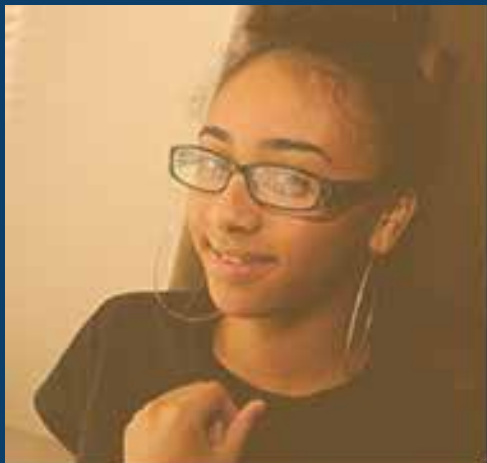


# FRESNO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:

Confronting Racial Inequities and Disproportionality to  
Improve Child Welfare Outcomes for Children & Families

BY KRISTEN WEBER



Over the last decade, state and county child welfare systems have increased their efforts to respond to the disparate outcomes that impact historically marginalized communities, particularly African American, Native American and Latino children and families. Nationally, children of color are over-represented in child welfare systems and experience worse and disparate outcomes than white children. Data around disproportionality and disparities are affected by regional dynamics—including the history of the community, current demographics, system leadership, local initiatives and funding—yet this is a widespread issue that requires a response from child welfare systems throughout the country. Efforts to date to address this problem have included an intensified focus on data that identify racial inequities, raising worker competence in understanding explicit and implicit bias, building strategic community partnerships and launching initiatives with promising or evidence-based practices to produce better results for families who are frequently over-represented in the child welfare system.

**F**resno County, California, offers important lessons to the field about its work to understand and confront racial inequities and ultimately improve outcomes for all children and families involved in its child welfare system. The rate of racial disproportionality in the Fresno County Department of Social Services (DSS) had been a long-standing phenomenon. Data starting as far back as 2000 showed that 24 percent of children and youth in the foster care system were African American, while the overall African American population in Fresno was only six percent. In 2002, 31 percent of white children who entered foster care went home to family within a year while only 13 percent of African American children did so. By 2013, African American children made up 14 percent of the foster care population (but five percent of the general population) and reunification rates within 12 and 24 months for African American children had improved but fluctuated over time.<sup>1</sup> Fresno County's improvement can be attributed to four key strategies:

1. Strong, sustained DSS leadership and commitment to ending disparities
2. Meaningful, robust and consistent community partnerships
3. Regularly seeking and understanding the experiences of youth and families of color served by DSS
4. Finding and taking advantage of new funding and reform opportunities

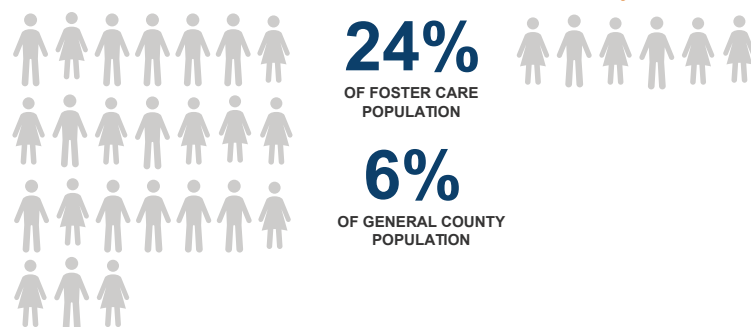
This case study details Fresno County's early efforts and the work still underway to address racial inequities and improve outcomes for all children and youth involved in the county's child welfare system.

