Building Community, Building Hope

USER'S GUIDE

Based on the
Building Community, Building Hope film series

Children's Bureau

CANTASD
A service of the Children's Bureau

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A NEW WAY TO REACH FAMILIES UNDER STRESS

The human costs of child abuse and neglect are profound. Those realities can darken the outlook of even the most optimistic professionals dedicated to supporting healthy, thriving families. But, a change is under way, and new research and insights offer hope that we can provide critical support to children and families before toxic stress takes its toll.

Over the past few decades, an explosion of research and insights has developed around the neuroscience of child development and parent engagement. We have learned about the power of safe and nurturing relationships to protect and heal children. With the right supports, even the most vulnerable parents can nurture their children and build their family's resilience to stress. New research also suggests ways to embed prevention strategies in health care, education, law enforcement, and other systems that also work with vulnerable families.

Passionate practitioners and pioneers are fighting to strengthen support to families and to get the word out that communities have tremendous power to protect children. But the prevention field suffers from a storytelling problem. All too often, the great work that is being done is done in relative isolation, trapped in white papers, and generally hidden from view by many who could benefit from it most.

That's why the Children's Bureau created the *Building Community, Building Hope* film series—a series of stories about some of the most interesting innovations around the country.

These films were designed specifically for you to use on your own, in the hope that they will inspire new conversations about how to approach this critical work with renewed excitement and fresh thinking. Each film highlights a specific practice area. While the films feature specific agencies and programs, the messaging of each film is carefully designed to help everyone working with children and families.

How did the films come to be made? Long before filming started, the *Building Community, Building Hope* film series began as an array of conversations with experts, academics, and advocates, to identify where the field had succeeded in advancing prevention work, and where there were still challenges.

Here is what we heard.

"A change is under way, and new research and insights offer hope that we can provide critical support…before toxic stress takes its toll."

CHALLENGES IN PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT: VOICES FROM THE FIELD	
The picture of what works is still cloudy.	Although critical research is being disseminated and pockets of great programming innovations are occurring, for many, the picture of how to translate research into meaningful programs is still cloudy.
Critical partners are working in silos.	To be successful, prevention work must be owned by multiple systems with critical touch points to children and families—but those systems continue to operate in silos.
Many are still blaming and shaming parents.	There is still significant shaming and blaming of parents, rather than seeing them as vital partners who can successfully nurture their children with the right supports.
Neglect is misunderstood.	Most cases of child maltreatment involve neglect rather than abuse. Most neglect is not willful, but rather the consequence of parents' complex issues, such as poverty, substance use, mental health, domestic violence, and others. Social norms that fail to acknowledge these critical factors affect the ability of agencies and individuals to provide positive supports for parents.
The prevention field has a storytelling problem.	Although engaging system partners in prevention work is critical, communication strategies tend to focus either on graphic tales designed to shock, or on white papers that fail to unlock the positive stories of hope and solutions contained in the research. In addition, most agencies working in the field lack the budgetary resources to devote to high-quality storytelling.

In response to these obstacles, the Children's Bureau's Office on Child Abuse and Neglect developed the *Building Community, Building Hope* (*BCBH*) film series to help the field break down communication barriers and start new conversations around supporting families under stress.

The films in the series are easy-to-use translational tools that feature innovative approaches. They follow practitioners as they apply research principles to programs that protect children from toxic stress and help them thrive. In addition, the films highlight cross-sector system collaborations that are changing the prevention landscape and show parents with complex issues overcoming their challenges to nurture their children. Using an emotional documentary storytelling approach, these stories help elevate the research by connecting audiences to the heart of the prevention story—strengthening bonds between parents and their children.

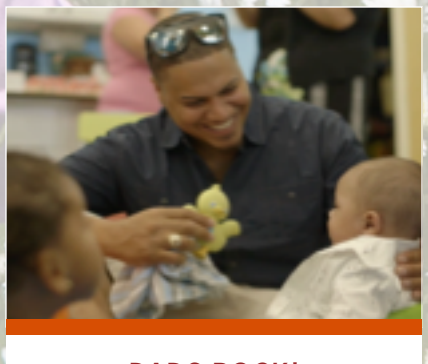
This User's Guide contains valuable tips on how to use the *BCBH* film series and powerful storytelling within your outreach efforts—throughout your community and with new partners. Along with each film, you will find topic-specific discussion guides, resources, and communication tools designed to help you start critical conversations with staff, funders, system partners, and policymakers. It will also allow you to explore fresh ideas for delivering family services.

