Child Safety Forward

A National Initiative to Reduce Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities and Injuries Through a Collaborative, Community-Based Approach

Evaluation Brief:
Strategy to Assess and Address Racism

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Evaluation+

During the planning year, Child Safety Forward took a developmental evaluation approach that included building a theory of change that would lead to a strengthened child and family well-being system. This approach elevated learning from the technical assistance team as well as through the demonstration sites' qualitative and quantitative data-informed implementation plans.[1] Based on this learning, the refined version of the theory of change included greater intentionality around three core conditions we believe are necessary to having this impact:

- Elevate families into relationships of equal power within systems
- Build intentional strategy to systematically assess and address racism
- Sustain communications strategy

This is one of three briefs that takes a deeper look at each of these conditions through the lens of Child Safety Forward learning during the first year of implementation. It is designed to highlight how Child Safety Forward is defining this condition, the strategies and approaches it believes will advance this condition and the intermediate outcomes from those strategies. While not mutually exclusive, the purpose of this brief is to define what Child Safety Forward means by *build intentional strategy to systematically assess and address racism* and, based on early learning during the first year of Child Safety Forward implementation, create a roadmap for this strategy. These roadmaps will be further refined through the implementation study conducted at the end of the second year of implementation.

Learning Approach

The learning on how to build intentional strategy to systematically assess and address racism was gained through data collected during the planning year, discussions and relevant observations and notes from biweekly strategy meetings with demonstration sites, monthly technical assistance team meetings, review of demonstration site implementation plans, literature used to inform Child Safety Forward technical assistance (see references), and outreach to sites to share their learning about equity efforts within Child Safety Forward. Additionally, the design thinking convening in September 2021 focused on this condition.

Defining Strategy to Assess and Address Racism

The negative impacts of racism are undeniable. Repeated evidence shows that young people of color experience disparate health and well-being outcomes and that the trauma of oppression moves from generation to generation. Further, child- and family-serving systems, by design, reproduce racial inequality. For Child Safety Forward sites to move toward a child and family well-being system, where child protection agencies, community partners, neighbors and families share a responsibility to ensure children thrive, they need more than a set of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) values, policies, and practices. They need to actively work to dismantle white ideologies that reinforce systemic oppression.

Child Safety Forward's theory of change adopted the definition of deep equity:

> *working toward outcomes in ways that model dignity, justice, and love without recreating harm in our structures, strategies and working relationships. (ChangeElemental)*

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[1] The five demonstration sites are: Cook County Health in Illinois; Indiana Department of Health; Michigan Department of Health and Human Services; St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut; and Sacramento County, California's Child Abuse Prevention Council.

To intentionally assess and address racism in child- and family-serving systems, strategy needs to focus on nurturing well-being, enhancing protective factors, and adopting values that shift structures of power between systems and communities.

Early Learning to Inform Framework

Child Safety Forward did not embed an emphasis on systemic racism in its original design. However, the elevation of racial tensions in America during the early months of this initiative (summer 2020) and the data collected at the community level pointed directly at the need to elevate this issue in technical assistance and strategy development. The design of the technical assistance shifted early in the planning year to link equity to each of the technical assistance areas. The technical assistance team's decision to elevate racism as part of ongoing conversations with demonstration sites became more formalized at biweekly strategy meetings with the sites. In addition, the invited facilitators of convenings were encouraged to connect the dots between convening topics and equity. Additionally, at the beginning of the first year of implementation, Romero Davis joined as a co-lead of the technical assistance team.[2] His presence at regular strategy meetings changed the conversation and has helped centralize relationship building and more critical reflection on how power plays out across systems. As a Black male with deep community experience, he has brought credibility and experience with racism that was lacking on the Child Safety Forward technical assistance team.

While Child Safety Forward implementation plans include equity strategies, intentional strategy to systematically assess and address racism is still limited. The most specific actions intended by demonstration sites included using tools to conduct a racial equity audit and training in implicit bias. More indirect, but sustainable, strategies included in plans emphasized the importance of representation of parents and, in some communities, the recognition that representation needs to result in a shift in power.

