but also provides hope for change. CSH is doing transformational work to get systems partnerships transformed and moving in a different pathway to increase well-being for families."

Danielle Goodwin, KFT Fellow

Trauma-Informed Design Panel

As a part of CSH's Washington State Supportive Housing Academy, a series of trainings and technical assistance provided to service providers and

developers in Washington, the KFT Fellow participated in a Trauma-Informed Design Panel.

They participated alongside two additional consultants with lived expertise, two architects specializing in supportive housing, and two CSH staff members. The full Trauma-Informed Design Panel team met over a two-month period to prepare materials and talking points for the session. Preparation meetings consisted of ample time to build relationships and learn from each other. The two architects, both of whom completed multiple trauma-informed supportive housing buildings and renovations, were receptive to feedback provided by the KFT Fellow and lived expertise consultants, all of whom had or currently live in supportive housing. Working alongside peers with lived expertise of housing instability promoted a safer, more welcoming environment for the KFT Fellow. The panelists covered basic concepts including:

- Defining trauma-informed design
- Review trauma-informed design key principles
- Why is trauma-informed design important?
- Who benefits from trauma-informed design?



Trauma-informed design is essential to building physical environments that promote well-being and empowerment. The panelists highlighted three common themes:

1. Incorporating trauma-informed design considerations for supportive housing must include designing safe spaces specifically for youth and children
2. Trauma-informed design believes in making all spaces accessible
3. Trauma-informed design prioritizes preferences and choice

“This experience of learning about trauma informed design really has impacted me in a positive way, as a result of being able to participate, I desire to advocate that trauma-informed design is included for future supportive housing development and gives me insight to encourage this in my other workplace as well as in personal spaces.”

Danielle Goodwin, KFT Fellow

“Eye opening on how design impacts experience (e.g., school can feel like a prison – cement is the vibe you walk away with vs the feeling of belonging makes all the difference.”

Amiyoko Shabazz, KFT Consultant

“I gained deeper thought around designing my own spaces and to ask myself when in spaces, “Does this feel safe and comfortable? Welcoming?”

Amiyoko Shabazz, KFT Consultant

Recommendations to Implement Co-Design at the Intersection of Family Supportive Housing and Child Welfare

Lived expertise is both an integral and aspirational part of the work CSH and others are undertaking to center people and communities to lead the changes necessary to create more equitable supportive housing, programs and systems, as well as to create quality and sustainable supportive housing. Often, community members with lived experience of system impacts (e.g., homelessness, child welfare, and/or criminal justice) are asked to tell their stories (via speaker's bureaus or other panels), are invited to contribute their voices through one-time surveys or listening sessions, or through participation in advisory boards. Without a conscious commitment to collaborative practices from the sponsoring organizations, this involvement can be one-time or one directional, beginning and ending with minimal engagement or contributions by people with lived expertise. This co-design process has cemented that collaboration is an ongoing practice. Collaborative practice engages and supports lived expertise in ongoing conversation, whereby people with lived experiences are invited in to share in decision making with true shared power.

As described above, the KFT co-design team undertook a landscape analysis approach and conducted interviews,

analyzed notes from the 13 interviews, and reflected on the experience and learnings from collaborating with KFT consultants to co-design and deliver training and technical assistance. The team digested learnings from “tests,” and debriefed with one another and other CSH staff involved with co-design work. The team identified a fundamental takeaway: parents must have a presence, voice, and power in leading the work, rather than being merely ‘consulted’ along the way. Parents already tell their stories frequently; it is more about who is listening and the container that CSH and others can create to hold the story. The following section proposes recommendations, ideas, and action steps that organizations could take to engage in meaningful co-design work and projects.

“If we make lived experience separate, it can just go away, it’s not organizational change.”

Rae Trotta, CSH

Human Resources and Related Policies

The policies and practices that human resources teams oversee and implement are critical to ensuring parents with lived expertise have access to decision making roles and power and have a quality employment experience that is supportive and equitable. Specifically, human resources can avoid creating unintended barriers to hiring staff that bring critical expertise.

- Create, promote, and ensure mechanisms and best practices are in place to support parents with children, for example:
 - Understanding and empathy regarding information that may

- present in background checks and reports
- Flexible work schedules to allow for family-related circumstances that require time off or flexible work, including a policy and practice to problem solve around flexible work schedules to accommodate family and life
- Ensure that interns, fellows, and other short-term staff with lived experience can benefit from work travel and in-person meetings with co-workers and external partners
- Ensure that interns, fellows, and short-term staff have access to equal pay and stipends for travel, food, and incidentals, including opportunities to provide advance payment
- Consider multiple ways of partnering with parents with lived expertise, for example: hiring more than one intern or fellow, contracting with professional lived experience consultants, connecting to parents through national parent networks, and other methods of employment and/or compensated participation
- Ensure organizational policies do not inadvertently create barriers to hiring and/or contracting with parents with child welfare experience when doing background screening
- Anticipate likely past child maltreatment findings and/or court records related to historical family challenges, and eliminate or revise policies to ensure pathways exist for hiring and/or contracting with these parents

Supporting Staff who are Parents with Lived Experiences

As organizations intentionally hire and contract with people with the lived experiences of the systems we are working to change, it is crucial to intentionally support their transition from direct services and the peer-to-peer model of work into parent-led systems change and consultant roles. The following bullets describe action steps and ideas to support staff moving into systems change work.

