



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
PERMANENCY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

Disparate Treatment and Disproportionality: A Permanency Agenda

Southern Region Annual Report
FY10

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Table of Contents

	Page
Southern Region Action Team Contact List	4
Introduction	5
Membership and Community Outreach	7
Community Participation and Partnerships	
Promoting Permanency and Reducing Disparities	9
Permanency Enhancement Initiatives	13
Primary Action Team Initiatives	
Action Team Successes and Challenges	
Role of the University Partner	21
Recommendations	22
Conclusions	26
Appendices	28

Listing of Figures and Tables

	Page
Table 1: Established Partnerships between Action Teams and Stakeholders	8
Table 2: The Benefits of Shared Participation, Responsibility, and Risks	9
Figure 1: Disproportionality in the Southern Region of Illinois	13
Table 3: Action Team Initiatives	16
Table 4: Action Team Group Assessment Form	20
Table 5: Action Team Scores	21
Figure 2: Cycle of issues impacting disproportionality	22
Figure 3: Discussion of the systemic disparities facing families of color	22
Figure 4: Processing Actions for Accountability	24

Southern Region Action Team Overview

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INTRODUCTION

As the permanency journey continues, it is worth reflecting back on the history of child welfare in this country. As early as the 1700s and 1800s, we embraced a system of indenture and institutionalization that categorized families as “worthy or unworthy poor”. When the almshouses were found to be no better for the health and well-being of children private and religious organizations shifted to institutionalization via orphanages.

The steady growth of industry and the increases of immigrants coming to America created another shift in child welfare in the late 19th century; orphan trains transported children to rural areas to serve as a labor force on farms in exchange for a place to lay their heads. At this time acts on behalf of the poor were exclusive to white families and later, families of color. The needs of families of color were often ignored.

Family preservation was not a consideration for families of color and African American families were not a part of the equation where the provision of services was considered (disparate treatment had an early beginning). The 20th century brought about societies that were finally concerned about child maltreatment, juvenile justice, prevention, aid to families and so on. America finally developed a consciousness for all children and the child welfare movement was born. This movement still did not fully embrace children and families of color in the way it should have. In fact, family preservation was still not a priority for families of color. The child welfare movement was rather critical and punitive to families of color. Ironically, families of color began to be penalized by a system designed by the dominant culture to separate them. It is hoped that the 21st century child welfare system will be inclusive and right the wrongs of the past by ensuring permanency for all children. It is hoped that the resiliency

and strength of families of color will be the motivator for them to demand an inclusive child welfare system that accepts the true historical moments of their journey to the 21st century.

So where are we today? Often, we find ourselves rethinking decisions to embrace policies that we thought were in the best interest of children and families only to discover that despite our victories won and advances made, we still wrestle with the burden of determining when to return children home or keep children home, when to focus on the child or support family strengths, and knowing when to say “when” in situations where termination is being considered. These complexities are increased by the reality that the overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare systems is rampantly apparent at the local, state and national levels. More importantly, we cannot sit quiet and allow legislators, public laws, or reforms to continue to be enacted that are punitive to families of color. We must demand legislation, public policies and reforms that take into consideration history, our strengths and our inherent right to keep our families intact.

The current, looming, and continuous social ills surrounding children and families have historical roots. When faced with the statistics that report on the percentages of children that enter or remain in child welfare agencies, questions surface: How can the most advanced and industrialized nation still miss the mark in child care? Do we really understand parent needs? Do we really understand community needs? Did we overlook initiatives that might have yielded better results for families? What are our motives? Do we empower or do we enable? Do we value culture, do we accept history, and do we accept the social injustices of history? Analyzing these questions and beginning to answer them requires that we examine the internal drivers guiding our discretion in decision making, interventions, and advocating for systemic changes.

Membership and Community Outreach

Community Participation and Partnerships

Action teams were charged with recruiting members that reflected a diversity of community stakeholders. Ideally, action teams should have representation from birth parents and/or DCFS involved youth, foster/adoptive parents, court personnel/law enforcement, contracted agencies, faith-based organizations, schools, medical providers, housing, and the business community. Many of the action teams in the southern region have been successful with recruitment of other child welfare agencies, contracted agencies, faith-based organizations and court personnel. However, all teams seem to either be resistant or have not invited birth parents and foster parents to the action teams. Tables 1 display key established and ongoing partnerships by action teams with community stakeholders.