### THE FOCUS ON RACE EQUITY BEGAN EARLY AND INVOLVED TESTING MULTIPLE STRATEGIES

Prior to 2003, the Fresno County DSS did not examine its data internally with any level of sophistication. DSS had operated in an insular manner—data were not regularly shared with communities nor did communities play a role in sharing their expertise or helping to shape policies and practices that affected the children, youth and families served by DSS. The Fresno DSS leader at the

time, Cathi Huerta, and her executive team made it a departmental priority to understand what was causing the over-representation of African American children in the child welfare system and determine how children and families could be better supported to remain safely with their families. To accomplish this priority,

#### African American Children in Fresno County in 2000



DSS recognized that it had to:

- understand the data
- ask the community for help
- improve its relationship and trust with different community groups and leaders
- become more transparent with families and the community about DSS operations and decision-making

<sup>1</sup> Reunification rates within 12 months of placement varied over time for African American children in large part because African American children are a small cohort of the children involved in child protective services and in the most recent years included a significant number of older youth as foster care was extended for youth up to age 21.





Furthermore, Fresno DSS needed to work with the community to create systems of accountability to ensure that workers had the right skills to support families and the appropriate services available to meet families' different and unique needs. Fresno's journey toward better results and increased equity has not been linear, but rather has been shaped by forces both within and external to DSS. Necessary forces to provide the supportive atmosphere for change in Fresno began more than 10 years ago and continue to this day.

### THE FORCES FOR CHANGE

In 2003, Fresno County began implementing *Family to Family*, a national initiative developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) to increase child welfare systems' ability to keep children safely with their families and in their own community. Family to Family supported Fresno's interest in improving practice, collecting and analyzing data and forming meaningful community partnerships to safely keep children within their families. With significant technical assistance from the AECF, Fresno developed and implemented Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings, which focused on assessing and addressing the individual needs of children and families by making decisions with families and their informal supports and promoting practices to support safe placement at home, with kin or in children's own communities if they must be removed from their homes.

As a part of this initiative, Fresno regularly collected and analyzed data by race and ethnicity to understand who the children in out-of-home care were, where they were placed and how long they were in out-of-home care. These data were shared with the community, whose leadership described it as "an uncomfortable, yet validating experience." Based on data analyses by zip codes, Fresno DSS conducted more intensive outreach to specific neighborhoods with the greatest number of children and

families involved with the child welfare system. Then, as a critical component of this initiative, DSS worked closely with these neighborhood residents, as well as African American community representatives from across the county, to help staff understand neighborhood mores, values and practices. Some community representatives began to participate in TDM meetings to support families and also supported DSS's self-evaluation efforts and regular review of child welfare data.

Initially, DSS shared data with the community through meetings, PowerPoint presentations and hard copy reports. As part of a broader effort to promote transparency and regular communication, by 2007 DSS began placing data about children and youth in out-of-home care on its **website** and these data were used in discussions with oversight bodies, committees, staff, funders and community partners and residents.

In 2006, DSS created the *Disproportionality Advisory Committee*, composed of internal staff, foster family agencies and other service providers, public defenders and other community stakeholders and partners. With a strong commitment from the child welfare director and agency leaders, the advisory committee set a goal to build awareness about structural and institutional racism for practitioners in the child welfare system. As a result of the committee's work, DSS staff participated throughout 2006 in the **Undoing Racism** training, a workshop delivered by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. The training was widely viewed as successful in providing greater awareness and competency on the history of racism, disproportionality and the importance of public systems maintaining accountability to communities. Training on institutionalized racism and oppression continued and staff began to participate in brown bag discussions on racial equity issues.

In 2006, the community representatives who participated with DSS on the Family to Family efforts felt their role supporting families at TDM meetings could and should be expanded. The families expressed a desire for these representatives to keep meeting with and assisting families as they negotiated the child welfare system and services. Thus, these representatives, led by Margaret Jackson, a professor in the social work department of Fresno State University, developed the **Cultural Broker Program**. Cultural Brokers are trained, community members who advocate for families who become involved in the child welfare system. They collaboratively work with child protection investigators by joining workers on visits with families of color and assisting with initial engagement efforts. Cultural Brokers help explain the process and services offered by child protective services and work to ensure assessments and services are culturally relevant. They may also participate in TDM meetings and offer other support to families as needed. Fresno DSS contracts with the Cultural Brokers Program and views this as a valuable program for engaging families and a direct strategy to reducing racial disproportionality and disparities.

