

9000-0626
9/30/92 - 6/29/95



FEB -5 1997

Final Report
of
The African American
Male Adoption Project

September 30, 1992 - June 29, 1995

NATIONAL ADOPTION INFORMATION
CLEARINGHOUSE

The Minnesota Department of Human Services

FINAL REPORT

- 1) **Grant Number:** 90-C-0626
- 2) **Project Title:** African American Adoption Project - Continuation/Male
- 3) **Grantee Name and Address:** Minnesota Department of Human Services
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- 5) **Period of Performance:** September 30, 1992 - June 29, 1995
- 6) **Approved Project Period:** September 30, 1992 - June 29, 1995
- 7) **Period Covered by Report:** September 30, 1992 - June 29, 1995
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- 10) **Date of Report:** September 30, 1995
- 11) **Report Number:**
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FINAL PROGRESS REPORT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ADOPTION PROJECT

The purpose of this report is to describe the outcomes and accomplishments of the African American Male Adoption Project. The project period was from September 30, 1992 through June 29, 1995.

I. SUMMARY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ADOPTION PROJECT

The Minnesota Department of Human Services in collaboration with Hennepin County (Minneapolis), and Ramsey County (Saint Paul), applied and received funding in September of 1992 to increase the adoption of African American males in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. In acknowledgement of the critical issues facing Black males today, the lifetime implications of adoption, and the need for more culturally oriented child welfare services, a separate program component for specialized recruitment, family preparation and post placement services for families adopting African American male children was developed and implemented.

The African American Male Adoption Project proposed to recruit 200 applicants and place 30-35 African American waiting male children adoptive families by tailoring adoption services to the unique needs of the African American communities in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties.

Our innovative approach emphasizes creative, flexible, non-traditional services, delivered through state, county, and community collaboration. Culturally oriented adoption services have been guided by the uniqueness of waiting African American male children and families. In other words, we set out to find families for our male children.

Program objectives addressed four areas: 1) specialized recruitment strategies targeting African American communities; 2) flexible adoption practice to screen in applicants, and remove barriers to the adoption of African American males; 3) participation from the African American community to help plan for the future of African American male children; and 4) training child welfare professionals who serve African American families and children.

Fifty-nine (59) African American male children were placed in adoptive homes during the period of the Project.

II. BACKGROUND

In October of 1991, the Minnesota Department of Human Services was awarded funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a 17 month demonstration project to increase the adoption of African American children in the Twin Cities.

The project was well received and within a year a total of 59 families had been recruited. Most of the families who responded to our initial recruitment efforts expressed a preference for a female child, or a female sibling group. Male children waited longer for adoptive families and thus were usually older when an adoptive family was identified.

In January 1991, the Minnesota Department of Human Services released a report of Minnesota Foster and Adoptive Care (1987-1989). The report provided information on the status of children of color in foster and adoptive care and examined county efforts to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families of color. The findings from this report clearly indicated that African American children were over represented in the foster care system and waited longer for adoptive families. This was particularly true for African American male children.

A continuation grant was implemented in March 1993, and continued until March 1994, that emphasized the placement of African American sibling groups. This project targeted 5 infants for placement - 27 were placed; 12-20 sibling groups were targeted for placement - 27 were placed; child placement was targeted at 25 - 7 were placed. Of the child placements 4 were male, 3 were female.

III. MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ADOPTION PROJECT

A. RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

The project developed specialized and ongoing family recruitment strategies to inform the African American communities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul about African American male children awaiting adoption. Recruitment strategies included: communications to churches, community and professional organizations, African American adoptive and foster parents and African American owned radio stations. Photographs and articles about waiting children were published in African American newspapers.

Clergy and lay leaders from the churches announced the Adoption project in weekly church bulletins, during church services and at various church events.

Radio announcements were developed and aired on KMOJ (an African American community owned and operated radio station). Public service announcements were also aired by other local radio stations and local television channels.

Public Service Announcements featuring Minnesota Vikings player Steve Jordan were produced and aired on local television channels. A regularly scheduled adoption news segment, "Thursday's Child", a part of the KSTP daily news show, was also used for recruitment. KSTP highlighted waiting African American children on several occasions.

Special sessions were held, adoption packets disseminated and adoption films shown at a number of African American community events.

