**MIND THE OPPORTUNITY GAP: TASHA’S STORY**

***Topic Overview:***

All children deserve the opportunity for optimal intellectual, social, and emotional development. But we see troubling statistics showing that the zip code where you are born or the color of your skin are strong predictors of future success. Here are a few highlights from [Opportunity in Connecticut](http://www.cahs.org/pdf/OpportunityInCT.pdf), produced by the [Connecticut Association for Human Services](http://www.cahs.org/):

* Children in schools where the majority of students are poor and have academic problems are more likely to have lower grades than if they attend a school with high performers.
* Eight percent of White Children, 29 percent of Black children, and 28 percent of Hispanic children are poor in Connecticut.
* Standardized test scores reveal that Connecticut has one of the largest achievement gaps in the country based on race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

These issues affect us all. Disparities are deeply rooted in our institutions. We need to retool systems that have failed generations of children. We must create a culture where we can hold the difficult conversations about why these inequities exist and commit to creating a better, more equitable future for all of our children.

*"Investing in early childhood development of vulnerable children produces great returns to individuals and society…”*

***Framework for action:***

**Approach A:** **Reduce barriers and increase access to early childhood healthcare, education and services,** including home visiting programs, to share important child development information and support for parents and families.

***Those who like this approach say:***

“Childcare providers have the closest relationships with parents and are trusted messengers.”

“Childcare providers see children daily and communicate with parents frequently which allows them to share ideas and information to help them with their children when they need it.”

“Programs like Early Head Start and Nurturing Families reach the most vulnerable children at an important stage of development.”

**Approach B: Create a system that supports both generations** by ensuring that parents have educational opportunities, job readiness training and help, as well as their children receiving the early care and education they need.

***Those who like this approach say:***

“Along with meeting basic needs, parents need systems to work together so they can find and keep jobs while their children are well cared for.”

“Both mother and child need good health care and educational opportunities.”

“When you help the parents you help the child.”

**Approach C:** **Make public system more accountable for the impact policies have** on racial and economic disparities. Policy makers are responsible for how well the system works, for allocating funding and deciding which families and children are served.

***Those who like this approach say:***

“Creating an effective system to meet the needs of all children and families can only be done by ensuring adequate funding and oversight through public policy.”

“The only way to serve the most vulnerable families is to have a system of public support.”

“Policies impact groups differently especially racially marginalized and economically less advantaged.”