



## The 2011-2012 Legislative Priorities of the ABPsi

### FOSTER CARE AND MENTORING

The Association of Black Psychologists looks forward to working with the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress to address legislative objectives related to African American foster care and mentoring.

#### **The Issue:**

Nearly 450,000 children are in foster care in the United States. African American children are disproportionately represented in this group. Studies report that children in foster care are more likely to suffer collateral challenges including having parents who are incarcerated; high rates of high school dropout, unemployment, arrests, and homelessness; and reliance on public assistance. Mentoring programs across the United States face a shortage of same-ethnic mentors. This shortage is exacerbated for African American youth due to the relatively few Black mentors, especially men, and the significant number of Black youth who disproportionately fill waiting lists nationwide.

Finally, under the current zest for evidenced based practice the field has put the proverbial cart before the horse. Sufficient substantive research focused specifically on mentoring African American youth is lacking. Therefore we should not limit what is offered and what is deemed legitimate for this population. More studies must be designed to carefully assess racial matching and to answer a number of critical questions related to effective mentoring for African American youth.

The Association of Black Psychologists encourages members of Congress to:

#### **Support the Foster Care Mentoring Act of 2011 sponsored by Senator Mary Landrieu.**

Companion bills H.R. 2012 and S.R. 420, the Foster Care Mentoring Act of 2011, proposes to connect children in foster care with responsible, caring adults by:

- Authorizing \$15 million to establish statewide foster care mentoring programs specially designed to serve the needs of foster youth. They would have a strong emphasis on improving academic achievement.
- Providing \$4 million to begin a national public awareness campaign and mentor recruitment program. This public awareness campaign is essential given the challenges of recruiting and retaining strong mentors particularly in communities of color.
- Allowing up to \$10,000 in federal student loan forgiveness for those who volunteer to mentor a child in care. Providing incentives to mentors can also aid in the recruitment and retention of sorely needed mentors.

This is an important step in the right direction to provide much needed mentoring support to African American youth in the child welfare and foster care system.

#### **Promote culturally-based approaches to mentoring of African American foster care youth.**

While there are many mentoring programs around the country, very few are dedicated specifically to working with youth in foster care through approaches that reflect their ethnocultural heritage, identity, and cultural values. Mentoring relationships add specificity to the mentee's personal identity formation by helping his or her inner personality and sense of self connect with the larger social-

cultural environment. In this meaning-making process, cultural tools, principles, values, and historical legacy can deepen the depth and effect of what is experienced, retained and used by mentees. For many African American youth, labels that should be mere descriptive observations of a person's life experiences instead become semi-permanent brands and indictments of their person and character. Culturally grounded mentoring carries the capacity to de-couple who a person is from the circumstance in which s/he finds him/herself.

Proper mentoring assumes that the mentor is “knowledgeable” and “culturally competent” to render the support necessary for a person’s growth. The Association of Black Psychologists strongly argues for the necessity of cultural competence in mentoring programs. There are individuals and organizations throughout this country that may have honorable intent, but lack the requisite knowledge and skills to impact African American youth in ways that really matter.

**Recognize that there are multiple models of mentoring including group mentoring which may have particular utility for African American youth.**

The power of mentoring lies in the relationships formed. These do not have to be solely 1:1 relationships. Group mentoring is a viable alternative model. For African American youth, a number of cultural factors point to this approach as one that is culturally congruent and therefore deserving of greater attention. Group mentoring has the capacity to simulate community systems that reinforce community safety nets so vital to well-being in African centered cultural traditions. By intentionally building networks of support that extend beyond a singular mentor-mentee dyad, positive outcomes might be better supported over time.

Racial matching is another mentoring model worthy of greater consideration. Racial matching is thought to influence mentoring relationships and outcomes through its impact on the development of effective mentoring relationships and positive ethnic identity in youth. Existing research is insufficient to refute whether racial matching is related to relationship quality, relationship length, or youth outcomes. Evidenced based practice withstanding, currently, no empirical evidence exists to identify promising or effective practices regarding race and ethnicity in mentoring programs. The evidence is insufficient across most evidenced based models when it comes to their “specific” effectiveness or efficacy with African Americans.

### **CHILD WELFARE**

The Association of Black Psychologists looks forward to working with the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress to address legislative objectives related to African American Child Welfare. The following testimony was delivered by The Black Administrators in Child Welfare in partnership with the Association’s legislative priority sessions, August, 2011.

#### **The Issue:**

Disproportionality or overrepresentation of children of color can be found throughout the child welfare system. Starting at the level of service intake, and continuing along the trajectory with referrals for investigation of abuse and neglect, actual placement decisions of children exiting foster care, and finally to those children being adopted and waiting to be adopted, there is evidence of treatment disparities that lead to the over representation of children of color in the child welfare system. Data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shows that African American children, not only stay longer in care, they are also represented at twice their proportion in the general population. While approximately 14 percent of the U.S. child population is African American, for federal fiscal year 2010, African American children represented 29% percent of the 408,425 children

in foster care. In regard to the number of children entering foster care, 24 percent of children coming into care in 2010 were African American. Disproportionality also holds true in adoptions. In 2010 of the 107,011 children waiting to be adopted approximately 29% were African American.

The Black Administrators in Child Welfare and The Association of Black Psychologists encourages members of Congress to:

**Develop strategy areas that support positive outcomes to reduce disproportionality and treatment disparities in the child welfare system.**

The Rational Equity Strategy Areas (RESA's) are designed to be compatible with standards such as those done by the Council on Accreditation or the Child Welfare League of America. When consistently being used, they provide increased opportunity to utilize a racial equity lens in the development of policies, practices and procedures that are being used in agencies serving African American children.

ABPsi supports the ten strategy areas advanced by BACW promotes that, when in place, can (1) equip child welfare administrators, managers, supervisors and workers with critical factors to improve service outcomes for children and families of color and (2) reduce treatment disparities and overrepresentation. For each strategy area, a context is provided that offers a framework or perspective for the user of the guide. Each context has specific standards that state and local governments can put in place to ensure sustained positive outcomes for African American children in the child welfare system. Action steps are also suggested for practice and policy inclusion and provide supporting research, promising practices, or models. The strategy areas include:

1. Data: Innovation
2. Finance: Creative and Flexible
3. Engagement: Parent and Community
4. Kinship Services: Effective and Appropriate Use
5. Youth: Informed Practice
6. Education: Collaboration and Partnerships
7. Health: Thriving Children, Youth, and Families
8. Legal Services: Culturally Informed and Competent
9. Leadership: Culturally Competent
10. Program: Policies, Practice, Review, and Analysis

The RESA is a system of ensuring best-practice done through a racial equity lens. It embraces a conceptual framework for understanding and achieving anti-racist policies and practices in child welfare. These strategy areas should be used to improve service outcomes for children and families of color and to reduce treatment disparities and overrepresentation.



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