In addition, photo albums of the targeted children were compiled and presented at orientation sessions, church and community events. Project brochures were distributed at dozens of community churches, agencies and events.

B. PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Promotional activities included the development of a project logo, letterhead and stationery, t-shirts and gift bags; presentations at professional and church gatherings and conferences; interviews on public cable television and public radio; forums with the Council on Black Minnesotans; published interviews and articles in major metropolitan newspapers and organizational newsletters.

C. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The project established a steering committee which consisted of collaborating agencies and their staff, and membership from the Council on Black Minnesotans and the African American Survival Committee. The steering committee developed a variety of approaches designed to promote the participation of leaders from the African American communities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

The African American Adoption Project was supported, promoted and influenced by the community-at-large. This was evident by invitations from community and civic organizations to share their forums and speak on the Adoption Project; pro bono announcements and services from a local sports celebrity; participation from KMOJ and WRNB radio stations, KSTP Television station and a major metropolitan newspaper; and a host of community cable television channels. Services provided by the Children's Home Society, Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, Caritas, North American Council on Adoptable Children, and the Permanency Task Force of Minnesota were vital to Project outcomes.

Other agencies offered services to the Project through consultation and active participation in forums and promotional events. The Black Ministerial Alliance garnered commitments from local church leaders to promote the Project at church sermons and church sponsored social events. Community churches provided space for a variety of Project activities.

Adoptive parents from the community participated by volunteering their time to assist project applicants in the adoption process and by sharing their experiences at Orientation meetings and the Realities of Adoption sessions.

Representatives from the Council on Black Minnesotans and One Church One Child-Minnesota met with the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services on separate occasions to discuss the positive impact of the African American Adoption Project on the African American community.

Thus, the community of Minneapolis and Saint Paul welcomed the African American Male Adoption Project and shared its resources to aid in the placement of children awaiting adoption.

D. TRAINING

Training was conducted for project staff, professionals from participating county agencies and community/church leaders. Training sessions promoted compliance with Minnesota's Heritage Preservation Act; informed participants of issues surrounding foster care and adoption; highlighted practice issues unique to African American males; expanded staff capacity to integrate cultural diversity into delivery of foster care and adoption services.

Five project staff attended the North American Council on Adoptable Children conference in San Jose, California in August, 1994.

Guardianship and social workers from Ramsey and Hennepin Counties, social workers from private adoption agencies; and program managers and project staff were trained on the following topics:

- Support Groups/Buddy System for parents
- Team Building
- Strategic Planning
- Strengths of African American Families
- Interracial Communication Styles
- Skill Building in Family Preparation and Assessment
- Special Needs Adoption: Meeting the Needs of Waiting Children
- Cultural Sensitivity: Nuances & Strengths of African Americans
- Assessing Gay & Lesbian Adoption Applicants
- The Sexualized Foster Child
- The Behavior Stages in Child Development

- Myths of the African American Male Children
- Building Positive Male Image
- Bringing Young Males to Manhood
- Myth of Extinction
- Relative Placement
- Transracial Adoption
- Permanency in Child Protection
- Curriculum Development
- Developing Culturally Dynamic Practice
- Rites of Passage for African American Male Children

Consultant and Trainer Wilfred Hamm also conducted adoption training sessions and facilitated child specific case consultation with adoption and guardianship workers of Ramsey County. Training topics included: recruiting specific families to raise special needs children and African American males with problematic welfare labels; preparing children to move from foster home to adoptive home; characteristics and treatment plans for drug exposed infants and children in the child welfare system; and dynamics of the birth parent/s in open adoption.

In March 1995, the African American Adoption Project staff presented a workshop at the 1995 Spring Conference sponsored by the Minnesota Social Services Association.

In June 1995, Ron Johnson, Executive Director, National Family Life and Education Center, Los Angeles, and Zena Oglesby, Executive Director, Institute on Black Parenting, Inglewood, California, presented a training session for African American Adoption Project staff and guardianship staff from Ramsey and Hennepin Counties titled "Working for Creative Change".

E. ANNUAL MALE ADOPTION CONFERENCES

The First Male Adoption Conference titled "Exploding the Myths of the African American Male Child" was held on September 16-17, 1993. The conference was attended by over 170 participants.