By 2008, DSS was equipped to join a larger initiative called the **California Disproportionality Project Breakthrough Series Collaborative** (CDP), which was supported by Casey Family Programs. From July 2008 through May 2010, 15 teams representing 12 California counties designed and implemented strategies to address racial disparities. Teams worked to raise awareness about issues of race, culture, disproportionality and disparities; crafted and provided training; and tested various practice strategies to improve outcomes for African American and Native American children and families.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS<sup>2</sup>

By early 2009, these concerted efforts produced results—DSS saw an initial decline in the proportion of African American children represented in the child welfare system—from 24 percent of the child welfare population in foster care in 2000 to 17 percent of children in care in 2009. However, these results were not good enough for the community, DSS or the families they serve. Despite these improvements, compared with other children in care, African American children still experienced declining rates of reunification, longer placement episodes and low rates of exit to guardianship or adoption. DSS leadership felt stuck and wanted to understand more. Specifically, DSS wanted to focus on the agency's policies and practices to understand why many of the system deficits remained.

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*One of the biggest benefits of participating in these activities was to build our relationship and trust with the community.*

WENDY OSIKAFO - CHILD WELFARE DIRECTOR

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Simultaneous to Fresno's early efforts in 2003, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), in partnership with AECF and Casey Family Programs, had been working to understand how public systems' policies and practices contributed to racial inequities in child welfare. CSSP used a methodology known as an Institutional Analysis (IA) to reveal system contributors in Michigan and was looking for another jurisdiction in which to test this approach. AECF, viewing Fresno County as an innovative and high-performing county in implementing the Family to Family initiative, suggested the county try the IA. Fresno County readily agreed and opened its system to examination. The county leadership viewed the IA as an opportunity to gather additional data and insight into contributors to racial disparities, as well as enhance its community partnerships and continue to publicly demonstrate commitment to tackling racial inequities. These various dynamics coalesced to create a system not only ready for deeper analysis but also positioned to act on findings.

## Key Findings from the Institutional Analysis

Through a set of iterative, structured interviews, observations and text analysis, a trained team of local and national partners collected information to better understand the organizational factors that contributed to African American children experiencing **low reunification rates** with their parents. This process—the Institutional Analysis (IA)<sup>3</sup>—also examined how DSS and its partners supported **the need for stability and nurturance** for children and youth who are not reunified with their parents.

Overall, the IA found a gap between the county's **intent** to move African American children out of foster care to their birth families

<sup>2</sup> The Institutional Analysis is a diagnostic tool that examines structural and institutional contributors to poor outcomes of a particular population with a public system. For more information, see the Institutional Analysis methodology brief in this series.

or other permanent options and the actual **outcomes** experienced by these children and families. The IA documented that DSS did not act with a sense of urgency to safely return African American children to their families or to find other safe, permanent and loving options. DSS did not have the tools and protocols to support workers in understanding the unique strengths and problems faced by African American families. Many African American families entered the child welfare system with complex challenges in their lives. Some of their problems were economic—poverty, homelessness and unemployment—while others included child maltreatment, domestic violence, mental illness and substance abuse. The IA found that DSS did not assess each family’s unique strengths and needs and, thus, created service plans with similar requirements for all families. In addition, assessments were categorical, focusing separately on substance abuse, mental health or domestic violence issues rather than understanding how all of these issues may be interacting and operating within a family system.

Service plans for families routinely consisted of parenting classes, drug testing, domestic violence classes, individual therapy and supervised visitation. These services tended to be centrally located in Fresno rather than in the communities where African American parents lived, and the operating hours of service providers were inconvenient for working parents. In addition, there was minimal evidence that DSS helped support parents in achieving economic stability by linking them with other available services, such as housing programs and benefits for teen parents.

The IA also found that the child welfare system was not organized in a way that fostered permanent, nurturing relationships for children and youth in out-of-home care. Specifically, DSS did not direct workers to proactively and consistently find permanent families for older youth. As a result, youth age 10 and older were uniformly considered by workers to be unadoptable.

