

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

SOUTHERN REGION TRANSFORMATION TEAM

# A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR

## PROMOTING RACIAL EQUITY IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM



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What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black?  
    ...What can I do to give him strength  
    That he may come through life’s adversities  
As a whole human being unwarped and human in a world  
Of biased laws and inhuman practices, that he might  
Survive. And survive he must! For who knows?  
    Perhaps this black child here bears the genius  
    To discover the cure for... cancer  
Or to chart the course for exploration of the universe.  
So, he must survive for the good of all humanity.

— *Margaret Burroughs*  
*Educator, artist, poet and founder of*  
*the DuSable Museum of African American*  
*History in Chicago*

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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The purpose of this strategic plan is to propose a course of action for identifying and eliminating the racial barriers within the child welfare system that damage and destabilize children and families of color. Like other public institutions in the U.S., the child welfare system has ignored the pervasiveness of racism and devalued the importance of racial identity in establishing policies, practices, and goals for stabilizing and strengthening children and families of color.

In 2007, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) hosted the *Southern Region Permanency Enhancement Symposium* to discuss the problem of low permanency achievement and the disproportionate number of children of color, particularly African American children, in substitute care.

Numerous participants determined that a sustained investigation of the role of race in child welfare was required to promote racial equity. These stakeholders from various public and private child-serving agencies agreed to attend a series of multi-day workshops over the course of four months.

Additionally, they agreed to join a Transformation

Team to address institutional and systemic racism that creates barriers to children achieving permanency. This resulted in the development of practice and policy recommendations for reforming the system to honor the identity of children of color and to promote racial equity for families navigating the child welfare system.



During this sustained investigation, the Southern Region Transformation Team targeted four main areas of the child welfare system: *Courts, Education, Management, and Direct Service*. Throughout the course of writing the Strategic Plan, the Transformation Team chose to focus on Educational Outcomes for Children in Care, Direct Service, and Community and Professional Anti-Racism Training.

**T**o recognize, resist and resolve the many symptoms of public and private racism that contribute to overrepresentation and disproportionality of African-American and other children of color in the Illinois Child Welfare System, the initiative focuses on the following objectives:

- ❖ Ensure that all DCFS and Private Agency staff are well trained and well prepared to assess families of color without applying unfair values or unfair community standards that contribute to racial disproportionality and racial disparity.
- ❖ Educate the Illinois stakeholders about the problems associated with disproportionality and/or about the problems associated with misguided community values and racial, ethnic, and cultural biases.
- ❖ Work with parents, former youth in care, community leaders and other stakeholders in the Southern region to establish fair assessment practices that eliminate disparate treatment and outcomes for children of color.

***RACE*** is a specious (intentionally deceptive, untrue) socio/biological classification created by Europeans during the time of world-wide colonial expansion, to assign human worth and social status, using themselves as the model of humanity, for the purpose of legitimizing white power and white skin privilege.

-From a definition by Dr. Maulana Karenga-Adapted by Barbara Major and Michael Washington, Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond

***PREJUDICE*** is defined as a preconceived judgement or opinion; an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge; an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race or their supposed characteristics.

-From Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, 1983

***POWER*** is the individual or collective ability to be or to act in ways that fulfill our potential. Its purpose is to be used for good, but it can be misused to control, dominate, hurt and oppress others.

-From CROSSROADS Anti-Racism Organizing and Training

## VISION STATEMENT

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**T**he Southern Region of the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services and its partners will live as an example of honesty, transparency, and accountability by:

- I. Embodying a culture of respect on every level:
  - ❖ Supporting and empowering a diverse staff
  - ❖ Empowering families and children to be active participants
  - ❖ Employing cultural competence to understand different communities and environments
  - ❖ Committing to dismantling institutional and systemic racism
- II. Being committed to a racial equity approach to protecting children and strengthening families that is guided by a collaborative effort with community stakeholders
- III. Supporting staff to be flexible, innovative and creative in case planning which is individualized for each family, culturally sensitive, and focused on family strengths and the needs of each child
- IV. Maintaining children’s relationships with identified extended family members and others with significant emotional ties, while strengthening and empowering each family to ensure the safety and well-being of its members

### Statement Adapted from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Policy Statement on Race

***Race Prejudice** + **The Misuse of Power**\* by systems and institutions is embedded in our Child Welfare system and communities. We remain a part of the problem rather than a mechanism for the solution, unless we identify specific practices, policies and procedures and work collectively across institutions (i.e. develop Transformation Teams) to end disproportionalities, disparities and racial inequalities in Child Welfare by creating and implementing **strategic plans** to guide our work.*

*\*Crossroads definition of racism*

## BACKGROUND

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**O**n October 23, 2001, the African-American Advisory Council (AAAC or the Council), chaired by Michael D. Burns, held an initial dialogue with Central Region's African-American DCFS staff from the divisions of Program Operations and Child Protection. Discussions centered on how current child welfare practice impacts the achievement of permanency and service provision to African-American families. The responses highlighted the need for more community support, enhanced resources, and a change in practice relative to addressing cultural, social economic and racial issues when making critical decisions regarding permanency, safety, and well-being. It was felt that these factors were contributing to the over-representation of African-American children and youth of color in the child welfare system.

