



FOURTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON FAIRNESS & EQUITY ISSUES IN CHILD WELFARE TRAINING

Regional Presentation:

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services: Addressing Issues of Fairness and Equity: Education and Collaboration with Community Partners

Summary of Presentation
April 27, 2006

The goal of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (LA-DCFS) regional update was to provide an overview of collaborative efforts with community partners to address fairness and equity issues. Below are panelists who presented in this discussion:

- Regina Gore
 - Assistant Regional Administrator, LA-DCFS
- Monica McCurdy
 - Training Coordinator, LA-DCFS
- John Owsley
 - Co-Chair, Pomona Community Council
 - CEO, Pomona Valley Youth Employment Services
- Sandy Perez-Diaz
 - Emergency response and family preservation social worker, LA-DCFS
- Claudia Thompson
 - Foster Mother
 - Member, Pomona Community Council

The Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) recognizes the importance of involving community-based partner agencies to reduce disproportionality in out-of-home placements. African American and Latino community members have expressed distrust of the Department. To address this distrust and reduce disproportionality in out-of-home placements, DCFS adopted the following philosophies:

- The Department of Child Welfare Services cannot make appropriate decisions to reduce disproportionality in the communities they serve without involving them in decision-making.
- One way of reducing disproportionality is to support families through engagement and connection to community-based supports. These community providers also require engagement and resources.

DCFS used the following strategies to engage community members:

- DCFS held a resource fair to meet community leaders and address their feelings of distrust.
- At foster parent forums, DCFS was told that community members' needs had been ignored in the past. DCFS learned that immediate response to their needs builds trust.
- Some DCFS staff members felt attacked at these forums. Thus, staff members' emotional responses were addressed so that the dialogue between DCFS and community members could continue.

The forums set in motion the following actions:

- DCFS made plans to hire caregivers as mentors for other caregivers, and established a caregiver support line that allows mentors to answer caregivers' questions.
- Mentors also support each other through meetings.
- A council of community providers was formed to build relationships within the community.
- Both the caregiver mentoring and the community council exemplify resources families can access that may serve them better than services offered by DCFS.

Community members expressed the following concerns:

- Community members welcome the opportunity to express their concerns but also demand that their concerns are addressed.
- Another problem pertaining to disproportionality is the lack of African American and Latino care providers. Recruiting more care providers of these ethnicities sends a message to community members that DCFS is serious about reducing disproportionality.
- DCFS can build trust by ensuring that truthful information is provided to caregivers as well as follow-up support services.
- Social workers also need to view parents as individuals. Parents whose children are removed should not be labeled as not knowing "how to keep a house" or as "uneducated." These parents need continued support.

DCFS currently uses the following strategies to reduce out-of-home placements:

- Strategic Decision-Making (SDM) has helped remove bias from decision-making.
- Team Decision-Making (TDM) increases community member involvement.
- Concurrent planning.