

Korina Barry ([00:08](#)):

Hello everyone. And welcome back to the CASCW podcast channel. My name is Korina Barry and I am the Director of Outreach at the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, otherwise known as CASCW. Today I am sitting down with Jenny Tessmer to hear more about an amazing podcast series she's been working hard on Jenny, can you share a little bit more about yourself and the fellowship that you're a part of?

Jenny Tessmer ([00:33](#)):

Yeah, so, um, so my name is Jenny. I'm a Master of Social Work student at the U. And, um, I am in the Minnesota LEND Fellowship. Um, Minnesota LEND stands for Leadership in Education and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities. Um, we have been spending the year focusing on what neurodevelopmental disabilities are, how they are really influencing the lives of people on a daily basis. And, also talking a lot about advocacy and various grassroots organizations in the Twin Cities. Um, part of being in LEND is being able to do, um, like our individual projects and mine is this podcast. And I was able to look at how neurodevelopmental disabilities do and in some cases do not intersect with the child welfare system through the Center of Advanced Studies in Child Welfare or CASCW. Um, and so yeah, the, this episode has been really fun to look at and to, I don't know, just like take a deeper dive in the frontline work of child welfare and what the workers are seeing or not seeing as far as disability goes.

Korina Barry ([02:01](#)):

And for this first interview, could you share a little bit about who you interviewed?

Jenny Tessmer ([02:06](#)):

Yeah, so I, um, interviewed a really nice person named DJ. He works for one of the counties here in the Metro and is an investigations in the Investigations Unit. The overall goal of his, um, unit is to figure out kind of what the status of a report is that comes into the County. And it's, it sounds like, um, DJ also does some home visits. And so I was able to talk with him a lot about what Investigations does and what they see in terms of disability. So like if disability even intersects at all with child welfare and it turns out it does. Um, but then we also spent some time talking about some gaps that the child welfare system has, as far as like perhaps not preparing the workers to really understand disability. Um, we also talk about a lot of strengths that the system child welfare system has in really like supporting the workers. Um, DJ also shares his journey to becoming a child welfare worker. And, um, we spend some time we don't, we don't really get too deep into his own, like his, like client caseload, you know, due to confidentiality and all of those logistics. But, um, he does share some moments when, um, he realizes that like, Oh, this is a disability that's kind of more impacting this parent's, um, capacities to parent. So it was a, it was a really good conversation. He's very passionate about his work.

Korina Barry ([03:53](#)):

All right, Jenny, anything else you'd like to say about the episode?

Jenny Tessmer ([03:57](#)):

Um, I guess, you know, I'm really excited to share the conversation with everybody, really hope it's everyone takes something away from it and yeah. Enjoy

DJ ([04:10](#)):

Good morning good people. My name is DerJuan Strons. I go by DJ to a lot of the staff and students here at the U of M. I'm so thankful to be here. Thanks Jenny, for having me.

Jenny Tessmer ([04:21](#)):

Of course. Yeah. DJ, you were a LEND Fellow. How was that experience for you?

DJ ([04:27](#)):

It was very interesting. Very educational and very helpful in the work that I do today.

Jenny Tessmer ([04:36](#)):

Okay. Cool. Cool.

DJ ([04:38](#)):

I didn't know what to expect at first. It was a little overwhelming at first with, you know. Cause coming into the fellowship I didn't have a lot of knowledge about, you know, neurological disabilities or, you know, I didn't really have a lot of family members who were impacted by that. I just knew that I would be working with a community and a population who have been heavily impacted by, you know, these disabilities. And so I wanted to kind of have that tool in my toolbox. So the LEND Fellowship really helped.

Jenny Tessmer ([05:10](#)):

Great. Do you want to speak more to how that looks in actual practice?

DJ ([05:15](#)):

Well, you know, we do, we get a, you know, a report, it'll um, say, whatever allegation it is and you know, I do the background checks on the family. Um, we have a database and, you know, if that family has been involved with Hennepin County before, it'll have the information in there, whether, you know, the criminal background, a child protection background, et cetera. It also has whether the family members or participants in the report have any, um, mental health diagnoses or anything like that. And so if it does, and I still make sure to assess, um, during my interviews and stuff, the mental health and stuff, and a lot of times with the, with the families that I engage with, uh, you know, uh, try to support, I do try to educate them on like signs of mental health diagnoses.

