

2GEN 2020 Listening Sessions

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2GEN 2020 Listening Sessions

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Background

Since 2016, four organizations have been working partnership with the state of MN in a 2GEN network to work together to explore systemic barriers to serving low-income families in a holistic way and to create new ways of working together. The vision that guides this work is that the state of Minnesota will have thriving families, integrated services to support children and families, and systems that support integration and effectiveness. At the core of this work are families that have health, economic assets, social capital, career pathways, and nurturing learning environments.

In March, 2020, COVID-19's impact hit. Our kids were sent home, and so were we. We started getting adjusted to remote working and rapid emergency response to family's needs. On May 25, George Floyd was murdered and social unrest followed. Our communities, families, staff and partners felt the repercussions of this for months. Our nation and world have started a racial reckoning while also working to address the systemic disparities exacerbated by the pandemic.

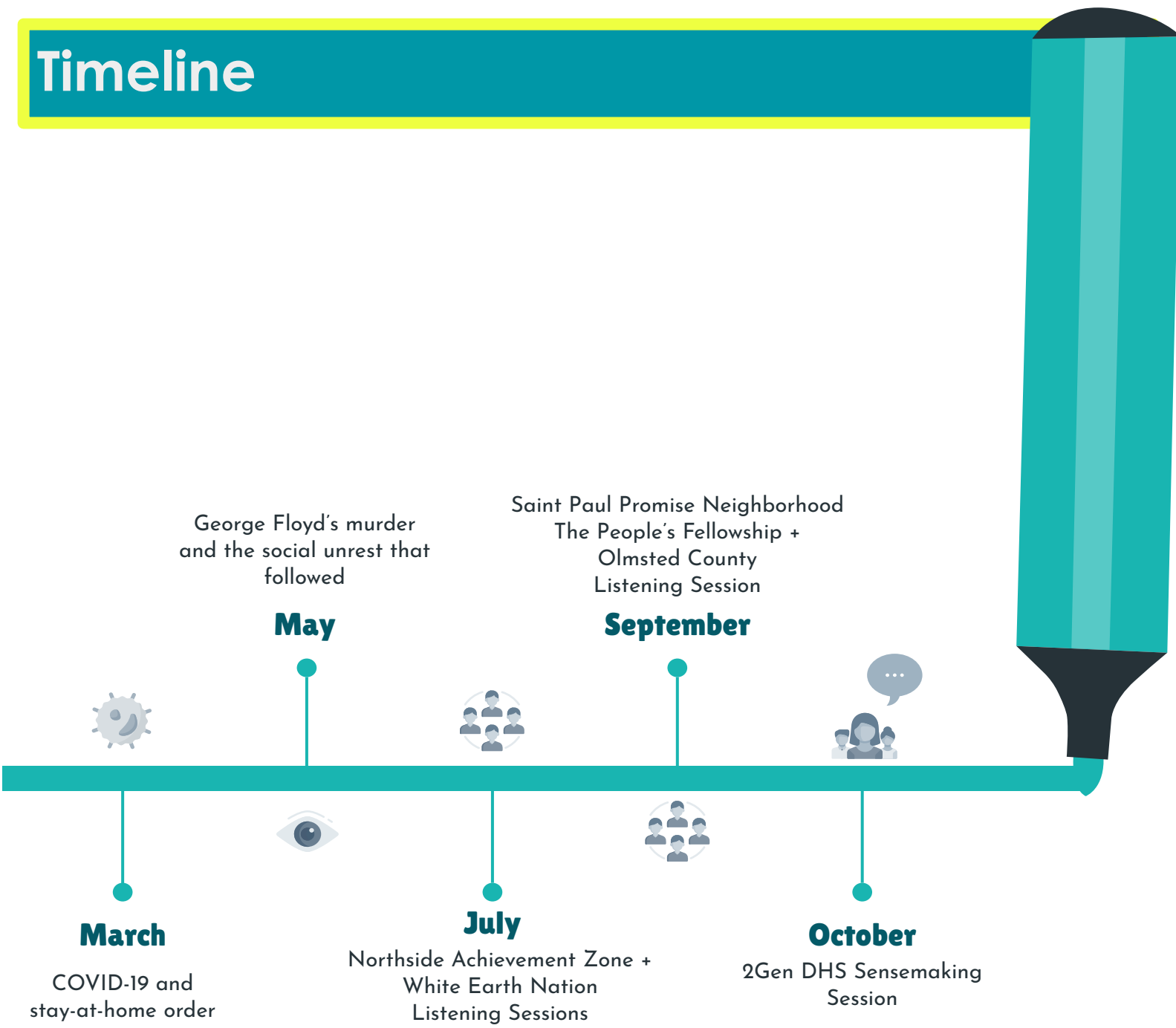
What did this mean for 2GEN sites, their work and efforts in working towards more just and equitable whole family systems here in Minnesota? As a network, we needed to determine if the planned work was still feasible, or if work plans needed to change and adapt to meet families and communities' new realities.