The series was intentionally designed as a compilation of short films (7–10 minutes each) that can be easily integrated into existing communication channels such as meetings, webinars, conferences, and email blasts. Using shorter content in these situations allows more time for conversation and creative thinking around new strategies and collaborations. It also allows audiences to view content as their schedule allows. All films and resources can be downloaded, embedded, and shared, and are free to the public. Please use them as if they were your own.

Over time, we will continue to add new films to the series and build a library of inspiring stories that highlight innovations in the field and help you think creatively around strategies for engaging communities and supporting parents and children.

FILM SERIES

BUILDING COMMUNITY,



DADS ROCK!

***Dads Rock!* follows fathers on the journey to deepen their bonds with their children and tells the story of the professionals working to improve father engagement. Research clearly shows that children do better when fathers are involved—and yet, all too often, agencies struggle to attract fathers to their services. Fathers also face unconscious bias that keeps them at arms' length. Highlighting the work of The Children's Trust of Massachusetts Fatherhood Initiative, this film provides a look at home visiting with fathers, father support groups, and support group leaders. It offers insights on working differently with fathers and addressing biases.**

Social Media Tags: *Father Engagement, Healthy Families, Home Visiting*

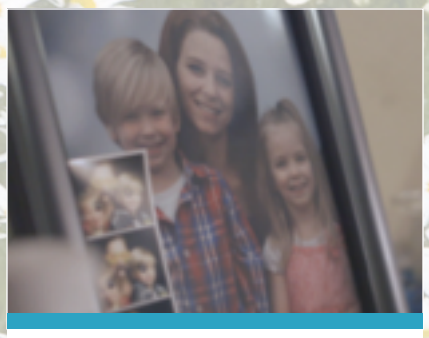
AN UNLIKELY PARTNERSHIP

***An Unlikely Partnership* is a film about the impact of incarceration on children and families, and an innovative partnership between Department of Corrections and the Department of Early Learning in Washington State. It is a film that shows how investment in strong, nurturing parent-child relationships can be a powerful motivator to reduce recidivism and keep parents from re-offending. Intriguingly, it is also a story about how the most unlikely of partners can come together around a shared agenda for the safety and well-being of children, and create remarkable results.**

Social Media Tags: *Incarceration, Substance Use, Kinship Care, Re-Entry, Strengthening Families Framework, Early Childhood Intervention*

At the center of the *BCBH* film series are five short films highlighting innovative partnerships to support children and families. The films are supported by Engagement Toolkits, additional video, and other materials.

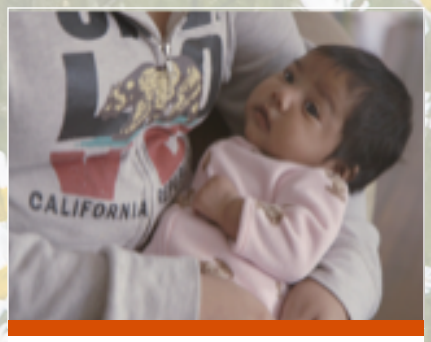
BUILDING HOPE



PARTNERS UNITED FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (PUSH)

***Partners United for Supportive Housing* (*PUSH*) is a film that looks at the complex challenges parents experience that can deeply affect their ability to nurture their children and make it hard to meet multiple agencies' demands. Watch as a young mother who has recently experienced homelessness and domestic violence works with the PUSH program in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to provide stability for her children while addressing her own issues. Through housing assistance, wrap-around services, and a vital family team meeting to coordinate agencies, our young mom is able to successfully navigate the often complex and daunting task of reunification.**

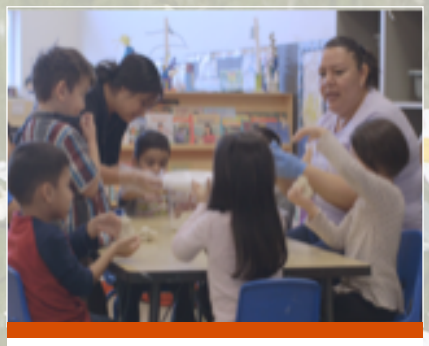
Social Media Tags: *Homelessness, Supportive Housing, Complex Needs, Domestic Violence, Family Team Meetings, Family Court*