DJ ([06:10](#)):

Because a lot of the parents that I deal with, you know, don't know, you know, what to look for. Haven't had any education around what neurological disabilities look like. And so for me, it's more of an educational, uh, uh, standpoint for them. And just like, you know, your, your child is doing this at school, maybe not at home, but at school, uh, mom, dad had you been diagnosed with anything?, If so, are you getting the proper support that you need, uh, providing them what resources that they need that they could go to. Because again, they may not even just have knowledge of what to look for in any disabilities or anything or where to go to get support, you know? And so it's kinda my job to kind of help educate and kind of guide them and direct them into the right direction.

Jenny Tessmer ([07:07](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That's a really important job and yeah, it sounds like you work with a lot of community members as well to kind of like help bring that education. What are some of those resources that you partner with?

DJ (07:21):

I know that, so as an investigator, I go out and do the initial assessment investigation depending on the allegation. And if I feel that the family needs some support, I would refer them to our case management unit and the case management unit, they provide them or guide them in the right direction as far as like getting the support they need. I know we do work with like Frasier, Washburn, places like that, et cetera. There's we have lists and lists of places that can kinda help parents like get some, you know, apply to get their kids some help. Right. You know, do an assessment at least. So we have a bunch of lists. I actually just printed off a list for a parent yesterday morning who wanted to get her children some support. Um, and it was just, the focus was on children, teens and children.

DJ (08:19):

And so you know, we have lists, but our case managers are a lot more knowledgeable of their resources around the Twin Cities. But if I assess and I feel that there needs to be some support around, with, for the parents to help kind of just help them support their children and provide a healthy environment. And if that needs to be with some mental health support, uh, then you know, I'll make a referral to case management.

Jenny Tessmer (08:47):

Okay. I see.

DJ (08:48):

So it's, it's the thing is like it's a lot of moving parts when it comes to supporting your children who have been impacted with a diagnosis like autism and things like that, you know, they're like, who do you go to to get an assessment done? Who do you go to, to maybe get grants or a scholarship to have your kid join this agency, or who, where would you go find therapy?

DJ (09:18):

You know, where can I go and just take my kid, who's living with autism to do some leisure stuff, to what like sensory rooms, libraries. Uh, so it's so many different things that go with this, that a parent who's just trying to, you know, be stable in the home who may be dealing with poverty, who may be dealing with different trauma in their life. They're not really paying too much attention to the kid who's living with autism. And so just kind of helping them provide them with the proper information is like very, very important because that may be the missing piece. It's just like, they just don't know where to find the help or they just need a little support. And so my job, you know, I really, and I, I really thank the LEND program for it is like I go in eyes open on looking for the mental health stuff, looking for certain diagnoses because, um, if the parents are not receiving the proper support and they're dealing with the same stuff, then the kid is going to be impacted by it as well. So that's one of my main things is to make sure that they're getting the support they need as far as like what the like neurological disabilities, et cetera.

Jenny Tessmer (10:29):

Yeah. Yeah. You're really looking at the person as a whole person looking at the family as a whole unit. And I don't know. I mean, I'm, I'm not as familiar with investigations, but it sounds like that's not always, um, happening, you know, like I've, I've heard that sometimes. Um, you know, they're just so stressed by the trauma and the event and that's all they focus on, but LEND really provided you that holistic approach to looking at the child and how they're presenting

DJ ([10:59](#)):

Yes for sure. And it's like two different workers coming in with two different perspectives. One worker could come in and say, this parent's not parenting this child in this way, this parent's not doing this for this child, a person who a social worker, child protection investigator will come in and say, is this parent capable of supporting their child in this way? Do they need support so that they are able to parent, not that they're just making a choice not to, but are they mentally able, are they, do they have the knowledge and education to do that, to parent their child in this way to support them in this way. And so programs like the LEND program give you that perspective when you're going into a home.

