

Free To Grow: Head Start Partnerships to Promote Substance-Free Communities

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the changing demographics of Head Start families and communities have posed increasing challenges to Head Start staff nationally. Alcohol and drug abuse, child abuse, and community violence have compromised the family and community environments of too many Head Start children, creating significant obstacles to their healthy development.

In 1994, the national Head Start program entered into a unique partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, one of the nation's leading health philanthropies, to develop substance abuse prevention strategies for the Head Start community. This program is called Free To Grow: Head Start Partnerships to Promote Substance-Free Communities. During Free To Grow's initial model-development phase, five Head Start communities were funded to develop comprehensive approaches to reducing the vulnerability of young children to the impact of substance abuse and other high-risk behaviors as they grew older. Based on growing research on risk and protective factors and the ecological development of the child, Free To Grow's program strategies were focused on strengthening the young child's environment, specifically their families and communities, *and not the child*. These strategies include: enhanced family-assessment protocols and procedures; intensive case management; dedicated substance abuse and mental health treatment partnerships; parent education and family support, including family-to-family mentoring strategies; leadership development; community engagement-focused community assessment; and community action to support environmental and policy change.

In June 2000, building upon the promising approaches developed during the model development phase, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, joined by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and in collaboration with local Head Start agencies in 15 diverse communities throughout the country, launched the Free To Grow national evaluation and demonstration program. Designed as a local funding partnership, this second phase of Free To Grow is testing the strategies developed by the Head Start programs in the first phase of the initiative to lay the foundation for broader dissemination of the program's most successful components within the Head Start community.

From its inception, Free To Grow was conceived as a series of interlocking partnerships. On the national level, partnerships between federal Head Start leadership, the Robert Wood Johnson and Doris Duke Charitable Foundations, the Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, which is responsible for providing technical assistance to local Free To Grow grantees, and Wake Forest University School of Medicine, responsible for conducting a rigorous process and impact evaluation, are critical for articulating the program's vision, determining the support that Head Start grantees would need to carry out the program's strategies, and laying the foundation for later sustainability of program practices.

On the local level, community-based partnerships were deemed so essential to the initiative's success that the concept was built into the program's title, "Head Start Partnerships to Promote Substance-Free Communities." Formal partnerships with a diverse group of community agencies and institutions were considered critical for supporting families and changing community environments over the long term. Free To Grow relied heavily on Head Start's credibility in the communities that it has served for over 30 years to bring a broad range of stakeholders to the table. Police departments immediately became valuable partners in working to enhance neighborhood safety and reduce drug dealing and the violence that often accompanies it. Substance abuse treatment organizations have also been instrumental in developing linkages for those families identified as needing this level of support. Schools have also been essential in order to see that children and their families continue to receive support as they transition from Head Start's nurturing environment into the school system.

Parents and other community residents have also been at the core of all partnerships in Free To Grow. One of the program's unique aspects involves its focus on linking Head Start parents with the broader range of parents and other residents within their communities. These relationships have been crucial for developing interventions that seek to change community norms regarding the use of alcohol and drugs.

By bringing diverse partners to the table and establishing enduring relationships that share accountability for outcomes, Free To Grow hopes to engage Head Start in participating in a broader community-wide effort to address the devastating impact of substance abuse and other high-risk behaviors on so many of our youngest citizens today.

The dialogue included below was recorded during a March 2002 meeting of Free To Grow program leadership and partners. The meeting was convened to discuss the elements of successful collaboration. During the meeting's sessions, we asked participants to talk about their emerging relationships and their importance to Free To Grow's efforts within their communities.

**More Than Just a Title: Head Start Partnerships
to Promote Substance-Free Communities**

**A Dialogue Among Head Start Program Leadership
and Community Partners**

New York City, March 8, 2002

MODERATORS:

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Free To Grow National Program Office

SPEAKERS:

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Leonard Busch, Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Tulsa, OK

Vickie Wolfe, Head Start Area Manager

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Wanda Smith, Executive Director and CEO

Kenneth Gilbert, Head Start Director

Deneeco Young, Free To Grow Coordinator

Candy Coblyn, Director, Project CLIMB, City of Dallas, TX

Head Start of Greater Dallas, TX

Angela James, Counselor, Wheeler Clinic

Braulio Santiago, Principal, Smalley Academy

Elena Trueworthy, Free To Grow Community Development Specialist

Kathy Williams, Director, Smalley Academy Family Resource Center

Human Resources Agency of New Britain, CT

Brenda Kofahl, Head Start Director

Laguna Division of Early Childhood, Laguna, NM

Sue Hinrichs, Head Start Director

Lincoln Action Program, Lincoln, NE

Sandy Ellis, Start Right Program Director, Children's Service Society of
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* Agencies are no longer funded under the Free To Grow national demonstration program.

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Judith Jones: As we all know, partnerships help make the goals of Free To Grow achievable. Free To Grow's mission is to strengthen families and communities in order to reduce the impact of child abuse and substance abuse on young children's development, so that they will make healthy choices as they grow older. Our job is to educate key audiences about the ways in

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which Head Start's partnerships through Free To Grow make them better equipped to respond to the changing needs of families and communities. However, it is one thing to conceptualize Free To Grow and quite another to activate and implement the programs. This is challenging work. At this meeting, we want to hear what you think of the partnerships you are building and how they help you achieve your goals for families and communities.

Why are partnerships important to achieving your goals in Free To Grow?

Juanita Nether: Partnerships enable us to serve families. No one organization has all the necessary resources, so we have to maximize the resources we have. One of the problems with Head Start is that family service providers, with 25 to 30 families for each caseworker, cannot give families all the attention they need. Other resources and organizations are needed to do intensive case management to ensure that families have all the services that they need and to follow these families more often than just a couple of times a month.