FOSTERING HOPE

***Fostering Hope* demonstrates a clear and compelling link between protective factors in communities and a reduction in foster care placement. Through a unique collaboration with a local elementary school serving low-income immigrant families, the Fostering Hope Initiative hosts community cafes and parent education classes. It also embeds a neighborhood connector in the school to help communities learn about child development, manage toxic stressors, and create safe and stable nurturing relationships. By engaging the community to identify their needs and issues, Fostering Hope provides support to promote community-led solutions for creating safe environments where children can thrive.**

Social Media Tags: *Community Cafes, Education, Kinder Ready, Neighborhood Connector, protective factors, strengthening families, toxic stress, immigration*



MAGNOLIA PLACE

***Magnolia Place* examines the provocative process of changing the way service agencies collaborate, analyze data, and learn, using micro-experiments to better serve children and families. Step inside the Magnolia Place Community Initiative, a voluntary network of 75 community partners addressing the fundamental question, "What would it take for 35,000 children living in a low-income Los Angeles neighborhood to break all records of success in their education, health, and quality of nurturing care from their families and community?" Watch as this innovative learning community strives to go beyond direct services to create large-scale community change.**

Social Media Tags: *Collaboration, systems change, learning community, data analysis*

USING FILM TO ADVANCE YOUR WORK

CHOOSING KEY MESSAGES

As you watch the *BCBH* films, consider the messages in each film and how they might help you advance your work. Let's take a look at "*An Unlikely Partnership*" as an example.

Highlighted Elements:

- Features an innovative program to help parents cope with the challenges of reentry back to their home and community after incarceration and to bond with their children.
- Demonstrates collaboration between the Department of Early Learning and the Department of Corrections in Washington State to address challenges both systems face.
  - Early Learning reaches a previously invisible population of children, and Corrections reduces recidivism by improving the parent-child bond.
- Improves vital knowledge transfer between departments.
  - Early Learning understands the needs of children and families under stress.
  - Corrections understands the offender population and challenges to reentry.
- Shows the Strengthening Families Framework being used outside the child welfare field by probation officers in the Department of Corrections.
- Demonstrates how parents with complex issues can learn to put their children first, with the right supports.

Potential Uses:

- Raise awareness and work to lessen the negative effect of incarceration on families and children.
- Initiate a conversation with a healthcare partner about collaborating to serve a shared population.
- Show how professionals in fields outside of the child welfare field can be trained to successfully use the Strengthening Families Framework and extend prevention work into other systems.
- Fight biases against parents with complex needs and advocate for services to support their parenting.

As you view each film, consider how all the messages apply to the work you do. Think about how sharing the film might help you educate or inspire others to consider new ways of working with families impacted by incarceration.

IDENTIFYING DESIRED OUTCOMES

Each film, along with the tools provided (see the "Engagement Tools" section of this guide), can launch a

In *An Unlikely Partnership*, Early Learning reaches a previously invisible population of children, and Corrections reduces recidivism by improving the parent-child bond.

From *An Unlikely Partnership* (Washington State)

From *An Unlikely Partnership* (Washington State)

variety of critical conversations to help you deepen your work. Thinking about the potential outcomes of these conversations can help you build a strategy for getting the films in front of the right audience. Consider the following outcomes:

- Provide educational tools for students of social work, child welfare, and other family-related fields to improve professional development.
- Improve agency prevention programming and practices.
- Educate and train staff on emerging prevention practices and potential collaborations.
- Raise awareness of issues around prevention and family support in your community.
- Heighten visibility and spotlight the importance of your organization's work by connecting it with the issues raised in the film.
- Establish coalitions with other family support organizations, and inspire the development of new programs that address prevention needs in your area.
- Develop new relationships with system partners in education, health care, law enforcement, and others that interact with families.
- Increase funding for new or expanded prevention programs.
- Advocate for policies that support prevention efforts.

TRANSLATING FOR LOCAL IMPACT

It is important to think through and translate how the messages in the film apply to the work you are doing or to a need in your community.

- What data and demographics do you need to explore the issue at the local level?
- What is happening in the communities you serve that can put a local frame around the issue?
- Which of your organization's initiatives or programs use research or practices like those highlighted in the films?
- How can the film help audiences understand a need in your community or see an opportunity to partner to serve children and families?