*No child should be removed from their home nor delayed in a return to their home for illegitimate reasons. All of our communities in Southern Region value the treasures they have in their children and want those treasures treated fairly and equitably.*

Subsequent to the initial meeting, focus groups continued with Central and Southern Region staff to further identify problem areas. In October 2003, the AAAC Executive Council presented their initial findings from the Southern Region dialogue and focus groups to DCFS Director Bryan Samuels who gave the Council approval to proceed in gathering specific information regarding staff's issues. After collecting the information, a written report was submitted to his attention. In July 2004, the Council formed a workgroup to develop a proposal that would encompass the nature of problem areas, contributing factors, and develop strategies for improvement. Over a two-year period, the committee gathered data, convened meetings, and conducted ongoing focus groups that concentrated on the following:

- ❖ Low permanency rates
- ❖ Attitudes, beliefs, and historic practices of staff
- ❖ Resistance in engaging intact families, and/or working toward reunification
- ❖ Lack of consistency of practice

In January 2006, in collaboration with Illinois State University, the Council submitted a report to Director Samuels entitled, “Central Region Permanency Project” that summarized the data, practice issues, goals, and strategies. Shortly afterwards Michael Burn, Chair, AAAC, Dr. Terry A. Solomon, Executive Director, Illinois African-American Family Commission, and Robert Blackwell, DCFS Regional Administrator, Central Region, met with then Acting Director Erwin McEwen and presented information from the Central Region’s Permanency Enhancement Symposium. He gave authorization to the collaborating partners to proceed with planning Permanency Enhancement Symposiums for each of the remaining five regions.

The Southern Region Permanency Enhancement Symposium was held on August 23, 2007 at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville with video locations in Carbondale and Mt. Vernon. The Southern Region Permanency Enhancement Symposium was part of a region wide action to improve permanency and examine racial and ethnic disproportionality. This partnership joined together the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, the Illinois African-American Family Commission, the Center for Adoption Studies at Illinois State University, the School of Social Work at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and the DCFS African-American Advisory Council to lead the efforts to better help children and their families. The keynote speaker was Mr. Zena F. Oglesby, Executive Director of the Institute for Black Parenting in Inglewood, California. Other presenters included:

- ❖ Dr. Jeanne Howard, Illinois State University
- ❖ Dr. Vanessa Brown, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville
- ❖ Dr. Shonda Lawrence, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville
- ❖ The Honorable Judge James Radcliffe, 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, St Clair County
- ❖ The Honorable Phil Isbel, Assistant State’s Attorney, St Clair County
- ❖ The Honorable George Timberlake, Retired, 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit, Jefferson County
- ❖ Mr. Michael Simelton, Youth Representative
- ❖ Mr. Erwin McEwen, DCFS

The following reflects a summary of the discussions during the Symposium:

- T**he following reflects a summary of the discussions during the Symposium:
- ❖ The literature on what becomes of children who “graduate” from the child welfare system is indeed troubling. Children without families are at great risk for unemployment, early parenthood, substance abuse, and incarceration. These children also experience significant problems in health and mental health. The children simply cannot be taken from their families and then left “family-less”.
  - ❖ The goal of this effort is to keep more children home safely, to return them home to a safer environment in a timely manner, or to move them to the permanency of guardianship or adoption so that they do not grow up in foster care. In addition, the goal is to consider the significant over-representation of African-American children who are in care throughout the region.
  - ❖ African-American children come into care sooner, stay longer and have lower rates of return home than should reasonably be expected (Statewide in 2007 19% of Illinois general population of children was African-American, yet accounted for 59% of the population of children in the child welfare system).
  - ❖ A need to carefully examine the reasons so many African-American children become wards of the Department, and develop strategies to reduce this over-representation. When approximately 13% of children in Southern Region are African-American and over 34% of the children in care are African-American, it makes sense to question why.
  - ❖ Many of the solutions to problems in permanency and disproportionality are local solutions. It is critical that local stakeholders examine local issues and identify strategies that will work in their communities. This is not to say that local communities can solve the problems they identify without additional information, support, and resources. It is to say that identifying problems and developing suggested strategies begins best at the local level.
  - ❖ This effort, overall, is one of accountability to children and families. We owe it to children to keep them home safely when we can or return them to their families as soon as is safely possible. We also owe their families the supports they need to increase their ability to take good care of their children.

