Child Welfare Practice to Address Racial Disproportionality and Disparity

The child welfare field has moved from acknowledging the problem of systemic racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity to formulating and implementing solutions. As jurisdictions and agencies evaluate their systems to identify where and how disproportionalities and disparities are occurring, they are increasingly seeking practices that use an antiracist approach and show promise for their own populations.

This bulletin provides a brief overview on the issue of racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system and the factors that contribute to the problem. It then describes practices that child welfare caseworkers, administrators, program managers, and policymakers can implement to address these issues in general and at specific decision-making points along the child welfare continuum.

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Children's Bureau
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The August/September 2020 special issue of *Children's Bureau Express* draws attention to the need for an antiracist child welfare system that dedicates resources for enabling children and families of all races and ethnicities, and particularly those from marginalized communities, to achieve their full potential. The issue features guest articles from a range of leaders in the child welfare field, including voices from the public, private, philanthropic, and faith-based sectors. This bulletin was designed, in part, to present strategies that can be used in agency practice to directly answer the issue's call to action.

Terminology

The terminology used to define and describe concepts related to race and ethnicity varies throughout child welfare and other fields. For the purposes of this publication, the following terms and definitions are used:

Disproportionality: The overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a racial or ethnic group compared with its percentage in the total population.

Disparity: The unequal outcomes of one racial or ethnic group compared with outcomes for another racial or ethnic group.

Racism: The systematic discrimination directed against minority or marginalized groups.

Antiracism: The active process of identifying and challenging racism by changing attitudes, policies and practices, organizational structures, and systems, with the goal of redistributing power in an equitable way.

Cultural humility: The ability to maintain an openness to learning about other cultures.

Cultural responsiveness: The ability to adapt one's behavior to the cultural needs of others.

Families/children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds: Families or children whose race or ethnicity is other than non-Hispanic, White only (e.g., African American, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native).

THE PROBLEM OF RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY IN CHILD WELFARE

A significant body of research has documented the overrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic groups in the child welfare system relative to their representation in the general population (e.g., Cénat et al., 2020; Ganasarajah et al., 2017; Wells, 2011). In 2019, American Indian and Alaska Native children made up 1 percent of the child population and accounted for 2 percent of the foster care population, while African-American children accounted for roughly 14 percent of the

child population and 23 percent of the foster care population (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020a; Children's Bureau, 2020b). That same year, White children made up half of the child population and just 44 percent of the foster care population. Although Hispanic children have historically been underrepresented in foster care at the national level, they were overrepresented in 20 States in 2018, when the most recent available data were collected (Puzzanchera & Taylor, 2020).

Racial disparities occur at nearly every major decision-making point along the child welfare continuum. At the national level, African-American families are overrepresented in reports of suspected maltreatment (Krase, 2013) and are subjected to child protective services (CPS) investigations at higher rates than other families (Kim et al., 2017). In addition, African-American and American Indian or Alaska Native children are at greater risk than other children of being confirmed for maltreatment and placed in out-of-home care (Yi et al., 2020).

Families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds also experience disparate treatment once they are involved with child welfare. Relative to other children, African-American children spend more time in foster care (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007a) and are less likely to reunify with their families (Lu et al., 2004), and compared with White children, they are less likely to receive services (Garcia et al., 2016). In addition, African-American and American Indian or Alaska Native children are more likely than other children to be removed from their homes (Maguire-Jack et al., 2020) and to experience a termination of parental rights (TPR) (Wildeman et al., 2020).

Just as some racial and ethnic groups are overrepresented in the nation's child welfare system, other groups are underrepresented—particularly Asian children and, to a much lesser extent, Hispanic and White children. It is unclear whether underrepresentation is due to a lower occurrence of child maltreatment among these populations, or if it is caused by underreporting driven by either cultural norms or cultural perceptions that others (e.g., mandatory reporters) have about these groups (Cheung & LaChapelle, 2011; Maguire-Jack et al., 2015).

Data-collection limitations. When examining data and evidence pertaining to race and ethnicity, it is important to consider the challenges associated with collecting and analyzing these results. The following issues could impact data describing the numbers and rates of children of a particular race or ethnicity who are involved with the child welfare system:

- **Race and ethnicity are not biological or scientific.** People may identify their race or ethnicity based on a number of factors (e.g., family and social environment, historical or sociopolitical definitions, personal experience), and the definitions for a particular race or ethnicity may differ across studies or data-collection efforts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).
- **How people define their own race or ethnicity can change over time.** Researchers found that more than 10 million people changed the identification of their race or ethnicity between the 2000 and the 2010 censuses (Cohn, 2014).

- **Administrative data on race and ethnicity may be incorrectly assumed by the recorder.** Without detailed assessment guidelines, recorders may rely on their own judgment when determining an individual's race or ethnicity—a scenario that can invite error. One study comparing the self-report race and ethnicity data of hospital patients against observational data found discrepancies in roughly two-thirds of cases (Polubriaginof et al., 2019). Identification during CPS intake can be especially problematic when determining whether children are American Indian or Alaska Native and thereby eligible for the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) (Luth, 2016). Caseworkers often do not know to or do not routinely ask about Tribal affiliation, or they make assumptions about ancestry based on physical attributes (van Straaten & Buchbinder, 2011).
- **Recorder bias:** In some instances, child welfare caseworkers may refrain from formally assessing a child's race or ethnicity. For example, when determining ICWA eligibility, a caseworker might avoid determining or recording that a child has American Indian or Alaska Native heritage because the agency must then get handwritten documentation that the child has Tribal affiliation—a process that can incur extra work for the agency (Luth, 2016; T. Lidot, personal communication, February 16, 2021).

