AMCHP 2007 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
March 3rd to 7th, 2007

Future Search: A Systems and Policy Change

Strategy for Creating Healthy Communities

RICHARD ARONSON: Great. Why don't we start? I think it's really neat that the theme – welcome to AMCHP, by the way for 2007. How many of you are here for the first time. Oh, welcome. Welcome to each of you. I hope that this is a positive experience for you and we welcome you to here. How many of you have been here five times or less? Yeah 10 times or less? Fifteen times, and twenty? Yeah I think that's twenty here. So, this is great. We have a diverse group, and the theme for the conference this year is "Healthy Communities for Children and Families", and I thought that was great because that would make a really good focus for our dialogue this morning, and it would have a really great topic to have a Future Search conference about. So, My name is Dick Aronson. You all should have handouts, and we will go through those handouts. Hi. Come right in. We're all in a circle. Great. Hi. Come on in. When you come in, be sure to widen the circle, bring a chair in so that you're part of the circle, please. Thank you. Okay. Great. So, what I'd like to do is, that we all introduce ourselves. And if you could give us your name, where you're from, and what's your particular role is, with respect to maternal and child health. And then, I guess if you can just share with us why you chose this particular workshop that would be great. So, name where you're from, what your particular role is, with respect to maternal and child health, and then why you came here. And then I'll start, and then I'll have my two graciously volunteering helpers, Betsy

and John join me in intros, and then we'll go around. Okay? My name is Dick Aronson, and I live in Maine. I have two children who are now 17 and 21 years old. And I am the maternal and child health medical director for the state of Maine. So my role, my stakeholder group would be maternal and child health leadership at the state level. And I'm here because I have been involved with Future Search, now, for about 13, 14 years, since 1993. And have had the opportunity to run many Future Search conferences, and also participate in workshops around Future Search and it excites me greatly, because it's a tremendous tool to use in our profession for bringing people together. Go ahead. Yeah, it should be.

Welcome. Welcome to all of you and I definitely want the two of you to introduce yourself too, Debbie? Welcome. Want to mention your role at North Dakota? Can you mention about the sign-sheets? Great. So we have sign-in sheets. Super. Great. By the way the grant Debbie was talking about is a grant to do a Future Search conference on the medical home in North Dakota, which is very exciting. We can talk about that. And Taylor? Can you just introduce yourself?

Great. So welcome to all of you. Prepare for a very interactive, and participatory morning. We have a really great group here. I'm already energized, and we're going to be moving around, so get ready to move around. And, you've already seen a couple of things about Future Search that are different from the usual meeting. One of them is, what?

The microphones. And, the microphones are interesting, because, anyone familiar with the Native American talking stick; talking stick, and passing it from person to person? In Future Search, every voice is important, and we listen and we honor and we incorporate every voice that we hear. So that's why, please, when you do speak, use the microphone, so that we can honor you, as well as others in the future can see this on the web. It's important. What about the arrangement of the chairs? When someone wants to speak, you can just indicate you want to speak, and we'll pass it around. What about the arrangement of the chairs, and the way we've done the room so far? Who wants to share about that? What's your observation of the way we arranged it when you came in here? Go ahead.

Right. Exactly. And in Future Search, every person has a unique contribution to offer to make whole systems change. That's really, really important.

Another aspect is we don't have any tables. Did you notice that? And this is all based – by the way I should say at the start here, the book is in the middle. Future Search was created by two extraordinary people twenty years ago. And it's Marvin Weisborgh, and Sandra Jannoff. And they send their very best to all of us today. They're with us in spirit. They are both currently in Japan right now doing a Future Search workshop in Japan. Future Search has been used all over the world in all different kinds of cultures, including Indonesia, including Sedan, including South Africa. I mean many, many different countries. And those who are involved in Future Search are part of a Future Search network, in which we share and have collegiality all over the world. So anyway,

their whole design of Future Search – I can't emphasize this enough – is exquisite. They based it on 70 to 80 years of research. On what are the conditions that enable people to work most cooperatively together, so that they honor each other and they work together in good partnership? What are those conditions? And one of those conditions are important. Circle, not having tables so that we can have eye contact with each other. And as we go through the morning you'll see more of that as well. Okay. Let me just get some water here.