Jenny Tessmer ([11:43](#)):

Yeah, yeah. For sure. Are a lot of your coworkers or have some of them been participants in LEND in the past?

DJ ([11:52](#)):

The unit that I'm in currently right now, there was, uh, another, um, person that she was in a LEND program before me. Um, and actually, that was, she's the only other one that I knew about it. Um, but I always speak about the LEND program and how it supported and helped me with my current career. And I always tell people like without that training and education, I would probably be missing a lot of things during my assessment and investigations. You know, I know that the County does a lot of trainings around mental health and what to look for and maybe how to support. But I guess it's kind of like, I really got like an extra boost on like, you know, the training and knowledge and things that, that mattered. I felt like really lucky and grateful that I was able to do that because the LEND program, because it really helps me and talking to my coworker at the time who was in the, um, LEND program, she was like, yeah, like it definitely opens your eyes to different things when you're in a home working with a family.

Jenny Tessmer ([12:59](#)):

Yeah. That's validating hearing from someone else too. Um, I, maybe this question also could have been asked, I guess at the beginning. And I wasn't thinking, um, what I guess, like drew you to become a child welfare social worker?

DJ ([13:13](#)):

Well, since I was, I remember like being in high school and I would always work like youth camps and church youth groups, church, youth groups. And then like in college, I remember my first job in college was I worked at a, uh, Job Corps. And what that is, is a place for kids from the age of 16 to 21, I'd say to go and kind of get their GED as well as like learn a trade. And so I remember working there for three, four years and just like I worked in the rec center for, you know, but it was just like, I was, I could easily like build a rapport with these kids who sometimes were, come from traumatic paths or, you know, violent, uh, paths, uh, neighborhoods. And they had a hard time connecting with a lot of people, but I found that I could really, really help them.

DJ (14:15):

You know, I really built rapport. I really built relationships and I kinda helped them see their capabilities and what they were able to do. And then looking back on that, I realized there was a lot of them that were dealing with mental health stuff as well. Uh, but when I started to do that work, you know, I was still in school for sociology. I ended up graduating and this was back in Indiana, you know, working with, and then when I moved out here, I started to work in the Minneapolis Public School district and, um, had a little more of a responsibility with the kids and, and kind of, um, working with the families as well and just, you know, kind of building that rapport and that bond and that bridge between school and the families and the kids and found myself being like, okay, this is, this is kind of like what I'm meant to do.

DJ (15:02):

And then I got into, uh, the domestic violence, sexual assault, uh, job setting. And that's when I realized like, all right, I'm gonna do, I'm gonna work with children and family the rest of my life. But I realized when I was at the agency, that it was only so much I could do without getting more education and getting my master's. And when looking into the U of M, I started, you know, looking at the concentrations and stuff and seeing the Child Welfare, I just knew like that was, that was it for me because working with children and family was that always came easy to me, but the passion came with helping like the families in need and children in need that coming from certain environments that I'm familiar with and being able to just help them and support them, uh, was just something like, you know, and then once I finally got into school, I was just like, yeah, you know, this is it. And so that's kinda how I navigated towards, um, child protection. Yeah. And thing about social workers is so broad and like, yeah, I do child protection for Hennepin County Monday through Friday, but I was just like, man, I kind of want to see what a different setting is too. And so now I do every other weekend, I'm a hospital social worker at Mercy Hospital in Coon Rapids, just because I wanted to work with a different population as well, but also still serving children and families, but in a different capacity. And it's different kind of work all under the social work scope. So it's really, it's really awesome.

Jenny Tessmer (16:34):

Yeah. That's so cool. That's amazing. So it sounds like, you know, even like some of the stuff that in hospital, social work it probably really overlaps with Child Welfare, you know, or you could see clients in the hospital that maybe have similar situations to your clients in the child welfare system, specifically. How many kids and families would you say that you work with at a time with Child Welfare?

DJ (17:00):

Child welfare, right now, I have a, uh, I'm kind of floating between 18 and 20 families on my case load. Uh, we have 45 days to complete our assessment or investigation. So the ones that have more severe reports, I kind of put on the front front burner for a little bit, but thing is we have a certain, we have a timeline, to, to see the children to assess them as a situation. And then, um, but 18 to 20 is usually where I'm at as far as my case load. And it's not, I mean, it's not too hectic at all. It's just, you know, you gotta prioritize assessments and things like that. So, yeah.

