

DC Child & Family Services Agency
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging
Philosophical Statement



*** WE ARE WASHINGTON ***
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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INTRODUCTION

Racism is one of the most divisive forces in our society; racial legacies of the past continue to haunt current policies and practices that create unfair disparities of communities of color due to systematically oppressive design. If the desired outcome is for our existing child welfare system to be transformed into a child well-being system, we must obliterate barriers and eliminate long-term unequal social arrangements.

We know that children of color are disproportionately represented in the foster care system. As a result, they are less likely to encounter caseworkers, service providers, lawyers, judges, or GALs who share their race or ethnicity. In addition to people of color experiencing unfair disparate outcomes, we affirm that LGBTQ+ youth face increased discrimination, harassment, and hostility in the foster care system, as well as a higher-than-average rate of suicidality. We recognize that undocumented children face constant fear of family separation and experience significant barriers to accessing educational, health, and housing services. These are just a few of the many complex issues we must take into consideration within the equitability framework of our mental models. Our work with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is evolving, and we recognize the need for reviewing practices related to youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and other members of the team, as well as those of various legal statuses in our country.

The DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) is doubling down on a commitment to DEI by establishing a formal, agency-wide initiative to develop a change management plan to better meet the needs of the children and families we serve, as well as partners, stakeholders, and our staff. As an initiative based on inclusivity, we seek to better understand the systemic inequities that impact communities of color, people who identify as LGBTQ+, and a plethora of other historically marginalized and underrepresented populations.

We cannot achieve equity of any kind without ensuring diversity and inclusion while working to acknowledge, mitigate, and dismantle oppression. CFSA will develop a theory of change, impact goals, and a list of tailored recommendations, to provide more culturally responsive practice. Another long-term goal is to leverage this work to retain and maintain staff, contractors, service providers, resource parents, and stakeholders (e.g., task force members) that reflect the diversity of the children and families we serve.

We encourage intentional thinking, taking time to reflect, to consider, to question, and to inform yourself. We are committed to changing the child welfare agency to be more equitable and just. We are committed to strengthening our relationships and building partnerships with people, organizations, and businesses that reflect the diverse identities and cultures of the children and families we serve. We believe bringing more voices to the table to influence our policies and practices will help us provide better advocacy and arrive at better outcomes for our children and families.

CFSA'S DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & BELONGING VISION AND MISSION

Vision

CFSA will be a child welfare agency that is equitable, just and centered on the voices and lived experiences of the children and families we serve. We envision CFSA collaborating with partner organizations to create and advance an equitable child and family serving system by bringing accountability to those we serve.

Mission

We vow to prioritize the identification and elimination of all forms of racism, dismantling all policies and practices rooted in White privilege and centering on the voices and lived expertise of children, parents, caregivers, families, and their communities.

CFSA will identify, acknowledge, and address diversity, equity, and inclusion opportunities for improvement, accelerating our transition toward a more, community-centered Agency that values the gifts and potential of all the children, families, and communities we serve.

THEORY OF CHANGE

A theory of change is a document that outlines specific changes that need to be made within an organization to reach a goal. Discrimination due to race, ethnicity, language usage, gender identity, and sexual orientation is so pervasive in our society and detrimental to the work we do in child welfare. We recommend that a theory of change model be implemented to assure short-term and long-term goals for CFSA are met. Data, critical thinking, and meaningful stakeholder input are invaluable to effectuate a successful shift in corporate behavior.

VALUES & BELIEFS

We believe that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are mutually reinforcing principles within our organization. A focus on diversity alone is insufficient because a person's sense of belonging (inclusion) and experience of fairness (equity) is critically important.

- **INTEGRITY:** *Integrity is the quality of being honest and fair, adhering to moral and ethical principles, a soundness of moral character.* This describes how members of our organization will "show up" and how members will treat others and expect to be treated.
- **RESPECT:** *Respect is the quality or state of being esteemed.* Respect for our clients, stakeholders, and colleagues is fundamental to belonging. We will develop mutual respect with colleagues, community partners, and the population served through the use of more thoughtful language.
- **LANGUAGE:** Language is vital to building rapport and recognizing the importance of the tools we use to communicate with each other, including how we discuss our clients & colleagues. We will need to be mindful that language is ever-changing and we will need to adapt to it as we learn and grow.
- **CULTURAL HUMILITY:** Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection and growth in order to build awareness about power, privilege and prejudices. It requires a life-long commitment to learning and a commitment to be aware of and actively mitigate power imbalances rooted in

cultural identity. This framework is important as race equity becomes the norm at CFSA and inclusion is part of our everyday operations.