## MOVING FORWARD: IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

According to the current child welfare director, Wendy Osikafo, the Institutional Analysis report was “painful and eye-opening to read but made us see things differently.” DSS now had information about how the system itself was not treating African American families as individuals with unique needs and strengths, but was rather moving them through an assembly line of workers to ser-

vices that did not support families to be stable, heal and safely care for their children. The report, while recognizing the aspirations and some promising efforts, presented hard-hitting details of the negative effects of policies and practices on families DSS had intended to help.

## Immediate Efforts

### ► Create a Communication Strategy

DSS, the community and supporting organizations spent considerable time thinking about and discussing the most productive manner to release this report. The goal was not to vilify DSS but to use the report to support reform efforts and enhance community engagement. As soon as the data collection had been completed, DSS began multiple conversations with various community leaders and groups about the IA’s initial findings—again, affirming its commitment to transparency with the community about its efforts and shortcomings. Recognizing that such a report, standing on its own, would position the department for potentially debilitating criticism from the Board of Supervisors and the media, DSS leaders asked community partners to support them publicly. In addition, Casey Family Programs, on-site **Family to Family** technical assistance providers and CSSP provided planning and resource support to the department in shaping and implementing effective strategies to communicate the findings of the report and the response of DSS. As a result of a thoughtful communication strategy, DSS did not receive negative media coverage from the report and received extensive community support when DSS leaders testified before the Board of Supervisors on the findings of the IA. DSS came out of the IA process not only with valuable insights to shape their reform efforts, but also with enhanced community partnerships and momentum to keep moving the reform efforts forward. As part of its ongoing communication strategy, Fresno continued to talk publicly about and report on the progress the county was making to address the IA findings.

### ► Create and Act on Initial Steps in Response to the Report

Recognizing that reform requires immediate responses to maintain the momentum coming out of the IA process, DSS launched reform efforts swiftly. DSS worked with the community early on to craft the county’s initial action steps in response to the report findings, as well as to begin the work to develop longer-term reform strategies. The following chart provides a few examples of the initial activities.

<sup>3</sup> The IA methodology uses data collection and analyses traditionally used in case studies, organizational assessments and managerial audits combined with the concepts and assumptions of institutional ethnography. The IA does not identify the shortcomings or failures of individual case workers, judges, lawyers or police but instead identifies and examines problematic institutional assumptions, logic, policies and protocols that shape the actions of practitioners. The IA methodology requires a specifically trained team. Much of the data analysis occurs concurrent with data collection. Each new insight or piece of information is considered in light of previous information gathered, starting with the original analysis of a jurisdiction’s quantitative data by race and ethnicity. In Fresno, much of the quantitative data examined were reunification rates and length of stay for children and youth in out-of-home care.

The on-site data collection team debriefed as a whole team at the end of each day and representatives of the IA Advisory committee (a group of community leaders). Fresno County Quality Assurance staff and leadership joined in the discussions. The team met with Fresno County child welfare leadership at the end of the on-site work and provided an overview of the preliminary findings, asking for feedback and clarification. In this way, the process promoted transparency with Fresno leadership and community partners. Initial data collection began in June 2009, with on-site data collection occurring in November and December and a final report jointly released to the field in October 2010.



INITIAL ACTION STEPS

Issue Identified	Action Steps
<p><i>There is a gap between the County's intent to move African American children out of foster care to their biological families or other permanent options and the actual outcomes that the families experience.</i></p> <p><i>DSS did not understand the unique strengths and needs of African American families.</i></p>	<p>Provided Racial Sobriety training to entire workforce to increase awareness of each individual's opportunity to mitigate personal bias.</p> <p>Established a Quality Supervision approach that supports supervisors in modeling, coaching and guiding Fresno social workers to continuously develop and enhance their engagement and teaming skills with families.</p> <p>Expanded the Joint Community Response practice—a strategy involving a coordinated joint response between a social worker and a Cultural Broker and/or Parent Partner to more successfully engage African American families and conduct more accurate, upfront assessment of family's needs.</p>
<p><i>Services tended to be centrally located in Fresno, rather than in the communities where African American parents lived. The operating hours were inconvenient for working parents.</i></p>	<p>Implemented visitation contracts that include expanded visitation hours (9 a.m. – 8 p.m., Monday through Saturday and Holidays) in the neighborhoods in which their clients lived.</p>
<p><i>Fresno County DSS, through policies and practice, did not act with a sense of urgency to safely return African American children to their families or to find other safe, permanent and loving options.</i></p> <p><i>The Department does not direct workers to proactively and consistently find permanent families for older youth.</i></p>	<p>Kinship Resource Center—planning efforts began for the development of a center that will provide support and resources to relative caregivers</p> <p>Implemented Permanency Teaming—a practice that focuses on building a circle of support that will stay with the family beyond their involvement with the child welfare system.</p>