The action teams recognize how important it is to build relationships with community stakeholders that account for a larger percentage of hotline calls. Varying across action teams, the particular stakeholder groups making the hotline calls include the education system, medical providers, law enforcement, and relatives. In response to this, action team members advocate for DCFS by educating community stakeholders on the variety of services that DCFS provides aside from investigations and placement. Teams have been encouraged to seek membership from community people who are quick to make hotline calls. This would allow those individuals to learn more about DCFS' role in serving families. It is important that all members of a community including relatives understand their role in ensuring children remain home and are returned home.

Table 1: Established Partnerships between Action Teams and Stakeholders

	Belleville	Cairo	Carbondale	East Saint Louis
Stakeholder Groups	Judge Walter Brandon	Mayor	Mayor	Mayor Alvin Parks Office
	Catholic Social Services	State’s Attorney	Police Department	SIUE Head Start
	Lutheran Children and Family Services	Local Judge	SIUE	Judge Walter Brandon
	SIUE	SIUE	SIUC	Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation
	DCFS	Delta Center	DCFS	SIUE Community Nursing Program
		Shawnee College		SIUE (Head Start, Project Success, Trio programs)
	DCFS		Family Advocacy House	
			DCFS	

	Effingham	Madison-Bond	Mt. Vernon	Olney
Stakeholder Groups	Sexual Assault and Family Emergencies	Children’s Home & Aid Society	South town Youth Programs	P.T.O. Member (Education)
	Jasper County Health Dept.	Hoyleton Youth & Family Services	Jefferson County Probation	Local Health Provider
	Lutheran Children and Family Services	SIUE	Catholic Social Services	LANS Representative
	Addus Healthcare	DCFS	Lutheran Child and Family Services	SIUE
	SIUE		State’s Attorney	DCFS
	DCFS		SIUE	
			DCFS	

There are common themes that all of the teams encounter in their efforts to engage communities and implement strategies for their particular teams:

- closed systems
- lack of funding to support remain and return home efforts
- public disinterest and misinformation, and
- time constraints.

Yet, the teams recognize that perseverance and that old social worker adage of “meeting the client right where they are” must be constants throughout the permanency journey as they endeavor to build relationships. The transition from relationship building to establishing dedicated partners is realized in action teams where the idea of shared participation, shared responsibility, and shared risks is both accepted and practiced. Table 2 illustrates how actions teams benefit from shared participation, responsibility and risks.

Table 2: The Benefits of Shared Participation, Responsibility, and Risks

	SHARED PARTICIPATION	SHARED RESPONSIBILITY	SHARED RISKS
EARNED VALUE	Open communication Shared provision of resources	Delegation of roles and responsibilities – e.g. note taker, facilitator, researcher, contact person, etc	Advocating for change within your own agency Development of common understanding and solutions
BENEFITS TO TEAM	Exposure for the group	Establishes balance and clarity among group	Promotes successful group outcomes

Promoting Permanency and Reducing Disparities

The ideal of promoting permanency by addressing disparities has been somewhat of a challenge for all teams. While everyone believes there are disparities in working with families of color, teams struggle with discussing these because of the pain and hard feelings associated with these discussions. Nevertheless, the majority of the teams are beginning to make progress.

The Belleville and Mt. Vernon action teams have experienced sustained successes in their efforts to promote permanency and reduce disparities. For more than a year now, the Belleville team has maintained a thriving and ongoing relationship with the Honorable Judge Walter Brandon. Initially, there was minimal communication between social service agencies and court representatives regarding the best interest of children, the purpose of mandatory reporting, and other issues critical to decision making.

The Belleville team continues to hold quarterly meetings with Judge Walter Brandon; the meetings focus on understanding perspectives regarding issues such as ways to improve communication between the court, DCFS, and social service agencies, suggestions for improvements on case documentation, and mock court procedures. The permanency process is benefited by these processes as effective communication and better understandings are important in reducing the time children and families spend lingering in the court and child welfare systems. One great accomplishment is the fact that action team members talked to Judge Brandon about the way clients felt with everyone sitting in the courtroom during their court cases. After hearing how clients felt, Judge Brandon now does not allow anyone in the courtroom without the permission of the family. He has arranged for other families to wait outside the courtroom until it is time for their cases to be held. He extends the same courtesy to all children and their families.

For the past two years, the Mt. Vernon region action team focused on addressing the societal issues in Jefferson County. The team recognized that Jefferson County, a county with a significant African American population, did not have an accessible venue for providing support, sharing resources, and empowering change in communities. In 2008, the action team

established a parent group. Initially, the action team moderator provided oversight and encouraged dialogue with parents (many who had been or were involved with DCFS) about what they perceived as needs for their families and communities. The Mt. Vernon action team constructed a community survey during the summer of 2009 and distributed it to the parent group and many of the families in the Jefferson County area with the hopes of targeting the specific needs of parents and community members of Jefferson County.

