

TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S CARE GLOBAL COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM WEBINAR SERIES

Webinar #3: International Review of Parent Advocacy in Child Welfare

12 May 2021



WELCOME

- This webinar is part of a series of webinars from the Transforming Children's Care Global Collaborative Platform
- The platform establishes more strategic sector-wide collaboration
- Sign up at the link in the chat to join the platform and receive updates about future webinars

HOUSEKEEPING

- This webinar is being recorded and the recording will be made available to you (with Spanish and French subtitles).
- Introduce yourself in the chat (select “Panelists and Attendees” when sending a message so everyone can see it)
- Use the Q & A to ask questions and upvote and comment on the questions of other attendees.
- Respond to poll questions when they pop up.
- Those accessing the webinar from their internet browser will not be able to see polls but are encouraged to respond in the chat.

AGENDA

- Introductions
- What is Parent Advocacy?
- Presentations from Parent Advocates
- Presentation on the Literature Review
- Presentations from Parent Advocates
- Q&A and Discussion



International
Parent
Advocacy
Network

Building a Parent-Led Movement to Transform Child Welfare

IPAN aims to increase the power of parents impacted by child protective systems. We support parents and organizations that mobilize against excessive surveillance and family separation through state care and adoption. IPAN works to empower parents around the world, so that their voices are heard and their rights protected

<https://www.parentadvocacy.net>

PRESENTERS

David Tobis

IPAN Vice President & Ally

Mary Burton

Executive Director of FearlessR2W Inc. &
IPAN Parent Advocate

Tony Lawlor

Chief Executive Officer at Lawlor Consulting
Group L.L.C. & IPAN Parent Advocate

PRESENTERS

Andy Bilson

Emeritus Professor of Social Work
University of Central Lancashire
IPAN Ally

Shantelle Common

IPAN board member, Management Committee
member of Family Inclusion Strategies in the
Hunter (FISH), Parent Advocate

Taliah Drayak

IPAN Director & Parent Advocate

POLL #1

Which of the following best describes you or your area of work? Choose all that apply.

- Parent
- Legal Professional
- Child & Family Services Worker
- Academic/Researcher
- Specialist in Care Reform
- Specialist in Child Protection
- Policymaker/Policy Specialist
- Other

Do you know what parent advocacy is?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

David Tobis

IPAN Vice President & Ally



David has worked with UNICEF, the World Bank, foundations, NGOs, and governments to reform child protection systems. The work described in his book, *From Pariahs to Partners: How Parents and Their Allies Changed New York City's Child Welfare System* has been a catalyst to increase parents' participation and influence in child protection decision making globally.



PARENT ADVOCACY IN CHILD PROTECTION

David Tobis, Ph.D.

<https://www.davidtobis.com>

International Parent Advocacy Network

<https://www.parentadvocacy.net>

May 12, 2021

Basis for Parent Participation and Advocacy



- Parent participation is a matter of human rights
 - **OHCHR: Guidelines** on Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs
 - **CRC:** centrality of parents to maintain child rights
 - **Guidelines for Alternative Care:** parents have primary responsibility for children
- Realization of these rights requires participation of all those involved: children and parents.
 - Child and youth participation have often been tokenistic;
 - Parent participation has most often been non-existent

What is Parent Advocacy in Child Protection



- **Parent advocacy**

- Parents with child protection experience promote parent participation and the rights of children and parents through advocacy.
- Parent advocacy promotes parent participation at:
 - case
 - program
 - policy level

- **Parent advocates**

- Parents, mostly mothers, with lived child welfare experience are trained as advocates to support other parents and promote policy change
- Training to be advocates
 - Class room training
 - Experiential learning
 - Support groups

Origin and History of Parent Advocacy in Child Protection



- Maori Family Group Conferences
- Problems in New York City child protection
- Parents organized with allies as a countervailing force for change
- Parents were trained to be advocates and:
 - Coached other parents
 - Attended initial child safety conferences
 - Wrote their stories: Risemagazine.org
 - Testified for budgets and legislation
 - Advised commissioners and ministers
 - Protested in the streets when government wouldn't listen
- A movement was created. NY system changed