Despite these limitations, there is a wealth of data and analysis on this topic. For more information, see the following resources:

- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges — *Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care (Fiscal Year 2015)*: Presents State-level data and national trends for disproportionality by race and ethnicity at various decision-making points along the child welfare continuum
- National Center for Juvenile Justice — "Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care Dashboard": An interactive dashboard with disproportionality data by race and ethnicity for children in foster care, presented by State and fiscal year

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY

There are a variety of factors that may contribute to racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system. It is often difficult, however, to determine the particular aspects at either the system or the family and child level that have an effect and to what degree. Furthermore, the theories for why disproportionalities and disparities occur are, at times, conflicting. This may be due, in part, to demographic, practice, policy, and other differences at the national, State, and local levels and to the fact that this is an exceptionally complex issue. Furthermore, child welfare research has not historically utilized an antiracist approach and rarely includes the perspectives of those with lived experience. Keeping these conditions in mind, researchers in the field organize explanatory factors for racial disproportionality and disparity into the following overarching pathways (Boyd, 2015; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021; Fluke et al., 2011):

- Disproportionate and disparate needs of children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, particularly due to higher rates of poverty

- Racial bias and discrimination exhibited by individuals (e.g., caseworkers, mandated reporters)
- Child welfare system factors (e.g., lack of resources for families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, caseworker characteristics)
- Geographic context, such as the region, State, or neighborhood
- Policy and legislation (e.g., lack of measures targeting the needs of children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds)
- Structural racism (e.g., historical policies and cultural dynamics)

DISPROPORTIONATE AND DISPARATE NEED

Children and families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds may have a disproportionate need for child welfare services due to a range of factors that put them at greater risk for being reported for child maltreatment—most notably, poverty. While poverty does not equate to abuse or neglect, it is a risk factor that can interfere with a parent's ability to care for their children by restricting access to basic needs, such as housing, food, and health care. The stress of living in economic deprivation can also affect parenting capacity, resulting in inconsistent discipline, the inability to respond to a child's emotional needs, or a failure to prevent or address potential safety risks (Duva & Metzger, 2011).

Research has firmly established an association between environmental (i.e., community or county) poverty and increased rates of substantiated child maltreatment (e.g., Eckenrode et al., 2014). Race contributes a level of complexity to this relationship. For example, national data on child maltreatment indicates that reporting rates for low-income White children are actually higher than for low-income Black or Hispanic children (Kim & Drake, 2018). Still, poverty is strongly related to minority status in the United States, with both African-American and American Indian or Alaska Native children being about three times more likely than White children to live in poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020b). For more information on the complex empirical relationship between poverty and neglect, see *Addressing Poverty as a Major Risk Factor in Child Neglect: Promising Policy and Practice*.

Professionals in the child welfare field have also posited that poverty and other vulnerabilities experienced by families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds may amplify their exposure to social services systems (e.g., financial or housing assistance), which may further increase their visibility to mandated reporters—a phenomenon often referred to as surveillance bias. Existing studies indicate that the effects of surveillance bias on reports of child abuse and neglect range from minimal (Chaffin & Bard, 2006; Drake et al., 2017) to nonexistent (Kim et al., 2018). However, there may be other consequences for families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds living in poverty that are subject to increased surveillance. For example, interviews conducted with African-American families living in an impoverished area of Chicago found that CPS neighborhood presence interfered with parental authority and fostered distrust among neighbors (Roberts, 2008). Furthermore, once families in need are involved with the child welfare system, they are often referred for services. This increases the number of entities surveilling them, thereby potentially fostering apprehension and thwarting service engagement (Fong, 2020).

RACIAL BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION

Human decision-making by mandated reporters, caseworkers, and other personnel may play a role in perpetuating poorer outcomes for families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who come into contact with the child welfare system. With disparities occurring at every major decision-making point along the child welfare continuum, implicit racial bias (i.e., unconscious attitudes and beliefs) and explicit racial bias (i.e., overt acts of discrimination and prejudice) may impact families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds during reporting, investigation, substantiation, and out-of-home placement. Vague definitions of maltreatment and insufficient cultural responsiveness and cultural humility training for caseworkers allow subjectivity and bias to enter into case decision-making. Furthermore, families are often evaluated by individual caseworkers, rather than by committees that could mitigate bias through discourse (Beniwal, 2017).

A small body of research from the medical field supports the racial bias pathway in child welfare reporting. For example, an examination of drug-positive newborns found that African-American mothers were more likely than White mothers to be reported to CPS, despite the similarity of the overall health characteristics of their infants (Neuspiel et al., 1993). More recently, researchers found that children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds with head injuries were almost twice as likely to be reported for abusive head trauma than White children with similar symptoms (Hymel et al., 2018). However, an analysis of national-level child welfare data found that racial bias was not a large-scale driver of disproportionality at the referral phase of the continuum (Drake et al., 2011). While additional research is still needed to explore the precise role of racial bias in child welfare decision-making, large-scale studies conducted in other fields indicate that implicit and explicit biases toward African Americans are widespread (Nosek et al., 2002) and that racial biases may impact decision-making in service provision (FitzGerald & Hurst, 2017).

CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM FACTORS

Characteristics of the child welfare system may affect the services and outcomes for children of different races and ethnicities (Fluke et al., 2011). Factors at the agency level—including organizational culture and infrastructure, institutional racism, resource availability, and disengagement from the community served—can impact the frequency and quality of service provision, which in turn shapes case outcomes for children from overrepresented racial and ethnic groups. For example, a review of the child welfare agencies serving Santa Clara and Fresno counties in California identified several institutional features that negatively impact Hispanic children and families (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2016). Specifically, the analysis revealed that the agencies did not have enough bilingual workers to meet the language needs of the populations they served, and the surrounding community lacked proactive, preventive, and accessible services.

GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

When examining data on racial disproportionality and disparity, higher-level (e.g., national) trends may obscure differences that occur at lower levels. Findings from studies utilizing State-level data have confirmed that, while racial disproportionality exists nationwide, the populations impacted and the magnitude and types of disparity are unique to geographic location (U.S. Government Accountability

Office, 2007b). Differences in disproportionality and disparity across geographies may reflect variations in child welfare policy and practice, historical circumstances, and a range of demographic, socioeconomic, and community factors found in specific regions across the country (Fluke et al., 2011). For example, one study found that African-American, Hispanic, and White children living in diverse neighborhoods are more likely to be reported to CPS than children of their same race or ethnicity living in homogenous neighborhoods (Klein & Merritt, 2014).