Are there partners that are particularly critical for Free To Grow's substance abuse prevention goals?

Almetra Franklin: In the Head Start community, we are accustomed to working with partners. That is what Head Start was built on—putting all of our resources together to provide those services that families need. Granted, all of those resources cannot come from within the Head Start program. In Free To Grow, we know that some of our critical partners are the judicial system (including judges and district attorneys who make decisions about substance abusers), treatment facilities (a big piece of Free To Grow), and the local education system (the lead educational agencies or the local school boards).

Why are the schools so important?

In our community, the schools have some of the resources Head Start needs, such as case managers and support services. Also, when children leave Head Start, they go into the school systems. Their siblings are in those school systems as well.

Judith Jones: Over the past several years, the question we always hear raised is, Are the children ready for school? I would like to ask different, but related questions: *Are the school systems ready for these children? Are they ready for the parents to be involved?*

Jeanne Sorci: I do not think so. Teacher education does not deal with how to engage parents when they arrive at the school door. We have a long way to go to provide training for teachers on meaningful interactions with parents. They also need to recognize the power of parents and how to give them quality information about their children.

One thing that we in the public schools can learn from the Head Start program is the concept of transition. The parents are used to being involved and want to be involved, as Head Start sets the expectation. Public schools need to take the next step and say, “You will be involved, and we are going to make it meaningful for you.”

Kathy Williams: As the director of the Family Resource Center in a public school, the principal and I are that first bridge to new parents, including Head Start parents, because the program is housed in our school. We conduct parent training on any questions that interest them, and we hold workshops on any topic with which the parents need help. If they are interested in how to help their child with homework, we work with the Parent Teacher Organization’s office and the social worker in the school in planning appropriate workshops. If we do not have the expertise, we get speakers to come and meet with the families.

We also have Early Childhood Outreach classes where mothers come with their infants and discuss parenting topics. Our staff speaks a number of languages so we can communicate easily with parents. We have playgroups for mothers with infants. We model techniques in reading, literacy, and language. We are there for the families, so that they feel comfortable in the building and get a chance to meet the teachers as they walk around.

Judith Jones: You are very fortunate. Not every locale has a Family Resource Center, but they belong in every school. We want to elicit ideas for the national policy agenda—ideas for the most important ingredients to help families and children. Family Resource Centers are one example.

Sherry Byrd: Our Trenton Public Schools contracted with Head Start last fall, which is a great bond between the two, because we have resources coming through the Abbott Decree program: social workers, nurses, and others who will be able to take over where Head Start staff leaves off when children move from Head Start into the elementary schools.

Judith Jones: We are lucky to have some schools represented here who have made a commitment to partnership and understand its importance. *However, many of you have told us how difficult it is to get schools to the table in Free To Grow. Can you talk about those challenges?*

Robyn Class: In Orange County, California, our biggest challenge is to be seen as a partner and not a burden to schools already dealing with children and families who have multiple challenges. We try to let them know that Free To Grow and the Head Start program can help enhance the work they are doing. We are finally seeing a change in some of the policies that allow the schools to deal with disadvantaged children. We do not have counselors or social workers, and our school district even wanted to turn back the free lunch program, thinking that then they would not have to deal with the problem of disadvantaged children. Fortunately, there are some individuals, principals, and others who are passionate about helping children and who advocate for their needs.

Judith Jones: *Can we talk about the role of law enforcement and how you are working with that critical partner through Free To Grow?*

Manuel Hays: I am a Community Resource Officer with the Denver Police Department. We are an agency that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Although most of our expertise is free, it goes largely untapped. The social agencies seem to turn their backs on us or scowl as if to say, "What are you doing here? Is there a problem?" I do most of my work in uniform because I want children to see that I am a friend and not an enemy. Too often, though, we see parents and agencies tell children, "You see that police officer? If you don't behave, you're going to go to jail." However, with the advent of community policing, officers are receiving excellent schooling in human relations.

From my perspective, the number one preventative for drug abuse, substance abuse, and alcoholism in Colorado is the visiting nurse program, starting with a young mother or young family in prenatal care, postnatal care, and follow-up. Most of the other programs in place concern the cure, but this is one way to address prevention.

Albert Alexander: Our district attorney in Secondary Parish, Louisiana, has vision: He incorporated an early childhood intervention program into the 16th Judicial District, reaching children in the formative years before they become addicted or in the habit of substance abuse. My job as family service manager in the early intervention program is to determine the community service that will meet the child's or family's needs, no matter what they might be. Although the 16th Judicial District has comprehensive services available, too often those who need assistance the most do not know where or how to find it. Family service managers in each district address that gap. We started with three last year and have added three more.

This early intervention program should give some relief to teachers and schools because they are overwhelmed. Usually, every time a new program is introduced, it means more work for teachers. When I was an elementary/

middle school principal, I know the relief I felt when I had the support of parents at home and of other agencies.

Ella May Russell: In Maryland, where I am Director of the Department of Social Services, and in a number of other states, we have initiated a “Hot Spots” program. Money is appropriated from the Governor’s and Lieutenant Governor’s offices to identify areas where there is an existing or potential high crime rate.

In St. Mary’s county, we have been very successful with community policing. It is a coordinated effort among law enforcement, juvenile justice, home probation officers, social services, education, and Head Start to work with gangs. We have already had dramatic and positive effects.

