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The ROUNDTABLE

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Engaging African American Communities and Organizations to Support Foster Care and Adoption for Children in the Child Welfare System

By Kathy Ledesma, MSW; Stephanie Pettaway; Ruth McRoy, PhD; Elissa Madden, PhD, MSW; Patricia A. Cody, PhD, MSW

Engaging African American communities and organizations to support foster care and adoption for children in foster care is necessary in order to address the needs of the disproportionately high numbers of African American children who enter the child welfare system. Moreover, the Multiethnic Placement Act, as amended, (P.L. 103-382, or MEPA) requires States to conduct diligent recruitment to target their efforts to recruit a pool of foster and adoptive families that reflects the demographics of children in care.

Although the ratio of African American children in foster care, as compared to their representation in the general population, has decreased from three times to two times during this decade, the need for families for African American children in care continues to be acute. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2008, 15 percent of the U.S. child population under the age of 18 was African American¹. According to the federal Administration for Children and Families Adoption and Foster Care Administrative Reporting System (AFCARS), 31 percent of children in foster care and 30 percent of children waiting to be adopted, in 2008 were African American. Yet, only 25 percent of all children adopted from foster care in 2008 were African American².

In general, when compared with other children needing permanent placement, African American children are older, wait longer for adoption, are more likely to be adopted transracially, and are less likely to be adopted.

AdoptUSKids is a project of the Children's Bureau, funded through a cooperative agreement with the Adoption Exchange Association. The mission of AdoptUSKids is two-fold: to increase public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system and to support and build capacity in States, Tribes, and Territories (STOs) in their efforts to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families and connect them with children in foster care.

AdoptUSKids has undertaken a number of national activities to assist STOs in addressing the permanency needs of African American children in care, including the following:

- Between 2004, when the first AdoptUSKids National Media Recruitment Campaign was launched, and September 2009, AdoptUSKids funded Recruitment Response Teams (RRTs) to provide bridging activities to families between their initial contact with AdoptUSKids and their engagement in services in the jurisdictions in which they reside. Through the RRTs, AdoptUSKids supported STOs while they built their capacity to respond to the increase in families inquiring about becoming foster and adoptive families, as a result of the media campaign.

(see *Engaging African American Communities* - next page)

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"Embracing partnerships that build strong foundations for the adoption of waiting children in the child welfare system!"

- In the spring of 2009, AdoptUSKids began its planned phase-out of the RRTs. Based on data gathered during this project, AdoptUSKids identified four populations of prospective foster and adoptive families who are at special risk of encountering cultural challenges that might discourage their completion of the application, preparation, approval and placement processes. In consultation with the Children's Bureau, AdoptUSKids began strategizing for extending the direct provision of retention services for inquiring families who self-identify as African American, Native American, military/global, and/or lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-gendered (LGBT), while at the same time building tools and supports for STOs to build their capacity to retain and connect these families with children in foster care.
- Over the past year, AdoptUSKids, as part of their capacity building activities, has focused on assisting STOs to build their capacity to recruit and retain prospective foster and adoptive families who are African American.
- During the summer of 2009, AdoptUSKids gathered and analyzed data about African American waiting and adopted children from the latest available AFCARS data at that time (2007). In addition, the University Texas at Austin evaluation team analyzed the demographics of the 11,000 children who had been photolisted on the AdoptUSKids web site (www.AdoptUSKids.org) between October 1, 2003, and July 20, 2009, and subsequently were reported as placed into adoptive families. AdoptUSKids also analyzed the demographics of the families who adopted the 11,000 photo-listed children.
 - Of the 11,000 children who had been photolisted on AdoptUSKids and subsequently placed for adoption as of July 20, 2009, 40 percent were African American.
 - Of the 4,598 waiting photo-listed children on that date, 47 percent were African American.
 - Families who have current home studies can register on the AdoptUSKids web site, view more information than the general public can view on waiting children, and can submit formal inquiries on specific waiting photo-listed children.
 - On July 20, of the 4,584 registered families, 12 percent had at least one African American prospective adoptive parent.
- In September 2009, AdoptUSKids invited a group of adoption professionals with experience in providing services to African American families to participate in teleconferences to help inform and shape the AdoptUSKids internal capacity building activities for the retention of all viable African American families who contact AdoptUSKids. Key suggestions and hands-on assistance that came from this group included:
 - development of a cultural tip sheet for engaging African American families, along with a well-researched bibliography.
 - compilation of a current list of African American specializing agencies.
 - compilation of a list of African American fraternities and sororities, faith communities, and other key national organizations.
 - creation and administration of a survey of African American adoption professionals and families regarding barriers to and successful strategies to recruit and retain African American foster and adoptive families.
 - dissemination of these materials as well as up-to-date AFCARS and AdoptUSKids data and the African American national recruitment campaign TV, radio, and print public services announcements to State child welfare administrators, foster care managers, adoption managers, and all of the African American agencies and organizations cited above.
- In October 2009, AdoptUSKids extended its information-gathering through a survey distributed at the One Church One Child national conference in Baltimore and distributed in November to participants in the Together as Adoptive Parents support group. In addition, e-mail invitations were sent to 35 five minority specializing agencies to request their participation in a survey about what should be done to engage African American communities in foster care and adoption.