A total of 229 survey participants completed the survey which consisted of 20 statements on the seriousness of various community issues. Survey participants were made up of parents, guardians, teachers, grandparents, youth, counselors, social workers and a percentage of participants who remained anonymous. The breakdown of the survey participants consisted of: (a) 102 parents; (b) nine guardians/caretakers; (c) one teacher; (d) five grandparents; (e) 37 youth; (f) two counselors; (g) one social worker; and 72 anonymous individuals. See full report in Appendices.

Overall, the results of the survey indicated that the majority of survey participants did not perceive any of the subject categories to have very high levels of seriousness. Lack of daycare, gangs, and youth crimes were among the majority as issues with high levels of seriousness. The results of the survey indicated a need for interventions specific to various populations experiencing disproportionate unemployment, poverty and other crises impeding positive growth and sustainability. Twenty-five percent of survey participants wrote additional statements regarding their perception of the pressing issues within their communities:

“funding at school locally”

“lack of things to do in the community”

“lack of teenage activities to do”

“other activities for young ones”

“GED, college”

“Jails overpopulated & prisons”

“Mentoring and employment opportunities for high risk youth lacking transportation”

“People need to take time to be with their children and teach them morals and values”

“become better people and just take an interest in their lives”

“Parents need to be made to take responsibility for their children”

“We need higher paying jobs in our area”

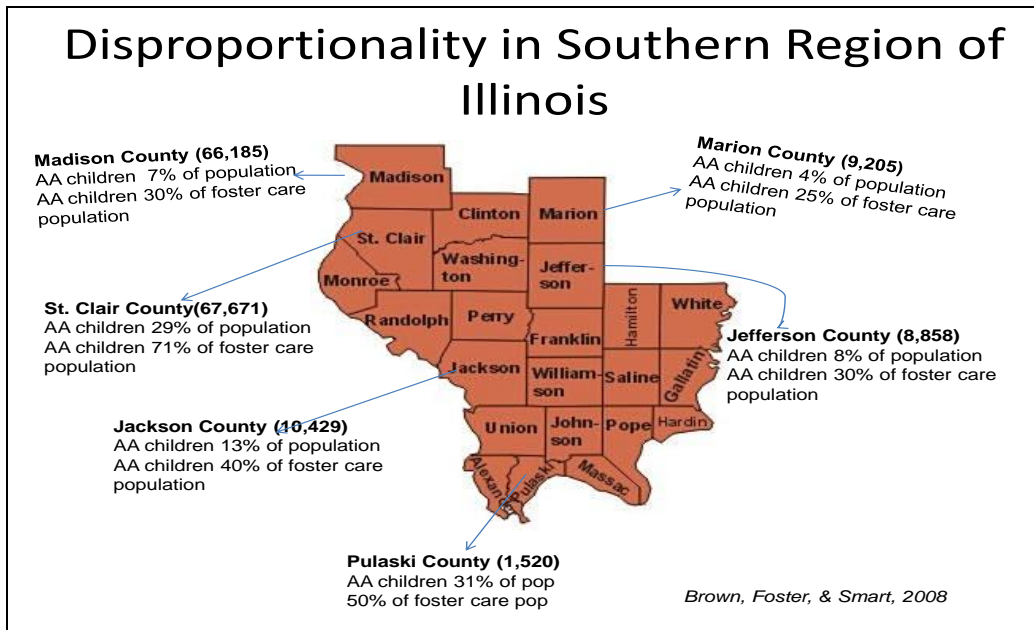
Over time, the parent group grew and a trusting relationship developed. To date, the parent group is a self-functioning group with elected roles and responsibilities and no longer requires the physical oversight of action team members. The parent group meets on a monthly basis, holds workshops and is actively involved in evaluating their community's strengths and areas of improvement.

In February 2010, the Belleville action team sponsored a symposium on disparate treatment and disproportionality at their quarterly meeting with the Honorable Judge Walter Brandon. The SIUE University partner presented the presentation. Attendance included community stakeholders from the medical community, law enforcement, court personnel, and private and public social services agencies. There were approximately 35 action team members in attendance.

The presentation impacted all in attendance by demonstrating how we all had been impacted by the “cause and effect” by-products of disparate treatment and the

overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system. We reduce disparities when we understand why they exist and how they impact all parties involved. Thus, we are better prepared to deal with disproportionalities in the nation, in the state and in our own regional backyards. Figure 1 highlights the disproportionate numbers of African American children in care as compared to their percentage in the population for the given county.

