



The Annie E. Casey Foundation

**FAMILY TO FAMILY**

# AT THE TABLE

**A National Newsletter for TDM Facilitators and Supervisors**

**Summer 2008  
Issue 3**

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## New Name For Newsletter

The newsletter has a new name thanks to Patty Liles, Child Welfare Services Manager from San Bernardino County, California DCS. Patty's submission of "At the Table--Sharing TDM Practices and Concerns" was the top vote-getter. The new title reflects our publication's goal of being a vehicle for sharing information between TDM practitioners.

Contributions from facilitators and supervisors like Zarah Robinson and Derrick Byrd, who have contributed articles to this issue, greatly enhance the newsletter. Let your voice be heard. Write an article, ask a question, offer a suggestion -- we will love to hear from you. We can be reached at [TDMnewsletter@bex.net](mailto:TDMnewsletter@bex.net) or talk to your site TA.

## TDM: The First 20 Years...

By Pat Rideout

As hard as it may be to believe, Team Decisionmaking is entering its third decade! I hate to reveal my age, but I must confess that I'm one of the people who was there at the start, in Toledo, Ohio in the late '80s — at an agency whose leader was John B. Mattingly, former F2F head and now the Commissioner of child welfare in NYC. What a long way we've come!

Thousands of TDM meetings are occurring every year in sites all over America, and the impact of including birth parents, youth, extended families and community partners in critical child welfare decisions is becoming more evident all the time, thanks to our sites' diligent data collection and analysis. It's truly an exciting time.

So what are our continuing challenges? How can we push TDM over the top, to maximize its huge potential to change the face of child welfare practice? 20 years on, our anchor and network sites are striving to achieve goals such as these:

- Ensuring authentic voice and choice for all foster youth;
- Building a continuum of family meetings, including TDM and its many 'relatives,' that engages and supports families at each step of their child welfare journey;
- Tapping into TDM's potential to interrupt long, stagnant deep-end placements and also to ensure permanent family connections for older youth;
- Exploring TDM's potential to make a dent in the overrepresentation of children of color in out of home care;
- Empowering birth parents to participate fully and meaningfully in key decisions involving their families;
- Building skill in our facilitators and other staff, so that each meeting represents the best possible opportunity for family success;
- ...and so many more.

Let's keep learning together. The possibilities are endless. Here's to our next 20 years!

## F2F Loss, Philly's Gain

For the past 3 1/2 years the Family to Family Initiative and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's child welfare reform efforts were led by Wanda Mial, our Senior Associate for Child Welfare. In March, Wanda left AECF to become the CEO of the Women's Christian Alliance (WCA), a flagship African American multi-services non-profit in North Philadelphia, founded in 1919 by Dr. Melissa Coppin, an African American physician and community pioneer.

Wanda will be back in Philly to be with family and to cheer on her beloved Philly sports teams! We'll miss her energy and her spirit but know that she will be using her considerable leadership skills to continue to build and develop better services and programs for the families of Philadelphia.

## Getting to Permanency in Louisville...Congrats!

This is the story of the Permanency TDM that could – finally!

Our site, Louisville, KY, has been working toward the implementation of the Permanency TDM for several years, but barriers kept popping up every time we would take a step forward. A central challenge was the lack of clarity about how these meetings would be integrated with our existing family meetings, and workers were continually mystified about what was to be accomplished during the Permanency TDM.

The big push started in August

2007 when our leadership team, after earlier efforts failed, finally determined how to integrate the family meetings in a complementary way, and agreed full implementation should move forward. First, the family meeting workgroup developed training protocols and tools to help workers understand how to use the Permanency TDM. Then, unit-by-unit, we trained all staff on the purpose of the meeting and when to call the meeting.

In addition to training workers, we also worked externally to train judges, attorneys, and the

private foster care providers. We engaged mental health providers to ensure they understood the importance of permanency, in part to reduce the likelihood that they would recommend against adoption for teenagers in their reports to the court.

One of the most critical steps we took was to develop a firewall so that no goal could be changed to PPLA or adoption without a meeting being held first. The attorneys in our agency serve as the firewall by requesting a goal change

Permanency continued on page 5

# Hearing the Voices of Youth on Permanence

Youth Engagement TAs attended the 2008 National Youth Permanency Convening in May and facilitated an impromptu session with youth and young adults in attendance. Their life experiences can help reshape, redefine and renew efforts to achieve permanency for youth.