Source: DSS Child Welfare Annual Report, 2011

Long-Term Reform Strategies

DSS used the experience of the Institutional Analysis to shape its long-term planning to improve case practice work and create institutional changes to support better practice. Fresno continued to share and discuss with the public the findings of the IA and in its 2011 annual report detailed IA findings and efforts the department planned to undertake.

The IA findings helped shape DSS’s five-year strategic plan. This plan, anchored in the development and implementation of a new

case practice model, works to integrate various initiatives and ensure that each effort supported the agency’s new mission, vision and case practice model. DSS leadership and staff had described themselves as suffering from “multiple initiative disorder.” In their desire to effect system change, DSS had brought in many different and promising initiatives, including the work on reducing racial disparities. Unfortunately, these initiatives were not integrated into an overall, unifying framework and were not implemented uniformly throughout the agency or sustained over time after initial funding and technical assistance ended. Thus, DSS recognized the need to have a new, intentional mission and vision statement that focused on partnering with families and communities.

Additionally, as a result of the IA report, DSS recognized the importance of moving the system from a focus predominantly on complying with state and federal mandates to one that also regularly sought to understand how its interventions affected families and supported workers in engaging with families. DSS leadership also recognized that it needed to help workers and the system be more attentive to the trauma experienced by many families, and that for workers to better help families, the system needed to attend to the secondary trauma experienced by workers.

There have been five child welfare directors from the beginning of Fresno County’s efforts to address racial disparities to the present, and each director has supported the findings of the IA and worked toward system reform. These directors helped position the county to take advantage of new grant opportunities and develop new systems of service delivery to better support the needs of African American

families. These directors focused Fresno DSS on the following areas, which are incorporated into the current strategic plan:

- Practice Model Implementation
- Community Involvement
- System Alignment
- Continuous Quality Improvement

### ► Practice Model Implementation

In 2010, the California Department of Social Services received a federal grant to develop a comprehensive and culturally responsive approach to practice and system change designed to improve permanency outcomes for all children and reduce disparities in outcomes for those children at highest risk of long-term foster care – specifically African American and Native American children in foster care. Fresno County was chosen as one of four counties to participate in this grant. The grant, California Partners for Permanency (CAPP), supported these counties in developing a new child and family practice model. As noted, the IA found the system did not have a full understanding of the families whom it served and thus families' needs were not being met. To reverse this condition, Fresno County DSS leaders knew they needed to find a way to organize the work differently and change the focus of all involved. The CAPP grant award provided the resources to move ahead quickly. The Institutional Analysis positioned Fresno County DSS well to partner with communities and other CAPP counties in developing and implementing a practice model that would eventually integrate with other existing initiatives and proven practices into a statewide practice model.

The CAPP practice model created a framework to organize workers focus on engaging, supporting and healing families in a respectful and collaborative manner with the families themselves. During the development of the CAPP practice model, DSS collaborated with community partners. DSS also asked community members and families (those formerly involved with the child welfare system) what type of behavior they would like to see from case workers. Fresno DSS and community leaders attended the CAPP design meetings. Thus, the CAPP practice model incorporates 23 behaviors, in part identified by families and community partners. Examples of these case worker behaviors include:

- Listens with openness
- Explores relationships
- Uses cultural lens
- Listenes for loss
- Tailors supports to underlying needs

