Jen Chong Jewell - Dreaming Big is an Act of Resistance, and When We Dream Big Together, We Can Get to Liberation for All of Us

Carrie Basas: [00:00:00] Welcome to Rooted in Washington, a podcast about family engagement from roots of inclusion. I'm your host, Carrie Basas, and my guest today is Jen Chong Jewell. Welcome Jen.

Jen Chong Jewell: Thank you, I'm so excited to be with you.

Carrie Basas: I haven't seen you in forever and this whole thing has felt like Reunion City.

It's been nice.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes. I'm digging it.

Carrie Basas: I also feel like, I know we weren't babies, but I did feel like we grew up a lot as moms who are advocating for our kids, and then I felt thrown into that advocacy space, and I've always assumed that you were thrown in too. I see you post a lot about your son, and I know that you've always encouraged him to dream big, and I was just wondering, can you share a little bit about your journey?

Jen Chong Jewell: Absolutely. And it's wild now, right? Because our kids are teenagers [00:01:00] and yeah, they were so much younger back in the day. So I think now as I reflect, I've always encouraged Gabriel to dream big because my desire to dream big started when I became a parent. I became a parent later in life, and so I had a lot of hopes and dreams when I was able to have Gabriel and also.

I'm a daughter of an immigrant and so that's been instilled in me to like dream big for not only my life, but I would pass that on to my kiddo. And when he was born, it became pretty clear that he had a lot going on medically, and in the early days it became also clear that he would have a lifelong disability.

So what that told me was that as a parent, [00:02:00] I needed to step it up and learn all I needed to learn. Because growing up in public schools and stuff, I knew enough to know that systems don't always serve. Children and families? So when it was clear Gabriel had a disability, I knew that it was not gonna be a given.

That he would have opportunities and the ability to be encouraged to dream big for his own future. So I think learning all I can early and often was very important to me, and this journey has been relentless. And sometimes really brutal. But I have also come to know the best people. That includes you and other parents and other community members who have just, I've learned so much from and have encouraged me so much to keep going, and it's helped to [00:03:00] sustain me to support him.

Carrie Basas: I don't know how we get through without community. I became a parent by adoption and she was almost four. And then we were new to Seattle when we moved here and we moved here and then a few months later got the call to go adopt and be abroad for two months and then come back. And I assume that a lot about the education system had been fixed since I had been in school.

And then. I was just new to the city and I assumed that it was a progressive place, and we moved into a neighborhood that the realtor said, oh, these are the good schools. And then all these things you learn could schools for whom, not for my kid, they didn't. They were gonna send her somewhere else anyway.

In our neighborhood. We should have lived closer to a school that actually provided services, but just navigating all of that. Was really overwhelming, but I couldn't have done it without meeting folks [00:04:00] like you too. And just even to have somebody to ask, is what I'm seeing real? Because so much of it am I being fair?

Is this what's really happening? Why is this so hard? Is it's just hard for me. And that's what made me think, if this is hard for me and I am a lawyer and I find this overwhelming and I don't understand what they're asking of me, what is it like for everybody else? Exactly. And I thought, wow, they' re really screwed -- lovely word for a family engagement podcast.

I was like, that's the cleanest word I have. This is clearly just not working. And I don't think it felt good to people either, whether they were educators or families in the mix, or students. It just felt like this slog and trying to get supports and be seen.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes, all of that. And going back to the importance of community and connections, definitely because as a parent I've had to ask the questions of [00:05:00] other parents does this sound right?

Or, yeah. Is this really true? And so I've just appreciated being connected to other families. And often, I will acknowledge even in school systems, there are educators, administrators who are living at that intersection of being a professional, but also having their own kids with disabilities.

So sometimes I come across those folks and that's been helpful too, because then we have some like shared, oh, I don't know what's the right word? Is it anxiety or just frustration? It's a lot of things, but I. Finding people who are willing to talk about it is really important. So

Carrie Basas: we had that experience once at a cupcake store in Seattle where this random woman came over and she and Dasha was maybe not even in kindergarten yet, and she said, you should [00:06:00] come to my school.

And I thought, who is this weirdo? What, no one has boundaries. What is going on here? The Seattle way of no one talks to anyone, or when they say something, it's really out of left field. What is going on? And her kid was staring at my kid, so I was totally mama bear. And then I noticed her kid was missing a limb.

I'm like, oh, okay. Okay. We both like their limb differences. Okay. And then the person who came up to us in the cupcake shop shared that she was a teacher. And so she was coming from that perspective of, I am of a kid with disabilities and I work at a school and I want you to feel welcome, but out of context, I was not used to, I was how do I even go to that school?

What is this recruitment effort clearly of cupcakes in common? That's how we parent at two o'clock in the afternoon. Just put more sugar on board. But it was really lovely. But I just at first didn't know why is someone coming up? And then why is their kid staring? And I'm like, oh, okay.

