

Episode 255—Dr. D. Crystal Coles: Privatization in Public Child Welfare... Good for the State or Good for the Child?

[00:00:08] Welcome to inSocialWork, the podcast series of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work at www.inSocialWork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of inSocialWork is to engage practitioners and researchers in lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice to research. We educate. We connect. We care. We're inSocialWork.

[00:00:37] Hello from Buffalo and welcome to inSocialWork. My name is Louanne Bakk and I'll be your host for this episode. We're currently seeing an increase in models of privatization within state public child welfare. This increase is based on the premise that it can improve efficiency of the system and effectiveness of the services that are provided. However the rationale behind privatization does not always support the opinion that privatization models produce cost savings or effective services. In this podcast our guest Dr. D. Crystal Coles discusses her research pertaining to privatization within child welfare and the trajectory of experiences of children in foster care. She describes the different levels of privatization between and within state foster care and how these multisystemic variances impact service delivery. Dr. Coles emphasizes that privatization is not unique to child welfare and is increasingly common within all areas of social work. In order to move our profession forward and effectively advocate for change she stresses the importance of understanding the multisystemic implications of privatization and the need to provide training in education on privatization within schools of social work. Dr. Coles concludes by highlighting the need for stakeholders to work together in order to gain insight on the implications of privatization and to develop new and innovative ways to enhance service delivery. Dr. D. Crystal Coles is a faculty member in the School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas. Her research and practice experiences lie in the public child welfare arena. Specifically she focuses on child welfare in the intersection of the African-American Black Diaspora through the lens of health disparities in rural and urban communities and on child and maternal well-being as a preventive method of children transitioning into the foster care system. She was interviewed in October 2018 by Todd Sage MSW and clinical assistant professor here at the UB School of Social Work. We would like to mention that this episode contains some background distortions that are due to technical problems we experienced while recording. Thank you. And we hope you enjoy the podcast.

[00:03:14] Hi my name is Todd Sage and I'm a clinical assistant professor at the University of Buffalo and today I have the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Crystal Coles from the University of Kansas. And today's topic we're going to discuss the privatization of child welfare and our first question is Dr. Coles can we just describe your research and how it relates to privatization?

[00:03:36] Yeah so much for having me too. So my research really looks at the differentiation related to states that are privatized within child welfare and different levels of the privatization in childcare, particularly have usually three sectors of the system adoption, foster care and family preservation, and looking at whether those states have privatized one of those sections or two of those sections or all three of those sections or none of those sections. And if so what are the varying levels of efficiency and effectiveness. I particularly look at and I'm interested in efficiency and effectiveness as it relates to the well-being of children in care and needing some of the outcomes that we have deemed are important in foster care and in the public welfare system in general but also looking at cost effective measures within those rounds as well.

[00:04:33] Interesting, and I know that privatization for quite a while.

[00:04:37] We have.

[00:04:38] When we think about this, you know, the next question that it leads us to is the why

question. So why is this important for frontline practitioners and the researchers and the policy makers to really understand how we came about to privatization and that we're looking closely at privatization.

[00:04:56] Yes, you know I got interested in privatization after practicing myself. So a bit about my background, I practice as a foster care social worker for many years as well as a clinician and I've practiced in the state of Kansas where it was fully privatized. In one of the things that I didn't know as a practitioner was really what that meant for business that it didn't work and for us. I just knew that it meant certain types of rule. And when I went to go get my Doctoral degree, I've got that in Virginia which is a state that wasn't privatized. And I got to see how varying the system can be in regards to how they're run. So I think it's important for a practitioner to know about privatization because it really directly impacts how your practice can be with your clients. It impacts your pay, it impacts your benefits, it impacts your flexibility to provide the services that you want to provide and tax rules in which organization operate. For researchers I think that as we take a step back we tend to lump public child welfare into one big context, and privatization really changes the game. Privatization really differentiates how states operate and how research needs to be approached in each of these states. One of the things that I learned in my research is that I thought that we can kind of lump it together. And even if I was comparing say Kansas to Florida, well Kansas and Florida are all fully privatized so that would be comparing apples. But it's not comparing apples, it's comparing apples, kiwis, all different types of fruit in the game if you think about it. So it's important for us to know because it's a factor that really impacts the service to the root of children. It impacts how states are operating and it impacts the different sorts of measures we have to take if we want to have a successful system and if we want to be sure that we're increasing from it for children and increasing their safety measures for children as well.