The objectives of the Symposium were the formation of local Action Teams and a Transformation Team. The Action Teams were tasked with bringing community members together to discuss the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the child welfare system and to address the over-representation of children of color, particularly African-American wards. Teams were formed and have evolved over time but are still addressing local issues contributing to racial disproportionality and disparities and obstacles to timely permanency, safety, and well being with the support of the School of Social Work at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville.

Each community has its own issues and ways to deal with these issues and is being addressed by our local Action Teams. The local Action Teams cannot overcome systemic and institutional bias. As a result, the Department asked the Crossroads Antiracism Organization to train and to facilitate the development of a Transformation Team. Crossroads was founded in 1986 to develop new directions in understanding and combating the root causes of institutional racism. Their primary work is assisting institutions in creating internal transformation teams that develop long-term solutions to dismantling racism within their institutions.

In March 2010, an orientation meeting was held to recruit members to join the Southern Region Transformation Team. The Transformation Team was created to 1) address the systemic or institutional elements that contribute to racial disparities in the child welfare system and 2) to develop a strategic plan that assures equitable outcomes and treatment for ALL children in the Illinois child welfare system. The Transformation Team was developed as a diverse group of stakeholders that were committed to receiving the Crossroads Antiracism trainings and guidance to effectively address the institutional and systemic racism found in Southern Region. This group of committed people was tasked with determining the causes for disproportionality in children of color in the child welfare system (i.e. are they more likely to “age out” or substitute care than children from other racial groups) and finding resolutions to those causes.

No child should be removed from their home nor delayed in a return to their home for illegitimate reasons. All of the communities in Southern Region value the treasures they have in their children and want those treasures treated fairly and equitably. The Transformation Team strategic initiatives will help to make that a shared value in the child welfare system's practices by examining the role institutional racism (racial prejudice coupled with the misuse of power by systems & institutions) plays in the overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system.



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## STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

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- I. Education of Youth in Care
- II. Direct Service
- III. Community and Professional Training



*The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to.*  
*-Marian Wright Edelman*



## **I. EDUCATION OF YOUTH IN CARE**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Education Committee is to examine the relationship between Southern Region's education services, racial disproportionality and racial disparities in permanency outcomes for children.

### **GOAL**

The goal is to address racial disparity and disproportional representation of children from certain racial and ethnic communities in schools and school environments, striving for continuity of school stability and improving health care by assuring a quality education for children in the care and custody of the Department of Children and Family Services.

### **KEY ISSUES & CHALLENGES**

1. No formal system to address education concerns (enrollment, attendance, and education)
2. A lack of procedures to assist youth in transition with goals and economic self-sufficiency.
3. Foster parents and workers need to be more involved in assuring school success for children in care.
4. Stakeholders have limited information on the education needs of foster children.

### **EXISTING INTERVENTIONS OR POLICIES**

None

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Establish a DCFS and school-environment relationship emphasizing key education concerns (enrollment, attendance, and education)
  - a. Create a formal process to improve communication and coordination between child welfare and school districts to facilitate information exchange for children in care
    - i. A communication system for child welfare workers, foster parents & community providers
    - ii. A data system that provides current year to date information on child progress with the education community
    - iii. Ensure that children are assessed appropriately in the field of education, mental health, and health needs
    - iv. Eliminate disparity in school enrollment and education
  - b. Develop a measurable system of agency and interagency accountability

2. Establish successful school stability and seamless transition procedure into adulthood (a personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency)
  - a. Develop written protocols for school staff on policy for allowing children in care to remain in their school of origin when possible
  - b. Develop written protocol for school's staff about what to do when a child in a foster care is moved into a new school
    - i. Inform new and old school as soon as possible
    - ii. Transfer records immediately
  - c. Implementation of best practices to maintain school continuity for a successful transition into adulthood (elementary, secondary, and post-secondary)
3. Encourage foster parents and workers to take an active role in the child's education
  - a. Encourage teachers, foster parents, and caseworkers to attend school meetings and assist youth in becoming aware of health concerns
  - b. Become familiar with school policy and the role and responsibility of a foster parent
  - c. Become familiar with established age-appropriate strategies and assist in addressing educational needs of the youth
    - i. Empower youth to progress in their educational fields
    - ii. Empower bio-parent to support students in the educational fields
4. Increase stakeholders investment through training and education
  - a. Use tools to help judges, court appointed special advocates (CASA) and education advocates to effectively inquire about children's educational history, school status, attendance records, and special needs
  - b. Create opportunity for youth to raise their awareness and advocate for themselves the importance of school stability and educational continuity and its impact on the youth's ability to succeed academically
  - c. Increase the awareness of individuals who work with children and youth regarding the components of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