They both have limb differences. And here's a teacher who asked [00:07:00] herself the same thing. Where is my child welcome? Yeah. And turns out she had to work at the school for that to happen, but she wanted. To make that an option for other people.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah, they're everywhere. I remember, in Gabriel's early days there was a pediatrician who just knew and has a sibling, with the

developmental disabilities and then just opened up and shared all the things that's, related to requesting, at the time it was medical supplies.

Or, even how to get a accessible parking permit, like just opened up. And because she did that, like that was so helpful. So yeah, I think just people showing up and under with a shared understanding of how hard it is really. Been helpful for me on my journey anyway,

Carrie Basas: it's, yeah, it's almost like someone could use some sort of guide, a person as a guide in the beginning of that, because oftentimes those [00:08:00] medical settings can be places where you get information.

But not necessarily a path forward. Yeah. You're told, take the information to school, take it to the childcare facility, take it somewhere else, tell someone else about it and they'll do something. Yeah. But there's a disconnect, but just having a doctor like you were talking about. Think about what are some of the practical things that could be helpful.

Right now we could just knock them out, like the disability parking spot. Okay and then we can do this and here's some other things. And just to make the day a bit easier, we can get to the other things. We can do referrals, we can think about what supports need to be in place in school, but. Here are some other connections and resources for you.

Yes. Not great. You have a diagnosis now. We've done some testing go forth in Google.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes. Go to this workshop and talk to this person. Maybe this looks like play into some ideas about better family engagement, this kind of mindset.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. And I think some facilities do have family [00:09:00] navigators, like who gets access to them.

Yeah. And whether they're enough of them and what knowledge they have about things and the connections, because so many people just end up working in isolation.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes.

Carrie Basas: And I'm always discovering some new resource that's out there. Whether it works or not, or it works in the way it's supposed to, is another question.

But just being aware that there is something is like that. It

Jen Chong Jewell: exists.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. Yeah. There's. Like I realized they're small business incubation services for disabled entrepreneurs. And I thought that's really helpful. And they have funding to do that for now, however long that lasts. But that is something where, and it's extremely difficult to help people navigate if they're getting benefits or how would they handle something like health insurance.

And if we could think about those resources, wind them back a little for young people too. How do we even create a pipeline and saying, [00:10:00] if you have a passion, maybe you could develop a business around that or. Doesn't have to be a full-time job. Or maybe there's a family member who has learned a lot from their experience and wants to think about what services or products would look like.

Here's here are supports. So connecting those parts, it's definitely more than one person's full-time job. You found people, but were, what were the biggest barriers to advocacy or what were even some of the barriers stuff, finding people. Where do you find people?

Jen Chong Jewell: There's the finding the resources and the people and naming them, but also I think something that doesn't get talked about.

Enough is the emotional toll and labor it takes to engage in that. As I've aged and my son is, a teenager now, I've learned that some of these [00:11:00] things, the emotional labor and the experiences have like actually changed me. And some people might refer it to this as like trauma and I agree.

But also as I've worked through these things, I've learned that even knowing all the things, like having all the lists and knowing all the people does not guarantee an outcome

Carrie Basas: no

Jen Chong Jewell: for my kiddo. So there is a balance that I have to strike with the. Relentless pursuit of all the knowledge and all the people and all the connections.

And then also caring for myself and caring for my kiddo. And just also acknowledging like at times when harm has been done to me in engaging in these systems. So like recently my son had a school evaluation where it really felt like the most humane [00:12:00] school evaluation I've ever had. And it was all done, with an intent to talk about my son, acknowledged the challenges, but also the many strengths that he has.

And also not go into the like deep, dark, every statistic, every like deviation from what a, what is known as quote unquote the norm. Like we didn't sit there and read through. Document or page after page. So that's what I think about. Like it's easy for me because I am a good researcher. I can find things and locate people, but what hasn't been always easy for me is acknowledging what, at what costs that has come.

Carrie Basas: Yeah.

Jen Chong Jewell: For me

Carrie Basas: it certainly takes a toll. I think we talk a lot about. Compassion fatigue, and we talk about burnout for [00:13:00] educators, but advocating can feel like a game of attrition. Years ago, I ended up writing this article about advocacy fatigue because it's how you're perceived, but then it's also not an abstract concept.

It is your child. And you're right in the throes of it. So wondering if you're doing enough for your child, is there something else you should be exploring? Realizing that you people don't always respond well to even the best intentions or efforts around advocacy or even questions. And then sometimes parent community can be supportive, but I've also seen parent community.

Give bad information to other people. Yeah. Shame people. Maybe sometimes the best solutions can come, but there's a lot of sorting through the fact that other people are also on high alert and have [00:14:00] had negative experiences. And if they've had an overwhelmingly positive experience, then sometimes that doesn't feel good either, because you're like what is it about my situation?

Did I not know the magic words? Am I a jerk? What is what? Why did I bring out the worst? What is this? So it's, I find it very easy to spin about all of those things. Yeah. And. Just, there's often like a lot of deference expected for experts, but then I think things can fall apart when experts are not, the experts, air quoting are not necessarily offering solutions or strategies.