[00:06:58] Absolutely. Listening to your answer makes me think about back to my own practice as a child welfare worker when you're describing why the practitioners need to really understand why I think you're absolutely right. Too often the front line workers are given the what to do, but they're never really explained the why to do it.

[00:07:16] And it's frustrating, right? I think feeling like you know the client best, and it's true, I mean you're seeing clients most day in and day out. But you have these people at the top that are really making decisions that impact your ability to do your job and you never get to really say why or ask questions why. And I think privatization is that mechanism that provides opportunities for... If we can sort of explain what's happening through the lens of privatization to practitioners I think it empowers practitioners to have this knowledge base. Not just about how they're delivering services but also how the system is operating and why it's operating in that fashion. At least that would be my goal.

[00:07:59] Absolutely. And that goes into another area of research that we know it supports is the organizational culture because we know when workers understand the ins and outs of the why they tend to be more content with their organizational culture as well.

[00:08:13] If the workers can understand what's going on we can decrease burnout, we can decrease turnover, we can decrease a bunch of different other things that are happening within our orgs. I feel like it is a really good opportunity for us or for practitioners in general to be a part of the system and not just hand of the system ideally.

[00:08:33] Absolutely. And when I think about your comments about the researchers it makes some sense that we really do have every state having different social work systems and child welfare systems. And depending on whether the state is a state-ran child welfare system or a county-ran state supervised child welfare system, what privatization looks like even within a state can be very

different across the state and so it's important that researchers that are engaging in this type of research truly understand the dynamics at play in the state. And so it absolutely makes sense that this research could inform that.

[00:09:10] Yeah absolutely. And I think that was something I learned soon. Having been in a privatized state and working in one it's a more centralized model. The state that I worked in was not county run and when states are county run, like Texas is one of the states that's county run. For me to be able to do my study I contacted state administrators and officials in all of the states in the US as well as our territories which included Puerto Rico, which includes D.C., which I remember thinking "I'm calling Hawaii and I'm calling Puerto Rico." And asking what are your thoughts about the level of privatization here and so forth and it was a complex answer for D.C. Because again, it's different and it's operated different in different counties, different sections and so forth. And we have some states that are divided into regions and if you're divided into regions then organizations are bidding on contracts and they run operations for different sectors of privatization just in that region alone. So you can have a state have two regions, you can have a state that has six regions, eight regions. We can also have what we're seen in privatization more frequently these days are that states in organizations outside of the states that are privatized are bidding on these contracts as well. So what does that mean for a state when an organization, for example could be in Oklahoma bidding on a contract in Washington, and if they win the bid they are going to be operating in the state of Washington and not even familiar really with the context of that state. So we have to know that privatization operates differently in different spaces. There really is no generalized approach in terms of how things are done. And that's really in congruent with how state systems operate in general. Even though, for example, Kansas and Oklahoma and Nebraska are right by each other, it doesn't mean that their state systems run similarly at all. So what are the implications for that when we're doing research and trying to figure out how we need to shift and do things? And how do we as researchers really reflect in research the actuality of privatization in the state in our studies?

[00:11:21] And I think that's a great lead-in to the last part of the question is the policymaker aspect because we know too often sometimes it's easy just to adopt what another state has done and let's go ahead and bring them in and do a similar contract and we'll have the same outcome supposably. But we know in practice that isn't what happens a lot of the time. So how do you see the policymaker aspect into this research agenda?