The following tables present selected findings from the 67 African American foster and adoptive families and adoption professional respondents to two of the key survey questions:

(see Engaging African American Communities - page 3)

What do you think are the best ways to recruit African American foster and adoptive families?

Table 1: Recruiting Methods – Parent and Professional Perspectives		
Method	Parents (n=31)	Professionals (n=36)
Churches	23 (59%)	32 (89%)
Connection with current foster and adoptive parents	19 (49%)	29 (81%)
TV	19 (49%)	22 (61%)
Community organizations	16 (41%)	20 (56%)
Word of mouth	16 (41%)	32 (89%)
Radio	14 (36%)	20 (56%)
Employers	13 (33%)	9 (25%)
Wednesday's Child programs	13 (33%)	15 (42%)
Beauty shops and barber shops	12 (31%)	13 (36%)
Billboards	12 (31%)	13 (36%)
Childcare centers	12 (31%)	7 (19%)
Photos of waiting children (i.e., Heart Gallery)	11 (28%)	19 (53%)
Doctors' offices	9 (23%)	5 (14%)
Fraternities and sororities	8 (21%)	9 (25%)
Other	2 (6%)	4 (11%)
Missing	1 (3%)	0

What are some of the barriers to African American families fostering and adopting from the foster care system?

Table 2: Barriers – Parent and Professional Perspectives		
Method	Parents (n=31)	Professionals (n=36)
Families lack financial resources to support additional children.	23 (74%)	23 (64%)
Families are concerned about the challenges the children needing placement may bring into their family (behavioral problems, attachment issues etc.).	22 (70%)	26 (72%)
Families do not have the financial resources to complete an adoption in the legal system.	16 (52%)	11 (31%)
Families do not know the process involved in becoming an adoptive or a foster family.	13 (42%)	25 (69%)
Families distrust the foster care system.	13 (42%)	20 (56%)
Families are unaware of the fact that there are many waiting African American children who need permanency through adoption.	12 (39%)	22 (61%)
Families feel disrespected by workers in the child welfare system.	11 (35%)	14 (39%)
Families may not know which agencies to call to get information about adoption.	11 (29%)	10 (28%)
Potential foster and adoptive parents are confused about the implications of the child having contact with birth family members.	9 (29%)	14 (39%)
Families are already informally caring for children who are not related to them.	9 (29%)	12 (33%)
Some families believe that their primary obligation is to care for their own relatives first.	7 (23%)	7 (19%)
Families don't know other persons who have adopted or fostered children.	8 (26%)	7 (19%)
Other	2 (1%)	6 (17%)

(see Engaging African American Communities - page 5)

Natalie's Notes



Hello Friends:

This edition of *The Roundtable* is dedicated to the issue of “partnering communities of color and supporting adoptive families” to improve outcomes for children, youth and families in the child welfare system.

We are pleased to highlight the efforts of two jurisdictions and of AdoptUSKids, our sister member in the Children’s Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network (T&TA Network). *The Roundtable* shares examples of how they are striving to make a positive impact through collaboration with communities of color. We hope you will find it informative to your work.

Staff from the National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) led a focus group discussion during the 2007 Annual Working Meeting of the National Association of State Adoption Programs (NASAP). Adoption program managers in this group articulated seven key steps necessary for successful collaboration with communities of color. They are as follows¹:

1. Begin a journey toward cultural competence.
2. Acknowledge the challenges involved in establishing a trusting relationship.
3. Avoid generalizations and false assumptions.
4. Assure equal representation.
5. Determine common interests and goals.
6. Recognize the impact of vocabulary.
7. Be flexible.