*Standing still is never an option so long as inequities remain imbedded in the very fabric of the culture.*  
-Tim Wise

## **II. DIRECT SERVICE**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Direct Service Committee is to determine the connection and needs of direct services of Illinois Children and Family Services of Southern region with racial disproportionality and racial disparities in permanency outcomes for children.

### **GOAL**

The goal is to decrease over representation of families of color receiving DCFS services by intervening to prevent unnecessary antagonism between service workers and families and to increase the incidence of reunification of families of color and the use of culturally sensitive individualized alternative placement and collaborative problem solving.

### **KEY ISSUES & CHALLENGES**

1. Disproportionality of African-American children taken into care
2. Disproportionality in placement decisions
3. Disproportionality in access to services
4. Disproportionality in rates of reunification
5. Disproportionality in rates of reporting and findings of abuse and neglect

### **EXISTING INTERVENTIONS OR POLICIES**

1. Fatherhood Initiative
2. Reunification Initiative
3. Mandated Reporter Training
4. Mandatory Training of Investigators
5. Mandatory Training of Caseworkers
6. Home of Relative Policy
7. Learning Collaborative

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Disproportionality of African-American children taken into foster care
  - a. Reduce disproportionality of African-American children taken into foster care
    - i. Mandatory training of both investigators and placement staff on subjects of cultural sensitivity and methods to engage and collaborate with resistant families
2. Disproportionality in placement decisions
  - a. Reduce disproportionality in placement decisions
    - i. Increase opportunity to develop alternative placements within kinship and fictive kinship network

- b. Increase the number of children remaining at home
      - i. Increase opportunities to design safety plans with provision of services where imminent dangers to children is not present
- 3. Disproportionality in access to services for African-American families
  - a. Increase levels of collaboration between caseworkers and families
    - i. Mandatory training on engagement of clients delivered in small groups at the level of each office
    - ii. Training in engagement and collaboration reinforced in supervisory setting
  - b. Services included on service plans are developed and agreed upon in family meetings through collaborative problem solving efforts to guarantee that services included on plans are specifically geared to assist the particular family with problems they recognize
    - i. Ensure required family meetings at the beginning of case planning
  - c. Transportation to services is provided where needed
    - i. Increase transportation availability
- 4. Disproportionality in rates of reunification of African-American families
  - a. Increase rates of reunification of African-American families
    - i. Increase use of option of early reunification in eligible cases
    - ii. Train staff in use of existing services to promote resolution of family conflicts when they impede reunification (i.e. family therapy)
  - b. Increase alternative placement with extended family and fictive family
    - i. Increase options for alternative placement of children, which maintain family, and attachment ties
    - ii. Within the first 30 days, assess each family with an active goal of finding alternative, creative, solutions specific to the needs of the individual children
  - c. Increase level of empowerment and responsibility within the family to collaborate in efforts to find solutions
    - i. Family meetings used to empower family and family problem solving efforts are encouraged, appreciated, respected, and executed when feasible
- 5. Disproportionality in rates of reporting and of findings of abuse and neglect in African-American families
  - a. Decrease disproportionality in reporting
    - i. Train mandated reporters in cultural sensitivity and awareness
  - b. Decrease disproportionality in findings of abuse and neglect in African-American families
    - i. Train investigators in engagement of resistant and threatened family gatekeepers
    - ii. Train investigators in cultural sensitivity

### **III. COMMUNITY AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Community and Professional Training Committee is to inform key child welfare stakeholders of racial disproportionality and racial disparities in permanency outcomes for children.

#### **GOAL**

The goal of the Community and Professional Training Committee is to engage child welfare staff and stakeholders in providing solutions to eliminate racial disproportionality and disparities in child welfare outcomes.