[00:11:47] That's a really good question. I had another study that I just finished this summer. It's a qualitative study where I interviewed practitioners, supervisors and direct service practitioners regarding their thoughts about that. There were 30 people in the study and every single one of them had the same answer, which was that policymakers really should come spend a day or a week on the ground and see what these implications are. I think you know as a social worker one of the things that's important to me is that we understand the implications of macro practice on micro practice and we understand that what happens in policy impacts what I do in my day to day work as a social work practitioner. And so the best way to really think about the role of policymakers in regards to privatization is to really see the impact that policy in our system. To see it in a way that is not necessarily from a legislative space or this space where these are words of the bottom line, but to see it in actuality, like how does this policy really impact this organization that impacts the administration, impact the supervisors, impact the workers, impact the family and the children. And the only way to really do that is to be a part of it. I think for a long time we've have sort of a bifurcated approach in child welfare where we specialize in one particular area and we don't really know what happened to the other part. But my research really suggests is that we need to work more together and we need to know that when we have models of things like privatization it impacts how these services are delivered. It impacts the way policies are developed. And if that's the case it then directly impacts children and families we're surveying. So it would be really really ideal for us to have policy makers speaking with families and speaking with the workers and really

getting a feel for what this means for them, because for example when a contractor is shifted in privatization I don't think policy makers understand the implications of what that means for the workers in service delivery. I think what they think about primarily, mainly because I've been in meetings at this level and policy makers are not social workers more often than not. They're economists or these different spaces or in administration and in different disciplines outside of social work. And so I don't know that oftentimes that thought about multisystemic implications are at the forefront because it's really a social work perspective that allows us to look at a multisystemic approach to understand the implications of policy. So I think their role really would be enhanced if there was some type of integration understanding how these policies really directly impact society.

[00:14:50] Absolutely and I really love and appreciate that answer because I think one of the things that happens a lot is they get information from researchers and from upper managers, but the information they receive a lot of the time has been sanitized and they don't really get to see firsthand accounts of how the policy that they are implementing, how that really translates into practice and what's the ramifications of that practice. And so I love the fact that you're really advocating for policy makers to have a more hands on experience so that they understand what their role is and how to play that critical role in the system.

[00:15:24] Definitely. I also think it's our responsibility to have more of a hand in policy. One of the things that I believe as a researcher, as a practitioner and as a professor is that especially in the context of our practice now, it is more important now than ever to really understand that we have a responsibility to our clients and to our field to be engaged in these policy levels and in the policy development and the policy implementation. What are ways that we can do that? What are ways that we can go to these town halls and be a part of these meetings in child welfare? I remember as the practitioner being exhausted consistently and the last thing I wanted to do was to go to one of those meetings, but it's so important. It's so important because policymakers need to know that the impact of this contract shift or contract development has direct implications for how our system is being operated versus just the number that we're seeing in my logistic regression or one of those things. We need more people that can translate what's happening at the front line to the mental part of it to the policy part of it. I totally believe that.

[00:16:39] Absolutely that's a message that I echo back in my teaching as well, that the macro practitioners and the micro practitioners need each other and they need to be working together. They are not two separate fields, they are one field that needs to be working together. So you and I, having someone a child welfare background, this is something that we could probably days talk on. But what initially sparked your interest in this particular topic? How did this research agenda come about for you?

[00:17:05] I think the main thing was that being that I was a young practitioner I really thought all states worked like the seeds that I worked in. And it wasn't until I left it that I was like whoa what's happening. I didn't realize that there were states that weren't privatized. And then I didn't realize that there were states that only had one thing privatized. I really got engrossed in the literature about privatization and just kind of realized that we were transitioning our system without a lot of research being done at that time. This was a few years ago. I think we've gotten better at it now. But at the time we just continued to replicate models of privatization without knowing much about it. And if you look at the history of privatization, when states initially transitioned, there wasn't any research done on it, it was just a mechanism to say "hey we're just trying to see if this is going to work. We're trying to make our system better." So I just got really interested in that. I think what I began to see when I looked in the literature at the time was that I kept seeing the word "efficiency" and I kept on seeing the word "effectiveness." But I never saw anybody actually explain what that was. And I never saw anyone really differentiate between the fact that states have different types of privatization. You're not privatized or not. There's different types of it. So that really led me to

