

## Transcript of Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

It's Erin Trenbeath-Murray. E-R-I-N, T-R-E-N-B-E-A-T-H, hyphen, M-U-R-R-A-Y. And I'm the Chief Executive Officer for Head Start and Community Action.

Interviewer

We are here in a Head Start classroom at Palmer Court. Tell us what goes on here at Palmer Court.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So the program here is a unique program because it's birth to five. And we serve pregnant women that have been chronically homeless and infants and toddlers that were also chronically homeless, and then preschoolers. And most of the children in this program, they reside here at Palmer Court.

Interviewer

And the Kids Count data book, I think I mentioned this when I was with you, poverty just slowly continues to go up, up, up. We'll talk about poverty for a bit in Salt Lake City and some of the programs. I'm considering a focus on poverty and two generational, helping the parent, helping the child. Let's talk about how that works here.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Sure. So in this environment in looking at intergenerational poverty it's a little easier, it's a little more transparent than say some of our other Head Start classrooms. Those parents in other Head Start classrooms aren't quite as fragile as this "at risk" population. And so they may or may not have been on assistance when they were children. It's highly likely that the families here at Palmer Court that were previously chronically homeless were on assistance when they were children, utilizing food pantries or assistance from the state. And so our work here really focuses on the parent/child bond. There's a lot of parenting trainings, a lot of modeling, a lot of coaching that goes on for appropriate parenting skills. And then we're also looking at working with the parent on how they can maintain a healthy lifestyle for their child and for themselves. How do they maintain self-sufficiency, how do they stay stable? So it's definitely a two-pronged approach between educating the child and educating and working with the parents.

Interviewer

I know this is a very vulnerable population here. How does that two-pronged approach work outside of here? A lot of people still don't understand what Head Start is. Describe what Head Start is first.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Sure. A lot of people have heard of Head Start, don't know exactly what it is. But Head Start is a comprehensive program that works primarily with preschool age children and their families on health, education, and self-sufficiency. And Head Start programs serve the poorest of the poor and the neediest of needy children in the communities that they're in. So for example, the average income for a family of four in our program is about \$14,200 a year. So it's pretty stringent, it's a pretty tight amount of economic resources to survive on. But we are a very large Head Start program, we're the largest in Region 8. We serve about 2300 children in Salt Lake and Tooele County each year.

Interviewer

So the two-pronged approach with parents and children outside of Palmer Court, how does that work?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So when our families enroll and register in the program, we're having a dialogue with them and asking them, "Do you remember being on benefits as a child? Do you remember going to a food pantry?" We would love to get to the point someday where we can share data with the state, with their intergenerational work in the Department of Workforce Services so we can target families to help assist them. But for now we're doing it in-house and looking at the highest risk families that we have to try to make sure that the services and the referrals and the follow-up are taken to the Nth degree and that there's some really deliberate and purposeful intervention that's happening with that family whether it's to flee a domestic violence situation, to become sober, to work with a family who might have a mother or father who is incarcerated. So when you look at the intergenerational poverty approach, Head Start is not about taking the child and putting him in an amazing preschool program and fixing him, and then sending him home. It's about how do you facilitate the parent getting on the path to self-sufficiency? So the parent can take care and sustain their family and the child has a fighting academic and social chance when they get to kindergarten.

Interviewer

And for the child to succeed the parent has to have good executive functioning skills. So they have to be wired to make good choices. What programs do you have to help parents with their choices, emotions and stress and all those things they're experiencing when they are struggling financially?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Right. So one of the beautiful things that I love about Head Start is that we have, and we do offer a wide variety of classes such as Love And Logic for parenting skills or Sustaining Healthy Marriages or Financial Literally or Guidance Techniques -- how to appropriately discipline a four-year-old when they're cussing and swearing or biting and how do you deal with that. And when those

classes are held in our schools they're huge attendance, they're very well attended. And then we have the other part that is the self-sufficiency piece. We offer a lot of adult education classes: ESL, GED, our sauté culinary arts program. So we do a lot of partnering with Salt Lake Community College and University of Utah to get our families from an adult education point of getting their GED to then how do you get a Pell grant or how do you apply for Salt Lake Community College to begin adult education or an applied technology center? So that's, we approach it both from the self-sufficiency side, but then there's also this other piece that's harder to quantify and that's the, as you refer to it, the executive functioning, about making good decisions, about choices for parenting, choices of where you're using your financial resources for a cell phone or for food, you know, and helping them kind of weigh those choices out so that ultimately they continue on making good choices for their family.

