

The Leading Edge

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8th Edition / October 2021

Director's Corner: Engaging the Challenge

The DIRECTORS INSTITUTE aims to develop a cohort of strong, effective leaders to support and sustain local use of the California Child Welfare Core Practice Model (CPM). By January 2019, all County Child Welfare Directors (CWDs) will have the individual skills & organizational resources to systematically implement the CPM.

During the August 2019 Directors Institute Learning Session VI, before the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other tragic victims of racial injustice forced our country to finally come to grips with the inequities in our society, a number of Child Welfare Directors and CPM faculty challenged us to have courageous conversations about how California's Child Welfare system might confront our own issues of racial injustice.

We have always believed that the behaviors promoted by the Core Practice Model—engagement, teaming, inquiry and exploration, advocacy—would naturally promote a more equitable system. The CPM grew out of the California Partners for Permanency (CAPP) project, which was generously funded by the federal government in order to address the disproportionate representation of, and disparate outcomes for, Black and American Indian youth in long term placement; this foundation informed the development of the CPM behaviors that were intended to extend the focus to all children and youth throughout the system.

But when we began these courageous conversations we realized that it is not important enough that addressing race equity and inclusion is implicit in the Core Practice Model; we understood that we must take an active, vigorous, and explicit approach to ensuring that the CPM makes a difference in the lives of children and families of color in the Child Welfare system.

Immediately following Learning Session VI, we began planning for Learning Session VII. We unanimously agreed that our immediate purpose going forward would be to thoroughly explore all aspects of the CPM so that we could identify those areas where explicit discussions of race equity and inclusion would strengthen the impact of the CPM on interactions between Child Welfare agencies and communities, between Child Welfare agencies and their partners, between Child Welfare leadership and staff, and between social workers and children, youth and families.

Directors Corner cont...

As our planning progressed, so did COVID-19. Because the work that we envisioned would benefit most from in-person teaming and engagement, we began to explore other ways in which we might make a difference while waiting for the world to weather the pandemic storm. So we began planning the series of Racial Justice Zoom sessions that have become our focus over the many months since the lock-down began.

Our first step was to conduct a virtual listening session with the state's Child Welfare Directors to make sure that we were responding to the needs of our constituents. We learned from those sessions that there would be great value in providing some level-setting conversations about race in the history of the Child Welfare system, additional conversations about the ways in which the

Child Welfare leaders might host their own courageous conversations about race in their own agencies and communities, and lessons that have been learned from their peers in addressing race equity and inclusion in their organizations.

We have followed up with a series of virtual educational and interactive sessions, beginning in October 2020. The series is entitled, "**Racial Justice in the Child Welfare System: Leveraging the CPM to Build a Race Equity Culture,**" with the following learning objectives:

- Know the context and history of racism within the child welfare system in order to appreciate the impact that race has on decision-making within our field
- Understand key principles that leaders can visibly practice to set the stage for addressing racial justice in their organizations
- Leverage CPM behaviors to initiate conversations about racial justice that allow for constructive discomfort, productive conflict and courageous advocacy
- Learn about strategies that counties and states are using to address racial injustice in the Child Welfare system

Session 1, on October 29, 2020, focused on becoming familiar with key terms to establish a common understanding about racial equity/inequity in the Child Welfare system and knowing the context and history of racism within the child welfare system in order to appreciate the impact that race equity has on decision-making within our field. The PowerPoint and handout from that session can be found [here](#) on the CFPIC website.

Session 2, "Changing our Behaviors to Change our Culture," on 2/24/21, offered participants the opportunity to acquire ideas about entry points into the work of anti-racism within our systems, examine how the antidotes to white supremacy culture can transform organizational culture, and continue to explore together what we can do to promote equity in our organizations. The Powerpoint and handout from that session can be found [here](#) on the CFPIC website.

Session 3, "Learning From Our Past and Present to Create a More Promising Future," occurred on 4/27/21. This interactive event reflected on 20 years of REI work in California's child welfare agencies by looking back on past strategies utilized to address racial disproportionalities and disparities and offer counties an opportunity to share their current efforts through facilitated discussions. The PowerPoint and handouts from this session can be found [here](#) on the CFPIC website.

"Growing and Linking our Knowledge About Data, History and Sovereignty to Strengthen ICWA Practice and Leadership Behaviors" took place on 8/19/21.

Directors Corner cont...

During this first of the three planned ICWA Sessions focused on what data tells us about Native families and CWS, we explored the historical context of the Native experience and the impacts of government laws and practices on Native children and families. The Powerpoint and recording can be found [here](#).

Additional sessions are being planned for the upcoming months and will be posted on the CFPIC website:

- A deeper dive into some of the successful strategies explored in Session 3
- Additional sessions that will explore the history of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), its impact on the Child Welfare system, and successful approaches to its implementation in California

As we emerge from the COVID-19 restrictions, planning is resuming on the work that we have had to postpone, and we are looking forward to rolling up our sleeves in 2022 to begin in earnest the efforts to help realize the promise that California's Child Welfare Core Practice Model offers an effective avenue towards achieving true racial justice in the Child Welfare system.

