

[00:00:00] **Christina Rouse:** Here we are to talk about innovative programming, and Christina and Josh will be sharing how they have revolutionized their states. Thanks for joining me, friends. So glad

[00:00:09] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** you're here. Thank you so much for having us. Thanks so much, Christina.

[00:00:13] **Christina Rouse:** So we know that there are over 900 Cs across the country, and they come in so many varying sizes and shapes and abilities and access to resources and staff of one to overt staff of 50.

And you both have laid the groundwork in your states to give access to CACs around developing and supporting their forensic interviewers. So Christina, why don't you introduce yourself and your background in the forensic interviewing field.

[00:00:44] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** So my name's Christina Taylor Porter. I am actually a vice chair to our Children's Advocacy Center of Pennsylvania.

So our statewide chapter. Within that role, I also have the opportunity to be the chair of our education committee for the chapter. But in addition to that I am also a former director of two different children's advocacy centers. One that was a very rural CAC within Pennsylvania. And then one that was more semi-rural and with a little bit more population there too.

But I'm also a trained forensic interviewer and still do contract forensic interviewing across Pennsylvania. In addition to that, not that has much of what we're talking about here too but I am also teaching faculty at Penn State and our child maltreatment advocacy studies minor as well.

So very grateful to be here today. You sound like

[00:01:32] **Christina Rouse:** you have your hands in a lot of the things going on in forensic

[00:01:36] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** interviewing. I like to stay busy. There's no doubt about that.

[00:01:40] **Christina Rouse:** Awesome. And Josh, thanks for joining us. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

[00:01:44] **Joshua Bissell:** I'm Josh Bissell. I'm the program director for Children's Advocacy Centers of Michigan.

And we're the state chapter in Michigan. before coming to Michigan, before becoming a Michigander, I was living and working in New Orleans, Louisiana. Shout out to my southern regional roots. I worked for the New Orleans Children's Advocacy Center as a case manager and forensic interviewer.

Worked for New Orleans Police Department after that in their special victims section as a social worker. And then moved up to the Great Lakes State and took on this role. So a lot of my work revolves around working with forensic interviewers. Facilitating training and education opportunities, working on protocol development just supporting those professionals.

[00:02:35] **Christina Rouse:** So listening to both of your origin stories, so to speak, I feel like you've both embraced that saying of be the person you needed when you were younger, having started in the field of interviewing. Does that resonate

[00:02:51] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** with you guys? It does for me, I will say that, yeah. Being in a rural CAC initially there was.

Nobody there to help support, the role of the forensic interviewer. I mean, I don't wanna discredit some of the state troopers I worked with that were also trained as forensic interviewers that would give me some pointers from here and there. But the level of networking, support, supervision, mentorship, all those kinds of things were very much missing, I will say at the time.

So now I really wanna be a level of support for other interviewers across our state.

[00:03:26] **Joshua Bissell:** Yeah, I feel the same way. New Orleans, clearly not a rural cac but really small. We had 3, 3 full-time employees at our c program. And so there was a mentality of. Be what you have to be to get it done.

For sure. interestingly enough, when I went to the police department too, it was to sort of figure out how social workers can exist in a special victim section. They didn't have social workers there paving the road before us, so we had to reinvent ourselves. And when I came to Michigan, forensic interviewing wasn't in my job description.

I just made it my job. So I got here and identified some of the needs and I was like, this is what I'm gonna be doing now. And they were like, yes, let's do that. So, yeah, it resonates with me too, in a different way. Having been

[00:04:16] **Christina Rouse:** interviewers, both of you, when you hear people talking about development or growth continuum for interviewers, what does that mean to you to develop your

[00:04:26] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** interviewers?

Yeah, I think, that is. I think a little bit challenging in some ways because I think that we have different levels of interviewers and so I think with that development is dependent on the level of the interviewer. But you know, for purposes of Initial interviewers, you know, really helping them hone those initial skills.

And then how do we continue to engage our more seasoned interviewers moving down that continuum, So you have your level one interviewers, brand new, fresh, ready to go. But then you have your level two, level three interviewers. What are we doing to help in that development? What types of skills are we helping in that development?

So I think it very much. Differs based off of where they're at their career level.

[00:05:11] **Joshua Bissell:** That's a really good point. It has to be flexible. Cause every interviewer, even our entry level interviewers come into this work at different places of expertise. Some are already seasoned professionals in another capacity.

Some are fresh outta undergrad and just looking for a job and they're interested. even new interviewers sort of need a, different approach regarding their development. And one of my things that can, I'm taking out the soapbox warning is when you in there and.

Those veterans that have not had a history of good engagement or are like sort of isolated, they sort of have lost track, I think, of like how to do professional development for themselves. And or, and so sometimes I find people are sort of smashed up against the ceiling and just not sure how to grow beyond just being a forensic interviewer.

Like, what is next after this? There's no real place for growth unless I'm gonna become an executive director of a cac. So like what happens after senior forensic interviewer? And there's so many opportunities and so many options. So just development is sort of raising the ceiling for those professionals too.

[00:06:26] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** Yeah, and I would say, also that level of. Engagement too, or creating that environment and network for new interviewers

and even those more seasoned interviewers too, because there's just the, or more veteran, I like your word there, Joshua more veteran type of interviewers where they have that network of individuals to help bounce ideas off of.

Because we get such unique cases, it seems more and more of, look, this is what I tried. What would you have suggested in a different, realm too. And that, alone is even developing too, whenever we're creating that network of those veteran interviewers. And I think even encouraging retention whenever we're creating that network

[00:07:06] **Joshua Bissell:** as well.