- Work with parents to address and resolve logistical barriers, for example:
 - Support in accessing and utilizing childcare when traveling
 - Access to credit cards when needed for travel related expenses
- Setting up and having access to quality and connected technology tools, such as laptops, Wi-Fi, phone, video camera
- Intentionally create, maintain, and support mentorship relationships and supervision
 - Examples include: using Microsoft Office products, developing writing skills, supporting professional growth and development, and exploring how to apply insights learned from experiences
- Intentionally create, maintain, and support relationships between current staff with lived expertise who can support new staff with lived expertise
- Ensure diversity of lived expertise across systems, including but not limited to, child welfare, justice, and mental health
- Ensure that partnerships with parents and caregivers are continuous and multiple
 - Organizations run a risk of exploiting or tokenizing parents

- with child welfare involvement and experience of housing instability by asking any one person to carry the burden of being ‘the’ lived experience representative
- Partnering with groups of parents with lived experience increases the likelihood of such engagements being mutually beneficial – including opportunities for peer-to-peer healing
- When developing work plans, supervision, and check-ins, create regular touchpoints for parents with lived experiences to meet with a wide range of staff in the organization, specifically other staff identifying as having systems involvement lived experience
- Prioritize opportunities to spend time in-person and in face-to-face meetings

- KFT partners, including supportive housing providers, should build and enhance relationships with BIPOC organizations and consumers to increase the voices of marginalized people and their experiences

“Child welfare systems are still targeting families when they live in supportive housing, while they are in process of healing their lives. An example of this being addressed is with White Earth’s Tribe. The homeless program will also use the family shelter temporarily when a parent does not have housing and assist with rental assistance.”

Participant, Talking Circle on Housing, Child Welfare and Native American Families

KFT Supportive Housing: Planning, Implementation and Quality Improvement

- Parents must have a presence, voice, and power in leading KFT work from initial planning through implementation and continuous quality improvement
- Supportive housing often overlooks fathers and children, instead focusing on mothers, caregivers, or other adults in the household. Identify ways to embed fathers and youth voice and roles throughout supportive housing planning, implementation, and continuous quality improvement
- KFT should create opportunities for teaching and modeling parent and youth advocacy
- KFT and related work involving families must prioritize authentic relationship building



In Conclusion

Partnering with parents with lived experience was an inspiring and motivating experience for the KFT co-design team. To attain different outcomes, the KFT co-design team's approach to the project work, in and of itself, provided an opportunity to experiment with a different way of operating. The KFT co-design process provides these final reflections around true partnership with lived experience at the intersection of child welfare involvement and housing instability:

- Partnerships are multi-directional and embody a commitment to continue embedding lived experiences at all project levels. When partnering with parents with lived experience, each individual works together wherein the goal of the work is to share power and decision making.
- Partnerships are based in transparency. Projects and organizations have a great opportunity to demonstrate the importance of lived expertise through budgeting processes by including lived experience members in discussions about how money and time is allocated. Projects and organizations have the opportunity to explore realigning funds to best meet the needs of those with lived experience contributing to a project.
- Partnerships require dedicated time to foster and maintain relationships. Building a foundation of relationship and trust provides safety as individuals choose to disclose their lived experiences to the benefit of projects and systems.
- Partnerships are person-driven, creating opportunities for organic interactions, experiments, and

collaborative working styles.

- Partnerships require utilizing a trauma-informed approach, which can include: flexibility in how work is done, opportunities for deadlines and deliverables to change, adapting to people's preferences, needs, comfort level, learning and work styles, with flexibility to work in different ways.
- Partnerships in family work have the opportunity to mirror the inherently relational and protective nature of families.

Appendix

Housing Stability Screening Workgroup Related Hypothesis:

1. If we convene a working group of internal and external experts with housing, child welfare, and screening experience, including parent representatives and national partners, then we will develop a model family housing stability screening tool framework (tool, process, and policy).
2. If we develop a model family housing stability screening framework then we will share with state and federal child welfare and related partners, and additional public child welfare agencies (PCWA) will adopt the framework.
3. If PCWA adopt the model family housing stability screening tool framework, then there will be a resulting systems transformation that increases timely, consistent, and equitable identification of housing needs and connections to housing.
4. If family housing needs are identified timely and consistently by PCWA, then families, especially BIPOC families, will

experience more equitable connections to appropriate housing and services.

5. If there will be a resulting increase in timely, consistent, and equitable identification of housing needs and connection to housing, then there will be a reduction of children in out of home placements and a reduction in disproportionate impacts on BIPOC families due to separations through out of home placements of children.

Resources:

- [Centering Community Self-Assessment Tool – Full Frame Initiative](#)
- [The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership - Movement Strategy Center](#)
- [Partnering with People with Lived Experience to Co-Create Systems Change - Capacity Building Center for States](#)
- [Building Parent Partnerships - Center for the Study of Social Policy](#)
- [Dear Leaders - Alia](#)
- [Keeping Families Together - CSH](#)
- [One Roof](#)



ABOUT CSH

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) is the national champion for supportive housing, demonstrating its potential to improve the lives of very vulnerable individuals and families by helping communities create more than 385,000 real homes for people who desperately need them. CSH funding, expertise and advocacy have provided \$1.5 billion in direct loans and grants for supportive housing across the country. Building on 30 years of success developing multiple and cross-sector partnerships, CSH engages broader systems to fully invest in solutions that drive equity, help people thrive, and harness data to generate concrete and sustainable results. By aligning affordable housing with services and other sectors, CSH helps communities move away from crisis, optimize their public resources, and ensure a better future for everyone. Visit us at [csh.org](https://www.csh.org)