

## Unit II: The Sociocultural Contexts of Kinship Care

### Overview

This unit describes the societal factors that contribute to the use of kinship care as a child welfare service. It stresses the need for caseworkers to engage in ongoing striving for cultural competence. This striving for cultural competence includes efforts to develop awareness of one's own assumptions and beliefs about healthy family functioning and to realize that many of these beliefs are influenced by personal life experiences, family traditions, cultural beliefs, and customs. Striving for cultural competence also requires an appreciation of diversity within and between cultural groups and the ability to identify and assess cultural strengths and helping traditions. A framework for assessing family organization and functioning across cultures and various family structures is presented. Learning activities are suggested to assist caseworkers in assessing the organization and functioning of extended families and in identifying relevant cultural strengths and helping traditions.

### **Goals for Unit II: The Sociocultural Contexts of Kinship Care**

This unit is intended to assist child welfare caseworkers in developing:

1. self awareness as a necessary skill for effective practice;
2. a commitment to ongoing striving for cultural competence;
3. the ability to identify and assess cultural strengths and helping traditions;
4. an appreciation of diversity within and between cultural groups; and
5. the ability to assess the leadership, balance, and harmony of systems across cultures.

## **UNIT II DISCUSSION The Sociocultural Contexts of Kinship Care**

Many children, particularly children of color, are reared not by one or two parents, but by a caregiving system of related and non-related kin (Hill, 1977; 1987; Martin & Martin, 1978; 1985; Stack, 1974). The practice of extended family caring for children when their biological parents are unable to care for them has existed for generations in a variety of ethnic groups. However, societal conditions have increased the involvement of the formal child welfare system in the care of children by relatives. Poverty, substance abuse, violence in communities and in families are among the major threats to the natural helping traditions in families. These threats have increased the need for kinship care and at the same time have increased the involvement of the formal child welfare system in the lives of families.

Children who have been taken into the custody of the child welfare system and placed in kinship foster care have remained in the custody of the child welfare system longer, returned home at a slower rate, and have been adopted at lower rates than children placed in foster care with non-related foster parents (Barth, Courtney, Berrick, & Albert, 1994; Goerge, Wulczyn, & Harden, 1995). These slower return home rates and lower adoption rates have been defined as "permanency planning problems" for children in kinship foster care and for the child welfare system. Children in kinship foster care have been described as less likely than those in traditional foster care to live in a "permanent" home with adults who have made a legal commitment to rear them to the age of majority without the monitoring and intrusion of the child welfare system. For the child welfare system, permanency planning problems mean that children are not exiting state custody or are doing so at a slow rate. As a result, caseloads and substitute care costs have grown in an era that is not supportive of public funding of programs for vulnerable children and families (Gleeson, 1996).

The growing need for kinship foster care and the slower exit rates may be partly due to increasing conditions of risk for children and families, particularly for poor children and families of color (Testa, 1992). The child poverty rate in the United States increased from 19% in 1989 to 22.7% in 1993 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1995; CDF, 1995). Both AFDC benefits and the minimum wage have eroded dramatically since the 1970's even when food stamps and Medicaid benefits are considered. Also, the percentage of families headed by single parents increased from 21.6% in 1986 to 25.3% in 1992 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1995). Single parent families headed by females are the poorest in our country and poverty has consistently been a strong predictor of child placement (Lindsey, 1992).

Compared to Caucasians, people of color in general and African Americans in particular experience considerably higher rates of poverty and are more likely to grow up in single-parent households. Research conducted in New York City demonstrates that the poorer the community, the greater the chances that children will be born at low birth weight, to mothers who did not receive prenatal care (Wulczyn, 1994). These children are more likely to be placed in foster care during the first year of life. Children placed as infants are most frequently placed with relatives and remain in state custody longer than children entering state custody later in their lives. The same risk factors that contribute to higher rates of placement may also be barriers to discharge from state custody (Leashore, McMurray & Bailey, 1991).