Yeah. Waiting till peer review, the two to four times a year, that's not enough, Yeah. I want my interviewers to be able to pick up the phone and call someone on the other side of the state and say, Hey, I got this kind of case. Like, have you ever had this before? just to have that kind of support.

And also it can't always just be my interviewers calling me. That's a capacity issue. So we need to be able to create that space.

[00:07:32] **Christina Rouse:** I love everything you guys both have said, because I think in the beginning of the forensic interviewing profession, it was literally about getting the skills to interview the children.

And that's where we spent and focused a lot of our energy around forensic interviewing. And it's just been within the last five years that people are really starting to talk and think about how do we grow and develop interviewers outside of the interview room for all the things you mentioned, retention, capacity development that really wasn't present before.

So I think we're in this. Opportunity and prime time to give things to new interviewers coming into the field that we didn't have when we were kind of growing up. So I'm excited to hear about what you guys have done in your state. So as we were talking about development and what that means to you, what were you seeing occur in your states before you both started your programming?

What was present or what was missing that kind of really got you thinking about how to launch new

[00:08:37] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** programming? I would say within Pennsylvania, I mean we're 67 counties with a pretty rural in between Pittsburgh

to Harrisburg, Philly area. so what you typically would see are very small children's advocacy.

Centers and maybe one, to 1.5 interviewers, So you really didn't have a lot of folks in there. And so there just was not as much of a level of support as what I've seen in like our Pittsburgh places where you have four or five interviewers or, Harrisburg area where you can bounce those ideas off of or just really run to for support, those kinds of things.

And I think that, Not that I, I don't think that there were connections beforehand, but I just don't know if people felt that level of comfort, and especially for newer interviewers coming into that role, felt that level of comfort to say, Hey, I know somebody in Philly that may have dealt with this.

Type of case I can reach out to them. So there wasn't that level of comfort to reach out to other interviewers at the time. and even from a small c a c standpoint, bringing in new staff and specifically a very specialized role as an interviewer that's a heavy lift for a director to get them up to snuff, get them ready to step into that interview room with a level of competency and confidence at the very beginning.

And so I think that was one of the areas from, just sort of my experience as a director of, okay, what can I possibly do to get them where they're really comfortable and ready to step into that room? And I think that, that's not something that every C a C had access to. So now recognizing that that's where we started to look at our programming then too, and what we could potentially do.

That's fantastic.

[00:10:26] **Christina Rouse:** Josh, what were you guys seeing out there in Michigan? I just

[00:10:29] **Joshua Bissell:** have to respond to Christina first though. I, it's just, it's so lucky that at least you had the fi experience to take on that role as a director and it's got my brain spinning to try to think what is the percentage of directors at our programs right now that have fi experience.

And I think you've got a lot of small rural CACs that are isolated, have one, maybe two interviewers with a director who has never even stepped foot in an interview room before. So like, being able to provide that support is exceedingly complicated. I can't stop listening to everything you have to say, Christina.

But Michigan, let's talk about Michigan. Michigan's 83 counties. I'd say similarly Spread in terms of like rural to urban. You have Grand Rapids, Lansing in Detroit that kind of spread across the state. And a handful of cities here and there, but vastly pretty rural.

And then when you get up to the upper peninsula almost completely rural, So a lot of programs, we've got approximately 40 CACs. And when I first came to Michigan, the chapter staff was three people. And I was the only person with direct c a c experience. So I think there was a lack of support from the chapter when I first joined.

There was isolation. There were interviewers that I think just didn't have access to the same resources. I think there's a lot of vicarious trauma a lot of stress. Also, not to bring up a sensitive topic, but when I joined about four or five months in this pesky thing called Covid 19 started so There's a lot going on. And so just from like a point of like recruitment and attrition and capacity management and trauma support, there was a lot of inconsistency between program to program and what resources they had available to them and not a clear line of communication connecting, at least specifically connecting forensic interviewing staff.

I think the one thing I really like about Michigan is we've got a strong core group of directors who are all very close and talk to each other and share. But the interviewing staff specifically, you had like some regionalization, but not something every c a C had access to. Yeah, as I

[00:12:56] **Christina Rouse:** hear both of you speak about what you were seeing in your states, so our frontline workers, our direct service staff at CACs, they're in the trenches doing the work.

They're head down, seeing kids in and out. And sometimes when you're there, it's really difficult to pick your head up and look around and even have the brain space to think about, do I need to be networking with other folks? Should I be thinking about my development? Like it's very difficult to do that and without tructure or a foundation in place, that's where I've seen a lot of, as we're talking about these smaller centers without FI experience or leadership experience.

That's just what happens is they're in there doing the work and they just forget to pick their heads up or they don't have time to pick their heads up. So I'm wondering if you guys sense that feeling as well.

[00:13:50] **Joshua Bissell:** Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it just made me think to my own experience, and I mean, I have my anecdotal experience.

I have what I've collected from talking to interviewers in our state. But even when you have someone telling you to do that, it's hard to pick your head up and like step outside of the trenches, the proverbial trenches to go in that work, Because there's so much work to do. You have to be available.

And if you're in a small community and you only have one person and maybe half of a person to back you up You have to take on a little bit of or let go of a little bit of responsibility or you, there's that sense that you're letting go of responsibility if you're going to go to a conference for a week or you're gonna take a whole day and go to peer review.

