

**Liz Ghilardi:** we would never send a doctor out to do some new procedure with five days of training and no ongoing practice. And I think that seems to resonate with people that this is a really important skill and a really important role.

**Christina Rouse:** I am so pleased to be joined with the esteemed folk in my conversation today who have a lot of knowledge and experience around developing forensic interviewers. And I am so excited to hear all of their thoughts about onboarding your forensic interviewers. So I will have everyone introduce themselves then we're gonna get right to the conversation, So Liz, please introduce

**Liz Ghilardi:** yourself. Yeah. Hi and welcome. I'm really happy to be here. Thank you, Christina, for the invitation. I'm Liz Gilardi. I am the forensic interview program manager with Children's Wisconsin, based out of Milwaukee.

**Christina Rouse:** Great. Thanks for being here. And Heather,

**Heather Stewart:** Hi everybody. Thank you Christina, for having us. When you introduced us and you said esteemed friends, I thought you were gonna say senior friends, so either way we'll go with it. Hi everybody. Welcome. I'm Heather Stewart. I am the Deputy Director of the Utah Children's Justice Center Program, which is our state chapter in Utah. I've been here for about five years, and previous to that I managed our busiest c a c in the state for about 23 years.

**Christina Rouse:** Great, thank you. I wasn't gonna even mention how long we've all been in the field because that's another conversation, so thanks for joining us and Les, but definitely not least Julie.

**Julie Kenniston:** Hello everyone and thank you Christina for the invitation. My name is Julie Kenon and I am a program manager for the National Criminal Justice Training Center, and I am also a

Contract forensic interviewer at a local CAC here. And just to go along the lines of my dear friend Heather, this is your 32 for me for interviewing, so I'm excited to have this conversation.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah, I think this is a conversation that a lot of folks are having in the field right now, right? field of forensic interviewing, the profession of forensic interviewing.

Is really moving into a direction of more professionalism and development. And so our conversation about onboarding forensic interviewers today is hopefully to set the stage of how we wanna see the culture shift in regards to thinking about onboarding your interviewers. So very often, I send new forensic interviewers to their initial protocol training and think that's part and maybe the only thing they do for onboarding.

And we're hopeful that at the end of our 20 minute conversation today, you'll have some different ideas or thoughts around how you can bolster your onboarding process. For interviewers in regards to keeping them sustained, retained, and professionally developed for a long time. So we're gonna get right to it.

And the first thing I'm curious to know, and I think of the field would be also wanting to know is why does onboarding even matter? What's the purpose of onboarding our interviewers? And why should C a C leaders and supervisors make onboarding a priority? And Heather, I'm gonna start with you. What thoughts do you have around that?

**Heather Stewart:** I think one of the things that we've seen evolve over time is this elevation in professionalizing forensic interviewers and understanding that our training is ongoing for the rest of our FI lives. It's not a one and done. With a group last week talking about this, and people talked about when you go to your initial.

FI training, you should consider that as graduation from kindergarten. That's the beginning and that starts the rest of your schooling and your learning journey as a forensic interviewer. And the beginning of that journey starts with really strong onboarding. So often interviewers come to a training and they go back to their c a C and kind of live in a vacuum where they're not getting the support.

And mentoring that they need to strengthen their skill and feel more confident. So I think that's one reason that this conversation's so important.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah. And Liz, I know you run a fabulous program at Children's Wisconsin, and I know you feel very strongly about onboarding. So why is that important to onboard your interviewers?

**Liz Ghilardi:** Well, I agree a hundred percent with what Heather said, and that this is really a profession that we're

**Heather Stewart:** developing. And I think when people see.

**Liz Ghilardi:** Really good forensic interviewers. It looks easy and they think all you're doing is talking to kids. Well, it's way harder than that we are a profession and I think we want to follow the research, which is really important.

And there's quite a bit out there now that talks about all the things we should be doing as good forensic interviewers. And people come to CACs because they want a good product and a good service. And we are the experts. You know, we're the premier. We should be, I hope, premier forensic interviewers in our area.

And the one other thing that I would add in talking about professionalism is there are a lot of trainings that I do. I equate being a forensic interviewer and a specialist to being a doctor, I mean, we would never send a doctor out to do some new procedure with five days of training and no ongoing practice.

And I think that seems to resonate with people that this is a really important skill and a really important

**Christina Rouse:** role. Yeah, it's definitely not a one and done lifestyle for forensic interviewers. And I think a lot of times the onboarding piece, that I just got hired. And then what is a gap that we don't tend to think about a lot?

