Addressing Disproportionality and Disparity in Child Welfare

Iowa’s Response to Disproportionality
Disproportionality in Iowa

- **2007 GAO Report**
  - Iowa’s “disproportionality index” in foster care 3rd highest in nation for African American children, and 4th highest for Native American children

- **Children in child welfare system**
  - **African American** – 54 per 1000
    - 3.76% of child population, 13.79% of child welfare population
  - **American Indian** – 63 per 1000
    - 0.44% of child population, 1.87% of child welfare population
  - **Hispanic/Latino** – 17 per 1000
    - 5.91% of child population, 6.76% of child welfare population
  - **White** – 12 per 1000
    - 82.2% of child population, 66.37% of child welfare population
Iowa’s Work with Tribes

- Iowa’s Native American population concentrated in 2 counties – Tama & Woodbury
- Tama County – Sac & Fox of the Mississippi settlement
- Woodbury County
  - 3 states – Iowa, Nebraska, & South Dakota
  - Nearly 30 local Tribes
Work in Sioux City

- Formation of Community Initiative for Native Children and Families (CINCF) (2001)
- Public child welfare agency meetings with CINCF (2001 – present)
Alliance Dimension & Sioux City

Strategies

- Legislation, Policy Change & Finance Reform
  - Review of foster family licensing standards
  - Flexible resource pool
- Research, Evaluation & Data-Based Decision-Making
  - Disproportionality scorecard & social distance mapping
  - Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) reviews
- Youth, Parent & Community Partnership & Development
  - Truth, Healing and Reconciliation forum
  - CINCF collaboration
- Public Will & Communication
  - Elected Official forums
- Human Service Workforce Development
  - Native provided services & use of relative/community/tribal networks
  - Training (ICWA, Native American culture, Race – The Power of an Allusion)
- Practice Change
  - Native American child welfare unit & tribal liaisons
  - Use of healing ceremonies, sweats & other culturally competent practices
Related Legislative and Governor’s Office Activities

- **Legislature**
    - Active efforts, expert witness, placement preferences
  - Commission on Native American Affairs (2008)

- **Governor’s Office**
  - Quarterly meetings between state agencies (education, public health, human services, human rights, economic development, workforce, housing, corrections) and CINC (2008 – present)
Sioux City Results

- Reduction in foster care disproportionality rate: 28% decrease from 6.8 (2005) to 4.9 (2008)
- “DHS is more receptive to trying new services . . . A year or two ago, sending families to Flowering Tribe (substance abuse treatment for Oglalla Sioux women with children) would have been unheard of and now it’s considered part of a service option menu.” Guardian ad Litem
- “The DHS Native American Unit helped by having our family take the situation into our own hands and learn how the system works. The workers stood behind us and advocated for us, and helped us contact the Yankton Tribe for help too.” Family
Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)

- Polk County Participation in National BSC (2005 – 2006)
  - Specific strategies
  - Undoing Racism Training
  - Culturally competent family team meetings
  - Community engagement
  - Parent Partners
  - Pre-removal conferences & 24-hour check back
  - Child welfare – income maintenance coordination
  - Parent representation in the courtroom
  - Hair care
  - Hiring protocols
  - Reduction in foster care disproportionality: 55% decrease from 5.5 (2005) to 2.5 (2008)

- Development of statewide BSC to build capacity and momentum for statewide systemic change (2009)
Statewide Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)

- Framework for Change – Practice Areas
  - Engaging the family network as partners
  - Engaging with community partners and tribes
  - Engaging across systems (e.g., court, schools, law enforcement, corrections, medical, mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc.)
  - Addressing racial bias at multiple levels
  - Developing leadership
  - Key decision points
  - Resources, supports & services

- 8 sites/teams across state
  - DHS, parents, youth, community members, providers, Courts, legal community

- Faculty
  - Parents, youth, community members, Courts, Tribes, university, national leaders

- Connecting to Courts Catalyzing Change
Related State Level Work

- Partnership with University of Iowa Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Resource Center
  - Annual DMC Conference – Juvenile justice, child welfare, education
  - Data analysis & creation of disproportionality scorecards
  - Technical assistance (e.g., key decision points)

- Legislation
  - HF 2392 Minority Impact Statements
  - Governor’s Executive Order #4 re staff diversity
  - Children’s Justice priority
Challenges

- Lack of awareness of issue and contribution
- Complexity of issues/causes
- Uncomfortable subject

Lessons Learned/Critical Elements

- Parent/youth voice
- Community engagement, building relationships
- “Courageous” conversations
- Executive – Legislative – Judicial support
- Specific focus on disproportionality
- Embedding racial equity lens & disproportionality focus
- Data
- National attention & technical assistance
“The community is seeing action, not just words. Action helps them to deal with all the removals and terminations in the past.” Native community member