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Texas Child Welfare Partnership with The People’s Institute and Casey Family Programs Produces Positive Results for Children
A Story about Institutionalizing Undoing Racism™ in a State System
(based on presentation by Sheila Craig and Elizabeth Kromrei, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, New York City, October 13, 2008)


Sheila and Liz recount how Texas antiracist organizers have institutionalized The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond's Undoing Racism™ workshops with Child Protective Services staff as a key component to further statewide work to reduce disproportionality in the Texas child welfare system.

In 1996, when Joyce James served as a Regional Director with Texas Child Protective Services, she expanded her work into community collaboration, due to a passion for reducing disparity in outcomes for children of color. In 1998, determined to produce significant changes in the racial disparities within not only the Child Protective Services system but also other social services, she partnered with Stephen F. Austin University to compile research data to help her team better understand and change the disproportionate outcomes for children of color. The result of data analysis and partnership with other systems in her region was the creation of Project HOPE (Helping Our People Excel). The opening of Project HOPE in 2002 brought services to the community and became the model for later pilots in the state. In 2004, being appointed the new Child Protective Services Assistant Commissioner, known in other states as the child welfare director, Ms. James brought her vision to a statewide level.

In 2004, under Ms. James’ leadership, the Texas Child Protective Services program in partnership with Casey Family Programs through a collaborative called the Texas State Strategy revisited and recommitted to our vision/values and began efforts to address true systemic change for services to children and families. The 79th Texas Legislature responded to the need for program wide change by including the addressing of disproportionality in Senate Bill 6. That legislation mandated an analysis, while controlling for factors such as family structure and poverty, to determine if disproportionality existed. And, if disproportionality was found, the Legislature mandated the development and implementation of a remediation plan. The analysis of data, published in January 2006, determined disproportionality does exist for African American children and a very small population of Native American children. It also determined that, despite their disproportionate numbers in the various systems, African-American families don't abuse their children any more than any other group. The remediation plan, published in July 2006, outlined steps to address disproportionality in Texas.

The Texas State Strategy, consisting of Child Protective Services leadership, Casey Family Programs leadership, parents and youth, began addressing challenges and services with an approach to improving the outcomes of those with the poorest results in recognition that this would ultimately result in better outcomes for all children and families. As a result of their work:

- Efforts, which began in areas with the greatest disparity, have been expanded to each region of the state.
- Texas, with legislative support, has utilized federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) funds, state funds and the support of Casey Family Programs in order to hold Undoing Racism™ workshops in all areas of the state. More than 60 workshops have been held; many more planned.
- The Texas population of children in paid foster care settings has been reduced, now exits are outpacing entries into foster care.
- Kinship placements have doubled, as local communities are engaged in decision-making and the use of Family Group Decision-Making models have been expanded to all stages of service. This approach to service planning is more inclusive of families and kin and is culturally sensitive.
- There has been a substantial increase in the number of families receiving in-home services.
- State office and regional leaders meet regularly with Disproportionality Specialists (now in every region of the state) to strategize about how to implement the vision and values they've learned;
- The experience of Undoing Racism™ workshops has resulted in a common language and clear message that issues impacting decision-making, poverty, institutionalized racism can be directly
addressed. Many communities respond to the workshops with "Talkback forums" and debriefings to allow an opportunity for CPS staff and community partners to continue talking about how to undo racism.

Learning:

- Strategic planning is central to all the work - and the community, including foster-care parents/grandparents, parents and youth who were in foster care, must always be engaged with process
- Leadership development is key to sustaining the work - the Texas work began with child welfare leadership and has expanded down to the caseworker level;
- Budget analysis is crucial, both to finding monies to sustain the work and demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of antiracist procedures and practice.
- Disproportionality work needs to be imbedded in other programs/systems; in Texas, it is institutionalized within the Family Group Decision-Making, Kinship Care programs, a formal venue for raising the youth and parent voices, and other Family Focus initiatives.