#### **KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

1. Families of color have less access to services than white families
2. Child welfare professionals have limited understanding of the history and role of racism in this country
3. The racial belief and values of child welfare professionals affect services, permanency goals, and outcomes
4. Children of color's caregivers are more likely to be indicated for child maltreatment than white children
5. Children of color are more likely to remain in foster care longer than white children

#### **EXISTING INTERVENTIONS OR POLICIES**

1. Illinois Permanency Enhancement Action Teams
2. Illinois Permanency Enhancement Transformation Teams
3. IDCFS Training Department
4. Training by Crossroads Antiracism Organizing & Training

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Engage the Action Teams in the planning and organizing community meetings to discuss permanency outcomes
2. Create a mechanism for members of the Transformation Team to request training
  - a. Develop forms and procedures for trainings
  - b. Present forms and procedures to the Transformation Team

3. Conduct town meetings in select counties to increase their awareness of racial disparities and disproportionality in their community
  - a. Identify speakers to present information at community and town meetings
4. Train individuals to conduct informational workshops
  - a. Identify individuals willing to become antiracism trainers
    - i. Select individuals to become trainers
    - ii. Schedule meetings to discuss the role and goals of the training
5. Develop talking points, data, and other information for public meetings
  - a. Create anti-racism training curriculum
    - i. Identify and select training materials
    - ii. Create a syllabus for the training
  - b. Implement the train the trainers pilot
    - i. Conduct antiracism training sessions
6. Train individuals to provide the 3½ hour Crossroads Anti-racism Orientation
  - a. Offer this training to child welfare and community based providers interested in addressing racial disproportionality and racial disparities
    - i. Select trainers
    - ii. Develop a training calendar
    - iii. Create announcement and invitation for informing the child welfare community of the training
    - iv. Select schools of social work and affinity groups for the trainers to conduct component of the Crossroads introductory training
7. Incorporate anti-racism training into the DCFS core trainings
  - a. Inform the training division leadership about the anti-racism training committee



## ACCOUNTABILITY

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Consistent with the Vision of the Southern Region Transformation Team, to embody a culture of respect and to commit to a multicultural approach to protect children and strengthen families, the Team will be accountable to:

### **THE PEOPLE OF COLOR OF THE SOUTHERN REGION TRANSFORMATION TEAM BY:**

- Committing to our covenant to create a safe space for People of Color
- Honoring the caucusing process that addresses real power issues affecting the team, its members, and the institution
- Honoring the ‘lived experience’ of racism for People of Color

### **THE WHITE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTHERN REGION TRANSFORMATION TEAM BY:**

- Committing to our covenant to create a safe space for White People
- Honoring the caucusing process that addresses real power issues affecting the team, its members, and the institution
- Honoring White People as they grow in their understanding of racism, white privilege, and the internalization of superiority

### **THE TEAM’S ANTI-RACISM ANALYSIS BY:**

- Working with identified stakeholders to enable them to claim an anti-racist identity
- Building relationships with the partners of DCFS and communities of color
- Conducting an ongoing review of the Team’s analysis

### **THE SOUTHERN REGION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES BY:**

- Coordinating a long-range program in the Region to challenge racism and create an anti-racism agenda for the Region
- Reviewing the Team’s analysis annually to insure it is current and available
- Reporting the work of the Team to the Steering Committee and DCFS Management
- Supporting the issues and concerns that People of Color raise

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You're either part of the solution ... or  
part of the problem.  
-(Leroy) Eldridge Cleaver

Nothing in all the world is more  
dangerous than sincere ignorance and  
conscientious stupidity.  
-Martin Luther King, Jr

**APPENDIX A**  
**SELECTIVE HISTORY OF THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN**  
**& FAMILY SERVICES**

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**T**he history of the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (Department) is steeped in a long tradition of service and innovation.

- 1787 – Indiana Territorial Law (under which was the territory of Illinois) – Poor orphaned children were identified as needing governmental intervention – were apprenticed until age of majority
- 1819 – Illinois Poor Law – same provisions – goal was to educate these poor orphaned children and to give them a financial start to adult life (\$100)
- 1837 – Institutions for blind, deaf and mentally ill children were established
- 1847 –New York city case of Mary Ellen, abused illegitimate child whose protection was sought legally under the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- 1877 – Illinois Humane Society was organized. From 1881-1893 it was estimated that 10,000 children were “rescued”
- 1895- poor orphaned children to be educated at public schools
- 1899 – 1<sup>st</sup> Illinois Juvenile Court act created entitled “The Act to Regulate the Treatment and Control of Dependent, Neglected and Delinquent Children “ – defined categories of children who were of public concern- Illinois had the first Juvenile court act in the nation
- 1917 – Illinois Department of Public Welfare – employees visited children in foster care
- National Focus – Depression – School Lunch Program was created
- 1935 National Social Security Act – Title V Child Welfare Services – mandated US Children’s Bureau to cooperate with states for the protection and care of needy children
- 1962 – Child Abuse was re-discovered with the publication of the Battered Child Syndrome by Kempe and Silverman

