



People of Color Leadership Institute

714 G STREET SE ■ WASHINGTON DC 20003 ■ (202) 544-3144

WELCOME

POCLI: AN INTRODUCTION

—by Joyce N. Thomas

“Child Abuse and Neglect: The People of Color Leadership Institute” is a four-year NCCAN-funded project which represents a collaborative effort of major national professional and advocacy organizations in the field of child abuse and neglect. The Center for Child Protection and Family Support of Washington, D.C. will serve as the lead agency and will work closely with the American Association for Protecting Children (Denver), APSAC (Chicago), the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (Chicago), and the Northwest Indian Child Welfare Association (Portland, Oregon).

The overall intent of the project is to promote the development of leaders of color and to improve the cultural competence and sensitivity of agencies and organizations affecting families of color involved in child protective systems. Families of color are overrepresented in child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems. It is important to examine and understand all of the various factors that lead to this disproportionate representation. Among these factors are almost certainly biased reporting and treatment practices. Cultural competence on the part of system professionals and leaders of color can help clients in the protective service system by creating more enlightened program planning, intervention and treatment practices, and prevention efforts.

Specific POCLI objectives include:

- Expansion and enhancement of the role of professionals of color at all leadership levels within the largest national membership organizations in the field of child abuse and neglect: the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, and the American Association for Protecting Children.
- Provision of concrete assistance to emerging professional leaders of color through a mentoring program.
- Development, field testing, refinement and dissemination of a protocol for agency, organization, and self assessment of cultural competency.
- Training of professionals in techniques for assessing and strategies for enhancing

agency or organizational cultural competency.

- Development and dissemination of a series of professional monographs addressing organizational cultural competence and child abuse and neglect within Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian communities.
- Development and dissemination of an annotated bibliography on materials about cultural competence in the field of child abuse and neglect.
- Provision of various forums within which professional leaders of color can affect current public child welfare policy and practice.
- Development of a special section of *The Advisor*, the quarterly publication of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, designed to increase awareness of cultural issues related to treatment and prevention of child abuse and neglect, to improve the cultural competency of child protective systems, and to increase the visibility of professionals of color working in the field of child abuse and neglect.

With this issue of *The Advisor*, we inaugurate the POCLI News. Each subsequent edition of POCLI News is to have five major sections: (1) a feature article on one of the major issues in the field; (2) “Meet the Task Force,” a section introducing members of the APSAC Task Force on Ethnic Minority Affairs; (3) feature-length descriptions of programs in the field that are striving for cultural competency; (4) “Meet the Mentoree,” introducing participants in the POCLI Mentorship Program; and (6) “Resources,” which will list conferences, special meetings, information, and publications relevant to POCLI’s aims.

This issue we’re missing a few pieces, but by next quarter we should be fully up to speed. We hope you find POCLI News stimulating and informative. If you have any questions or suggestions, please don’t hesitate to call me or the Assistant Project Director, Cheryl Rust, who is introduced on page 18.

Joyce N. Thomas, RN, MPH, is President and Co-founder of the Center for Child Protection and Family Support.

FEATURE

WORKING TOWARD CULTURAL COMPETENCE: ONE AGENCY’S EXPERIENCE

—by Terry Cross

Our country is experiencing dramatic demographic changes. The latest U.S. Census (1990) revealed that nearly one in four Americans is now a person of color. This fact marks the biggest one-decade change in the racial composition of the U.S. in the 20th century. As a result of this change, mainstream private non-profit agencies are increasingly serving children of diverse cultural backgrounds. Minority communities and professionals are demanding services responsive to the unique needs of these children. The following discussion summarizes the efforts of one private agency to meet these needs, highlighting the elements of policy, structure, practice, and values which are believed to promote more effective services for children and families of color.

Until recently, most agencies have assumed that services should be culturally blind, provided without regard for cultural differences. The result of this admirable attempt at fairness in service delivery, however, has too often been ethnocentric services inappropriate to families of color. Numerous studies have documented the differential treatment of children of color in the child welfare system (Cross, et al., 1989; Cummins, 1986; Katz-Leavy, Lourie, and Kaufmann, 1987; Stehno, 1982; Sue, 1981). Unfortunately, few published sources have provided concrete direction for change. Through early recognition of the issues and by trial and error, some agencies have been in the vanguard of development of culturally competent services. The Casey Family Program is one such agency.

Neither systems, agencies, nor individual professionals become culturally competent overnight. It is a developmental process aimed at implementing and maintaining a set of congruent policies, structures, values, and practices which enhance the organization’s capacity to serve people of color effectively. The organization cited in this article would be the first to say it is not “there” yet. It does, however, illustrate important steps in the process and provides a model for other organizations as they begin their movement toward cultural competence.

The Casey Family Program

The Casey Family Program (ICFP) is headquartered in Seattle, Washington and has division offices in 18 locations in 13 states. TCFP is unique in several respects:

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It provides only long-term planned foster care and related services, and it serves children for whom adoption is neither advisable nor feasible and for whom a return to biological parents has been ruled out. Serving over 932 children nationwide, over 50% of whom are children of color, TCFP has made extensive efforts to enhance its cross-cultural services over the last ten years. Our discussion will highlight only a few of the steps taken by TCFP.

Perhaps the most important example of the inclusion of cultural issues into the policy of the agency are TCFP's "Standards for Services to Children of Color." These written standards, effectively communicated throughout the agency, clearly delineate the policy of the agency's services to children of color. Placement guidelines, case review procedures, and other organizational structures are mandated by the standards, ensuring that cultural issues are considered as part of every case decision.