This summary shares the youth and young adults' messages and encourages others to feel their experiences, hear their recommendations and make permanency a reality for all youth and young adults.

Does EVERYONE deserve a forever family? Do teens and young adults desire a forever family? Which permanency option is best for youth? How do young people define permanency? These were some of the questions asked by over 30 youth and young adults attending the National Convening on Youth Permanence.

## EXPERIENCES

Youth and young adult participants reported that while the states are different, the rules are different, and the details are different, many of their experiences remain the same: a majority of the youth in atten-

dance reported negative experiences in efforts to achieve permanency. While their stories are all different, their outcomes appeared to be similar: child welfare agencies had not assisted them in achieving permanency.

While the initial thought among participants was that permanency does NOT work, with further discussion, they agreed it can and does work. Yet the child welfare system did not make it work for them. The group then discovered a more accurate statement: "*we do not trust permanency*".

*Dre (AK) mentioned he had tried reunification, guardianship and adoption...all of them failed.*

The young people discussed how their negative experiences with permanency led to their inability to trust both the concept and the process of permanency planning. One consistent theme was the majority of the youth and alumni were not engaged in the process of identifying viable permanent connections. As they engaged in an opportunity to self-select which permanency option is best for them, they considered

the benefits and challenges of reunification, guardianship, adoption and other. The vast majority selected reunification, guardianship or adoption. Only a few felt none of these options were good for them. While debriefing the activity, even the individuals who chose "other" were willing to select another option if they were integrally involved in the process.

All agreed that it is important to learn from youth who have both achieved and not achieved lasting permanency outcomes. These valuable experiences led to four simple and doable recommendations. They are as follows.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

### Redefine Permanency to Include Emotional Connections

*When asked to define and describe permanency in one word, youth shared incredible responses from consistency to covenant, normalcy to never alone, intentional to unconditional.*

Conversations with the youth who attended the Convening revealed that there is a lack of clarity and inconsistent mes-

sages around the true definition of permanency. This confusion seems to be further fueled by misinformation received from agency staff, upon which youth must rely for information. This may be due partly to the fact that staff are unclear about how to define permanency, both for themselves and especially for the youth.

Youth recommended that each agency closely examine their current definition of permanency, priorities around meeting its goals, and work in partnership with youth and staff to develop a clear working definition that not only encompasses the legal but the emotional aspects of permanency. Agencies may choose to do so, by looking at current popular definitions for inspiration and as a guide.

*Adam (KS) was very poetic when he reminded us that we were at a permanency conference and virtually none of the young adults had achieved permanency, nor did they really understand or agree with the definition of permanency.*

Youth Voices continued on page 5



## Spotlight on a FAQ

In order to avoid additional meetings, is it appropriate to write a contingency plan during all TDMs? For example, "The agency will file for emergency custody of Susie, and she will be placed in foster care, unless her mother gets a positive report from her therapist by next week, in which case the agency won't file."

This question comes up a lot. It's natural to want to avoid repetitive meetings, but critical to protect our commitment to ensuring full participation when critical plans are made. In addition, any new information should trigger a new meeting since changed circumstances directly impact recommendations made. Therefore, the TDM practice model supports the use of contin-

gency plans only in the following situations:

1. The contingency is anticipated and discussed during the TDM
2. The window within which the contingency plan will be needed is short (no more than 3-5 days)
3. The contingency plan is documented on the original summary report as the action that will be taken if the original plan can't be implemented.

Finally, best practice dictates that if a contingency plan is used, the social worker be required to send a note to the original facilitator, providing notice that the plan was implemented and when, so that the TDM database can be changed to reflect the plan.

## Site News

Look What's Happening

### New York City

Rolling out Team Decisionmaking in NYC is a massive effort! Manhattan is the first borough to implement Child Safety Conferences (CSC), which are initial removal meetings. Four units of facilitators have provided facilitation for hundreds of meetings since fully implementing in October, 2007. Placement change and permanency meetings are being implemented on a different schedule, due to NY's privatized foster care system, and these TDMs, too, are well underway for many families. We're very proud of NY's efforts.

