

Being Gina: A Call To Action

BEING GINA
CONVERSATION
GUIDE



// BEING GINA

About the film:

In *Being Gina*, we meet and learn from Gina, a mother of three and a passionate parent ally, about her personal journey of healing and resilience. She recounts her evolution from being a parent struggling with substance use disorder and abuse and losing her children to now being the leader of the F.I.R.S.T. Clinic, an organization that supports new mothers experiencing substance use challenges with legal advocacy and other services to prevent CPS removals. Through the reflections of a F.I.R.S.T. Clinic mom, we see the impact trusting relationships and authentic human connections can have on families' abilities to thrive. Empathy is built through understanding that parents are essential to their children's well-being and worthy of receiving the supports they need to keep their families safely together.

At its core, *Being Gina* is a testament to human potential and a reminder that when people are seen as worthy individuals, despite the challenges they may be facing, and provided with the supports they need, they can exercise their inherent strengths and create true and lasting change in their and their families' lives.



How to use these questions:

These critical questions are designed for child welfare professionals, advocates, and community leaders of all backgrounds to ignite and facilitate critical conversations around the importance of seeing, listening, and hearing from families as part of imagining family-centered systems change. We hope these questions help create brave, inclusive spaces for critical conversations where we can come together to challenge the prevailing stereotypes and barriers that prevent us from seeing the value in each and every individual and hold so many families back from reaching their full potential. Most critically, with the goal of keeping more children at home with their families as our north star, we hope communities will utilize these questions to gain wisdom and knowledge about the universal experiences of all families and move towards a path of co-creation with families as guides and experts.

More specifically, here is a list of ways to utilize the guide to build shared understanding, challenge assumptions and uncover new ways of thinking:

- **Create an inclusive space for the film screening.** Think intentionally about who to invite to the screening so a diverse range of voices are present. A welcoming space can encourage people to share about their lived experiences and can help strengthen community bonds. These rich discussions can further inform solutions that put family first and fit specific community needs.
- **Promote an upstream, prevention focused mindset.** During the discussion, encourage screening attendees to think about the family-focused solutions that would allow their communities to act now rather than react later.
- **Invite experts, local leaders, and grassroots organizations into conversations and to screenings.** These individuals are currently doing the work and can enrich conversations by providing concrete data and context to further educate your audiences.
- **Increase cross-sector collaboration.** Invite advocates from various backgrounds —child welfare, education, law, policy, healthcare, substance use programming, etc. —to be a part of the discussion. Encourage them to think about the partnerships that can be built that will help improve conditions for families.
- **Focus on community planning.** After watching the film and using the questions for a guided discussion, brainstorm as a group how communities can empower families and encourage greater community investment. Encourage the audience to think about current resources, potential challenges, gaps in services, and community needs. Use findings to create a community action plan that outlines next steps.

// CRITICAL QUESTIONS

We hope that the following critical questions highlight the importance of centering empathy, compassion, and understanding in your work with families to ensure they are seen, heard, and listened to without judgement. Most importantly, we encourage you to engage families in ways that center them as the architects of their own well-being.

// LET'S GET INTO IT.

- After watching *Being Gina*, one of the overarching themes is how Gina, drawing from her own past experience, recognizes the importance of seeing parents in their full humanity despite the challenges they may be experiencing. In thinking about the stereotypes associated with parents struggling with substance use disorder, how do those perceptions impact the type of supports and care families receive? What are the different ways your community is working to disrupt these types of stereotypes and see parents in their full humanity? What more needs to be done?

- At one point, Gina says: "I offer the support I wish I'd had." Reflect on how the stereotypes centered around shaming and blaming of parents living in addiction prevented Gina from being seen as a parent who deserves supports and resources to keep her family together. Now, consider the types of supports Gina offers F.I.R.S.T. Clinic parents that would have been helpful for her when she herself was struggling as a parent. Are these supports available in your community? How can you help focus these supports on keeping families together?

- Because of Gina's lived experience, she has an understanding of the challenges and barriers the women in the program are facing and is able to build authentic connections with them. Can you imagine what it feels like for a parent to have an ally like Gina and a support program like the F.I.R.S.T. Clinic advocating on their behalf? What makes Gina's lived experience so important for the parents she is working with?

- Think about Gina in her journey from being a parent whose children were placed in out-of-home care to now, years later, being a leader of an organization supporting families who are dealing with those same struggles. We can see that with the right support, people can exercise their inner strengths to make positive changes in their lives. How is your organization keeping this mindset front and center in the work you are doing with families and living this value everyday?

- In thinking about envisioning transformative change to support families like Gina's and others from the F.I.R.S.T. Clinic, why is it important to create programs and solutions that are parent-led and informed by their lived expertise? How can communities harness current and potential parent allies' strengths and passion to create solutions that consider what the whole family needs versus solely thinking about out-of-home placement for the child?

- Final notes and conclusions