The conference opened with a policy planning session that focused on developing strategies to reduce the number of African American male children who enter the child welfare systems of Ramsey and Hennepin counties. The session was attended by top level management and mid-level management of Ramsey and Hennepin Counties, and management from the Minnesota Department of Human Services and community agencies. The meeting was conducted by an independent facilitator who focused the meeting on child protection workers assessment of family situations which foster separation of child from birth family, the need for guardianship workers to be culturally competent to work in a diverse community, guardianship workers and social workers' misconception of "the best interest of the child", which delays reunification of child to family of origin or their

misconception leads to a termination of parental rights and the improper assessment of willing and waiting African American adoptive families.

That evening, the Governor representative issued a proclamation proclaiming September 12-18, 1993 as African American Male Adoption Week. A speech on "the media portrayal of male children and its effect on the adoption of waiting male children" was followed by a recognition of adoptive parents and a reception.

Conference workshops on September 17, 1993 included:

- "My Journey From Foster Care to Adoptive Parent"...
- "Toward a More Positive Image of Black Males"...
- "Black Males in the Child Welfare System - Our Challenge, Our Charge"...
- "Bringing the Young Male Child to Manhood"...
- "Understanding the Strengths and Social Coping Strategies of the African American Male Child"...
- "Myth of Extinction"...

Dr. Oliver Williams and Mahmoud El-Kati, two local Afrocentric university professors who are steeped in systemic change models which address over-representation of ethnic children in the child welfare system led the conference. Other presenters were Matthew Ramadan, Executive Director of Northside Neighborhood Community Development, Inc.; Ted Thompson PhD, Hennepin County Administrator and practicing psychologist; and Richard Spratt, Supervisor of Adoptions at Hennepin County.

Participants completed evaluation questionnaires. An analysis of data demonstrated that participants found the conference informative and outstanding. Individual comments were very positive and included:

- ... "the presenters focused my social work practices on my own cultural bias"...
- ... "this was a very positive and enlightening conference"...
- ... "conference was timely and more conferences should focus on African American males and similar topics"...
- ... "conference provided an opportunity to network with workers from other counties"...

Recommendations from participants were:

- 1) the need for participation from local African American churches to address the male children issues; and
- 2) a workshop facilitated by African American adoptive families sharing their experiences in raising male children".

The African American Adoption Project held its Second Annual Male Adoption Conference on September 22-23, 1994, titled "Effective Parenting: Cornerstone of a Self-Directed Community".

A conference kick-off and reception was held on the afternoon of September 22, 1994. Attenders included: state legislators, state program managers, county welfare directors, child advocates, private agency representatives and Project staff.

One hundred and sixty five participants attended the conference which was held on Friday, September 23.

Conference session presenters and topics included:

- 1) Zena F. Ogleby, Executive Director, Institute for Black Parenting and Ron Johnson, Executive Director of National Family Life Education Center, Los Angeles, California: "Effective Education and Community Services: Foundation for a Black Male's Success";
- 2) Rose Brewer, Chairperson, African and African-American Studies Department, University of Minnesota: "The Role of the Black Female in Influencing the Development of the Black Male";
- 3) Ron Johnson, Executive Director of National Family Life Education Center: "Ten Steps to Rites of Passage";
- 4) Honorable Jerry Blakey, Saint Paul City Councilman: "Bridging the Separation of Church and State to Strengthen the African American Community";
- 5) Sgt. Melvin Carter, Saint Paul Policeman, Law Enforcement: "Balancing Services and Policing the African American Male";
- 6) Zena F. Ogelsby, Executive Director, Institute for Black Parenting: "Increasing Adoption Opportunities for African American Males";
- 7) Ted Thompson, private consultant: "The Social Ramifications of Interracial Adoptions";
- 8) Wilfred Hamm, Chief of Adoptions District of Columbia: "Needs of African American Male Children in Out-of-Home Placement"; and

- 9) John Wright, Associate Professor, African and African-American Studies Department, University of Minnesota: "African American Males: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow".

The participants evaluated the conference with high marks and personal statements such as:

- ... "best conference ever attended"...
- ... "speakers were knowledgeable, presented well"...
- ... "information was relevant and timely"...
- ... "information was not a rehashing of research papers or research abstracts"...
- ... "conference has refocused and shaped my view of children in placement"...
- ... "child welfare system really labels children"...

