

# ONE VISION ONE VOICE

CHANGING THE ONTARIO CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM  
TO BETTER SERVE AFRICAN CANADIANS

## **PRACTICE FRAMEWORK PART 2: RACE EQUITY PRACTICES**

September 2016





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# ONE VISION ONE VOICE

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TO BETTER SERVE AFRICAN CANADIANS

**Practice Framework Part 2: // September 2016**

**RACE EQUITY PRACTICES**



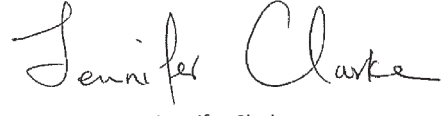
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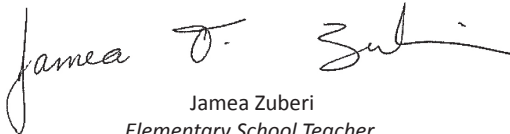
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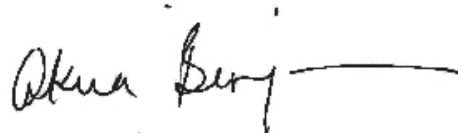
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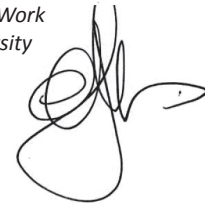
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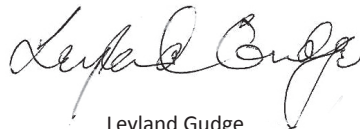
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## PREAMBLE

As the Steering Committee for One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System for African Canadians, we are honoured to have had the opportunity to lead this project on behalf of the African Canadian community in Ontario.

For over a century, Ontario's child welfare system has been mandated to protect the province's most vulnerable children and youth from abuse and neglect. With roots in the early twentieth century, the child welfare system emerged as a response to the growing marginalization of poor families, children and youth, who were victims of social and economic hardships produced by rapid industrialization and urbanization. Like other Canadian institutions, child welfare agencies have evolved within an historical context of white supremacy, colonialism, and anti-Black racism, all of which have been woven into the fabric of child welfare policies and practices, leading to the creation of long-standing disproportionalities and disparities for African Canadian and Indigenous communities. The success of African Canadian families in spite of this context is a testament to the resilience of communities and cultures of African descent.

Today, the child welfare system is in the midst of wide calls for major transformation that creates greater equity, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness. These calls are situated within a wider context of rising collective consciousness and mobilization around anti-Black racism across North America, and a political climate that is beginning to recognize and respond to anti-Black racism. This moment represents a critical historical opportunity to move the needle on transformative, anti-racist change in child welfare and other institutions such as policing, corrections, and education.

This Practice Framework, funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and developed by the African Canadian community with support from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, represents one piece of that larger effort, and will guide practice and systemic change within child welfare agencies.

As the Steering Committee for this project, we look forward to the implementation of this Practice Framework within child welfare agencies, and with ongoing conversations and collaborations with the African Canadian communities across the province. We also look forward to the ultimate outcomes of the implementation of this framework, namely that families are provided with the supports they need to thrive and that African Canadian children are supported to remain with their families.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We, the members of the One Vision One Voice Steering Committee, are grateful to the many people who have contributed to and supported the development of this Practice Framework, which is designed to change the Ontario child welfare system to better serve African Canadian children, youth and families. Specifically, we would like to acknowledge the following individuals:

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### **Graphic Designer**

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Most of all, we are grateful to the youth, parents, advocates and community agencies involved with the child welfare system who gave generously of their time to share their experiences and offer their recommendations to create a child welfare system that better serves African Canadians.

ONE VISION ONE VOICE:  
Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## Steering Committee

### Preamble

### Acknowledgements

Introduction and Purpose .....	1
Project Rationale .....	3
Process for Developing the Practice Framework .....	5
Values and Principles .....	6

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## **PART A // SETTING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT .....** 8

<b>PRACTICE 1:</b> Commit to courageous leadership .....	8
<b>PRACTICE 2:</b> Collect and analyze data to measure racial disproportionality and disparities. ....	10
<b>PRACTICE 3:</b> Evaluate programs and monitor performance. ....	11
<b>PRACTICE 4:</b> Allocate appropriate and dedicated resources. ....	12
<b>PRACTICE 5:</b> Engage African Canadian parents and communities .....	13
<b>PRACTICE 6:</b> Engage and educate mandated referrers .....	14
<b>PRACTICE 7:</b> Establish effective internal complaint mechanisms. ....	15
<b>PRACTICE 8:</b> Enhance human resource management. ....	16

---

## **PART B // DIRECT SERVICE PRACTICE.....** 17

<b>PRACTICE 9:</b> Provide daily supervision, ongoing training, and supports for staff, volunteers and caregivers. ....	17
<b>PRACTICE 10:</b> Establish collaborations and partnerships .....	18
<b>PRACTICE 11:</b> Strengthen the ability of caregivers to support African Canadian children and youth. ....	19



# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose

In 2015, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services funded the African Canadian community, through the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, to facilitate the development of a Practice Framework that would support child welfare agencies in providing better service to African Canadian children, youth and families.

As heard through the province-wide community consultations and detailed in Part 1 of the Practice Framework, addressing the issues of racial disproportionality and disparities in child welfare requires much more than just tinkering with the system. Systemic issues demand systemic solutions.