There are a lot of handouts, and I'll refer to some of them as we move on. If you're here for the whole conference, please feel free to ask me at anytime for further dialogue. Okay? And again, I want to thank Betsy and John for their willingness to join me today. Thank you so much. Okay. Yeah. As you can see we did a lot of preparation, it just took an hour. But with three people, and some of you helping, it gets less. So, Future Search is really two things. So I'm going to talk a while about Future Search, and I would like you all to feel like you can ask questions and comment as we move on. One thing I would ask of you all is please use language that is as clear and as non-bureaucratic as possible. One aspect of Future Search is that in order to get a good cross section of people in organizations in the room, we have to be able to talk with each other in language that we all understand. So please refrain, if you can from technical terms that are particular to your own perspective. And please, if possible avoid using acronyms. Because every time we use an acronym that somebody in the room might not understand, what happens? What's your own experience when you hear an acronym that you don't know what it means?

If we can start out by identifying, saying your name at first too, so we can get to know each other. So language is really important. And if you hear, I want to sort of model this here. If I say something or Betsy or John, or any of us say something that you don't know or understand that's not clear, raise your hand please. And we'll clarify.

Yeah. If you're wondering, there's somebody else that's wondering also. And Future Search is very much rooted in the idea that every voice matters and that we need to have the whole system in the room to make change happen for children and families, we need to really feel like we're all included. Thank you. John?

JOHN HURLEY: I sometimes stop listening to what the speaker is saying and try to figure out what the acronym is, so it becomes somewhat self defeating.

RICHARD ARONSON: Yes. Exactly. Okay, so thank you for your attention to language. Okay, it's two things. Future Search is two things. First of all it's a set of principles and there are four of them. And those four principles as I said before, Marvin Weisborgh, and Sandra Jannoff developed those based on many, many decades of research. Mostly in the social sciences literature, which I hadn't been familiar, with until I got into Future Search. But it's exquisite in that they integrate all kinds of studies and research to examine the best way; the conditions for people to interact the best on. So it's a set of principles and you can use those principles. You already use those principles. Just by going around the room and listening to each of you, and hearing what you do, and just

getting the sense of where you're at; you're using these principles. You may not be naming them. But the challenge is to use them all the time. Use them systemically in the way we do business in maternal and child health. That's the challenge. And you can use them in every meeting that you have, in every project that you plan for, in every initiative that you have, in every grant that you write. I didn't know that Betsy is in the midst of writing grants now. Anybody else writing grants right now? Okay, that's something that we share. And, so it's really applicable across the board. And last October when we had seven sessions on Future Search at the Maternal and Health Federal State Partnership Meeting. And that came through loud and clear, that we can really be learning to practice those principles as a way of being leaders in our field. Okay. That's the first thing about Future Search. The second thing about Future Search it is a particular kind of meeting. A very unique kind of meeting, and it's a three-day meeting over a course of 16 to 18 hours. The design is constantly evolving. The recent change was from 16 to 18, to allow more time on the third day for action planning. And we'll talk about that. So Future Search is a unique kind of conference that brings together, into the room, people who have never in the same room together before. And they come around into this room for 2 ½, 3 days, and they focus on a particular task, a particular theme, a topic, a purpose. They explore their past; they look at their present. They share their aspirations for the future. They agree on common ground, and they take action on it. So, it's particular conference which involves planning, a lot of planning – and we'll explain why that's important- and it involves a follow-up as well. One of your handouts, which I believe is called "Future Search in Action". I want to make sure that everybody has that particular handout, and it's called "Future Search in Action", is that what it is? It gives

about a dozen examples of Future Search conferences that have been used around the country. These are just a sample, and when you have a chance to go over these, you'll see some of the incredible outcomes that have occurred and that we've documented on Future Search in action. The ones in the book here come from California. I'm trying to think of states. The state of Washington, we have Wisconsin, Maine, Michigan, and Montana. And I think you'll probably find when you go back to your states that Future Search has occurred. Does everybody have that handout? I just want to make sure we – it says "Future Search in Action" MCH and Public Health examples.