Parent Advocacy spread globally



- To other anglophone countries
 - United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada
- To social democracies:
 - Norway, Finland
- Beginning to reach middle income countries:
 - Russia, Bulgaria
- Discussions with low income countries:
 - What is needed
 - Readiness and points of entry
 - To create a tool in parents' voice (<https://toolkit.parentadvocacy.net>)

Mary Burton

Executive Director of FearlessR2W Inc. & IPAN Parent Advocate



Co-founder of Fearless R2W Inc, Mary has been an advocate for system change, and parents involved in the child welfare system in Manitoba Canada.

Mary Burton

WHO AM I?

- FIRST NATIONS, SWAMPY CREE
- NORWAY HOUSE & NORTH END
- DAUGHTER, MOTHER, GRANDMOTHER
- INTERGENERATIONAL SURVIVOR
- HELPER & ASS KICKER



Mary Burton

WHAT I DO?

- "SUPER GRANNY"
- SUPPORT PARENTS & FAMILIES
- VOLUNTEER & COMMITTEE MEMBER
- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- CHANGE SYSTEMS



Tony Lawlor

Chief Executive Officer at Lawlor Consulting Group L.L.C. &
IPAN Parent Advocate



Tony grew up in the child welfare system, as an adult he started a non-profit that served youth in foster care, then he was wrongly accused by the welfare system of harming his own child. Tony became a parent advocate since then and is leading his state with legislative efforts to transform the child welfare systems that ruined his life and so many others.

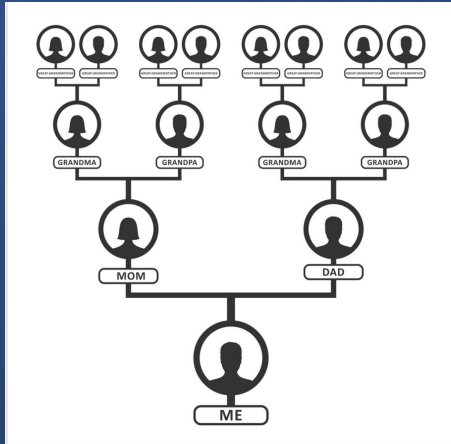
According to the famous African proverb: 'It takes a village to raise a child!'
“to raise a child” means more than parents helping one another,
it means it takes a community or village to raise a child.



When the Village Fails to Do Their Part, The Children Suffer

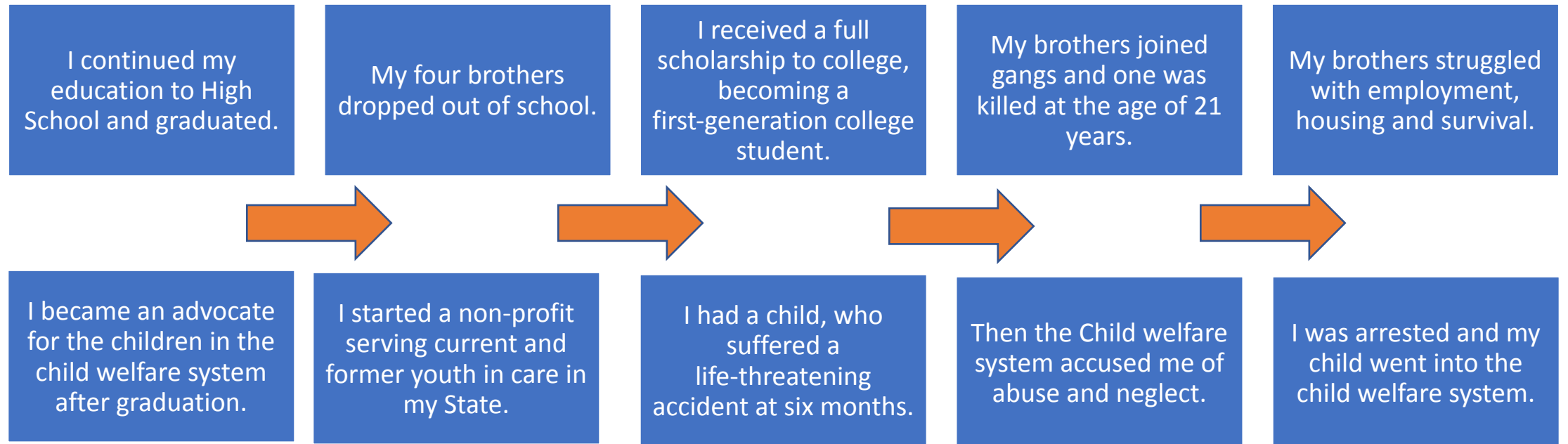
- My Mom's father was an orphan as a child and later adopted.
- He married my grandmother and they had two children.
- My mom was abused as a child. She developed low self-esteem.
- Her parents divorced when she was a teen.
- She was taken advantage of and became a teen parent.
- My mom dropped out of high school before graduation.
- She did not receive any help or support from the village/society.

