



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

Interactive Presentation

**What Puts Children at Risk? Using a Power Analysis in the Struggle for
Equity and Human Rights**

Reverend Buford

Summary of Presentation

April 13, 2007

Reverend Buford presented a tool for workers to use in the field to assess the strengths and needs of a client or community. Part of the tool concerns a visual mapping of neighborhood institutions that affect a person, family or community. This mapping is used to analyze power structures in the neighborhood and to identify existing supports and barriers relative to specific concerns.

Reverend Buford began this interaction by posing the question:

- What are the basic human rights of a child?

Audience members provided the following responses:

- Right to a family
- Right to a safe environment
- Right to knowledge of one's culture and heritage
- Right to general well-being
- Right to knowledge of one's legal rights

Reverend Buford then discussed the distinction between civil rights and human rights. He defined civil rights as the rights of an individual as a citizen of a country, and human rights as the inherent rights of an individual as a human being. Human rights are the same for all people regardless of where they live, and should be standard. However, while citizens' rights are outlined in the U.S. Constitution, human rights are not clearly specified or communicated.

Reverend Buford alluded to a report filed last year with the U.N. regarding the inhumane and tortuous treatment occurring in the California penal system, and how inmates' human rights, including those of adults and juveniles, were repeatedly and frequently violated. These inmates were not, and most likely still are not, aware of their basic rights as human beings. Consequently, they remain powerless in their current situation. Reverend Buford maintains that if people are informed of their rights, and told when their rights are being violated, they are more empowered to advocate for themselves.

Besides knowing basic human rights, it is also important to know how systems and institutions uphold or violate those rights. When working with families involved in the child welfare system, it is important to identify the factors that lead to and maintain the disparities that exist. For families who are living in poverty, it is important to note that frequently the only institutions that inhabit their neighborhoods are check-cashing and liquor stores. There is a dearth of supportive resources that would allow the client to succeed. Workers in the system must also be conscious of themselves and colleagues as gatekeepers, either helping to maintain structures of disparity or working to hold systems accountable to the ways they contribute to disempowering and oppressing individuals, groups and communities.