Judith Jones: *It is interesting that you began talking about the Hot Spots and the role of juvenile justice and law enforcement and very quickly mentioned all the other partners, because it is comprehensive partnerships that we are talking about that make such a difference. Can we hear now from the faith community?*

Leonard Busch: I am here in a triple role: I am on the governance team for Free To Grow in Tulsa, I represent the East Tulsa Prevention Coalition, and I am the pastor of a Lutheran congregation. As we look at establishing partnerships that include faith communities, the critical question is, What does a faith community have to contribute to any initiative?

Faith communities, people of faith living together as distinct from faith-based organizations, have tended to serve in partnerships as dispersed dispensaries of social services. Their most valuable contribution to individual family and community health lies in their role of supporting spiritual development. Research has demonstrated and quantified the impact that spirituality has in recovery.

Given the role of spirituality in substance abuse treatment programs, what might be the role of spirituality in prevention programs? I do not know the answer, but I think the question needs to be on the table.

Craig Hall-Cutting: I am the pastor at the United Methodist Church in Umatilla–Morrow in Oregon. We try to reach out to people in a nonjudgmental way, so that they will not feel that they are being looked down upon, or that they are not good enough to associate with church people. For example, we do a soup kitchen once a week and many of the people who come have a variety of problems, including mental illness, drug abuse, or alcoholism. Our practice is to treat them with the utmost respect. We serve them; we sit with them at the tables and interact with them. It seems to me that those are opening ways to help a person know that they do have self-

respect. It provides an environment where they can share things about themselves that they might not otherwise share.

Judith Jones: *I would like Head Start directors to talk next about the value added for them from their partnerships with law enforcement, the faith community, social services, and schools.*

Wanda Smith: I am from Dallas, Texas. The partnership in our community, including all of the providers, comes together to look at a problem and then tries to identify how everyone can contribute. I have been pleased to see the interaction on the Free To Grow governance board of all the people willing to come together on behalf of a particular community that everyone already knows is drug-infested and work with each other to determine what kinds of preventive actions can be taken.

Almeta Keys: I would like to sum up my role as Head Start director with the words “synergy” and “energy.” An African proverb says that it takes a whole village to raise a child, and I strongly believe in this concept. No one of us could do these things alone; we need each other. It takes law enforcement, the school system, and the judicial system. They are all players in the complex task of addressing substance abuse and child abuse issues.

I was thinking about the difference in our program before and after Free To Grow. The difference is that Free To Grow has brought a vehicle of hope to our Head Start parents. Before Free To Grow, we were collaborating with all of these players—the judicial system, the school board, the regional office, and all the other partners—but with Free To Grow we come together more often and go deeper into problem solving. We do not just look at the surface and offer a variety of services to our parents, but we actually meet our parents’ needs.

It is fine to educate the child, but the child has to go home, and if the child does not have a safe place to lay his head at night, then our job is not complete. That is why we need all of the partners—law enforcement, the school board, the judicial system.

In our parish, since Free To Grow has come into the picture, our district attorney has appointed a faith-based organization where, instead of sending the parents to jail when they get arrested for substance abuse and/or certain other crimes, he sends them to the preacher, who does counseling and gives them hope.

We are building families and strengthening communities. This is all about synergy, all of the players coming together to address one common goal and to focus on the prize: the children.

Cathy Wamsley: Hermiston, Oregon is the crossroads for some heavy drug trafficking from California up through Oregon and into the Yakima Valley

in Washington State. We recently had a new chief of police join Free To Grow. At first, he was not quite sure of his role or the impact that Free To Grow would have on the police department.

He wanted the police in our community to have expertise in detecting drug abuse and to be out working with families and identifying those who had substance abuse problems. Because of his involvement in our governance team, he gained advocates for his reasoning, which in turn made the community feel more open. It was valuable for him to be part of that team and to spread the word.

Elena Trueworthy: I want to elaborate on the issue of hope. Free To Grow made the right decision to implement its strategy through Head Start, because Head Start already has the trust of the people in the community. This gives people an increased sense of hope, because they know that Head Start has helped them in the past and that we will help them in the future. This is especially helpful in implementing the community development component of Free To Grow.

Judith Jones: In some of the Free To Grow sites there is a level of discomfort for staff, as well as for the community, in talking about issues relating to substance abuse. We obviously do not expect anyone to walk in the door and say, “Good morning, Mrs. Jones, do you drink? You have a problem.” There is also a stigma attached to people who are substance abusers.

What are the strategies you and your partners are using to address this?

Jeanette Grimes: In the Trenton Head Start, we have been working with a new initiative called Friends of Recovery. Although the term “stigma” usually has a derogatory connotation, this organization purposely seeks to create stigma, but in a positive way, to change the stigma associated with recovery. They also promote prevention. Friends of Recovery is not presently on our governance team, but they are excited about helping and are promoting it politically, starting with the councils and the community. Everyone is invited to their meetings and to their free training. This initiative is going to help us put a face on recovery.

Angela James: I have a dual role with Free To Grow in New Britain. I sit on the governance team representing Wheeler Clinic, a nonprofit organization that provides many services focused on mental health and substance abuse issues. I also work for Loving Earth Consultation and Education to provide training for the advocates who work with Head Start families.

Head Start has always been about helping families, but the substance abuse component is now an additional asset with Free To Grow coming in. The first questions the advocates had for me when I started training them

were, “How do we talk to families about substance abuse? What do we say so that they will begin to talk to us and not shut us out?”

We are working with the advocates so that they know what resources are available. It is important to know where to refer families for substance abuse issues, whether for intensive treatment or for support for a minor or adult who has some substance abuse problems but who might not be addicted.

