

80x3 Podcast Series - Part 1: Early Childhood Budgets, Boards, and Brain Development

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SPEAKERS

Amanda, Priscilla W., Art R., Jamie B., Narrator

Narrator 00:02

Welcome to Inclusion Matters, a podcast about children's development from the Center for Inclusive Child Care.

Priscilla W. 00:19

Welcome to Inclusion Matters, a podcast from the Center for Inclusive Child Care. I'm Priscilla Weigel, the Executive Director and I am here today with three amazing guests to have a conversation that I think all of us need to be focused on in the field of early childhood. I am going to jump in with some of the bios of our guests this morning. But, before I do that, I just want to thank the 80x3 Initiative from Greater Twin Cities United Way that has pulled this group together and allowed us to spend some time together talking about this topic. We are going to have a three part series, so look forward to other episodes once you listen to this one. Our first guest is Amanda Ziebell Mawanda. Amanda believes in the power of relationships and the ability of our communities to solve the most pressing challenges we face. She's had over a decade of experience consulting with nonprofits, faith based groups, schools, and governmental agencies around organizational leadership, health and strategy and network development. Amanda enjoys working with clients who are committed to making a difference in their communities, and she is passionate about building common vision, igniting creativity and unleashing energy for positive change. As a doctoral candidate, her research focuses on transformational leadership practices, and learning communities. She lives in the Corcoran neighborhood of Minneapolis where she grows and preserves food from her community garden plot, reads poetry, cooks delicious meals for those she loves, and creates beautiful pieces of origami. Next, we have Art Rolnick, who is an economist who's been on the faculty of the University of Minnesota since 2010. He previously served as co director of the Human Capital Research collaborative at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota and before that worked for 40 years at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis as a senior vice president and director of research. Art's main expertise is pre Civil War banking, but he is well known for his decades of work in early childhood, and especially the Minnesota early learning scholarships program, which he launched 20 years ago in Minneapolis. His work on early childhood development has garnered numerous awards, including those from the

George Lucas Educational Foundation, and the Minnesota Department of Health, both in 2007. He also was named 2005 Minnesotan of the Year by Minnesota Monthly magazine. We also have Jaime Bonczyk, who is a leader in early childhood education who strives to create social impact networks, change initiatives and partnerships that create sustainable health and education outcomes for children, families and educators. Her background includes roles as an executive director of an early learning nonprofit Headstart administrator, adjunct instructor, author, professional development content creator and preschool teacher. Jamie has a bachelor's degree from Minnesota State University Moorhead, and a master's degree from Roosevelt University, both in early childhood education. She's completed a headstart management fellowship at UCLA, and an early childhood policy fellowship at the Bank Street College of Education. Additionally, she became a certified professional project manager through the University of St. Thomas. Jamie and her family call Richfield home. They love to play games, travel, and play with their dog. A natural storyteller with the love of humor, Jamie can occasionally be found on the stage of the Strike Theater. For self care, Jamie has regular yoga and meditation practices. Welcome all of you to Inclusion Matters. I'm so glad you're here. And today we're going to be talking about early childhood budgets, boards and brain development. And those things are deeply connected, and sometimes that connection is forgotten. And so Jamie, can you just start us out with helping us understand how do budgeting decisions in the early childhood education sector translate to positive brain development in young children?

Jamie B. 04:21

Thank you for the question, Priscilla. So glad to be here with all of you. I think you know, just to get it started, put simply, brain positive brain development comes from healthy relationships with active caretakers and play partners. But it's not so simple to learn everything you need to do to create those healthy relationships and do those with ease and joy. And when I think about the connection between a budget and positive brain development in a classroom setting, I really think about some things like educators and recruiting. Like who are we looking for to be these relationship partners and play partners is somebody who is thinking about that a child is a whole person. And they have physical development needs and social development needs, and language development needs, and cognitive needs and creative development, all these things, and that each child differs one child differs from another person so you might have to use different approaches, and especially that we want to think about the intersection between like language and culture and family homes and how that brings people to our classrooms. And then how do we keep them there, because educators need to be invested in, they need professional development that needs to meet their needs, meet them where they are, they need wages and benefits, like health insurance and retirement, that's going to keep them in the field, but also allow for them to take care of their own families. And then we have to be able to also think about our budgets, meeting our mission, if that includes supporting families. So it's your budget to me is your, your values document, right? And so if we have a mission, and we have a value to meet the mission, what are we able and willing to do to put our money where our mouth is, and I think that that is much harder when we think