The 2GEN staff and team designed listening sessions for each of the 2GEN sites and their partners to get a better understanding of this new context. This report is a compilation of the insights, learning and feedback from these sessions. We hope this report sheds a light on what the human services sector can learn from these times as we continue forward in uncertainty.

"Story makes it real."

*~St. Paul Promise Neighborhood, People's Fellowship
Listening Session Participant*

Timeline



Process

- The Listening Session process consisted of a mix of storytelling, circle, deep listening and harvesting as well as collective sensemaking among numerous 2GEN site teams, coordinators across the 2GEN network, and DHS staff working on 2GEN efforts.
- The Listening Sessions involved 2GEN site coordinators, DHS 2GEN site leads and evaluation staff and core team members for each 2GEN site. Each site was able to invite their collaborative partners and support staff as well. All were invited to share their story and experiences.
 - **Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ):** NAZ staff, HIRED, Hennepin County staff, Wilder Evaluation Team, DHS 2GEN evaluator and site lead and Future Services Institute
 - **White Earth Nation:** Public Health Coordinator and WECARE Lead, DHS 2GEN site lead and Future Services Institute
 - **Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood People's Fellowship (SPPN):** SPPN staff, Ramsey County, DHS 2GEN site lead and evaluator and Future Services Institute
 - **Olmsted County:** Olmsted County staff, DHS 2GEN site lead and Future Services Institute
- Each 90- minute session was held virtually on Zoom. Small groups formed in breakout rooms to share stories, listen and capture what was shared. Each small group debriefed together and shared back to the larger group. Below are the questions that guided each session.
 1. *How has your work been affected by COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd and the other issues affecting the [community]? How are you responding to the needs of families? Are there important structural changes in your work that we should note?*
 2. *What challenges do these community events and the team's responses present to the goals currently identified in the 2GEN work plan?*
 3. *Where do you see an opportunity to move the identified goals forward or opportunities for changing goals that should be included in the work plan and what actions can your team take to move that work forward? Which goal? What can you commit to doing?*
 4. *(Small Group Debrief) What are we noticing now that we didn't see before? What themes, patterns or key insights are important to "lift up" to the larger group in service to our learning and work together? What was the "aha moment" for us individually and as a small group?*
 5. *(Large Group Debrief) Sharing back key learnings*
- Site Coordinators, DHS 2GEN Site Leads and Evaluators held debrief sessions with Future Services Institute after the Listening Session to look at all the insights and learning that surfaced
- A DHS 2GEN Sensemaking Session took place in October after the completion of all the sites Listening Sessions

Insights from 2GEN Sites - Question 1

QUESTION 1:

How has your work been affected by COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd and the broader issues affecting the [community]? How are you responding to the needs of families? Are there important structural changes in your work that we should note?

Northside Achievement Zone

*Includes staff from
NAZ, Hennepin
County and HIREd*

Sense of overwhelm and complication:

- “Communicate don’t duplicate”, challenge of having three different eligibility criteria (eg: *MFIP Eligibility, Employment Services, Child Care Assistance*)
- Community disproportionately impacted by COVID, family stress of having sick and dying family members
- Family’s needs were broad and immediate. NAZ launched an Emergency Fund and resources poured in. Staff provided mask distribution, Chromebooks, gift cards through multiple rounds of distribution. Families experiencing loss of jobs, no childcare, and children schooling from home makes it a real challenge to finding employment and moving towards family stability
- Murder of George Floyd was paralyzing, families and staff needed to be authentically reached out and listened to. Creating healing spaces and a sense of alignment with families (staff impacted just like the families were). Hennepin County board approved 16 hours of paid time off for staff.