It is also likely that narrow vision and policies and practices which are not relevant to the diverse children and families served by the child welfare system contribute to both higher out-of-home placement rates and slower exits from state custody for children in kinship foster care (Chipungu, 1991; Gleeson & Craig, 1994). The child welfare system in the United States is based upon residual social welfare policies which assume that intervention is required only when families fail to protect and nurture their children. This orientation to child welfare policy and practice results in the formal child welfare system

dominating the planning and decision-making on behalf of children who come into contact with the child welfare system. When the formal child welfare system dominates the planning and decision making and fails to collaborate with the child's family, the resulting plans and decisions may be irrelevant and unsuccessful.

Collaboration between the formal child welfare system and the child's kinship system is not easily achieved. Families involved with the child welfare system are viewed as failures by the general public and skeptics at all levels of the child welfare system. These skeptics believe that families of children in state custody do not have the capacity to participate in planning and decision-making on behalf of the child. While it is true that some families do not have the capacity for decision-making, a broader view is likely to identify strengths which are not obvious when the unit of attention is limited to the child, biological parents, and current kinship caregiver.

A broad view of families is not always easy to achieve. Our view of families is often clouded by our own personal biases, negative stereotypes, and negative public perceptions of families involved with the child welfare system. Developing a broad view of families requires child welfare caseworkers to engage in ongoing striving for cultural competence. This ongoing striving for cultural competence includes an appreciation of the diversity that exists between cultural groups and within cultural groups. It also includes persistent efforts to identify cultural strengths and helping traditions in families. A framework for assessing the leadership, harmony, and balance in families is a helpful tool that can be used in conjunction with the genogram and eco-map to identify these strengths and traditions.

### ***Ongoing Striving for Cultural Competence***

Culturally competent permanency planning requires that each child welfare caseworker and the child welfare system in general make a commitment to pursue cultural competence on an ongoing basis. Cultural competence is not a goal that is achieved but a continuing process of striving to become increasingly self-aware, to value diversity, to become knowledgeable about cultural strengths and natural helping traditions of families living in this country. Cultural competence is also characterized by a recognition of the enduring nature of family ties and use of informal systems of support in planning for the protection, permanence and well-being of children.

Our experiences growing up have influenced us in some evident and not so evident ways. For example, in our families of origin, our notions of *right* and *wrong*, *good* and *bad* are formulated. How we define *family* is influenced by our ethnic identity and our experience in our own families. Our roles, positions relative to siblings, and experiences in our families of origin influence how we relate and respond to others. Our expectations of ourselves and others as males or females, our views about children, youth and age, health and illness, causes and cures similarly are shaped by our family experiences, cultural beliefs, customs, and traditions. Our ethnic identification and cultural beliefs are influenced by the historical point in time into which we were born and the degree of ethnic identification promoted in our families and neighborhoods as we grew up.

Family and cultural influences are strong and personal. We often do not question the assumptions and beliefs that are passed on to us through our family and cultural traditions; rather we accept them as fundamental truths. We may naively assume that others share the same assumptions and beliefs. Encounters with those who express different patterns of beliefs and behaviors can be unsettling. We may interpret assumptions, beliefs, and customs that differ from our own as incorrect or abnormal. In order to work effectively with persons who have different experiences, it is important to become aware of the beliefs and assumptions that we hold most strongly, examine the

family and cultural roots of these beliefs and assumptions, and become willing to question the validity of these beliefs and assumptions.

Our own values and assumptions are often challenged when we attempt to define characteristics of functional families. Many people assume that healthy or functional families are similar to their own. Others assume that functional families are the exact opposite of the families in which they grew up. Upon examination, we find that functional arrangements within families are subject to great variability. There are numerous arrangements that accomplish the tasks of families, including providing for the care, nurturance, and development of children. We can all point to functional single-parent, step, blended, and adoptive families. To work effectively with families it is important to examine carefully our implicit models of family functioning, normality, and functionality to spell out what may be our own personal biases.