So Julie, what do you think about as that filled, that onboarding and why that gap is so

**Julie Kenniston:** important? One of the things that I think about a lot is the fact that what we do is different and we have people coming to us from all different backgrounds, whether they are coming as a child protective services person or a law enforcement person, or they're coming into a dedicated uh, forensic interview position, and maybe they worked with youth in a youth-serving agency or something.

And so that onboarding is taking some of those skills that they might have that are natural and really helping them hone those skills in a way that not only meets the needs of the youth that are sitting in the room, but also those jurisdictional expectations. So onboarding meets a multitude of needs for any individual, c a c, but also for that.

Individual who's growing as an interviewer, cuz you could be an interviewer. I could go work for Liz and be the best trained person on the planet and then go work for Heather and still need onboarding because there are gonna be things

that I need to learn as I move to that space and understand how things work in that jurisdiction.

So onboarding has a really important place.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah, and I think what we're hopeful for is that we want people to think about onboarding outside of training, We can get trained in protocol after protocol and skill development all day long, but without the onboarding of what our role is as an interviewer and what the expectations are from our team, I think we could potentially be setting up interviewers to fail without that groundwork M Foundation set.

As it relates to onboarding, so let's give some practical tools to the field. What would be some buckets of components that you would include in your onboarding process for your interviewers? And Liz we'll start with you this time. What would you include in

**Liz Ghilardi:** onboarding? first of all, what we do in our onboarding after the five day training is the new interviewer will watch a number of interviews, with experienced people.

And I'm fortunate to work in a huge system and we've got a lot of experienced interviewers, so they may travel around a little bit, but are watching them do those interviews in real time and sometimes Watching past interviews and sitting down with the interviewer and talking through what's happening.

It's not, the why's in the where force, and then the next step is usually doing a practice interview with somebody else's child not a victim. But maybe a colleague's child, just about a non abuse related event, just to get them used to the camera and the observation. And then they do a number of interviews and there's no real number you know, but 15, 20 maybe, where they're being mentored.

And observed and by an experienced interviewer. So that's really the beginning part. And then we do some extended things after

**Christina Rouse:** that as well. Great. Wonderful. Heather, what are you all doing in Utah to onboard your

**Julie Kenniston:** interviewers? I

**Heather Stewart:** would echo a lot of what Liz already said.

I think I. Two key pieces for me that I think are important and that are part of the onboarding process, especially if you're introducing a forensic interviewer who's brand new to a team or a C A C, and they didn't come up through the ranks, you know, and the team's not already familiar with that person.

Some kind of warm handoff. Of that brand new forensic interviewer to the team from someone that the team already trusts is really important because they're trusting that person to collect the evidence and do all of the things that they need to do, and they don't know that person at all. So, having someone sort of vouch for them and like, I've got this person, I'm going to coach them through it.

I'm not gonna leave your CAC in a terrible way. Because everybody has a beginning point, so, For me, that warm handoff is really pretty critical, And then the other piece I think to tag on to what Liz said is that once the interviewer is doing actual interviews, to give them as much immediate feedback on their interviews as soon as we can is really important to help build their confidence.

Build their skill and help them make sure that they're not accidentally developing bad habits that their team may not be able to correct for them because the team doesn't have the expertise in the forensic interviewing in the same way

**Christina Rouse:** that some of us do. Yeah. That's great. I love that handoff.

Portion of onboarding. A lot of times people don't think about that, how disruptive that transition can be in your theme with new staff and whatnot. So I love being able to build that trust in. Julie, what would you say are the big takeaways of what to include in onboarding?

**Julie Kenniston:** I love what Liz and Heather said.

I think what I would add too is taking some time to teach a new person how to code or map interviews. To really get them thinking about question types. so while they're watching interviews like Liz talked about, or while they're doing that observation, that they've got a purpose to do that.

That they're starting to pay attention to the questions that are used and then what the result of those questions are. And so those of you that are doing some type of coding or mapping, you know, the value of and it certainly helps with our ongoing. Approach to learning and evolving in our own skills.

But I think that's a good skill to start pretty early on in the onboarding process. And the other thing that I talk a lot about with my colleagues at the C A C where I have the absolute fortune to work is that it started with giving interviewers the sibling interviews or the at risk of's or the precautionary.

And I've really fought hard. To say, we're teaching people how to do interviews and I think we need to give them the kids that are in the disclosure process, because I think what happens is we give them the more difficult ones. Mm-hmm. Give them the kid that there isn't something to transition to.