Even just something to try next. That could be helpful. I don't wanna just know all the bad stuff or tell me that she's cute and you think she's funny, like great. But she's also here to be educated. And be a member of your school community.

Jen Chong Jewell: That's right.

Carrie Basas: And for running outta time. [00:15:00] And I had to say at, we had an eval recently, I had to say to them, you won't see the effects of this decision.

She will be out of here. Yeah. And I just have to think about what skills and supports we can work on now so that she's less alone because it's going to get harder. Yes. And I won't necessarily forgive myself for everything if we didn't try, but there's only so much you have of yourself to give too, because then it becomes fallout for.

Everything. Making dinner, being in decent mood, yeah. Wanting to try again to do something. And I think maybe not trying to do all the things is

What I have learned over time, because people will say, but what about, okay, she's happy there, but what about the rigor or what about this?

And I just said, see, I think about that, but, and I'm not just calling it in, but for me, these were some things that are really important

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah.

Carrie Basas: Be in place for her [00:16:00] for just my sanity and being able to build any sort of trust. So it's not perfect. It's not perfect. It's far from perfect.

Exactly. She's not suicidal. She's not there are just things where you're like, I didn't know that would be the calculus, but I've seen other school environments for my child. And I'm like I know what it could look like. Yeah. I know. I've seen it for friends, children, and clients and it's not perfect.

And a lot of that gets put on moms or people who are perceived as female or in caregiver role. Yeah. Even if there is more of an egalitarian relationship. Yeah. Or other supports.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes. I think, going back to that like vision and having dreams, for your kiddo. Yeah. And also at the same time, like you're fostering your kiddo to have and develop their dream too.

And what I've come to learn is that it's so [00:17:00] challenging across the board if a young person can't experience some of that in school. I, so for Gabriel, the preference of systems has been to segregate him and I have fought that for years. And so at this point in time, he is. In a setting where he's in general education most of the day, and I have come to learn how important that is for him because for him to even experience and see himself with his peers and having access to subjects, like all the subjects really, but like English, language arts, and, science he's got big gaps in his science because the preference has been just to not teach him that or segregate him.

But he's had like really challenging [00:18:00] science this year and I will not know exactly what, how that's gonna manifest for him because he's been in these classes this year. But all I know is that it's been important for him that he given, been given the opportunity to try. To be exposed to all the, those subjects and so he can start to figure it out for himself and see himself in a world that, I'm preparing him to advocate, to be part of and be included in because I'm not his dream.

My dream is not that he leaves school and goes to a segregated life or a segregated setting, sometimes known as institutions, like that's not in the cards. So I think that, is the emotional toll. I think for a lot of families that experience their children being pushed out or pushed to the edge for whatever reason, it's so hard because it's also, it [00:19:00] feels like this constant attack on somebody's human.

Their dignity, their worth as a human being. And that's really hard.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. It's really twisted system where we say, okay, you need to earn this. Yeah. And how does that, I mean there is this, that's the rural school. You're supposed to be in community with other people. Who are your age.

That certainly doesn't happen once you're out of any sort of system. It doesn't happen in your parents' basement or an institution. That's not gonna happen

later. We don't really care if he is getting an A in physics. It's more you don't learn that exists as a subject. Yes. When you're 22.

Exactly. There's a lot where even with my child of I think I need to send you back to what you're asking me if that's a city or a state and sometimes oh gosh, quality of it. Yeah. No, I don't want it. Sometimes she just messes with me. Sometimes it's a real thing and I thought I failed you.

But it's a, you're a smaller thing, but to take entire groups of people and [00:20:00] say, oh, I don't think you're quite ready to be a peer with someone. Yeah. Guess what? It never happens. And it never happens for the other students because they never spend any time with people with disabilities.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes.

Carrie Basas: No one could talk about it.

No one could talk to them. No one, it doesn't happen. It doesn't, there's not a magical second act here.

Where that happens. And that's all time lost. All time lost.

Jen Chong Jewell: And that was my experience growing up, and going to schools in Washington state, all segregated I just have these faint memories of seeing, the bus that was shorter or that the classroom at the far end of the hall that would like.

Creek gets door open from time to time and you would see students, my peers and, but you never had the opportunity to interact and develop relationships. And I knew that growing up, that was my experience. And then when I. My kiddo came along, it was like, oh, like to your point, nothing has changed.

In some ways and I'm not a [00:21:00] spring chicken.

Carrie Basas: That was so long ago. I'm not either. I'm not either. I'm in a parallel universe. The same universe at the same time. Yeah. I was in school in Maryland in a separate school until third grade, and then my parents advocated, but then I didn't see other people with disabilities.

I know there were other people with disabilities because so many people with disabilities in the world, but that's not how it was framed. And so then I lost out

on some community, but the people that did not leave that environment ended up on the floors of their. Bedrooms. And many of them were very smart.