F. RITES OF PASSAGE TRAINING AND ORIENTATION

The Rites of Passage model is built on the premise that boys do not automatically know when or how to become men, and that it is the responsibility of men to lead them through this process. The Rites of Passage program offers critical adult male leadership to African American boys, and helps them develop a commitment to family, race, and community, while empowering them with a sense of responsibility and personal mastery.

The program is based on the Rites of Passage model and includes elements of the Nguzo Saba Black value system which contains seven principles: unity, self determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. Activities are flexible but must present a challenge, require commitment, prepare youth for the responsibilities of adulthood, and provide exposure to knowledge and resources.

The African American Adoption Project held an orientation and training session in May, 1995, on the "10 Steps to Rites of Passage Program for African American Males".

The Rites of Passage Orientation and Training was presented by Ron Johnson, Executive Director, National Family Life & Education Center, Los Angeles, California. Community participants included:

- Willie Nesbeth, Save Our Sons, Minneapolis;
- Dorothy Hogan, Rites of Passage Foster Care Homes, Human Services Association, St. Paul; and
- William Pierce, Executive Director, Right Step Academy, Minneapolis.

As a result of this training, two mentors were identified and a contract for referrals was developed with the Right Step Academy. The Right Step Academy will continue to deliver the Rites of Passage Program. Referrals will be made through

the African American Adoption Program Parent Support Group, and through the Rites of Passage Foster Care Homes.

G. PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

The African American Male Adoption Project has provided a range of post placement services that include home based services and educational and training sessions for adoptive parents and children. A Parent Support Group was established, convened and facilitated by Project staff for families adopting male children.

The monthly parent support group is independently incorporated through funding from the North American Council on Adoptable Children. The group is a 501(c)3 organization, operating under the name of Minnesota Parents Supporting African American Adoptions (MPSAAA). The support group provides an important resource for adoptive parents and children to promote their understanding of special needs adopted children, share experiences and build on family and community strengths. Approximately seventy (70) families participate in the group sessions.

The Parent Support Group has provided critical support to families through post placement, minimizing adoption disruptions and bolstering the strengths and confidence of adoptive families.

III. OUTCOMES

A. ADOPTION PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

The development of culturally sensitive practices and the ongoing recruitment and training activities of the African American Project has promoted communication and collaboration between the community and the project, the three agencies involved in the project, and among individual child service units within the county agencies.

The African American Project in Ramsey County has entered into a joint agreement with the Foster Care, Child Protection and Guardianship Units to collectively change policies to eliminate interdepartmental, interagency and administrative barriers to adoption procedures. In addition, the County is actively working to prevent multiple placements and extended delays in adoption procedures for waiting children.

New procedures to improve coordination of adoption/guardianship and foster care services include:

- Guardianship and Adoption workers will now co-supervise cases in placement and post placement until finalization of adoption.
- All issues that arise in the post-placement pre-finalization phases will be jointly resolved.
- Information on available children that includes age, sex and other pertinent information will be forwarded to the African American Adoption Project immediately following receipt. A data base of available children will be accessible to both counties. Information also includes dates of home studies, all updates, contact information and location of families ready for children.
- Information on available children will be shared between counties upon request. Counties of responsibility will strive to meet a goal of "One child - One placement - One year to finalization".
- Preparation of available children will begin as soon as a child is assigned to the guardianship unit. Joint efforts with the African Adoption Project will facilitate timely assessments and social histories; create a life book for each child; and forward photographs of each child to "Minnesota's Waiting Children" for publication.
- Both counties now hold joint staff meetings with Adoption and Guardianship units and continue to share staff and resources of the African American Adoption Project.

Counties actively support relative adoption services. Incentives include financial assistance and immediate access to support services and training for families.

Currently, a new recruitment mail campaign is in the planning phase. The campaign will target waiting families, those who already have adoptive placement/s, and those who have inquired about waiting children. A monthly newsletter will inform potential families of children available for adoption. A non-identifying description of each child will be included along with a contact name and telephone number for more information.

In response to suggestions from the initial applicants, Realities of Adoption group sessions were changed from daytime hours to Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. The schedule is designed to be accommodating to most applicants, who often were working single and/or two parent families. Sessions were held at other times, when necessary, to accommodate applicant work and vacation schedules.