### Denver, CO

57% of all types of TDMs are being held in community locations and 35% of those meetings include a community representative, from one of Den-

ver's seven community collaboratives. Denver has a total of eight TDM facilitators and plans are in process to develop in-state capacity to train future CO. facilitators. Way to go Denver!

### Phoenix, AZ

Facilitators have worked hard to develop internal capacity to train future facilitators. They have also hosted and provided two five day facilitator trainings for facilitators from other F2F sites including Denver. Monthly meetings occur within each District Section within Phoenix to discuss outcome data from TDM quarterly reports. Maricopa County has implemented all of the types of TDMs, and families and their supports consistently provide positive comments about the process. Great work Phoenix.



In the time I have been a TDM facilitator, I have learned an enormous amount. Out of necessity, I have learned about program areas I never had the opportunity to work in. But I have also learned about human emotions in countless ways. I've learned how to stand firm as emotions fly, letting the deluge pass and then moving forward. I've learned to recognize maladaptive coping strategies in myself, and how to help my coworkers recognize them in themselves. I have learned to focus on small achievements amid the crushing desolation of perceived overall failure. I've learned to disguise the sense of rote practice that can result from repeat actions as a facilitator, so that each family may feel as if their meeting is my only concern. I've learned a lot about myself and about the value of what I do.

In my office, the job of TDM facilitator is thought of as a "plush" job; better pay for

easier work. We should be flattered, really. To truly master a difficult skill is to make it appear easy to others, but this disguises the truth of the matter. Anyone who has facilitated TDMs knows first hand the emotional exhaustion that can result from standing at the flood gates, maintaining the invisible guiding hand as parents, children, family members and workers rage and grieve as they come to terms with the reality of their situations. We share disappointment and frustration as placements disrupt or parents' dissolute behaviors make reunification impossible. We face not only the failures of families, but of the agency as well. We try to encourage burned out, overworked social workers with staggering case loads to give this meeting enough time and creative breathing space to allow a good decision to surface. We confront their lassitude and encourage them to give this child a little more. We safe-

guard adherence to policy and counsel those unsure of it.

Our presence gives parents someone to target when they need to vent but are afraid of damaging their relationship with their worker. It gives a victimized child a neutral party to focus on as they tell their story, as painful or embarrassing as it may be. It emboldens workers to discuss concerns they may have avoided in the field. None of these are easy positions. None of these are comfortable or enjoyable, and they take their toll.

So this week as you set up your name tents, lay out your markers and prepare for your next meeting, take a moment to be proud of what you do. Remind yourself that you are the rock that gives each meeting form. Remind yourself that, at least in part, because of the strength you lend them, families get to experience the transcendent joys of success. Families reunite, children get to go home

(be it to their biological parents or to appropriate foster/adoptive families) and workers are rejuvenated. Celebrate your contributions!

*Zarah Robinson is a TDM Facilitator at the Department of Social Services, St. Louis, MO*

### Saluting Susan

The State Of Michigan has been involved with Family To Family for over 8 years.

Longtime TDM champion Susan Kelly, who served as Michigan's state F2F Coordinator for many years, has moved on to a new position as Senior Director of Strategic Consulting for Casey Family Programs.

Susan was instrumental in establishing TDM in both Wayne and Macomb Counties, and her tireless efforts helped to ensure that TDM (and the necessary facilitator positions) became solidly entrenched throughout the state.

In April, the Michigan F2F TA team and many of their colleagues and friends from within the state saluted Susan at a farewell dinner in Ann Arbor. Good luck, Susan -- your legacy lives on.

### Using Interpreters at the TDM Table

As America becomes ever more diverse with arriving families from the world over, our work as TDM facilitators must strive to ensure that non-English speaking parents and children have the same positive experiences with TDM as those who speak English. Our own bilingual TDM TA, Stefanie Nieto-Johnson, offers these tips to F2F sites to consider when planning for the participation of foreign language interpreters in TDM meetings:

#### Use qualified interpreters

Do not depend on children, relatives, or friends to interpret.

#### Have a brief pre-interview meeting with the interpreter

It is always a good idea to meet with the interpreter prior to the meeting to introduce yourself, explain the purpose of the meeting, discuss the gist of the situation and topic of the conversation.