Interviewer

And then it goes further to what has been labeled, "toxic stress." Can you talk about that? Do you refer them to places that can help them, or how does it work?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So Head Start primarily is referral, does referrals for families. So we don't do it in-house. The children, for sure, especially for traumatic situations, we work with the Children's Center, they are a good partner of ours and a lot of the children at the Children's Center are in the Head Start program. And they're well-equipped and work really well with the mental health of the children. The adults, we work with Valley Mental Health or we have private providers that we also set up families with for counseling. And you know, that's just such a critical piece is this cycle of a lot of times of trauma and chaos and it's just one hospital stay and then the next thing you know, because of the hospital bills they weren't able to pay their rent, and so then all of the sudden they've been evicted, and then they're trying to find new housing and because they're looking for new housing they missed part of their time at their job. And so then they lose their job. And it's very -- it is toxic and it is circular and it's really hard to break that chaos sometimes.

Interviewer

And it really comes down to this program is about the child, really. But when they're so young, zero to five, we have to talk about the parents. So when it's toxic like that, research has shown developmentally it affects the child. Do you know about that at all?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So you know, there's a lot of really interesting research about the neurons and the synapses that takes place in a child's brain, especially before the age of three. And the brain being so pliable. But the interactions that a child is having with a warm and caring and interactive adult, an adult that's reading to them, an adult

that's talking to them, singing to them, cognitively pushing them. Even at two, having, you know, singing *Old McDonald* and all of that. Each time those interactions happen then synapses occur in the brain and it strengthens and builds and builds. And happens oftentimes with really high-risk families are the parents are so -- I don't want to say distracted, but their demands of getting food on the table and making sure that the utility bill, the heat is still on -- those stresses are so overwhelming to the parent, that really the last thing they're thinking about is singing *Old McDonald* to their child. They love them dearly but their critical choices that they're making about their family is different than I made with my family. And that stress level just can be overwhelming to them.

Interviewer

But the children can get a lot of that in Head Start?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Exactly. We're the supplement and we work very hard, stabilizing the family at the same time, helping them to understand how they can engage with their child and things they can do on a daily basis -- sorting the clothes to go into the washer. Put all the reds together. Put all the blues together. We give a lot of hands-on examples in our homework that we send home every week with the parent to do with their child. They're going to be going to kindergarten next year and they're going to be expected to be doing homework with their children and reading to their child every night and going to parent teacher conferences and taking an active role. And so our job is to prepare them and get them, the parents, as ready as it is to get the children ready for that leap into public school.

Interviewer

And that is the piece that really sets apart as well as the poverty piece, sets it apart from public schools, is that parents have to participate?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Parents, we highly encourage them. They're not mandated to participate, but it's to the point, the families so much want their child in Head Start. And we end the school year about 800 children every year that don't get in. And those kids will go straight into kindergarten without possibly ever seeing a doctor or a dentist or having this preschool experience. And they're going into our public kindergartens and then the kindergarten teachers are right there at base level. So with our parents, it's a culture. It's a culture and it's an expectation that you will be involved in your child's educational and social -- and because every family has a case manager in Head Start which is obviously, that does not happen in Title 1 preschools or private preschools -- every one of our families has someone who is there every day saying, "How was the doctor's appointment? Were you able to get her in? Okay, do you remember you have a dentist appointment for her next week? Did you have any questions about WIC on the application?" And so someone is really guiding them and trying to help launch them into self-sufficiency and starts with a lot of baby steps at the beginning of the year,

and they, just like their children, they slowly kind of outgrow us and then they're standing on their own.

Interviewer

So there's 2,000 in the program, 800 are on the waiting list. What's going on here, we need more Head Start? Real estate?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So Head Start in Utah does not receive any state funding. And unfortunately, we are one of seven states in the country that does not receive state funding. It's a shame because we have so many children that eagerly want, and their parents want them to have this opportunity and this experience, but we are completely federally funded for our slots and then we have wonderful, generous donors, private donors from the community that contribute for unique needs that we have in the program. But more than anything, if I had a wish, it would be for our state to recognize that early childhood education not only is a priority in our state, but the neediest of needy children should rank up on that priority list. And our state stepping up and providing those classrooms and those opportunities for those children on the waiting list are critical. And I think I shared with you that one year we did receive state funding a few years back for 17 children. And someone, a legislator said to me, "You know, Erin, did it really make any difference? I mean it wasn't very much money and you only got 17 kids." And I relayed back to him that it's just like the star fish story. And there was one little kiddo that had been locked in a closet for three days and his mother and his grandmother both had hepatitis C and the boyfriend had locked the little boy in the closet. The mother knew she couldn't take care of him during the day and so she enrolled him in Head Start. And that child, being subjected to that type of abuse and that type of environment, it was -- it's indescribable, it was a lifesaver for that child, literally, to be able to be one of the lucky 17 that got into Head Start that year. But there's still another 700 and something that didn't, and should've had the opportunity.