Jenny Tessmer (17:42):

Yeah. Yeah. Would you say that when you are, you know, 18, 20 families at a time would say that a majority of them have disability in their families in some capacity?

DJ (17:54):

It's crazy. The last three families I've been at that, have come across my desk. Um, all those families have, uh, a child or children, um, that have, uh, been diagnosed with autism. And the last, the two of those, uh, mothers, um, was me sitting down and talking to them about how I'm going to support them and kind of making that referral for case management and, and kind of explaining how the case managers are going to help educate them on a better parent, their children with autism, because a lot of it was them just being overwhelmed and then having these two young kids with autism and then trying to parent them and the others. So, yeah, I'd say a lot of the families I run into have some mental health things going on in a home. The last three families that I've been assigned in the last two weeks have been impacted by autism.

Jenny Tessmer ([18:56](#)):

It's, um, you know, unfortunately not surprising to hear, cause I, I can understand how the intersectionality of poverty and then if you're not aware that your child has a disability, how that can really compound a lot of stress, like excess stress in the family. Um, so also again, another question I probably should ask at the beginning. Um, so I'm a little bit familiar with investigations and I'm a little bit familiar with the track right? Of like how there's investigations, there's a case management could be something, or it could be referred to like a higher level need. Could you explain to listeners who don't know a lot about the child welfare system, how those branches look.

DJ ([19:38](#)):

Yeah. And so in, um, child protection, there's, there's different units for Hennepin County. There's the intake screening unit. So if like somebody has a safety concern for some children, whether it be mandated reporter or not, they call the intake line, um, and they can either make, make a report or they can talk to the intake worker about the concern and they can decide whether they still want to make that report or not. Um, so they make a report, the screeners either screen it out or screen it in. So if they screen it out, if it's not enough info or if it doesn't qualify as, um, a child protection matter. Uh, so once if it's screened in, it comes to investigations, which is my unit and there's nine or 10 investigation units in Hennepin County with about 10, uh, 10 investigators, each unit.

DJ ([20:38](#)):

And so, um, it'll come in on two different tracks to me, it'll come in as a family assessment, which is usually like neglect cases like educational, neglect, uh, supervision, concerns, um, hazardous and dangerous environments for children, things like that. That's family assessment stuff. There's also the investigation track, which is more serious concerning, um, allegations like physical abuse, sexual abuse. On these investigation tracks we're trying to determine whether maltreatment happened or not. So we're trying to make a finding or not. And for the family assessment, we're usually just looking to see if the family needs some services or not. You know, if they need some services we can voluntarily offer like, Hey, would you like to get some services? Um, and they can decline it or accept it. Also if we find that there's something more serious going on, say if we find somebody living in the home that has a, um, that's a sex offender or something like that, that they shouldn't be in a home, we could switch it over to investigations.

DJ ([21:47](#)):

And so the investigations, we get those reports, if we feel like the children are in danger or there's some safety concerns, we could file a CHIPS petition, child in need of protected services, uh, which then we take to the County Attorney. Um, we do a court consult kind of explain what we find and why we have

concerns. And the County Attorney, um, can then decide whether we are going to, uh, offer, uh, we're going to have the family make a work, a case plan with a case manager. So like when I say we make referrals case managers this'll be on the involuntary side, like they won't have a choice. So you have to work that case plan with a case manager for at least six months. Um, and if it's too dangerous, we can decide to remove the children, um, out of the home while they work, the family works the case plan and we'll place the kids in out of home placement whether foster care or with kinship.

DJ ([22:49](#)):

So, which is what we really want to do is place them with family while the, um, parents work a case plan. Um, if the kids stay at home and there's a CHIPS petition, you know, whatever offender or whoever the allegation is against, usually can't be home alone or, you know, have a supervision alone with the children while they're working the case plan, things like that. And so the different tracks depend on the allegations. And so, you know, there's the intake, there's investigations, there's case management unit. There's also an ICWA Unit. So if, um, there's families enrolled in Native American tribes or have ancestry, um, we have, um, certain, uh, units that specialize in the Native families and things of that nature. We have foster care, uh, unit, uh, adoption programs, um, children's mental health programs, all of these programs set up to support the families. But our main goal is reunification with the parent, the kid and the parent.