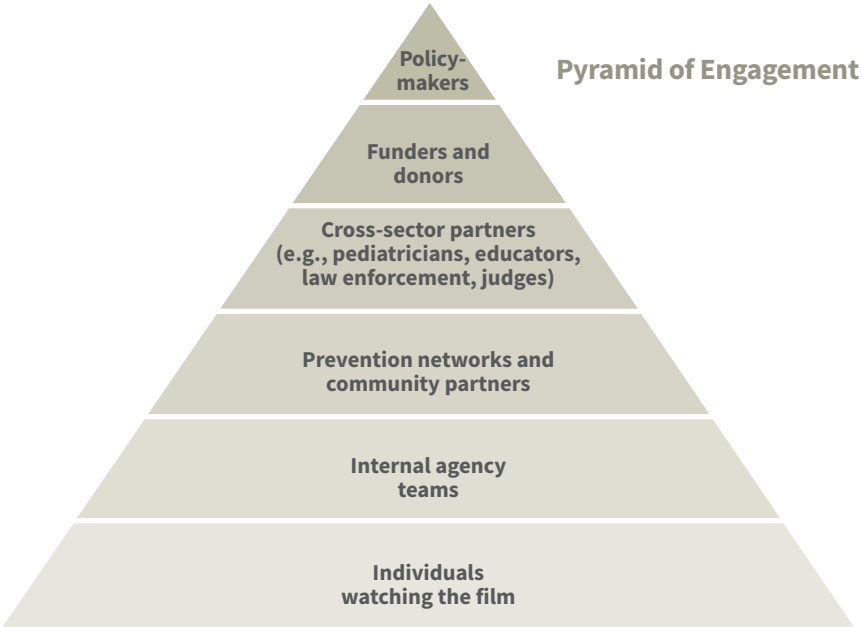
FINDING AGENTS OF CHANGE

A variety of systems and programs serve or encounter vulnerable children and families, and each one can have an impact. When you think about the people you want to reach, don't limit yourself to internal staff or existing family service systems. Think about all the potential actors that could change their beliefs, their behaviors, or their structures to deliver prevention strategies—teachers, pediatricians, police officers, faith-based communities, and others.
Who could be a powerful agent of change to help you achieve your desired outcomes? *Building Community, Building Hope* films can be shared with multiple audiences in the prevention ecosystem and start conversations at various levels of engagement.

ACTIVATING YOUR AUDIENCE

The goal of using *Building Community, Building Hope* films is to activate your audiences to bring fresh new thinking into the delivery of family services. It is important to set expectations for what you want them to do as a result of seeing the film.

As the Pyramid of Engagement shows, each level of engagement carries a different expectation for action:



LEVELS OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Individuals	• Engage in self-reflection about your practice and what ideas you can adopt from the films, starting today.
Internal agency teams	• Develop ideas for program improvements.
Prevention networks and community partners	• Consider unlikely partners to approach to expand services to vulnerable populations. • Share critical innovations from the prevention field with others who interact with children and families.
Cross-sector partners	• Get commitment from organization leaders to innovate and collaborate to serve shared populations. • Share data and knowledge about shared populations to improve understanding of system issues and identify ways to help each other.
Funders and donors	• Determine the level of interest in funding specific initiatives as they relate to the film. • Consider what additional information the funder would need from the agency to support that work.
Policymakers	• Support or sponsor legislation or policies that support specific prevention initiatives. • Convene a policy forum to share the work with colleagues and spark conversation about what can be done legislatively. • Consider funding streams that support prevention work.
All audiences	• Share the film with others in other networks (agency, community, cross-sector). • Share on social media. • Support specific local, state, or national policy initiatives. • Volunteer for prevention agencies who serve local families. • Donate to local prevention services.

ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Each film in the *BCBH* series comes with topic-specific engagement tools to help you start the right conversation with a variety of potential audiences. You can find the tools and additional resources on each film's webpage at **www.cantasd.com/bcbh/**.

Each film has the following tools you can use:

Engagement Toolkit

Discussion Guides
A brief series of questions to help you prompt a rich discussion with diverse stakeholders.

Checklists
Helps your organization determine how you are addressing the issue presented in the film. What gaps do you have in your programming, partnerships, and outreach? Is the research widely understood across your staff?

Using the film in your own communications
Specific language recommendations and strategies for crafting email blasts, tweets, social media posts, and other communications.

Resources and Factsheets

More resources and information related to the topic.

Video

Includes downloadable versions of the films that you can save to a DVD and share with your local audiences and partners.

The goal of the *BCBH* films is to help activate your audience and bring fresh, new thinking.

From *Partners United for Supportive Housing (PUSH)* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa)

REAL-WORLD IDEAS

When you consider the possibilities for change and the people you need to engage, the opportunities for reaching your target audience are endless. Below are just a few ideas to get you started.