We don't really have a way to get to the topic, and so they spin their wheels and we're. Expecting them to be critical thinkers in that interview, and they don't even know where they're going. And we're asking them to have these higher level processing situations. And so one of the things that we've really moved toward, and I would love to hear from Liz and Heather, what they think, but instead of thinking, we're making it easier on them because their early interviews might not end up in court.

Mm-hmm. By giving the siblings or the at risk of, to really get those skills, it's. Doing all these things that these two ladies talked about, but giving them the disclosing kids so that they've got a process, they can transition to the topic, they can work on their details, they can get the feedback right away that Heather's talking about.

They can see some success and they're not having to make. Those creative in the moment decisions that we really don't have research that'll back it up to let them know if they're making good choices. So those two things, I think have been

**Christina Rouse:** very helpful. Yeah. I love that. I would tend to think that most people aren't thinking about how to assign cases to new interviewers.

Right. They're thinking of maybe giving them ones that might not go anywhere, approx particularly, but. That might not be the best scenario for new interviewers. So I love that you mentioned that. That's a great component to think about. So we know all of the things that can benefit folks from being onboarded.

what are the potential fallouts? If you don't onboard your interviewers, I think that's important for the field to know as well. So, Julie, kick us off with the potential fallouts for not onboarding our people.

**Julie Kenniston:** I have found that recently, my phrase of the last six months has been going rogue.

Mm-hmm. That what we're seeing is that if we don't do a really solid job lifting people up and giving them the guardrails or giving them kind of the, we use the word guidelines a lot in forensic interviewing, so I don't wanna use it in this context, but giving them the guardrails of practice and some real critical thinking in the context of those guardrails.

They will go rogue. Because they're trying to do the best that they can. And I think onboarding can set the stage for that. Mm-hmm. And I think for me what that means is not just saying do what I say, but it's saying, let's guide you through this, but also give you the purpose. I think a lot in forensic interviewing and present company, 100% does these things, is to really think about why do we do what we do?

What is the purpose behind what we do? So that. People can make educated decisions around the choices that they're making and not go rogue. And that's the part that I see the most. They'll go to a training, they'll go to a conference, they'll hear some brilliant speaker, some really creative idea, and then they just infuse it into their saying, oh, I heard this person say this, and they infuse it.

And that can be very dangerous. And so I, I think without really good onboarding and those guardrails and the strength of team and that process to wrap around, that's. Could be a

**Christina Rouse:** problem. I was fearful of all the new folks in the crowds thinking like, oh, I'm gonna go implement this. And just like if they don't have onboarding or structure back at their programs, what potential damage that could do.

For the cases and children they're serving. So, Heather, in short, if you could give a cliff note. Thought on what the fallout could be for onboarding. What would you say?

**Heather Stewart:** Well, I'm gonna pivot a little bit. We've talked a lot about the impact on the M D T. I'm gonna talk about the impact on families.

Often families bring a child under our roof at A C A C and hand their baby over to us and say, talk to her or him, tell me if something happened and what I need to do about it. And they. Generally trust, you know, our bottom line on that. And if we haven't onboarded people properly to conduct most high quality

interview that they can, they may get flawed results from that interview, give that information to the caregiver who then is going according to that information that may not be entirely accurate.

And I think that's a huge disservice. We really are responsible to give kids the very best shot at the best FI when they come under

**Christina Rouse:** our roof. Yeah, I love that. A lot of times people think that developing interviewers is gonna give them good interviews, which hopefully it does. But that has a ripple effect to our team and to the cases of that we're serving with our kids and families.

So I love that. So let's keep talking about onboarding. We mentioned a little bit of Cliff note tools to implement or things to consider when you're onboarding, but if you're a CT director, And you don't have onboarding as part of your programming or have thought about it, but you want to. What are some strategies that you guys have used when you started building that part of the program in regards to onboarding?

What were the, maybe the first things you considered or things that you looked at to start building onboarding inside the development process for interviewers? And Julie I'll kick it to you to kick us off I really think that we need to rely on Heather and Liz contextually for building this kind of stuff in CACs, but I can talk about it as a contract interviewer in a child forensic interview.

**Julie Kenniston:** Capacity, but then also as a mentor for CACs. Cuz I think that's important cuz I've not been responsible for building onboarding, but I've been a part of those plans for onboarding. And so one of the things that I think is important is figuring out what mentorship looks like. And how do we create mentorship for onboarding for people without creating many needs.

So I know that we all see it. If, I'm working under Liz and I just think she's the best. Because she's the one that's teaching me and she's my mentor. I all of a sudden say everything just the way Liz does, and I do everything just the way Liz does. And it may not be the most effectual way for me to do it.