saying "Let me try to at least begin to figure that out, begin to differentiate between the different levels of privatization" and began to look at efficiency and effectiveness through what I think is most important in child welfare, which is the child. What I kept feeling like was we were leaning more, when we say efficiency and effectiveness because privatization is really a business model that we're applying to human services. And when we think of the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness in business are related to cost and are related to a product. But we deal with human beings and we're dealing with children. So what does that mean for us and how do I, I wanted to figure out a way for us to begin as a profession to sort of put into words what our expectations regarding models of privatization really were. So that started the process.

[00:19:15] Yeah, and I think that's a really important dynamic that your research pulls out is the business model dynamic can, speaking back on that, even if you have a not-for-profit organization stepping in to offer these services, it seems a lot of times if they don't approach it from a business model the politicians who are awarding the grants and creating that system are really looking at this as a business model. So a business model always seems to come into play.

[00:19:43] I definitely agree. I think the business model comes into play but what we fail to think about is that business models are looking at goods and we're looking at people. So what happens when we're applying that business model to quote unquote the business of children. What are those implications of it? Is that really what we want to do? That's kind of how it started. That's how I began to get intrigued about privatization in its operations in general.

[00:20:11] Absolutely. And that's a great lead into the next question is what were you hoping to discover through this research agenda?

[00:20:17] I've wanted to go past whether privatization was good or bad. And I wanted to begin a dialogue about really what is effectiveness in terms of service delivery for children, and what is efficiency and can we get past just it being the bottom line as a result of the cause. Because to me as a worker one of the things I remember is that the bottom line for me was well being. The bottom line for me with my clients was did my clients transition out of our system in a successful way that enhanced their life, that enhanced their well-being, that enhanced their mental health, enhanced all of these different aspects of well-being. And how can I as an early career researcher begin to have the dialogue and the language to speak the business model talk, but also being a social worker putting the concepts of the person at the forefront. So I wanted to transition our discussion in privatization to well-being. So it's why I chose to really focus on the experience of the child at the center of privatization and looking at it through the lens of effectiveness and what would it be if we looked at, for example, does this child had four placements or five placements and if they did is that considered systemic effectiveness. And who told us that it was appropriate for kids and have this many placements and that's indeed effective. Because a lot of the outcomes related to privatization aren't necessarily developed by individual I think that thought about the well being so much as the outcome of an organization and what would be considered successful. So how do we merge those things and keep the child at the forefront. How do we always keep the well-being of the child and the family at the crux of our system.

[00:22:09] Absolutely. And some of these constructs can be very difficult to define and to really ground in a measurement. And so it's important that we look at those. So you gave us a lot of the questions that you asked. What other questions have you asked in your research agenda related to this topic? What other areas have you explored?

[00:22:26] One of the things I think is always important is to just look at the numbers but look at the experiences. I've been really interested in the experiences of workers, as particularly as we shift contractors and seasonal workers for people that have been involved in working in privatized

systems for at least a minimum of three years because I believe it takes a minute to get used to it. And then if they decide to leave out why did they decide to do that. I'm interested in not just what privatization means for the children and families, but what does that mean for the workers, what does that mean for policymakers. What does that mean for you transitioning out of care type of thing. And so the study I mentioned earlier really was my attempt to kind of do a second portion or a follow up piece to the dissertation, and my dissertation really focused on looking at our system in its entirety in regards to privatization, but I wanted to know if the experiences of workers supported the findings in that because we know that the numbers reported for state are not always accurate. So it's the workers experiences that either in my mind attempt to be able to triangulate the validity of those numbers. So that's where I'm at now in the process of research.

[00:23:41] And that's very important because too often they're looked at as two separate subjects, the worker and the children and the families. And really in child welfare system my experience is they're really intertwined and to look at them as a holistic system, that's probably a better methodology.

