Through Vivian’s Eyes: Supporting Maternal Well-Being Then and Now – A cautionary Call to Action

In the 1980’s when the media demonized ‘crack mothers’ as selfish, uncaring & neglectful of their ‘no hope’ babies, Vivian was a major proponent of a Call to Action for these underserved mothers, espousing that those referred to as ‘crack-mothers’ love their babies, that they play a critical role in a child’s emotional - social development and well-being, and the service system needs to proactively support the mother’s emotional and social health. Shelters caring for the hundreds of babies removed from mothers at birth started increasing outreach that would support mothers & mother-infant engagement until reunification.  In the 2020’s there is another critical need for a Call to Action to ensure the well-being of our mothers who are caring for babies. The mutual responsiveness between mother and child may be in jeopardy if mother is dealing with negative life circumstance, such as financial hardship, racial discrimination, social isolation, or depression that we know affects 10% of all mothers in their child’s first year and affects 25% of mothers who live below the federal poverty line.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will

• Appreciate the significance of Vivian’s Call to Action Leadership espousing that “crack mothers” were mothers with promise in a time when their incarceration was discussed nationally.

• Review the value of mutual responsiveness between mother and child as the foundation for healthy social, emotional and behavioral development.

• Understand the roles of racial discrimination, financial hardship, social isolation & depression on maternal well-being and, when unaddressed, its potential impact on child development.

• Appreciate the need to change years of “Food for Thought” to “Food for Action”

BIO

Marie Kanne Poulsen, PhD is Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine, USC and is Chief Psychologist of the Division of General Pediatrics at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. She has worked extensively with service delivery, program development, research, and policy addressing the needs of vulnerable infants and young children and their families. Her work centers on supporting families to build resilience in young children at-risk due to biological and psycho-social circumstance, including developmental disabilities, chronic illness, perinatal substance exposure, maternal depression, out-of-home placement, domestic violence and the stresses of poverty. Currently, she has a Governor’s appointment as Chair of the State Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention.

Dr Poulsen was an invited participant at the Surgeon General's Workshop on Violence and Public Health, the National Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Summit, and the 1999 White House Conference on Mental Health. She has presented internationally in Amsterdam, Kyoto and Ra’anana, Israel.