



# People of Color Leadership Institute

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## FEATURE Moving from Talk to Action: Toward Cultural Competence in the Field of Child Abuse and Neglect

—by Joyce N. Thomas  
and Jacqueline Booth

So much has been said about the importance of the issue of "cultural competence", but the real challenge for the People of the Color Leadership Institute is to determine what specifically we are doing and what future actions must be taken to enhance services to children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Hardly a day goes by that we don't hear these questions. We know it's a fact that most child abuse professionals who are concerned about being sensitive or even competent are seeking *practical, concrete, and specific* information in order to improve the quality of their services. In spite of this demand for knowledge, the realities are that there are still more questions than there are answers. The good news is that some of the forums, workshops, and meetings which are being held throughout the country today are rich with ideas and information. On September 16-17, 1992, the People of Color Leadership Institute's Expert Task Force held its second annual meeting in Washington, D.C. to continue to seek solutions to these pressing concerns. The event was a welcome opportunity to review the project's accomplishments to date and to chart new directions in our planning for programs and services for abused and neglected children.

We were so pleased with the outcome that the group felt it would be important to share our early findings with the APSAC membership and reading audience. Theresa Reid, the Executive Director of APSAC, the original twelve-member task force, and the other child welfare professionals came together to discuss divergent perspectives on the issues of research, policy, programming, and legislation as they confront ethnic minority clients and professionals of color. David Lloyd, Director of NCCAN was present during the initial part of the meeting. The intent of this gathering was to begin to develop some concrete frameworks for addressing these complex issues. More specifically, the objectives of the meeting were:

- (1) to begin to develop a national agenda centered around issues of cultural competence in the field of child maltreatment;
- (2) to discuss the implications of the recent amendment to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) that specifically relate to issues of cultural diversity;
- (3) to identify appropriate criteria for selecting culturally competent child abuse treatment and prevention programs;
- (4) to delineate current and impending child welfare policy issues affecting persons of color, and;

(5) to review two POCLI products, the Cultural Competence Self Assessment and the Training Curriculum on Cultural Competence.

As we focused on each of the objectives that we set for ourselves, we realized that each one could in fact be a full scale project. It was a hard hitting group that expressed many concerns about problems in the system, inadequate services, and limited information for victimized children and their families who come from ethnically diverse communities. The group expressed a sense of urgency about addressing the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the system. It was recognized that as people of color, we are witnessing and participating in a multiracial and transcultural upheaval of social anger about our disenfranchisement.

The significance of this meeting was not just the coming together to rehash "unfixable" problems, but to formulate strategies for action within the field of child abuse and neglect. Many insightful suggestions, recommendations, and ideas were advanced during the meeting, in particular by small working groups focused on specific problems.

Lula Beatty, Ph.D., was the resource person for the working group on research priorities. Participants were expected first to identify the ten most critical research questions confronting people of color in this field, then to rank order these issues in terms of their need for attention. The top three needs identified were (1) to examine the participation of professionals of color in the research arena, (2) to develop programs of research which focus on prevention in communities of color, and (3) to identify effective service delivery models which are used within various ethnic populations. The full scope of ideas will be presented by the POCLI project director to the next Research Committee meeting. Review and refinement of these goals will be an ongoing effort of the POCLI project.

Fe'lecia Holley, MSW, JD, Director of Program Services of the Center for Child Protection and Family Support, led the discussion for the legislative working group. In May of 1992, Congress finally passed legislation to reauthorize CAPTA (the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act). This legislation authorized spending by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect through fiscal year 1996. There are lots of components to this law, including funds for discretionary research and demonstration grants, support to the U.S. Advisory Committee, and data collection through the National Incidence Study to name only a few. For the first time, the language within the law

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specifies issues of "cultural diversity," "cultural distinctions" and cultural sensitivity." The group strongly suggested that within the CAPTA legislation, in addition to research projects, the focus on cultural issues should extend to demonstration projects and technical assistance contracts. The terms referring to "cultural diversity," "culture specific," "cultural distinctions," and "cultural sensitivity," which are written in the language of the bill, were discussed at length. The group was charged with the responsibility to provide greater clarification of the meaning of these terms.