So like leaving the work is hard. It's hard to let go of it. And that's anecdotally that's been my experience and what I've seen around the state.

[00:14:41] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** I would agree. And I think that a lot of our interviewers are just in that mode of surviving, their day to day. And so they are just bringing in the interview, the kiddos doing the interviews, if they're doing reports, gonna case review, all those kinds of things, just doing this.

And I don't wanna say robotic, because there's nothing robotic about it. You're just literally trying to survive in your role, your professional role. And so they might be surviving, but are they really to that point of where they're thriving in their role as a forensic interviewer? so, it was funny, Joshua mentioned about you go to conferences and coming back and love going to conferences. I loved it whenever I was working at A C A C and I was doing that. Then you'd go to the conference and you come back home and then you're just right back into it, right? Like you're immediately back into doing those interviews. You're back into the role of the daily tasks.

And so what you learned in all those innovative pieces coming in while you're at those conferences, that implementation piece is such a challenge once you get back to your space, speaking from the chapter perspective, this is where I see that the chapter role is so incredibly critical because we can create these programs and then we can say, Hey, you know what?

We've got this, you guys keep doing the amazing work that you're doing, but we have this program that all you have to do is, enroll and not all. I know that it's not that easy but you know, like just sort of creating these opportunities where, we can encourage that engagement, we can create, that foundational work that needs to be done has been done.

And now all we need is for you to engage in that work. And we have this sort of, set up for you guys to continue to grow and develop in your role and learn

from people that understand what you're doing. Understand that you're doing this forensic interviewing role that is so unique that I don't think, people truly understand that unless you're a forensic interviewer, just how unique that role actually is.

And so, that's one of my favorite things about being on the chapter is, okay what can we do to really support. The work that's being done for CACs, what can we do to help our directors, what can we do to help those specialized roles like forensic interviewers? And, I think the chapter role is just so, it's grown, at least in Pennsylvania, five years ago it was a little bit different than where we are today.

But it's great to see that we're at that capacity within Pennsylvania to be able to say, Hey, we got this great program. We're ready to support you guys, what can we do? Yeah. I love that

[00:17:16] **Christina Rouse:** outsourcing of like, let us do this for you so that you can keep doing the direct service work cuz it is so powerful.

So let's get into it. Let's talk about programming. And I know we've talked off recording of the things you guys are doing but I think the programming you both are offering in your individual states is paramount and can give really innovative ideas, not necessarily for. Statewide initiatives.

I think that's the thing we always need to keep in mind is there's layers of opportunity, whether it's at your local center or maybe you've partnered with your neighboring c a C or maybe it's the chapter, like there are layers of programming that can come into fruition. You just need to think about what it is and how to implement it.

So we're gonna give our listeners a bunch of ideas. And Josh, I want you to kick us off. Tell us about things that Michigan is doing that you guys have kind of saw a need and you're filling the need.

[00:18:15] **Joshua Bissell:** thank you. So C CMI has grown a lot since the time I started now. Almost everyone at the chapter, but no, not almost everyone at the chapter.

We have four people now, and everyone comes from a place of content expertise. Having worked in the CAC before to some capacity. So I think in one way it's just making sure that those at the state level have been there and done the work and understand what it's like at a cac. And that makes a big difference.

It's increased credibility. I think our state chapter has done a great job of growth over the past few years, specifically for forensic interviewing. So, we do, of course, the We coordinate for quarterly peer review. We do our series of trainings that I'll deliver in person or virtually, or trainings will contract.

So bringing in external sources for education. I think those are sort of like the standards that we can provide. The things that have been really different and engaging, and honestly just what makes my job so much fun is some of the other things where we're doing right now. So, consultations has been one of my favorite things, which is outside of peer review, outside of training, you can reach out to the chapter and set up one-on-one coaching where we'll sit down.

Essentially it's like peer review. But imagine we'll spend two hours or three hours just watching your one or two interviews and go over line by line. Every word we choose to use everything the kid says. We examine, at under a microscope together. And with the safety that one-on-one provides for that intimacy and that vulnerability to really talk about practice and to really just like nitpick, what are we trying to do when we build a practice narrative?

What does rapport actually look like? Like what's important? That's been the most amazing. And so it's creating those one-on-one opportunities for interviewers. I think that's really helpful for our veterans and for our new interviewers alike. Cause the veterans, sometimes they don't wanna come to peer review.

This is what have been told to me without using names. I don't want to come to peer review and take over. so giving them like the special opportunity, to sit down and ask like really hard questions and monopolize time. Really helpful for the newer interviewers who are in rural CACs who have no other experts locally to work with them to get them ready to go in that interview room.

They just got out of training and they're like, yeah, but wait, how do I actually do this? And so, giving them that opportunity to sit down. Has been really helpful. And then also connecting interviewers to do that with each other. So it's not just they're reaching out to me. I'd say that's what's happening most of the time.

But it's also connecting interviewers that are close by. So you're a new interviewer, you don't have any other support at your c a C, well have you met so and so at the four counties around you. And so we see now interviewers are leaving and they're doing shadowing at other neighboring CACs.

They're working with other experts in developing those relationships. That's what fi consultations has been. Doesn't count as peer review. I have to make sure they know that. But it does fill like a huge gap for our professionals.

[00:21:38] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** How do

[00:21:39] **Christina Rouse:** you identify your folks who provide the consultation?

Are they contracted from outside? Are they in-state consults? How does that work?