The focus group participants stated that these seven strategies help them to engage children, youth and families of color receiving adoption services in the child welfare system.

In the same vein, child welfare agencies and organizations need to assess their effectiveness in delivering services that are culturally competent and responsive. Spaulding for Children’s *Cultural Competence in Child Welfare Curriculum* provides a definition of culturally competent practice adapted from the National Technical Assistance Center for

Children’s Mental Health in the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (formerly the Child and Adolescent Service System Program Technical Assistance Center). This definition dictates that practitioners be committed to providing culturally competent services while having an awareness and acceptance of cultural differences as well as their own cultural values. It further suggests that an understanding of what occurs in cross-cultural interactions is essential. Also necessary are a basic knowledge about the culture of the people with whom one is working and the ability to adapt practice skills to fit that culture.

A child welfare agency or organization could begin an assessment of its current level of cultural competence by answering the following questions²:

1. Are services delivered in the community where the families being served live?
2. Do some of the agency’s staff members and decision makers reflect the culture of the families being served?
3. Is the organization’s environment welcoming and culturally appropriate?
4. Are the various programs of the agency culturally sensitive?
5. Is the language appropriate to the families’ culture?
6. Does the agency reach out to the community?
7. Is respect for cultural values evident in the services that the agency provides?
8. Is the culture of the community celebrated?

A cultural assessment of an agency’s or organization’s service delivery also needs to address factors below:

- Do office location, physical appearance of the office, plus the written and visual pictures that the agency uses to present itself to its families and stakeholders all provide evidence that the agency represents the families it serves?

(see Natalie Note’s - page 5)

Engaging African American *(continued from page 3)*


- On March 9, 2010, AdoptUSKids mailed over 250 packets containing the complete results of this survey and the other materials cited above to the suggested individuals and organizations. Within just a few days, requests for additional packets and survey responses began arriving at AdoptUSKids—both encouraging signs that both STOs and African American agencies and organizations are eager to redouble the good efforts already underway to assure that all children in foster care, including African American children, have the opportunity to grow up in safe, loving, permanent families.
- Finally, in cooperation with the Children's Bureau, AdoptUSKids had convened a national workgroup in September 2010 to continue to tap the collective wisdom and expertise of child welfare and adoption professionals regarding best practices for the recruitment and retention of African American foster and adoptive families and the engagement of African American communities and organizations in this work. AdoptUSKids will be publishing a guide on these topics as part of its Answering the Call series of tools and curricula for capacity building technical assistance to STOs.

For more information, visit www.AdoptUSKids.org. To request a complete packet of materials mentioned in this article, contact Stephanie Johnson Pettaway, AdoptUSKids National Recruitment Campaign Fulfillment Director, at 410-931-0907 or spettaway@AdoptUSKids.org.

References

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, Fertility and Family Statistics Branch. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008.html>

² Source: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2008 data (October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008). http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report16.htm

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Natalie's Notes *(continued from page 4)*

- Are the organization's policies and procedures conducive to efforts related to outreach, hours of operation, community education, reduction of "red tape," etc.; and is a process in place to analyze whether policies and procedures are culturally competent to competent and responsive?
- Does an assessment of current staffing indicate that staff members reflect the communities served and that they are recruited, selected, trained and supported to provide culturally competent and responsive services at all levels of the organization?
- Are families given the opportunity to have their voices heard by the agency?

The National Resource Center for Adoption specializes in providing technical assistance, tools and on-site support to enhance the practice knowledge, skills and abilities of States, Tribes, territories, and courts in the development and provision of culturally competent and responsive services. If your State or Tribe wants technical assistance

from the NRCA, contact your federal Regional Office of the Children's Bureau to obtain approval; or send an e-mail to John Levesque, the NRCA's Director of Technical Assistance, at jlevesq7@maine.rr.com; or request help online via our web site at www.nrcadoption.org.

As a member of the T&TA Network, which is operated under the auspices of the Children's Bureau, the NRCA provides technical assistance at no cost to States and Tribes. Our goal is to assist you in increasing your capacity to serve children and families in the child welfare system better than ever.