Jenny Tessmer ([23:54](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. And thank you for sharing that too. Cause I think, you know, a lot of times there's a real big misunderstanding about child welfare and the social workers who do have to come to the home. There's a lot of like fear, hates all of those big emotions and

DJ ([24:09](#)):

It is definitely a stigma. Like, and I always ask people like, what do you think when you hear the word child protection? That, you're going to take my kid. That's the first thing they think. And I mean, that's, I mean, yeah, I get it. So really, and our job, like I really, I really, I really stressed to these people that I work with; families and communities, like we're here to support and educate and guide first. The last thing we want to do is take children away from their parents.

Jenny Tessmer ([24:37](#)):

Right. That's like plan Z or something, you know.

DJ ([24:40](#)):

If we do have to remove, our goal is to reunify. So we just want to support these families in any way possible, not just coming in, taking kids away. And so it's really, we really been trying to educate the families on what we're doing.

Jenny Tessmer ([24:55](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you so much for that crash course. Child Welfare 101! Um, I think again, going back to the whole fear of social workers in child welfare, everyone has this one track mind that it's like, you come to the house, you talk to the family, you take the kid and, you know, to be determined after that. So

DJ ([25:16](#)):

And before I was educated on what child welfare looked like or what the system looked like within, um, child protection. I too thought like, man, that must be a tough job. You have to initially lower that anxiety about their kids getting taken away.

Jenny Tessmer ([25:34](#)):

Yeah. Maybe that anxiety never goes away too, I suppose, because they know you're with the County.

DJ ([25:39](#)):

Right. So yeah, it's really, it, it really is. And then with investigations for what I do it's really about, because I only have 45 days to complete my assessment. I have to build rapport quickly and they have to trust me quicker than they would a case manager or somebody that they'd be working with for months. So finding a way to build trust with these families who may have a very bad history or some bad experience with the County or other child welfare agencies. So I'll have to kind of break that cycle and just break the ice really so

Jenny Tessmer ([26:17](#)):

Well, I think you could do it. You seem pretty personable just saying,

DJ ([26:21](#)):

You learn it over time you really learn how to, and again, I mean, I've come from similar backgrounds, you know, I, and a lot of the population I work with look like me, you know? And so that may help as well, but, um, just being able to empathize, being able to put yourself in their shoes and kind of understand why they're acting the way they are or kind of like, you know, if there's an educational, neglect case I get, but then I find out that the family is homeless and highly mobile. Uh, the last thing they'd probably be worried about is getting the kids in school. If they don't have a roof over their head at night, worried about what they're going to eat. So kind of being able to have that perspective of, well, I need to make sure that they're stable, then we can work on education or let's find, make sure they're stable. Then let's find transportation for them to get to school everyday, once they're in the shelter or something, or whether they're with a Kin until they find their own. So really you got to really put yourself in their shoes.

Jenny Tessmer ([27:26](#)):

Yeah. Survival mode. You have to think, what would it be like? Yeah.

DJ ([27:31](#)):

It comes with experience. It comes with time. It also comes with, uh, you know, your personal life and able to understand. But I mean, I love it.

Jenny Tessmer ([27:40](#)):

That's great. That's amazing. And how many years have you been in investigations?

DJ ([27:45](#)):

Um, I started at the County. Uh, I did my internship with Hennepin and I started that in September of 2017. And I did my internship in an investigation unit. And then once I graduated May, 2018, I got hired right in to, it's a, it's a form of investigations, but it's called the rapid response unit. So

Jenny Tessmer (28:09):

I feel like I've heard of that before from classmates.