Race, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives and Strategies Enacted between 2000 and 2020 in Child Welfare Agencies in California Counties

By: Anita Barbee, Danna Fabella and Gary Taylor

Over the course of the past two decades, hundreds of Child Welfare leaders and workforce members in at least thirty of California's 58 counties undertook efforts to address the systemic racism in Child Welfare that has produced a disproportionate representation of, and disparities in treatment and outcomes among, Native American, African American and Latinx families. As part of the work to center anti-racism and social justice activism in the execution of the Child Welfare Core Practice Model (CPM), the Directors Institute faculty have been creating resources and virtual convenings intended to create space for courageous conversations that are grounded in the history and continued influence of white supremacy in our nation and all of our institutions including those that feed and support the Child Welfare system. These sessions have also focused on building the skills that Child Welfare Directors can employ to undo racism in their own agencies. In order to better understand the work that has been going on for the past two decades, three members of the faculty conducted 16 interviews with county Child Welfare leaders, in addition to a session with members of the Cultural Broker teams from Fresno and Sacramento. These data-gathering efforts were accomplished between October 2020 and January 2021, focusing on race, equity, and inclusion (REI) initiatives that have taken place in the selected county Child Welfare agencies.



Marta D'Asaro

REI cont...

Eighty-one percent of the respondents were in counties that had participated in one of three previous REI initiatives:

- The Annie E. Casey *Family to Family Program* that mostly took place between 2000 and 2010 in 25 California counties
- The *California Disproportionality Project* sponsored by Annie E. Casey, Casey Family Programs, and the Stuart Foundation, which occurred from 2008 to 2010 in 12 California counties
- The California Partners for Permanency Project (CAPP) that was part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau *Permanency Innovations Initiative* (PII) grant executed in five sites around the nation between 2010 and 2016, including two in California- Los Angeles County (LA) and the four CAPP Counties of Santa Clara, Fresno, Humboldt, and LA.

In addition, from 2012 to the present, virtually all California counties have participated in the creation, preparation, installation and implementation of the CPM, with a focus on improving practice throughout the Child Welfare system. This work was always intended to improve the lives of children and families affected by Child Welfare, but it has often not explicitly focused on reducing the disproportionate representation of children of color and the disparities of outcomes that they experience.

Along with analysis of the interview and session responses, several reports and ancillary documents from these initiatives were synthesized to enrich our understanding of strategies and efforts to address systemic racism in California's Child Welfare system and offer further reflections regarding race, equity, and inclusion as part of CPM. This more detailed analysis is included in the report that can be viewed [here](#).

Demographics

In the interviews, 71% of 16 counties were represented by the Child Welfare Director of that county. In the other cases either an Assistant Director or Deputy Director took the lead in the interview process. Top leaders were sometimes joined by additional leaders (N = 11) such as Program Managers (64%), Division Managers (18%), Analysts and Administrative Assistants (18%). Participants' time with the Child Welfare agency ranged from 5 to 26 years with an average of 14 years, and their time in their leadership positions ranged from 2 months to 15 years with an average of 3.5 years.

Questions

Five main areas of interest were explored in the interviews, yielding information about 1) what led to the county joining one of the initiatives mentioned above or launching their own REI efforts and the goals of such efforts; 2) what strategies were utilized during the REI initiation; 3) what implementation strategies were utilized in the execution of the overall initiative, and what implementation strengths and barriers to implementation were present; 4) what impact did the REI initiative yield and 5) what strategies were sustained or not and why?

Response to Question #1: Lead Up to REI Efforts and REI Initiative Goals

In a synthesis of responses across the sixteen counties, five themes emerged regarding the impetus and key goals for REI work.

1. Awareness of the problem of disproportionality and disparities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families in the child welfare system
2. Awareness of the problem of disproportionality and disparities facing BIPOC children in the community
3. Commitment to changing the paradigm in the approach to BIPOC families and communities
4. Recognition that systemic racism both was facilitated by and affected the child welfare workforce
5. REI Initiatives were both top-down and bottom-up

Response to Question #2: REI Strategies

shows the 59 strategies used by interviewees. The list is divided into 12 areas, 11 of which are strategies specifically aimed at addressing REI issues. One area w focuses on practice changes that align with the following factors: family empowerment, respect for family expertise, voice and cultural heritage; they are also informed by family engagement, teaming and advocacy as elements that are critical to ensuring child and family well-being. These best practices lift all families up and are not sufficient to ensure BIPOC family success, but they are necessary for BIPOC family success to occur.

Response to Question #3: Implementation Strategies, Strengths and Barriers

Twenty-two implementation strategies were mentioned or built into initiatives (e.g., CAPP).

Forty-three percent of implementation strategies were utilized by all or almost all sites including:

- Determining an area of focus
- Creating an internal implementation team
- Creating an external implementation team or partnering heavily with other agencies or community members
- Conducting a needs assessment
- Researching potential REI strategies
- Adopting, adapting or creating new strategies
- Relying on or building up leadership commitment
- Building infrastructure to support new practices
- Engaging in workforce interventions (e.g., hiring, promotions, training, coaching)

Six other implementation strategies were moderately mentioned and included:

- Hiring or dedicating a staff position to serve as project manager for the REI initiative
- Changing organizational culture and climate to support or as part of REI efforts
- Redeploying or securing new resources for REI work
- Building up data infrastructure to support REI work
- Utilizing a CQI process throughout the REI initiative period
- Evaluating short- and long-term outcomes

cont...