about human centered work, then we've really given it a lot of thought we say like, okay, it's, it's really important, we care about kids, how are we going to do it, and who are those people. I think sometimes we leave out the who are those people, and how do we help them meet their needs. Because in my experience, early childhood education and care is always a two generation approach. Even if you're not saying the words two gen approach, it absolutely is because children do not arrive to any kind of early childhood education, preschool setting, in isolation. And that was the quality of those relationships that they have with their caretakers, whether they are their own family members, or if they are, you know, educators working in an environment, those, the quality of those relationships and what those educators know about developing intentional relationships and facilitating like really inclusive play. It's a, it's a skill as a former preschool teacher, everything I learned how to do, you gave me a beautiful introduction, social network weaver, all these things. I was a classroom teacher for 10 years. And for 10 years, I followed 20 preschool children, and looked at what do they want to learn about? How am I going to teach it to them? And I had to figure out, how do you get all these different young people to make it through 10 hours of a day together. That's a lot of practice. So, you know, what I would say is, we have got to look at who are the people we want in our classroom? How long do we want them to stay there for so they can, you know, build those relationships. And what is it going to take for our budget to look like that's what we're doing.

Priscilla W. 08:02

Which leads me to a question to you, Amanda, because, you know, this is really what your work is built around. First of all, the relationships and how sustaining those and cultivating those can really change the face of success for nonprofits. But how do you help nonprofits budget to advance their mission? Because early childhood education and the field of early childhood, so often, as Jamie said, you know, we're out there focusing on early childhood, children, their development, their social, emotional, the business side of things can so often be overwhelming, and forgotten. And that's the foundational essential. So how do you help folks understand that better?

Amanda 08:50

Yeah, thank you for the question. So over the last couple of years in my work life, working with nonprofits, I've had the chance to work with several several nonprofit childcare providers. I think there are some unique things there about the budgeting process. But before I get into that, I want to say like when Jamie was talking, the first note that I have here is that budgets are values statements. Yes. So that rings really true with me. Whatever ends up in the budget, is what you are putting your focus and your resources behind. So the first thing for me when it comes to a budgeting process, has actually nothing to do with money. It's about is there clarity about the mission? And does everyone understand the mission the same way. So a lot of the programs that I've worked with are embedded in a larger nonprofit, are not, not necessarily their own standalone 501 C three, but they might be a program of a larger nonprofit. They might be embedded in a faith community. And so sometimes the question needs to be before we

even talk about money is what is the, what is the mission as we all share that understanding in the organization. Has it shifted? Does it need to shift? And is it still meeting the community's needs and the organization's needs. So sometimes, having a child early childhood program is a great fit for an organization. And sometimes it's an add on or a legacy program that isn't getting the resources that they need to do the work well, because it's not fully integrated into the mission of the organization. For me, like the first question is, are we all on the same page about how this early childhood program functions within the larger organization to meet the mission? And do we understand that mission the right way. Once we're having a shared understanding of the importance of that program, then I think a piece that often gets missed is any input from the people actually doing the work. And they're the ones who know, what does it take to actually get the work done. I sort of think about it at kind of a programmatic level, operational level, or organizational level. So at the programmatic level, that's the day to day work, what do teachers need to be able to do and who do they need to be in order to show up in the classroom. And there are implications around how you fund PTO, how you fund benefits, how you fund programming at your school, what else? What other supplemental things do you fund and bring into your program. So asking those programmatic people first, what do you need to do what we're asking you to do? And then as that moves up, operationally, what supports need to exist for that to be successful. So then you're adding in the administrative costs, you're adding in space costs, you're adding in sort of what we would maybe call general ops, or general operations propel, we like to say, core mission support. And then at the organizational level, how is the whole organization supporting that work at the programmatic level and providing the needed resources at the operations level. And I think that's where you can get into the conversations about sort of the trade off between where your budget line is going, what's going where, who's paying for what, where are we going to find the money to do it, but it has to start first at the programmatic level. And then what do people on the ground need? What do people in the classroom need? How do we support that operationally, and then organizationally, what does that mean for what we need to do to stay healthy and vital. And I think that, in my mind, that's a great budgeting process. The only other thing I would say, is that start much earlier on your budgeting process than you think you need to. Because if you're going to have those conversations, realistically, you probably need to back up your budgeting process, so that you're beginning work on your budget, you know, at least four months out from when the board is going to approve it. Because that gives you a time to have those conversations and include everybody who needs to be included in the conversation. Truly.

Priscilla W. 13:27

Yeah. And when you think about the the nonprofits out there, those are the sites providing care to children and families who are doing it well, all those things you've described are in place and continually re evaluated. I think that that was really, you know, that point really struck me, too. And feedback is being gathered by the folks who are actually doing the work input from them to say, what do you need? Now? Maybe you didn't need that 10 years ago. But today, what do you all need to be successful to meet the needs of the children that you're serving each day and

the families? And so from an economic point of view Art, why is it important that everybody understands this investment? Not just the people in the organizations, but the whole community. All of us.