- 1964 – Act Creating the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services – became a separate agency from the Illinois Department of Public Welfare. DCFS also administered 7 state institutions that housed children
- 1965 – Child Abuse Report Act – gave authority to law enforcement officers or probation officers to take protective custody of children who were at imminent risk of harm
- 1975 – Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act that mandated certain categories of professionals to report suspected child abuse and neglect – also authorized Child Protection workers as well as physicians and law enforcement officers the authority to take protective custody of children
- 1977- Burgos Consent Decree- federal mandate which requires DCFS and all of its vendors to comply in providing services in Spanish to clients speaking Spanish
- At this time society was undergoing a transformation as to a hands-off approach and a belief in the sanctity and privacy of family life to one of prompt responses of suspected child maltreatment
- Illinois law defined what children would benefit from state intervention – poor, dependent, delinquent, abused, neglected and those with handicapping conditions
- 1978 – Indian child Welfare Act – Legal requirements to contact the child’s Indian Tribe if protective custody of that child was taken- an effort to honor the Native American rights to raise their own children within their culture
- 1979 – DCFS created an Administrative Case Review process where an outside individual (also a DCFS employee) would review the progress of children in care towards permanency
- 1980 – Creation of the State Central Registry – centralized the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect (CA/N) and created a computerized data bank of individuals’ history of CA/N
- 1991 – ACLU filed lawsuits (BH, Norman, Aristotle) on behalf of children served by DCFS. The findings in these lawsuits involved court monitoring on size of caseload, sibling visitation and offering financial resources and services to prevent children placed in substitute care based on subsistence issues alone

- 1994- Multi-ethnic Placement Act – federal law that forbids a delay in placement in a substitute care home based on race alone – more African American foster children were placed in white homes as a result of this act
- 1997 – Adoption and Safe Families Act – designed to limit time kids spend in foster care. However, most of Illinois’ foster kids typically remain in care longer than 3 years and on the average live in three different homes- Southern Region has the highest reunification rate within 12 months of all the other regions at 35% (2007 data). However, white children return home at a higher rate than African American children in Southern Region. FY 2010 data shows that in the East St. Louis area – 42% of African-American children returned home as compared to 70% of white children. In the Marion area, 67% of white children return home while 60% of African-Americans returned home during that fiscal year.
- 1997 – peak of 51,000 kids in care to 2007 when 16,160 kids in care (decline by 60%) – this decline was due to a front end re-design initiative where families were given help first before a report was taken
- 1999 – Foster Care Independence Act - services required to youth who are transitioning from foster care to independence - African-American children are more likely than white children to “age out” of the system
- Illinois is the largest Child Welfare Agency to be COA Accredited
- 2007 – Southern Region Permanency Enhancement Initiative – part of a statewide effort to examine and address factors that hinder permanency and factors that contribute to racial disproportionality among children involved with DCFS. Statewide African American children comprise 19% of the general child population and 59% of those children in care.
- Early days of DCFS – There were eight regional offices. Prior to DCFS, individuals billed the county for \$50 per child per month for foster care. After DCFS, the state reimbursed these individuals. In order to recruit staff, DCFS offered scholarships for those who promised to work for DCFS after graduation. DCFS collaborated with courts, schools, Public Aid, and volunteer agencies.

## APPENDIX B SELECTIVE HISTORY OF DCFS SOUTHERN REGION



**A**t one time, there were two distinct areas in the Southern Region (1970–1992):

- East St. Louis Region – Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington counties
- Marion Region – Alexander, Clay, Crawford, Edwards, Effingham, Fayette, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Johnson, Lawrence, Marion, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Richland, Saline, Union, Wabash, Wayne, White and Williamson Counties

The East St. Louis Region was characterized by the urban, economically depressed, and large African-American population of St. Clair County. The Marion region had a more Caucasian, rural population with the exception of Alexander and Pulaski counties, which are characterized by a rural, poor African-American population. Currently the Southern Region is marked by poverty – seven of the nine poorest counties in Illinois are located in Southern region. (2013 US poverty data).

In 1972, an extensive study was done by DCFS staff in Alexander and Pulaski counties to determine the main reasons that children were removed from their homes. It was determined that poverty and alcohol abuse were the primary factors causing this intact family disruption.

