

UNIT III EDUCATING STAKEHOLDERS ON DIVERSITY

Identifying Stakeholders

CASA cannot take on the challenge of diversity alone. If CASA recognizes the benefit to diversity, it cannot act in a vacuum. When CASA begins to diversify its volunteers it will be helpful to take up the subject of diversity with other stakeholders involved in the court process. The first step in doing this is to identify the stakeholders and the roles they play. Judges, Petitioners, agency representatives, advocates, parents and children all have a stake in child abuse/neglect proceedings in Family Court. Although they all have an interest in the welfare of the child, they do not view the case from the same perspective nor do they have equal capacity to influence the outcome of the case. What they do have in common is that they all stand to benefit from diversity. These stakeholders fall into several categories with some overlap among the categories: decision makers, service providers, respondents, advocates and interested parties.

Decision Makers

Decision makers are directly or indirectly part of the Family Court system. To varying degrees the decisions they make affect the lives of the families and children in every abuse/neglect case. In theory, the decisions they make are free from issue of race, culture, and socio-economic status. In reality, they are human beings with human flaws just like the rest of us.

- \$ **Judges** - Preside over the abuse/neglect case from beginning to end. They make the determination as to whether the allegations of abuse or neglect contained in the petition have been established. They also make the determination as to what the disposition should be.
- \$ **Petitioner**- This is the person or agency filing the petition alleging abuse or neglect on the part of a parent or parents. In some jurisdictions it may be the Department of Social Services, or some other authorized agency, or some person authorized by the court to file the petition. They will make the decision as to whether to bring the case into court or not.
- \$ **Attorney for Petitioner** - In some jurisdictions the County Attorney represent the Department of Social Services. In other jurisdictions some other public or private entity will represent the petitioner. They help make the decision as to whether to bring the case into court and what allegations to pursue.
- \$ **District Attorney** - Abuse and neglect may be criminal acts. The District Attorney will make the decision as to whether the case should be prosecuted in criminal court against one or both of the parents or a person responsible for the child's care.

Advocates

There are several advocates representing different interests in a child abuse/ neglect case. Advocates have different power and authority to influence the outcome of a case based upon who they represent. They each have the opportunity to be heard by the court. Some will be in a position to present evidence and call witnesses, others will be in a position to present a report or provide oral advocacy.

- \$ **Law Guardians** - This is an attorney appointed by the court to represent the best interests of the child.
- \$ **Respondent's Attorney** - This is an attorney who is either appointed or retained to represent the parent or person legally responsible for the child who is alleged to have abused or neglected such child.
- \$ **Petitioner's Attorney** - This is the attorney that represents the person or agency filing the petition. They will advocate to prove the allegations of the petition and in support of a particular dispositional order. They are also in the role of decision maker.
- \$ **Probation Department** - The Probation Department or some similar agency may be ordered by the Judge to undertake a social investigation after the fact-finding hearing to assist the court in determining an appropriate dispositional order. Although considered by some to be simply an objective report, others consider the social investigation report to be a form of advocacy.
- \$ **CASA** - volunteers assigned by the court to investigate and advocate for the best interests of the child.

Service Providers

Service Providers consist of an array of public and private agencies, and professionals who provide a wide spectrum of services to the respondents and children in child abuse/neglect cases. The goal of these services is to assist the children and parents in achieving the case plan. These service providers present a wide range of diagnostic and rehabilitative services that involve them in the lives of the family members. Although well intended, these services are not always welcomed or appreciated by parents who are respondents in these cases. Some families may perceive service providers as part of the family court system that has intruded into the privacy of their family. In order for service providers to be effective they may have to overcome some of these perceptions.

Respondents

A respondent is any parent or other person legally responsible for a child's care who is alleged to have abused or neglected such child. The respondent may be considered to be a reluctant participant in the Family Court proceeding.

Interested Parties

\$ Foster Parents

\$ Children

\$ Families of Respondents

The stakeholders we have identified have different, and often competing responsibilities. For the decision makers, advocates and service providers, they share an awesome responsibility for the future of a child and a family. From the perspective of CASA, the best interests of the child will be served not only by the diversity of the CASA program but by an appreciation for diversity and cultural competence of the other stakeholders. It is critical to the CASA mission that the rationale for its commitment to diversity is understood and appreciated by the many stakeholders who on any given day will play crucial roles as decision makers, advocates and service providers in the lives of children and their parents who come from different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Understanding Diversity

According to Santiago Rodriquez, nationally known expert and consultant in the area of diversity management and marketing, the diversity movement supports an assumption that the inclusion in the workplace of people from different cultural backgrounds has an additive, or positive impact on agency efficacy. It also asserts that work environments, organizations and institutions that learn to utilize individual differences will be more competitive or effective than those that fail to take advantage of these untapped resources. Diversity, therefore, means increased productivity, as well as, inclusiveness and appreciation for the rapidly changing complexion of the national workforce. The ground work for creating a culturally diverse work environment therefore includes organizational willingness to broaden the selection of new staff and a personal investment from existing staff to engage in a process of self-examination.

Becoming Culturally Competent

Culturally competent organizations and institutions employ and train workers in specific behaviors, attitudes, and policies that recognize, respect, and value the uniqueness of individuals and groups whose cultures are different from those associated with mainstream America. These populations are often identified as people of color, such as Americans of African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American descent. Cultural competence as an approach can be applied to agencies that serve all persons, because everyone in society has a culture and is a part of several subcultures, including those related to gender, age, income level, neighborhood, sexual orientation, religion, and physical ability. As a result, culturally competent agencies provide appropriate services to individuals, children and families of all backgrounds regardless of the ways in which they may differ from mainstream cultural norms.