Another compelling question which often gets presented to the POCLI staff is, "How many child abuse and neglect programs focus on issues of culture and ethnicity?" and, "What criteria should be used to identify such programs?" Our goal is to assist the Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect in the development of a directory of such programs. Building on her extensive experience with technical assistance projects, Mareasa Issacs, Ph.D., was charged with leading this important working group. In terms of identifying "culturally competent" child abuse and neglect treatment and prevention programs, the group suggested that one should look at the factors determining "community-based" status; the ethnicity of the staff; and active efforts to promote cultural awareness. These were only a few of the suggestions that were cited as criteria that are useful to consider. The group felt that site visits, surveys of the mission statement, a review of the philosophy of the program, and conducting more in-depth interviews with clients would certainly contribute to more quality selection of programs.

The final small group focused on identifying critical policy issues in the field of child abuse which have implications to the children and families of color. Under the leadership of Terry Cross, MSW, the policy group's key recommendations included that local, state, and federal agencies should be thoroughly coordinated to form a fine-webbed, strong safety net for families in trouble; that all agencies should shift their focus from punishment to empowerment; that we should ensure parity in services for all communities; that risk assessment in populations of color should be culturally specific, and that child placements should be culturally congruent.

In addition to the group discussion, the task force provided critical feedback on the progress of the POCLI products under development. Terry Cross, Executive Director of the Northwest Indian Child Welfare Association, has been instrumental in developing and refining two major POCLI products, the Cultural Competence Agency Self Assessment and the Training Curriculum in Cultural Competency. Using a self-study model, the POCLI Agency Self-Assessment is a diagnostic tool that examines the cultural relevance of the policies, practices, administration, and community relations of child welfare agencies serving populations of color. Pilot testing of the instrument was completed at each of POCLI's four collaborating subcontracting agen-

cies, whose feedback will be crucial in revising the tool. All of these national child abuse agencies indicated that the POCLI Agency Self Assessment instrument is a concrete and useful tool to assist agencies in exploring organizational components of cultural competency. It is expected that during the third year of the POCLI project this Agency Self-Assessment Instrument will be pilot tested in three state CPS systems. Following the final modifications of this instrument, we hope that *all agencies* which serve maltreated children and their families will volunteer to examine their levels of cultural competence.

A second product reviewed by the Task Force was the Training Curriculum on Cultural Competence. The goal of this curriculum is to assist child welfare workers in developing cultural competence. During the Task Force meeting, the curriculum underwent a thorough review of its content and structure. Although they recommended substantial revisions, Task Force members also expressed enthusiasm about the potential of the curriculum to create cultural competence among CPS line staff—the critical point of entry for most families entering the system.

The Task Force Meeting had a particularly memorable moment in bringing together a mentor and a new mentoree. Carmen Fernandez, a mentoree, is a social worker who has worked in the area of child abuse and neglect for many years. Ms Fernandez wishes to be mentored to enhance her skills in the areas of research, proposal writing, and public policy. Her mentor, Dr. Eduardo Diaz, is Director of the Department of Justice Assistance in Miami, Florida. The Task Force Meeting provided an opportunity for them to meet face-to-face for the first time and converse about their intended projects within the Mentorship Program. Contact such as this is crucial to a productive mentoring relationship. POCLI hopes to provide other occasions in which mentorship dyads will be able to meet. To date, there are over 100 nationally-recognized persons of color available to serve as mentors in the program. Requests for mentoree applications are steadily coming in to the POCLI office.

There was a strong sense that the Expert Task Force meeting was a tremendous success. A multitude of insightful findings and recommendations were generated from the event, and efforts are currently underway to incorporate these suggestions into the POCLI framework. As part of its attempt to propel issues of cultural relevance into the national arena, POCLI continues to share this information with members of APSAC and other local, state and national child abuse organizations. For more information on POCLI activities, contact Jackie Booth, POCLI Coordinator, at (202) 544-3144.

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