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| African American Children in Foster Care |
| Pride In-service |
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| **Spring 2014** |

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Across the United States, Children are being placed in foster care. Many studies have been conducted in order to collect statistical information regarding the ethnic backgrounds of these children. This information shows us that the percentage of African American children in foster care has decreased significantly from 2002 to 2012.

Located on the Department of Health and Human Service’s website are the findings of a study which reflect the number of African American children in foster care. In 2002, approximately 524,000 children were in the foster care system. In 2012, that number had decreased to approximately 400,000. The decrease of African American children in the system from 2002 to 2012 has far exceeded any other ethnic group. The table below reflects the change.

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| **Race/Ethnicity** | **FY 2002** | **FY 2012** | **Percent Change** |
| **Black or African American** | **192,859** | **101,938** | **-47.1%** |
| **White** | 202,018 | 166,195 | -17.7% |
| **Hispanic (of any race)** | 86,698 | 84,523 | -2.5% |
| **American Indian/ Alaska Native** | 9,735 | 8,344 | -14.3% |
| **Asian** | 3,443 | 2,296 | -33.3% |
| **Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander** | 1,194 | 789 | -33.9% |
| **Two or More** | 13,857 | 22,942 | 65.6% |
| **Missing or Unable to Determine** | 13,812 | 12,519 | -9.4% |
| **Total** | 523,616 | 399,546 | -23.7% |

As listed above, in 2012, the percentage of African American children in foster care had decreased by 47%. There was no mention of the reason for this decrease in this source. This source also did not mention an important factor.

When discussing this decrease in the foster care of African American children, important questions in my mind arise. Questions like, “Where these children released into the care of their parents/guardians or another family member?” and “What were the races/ethnicities of the foster families of the African American children who remained in care?” One might wonder why such questions are important.

For children of any race/ethnicity or culture, growing up with a sense of self is extremely important. A crucial step is obtaining an accurate sense of self is knowledge of one’s own culture. Culture may affect the way a child thinks, handles situations, learns new information, language, and world view. If African American children are placed in homes with foster parents of another race, will the foster parents be prepared to raise them?

The chart below highlights the unique challenges a foster parent of an African American child may face.

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| Unique Challenges of African American Children in Stages of Development | |
| Sensorimotor  (Infancy-Two Years) | Infants of color may exhibit specific hereditary factors, such as advanced psychomotor and sensorimotor skills, including coordination skills and the ability to manipulate objects, which caretakers must consider to be responsive to children's needs |
| Preoperational  (Two-Seven Years) | Children may be able to recognize difference in skin color and racial and ethnic labeling as early as two years of age. Eventually, the children will begin to realize the important social meaning of these differences. |
| Concrete Operations  (seven to eleven years) | During their middle school years, a difference in learning styles may arise. Often times, African American children may be labeled as disinterested or insubordinate. This puts them at risk for being left back a grade. |

A Princeton University Journal issue regarding the major challenges facing the child welfare system elaborates on the aforementioned issue. Children of color do present unique developmental needs from infancy to adolescence. For example, infants of color may exhibit specific hereditary factors, such as advanced psychomotor and sensorimotor skills, including coordination skills and the ability to manipulate objects, which caretakers must consider to be responsive to children's needs during this vulnerable stage of development. (Chipungu & Brent-Goodley, 2013, para.12). This is a fact which most people would not be aware of and is an important lesson to learn for the caretakers of these foster children.

An important issue for foster parents to be aware of may begin in the preoperational stage. Children may be able to recognize difference in skin color and racial and ethnic labeling as early as two years of age. Eventually, the children will begin to realize the important social meaning of these differences. This is something their foster parents of a different race need to be ready for.

During their middle school years, a difference in learning styles may arise. Often times, African American children may be labeled as disinterested or insubordinate. This puts them at risk for being left back a grade. These issues coupled with the additional barrier of moving from school to school, location to location may also present problems for foster children.

Case workers helping these children also must be prepared for the difficult tasks ahead. Issues within African American communities present unique obstacles. A comprehensive knowledge of the communities they are working in will help case workers better serve these children and families.

In a study conducted by C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital at the University of Michigan, 2,000 adults working as teachers, social workers, childcare providers, and law enforcement officials were asked about challenges facing children of color. The findings imply that children of color from birth to age 8 and teenagers ages 13 to 18 face diminished opportunities that reduce their chances to succeed. (Krell, 2010).

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| **The reasons for the reduction of success were as follows:** |
| **31 percent** cited family financial problems |
| **25** **percent** cited unfair or inappropriate treatment by law enforcement |
| **22 percent** cited inadequate academic support for vulnerable children |
| **22 percent** cited children’s health or social needs |
| **21 percent** cited a lack of counseling or mentoring about opportunities after high school |
| **20 percent** cited lower-quality teachers in some middle and high schools |

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| **Differences in Communities Which Affect African American Children** | | |
| **58 percent** said white children in the community have "lots of opportunity" to live and play in healthy environments, safe from lead and other toxins | **vs** | **42 percent** said the same about African American children. |
| **59 percent** said white children have lots of opportunity to play in homes and neighborhoods without violence | **vs** | **37 percent** said the same about African American children |

A higher rate of poverty is directly linked to the proportion of African American children entering and remaining in foster care. The biological families living in poverty may experience several issues which contribute to the removal of children from their homes. Difficulty accessing adequate housing, mental and physical health care, and other services are essential in keeping children inside the home.

Those working with African American children and families of either a biological or fostering nature must be aware of these issues in order to adequately advocate for them. Campaigning for the rights of those in disadvantaged communities is key in changing attitudes, policies, and outcomes. These indifferences cannot continue to affect the next generation.

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