References

¹ Harrison, Sharonlyn. (2008). Model Protocol for Collaborative Community Strategies Aims to Remove Barriers to Timely Adoptions. *The Roundtable*, 22(1), 6-7.

² National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption. (1995). *Cultural Competence in Child Welfare Curriculum*. Southfield, MI: Spaulding for Children.

Supporting Adoptive Families on a Shoestring

By Ann Turnlund-Carver, MSW

In these times of diminishing resources and expanded needs, it is not surprising that adoptions of children with special needs have increased in the United States while resources for social services have decreased.

Forced to examine their programs, including their support for adoptive families, many State agencies are seeking ways to minimize costs and to maximize outcomes. Arizona is one of these States.

In Arizona's Department of Economic Security, the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) has sought ways to increase support and assistance to families who care for children with special needs at minimal expense. For the purpose of adoption subsidy, Arizona considers children and youth with special needs as those who are:

- physical, mental or developmental disability
- emotional disturbance
- high risk of physical or mental disease
- age 6 or older
- sibling relationship
- racial or ethnic factors
- high risk of severe emotional disturbance if removed from the care of the child's foster parent or relative

In Arizona, Federal and State adoption subsidy programs provide maintenance payments, medical coverage, special services, such as specialized programs related to the child's special needs or respite services, and case management; but for families caring for children with special needs, additional assistance is necessary.

Research indicates that the availability and provision of post-placement and post-adoption services have shown to be influential in successful permanency outcomes. Post-placement and post-adoption services can be provided to the child and/or the permanent family and generally fall into four categories: material assistance (financial and medical assistance); clinical services (crisis intervention, counseling, respite care, and residential treatment); educational and informational services (information and referral to community services); and support networks (support groups and social

gatherings) (Freundlich & Wright, 2003 as cited in "Why families Need Post-Adoption services," 2004).

Several studies found that the most meaningful services for each family depend on the composition of the family, the children's ages, and the children's special needs (Freundlich & Wright, 2003 as cited in "Why families Need Post-Adoption services," 2004).

Meeting the individualized needs for each child eligible for adoption has been a key principle in the Arizona DCYF's recent work to improve the adoption process. The division has been working with adoptive parents and stakeholders in the adoption community to improve the process for selecting adoptive families for a child.

Adoption and Recruitment Specialist Lynn Griffin, BSW, as part of her participation in the Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute (MALDI) in 2008, conducted interviews with parents who had adopted African American children. Her research found that beyond adoption assistance, parents most often requested more information about their child's background and about how to talk with their child about adoption.

In our efforts to support the families interviewed as well as all of Arizona's families, we considered the research findings of Freundlich & Wright, (2003) that reflect an even broader list of what is useful to families which is listed below:

- Support groups, informal contact with other adoptive families and help lines.

(continued on next page)



- Accessible information about services, supports, and resources.
- Parenting education, including practical help with children's needs.
- Respite care and babysitting for other children in the family.
- Counseling, including assistance with children's attachment issues; guidance in responding to their adopted children's emotional, behavioral, and developmental issues; assistance in dealing with the impact of adoption on their birth children; and help with life planning for their children.
- Counseling services for their children, including group services for older children.
- Crisis intervention services.
- Advocacy services, including help negotiating the educational and mental health systems.
- Educational assessment, special education services, and tutoring.
- Specialized children's services, including mental health services, outpatient drug and alcohol treatment, physical therapy, and special medical equipment.
- Adoption assistance (subsidies) and medical coverage.

In light of the information learned from those interviewed and the broader list from research, Arizona's approach is reinforced as we consider the critical aspect of the selection process.

One consideration is anticipating the needs of families, like those interviewed, who adopted African American children from the Arizona's child welfare system.



Secondly, it is essential to gather information, including the short-term and permanent needs of the child, and then sharing it with the prospective adoptive family as well as the adoption selection team.

Providing accurate, honest information about the child before the selection allows the prospective family to consider how well the child will fit in their family. It also offers an opportunity for the family to provide specific information about their ability to meet the special needs of the child beyond what has been presented in the homestudy.

Efforts by Arizona include ensuring that families like those adopting children with special needs also benefit from gaining knowledge about the overall experience of adoption.