Figure 1: Disproportionality in the Southern Region of Illinois



Permanency Initiatives

Primary Action Team Initiatives

In their efforts to raise awareness about the Permanency Enhancement Project, the teams were charged with the tasks of implementing or participating in community awareness fairs related to (1) parent education, (2) health education, and (3) employment and educational training. The purpose of the community fairs was to generate a venue for community collaboration and to provide parents and agency partners a venue to display resources and opportunities.

The Cairo action team partnered with other organizations and participated in a job fair in April. The job fair provided a venue for action team members to share information about the Permanency Enhancement Project. On July 22, 2010, the East Saint Louis action team held their first Health Education Fair at the SIUE East Saint Louis Higher Education Center. Their theme was “Linking Children and Families with Community Resources”, the fair’s purpose developed when the team recognized that many of the children in the community were restricted from school attendance as they lacked updated school physicals and immunizations. The event also provided a variety of health screenings for adults.

The community fair generated support and participation from a variety of community stakeholders (e.g. local government, educational institutions, private agencies, community health, law enforcement, etc.). Most of the agencies present were from St. Clair and Madison Counties. Booths were set up and a variety of materials were provided to all participants. In addition, East St. Louis Mayor Alvin Parks, DCFS Representative Michael Burns and Central Regional Administrator were present on behalf of Director McEwen. Aside from the games, food and entertainment, the fair provided action team members the opportunity to share with many parents and community residents the purpose of the Permanency Enhancement Project.

The other action teams are currently discussing and planning community fairs based on the needs of their service areas. The teams will continue the task of building relationships, analyzing past behaviors and advocating for agency changes. Table 3 highlights current and ongoing efforts for each action team.

Specific Initiatives and Goals Addressed

Belleville Action Team

The Belleville action team has established a strong relationship with Judge Walter Brandon and is currently building relationships with other key stakeholders influencing child welfare outcomes and permanency rates in Southern Illinois. The team is in the planning phase for a morning plenary session with a multidisciplinary team of community providers in the St. Clair county area. The event will focus on (1) mandatory reporting, (2) disproportionality, and (3) addressing conflicting values between agencies. The event is tentatively scheduled for September 9, 2010, from 8-12:30 at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Specific goals to be addressed: **Remain Home** and **Return Home**.

Cairo Action Team

Fall 2009, the Cairo action team began working on establishing a prevention-focused committee to address youth at risk of coming into DCFS care. Gloria Pounds, the team moderator, invited community representatives and held potluck luncheons while encouraging dialogue about the future of Cairo's youth. The sacrifice of time and the willingness to analyze their options paid off for the team. During the beginning of 2010, the team established Youth Support and Intervention Services (YSIS). The YSIS committee is composed of the action team members and other community stakeholders vested in the cause.

The YSIS mission is to provide support and interventions for youth who are experiencing truancy, family problems, behavior, and socio-emotional issues. Their goal is to prevent youth from entering the system, encourage academic success, increase awareness of community resources, and to establish partnerships between agencies and families. The committee will operate based on a referral system. YSIS is currently open for service. The team will work with

the University partners to develop a YSIS model that can be replicated statewide. Specific goals to be addressed: **Remain Home.**

Table 3: Action Team Initiatives

Action Team	Initiative	Expected Outcome	What the team planned to do	What the team actually did
Belleville	Quarterly meetings with judge	Impact "Return Home" rates for children	Focus on court documentation/ testifying issues	Established an ongoing dialogue with judge; shared strategies for supporting parents; mock trials for new workers.
Cairo	Address issue of reports coming in on unsupervised youth	Impact "Remain Home" Outcomes	Exchange strategies and resource information with community providers	Developed the Youth Support & Intervention Services Model to be presented statewide and shared with other action teams in the southern region.
Carbondale	Address the large percentage of hotline calls coming from campus community	Impact "Remain Home" Outcomes	Meet with community providers and families to better understand needs	Currently planning a town hall meeting to discuss issues related to DCFS and SIUC student family housing
East St. Louis	Address hotline calls coming from schools and family members	Impact "Remain Home" Outcomes	Meet with school social workers	Hosted an informational and get to know you event for school social workers and planned a community health fair.
Effingham	Determine ways to link social service resources together	Impact "Improve Adoption/Foster Care Outcomes	Meet with social service agencies and plan events	Met with LANS and court personnel.
Madison-Bond	Build a relationship with court systems	Impact "Return Home" Outcomes	Meet with community providers and plan an employment fair.	Planning a symposium with Madison County Judge; planning a seminar on Disproportionality
Mt. Vernon	Develop a partnership with community stakeholders	Impact "Return Home" & "Remain Home" Outcomes	Provide support and build relationships with community members	Established a successful parents group that is now self-sufficient; plan to host a health or educational fair.
Olney	Find resources to assist rural families	Impact "Remain Home" Outcomes	Build relationships, provide training	Team is revising its action plan