[00:21:48] **Joshua Bissell:** Yeah, it's informal, so it's not something where we're formally creating. It's if you have the capacity, if you have the space so like, no one's getting paid extra to do this work. It's just, we're gonna kind of like what you were saying earlier, Christina if there's like a need, we're gonna be that need we're gonna create that service to serve that need.

And so instead of it just being about, working with children and families and it's also working with each other. I think what we've kind of created is this new professional spirit that supporting other interviewers is part of being like the consummate forensic, interviewing professional.

It's not just about your work or yourself, but also the others doing this work. And I think, that's one of the biggest things that's important to me is that you could have seven amazing forensic interviewers, And then if there's an eighth, who's really missing the mark and isn't supported and maybe is even the asking a lot of leading questions in an interview, right?

That hurts all of our credibility. And so the job isn't to say that person's not cut out for interviewing. It's our job to reach out, pull them into our network and supply them with resources that we're a stronger professional base. I guess that's kind of like the thought behind it.

Eventually maybe we'll grow into paid consultations but at this point it's an informal

[00:23:06] **Christina Rouse:** network. Well, I just envision you as like a main board switch operator, Josh, and you're like plugging people into each other and like connecting everybody.

[00:23:16] **Joshua Bissell:** It does feel that way with like extra arms too. I

[00:23:20] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** was just gonna build off of that too, and I love the idea where you're doing that shadowing for not only the interviewer, but especially for those smaller Cs and maybe even the more rural ones, we know how transition can happen where there's a little bit of a, a lapse in.

We don't wanna ever have a delay in service for our kids if that's, something that we can prevent. And so if even the CAC director have this connection, this relationship now with another forensic interviewer, and they're in a pinch that now knows how they're doing their interviews and can say, Hey, Julie, can you come over and cover an interview for me today?

Those levels of networking and connection really isn't just at. That interviewing component, it's at a larger organizational piece too. You know, you're really creating a strong network of interviewers and capacity is growing to be able to provide those interviews whenever you can. I hate to say borrow an interviewer from a neighboring c aac, but that may potentially happen and, we see that and not every CAC is going to have a bilingual interviewer, but there are some CACs that do, and so when we come into the need, then we know who to contact so that we can have an interview conducted in that child's primary language rather than, you know, Maybe it works, but, having somebody that already speaks that language and can go ahead and do an interview without another person in the room if if necessary.

so I love that connection and that networking not just between interviewer to interviewer, but then you also come up with new ideas as a c a C director might be like, Ooh, I like what they're doing there. and that's not that difficult for us to add into our program or something that we might wanna consider too.

Yeah. And

[00:25:09] **Christina Rouse:** it gives interviewers the ability to lift up the profession with their M D T members as well so that they can tell their M D T that might be wanting to bring a family that actually is physically located in another neighboring center. Like, no, they have a great interviewer. You're in good hands.

Go use them. You're good. Like, that builds the community. I think perception of interviewing when we can lift. Just the overall skill development of interviewers.

[00:25:38] **Joshua Bissell:** One of the other things we're doing, which has been really great is what we call forensic interviewer support circles.

that is a monthly opportunity virtually for interviewers to get together in a confidential space to just talk about the impact of the work. It's not about technical skill, although get a room of interviewers together and have them not talk skill, and I'll give you a dollar. But the point of those calls are to talk about difficult cases to sort of unpack a little bit and Either share resources with each other, share strategies for self-care, or ideas for how to stay strong while doing this work. There's a lot of powerful listening that happens on those calls. And I think it's an opportunity, at least a monthly opportunity for the chapter to model what we wanna see happen at local CACs too, because this is just, once, one month.

And if you're listening to this podcast right now, this is a Josh Bissell challenge. Maybe the C A C M I challenge, but create opportunities for your interviewers to unpack the work. whether you're at a rural or an urban c a c, intentional time to. Unwind to process. Because without that it's impossible to stay healthy.

So monthly is not enough, but it is one way we can sort of model what I think should be best practice for professional forensic interviewers which is to talk about our experiences. A lot of interviewers aren't necessarily coming from a mental health field. They're not all social workers, right.

Or LPCs or people who have been formally trained to understand what it means to work in like a trauma exposed environment. And as far as I've been trained before in multiple models, that's not really part of formal training and forensic interviewing either how to cope with the work. And so I think we've gotta create space for that.

And that's something we've been doing with the FI support circles.

[00:27:49] **Christina Rouse:** Yeah, I love that interviewing is so much more than technical skills. A lot of the

[00:27:54] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** times. I love that you mentioned about that they're not all coming from the mental health background or interviewers. They're not always coming from that.

And even whenever they are though too, there's so much about the knowledge of trauma. But to have somebody that knows your baseline and is able to say, Ooh, even if they have that level of mental health training in the past, they may not recognize the impact that the work is having on them too.

And so having somebody that is that support for them to be able to say, I've noticed over the last three months that there's been a change in your interaction.

You know, and being able to recognize that and have that level of comfort to be able to say, I'm really getting concerned that there might be something going on here.

And that just is such a strong level of support that you may not get if you don't create that. Network of people and that level of communication too. So that's wonderful that you have

[00:28:51] **Joshua Bissell:** that, this is just striking me hearing you comment on it, Christina. I'm wondering if that's why peer review has been getting better lately.

Because I feel like maybe with that opportunity to like be vulnerable in a different, Format when you're coming to peer review, you just see people sharing exactly what they think. There's not as much over reformulation of thoughts when they're expressing them at peer review and people are.