Throughout the consultations, participants reminded us of the enormous human suffering caused by systemic racism in the child welfare system. Youth and parents told us that involvement with the child welfare system changed the trajectory of their lives – and not always for the better. Youth shared their pain of growing up in homes that provided food and shelter, but not loving and nurturing environments that supported their emotional and social development or the development of a positive racial identity. Parents asked the question, “If CAS intervention hasn't improved the life of my child, why did they take my child from me?” They reminded us that the creation of a child welfare system that supports better outcomes for African Canadian children, youth and families requires transformational change – we can't tinker with the system while African Canadian children, youth and families continue to suffer.

The community expressed a need for a cultural shift from an approach where African Canadian children and youth are often removed from their homes to an approach that ensures African Canadian children and youth have more opportunities to be safe and healthy in their homes, or to remain within their communities.

The 11 Race Equity Practices contained in this document were developed to ensure systemic change occurs throughout all aspects of child welfare agencies and address the interconnectedness of leadership, community engagement, partner relationships, human resources, finances, and service delivery. We have called them Race Equity Practices because the goal is to achieve equity in outcomes for African Canadian children, youth and families. These practices focus on African Canadians because they are the racialized group in Ontario, in addition to Indigenous people, currently known to experience significant disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system. But while the focus is on African Canadian children and youth, the implementation of these practices will create a child welfare system that better reflects and is better able to serve the increasingly diverse provincial population.

The consultations for this project also highlighted for us the relationship of the child welfare system and other systems, particularly education, police, and healthcare, and how they interact to create and maintain racial disproportionality and disparities in child welfare. Participants reminded us that child welfare agencies should not only be concerned with the experiences of African Canadians when they come into contact with the child welfare system, but must also seek to address the systemic racism within other systems that overexpose African Canadians to child welfare.

The 11 Race Equity Practices promote that organizational change occurs throughout child welfare agencies through a race equity lens. For each practice, there is a context provided, offering a framework or perspective. The practice is then broken down into activities that child welfare agencies can implement to reduce racial disproportionality and disparities experienced by African Canadians. It also includes activities that the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies can undertake to provide leadership to the field and support implementation of these practices.

In developing these Race Equity Practices, we recognize that there are significant regional differences in the size of the African Canadian population and the extent of disproportionality and disparities across the province. While each child welfare agency will take a different approach to implementing these practices, the common goal is to achieve these Race Equity Practices across Ontario.

The Race Equity Practices in Part A are designed to set the organizational context to support the effectiveness of the practices in Part B, which focus on the delivery of child welfare services to service users.







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## Part A: Setting the Organizational Context

- PRACTICE 1.** Commitment to courageous leadership
- PRACTICE 2.** Collect and analyze data to measure racial disproportionality and disparities
- PRACTICE 3.** Evaluate programs and monitor performance
- PRACTICE 4.** Allocate appropriate and dedicated resources
- PRACTICE 5.** Engage African Canadian parents and communities
- PRACTICE 6.** Engage and educate mandated referrers
- PRACTICE 7.** Establish effective internal complaint mechanisms
- PRACTICE 8.** Enhance human resource management

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## Part B: Direct Service Practice

- PRACTICE 9.** Provide daily supervision, ongoing training, and supports for staff, volunteers and caregivers
- PRACTICE 10.** Establish collaborations and partnerships
- PRACTICE 11.** Strengthen the ability of caregivers to support African Canadian children and youth

### Project Rationale

For decades, African Canadians, advocates, service users, community partners, and most recently the media have raised the issue of overrepresentation of African Canadian children and youth in Ontario's child welfare system. While the data to quantify the extent of racial disproportionality have not been collected on a provincial level, the limited data that are available, the personal experiences of service users, as well as observations by service providers, advocates, family courts, and group home staff confirm that there is an overrepresentation of African Canadians in Ontario's child welfare system.

Further, African Canadians report that they experience disparities when they do interact with child welfare agencies, in that they are treated differently than their White counterparts, are criminalized, lack access to culturally appropriate services, and experience poorer outcomes than their White counterparts. They have identified anti-Black racism operating at three levels in the child welfare system as being at the root of their experiences: systemic racism embedded within organizational policies and practices; cultural biases embedded within the culture of the child welfare system and individual agencies; and, interpersonal biases, including anti-Black racism, a lack of cultural understanding, or biases about people of African descent that impacts interactions with and decisions made by child welfare staff.

In response to the concerns of the community, the African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC) and other community organizations have identified the overrepresentation of African Canadians in the child welfare system as a serious issue and have been advocating – for decades – for change. These organizations have engaged directly with various child welfare agencies, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, as well as the general public through the media. In the ACLC's 2013 Annual Report, it notes:

The ACLC continues to coordinate advocacy, law reform and outreach initiatives to raise awareness and effectively address the gross over-representation of African Canadian children and families at all stages of the child welfare system in Ontario... The status quo is no longer acceptable as the child welfare system is an early form of institutionalization for our children and youth.<sup>1</sup>

In both 2012 and 2016 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns about the significant overrepresentation of Indigenous and African Canadian children and youth in this country's child welfare system. In 2016 the Committee recommended that Canada "take effective measures to address the root causes of overrepresentation of African-Canadian children in care institutions."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> African Canadian Legal Clinic (November 2014), p 18. <sup>2</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016)

## What I want CASs to know...

“

The CAS should know that every thing about BLACK kids are different from every other kids. They should respect our culture and realize we can't act like every other races.