Arizona's DCYF publishes and distributes *The Arizona Statewide*, a quarterly newsletter for foster, kinship, and adoptive parents. It provides current information about adoption policy, supportive services and programs, plus medical tips and

announcements about events honoring foster and adoptive parents. In the "Shining Star" section, it features children who are free for adoption but who do not have an identified placement.

By using electronic distribution channels, the DCYF has more than doubled the newsletter's distribution over the past two years without increasing costs.

We utilize the wealth of knowledge available on the internet as well. Arizona's DCYF refers families to web sites that provide support and general information about adoption and the uniqueness of raising an adopted child. For example, the Center for Adoption Support and Education site at www.adoption-support.org presents "The Adopted Child's Changing View," a childhood development time line. This outlines the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of development from infancy through age 19 as well as the adopted child's awareness of being adopted and

(see *Supporting Adoptive Families* - page 10)

Disproportionality in Child Welfare Practice: Perspectives from the Child Welfare Community

By Janice King, LMSW

Lessons learned about disproportionality from the child welfare community continue to provide the foundational knowledge and approaches for improving child welfare systems in the field today.

The findings and strategies from the study, “Children of Color in the Child Welfare System: Perspectives from the Child Welfare Community” (Chibnall, et al., 2003, pp. i-v), inform and provide direction in the field.

This review serves as a reminder of the knowledge held within the community about the issues surrounding disproportionality and the approaches that many agencies embrace to prevent, to educate about, and to resolve those issues as they relate to children of color, specifically African American children in the public child welfare system.

The study was directed by Mary Bruce Webb, PhD, Director of the Division of Child and Family Development in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its stated purposes were:

- to gain insight into the issue of over-representation (or racial disproportionality) from the perspective of the child welfare community, including agency administrators, supervisors, and direct service workers.

- to describe the strategies child welfare and child-welfare-serving agencies use to meet the needs of children and families of color in the child welfare system.

Sponsored by the Children’s Bureau and the ACF, the three-year study was conducted under a contract with Caliber Associates, in collaboration with the Howard University School of Social Work. Completed in December 2003, it was self-described as “one of the first major efforts in the child welfare field to explore the attitudes and perceptions of the child welfare community concerning racial disproportionality.” It was an exploratory, qualitative study involving nine sites, including two agencies in Minnesota and one each in California, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Virginia and Texas.

Excerpts from the study itself reveal these emerging themes:

- **Poverty:** Poverty and poverty-related circumstances were cited as “primary reasons for the over-representation of minority children in the child welfare system.”
- **Need for services and lack of resources:** “Poor families were more likely to be living in resource-poor communities.”
- **Visibility of impoverished and minority families to other systems:** “Because minority families are more likely to

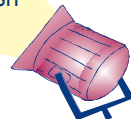
be poor and to lack access to resources, they are also more likely to use public services, including public health care and to receive public assistance, including TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and Medicaid.”

- **Vulnerability of African American communities:** “Effects of oppression on the African American community include(d) under-education and unemployment.” With diminished opportunities, “the community found itself disempowered.”
- **Over-reporting of child abuse and neglect among minority parents:** “In relation to the child welfare system, this differential treatment (by race) manifests itself most often in the over-reporting of minority parents for child abuse and neglect.”
- **Pressure from the media:** “Increased media attention nationwide to extreme cases of abuse and neglect has left supervisors and workers alike feeling vulnerable and under increased scrutiny. Unfortunately, participants in several agencies reported that these feelings of uncertainty often manifest in their substantiating more cases and, as a result, bringing more children into care.”

(see *Disproportionality* - page 10)

Open Adoption/Youth Permanency Grantees Cluster

Developing Services and Supports for Youth Who Wish
to Retain Contact with Family Members



ROAD Paves the Way in New York City to Recruit and Support Adoptive Families in Communities of Color

By Eileen Lopez and Mark Fairclough

Realizing Open Adoption Dreams (ROAD/El Camino Hacia Un Futuro Mejor) is one of five programs operated by the New York Council on Adoptable Children. ROAD's main objective is to work with adolescents 12 to 21 years old in the New York City foster care system ambivalent about being adopted. ROAD staff introduces the concept of open adoption by explaining to youth, "You still can have a relationship with your birth family, but your adoptive family will give you the financial, emotional, and physical resources to survive in life."

