

Culturally Sensitive Advocacy for Children In and Out of Home Placements

The Role of the CASA volunteer

Amy Ford, Author & Advocate

- Foster Parent since 2002
- Adoptive mother of 3 African American daughters
- President, Parenting Across Color
- Author, *Brown Babies Pink Parents*
- Blogger, Naturally Curly
- Owner, Brown Babies Pink Parents Consulting & Coaching
- Representative, Curls
- Board Member, Texas Council on Adoptable Children



The Role of the CASA volunteer

CASA volunteers are appointed by Judges to

- Watch over
- Speak Up
- Guide
- Advocate for the best interest of the child



THE GOAL
A safe, **PERMANENT** home for every child

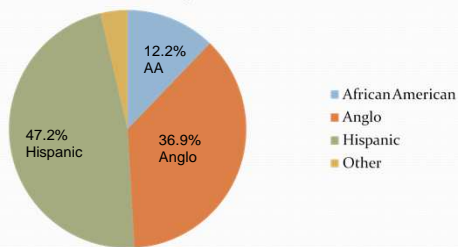
Disproportionality in the System

- African American children represent 12.2% of the total child population of Texas
- African American children represent 27.9% of the children removed from their homes in Texas
- African American children represent 35.3% of the children eligible for adoption in 2010
- In 2010, 35% of all adoptions consummated in Texas were transracial, meaning the race of the parent does not match the race of the child

All numbers provided by the Texas DFPS Data Book 2010

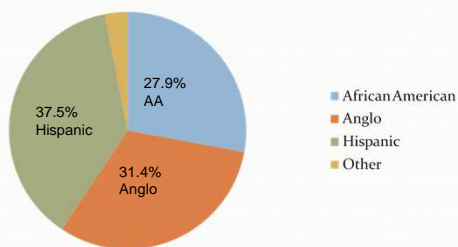
Disproportionality

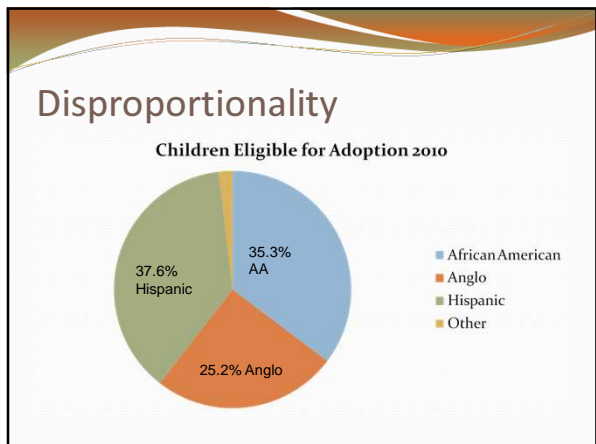
Total Child Population of Texas

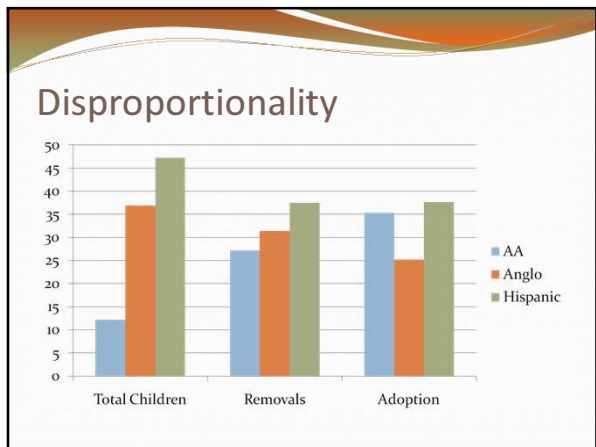


Disproportionality

Number of Removals in Texas 2010



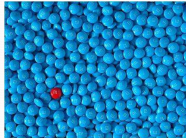




What do these numbers mean?

- There are too many African American children in the foster system
- Many of these children are placed in Anglo households as foster placements or reside in group homes staffed by Anglo people.
- Many of these children have Anglo caseworkers, judges, and CASA volunteers assigned to their case who are not familiar with African American culture

Picture Yourself Here



How would you feel?

Cultural Competency is Essential!

- African American children have specific physical and cultural needs that must be met to minimize the level of trauma and maximize the potential for positive outcomes
- CASA volunteers have a direct impact on the experience of African American children in Anglo households by ensuring these needs are met.
- CASA volunteers have a direct impact on the lives of African American children in the foster system. Remember the blue vs. the red M&M.

Physical Needs - Hair

- Hair – Hair is huge!! Never underestimate the power of the hair.
- Do not wash daily. This will cause excessive drying and breakage resulting in itching, flaking, sores, and bald spots
- Hair should be combed properly. If a foster parent does not know how, then seek out a professional.
- The scalp should be oiled frequently to keep hair soft and shiny, thus reducing itching and flaking

In the African American community, hair is an expression of cultural pride, a direct link to self esteem, and the measure of a parent and child. Do not neglect the hair.



There are professionals to Help!



Physical Needs - Skin

- African American skin is drier than Anglo skin
- Lotion is applied often
- Skin lacking adequate hydration will appear “ashy” or grey, causing a child to itch
- Identify lotion with little water content to maximize the hydration. Suggested brands include Aquafor, Eucerine, Kerri, or anything else that is thick and creamy.
- Cuts and scrapes will scar. Apply coco butter such as Palmer’s. Keep hydrated.

**When we look good,
We feel good!
And when we feel good,
We do good things.**


Cultural Needs

- African American children need to see other people of color – Think about the M&M's
- African American children need advocates who understand the culture of their family
- African American children need community – church, sports, dance, play groups, support groups, extra curricular activities
- African American children need rituals of bonding – combing hair is a BIG one

How can CASA help?

- Include cultural resources in your tool box – salons, barbershops, support groups, community events
- Talk about it! Race matters. Open the door to the conversation and a child will walk through it.
- Support the foster family in caring for the child
- Assure the birth family of the efforts being made to meet the cultural and physical needs
- Remember how it feels to be a red M&M in a sea of blue. The life experiences of an Anglo CASA worker is NOT the same as an African American child.

No child wants to feel like ...



A fish out of water!

Don't Forget!

- Love is not enough to bridge the gap between black and white.
- In advocating for the child, protect the integrity of the culture by meeting the cultural needs of the child.
- Every person has a certain level of bias based on their life experience, which is influenced by ethnicity.
- Love may be colorblind, but people are not. Acknowledge the differences and embrace the likenesses.

Resources

- COAC of Texas – Council on Adoptable Children
Support groups focused on foster and adoptive families
www.coac-texas.org
- Parenting Across Color www.parentingacrosscolor.com
- Tapestry Books www.tapestrybooks.com
- Naturally Curly www.naturallycurly.com
- Happy Girl Hair www.happygirlhair.com
- Chocolate Hair Vanilla Care
www.chocolatehairvanillacare.com
- Yahoo groups, You Tube, Facebook

Contact Information for Amy Ford

- Phone (512) 844-7907
- E-mail amy@parentingacrosscolor.com
- *Brown Babies Pink Parents* may be purchased at www.brownbabiespinkparents.com
- Discounts apply to orders of 10+ books made directly through the author
- Amy Ford is available to provide training for staff and/or volunteers both in person and by webinar. Contact her directly to make arrangements.

Thank you for your time and dedication!