Art R. 14:21

Well, not only the whole community now then I'll explain, and actually why invest in ECE or early childhood education from an economic point of view, I'm gonna make the case it's both from a neuroscience and an economic point of view. And let me let me explain that, as sort of mentioned earlier, brain development is critical from prenatal defy those are critical years for how that brain develops or doesn't. For example, neglect is a real issue with with our children. If a child is neglected, if they don't get that, that environment, that positive environment feedback from the parent, and this is a two generation approach that was mentioned, that brain doesn't develop right. And it's not that you can't improve things later on. But it's so much more efficient to start at the very beginning. So when I talk about early childhood development and education, I'm talking prenatal to five. And what we know is from an economic point of view, if a child starts school ready to learn with an engaged parent, and I want to stress an engagement, they're much more likely to succeed in school and in life. And in fact, I'd argue it's a three generation approach, because we know that if a child succeeds in school, and in life, as adults, their children, we now have evidence that their children succeed in life. So you know, this intergenerational problem, this is a way to really make a difference if we start early. Conversely, if a child starts behind, what we know, they're less likely to graduate high school struggled, to earn a livable income, and often end up in the criminal justice system. So investing in these kids, and our most vulnerable kids in particular, has a significant economic benefit not just to the child, but to the community at large. So these are critical points I can talk about later about the research supporting this. But this is why it's so important from an economic point of view and a neuroscience point of view to invest in our children starting as early as we can and engaging the parents. It clearly is a two generational approach. And we now know we have evidence, it's a it's a three generational approach.

Priscilla W. 16:39

Definitely. So now, Amanda, going back to your support that you've provided to early childhood centers, thinking through when there are huge gaps in the way that they provide for will just say benefits, for their employees and the folks who are actually doing the work and, you know, seemingly sometimes insurmountable tasks to re evaluate and revamp budgets in order to truly match their mission. How, you know, in those situations, what are some ways to start? Because it can seem, how would we even know where to go? How can we begin in that situation?

Amanda 17:27

I would say one of the things that I've seen, particularly with the programs that are focused on trauma informed care. And this I've seen, I mean, this is not unique to the Early Childhood sphere. This is many, many of my clients

who are doing the hard work of nonprofits who are working with folks who have experienced trauma or violence or any adverse effects in their life, is that number one for me, is during the budgeting process, or prior to the budgeting process, understanding as an organization that your clientele or your service population, or however you want to identify the participants that you're serving is only one part of the people you're actually serving, The other people you need to think about are your staff. And you need to think about how, particularly if you want staff with lived experience, you need to be supporting them in new innovative, different substantial ways that reflect the acknowledgement that adults have had trauma in their life to. And when we put them in situations where we're not giving them what they need to do their jobs well, or where we're exposing them day to day to traumatic events in young people's lives and with other families, that has the potential to re traumatize our staff. So for me, I think it begins with understanding your service population is not just the young children and families, it's also the people who work for you. You're also delivering service to them and creating an environment for them. So for me, it kind of starts there. Once you have sort of that philosophical underpinning, and like I said earlier, the shared understanding of mission, then I think it's a process that sort of concentric moving from people who are closest to the work and moving out within the organization. A lot of times what we'll see is that somebody will inherit a budget template that a nonprofit. And what they're doing is they're making small tweaks to that over time, in relation to what money they see coming in, or expenses increasing or changes in their business model. I think what's more important is to have a fresh look at least every two - three years with your strategic planning process to say, what are the goals we're trying to achieve, and are our finances in alignment like with that. So when I do strategic planning work, it's all about marrying your vision and your mission and your goals to that financial strategy. So for me, those are like underpinning foundational aspects that have to be in place. And then like I said, the amount of time that needs to go into it and the space for being able to have generative conversation. A lot of times we hand out a budget document, and it feels like it's finished, it's done. There's not space to change things. And if we have to start from a place of what are we building together? What's the future we're creating together when we're building this budget? And what do we really need to do in order to achieve the goals we've said we shared to support students and families and staff and to reach this overall mission that we are working towards together?

Jamie B. 21:03

Priscilla , so if I jump in for a second, there's a piece that, as, you know, Art, you had mentioned, what has happened if children have experienced neglect, and then Amanda, you mentioned, you know, adults working in spaces that have had their own lived experiences, and I really appreciate the conversation about updating budgets and kind of mapping out what is going to be required, or what is updated best practice, because when I hear, you know, aren't talking about neurobiology, and I think about, man, when, when I got my degrees in early childhood, even when I had my master's degree like iPhone didn't even exist, let alone the Harvard Center for the developing child and a beautiful little three minute video on serve and return all these things that we know, that are now informing best