Judith Jones: We know that we are asking Head Start Free To Grow sites to take on a challenging but important issue concerning substance abuse. *Many of you are working in communities where substance abuse is all around, but no one wants to talk about it. What are the first steps that you think are important in addressing this issue?*

Christy Klein: I am from Southwest Head Start, in Phoenix, Arizona. I see a feeling of discomfort among staff in asking about substance abuse, in part because we have not given much importance in the past to identifying substance abuse resources in our community. There is a perception that there is not much out there, which may or may not be true. Advocates are uncomfortable asking people about substance abuse if they think they have nowhere to send them or no way to help them. Part of what we are hoping to do through Free To Grow is to recognize the resources that are available to us through our partnerships.

Judith Jones: You have raised an important issue. It is similar to giving a party and not being ready when everyone comes. We are seeing this in many of our sites; however, Free To Grow nationally is working on many policy issues. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, our major funding partner, is working on expanding treatment availability across the country. In addition, because prevention often gets a back seat, our hope is that through Free To Grow we can reduce the number of people over time who need that help.

Sue Hinrichs: There are two strategies that we are using in Lincoln, Nebraska. One is motivational interviewing. We have trainers work with our staff to develop skills and competencies using that technique. We also have tapped our mental health consultant for some training, which has included self-reflection, looking at our own thoughts and experiences concerning substance abuse and considering whether these factors will help or hinder us in our work. After the self-awareness training, through reflective supervision or additional support, we help staff with some of their personal feelings and experiences as they go out and work with families.

Alice Blue: As part of our partnership in Tulsa, we have looked at what is available in the community that works. Through Free To Grow and a general coalition, we brought in a program to work with Head Start called FAST

(Families And Schools Together). Although it has been around for a long time working with grade school children, it is new to Head Start. The ideas behind it are based on many of the ideas we have been discussing. In FAST and Head Start, staff have been trained to work with Head Start families and social service staff. This is a 10-week program, with a 2-year follow-up, that uses ritual, is developmentally sound, and has songs and activities. In the program, we begin to talk to parents and have them talk to each other about how they can be better parents. One of the themes of the FAST program is organizing a team of social service, Head Start, and substance abuse prevention professionals to provide resources to families.

Deneeco Young: Our Free To Grow site in Dallas is located in the Housing Authority and, for the first time, Free To Grow has a Narcotics Anonymous (NA) group held in the Free To Grow office. It helps to be located in this target community because when people complete their attendance at NA, we have counselors available if they want to talk. In addition, one of our other partners is a treatment facility. If people have relapses and want to go back into treatment, we can assist them in that process. We also have available someone from Family Place who deals with domestic violence.

Marie Robinson: In Southern Maryland Tri-County Community Action, our staff often knows who is using drugs and who has substance abuse issues in their family, but the staff do not know how to approach families. Therefore, with our partners, we are going to educate and empower our staff with knowledge of how to help them so they are comfortable approaching someone on the issue of substance abuse.

Lori Levine: I think some of the stigma comes because those of us who work in poor communities do not want this to be perceived as strictly a low-income problem. We are afraid that if we spend too much time focusing on this, we will be reinforcing stereotypes about low-income families. It is important that we know that these problems exist across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Judith Jones: That is our job in communication—to always put what we are doing in Free To Grow in a broad context. Many of us live in upscale communities, and we know substance abuse exists there, too, but it is treated very differently. In Manhattan where our medical school is, we have suburbanites coming in from Connecticut and New Jersey and helping the local drug economy. We know that substance abuse is not just a low-income problem, and we need to make sure that everyone is aware of this.

Daphne Aponte: I am a parent educator for the city of Trenton. One of the things that I have not heard mentioned yet is home visiting, which is a won-

derful tool to assist families with getting help for substance abuse. Being in the home and developing rapport with the family makes it harder for them to hide abuse. People will reveal things in their home that they would hesitate to discuss in a Head Start office

I have been home visiting for 3 years, and I have seen families who seem to have it together when they come to the day-care center or the office or when I see them in the community. However, when I am in their home, I might notice ashes in the ashtray, cigars, or bottles of beer. Although initially I might not say anything, I might ask, "You seem uncomfortable about that. Is it something you want to work on?" They may give me only one or two sentences at that time, but during the next home visit they may say, "Well, I really got blasted this weekend and I did this," or "I did not pay enough attention to the children, and one bumped his head. I do not want that to happen again." Then I have a window of opportunity.

Antonio Esquibell: As an educator, I have faith that education can make a difference. The issue in our communities, and even with our staff, is that we are ignoring abuse problems because we do not want to address them. Education can help with this. A few weeks ago, we had a substance abuse counselor give a brief talk on substance abuse and I could see that my staff was impressed.

However, the education we do has to be culturally based. If it is a Latino family we are dealing with, we have to talk about substance abuse from a Latino perspective.

Finally, people need to know that Latinos do have serious problems, just as other groups do. I was shocked recently when I read a study that said 25% of all Latino males will be dead by the age of 40 because of substance abuse, AIDS, suicide, and homicide. I thought that was a high statistic until I looked at my own family. I have about 100 or so nieces and nephews, grandnieces, and grandnephews. Out of 19 males, 5 are dead because of these same issues.

Judith Jones: While education is absolutely central, it is clear that social supports along with education have been shown to make a difference, particularly with families who are economically disadvantaged and deal with many problems on a daily basis.

Carmen Nicholas: I would like to add two points relating to that. Getting treatment to the people who need it begins with an assessment. Free To Grow has brought Head Start a new, deeper approach to family assessment, which builds faster relationships with the families and enables us to partner with them. In addition, Free To Grow's community partnerships enable us to get services and support to families. In Florida, for example, we have a partnership with the Drug Abuse Foundation and South County Mental Health. They committed eight beds to our Free To Grow participants at a

time when services are scarce. Recently, we learned that we might lose our state funds for substance abuse prevention, and yet the Drug Abuse Foundation has continued its commitment to this partnership and to this program. That would not have happened in the past when we worked with them at a superficial level and never had this kind of commitment from them.