POLICY AND LEGISLATION

A lack of policies targeting the needs of families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, along with the presence of policies that negatively target these families likely contribute to their increased involvement with the child welfare system. One important example of child welfare legislation that falls into this category is the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), which calls for timely permanency planning for children by requiring States to file for the TPR for any child who has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. This legislation may disproportionately affect families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who struggle to reunify due to a lack of resources, unavailable or inaccessible services, and barriers to kinship care placements (White, 2006). ASFA may be especially harmful to the many children in the United States who are impacted by parental incarceration—a circumstance that disproportionately impacts African-American families. With the average prison sentence spanning more than 1 year, fast TPR timelines are often a significant barrier to reunification. For an indepth look at the impact of ASFA on casework practice with specific populations, see the Urban Institute's *Intentions and Results: A Look Back at the Adoption and Safe Families Act*.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

Structural racism is the result of the accumulation of historical and cultural factors that have allowed racial inequities to endure and adapt over time. It is embedded in public policies, institutional practices, cultural representation, and other norms within and outside of the child welfare system, and it continues to shape modern-day determinants of well-being for families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds—including their disproportionate risk for child maltreatment (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021). Some enduring consequences of structural racism include racial profiling in policing, disproportionate criminal sentencing, and poorer mental and physical health outcomes.

One example that shows how structural racism can be linked to child maltreatment involves the systematic exclusion of African-American families from home ownership. This exclusion can be traced back to housing policies enacted under the New Deal, when the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) refused to insure mortgages in African-American neighborhoods, a policy called redlining (Gross, 2017). The FHA also issued a requirement that the suburban subdivisions that the organization was subsidizing must be off limits to African-American families. These policies have had a long-lasting impact on economic inequities, in part because African-Americans have historically been forced to live in higher-poverty areas and because homeownership is a key means of building family wealth. Poverty, in turn, is a well-established risk factor for child maltreatment (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021). For an indepth look at structural racism in the child welfare system, see "Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in the Child Welfare System: Why Do They Exist, and What Can Be Done to Address Them?"

SYSTEMWIDE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY

The process of addressing racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare should start at the systems level. It is critical for agencies to understand the root causes of these issues in their jurisdictions and to address systemwide challenges in order to lay the groundwork for effective casework practice. There are a number of promising practices for addressing disproportionality and disparity that can be implemented throughout the child welfare system and applied across multiple stages of the service continuum.

Measuring Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare Systems

Racial disproportionalities and disparities are often driven by a range of factors related to demographics, casework practice, and agency policy. To determine the best strategies for addressing these issues at the local level, agencies should examine data sources on their service population (e.g., agency, educational, probational, and/or Tribal data) to illuminate how key decision-making points along the continuum are impacting children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Disaggregating agency data is a critical first step in analysis. This process involves breaking down datasets by key variables (e.g., race, ethnicity, ICWA eligibility) to expose trends that may be obscured by aggregated statistics.

For an indepth look at how disaggregating data can improve outcomes for children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, see the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *By the Numbers: A Race for Results Case Study: Using Disaggregated Data to Inform Policies, Practices and Decision-Making*.

Once data are disaggregated, agencies can hone in on the decision-making points where disparities occur by using metrics such as the disparity index and the relative rate index—calculations explained in detail by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the following companion works: *A Child Welfare Leader's Desk Guide to Building a High-Performing Agency: 10 Practices Part One* and *10 Practices Part Two: Making the Business Case: Research and References for 10 Practices and Appendices*. Pinpointing disparities along the child welfare continuum—and doing so on a continuous basis—allows agencies to develop targeted practice and policy solutions that are tailored to the culture, strengths, and challenges of specific communities.

It is important to note that any data analysis conducted by an agency should draw on the expertise of the impacted population—those with lived experience. Agencies should collaborate with these families impacted by racial disproportionality and disparity in order to inform the development of research questions, data-collection methods, and approaches for interpreting their findings. The goal for this type of collaboration is for the agency to develop a more nuanced understanding of the problems and their root causes and to engage in collective efforts to design and sustain strategies to address them.

Agency policy review and revision. Reviewing agency policies on a regular basis can ensure that child welfare practice supports equity for all children and families. Agencies can take the following steps when examining their policies and practices in terms of racial and ethnic equity (Derezotes, 2006; T. Lidot, personal communication, February 16, 2021):

- Invest in assessments, training, and technical assistance for cultural responsiveness.
- Develop ways to measure racial equity in agency programs and outcomes.
- Identify and track agency goals by racial and ethnic groups.
- Determine the unique needs of children and families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and identify practices that will better serve them.
- Involve members of impacted communities in the review and revision process.

Formal operational structures, such as task forces or committees, can greatly assist efforts to assess how agency policies affect disproportionality and disparities and to enact system changes. A review of racial equity efforts across the country found that these structures were most successful when there were operated out of, or reported directly to, the executive leader's office, as well as when they engaged other institutions and community members (Miller & Esenstad, 2015). The following are examples of State and local efforts:

- *Fresno County Department of Social Services: Confronting Racial Inequities and Disproportionality to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes for Children & Families*
- Fairfax County, Virginia: "One Fairfax" countywide plan
- Indiana Disproportionality Committee
- Texas Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities (Although the center is now closed, its website was still active as of February 2021.)

To assist agencies that are experiencing challenges around assessing disproportionality, the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA) developed the Disproportionality Diagnostic Tool (see the NAPCWA Resources section of the American Public Human Services Association website), which allows users to identify gaps, areas for improvement, and agency strengths that can support equitable representation. Additionally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy partners with child welfare agencies to perform institutional analyses, which assess contributing factors to disproportionality and disparity at various levels, including a system's theories, practices, policies, and procedures. The institutional analysis process also identifies opportunities to improve and mobilize interagency collaboration within the served community. To learn more, visit the Institutional Analysis section of the Center for the Study of Social Policy website.