DJ (28:11):

Yeah. So what that is is me. I work nights and weekends. My schedule was Thursday through Sunday, 2:00 PM to 11:00 PM. I usually worked a lot later. And those were, where we get some cases that are called 24 hour cases to where you have 24 hours to go make contact with this child. Um, those were the cases, rapid response gets. And, uh, a lot of those were removal. They need, like there was a sex abuse allegation. There was a offender in the home or there's like, you can see that there's been violence or abuse, you know? And so we collaborate with the police on every case. I forgot to mention, we cross report to the police departments of the area of the address of the, on the report. And, um, so in the 24 hours, we always, worked with the police and, get out there as soon as we can and if need to be removed, we removed. And like, I'd be at the hospital two or three in the morning, some nights, like maybe even later, but I started, that's why I was, I was in RRT when I first started and I worked RRT from May, 2018 until the beginning of December. And then I switched to regular investigations is where I'm at now. And I've been there ever since the end of 2018.

Jenny Tessmer (29:33):

Yeah. Yeah. Very cool. Yeah. Thanks for sharing all of that too. Again, more 101 of Child Welfare,

DJ (29:41):

It's a lot of moving pieces, especially in Hennepin County, being the biggest County, like there's other counties where, you know how we have different units, uh, intake screening, there's an investigation. There's case management. There's smaller counties that their worker, they have a child protection worker takes the screening call, investigates the assessment, case management with the family. Because they don't get, I get two or three cases a week. They may get one, two. Maybe one every two..you know, something like that. So us being so big as a County, we need more workers. We don't have as much responsibility, you know with the job so

Jenny Tessmer (30:23):

Okay. I see. Yeah. That's good. Thank you for clarifying. Cause it's like when it's like one person doing all. Ooh. Yeah, that'd be..

DJ (30:33):

And then we have specialty units in investigation. So with me, I am my unit. We, uh, we, uh, we get most of the cases from the Brooklyn Center area. Um, and so a lot of those cases are in that area. I am also the embedded worker. Now they've started a program to where they have workers placed in certain police departments. I'm the embedded worker in, um, Brooklyn Center PD. And, um, and so I work out of there two or three times a week just as like a liaison, if they have any questions, as far as like child protection, things like that. Um, and there was also like one or two investigators in each unit who are

specialized in SEY cases. So sexually exploited youth cases. And so it's me and another member in my unit who get the SEY cases as well.

Jenny Tessmer (31:30):

I'm trying to think of like, I'm sorry, I'm just trying to like take this all in.

DJ (31:35):

Sorry, once I get going, I just start, you just have to say Hey, hold on, let me ask you something .

Jenny Tessmer (31:40):

It's all good. I really appreciate your passion for the field. I can, I feel it. I'm sure listeners will feel it and sense it as far as trainings go. Cause you know, with, you know, with your heavy caseload and how quick it builds up and how much things are changing in society, literally all the time. Um, and with, you know, new knowledge of disabilities, does your county specifically do trainings for workers pretty frequently? Like,

DJ (32:10):

All the time.

Jenny Tessmer (32:10):

Oh good. Okay.

DJ (32:12):

We have trainings all the time. And um, our supervisors are really, really, um, they're really like open to us, going to these trainings. Like.

Jenny Tessmer (32:22):

that's great,

DJ (32:23):

You know, they, they want us to, they push us to go. That's the only way we can get educated on the new things that are going on, the new knowledge that could help us with the families. And, um, and the county's really good about like, yeah, providing those trainings. And when there's a concern that comes up within the County, they try their best to address it and provide information or trainings or whatever and make it available whether. And they'll have it for several days so that everybody can try to get there to fit in their schedule and things like that. So yeah, we, we have trainings provided all the time, some mandatory, some not, but

Jenny Tessmer (33:04):

Okay, sure. Yeah. Yeah. Do you remember if there was a training that you went to recently like around disability, neurodevelopmental or not? Do you recall any?

DJ (33:14):

Man? I can't, no. I can't remember any mental health when I got, did we do like some there's there's a lot online too. We do a lot of modules online. I think I had done one like five or six months ago on some mental health stuff.

Jenny Tessmer ([33:28](#)):

Okay. Mental health

DJ ([33:31](#)):

Within the families and stuff like that, but really.

Jenny Tessmer ([33:34](#)):

None for disability that you can like totally pinpoint right now?