Pamela Shannonhouse: The Drug Abuse Foundation has agreed to provide our staff and our partners' staff in West Palm Beach with intensive case management training on drug abuse. South County Mental Health Center has also agreed to provide training.

There is one member on our governance team who knows almost everyone in the community who is using drugs or who has a drinking problem, and he brings this information back to us so we can do something about it.

Judith Jones: *Can you describe your work with families?*

Shannon Jackson: This work is difficult. The first thing that I would say to anyone starting up Free To Grow is that staff should be able to focus not only on treatment, but on the big picture of what is going on in the community as well. When we hired a new substance abuse prevention specialist, we were fortunate because we found someone with these abilities without our realizing how important this was. I will tell you a story about why this is so important.

A husband and father, who had been clean and in a treatment facility for 1 year, was coming home to a wife who had been clean for 3 years. She had four boys under the age of 5. Grandma and grandpa had been clean for 8 months. This was a family who was totally involved in struggling to come out. The father came home, and those boys were ecstatic.

Immediately, Jamie, our family advocate, called the prevention specialist, who had only been on staff for 2 weeks, and said, "I have a family. Can you come and talk with us?" She worked with the family, talking with the father and helping to integrate him back into the family. She knew that he had to contact his probation officer; she knew there had been a restraining order; she knew all the judicial requirements that went along with this father coming back into the family. Then, a week later, the father died of an asthma attack. The little boys found him, and it was very traumatic. The first person the mom called, after her family, was her family advocate.

The Free To Grow prevention specialist was able to help our family advocate get things into place so that we were at the funeral home with them. We contacted their schools and we gave them total wraparound care. In addition, the specialist had the grandparents in a treatment facility within 8 hours in a group with wraparound support. None of this would have happened without the specialist, but the reason for this story is not just that. As a result of this intervention, the other family advocates realized that the prevention specialist is not threatening; she is a help.

Judith Jones: That sad story is not atypical. However, it also highlights how important deeper partnerships are within Head Start in order to address the needs of some of the families participating in the program. In addition, while your Head Start programs have some additional Foundation funding now, that funding will only be there for a few years. So I would like to talk a little about institutionalization of these relationships.

How do you keep these important partners at the table? What can they bring beyond resources so that after 4 years the principles and work that Free To Grow has supported will not just disappear?

Jeanne Sourci: I am the principal of Crockett Elementary School in Phoenix, Arizona. As a principal, my job is to raise student achievement, and I do not know any better way to do that than to be supportive of Head Start. The role of Head Start is to help families in our community continue to support the education of their children.

My job is to ensure children are learning, and the greatest predictor of student success is the language skills they bring to school. The children from Head Start come with more language skills than those who were not in the program. They come with more social skills and basic literacy skills. They recognize and write their name. They are well prepared to become part of the school community.

My school is a Title I school in an inner city, as most of yours are. Title I requires the school to have an effective parent involvement program. With Head Start, I can get the involvement going, continue the process, transition those parents into the school, and maintain the integrity of parental involvement.

In addition, I can ask Free To Grow to help us have meaningful parental and family involvement at the school level. Every week, I have four or five families come to the school seeking assistance. In my community (the red light district of downtown Phoenix) there is only one church, no parks or green belts, no grocery stores within walking distance, and no social services available, with the exception of the county hospital, which is about eight blocks away. That is it. There is no place but the school. It is where people come for help when their electricity gets turned off or when their brother gets shot. We have probably four or five deaths in our community each month. The school is, indeed, the center of the community.

I am excited about Free To Grow because it gives principals and schools hope that someone else is out there to help. I have prevention money from Title I and Title IV. I have an obligation to make a difference in my community and I cannot do it alone. The only way that I see being able to make effective change is through affiliation with Free To Grow in the Head Start community.

Jacqueline Reed: I am the program director for community development at East Side House Settlement in the south Bronx. We have worked hard with the public schools in our neighborhood. It is no secret that New York City public schools are in trouble, and the schools in our neighborhood are among those struggling the most. However, the politics in New York make sustaining partnerships complex. People can get lost in the different levels of bureaucracy and never get anywhere. In our agency, we have taken what we learned in Head Start and applied it to the parent involvement work that we do with families once their children move on to the elementary schools. We focus our partnership building heavily on identifying self-interest—trying to find principals who recognize their interests will be served through partnerships with us and who understand the value of working with community-based organizations. Any successful school-reform effort requires the collaboration of the administration, teachers, and parents. East Side House is trying to use our relationship to broker those kinds of collaborations.

Lori Levine: *What are the elements of your relationship with the schools that have made this an effective partnership?*

Vernell Reed: First, it has been successful because we have been able to place our Head Start parents on leadership teams in our public schools. Before the relationship, they were not even at the table most of the time. Now more and more of them are becoming part of the school-based management teams.

Another thing is that while Head Start teachers often go to the public schools to introduce their children, the public school teachers never came to see us, even though we have been inviting them for many years. We finally persuaded them to come have lunch, see our class, and see what we are doing. This opened a door for them to call us when parents are having problems, to ask the Head Start staff how they handled different issues, and to partner with them to work out these issues.

Free To Grow has been instrumental in helping Head Start and the public schools work together, to realize that they need each other, that neither one is better, and that they can move forward by becoming partners. Our children need us as parents in Head Start and also as parents on the Board of Education. I am hopeful that Free To Grow will let us continue to do that.