Interviewer

Why should the community care? Why should this be an issue for the community?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

You know, I have had the profound experience of being involved in Head Start and it's made such an impact on my life. It has made me a better community member, it has made me more charitable, it has made me more aware of the economic impacts in my community, it makes me more savvy about my choices of charity giving and financial commitments that I have. And I think that's true for the entire community. Your child may not have been in Head Start, but those children will be in our children's kindergarten classrooms. Those families live in our communities and shop in our stores. And it's just good for all of us. It's a good economic boost for the entire community to not have people in poverty. And when you can give them that little nudge over the tipping point, seems like

an easy solution to me.

Interviewer

Why doesn't the state of Utah fund Head Start?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

You know, I think that there's two primary reasons why our state has opted not to fund it. We have such demands in our public education system financially and to fund the cost per child that is necessary for K through 18 and actually kindergarten not even being mandatory by the state, the precious resources that we have go to those grades. But we've also enjoyed some great economic years that other states haven't. And we know that the earlier we invest the bigger the payoff is in the long run for reduction of crime and reduction of teen pregnancy and incarceration rates. So it behooves us for sure to have a pay for success model and look at where our investment in early on. And the second reason I believe is just that there is a cultural feel and determination about when young children should be in a school setting and those are very personal and deeply held values. But I believe our community is recognizing that high income people have their children in preschool, middle income people have their children in preschool, and the same opportunity should be afforded to low income people.

Interviewer

And what would you say to those who believe that mothers should stay at home in all those socioeconomic tiers?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I think that you know, my belief system is certainly different than other people's belief systems. I think the reality is you can't have it both ways. You can't say people should be working and so they're not receiving benefits. And then say you can't be working, you need to be in the home. In this day and age it just economically does not work out, it does not balance out to have your child remain in the home with a parent means the other parent needs to have a substantial income. They're supporting three or however many. But in this day and age it takes both incomes, especially when you're not making a livable wage, when you're making eight, nine dollars an hour. Where to afford a home with a livable wage is \$14.75 an hour. So when you're making \$8.50, \$9.00 an hour, you're juggling each month what should I pay this month? And if one of the parents is not working it just can cause a real economic disadvantage to the family.

Interviewer

So beyond five. So when they go into kindergarten, do you follow the child? There has got to be a way to track what's going on at home too. Are they just out of the program?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So up until this point, till recently, last couple of years it has been that. Head Start is federally funded. They only fund us for that year. You cannot use Head Start dollars for anything beyond Head Start services. So you certainly could not use Head Start dollars to track children or to follow families. With private money, you can. And so with some of our new incoming private donations that we've been receiving, we're setting up a model -- we have not launched it yet -- but we want to work with families beyond preschool and be in touch with those families and provide case management support into kindergarten or first grade. Are they still accessing a medical home for their child? Do they have any questions about filling out applications online for employment? And just taking it a little bit further. The child's academic success, with Salt Lake School District, we do have a wonderful agreement with them and they're tracking our children for us and they're giving us reports each year of how they're comparing against their peers, and they're doing very well. And so we can track our children in Salt Lake District and we're hopeful, with the new initiatives of House Bill 96 and the initiatives at the legislature that we can move forward with a pay for success model and do a better job of tracking kids to third grade and beyond.

Interviewer

So you've received HB 96 funding?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

We have. We have. We've received House Bill 96 funds for our program.