Thank you. Has everybody signed or are we still going around? Great. Okay. So let's go over the principles. By the way feel free to move around, because movement is good. Movement is good actually, that is part of Future Search. Actually, physically move. And here are the four principles, and if you get anything from today, it's to understand these four principles, and to begin to think about how to apply them to maternal and child health, and to having healthy communities, which is our passion. The first principle is to get the whole system into the room. And to encourage dialogue here, who would like to comment on what you think that means, to get the whole system in the room. You can get some flock; you don't have to answer immediately. Getting the whole system in the room, and we're talking, for a Future Search conference about 60 to 80 people is a good number of people for a Future Search conference.

You never can get the whole system in the room, but you're constantly asking who should be at the table to make a difference. And you can say your name first.

Don. Hi. Beautifully stated. Others want to comment on what you think that means? Getting the whole system in the room. Thank you Don.

When we talk about the whole system in the room, the point is that each of us brings a unique perspective and take on the system that we're trying to change, and it's only when we get the whole system in the room that when we can get as complete a picture of what that system looks like. And we'll get a taste of that when we do this mind map later. So when you plan for a Future Search, and usually you need to have a planning committee of about 8 to 10 people, because you want to have the planning committee reflect the diversity of a Future Search conference. The usual mix for a Future Search conference is 8 stakeholder groups in groups of eight each. And this, by the way, this is all flexible to a certain extent, but there is this structure to it is that is very clear. And those eight stakeholder groups would be identified by the planning committee who plan for the conference and decide, "Who are the people that need to be in the room for us to really take action and make change happen?" So typically, eight stakeholder groups of eight people in each group, and each of them sitting, again the room is arranged in circles of eight. Okay. The second principle is to explore the whole before acting on a part. The theory behind this is that before we can take action on a particular task or item, let's say the medical home, we need to have a shared, global understanding of what is the context. Not just within our own work of trying to improve the medical home for children. But what are the factors, what is the world in which we live that has an impact on our work? And we find that for systems change to happen that whole context is so, so very important. So at Future Search we gain a better understanding. We

realize that we only have one view, one contribution. But together we can have a sense of the whole. So, global context before local action. The third is to focus on the future and common ground, not on past problems or conflicts. And this is a very powerful principle. They're all powerful. They're much more powerful than PowerPoint, by the way. And I'll tell you; we try not to use PowerPoint in Future Search conferences. We do not have experts come and give talks. Everybody stays for the three days, that's part of the agreement. Every voice is important. Every person is an expert. Expertise is not defined by the title after your name, or the degrees after your name. But just by the fact that you're a human being, capable of doing extraordinary actions when given the conditions. Every person is an expert who comes to a Future Search, that's a really important point. Now, I have been thirty years in my work here and I've loved public health, I love pediatrics. I'm a pediatrician too. But, I have been in hundreds of meetings where I left feeling, how? Down, depleted, frustrated, lack of energy, tension. And so people enter Future Search with a lot of skepticism, because this is a history of being meetings that don't work and don't lead to action. So, one of the reasons that meetings are not effective, is because we spend most of our time trying to solve problems and resolve differences and conflicts, rather focusing on what we in fact share as common ground in our aspirations for the future. And what we discover in Future Search is that we have much, much more in common than we ever before realized. But to get there you've got to go through this whole process that we're talking about and honor all those principles. Any comments or thoughts on that third principle of the focus being on the future and on common ground? Betsy? John?