Among the requirements established by the Standards is that the treatment plan for all children of color include a "cultural plan." Case workers required to devise such plans become knowledgeable about particulars of cultural differences in the groups with whom they work. For example, positive identity formation in children of color is complicated by a number of factors. These children are often subject to conflicting demands for identification from their own ethnic group (e.g., to preserve customs of dress or hairstyle) and from the dominant culture (e.g., to conform to fashion). At the same time, elements of the dominant culture openly or subtly disparage the ethnic group to which they belong. As a result, children may resist identifying with their own cultural group, yet they may never make a comfortable identification with the dominant cultural group. A cultural plan can address these conflicts in a number of ways. It can seek to build positive group self-esteem by teaching the child about positive role models, both present and past, and about the history and culture of their group. In addition, it can seek to resolve the child's confusion over conflicting demands for identification by helping the child clearly articulate both the demands and his or her feelings about them. The cultural plan can include provisions for helping the child avoid denial of his or her culture and for facilitating conscious, constructive choices about group identification.

Another organizational structure supporting TCFP's policy is the "cultural specialist" position within each division. Cultural specialists review intakes for cultural implications, plan and schedule culturally-related training, and conduct periodic reviews of cultural plans.

One example of a practice adaptation developing within TCFP is the use of extended family placements as long-term resources. In both Native American and African American communities the program has found a great deal of success in working with the natural systems of support, most important of which is the extended family. Extended family placements have presented unique recruitment and service delivery issues which the TCFP has had to overcome, often through trial and error. To recruit extended family care providers, TCFP has

had to rethink the recruitment process. While cultural values and historic distrust often inhibit potential relative care providers from voluntarily seeking out the agency, they seldom say no when the agency approaches them. Through use of respected community members as "home finders" and through direct personal contact, TCFP has disproven the myth that minority foster homes are unavailable. Today, within TCFP a child of color in a Caucasian home is the exception.

TCFP is learning how to help relative care providers work out functional relationships and boundaries with biological parents. Support activities and issue-focused training have proven very helpful in this effort. In addition, social workers are learning how to help biological parents develop positive non-custodial roles with their children. The agency is still learning, but is making clear progress in understanding the support needs of these families and the children they care for.

The value base that has driven this development in TCFP has been modeled by management and spread throughout the agency by use of training and by diversifying the staff culturally. The agency maintains a cultural advisory committee, and has recently opened a dialogue with people of color on staff regarding the attitudes they encounter within and outside the agency. By keeping the issue open for discussion at every meeting or event, the agency continues to grow and develop toward cultural competence. The growth has not been all smooth sailing, however. With divisions in 13 states, the organization has faced problems with consistency of application of the policies and diverse levels of commitment to the effort. With the growth of new practice adaptations, the agency has occasionally faced its own identity crisis struggling with conflicting internal views of what constitutes good practice. For example, supervisors have sometimes not known how to judge the clinical implications of indigenous healing practices and have therefore been cautious about their use. As the staff has become more diverse in its ability to draw on the natural helping practices and resources of the communities it serves, the supervisors' need for cultural knowledge has become increasingly acute.

Also, with an increase in the diversity of staff, the agency has encountered a new generation of issues. While the early step was hiring a diverse staff, the next set of problems arose around retention of such a staff. Experiencing a high turnover rate among minority staff, division directors found that cross-cultural supervision skills had to be carefully cultivated. To cope with these second-generation issues, TCFP is drawing on cultural consultants and providing cross-cultural supervision training to managers and supervisors.

TCFP illustrates different aspects of the effort to enhance service delivery for children of color in the context of a changing world. Observers from inside and out of TCFP would judge the agency's progress differently. Yet over the long range these efforts represent significant progress. Each organization will approach the task differently. Some will make changes in response to community advocacy efforts. Some will change because funding sources or accredi-

ing bodies demand it. All can take comfort in the experience of TCFP, however, which promises to show that improved services for people of color enhances benefits for all consumers.

References

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Terry L. Cross, ACSW, is Director of the Northwest Indian Child Welfare Institute in Portland, Oregon. He is profiled in "Meet the Leaders" elsewhere in this section. For more information about the Casey Family Program, write or call Ruth Massinga, Executive Director, at 2033 6th Av., Suite 1100, Seattle, WA 98121. 206-448-4620.

RESOURCES

—compiled by Terry Cross and Char Tong

In the last 15 years the literature on minority mental health and on the dominant culture's perceptions of and responses to it has grown quickly. The field now has access to a broad base of information about practice, policy, and epidemiological issues in minority mental health. References to this literature will be published in this section over the months to come. Below are listed three valuable annotated bibliographies.

1. **Selected Citations from Afro-American References, An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Resources.** Nathaniel Davis (Ed.), Greenwood Press CN, 1985. These citations were taken from a bibliography citing some 642 selected resources. Items listed include bibliographies, indexes, directories, and almanacs. Available from Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Box 5007, Westport CN 06881.
2. **Annotated Bibliography on Cultural Competence.** Mary Elizabeth Ryder (Ed.), Portland State University, Regional Research Institute, 1989. This bibliography is likely the most useful and comprehensive of the resources available for use in the development and evaluation of culturally competent human services. The citations are not specific to mental health: they discuss all aspects and considerations in agency cultural competency. Available from Portland State University, Regional Research Institute for Human Services, PO Box 751, Portland OR 97207-0751 503-464-4040
3. **Annotated Bibliography on Minority Mental Health Issues.** Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) Data Base. Compiled July 1989 at Portland State University library by C. Tong. A search through the ERIC data base led to 29 annotated bibliographies which include position papers, journal articles, directories, literature reviews, project descriptions and legal material. They are available for purchase from ERIC Document Reproduction Services (EDRS), 3900 Wheeler Av., Alexandria VA 22304-6409 800-227-3742.