Role of Technology:

- Requires internet access, devices and tech literacy (this has an impact on both families and staff).
- Families prefer being able to do this over the phone vs. coming into the office (this was heard from a county employee who shared in the session, no additional specifics are available around this)
- Loss of face-to-face contact is huge, both families and staff experiencing a deep sense of loss due to lack of human connection, COVID has had an isolating effect on families and staff.

Shift in Staff Roles, Skills and Addressing Systemic Racism

- Deeply rooted barrier is trust with families as staff work within and try to simplify systems, families have little trust and see staff as regulators and maintaining compliance in the system
- Peacetime Waiver allowed for immediate engagement with families.
- Switching from eligibility driven work to deep listening, different kind of relationship for some staff
- Building and honing listening skills and building relationships with families in virtual space, importance of listening and responding vs directing
- Staff are more responsive in seeking out and informing families of resources
- Strong commitment to equity, continuing discussion of systemic racism (housing, food, transportation, employment).

Insights from 2GEN Sites - Question 1

White Earth Nation

Includes interviews with 2 staff held in circle

Technology and Building Social Capital

- Making sure families have internet access (concern over cell phone data and use, too much data required for online engagement)
- Working to help families gain social capital. Building social capital involves assisting the families within our 2Gen program to increase the connectivity to other families in the community. By doing this families are able to surround one another while working on positive life outcomes simultaneously (eg: At Monthly Family Cultural/Activity Night families get to know one another on a more personal level. At one event, two families were discussing the possibility of babysitting for one another on the opposite days which they are working. This helped these families save money on child care costs and build a positive relationship.)

Mental Health and Systemic Racism

- Want to do more mental health outreach, stress and anxiety of COVID is having a big impact on families and staff
- Talking to clients and opening the door of their experiences with racism, they need space to share and talk about these struggles, racism needs to be acknowledged. This open door ensures we better understand their needs, mental health, offering teaching and trainings as well.

Distance Learning

- Trying to figure out what school and Head Start looks like and how will that impact children's and parent's mental health

Leveraging Resources

- Received a grant and are looking at improving the WECARE system as a whole (Rite Trak System has been problematic)

People's Fellowship (SPPN)

Includes staff, county and collaborative partners

Life Impacting Events

- Struggle working from home and distance learning for parents
- Seeing the disparities impacting young and communities of color, pushing for systems change and leveraging more systems change
- Seeing intergenerational response, youth rising up with support of the elders
- People's Fellowship families said they had enough and other people needed resources. Families checking in on staff, this was a reminder of community that was created through the Fellowship experience
- Connectivity with families was face-to-face, experiencing barriers that make it hard to connect with families with school system (SPPS) won't let us work with families as a 3rd party vendor

Impacts of Systemic Racism

- These events put community in a state of shock, how are we supposed to function at normal capacity?
- Staff are seeing and feeling the impact as much as families are, it's our neighborhoods, our people, our streets, or stores - all of this is within walking distance from each other
- Significant structural impacts at Wilder, lots of changes happening in order to meet the needs of safety for all staff
- Need to pause and reflect, asking questions, checking privilege, bias and institutionalized racism. Having difficult conversations that require compassion.

Olmsted County

*Includes staff from
Olmsted County*

Adjusting to a New Way of Working

- We've seen more change in one month than we have in years, created new ways for how we connect with customers as a result of working from home (eg: phone, text, email, virtual Zoom, etc.)
- Utilizing resources to address new needs that arise
- Opportunity to improve community relationships but it strains capacity for internal operations (eg: pre-COVID ES staff would focus on work plans, now focusing on how people and families are doing. Everyone is trying to reach families in ways that are comfortable for them, developing new rules and procedures and re-learning how to do the work on top of addressing the needs of the individuals and families served. People who were comfortable with their jobs before are not knowing their jobs as well in the COVID environment. Hard to ask staff to do more with less resources.)
- COVID made it harder to establish new relationships with new intakes, harder to maintain ongoing relationships and it is impacting referral partners
- Court process slowed down, impacted participants with child support. Fathers are impacted with parenting time limitations and restrictions
- Staff are stretched, doing more with fewer resources
- Working remotely makes documentation seem less clear, juggling finding new ways of doing work and recognize families limited ability to access technology, dealing with digital divide in real time and families don't have the support needed to do that
- Staff working quickly and re-learning with new rules and policy change, working together and supporting each other - team dynamic have changed