JOHN HURLEY: Well on common ground I think it's [inaudible]

RICHARD ARONSON: Right. Question? Go ahead. Just say your name please.

Great Question. Thank you. That's why the planning for a Future Search conference is so important. Because the planning committee needs to reach out. And personally, the planning committee does two things. First of all they define what the theme, what the overall purpose of the conference is going to be. And then secondly, in other words, how to frame the issue. And the second thing is who are the stakeholders. Who are the stakeholders that need to be at the Future Search? And as John just said, you want to have a diverse group of people. You want to include people that are not just the people that usually come to meetings. You want to include people who have historically marginalized. You want to be sure to include families, and that's why Family Voices, and that's why family voices and the whole movement in family involvement in our profession of maternal and child health has been so inspiring. And you want to have sectors; different sectors. And then the planning committee actually decides, you know, who needs to be at the conference; who is important to be at that conference. And then we all go out and we all speak and we make a personal contact with each person. That's why the planning has to take at least three months, so the planning for a Future Search is at least three month's. It's usually longer than that. The first one I did in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I mean we took 13, 14 months between our first gathering as a planning committee, and when the conference was held. And I can tell you that the planning itself is a change process. And reaching out to people, I remember in

Milwaukee, we realized that an important stakeholder were the Health Maintenance Organizations. I don't know where you are all, but in Milwaukee HMO's, Health Maintenance Organizations are really big. And we decided there was a Chief Executive Officer, named Larry Rambo, who had the largest HMO in Milwaukee and we felt he needed to be there. And I spent probably 2 or 3 hours of phone calls over a couple of months. He had never been to any meeting like this before. He saw no wave. How could he possibly commit three days? But he ended up coming. And, as a result of his coming there, partnerships emerged between the HMO, and the community, and families, and the Health Department. And actions occurred that were totally unimaginable before. And we had him come here last fall with a panel of 8 people from Milwaukee, and this first conference was 13 years ago. And they were still expressing their sense of, what would the word be? Almost a sense of the power of the impact of the conference on the work that they do. And in particular, Larry Rambo said to Pat McMannis, who is the Director of the Black Health Coalition there in Milwaukee, and they said, you know, "Going into the meeting we were really openly hostile to each other. We didn't even talk to each other." And as a result of the Future Search conference and the follow-up, they had a better understanding of each other and they started to work together. So, your question – it's Kristy right? - Is a really good one. Thank you.

And say your name first, please? Laura. Thank you. In fact, in New Mexico. A Future Search conference done in New Mexico, in 1997 resulted in partnerships between parents, families and the health department and the university. And resulted in dollars,

actually, new funding passed by the State Legislature for parent education, and resulted in several grants that had not been previously possible. So, one of the outcomes of Future Search is that it leverages resources better and creates partnerships that become the foundation for grants and for funding that was not otherwise possible. On the other hand, the funding issue can very much divide and polarize us, especially now. Future Search is particularly relevant now. When things are changing, when they are in flux; either at the organization level, the community level, the society level, at the federal level, Future Search is a very effective way of moving forward in the midst of change. And the final, the fourth principle is the idea, that people, when they're given the conditions, they're given the opportunities, they can do it. They can do it themselves. They don't need to be told what to do or how to do. And you know, that word early intervention, that we use? We use that word to describe a lot of programs that we do in public health. And I've used that word constantly, all the time. But when you really think about that word, intervention, how does that term go against this concept of people taking responsibility and managing their own actions together?

