

Executive Summary

Addressing Racial Disparity & Disproportionality in your County

By Rita Valenzuela Lavelle, MSW

Course Description

Rita Valenzuela Lavelle will share how Fresno County is addressing disproportionality in their county utilizing a cultural broker model. Cultural Brokers are community members that have received extensive training on the child welfare system and the Family to Family Initiative, including TDM meetings and Family Group Conferences. Ideally (but not always) the brokers will be of the same culture as the family and/or have an extensive knowledge base of the family's culture. Some Cultural Brokers also have extensive knowledge of not only ethnic groups but knowledge of sub-cultures/specialized cultures such as substance abuse, domestic violence, ICWA, and immigration/undocumented persons and how best to serve these families. Cultural Brokers consistently attend one or more of the Family to Family collaborative meetings. Cultural brokers work to increase the quality of the relationship between the DCFS and the families it serves, so that better outcomes are achieved for the families. Cultural brokers work in partnership with social work staff to assess and engage families at various decision points, serving as instrumental resources to assist in the identification of and movement away from bias.

The Role of the Cultural Broker

- Cultural Brokers work to increase the quality of the relationship between the DCFS and the families it serves, so that better outcomes are achieved for the families.
- To promote engagement of families by shifting the focus from fact- and fault-finding interviewing to respectful and cooperative relationship-based and solution-focused interactions with families.
- To serve as a natural ally and at times, as an advocate, for families.
- To represent the birth family's "community," whether because of a shared home neighborhood, or a shared community of faith, ethnicity or other natural connection – this supportive connection can continue throughout the family's involvement with the system and beyond.
- To share an awareness of resources which might support the family, especially those available within the family's home community.
- To help the agency's staff and its partners better understand the family's community of origin, especially its strengths.
- To help the agency's staff and its partners better understand the family's cultural heritage and racial identity, especially its strengths.
- To assist the family in understanding the agency's concerns in relation to safety and risk.
- To assist the family in understanding the agency's "culture" – the laws, policies, and language/technical terms that govern child welfare.
- To ensure that the family is provided information that is concrete and clear in order to support the change process.

Target Audience:

This training is appropriate for Undoing Racism attendees and/or county representatives tasked with undoing racism in their counties.

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Understand the development of the cultural broker program and how it followed intensive and highly focused efforts to build community partnerships
- 2) The utilization of cultural brokers to work in partnership with social work staff to assess and engage families at various decision points, serving as instrumental resources to assist in the identification of and movement away from bias.
- 3) The challenges of developing a structural framework needed to focus disproportionality efforts on a systemic level.