Like a word like smart is ki is loaded. But yeah, really just inquisitive and engaged. When I knew them and they were younger and they had things they wanted to do in the world. It wasn't a lack of dreaming big or ideas or curiosity, but that all just went downhill as the years passed.

[00:22:00] Because there's hardly any sort of stimulation or engagement. Yes. It's a great way to tell an extremely depressing story, but also to really tank someone's life. If that was the peak of, early elementary is the peak of when people would be eating with other people at lunch. Yeah. Or maybe going to music class.

And then after that, yeah, you give a lot of people therapies to stay in their house. I don't know, it was so sad. It's. Also this weird, confusing, structural thing that was happening because I was having my experience in which people didn't really wanna talk about disability or acknowledge or anything differently, but I also had these other friends that they were together, but there wasn't much being poured into that space or other people coming in and out.

It was the same. Yes. Except they went home at the end of the day. But everything else about it, the best qualities of an [00:23:00] institution and hard for the people who worked there, too many of whom were there for decades.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah. It's very depressing.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. It is really depressing and I don't think what, that's what people think they're signing their kids up for or signing them cells up for if they're, doing early learning or happy doing physical therapy school or something else.

They have a different dream to. So there's not much balance with the advocacy and enjoying life with your children. So having some perspective. Is there other advice you would and community, I heard that. Is there other pieces you would offer to people as you're trying to like tilt at the windmills.

Burn it all down. Let everybody out of the short bus whatever our activism's fantasy is. And also feed your family and Yeah. Be in a decent mood for your child and not hate everybody.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah.

Carrie Basas: Yes.

Jen Chong Jewell: [00:24:00] So the things I've been leaning into lately. With my kiddo has also just been like getting out as much as we can.

So we do go to a lot of like different cultural events. We just get out. And also like some of the work that I do, he's like right there alongside me and over the years because he's watched me, 'cause I've always taken him to like school board meetings and to make public comment and otherwise he's just also learned by observing.

So he comes to certain meetings with me and hangs out and I pay attention to what is his level of engagement, because he will have the things he's interested in doing as people are talking. But I will see him pause and listen, when there's a particular topic, for example. So I think that's the balance of.

Like we do a lot of fun things together, and we [00:25:00] also do some of the advocacy work together side by side. And my hope is that as he's getting older, like he's gonna be able to find his path in that advocacy for himself. That's the goal, I think for any parent who wants to see their kiddo grow up and develop their own skills, and ultimately, like I know that one day I'm just not gonna be around to do that on his behalf or for him.

So the most that he can learn now is really important. What it looks like, what it feels like, what it might sound like is really important. Yeah, and then at times it's just like too, he just is a wonderful human being and he deserves my full attention and love. So the times that we carve out for us to be together and do that is really important.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. It can't all be advocacy. No. Sometimes when you're just relaxing, you're [00:26:00] thrown into a situation where you're like, okay, now we're advocating again. Great. Right here, we're here we are. Another meeting at a concert or whatever, wherever you are. There you are in your life with though we have some sort of disability issue or some encounter with someone in a conversation and sometimes things are really relaxing.

But if you leave your house, it's always a danger. So highly encouraged leaving your house. Yes. But you've done so much advocacy over the years from language access to the Special Education Advisory Council. What do you think are some of the biggest barriers that families face when they're trying to engage with schools?

Jen Chong Jewell: So I think, start off with is just acknowledging. How complex these systems are, and they don't center families and students. So starting off with that, just knowledge that this is what it [00:27:00] is, I think other barriers that families experience are some of the ones we talked about. So like the burnout.

And then repeated discrimination. So however that manifests, whether it is the ableism and or the language access, like you come from a different nationality. You English is not your first language and people are not honoring that. Or we have professionals who are asking children to interpret for their families.

That still happens. It is 2025 and that still happens. So what I think ultimately these systems are designed to burn people out and that's a really sad thing. It also changes people like you can only come up against these systems so much without starting to feel like you're being changed in one [00:28:00] way or another.

I think those are the biggest barriers. And also just not knowing like. How to navigate these systems. And I think too, also acknowledging many families have their own experiences, their historical experiences with schools. And that will play a role too in how they are experiencing this. Another level of engagement with schools now that their children are involved and now that their child has a disability and they have to like, have to move forward and learn about these things if they have the bandwidth to do it or the desire to, to engage with it because it is so complex, unnecessarily so in my opinion.

But

Carrie Basas: yeah, it can cut in many ways. If a parent had a positive experience of school, it can be even more upsetting to see that is not happening for your student. And that they're. [00:29:00] The default is, maybe in that particular school to not include them. Most of their time with their peers.

And on the flip side if somebody's had a really negative experience, the school can go in with your armor up or expecting something to happen in a certain way. So going back to that idea that you mentioned of, these systems were not created to engage with many families and center families, it makes it a little less personal, but we're still there as people.