### ***Identifying Cultural Strengths and Helping Traditions in Families***

Every family has its own strengths and helping traditions. Some families are more connected to their cultural traditions and find greater strength in these traditions than other families. It is important to understand the strengths and helping traditions that are most common to the cultural groups represented by the families served in kinship foster care. It is also important to identify the strengths and helping traditions that are unique to individual families.

Much has been written about the cultural strengths and helping traditions of African American families. From an Africentric perspective, "family" is conceived of as a multi-generational network of blood and non-blood related persons with reciprocal social and emotional obligations (Staples & Boulin Johnson, 1993). These obligations often include economic cooperation, a notion of family property rather than personal property;

affectionate and material exchange among relatives, respect for elders, shared residence patterns, joint activities among relatives, and child rearing that is shared by a large number of relatives and community members. These obligations, commitments, and traditions are frequently reinforced by a strong spiritual orientation.

### **Figure II-A: The Black Helping Tradition**

Martin and Martin (1985) describe the following major elements of the Black helping tradition:

- ! **Mutual Aid:** The reciprocal effort of family members to pool the resources necessary for survival and growth; also includes the emergence of mutual aid societies to support all Black people (e.g. the National Urban League, the NAACP, the Masonic Lodge, etc.).
- ! **Social Class Cooperation:** The endeavor of family members from different income, educational, and social class levels to down play class distinctions in giving and receiving aid.
- ! **Male-Female Equality:** Promoting the welfare of the family through an emphasis on sexual equality and a de-emphasis on matriarchy and patriarchy. This includes the expectations that both males and females will work, rear children, share leadership and responsibility.
- ! **Prosocial Behavior:** Attitudes and practices of cooperation, sharing, and caring that adults consciously strive to instill in children so the tradition of self-help will be passed on to future generations.
- ! **Fictive Kinship:** Caregiving and mutual aid relationships among nonrelated Blacks that exists because of a common history, ancestry and social plight.
- ! **Racial Consciousness:** Keen awareness of the history and condition of Black people and a sense of racial dignity and pride.
- ! **Religious Consciousness:** Deliberate attempts to live according to religious beliefs that call for acts of charity, brotherliness and neighborliness as a means of coming closer to God and carrying out God's will.

The themes of extended kinship mutual aid and cooperation are part of the African cultural tradition that were continued in the Black helping tradition (Martin & Martin, 1985). The Black helping tradition evolved from the extended family and spread throughout every phase of community life as Blacks in this country struggled and survived slavery and continue to struggle in a climate of racism and oppression. It is important to note that the Black helping tradition is not merely a set of ideas but a whole social environment and prescription for living that is handed down from generation to generation. It is not the practice of unrelated, fragmented, and aimless beliefs, but a phenomenon that is significantly intertwined with the whole culture of Black people and the quest for survival

and advancement. Thus, the Black helping tradition refers to the pattern of self-help activities developed from the Black extended family for the survival and advancement of African Americans from generation to generation. Components of the Black helping tradition are summarized in Figure II-A. Robert Hill's (1972; 1997) research identified strengths of African American families that are consistent with the Black helping tradition. The strengths revealed in his research are listed in Figure II-B.

Other cultural groups have their own strengths and helping traditions, some of which are similar to the strengths of African American families and the Black helping tradition. For example, extended family caregiving has been described as a strength of families from traditional Latino cultures, Asian cultures, as well as families with European roots (Lum, 1986; McGoldrick,

**Figure II-B: Strengths of African American Families**

Robert Hill's (1972; 1997) research revealed the following strengths of African American families:

- ! Strong respect for elders and a tradition of caring for elders and children.
- ! High value placed on children as gifts from God and the continuity of Black people.
- ! High value placed on education and willingness to sacrifice to educate the younger generation.
- ! Work/achievement orientation as a prosocial behavior and a way to uplift self and others.
- ! Extended family relationships that provide its members with a source of connection, attachment, validation, worth, recognition, respect, and legitimacy.
- ! Elasticity of boundaries and flexibility of roles that allows the family to meet the needs of its members, particularly under conditions of hardship; expresses the value orientation of communality, kinship obligation, and male-female equality.

