

Testimony for Governor's Task Force on Child Protection
January 8, 2015

Phyllis Sloan as Spokesperson for African American
Working Group on Child Protection

Introduction

- Madam co-chairs and members of the Task Force,
I am Phyllis Sloan, the Executive Director of La Creche Early Childhood Centers, Inc.
- I am here today as a spokesperson for the African American Working Group on Child Protection
- We are a group of professionals working with families and children primarily on Minneapolis North Side, and who have ongoing interactions with county child protection
- Until recently there has not been a lot of interest in the community in reforming the child welfare system
- However this group started to form last February, well before the recent media attention to child protection and the convening of this Task Force, because of concerns about the safety and well-being of our children
- Our purpose today is to present ideas and recommendations to help the Task Force carry out its mission particularly as it relates to addressing racial disparities in the child welfare system
- In addition, earlier this week we were asked to share any thoughts we have about the role of Family Assessment. We have not talked about

Family Assessment specifically in our meetings, but we did poll our members for their thoughts and I will share their responses with you as well

Developing a Culturally Skilled Workforce

1. It is important to tackle racial disparities as early as possible in the relationship between child protection and the family, i.e. not wait until they are deep into the system.
2. To succeed with this in any culture it is critically important to build relationships with families.
3. This requires staff who are skilled and knowledgeable about the culture the family is from.
4. The Working Group recommends that the state take intentional steps towards building these capabilities in the child welfare workforce.
 - a. First would be to develop and fund a paraprofessional position to work side-by-side with child protection and child welfare workers as a cultural mediator/translator.

This person would:

 - i. Be from the same culture as the family being engaged.
 - ii. Graduate from a rigorous training program leading to some form of certification or licensure, to ensure an understanding of the child welfare system and basic clinical skills.
 - iii. The role of the paraprofessional would not be to advocate for the parents in opposition to the system but rather to:
 1. Help the parents and the child welfare worker communicate more effectively.
 2. Help the parents understand and

- meet the requirements of the child protection and court systems, and navigate successfully through them.
3. Facilitate connecting families with services.
 - b. As an additional route or enhancement to this approach, develop a certification program that would prepare BSW and MSW workers to work in specific cultures through internships
 - i. These would immerse the workers in that culture.
 - ii. It is especially important that the internships be hands-on experiences and that great care be given to developing the training curriculum and having enough resources to provide the necessary supervision.
 5. In addition, the Working Group recommends a thorough analysis and, where needed, strengthening of current cultural competency training for child welfare workers.

Adapting Evidence-Based Practices to Work Well in Non-Mainstream Cultures

1. In our experience evidence based practices do not need to be fundamentally changed to work in non-mainstream cultures, but they need to be introduced to families and implemented with knowledge and expertise about how they will be perceived by people who are from various cultures.
2. Better preparation of the workforce recommended earlier will help with this 'translation'
3. In addition the Working Group recommends

funding new research into evidence-based interventions that are working in other states, with a particular eye to those that will work well across cultures. Working Group members have suggested some examples to explore. They are not in my personal area of expertise so I am not prepared to discuss them today, but they are in our handout and we would be happy to work with the Task Force to explore them and other examples more specifically

- a. Examples in the clinical world may include the use of narrative stories, mindfulness, and trauma-informed therapy.
- b. Parenting skills training may include models such as Parent Child Interaction Therapy and Triple P.
- c. Review research on how to develop relationships in families in non-mainstream cultures such as by Franklin Boyd

Ombudsperson for Children

The Working Group also recommends funding an Ombudsperson for Children.

1. This position or positions would be housed in the Office of the Governor and would respond to concerns from community members, foster and adoptive parents, and professionals about counties' responses to child maltreatment situations. These may be to follow up on repeated maltreatment reports that were not responded to by counties, or difficulty in getting services for foster and adoptive children, or similar concerns.
2. The Working Group suggests that the state research similar positions and offices in other states such as the Georgia Office of the Child

Advocate to determine the best approach for Minnesota.

Increased supervision of counties by the Department of Human Services

Along with others, the Working Group is concerned about the lack of consistency in child welfare practice among counties.

The group supports recommendations by the Task Force to address this issue, including particularly:

1. Require counties to follow the same guidelines for screening child maltreatment reports.
2. Implement accountability measures to ensure that standards are being followed.

Family Assessment

1. While our group did not discuss Family Assessment in detail, there was a clear consensus in our meetings that the safety of children is paramount.
2. We understand that one issue is whether to interview children prior to and separately from the adults in the initial contact
3. We were not able to reach everyone in the group on short notice, those that responded landed clearly on the side of interviewing children separately from and prior to talking with the adults in the family. This is obviously so that children are as free as possible to speak. We think this can be done in a respectful way particularly if the Task Force supports the ideas presented earlier about paraprofessional navigators and improved training in cultural competency
4. On the other hand, once workers have been able

to get the facts in this manner we agree with the philosophy of working with parents to keep families out of court system, if that can be done while ensuring the safety and well-being of the children.