#### Speak clearly and at an even pace

Avoid complicated sentence structures.

#### Avoid acronyms, idioms, and jargon

Be aware that many concepts have no linguistic equivalent in other languages. Sometimes it might take a whole sentence to interpret one word. If you must use professional jargon, explain it to the interpreter before the interpreting session.

#### Pause for interpretation

Do not forget to pause after 3-4 sentences to give the interpreter an opportunity to interpret what you have just said. Arrange a signal for the interpreter to stop you if something is not clear or you need to pause for interpretation.

#### Cultural differences

Encourage the interpreter to alert you about potential cultural misunderstandings. The interpreter may play a role of a cultural broker and help explain the concept to you or the other party.

#### Sensitive issues

When hiring an interpreter be sensitive to cultural and/or religious differences as well as varieties and dialects of certain languages. In some cultures female interpreters might not feel comfortable interpreting for male clients, etc.

Share your TDM story with colleagues.

Submit your article to [TDMnewsletter@bex.net](mailto:TDMnewsletter@bex.net) by October 1, 2008.

### Training Corner

The five day TDM training for facilitators has traditionally been provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's TDM TAs. While many sites have sent trainers to the 5-day training, very few have succeeded in establishing an ongoing, internal capacity to train their own new facilitators on a routine basis. This is gradually changing! While Michigan and California were early success stories in providing their own training for facilitators, sites including New York City, Phoenix, Arizona and Denver, Colorado are now making inroads to build their internal capacity to support facilitator development on their own turf with their own trainers.

In 2007 New York City began the process of training a cadre of five trainers to provide the facilitator training. Their trainers have since trained a few hundred Manhattan TDM facili-

tators, with the other four boroughs preparing to follow suit as TDM rolls out citywide. Phoenix has offered three rounds of training over the past 14 months, resulting in 30 of their own facilitators across Arizona being trained, and they have also provided space for Colorado facilitators to attend. Meanwhile, Denver is working to train its own trainers and plans to kick off capacity building by holding its first 5 day training this summer.

All of these sites have a common vision – to create the internal capacity to train and prepare TDM facilitators over time. While it takes an enormous commitment, resources and planning, with the collaborative support of the F2F TDM TA team, this singular vision is growing and with each home-grown session, full integration and internalization of this work is assured.

## TDM: Making Every Family's Potential A Reality

The past 30 years have seen major changes in how child welfare professionals think about the needs of children, and about better ways to serve and engage parents, including birth fathers and their families. This evolution has resulted in refined definitions of best practice and a challenge to public child welfare agencies and practitioners to do a better job for children.

Team Decisionmaking (TDM) supports principles of effective partnerships, and promotes opportunities for families to effectively participate in their children's lives. TDM connects child welfare agencies to schools, agencies, and the community to help children and families reach their full potential.

Safety and permanence is just one outcome of TDM. Improved family health and welfare, reductions in racial disproportionality and increased male/birth father involvement empower families to recognize their strengths and act on issues that matter most to them.

Here are some of the ways in which TDM promotes and supports effective family engagement and partnership values:

- Communication between families and professionals is two-way, and meaningful.
- Parenting is promoted and supported, and parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Extended families are welcome in the meeting and their support and assistance are sought.
- Birth fathers are identified and engaged in the process early
- Community resources are used to strengthen families

Team Decisionmaking connects communities around "their" families, ensuring that all families have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

*Written by Derrick Byrd, a TDM Supervisor at Wake County Human Services, Raleigh, NC*

## Fast Facts

Permanency TDM meetings provide a critical tool to ensure that attention is continually paid to a child/youth's need for permanency and a continuing connection to family. These meetings are the third critical piece of a fully implemented TDM meeting continuum, and for many sites they are the last TDM type to take shape. When fully implemented, Permanency TDMs are held each time a family's worker is ready to recommend family reunification, termination of parental rights, or guardianship. In addition, the TDM practice model includes the use of a permanency meeting to make plans to extend temporary custody beyond initial ASFA timelines, to place a child in a Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (PPLA) or other long term foster care arrangement, and to facilitate the emancipation of a foster youth nearing the age which allows him/her to leave the system.

