

Barriers to Promising Practices for Children and Families of Color*

Barrier	Description
Large numbers of inappropriate referrals	Results suggested that low-income children and families are frequently referred to the child welfare system because of issues more closely associated with poverty than with abuse or neglect. Repeated inappropriate referrals can be damaging because they create a perception of increased risk that may or may not be accurate. Inappropriate referrals reduce the amount of time social workers have to identify and serve families who are in need of services.
Inconsistency in decision-making	Decision-making may often be determined by the biases and perceptions of individual social workers. Decision-making is often influenced by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.
Inadequate prevention of child maltreatment or entry into the child welfare system	In general there is a need for more services in the community that would help to prevent entry into the child welfare system. Also a need for more community education about child welfare laws and definitions of child abuse, particularly for cultures in which norms related to discipline differ from expectations in the dominant culture.
Problems with service plan recommendations	A “cookie cutter” approach to services was described as a barrier to implementation of promising practices for children and families of color.
Need for stronger linkages with substance abuse services	Families with substance abuse problems were described as a large portion of child welfare caseloads. A lack of formal agreements between the child welfare system and substance abuse services was described as a barrier to effectively serving these families.
Barriers related to relative and foster placements	Poverty issues and timelines were described as factors that often prevented the use of relative placements for children and families of color. Even if a relative placement is identified it is often difficult to complete placement paperwork within 24 hours with required background checks and fingerprinting.
Heavy caseloads and staff shortages	Children and families of color, particularly families who may be less trusting or more intimidated by the system, may require language specific services, or who may have multiple vulnerabilities were deemed very likely to be impacted by the heavy caseloads of social workers.
Need for more bilingual and bicultural social workers	A lack of bilingual and bicultural social workers was perceived as a major barrier to the implementation of promising practices for children and families of color. It was noted that English speaking social workers who are assigned to families with low English language proficiency may not be able to conduct proper assessments.
Time limit constraints	May be difficult to work toward family reunification in the context of federal and state time limits. It is often difficult to access services in a timely manner—especially services for clients with low English language proficiency or those who can only attend services during non-working hours.

* Results are from the Main County focus groups