Statewide legislation and policy. Federal policy allows States a high degree of flexibility in the development of their child welfare policies; therefore, legislation and policies can be shaped to address systemic issues and meet the needs of children and families of diverse racial and ethnic

backgrounds (Martin & Connelly, 2015). States can take the following steps toward developing legislation and policies that ensure all families have access to the services and supports needed to keep children safely at home:

- Research practices and programs and release findings to the public. Published findings will ensure that policies and programs that are effective at reducing disproportionalities and disparities are labeled as "evidence based" and can be tailored for multiple jurisdictions.
- Invest in early interventions. Services and supports designed to target issues that disproportionately impact children and families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (e.g., poverty, incarceration) may be especially effective at preventing child welfare involvement for these families.
- Encourage and support cross-system collaboration. Prioritize diverse partnerships within child welfare and between child welfare and other public systems.
- Create community councils to review institutional policies and practices that are negatively impacting families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and contributing to disproportionalities and disparities.
- Increase investments in reunification services, particularly in communities with children and families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Promote a range of permanency options, such as Tribal customary adoptions and the reinstatement of parental rights that have been terminated.
- Prioritize quality legal representation and court oversight, as the legal process can be intimidating for families—especially those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, who have disproportionate contact with the justice system.
- Develop a culturally responsive and diverse workforce. Create legislation that mandates targeted recruitment efforts and cultural responsiveness training.

In addition to adapting these policies, States must ensure that existing policies are being implemented in a manner that supports the well-being of children and families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. For more information on these approaches, including funding strategies and examples of States that have implemented them, see *Achieving Racial Equity: Child Welfare Policy Strategies to Improve Outcomes for Children of Color* by the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Interagency, community, and Tribal partnerships. Racial disproportionality and disparities in child welfare do not occur in a vacuum but often reflect other societal dynamics. Child welfare agencies can join forces with other community-based entities (e.g., juvenile justice, minority affairs, mental health and substance use services) to hold collaborative stakeholder meetings and trainings that address racial disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare and other local systems. Jurisdictions can also take a systems-of-care approach to service delivery that builds on interagency partnerships to create an integrated and streamlined process for meeting the needs of families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. For more information, visit Information Gateway's Systems of Care web section.

Forming partnerships with community- and faith-based organizations can also help child welfare agencies take a more encompassing approach. Agencies and organizations may be able to work together to establish councils or other communitywide bodies (e.g., citizen review boards, foster care review boards, youth advisory boards, continuous quality improvement committees) that regularly meet to respond to issues regarding disproportionality. These groups can address the issue as a whole or concentrate on specific aspects of disproportionality and disparities, such as hiring practices or foster family recruitment. A regular review process can help ensure that programs and connected services are delivered in a culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate manner.

Interagency and community collaboration efforts should include representation from groups that are overrepresented in the child welfare system. These approaches may make child welfare services more accessible to those who need them, educate other social service providers about child welfare, enhance child welfare staff's understanding of particular racial and ethnic groups, build trust, and demonstrate the agency's commitment to finding homes for children within the community.

When working with Tribes, it is important for State and local child welfare agencies to understand Tribal sovereignty (i.e., self-governance) within the relationship between the two agencies. ICWA allows for the formation of Tribal-State agreements, which often serve to improve ICWA compliance and outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native children, and to increase Tribal access to Federal child welfare funding. Having these Tribal-State agreements in place increases the ability of Tribes and States to provide culturally relevant services to American Indian and Alaska Native children and allows Tribes access to the additional funding needed to administer their own programs and provide services to their community members (Martin & Connelly, 2015). For information on existing Tribal-State agreements, see *A Survey and Analysis of Tribal-State Indian Child Welfare Act Agreements: Including Promising Practices* by the Association on American Indian Affairs.

Diverse and culturally competent workforce. According to the most recent available data, 58 percent of child welfare social workers are White, 24 percent are African American, 15 percent are Hispanic, and 4 percent are another race or ethnicity (Dolan et al., 2011). Although it is neither possible nor necessarily desirable to match all caseworkers and clients by race or ethnicity, child welfare staff who share or understand the culture or language of a particular family may have a better comprehension of the family's background and needs. Therefore, hiring a diverse staff, particularly one that mirrors the racial and ethnic composition of the community served, can help with family engagement and reduce opportunities for cross-racial misunderstandings or tensions.

A culturally competent workforce acknowledges the importance of culture, has the capacity for cultural self-assessment, recognizes the dynamics resulting from cultural differences, strives for the expansion of cultural knowledge, and adapts services to meet culturally unique needs (Cross et al., 1989). Family practices that might be seen as abusive or neglectful by mainstream standards may have a cultural component that would define them differently by a caseworker of a different background. Commonly encountered cases involve different cultural views of corporal punishment and parents' rights to discipline their children as they see fit. In cases in which children are being harmed, the role of agencies is to honor the intentions while educating the parents about the laws and reasons behind the laws and helping them identify other approaches.

Cultural responsiveness training is essential for all staff regardless of their racial and ethnic background, as biases related to other factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, parent marital status) may also impact decision-making in casework. Training for child welfare staff can include guidance on disproportionality and disparity, institutional racism, and identifying personal biases and their impact (Lancaster & Fong, 2015). Some organizations offer training on culturally competent practice with specific groups, including the Center for Regional and Tribal Child Welfare Studies at the University of Minnesota Duluth, which trains both indigenous and nonindigenous child welfare caseworkers on practice within Tribal communities. While training is a key first step to enhanced agency practice, it is also important to support the transfer of learning in order to ensure that staff apply the training concepts to their jobs.

Test Your Biases

To understand how racial biases operate within the child welfare system, it is important for individuals operating within the system to understand the nature of their own biases. Implicit association tests measure attitudes and beliefs that people may be unaware of. You can explore your own biases by taking a free test on the Project Implicit website.

One training frequently used in the field is the Undoing Racism workshop, developed by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. This training helps participants better understand racism and its impact on institutions and their own work, as well as how to lessen racism within systems. Studies of this training in the Kentucky child welfare system found high participant satisfaction with the training and that 80 to 90 percent of participants reported in a follow-up that they had transferred the learning to practice by attempting to or actually bringing about changes in their organization (Curry & Barbee, 2011).

