

## Promoting Youth Well-Being: An Organizational Shift

Amelia Franck Meyer, MS, MSW, LISW, APSW & Crystal S. Peterson, MSSW, APSW

### Anu as a Permanence-Driven Organization

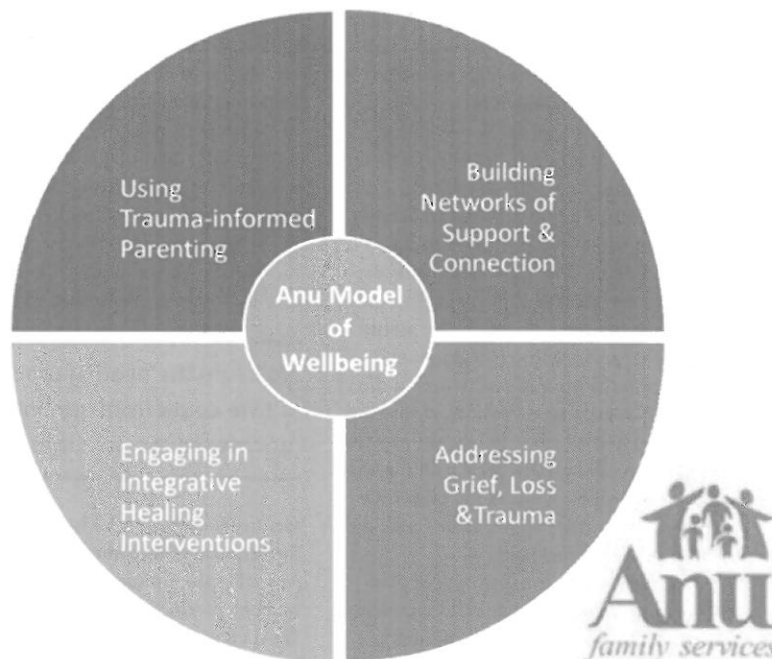
Anu Family Services is a 22-year-old non-profit child welfare agency operating in Wisconsin and Minnesota. With founding roots as an early provider of Treatment Foster Care (TFC), Anu became passionately committed to increasing youth rates of discharge to permanence. In 2006, through a partnership with the Otto Bremer Foundation and the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW), Anu was able to conduct literature reviews, analyze practice strategies based on current best practice, pilot evidence-informed models, and develop interventions that moved the discharge to permanence rate from 38% in 2006 to 70% in the last half of FY13.

Anu believes that it could reach 80% - 90% discharge to permanence rates if it was fully funded to implement its models with fidelity; however, in the current funding climate, fully funded models are unlikely to happen. This environmental reality—coupled with emerging indicators that show that youth who are placed in out-of-home care may not have better outcomes than those who remained at home in at-risk situations—presented a dilemma and some questions for Anu. If the youth are no better off, then what are we missing? Do we continue to focus solely on permanence, or do we broaden our efforts beyond permanence to ask, “Are the youth okay, and how do we know?”

### Moving Toward Well-Being

The emerging evidence that achieving permanence may not provide all of the healing that we had hoped furthered Anu's passion to begin looking at models that could provide that healing and promote youth well-being. Among these models was the Present Moment Parenting approach (Feigal, 2011) utilized by the Center for the Challenging Child (CCC) which uses Parent Coaches to teach trauma-informed parenting techniques that focus on the whole child. Anu partnered with CCC and began training all of its Permanence Specialists (TFC Social Workers) and Treatment Foster Parents in this trauma-informed parenting model. Through this work, Anu began to conceptualize “Healing Homes” which were better prepared to understand and to parent in a trauma-informed way. The Bremer Foundation funded Anu to explore the development of Healing Homes and Healing Parents and to redefine the purpose and approach of traditional foster care through partnerships with healers who were

Figure 1. Well-Being Model



attuned to trauma such as yoga instructors, acupuncturists, therapists, etc.

Further study into child well-being and healing led Anu to connect with the University of Minnesota's Center for Spirituality and Healing (CSH) through a 2012 Wellbeing Lecture Series on “The Science of Positivity” presented by Dr.

### Making the Shift

At Anu, we strongly believe in Kotter's (1996) theory that “a sense of urgency” and other resources are required to fuel any initiative. The real-life experiences of our youth and the growing industry-wide consensus that the children seem to be getting worse, not better, was all we needed to drive our sense of

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Barbara Fredrickson. Dr. Frederickson's (2009) research on positivity provided the clinical explanation for the success of the Present Moment Parenting Model and propelled Anu's relationship with CSH. Through this relationship, and in conjunction with CASCW, Anu has worked with CSH to adapt their work and research on adult well-being to that of youth well-being. Anu, CSH and CASCW continue to work in partnership to develop tools to define and measure youth well-being, in addition to developing interventions that promote well-being. While this conceptual work continued to develop and evolve, so did the interventions in our homes and in our practice.

urgency. Fortunately a grant from the Bremer Foundation provided the fuel Anu needed to launch our well-being initiative.

The first use of this funding allowed Anu to dedicate a 1.0 FTE position, divided between two staff positions. The Integrative Practices Coordinator focused on the internal shift toward well-being by leading the culture change, training of staff and foster homes, and adaptation of internal practices. The Director of Partnerships for Wellbeing focused on the external shifts toward well-being and the development of resources, relationships, and partnerships external to the organization and the recruitment of Healing Parents. It was clear, however, that this level of change