According to Census data from the year 2000, 16% of the general population in the East St. Louis area (see above counties) is African-American while 8.6% of the general population in the Marion area is African-American.

Affirmative Action efforts in the 1970s resulted in the hiring of African-Americans in DCFS positions in the Southern Region. Currently there is a concentration of African-American staff in the DCFS offices in Southern Region where the African-American population reside. However, there are significant pockets in Southern Region where no African-Americans live and many DCFS offices in Southern Region with no minority staff at all. In 2010, in the East St. Louis area, 28% of the DCFS staff in the

child protection and program operations divisions was African-American. In the Marion area, 11% of the staff in the same divisions was African-American.

When the East St. Louis Region and the Marion Region merged into the Southern Region in 1992, Mr. Anthony Jenkins (an African-American) became the Regional Administrator for this newly formed region. His exemplary leadership greatly facilitated the transition of staff and offices from two very different cultures. However, for many years it remained difficult for African-American DCFS employees to attain positions of leadership within the Region. Even in a female dominated profession, the positions of authority within DCFS Southern Region were largely filled by white males.

In the early years of DCFS in the Southern Region, DCFS staff collaborated with community agencies, most importantly the Department of Public Aid. Offices were established within the communities where the clients lived and were easily accessible to all. Although this is largely still the case, recently some field offices have either closed (Salem); have moved in with other agencies (Granite City and Belleville); or moved outside city limits (Marion, Mt. Vernon) thus creating more barriers for clients to access the office for assistance.

*The ultimate measure of  
a man is not where he  
stands in moments of  
comfort and  
convenience, but where  
he stands at times of  
challenge and  
controversy.  
-Martin Luther King Jr*

## APPENDIX C OVERVIEW OF SOUTHERN REGION'S TRANSFORMATION TEAM



The Southern Region Transformation Team was developed in 2010 when a group of committed individuals met together to train with the Crossroads organization. The Crossroad organization's primary work is to assist institutions to dismantle institutional racism. The training consists of Orientation (1 day), Analysis (4 days) and Strategic Skills and Organizing (5 days). The Southern Region Transformation Team has been meeting every other month since 2010 discussing child welfare practice in southern Illinois as it relates to racial disproportionality and disparity. The goal is to create the Southern Region Strategic Plan to present to the DCFS Director with the hope of living out the ideals as described in our Vision Statement and to dismantle institutional and systemic racism in DCFS Southern Region.

### **INTERNAL ORGANIZATION**

The Southern Region Transformation Team is organized to meet its responsibility to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to strategically plan to dismantle institutional racism within its organization. The Team is comprised of DCFS staff, private agency staff, and other child welfare stakeholders. The Team is structured to assure a balance of members based on gender, geography, child welfare experience, representation from diverse racial groups, private and public employment, and leadership. Each member must complete the Analyzing & Understanding Systemic Racism 2.5 Day Training. Members are asked to commit to attending meetings and to participate in the work of the Team. Any member may voluntarily resign from the team.

The Transformation Team has several committees to facilitate its work, including History, Action Teams, Reflections, Recruitment, and Leadership. The Transformation Team (Team) operates under three guiding principles 1) Accountability 2) Structure, and 3) Communication. Each of the Committees and Guiding Principles are briefly discussed below.

The History Committee will compile a history and analysis of DCFS from an anti-racism perspective. The Team will continue this analysis through data collection and research review for targeted areas. Team members from the Southern Region Quality Assurance Division will be asked to provide requested data.

Community or Local Action Teams in the Southern Region were formed as a result of the Illinois Permanency Enhancement Project which began in 2007 as a partnership between the Southern Region of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, the Illinois African-American Family Commission, the IDCFS African-American Advisory Council, the Illinois State University School of Social Work and the Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville School of Social Work. These Action Teams are made up of DCFS staff and community stakeholders with the goal to improve permanency outcomes for children and to reduce racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. There are Eight Action Teams in Southern Region

- (1) Cairo – Alexander, Pulaski, Johnson, Union and Massac Counties
- (2) Carbondale – Perry, Williamson, Franklin and Jackson Counties
- (3) Effingham – Effingham, Fayette, and Jasper Counties
- (4) Madison and Bond Counties
- (5) Mt. Vernon – Clinton, Clay, Gallatin, Jefferson, Hamilton, Marion, Wayne and White Counties
- (6) Olney – Crawford, Edwards, Lawrence, Richland and Wabash Counties
- (7) Belleville/St. Clair – Monroe, St. Clair, Randolph and Washington Counties
- (8) East St. Louis/St. Clair

The Reflections committee offers “Reflections” at each Team Meeting. The “Reflections” can be in any communication format (e.g. song, poetry, reading, and video). The “Reflections” should express the mission and work of the Team.