Who Am I?



- My name is Tony Lawlor
- Born to Jean Lawlor when she was 16 years old.
- My father left my mother when I was 3 years old.
- Oldest of Five Boys by the time my mom was 22 years old.
- Mom suffered verbal and physical abuse by stepfather.
- My Mom left and became a single parent again, forced to raise five multiracial children on her own.
- My mom was poor, and she struggled taking care of us.
- She was arrested for selling drugs to survive & pay bills.
- At age 13 yrs old, my brothers and I went into foster care.

A Generational Curse: The impact of the Child Welfare System on Me.



Parent Advocacy

- Sometimes the village fails the family.
- Sometimes parents just need support rather than having their children taken away.
- Generations after generations are affected when children are taken away from the family.



What do I do now? The Journey Continues....

- I battled the system for over four years to get my child returned home and my record cleared.
- My child and I suffered a great deal of residual trauma.
- I became a parent advocate in 2016, after my case was closed to help fight to keep families together.
- I am a co-founder and the Vice Chair of Family Justice Resource Center (FJRC). Advocate for parents wrongly accused of medical mimics of abuse.
- I am a co-founder of a parent advocacy group POWR - advocating for policy changes in the child welfare system.
- I am an executive member of International Parent Advocacy Network (IPAN)
- I am the founder of Lawlor Consulting Group LLC, I help transform lives in communities, by helping people with resources who serve youth and families.



● The Importance of Parent Advocacy

- For far too long Institutions and systems were created to replace the role of the parents when the village fails them.
- However, there is a need to restore the family and parents need to have a seat at the table.
- Parents Need to Have Their Voice and Choice in the Decisions that affect their children and the legacy of their generations to come.

POLL #2

Are there existing parent advocacy networks in your country/area?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Do you know of parent advocacy networks in any of the following regions (choose all that apply)

- Eastern Asia
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- Latin America and Caribbean
- Middle East and North Africa
- North America
- Oceania
- South Asia
- Southeastern Asia
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- Western Europe

Andy Bilson

Emeritus Professor of Social Work
University of Central Lancashire



Andy was director of the Centre for Europe's Children, the UNICEF and Council of Europe observatory on children's rights. He is internationally renowned for his work on deinstitutionalisation and his research on child protection.

Key Findings from the International Review of Parent Advocacy

Professor Andy Bilson

See <https://www.parentadvocacy.net/activities/international-review/>



Why promote parent participation and advocacy

- It promotes children's rights and human rights
- It improves outcomes for children
- Parents are the experts on what they need
- It creates better care and protection of children





What is parent
advocacy?

Three areas:

- Case Advocacy
- Program Advocacy
- Policy Advocacy.

Parent Advocacy Research

A review of over 100 papers :

- Improved parent and family engagement and partnership
- Reduction of maltreatment
- Reductions in entry to care
- Increased reunification
- Speedier placement with kin or permanency
- Promoting Sobriety
- Agency Culture Change.



