ENGAGING AFRICAN
AMERICAN FAMILIES
REIMAGINING FAMILY SUPPORT

"A Family is like a Forest when you are outside it is dense, when you are inside you see that each tree has its place. "African Proverb

PROJECT SAVE OUR CHILDREN

Reimagining Support for African American families.

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?" Dr. Martin L. King

Objectives

◦ Explore the complicated and traumatic history of African American families involved in the Child Welfare System.

◦ Examine the importance of engaging African Americans where they are.

◦ Identify practical strategies to employ when engaging African American families.

What is Historical Trauma?
"History is not about the past. It's about the present!" Dr. El-Kati

◦ Developed in the 1980s by First Nations and Aboriginal peoples in Canada to explain the seeming unending cycle of trauma and despair in their communities.

◦ The devastating trauma of genocide, loss of culture, and forcible removal from family and communities are all unresolved and become a sort of 'psychological baggage...

◦ Transgenerational trauma is transferred from the first generation of trauma survivors to the second and further generations of offspring of the survivors via complex post-traumatic stress disorder mechanisms.

◦ Historical Trauma is **<u>cumulative</u>** and **<u>collective</u>**. The impact of this type of trauma manifests itself, emotionally and psychologically, in members of different cultural groups (Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD)

Why is Historical Trauma Relevant?

◦ As a collective phenomenon, those who never even experienced the traumatic stressor, such as children and descendants, can still exhibit signs and symptoms of trauma.

Who Is impacted by Historical Trauma?

◦ American Indians/First Nations People
◦ Immigrants
◦ **People of Color (African-Americans/Blacks)**
◦ **Families Living in Poverty**

Symptoms of Historical Trauma

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Isolation
- Loss of sleep
- Anger
- Discomfort around white people
- Shame
- Fear and Distrust
- Loss of Concentration
- Substance Abuse
- Violence and Suicide

Reason for Fear

- Slave labor
- Forced migrations
- Stolen property
- Dehumanization
- Mass incarceration
- Torture
- Medical experimentation
- Discrimination
- Race riots
- Police Brutality
- Racial Profiling
- Lynching's
- Mass murder
- Long-lasting psychological effects (PTSD) on survivors and descendants

Impacts to African-Americans/Blacks

- Exposure to generational discrimination, racism, race based segregation and poverty.
- Exposure to macroaggressions, which are "events involving discrimination, racism, and daily hassles that are targeted at individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups (Slavery; colonialism/imperialism, segregation, discrimination).
  - Mistrust of police; mass incarceration; throw away children (high level children in foster care, etc.).
  - Self-hatred among Blacks/African Americans who act out that aggression on people who look like them.

Impoverished Communities

Poverty can lead to:

1. Family stress
2. Child abuse and neglect
3. Substance abuse
4. Mental health challenges
5. **Domestic violence** (Wilson, 2005)

Intergenerational Poverty and the Impact on Communities

◦ Poor individuals and families are not evenly distributed across communities or throughout the country.
   ◦ Clustered in certain neighborhoods and regions.

◦ Poverty concentration results in higher crime rates, underperforming public schools, poor housing and health conditions, as well as limited access to private services and job opportunities. (Kneebone, Nadeau & Berube, 2011)

Intergenerational Poverty and the Impact on Families

◦ Poverty in these communities is frequently intergenerational.
  ◦ The lack of access to services, increased exposure to violence, and higher risk of victimization in these communities often results in a much greater risk for experiencing trauma and re-traumatization than people not living in areas of concentrated poverty.
  ◦ Example of stressors: Hunger; poor or inadequate housing; lack of access to health care; community crime
  ◦ Current Manifestations: Domestic violence; child abuse; substance abuse (Wilson)

WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BEFORE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?

"What makes a good community"

Guide to Engaging Diverse Communities

◦ Before defining a plan or project, make sure that you understand the community, the local history, demographics, socio-economics, culture and language, etc.

Benefits of Engaging Diverse Communities

◦ Allows you to build credibility and trust.

◦ Develops supporters and champions.

◦ Allows you to identify potential risks (i.e., individual organization the may have issues about your program), and make course corrections.

◦ Allows community members to be heard, and encourages transparency and consensus.

Benefits of Child Welfare Engaging Diverse Communities

- Commits Child Welfare and other systems to be open and accountable.
- Helps CWS' other systems plan services better to meet community needs and aspirations.
- Helps Child Welfare and other systems prioritize services and make better use of resources.
- Allows broader range of views to be expressed and more informed action to be assembled prior to making decisions.
- Enables Child Welfare and the Community to work together to achieve balanced decisions
- Offers opportunity for Family/Community to contribute to and influence outcomes which directly affect their lives.