Participants who have been identified as hard to place are referred to ROAD by adoption and foster care agencies, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, and the New York City Administration for Children's Services.

Within the past two years, recruiting families of color has been a major area of focus. As of November 2009, children of color compose the biggest percentage of children and youth in care in the state of New York: 49 percent are African American; 21 percent are Latino. Therefore,

recruiting in communities of color is an essential component of ROAD.

The most viable gathering places in these communities are churches, barber shops, and beauty salons. ROAD has recruited at churches, street fairs, Parent Teacher Association meetings, and via public service announcements at radio stations, especially those that have audiences of color.

While these methods have worked well for ROAD in New York City, agencies in other parts of the country may have additional established events or resources that would be great ways to recruit. For example, options include county fairs, town hall meetings, and events on campus, such as barbecues, meet-and-greet parties, and car washes.

During recruitment events, ROAD provides the community with brochures, giveaways, and answers to all questions pertaining to adoption and the benefits of adopting a child, particularly an older child of color.


ROAD staff has observed that awareness often is spread through word of mouth and that this is the most effective method of dissipating

the myths about open adoption and adoption in general. Topics discussed include incentives, such as medical coverage, adoption subsidy, and tax credits.

Staff members stress the urgent need for more families to adopt children of color and describe how fulfilling life can be for families that bring one or more of these children into their lives. They provide examples of successful adoptions, especially those involving adopted adolescents.

Recruitment and follow-up assistance, such as visits, phone calls and accompanying families to case planning meetings, have been keys to the success of ROAD.

Families receiving these services feel supported, which leads to successful matches and subsequent adoptions.

Coauthors are **Eileen Lopez**, Program Director, and **Mark Fairclough**, Project Director, of ROAD at New York Council on Adoptable Children. For more information, contact the authors at www.coac.org. 

Supporting Adoptive Families *(continued from page 7)*

its influence on the maturing child. Families are referred to this site to help answer their children's questions about their own adoption experiences.

The Center for Adoption Support and Education web site also has been helpful to families preparing for their adopted child's adolescence. It addresses the inevitable questions that arise about how the child fits in the adoptive family, and it discusses the child's consideration of a search for the birth family.

At this developmental stage when older children and youth are separating from their parents and peer relations are becoming paramount, various internet resources provide adoption-centered, peer-to-peer supports. For example, the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network is launching the Adoptees Have Answers program at www.aha.mn. This program will give adopted children opportunities for online peer-to-peer support and will allow them to be the adoption "experts" about their own experiences. There are online peer-to-peer support groups to help adoptive parents, too.

While online resources are widely accessible, conventional support group meetings offered through foster care and adoption coalitions, parent groups, adoption agencies, and churches continue to be worthwhile, cost-efficient endeavors.


Two key programs in Arizona that offer education and support for adoptive families were started with grants and now receive some support from community agencies. These are the Kinship and Adoption Resource and Education (KARE) Family Center, described at www.arizonaschildren.org/programs/karecenter.html, and the Lodestar Family Connections Center at www.familyconnectionscenter.org. They both offer free training, support groups, and referral assistance to adoptive and kinship families.

Churches and faith-based groups also are beginning to recognize the need to support adoptive families and are becoming resources. The Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents, described at www.azafap.org, is another resource for making connections to families who support each other and advocate for foster and adoptive children.

Support groups, whether faith-based or community-based, can be the life line for adoptive families working through childhood experiences different from those of families not impacted by adoption. Parent groups provide an opportunity for supportive relationships to grow naturally. Before long, families in these groups exchange not only tips for child raising but also phone numbers, recipes, and even respite care.

Parents wishing to start a support group may benefit from the resources available through the North American Council on Adoptable Children at www.nacac.org or AdoptUSKids at www.AdoptUSKids.org, which are funded by the Children's Bureau as part of the cooperative agreement with AdoptUSKids.

Agencies like Arizona, operating within budget constraints, need to find new and innovative ways to support adoptive families. Financial support and the services of skilled mental health practitioners in adoption are essential, but they may not be available in this time of budget shortfalls. Therefore, developing supports and resources at no cost or low cost must become a priority in order to maintain and to continue adoptions for children, like our families supporting children with special needs and those parents interviewed.

