



SIXTH ANNUAL
**SYMPOSIUM ON FAIRNESS AND EQUITY ISSUES
IN CHILD WELFARE TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

Keynote Address & Discussion
**Fairness, Equity, and Well-Being:
Transformative Possibilities of Public Child Welfare**

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Summary of Presentation
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Mr. Miller began with the story of his life as a child in the child welfare system and later described how those experiences influenced his work in the field. Mr. Miller's mother was a White woman from a rural area of Ohio. When she became pregnant at age 18 through a relationship with an African American man, her family rejected her and she sought shelter in a Christian maternity home. At the home, she was coaxed to give up her baby for adoption, but she refused. She maintained her involvement with the baby's father, and within two years, gave birth to her second son, Oronde.

By this time, Mr. Miller's father was married to another woman and unable to support Oronde and his older brother. Without sufficient resources, Mr. Miller's mother decided to place the children in foster care. Miller's father and his family approached the foster care agency in order to gain custody of the children but were informed that it was too late for the family to alter the decision. As was often the case then as now, Mr. Miller explained, fathers were not included in decisions regarding their children.

In view of his personal history, Mr. Miller cautioned that increasing the number of adoptions and decreasing the number of children in care does not necessarily mean that child welfare practice is successful. Although he and his brother eventually had a positive adoption experience, in many respects, the system failed his birth mother and father. Mr. Miller maintains that indicators of success and failure in child welfare work need to address a broader context of child and family well-being.

Mr. Miller's professional involvement in child welfare began with his work for the National Center on Permanency for African American Children based at Howard University. At this agency, he was charged with developing a resource center for African American children and families who participated in the child welfare or juvenile justice

systems. In fulfillment of this assignment, Mr. Miller founded the Institute for Family and Child Well-Being, an on-line resource repository committed to sharing the stories of families and children involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The Institute provides information to professionals, community based organizations and others who are interested in deepening the understanding of well-being, and transforming how well-being is addressed in child welfare.

Mr. Miller also discussed his work with Casey Family Programs as Senior Director of Strategic Consulting for The Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Reducing Disproportionality and Disparate Outcomes. The Breakthrough Series Collaborative is an innovative method for systems improvement to address child welfare practice issues using action-oriented teams on a local scale in locations around the country. The Collaborative seeks to harness the energy from conversations about race, institutional racism and biased decision making into models of action for positive change. The Collaborative method includes a cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The Breakthrough Series Collaborative uses a definition of structural racism that is found in The Aspen Institute's publications on community building and youth development. Mr. Miller described The Aspen Institute's definition of structural racism as follows:

The complex ways in which historical oppression, culture, ideology, political economy, public policy and institutional practices interact to produce forms of racial sorting that reproduce and reinforce a hierarchy of color that privileges whiteness and marginalizes blackness.

Proceeding from this definition, the Breakthrough Series Collaborative explores:

- the racial legacy of our past
What is the historical context?
- how racism persists in our national policies, institutional practices, and cultural representations
What is the present-day manifestation?
- how racism is transmitted and either amplified or mitigated through public, private, and community institutions
What is the role of institutions?
- how individuals internalize and respond to racialized structures
What is the response of individuals?

Mr. Miller shared major themes that have arisen from the work of child welfare agencies:

- Centrality of culture, language, and values in child welfare practice:
Implications for the designation of "culturally responsive/culturally competent" caseworkers, teachers, guidance counselors, therapists, etc.
- Engagement of Maternal and Paternal Relatives:
Their strengths; their role in case planning, educational needs assessment, educational planning, and decision making.
- Centrality of Extended Family & Support Network:

- Consistent efforts must be made to engage members of the extended family and support network in case planning and decision making, as well as the ongoing encouragement, support and nurturance of families and children.*
- **Equitable Access to Services and Opportunities:**
Systems must be in place to track current access to, as well as quality of, timely services, resources and opportunities for families and children.
 - **Interagency and Between Systems Accountability and Transparency:**
Contractual agreements, service agreements, and memoranda of understanding must reflect an expectation of data tracking and data sharing which includes data collected by race and ethnicity.
 - **Effective Community-Based Service Providers and Educational Enrichment Resources:**
Efforts must be made to identify the range of traditional and non-traditional community-based service providers, therapists, educational support programs, after-school programs, etc. Agencies must be committed to supporting and working with the range of service providers and support resources. Broad awareness and timely accessibility is critical.
 - **Timely Check-back, Troubleshooting, Adjustments:**
There should be timely check-back and troubleshooting (when necessary) around times of transitions, placement changes, changes in teacher and/or school assignment, etc.; these should be frequent during the early phases of case management, followed by timelines that are responsive to the developmental experiences and needs of the child and family.

Mr. Miller continued by reviewing what people can do to effect change in the child welfare system. For example, people may not be able to control how families are reported to the child welfare system, but they can influence how community based organizations and support networks engage families.

Mr. Miller concluded by posing questions about the scope of child welfare practice: Should child welfare be charged with influencing access to quality opportunities that support children's growth and development? Should child welfare explore why some groups of children are given opportunities and others not? Should child welfare determine who is deserving of success? Mr. Miller urges us to find answers to these questions as part of our commitment to child and family welfare.