Interviewer

Is Head Start considered quality child-care? That's a big thing right now. What is quality child-care? Obama's saying we need to all invest in high quality preschool.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Well, I think that there is, for us, there's a big differentiation, we don't consider Head Start child-care. There is some very high quality child care programs in our state which we just applaud them for the work that they do and they're really caring for children so that there can be a strong workforce. And those children are typically there --

Interviewer

Child care or preschool, is it all the same, day care? Child-care? Preschool? Are they all considered the same thing?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

No. I wouldn't say they're considered the same thing. Child-care works to assist families who are in the workforce and they need assistance with their children, typically from very early in the morning until evening hours. And there are some amazing, very high quality child-care programs in our state. And then there are

often preschool programs that are typically three hours -- two, three hours a day and that, lot of folks have their children in preschool for a social or academic benefit. The Head Start program is a preschool model, more focusing for the child on the academic and social benefit, but then there's a full case management and a health component, the mental health, and all of that that's very unusual and not in a typical preschool program.

Interviewer

What is the role of the teacher?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So the Head Start teachers, our teachers all have bachelor's degree in early childhood education. And the focus really is to have them academically ready for kindergarten. We do pre and post assessments, we do tracking children with child outcomes. But their job is to have those children ready to go and on the best possible playing field they can to enter kindergarten.

Interviewer

Why do some of the community feel like Head Start fails children and families?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I think that folks in the community that are relying on old data, old studies, the fade-out effect, they like to refer to. The most recent data and the changes since 2001 and the approach of how Head Start teachers are deliberately and purposefully teaching the children. The new studies that have come out from New York and Mississippi are not showing a fade-out effect, and are showing hands-down these huge gains these children are making. I can speak mostly to our program because I'm familiar with it, but 92 percent of our children left our program this past May academically on level for kindergarten. So I know we're doing what we need to be doing to have our kids ready for our public schools.

Interviewer

What do you want people to know about Head Start? Any myths that you hear out there that you want to correct right now?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

***I think the biggest myths that we've talked about a little bit are that Head Start is child care and that Head Start doesn't make an impact. And in Salt Lake nothing could be further from the truth. Both of those are completely opposite. It's an academic and social preschool program to have kiddos ready and our kids are leaving on a very strong footing and we're very proud of how they're approaching their kindergarten experience.***

Interviewer

Lets talk about p overty and families. Define the poor versus the working poor.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

The poor versus the working poor. Certainly each have their own trials and challenges that are unique. The working poor who are constantly juggling and the stress of what that is like for a mother or father that are doing the best they can. And they may be receiving some benefits but they're right on that tipping point and they're still able to financially maintain their family to some degree. They may receive one or two benefits but they're just about there. But the poor that are the most disenfranchised and are really desperate, their challenges are so complex I can't even wrap my head around what that would be like. And I don't think you could unless you have been in that situation of complete loss of faith and hope and you're frustrated and no one cares. I don't know how you would begin to pick yourself up to move forward. It would be quite, quite challenging.

Interviewer

And that is the poor.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

And that is the poor.

Interviewer

So they're dealing with housing issues, they're dealing with --

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

The poor are dealing with certainly housing issues, a lot of doubling up, staying with family members until a family member gets tired of having them there, and then they get bumped to another household and that doubling up cycle continues. And they can't get first or last month's rent together to move into an apartment. Or it is embarrassment of getting food from the food pantry several months in a row. There's a lot of waiting in lines. I've really noticed that even with our services, too much waiting in lines--waiting for assistance for utility assistance or waiting in line for food. My day is so busy and so packed it just -- I don't know how you would have a full-time job and need to get food from the food pantry if your child was hungry. How would you wait in line and leave your job for an hour to get a box of food? So those kinds of challenges --

Interviewer

Transportation --

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Transportation. All of that. Yeah, the logistics of getting around, the hours of operation. We've just recently adjusted our hours for our food pantries and heating assistance offices. We're going to start being open at night and on weekends because eight to five does not cut it. If we want them to be self-sufficient then it's contrary to what we're asking them to do.

Interviewer

It makes life easier for them, at least getting their food. What don't we know and what should we know about the working poor?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I think what we know, Utah is a very industrious state. Very hard working. Work ethic is a high value here. So I think there is a strong value system and a way that people can empathize with the working poor in that regard. That working poor are doing it all. Somehow they are managing and juggling and doing it all. So I think that that is something that our community knows and understands and appreciates. They appreciate that effort. I think what they don't know is that they're underpaid and so they're having to work three times as hard as I am. Five o'clock comes, I'm going home. And I may work on some projects tonight at home, but I'm not going to Wendy's to go work the night shift and then get up tomorrow morning to go work in a factory and then at three o'clock go work at, you know, a major retailer. That's what maybe the public doesn't fully understand and that they're working two and three times as much as I am and they're underpaid dramatically. And so it's just trying to tread water all the time.

