



## **MONDAY MORNING MEMO**

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### ***Self-Assessments A Way to Begin Conversations About Culture***

A number of tools exist for organizations to assess their cultural competence and to begin conversations about changing their organizational culture, according to trainer Cathy Cave. Cave, formerly Director of Cultural Competence at the NYS Office of Mental Health and now Founding Partner of Unlimited Mindfulness Consulting, has worked with a number of government and private agencies to help them move toward a more inclusive environment and more culturally appropriate services. She recently presented a training in Albany on “Empowering Strategies for Families in Transition,” sponsored by the St. Paul’s Center, a homeless shelter for mothers and their children.

Culture is “anything that unifies a group of people,” Cave said. It is critical to understand an individual’s culture particularly at times of transition, as they still have connections to what they may have lost.

***A good guide to promoting cultural competence is: assume nothing.***

The first step of any self-assessment is to ask: What is the makeup of the community as a whole? What is the makeup of the people who use our services? Then you can begin to identify what groups are served well by your organization, and where there are service gaps. Engage the community in creating appropriate outreach and in restructuring how you do business. “If you are not listening to folks,” Cave said, “you’re missing a lot.”

A common gap, Cave said, is in barriers to communication. This can be as obvious as not offering information in an individual’s native language, or just minimizing the complexity of the information you are trying to impart to a family that is under stress. One suggestion is to provide an extra copy of your brochure, so if individuals you are meeting with don’t understand or can’t read, they can bring the copy to a friend or family member to review it with them. That may be less stressful than asking what might feel like basic or embarrassing questions.

A good guide for CASA programs and other agencies serving families is to “assume nothing,” Cave said.

***Turn “facts” into questions, searching to identify strengths.***

Always seek first to understand, exploring all the cultural influences impacting this person and their family. Turn “facts” into questions, searching to identify strengths. Some suggested questions include: How do you describe yourself? Tell me about your family. What language do you speak at home, at work, or with friends? Is spirituality or religion important in your life? Do you have a religious or spiritual practice now? Who or where do you go for comfort?

Every agency should have a Cultural Competence Plan, guiding recruitment, training and program services. Examine all aspects of what you do for practices that inhibit or prohibit engagement, Cave suggests. Continually seek information from the families you serve, using that feedback to make necessary changes. Utilize “cultural brokers,” individuals in the community who can help connect you with different cultural groups, in order to continue to diversify your staff and volunteer pool.

Cave often quotes an old movie line: “If you give a man a label, you don’t really have to get to know him.” Make it standard program practice to gain knowledge rather than place people in compartments.



Further information can be found at The National Center for Cultural Competence, <http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/>. Another good resource, geared for health care providers, is Diversity Rx at [www.diversityrx.org](http://www.diversityrx.org).

### ***Free Teleconference Presented on Fostering Connections to Success Act***

The American Bar Association's Section of Litigation, Young Lawyers Division, and the Commission on Youth at Risk will present a free, 90-minute Live Webcast and Audio Teleconference on "The Fostering Connections to Success Act: Moving from Act to Action" on Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Faculty for the training include Howard Davidson, Director, ABA Center on Children and the Law; Marisol Garcia, attorney; Honorable Michael Nash, Presiding Judge, Los Angeles Juvenile Court; and Jenny Weisz (Moderator), Tufts University, Department of Child Development and Urban Policy.

To register for the teleconference (free for the first 300 registrants), go to: [www.abanet.org/cle/programs/t09fcs1.html](http://www.abanet.org/cle/programs/t09fcs1.html) or phone 800.285.2221 and Select Option "2."

The Fostering Connections to Success Act, H.R. 6893, signed into law in October, puts into place some of the most sweeping federal foster care reforms in over a decade. For a comprehensive review of the Act, see the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project's Best Practice Bulletin at: [www.nycourts.gov/ip/cwqip/Publications/BPB\\_V1N3.pdf](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/cwqip/Publications/BPB_V1N3.pdf)

## **Resources**

*(Please note: Links to third party sites do not imply any affiliation between the UCS CASA Assistance Program and the site owner, or an endorsement, approval, or verification of any content available on such third party sites.)*

### ***PBS Offers Online Tools and Resources for Parents***

On the Public Broadcasting Systems' website, there is a section of on-line resources for families titled "PBS Parents." The site includes information about child development, nutrition, education, games and activities, even planning of birthday parties. You also can sign up for a weekly newsletter. Go to: [www.pbs.org/parents/](http://www.pbs.org/parents/)

A workshop on the PBS tools and resources for parents will be offered at the Prevent Child Abuse-New York annual conference in Albany April 20-22. For more information on the conference, "Transformations," go to: [www.preventchildabuseny.org/conf09/index.shtml](http://www.preventchildabuseny.org/conf09/index.shtml)

### ***Information on Siblings Available on Citizen's Coalition Website***

An overview of "Overcoming Barriers to Keeping Siblings Together" in foster care and adoption is available on the NYS Citizen's Coalition for Children's website. The article, by Linda Glover from "Connections," Michigan Foster Care Program Review Board, examines common barriers to sibling placements and discusses challenges with the "parentified sibling." Go to: <http://nysccc.org/adoption/waiting-children/keeping-siblings-together/overcomingbarrier/>



***Report Issued on Domestic Violence Fatalities in New York State***

Fifty-five percent of female homicide victims in New York State last year were murdered as a result of a domestic incident, according to a report by researchers at the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (NYS DCJS), in comparison to seven percent of male homicide victims being killed by a family member. The report, "Domestic Homicide in New York State: 2007," is a comprehensive statewide analysis of homicides in which the victim was either an intimate partner or child of the alleged assailant, or involved in some other type of family relationship. Statewide, of the 36 child victims of domestic homicide, 22 of them were under the age of one.

The report was written by Adriana Fernandez-Lanier, Ph.D. and James A. Gilmer, both of the NYS DCJS Office of Justice Research and Performance. It is available on the DCJS website at: [www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us/pio/domesticomicidereport\\_120808.pdf](http://www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us/pio/domesticomicidereport_120808.pdf). For more information on domestic violence, visit the OPDV website ([www.opdv.state.ny.us](http://www.opdv.state.ny.us)).

***Newsweek Article Discusses Credit Ratings of Children in Foster Care***

The February 16<sup>th</sup> issue of *Newsweek* magazine featured an article about a youth who experienced identity theft while in foster care. To view the article, go to: [www.newsweek.com/id/183711](http://www.newsweek.com/id/183711)

***Save the Dates***

***"Spring" CASA Program Directors' Meeting to be Held March 23-24***

CASA Program Directors' spring meeting, coordinated by the UCS CASA Assistance Program in collaboration with CASA: Advocates for Children of NYS, will be held in the Albany area Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 2 to 6 p.m. and continue Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. To register, go to: [www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=Wquvs9Yblhc1zuIxzLIZGQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=Wquvs9Yblhc1zuIxzLIZGQ_3d_3d)

The meeting will take place at The Comfort Inn, Glenmont. A block of overnight rooms is available for Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> at \$99/room. To reserve, call 518-465-8811 and ask for the Unified Court System room block. For more information, go to: [www.comfortinn.com/hotel-glenmont-new\\_york-NY219](http://www.comfortinn.com/hotel-glenmont-new_york-NY219)

***Quotable***

"With the gift of listening comes the gift of healing."

*- Catherine de Hueck Doherty*

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