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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Next door. And who are you?

[00:00:01] **Speaker 2** Sure. Next door in Milwaukee is a foundation and education foundation. We have two major centers where we serve upwards of a thousand children, along with our our partnerships. We have 13 partnerships. So we have two major centers, 29th Street and Capital. Those are two locations. And then we also have early Head Start and Head Start grants with 13 partnerships that we have. And we also have our Homebase program where we serve, I believe, about 200 children currently.

[00:00:35] **Speaker 1** Okay. And where how does the how do you select who gets to come here? Pretty beautiful facility.

[00:00:40] **Speaker 2** It is. It is it really is based on where people live. And then if they are eligible for Headstart or early start. So that is an income based question.

[00:00:54] **Speaker 1** Okay. But otherwise, they're coming from roughly around.

[00:00:57] **Speaker 2** Absolutely. This is a community based. Yes.

[00:00:59] **Speaker 1** So in terms of the classroom that we saw this morning, is that a general classroom or what were we what were we seeing in there?

[00:01:05] **Speaker 2** Yeah, we're seeing fun. So just a wonderful classroom, an early Head Start classroom. And we stay that early head Start because that's our grant. And that was a two year old kind of a toddler classroom, and it had three teachers and a coach working in there this morning. And they are doing lean at this morning. So they you could tell they had the little vests on. And inside those little vests are these little recording devices. And they are actually recording the frequency of the interactions between the teachers and the children.

[00:01:41] **Speaker 1** So talk to me about what Lean is and then how we became a partner with what you're doing here.

[00:01:46] **Speaker 2** Leanna is an amazing program that we were actually part of a research piece about two years ago where at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, a researcher from there and a researcher from our Kat and Leanna. And we loved it so much that we made it sustainable practice. So we do Leanna specifically in classrooms with tos in them, meaning two year olds. And we focused on two year olds because as we were walking through the COVID times, we noticed kind of a dip right before our two year olds and in communication. And then as they were coming through tos into just the next couple of months, we know that that's a critical time for our children because that's actually when they start to put words together and and may start like beginning sentence structure. So this was a really important time to catch them and do more communication with them.

[00:02:44] **Speaker 1** So was Leanna a program or a group, or is it all.

[00:02:48] **Speaker 2** Leanna is actually a way it's a coaching. It's a form of coaching. And basically what we do is we collect the data from the frequency of interactions between the teachers and the child. And then we have a coach that that coaches in debriefs with the teachers around that data that is given to us through the Leanna program. And that data helps us to set goals for the teachers. And then they work a weekly on those goals. So it's really exciting.

[00:03:19] **Speaker 1** What did you see in that early in the first year or two of the program that made you feel like this is something we want to do permanently?

[00:03:27] **Speaker 2** Oh, that's a great question. We saw, first of all, teachers interacting with the Lena program, being very excited about their data, being challenged by their data, enjoying the coaching around that, the teachers sharing the information and data with for their individual child with parents and giving parents some things they could do at home to also reinforce some of that communication. We also saw for our children we saw an increase, especially in the children that really were maybe not as verbal, not as expressive. We saw an increase, a pretty significant increase in the amount of interactions. So the teachers were doing very targeted interactions with children and trying to increase that opportunity for them to be expressive.

[00:04:22] **Speaker 1** So is it it's a coaching system for the teachers. Is it more it helps the teachers understand what's going on so they can do a better job with the kids?

[00:04:30] **Speaker 2** Yes. Yes. So it's very it's informed data for our teachers. So we talk about data informed practice. This is data informed practice. So we are doing the best of data informed practice and the teachers love it. In fact, they actually enjoy even doing coaching as teams. So if they choose to be in a team, they can have that done also. And they really enjoy that because they they even get really excited about seeing how they can empower.

[00:05:01] **Speaker 1** So part of the story that we're working on looks at the broader delays that are being noticed in young children today coming out of the pandemic. I'm assuming you've identified and seen those same things.

[00:05:12] **Speaker 2** Yes.

[00:05:13] **Speaker 1** So, yes. Talk to me a little more broadly about what what you're seeing or when you first started noticing that that uptick.

[00:05:19] **Speaker 2** We noticed it. I came aboard next door, June of 2022, right in the middle of the pandemic, and started looking at the data right away. As a director of educational services, I have access to a lot of the assessments that we do and the results. And we were seeing certain areas, not it not as bad as some situations that we were hearing nationwide. We actually did pretty well through COVID. And I have to say a lot of it is because maybe we were open, we offered intensive services to. But this Lena was part of that. So we started seeing dips, especially dips in communication. So many of the teachers talked about the children being quiet. We also referenced that the teachers were being a little bit more quiet. So we were so used to having the masks on. And we really needed even when the masks came off, to get back into those habits of communicating verbally. And that was a practice we had to get back to. So this was a way that our teachers reinforced that they had to do something that they were committed to doing, and also helping our children to have that more opportunity to interact and build communication.

[00:06:34] **Speaker 1** What is the difference it can make for a child over the course of their time here and then obviously into the rest of their life? If they're if a delay isn't caught or if a delay is worked on or is allowed to remain.