KEY DEFINITIONS

- **Diversity** is the presence of differences within a given setting, generally referring to psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals. A diverse group, community, or organization is one in which a variety of social and cultural characteristics exist.
- **Equity** ensures everyone has access to the same treatment, opportunities, and advancement. Equity aims to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups.
- **Inclusion** refers to how people with different identities feel as part of the larger group. Inclusion is about feeling and/or being welcomed, valued, and given opportunities to grow within a given setting. Inclusion doesn't naturally result from diversity, and in reality, you can have a diverse team but that doesn't mean that everyone feels welcome or valued. "Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance."
- **LGBTQ+** is an acronym meaning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and the + signifies all persons who do not identify with any of the preceding terms. We use LGBTQ+ as universal language, following the leadership of many organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign, Trevor Project, DC Center, and PFLAG (previously known as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). We acknowledge that not all persons identify or choose to use LGBTQ+ and we welcome the reader to interpret LGBTQ+ as their identified term.

APPLICATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENT

This philosophical statement requires acknowledging and addressing the impacts of historical and contemporary trauma, both from chronic racism and from the unnecessary removal of children from their families. And this requires urgent advocacy for a social safety net that helps prevent deprivation and supports stability. This is fundamental.

We will address race equity matters at CFSA by focusing on targeted processes and procedures.

- **Language** - We will review reports and other written documents for race equity considerations, as well as the use of equitable language and design in them.
- **Data** - We will examine how we collect data and identify trends in our data that result in inequity in the service we deliver to our families.
- **Policies** - We will analyze our policies to ensure that they do not result in a disparate level of service due to a client's or family's background.
- **Trainings** - We will update our current training which includes race equity ideas as we continue to become more aware of race equity issues as this process evolves. We will

create a program to train current CFSA employees and contractors about our race equity focus and how it relates to their role at CFSA. We will also create pieces of training for onboarding employees and contractors so with will understand the importance of race equity in their work.

- **Practice** - We will apply race equity to our practice in that we more precisely identify the strengths and needs of the children and families we serve so that we can individualize our support of them rather than base our decisions on stereotypes or preconceptions.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The work of equity for people of color and LGBTQ+ is a priority for CFSA in order to ensure equitable services for the people we serve. We are striving to remedy these issues through our multi-step cultural shift. Concurrently, we recognize that there are several factors affecting our advancement in this work which we will remain mindful of as we address these issues.

- **Not everybody is on the same level of understanding** - As we address these issues within our workplace, we understand that different people are coming to these ideas from various vantage points. We will be mindful and respectful of those historic and current differences. Specific concerns that we've identified include:
 - Learning new, nuanced terms so looking at the context of language (e.g., always use undocumented vs. illegal; use Resource Parent depending on context)
 - Appropriateness of choice of term (e.g., resource parent is an umbrella term to use when referring to foster, adoptive and kinship caregivers globally)
 - Retiring outdated or inappropriate terms (e.g., explain why we use undocumented vs. illegal; separation vs. removal).
- **Using shared language** - We will acknowledge the Key Equity and Terms Glossary from the Center for the Study on Social Policy as our guide on racial equity. We will acknowledge the Human Rights Campaign Glossary of Terms as our LGBTQ+ informational glossary.
- **Constant change** - As we address the issues of equity, we recognize that the process and language itself is not static and always evolving. Language is dynamic and we will adapt as language, and the culture around language, change.

CONCLUSION

The Child and Family Services Agency is honored to work with the full diversity of our community, and we strive to continue in our efforts of being inclusive of all persons. The statistics indicating the rate of African American children coming into care compared to the percentage of the population of DC who are African American is deeply concerning and the cause of this disconnect needs to be explored so a cause, or causes, can be identified. We plan to address this race disproportionality and disparity in child welfare through policy, data and language exploration.