For additional information, resources, and trainings on cultural responsiveness for child welfare professionals, see the following resources:

- Racial Equity Resources (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute)
- *Implicit Racial Bias 101: Exploring Implicit Bias in Child Protection* (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity)
- *inSIGHT: A Workshop on Implicit Racial Bias for Child Protection* (Alliance for Racial Equity at the Center for the Study of Social Policy)
- Cultural Responsiveness (FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention)
- Cultural Competency and Diversity Publications and Resources (Florida's Center for Child Welfare)

CASEWORK STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY

The casework strategies used to address disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system are often the same strategies used to improve outcomes for all children and families; however, agencies are beginning to explore more deliberate, antiracist approaches to practice. Agencies and caseworkers should employ strategies that are specific to the disproportionalities and disparities present in their jurisdictions, both in terms of the racial and ethnic groups that are impacted and the points in the child welfare process at which those differences are apparent. This section describes strategies that can be employed at various points along the service continuum (i.e., prevention, reporting, screening and assessment, service provision, permanency in a child welfare case).

PREVENTION SERVICES

Prevention services in child welfare are designed to support families and build their protective factors while eliminating risk factors that may lead to child abuse and neglect or the separation of children from their families. The child welfare field is increasingly joining partners to invest in prevention services that improve family well-being and decrease reliance on the more intensive and potentially traumatic interventions required once families are in the system (e.g., foster care). This shift has been accelerated in part by the Title VI-E Prevention Services Program, as amended by the 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act, which allows States to be reimbursed for evidence-based prevention services. Effective prevention services focus on increasing the overall well-being of children and families by building resiliency, parenting capacity, and protective factors. Concrete supports such as housing services and financial resources (e.g, increases to the minimum wage) (Freisthler, 2014; Raissian & Bullinger, 2017), home visiting programs (Olds et al., 1997), and in-home services (Kirk & Griffith, 2008) may be especially beneficial for at-risk families.

Concrete supports. The second National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being revealed that nearly a quarter of families who came into contact with the child welfare system between 2008 and 2009 had trouble paying for basic necessities (Casanueva et al., 2011). Because poverty disproportionately impacts families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, providing access to concrete supports may impact racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. While agencies often have limited resources to respond to ongoing economic need, partnerships between child welfare and other community systems can bring together the often-isolated resources that exist within many jurisdictions. For instance, the Connecticut Department of Children and Families collaborates with State partners, community agencies, and service providers to help families who come in contact with the child welfare system find stable housing. For additional examples of jurisdictions that are accessing concrete supports through community partnerships, see the Center for the Study of Social Policy's *Prevent, Protect & Provide: How Child Welfare Can Better Support Low-Income Families*.

Home visiting programs. At-risk parents or expectant parents participating in home visiting programs are visited in their homes by professionals or paraprofessionals who provide support, education, training, and resources. One of the best-documented home visiting programs is the Nurse-Family Partnership. This program, which involves nurses visiting families during their children's infancy, has demonstrated positive outcomes for low-income African-American families, including a decreased likelihood of preventable child mortality (Olds et al., 2014). Another evidence-based program, SafeCare, has been shown to reduce child welfare recidivism among indigenous families (Chaffin et al., 2012). For more information on home visiting, including additional programs, see Information Gateway's Home Visiting web section.

In-home services. In-home services are a continuum of prevention-related services to help strengthen children and families who are reported to CPS for possible child abuse or neglect or who are deemed at risk for maltreatment. The term "in-home" refers to the location where the child and family are residing and not necessarily to the place where services are delivered. North Carolina's Family Preservation Services, which incorporates characteristics of the successful Homebuilder's model, is one evidence-based in-home services program that has demonstrated success for families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. A study showed that this intensive, strengths-based crisis intervention program reduced out-of-home placements for children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Kirk & Griffith, 2008). To learn more about effective programs, visit Information Gateway's In-Home Services to Strengthen Children and Families web section.

The FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention developed *Introduction to Cultural Responsiveness: A Training Tool* to help prevention program coordinators train their staff in culturally responsive service delivery.

REPORTING

Most families first come into contact with the child welfare system due to a report of suspected maltreatment. Therefore, ensuring that racial and ethnic biases are eliminated from a reporter's decision-making process may help reduce racial disproportionality and disparity in the system. At the national level, children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are overrepresented in reports of suspected maltreatment by all groups of reporters, as categorized in the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (Krase, 2013).

Mandatory reporters—those in designated professions who are mandated by law to report child maltreatment—would benefit from detailed guidelines that expand upon the brief checklist that often outlines criteria for reporting child abuse and neglect. They may also need enhanced training, including instruction on the distinctions between poverty and neglect, guidance on racial bias and cultural responsiveness, and information on any cultural practices specific to their region that may be misconstrued as maltreatment. At the agency level, States should evaluate whether legislation and policies related to mandated reporting promote equity. They should also consider how these mandatory reporters can connect families to services and supports, where appropriate, rather than to CPS.

To see the mandatory reporter trainings currently available in each State, visit Information Gateway's State Training Resources for Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect web section. In the absence of State-specific racial bias trainings, mandatory reporters can take *Implicit Racial Bias 101: Exploring Implicit Bias in Child Protection*, which offers an introduction to how biases can impact decision-making in child protection and challenges users to confront their own biases.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

Families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are significantly more likely than White families to be subjected to a CPS investigation (Kim et al., 2017) and substantiated for child abuse or neglect following a child maltreatment assessment (Yi et al., 2020). Many factors can impact the decisions made during screenings and assessments, and agencies should examine how case and caseworker characteristics, agency policies, and screening criteria affect children of different races and ethnicities.

Assessment tools. The use of risk assessment tools can help guide caseworkers in assessing families on safety and risk issues and remove error from the decision-making process. Caseworkers who have detailed, culturally relevant guidelines about what constitutes maltreatment may have an easier time controlling bias. In addition, because poverty disproportionately affects communities with families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, a critical step toward reducing racial disproportionalities in the child welfare system involves agencies issuing guidance and using assessment tools that can help caseworkers distinguish between poverty and neglect. It is important to note, however, that not all standardized tools have been sufficiently tested on children and families from different racial and ethnic groups, and these untested tools may actually introduce bias into the assessment process.

