

## Executive Summary

# Addressing Disproportionality of Minorities in the Iowa Child Welfare System

## Overview

Minority children in Iowa have a significantly higher chance of being placed in foster care, and for longer periods of time than non-minority children with similar factors. While some county level efforts (e.g., Woodbury County's efforts with Native American children and families and Polk County's efforts with African American children and families) have produced promising results, it is now time to expand to a statewide approach. On May 7, 2009, a group of community stakeholders, youth, parents, court representatives and leadership from the Iowa Department of Human Services met to identify issues and an approach to this systemic problem. The group was facilitated by Casey Family Programs staff using a methodology to get beyond dialogue to action. There is an urgency to take develop a statewide frame with our partners to address this issue. From that meeting a report was created, *Developing a Statewide Framework to Address Disproportionality*. While more information can be found in the report this *Executive Summary* document serves to provide a brief introduction to the issues, data, and next steps.

## Partnership and Leadership

While the Iowa Department of Human Services owns its accountability for addressing this issue and will take a strong leadership role, we recognize that we cannot address this issue on our own and are calling on our partners within the community, courts, education, private providers, counties, and others to identify ways we can make true lasting change. To this end, the group that met on May 7th recognized the need to identify a statewide cross-agency table to lead on this initiative.

## What the Data Tells Us

Through work in DHS called Better Results for Kids, a number of issues surfaced and were addressed to have better outcomes for the children and families that we serve. While a number of changes occurred that decreased the number of children that came into formal DHS care, we still have the same or higher disproportionate number of minority children.

According to a 2007 report by the Government Accounting Office (GAO-07-816), the proportion of African American children in foster care in Iowa is 4.45 times their proportion in the general population; and the proportion of Native American children in foster care in Iowa is 5.41 times their proportion in the general population. According to this report, Iowa's "disproportionality index" for African American children is the third highest in the nation, and the disproportionality index for Native American children is the fourth highest in the nation.

## Addressing the Problem

The group that met on May 7th identified a number of things that we can do to address this problem by leveraging existing efforts, implementing changes in policy and practice, and taking advantage of opportunities to work together. The report *Developing a Statewide Framework to Address Disproportionality* provides a more detailed description of steps and key leverage points

that should be considered in five key areas that, if addressed, would positively impact disproportionality.

#### Leadership

- Leverage existing leadership (e.g., in Children's Justice State Council and District Teams, Community Partnership for Protecting Children) and successful initiatives (e.g., Polk and Woodbury Counties Minority Youth and Families Initiatives)
- Build and share leadership with families and communities

#### Community/Constituency Participation

- Convene community conversations with a broad array of stakeholder groups to impact public will (e.g., family, schools, faith communities, youth, etc.)
- Broaden involvement and partnerships

#### Key Decision Points in the Life of a Case

- Identifying Decision Points throughout the life of the case from the first contact to the last, and the racial impact of these decisions
- Use data for analysis

#### Resources

- Align resources with gaps in services, and use resources within minority communities

#### Racial Bias

- Expand training on cultural responsiveness and engage in structured conversations about racial biases and cultural differences
- Conduct assessment of institutional bias

### **Action Plan**

- Communication to begin immediately. The more the community and our partners know the more successful we can be.
- Start a statewide Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) on Disproportionality (using the Plan, Do, Study, Act [PDSA] methodology) to begin small tests of change at the community level in eight sites by fall of 2009.
- Identify the ongoing body that will be responsible for managing the statewide disproportionality efforts moving forward by July 1, 2009.

### **Summary**

While the problem is not new in Iowa or to other states, the statewide approach to action for child welfare system is new in Iowa. As the work on disproportionality evolves, we will keep partners informed of our actions. If there are ways that you can support our efforts please let us know. DHS is currently developing a page on the DHS website, where future information about this work will be posted.