- Who in your immediate network of colleagues, staff, and coworkers could you show the film and start a conversation about enhancing your programs, practices, and structures?
- During what training events could you use the film to put a human face on struggling parents and spark conversation about working directly with families?
- How could staff be empowered to use films to help them do their work? Can you encourage staff to engage new supporters, brainstorm with community partners, or arrange meetings with new collaborators?

- What communication vehicles do you use regularly that could feature the film and the issue being addressed? Newsletters, listservs, blog posts, webinars?
- Looking across your organization's calendar, what events throughout the year could provide opportunities to feature the film?
- At what events could you screen the film to inspire a community dialogue around these issues? Community meetings and events, conferences, webinars?
- At what current cross-agency meetings could you screen the film to discuss how the community could adapt programs or practices?
- What academic or professional development opportunities exist to inform the next generation of professionals?
- What community groups do you want to engage to support families under stress? Faith-based organizations, business leaders, schools?
- What system partners do you want to collaborate with to support families served by multiple systems? Educators, health care representatives, law enforcement?
- What professional organizations serve these systems? Are there opportunities to present the films at their conferences?

A variety of systems encounter vulnerable children and families. Don't limit yourself—think about all the potential touch-points in your community.

PLANNING A SCREENING

Whether you are sitting down with a few colleagues or presenting at a conference, it is critical to set context for the film to actively engage audiences.

When planning a screening event, identify the messaging in the film that you want to emphasize to your audience and topics you would like to discuss after the screening. You can adapt the discussion guides provided in the Engagement Toolkit based on your audience and desired outcomes.

To open the event, tell the audience what you found interesting, why the film is relevant to the group, and what you would like to talk about after the screening.

After showing the film, begin the discussion by gathering first impressions from the audience so that you can get to know what interests them. This is an opportunity to understand how audiences react to the information and what ideas it naturally stimulates.

Follow up on the first impressions conversation with the guided discussion questions you have prepared—but be flexible about the direction of the conversation. Brainstorm ideas for improving programs and collaboration to serve families. Be sure to allow enough time to ask audiences what next steps you can develop as a group to move forward in your prevention work.

Lastly, be sure to tell audiences that the films, toolkits, and other resources are available free of charge to anyone to be shared, embedded, and used as communication tools.

CONFERENCES

Conferences provide a particularly rich opportunity for films to enhance presentations and dissemination of new ideas. Opening a presentation with an emotionally engaging and informative story inspires audiences to lean forward, ready to learn more. Conference-goers often struggle to translate the excitement of what they have learned at the conference for colleagues back home. The film can serve as a shorthand to explain an issue.

Be sure to tell conference audiences that the films are available for their use along with engagement tools to help them with outreach.

Brainstorm ideas for improving programs and collaborations … and be sure to leave time to identify next steps you can take as a group.

From *Fostering Hope Initiative* (mid-Willamette Valley, Oregon)

FINAL THOUGHTS

Use the films whenever you need to open a door for conversation around a specific topic, population, or family service innovation.

THINK EVERGREEN

It is important to remember that you don't have just one chance to use the films. The films in this series have been designed to be "evergreen" so the content remains relevant and fresh. Tackling the issues raised in these films and discussing innovations with new audiences is a long-term project. Sharing the films is an especially effective way to jump start critical conversations.

As you encounter new organizations, develop new supporters, or unearth new opportunities within your communities, the films will remain a vital tool for creating a common understanding around the issues they address. You can post or email the content whenever a current event related to the issue occurs or when your organization has new initiatives or information to share. The key to using the films multiple times is in providing different viewpoints or topics that are associated with each film.

Over time, we hope you'll come to rely on the films in the *Building Community, Building Hope* series as one more effective tool in your arsenal whenever you need to quickly open a door for a conversation around a specific prevention topic, population, or family service innovation.

SPREAD THE WORD

The films' powerful message is that there is hope for families under stress. The films were designed to foster a learning community around solutions. Once you begin to use the films to engage others in the work of prevention, you can empower them to use the films as well. This series is for everyone who wants to improve the well-being of children by strengthening families. Let them know that they, too, can use the films to reach out to others, access the discussion tools on the site to facilitate conversations, and explore links to learn more about the issue.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We would love to hear your stories of how the films and tools worked for you, tips you may want to share with others using the films, or feedback you may have for how these tools can be improved to better meet your needs. Send us a message at hello@cantasd.org to share your thoughts. We look forward to hearing from you!