When agencies are familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their assessment tools, they can train supervisors and caseworkers to be aware of the biases they may incite. Some studies have shown the promise of risk assessment tools in improving an agency's ability to accurately classify cases and decrease disproportionality, but others, including one State-level evaluation of a structured decision-making model, found no differences in disproportionality regarding out-of-home placements (Osterling et al., 2008; Miller, 2011). For a review of commonly used risk assessment tools, including information on their viability for use with families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and Tribal populations, see the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare's *Assessing Risk: A Comparison of Tools for Child Welfare Practice With Indigenous Families*.

Predictive risk modeling. Some child welfare agencies use predictive risk modeling (PRM), a form of predictive analytics, to improve reliability in decision-making with their cases. PRM tools allow agencies to use linked data from existing datasets to identify patterns that could predict future outcomes. Agencies have used PRM for a variety of purposes, such as identifying at-risk families that may be good candidates for prevention services (Cuccaro-Alamin et al., 2017). PRM tools may be especially useful for eliminating racial bias in decision-making, as they operate independent of

caseworker judgements. PRM can also help pinpoint where biases exist in an agency's decision-making process by identifying variations in responses to families based on race. It is important to note that, while predictive analysis has the potential to address issues of racial disproportionality and disparity, there are a number of measures agencies must take to ensure their approach and data yield accurate results. (To learn more, see Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago's *Using Predictive Analytics to Improve Outcomes in Child Welfare*.) For more information on using PRM in child welfare, see Mathematica's *Predictive Risk Modeling for Child Protection*.

Blind removal meetings. To address potential caseworker bias and subjectivity in child welfare decision-making, some jurisdictions have instituted blind removal meetings to determine whether children should be removed from their homes. During blind removals, cases are presented to committees without any identifying personal or demographic information (e.g., family name, neighborhood, race, ethnicity) and removal decisions are made based solely on the safety and risk factors present in the case.

In 2009, the New York Office of Children and Family Services distributed Disproportionate Minority Representation grants to several counties across the State to support strategies aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of African-American children in out-of-home care. Nassau County significantly reduced racial disparities in foster care and pointed to blind removal meetings as an important factor in those reductions. An evaluation of Nassau County's programmatic successes found that the blind removal process increased staff awareness of institutionalized racism and implicit bias (Pryce et al., 2019). For more information on Nassau County's implementation of blind removal meetings, see the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute's "Dismantling Racial Inequity #5: Strengthening Our Efforts Through Partnerships With Academia".

Differential response. Differential response, also known as alternative response or dual-track response, refers to the use of a tailored response for families reported for child maltreatment and is most often used when there is a determination of low risk or when the family might not otherwise qualify for services. Families may receive services without a substantiated finding of child maltreatment or, in cases of substantiation, when the child can remain safely in the home while the family receives services.

Differential response has been recognized as a strategy that could potentially reduce disproportionality and disparity (Martin & Connelly, 2015). This is a flexible, strengths-based approach to working with families that provides more options for utilizing family involvement and community resources in case planning and service provision. An evaluation of a pilot alternative response project in 10 Ohio counties showed a decrease in all child placements, including a reduction in the number of African-American children in State custody (National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services, 2009) and a major decrease in new accepted reports of child maltreatment among African-American families (Kaplan & Rohm, 2010). However, there are also indications that disproportionality and disparities still exist within differential response systems (Connell, 2020), and additional research on the strategy's impact on families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds is still needed. For more information on differential response in child welfare, read Information Gateway's *Differential Response: A Primer for Child Welfare Professionals* and visit the Differential Response in Child Protective Services web section.

CULTURALLY SPECIFIC AND RESPONSIVE SERVICES

When referring a family for services, child welfare caseworkers should seek out options that offer culturally specific or responsive approaches. Culturally specific services are developed specifically for members of particular racial and ethnic groups, while culturally responsive services are designed to respond respectfully and effectively to people of various cultures. Finding such services may be challenging, as services in general may not be available or accessible for communities affected by disproportionality (Dorch et al., 2010). To expand culturally specific and responsive services within a particular community, child welfare agencies should first assess the accessibility and availability of their current service offerings to children and families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. If there are gaps, agencies can pursue solutions, including increasing availability and usage through changes to service locations and hours and removing any attendance obstacles (e.g., lack of transportation or child care). Agencies should also pay attention to any language barriers between service providers and the populations served. When barriers are present, staffing and materials (e.g., brochures, program pamphlets, forms) should be expanded to accommodate the linguistic needs of the community.

In cases where agencies need to increase the types of services available to families, they can approach community and faith-based organizations and discuss the potential expansion of their services to meet client needs. Services provided by faith-based organizations may be especially effective for groups that tend to turn to the church for support, assistance, and community (Collins & Scott, 2019; Inniss et al., 2009). For more information on partnering with community- and faith-based groups to increase service provision, visit Information Gateway's Engaging Communities to Support Families web section.

Acknowledging and addressing historical trauma. Historical trauma—also called intergenerational trauma—arises from a catastrophic event or series of events and is shared by a collective group of people across generations. An example of historical trauma that is especially relevant to child welfare involves the Federal Government policies of the 19th and 20th centuries that permitted the forced removal of thousands of Indigenous children from their homes, families, and Tribes for placement in boarding schools. The removal of these children led to generations of Indigenous children growing to adulthood without the benefit of parenting or the support of their families and Tribes. Another example of historical trauma is the intergenerational impact of slavery and racism on African-American families.

