

Why there is a Compelling Need for Cultural Competence In Child Welfare

1. **To respond to current and projected demographic changes in the United States.**

The make-up of the American population is changing as a result of immigration patterns and significant increases among racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse populations already residing in the United States. Child Welfare organizations and programs, and federal, state and local governments must implement systemic change in order to meet the needs of this diverse population.

The results of a March 1997 survey conducted by the Census Bureau reveal that one in every ten persons in the United States is foreign-born. Currently, the US foreign-born population comprises a larger segment than at any time in the past five decades. This trend is expected to continue.

The Children's Defense Fund predicts that early in the first decade following the year 2000, there will be 5.5 million more Latino children, 2.6 million more African-American children, 1.5 million more children of other races and 6.2 million fewer white, non-Latino children in the United States.

2. **To eliminate long-standing disparities in status of people of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.**

Despite recent progress in overall child welfare in Kansas, there are continuing disparities in incidence of removal and length of time to reunification among African Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Alaskan Natives and Pacific Islanders as compared with the US population as a whole.

3. **To improve the quality of services and child welfare outcomes.**

Despite similarities, fundamental differences among people arise from nationality, ethnicity and culture, as well as from family background and individual experience. These differences affect the beliefs and behaviors that both consumers and providers have of each other.

The delivery of high-quality Child Welfare that is accessible, effective and cost efficient requires Child Welfare practitioners to have a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural background of consumers, their families and the environments in which they live. Culturally competent services facilitate encounters with more favorable outcomes, enhance the potential for a more rewarding interpersonal experience and increase the satisfaction of the individual receiving services.

Critical factors in the provision of culturally competent Child Welfare services include understanding of the:

- beliefs, values, traditions and practices of a culture;
- culturally-defined, needs of individuals, families and communities;
- culturally-based belief systems of the rearing of children and those related to health and healing; and
- attitudes toward seeking help from Child Welfare providers.

In making an assessment, providers must understand the beliefs that shape a person's approach to child rearing, health, and safety. Knowledge of customs, value systems and healing traditions are indispensable to the design of any assessment and intervention. For reunification and reasonable efforts to occur services must be received and accepted to be successful.

Increasingly, cultural knowledge and understanding are important to personnel responsible for quality assurance programs. In addition, those who design evaluation methodologies for continual program improvement must address hard questions about the relevance of Child Welfare interventions. Cultural competence will have to be inextricably linked to the definition of specific child welfare outcomes and to an ongoing system of accountability that is committed to reducing the current disparities among racial, ethnic and cultural populations.

4. To meet legislative, regulatory and accreditation mandates.

As both an enforcer of civil rights law and a major purchaser of Child Welfare services, the Federal government has a pivotal role in ensuring culturally competent Child Welfare services. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandates that no person in the United States shall, on ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

Organizations and programs have multiple, competing responsibilities to comply with Federal, state and local regulations for the delivery of child welfare services.

Child Welfare agencies serve culturally and linguistically diverse communities and many serve multiple cultures within one center. Although race and ethnicity are often thought to be dominant elements of culture, SRS and provider offices should embrace a broader definition to include language, gender, socioeconomic status, housing status and regional differences. Organizational behavior, practices, attitudes and policies across all child welfare functions must respect and respond to the cultural diversity of communities and clients served. Child Welfare agencies should develop systems that ensure participation of the diverse cultures in their community, including participation of persons with limited English-speaking ability, in programs offered through or by SRS and its partners. SRS

and its partners should also hire culturally and linguistically appropriate staff.

5. Socially marketing cultural competency.

A number of SRS services are being contracted/provided for by the private sector. Issues of concern in the current child welfare environment include the marketing of these services and the cost-effectiveness of Child Welfare services delivery. The potential for improved services lies in contractors that can increase retention and expand recruitment of staff and increase the satisfaction of individuals receiving their services.

To reach these outcomes, SRS and its contractors must incorporate culturally competent policies, structures and practices to provide services for people from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and to market those services in a more diverse and culturally incorporating manner.

6. Increased/Improved Communication

Lack of awareness about cultural differences may result in misunderstandings or miscommunication in several ways. For example, SRS and providers face potential conflict with consumers because of their failure to understand the consumer's beliefs, as well as, the practices and behaviors on the part of providers could contribute to the potential for mistrust. Note: In some states, failure to follow instructions because they conflict with values and beliefs may raise a presumption of negligence on the part of the provider.

Effective communication between providers and consumers may be even more challenging when there are cultural and linguistic barriers. Child Welfare organizations and programs must address linguistic competence--insuring for accurate communication of information in languages other than English.

Source: Adapted from National Center for Cultural Competence