More physically like I can observe that they're more comfortable in their chairs. And I think maybe that's part of it too, is spending time outside of the context of our work. We're not just talking about technical skill, we're talking about what it feels to be a human doing this work.

Cause interviewers sort of get put in a box where they are kind of expected to be mechanical. You're gonna talk to a kid about their trauma, you're not gonna be overly supportive, you're not gonna be a therapist. You're just gonna listen, be objective, come to case review, give very verbatim quote summaries of what the kid said in the interview, and you're gonna go to court and you're gonna testify about that.

And there's no real opportunity there to be human. And so we've gotta give more time back to professionals to be humans doing this work. I've got one other program real quick. this is is the idea of. There's a ceiling that interviewers eventually reach where, like, what else can I do?

And so the idea is just special topic work groups. Like an opportunity to engage and work with other interviewers and other experts outside of interviewing practice. On special topics, whether that's developing research or new training. The specific group that we started is a group called Honoring Cultures.

And this group was to sort of tackle the incredible issue of how do we do this work and be respectful of all the people we intersect with as forensic interviewers especially. Understanding the reality that a lot of the families we

intersect with may have had an adverse experience with the system before they've come to the cac.

So how do we flip the script? How do we approach that work in a way that's not just like sensitive, but actually practically respectful for any population we're working with. That has been an incredible opportunity for our interviewers to sort of engage on a different level.

And. We're developing resources as part of that work group's efforts training, and we just worked with Midwest Regional CAC to develop an actual training guide on how to check unconscious bias prior to going into a forensic interview room. That's a resource that. We might be able to make available too.

So I'm uplifting that resource here. Yeah. Beyond the lookout for our practical guide for managing bias as a forensic interviewer. Cuz they tell us all the time to do it, but there's not really ever been like, great instruction on how to do that. And just as a as a quick spoiler alert the answer is time.

You need time to manage your own resiliency. You need time to manage your bias. So actually putting time in between those interviews, not scheduling interviews back to back. So you go out of one room and into another, You need that time not just to process your exposure to traumatic information, but also to like, check in with yourself.

And see how are you thinking about your experience working with a child or family, or what are you expecting or assuming about the work you're about to do with a child and family if you don't actually put physical time and intentional time towards that work? I don't know that we are conducting unbiased forensic interviews.

So anyway be on the lookout for that resource. That's coming soon. That's

[00:32:42] **Christina Rouse:** great. I have one question on your honoring cultures workshop were those topics that interviewers were bringing as things they wanted to address that they didn't have the space for in peer review or those other consultation groups that.

Birtherd these separate

[00:32:56] **Joshua Bissell:** workshops? Yeah. In part, I think in part it was, and also other community members and state stakeholders who were just asking a lot of powerful questions. how are forensic interviews respectful of my culture?

And honestly, my answer was, I don't know. and if you don't know Josh Bissell, when I have to answer, I don't know.

You've put fuel on the fire of we've gotta do something now. So we we just got a powerful group of experts, both forensic interviewers and not together to start examining some of those issues facing our practice.

[00:33:32] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** I love the idea that you brought up about checking your unconscious bias and even the information that's being shared with the interviewer pre-interview.

Yes. That itself could be biased, and so that could cause you to form your own biases before you even get into that interview room as well. So I really love that, identifying a practical way and sort of recognizing that early on. I think that's great. I'm glad you're doing that.

All right, Christina,

[00:34:00] **Christina Rouse:** tell us about Pennsylvania. You and I have talked numerous times separately about your preceptorship, and that's what I'm hopeful you'll highlight for our

[00:34:08] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** listeners today. Absolutely. Yeah. So we started the FI preceptorship program. I wanna say it was in 2021 through grant funding to pilot the program.

And so the grant funding actually came from nca to work on developing this. And so it was a great opportunity in sort of recognizing the need within what we believed at anyway, was the need within Pennsylvania of creating some connection. I mean, I think many people out there any director or interviewer at this point knows that the retention for some of our interviewers is.

Pretty limited. You know, we're not seeing interviewers sticking around for a period of time. And what is the reason as to why that is? I mean, obviously we know this work is difficult and we can say that till we're blue in our face, but what are we doing to ease that difficult component, you know, and what can we potentially create?

And is it that difficult or is it, there's something else that they just don't feel connected? Because as you've heard me say a number of times, this is such a specialized. Position that I mean, caseworkers, law enforcement, they have such different roles that, the interviewing role, you don't have somebody to lament with, to debrief with in a way that you feel that need to connect.

So, I was working with the chapter obviously, on the education committee and sort of saying, Hey, could we create this program where we partner those more veteran or seasoned interviewers with our new interviewers within Pennsylvania? And so we saw this. Interest in it.

We saw some of our more seasoned interviewers saying, Hey, yeah, I'd like to, step into that mentorship role. And then our newer interviewers, they were sort of identified by our CACs throughout Pennsylvania to say, look, this is one of our new interviewers coming back from training. Can we partner them with that seasoned person?

There was a whole application process that they went through. Our what you would consider seasoned interviewers. We were looking at, more than 400 interviews. So for some people that's within a year, not even, and so you could be seasoned rather quickly. So we identified who would be the most ideal interviewer, taking into consideration, are you okay with working with an interviewer from a different protocol?

Cause in Pennsylvania you can utilize whatever forensic interviewing protocol that suits your C a C so long as it meets N C A standards. And so there was this partnership that was developed an agreement from both the mentee that would say, yes, I agree to participate in this program.