Yes. Because as family engagement, it's not getting your driver's license and it keeps, yeah, hopefully you don't have to do that on a daily basis or get emails, it, it keeps happening. Keeps happening. It keeps happening. And as the lifespan

of a student and the random assortment of adults and children that kind of come in together.

So what does it, and it's straining. Yes. And so what does it look like for it to be meaningful? Family engagement. [00:30:00] Can it even be healing? Family engagement? So like 3.0

Jen Chong Jewell: that would be ideal. That would be so much better. If there was a thought that, approaches to family engagement these days need some kind of like restorative or healing aspect to them, if that was acknowledged upfront.

I think that meaningful family engagement would mean that everybody's humanity is prioritized, particularly the student and the family. That language access is not the afterthought that it is planned for. And also, any accommodations related to disability even. 'cause there are parents who are disabled too.

And accommodating people's needs are so important, and then, and a strong commitment to constantly evaluate practices and individualized practices for families and students. I think it would mean [00:31:00] that our schools would understand that sometimes these things aren't, it's not a necessarily a linear thing.

A point in time where, okay, early on it, family engagement looked this way, but thinking ahead down the road, maybe it's gonna need to shift and change is that child gets older, or the needs of the family and the child change. I think those are some of the ways that it would look like, but also, you would hear directly from families and students that it is working and that would be the most important criteria of determining if it's working or not.

Carrie Basas: Yeah, just the feedback instead of, counting number of hours. That someone's been in the building or volunteered for the school, or donations made through the PTA or something else where we're always grabbing for some sort of metric.

And. Some families you may not see a lot of are good, most part situations where I'm like, I'm [00:32:00] good. I don't actually need to be there. And that's the biggest sign of my trust and belief in you is that I am not up in your business like I am just good, I can send in the snack. Yeah. I'm learning about school. I can do things that are supportive, but my level of engaging is I'm just over here saying thanks, yeah. There's not a lot of me around. Yes. And for other people, sometimes if there's somebody around in the building a lot, it could be because

they just, I don't even know if it's okay for their child to be in that building. Sometimes they're really engaged or sometimes what the school's offering them Yeah.

Really fits with how they like to be connected or contribute. But many people, if you're not, if. Hearing from me in a way, and you're mostly sending positive communication or when we interact, it's pretty good.

I might be someone you could check off the list. Yeah. If they go work on another relationship.

Jen Chong Jewell: Exactly. I've had seasons where I would say that the family engagement piece, I've experienced [00:33:00] it as really good and as I'm thinking about it, it was good because my central nervous system was good. Yeah. Like I just, the anxiety the fear, whatever, like it was at a low and then there was the trust and.

I got communication proactively and thoughtfully, and then also in return, like I could send in all the treats and just feel free to do that. And so I've experienced it that way too. My central nervous system was really good during those periods. Yeah.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. Not being in a state of high alert. And, but also, at least for me, it's always wondering when is this going to stop? Which is not a healthy thought to have, but it is a sign that you've experienced trauma. When is it gonna stop? This is fine, but what comes next? Who's next? And the cast of characters, and how does that spin the things out of control?

[00:34:00] And then what do we do? But if it's been a good run and things have come up where there have been some bumps or miscommunication or you've had to share, oh, that didn't go so well for my student and you're not in the middle of this back and forth, or replies looking longer and longer, you built up a little reserve to say yes.

We could do this. Oh, I don't know what student's going to come cause drama or new staff or side eye. I don't know what's gonna happen, but we've got a little bit of a history of sorting through some things before and yeah. It's been okay. Yeah. I don't feel like I getting weird looks if I go in the building yet.

We're okay. There's a period of grace and Yeah. But if that's not there, we'll try to build that right in the middle of a conflict.

Jen Chong Jewell: Oh, that's, yeah. And I imagine that's hard for any student in our schools that experience going to school that way too, right? Yeah, I think about that. Their own [00:35:00] central nervous systems going into spaces and places where they don't feel welcome or included, or something's going on.

Like the toll it takes on that young person over time is immense. And we're talking about family engagement and how families and parents, caregivers experience the system, it's so deeply connected to that young person too. What family experience, what the young person experiences are intertwined.

Carrie Basas: So we can sometimes lose sight of that because it can become about the adults and that yes. The student, which is why all the adults are there at the beginning. Yes. But it, it is hard and they are their own people. And so how they engage with conflict or what they're able to share their perspective on why something's happening.

Yeah, their awareness of it. There have been several times where. My my take on it was to try to coach my daughter in to doing something differently and not being so shy [00:36:00] about that, or being proactive. And she really felt like it was judgment. And I was spinning because I couldn't go and, make kids sit together at a lunch table.

Or there were things I thought it was, part of me probably thought I was being helpful, but really no. She said, just feel like you're judging me. I feel like you're upset with me and judging me, which is total opposite of my intention and the mix with my own child or relationship with versus, somebody who's emailing me from school and I'm like, who are you?

Where if I met you? But at least she could say just no, that's not really working for me. Yeah. And what are we gonna do to make it better? And sometimes there just wasn't a ready answer, except we're gonna suffer for a while.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah.