Interviewer

So give them a working wage and tax breaks. Can you talk about that, what you think needs to happen?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I think what needs to happen is that minimum wage needs to be raised for individuals in our community. As I mentioned earlier, \$10.10 is often referred to for the minimum wage. For housing, to be able to have a livable wage and maintain housing is about \$14.75. And even that, to pay for housing and food and utilities, you know, you got to make sure you're savvy and budgeting correctly. So I think that what our state could reconsider and think about is if we're going to raise the overall economic landscape of our community, what does that look like for people that are making so little.

Interviewer

Doug Goldsmith, he asked me to ask our audience why we're afraid of the poor? Why are people afraid of poverty?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I thought that was a great question. Why are people afraid of the poor? I think it's unknown. I think it is such a small percentage of people compared to our population that it's likely that parts of our population don't know anyone living in poverty. So that unknown factor -- and I think there's some biases. You know, we all grew up with biases and so you have fear, you have unknown, and you have biases. And so I think that is why it's easier for people to not recognize that there are poor. I didn't recognize that there were poor when I was in graduate school and knew a little bit about Head Start and didn't know very much. I taught

at a private school. And I went to a Head Start classroom and I watched a child act out a drive-by shooting and he shot all the babies in the housekeeping area. And it wasn't like random play. It was very deliberate. It really sent chills down my spine. And then I found out that his cousin had been killed the week before in a drive-by. And that was the first time I realized, wow, like right here in Salt Lake, I didn't realize that we had that kind of trauma here. I didn't realize we had poverty here in Salt Lake. And that was really life-changing for me. But that kind of situation could be incredibly scary to a lot of people and that could be why they don't want to see it or recognize it.

Interviewer

And also the recession, so many people, middle class people lost so much so quickly that others could fear they're going to be in that group.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I kind of thought, I remember telling people in 2008, when everything was gloom and doom and a mess and we were looking at our rising numbers and how do we deal with this swell of population that never in their life thought they would be using a food pantry. They did everything right. You know, they went to school, they got a job, they had a house. And then everything was coming undone. And I thought I'm hopeful that those people that have had this experience, they are going to bounce back. They do have support systems, they do have an education, they have jobs on their resumes. It's very likely that many of those people, if the vast majority don't return to the workforce. And I hope that they will remember this experience for the rest of their life and be an advocate for the poor and vote for people who are advocates for the poor and consider giving charitably to the non-profit community because of that life experience that they had. So if anything, I'm hopeful that that comes out of it.

Interviewer

Have you felt that yet?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Not yet, but I'm hoping. I don't know, it's hard to -- I haven't had anyone come forward and say, "I was really struggling in 2008 or 2009 and I want to give back." I haven't had anyone being willing to step forward. But we just had our gala last Friday and the generosity was ridiculous. I just was in tears. I could not believe, I've never seen anything like it from our community and from their giving perspective.

Interviewer

It's something Utah does very well.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Right. They do. They do.

Interviewer

What are the effects of poverty on babies and children?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Oh, well, **the** effects of poverty on babies and children is substantial obviously with young, young children. We look to their health as their indicators for their cognitive development, their social development. So we're watching for red flags. We're watching for developmental milestones and when a child's not getting proper nutrition or if a child has been exposed to substances while he or she was in utero. If they're not having well child checks and we're missing things like vision problems or hearing issues. Abuse. Not being seen by a doctor for fear of that the doctor noticing a sign of abuse. And then dental is a really big one. A lot, not, gosh, the vast majority of our children don't see a dentist till the year they come to us in preschool. And they have bottle rot and they haven't had their teeth looked at or taken care of for the first four years of their life. So all of those things that often seem natural to someone in our community that you go to your well child check-ups with the baby. You take your prenatal vitamins, you're seeing your doctor at the prescribed times, your child is getting well-child checkups, you're getting immunizations, you're getting them in to see the dentist for the first time. That's not happening. And then they come to us and we got to play catch-up real quick, and educate the parents on why this needs to happen and why this needs to take place. And a lot of times in their mind, they're like, well my baby's not sick so why would I go to the doctor? And they don't understand the implications of not having well-child checks to look for developmental milestones that might have been missed like rolling over or tracking an object. And then we're just dealing with special ed issues and other issues that are more costly in the future.