And the mentor being able to say, yes, I would be willing to participate, and this is what we're planning to do. And it was a very individualized type of Program that, the mentor would meet with the mentee, start identifying what are the goals that you wanna be working on as we're doing this over the next few months.

And, they would share their interviews. The mentee would be able to watch the ment interviews. They would go to a site visit at that cac, sort of see how they operate, what's. Similar, what's different, those kinds of things. And then the mentor would be able to go to the mentee site and see their children's advocacy center and sort of see how they operate as well.

And what we've seen is I think an appreciation for the program. I think that the new interviewers felt a level of connection and just some of the ones that I've spoken with have, agreed. Now the ones that were in our first Guinea pig role probably had a, a little bit different feedback.

But that's, where we grow and we, make adjustments and those kinds of things. but I think what we've learned from the ones that have gone through this program a little bit at this point, they really appreciate that connection and being

able to go to another cac, I think that for those new interviewers was like, oh yeah, okay, this is what we're doing at ours.

And you're doing something a little bit different in your interview. Why do you guys do it that way? And so you can get a better understanding of why some interviews might be conducted slightly different than another, or why the process might be a little bit different than the other.

But what we heard from some of our new folks were saying, I wish this was longer. I wish the program was longer. But what we see from our more veteran folks are saying, I was getting in a rut. I really reached that ceiling of my professional growth, this was a new, avenue for me to pass on the things that I've learned and, sort of help educate somebody else.

And, I think that's great to sort of reflect in that veteran role to see how far things have gone and I think gives you a new level of appreciation for your role within your organization too. Oh man. Christina Taylor Porter transforms me into a bobblehead where I just find myself, it's nodding emphatically like the whole time.

[00:38:59] **Joshua Bissell:** This program is incredible. it's like the structured mentoring that I think any state chapter could really, I think, really could grow into doing something like that. you're using your most precious resource, which is the forensic interviewers in your state, and you're just mobilizing them and giving them a framework to support each other, which is just incredible.

It's so nice. I had a question though for you well I got two questions. The first one for me was what does onboarding those mentors look like? Is there like a training process or some sort of like, discovery to see like who is like a good candidate to provide that service for other interviewers?

So

[00:39:44] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** what we did is really, they applied for that piece. So we did a push through the chapter, sent it out to CACs across the state, and said, who would be willing to serve as a mentor for the preceptorship program so they could apply themselves? And then there was some discussion generally through, our peer reviews.

We know. who interviewers are and those kinds of things. And the great thing is, is Megan leader is our training manager within the CACs of Pennsylvania. So she has been an interviewer herself too, and more on the eastern part of the

state too. So she knows a lot of these folks and has been connected in that regard.

But certainly conversations can happen. And one of the great things that Megan did whenever she came into her role, cuz she's been there for just over a year now was creating a manual for this program as well. And so there's the fi preceptorship manual where we have sort of the evaluation forms for the mentees.

We have the evaluation forms for our mentors the identifying what are the goals that they hope to attain throughout this program. So a very tangible piece in. This program where you can see like, okay, whenever I came in three months ago, this is where I was struggling, and now as I'm about to exit this program, this is where I am.

And by saying, exit the program, it's just saying funding has gone away. It's not like you're kicked out and you can't participate any longer. It's just you met that max amount of time that we've budgeted for the program. But that's not to say that you can't, and we certainly would not want our interviewers to say, okay, well, I.

Talk with my mentor anymore. No we want to facilitate that, piece and we see that they continue to bring that on too. so, continue that level of communication and things like that. So there is more of a structured training piece that comes into it, and I was actually reading through the manual.

even, as I'm reading it, I'm looking at it from a new interviewer's perspective and as a mentor's perspective and thinking this is. Amazing because it has not only the evaluation pieces, but it also has, in the interviewing world, we wanna stay up to date on the research, we wanna know what's going on, but it has, how to read a research article, how to pull the detailed information from the research piece.

And I'm just like, I could have saved so time in my life, so, as a new interviewer, but identifying is this one. You want to incorporate into your bank of knowledge, is this one that is going to be helpful for you, in doing the actual interview. Like those kinds of things.

And then we provide some of the articles to get you started too. And so even within that manual too, as a new interviewer, you get access to all these types of trainings that are out there. You can become a training junkie, where you're just constantly watching, especially now in our world where you can watch

webinars from, three years ago you could be doing this all day long, but it's not helping you.

Attain skill. It's not helping you in your practice. And so one of the things that Megan has done a wonderful job at was identifying what are some of the great programs for new onboarding interviewers. And these are the trainings that we recommend that you work on during this preceptorship too.

So the mentor knows this, knows the articles that are being provided to the new interviewer knows what types of training, so, build that into their mentorship relationship as well. So I was so, I was geeking out over it a little bit. I'm like, Megan, you're amazing. So, because it pulled so many great resources together, and it lays that strong foundation of, this is where you are as a new interviewer, regardless of your professional background in the field.

These are new skills and these are skills that, we want you to work on and develop within this specialized role.

[00:43:57] **Joshua Bissell:** I just wanna let you know like how to read research. that's another soapbox of mine. we're always talking about stay up to date on the research, stay up to date on the research, and then you send out articles and then who read the article and everyone's like, I couldn't get past the statistical analysis.

Right? Cause it's like, how do you make sense of that if you weren't trained in some kind of research methodology? Those things get crunchy fast, right? So I just love to hear that the research nerd in me love to hear that. Cause we gotta train people not just how to do the work, but how to be professional doing the work, and that's how do you read research?