Carrie Basas: Together. And we'll talk about it until we're ready to do something else or get someone else involved and or just call it, this is not gonna be a good, this thing is just not [00:37:00] gonna be a good experience.

And we'll find somewhere else to go to school or some other activity to engage in because they just spend all of our energy on this one thing.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah.

Carrie Basas: Just meting out or metering out the energy and the load of everything. Yeah. Is there a particular success story that comes to mind for you when you think about from your advocacy or your personal experience where families and schools have really worked together to create better outcomes for students?

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes. And. There are several situations that come to mind, but I also think in that conversation, sometimes these outcomes are about a point in time. So an outcome that for that moment in time worked for everybody. Because I think in the advocacy world, or talking about policies, we have these like outcome measures that also get thrown about, and those are also point in time.

[00:38:00] So I think. For example, like an example of this would be because there are those families and students who actually have a really great supportive pre-K 12 experience, they'll talk about that. But when it came to the time to transition to life after high school, like that's when things fell apart. And the adult systems are a whole other experience for sure.

But what I would think about is so that was success in that pre-K 12 time period for a number of reasons. Thinking about the future when young people and families fall off with that, what's known as the disability services cliff, like they experience this huge transition that they weren't prepared for or they're not connected.

Then I wonder about is that a great outcome? So I think, speaking for myself, I've had, like I mentioned earlier, I've had those [00:39:00] seasons where the school team and my son and myself were really well supported, and that was because of really great communication, everybody being on the same page and just a shared vision of what was going on.

What was the goal for Gabriel in that particular year? I think that's success. And other successes have been, that I've been a part of is, when family's going to a mediation, for example, that through that course they could figure out a resolution that was gonna work for everybody.

So that's a success in a point in time. But also, these are things that are always gonna be measured by. What was the goal, I think what was the shared vision for that point in time? What was everybody hoping that the outcome would be?

Carrie Basas: Yeah. And having perspective [00:40:00] about that. What did you miss out on or, oh wait, that was really serendipity or some good decision making.

It was really helpful to have that other person in the room and, but the moment in time piece is really big. Yeah. I know people want to live with no regrets around the decisions they make Yeah. For their kids. But I don't really don't know that state of being exists. We try to do the best that we can at the time.

Yeah. Which doesn't always feel like good enough and the impacts on them of, you're not like a, our house is not a law firm. Child development center therapeutic space. Yeah. There's no equine therapy. It's just like there's only so much. And sometimes we'll just wanna be kids too.

Yes. As we face having 15 and 16 year olds. Yeah. I like this age [00:41:00] though. Now you're on the state board of education. Yes. And then how do you see your role in shaping policies that support families and students with disabilities, or families and students in general?

Jen Chong Jewell: So I'm so excited to have been elected to the State Board of Education.

So that started in January and that'll be, a four year term. And I think what I'm excited for several reasons, but also feeling like there is a space in place to make sure that in all the conversations when it comes to. Graduation requirements, education, policy and advocacy. That all means all that we, in any topic we're discussing about Washington State students, we mean all our students.

And so reminding folks about that and also the composition of the board, they're just [00:42:00] really great people. It's a really great time to be connected and be serving on that board. So that's what I'm thinking about. We're also. Into the work of Future Ready, which is aligned with, reexamining the graduation requirements and doing that with community members, which is so important.

And that staff for the State Board of Education does so much work and intentional thought and planning to make sure that we are engaging with community members. So I'm looking forward to what the outcome of that will be because we're still in it, but also being in a space that, in place that's not separate and set apart as being special or special education.

It's education folks. We're talking about educating all our young people in Washington state,

Carrie Basas: and that is one of the issues with policy circles and making, and [00:43:00] somebody had sent me a message recently saying, oh, somebody said they would do a task force or a work group, and my immediate unfiltered reaction was like, oh gosh, seven hours.

Where good ideas can often go to die or just be with other people. Extremely important part of my experience and being in state government and building relationships and really like fond memories and good discussions. But so many times I thought that the discussions that we were having in settings that were focused on disability, focused on race, focused on language access, whatever the topic was, weren't actually going further.

Sometimes they were in powerful ways through bills and legislative, following through. But there was so much wisdom that was coming that really was going to end in a report or recommendation. And it wasn't necessarily in a larger decision making body. Yes. [00:44:00]

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah,

Carrie Basas: Good discussion, also memorable experience and made me think more critically about all kinds of things, and I'm grateful for that.

But some of those ideas are still in the basements of Olympia or Renton or wherever it is that we met. And I just, it was on a job interview. I really applied for one job in the last year. It was on a job interview, one for one. It was on a job interview, I guess a month ago. And they said tell me about a bad day at work.

And I gave that example. I said here's the flip side. You know it well. One, you're in a Windows room, it's a seven hour policy meeting, and all the people come together. You establish these strong relationships. There's some energy, but then what next?