Culturally sensitive practices are centered around two themes:

- 1) the provision of a safe, nurturing and permanent environment for the proper socialization of African American children; and
- 2) non-generalization and non-characterization of applicants and their abilities. These themes were paramount in the development of a conducive atmosphere for which culturally sensitive practices flourished.

Open communication is encouraged between applicants and project staff, Applicants share concerns, expectations and joys of adoption, participate in numerous group discussions and develop close associations with fellow applicants.

Practices of the African American Adoption Project reflect an awareness of cultural nuances, an appreciation of varied beliefs, values and social behaviors and flexibility in the delivery of services.

Project activities are held in African American churches and community centers and include the provision of a light meal. Applicants view this as an indication of the Project's staff concern for their welfare. The development and provision of culturally sensitive and flexible adoption which recognizes the cultural nuances and strengths of African American families has enabled the project to achieve the following results during the past three years:

- 230 Attended Orientation
- 236 Attended "Realities of Adoption" Training
- 30 Families with Placements
- 32 Children Placed

B. PLACEMENTS MADE

MALE CHILDREN PLACED WITH ADOPTIVE FAMILIES from
September, 1992 through March 31, 1994 totals 26.

MALE CHILDREN PLACED WITH ADOPTIVE FAMILIES from
April 1, 1994 through June 30, 1995 totals 32.

- male, born April 16, 1994; placed May 1994
- male, born May 30, 1992; placed May 1994
- male, born January 5, 1994; placed June 1994
- male, born March 3, 1994; placed June 1994
- male, born June 13, 1994; placed June 1994
- male, born March 12, 1988; placed July 1994
- male, born June 25, 1989; placed July 1994
- male, born June 12, 1992; placed September 1994
- male, born April 17, 1990; placed October 1994
- male, born September 6, 1992; placed October 1994
- male, born August 26, 1982; placed November 1994
- male, born November 18, 1992; placed November 1994
- male, born March 1, 1983; placed December 1994
- male, born May 8, 1994; placed December 1994
- male, born July 13, 1984; placed March 1995
- male, born December 4, 1984; placed March 1995
- male, born October 28, 1984; placed June 1995
- male, born February 19, 1985; placed June 1995
- male, born July 5, 1987; placed June 1995
- male, born September 15, 1987; placed June 1995
- male, born June 16, 1990; placed June 1995

C. FINDINGS:

Key findings show that:

- from January 1989, to June 1995 there has been a 173% increase in the number of African American and bi-racial children in need of adoptive homes in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties;
- ninety-eight percent of families who attended the "Realities of Adoption Training" report that the training is worthwhile and only 11% who complete the training choose not to participate in an intensive home study;
- targeted recruitment, specialized messages and the inclusion of a variety of resources, media and community organizations greatly increased the number of African American families who come forward to learn about adopting a male child;
- new culturally oriented, meaningful, relevant adoption practices have been developed in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties as a direct result of this project; and

training, conferences and promotional activities united the African American communities of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties in their commitment to provide homes for our waiting male children.

IV. BARRIERS AND DEVIATIONS FROM THE ORIGINAL PLAN

The 90 day start-up period did not allow sufficient time to: educate county boards on the merits of the demonstration project; address county board questions regarding staffing of the project, and negotiate contracts with collaborating agencies and obtain contract approval from county boards.

Ramsey County Community Human Services' delay in final approval and execution of Project contracts presented some administrative problems to the collaboration but not so great as to delay implementation of the Project activities. This inconvenience was handled by the fiscal host and a Hennepin County Community Services agreement to carry out some of the fiscal responsibilities for Ramsey County Community Human Services.

Cultural sensitivity training was to be implemented during the period of April, 1992-August, 1992. Instead, the training was held in February, 1992. The steering committee decided cultural awareness training and related information about African American culture was needed at the beginning of the project.

"Thursday's Child", a weekly news segment, featured only two of the targeted waiting children but was not utilized fully due to the reluctance of the guardianship workers to publicize children waiting for adoption. Reasons given were: children may be seen by relatives; publicity may negatively affect peer relationships of school aged children; and adherence to children's wishes not to be televised.

VI. FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOPTION PROJECT

The African American Adoption Project will continue providing services to the community with in-kind contributions of direct service staff and program management. The longer term goal of the program is to increase presence in the African American community and to promote involvement in all levels of permanency planning for African American children. The program will continue to seek funding through state appropriations, foundation support, and state and federal grants.