Interviewer

And the psychological part, the toxic stress that's going on in those struggling homes and what that's doing to the child developmentally, you see that as well?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Oh, for sure. The children, it's very interesting. You know, children are brutally honest for one, which I love. They're also a little tabula rasa, little bit of a blank slate. And they're absorbing these influences that are all around them. So if they're witnessing a domestic violence situation and they're three and they're watching their parents engage in a physical dispute, if they're four and they're watching a substance abuse situation, you know, they're young, but they see it. They feel it. And the ramifications are often really hard to see. It may not happen immediately, it may be three months from then and the child starts acting out or wetting the bed or hurting or harming their pet. And that's when we call the Children's Center and do a referral.

Interviewer

How do families access services and information?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

So every family has a case manager and once the needs are identified from that family of what the family's strengths are and what their needs are, then the family advocate makes referrals. So it could be to get a GED and then we'll give them a list. So Horizonte, Granite Peaks will offer a GED. And so we'll figure out with that family what they're trying to grow in, and then that family advocate makes sure -- not only, they don't just give them a piece of paper and say here's the referral, go ahead and call them. It's a relationship and they talk to them the next day. "Were you able to call? How did it go? Did you get your appointment? What did they say? Do we need any follow-up?" So they really coach them all the way through it, getting their referrals.

Interviewer

That's great. Every family that comes in that says we're struggling, help us. They're assigned.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Yup, every single family, not even ones -- I mean every family. And sometimes they don't open up until around the Christmastime period and then we realize, you know, when you're thinking about what food am I gonna put on the table, how am I going to get food? And they're living in such a day to day survival mode, then all of the sudden it's a week before Christmas and they realize I don't have any money, how am I gonna get something for my child? And that's oftentimes when they come forward and then we'll be able to not only help the child certainly if they have holiday needs, but then it kind of opens the door, the family advocate and the client -- the client starts trusting the family advocate more and then says, you know, actually, can you help me, I'm trying to get out of, you know, a domestic violence situation or I'm trying to figure out what my options are here or you know, and that's when they kind of open up.

Interviewer

What are policies to lift families out of poverty? What are policies that you would like to see that aren't there now? What can help the community lift them out of poverty? The working poor?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I think most of the working poor are accessing services through Department of Workforce Services. I think the administrative rules that are developed outside of the legislative session--I think that can eliminate the bureaucracy of waiting, of duplication of filling out applications for services. Doing things like staying open at different hours, being available on weekends, rethinking about if the working poor are working, and we're trying to help them keep going with this momentum, then let's not just be open 8 to 5. So I think it's more not about a specific policy, I think it's about a mindset. It's more about our cultural approach to

acknowledging and accepting and almost embracing that we have people in poverty and as a community, what can we do to uplift. To, as a cohesive group, how are we going to move our community forward and we're not going to leave anybody behind? I think it's more that than this specific policy or that specific policy.

Interviewer

And why is it is a community issue? The families, the children specifically, why is it a community issue, poverty?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I think it's a community issue of poverty specifically because children in poverty are not going to score as well on exams. They're going to be disrupting classrooms oftentimes. There's behavioral issues. They're dealing with stress. So those conditions and elements affect the other children in the classrooms as well and their academic and social development. So just from an educational perspective alone, we should have an investment that we want all of these children to be moving in the same direction together. It's very challenging as someone who was a kindergarten teacher to have a handful of students that demand a lot of time and energy because they're so far behind. That does not help the other 90 percent of the children in the classroom so it behooves us already to have those kiddos together and on grade level. It helps the community has a whole with the parents, back to the economic stability of our community. We want them working and we want them making healthy and stable choices so that our community is stronger as a whole. So it's good for us if families are stable and self-sufficient. We just need a little push and a little help to get them there.

Interviewer

Does where families live matter?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Oh, absolutely. For sure. Where families matter in this community matters.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Where families live in this community does matter. It depends on the neighborhood, the ZIP code, where there is some very interesting statistical information about health and wellbeing, economic security. I heard some interesting work that was presented at the county healthy summit from a professor at BYU that could identify by ZIP code the life expectancy of individuals and with some comparative information about health care, habits, health habits. And they all correlated to the poorest of poor neighborhoods and communities in Salt Lake County..