Jen Chong Jewell: What next?

Carrie Basas: And you're just worn down.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. And it's not just because, it's not because you've assembled a group of people that just wanna appreciate a problem. Yeah. It's how do you translate that? [00:45:00] How do you apply pressure? So I'm glad

that the state board is a positive experience, is honored youth voice over the years, which is great.

More community members need to know about graduation requirements. Yeah. I would not pass a test on graduation requirements. My husband recently asked me what they were for my daughter. I told him to look it up. I know we have teenagers. Scary. I know. And I've seen so many slide decks, but I really could not pass a test on that.

I assume that she's on track. That's what I'm told. But I really should review them. But they're just not accessible in so many ways. This is true. What you're gonna consume and what you keep space for. Yes. So whether, you said the community engagement around the state board and graduation and being future ready, are there other policy changes or initiatives that you think it will that will make it easier for families to engage with the education system?

Jen Chong Jewell: Time will tell. So the shift in the burden of proof [00:46:00] that happened last session. So where, families, if they are taking the school district to due process, it's on the school district now to prove upfront that they are providing a free and appropriate public education. So there was a lot of thought that was going to be meaningful and help families and my hope is that it, it does and that it will.

And so we'll just know more with time, like how that's shaping out for families. I think this point in time about the solidarity and fully funding special education, that has been interesting for me to watch because all the education partners have been coming out of the woodworks, schools and superintendents and all the acronym soup of the Association of Washington School Principals.

Everybody comes out and talks about the importance of fully funding special education and I appreciate that. So if we [00:47:00] get there as a state, I think that'll be helpful and. I would love, and I hope we can have more conversations about if we get this funding to fully fund special education. Can we talk about how that's funding is being utilized to do anything different than we've already been doing to improve outcomes by any, measure that we are currently utilizing to measure outcomes?

Can we talk about also going back to basic education, how we fail to fund that in and of itself? Because special education, again, is not separate and set apart from basic education. It is the service that is required to let every young person access their basic education, right? So I think it can be helpful.

I wonder how that'll shape up at the end of the session. And then, lastly, the [00:48:00] piece of legislation that my heart just keeps. Plummeting you know about is the bills that we've had co come up about ending isolation practices or rooms and addressing mechanical and chemical restraint of students like that.

Bill died. Once again. And I'm so disappointed about that because in my mind I see that as a measure of how we are not acknowledging the humanity, the full humanity of our young people in our schools. And I'm hopeful that will come back again, that we'll have another opportunity in years ahead to make Washington a place where we don't build isolation rooms for our young people, especially our youngest ones.

'cause those are the ones who are most impacted, the ones who are in elementary school settings. [00:49:00] And then, because we have the data around that, we just know that overwhelmingly it's students with disabilities. And then on top of that, it's also, our students of color, students who are having high trauma backgrounds like.

Particularly those in foster care. So that's like a future hopeful one. But the previous two proof of burden. And if we get to the point that we're fully funding special education, can we talk about more about how we use that funding?

Carrie Basas: Yeah. Seems like fully funding special education means fully funding general education.

And it also means students come in with different identities and needs. And so we're talking about the other. Services, instruction, differentiation, students need so they can all be, so it can be like, we got some funding for special ed. So your disability stuff, great English, not as your primary language.

Bad news about that. You're [00:50:00] gonna be going back to the trailer for that one too. Or you're an interesting combo. We were anticipating, we're anticipating people with a DHD in the general ed classroom, and that's what we meant by this. And it just, and then where did it go? What was our intention?

I think the restraint isolation piece is so hard. I was talking to a student recently who's in high school and they were talking about the many schools that they have been to over the years, and they're very. And they're about to graduate from high school, calmly told me about the various times they were restrained and isolated and then, oh, we switched schools.

It was like talking about when did you last get a vision exam? And you know that there's more feeling to it because it's the number of schools the student has been to and they are in a better place now. And that's what makes that conversation possible. But this started so early. Yeah.

And then we were saying the school didn't wanna call it in isolation rooms, so they called it something else. But I knew in my little heart of heart as a first grader [00:51:00] that it was that, because that's what was happening there. Yeah. So we can rebrand remarket, put streamers in LED lights. Yeah.

And it still is what it is if you're there and you know it's in response. So then it set off what we see as students not going to school. And then behavior escalating and going to school and not staying at school very long for the day.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yeah.

Carrie Basas: And it feeds into all the narratives that come out when this advocacy pops up about how students are dangerous.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes.

Carrie Basas: People react the way that you treat them over a certain amount of time. And it's really has been a national struggle, I think. Yeah. It dis fully rice advocacy to change this. Even though the protections are better in mental health treatment facilities, which we know are not places where people often feel supported when they go into those kinds of settings or institutions.

But advocacy there seems easier and maybe as a federal movement than [00:52:00] getting schools to think about what they do to children.