And so part of it, I think, is making sure that as we set people up who are a part of that, whether it's mentorship or supervision or whatever it is, people that are guiding. newbies and the onboarding process is also making sure that we enlighten them so that they understand this purpose-driven approach for things, and they don't just say, do as I say, do it just like I do it.



I know that Heather and I have had these conversations before that words and the way that we say things, Liz and I have certainly had these conversations. Mm-hmm. A lot. And it's that not just creating mini mes, but being really thoughtful around that piece. So mentorship, and then also just really thinking about in this onboarding process, what are the steps for continual improvement?

And education. I know that all of you are in the same place. I'm still striving to do the best that I can every time I go into the interview room. We all know there's not a perfect interview, but I think sometimes new people are coming in. It's like, when did I achieve it? And, how do you say to the new person you don't, you're gonna, this is gonna be, your lifelong goal is to always be the best that you can be.

So, There were so many other things to say. So instead of me doing all the talking, I'm gonna flip it back to you to Christina. I love that you mentioned not creating mini mes because there's always that conversation of like the art and the science. Mm-hmm.

**Christina Rouse:** And when you come back from your initial protocol training, you're so like, oh my gosh, I have to stay inside the science, or I'm gonna mess up. And we don't cultivate those soft skills for interviewers to like lean into who they are as an individual. Because we know being genuine and being a human in an interview is gonna make you a strong interviewer.

But if you're going back to a program that you know that's important to give 'em the freedom to do, you're you might be creating a robot a non-human, which kids don't respond to those right. So, There's so many different buckets of onboarding that have the potential to be developed and cultivated that I'm hopeful after the theories that folks can think about it in a different way.

So, thinking about the programming part of it, Liz and Heather, you guys have built programming around this specific thing. Where'd you guys start? Like what was the first thing you thought of

**Liz Ghilardi:** I can jump in. I mean, I started 32 years ago and, well, 30 when we opened our c a C as the first interviewer and we now have, I always have to look, we have 11, I'm across the state of Wisconsin in seven CACs, and so I've followed it through that entire process.

And took a lot of strong advocacy on my part, really. Mm-hmm. And then buy in for my director to develop the role. It you know, I was about 15 years in when I said we need somebody to supervise because I don't have the power,

even as the senior interviewer you know, so that I advocated to develop my own role and sort of made it up as I went along.

And, then really got connected with a lot of very smart people over the years and went to a lot of conferences and, and really developed it. But it came out of the concern of one of our interviewers who we thought and we were doing peer review. We were doing weekly peer review as people joined the team. One interviewer that wasn't doing such a great job and there was really nobody to say, you can't do that way anymore. And I didn't really have the power, so, now I do, we're in the process right now of onboarding three people at different stages and two more upcoming. So, we're doing a lot of different things and I'm finally having to hand off some of that to one of my more senior.

Interviewers and I could, of course, go on for hours about this in the process. But one of the things that I do also is I assign these new interviewers once they're doing interviews on their own, a mentor. it's kind of their phone a friend, and in addition to me watching a couple of interviews a month when they're on their own, I also alternate with the more experienced interviewer.

And that way it's not like talking to the supervisor or the manager and they do one of two things. They either watch an interview that the newer person has done and give feedback, or with one of my people, I found that she had not seen enough. Really good interviews. So the experienced interviewer is actually showing hers and then talking through her thought process and what she's doing.

And the one other thing I'll say too that I think is really difficult in this field when we're looked at as the experts and hopefully we are, is really helping interviewers develop. I always say, Confident, yet humble, and that's something that I really work on with people as a new interviewer is how do you make somebody feel confident in what they're doing when they're new, but yet humble to not come across as well.

I've been here six months and I know it all, so something that I'm always working on.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah, that's a whole other conversation of onboarding is the reality that if you're a new interviewer and let's say you're the first interviewer back in your community and you're the only one with this developed skillset that nobody else has, you're automatically put on a pedestal of being an expert, but you're brand new.

And so like how do you be humble when your team is looking at you as You're the expert. You need to do the best that you can do, and it's a fine line and it's very tricky. And Heather, you and I were talking about this of like, we don't do a really good job of onboarding our new interviewers in regards to the relationship with our team.

And that alignment with our team. I mean, we can train interviewers all day about a protocol, but are we training them on how they're engaging with their team during the break or helping them understand what's happening in an interview? Or how do you train an interviewer to maybe stand up to questions from the team that aren't appropriate?

And there's like so many different things to think about that it's not just interviewing skills. That our new interviewers need. So Heather what, kind of stuff have you guys seen in Utah that has been helpful to include?