[00:06:47] **Speaker 2** We know so much about that now. We know that early communication affects children's communication throughout their life, that that is connected. Language is directly connected to literacy. Literacy is the foundation of all the other academic areas that a child will get into. So if they don't have access into strong literacy skill sets, then they're really they could really significantly be impacted academically in that. And that is directly connected to everything from graduation rates to to whether or not children stay in school, whether or not they feel connected to their system in school and excited about their future. So all of that has a lot to do with that early communication. We also know that early communication in itself allows a child to feel like less frustration. So if they're able to verbalize or at least find a way to express and be understood, we have less social emotional issues. And we did see an increase in social emotional concerns, right, as as COVID was rolling out.

[00:07:59] **Speaker 1** So so, so much of this was all happening at once, that there were a lot of conspiracy theories surrounding COVID and vaccines and masks and isolation and then exacerbating the issues surrounding wealth inequality and other kind of gaps that exist already and some of those barriers. Is there a way to separate any of those out to find out what was actually happening and causing this.

[00:08:26] **Speaker 2** And in causing the communication.

[00:08:28] **Speaker 1** Some of these delays, the dips that we've been seeing?

[00:08:30] **Speaker 2** Yeah, actually, we do know because of the Lena data that has been shared with us, because we are we are one of the sites where the research was done. We do know we have a significant data pool to pull from and see that that during COVID we were directly impacted. The masking did make a significant difference as we are now seeing also the trends in children's understanding of literacy. Later on. We're also seeing that that not having it early on is making an impact. Those communication gaps are pretty significant. So we are seeing it's on nationwide, you're hearing terms like COVID babies. So we know that we are seeing an increase in social emotional challenges nationwide. We are seeing nationwide an increase in literacy issues and actually literacy dropping. That's why we came in really solidly and said we're not going to let that happen. We're going to come in strong and we're going to come in with every way we can to support and intervene prior to that happening so that our children have everything they need to succeed. And being in early Headstart and Headstart, we know that we also have situations of economic disadvantage. Our families have situations that, you know, can impact our children. And absolutely, that makes it, I think, even more credit. Recall that we take this very seriously and do everything we can to make sure our children go into kindergarten, first grade, ready to go.

[00:10:09] **Speaker 1** How much of this are you able to send home to parents so that they obviously can't do everything here? Yes, They spend most of their time at home with family.

[00:10:16] **Speaker 2** Absolutely. Quite a lot. We have strong relationships with our families. Head Start, really solid lives, always based on family and community. So we not only have a wonderful relationship with families, we have family advocates for every classroom. We have our teachers committed to connecting with the families on a daily basis. And we even have apps we have we're on Tik Tok now, Facebook. We do everything we can to connect with their families. So that's and we've been open so our families come through for most of COVID. So that's been a huge, huge piece of that. But we also have community members that come in and we really do believe that we could not do our work without the village that and the community that helps us to do our work well.

[00:11:07] **Speaker 1** All right. So I know I've got more people that are going to give me more insight from their levels. Is there anything else that you'd like to add along the lines of what we've been talking about?

[00:11:15] **Speaker 2** I think Lena is an amazing program We have. We do it in both sites in our center based, and we do it with our childcare partnerships. It is something that has been changing our a lot of our trajectories, right. A lot of our journeys. And we see a positive impact of this and want to continue that. So if anybody is considering that they'd be open to seeing how it runs, we we would be a site that that I think would be interesting to look at. Along with that, though, it's just one of the many things that we are doing to make sure that our children are ready in language and literacy.

[00:11:57] **Speaker 1** I do have one final question for you, and that is looking at the public schools and other facilities around the state that aren't as well supported, that don't have as much community support involved with it. I've heard from a lot of them that they are overwhelmed with the increased caseload, the number of other people coming in. Are they able to handle that capacity? I mean, in your estimation, what would it be like if you saw the dip? You know that these issues are here. There's an increased need, but you didn't have the capacity to to do more with those kids.

[00:12:29] **Speaker 2** It's a challenge. It is a huge challenge. We know a lot of our systems are resource depleted and and they're tired. They're tired of taking on that and not having enough. And that people say that money doesn't make a difference. It does. It makes a difference in resources make a difference and community makes a difference. And I think next door has built not just the resources, financial resources to Headstart, an early Head Start supports, and also our charter. But I think more than anything, we know that the impact that our community makes and we put in the time and effort to do that and I think not not getting down and finding, you know, being proactive about everything you can do around language and literacy is really very important. It gives gives our families the foundation of what they need for their child's future and even their future. So I think that that's really important. It doesn't have to always cost a lot of money either to do some things. I think Lena's one of those programs that's worth it.

[00:13:33] **Speaker 1** Can I get you to spell your name? Get your title?

[00:13:35] **Speaker 2** Absolutely. My first name is Tonia, Tio and y e. My last name is hamster h m nist.

[00:13:43] **Speaker 1** R All right. And title, track it. Title What You Want to be. Oh.

[00:13:50] **Speaker 2** Oh, I thought you meant. Sorry. I'm a doctor, too. Director of Educational Services.

[00:13:58] **Speaker 1** All right, Perfect. Thank you.

[00:14:00] **Speaker 2** Thank you.

[00:14:00] **Speaker 1** I didn't need your notes. I made it.