Social Justice Issues Focus Attention on Equity

- George Floyd's murder affected many staff and team members, we are looking at this as an opportunity to reach deeper professionally and personally
- Restructuring power and massive structural change - restructured all job descriptions centered on core values, redesigned performance evaluation, additional training, service delivery shift, situational awareness perspective for client has changed for us as workers - more conversation around systemic racism and adding more Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into new structures
- Racial stress is pushing the boundaries between what we do and how we do it with our personal values
- Tough work, engaging in tough conversations and creating healing circles has helped open our eyes around privilege, we are leaning in and this new space is critical

The Challenge in Serving the Homeless

- Homeless shelter was set up at Civic Center and Nonprofit Consortium came together
- Challenging to serve clients who identify as homeless with no phone
- Large influx in June of homeless population from Minneapolis when local shelters closed
- Interracial conflict is increasing in shelters and supportive housing

Insights from 2GEN Sites - Question 2

Question 2:

What challenges do these community events and the team's responses present to the goals currently identified in the 2GEN work plan?

Northside Achievement Zone

Adapting and Learning

- Waivers in place will impact the feasibility of policy work (eg: Presumptive Eligibility barrier is provider's trust and willingness, staff working on communication and talking points to try to address this barrier)
- County childcare eligibility process doesn't line up with family's needs, need to reduce the time and red tape it takes
- After Care is important but still experiencing challenge of who and what should be the focus
- Staff more responsive in seeking out and informing families of resources
- Simplifying things and moving things in a more expedited way - making a decision and fixing it later, these events are pushing for more action, hesitating getting it perfect but improving on it as we go

Harder to Engage Families

- Loss of face to face time is huge, technology is a barrier
- Engagement has been low for families for multiple reasons (tech, working and don't have time, or don't see the immediate benefit)
- Deeply rooted barrier is trust with families and "the system" (seen as regulators and compliance vs. relational)

White Earth Nation

Adapting and Learning

- Unsure if we will be able to access online school and training for Kinship Navigators
- Contacting programs to see what their "new normal" is and not sure how intakes have changed
- Staff have flexibility with working hours to meet family needs

Uncertainty and Stress for Families

- Families worry about losing jobs, currently have 400 people unemployed
- Fear of job loss adds to fear of losing housing and what to do with children who are distance learning or no longer able to access childcare
- How can we expect families to move towards goals when we are still learning what this looks like?

Insights from 2GEN Sites - Question 2

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| <p>People's Fellowship (SPPN)</p> | <p>Adapting and Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DHS waivers huge for families, helped alleviate some of the high anxiety and loss of safety families are experiencing• How to do things online is a huge challenge, building partnerships and recruitment of families is challenging• Concerns of impacts of isolation, social, mental and emotional health and well-being of children, families and elders in community <p>Responding in New Ways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responding with increased empathy, taking a step back, showing concern and sharing resources like never before (food, housing, basic needs)• Jumped in with partners, offering resources and distributions to families• Fellowship experience includes in person meeting, it's part of the culture of the community - proving to be very difficult to think about what that looks like in an online environment |
| <p>Olmsted County</p> | <p>Adapting and Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• COVID slowed things down and challenged us to consider capacity, time and energy is refocused and there are competing priorities• Making it challenging to identify family needs that are exacerbated by the current pandemic or if the needs occurred prior and is on-going• Group activities are more challenging, distance makes it difficult to engage families• When families come to us in crisis, need to listen to what is deeper than what is presenting, send them additional resources because there are many layers and impacts on our system <p>Responding in New Ways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opening up a dialogue with team and people we served, seeing each other as human beings first• Challenge of finding time and capacity to think about next steps, build relationships and work on collaborations to implement services in a broader way |

Insights from 2GEN Sites - Question 3

Question 3: Where do you see an opportunity to move the identified goals forward or opportunities for changing goals that should be included in the work plan and what actions can your team take to move that work forward? Which goal? What can you commit to doing?