Carbondale Action Team

The Carbondale action team is currently planning a town hall meeting. The decision to do the meeting came about as a result of several discussions that recognized the disconnection between residents of Carbondale, IL and the Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) family housing community. In addition, the team identified its greatest percentages of hotline reports as coming from Evergreen Terrace, a family housing unit at SIUC. Overrepresentation of African American children in foster care is heavily identified in Jackson County. The town hall meeting will allow the community to voice their issues and identify risks factor or cultural issues (e.g. cultural barriers, discrimination) that contribute to disproportionality and disparate treatment once families come into care. Specific goals to be addressed: **Remain Home, Return Home, Improve Foster Care/Adoption Outcomes, and Address the Overrepresentation of African American Children in Foster Care.**

East Saint Louis Action Team

The action team continues to work toward building a relationship with school social workers. The greatest percentage of hotline calls for this team come from school systems and hospitals. Future initiatives include a discussion series with topics such as, mandatory reporting; remain home prevention resources, ways to engage extended family and other issues related to permanency. Specific goals to be addressed: **Remain Home** and **Return Home.**

Effingham Action Team

Quarterly, the Effingham action team meets with its local LANS and share information regarding available resources. The counties for this team are rural and distanced from each other. The SIUE University partners have suggested that they revisit their action plan,

formulating new goals and meet on a monthly basis. The team has not reported on any specific projects, events or other actions related to permanency. The moderator for this team reported that she was not interested in revisiting the action plan or working toward a specific goal or initiative. She added that her team would continue to meet every three or four months to share resources. This team has not been compliant with any of the permanency initiatives. Countless hours have been spent in attempting to engage this team and the moderator. The University partner has discussed this issue with the Assistant Regional Administrator, Valda Hayward. However, no change has taken place. This is our most disturbing action team. The University partner will disengage with this team and wait for intervention from the RA or other DCFS administrator. Specific goals to be addressed: **None.**

Madison-Bond Action Team

The Madison-Bond action team seeks to address the barriers in communication between the court systems and DCFS workers. The team is planning to hold a symposium with the Madison County judge to discuss issues such as, case reports, court training and other issues related to permanency. The team is also planning to utilize the assistance of the SIUE team and conduct a presentation on disproportionality as it relates to Madison County. Specific goals to be addressed: **Return Home, and Improve Adoption/Foster Care Outcomes.**

Mt. Vernon Action Team

The Mt. Vernon action team is currently working on recruiting and increasing the diversity of its team members. Future goals for FY11 will include the start-up of a parent group for the Marion County area. The team also plans to work with its current parent group to plan

an employment and resource fair for Jefferson County. Specific goals addressed by these efforts: **Remain Home, Return Home, Improve and Adoption/Foster Care Outcomes.**

Olney Action Team

The Olney action team welcomed a new moderator, Janet Redeker. Janet is eager to address the goals as they relate to children and families for their area. The team has partnered with the LANS group and together, they are considering establishing a resource symposium that would bring area providers together in effort to develop joint-solutions to the lack of resources and breakdown in communication between major stakeholder groups. Critical areas where resources and services are needed are with substance abuse and sexual offender counseling. The team recognizes that the lack of resources and services in these areas is often a barrier to children returning home. Specific goals to be addressed: **Remain Home and Return Home.**

Overall, all of the teams continue to contend with the challenges that the lack of funding and time constraints present. Other major challenges for the action teams include recruiting diversity on the team, poor communication, and the lack of group identity. The majority of the action teams are challenged with maintaining diversity from community stakeholders and within their own agencies.

The challenges that moderators face is in determining how best to establish and maintain communication with community stakeholders that have the potential to be action team members. Poor communication on teams poses a challenge to team members when they are unaware of project goals and purposes. The lack of communication leads to the challenge of group identity. On action teams where team members had failed to understand the permanency process and its associated goals, members often loss interest after a few visits. It is

also unclear why teams are not successful in recruiting parents and foster parents to the action teams. It is the recommendation of the university partner that the action teams open this up for conversation and consideration.

Table 4 presents a group assessment that relates to all action teams and can be used quarterly or yearly to review team strengths and weaknesses. The table is based on seven group characteristics and in review of performance of overall team performance for the fiscal year. A score of 5 would indicate that the team sufficiently validates the given statement. A score of 1 for a statement indicates that the team is poorly functioning. Table 5 presents the scores for the action team.