”

—African Canadian youth in care, Feedback Session 2016.

Coverage of this issue in the African Canadian media has reflected the concerns of the community (see “Prof calls for Black children’s aid society,” *The Caribbean Camera*, December 18, 2014). Articles in the *Toronto Star* have helped to bring this issue to the fore for the general public (see “Why are so many black children in foster and group homes,” December 11, 2014; “Black kids stay longest in care,” August 26, 2015).

In December 2015, the Black Community Action Network of Peel released a paper, *Pathways and Prevention of African-Canadian Disproportionalities and Disparities in the Child Welfare System: A Position Paper*. In it, the organization issues a call to action:

Because of these information gaps, we believe that an urgent and comprehensive response is needed to address Black disproportionalities and disparities in Ontario’s child welfare system. We believe that the response must be prevention-oriented, with a focus on addressing systemic and structural factors that lie at the root of such inequities.<sup>3</sup>

The Children’s Aid Society of Toronto, the first child welfare agency in Ontario to publicly share race-based data, held a series of community consultations to share its data with the community and seek their advice regarding solutions. These data confirm the concerns expressed throughout the African Canadian community and show that African Canadians are significantly overrepresented within the child welfare system. These data show that while African Canadians make up 8.5% of the population of Toronto, they constitute 40.8% of the children and youth in care of the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.<sup>4</sup> Advocates, along with those in the child welfare field, suggest that this disproportionality is not just an issue within Toronto but is experienced throughout the province.

Finally, the Ontario Human Rights Code requires that child welfare agencies be non-discriminatory in service delivery to Ontarians. Responding to the issues raised by the African Canadian community, the Ontario Human Rights Commission has called on the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to help all child welfare agencies collect and report disaggregated data for Indigenous and racialized children and youth in care. Further, the Chief Commissioner recently contacted each of Ontario’s child welfare agencies to request that they share data on their service users by race and other human rights protected grounds.<sup>5</sup> The letter sent to each agency notes that the Commission is “concerned that the over-representation of Indigenous and African Canadian children in child welfare may be indicative of systemic and persistent discrimination.”<sup>6</sup>

This confluence of developments has made this the time to explore the root causes of racial disproportionality and disparities and act to address them. Without bold and consistent action, the outcomes for African Canadian children, youth and families involved with the child welfare system will worsen, the racism within the systems and larger society that created the racial disproportionality and disparities we see today will be further entrenched, and the human and social costs will continue to mount.

While the lack of province-wide and local data on the representation of African Canadians in the child welfare system suggests that more research is needed, the urgent call to action expressed by the community suggests that African Canadian children, youth and their families cannot wait. Community members are concerned that as the issues are researched, families continue to be torn apart, children are growing up without their parents, and youth are transitioning into adulthood unprepared and more likely to face homelessness, low educational achievement, high unemployment rates, and increased involvement with the criminal justice system. The community has made it clear that the time to act is now.

3. Hasford (2015), p. 1. 4. Children’s Aid Society of Toronto (2015). 5. The letter from the OHRC to each child welfare agency can be accessed at: [http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news\\_centre/children%E2%80%99s-aid-societies-ontario-re-request-disaggregated-data-regarding-children-and-youth-ontario](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/children%E2%80%99s-aid-societies-ontario-re-request-disaggregated-data-regarding-children-and-youth-ontario) 6. Rankin (2016)



## Process for Developing the Practice Framework

The Practice Framework is comprised of two companion documents. Part 1 is the Research Report and is meant to provide the context for the implementation of the Race Equity Practices contained in Part 2. The information and process used to develop the Practice Framework include:

**Literature review:** A review of the literature was conducted to identify the issues with respect to disproportionality and disparity for the African Canadian community in Ontario's child welfare system. While this literature review is not meant to be exhaustive, it helps to set the context for the issues and challenges experienced by African Canadians, which the Practice Framework is meant to address.

**Review of promising practices:** A review of practices that are emerging as among the best in child welfare to address the issues faced by people of African descent was conducted. While the effectiveness of these programs may not as yet be assessed and the review not exhaustive, they offer principles and approaches that can be adopted or adapted for use throughout Ontario's child welfare system.

Practical considerations for identifying promising practices to include in this report were:

- Whether the program offers innovative programs and practices that align with what the literature identifies as issues for children, youth and families of African descent; and
- Whether these programs can be easily adapted for use in the Ontario context.

**Community consultations:** An essential element of this work was hearing directly from the community. The province-wide consultations helped the project team understand how youth, parents, and families have experienced the child welfare system and the particular issues faced in the Ontario context.

From September 2015 to March 2016, 16 community consultation sessions were held to allow families, service providers, advocates, educators, social workers, and others to offer their insights into how Ontario's child welfare system impacts African Canadians and provide their recommendations for change.