**Heather Stewart:** So I think I'd probably take a more pragmatic approach. That's pretty concrete.

So I'm gonna talk about some specific activities, maybe. Instead of more theoretical or pieces. And I believe that meet people where they are like, absolutely capitalize on their strengths, help them build confidence, help them be their own person, help them relate to the team, help them relate to kiddos while still adhering to, best practices and those kinds of things.

But I think some. Very specific things we talk a lot about as interviewers being intentional, thinking about what we're going to ask, how we're going to say it. Being able to articulate why we did it the way that we did, being able to defend it later on. I think as we're onboarding them, we need to be just as intentional and have a little bit of a roadmap for them because when they're brand new interviewers, the world is your oyster.

It's so big and overwhelming, and you not even quite sure. Which parts to start with first. So a couple of concrete things that I've seen to be very helpful. Julie mentioned this early on and I echo it a million percent. I think one of the best tools interviewers can develop early on that will serve them well, I.

Throughout their life as an interviewer and Christina, you referred to it as a lifestyle, which I love is being able to in the moment absolutely code and know what your question types are. You can so easily do that via transcripts. You can do that by email. I mean, it's not a labor intensive, time intensive thing.

You can do it in the moment. There are lots of ways to build that in. So I would say that has to be a very early on practice with somebody who can help them, obviously with the accuracy in talking through some of those things. The other thing that I would say is that when interviewers knew or experienced call me and they say, this happened in an interview, what should I do?

What could I do? What could you do next time? I always ask them, well, what did you do? What do you wanna do? What is your. Plan because I wanna know what feels comfortable for them. I don't want a mini me, so I wanna hear what their brain is saying about what makes the most sense and then help them through that.

I see my role really as a coach to help them, boost them up when they need it. Maybe help with humility a little bit when they need that too. But really coach them what fits for you and how can we make sure, that fits within the world of FI that we do is the other thing. And then the last thing I would say is when I'm working on the coaching piece, whether it's through peer review or talking them through their interviews, I always end the conversation with what are three things that you want to try to implement going forward in future interviews?

If they can't come up with any, I can usually help them identify, but then we check in. That's sort of our baseline next time we chat, how that went, how that's working for them, have they mastered those things more? And now next time we're gonna build three more things into it. Something like that.

So some pretty concrete kind of activities around it.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah. And I know we're talking about really formalized programs that have taken a lot of time and effort to put into place that isn't easy to do and doesn't happen overnight. And so maybe some leaders are hearing this and they're like, oh, that's the whole project I cannot undertake.

So let's talk about some of the barriers to creating the onboarding process. What are some things you guys are seeing in the field as to maybe some reasonings why people can't onboard or haven't even started onboarding? I have to

**Liz Ghilardi:** say, and there are many, but you know, even as an experienced interviewer, and I've been at this for many, many years, even as I'm listening to Julie and Heather talk, it's like my brain is just popping.

Like, oh my gosh. And so I empathize with people that feel like. This is huge because it is and we have a very big, well-developed program and I have a lot of

resources around me and very smart people and I'm still, you know, so it's not only do you never do a perfect interview, but you never have a perfect program.

Always things to learn. Right. I mean, definitely I see the barriers as being, and we talked about this a little earlier, time and money, How do you do that? I think using the research to inform what you're telling people.

That you gotta do it, you've gotta do it. And whether it's talking to foundations or funders or upper management or whoever that is, try and help. Do that and I realize in rural areas and such, that's very difficult. Maybe teaming with other CACs. Something like that because, I think that the frustrating part is that we can say we don't have the time or the money.

And that's probably true. I mean, I don't doubt it, but that doesn't make it any less necessary. when I hear people say, well, I need this, that, or the other thing in my forensic interview, well, that's great, but the kid can't do that. So, In some ways I almost feel that way about this. I don't know what the answer is, but We all gotta work together.

**Christina Rouse:** Julie, you're inside a lot of ccs quite often, and so what are you seeing or hearing from centers in regards to onboarding? It's

**Julie Kenniston:** an interesting thing I was just thinking about, as Liz was talking, some of the conversations I had last week in Huntsville there were some really passionate forensic interviewers who are just desperately seeking somebody to have conversations about their interviews because they don't have those people, they don't have this infrastructure that.

Liz and Heather were talking about, and I was even just trying to problem solve. You know, We're standing in hallways, I'm like, who can I connect you with? Who's in your region? What can we do in terms of peer review or who are some phone numbers that I can send in your direction? And what are your laws in your jurisdiction about sharing information and just.