The roadmap at the end of this brief remains untested, but it has been informed by insights gathered through Child Safety Forward implementation and technical assistance:

- While there is a general commitment to addressing resulting disparities in outcomes, there is not a strong commitment to dismantling the learned biases and aspects of systemic racism that perpetuate them. An equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategy is an important precursor to preparing organizations and collaborations rooted in white ideology to tackle systemic racism. This is a "meet people where they are at" strategy that can start the conversation. An early EDI strategy tends to focus on individual and organizational work that begins to unpack belief systems and bias in how data and evidence are viewed in the process of resource distribution and the design of policies and programs. However, an EDI strategy is not enough to undue racism.
- Multiple methods of data collection, including qualitative and quantitative, will help uncover deep insight into the experiences and external conditions influencing BIPOC and other groups that sit outside systems of power (e.g., individuals with disabilities, LGBTI+). These methods need to be paired with accurately identifying and understanding disparate outcomes and their causes. Simple disaggregation of data by race does not do enough to highlight the ways that

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[2] Romero Davis is a senior program manager at Social Current and brings substantial experience in working with agencies in areas such as polyvictimization; trauma in families; equity, diversity and inclusion; juvenile justice; and domestic violence. Romero also supports Social Current's equity, diversity and inclusion work helping to create networks and linkages to solid EDI strategy.

race intersects with other aspects of identity and validate how systems rooted in racism continue to overload the day-to-day experience of parents. Absent this understanding, strategic approaches to improve well-being and reduce fatalities will fall short of their intended outcomes. For example, the technical assistance team has flagged unsafe sleep practices as an area where root causes such as racism and poverty are often overlooked, and solutions are created to address individual behavior rather than designing system-level change to improve underlying conditions.

- It is difficult to shift systems rooted in racism without the voice and leadership of people of color in the system, including parents and youth. Members of the technical assistance team and demonstration sites have shared that conversations on racism are challenging and uncomfortable whether they identify as white or as a person of color. The perceptions and understandings of the system brought forward by the few Child Safety Forward members who identify as people of color are extremely valuable; however, sharing these thoughts can be a burden because these individuals are usually the racial minority in these conversations. There must be intentional efforts to train, recruit, and promote a more diverse leadership and staffing of system design positions that includes space for those who bring lived experience and, in particular, come from BIPOC communities.

Resources

Hanson Langford, B., Kraus, S.M., & Legters, L. (2021, May). Investing in the well-being and well-becoming of America's young people: Recommendations for philanthropy, policy, and practice. Youth Transitions Funders Group.

Children's Trust Fund Alliance (2021). What parents say about advancing equity and support for underserved communities.

Change Elemental (July, 2020). Systems Change & Deep Equity: Pathways toward sustainable impact, beyond "Eurkea!," unawareness & unwitting harm. An interview Sheryl Petty and Mark Leach.

Strategy to Assess and Address Racism

Child protection agencies, community partners, neighbors and families ("child and family well-being system") intentionally co-create strategies with communities that are proactive, just, address system barriers for people of color, and are delivered in communities where they are most needed.

Intermediate Outcomes

Child- and Family-Serving Systems, Collaborations, and Organizations	Representatives of Systems and Organizations, Funders, Neighbors and Caregivers
1. Values focus on keeping kids safe at home with their families, not from their families	1. BIPOC and others with lived experiences hold positions of power and are in the majority at decision-making tables
2. Resources are directed at trust building, networking, and justice work	2. Are interconnected and able to mobilize at a grassroots level
3. Language and priorities are free from bias and exclusive attention to western supremacist norms	3. Listen actively, take a humble stance, show up, and are willing to get it wrong
4. Data demonstrates that disparities no longer exist based on race or where you live	4. Are aware of and own their individual history and impact on others and feel safe sharing that story
5. Adopt a shared view of reality and system dynamics with those directly experiencing racism and oppression	5. Champion and advocate for justice in their communities

Strategy to Systemically Address Racism

1. Create and communicate an affirmative racial justice statement and deploy an EDI strategy through the organization or collaboration	4. Disaggregate data and use equity assessment and intersectional analyses during strategy planning and design
2. Recruit, hire and fairly compensate people of color, especially those directly affected by services and resources, who sit at all levels of the organization including leadership	5. Actively dismantle existing policies and practices that are rooted in white supremacist ideologies
3. Engage in ongoing learning and training on equity and racial bias, trauma and science of the brain and relationship between racial justice and well-being	6. Institute ongoing feedback loops between community and systems that focus on whether people feel heard, honored and respected

Current Conventions

- Child protection systems do not have the same outcomes for all families
- Our systems, deliberately and unintentionally, fail and harm people of color
- Our systems are designed to reinforce and protect bias language other aspects of the system that hold racism in place