practice documents for what it looks like to be in a classroom. I think about Minnesota's update to the knowledge competency framework and I know currently, there's not a requirement necessarily on some of those best practices that have been updated around trauma informed practice that Amanda mentioned, but also working with multilingual learners and working from a lens of being culturally responsive. So these are updated practices. And we're in a place where things that our accrediting bodies are best practice. Bodies, like the parent awareness system in Minnesota or N.A.E.I.C. are in a process of updating, how are they going to say, what is high quality. And where are we backwards mapping, right? So from like, 2026, when new things are gonna happen how are organizations that maybe aren't already doing best practices don't already have a mission vision value towards this work. How are they preparing their budgets to do those best and better practices? And how do we know and I think that is a when I think about like, what is the role of executive directors? What is the role of Board of Directors, people who are doing things like strategic planning is, what are we going to be held responsible for doing? And why? I think some of it is the why like, why are we doing this? I think those things have been updated, because they speak to what we know is human centered design, and what really supports a two generation approach to child development. And they do cost money to implement really going to look through the updated guidance, there's going to need a map of how do we do this work. How do we prepare ourselves to best be serving people so that we get those return on investment. I'm not exactly sure Art, if that's what you said. But ultimately, like we get a return in our humans, it's not only the economy is that our people are better regulated, both children and adults, they're more likely to have pro social development, both children and adults, they're more likely to have high wage incomes when they enter and stay in the workforce. So I think it's, it's important like to understand the why. And then to map that out with what are we going to need to do in order to position ourselves to be able to deliver on what's expected of us by the community. And I that question that you asked Art is like, why does everybody need to know about this? As a former preschool teacher, when people said, what do you do? They did not make an assumption that I was a brain architect and a nervous system regulator. They made an assumption that like, I got to play all day, which I did, but I had to do it with intention. I had to understand how to set an environment so that their environment allowed children to form peer relationships that influence their nervous system regulation in their brain development, and those are things 80x3 80% of brain development happens by the time a child is three. Why are we doing this? Why is it important and why is this an all in community investment is because teachers can teach, but they also need the resources to do their job. And they're brilliant. The people who have opted in to working with our youngest community members, that is not a job that many people I think could do. And we need to resource them so they can actually do their job. Yes.

Art R. 25:27

Priscilla, I'd like to jump in on this on both, both these these answers, and into a real world example. And it really fits with what we've been saying, Amanda in particular, this is Way To Grow. It's an organization that's been around for many, many years, established by Don Frazier, and with with a very clear mission, to close the achievement gap.

Minnesota is an education state. And yes, our vulnerable kids are kids who, who live in poverty. They're not, they don't succeed, we have one of the largest achievement gaps in the country, and Way To Grow, that's their mission, to close the achievement gap. And the way they've done that, and we now document that I've been on their board for many years and been involved with and we've documented our results. It just shows exactly what Amanda was saying what a nonprofit should do they have a clear goal, and how did we do this. And this is what Jamie was saying. It's the two generation approach. We provide mentors, home visiting mentors for our parents starting prenatal, and we are showing and then we have the scholarship model. So these parents can use high quality early on, and there's a question about what high quality is, but the bottom line is that our kids, we have the data to show this now, we serve over 600 families, our kids are born full weight full term and not addicted. So the the health aspects are critical at the beginning. Our teenage moms are not getting pregnant again. And 90% of our children over 90% are starting school ready. Historically, it's only about 30% of poverty, kids start school ready. And so we're already getting the results. And our bottom line is getting good at closing the achievement gap. That's how we that's how, we've only got to funders. That's how we explain why we're such a good investment. Because we can show results. And it's exactly what Amanda was saying is what what you need to do as a nonprofit, you need to focus in on accountability, and again, collecting the data, not just to show that your results, but where do you fail? How can you improve? That's another critical aspect. So I think this discussion is really important to communicate to the broad community, why you should invest Why this is such a good investment. Because these kids are a future workforce. And if we don't invest in these children, and we don't take the two generational approach, we're going to fail. We've been failing these kids for years. What bothers me is we now know how to fix this problem. We know how to solve it. And unfortunately, it does, while much of what we said is right, ultimately, it does depend on funding. If we don't fully fund this, we're not going to get there. I have to say Minnesota, in this last legislative session, they gave us over a half a billion dollars for our program. Because we're showing these it's not just the research, which is important, but we actually have real world results based on well managed nonprofits. Critical.

Priscilla W. 28:25

Critical. And you know, Art, that's a that's a great segue to our part two of this conversation, a great place to wrap up, we're going to spend time in part two, really helping all of our listeners articulate these very things to stakeholders and funders and their teams to get everyone on the same page with their mission to kind of do that actual work. So we're going to talk more strategy more detail. And I thank you, Amanda and Jamie and Art and I look forward to part two of our conversation. So thank you listeners, and we'll talk with all of you very soon.

Narrator 29:10

Thanks for listening. For more resources, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org