When rating the action teams, discretion was given to factors such as teams where leadership has changed, agencies that have experienced staff shortages, and the fact that team moderators are also supervisors with multiple responsibilities. The university partners will address all challenges this year and work to develop a plan of action to move all teams forward.

Table 4: Action Team Group Assessment Form

Score Range per item 1- 5(5 = high functioning action team, 1=poor functioning action team) Action Team Group Performance Assessment Total Points Possible – 35
Item 1 - Clear understanding of PEP purpose/Group Identity Established <i>all team members understand purpose and history of PEP (including goals & action plan)</i>
Item 2 - Defined roles on team <i>members understand how the action team functions (e.g. participative leadership, shared accountability)</i>
Item 3 - Diversity on action team <i>(e.g. reps. From court, targeted communities, P.O.S. agencies, etc.)</i>
Item 4 - Group description available to potential members (e.g. brochures, flyer, etc.)
Item 5 - Team has an ongoing relationship with stakeholders
Item 6 - Teams meets on a monthly basis
Item 7 - Team plans and completes at least two action items within fiscal year

Table 5: Action Team Scores

Action Team Assessment Scores (Total Score Possible – 35)	
Belleville Action Team	27
Cairo Action Team	25
Carbondale Action Team	14
East Saint Louis Action Team	20
Effingham Action Team	9
Madison-Bond Action Team	17
Mt. Vernon Action Team	21
Olney Action Team	17

Role of University Partners

The role of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) is to advance the Permanency Enhancement Project in the southern region in partnership with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. We provide training, technical assistance and evaluation of team efforts with the goal of improving permanency outcomes and reducing disproportionality for families in the southern region. Specific task and responsibilities for this year were:

Goal/Task	Achieved (Yes or No)	How was the task achieved
Provide research on disparate treatment and disproportionality	Yes	A PowerPoint presentation was developed and will be presented to all action teams.
Monthly meeting with action teams	Yes	We schedule and attend all action team meetings
Review Action Plans	Yes	All team wishing to revised and update their action plans we assisted them
Recruitment and retention strategies for membership	Yes & No	Action teams struggle to recruit new members. However, ESL and Belleville had the highest new membership.
Technical assistance with flyers, invitations, and agenda development	Yes	All teams wishing to develop a brochure or flyer for their events we provided the support for the teams. We also developed the agenda for the action team meetings
Brochure development	Yes	4 teams developed brochures
Assist in the development of the YSIS Model	Yes	We worked with the team to develop, review and enhance the model
Advocating for the permanency project in the community	Yes	We spent a lot of time attempting to engage the community and community partners in order to retain members and keep their interest in the action team initiative.

The University partner participated with other university partners at the 18th Annual African American Advisory Council Conference in April. The development of the PowerPoint on disproportionality was a major accomplishment as it allowed for a fruitful discussion on why permanency is really an issue in this country specifically in Illinois. The following figures 2 and 3 display the essence of the intent of the PowerPoint presentation.

Figure 2: Cycle of issues impacting disproportionality

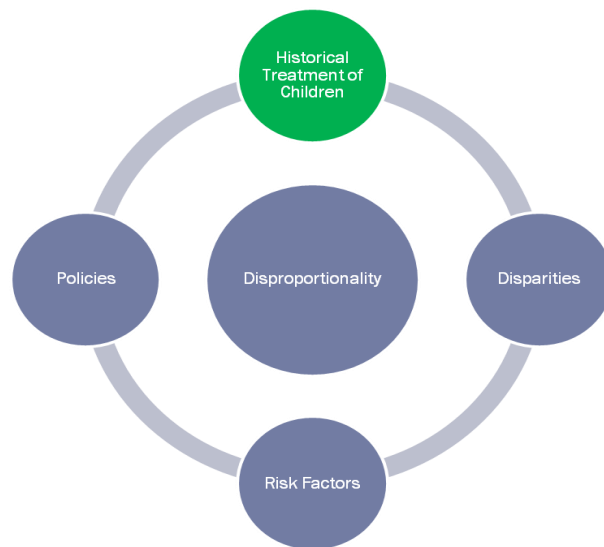
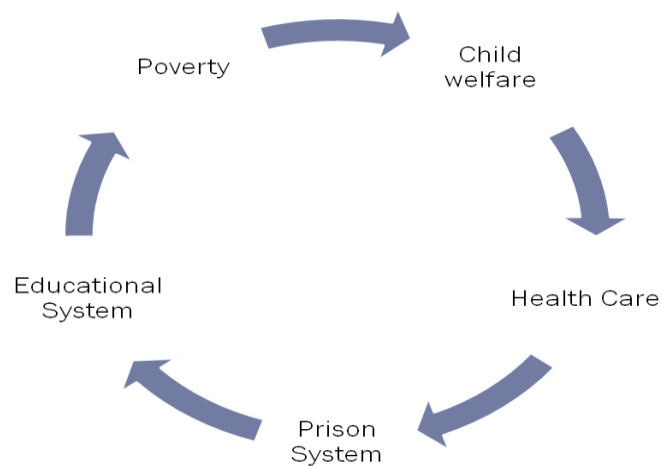


