

# **Developing Cultural Competence**

## **by Linda Whitfield**

To address the permanency needs of the disproportionate number of children of color in foster care, Spaulding for Children received a federal grant to develop a Curriculum for Cultural Competence in Adoption in 1992. The overall goal and purpose of the project is to increase commitment, capacity and effectiveness of organizations serving families and children of color to achieve and sustain appropriate and timely permanency outcomes. To meet this goal, this curriculum is being developed with a community-based empowerment focus drawing on the expertise of African American, Asian, Native American, and Latino communities. The central elements are as follows:

- Do your homework: know something about the cultural group prior to approaching them.
- Follow protocol: know and demonstrate respectful behavior based on the values of that cultural group.
- Develop relationships: develop a relationship with persons trusted by the cultural group to function as the cultural guide.
- Gain appropriate entree: obtain permission to enter the community (usually done through the cultural guide).
- Develop a collaborative network: build relationships with community organizations and natural supports.
- Acknowledge reciprocal nature of relationships: in gathering information from the community, it is always important to remember to give something back.

These elements have been reinforced by the represented communities and agencies as an appropriate way to work effectively with diverse cultural populations. Exploration of

services provided and conversations with individuals involved with the visits indicate that the key factors/components of culturally competent services are as follows:

- The agency-related philosophy and practice are culturally relevant at all levels.
- Services and forms are provided in the language and dialect of those being served.
- Staff is representative of the culture at all levels of the organization.
- Program procedures and policies are developed in the cultural context, i.e., value systems, family definitions and traditions, gender and age, etc.
- Programs exemplify cultural preservation and celebration.
- Language translation services are provided, particularly in assisting and advocating for families whose first and/or primary language is not English.
- Empowerment practice and respect is practiced throughout the organization.

The curriculum development process has provided an opportunity to capture and illustrate a unique experiential learning in cultural competence, and project staff have vastly increased their knowledge base. This process, as well as the experiences of communities and agencies studied, will be taught in the curriculum.

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