Just some of those quick things because we are a small community. I mean, there are a lot of us, but we're a small, dysfunctional family of forensic interviewers across the country. We tend to know each other and reach out and support each other. But the thing that strikes me, and we've talked about this a lot in the field of CACs, is that there isn't really in most.

Organizations, there is an upward mobility for forensic interviewers. Mm-hmm. if you stick around a long time, you either have a pretty good funding

structure that you can get pay increases to continue to do this job, or you've got a life that allows you to sustain it and not very high pay, which is possible for some people, but for a lot of forensic interviewers in small communities, they're moving into director positions.

And then they're onboarding somebody. And so when we think about that, they're learning a whole new skillset. They're trying to figure out all of those things. They don't really have the bandwidth, and this is probably where their passion is. Right. I love being in the room with kids. That's what I hear from directors all the time.

I wanna stay, I just gotta keep in the room, I gotta stay there. So they've gotta figure out funding and all that kind of stuff, and meeting with their boards and doing all that stuff. They don't have time to supervise. And they certainly don't have time to keep up with the research that Liz was just talking about.

So what I am seeing, to your point, Christina, is that the passion is there. The idea is there, the desire to support this new person is there, but the bandwidth is not there. The updated stuff isn't there. I mean, not a system that is sustainable. Mm-hmm. so now you've got this person who might have a really good leader and a really good supervisor.

But there's this whole gap, and so they're having to make it up. And I think Liz and Heather, and you too, Christina, but I think we are all in this position when we train. They're the people that line up at the end of a presentation. Wouldn't you say that ladies like they're the ones that have all the questions because there just isn't another space.

For them to do that work. And God love 'em. I mean, thank God that their director finds the money to get 'em to these conferences. To do this stuff. But that's not the best way to move them forward. So I think that is a big barrier because they are passionate and they wanna do the right thing, but by the time they come to us, yuck has already happened.

I had this case three months ago and I really wanna talk to you about it. I don't have an answer for that. I wish I had an answer for that. But it is a huge barrier. So it's skillset, even if the passion is there, it's a lack of being updated. It's all of those things.

And I think that peer review attempts to meet that. But I think all of you that met and had that really detailed conversation about, What does ongoing training look like is important because we're not meeting the need and the way that we're

doing it right now isn't tapping into that piece. So I'm looking forward to the way that we're gonna evolve to try to get into that ongoing niche for people.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah. And Heather, coming from a chapter lens, you probably get a lot of these TA requests from centers, and so what could be some, Resources or, things that centers can do if they don't feel like they can build full programming. what's out there at the chapter capacity?

**Heather Stewart:** I am lucky enough to be able to work for the chapter. We have 25 CACs in Utah. And help all of our forensic interviewers, across the state with all of these issues. But that was just five years ago and that was just an idea that we had because we were trying to address the very things that we've been talking about.

So I would say I would really challenge states to look at, things at the chapter level and how the chapter can develop resources to help. We all have regional. CACs that may be able to build and bolster some of these things to help individual centers that may not have resources. So in our state, we have, me and I can help with all things around FI statewide, but I have tried to develop regional experts, It's a big state for one person to cover, and some of us would like to retire someday potentially, and pass the torch.

So we need to be thinking about how we leave this place better than we found it, and let these things live on. So that's always something. If anybody's interested in exploring, a chapter resource, definitely reach out to me and I can help you with lots of logistics behind that. But I would say to Julie's point too, we are so fortunate to be part of this great big, dysfunctional family that is beyond generous.

Mm-hmm. All of us share and share and don't wanna recreate things. And we all learned by trial and error and what maybe didn't work for me, may work for Liz, and all of those things. So I would also encourage people that if they need to find a connection, just reach out. No one's gonna tell you no.

You can start your own little lister or your own little consultation group of people to log on. You know, here in my state, I do a consultation call online for all bys and they can come if they want. They don't have to come. I mean, a lot of people show up. And we never have a, quiet moment about things that people don't have to talk about what happened in the last month in their world of fi.

But you can start that informally. You don't need a chapter leader to do that. You can reach out to a couple of counterparts and just say, Hey, do this. I mean,

I know regionals are looking at that. Obviously N C A C is, revamping a lot of what they're doing. But just ask. I mean, chances are there are people that can help you, feel more confident and feel more supported moving

**Christina Rouse:** forward.

Well, I would imagine that a lot of the programming that exists in CACs around interviewing Spawn out of a passionate person who is like, this is how I wanna operate as an individual in my center. So they advocated for themselves to get more funding or whatever support, or they connected with someone else who had that same spark that they did and they just made things happen.

