

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #3 Transcript – Greg Abell

Marshall: IEP and IFSP meetings represent critical opportunities for parents and schools, early intervention providers, to sit down and develop a shared vision about a child and their educational program. You know, do you have thoughts about how those moments can be most advantageously used? How much time do you have?

Greg: Yeah, I think it's, it's not that they're the critical, I think you used the term, they are the primary contacts. I mean in special education we have this initial process, we identify kids with special needs and we go through the original identification process and once we're done with that we put them into this system which is really couched as an IEP that says, okay this is a child who needs specially designed instruction and there's a group of you adults who need to get together and form a team to address that need on an ongoing basis and so for me that's sort of the other real focus for me professionally in the year coming forward is that. You know, one of the questions that came up in Washington, is when we were implementing IEP meeting facilitation a group of us were talking about that and we said well you know IEP meeting facilitation is a great idea, however, for many of us we think the IEP process is in fact broken and so to really overlay facilitation on what is fundamentally a broken system it's, you know, sort of a Band-Aid approach. And I'm not saying IEP facilitation doesn't add value, it adds clear value, we've got to move upstream and I think that for many of us the frustration for me is and I was with the district in another state a couple of years ago and we were having dinner and one of the people at the table was lamenting that the number one metric they were being given for a good IEP is that it be legally defensible and I'm just going, I don't think that was the intent of the process, I don't think the intent of an IEP team is to create a legally defensible document and in fact if that's our goal then we've actually created a system, in my mind, that's fundamentally couched in fear. I'm afraid of you, you're afraid of me, I don't trust you, you don't trust me, so we're going to create a system that operates and sort of acknowledges and just says that's okay and I'm going, that's not okay because if in conversations of fear there's no possibility for conversations of innovation and to me, specially designed instruction fundamentally is about innovation but if I'm afraid to talk to you to float ideas to

say in some cases, 'I'm really not sure what to do, what do you think?', we're not going to have those conversations. So I think that one of our biggest challenges is that the fundamental context in which special education is designed and considered and developed is in that context and I think that we've got to revisit or rethink the entire process. Not that we get rid of compliance, compliance is essential, I think it's important but we've got to begin to shift some of the attention back to how do we create convers, how do we restructure the conversation that fundamentally is about innovative thinking. How do we shift the conversation that says you know we're really talking about a complex issue here? This isn't simple, it's not complicated, it's complex, we're talking about a child. And even though this child may look like other children, this child is unique and that whole idea has somehow been lost. So I think that, there's a need fundamentally, I think, to go back and revisit the idea of collaboration. You know, we create, we do a lot of work around collaboration and say you're going to create a team and you're going to collaborate. Oh and by the way, we're not going to tell you how to do that, and by the way most of you've never really done that effectively. So, I'm sort of floating around the question, the answer to the question is I think that's where we really need to focus our energy and I think the energy is not in, in continuing to look at resources that support that effective process but also in looking at the CADRE Continuum moving upstream and saying, let's begin to look at what's happened to that process and I think many of us would say that process is not what we want it to be. You know that process has become something that is really out of integrity with where we want it to be and you know, coming back to the conversation we were having earlier we're sort of at the effect of that process and I think our choice is let's be at cause of bringing that process back into integrity with what it was intended to be – a group of adults with diverse experience, divers perspective and say let's come together and talk and let's leverage that thinking and let's leverage that thinking into new learning so that we can do good things for kids. As opposed to let's make sure we've completed the 35 page document complete enough so that we are squeaky clean. So...I don't know if that answers the question, but I think that's really where we think we need to go and begin looking at it because that's fundamentally where it all happens, is in that context