When working with families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, caseworkers should strive to learn about their cultural histories so they can approach these relationships with more empathy and understanding of the challenges to their well-being (Zimmerman & Shannon, 2013). Including cultural activities in children's case plans—for example, powwows or meetings with spiritual teachers for American Indian and Alaska Native children—can help provide a reconnection to their identities, families, and Tribes. Caseworkers may also find it helpful to consult cultural and spiritual leaders in a child's community to gain insight into culturally specific ways of healing. For an indepth look at best casework practice with families impacted by intergenerational traumas, see *Historical Trauma and Microaggressions: A Framework for Culturally-Based Practice* by the Center for Excellence in Children's Mental Health.

Family group decision-making. Family group decision-making (FGDM) reflects the traditional values of kinship and community seen in African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian or Alaska Native cultures and shows promise in reducing racial disproportionality and disparity among those populations (Sheets et al., 2009; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2014). The intent of FGDM is to bring together immediate and extended family members, a trained facilitator, and others (e.g., community members, agency personnel) to develop a plan for child safety and well-being. The following strategies can be incorporated into FGDM to increase the cultural responsiveness of the practice (Merkel-Holguin, 2015):

- Employ a coordinator who represents or understands the cultural context of the family and who remains aware of his or her own biases.
- Allow the family to define their own group and recognize that children belong to a family and a kinship network.
- Maintain a simple conference format that allows the family members to hear the concerns of the child welfare agency and does not require them to share private information that is irrelevant to case planning.
- Position elders in culturally appropriate ways, which might include allowing them to facilitate FGDM sessions, invite additional participants, and teach the coordinator about cultural norms.
- Avoid facilitating meetings in a manner that elevates the role of the coordinator.
- Set a comfortable location for FGDM that protects the family's privacy.
- Create a flexible process and schedule that accommodates cultural norms around conferencing and decision-making.
- Prepare and share food that reflects the family's cultural traditions.

Casey Family Programs' Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) on racial disproportionality utilized family engagement for decision-making and case planning in several child welfare agencies across the United States. An evaluation of BSC found that families were generally more willing to participate fully in the FGDM process when agencies used trusted community members, such as ministers or community organizers, as facilitators. Communities that used family engagement in case-planning and decision-making processes reported fewer children entering foster care, increased rates of kin placements when removal from the home was necessary, increased exits from out-of-home care, and shorter stays in care (Miller, 2009). Other research has shown that FGDM participation increased the rates of exits from care, especially to reunification, for African-American and Hispanic children (Sheets et al., 2009) and improved African-American children's receipt of mental health services (McCrae & Fusco, 2010). To learn more about this practice, visit Information Gateway's Family Group Decision-Making web section.

Parent partner programs. Parent partners are fathers and mothers with prior child welfare experience who have been successful in overcoming the obstacles in their own lives and are ready to support other parents. Parent partner programs match these experienced parents with parents who are new to child welfare to provide peer-to-peer support and mentoring. Ideally, families are matched based on language needs and cultural background; therefore, agencies should recruit parent partners who reflect the diversity of the community they serve. When implemented effectively, parent partner programs may help advance a child welfare agency's cultural responsiveness in the following ways:

- Parent partners can help connect parents with culturally appropriate services that meet their specific needs.
- Parent partners act as cultural translators and can provide insight and training to child welfare professionals, helping them understand families' cultures, values, and perspectives.
- Parent partners can help American Indian or Alaska Native families by connecting them with Tribal authorities to gain a better understanding of available services and their rights under ICWA.
- Parent partners can work with Spanish-speaking Latinx families in their native language and break down language barriers. They can support families in advancing their case plans while exhibiting sensitivity to potential fears of the legal system.

One example of a successful parent partner program is the Iowa Parent Partner Approach. When evaluated for use with the State's general foster care population, the program increased the likelihood of family reunification and decreased the likelihood of reentry into out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification (Chambers et al., 2019). For information on best practices for parent partner programs, see *Parent Partner Program Navigator: Designing and Implementing Parent Partner Programs in Child Welfare* by the Capacity Building Center for States, which presents tools and resources that agencies can use to improve existing parent partner programs or to design and implement new ones.

Cultural broker programs. Cultural brokers serve as advocates for families from marginalized racial or ethnic groups who are at risk for or have experienced child maltreatment. They also work with child welfare agencies to ensure that agency practice with families from diverse populations is culturally specific to addressing unmet needs. Cultural brokers support families throughout the life cycles of their cases, accompanying the responding caseworker on the initial response and assisting with family assessments, safety plan development, and service coordination and delivery. One of their overarching goals is to help enhance family engagement by serving as a cultural guide, thus decreasing the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings between families and caseworkers. For more information, see the Cultural Brokers website.

Compliance With ICWA

To address the high rate of removal of American Indian and Alaska Native children from their families and their subsequent placement with nonindigenous families, as well as the historical trauma these actions generated, Congress enacted the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 (Simmons, 2014). ICWA established Federal requirements for how State and private agencies handle the involvement of American Indian and Alaska Native children in the child welfare system. The following are some of the major provisions of ICWA (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019):

- Established minimum Federal standards for the removal of American Indian and Alaska Native children from their families
- Required American Indian and Alaska Native children to be placed in foster or adoptive homes that reflect their culture
- Provided assistance to Tribes in the operation of child and family service programs
- Created exclusive Tribal jurisdiction over all Indian child custody proceedings when requested by the Tribe, parent, or Indian "custodian"
- Granted preference to Indian family environments in adoptive or foster care placement
- Provided funds to Tribes or nonprofit off-reservation Indian organizations or multiservice centers for the purpose of improving child welfare services to Indian children and families
- Required State and Federal courts to give full faith and credit to Tribal court decrees
- Set a standard of proof for terminating Indian parents' parental rights that required the proof to be beyond a reasonable doubt

Professionals in the field note that ICWA compliance is inconsistent across the United States, with the following issues being some of the most critical challenges (K. Deserly & T. Lidot, personal communication, February 16, 2021; Simmons, 2014):

- Lack of oversight of implementation
- Agencies not identifying American Indian and Alaska Native children early in the process
- Child welfare agency and caseworker bias toward considering ICWA implementation "extra work"
- Lack of placement homes that reflect the preferences stated in ICWA
- Insufficient training and support for child welfare staff, courts, and county counsels on ICWA provisions and implementation
- Scarcity of resources for Tribal child welfare agencies to work with State and private agencies
- Lack of consequences for ICWA compliance failures

Practices that show promise in improving ICWA implementation include laws defining the State's relationship with the Tribe, guides and trainings about ICWA for child welfare agencies and State courts, and forums where representatives from Tribal and State agencies and organizations discuss relevant issues (Simmons, 2014). Some jurisdictions with more ICWA-eligible children—including Multnomah County in Oregon and Hennepin County in Minnesota—have created dedicated ICWA units staffed by caseworkers with expertise in ICWA best practices and relationship building with Tribes (Martin & Connelly, 2015).