Lessons from Research on Effective Implementation

Strengths based approach

Training for parent advocates

Parent recruitment/retention

Prepare your agency

Training agency staff

Supervision and support

Leadership

Clear roles

Funding

Shantelle Common

IPAN board member, Management Committee member of Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH) & Parent Advocate



Shantelle is a parent advocate and mother of two daughters who supports parent advocacy, family inclusion and restorative practice. After experiencing domestic violence and seeking help, her children were removed without adequate support to remain safely together, becoming the driving force that led to her working towards systemic change of the government response to remove children from non-abusive mothers.



PARENT ADVOCACY & PARENT PARTICIPATION

Shantelle Common - Parent Advocate

International Parent Advocacy Network (IPAN)

*Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH –
Australia)*

PARENT ADVOCACY IS...

...when a parent provides peer support to another parent through shared experience of the child protection system, providing emotional support, advice and encouragement.



Illustration by Chrissy Young

WHY IS PARENT ADVOCACY NEEDED?

- To give parents a voice
- To support better outcomes for children
- Children are removed from vulnerable families that need better support



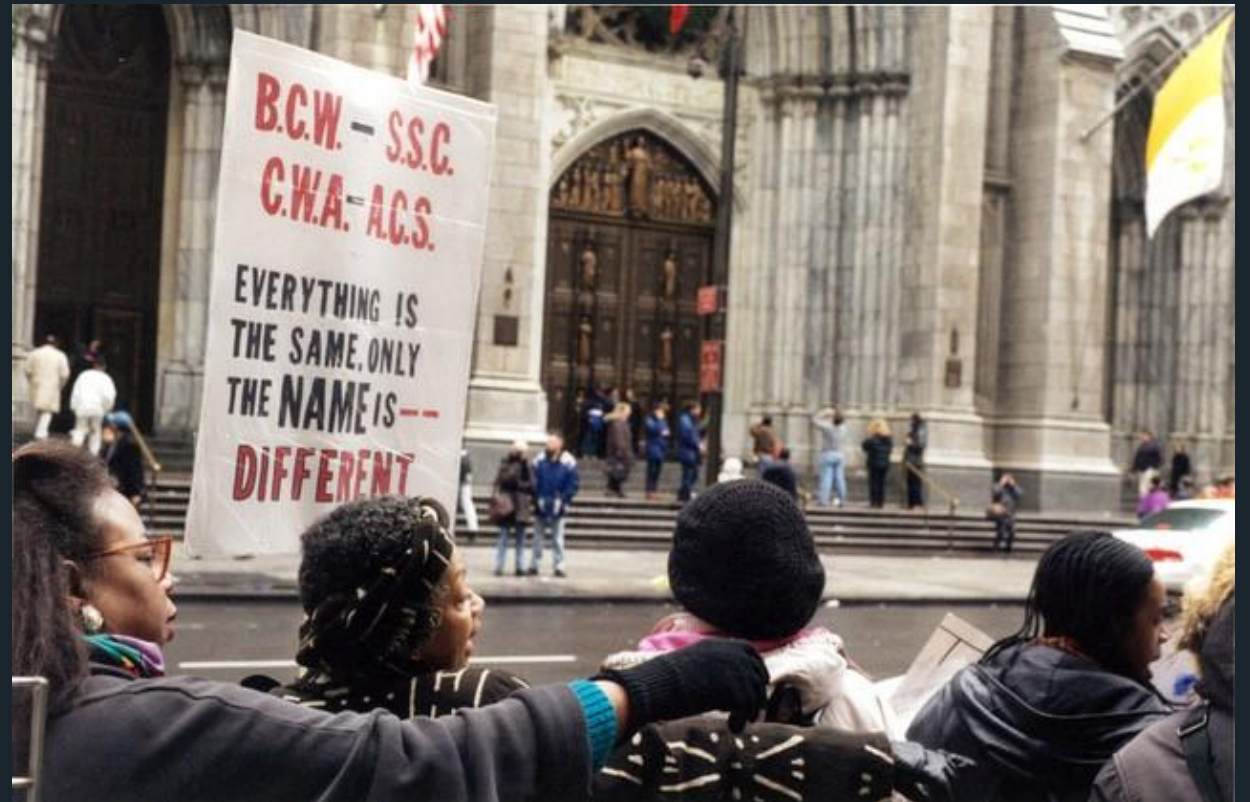
DOES PARENT ADVOCACY WORK?