Lori Levine: *Can we next discuss partnerships with parents, their part in Free To Grow, and their part in doing this work in communities.*

Lyn McNeff: I am from Maui Economic Opportunity in Hawaii. Parents are what have made Head Start endure for 38 years. We value parents greatly in all of our agencies, but in Maui particularly. We involve them in all aspects of our program: They go with me to the Head Start Association of Hawaii and sit on our governance team. An added benefit of parental in-

volvement is that the parents tell us candidly what it is like in the community and whether the services are effective or not. This relationship is based on trust, which has been developed between the partners and the parents, and it will be what sustains Free To Grow after the money is gone.

Elena Trueworthy: While I agree that parents are one of the most important components of Free To Grow, I also believe that all residents who live within the target community are important. It is important to respect the voices of the people who live in the community and give them the power to make positive changes. Neither Free To Grow nor Head Start should go in and decide what needs to be changed in the community. The residents and parents need to have the power to make those changes themselves. Our responsibility is to support them and strengthen them in the areas where they need help.

We have two parents who participate in our advisory council, a separate committee of our policy committee. Our parents were ready for action much sooner than some of our service providers and, therefore, have done a good job of pushing us forward, making their needs known, and asking the questions, "How long will you be here? How will we sustain these services?" We had our first community meeting, where three mothers, along with numerous other community members, got up to talk about what they wanted to see done with an empty lot. They left saying that we need to get more parents at the table and more community members involved.

Carmen Nicholas: I am the Early Head Start Director in Palm Beach County. Traditionally we pay lip service to, but place little value on, what a parent can contribute because we do not pay them for their contributions. We need to remember that parents will listen to other parents much sooner than they will listen to regular staff. We have combined those two ideas into our program by hiring peer organizers. Even before Free To Grow, we hired one active parent in each center on a part-time basis to help us stay connected to the other parents. They would help us stay abreast of parents' needs and interests and what was going on in that community, so that we could best serve those families. They also helped us in other ways; for example, we could provide more services outside the traditional 9-to-5 hours, do family-support activities on Saturdays and evenings, and help to provide babysitting services that allowed families to come to these activities.

This concept has been extended to the Free To Grow program, which has allowed us to hire four parents from the following community groups: one from the grantee-managed Head Start program, one from the school board-delegate Head Start program, one from the school-age program, and one from the Village Academy that is a part of the partnership. Another position will be opened up to a regular resident of the community, who could be a non-Head Start parent.

Kathy Williams: We have had the same success with a parent organizer in our school, a full-time, paid position for a parent who can communicate with and bring in other parents. One Head Start mother came to us with children and joined us in our playgroups and our workshop. When we had a legislative meeting to talk to our senators about how we partner with parents, this mother, whose first language was not English, volunteered to speak in this forum in both English and her native language. This was parent empowerment, and it took all of our partnerships working together to make it happen.

Lori Levine: *What is different about Free To Grow's partnerships with parents and residents, and traditional Head Start partnerships with parents?*

Wanda Smith: An added value of the Free To Grow partnership with parents is that parents may be able to work on a smaller, more close-knit level with providers than we would normally be able to do in Head Start. There are partners from the community at the table, and parents are able to speak directly to them. Parents should be at the table at all of our meetings because, for communities to change, parents have to be the change agents.

Lori Levine: Some of Free To Grow's greatest successes occurred when parents took the role that they traditionally hold in Head Start as decision makers and moved out onto the streets to effect community change. In one community in Phase One of Free To Grow in Owensboro, Kentucky, the police and the residents were literally throwing things at each other, and the police would not respond to calls. It took a few officers who were interested in community policing and were willing to partner with residents in the community to try a different way and realize that this way works better. In addition, it took 400 residents who have children in Head Start and the public schools to send letters to the mayor's office and write letters to the editor in the local newspaper. The mayor finally heard enough and institutionalized community policing, not only in that neighborhood, but also throughout the City of Owensboro.

Sandy Ellis: No matter how much we develop strategies and service partnerships, we have to have funding partners. We have to convince them to support our projects. If community policing is what we want, then the police department needs money for those positions. We cannot forget funding.

Judith Jones: *What does Free To Grow bring to the table other than resources that could make a difference in the lives of families in the communities? While money is important to get people to the table, it will not keep them at the table.*

Sandy Ellis: About 10 years ago, the United Way did a needs assessment in our community that identified strengthening families as the number one priority. They work closely with a community planning council organized by business and political leaders. We have good representation of all our community, including adolescents. The parents on the council tend to be the gatekeepers for what is happening in our community, watching for duplication of services and streamlining grant and foundation initiatives, so that we are not all trying to compete for the same money.

We have 40,000 people in our entire city, so I know that we have a manageable size that makes this work possible for us. Our United Way and other foundations watch for demonstration projects and allocate resources to strengthening families if we can show that this is an initiative that makes sense in our community.

We have a long-term home-visitation program, part of which includes a network of eight family resource centers. Head Start is a perfect partner for us to transition families, when their children reach age 3. However, we know that we cannot wait until children are 3 to begin providing prevention services because early child development research teaches us that many learning opportunities occur before 3 years of age. Because services need to be continued after children reach age 3, we need to pay attention to school readiness and social skills that children sometimes miss in 4-year-old prekindergarten.

Our partnerships will be successful when there is an exchange of service strategies so that Head Start and family visiting are not case managing the same families. Together we will make decisions about who will be the best provider of case management services and who will be the best provider to transition those families to elementary school. If a family visitor has a long-term relationship built on trust, then that may be the deciding factor. Exchanging services in this way will embed this project in our community and our own local people will be able to fund it so that it can become institutionalized.