| Northside Achievement Zone | White Earth Nation | People's Fellowship (SPPN) | Olmsted County |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAZ is in a position to engage families and community voices in the process - CCAP is a tough process, need to try to cut down the time it requires, less red tape - families get easily discouraged and skip this if it takes too long - Need to connect the dots - there's lots going on, need to be intentional about connecting across divisions | <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue adapting to changing standards of COVID - Get families thoughts on strengths and challenges for working with these goals - Exploring college as an option in these times, an opportunity to "learn and earn", improving employment helps make people stronger, having a job reduces the fear families feel | <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rethinking what fellowship means and strategies to maintain and build an online community, hard to not be face to face, it's part of our culture - Finding ways to recruit families and shifting the ways we do recruitment - Strategies are limited because of the medium (Zoom) | <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Authority Master Lease program continues to work on removing barriers - Pathways to Prosperity and Well-being (PTPW) model moving self-sufficiency across divisions - Look at Individualized Services Assessment Tool (I-SAT) and making changes to see how it can help both social worker and clients moving forward |
| <p>Commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Important to continue to listen, be flexible and shift as needed - Identifying strategies to simplify programs and policies - Everyone sees this as a catalyst, needing to lock in a plan for engaging families and practitioners on each of the policy practice areas | <p>Commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need a community health worker - Regarding Kinship Navigators, need to figure out and bring a billable nursing service that can be done over telehealth - Leveraging data phone cards as a way to engage families with low data cellular plans | <p>Commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need for therapeutic services within African American community and the need to find black male therapists - Work to find easier and more simplified way to opening an account at the bank - Ramsey county accessible through email, text, virtually and being the best support with an ear to listen, heart to respond, and commit to offering hope | <p>Commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenging staff in positive ways to be person-centered and family-centered in our work - Focusing on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training, can't spend enough time on disparity issues, so much work to be done and commitment to need for variety of voices with different backgrounds and expertise - Remote working and connecting with customers highlights the digital equity issue and offering opportunities (ie: community kiosks, remote interviews, waivers) |

Insights from 2GEN Sites - Key Essential Learnings

Key Essential Learnings from the Small Group Debrief:

What are we noticing now that we didn't see before? What themes, patterns or key insights are important to "lift up" to the larger group in service to our learning and work together?

*What was the "aha moment" for us individually and as a small group? **

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Northside Achievement Zone</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's about <i>care</i> rather than <i>compliance</i>, value of relationships, listening intentionally, engaging more, where there is not relationship it exposes the challenges • Very challenged by the weight of systemic racism, this conversation lifted up the commitment which offers an incredible opportunity • Proud of agility and ability to make decisions that are imperfect and fix them along the way • Gaps in technology, families did not have access to tech or did not have digital literacy • It took a crisis to make us shift how we do things, now that we know better, we have to do better - make the system fit families, instead of families fit the system • Four shared core values: focus on success of children and families, advancing racial equity, creation of intentional village, transform by data and learning |
| <p>People's Fellowship (SPPN)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned the full meaning of community - you're not only trying to respond but filter through your own emotions, it hit home. The work we do, passion and full understanding first-hand what our clients could be up against because we're facing the same challenges • This has taught us that we can be flexible and nimble if we want to, having the willingness to make change - recognizing police brutality, systemic racism and COVID isn't going to stop and this work requires us to continue to adapt • Finding collaborations and workarounds, worry that when the waivers are done where that will leave our clients. We have to be proactive vs. reactive. • Until we walk a mile in someone else's shoes, we can't truly comprehend what the impact is. Recognizing the impact is felt among colleagues, staff - trying to work and be present while juggling parenting and distance learning |
| <p>Olmsted County</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity - having deeper conversations, people are willing to be more vulnerable and act on the problem of racial injustice • Building relationships across the system better, learning what we can do across departments because we're connecting more virtually. We've been able to change policies doing things remotely • Importance and significance of technology - enhances and challenges of that in the work • Inter-racial tensions rising in housing and shelter programs - people escaping violence in the cities and are coming to Rochester to find housing • Recognizing the interconnectedness and ripple effects, what happens to one happens to all and understanding for other people's experience, while being more efficient internally in how we do what we do • Creativity, innovation, flexibility and adaptability - continue to push boundaries as we commit to being person and family centered |

* White Earth Nation had 2 staff participate in small circle with site team. Learning is reflected on previous pages.