How do you peer review? How do you engage in powerful conversations at the case review? you can't just tell people to do it. So, the other thing I was just thinking about and I was curious how you navigated this when you're creating those relationships I assume it's typically.

People outside of counties. So you have a mentor in one county, a mentee in another.

[00:44:51] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** Yep. That's right. So generally what we were trying to do was to ensure that the driving distance wasn't significant. Just because it's such a timed amount for, at least for that grant at the time. And so, generally not more than two hours away, just because, in the drive total it's gonna be four hours.

So we wanna make sure that they're able to utilize the time effectively. and so it was separate and some rural CACs. Partnering with more urban, which I think is great because the level of exposure in some of the urban communities of, the types of cases and the resources and those kinds of things.

But I can even see, rural to rural because the level of commonalities between that too. Because, from a rural community, we're not resource rich. And you might walk into an urban C a C and see these amazing levels of resources and think, well, we can never provide that. we don't have that capability or that capacity.

so, even rural to rural, I can see that continue to grow over a period of time. But I think what we see out of this program is that level of. Connection, competency and confidence in every arena that our interviewers are going to walk into. At least that's my pie in the sky goal, Where our interviewers, when they're walking into that room, they're confident and what they're about to do, they feel engaged in that profession. They know, if I get tripped up on this question, it's okay, but, there's no perfect interview. I know how to sort of navigate this. But then they're also confident and competent and representing their role with their M D T whenever they step out.

I think that's something that we've missed. And I'm grateful that this discussion's gonna continue on where we're pulling that piece in. But really, Recognizing that we want our interviewers to stand their ground too, to recognize that I have a very specialized role and I can't step over certain boundaries in that room.

You know, I can only ask certain types of questions and certain ways, and just being very mindful of that and know how to represent their position as an interviewer. But then even more so, feeling that they are comfortable and confident, probably never not nervous. Might double negative there, but never, not nervous whenever they take the stand.

The more we have our interviewers talking about their role, talking about the types of questions that they ask, why they ask these types of questions, to potentially nauseam around the people around them. Cause I know my family's tired of me talking about this, but. You get comfortable with talking about that role, that it becomes second nature.

And so when you're on the stand, you're comfortable with that. I always value the pushback that I get from MDT members. Sometimes it can be a little bit frustrating, but I value that because that's the question I might get whenever I'm on the stand too, and so helping interviewers embrace.

That level of frustration, but recognizing, okay, on my feet, how do I defend what I just did with my team member because what I'm having to defend with my team member might be something that I have to defend once I'm on that stand too. So, really creating that level of competency and confidence with our interviewers through that level of connection with other interviewers that have been in their shoes and understands the challenges.

As a new interviewer, I think, this is a program. I hope we continue to see it grow and develop because I think it has great potential I'm very proud of it. I think it's great that Pennsylvania's doing it, because I wish it was there whenever I first started too. And I know you already mentioned a little bit, Christina, just the benefits that you're hearing from those that have gone through the preceptorship and how helpful it is. And Josh, you also mentioned having already gotten a lot of feedback from interviewers around the support circles and just that need.

[00:49:04] **Christina Rouse:** So we know programming is beneficial and supportive in a lot of different arenas for interviewers, but what are some insights that you can give to either a center or a chapter that is looking to start programming? What do they need to know when they're considering to build out programming?

[00:49:22] **Joshua Bissell:** Honestly, I think the most important thing is to know your constituents.

So before you even build programming, do you really, truly understand who the interviewers in your state are? do you have a good idea of the state of affairs currently facing that practice in your state? And it's a little bit more than just how many interviewers per county, It's like demographics of those interviewers.

It's like expertise levels, years of experience. Really kind of doing a resource analysis of like the interviewers in your state. And then not building programming, of course, without asking what people need. I mean, I still fall into that pit where I've got so many great ideas, but I gotta slow down, pump the brakes and ask people, what do you need right now first before Josh gets carried away.

Cause you know, C A C M I We have a lot of ideas. We've got four dreamers on our staff right now who would just wanna build and grow. And so, I think you just gotta, you gotta pump the brakes, ask good questions and understand who you're working with before you start building.

that was my immediate thought. I would

[00:50:35] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** say the same, in terms of evaluating the need and the capacity that the organization has. If you would've asked us in Pennsylvania five years ago to pull this together, I don't think it would've been something for us to have been able to do.

And I do. I think it was needed then. Absolutely. But I don't think that we were in that position at the time as a chapter to pull it in. That being said I do think that chapters have excellent resources that But you know, you have interviewers at least thinking about the fi preceptorship and maybe even, the support, the fi support circles too.

You might have people in your state that are saying, you know what, even though the chapter can't, support it or organize it, that's something I wanna take on. That's something I want to, hey, director, is it okay if I spend some of my time on this? Because I think it's important for the state as a whole, and so, if that's possible, then that's great, and think looking at how can we pull in c a c staff in a unique way.

And if we can compensate them for that time, then great. But if not, people might just wanna say, Hey, I can add that to my resume of things that I've been a part of, that I've been able to engage in. And I think we should be reaching out to CACs. They're the ones in the, line of duty right now, so they're the ones that know what they need.

And so I think it's great from, at a chapter perspective, we can provide this level of support and we have some staffing, to potentially help. But at the end of the day, we want to create those networks. So if you have somebody at A C A C that's saying, Hey, I'm willing to, take the lead on this Have at it.