As part of this grant, supervisors learned to coach workers on how to consistently exercise these behaviors with families. DSS also examines the fidelity of the CAPP practice model by combining an agency coach with a community partner to observe interactions of workers in meetings with the family and their circle of support. The fidelity data help the organization understand how well they are training, coaching and supporting workers to use

the 23 behaviors in diverse family contexts and cultures. The heightened scrutiny on system support for the practice model holds the organization and system accountable for supporting staff to engage and work collaboratively and effectively with families—another key need identified by the IA. Fresno was the first county to implement the CAPP practice model and begin conducting Fidelity Assessments of the 23 behaviors.<sup>4</sup> This innovative practice model, as it was designed and implemented, includes a strong focus on community partnership and providing supports such as

coaching to build the confidence and competence of workers in using the 23 behaviors. The federal government and others will evaluate its effectiveness, but at this point, only anecdotal information is available as to its benefits.

#### *Dismantling Policies that Work Against Practice Model Behaviors and Outcomes*

In response to the IA and as part of developing the CAPP practice model, DSS leadership spent time identifying and dismantling policy myths that contributed to poor outcomes for children, youth and families—policies that workers thought existed and acted on that in fact did not exist and were detrimental. Two examples of policy myths were:

## THE NEW MISSION

*The mission of Fresno County Child Welfare Services is to help children who have been maltreated or are at risk of maltreatment. We do this by partnering with their families and communities to prevent further harm, preserve family connections, restore positive and stable family interactions, and rebuild each family's capacity to safely and successfully nurture their children's growth and development.*

<sup>4</sup> See Fresno County update, [http://cfpic.org/pdfs/capp/RE-CAPP%20FRESNO\\_MAR14\\_P1.pdf](http://cfpic.org/pdfs/capp/RE-CAPP%20FRESNO_MAR14_P1.pdf).

- **MYTH—Workers were not required to look for permanent home for youth older than age 10.** As a result of this myth, workers were not searching diligently for permanent placements for older youth. Youth were remaining in care, unnecessarily for long periods of time without the benefit of a permanent, nurturing family. In June 2009, 53 percent of African American children had been in care eight years or more, but by December 2014, DSS had improved practice such that 30 percent of African American children had been in care eight years or more. In 2014, DSS ensured that 50 percent of children had a completed adoption within 24 months of detention. Twenty percent of these adoptions were children older than nine years of age.

- **MYTH—Parents who initially had supervised visits could not progress to unsupervised visits until they had completed all, or nearly all, requirements of their case plan.** No protocol existed to support workers in moving parents to unsupervised visits. Workers believed they had to wait for case plan completion before moving toward unsupervised visits. Thus, the amount of visits parents could have with their children was limited and attachment among family members was compromised. In response, DSS developed with the community a visitation model to provide guidance about what parental behaviors (rather than task completion) workers should look for to support a change to unsupervised visits. This model emphasizes both safety and relationship between children and parents and encourages the team to revisit on a regular basis the need for supervised visitation.

#### ► **Community Involvement**

As previously described, by the time the IA occurred DSS had made consistent efforts to engage and work with the community

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*Our work with the community is an important part of our journey. Our work with the community went beyond just town hall meetings, we relied on the community to reform the system with us.*

WENDY OSIKAFO - CHILD WELFARE DIRECTOR

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to improve its system. Transparency about the IA findings served to strengthen community engagement rather than upset it. DSS leadership continued to engage key advisors and leaders in the community, which led to changes in the Request for Proposals processes. These advisors also provided advice and guidance to DSS leadership on disparity issues and the development of the strategic plan and the case practice model. Further, the county includes community partners in assessing case workers fidelity to the case practice model. Fresno has expanded its Cultural Broker program and has community and parent partners available to support families by participating in Team Decision Making meetings. Additionally, the community worked with DSS to customize an existing parenting program to have a cultural lens to better support African American parents. DSS contracts with community groups and members for their time.