In total, over 800 individuals and community organizations provided input through the following sessions:

- North York, Toronto (September 15, 2015)
- Scarborough, Toronto (September 21, 2015)
- LGBTQ-focused session, Toronto (September 25, 2015)
- Durham Region (September 26, 2015)
- Hamilton (September 28, 2015)
- Windsor (October 1, 2015)
- York Region (October 3, 2015)
- London (October 5, 2015)
- Ottawa (October 7, 2015)
- Peel Region (November 6, 2015)
- Downtown Toronto (November 7, 2015)
- Sudbury (January 28, 2016)
- Thunder Bay (March 17, 2016)
- Sessions for youth who are currently or have been in care (Windsor, November 3, 2015; Toronto, November 14, 2015; Ottawa, December 2, 2015).

In addition, a number of individuals prepared written comments that were submitted to the project manager.

In May and June 2016, feedback sessions were held in seven cities to provide consultation participants with a summary of input received from all the consultation sessions. The intention of these feedback sessions was to ensure that we accurately captured the community's perspectives, and to give community members the opportunity to provide additional input.

**Input from the Steering Committee:** A Steering Committee consisting of 17 individuals from the African Canadian community who are familiar with the issues was established to guide this work. The Steering Committee provided direction for the project, including the locations and form of the community consultations, literature/best practice reviews, and the development of the Practice Framework.

**Input from the CAS Reference Group:** A Reference Group consisting of 13 African Canadian employees and allies from various child welfare agencies across Ontario was also established to provide input into the project and provide insights into the child welfare system and its impact on African Canadian children, youth and families.

## Values and Principles

This project recognizes that policy development is a value-laden process that should be guided both by empirical evidence and a principle-based framework. These values and principles were distilled from the discussions with the Steering Committee and have been used to guide this project and the development of the Practice Framework.

### Anti-Black Racism

The project acknowledges that anti-Black racism exists in Canadian society and in the child welfare system as evidenced by the racial inequities experienced by African Canadian people in multiple systems, including child welfare, criminal justice, education, and the labour market. As such, this project was not focused on proving whether anti-Black racism exists, but instead focused on exploring how anti-Black racism is manifested in the child welfare system and how it impacts outcomes for African Canadian children, youth and families.

### Equity

Progress will be measured by equity of outcomes, not the intentions or actions by the child welfare system that may or may not create meaningful and sustained change.

### Honour Community Voice

The process for consulting with the community and developing the Practice Framework will reflect the voice of the community. As such, the project honours the community's voice by virtue of being led by a Steering Committee of community members and privileging the input of African Canadians in community consultation sessions, particularly those of African Canadian youth in care.

### Community Empowerment

While the community consultations are critical to hearing the voice of the community, we also endeavoured to educate community members and provide them with tools they can use to advocate for themselves and engage with their local child welfare agency to create change.

### Transparency and Accountability

This project took transparency and accountability to the African Canadian community seriously. As such, the community was provided with detailed background information about this project, including its process, leadership, and outcomes.

### Diversity and Intersectionality

This project recognizes the diversity of identities within the African Canadian community, and the intersections of these identities and their impacts on the experiences of individuals.







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## Part A: Setting the Organizational Context

### PRACTICE 1:

## COMMIT TO COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

While all employees are able to influence organizational change, it is the responsibility of the organization's board, Executive Director / Chief Executive Officer, and senior management team to set the direction, specify organizational expectations, and allocate resources. They also need to boldly lead conversations on anti-Black racism, spearhead anti-racism organizational change efforts, and engage the organization in courageous conversations if racial disproportionality and disparities are to be identified and addressed.

### The Board of Directors

Child welfare agencies are run by a board of directors made up of volunteers from the community. This model of governance puts the onus on the board for the functioning and financial well-being of their agency as well as ensuring the agency meets the needs of the local community by providing services that best benefit children, youth and families.

Executive Directors / Chief Executives Officers are hired by and report to their local boards, which in turn provide strategic direction for the agency.

### Activities:

- 1.1 Ensure the organization has a stated commitment to equity and addressing anti-Black racism, that is reflected in its strategic plan and other organizational documents, which will be achieved by reducing disproportionality and disparities through an anti-Black racism lens.
- 1.2 Ensure the Executive Director / Chief Executive Officer's performance plan reflects their responsibility to create an equitable and anti-racist, anti-oppressive organizational culture and includes benchmarks to reduce the disproportionality and disparities experienced by African Canadians.
- 1.3 Report annually to the public on plans, activities, and outcomes from implementing these Race Equity Practices.
- 1.4 Receive regular updates of the key performance indicators disaggregated by race, set goals for the reduction of disproportionality and disparities, and assess progress made in achieving these goals.
- 1.5 Ensure the composition of the board reflects the diversity of service users.
- 1.6 Receive mandatory and ongoing training and education on equity, disproportionality and disparities, anti-Black racism, and anti-oppression.
- 1.7 Receive regular updates on racial disproportionality and disparities, the changing demographics of the community served, and projections of further demographic changes to inform community engagement and service delivery strategies.
- 1.8 Establish an African Canadian Advisory Committee that includes former African Canadian youth in care, other service users, and community partners to advise the board, identify issues, and provide insights into opportunities to reduce disproportionalities and better serve African Canadian children, youth and families.

### The Executive Director / Chief Executive Officer

The Executive Director / Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the agency, which includes setting direction for the organization, managing staff, as well as developing service plans in collaboration with the board.

### Activities:

- 1.9 Ensure the organization recognizes, in internal documents and communications with the public, the existence and impact of anti-Black racism in society, in the local community, and within the organization.
- 1.10 Ensure the organization's stated commitment to equity, which will be achieved by reducing disproportionality and disparities within an anti-racism / anti-oppressive framework, is reflected throughout the work of the organization.