Let them go ahead And do that. And just support them and check in with them too. And I think too,

[00:52:27] **Christina Rouse:** just knowing that those other opportunities for the direct service interviewers will rejuvenate them to want to stay in the work. And I think, Josh, you were mentioning this time piece, Carving out the time, giving the space. yes, they might not be physically seeing kids during that time serving clients, but those other things, teaching, mentoring, training, developing, those are the things that are gonna keep interviewers in the job, I feel like, because we wanna be passionate about the work.

But if we're not able to extend that outside of the interview room, it does kind of lead interviewers into this mindset of like, well, why am I here? What's the

point? Like interviewers are so passionate about what they do, they need the opportunity to do other

[00:53:23] **Joshua Bissell:** things, and they're not gonna take it.

In the seat here. Like I wouldn't have taken it unless I was getting like told and supported by my director to go and do it. That's the other piece too, right? You make sure you sold your directors so that they create the space where the interviewers to enjoy those benefits you're creating at the chapter.

Cause it's useless if they don't have that administrative support to be that professional. And I had one interviewer tell me once at an fi support circle, and I had would gone for a few months and they came to everyone and they never shared anything. And so I did a little reaching out in the side just to see, hey, is this like a, is this a safe space?

Like, I'm assessing psychological safety, just wanna make sure everyone has the opportunity to. And they just told me, like, Josh, I come just to breathe. that's one day a month. I know I can come and breathe the same air as other interviewers. And like learn a little bit in the process.

And they're like, I'll talk next time though. And sure enough, they pretty much talk the entire next session. but you know, you can look forward to, oh, I've got an hour a month that I know I'm not going to be reading research, testifying in court, working with kids, or, like they've got time.

time's number one resource, I know money's important, but time's huge

[00:54:46] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** time's more important than money, right? Money's renewable time is not. So, I think that's important. But in thinking about sort of that development component too with our.

More veteran interviewers is that, they can start to serve as a mentor for their cac then too. You know, I mean if we give them this opportunity, then they're able to start to mentor within their own C A C, which then may lead into a supervisor that has that f I. Experience and then that serves that mentorship role and that level of support role as well.

So I think that's important and I think we can retain our more veteran interviewers. But one, other point in terms of the evaluation, I don't wanna go too far into the weeds on this, but, one of the things that we did see was we had a new interviewer going to another site in our fi preceptorship, learned all this great information, was so intrigued by, what this other site was doing.

She brought it back and was talking with the interviewers at her site and saying, guess what they're doing there? And those interviewers then were like, oh my gosh, I gotta go see it. And then they all, went and saw it and they, had this opportunity to say, yeah, I really like this. We could actually pull this into what we're doing.

Or, yeah, that's not something our DA's gonna, or our prosecutor's gonna be okay with, So it was neat to sort of see that blossom, not just with that one new interviewer, but then, other interviewers there too. So, and it's great to get them outside of their box, I think the more we connect people together, interviewers together, then we get that opportunity to problem solve, catch the common mistakes that new interviewers have, create some accountability and make some adjustments too. I think that that's awesome.

[00:56:31] **Joshua Bissell:** I mean, like I said, get some interviewers in the same space and try to keep them on task.

Impossible. Case

[00:56:38] **Christina Rouse:** in

[00:56:39] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** point right now. Convers case right here, conversation right here.

[00:56:42] **Joshua Bissell:** I was thinking about just the other insight that I wanna share, and I think if you've been listening closely, you've probably heard it at this point too from everything Christina shared and I've talked about is that a lot of the most innovative programming that we can create isn't necessarily about practical skill.

So, what's so amazing to me about Christina's preceptorship program is like teaching some of those things that are just. Otherwise expected to happen. how do you evaluate someone else's forensic interview? Or how do you provide leadership? How do you read research, what we're doing in Michigan, it's like, how do you actually peer review?

You're gonna, you're expected to go to peer review, the standards tell you to go to peer review, but do you actually know what to do when you show up? Probably not. You have a rubric and you're like, oh, how do I fill this out? So like, training on how to do peer review training on how to take notes during a forensic interview.

a lot of the things that we just expect people to figure out, take a second and like strip it down and train on some of those ancillary parts to being a forensic interviewer too. how to actually be a professional interviewer. How to talk at case review. How to navigate conflict, there's a lot of other elements to forensic interviewing practice. That doesn't take a ton of lifting from the state perspective to provide that support.

[00:58:09] **Christina Rouse:** So this conversation has been so rich. And to Josh's point, we could go on for days talking about the love of forensic interviewing, but I wanna leave everyone with this quote cuz as you both were explaining your programming and things that you've done, I feel like you guys have lived this quote fully in the work that you're doing in your states.

And it comes from Nelson Henderson and he said, plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit. And that's exactly what we're doing when we're thinking about developing future interviewers and offering programming, is that we may not see the fruits of these programming in the years to come, but we know it's gonna make a difference.

For the kids and families that we're serving. So I love that you both have invested in the needs of interviewers in your state and have paved the way for them to grow and be supported. And I know that everything you talked about has sparked ideas and innovative thoughts and others and our listeners that I'm sure they will take back to their center.

So thank you both for joining me in on this conversation. Thank

[00:59:20] **Kristina Taylor-Porter:** you so much for having us, and if anybody needs to get ahold of us, our contact information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

[00:59:26] **Joshua Bissell:** Yes. Thank you so much, Christina. It's been a great opportunity and also Christina to just share the space with you.

You're incredible and what you're doing in Pennsylvania is really inspiring. I took a lot away from this today. Everyone listening does