The Recruitment committee engages an ongoing process. Any individual joining the Team is required to undergo basic Team Member training as outlined by the Crossroad staff and agreed upon by the team as a whole.

The Leadership committee makes recommendations regarding leadership positions. The Team will have two co-chairs (and alternates) selected by team consensus. These co-

chairs should be one person of color and one white person. The responsibilities of the co-chairs are to meet with a committee composed of chairs of the working committees to devise an agenda for the meetings. The co-chairs will facilitate discussion and implementing of the agenda. The co-chairs must be able to keep the mission of the team in clear focus.

The Team will have two Caucus Chairs (plus alternates) to lead the respective People of Color (POC) caucus and White Caucus. Each meeting agenda will have time for these caucuses to meet.

A scribe (and alternate) will be selected to keep minutes of each meeting.

The people in these positions will remain in place for at least one calendar year and can serve for a term decided by the team members. Retention or re-assignment of leadership positions will be considered during the January meeting of each year.

The Team remains accountable at all times to DCFS from whom the mandate of the Team resides. In that respect, the ultimate accountability of this group is with the families and children that are in need of DCFS intervention and services, particularly those families of color that may fall victim to disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare system. The Team is also accountable to their participating partners who are committed to the team's vision.

The Team will select at least two spokespersons (one White and one POC) that will be responsible for communicating the work and direction of the team to the key institutional partners. These spokespersons will also be responsible for the communication between the Transformation Team and the local Action Teams.

If we accept and acquiesce in the face of discrimination, we accept the responsibility ourselves and allow those responsible to salve their conscience by believing that they have our acceptance and concurrence. We should, therefore, protest openly everything ... that smacks of discrimination or slander.

-Mary McLeod Bethune

## ORIENTATION PROCESS FOR NEW MEMBERS

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**A**s the Southern Region Transformation Team continues to grow and evolve, a process is necessary for adding and orienting new members to the Team while maintaining group cohesion and momentum. The following guidelines for this process are recommended by the Transformation Team Training and Education Subcommittee:

1. Transformation Team members will nominate prospective team members. The recruitment committee will send a Letter of Invitation to attend an Informational Meeting to prospective members. When nominating perspective members, it is important to identify a diverse pool of participants, with consideration of age, gender, race, geography, public/private participants, community-based providers, and individuals in leadership positions to effect change.
2. An Informational Meeting will be held to inform potential members about the Permanency Enhancement Initiative and the role of the Transformation Team.
3. Prospective team members will submit the Member Application Form at or after the Informational Meeting. The applications will be reviewed by the Recruitment Committee. In making selections, it is important to maintain an emphasis on diversity among team members.
4. New members, approved by the Recruitment Committee, will receive an Orientation Packet detailing their responsibilities as a team member, requirements for joining the team, and ongoing expectations. The Orientation Packet will also include a calendar, explanation of caucusing, history of the Southern Region transformation team, a list of current team members and their relationship to Child Welfare.
5. New Members will complete the following:
  - a. Attend a three-hour Orientation hosted by the Training and Education Committee. This orientation will review elements of the Training and Education Curriculum that are not addressed as part of the Crossroads training (e.g. history of disproportionality in the child welfare system, current research regarding disproportionality and disparities). New members will complete a series of readings included in the Orientation Packet prior to this training in order to facilitate discussion.
  - b. Attend a Crossroads 2 ½ day training with current Transformation Team members who are available.
  - c. New members will participate in a one-on-one interview.
6. The Recruitment Committee will track completion of the above activities.
7. The Transformation Team Co-Facilitators will send an email to existing team members introducing new members prior to their participation in a team meeting.

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Permanency Enhancement Project  
Transformation Team Member Application Form

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT CLEARLY

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

**EDUCATION**

**DEGREE/YEAR**

HIGH SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

UNDERGRADUATE \_\_\_\_\_

GRADUATE \_\_\_\_\_

**CURRENT EMPLOYMENT**

BUSINESS: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

DUTIES: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF EMPLOYMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

CIVIC ACTIVITIES: \_\_\_\_\_

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AWARDS, AND HONORS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

LICENSES / SPECIAL SKILLS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**PRIOR AND/OR CURRENT INVOLVEMENT WITH:**

ACTION TEAM: YES NO

CROSSROADS TRAINING: YES NO

PLANNING & DESIGN TASK FORCE: YES NO