Jen Chong Jewell: Think about what they do to children. Yes. Children. Children.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. Yeah. I know we're all up for the lighthearted conversation. What's your favorite recipe? Just kidding-- as we're shifting towards the end of things, and you're in a transition state with your own child or entering that. What do you think we could do better around transition?

Oh my goodness.

I'm sorry. I consolidated like 10 questions into one. What can we do better? What could we do worse? Oh, let's take something and make it worse?

Jen Chong Jewell: And it's almost like that could just be another podcast, but Yeah, I know. So going back to the themes about what we talked about early, family engagement and. Engaging families early around this topic. So families and young people do not know what they don't know. And often, some [00:53:00] education partners don't even know, like the transition to adult services is again, another layer of complexity.

And so what I'm saying is that we could do so much better by having these conversations early with families, particularly with families who might have children who, you know, off the gate, there's not a lot of expectation for them because of, whatever disability that they're being labeled with.

So having high expectations that every young person can find their space and place in community, and most often that, and why not? Shouldn't that be a place of employment? Like we could think about that. So starting sooner and. I am gonna say high school and beyond plan. It is just a tool, and it is a tool that's evolving right now.

It's moving to an online statewide platform as a tool. It is an opportunity to [00:54:00] engage families and young people earlier about these conversations about planning for life after high school. What can supported employment look like? What does competitive and integrated employment look like? What does what employment first mean?

Most folks don't even know that's a thing in our state, and actually our state leads the nation that having these work for. Supported employment initiatives in place. So starting earlier, high expectations for our young people and starting these conversations early. Let's make sure we ask every young person in their family, what do you wanna be when you grow up?

Yeah. Because honestly, not every student, not every young person is asked that because it's assumed that they're, they have another path ahead of them.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. And whatever [00:55:00] tools you would use or offer to another student offer Yes. To every student. Absolutely. Because that's also one, it's important to be asked.

Yes. 'cause you mean that you actually, hopefully there's genuine intention that you care behind that and that you see a future for someone. Yes. And then how do you break it down? Because that's really difficult. Yeah. For many people. What does that look like? And then being specific about how we'll support you on that journey or?

Not dismissive. If someone says I wanna be a surgeon you have an intellectual disability. And then says: Maybe you'd like to be the janitor at the hospital.

What is the conversation that happens between those? What does that look like? What about it in medicine interests you, here's what the requirements would be.

Yeah. Here's, we have legislators that have not here in Washington state with Down Syndrome. Like they're. Somebody would've said to someone, sorry, that's not something, you could watch the news a lot.

But I [00:56:00] just, I think, yeah, you use some supports on how to hold those conversations with, hold the

Jen Chong Jewell: conversation.

Carrie Basas: What are the requirements here? What, like you would have a conversation with a child of any age who says I think you wanna do that. You're like here are some of the steps to what that would look like. Yeah. And we only hear about this kind of career, but here's what else happens in that space.

Or people who are working in the health field, but there's just not a lot about, what do you wanna do? Is might not envision a future. Final question. Yes. Just combining everything. Okay. Let's do it. Yeah. Is there a message you would like to leave families and educators with about the importance of dreaming big for every child, or, I think about this like advice you would give yourself.

What now if you Yes. Current, you would've given past you. Oh my goodness. Like you could write a letter.

Jen Chong Jewell: Yes. Okay. [00:57:00] So my message would be that in every community, our children and our families deserve to dream big. Each and every member of that community deserves that, and that the things that we experience.

I might call it oppression at every level are deeply intertwined and connected. So oppression is designed to keep people from dreaming. So dreaming big is an act of resistance, and when we dream big together, we can get to liberation for us all. So that's a really heady response to that, but it's what I think about often, and I would say to the younger version of myself, especially when I was holding my little one and I had so many fears and anxieties, I would just tell her, keep dreaming big and believe [00:58:00] that there's people you can connect to that will support you, and that you all also be changed.

This experience too, and it's so worth it. It's so worth it to lean in and connect with other people and dream big for your community and your loved ones.

Carrie Basas: It is, what is the value of playing small? Or feeling like you are limited to a certain place or set of options. No one really benefits from that, not the world around us, not the individual person who's being told that.

Yeah. And if we can provide that for each other, it's always, yeah, path to liberation

Jen Chong Jewell: services and supports. They're important, but they're one piece of it. It is one piece that supports the vision of dreaming big. So knowing that even if you're not able to access something right now, there's a lot of other things you can [00:59:00] access and support that are available in community.

With the support of other people. So I think that's the thing. That too is so discouraging for families and young people. If they can't access a service right away or if it's, because it's a hurry up and wait, like you apply for something. So you gotta hurry up and then just wait for it.

And the meanwhile you just, you have to keep dreaming and building your community and believing that it's possible.

Carrie Basas: Yeah. And the service is not a cure all, even if you get it. It's the fact that you are connected to community and that Everything was set up so that you would exist in isolation, but you're not accepting that.

No. And that's how we get through. That's

Jen Chong Jewell: how we get through.

Carrie Basas: Thank you so much, Carrie.