Twenty-nine percent of areas that were seldom if ever mentioned included:

- Developing a theory of change or logic model to guide strategy
- Piloting a strategy before fully implementing it
- Assessing fidelity to interventions or strategies
- Scaling up strategies
- Negotiating with the union about adoption of new policies
- Procedures or practices related to REI
- Assessing readiness to implement any change effort, much less an REI one

Four Major Factors Facilitating REI Success

- Having the commitment and buy-in of leaders throughout the organization and those on the front-line.
- Being data driven, monitoring and communicating success.
- Investing in efforts to develop leadership and staff
- Partnering with other entities

Three Major Barriers to REI Success

- Lacking the commitment and buy-in of leaders and the workforce
- Lack of organizational readiness and capacity
- Challenges in partnerships

Response to Question #4: REI Impact

- Overall safety, permanency and well-being **outcomes were positively impacted**.
- **Particular strategies seemed to work well**. There was a belief and some data to suggest that Differential Response, SDM, TDM/CFTs, Parent to Parent, Youth Partners, Kin Partners, Cultural Brokers, and Family Finding all make a difference.
- **There were positive workforce outcomes**. There was an increase in diversity in the workforce and leadership in many counties.
- **Changes in some counties were short-lived**. Some counties did not sustain changes, but many counties showed sustained changes.

Response to Question #5: Most counties sustained REI programs — Conditions that Supported Sustainability

- **Leadership development of champions throughout the agency matters**. In counties where committed leaders nurtured the development and leadership skills of champions throughout the organization, and where staff rose to the CW director and other leadership roles from within the agency, sometimes as part of deliberate succession planning, the REI initiatives continued and/or grew in scope. In many of these counties the new leaders were BIPOC which intensified commitment to REI.

Jaiya John tells a story that illustrates this point well:

“A DESERT’S SOIL CAN BE HARD AND DRY. WITH HEAVY RAINFALLS, THE WATER WILL JUST RUN OFF AND NEVER PENETRATE THE LAND. BUT IF WE “SOFTEN THE SOIL” - AND PROVIDE WATER/RAIN A LITTLE BIT AT A TIME, THEN, THE SOIL CAN ABSORB THE MOISTURE AND PLANTS WILL THRIVE.

- Best if REI doesn't solely fall on the shoulders of BIPOC leaders and staff.
- Early engagement of unions and the workforce helped in sustaining efforts.
- Embedding REI strategies deep in the organization was key.
- California legislators did their part. For example, legislation requires family and youth engagement through Child and Family Team Meetings.
- Grounding the work in practice models helped. Both CAPP and the CPM were noted as practice frameworks that embedded REI into the DNA of practice and supported ongoing focus on cultural humility, family voice, family engagement, teaming, and advocating and partnership with BIPOC communities.
- Attending to general and specific aspects of organizational culture and climate facilitated sustainability.
- Careful planning, staging and persistence was key but as one interviewee said, *This work is never done.*"



Overall, this research effort revealed that many California counties have sustained efforts over many years to address the dual problems of disproportionate representation of families of color in the Child Welfare system and the disparate outcomes that the children of those families experience. Those efforts have had a varying degree of success, but all of

More Racial Justice Resources Available!



County agency partners can now access additional Racial Justice resources directly from the CFPIC website. To do this, visit the [Racial Justice in Child Welfare](#) page and scroll down to Additional Resources and click View More. You will immediately be directed to a series of folders organized by topic and an index of resources with live links and descriptions of each item posted thus far.

CFPIC will continue to expand and refine its Racial Justice resources as its work in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion progresses. Feel free to share these resources with your colleagues and let us know how helpful they have been for you. Special thanks to CFPIC consultants and faculty members for contributing to and organizing these valuable resources.



Child Welfare Core Practice Model

Directors Institute



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CA Department of Social Services (CDSS)
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County Welfare Director's Association (CWDA)
www.cwda.org

Child and Family Policy Institute of CA
www.cfpic.org

California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC)
calswec.berkeley.edu

Bay Area Academy
bayareaacademy.org

Northern Training Academy
humanservices.ucdavis.edu

Central California Training Academy
fresnostate.edu/chhs/ccta

The Academy for Professional Excellence
theacademy.sdsu.edu

Calendar of Events

Growing and Linking our Knowledge about Data, History, & Sovereignty to Strengthen ICWA Practice and CPM Leadership Behaviors - Part Two
November 15, 2021
 9 AM - 12 PM

An additional session that will explore the history of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), its impact on the Child Welfare system, and successful approaches to its implementation in California

January 2022, Date TBD

A series of sessions on the Latinx experience in Child Welfare is being planned for early 2022. More information will be shared as it becomes available.



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CalSWEC

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