DJ ([33:36](#)):

Nope. And I got a terrible memory, so , if I don't put it in my phone...I don't remember it so.

Jenny Tessmer ([33:38](#)):

no, that's totally fine. I feel that,

DJ ([33:44](#)):

But I know that they do provide, you know, uh, there's a thing called apex within our database that you can look up certain trainings. And so you just type in a topic, the list of those trainings that are provided that are put on by Hennepin.

Jenny Tessmer ([33:58](#)):

You said that its apex?

DJ ([33:58](#)):

Yeah. But it's like a Hennepin County database.

Jenny Tessmer ([34:02](#)):

Oh, okay.

DJ ([34:02](#)):

Yeah. So you have to be a worker to, um, get it. Um, but they also like will email the, like the workers, Hey, there's this training that's at Concordia, whatever. It's not Hennepin based, but this could help you with your work. Feel free to apply. There may be a fee sometime. A lot of times we get like I, uh, being an SEY worker in my unit, um, there's always a big conference out in a Breezy Point, Minnesota and it's like \$150 fee to go. It's like a three-day conference. And like the County will pay that for some workers.

Jenny Tessmer ([34:41](#)):

That's nice.

DJ ([34:41](#)):

And so, yeah. So like, even if it's not Hennepin, like put on, facilitated, then they'll still like, Hey, just to let you guys know, there's this children's mental health or there's this, uh, conference on families impacted by autism. That could really be educational, you know, as your social worker, I mean, ask your supervisor if you can go or whatever. So yeah. There's always trainings and incentives and stuff.

Jenny Tessmer ([35:07](#)):

That's great. I am wondering if in regards to disability, if there's something that you wish you could tell, not just your County that you work with, but like other counties as well, how they should approach disability or what needs to be done differently so that they can have a hold a disability lens in their work.

DJ ([35:26](#)):

I'd say that every County, every child where a child welfare agency should make a huge effort in educating their workers. That's the biggest thing. I mean, if you don't have knowledge about anything and not going to respond to it in the right way. I mean, you know, if, if you're, and you might be afraid to like, I don't know how to deal with this, what am I supposed to do? What does this look like? So I'd say with these counties spend some money, get your, get your workers trained because it's super important because it'll change your perspective on how you work with these families. Because a lot of these families in the child welfare system do not have the education on someone in their family is dealing with something like autism. They don't even know where to go, how to help them, how to support them, where to get the resources.

DJ ([36:17](#)):

And we need to be able to provide that for them. Social work is broad. Social work is very rewarding. Social work mostly is about educating the population that you're working with and supporting them in any way possible possible. In child welfare, you have to, you have to have empathy. You have to be able to understand these families. If you don't understand them, it's your responsibility to educate yourself on the population that you're working with. Child welfare can be very tiring, frustrating, but it's one of the most rewarding jobs. Um, there are a lot of people and families within our society who have kind of started behind the eight ball and it's our job to provide them with the push they need to have a chance to live a healthy, successful life. And, um, I really, I really appreciate LEND for giving me the opportunity to kind of have that scope into what, you know, the neurological disabilities, how they impact parenting in general. And I'm so thankful to, uh, the MSW program and the LEND Fellowship for providing me with the education needed to help with these families, because it's it helped me more than I ever thought it would. Yeah.

Jenny Tessmer ([37:59](#)):

That's amazing.

DJ ([38:00](#)):

Yeah.

Jenny Tessmer ([38:01](#)):

Your, your wisdom and nuggets are always so like, I'm just like sitting here, like yeah!

DJ ([38:08](#)):

And I love it, this is a passion, so I go on forever about it. Like, you know, long days; long days, it doesn't even matter sometime it doesn't feel like a job, but

Jenny Tessmer ([38:15](#)):

I'm sure everyone listening has learned so much from you about the intersectionality of disability, social work, child welfare investigations, like yeah. You have been, it's such an honor to talk with you and sit down with you. So

DJ ([38:29](#)):

No problem, thank you Jenny for having me, I appreciate it.

Denise Cooper ([38:32](#)):

This podcast was supported in part by a grant from the Minnesota department of human services, children and family services division.