Ann Turnlund-Carver, MSW, is an adoptee who has been working in child welfare and related services for 15 years. When this article was authored, Ann was the Manager of Adoption, Guardianship and Home Recruitment in the State of Arizona. Currently, Ann Turnlund-Carver is Regional T/TA Coordinator with the Children's Bureau's Training and Technical Assistance Coordination Center. 

Disproportionality *(continued from page 8)*

- **Lack of experience with other cultures:** "In many cases, participants felt that their colleagues, across racial and ethnic groups and job categories, brought preconceived ideas or biases against minority groups, most often African Americans, to

their position within the agency. Participants, most often African American participants, identified racial bias as a common problem that frequently interfered with good decision making. They felt that many staff, but Caucasian staff in particular, lacked

exposure to cultures other than their own and had no context for understanding the cultural norms and practices of minority populations."

- **Defining abusive behavior:** "One frequently cited example of worker bias was the difference
(see Disproportionality - next page)

in perception between white and black workers regarding what constitutes abuse and discipline, particularly discipline within the African American culture.”

Participants in the study shared the following strategies they were implementing in their agencies either to reduce over-representation or to serve minority families better:


- **Emphasizing prevention:** A shift in focus to prevention would allow agencies to capitalize on opportunities to stabilize families before they come to the attention of the child welfare system. Earlier provision of resources and services to support families would result in fewer minority children entering the system in the first place.
 - **Building public and private agency partnerships:** All nine participating agencies at the time of the study had current “relationships with private child welfare agencies, including community-based and ethnic-oriented agencies. These relationships include(d) both formal contractual relationships and informal referral-based ones.”
 - **Administrative support:** Recognizing the importance of a strong relationship between an agency’s administration and its workforce, agency administrators in three states talked about their efforts to improve services by improving the work environment. Specifically, they “talked about the importance of an agency infrastructure that includes experienced workers, proper supervision and oversight, strong peer relationships, and
- manageable caseloads. They felt that a strong agency infrastructure could reduce disproportionality by allowing supervisors and workers alike to do their jobs more effectively. If supervisors are able to supervise properly, then workers will be able to do their jobs more effectively, leading to better outcomes for children and families, including fewer children coming into the system in the first place.”
- **Community connections:** “Participants in all sites felt that developing relationships with communities and partnerships with community-based systems and agencies was another important mechanism for reducing over-representation, re-emphasizing the need to establish collaborative and contractual relationships with ethnic and community-based agencies to provide services to minority families.” In this context, however, participants talked about moving beyond the provision of community-based services, focusing instead on establishing real connections with minority communities.
 - **External resources for clients:** Related to the perception that poverty and poverty-related issues are two primary explanations for over-representation, participants linked the availability of resources, again, preventive resources, for clients to a decrease in over-representation. Specifically, “participants referred to the importance of having access to resources external to the agency to help

support families to stay together, including adequate housing, educational and employment opportunities, quality child-care services, and financial support.”

For a more detailed review of the child welfare system’s response to children of color, the complete study excerpted in this article can be found at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/respon_coc/reports/persp_ch_welf/child_of_color.pdf.

To learn more about how this topic is being addressed in child welfare systems through diligent recruitment projects under Adoption Opportunities grants, the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), and the dissemination of promising practices, see sources below on web for information:

- MEPA video at www.nrcadoption.org
- Learn innovative ways to achieve permanency options for youth at www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/diligent-recruitment/
- Child Welfare Information Gateway at www.childwelfare.gov
- Ultimately, the knowledge and strategies identified by the child welfare community are intended to support policies and practices that will improve services to children and families.

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NRCA's Web Site Has a New Look

We are excited to announce a new look and features on our web site.

You'll find helpful information on current child welfare adoption topics as well as updated tools, resources, and web media.

The site features clean and easy navigation through drop down menus and section highlights. You will always know where you are with just a quick glance at the main menu. You can also find things easily using the Google search box.

If you would like to receive future issues of *The Roundtable* electronically, you can subscribe on our website at www.nrcadoption.org/newsletter/roundtable.

Check our site out at www.nrcadoption.org.

2010 P2P Dialogue Video Archive Now Available



The Children's Bureau is pleased to announce the availability of video archive of presentations from the 2010 Policy to Practice Dialogue, "Making Connections in Child Welfare!"

The archives may be accessed on the NRCA web site: www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts/policy-to-practice-2010.



The ROUNDTABLE

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