YES!

New York - Children in
care reduced from around
50,000 in 1992 to less
than 8,000 in 2020

How New York City's parents took on the welfare system - and changed it

Over the past two decades the number of children being taken into care in the city has plummeted, thanks to a grassroots social movement. What are the lessons for the UK?



PARENT PEER SUPPORT PROJECT

“ I think what was helpful was... parents were calmer – there was that little bit of dignity that they got back because here were people who could relate to them... that one person to sit there and say,

“well mate, you are in this now, you can get out of it..
..I got out of it”.

To have that little bit of inspiration to actually help someone at their lowest and even if it is just that, and they go back that night and think “I can beat this, it can be done”. I really think that is a message no one else can give.

(Solicitor, interview)

”





BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



*Article 18 – Children have the
basic human right to be raised
by their parents if possible*



BECOME A PARENT ADVOCATE OR ALLY



Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (NSW, Australia)

<https://finclusionh.org/>



International Parent Advocacy Network

<https://www.parentadvocacy.net/>



Shantelle Common

shantelle.common@outlook.com

Taliah Drayak

IPAN Director & Parent Advocate



Taliah is a care experienced mother of eight children. She sits on the oversight board for the Scottish independent care review and on the Expert by Experience board for the National Children's Bureau.



Transforming Children's Care Webinar Series on an International Review of Parent Advocacy in Child Welfare

Why? How? When? Parent Advocacy Presentation

By Taliah Drayak

International Parent Advocacy Network

<https://www.parentadvocacy.net/>

Why work with parents?



- Parents and families are the link to a child's heritage and identity
- Parents have a deep love for and bond with their children which can endure the ups and downs of a lifetime. Long after the child is an adult, beyond the time that systems offer support and care their family will be there for them in times of crisis and hardship.
- The challenges parents face become generational if not addressed. Working with parents can stop generational intervention. Why not start today?
- When you work with parents there are proven to be better outcomes.
- Long term working with parents is financially beneficial and more sustainable.
- Children have a right to family life

How can parents participate in a meaningful way? (These are just a few examples)

- Parents can participate in focus groups to look at specific aspects of child welfare and the associated processes
- Parents can work to raise awareness through public speaking and writing
- Parents can participate on parenting boards and committees to offer their experience and perspectives.
- Parents can work with both local and national governments, charitable organisations, and judicial systems to inform good practice.
- Parents can work together, often building grassroots organisations, to address a specific challenge or need.
- Parents can offer peer to peer support



When could we work with parents?

- Start small, start simple
- First and foremost, reframe perspectives on parents – parents are not the bad guy and they are able to work together with you
- Open a conversation – through surveys, one to one conversations, focus groups
- Consider a parent committee
- Ask the parents in your community what they need and want



Final thoughts

- We all need a good support team to tackle challenges. Don't limit your team – consider the value of having parents be a part of your team. You are all working towards the same goals: Children to be safe, loved and thriving!
- Shared experience is a powerful way to motivate each other for change.
- Parents are not the problem. Poverty is the problem. Poor health care is the problem. Poor education is the problem. A combination of severely lacking support services and misunderstanding of inappropriate coping mechanisms is the problem.
- Parents are an important part of the solution!



POLL #3

Does your organization work with parents/caregivers?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

Do you feel that parent advocacy is relevant to your work?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

Q&A



**THANK YOU
FOR
JOINING!**

Please see the chat box for a link to learn more about the Transforming Children's Care Global Collaborative Platform and find out how to join.

We will be sending you a link to the webinar recording and slides in a follow-up email shortly. If you have questions, comments or recommendations for future webinar topics, please send them to:

contact@bettercarenetwork.org

The next webinar, focused on frameworks for foster care, will be held on 17 June. Registration link in chat.

Visit <https://www.parentadvocacy.net> for more information about IPAN and sign up for the mailing list via the link in the chat.