

Promising Practices to Address Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System

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CalSWEC F & E Symposium, 4/4/05

Presentation Summary

Kathy Lemon presented results from the multi-phase, multi-method study of Santa Clara County's child welfare system (CWS) conducted by the Child Welfare Research Team at the San José State University College of Social Work. In addition to assessing identified key practices affecting children and families of color in Santa Clara County's child welfare system, the study also sought to explore the influence of the court system on child welfare practice and to complete a statewide comparative analysis of identified key practices that may affect the disproportionate representation of children of color. The study identified promising practices at the beginning choice point, continuing care/ending choice point and at the organizational level. Overall, the study concluded that:

- There is a need to expand child welfare services and increase the availability of:
 - preventive, in-home services
 - non-traditional, culturally-sensitive services
 - services that are inclusive, collaborative, culturally appropriate, and that involve clients' communities
 - services targeted to fathers (family-based)
 - innovative services and evaluation of their success with different racial/ethnic groups
- There is a need to involve multiple social service systems by developing formal interagency agreements and connections with agencies, including co-location of services.
- The ways in which agency organizational context and culture affect children and families of color merits attention.
 - It is important to recognize that a large bureaucratic organization may impede the implementation of best practices. In Santa Clara County, practices that have been implemented in the southern part of the county that include parent orientation, vertical case management, and the establishment of a culture of commitment to maintaining/reunifying families might be beneficial to use in the main county offices as well.
- More attention to the impact of system-level changes of children and families of color is warranted. This includes regular monitoring and assessments of how policy changes or changes in organizational culture may affect children and families of color.