



# Change the WORLD

Workgroup on Racial Disparities in Kansas



Advocating for racial equity in child welfare

The Kansas Strong Steering Committee, in partnership with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) has convened a workgroup to assess and address racial disproportionality and disparities experienced by Black or African American children and families who are involved with the child welfare system in Wyandotte County Kansas.

## The Need

- Black children represent 13.8% of the national child population and make up 24.3% of the foster care population.
- Placement stability is lower for Black children even when accounting for age and trauma symptoms.
- Reunification of Black families occurs at lower and slower rates as compared to their White counterparts in foster care.



## The Guiding Questions

The Wyandotte County Institutional Analysis was guided by two research questions:

1. How does it come about that Black families with young children (ages 0-5 years) experience **low and slow reunification rates**?
2. How does the child welfare system, prevention services, and other partners **support the bonding and well-being** of Black families and young children?

## The Approach

To answer these questions, the workgroup conducted interviews and focus groups with 58 participants including: (1) Black parents with lived experience of the foster care system; (2) non-relative and relative foster parents who had cared for Black children in foster care; (3) front-line caseworkers and supervisors; (4) administrators in public and private child welfare agencies; (5) administrators and professionals in other community-based child and family serving agencies (e.g., hospitals, early childhood); and (6) court and legal personnel.

## Institutional Analysis (IA)

### A process of uncovering systemic bias and racism

IA is a diagnostic process of collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data in a system and community to understand how families experience child welfare systems. It aims to reveal and address the *disconnect* between what children/youth and their families need to be safe, and how institutions are organized to act.

The Work Group on Racial Disparity is one strategy of *Kansas Strong for Children and Families*, a federally-funded initiative that aims to support Kansas child welfare as a collaborative, data-driven system that achieves positive outcomes for children's well-being, safety, and permanency. Collaborators include the Kansas Department for Children and Families, Cornerstones of Care, DCCCA, KVC Kansas, Saint Francis Ministries, TFI Family Services, Kansas Family Advocacy Network, Children's Alliance of Kansas and University of Kansas School of Social Welfare.

For more info, contact the Kansas Strong Project Manager, Sarah McCall, at [saritam@ku.edu](mailto:saritam@ku.edu).

# Engaging the Community



Black community leaders in Wyandotte County served as advisors to the *Change the WORLD* project. Community leaders contributed by providing broad community context on history and perceptions of child welfare in the Black community, reviewed initial themes for clarity and credibility, and will participate in generating action plans to implement recommendations. To ensure accountability for action and change, the workgroup developed a covenant as a compass guiding our purpose and intentions. The covenant is a living document binding members to the community, ensuring a commitment to laboring for an equitable and just child welfare system. The covenant states our guiding belief in the equitable treatment and worth of every person, that change is possible and everyone contributing is vital, and that transforming our organizations to be more just and equitable is imperative. Finally, the covenant describes the ways in which members can challenge racism to realize these beliefs in action.

*“I think imminent risk is assumed in so many of those cases...and I’m honestly just confused... ‘how the hell did we get here?’ ...there are so many resources that could’ve mitigated that...White parents don’t seem to have the same onus of responsibility.” -Frontline Worker*

## Key Themes



1. The system’s response to Black parents’ trauma and loss was frequently indifferent, lacking in compassion and empathy, and hyper-judgmental.
2. Within placements, anti-Blackness, power, and privilege were used in favor of White foster parents and to the detriment of Black birth parents.
3. The system was widely and deeply structured to prioritize and promote child-saving over supporting and preserving Black families.
4. The most pervasive and problematic response to Black families’ needs, including non-safety needs based in material and financial hardship, was removal of children rather than provision of resources and supports.
5. Services were centered in compliance and monitoring and were not organized for engaging, supportive, strengths-oriented, culturally-relevant, and individualized services to Black families
6. Services were designed to be “color blind,” not accounting for Black families’ culture, community history and context, historical racism, ongoing oppression, and cumulative disadvantage
7. The court and legal system also harmed Black families by not assuring quality legal representation and authentic parental engagement in court processes.

## Recommendations for Action

1. Center parent, youth, and relative engagement in agency and court practices.
2. Reduce caseloads for caseworkers and attorneys to decrease turnover and support comprehensive and race-conscious engagement practices.
3. Provide routine anti-racism and cultural humility training with ongoing coaching or consultation.
4. Reimagine the child welfare system into a system of child and family well-being that incorporates poverty reduction strategies and considers intersectional discrimination.
5. Broaden the array of community supports and simplify the pathways to accessing supports.
6. Refine trainings and policies around mandated reporting to operationalize collaborations among reporters, service providers, and child welfare professionals to promote shared accountability for family well-being.
7. Institutionalize accountability to intentional organizational and data-driven strategies to achieve racial equity.
8. Refine data tracking processes to routinely examine racial differences in processes/outcomes.
9. Develop shared responsibility for reviewing data among multi-stakeholder groups where diverse views on the system can be leveraged for actionable change.
10. Establish ongoing community advisory panels of Black community members and leaders.