

- Jerry Milner: [00:05](#) Child welfare stands alone as a system that allows the need for its services to grow without a good-faith effort to stem the tide of children and families who need those services. Child welfare stands out in our culture as a system that focuses on picking up the pieces after something has gone terribly wrong, instead of helping families avoid falling to pieces.
- Jerry Milner: [00:34](#) Please imagine with me for just a moment, a different kind of a child welfare system. Imagine the difference it would make to parents and their children if they were able to reach out and get the help they needed before there was a crisis or a threat of removal of their children. Imagine how the quality of life for families and within communities could be improved if everyone had the concrete supports and services they needed to stay safe and healthy. Imagine the difference in the intergenerational experiences of children and families if we focused on preventing the initial occurrence of child abuse and neglect and its resulting trauma rather than on preventing it from happening again.
- Jerry Milner: [01:30](#) Imagine the difference in our child's foster care experience, if he or she could see her foster family and birth parents working closely together to meet their needs. And imagine, if you will, the difference in outcomes if every child and parent in the child welfare system had access to high quality legal representation to advocate for their needs and to insist upon appropriate and timely services.
- Jerry Milner: [02:04](#) Finally, imagine what our world would be like if every child, every family, and every community, and every individual who works to support them had what they needed to thrive and not just survive.
- Jerry Milner: [02:24](#) I do not have difficulty imagining that kind of a child and family wellbeing system. I do have great difficulty imagining the logic behind our current system because I've seen firsthand the beginnings of a re-imagined system in so many places in our country, many of which are envisioned and implemented by those of you in our audience today.
- Jerry Milner: [02:54](#) Achieving a new vision for child welfare calls for a fundamental reconceptualization of the mission and functioning of child welfare systems—nothing less. We also must recognize that the responsibility for transforming our current system into one that truly supports child and family wellbeing does not belong solely to the child protection agency. Although the agencies must be critical players, we all have roles to play in this critical effort.

- Jerry Milner: [03:29](#) I've been doing child welfare for more than 40 years, and I believe that not many things are more important than ensuring the safety and the well-being of our children, which at their heart imply the wellbeing of their parents as well. I know that you believe that as well. Nonetheless, few things are as disheartening to me as hearing child welfare administrators ask me how I expect them to engage in primary prevention on top of all they're currently doing. My response is simple. "I don't. I expect you to do it instead of what you're currently doing."
- Jerry Milner: [04:22](#) I'm brazen enough to believe that we can do it—by investing strategically and flexibly in primary prevention and creating a broad system of support for families across the board that includes housing, education, social services, health. We can reduce the intergenerational trauma experienced by so many of our families. Reduce the current burdens on our child welfare system and allow us to devote more attention to safety, to healing for those families who actually do cross the tipping point.
- Jerry Milner: [05:03](#) This National Conference comes at a critical time for our field. I believe that we can transform the way we protect and support children in this country, and that the best way to support children is to support their families. We need to shift our focus to primary prevention and to creating the conditions for strong and thriving families and communities where children are free from harm. For whatever time I have in this job or elsewhere, I will be a champion for advancing that understanding in that cause.