Name again. Exactly, exactly. So, in Future Search conferences -and we're going to go over what it looks like – is a series of activities over a three-day period. Either in small groups of about eight people each, or in the large group of 60 to 80 people. And, when we do the work in the small groups, that's all self managed. In other words, each group of eight, before they do every task, they decide on who's going to be the facilitator for that particular task; who's going to be the recorder, and all the information in Future Search gets put up on the flip charts, so by the end of a Future Search conference, you

have huge amounts of data information up there. You're going to have a reporter who will actually share what happens in your group; and a timekeeper. And that's just an example. And, so, throughout the whole conference, by the end of the conference, everybody's had a chance to be in all those roles, if they so choose. And this carries forth into everything that we do in maternal and child health; just share responsibility. Because every time that I stay quiet as a facilitator, rather then say something, somebody in the conference ends up saying that very thing. And when you say something, you take ownership of it. So, by me as a facilitator, being quiet, and letting things happen; the chance for ownership and collective action at the end of the conference increases tremendously. It's very profound observation that comes from a lot of research. So facilitation, I'm doing much more talking here today then the facilitators usually do at the Future Search conference. Okay. So does everybody have a sense of those four principles? And I'm going to just now, give you the conditions for success of the Future Search conference, or Future Search work, leadership. The first four conditions are the principles that we talked about. The whole system in the room; exploring the whole before working on a part; focusing on the future and common ground; and having self management and responsibility for the future. Here are the other conditions for success. Stay the whole time and two nights of sleep. If a person cannot stay the whole time, can't commit to the whole time, it's better that, that person not be at the conference. And there are many ways, after the conference, to reach out to partners who weren't there and to share it. And that's why documentation is so important. A public commitment to action. By the end of the conference, people are willing and ready to take action on a particular piece of the issue. And they're willing to

say that in either a smaller group or in the large group. And the conditions for the meeting have to be healthy. Good healthy food, opportunity for exercise; to move around. A room like this is pretty good. The acoustics is pretty good, you need to hear each other pretty well. The one real down side of this room is the lack of light; lack of natural light. We hold Future Search conferences in places that have a lot of natural light, and that makes a big difference in the energy level for the people and their capacity to be creative. And I'm going to get you all going real soon here. Before we move on to kind of an interactive exercise, here's how the Future Search conference is designed. As I said, it's over three days. The first day is usually a half-day that can be an afternoon, say from 1 until 5 o'clock, where you can start at noon with a lunch, and then start at 1 o'clock. It's about four hours. Two nights of sleep is important, because there's a lot to process throughout the experience. And then, so a half-day is spent, starting out with going over the past. We each have a different view of the past and we put that up on a timelines. Then we move on to the present. Then on the second day, is a full day, 8 hours, usually, and we move into the future. And we begin to identify the common ground that everyone in the conference can agree to. Now this is really an important point, and probably the most important focus of the conference. And this is not like voting. It's not like majority. Everybody in the room has to agree for something to be on the common ground board. So there are two pieces of paper. One is for common ground the other is for disagreements. And it's fine to have disagreements, but those go up on a separate list. Now, someday, it may be possible to work on those disagreements, but for now, we're just going to work on the things that we share in common as common ground. And then the final day, which I said is a half-day, but now

we’re doing more and more, until 3 p.m. And that is the day when we move from the common ground that we share as a community to the action. And we usually end up with a group with 4 or 5 work groups that identify specific aspects of an issue that they want to work on. They agree on a time to meet again. There is a coordinator of a Future Search conference who is going to make sure that, that happens. Follow-up is absolutely essential; absolutely essential to a Future Search. So that’s the agenda for a Future Search conference. There are variations on it. If you have like, a lot of people. If you like, have more than 100 people that are willing and committed to do this. This happened actually in Maine and we screwed up on it. We didn’t anticipate one conference in Maine. We didn’t anticipate such a huge response. If you have a large response there are things you can do. You can hold what are called parallel Future Search conferences. Have two of them go on at the same time, in the same location. And then at the end of the conference the two groups merge. You can have a Future Search in April, and then you can have another one in September, say? Or you can always, always at the end of a Future Search is make sure that you reach out, and to involve as many people as possible, and bring new partners to the table.