For guidance on the application of ICWA in child welfare practice, see the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Services ICWA web section and *Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act*. For additional information on working with Indigenous populations, see Information Gateway's Working With American Indian Children and Families web section.

PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

African-American and American Indian or Alaska Native children enter foster care at higher rates than other children (Ganasarajah et al., 2017), and many States have difficulty recruiting foster and adoptive families who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children awaiting homes (Children's Bureau, 2020a). The following strategies show promise in improving permanency and well-being outcomes for children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who are placed in out-of-home care.

Kinship care. When removal from the home is necessary, it is often preferable for children to be placed directly with kin. In addition to a range of positive permanency and well-being outcomes, kinship placements can promote the preservation of family, community, and cultural ties (Epstein, 2017). African-American and Hispanic children are significantly more likely than White children to experience a kinship placement (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007a), and informal kinship care—when parents voluntarily place their children with kin without any formal child welfare agency involvement—is a longstanding practice in many African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian or Alaska Native communities. Therefore, it is critical for child welfare agencies to prioritize kinship placements and provide resources for formal and informal kinship families.

There are a number of policies and practices that State child welfare systems and local agencies can enact to support kinship caregiving, including broadening kinship caregiver definitions, instituting flexible licensing procedures and requirements, and seeking out financial assistance for kinship families—strategies covered in detail in the Center for the Study of Social Policy's *A Critical Resource at Risk: Supporting Kinship Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond*. For additional guidance on providing support to kinship caregivers, see Information Gateway's *Working With Kinship Caregivers* and *Placement of Children With Relatives*.

Recruitment of resource families. When placing children with foster and adoptive families—also called resource families—it is ideal to secure homes that are reflective of, and responsive to, children's culture, language, religion, and background. Placing children in culturally reflective and responsive homes may increase their feelings of belongingness, social connectedness, and ethnic-racial identity. While research on the subject is limited, one study found that cultural dissimilarity between children and their foster homes can lead to depression, loneliness, and behavior problems for children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Anderson & Linares, 2012).

The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996 require States to pursue the diligent recruitment (DR) of resource families who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children awaiting homes. Results from the latest round of the Child and Family Services Reviews indicate that many States struggle with DR, with only 17 of 51 (33 percent) receiving a positive rating on efforts to recruit culturally reflective resource families (Children's Bureau, 2020a). In response to these and past findings of a similar nature, the Children's Bureau, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, has provided grant funds to support DR efforts. To read about successful grantee strategies, see the Children's Bureau's *Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System: Challenges and Recommendations for Policy and Practice*. For more information about DR, visit the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment website.

When recruiting resource families for American Indian or Alaska Native children, agencies must account for the preferences of the child's Tribe. ICWA requires that agencies seeking foster or preadoptive homes give preference to placements with children's extended family or to homes licensed, approved, or otherwise specified by the Tribe. Agencies should establish relationships with nearby Tribes to ensure they are aware of their preferences and find the most suitable placements for American Indian and Alaska Native children. For additional information, including recruitment strategies for ICWA-preferred resource families, refer to *Strategies for Successfully Recruiting and Retaining Preferred-Placement Foster Homes for American Indian Children* by Casey Family Programs.

Reunification. Promoting family reunification involves utilizing many of the same services needed for prevention: family strengthening, parent education, mental health and substance use services for parents, treatment for domestic violence, and concrete supports such as housing and transportation. The speed at which these services are provided has a great impact on the success of reunification due to the enforcement of ASFA, which requires the agency to file a petition to terminate parental rights for children who have been in out-of-home care for 15 out of 22 months, with some exceptions.

Targeting appropriate services for families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds involves selecting strengths-based and accessible providers with demonstrated cultural responsiveness and coordinating with other demands on the family, such as employment and child care. In addition, placement of children with kin or with foster families that are in or near the children's own neighborhoods may enable parents to visit more easily—a necessity for achieving reunification goals. For more information on strategies that child welfare agencies can use to achieve reunification and prevent reentry into out-of-home care, see Information Gateway's *Supporting Successful Reunifications*.

Adoption. When seeking adoptive homes for children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, child welfare agencies should pursue effective DR practices (see "Recruitment of Resource Families"). In addition, agencies can explore possibilities for open adoptions, which involves the creation of a kinship network through ongoing contact between a child's birth and adoptive family members, thereby protecting a child's cultural ties (Grotevant, 2019) (For more information, see Information Gateway's Maintaining Connections With Birth Families in Adoption web section). Finding preadoptive homes for American Indian or Alaska Native children requires additional considerations. Specifically, agencies should pursue opportunities for Tribal customary adoptions, in which Tribes determine adoption outcomes. In customary adoption cases, parental rights may not be terminated, and the child maintains connections to his or her biological parents and other family members. This arrangement is more flexible than mainstream legal adoption. For more information about customary adoption, visit Information Gateway's Working With American Indian Children and Families in Adoption web page.

CONCLUSION

Racial disproportionalities and disparities are urgent issues that need immediate attention from child welfare systems throughout the country. Although there is widespread recognition of the problem, there is conflicting research on the causes of disproportionality and disparity, as well as a limited number of promising practices that use antiracist and culturally specific approaches to directly address them. In order for child welfare agencies to confront this pervasive problem, they must first assess the nature of disproportionality and disparity, including at which decision points they occur and which racial and ethnic populations are affected. They should then address the issues from an institutional perspective, which lays the groundwork for implementing antiracist casework practice and strategies.

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