[00:23:57] I mean I hope so. I think that one of the things that I've learned sort of in research is that it's all about building blocks. And what made sense to me as a worker is different than what makes sense to me as a researcher. And one of the things I would like to contribute to the space of child welfare is to depict the reality of what's happening within our system and how to look at them separately is I think problematic in that it doesn't paint an authentic picture of those. Like we've got to be able to know because our system is comprised of the children and families receiving services, the workers delivering them, the administrators running organizations and organizational operations, and then you function within a system itself whether that is the system or a system in its entirety within policies from the federal level. We've got to look at all aspects of that to see what's happening within our system because it's really just general systems theory what happens in one part of the system impacts the other part of the system. So to me my goal is to take privatization and really have, like you said, a holistic view of what's happening in it. I would love to be able to engage with the youth who transitioned out of care when they were in privatized system, but also the youth that are in care and the workers and then policymakers as well. Because we need to know why. I always tell my students the why is really important. The explanation of what were your hopes with doing this. Because what happened is that's why we get on a soapbox kind of talking about "well the system is bad," or "the policy is bad," but we don't really know how it was meant to be enacted without actually asking the question. And we don't know how workers are experiencing it. We know the numbers. We know the outcomes, but we don't know what's happening within that system, with the multiple parts of the system, and how privatization is really being experienced and enacted. So it's beyond whether it's good or bad at this point.

[00:26:05] Absolutely. I agree that most policy isn't put in place with good intentions and understanding the why is really important so that we can really truly understand if those good intentions were actually occurring are for having unintended intentions occurring. So earlier on we talked about why this is important for child welfare practitioners but for our listeners to this podcast who don't work in child welfare or maybe exploring on this topic, why is this important for us as social work profession, social workers in general?

[00:26:35] Privatization is happening everywhere. Child welfare is not the first area to be privatized and it won't be the last. We've seen it in education. We've seen it in prison and we continue to see the implications of privatization especially as it relates to the way prisoners are operating in general these days in particular as long as there's money involved and as long as there's a cost saving mechanism that somebody suggests, privatization is going to be a part of our profession. I also feel like the way to sort of move our profession forward is to not just think about, we sometimes I think as a profession we have a situation occur and then we sort of say "this is wrong it shouldn't be

occurring." But for us to really understand an outcome we have to understand how different things are being implemented and then that outcome came. We have to understand kind of the history behind it. I would gander to say that there are very few areas that we are practicing in where privatization is not a mechanism. If you're in health, privatization is happening. If you're in education privatization has happened. If you are in working with prison reform or juvenile courts or anything of that nature, privatization is happening. I have a hard time understanding and thinking of any areas not impacted because privatization is modeled off after managed care. So understanding in implications on how it operates and the differentiation between different levels of it is important for the future of our practice particularly in a time where we're seeing how political spheres and how policies are going to be impacting our profession and where our profession will likely go in this day and age.

[00:28:19] Absolutely. For those of us that are a little bit older I can think back when counties used to run a county hospital system. Counties don't have hospitals anymore, they're all private. So you're absolutely right, all the systems are becoming privatized and if they haven't become privatized there's an eye towards privatization. So that's very true.

[00:28:36] Absolutely. And I think it's our duty as social workers to really be able to sort of understand it. Because understanding privatization will help us to be able to advocate in a more, to use their words, efficient effective manner. A lot of the times I think that social workers gets this rap for being super-feely and so forth, but we want to make change, we want to make the world a better place. And those things are true. But social workers are incredibly intelligent and our training really allows for us to understand the systemic issues and the implication it has for society. And my goal as a professor is to push us forward into getting comfortable in that space a little bit more because I think it's going to be intrinsically important for the next generation of social work practitioners.

[00:29:24] Absolutely. So Crys, I'm going to ask you the question because you've shared with us it's not about good or bad. What has your research taught you about privatization?

