

RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY OF BLACK CHILDREN IN CHILD WELFARE

NEEDS STATEMENT

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Child Welfare Workers need increased knowledge related to racial disproportionality and social justice to decrease racial disproportionality for Black children.

HISTORY OF PROBLEM

The child welfare system has long been shaped by racial oppression, with policies such as "home suitability clauses" and "man-in-the-house" rules that disproportionately targeted Black families. Despite efforts like the 1961 Flemming Rule, which aimed to ensure due process and equal services, these families often faced culturally insensitive services due to racial stereotypes (Lawrence-Webb, 1997). Racial disparities persist today, as Black children are more likely to be removed from their homes and stay longer in foster care than White children (WSIPP, 2008). Studies, such as one in Washington State, highlight the disproportionality in child welfare involvement, with Black children facing longer foster care stays and fewer permanent placements (WSIPP, 2008). Four policy perspectives—social advantage, expedient permanency, cultural continuity, and family preservation—have shaped child welfare interventions, each prioritizing different developmental outcomes. Racial inequities persist not only due to historical policies but also through racial biases among workers (Anyon, 2011). Efforts to address these disparities have focused on reducing bias through standardized risk assessments, cultural responsiveness training, and systemic changes, though debates about the causes of disproportionality, including whether it is driven by racial bias or disproportionate needs, continue (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020).

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Race Theory includes 6 main tenets. 1) CRT believes that race is a social construct that maintains the dominance of certain racial groups over others (i.e., White people in Western societies) 2) Racism is deeply embedded within structures, which makes it widespread 3) Liberalism is rooted in the idea that people are equal and that objectiveness in the legal system allows justice 4) racialization is fluid and serves the advancement of the dominant racial group throughout time 5) CRT recognizes that intersectional identities create a network of oppression (e.g., age, gender, religion, etc.) 6) CRT highlights that counter storytelling is a way of giving minoritized communities voices given that the dominant racial group has often excluded minoritized groups from its accounting of history (Gourdine, 2019). These six tenets inform my project activities because it is important to understand racism is embedded into society and therefore is not on the oppressed to change it is on the oppressor and is why child welfare workers are the ones needing to gain knowledge on these topics. It also emphasizes the need for storytelling and so having Black families, service providers, and social workers come and explain what they need speaks to this. Outcomes I hope to accomplish include a better understanding of racial bias and disproportionality and social justice so that child welfare workers can make more racially and social justice informed decisions for families.

Intervention

My intervention consists of connecting Black families to evidence-based service providers with knowledge in working with Black families. Evidence based refers to research and data showing success of these programs for Black families specifically. To engage and connect Black families with prevention services/service providers, DCYF will connect with community providers that already service Black families to help inform Black families of resources out there and use social media to promote these prevention services. DCYF will ensure child welfare workers are knowledgeable of evidence-based services and offer them to Black families. Child welfare workers will then receive education on best practices for working with Black families to include education on racial bias, racism, disproportionality, and social justice. Education will be delivered in workshops that are ongoing in nature and reflect current DCYF policies and WA state laws.

Possible workshop topics include:

- What is Racial disproportionality?
- What is Racial bias?
- How to combat Racial bias
- Social Justice Framework
- Hearing from Black children and families impacted by the child welfare system and their experiences
- Case scenario work through

GOAL

Safely reduce the number of black children in the child welfare system.

OUTCOMES

Outcome 1: Increased number of culturally appropriate services to Black families.

Indicator A: Black families will report services they received aligned with their culture, values, and needs through a survey.

Indicator B: There will be a 5% increase in engagement in services for Black families

Outcome 2: Increased knowledge of child welfare workers related to racial bias, disproportionately, and how to work with Black families through a social justice Lense.

Indicator A: Through case scenarios child welfare workers will identify racial bias practices with Black families.

Indicator B: At least 20% of child welfare workers who took part in the training workshop are able to identify three ways racial biases play out in the system.

References:

Anyon, Y. (2011). Reducing racial disparities and disproportionalities in the child welfare system: Policy perspectives about how to serve the best interests of African American youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(2), 242–253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2010.09.007>. Dettlaff, A. J., & Boyd, R. (2020). Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in the Child Welfare System: Why Do They Exist, and What Can Be Done to Address Them? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 692(1), 253–274. Gourdine, R. M. (2019). We Treat Everybody the Same: Race Equity in Child Welfare. *Social Work in Public Health*, 34(1), 75–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2018.1562400>, Harp, K. L. H., & Bunting, A. M. (2020). The Racialized Nature of Child Welfare Policies and the Social Control of Black Bodies. *Social Politics*, 27(2), 258–281. Lawrence-Webb, C. (1997). African American Children in the Modern Child Welfare System: A Legacy of the Flemming Rule. *Child Welfare*, 76(1), 9–30. Washington State Institute For Public Policy. (2008). Racial Disproportionality In Washington State's Child Welfare System (Document No. 08-06-3901).