“ Our families are hoping for a time when we will be treated by CAS according to our culture, instead of being treated according to society's norm. ”

—African Canadian youth in care, Feedback Session 2016

- 1.11 Using the key performance indicators, report on the agency's efforts to reduce disproportionality and disparities for African Canadian children, youth and families and the outcomes achieved.
- 1.12 Receive mandatory and ongoing training and education on equity, disproportionality and disparities, anti-Black racism, and anti-oppression.
- 1.13 Ensure that senior leaders are regularly updated on racial disproportionality and disparities, the changing demographics of the community served, and projections of further demographic changes to inform community engagement and service delivery strategies.
- 1.14 Ensure that activities to reduce disproportionality and disparities and outcomes achieved are regularly discussed at leadership meetings.

### Senior Management Team

The senior management team is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the agency under the direction of the Executive Director / Chief Executive Officer.

#### Activities:

- 1.15 Ensure all aspects of the organization's work is conducted using an equity lens to ensure that addressing disproportionality and disparities is not seen as an optional add-on, but is integrated into all aspects of the work of the organization.

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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

#### Activities:

- Design and make available ongoing training and education on equity, disproportionality and disparities, anti-Black racism, and anti-oppression for board members, Executive Directors / Chief Executive Officers, and senior leaders at all agencies.
- Establish a specific team at OACAS that will move forward the work outlined in this Framework across the province, in addition to leading further research into other issues of disproportionality, with the goal of eliminating disproportionality in the child welfare system. This team will work in full partnership with the African Canadian community through an African Canadian Advisory Committee.

## PRACTICE 2:

# COLLECT AND ANALYZE DATA TO MEASURE RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITIES

The collection and analysis of data is critical to informing policy and practice to improve outcomes for African Canadian children, youth and families. Through the use of data, child welfare agencies are able to assess the extent of racial disproportionality and disparities, identify the underlying causes, as well as measure progress toward improving service outcomes.

### Activities:

- 2.1 Collect disaggregated race-based data for each family and child and input this information into CPIN or the organization's legacy system for data collection and case management.
- 2.2 Regularly analyze and report on this data to identify disproportionality and disparities at each decision point on the child welfare continuum and to monitor change. For example, compare the proportion of African Canadian families reported to CAS in relation to their composition of the community, the proportion for which investigations are conducted as compared to their White and other racialized counterparts, the proportion of African Canadian children and youth apprehended as compared to their White and other racialized counterpart, etc. Such an analysis will help identify the points at which issues occur and will help the agency target change efforts.
- 2.3 Ensure staff have the knowledge and skills to gather race-based data from service users.

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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

### Activities:

- Work with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to ensure that the race categories in CPIN appropriately capture African Canadians, including bi-racial African Canadians, and are made mandatory.
- Develop a template to support agencies to analyze and report on racial disproportionality and disparities.
- Use the key performance indicators, disaggregated by race, to report on the field's efforts to reduce disproportionality and disparities for African Canadian children, youth and families and measure improvements over time.
- Design and make training available to caseworkers to ensure they are able to accurately and consistently collect race-based data from all service users.



## PRACTICE 3:

### EVALUATE PROGRAMS AND MONITOR PERFORMANCE

Ongoing program evaluation and performance monitoring allows organizations to understand which programs, services, and practices are working, the impact they have on African Canadian children, youth and families, and where changes are needed to achieve desired outcomes. As such, ongoing program evaluation and performance monitoring are needed to assess the effectiveness of services, practice models, and tools provided to and used with African Canadian children, youth and families.

#### Activities:

- 3.1 Regularly conduct research and reviews on the services, practice models, and tools, provided to and used with African Canadian children, youth and families to assess their effectiveness, ensure they don't create or maintain disparities, and ensure that they recognize and respect the culture of African Canadian children, youth and families.

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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

#### Activities:

- Review practice models and tools used province-wide to assess their impact on African Canadian children, youth and families.
- Assess the social return on investment (SROI) of better serving African Canadian children, youth and families, e.g., apprehension prevention, strengthening families, increased use of kin service, etc.

What I want CASs to know...

“ Our culture is something that should be preserved even after entering CAS, by having constant interaction with it. ”

—African Canadian youth in care, Feedback Session 2016

## PRACTICE 4:

### ALLOCATE APPROPRIATE AND DEDICATED RESOURCES

While the Ministry of Children and Youth Services determines the annual budget allocation for each CAS, each agency has the flexibility to determine how resources will be allocated to support service delivery priorities, including the achievement of better outcomes for African Canadian, children, youth and families.

Further, when procuring services (e.g., group homes, outside paid resources, and mental health beds), each agency should include an assessment of the service provider's ability to reflect and appropriately serve African Canadian children and youth in care and their complex needs.