[00:29:32] My research really has taught me that privatization is here to stay. I have not in my research yet seen a state transition from privatization. I've seen models piloted that then they decided not to go through with the next step after the pilot which was the privatize a specific sector. But I haven't seen states transition back from privatization. And as long as the privatization is here to stay it means that it's an area that we need to get a handle on more in terms of understanding the implications part. I think research has done a great job of studying states that are privatized, organizations that do contracts, and like the technicality parts of it, the technical parts. I think the next step is to think about if this is a mechanism that's going to stay, what does this mean for us? What does it mean for our system when contractors shift? What does that mean for those children? If we are in public child welfare and we're still battling some of the same things that we were before privatization then what can we do to increase the successfulness of being privatized in these states? I think we need to take it a step further and think about layering the complexity. And what I learned is that states are complex, systems are complex and that means that privatization is complex, but I don't think we know immensely the implications of that complexity on the operations of our system.

[00:31:02] Absolutely. So the call to arms question; So what can we as social workers offer in this area to meet the challenges related to what you learned?

[00:31:12] And I think what we can offer is the multisystemic lens, is the ability to say that we as system have an obligation in my mind as social workers to always bring forth the client. It's really almost social worker 101 if you think about it. We're always fighting for change and justice and so forth. But what does that mean when we're fighting a system, and what does that mean when we're

trying to not necessarily, like we're not against the system but how do we make change within this system and how do we make it for the betterment of the children of families that we serve? And I think the way to do that is to learn more about privatization, is to be open to having those dialogues with policymakers and administration and to stay in the fight. It's hard to stay in child welfare. It's hard work but it's meaningful work and at the end of the day I think that the children that we serve and the families that we serve, they have to have somebody that will say "we have an obligation to think past the coin." We have an obligation to really think about how we can make sure that we are serving these families the best that we can, and what that means for them in terms of well-being. It's my goal to make sure that wherever I'm at privatization is a part of our curriculum and it becomes the norm. It becomes the norm for students to know what that means so that by the time they are out in practice it's pushing people to have to address it.

[00:32:42] Absolutely. I think throughout our discussion we've addressed a lot of the practical implications of this area of research that you've done and you've touched just briefly just now on how you ensure that it's incorporated in your school. How should other social worker educators out there listening to this? Why is this important for them to implement it into social work education?

[00:33:02] Well I think it's important for social work education to always be at the forefront of what's happening in society. And you asked a great question earlier which is essentially what realm of practice does this not touch, and since it's so heavily connected to all of our areas of practice I feel like it now needs to be chapters in our textbooks. It now needs to be a part of our lectures because I think it is the primary operating force for a lot of our practice arenas. And I think the way to just begin to be engaged in it is just look it up in your community and look it up in the organizations that we work with. Are they bidding on contracts and are they providing service provisions for the state or is it a separate entity? You know, I think the days of things just public and private separately are long gone. And I think that profit agencies and public agencies, I think we blurred the lines of it. I would add privatization is a nasty word to some people but what's not is a different phrase called "public private partnership." Are you doing things like that? That's just privatization with a new name. So just really understanding the hemisphere of practice is really important for us, and making sure that our curriculum is current and inclusive of what is happening. There are some times where I'm really engaged in a lot of curriculum work because I think that things consistently change, like we don't use phrases like mental illness. We use behavioral health. And if that's the case then that means the concepts of our practice is changing, and stuff like privatization had been here for a while. Canada has privatized over twenty five years ago. And it was one of the first states that privatized fully. And if that's the case we're well behind the curve of figuring out what those implications mean if social work is not kind of in the forefront within it.

[00:34:59] Absolutely, and you won't get any pushback from me on that. I agree with you, I think child welfare education needs to move throughout the curriculum. Too often it's a stand alone elective and there really has implications that really impact every aspect to social work. So I agree with you on that.

[00:35:16] Yeah. It's one of the reasons I chose to go to KU to be quite frank, is that child welfare really is quite centralized here, it's really important we have this center and so forth that we work through doing research and really trying to be the link between practice and research. And really making sure that we're not doing research for research sake, that we're contributing to scholarship. And scholarships for social work is different in that the undercurrent of it is change. We're not robots in research and social work, we're doing the work to be able to shift systems to be able to shift our practice and to teach our students how to be at the forefront of that. Because we believe in change and we believe in social justice. And as long as we are believing in social justice we have to be able to teach kind of what is current within practice and so forth. It's a disservice to our profession and to do anything outside of that as a researcher in my opinion.

