



JPA in the Nation's Capital

JPA has been at the forefront of initiatives aiming to identify and help heal childhood trauma, so it was natural that JPA's Akadia Kacha-Ochana, Research & Quality Improvement Specialist, stopped by to meet with senatorial representatives in the halls of Congress at the first opportunity. She and Dr. Stephen Budde were on their way to present JPA's child welfare research at a conference sponsored by US Children's Bureau in Arlington, VA last month. Akadia discussed issues of concern to JPA and Illinois senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth.

Akadia first met with Senator Durbin's legislative assistant, Max Kanner. They discussed Senate bill (S.774), which Mr. Kanner helped write, entitled Trauma-Informed Care for Children and Families Act of 2017. JPA is excited about the goals of this bill, which addresses the psychological, developmental, social, and emotional needs of children, youth, and families who have experienced trauma. Its purpose fits well with JPA's mission to improve the social and emotional well-being of children who have experienced trauma. Mr. Kanner noted that the bill has been introduced in the Senate with Sen. Durbin a co-sponsor along with Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND).

Mr. Kanner expressed interest in Dr. Budde and Akadia's upcoming presentation, as well as in

JPA's child welfare consulting work. In particular, Mr. Kanner was interested in the Early Childhood Court Team (ECCT). The ECCT project is a new developmentally sensitive, trauma-informed, family-focused approach to the court process in child welfare cases aimed at getting young children out of foster care and into permanent, nurturing homes as quickly as possible while improving child well-being and safety. Working with Dr. Kimberly Mann--the Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Office of Child Well-Being--Ms. Sherri Moore, and her team, JPA is providing consultation on quality improvement and evaluation to DCFS.

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Akadia next met with Senator Duckworth's legislative assistant Josie Villanueva and legal aide Joshua Thomas. Akadia described the trauma-informed mental health services JPA offers in schools throughout Chicago, particularly on the West Side. Ms. Villanueva and Mr. Thomas mentioned that neighborhoods like North Lawndale had left an indelible impression on Senator Duckworth during her campaign,

describing the Senator as invested in helping communities affected by violence. Ms. Villanueva and Mr. Thomas said the Senator welcomes legislative ideas to address these problems.

Following the meetings with the Senator's offices, Akadia joined Dr. Budde at the 19th Annual Waiver Demonstration Projects meeting hosted in Arlington, VA by the U. S. Children's Bureau on June 29-30. (Title IV-E Child welfare waivers allow states flexibility regarding how they use federal funds to reform their child welfare systems and improve safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes for children.) They presented their findings on the DCFS Illinois Birth to Three (IB3) waiver project, which provides parents and caregivers with therapeutic parenting services to create timelier permanent and nurturing homes for young children in foster care. JPA provides quality improvement consultation for the project.

Leading the project, Steve and Akadia worked with data from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, the Erikson Institute, Chapin Hall, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. They reviewed cases in which birth parents had completed the therapeutic parenting service yet were still not reunited with their children. JPA's findings highlighted several challenges to reunification: For instance, though they completed the parenting services, parents still varied in their readiness for reunification. Some parents had severe, unaddressed concerns about housing, mental health, and substance abuse, while others struggled to reunify when multiple children were involved.

From this research, JPA had developed a framework for classifying families according to their readiness for reunification and capacity to sustain it once the family unit was together. This work has implications for both policy and program design that not only supports family reunification but also provides the resources that address parents' ongoing needs to provide stable, loving homes for their children. To learn more about the presentation please contact Dr. Budde at sbudde@jpachicago.org. **JPA**

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