This spring, the TDM TA team did a quick survey of Permanency TDM implementation across sites, and found the following:

Do you read articles, like *TDM: Making Every Family's Potential a Reality* and *Commit to Involving Fathers* and think about your practice? Do you evaluate your efforts promoting engagement and partnership with families? Do you consider if there are ways

9 of our anchor sites hold/require Permanency TDMs at varying levels, but only a few (marked with a \*) have fully implemented all types of Permanency meetings, for all children in care. Even in these sites, achieving 100% coverage is still challenging.

Louisville, KY\*  
Denver, CO\*  
Macomb Co, MI\*  
New York City  
Cleveland, OH\*  
Orange Co, CA\*  
Wake Co, NC\*  
Wayne Co, MI\*  
Phoenix, AZ

5 of our anchor sites are still working to establish required Permanency TDMs:  
Alameda Co, CA  
San Francisco, CA  
Fresno Co, CA  
Los Angeles, CA  
Guilford Co, NC

We have work to do in this area! See the related article, "Getting to Permanency in Louisville" to learn about one site's push to get the Permanency TDM implemented.

that you can strengthen your practice to further involve fathers?

Read articles with an eye on your TDM meetings and how you can continue to bolster your own practice and aid others.

## Commit to Involving Fathers

Those of us who are committed to TDM face many challenges as we struggle, along with families, to develop plans to keep their children safe, while at the same time seeking to support and enhance that family system to nurture and care for their children. One of those challenges has been and continues to be the frequent lack of involvement of fathers.

The Institute for Child and Family Policy at Bowling Green State University, in Bowling Green, Ohio, in partnership with the Ohio Practitioners' Network for Fathers and Families, recently held a forum focused on research and policy initiatives to en-

courage nonresidential fatherhood involvement. The following is a snapshot of the briefing offered to state legislators, policy makers and professionals, including some of the recommendations made to the State by Dr. Randy Leite, author of the report. There is much for us to consider in light of TDM practice in these words:

With nearly 40% of births today occurring to unmarried mothers, there has been growing research interest in father involvement, especially fathers who do not live with their children. Research suggests that many young fathers report a desire to participate in raising their children, how-

ever, that interest often wanes over the course of the first two years of the child's life.

The fathers' absences generally follow one of two forms: 1. those who leave without reasonable explanation and do not return to their children's lives or 2. those who leave temporarily or intermittently but remain in contact with their children.

Young parents who do not remain together often lack skills necessary to negotiate relationships with one another and the child, which negatively impacts the ongoing relationship between unmarried fathers and their chil-

dren. Social policy has historically focused on the establishment of paternity and trying to ensure financial support from nonresidential fathers, without encouraging the involvement in childcare, decision-making and other areas of fatherhood.

Dr. Leite and the Institute made several recommendations to try to address these concerns.

**Develop programs that more effectively meet fathers' needs, especially employment needs.** A man's ability to fulfill the "good provider" role is strongly associated with patterns of contact with children.

Fathers continued on page 5

**Involve Youth in Convening Planning**

*Blake (HI)* suggested having a *Permanency Convening that was planned and implemented by youth and alumni for youth and alumni.*

To ensure the needs of youth and alumni are met during the Convening, it is imperative that an organization, which values youth input and supports youth development, engages young people not only in the Convening, but also in the planning of the Convening. Therefore, steps should be taken to diversify the planning team to include a substantial amount of youth input so that the conference agenda and programming will more accurately reflect the organization's resolve to support youth engagement. One alumnus mentioned how important it was to allow young adults to get together and share their experiences around the culture of foster care.

*Julie (WA)* "A youth track would be so important for this conference, it would be a great way to promote permanency to older youth who may feel like it's too late for them."

**Address the Disparities in Permanency Outcomes for Both Older Youth & Youth of Color.**

*Kwanmay (MD)* "I play football and I'm going to college, why wasn't adoption and option for me?"

Youth participants reflected on the impact of racial disproportionality as seen most vividly in its direct influence on disparities in positive permanency outcomes for youth of color; and reflected as well on disparities in permanency outcomes for older youth and young adults. They discussed the experiences shared by the Convening's young adult plenary session and concluded that, while it was clear through their testimonies that each young adult was able to secure some sense of permanence, they did so primarily on their own. It was particularly moving that one participant, a 15-year-old African-American young lady, was forced to choose between permanence with a relative and remaining in her current school. Youth commented that this panel - whether intentional or not - bore testimony to what has been happening on a national scale: too many older youth and youth of color are allowed to languish in long term foster care without ever being connected to a forever family.