Culturally Competent Programs:

- \$ Acknowledge culture as a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values and institutions;
- \$ Acknowledge that cross-cultural relationships between agencies and families may include major differences in world views and that these differences must be acknowledged and addressed;
- \$ Believe that cultural knowledge and sensitivity must be incorporated into program policymaking, administration, and services;
- \$ Understand that helping networks such as neighborhood organizations, community leaders, and spiritual counselors can be a vital source for recruitment of both staff and volunteers;
- \$ Recognize that concepts such as “family” and “community” are different for various cultural groups and for subgroups within cultures;
- \$ Understand that people from diverse racial and ethnic groups are usually best served by persons who are a part of or in tune with their culture; and
- \$ Believe that when advisory boards and programs include staff who share the cultural background of their clients, the programs tend to be more effective.

Action Plan for Cultural Competence

As an action plan, cultural competence means that increased opportunities must be provided for ongoing staff development and for employing multicultural staff. For many programs, cultural competence represents a new way of thinking about the philosophy, content, and delivery of agency services. Becoming culturally competent is a dynamic process that requires cultural knowledge and skill development at all service levels, including policymaking, administration, and service delivery.

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Polycymaking Level:

- appoint board members from the community so that voices from all groups of people within the community participate in decisions;
- actively recruit multiethnic and multiracial staff;
- provide ongoing staff training and support developing cultural competence;
- develop, mandate, and promote standards for culturally competent services;
- insist on evidence of cultural competence when contracting for services;
- nurture and support new community-based multicultural programs and engage in or support research on cultural competence;
- support the development of culturally appropriate assessment instruments and interview guides.

Administrative Level:

- include cultural competency requirements in staff job descriptions and discuss the importance of cultural awareness and competency with potential employees;
- ensure that all staff participate in regular, inservice cultural competency training;
- promote programs that respect and incorporate cultural differences; and
- consider whether the facility's location, hours, and staffing are accessible and whether its physical appearance is respectful of different cultural groups.

Service Level:

- learn as much as they can about a family's culture, while recognizing the influence of their own background on their responses to cultural differences;
- include neighborhood and community outreach efforts and involve community cultural leaders if possible;
- work within each person's family structure, which may include grandparents, other relatives, and friends;
- recognize, accept, and when appropriate, incorporate the role of those who give spiritual counsel (shaman, clergy);
- understand the different expectations people may have about the way services are offered (for example, sharing a meal may be an essential feature of a home visit; or access to a family may be gained only through an elder);
- know that, for some people, additional tangible services—such as assistance in obtaining housing, clothing, and transportation or resolving a problem with a child's school—are expected, and work with community agencies to make sure these services are provided;

- adhere to traditions relating to gender and age that may play a part in certain cultures (for example, in many racial and ethnic groups, elders are highly respected). With an awareness of how different groups show respect, staff can properly interpret the various ways people communicate.

The Value of Diversity to CASA's Work

The value of Diversity to CASA's work can be appreciated by viewing the national data that demonstrate the need to recruit volunteers from communities of color. According to The United States Department of Health & Human Services, the rate of maltreatment per thousand children in 1999 was 14.6 for California, 13.1 for Georgia, 10.4 for Illinois, 20.2 for Massachusetts, and 14.4 for New York. Moreover, USDHHS data illustrate that while 15 percent of the total population of children in the United States is African American, 45 percent of children in foster care in 1998 were African American. Latino children, who represent 14 percent of the total population of children in the United States, comprised 13% of the children in foster care in that same year.

In your efforts to explain the need for diversity to Stakeholders, make certain to include local data as a part of your argument in presentations to governing boards, program staff, or other interested persons. The Onondaga CASA program in Syracuse, New York found this an effective tool in their efforts to sell diversity to their agency board. For example, local data from the Onondaga County (Syracuse, New York) Department of Social Services, paint a bleak picture and disparity between minority and European American children. Although minorities, primarily African Americans, constitute 12 percent of the population, 55 percent of the foster care population were children of color in 1995, and 57 percent by October of 1998. The disproportionate and growing number of children of color in foster care provides a rationale for CASA programs to improve their capacity to recruit and retain volunteers from communities of color.

The benefits of diversity and the recruitment of CASA volunteers from communities of color are numerous. The following list represents a sharing of the invaluable experience the Onondaga CASA gained during its Demonstration Project period (1999-2001). The list provides a sample of the benefits of diversity, and therefore, is not exhaustive, or representative of the only possible outcomes. A diverse volunteer pool:

- Allows all volunteers – – whether from communities of color or from white communities – – to learn from their peers. Interacting across racial and cultural lines facilitates a sharing of perspectives and viewpoints. It is a crucial step in the diversity effort to move beyond racial and cultural myths, stereotyping, biased thinking, and mis-communication.
- Sends an important message about inclusion to the larger community about the value and benefits of multi-racial, multi-cultural consonance between service providers and the individuals, children and families they serve.
- Distinguishes CASA from other human services institutions, especially those historically viewed with suspicion by communities of color. Typically, child welfare agencies are often epitomized by white staff exercising critical oversight and

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monitoring functions over clients who disproportionately come from communities of color.

- Serves as a model for diversity and a valuable asset to the larger child welfare system. Onondaga's CASA contributes persons from communities of color and has introduced more culturally competent and sensitive perspectives that would not otherwise be available in the almost all white local child welfare system.
- Enables greater flexibility and a more careful match of volunteers with specific cases. Diversification attends to the reality that, in fact, there are circumstances and cases that can be better served by the ability to take into account race, ethnicity and culture.
- Supports efforts to train white board, staff, and volunteers to become culturally competent. The anticipated outcome is that increased knowledge about communities of color will contribute to a perceptual shift in attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately, behavior, as well as, increased value and respect for these communities.
- Provides insights and understanding of family issues that are culturally sensitive and help to determine what is in the best interest of the child.