[00:36:12] Agreed. So what are the theoretical frameworks that really ground this research area?

[00:36:17] I definitely feel like for child welfare and especially with privatization, general systems there is a great one, the ecological perspective I feel like is important to have as it allows for that child to be placed in the system and figuring out how the interactions of that multisystem systemic perspective are impacting the individual. I think those are my primary ones that I really go from. Now if you're doing child well-being or something outside of that then I think it's also important these days to have a more health focus as well. And I think one of the things I'd like to push us forward to doing in child welfare is considering health as a lens to look to in terms of pushing our system forward as well. And there are a variety of different lenses you can look for that, or excuse me, different theoretical frameworks that you can utilize within that regard too. So those are the two that I use primarily though.

[00:37:11] Excellent. Always important to research is who is a vested stakeholders when we do this research that we need to make sure we're including.

[00:37:18] So I think the vested stakeholders are obviously the children and families that we your surveying, I think the workers, direct service workers and when I mean that I mean from the family support workers in the CPS investigators all the way to those clinicians that are doing in-home services as well. Administrators and supervisors are stakeholders, and to be quite frank policymakers are as well. When we talk about a system, a system has a variety of different parts and child welfare is one of those sectors and areas of practice that include a multitude of stakeholders. So when we're making decisions about this system and it's functionality and operationalization and so forth. I think all those people need to be present at the table. Not just one section, not just two, all of them.

[00:38:10] Absolutely the holistic approach is so important. So you're obviously doing wonderful work in this area of research. You're really guiding other practitioners and researchers going forward. What's next for you?

[00:38:23] I think the next thing is what I'm really excited about doing is trying to figure out how since privatization is here, what are the types of things that I can do, what state officials, how can I be at the table with policymakers and so forth to make sure that those other stakeholders are present as well. And how can I conduct research that holistically is inclusive of all of them too. I'm also really passionate about integrating a health framework inside of our child wellbeing structure in child welfare. It's taken us a while to get child wellbeing to be at the crux in the center of it. But I want to push us further and think about ways that we can really focus in on health that can decrease the amount of time that children are really in care and also decrease the amount of time that families have these systems within their lives. It excites me to think about new and innovative ways to enhance our system, and I think also to just make sure that we are always keeping the child in the family at the center of child welfare.

[00:39:28] Absolutely. I really appreciate you taking the time today to share this important research with not just the child welfare folks out there but also other social workers that may be wondering about if they want to enter child welfare or what is child welfare and why does it matter to my practice. I think we had a great discussion. It really kind of showed that this is important to all of us as social workers and helping professionals. Is there anything else that you want to add before we close out today?

[00:39:53] I think you summed it up greatly. I think the one thing I just want to say is you are absolutely right in that this is important for all of us. I think that child welfare gets a bad rap

sometimes and we have a long way to go but we have people that are passionate about really helping increase the safety and the well-being of children and families and that impacts all sectors of practice. So I think it's really important in social work for us to just remember that though there are always these, I call them "new and sexy topics" and so forth and work in research in areas of social work. But child welfare I think is one where it really touches so many aspects of practice in so much of social work that I just really encourage us to keep it at the forefront in terms of figuring out ways that are innovative to approach how we can really change our system and really ensure the betterment of lives of children and families and society.

[00:40:50] I think we couldn't end on a better note. Thank you so much, Dr. Crystal Coles, I look forward to following your research in the future. Take care.

[00:40:58] Thank you so much. Have a good day.

[00:41:00] You've been listening to Dr. D. Crystal Cole's discussion on privatization within child welfare. I'm Louanne Bakk. Please join us again at inSocialWork.

[00:41:18] Hi I'm Nancy Smyth, Professor and Dean of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school, our history, our online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs, we invite you to visit our website at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu. And while you're there check out our technology and social work resource center. You'll find it under the Community Resources menu.