Jim Ortiz: Since I seem to be the only person here with the state government, I would like to comment on how the State of Oregon approaches prevention.

Within the Department of Human Services there are multiple agencies. In order to avoid frustrating our clients who do not know which agency to go to, we have been trying to become one big agency again, so that no matter which door our clients go through, they will reach some help. We call it the “No Wrong Door Policy.”

We are taking a holistic approach to prevention in our state. Many people have enabling families who encourage drug abuse. As a result, the state agency realizes it must be concerned about the whole family dynamic, just as we are trying to do with Free To Grow.

How do we measure the success of our partnerships? If we were to boil everything down, it would come to prevention. That is what Free To Grow

is all about, and that is exactly what we want in the state agencies also. As Head Start and Free To Grow persuade their partners to start assimilating the idea of prevention within their agencies, it ultimately will help. Whatever will help strengthen the family and the community will also provide prevention for young people.

Lori Levine: *We have been hearing much about service providers' sustainability of Free To Grow. Are service providers the only group that can support program sustainability?*

Carmen Nicholas: It is important for Free To Grow and Head Start to become known for their services. I often get called from funding partners in my community saying that if we apply for a particular grant, they will match it. That is how we got the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to fund the Free To Grow project. Subsequently, they have even over-matched because they know we are going to use those monies to provide good services.

We need to be included in all the school readiness initiatives. My community looks to Head Start for best practices and for what works with families and young children. These approaches get adopted across the board in other service areas.

For me, planning for the continuation and sustainability of Free To Grow includes looking at my annual Head Start cost-of-living and quality-improvement dollars and planning for staffing. My program includes 2,050 children and families across Palm Beach County in several centers. We are starting with Free To Grow only in Delray Beach. Part of my long-term planning includes deciding how I am going to use those annual quality-improvement dollars to implement the program across the board over the next couple of years. We need to make sure that all of the centers and programs in Palm Beach County are fully involved in the Free To Grow strategies and approach.

Candy Coblyn: One of the reasons why the City of Dallas will stay at the table with Head Start is that the goal of Free To Grow correlates with our strategic plans. Dallas wants to bring community partners to the table. While we cannot bring much money to the initiative, we can assist with seeking some of those dollars. We have recreational centers that are open to the Free To Grow families and we have political power to get people to advocate for services. We have many other resources for families in need, including partnerships with over 30 coalitions.

Lori Levine: *Therefore, part of the challenge is enhancing the visibility of Free To Grow and forming relationships with the right people who can leverage resources to support sustainability.*

Vickie Wolfe: I am the director of a Head Start center with 200 children and 36 staff members. My background is in public school, and it has been a learning process for me to understand the holistic approach that Head Start provides. I am excited about the Free To Grow initiative.

Chemical dependency is not limited to lower socioeconomic groups. It hits everyone. I have members of my family who have been chemically dependent, and sometimes we did not know what to do or where to go. People do not talk to or try to help others because they do not know where to send them. Therefore, I want to take Free To Grow back to my staff because I want our staff, director, and executive director to buy into it.

Maricela Rios: As we begin to teach parents and community members skill sets for leadership development and how to become advocates for themselves, even if a service provider leaves the table, he or she will already have those skill sets to deploy. One of the unique (and nicest) things about Free To Grow is that it is community driven, while other services tend to be service-provider driven.

Juanita Nether: Although we need to bring the right people to the table, if Free To Grow is going to continue, we must be concerned about how the community perceives the program and the value it brings to the community. Our partners were passionate to see this project continue. That is special, and it will make the difference.

Lori Levine: We have heard that it is not only important to institutionalize Free To Grow in Head Start, but that the role of the partners, their passion and engagement, is critical to this process.

Cathy Howe: That is exactly the way it is in the Wausau program. We have to build strong relationships with our collaborating partners, the parents, and the families in the communities. If we are not there physically at the table building those relationships, or if our partners are not committed to building the relationships but bring hidden agendas instead, the program cannot be sustained.

Lori Levine: *Can we next discuss the relationship between the work we are doing in Free To Grow and the emphasis on early literacy outcomes in the Head Start program. What are some of the issues and challenges of that, particularly as the discussions go forward in Washington about whether or not Head Start should be moved to the Department of Education rather than staying in the Department of Health and Human Services?*

Brenda Kofahl: As Director of the preschool program of the Pueblo Laguna Head Start, early literacy is an area about which I am passionate. We

have tried at Laguna Division of Early Childhood to help parents understand how important their relationship to their children is in all areas of their life. In our monthly family-fun nights, we have recently been discussing the relationship between parents and children as it concerns early literacy. We talk about what parents can do even with infants.

Sometimes young parents experience frustrations that cause them to be more vulnerable to child abuse. This may be in part because they do not know what to do with their children, how to engage and entertain them. Just giving them some tools regarding early literacy, showing them how they can talk to their children and how children's literature can be a bridge for communication, gives these parents more confidence in their parenting and also helps to reduce the high-risk behaviors of their children.

One of our partnerships is with the Reading Is Fundamental Family of Readers program. On family-fun night, the families have dinner together and we have an activity with the parents and the children. On some nights, we provide child care so that we can address other issues with the parents.

The parenting classes that we offer through Free To Grow—emphasizing building relationships and communication with children—will be a big step toward prevention. In addition, we need to educate people that early literacy is much more than learning 10 letters or even 26 letters.

Carmen Nicholas: Our program is based on a model called the Parents Services Project. Families are highly stressed because they have little social support. When parents have little social support, we see psychological syndromes like child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, and other problems in families. If we go in and build a social support network, then families become less stressed and more cohesive. They are then better able to attend to their needs and have the energy for early literacy activities with their children. That model has been tested.