Youth and young adult participants recommended that as states/jurisdictions embark on their work around racial disparity, they pay close attention to the specific implications it bears on permanency outcomes and take deliberate steps to resolve existing disparities in positive permanency outcomes for both young adults and youth of color.

*Young lady (CA)* "When I was younger I saw a lot of the white kids around me being adopted. No one ever adopted me. It made me feel bad about my color."

**Continue Permanency Search Beyond Emancipation**

*Young lady (OH)* said it best, "you're never too old for a family."

While this recommendation may seem an unconventional concept to the child welfare field, it was a core point for the young adults at the Convening. Their desire to be connected and supported by individuals and communities resounded loud and clear, especially as the young people transitioned out of foster care. Independent living services are no substitute for permanence and the young people were adamant about their need to feel supported and loved as they embark on their adult lives. This group of young adults shared their struggles to develop and maintain positive and permanent connections while in care - struggles which only amplified at age 18 when the services and supports provided by the child welfare system cease. They recommended that agencies become deliberate about expanding family finding, reunification, adoption and other permanency efforts beyond the time a youth formally exits our system.

*Young man (CT)* "I never realized how much I needed a fa-

ther until I became a dad, by that time I was 19 and nobody cared anymore."

**SUMMARY**

Youth and young adults addressed the participants at Convening's closing session. They challenged each individual as they move forward in their respective roles and agencies to not only consider the recommendations shared above but to elicit even more feedback from the young adults in their care who possess just as much knowledge, passion and expertise as those who attended the Convening.

And finally, they reminded Convening participants that we are all working with a unified goal: to ensure the safety, well-being and permanence of the children and youth we serve. It was their hope that by listening to them, the real experts on foster care, child welfare systems can only increase their chances of getting it right!

*Merli, (NYC)* "It fueled the fire in my heart to know that one day, finding a forever family who can provide unconditional love, a sense of normalcy and happiness to your life will no longer be just luck, it will become the standard of foster care."

Summarized by The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Youth Engagement Team: Brandy Hudson; Giselle John; Captain Young; Maurice Webb; Lindsay Mason; and Michael Sanders.

court hearing only for those cases that have had a TDM - they now refuse any case where a TDM has not been held.

As part of our family meeting integration strategy, TDMs are not held if service providers, family, and youth are not present. We believe these meetings are not "emergent" and that the entire team should be present for the decision making process. We ask the case manager to reschedule the staffing when the team is available. Progress has been made, and in most TDMs the family and their team is present either in person or by phone.

We are in the beginning stages of tracking our work; anecdotally we believe that

about 85% of all goal change decisions are made in a TDM. Strategies are being developed to capture that last 15% and we hope to be at nearly 100% by the end of the summer.

It's been a great journey to get to permanency - the Permanency TDM that is.

*Contributed by Latesia Morris and Desirea Rhodes Cabinet for Health and Family Services*

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**Better integrate fathers into family services and health care services to young mothers and children.** Many unmarried fathers report feeling marginalized by agencies and providers who focus more on mothers and children.

**Enhance connections between programs targeted to low income men and child support programs.** Ideally, child support systems should be family-centered rather than residential parent focused, strengthening connections with nonresidential fathers.

**Provide stronger mechanisms to enhance fatherhood and fathering skills among incarcerated fathers nearing release from institutions.**

**Make changes to legal processes and systems that may**

**discourage father's contact with children.** Revisions to parenting schedules that maximize a child's time with both parents will reduce the parent against parent focus of child custody and residential decisions.

**What can we do in our role as TDM facilitators?** Accept our role as "change agents" within our social services organizations. Advocate within our organizations for our administrators to use their influence to fight for the types of reform/changes suggested by Dr. Leite. Keep the issue of participation by nonresidential fathers a major focus of every TDM meeting.

Our children's futures and well-being depend on it!

Dr. Leite's full report can be accessed <http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/icfp/UpcomingEvents.html>