DHS Sensemaking Summary

After the listening sessions, DHS 2GEN staff gathered for collective sensemaking of all the lessons, insights and questions that emerged from the listening sessions. Below are some of the individual, collective, tangible and intangible learnings that surfaced throughout this session.

| <h3><u>Collective Intangible</u></h3> | <h3><u>Collective Tangible</u></h3> |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incremental steps can be just as successful as large gains. How do we pull the needs of the people (based on the listening sessions) and accomplish the tasks?• The value of the listening sessions and how to use what we heard and learned to move our efforts forward• The importance of hearing voices of the people we serve, in doing so, how does this change how we work with families?• Adjusting while in partnership with other organizations is a challenge• High level anxiety among staff, participants, day to day jobs are more stressful, anxiety about the end of the expanded unemployment insurance• What will happen to the connections that have been made across partners when grants end? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental health concerns are more evident along with other compounding issues that create additional barriers• We try to do a lot• How do we help people during a pandemic when we have rules (some that are dumb) wanting to do what makes sense for the people?• Challenge of being in distance learning adaptation, everything was online, all sensible adjustments• We have to remember who created the rules, maybe we should do something different• Navigating through this, we have always known poverty was here - but now we see it. It's hard to ignore now.• Pandemic is forcing parents to take on more new roles• Racial justice has to be embedded in the work• How do we move our practice towards solutions? How much data do we need to show that things aren't working? Now what? How do we get there? |
| <h3><u>Individual Intangible</u></h3> | <h3><u>Individual Tangible</u></h3> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We want to take care of the people while holding people accountable, rules don't matter to people who are struggling. What do people need right now? Don't know what to do - no resolution at this point• Overwhelming to me... there is no solution right now. Hearing the struggles we aren't able to navigate/help. Doesn't feel good. People are impacted by what's happening.• 2Gen tries to mimic public sector and expand upon, address social and economic issues. Takes focus to hold space through changes. Slow moving, expected complexities.• Didn't expect information hoarding. What will come from these connections? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harder to separate work and personal. In leadership role, we have to try. What has happened is extremely personal and upsetting. Creating a space for my team to share what they're thinking and feeling - recognize that impacts me personally and professionally• Worried about job loss of workers |

Moving Forward

The pandemic is still ongoing with no immediate solutions or end in sight. There are no easy answers in the space between *what was* and *what is becoming*. Yet, these listening sessions have provided a much-needed pause for all involved in the 2GEN work: creating space and time to reflect, to be heard, to shape and form shared experiences and share our stories, to make sense of and meaning together, and knowing that we are not alone in this complex, challenging work.

What we know now confirms what we already knew: as a network, we are rising to the challenge of addressing systemic racism, equity, policy and practice change, and adapting as we go while also juggling a lot both personally and professionally. We know that the families we serve in this work are impacted even more.

It can be unsettling to come to the end of a process without a sense of ending or resolution. We still face a lot of uncertainty and yet, have quite an amazing opportunity to build on the learning from the listening sessions.

Opportunities for 2GEN network and Human Service sector moving forward...

These opportunities have been identified from feedback gathered throughout the Listening Sessions process and from feedback from the DHS 2GEN team:

Opportunities for 2GEN Sites

- Opportunities to redesign the county childcare eligibility process to help simplify this for families. Building trust and strengthening communication with providers to help support Presumptive Eligibility efforts in Hennepin County.
- Create sustainable, reciprocal feedback loops from families and partners beyond the term of the grant and contracts. Include the feedback loop in your 2GEN work plan. Communicate the feedback loop broadly so that all involved are aware.
- Utilize BUILD's Equity Action Framework and lift up the equity work that is happening, asking for policy proposals from state agencies and in determining funding decisions with programs. Share how you are using the framework with the network and others broadly.

Opportunities for DHS

- DHS has data on inequalities and they are the policy holders: Where can DHS begin to make changes to improve inequalities and racial injustices within the human services systems?
- Continue on the journey of becoming an anti-racist organization throughout Department of Human Services

Opportunities for the Human Service sector

- Take the time to read and digest what is in this report, apply what we are learning, and explore ways that DHS can help in this process.
- Continue to work on policies and practices that were relaxed by waivers due to the pandemic, and explore policy proposals to the legislature to continue some of these changes