#### Activities:

- 4.1 In the organization's service plan, establish specific goals to reduce the disproportionality and disparities identified and ensure the activities to achieve these goals are appropriately funded.
- 4.2 Use disaggregated race-based data to ensure the equitable allocation of resources.
- 4.3 Allocate appropriate funding to ensure that preventative services that are culturally appropriate are provided, including those that focus on decreasing apprehensions, strengthening families, and keeping families together.
- 4.4 Allocate appropriate funding to ensure that foster parents, group homes, and therapeutic residential programs are able to appropriately meet the daily needs of African Canadian children and youth in care, including providing culturally appropriate foods, skin care products, hair care products and services, books, toys, and other resources.
- 4.5 Ensure the allocation of Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent (OCBE) funds to support resilience, smoother transition to adulthood, and better educational outcomes for African Canadian children and youth. This should include using funds to meet the cultural requirements of children and youth and addressing the impact of systemic racism.
- 4.6 Purchase culturally appropriate services from African Canadian community organizations and service providers to keep children safely in their homes and reduce the number of African Canadian children and youth apprehended.
- 4.7 Ensure procurement policies and practices include an assessment of: suppliers' ability to meet the needs of African Canadian children and youth in care; the extent to which their policies and approaches to serve delivery align with anti-racism / anti-oppression practices; their organizational values; and, the diversity of their workforce.

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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

#### Activities:

- Advocate to Ministry of Children and Youth Services for appropriate funding of African Canadian organizations that will deliver proactive services that focus on strengthening and keeping families together by supporting the well-being of African Canadian children, youth and families and reducing the need for child apprehension.





## PRACTICE 5: **ENGAGE AFRICAN CANADIAN PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES**

Engaging parents and community members effectively in the child welfare system is both complex and vital to the outcomes for African Canadian children, youth and families. Given this challenge and imperative, child welfare agencies must develop ways of engaging parents and community members not only in the short term, but also with the goal of developing and maintaining relationships over the long term.

### **Activities:**

- 5.1 Engage in regular outreach to the African Canadian community to continue to get input into the development of service protocols.
- 5.2 Educate African Canadian communities about the role of Ontario's child welfare agencies, the rights of children, youth and parents when engaging with the child welfare system, the role and expectations of parenting in Canada, and how parents can advocate for themselves.
- 5.3 Engage in regular outreach to the African Canadian community to recruit staff, volunteers, board members, as well as foster and adoptive parents. Ensure outreach is conducted to the various African Canadian communities, including LGBTQ and the various cultural communities.

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## **OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT**

### **Activities:**

- Establish an ongoing African Canadian Advisory Committee to provide advice regarding disproportionality and disparities experienced by African Canadians in the child welfare system.

## PRACTICE 6:

### ENGAGE AND EDUCATE MANDATED REFERRERS

Mandated referrers are important partners in the protection of children and youth from maltreatment. However, as the first stage in the child welfare continuum, they can contribute to the overrepresentation of African Canadians in the child welfare system. As such, it is important that child welfare agencies analyze referral data and provide critical feedback and additional training to referral organizations and professionals as needed.

#### Activities:

- 6.1 Collect and analyze data on the referral source, race of the children, youth and families referred, the grounds for referral (e.g., abuse, neglect), and the outcomes of the referral (e.g., not investigated, investigated but not substantiated, investigated and substantiated) to identify whether additional education and training is needed for mandated referrers.
- 6.2 Provide critical feedback, engage in ongoing discussions, and provide training to mandated referrers when the analysis of data indicates racial disproportionality in referrals. Work with mandated referral sources to ensure their staff have a more nuanced understanding of child abuse and maltreatment, an understanding of poverty and the impact on parenting, and an understanding of how their biases can contribute to disproportionality in the child welfare system.
- 6.3 Educate and support screeners to ensure they respond appropriately to referrers who are expressing racism when reporting a concern of child maltreatment.
- 6.4 Provide screeners and investigators with a list of culturally specific community agencies and resources they can refer clients to address a variety of issues, including poverty.

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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

#### Activities:

- Develop a curriculum to support mandated referrers to have a more nuanced understanding of child maltreatment so that they do not over-report African Canadian families and contribute to the racial disproportionality in the child welfare system.

What I want CASs to know...

“ Black kids in care are way more than your stereotypes! ”

—African Canadian youth in care, Feedback Session 2016

## PRACTICE 7:

### ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL COMPLAINT MECHANISMS

Each child welfare agency has an internal complaints process through which families can have their concerns investigated and addressed. They can also make a complaint to the Child and Family Services Review Board. However, these two review processes do not consider matters currently before the courts or that the courts have already decided. Nor do they consider matters that fall under other decision-making processes under the *Child and Family Services Act*.

In order to be served by these processes, African Canadians involved with the child welfare system need to be informed of the complaints mechanisms available to them. Further, these mechanisms should be assessed to determine how well they serve the needs of and address the issues raised by African Canadians.

#### Activities:

- 7.1 Ensure all African Canadian children, youth and families who come into contact with the child welfare agency are made aware of how to make a complaint, including external and internal complaints mechanisms, should they have concerns of unfair treatment or racial discrimination.
- 7.2 Annually analyze and report complaint data to the board. This report should include: (1) a race-based analysis of complaint data to identify any issues and patterns of systemic and individual racism; (2) identification of issues of racial bias in organizational policies or practices. For example, the agency could report on the extent to which African Canadians raise concerns versus their White or other racialized counterparts in a number of areas, including treatment by CAS staff (e.g., being treated disrespectfully or rudely), experiencing harsher treatment (e.g., apprehensions perceived to be unwarranted, involvement of police, etc.), and not receiving the needed services (e.g., lack of access to programs, services, and resources). This would help to identify where disparities exist and target interventions.
- 7.3 Ensure there is a process in place for youth in care to make complaints and have their issues addressed.