#### ► **System Alignment**

The IA urged DSS to restructure and align its system to support the new practice model and promote better engagement and support of families. In an earlier effort to attend to the many complex mandates in child welfare, DSS had created many specialized, non-case carrying worker positions. As a result of this internal worker specialization, families were experiencing too many workers and were unable to form meaningful and productive relationships with their assigned case workers. Services needed to better meet the needs of African American families—they needed be culturally relevant and also aligned with the new practice model. To remedy, DSS:

- decreased the number of specialized worker positions and integrated case management divisions to reduce the number of workers a family might experience and to increase a worker's holistic knowledge of a family.
- changed contracts, such as ones with visitation centers, to increase hours and days families could visit one another. New locations were selected closer to where families lived.
- worked to align partners (such as Family Drug Court) and service providers with the new case practice model. DSS leadership found that some system providers, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment services, had their own processes and practice models in place that could not quickly become aligned with the new child welfare practice model. Thus, DSS supported a community-based system of care that could more readily include trauma-informed treatment and other essential elements of the case practice model.

#### ► **Continuous Quality Improvement**

The IA found that Fresno County DSS was a system with good intentions to work with families, but insufficient systems of accountability to ensure that families received quality services that matched their needs and that fami-



lies encountered professionals who supported them in healing and reunifying their family. DSS has developed many components necessary to have a strong, continuous quality improvement system—Fidelity Assessments, Quality Assurance unit, for example. The remaining work is to ensure these components are organized in a way to inform one another and provide timely and more comprehensive feedback on system functioning.

### WHAT HAS WORKED FOR FRESNO COUNTY

Fresno County is one example of sustained, focused work to reduce racial disparities and ultimately improve outcomes of all children and youth. The work of DSS and the community provide the child welfare field with some valuable insight into one county's journey.

*"The process is the most important piece, not the final product. The system is made up of well-intentioned, committed individuals. But if you don't set up your system for the outcome you desire, you won't achieve it."*

*"We learned you won't move fast enough, you will make mistakes—but we stayed at the table, we didn't defend or shy away from our mistakes—and thankfully the community stayed at the table too. Without them, this work would never have been done."*—Wendy Osifako

What worked for Fresno may or may not work for other places, yet it is worth articulating that Fresno has been successful in part because of the factors listed below.

Fresno DSS is a continuously evaluating and improving child welfare system. Fresno began its efforts with African American families, and now has a sufficient infrastructure and culture in place to advance efforts to improve outcomes for different populations served by DSS. Currently, DSS has expanded its equity focus to understand its shortcomings and improve outcomes for Native American and Latino children and youth and youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

## FRESNO COUNTY SUCCESS FACTORS

- 1** DSS leadership has brought to the forefront the **lived experiences of the families** with whom they work. DSS regularly examines the impact of decision-making, policies and protocols on the lives of families.
- 2** Since 2003, there have been five directors of child welfare. However, each leader has demonstrated consistent **commitment to addressing racial disparities**. Leaders have maintained a willingness to continually examine data and be open to criticism of their structure and institutional functioning without being defensive.
- 3** DSS has valued being **transparent with and inclusive** of community partners in efforts to address racial disparity by sharing quantitative data over time and the findings from the IA as well as working with them on strategies moving forward. In this way, DSS has created public accountability for maintaining reform efforts.
- 4** DSS incorporated strategies to address the findings of the **Institutional Analysis** into existing strategic planning work. The findings were not read once and then shelved away but continue to shape the work of the agency.
- 5** The county has been **opportunistic**—DSS used a federal grant opportunity to further refine and develop strategies based in part from the findings of the Institutional Analysis.
- 6** DSS has shifted its focus from being a system that is primarily focused on compliance with state and federal rules and regulations to also heavily **focusing on engaging and effectively working with families**.

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*Our work is not done. Other populations struggle. How do we better serve them? Deepening our understanding of each family involved in the system to better serve them is part of our ongoing journey.”* WENDY OSIKAFO - CHILD WELFARE DIRECTOR

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## 2015 Institutional Analysis Series



*The remaining papers in this series describe in more detail findings from the IAs conducted to date and provide policy and practice recommendations.*

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The Center for the Study of Social Policy is a national organization recognized for its leadership in shaping policy, reforming public systems and building the capacity of communities. We support elected officials, public administrators, families and neighborhood residents to take the actions they need. Our goal is to make sure children can learn, develop and thrive with the support of strong families, in safe and healthy communities.

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