Figure 3: Discussion of the systemic disparities facing families of color



Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Group Identity Assessment Tool

In observations, team moderators have multiple perspectives about the purpose of the Permanency Enhancement Project. All team should reflect the same purpose and mission of the project with the development of goals and objectives unique to their area. Team names and brochure or other literature explaining the team's purpose is vital to building long lasting relationships with community partners.

SIUE will create a standard brochure to be utilized by all teams. The Brochure will specify the overall mission, purpose and goals of the permanency enhancement project. To be completed by October 15, 2010.

Recommendation 2: Improving Awareness of Team Accountability

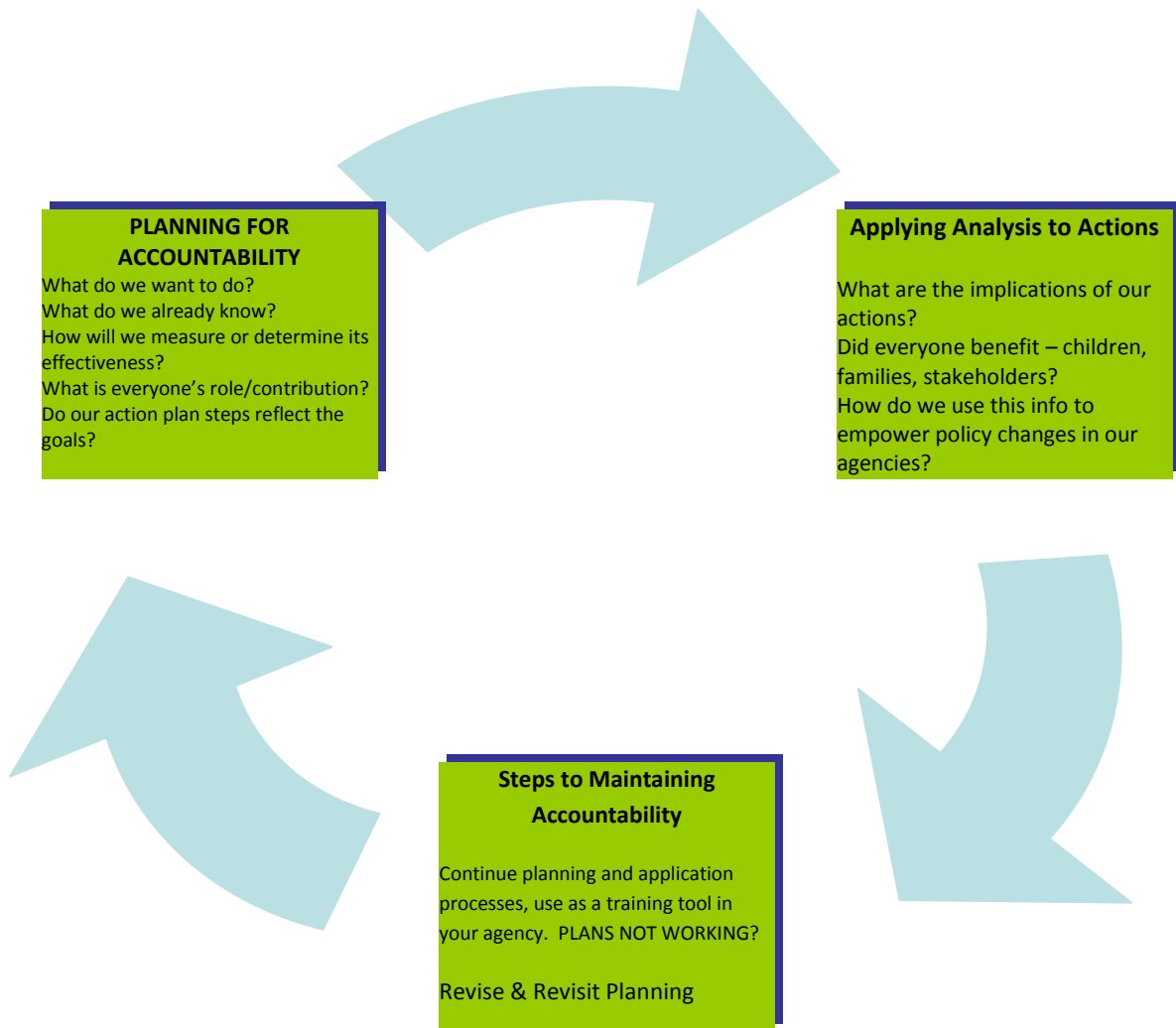
Action teams are representative of multiple stakeholders which means team members bring their own set of values and criteria that they use to make decisions related to children and families. Improving accountability begins with developing a sense of shared accountability. It does not mean assigning child welfare problems to a particular agency. Instead, accountability on the action teams calls for an active understanding and acceptance that all are accountable to advocating for and providing transparency and implementing programs.