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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

#### Activities:

- Ensure that the Survey of Service Users collects data on the race of service users and asks about experiences when service users interact with the child welfare agency.

## PRACTICE 8:

# ENHANCE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Critical to delivering culturally appropriate and culturally safe services to African Canadian children, youth and families is ensuring that the staff delivering those services and making policy and program decisions reflect the diversity of service users and understand the issues faced by service users. Further, within the agency, there is a need to ensure that African Canadian staff, and indeed all staff, are able to raise concerns as needed and advocate for changes to better serve African Canadians without fear of reprisal.

### Activities:

- 8.1 Implement an Employment Equity Program that is consistent with the requirements of the federal *Employment Equity Act*, to ensure that the organization is reflective of the diversity of service users and that barriers to their hiring, advancement, and full participation in the agency are identified and removed.
- 8.2 Conduct an assessment of the organizational culture, by an external, independent third party, that allows staff to provide perspectives about the organizational culture, their work environment, and whether they feel they are able to advocate for change without fear of reprisal. Use the findings of this assessment to create a plan to address the issues identified and support change in the organizational culture.
- 8.3 Support African Canadian staff to organize and participate in African Canadian staff groups and province-wide initiatives to reduce disproportionality and disparities experienced by African Canadians in the child welfare system.
- 8.4 Incorporate equity and anti-racism competencies into job descriptions and staff performance appraisals.
- 8.5 Provide mandatory and ongoing anti-racism training, which focuses on an understanding of anti-Black racism, to all staff, volunteers, and caregivers relevant to their roles.
- 8.6 Ensure trainers who deliver the OACAS-designed new worker training are well versed and have proven competence in anti-racism / anti-oppressive practice and an understanding of anti-Black racism.
- 8.7 Support mentorship of staff by supervisors through critical reflective practice. Use supervision meetings to increase staff understanding of disproportionality and disparities as well as anti-racism / anti-oppressive practice, with a focus on anti-Black racism.

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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

### Activities:

- Develop tools and resources to support agencies to develop Employment Equity Programs.
- Work with an independent third-party to develop a tool for conducting cultural assessments of agencies. Support agencies to use the results to make the organizational change needed.
- Update the OACAS-designed new worker training to include the history, experiences, and voices of African Canadian children and youth in the child welfare system. The training should also ensure that workers have an understanding of disproportionality, disparities, equity, and anti-Black racism. The training will be developed and delivered by African Canadian community members chosen by an African Canadian Advisory Committee.
- Design and make anti-racism training and trainers available to all agencies, with input from the African Canadian Advisory Committee.
- Ensure trainers who will deliver the OACAS-designed new worker training are themselves trained in anti-Black racism and anti-racism / anti-oppression.
- Develop training, with input from the African Canadian Advisory Committee, for OACAS staff to enable them to lead the field in addressing racial disproportionality and disparities.



## Part B: Direct Service Practice

### PRACTICE 9:

## **PROVIDE DAILY SUPERVISION, ONGOING TRAINING, AND SUPPORTS FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND CAREGIVERS**

Ensure agency staff, volunteers, and caregivers are well-trained in anti-racism, with a focus on anti-Black racism, and that they receive daily supervision that supports the application of this knowledge to support better outcomes for African Canadian children, youth and families.

### **Activities:**

- 9.1 Through the process of day-to-day supervision of staff, utilize an anti-Black racism lens that supports staff to reflect on their own biases, ask the right questions, assess systemic issues and the impact on families, and assess the language they use to document conversations and interactions with African Canadian families. For example, supervisors can guide caseworkers to: identify the strengths of the African Canadian family in an attempt to understand the family better, including their relationships, interpersonal competencies, and social and psychological characteristics; increase their awareness of how race, culture, and socioeconomic status impacts the family's lives and their perceptions of the family; reflect on their own family functioning, values, and parenting practices as the lens through which they view other families; compare the language they use in case files for African Canadian versus White families, how it reflects their personal biases, and how it affects outcomes for these families.
- 9.2 In collaboration with the African Canadian community, develop a resource and reference manual for child welfare workers, volunteers, and caregivers to support them in engaging with and effectively delivering services to African Canadian families to improve child safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes for African Canadian children and youth.
- 9.3 Establish mechanisms to gather feedback from staff, volunteers and caregivers about their concerns with respect to policies and practices that may lead to disproportionality and disparities.
- 9.4 Support all staff, volunteers and caregivers to advocate for the organizational changes needed to provide better service to African Canadians.

What I want CASs to know...

"Black families can love and care for us the way we want to be loved and cared for."

—African Canadian youth in care, Feedback Session 2016

## PRACTICE 10:

### ESTABLISH COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Ensure ongoing engagement of African Canadian parents and the local African Canadian community to support the work of the child welfare agency and the success of African Canadian children, youth and families.