Interviewer

Can you dispel any myths about the poor, that they're lazy and don't want to work, etc.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

I think the myths about the poor are that they're lazy or don't work and what we see day in and day out are people doing everything they can to financially support their families. We see very difficult choices -- food or heat. People ask me, "Do your families sign up for a lot of the budgeting classes?" But when you don't have any financial resources, there's nothing to budget. You're more trying to juggle how do I keep this utility on this month and then how do I get that utility on next month. There isn't a pot of money that's enough for them to even pay 30 percent of their income for housing and then a portion for food, and a portion for utilities, let alone a car. That's, you know, just over the top. So I think that myth is there and what we see is people working two and three jobs, or going to school and working at nights and just trying to make the American dream. Just trying to live the dream. But it's not that easy.

Interviewer

What about single mothers? Are you seeing that they're caring additional burdens?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Single mothers make up about 39 percent of our population in our program. And they are -- in my Head Start program. Is that right, 39? And they are -- so they're challenged with okay, so culturally in our community, I'm not supposed to be a single mother. But I am a single mother and I have these three babies that need me. But they also need food and they need shelter. So I need to work to be able to have those things for them. So I just have the utmost respect, just the utmost respect for single moms. I don't know how they do it all, special when they have little ones. And there's a certain element I think of women and mothers, maybe a little guilt. I know I feel it, that I can't be everything and do all things for my children. And I think that really be challenging to be stretched so thin.

Interviewer

There was a single mom we were talking with and she has a pretty good job and she drops them off at a day care, that has some of the House Bill 96 money and she's glad that they're there. But she says, "I'm afraid if I make more than I make, I don't qualify for those services."

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Right, for child-care.

Interviewer

Can you talk to that? People don't understand that issue... that they're in this place, the coverage gap etc...

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

No man's land. I don't know. So there is an interesting dilemma oftentimes, especially for single moms where I actually had this situation with someone who was an office manager for us. And she did not want to accept a small raise. It was \$.50 an hour, because it would disqualify her for child care benefits. The cost of child care can be astronomical as those of us that have ever paid for child care know. It could be a thousand a month for an infant. And so a \$.50 an hour raise is not going to make it worth your while. And when you're trying to balance your life and you want to move forward and be self-sufficient, but the system almost penalizes you if you do. You'd either have to make a huge leap in your income, but there isn't a really smooth transition to get to that place of being self-sufficient. It's a little tricky, especially if you're in school. If you're in school and working, there's just all kinds of interesting dilemmas that make it a lot trickier than people think.

Interviewer

She felt trapped. And she wants to go back to school. It takes a village to raise a child.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

It takes a community to invest in their neighbors and grow their communities.

Interviewer

And why should people invest in their neighbors? Some people don't care about their neighbors. We know those people.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Yeah. Investing, helping folks understand -- those that don't altruistically want to invest in their neighbors may also recognize though that it impacts their quality of life as well. When crime goes down, when communities are economically healthy, when there's political stability. The community is healthy overall, that also benefits them individually. So if you can't do it because you're altruistic for others, you can even see that ultimately it helps you in your own family by investing in people that are of all socioeconomic levels.

Interviewer

What are we doing well and what could we do better?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

In Utah? What we're doing really well in is I think economic opportunity and economic growth. I think we could do better in higher education and adult education and certainly we could do a lot better in investing in early childhood education.

Interviewer

Which we're starting to do, right?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

We're starting to do. We had three, I believe three initiatives at the legislature this year, three bills. House Bill 96 passed, which we were thrilled to see happen. And I think it's Utah's first very strong step towards this model of if we invest early it saves us money not 20 years from now, it saves us money like in three years, three years later. So I think that the public and the legislature are starting to recognize that there is some real economic benefits to investing in young children and it's the right thing to do.

Interviewer

And has the Goldman Sachs model been three years so far?

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

Nu-uh.

Interviewer

I'm going to read this to you. It says so much really.

*When children are nurtured and well cared for, they have better social emotional and learning outcomes. Parents struggling with financial hardships are more prone to stress and depression which can interfere with effective parenting. These findings underscore the importance of two-generation strategies that strengthen families by mitigating their underlying economic distress and addressing the well-being of both parent and children. Where families live also matters. When communities have strong institutions, the resources to provide safety, good schools and quality support services, families and their children are more likely to thrive.*

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

That's very good. Who wrote that?

Interviewer

This is in a two-generation mechanism book I received from Karen Crompton.

Erin Trenbeath-Murray

That's very good.