In Palm Beach County, south Florida, we have immigrants from many different ethnic groups. They are isolated with little social support, living in their own communities. They have disorganized families and no assistance. Part of what we focus on is supporting them, building their social support network, and relieving their stress so that they can, in turn, take better care of their families. The parenting education piece and the family support activities play a major role. We had one child from our Head Start of Haitian background whose native language is Creole, not English. She just won a library award. It all started though the Head Start center, where the parents learned to speak English first and then built on their love of reading. The end of that story is that this child just got a scholarship to one of the elite academies in Boca Raton. That is an example of what can happen.

Lori Levine: *If you were in your legislator's office or at the National Head Start advocacy conference, and you had to describe the relationship between your Head Start family and community partnership work and early literacy, what would you say?*

Kenneth Gilbert: As we talk about literacy attainment, we all know that parents are the first and foremost teachers of their children. If there is abuse or if there are problems in the home and the community environment, those issues have to be addressed. Even though our Head Start parents all said that they read to their children everyday, as we began to ask about their favorite books, we found that most parents were, in fact, not reading to their children. There were problems precluding them from reading. Many could not read, and there were substance abuse and other issues in the community preventing those who could. It was difficult for us to convince the funders of our Margaret Cone model center that in addition to the areas they wanted to fund, we also needed to address family services issues and fund those equally. That was a major fight for us. We had to present them with many social service data to get them to fund the program in the way that we felt was appropriate, but it has helped to make the program successful.

Almeta Keys: In our neighborhood, many parents do not know how to read and many are also very young. I started as a teacher in Head Start, and many children who are in the program now are children of my students. Therefore, I knew the parents when they were in the program themselves, and also knew that they dropped out at some point.

We are working with the parents and helping them remember what was important to them in their childhood—the playacting, nursery rhymes, songs, and sharing. We help them realize that they need to do these activities with their own children at home. We need to teach parents to share who they are with their children and be accepted, whether they can read or not. Children need to be able to accept their parents, and parents need to feel good about themselves, not embarrassed because they cannot read or help with homework.

Elaine Reaves: Since it was important for Head Start in Trenton to look at service models that incorporated literacy, we selected a nationally recognized parent and teacher model. We have been using that model in Trenton since 1996, so we know that it works.

We have also incorporated other models called Effective Black Parenting and Los Niños Padres, which address cultural issues. They look at families from historical and cultural perspectives and help build self-esteem. Many of our families are not proud of who they are.

We put these models together even before partnering with Head Start and we see a difference. When we bring families together from all over our

community, they begin to share stories. We have incorporated a theatrical piece. We have a couple of staff members who are theater enthusiasts and act out different scenarios. The reactions are amazing. Family members say, “Oh my goodness, that’s me.” We earn their trust and work with them in a private way to help them feel whole about themselves so that they can be that whole person for their children.

Lori Levine: *We have been talking about family obstacles to early literacy outcomes. Are there also community obstacles to achieving family literacy outcomes?*

Tonja Fraser-Jenkins: In southern Maryland, as a way to get people more involved in their community, we hold many community meetings. We send out flyers and make phone calls to a few key leaders in that particular neighborhood to get them to pass the word around. Most of our demographic group cannot read or understand anything sent to them, so we have been holding these community meetings where we can talk face to face. We hear what kinds of barriers families are facing and talk as a group about how we can address them. I make the Free To Grow coordinator available at these platforms, and parents are pleased to hear about that resource. These community meetings seem to be a good way to find out what the community needs.

Among the barriers we identified are lack of transportation and lack of day care. We are in a highly rural area, and people have no way to get to GED training, basic skills training, budget counseling, child care, the family center, or Head Start resources.

As a result, Free To Grow partnered with the family center of St. Mary’s because we have a close-knit relationship. Once we get the families in the program, the family center has a bus pick them up and bring both parents and their children to the center. The children are cared for, which allows the parents freedom to access Free To Grow resources.

Judith Jones: The integrated strategies in Free To Grow that help families and communities become more stable and highly functioning are clearly at the heart of a child learning to read. A child cannot learn to read in a chaotic family in a chaotic community. Those families who “do well with their children” are high-functioning families who are being identified for community leadership roles.

As Free To Grow expands, we need to address how to integrate all the pieces, so that the family and community pieces are not moving on parallel tracks. Children and parents also need to become citizens. If students are not citizens, they are not eligible for scholarships, and they cannot progress. This is where Free To Grow and the partnerships can help break down barriers.

To conclude our session, I want to synthesize what I heard as the value-added concepts of Free To Grow.

- Free To Grow has been the catalyst for Head Start to move beyond its walls, to develop the range of partnerships that can address the heightened needs of families in the 21st century.
- Free To Grow expands Head Start's reach to include non-Head Start parents, who are virtually indistinguishable from those in Head Start. Those families together are key to providing safe and stable community environments for healthy child development.
- Free To Grow emphasizes parents as partners, which implies a relationship that goes well beyond, in many instances, the traditional Head Start parent involvement.
- Free To Grow helps Head Start and its communities address substance abuse prevention directly, through heightening staffs' ability to address those issues. The partnerships in Free To Grow are the foundation for institutionalizing the program, even though money is critical as well.

Lori Levine: On some level, if we do our work right, we *will* be working our way out of our jobs, because the communities with which we work and partner will be self-sufficient and able to support the healthy development of their children. That does not mean that we will not continue to need support. All of us need support, but we will be able to get beyond the service provider mentality that drives so much of our work with families and communities.