

## Update on Initiatives

*This section brings you the latest information on programs and policies that help to fulfill our mission.*

### ACS Racial Equity Group Tackles Race and Culture Matters

Much has been written about racial and cultural disparities in child welfare. With the establishment of the Task Force on Racial Equity and Cultural Competency in May 2006, ACS began taking steps to change how we view race and culture in terms of client services and staff relationships.

**Taken from its mission statement:**

*The mission of the Task Force is to support the development of a system of directly provided and contracted services that responds respectfully and effectively to people of all racial and cultural backgrounds; that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families and communities; and that protects and preserves the dignity of each.*

Lofty goals indeed. Taskforce members (listed below) decided to look to the experts at the Jewish Board for Children and Family Services (JBCFS), who have been engaged in this effort for some time. To begin to address these issues, Joan Adams who founded and now heads the JBCFS Anti-racism and Multicultural Consultation Services, was asked to undertake a series of Racial Equity and Cultural Competence Training workshops and case consultations for family team conferencing (FTC) staff from the divisions of Family Support Services and Family Permanency Services.

**ACS Members**

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|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Joseph Cardieri     | Diane Connolly,            |
| Christiana Cummings | Jan Flory(co-chair)        |
| Diane Black Greene  | Michael Hernandez          |
| Lelani Hines        | Kathy Horchak-Adino        |
| Ray Kimmelman       | Tula Lacy                  |
| Elizabeth Lauren    | Mark Lewis                 |
| Dawn Littlejohn     | Nancy Nava Lupano          |
| Robert Martinez     | Jacqueline McKnight        |
| Mary Nam            | Nigel Nathaniel (co-chair) |
| Josette Nelson-Dabo | Pedro Ruberte              |
| George Sharples     | Gitanjali Thadhani         |
| Sara Workman        | Claudette Wynter           |

**Non-ACS Members**

- Joan Adams - JBCFS
- Aubrey Featherstone - Edwin Gould Family Services
- Sandra Killett - Children's Village
- Denise West - Brooklyn Perinatal Network/Staten Island
- Sandy Bernabei - Peoples Institute for Survival & Beyond
- Roz Ferguson - Catholic Charities
- Barbara Needell - University of California- Berkeley

The three-part training model began with an abridged adaptation of the Undoing Racism Workshop, featuring a brief overview of working definitions of race and racism,

and the ways in which institutional racism shows up in the workplace. Next, to bring the problem to a more personal level, staff were asked to examine their own racial and cultural identity and personal experiences with racism. Staff also considered the racial and cultural identity of clients as well as the possible impact of structural racism in their interactions with the child welfare system. Finally, Joan and her team provided consultation on actual cases, giving staff the opportunity to look at these cases through racial and cultural lens and make adjustments in how decisions are made from this new perspective. According to Joan, "the experience was very freeing. People weren't sure whether they should be talking about race. The result was a much more holistic view of their cases."

Pre-and post-surveys show that the training was useful with staff reporting a greater ability to talk with their colleagues about race, class, culture and structural racism in case discussion and decision-making. More importantly, most staff felt that they now had the tools to address racial equity in family team conferences, the skills to help their clients address any painful experiences with the child welfare system as a result of structural racism, and a heightened awareness of the need to find resources that are culturally appropriate for families.

ACS Preventive FTC facilitator Mildred Pittre says "Just acknowledging race and ethnicity is very important. It sparks the conversation with clients about how race impacts their involvement with child welfare. It allows clients to feel valued and understood." She notes that the training has been especially helpful in working with Latino and African-American families, some of whom traditionally feel more comfortable handling family problems within the family and may be resistant to counseling. The training has given her tools to help dispel myths regarding counseling and help clients see the benefits of accepting assistance from outside the family.

Another area where training has been helpful is bridging the cultural divide that exists around the subject of corporal punishment of children. "Talking about it allows us to start the conversation around safety and State Laws on child abuse, while acknowledging culture and customs," she explains. "The training has given me the confidence and the tools to ask questions that may not have been touched upon before and to get information that can be important to the case," says Mildred.

As a continuation of this effort, the one-day training session followed by case consultations for select preventive agency and ACS staff is planned to start May 13, 2011. For more information on this initiative, contact Taskforce members Robert Martinez and Tula Lacy.