#### Activities:

- 10.1 Ensure parents are invited and supported to attend plan of care meetings. Allow parents to have input into the care of their child while they are in foster care to ensure that the foster family's parenting approach respects their parenting styles and values and that it supports reunification with the family.
- 10.2 Promote a healthy relationship between the caregiver and the parents to ensure they understand their parenting styles, values, and care expectations.
- 10.3 Develop a resource directory for staff, volunteers, and caregivers that assists them to locate culturally appropriate products and services to meet the daily needs of African Canadian children and youth in care, including culturally appropriate foods, skin care products, hair care products and services, books, toys, and cultural events. Ensure that these products and services reflect the full diversity of children and youth in care, e.g. LGBTQ and culture.
- 10.4 Work with African Canadian community organizations and service providers to develop and provide culturally appropriate prevention services that strengthen families and ensures the safety and well-being of children and youth, such as family counselling, and counselling and supports for children and youth who come out as LGBTQ, and their parents.
- 10.5 Ensure reunification practices acknowledge the impact of being in care on African Canadian children and youth and provide culturally appropriate services to support successful reunification.
- 10.6 Develop protocols with local school boards to minimize lost school days for children and youth in care and support better educational outcomes for African Canadian children and youth in care.
- 10.7 Review existing protocols with other systems, such as education, police, and healthcare, to ensure that these agreements do not adversely affect African Canadian children, youth and families and result in disproportionality and disparities.
- 10.8 Develop a policy that supports staff to advocate for African Canadian children and youth in care and interrupt systemic racism within other systems, e.g., education, policing, and healthcare.

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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

#### Activities:

- Collect and share best practices for addressing the daily needs of African Canadian children and youth in care.
- Create a Vendor of Record list through which agencies and foster families can purchase culturally appropriate skin care, hair care, books, and toys for African Canadian children and youth in care from African Canadian service providers.
- Ensure that the number of African Canadian attendees at provincial youth conferences and events is reflective of their overrepresentation in care.
- Convene an annual retreat for African Canadian children and youth in care to help them connect with their community and culture and support the development of a positive racial identity. They can also provide insights to the OACAS about their experiences within child welfare and what further changes are needed to support better outcomes for them.

## PRACTICE 11:

# STRENGTHEN THE ABILITY OF CAREGIVERS TO SUPPORT AFRICAN CANADIAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Child welfare agencies can support positive outcomes for African Canadian children and youth in care by placing them with kin as the first option and African Canadian families as the second option, as well as by ensuring caregivers are well trained, supported, and able to support the development of a strong and positive racial identity and the maintenance of cultural connections.

### Activities:

- 11.1 Recognize that care by kin is preferred for African Canadian children and youth, and use kin when possible to ensure child safety and well-being, strengthen families, and support the best outcomes for African Canadian children and youth.
- 11.2 Support children and youth in the care of kin by providing or making available culturally appropriate services as needed, such as mental health treatment, counselling, and services for children and youth coming out as LGBTQ.
- 11.3 Ensure that the kin parents are adequately supported and receive the supports needed, which may include training and access to funding, specialized treatment, parenting classes, and counselling to maintain the health and integrity of the placement.
- 11.4 Establish protocols to ensure racial, cultural, and religious matching of foster care placements and adoptions. This should specifically address strategies to ensure that African Canadian LGBTQ children and youth are placed in homes that support their racial, gender, and sexual identities.
- 11.5 Establish protocols to help ensure African Canadian children and youth in care can remain in the same school or community from which they were removed to ensure that they are not inaccessible to parents and to minimize potential harm caused by isolating them in communities with little racial diversity.
- 11.6 Provide mandatory training and ongoing support for foster and adoptive parents who have or wish to have African Canadian children and/or youth placed in their care, to increase their awareness and understanding of racism and how it impacts African Canadians, racial profiling, and the additional dangers faced by African Canadian children and teens, as well as their skills and ability to address these issues and proactively support the well-being of African Canadian children and youth.
- 11.7 Ensure that the mandatory training and ongoing support is also provided for foster and adoptive parents who have or wish to have African Canadian LGBTQ children and youth placed in their care.
- 11.8 Ensure that each plan of care supports the needs of African Canadian and African Canadian LGBTQ children and youth and has elements that support the child's racial, gender, and sexual identities as well as their cultural, religious, and linguistic needs, and that these plans of care are implemented by the foster parents.
- 11.9 Ensure that all transracial foster and adoptive parents understand and are able to address the physical, emotional, and cultural needs of African Canadian children and youth and are able to identify, address, and mitigate the individual and systemic racism they will face.
- 11.10 Where psychological or parenting capacity assessments have been court-ordered or recommended, ensure that assessments are completed by an individual with a graduate or doctoral degree skilled in African Canadian cultural experiences and anti-oppressive and racism studies. The final report should also adequately examine systemic racism and allow for cultural differences in parenting styles and utilize evidence-based and/or supported assessment tools for African Canadians.
- 11.11 To minimize the over-diagnosis of African Canadian youth in care, ensure no diagnosis is formed unless the full psycho-social history of the child is included as part of the initial medical and clinical treatment. In addition, parents and caregivers should be part of the assessment and treatment process.
- 11.12 Ensure medical and clinical treatment providers are African Canadian or have an in-depth understanding of African Canadian cultures and anti-Black racism to ensure they are better able to serve these service users.



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## OACAS LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

### **Activities:**

- Collect and share best practices for supporting caregivers to support African Canadian children and youth.
- Develop and make available training to foster and adoptive families who have African Canadian children and/or youth in their care.
- Ensure the African Canadian youth voice informs the guidance and information provided to the field to strengthen the ability of caregivers to support African Canadian children and youth.





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The voice of child welfare in Ontario