Which if you think about the world of just industries, that's very rare that you can build things out of people that just having sparks. And I love that there are so many passionate interviewers and so, I always, you know, I have a interviewing friend, Michelle, and we always talk about finding your person and just being able to have somebody in your corner, whether, let's say it's not inside your center, but just somebody else that you can talk to be compressed with, bounce ideas off of that really rejuvenates folks who might be in centers that don't have a lot of.

Support from leadership because I would tend to say, and I don't have the research to support this theory, but I would imagine a lot of interviewers don't stick around because of the lack of support inside their programming for them to sustain for a long period of time. I would love to see that be a thing, like if there is research around that, but.

How do we not only empower the individual interviewer to be the advocate, but also leadership? How do we empower leadership from the top down approach too? And I don't have the answer for that of the whole industry shift. can I just say one more thing?

**Heather Stewart:** I just wanna say to, I mean, just don't be afraid to reach out because even as alleged experts if I had a nickel for every time I emailed or called Julie or you or Linda or somebody and said, Hey, can you check me on this? I'm not sure about this. Or I've been laying awake all night wondering if it should be this word or this word in a question.

Can you help me be the tiebreaker? I mean, we do that all the time with each other. We're not afraid to. Laugh at ourselves or kind of give each other a hard time about what we're doing. But that spirit of generosity, keeping each other in check and really lifting each other up and wanting the best for each other, I



think is one of the greatest gifts that this field really has given over the last couple of decades.

So I would just encourage new people to find your person or persons and hopefully you'll have 30 years of bliss, like all of us have had.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah, unfortunately, other than not knowing what all those ingredients are for that magical recipe other than you just know it when you right have it.

But I think cultivating the field is important and onboarding's part of that process. So, because we've all been around for a while, what would be, I kind of wanna end on this question cuz I think it could be of value for new interviewers, whether they're the interviewer or even c c leadership. What's one thing you wish you would've either been told about the position that you were about to take as a forensic interviewer, or one thing that you wish you would've?

Been educated about through onboarding that you think other people should know about. So this is where we're gonna impart our wisdom for other folks. Liz, I know there's probably lots of things we can think about. Like I wish someone would've told me exactly what I was coming into, right?

But Liz, what would be one thing you wish you would've known when you started? Boy,

**Liz Ghilardi:** that's really. Huff. I think, I don't know if it's what I would've known. I wished I'd have had people at the beginning to really mentor me, and there wasn't anybody. I mean, well, there were a few people and I picked it up along the way, thank goodness.

But, your person, I think is really. Important and then somebody to help me with my confidence because I think there just wasn't anything back then really. I mean, not much have that person in my corner to just help me build my confidence. So I think teaching people to find that person or be that person for somebody I think is really important.

**Christina Rouse:** I love the confidence piece because interviewers we're under a microscope from every angle. Mm-hmm. And we all probably dealt with imposter syndrome every other week of like, this is not what I should be doing. And just having someone to kind of encourage, I think is a good piece that we forget about in onboarding.

Cuz we think so much about guilt that we don't. Like we're human too. That needs strength building lifting in that way. So I love confidence. That's good. All right, Heather, what do you wish you would've known? I would

**Heather Stewart:** say there are lots, but first and foremost, show yourself some grace and don't feel pressure to make the case.

There's so much pressure on our shoulders, on your shoulders. Know that you are one piece of the investigation, just like we train, and we're going to help you get there. So just trust the process. Don't attach too much to the outcome because beautiful interview or not, sometimes cases just don't go the way that we hope.

a little bit of pressure off. Remind yourself that you don't have to make or break this. Just rely on the training. Trust the process. Get your person to help you through, or your team to support you, but just show yourself a little bit of grace.

**Christina Rouse:** Yeah. I love that. How do you define success?

And maybe figuring that out on your own terms rather than telling your team, telling you, or your center telling you what a successful interview looks like, I think will allow you to kind of stick with it for a long period of time. All right. Julie, what do you wish you would've been told or knew, or,

**Julie Kenniston:** it's funny, Christina, cuz you started talking about it and this was the note that I had made for myself.

So we are in one of the few professions that gets evaluated every single time we do our jobs. And multiple people are evaluating us. Our team is evaluating us, the court system's gonna evaluate us, and so we put an immense amount of pressure on what it is that we do. And so this really falls in line with what both of these fabulous women have said and what you were saying.

Christina that there's all this pressure and there's all this stuff, and I wish somebody had told me before. I had to learn the hard way that it's not about me. Because in order to have that confidence that Liz was talking about in order to do all those things that Heather was talking about, I think you've gotta look in the mirror and go, I am all that.