Partnership is not a posture but a process - a continuous process that grows stronger each year as we devote ourselves to common tasks. - John F. Kennedy

Reasons African Americans Don't Seek Out Clinical Care

- African-Americans with high levels of mistrust are more like to terminate therapy prematurely.
- African-Americans have been found to average fewer sessions and terminate from outpatient mental health services earlier than European Americans (Sue & Sue)
- Asbury, et al., (1994) conducted an empirical study of African American participation in rehabilitation services that may have relevance for attrition rates noted among African-Americans in therapy.
- The results of discriminant analysis indicated that:
  - Perception of provider competence, self-esteem, emotional support, and attitude toward seeking services were significant predictors of seeking services.
  - Racial similarity, perception of provider competence, and perceptions of the service process determined continued participation

Historical Trauma

Intergenerational Poverty

Barriers to Family Engagement

- Agency Culture
- Lack of Cultural Competence
- Social Work bias
- Mistrusting families
- Unreceptive/nonresponsive families
- Mental Health
- Developmental Disabilities
- Substance Abuse
- Poverty

What Families Report

- **Lack of Trust**

Participants reported that while psychotherapy might be beneficial, most psychologists and psychotherapists lacked an adequate knowledge of African American life and struggles to accept or understand them.

Participants discussed the stereotypes of African American in the larger society and challenged the ability of psychologists and psychotherapists to be free of the attitudes and the beliefs of the larger society. (Thompson, Bazile, and Akbar 2004)

- **Cultural Sensitivity**

Participants reported a preference that race not matter in the provision of mental health services, but a vague fear that it did. Most participants reporting this attitude noted that it was based on sensitivity to the issues and experiences that African-American community has historically confronted. (Thompson, Bazile, and Akbar 2004)

- **Cultural Beliefs**

Such as a belief in the need to resolve family concerns within the family and expectation that African Americans demonstrate strength.

Despite the sense that therapy was required to address certain issues, participants reported that they lacked sufficient knowledge of the signs and symptoms of mental illness, or information on the services available. (Thompson, Bazile, and Akbar 2004)

- **The stigma of Mental Health**

Its associated embarrassment and shame were noted by individuals who received services, as well as those with no prior experience with mental health services, as a significant barrier to mental health**. (Thompson, Bazile, and Akbar 2004)**

Project Save Our Children (PSOC) Engagement Model

1. Engage community members in the development of a strong shared vision.
2. Inform and Educate the Community about the project.
3. Bring to life the mission/vison/value of our project.
4. Engender a sense of community ownership, pride and stewardship of the project.
5. Create strong relationships between our organization, local community, local arts and cultural group.

6. Seek Champions and ever-expanding circle of friends and supporters
7. Build momentum.

Your success depends on your ability to believe in the possibilities

Strategies for Family Engagement

◦ Invite familial support such as extended family members or external individuals such as, friends, god-parents, program individuals and clergy.
◦ Clarify expectations, roles, responsibilities and goals.
◦ Communicate regularly with family to prevent unexpected issues.
◦ Show consideration of other family obligations; such as employment.
◦ Assist family with practical issues such as transportation.
◦ Always ensure that fathers are included in the process.
◦ Take a holistic approach.
◦ Dedicate resources.
◦ Recruit from local communities.
◦ Build social capital.

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Stereotypes about Blacks. What Do You Believe?

◦ Angry black women
◦ Welfare mom
◦ Multiple father
◦ Drug dealer
◦ Thugs
◦ Gang Banger
◦ Black on Black crime

Keys to PSOC MODEL of Engaging African American families

1. *We believe* unconditionally in their abilities to parent their children.
2. *We believe* that safety is a priority for our families.
3. *We believe* that knowledge of our history will motivate change.
4. *We believe* that our families are partners.
5. *We believe* that our families have the right to participate in decisions that affect them.
6. *We believe* fathers have an important role to play.
7. *We respect* -our families needs, wants, aspirations and preferences.
8. *We link* our families to professionals that share the same race and cultural background, when possible.
9. *We link* our families to arts and cultural events that reflect our history.
10. *We pro*vide services in our families home where they feel safe or where they choose.
11. *We listen* and address issues with respect and concern.

In Closing

◦ Recognize how trauma and poverty impact communities and families.
◦ Challenge racism and promote different cultures.
◦ Provide culturally appropriate services by dedicating resources.
◦ Empower minority ethnic families through partnership and respect.

QUESTIONS?

For additional questions, or reference, contact
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