Action plans should be current and at all times reflective of the permanency project's four goals of addressing (1) Remain Home Outcomes, (2) Return Home Outcomes, (3) Foster Care/Adoption Outcomes, (4) the Overrepresentation of African American Children in Foster Care. Team moderator must continue the process of developing action teams that are representative of stakeholders who are accountable to this process and receive local, state, and

federal dollars to advance the charge of empowering, protecting and preserving children and families. Frontline workers, parents, and community residents are critical missing elements on the action team. Figure 4 provides an overview of how teams can analyze the effectiveness of their accountability on decisions and efforts made.

SIUE will revise all action plans based on what we have learned about the teams, the region and the current data that is available. These plans will then be provided to each action team by September 30, 2010 for discussion at their action team meetings.

Figure 4: Processing Actions for Accountability



Recommendation 3: Identification of Internal Barriers

Internal barriers within DCFS impact the permanency process when competing values, perceptions and decisions find P.O.S. providers, legal representatives, and caseworkers in conflict about the best interest of children. It is critical that the PEP regional administrators analyze and develop tools and strategies that will lend themselves to greater transparency and encourage dialogue between providers, legal representatives, and caseworkers. Attitudinal barriers also exist internally. It has been said that an action team is only as great as its leader. From this perspective, it is very important that action teams have leaders in place that still believe in change, understand that the process will be ongoing, and have the time to dedicate to leading a group. Forced participation does not achieve long term successes. Team leaders who are also supervisors often experience stress, strain and eventually, resentment when action team duties clash with their daily responsibilities.

SIUE will provide tools and strategies for leading action teams and share these with the moderators and the teams to see if there are other members who might enjoy leading the action teams. This way there is some shared responsibilities in leading the teams. This 15 - 25 page position paper will also be shared with the Regional Administrator and other university partners for discussion. This task will be completed by December 15, 2010.

Recommendation 4: Increase Action Team membership

According to the DCFS moderators every effort has been made to increase membership on the action teams that reflect the communities they serve.

SIUE will develop a letter inviting community members to an action team meeting and encourage them to join the action teams. Letters will be shared with the teams for their input.

SIUE will mail the letters and follow-up with each interested person. An information card will be developed so that a database can be established. This task will be completed by October 1, 2010.

Recommendation 5: Increase Awareness of Permanency Enhancement Project

SIUE will create a PowerPoint presentation about the permanency enhancement project as a recruitment tool for membership and awareness.

Conclusion

Permanency will continue to be a challenge for the society as long as we operate in a silo and not as a community of service agencies serving the same families. We have to collectively work together to ensure children and families remain intact and when it is not possible we need to work together to ensure children are returned to their families. We have to have the passion and enough imagination to view environments as communities with neighborhood potential rather than places of despair. Everyone possesses strengths that can be useful to sustaining families and communities.

It is critical, at this point in the permanency journey to note two things. First, permanency is a process; the completion of action steps on action plans are just that – steps. Endurance and consistent leadership will be the guiding principles that will impact the outcomes desired. Next, the concept of “buying-in” to the goals and permanency process is essential to collaborative partnerships.

Buy-in is about more than just understanding the vision and goals of your action team and the permanency project. It involves an investment of the heart and sacrifice of time. Even in the light of budget cuts and the loss of staff, change is still possible. Collective voices and

collective actions pave the way to multiple streams of thought. We can no longer take on the barriers of time, funding and staff alone. We must work together for those children who still have a chance to go home and to stay home. We will improve adoption and foster care when we recognize that the epidemic of African American children being overrepresented in foster care in virtually every state in America has little to do with bad parenting and poverty and a lot more to do with bad policies and systemic barriers.