I'm good at my job and I can do this. And we create this false sense of confidence because we're not doing it the way Liz talked about, and we're not doing all these things that Heather said and understanding all of it, and it

becomes about us. Mm-hmm. Our success or whatever. And I just wish that somebody had said, it's not about you.

But it's about how you choose to hold space for the person in front of you who's doing the work. And they don't have to remember you. They don't have to even know who you are. When you see 'em on the street, they don't, it's so not about you that if a child walks out of this room and they never remember you, you've done your job really, really well.

And I wish that had been told to me, cuz I think it would've been easier than like, make an impression to everybody, including the child. Like, and that I think has been very humbling. So. To the point that you made earlier too, Liz, about confident, but humble. You know how beautiful that would've been.

But you don't know that when you're young. I think what I started when I was 24, I didn't, what did I know? Humble. That's a totally different, define it very differently when you're 24 than when you, you know, when knocked around a little bit and whatever. But holding space, I think, for people and letting them do the work.

Yeah. And honoring that, that they're choosing us. And so if we can create that space to allow them to do that that's what I try to tell newer people because then it feels like you go to bed and you go, okay, I did that today. Mm. yeah.

**Christina Rouse:** I love that reframing and so, These things that we've experienced can easily be built in to how you onboard new interviewers. So really giving them the space to define what success looks like or the purpose of them being in that room, or how do you help them build confidence through onboarding them.

All of those things will help build the interviewers. I know for me, I wish someone would have. Really been real with me about how the job would affect me in regards to secondary traumatic stress. until you, you know, wake up one day and go, you know, these thoughts I have are not normal, but it would've been nice to have known that that was was potentially could be a thing that happened.

And what the resources I had were for when I was starting to have those feelings and thoughts would've been nice. I think a lot of times policies and programming get developed out of like things that happened that shouldn't have happened in the first place, whether it was a bad interview or someone decided to quit because they weren't being supported.

So instead of. Potentially being in that situation as a program, just build it in already. Don't wait for something bad to happen. So I think what I'd like to do is for us to go around and just give one takeaway if you were telling a CT leader, cuz I think interviewers who have passion are gonna advocate all day about what they need.

So let's make this a takeaway for the CT leaders. What's one thing that we want CT leaders to know about onboarding interviewers? And this could just be a word or an activity or a practice, but one thing that they could start tomorrow that doesn't take a lot of work for them to move in that direction.

And Heather will start with you. I

**Heather Stewart:** would say support your people and your forensic interviewer. And if you're not sure how, there are plenty of resources that you can tap into to just get some ideas. Great. I

**Christina Rouse:** love it.

I can toss it to Liz. that's tough cuz there is a long list and I don't know if it's something you can do, but the thing that really has been in the forefront of my mind and training that I'm doing and people that I'm talking to is, remember these are children.

**Liz Ghilardi:** They're not victims that happen to be kids, you know, whatever we do from the second they walk in that door till the second they walk out, whether it's the interview or whatever it is, we need to treat them like we would treat any other child in our life. And I think that would change so much, if everybody heeded that piece of advice, if you

**Julie Kenniston:** will.

**Christina Rouse:** I love it. All right, Julie, take us home.

**Julie Kenniston:** So I think we need to remember that forensic interviewing is really sort of the lifeblood of the CAC movement. I mean, it's the reason why we're all there coming together to provide that resource to kick off the investigation, and then all of the follow up services.

And so to that end, that forensic interviewing program. Needs to be supported, like Heather said, and all the things that that Liz is saying. But in order to have a good program, those individuals are listening to these stories every day, and the

rest of the folks in the CAC typically are not. And so I think, you know, as I talked about, if I wish I knew just to hold space, that maybe our leaders need to hold space.

For those forensic interviewers and figure out a way, however that looks, to know that as the lifeblood of what it is that the center is doing, that we need to really think about that so that there can be some

**Christina Rouse:** longevity. Yeah, I love it. I think our overarching message is do something, don't do nothing, if you feel like you're in a situation for lack of time or energy or resources, know that.

You do have access to support to do something, and the chapters are there to figure out what that is. Regionals, they're there to help you build programming. Your neighboring c a c is there to help you build programming instead of just know there's a lot of resources that available. I wanna thank each one of you individually for joining me for this conversation.

We could probably have a year long series of interviewing thoughts and topic discussions because we're all very involved in wanting to see, interviewing, develop over the course of the c movement. So thank you, Julie. Thank you, Heather. Thank you, Liz, for joining me. Christina, thank you for bringing us together.

Yes, thank you. We'll keep talking when we see each other and we'll change the movement of interviewing for sure. So thank you all.

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