Giordano & Pearce, 1996). Each cultural group has its own legacy of cultural strengths and helping traditions, yet not all families feel connected to the traditions of the cultural groups with which they are affiliated. For example, not all African American families fit the multigenerational, extended kinship, shared residence pattern and not all experience their extended kinship networks as supportive. Some have adopted a nuclear family structure

or a combination of nuclear and extended family patterns. Factors such as geographic region of origin, socioeconomic and educational level, and strength of identification with traditional cultural values and traditions will modify the predominant family form and coping or problem-solving styles. For example, some families have little or no experience with informal adoption in their families, so when asked by the formal child welfare system to provide temporary care or consider adopting their relative, they have little to draw on from their immediate family cultural experience.

In order to understand the helping traditions of any specific family it is important to explore with family members the ways that they have solved problems in the past, the type of sharing that takes place in their extended family and community. Understanding patterns of sharing and helping that exist in families may help the family and the caseworker identify family strengths and resources that can be tapped to facilitate permanency for children.

Some major elements that impede the development of the helping traditions or interfere with passing on cultural strengths in families include societal values that place heavy emphasis on individualism, social-status seeking, and the acquisition of material goods. The emphasis on individualism and acquisition of material goods conflicts with traditions of sharing, communality, and mutual aid. Natural helping traditions and cultural strengths are further thwarted when people feel blocked from the acquisition of material goods except through such deviant or illegitimate means as manipulation, conning, or criminal activity. The emphasis on individualism and the pursuit of the "American Dream" through illegal means is at odds with the Black helping tradition and the helping traditions of many ethnic groups.

When children come to the attention of the child welfare system, the family's strengths and natural helping traditions may not be obvious. These strengths and helping traditions may not be strong enough at this time to prevent the child welfare system's

involvement. However, strengths and helping traditions do exist in most families. Several questions may be helpful in identifying strengths and helping traditions in families:

- ! Who is included when you and your family celebrate happy occasions?
- ! Who is included when you and your family need comfort on sad occasions?
- ! How has your family solved problems in the past?
- ! Who in your family has been helpful to you when you needed support or help in solving a problem?
- ! Are there others who have been helpful to you and your family when you needed help?

### ***Assessing Family Organization and Functioning***

Child welfare caseworkers need a culturally relevant framework for assessing a family's ability to make decisions and carry out the functions necessary to achieve permanency for children in care. The concepts of balance, leadership, and harmony, described in *Metaframeworks: Transcending Models of Family Therapy* (Breunlin, Schwartz & MacKune-Karrer, 1992) are relevant across cultures and offer a guide for assessing family organization that is applicable to all family forms: nuclear, extended, and augmented. These concepts are particularly useful for assessing a family's organization and ability to make decisions (Figure II-C). The concepts of balance, leadership, and harmony help us identify strengths that are necessary for a family to make decisions to provide a permanent home for a child. These concepts also help us identify areas that may need strengthening in families to enable them to ensure permanency for the child. These concepts can also be applied to transactions between family systems and the formal child welfare system.

*Balance* is defined as "...the degree of influence that a [part] of a system has in the system's decision-making process; the degree of access that a [part] has to the system's resources; and the level of responsibility that a [part] has within the system" (Breunlin, Schwartz & MacKune-Karrer, 1992, p. 136). A kinship system is out of balance if caregiving responsibilities fall exclusively on one member of the system and this caregiver is without social support and unable to meet her/his own needs. Temporary balance may be achieved through resources and support provided by the formal child welfare system. However, for the child to exit state custody the kinship system must achieve a balance that is not dependent upon the formal child welfare system.

*Leadership* requires that some part of the system must be in a position to help the system achieve or maintain balance. Effective leaders mediate conflicts and make sure that others are getting their needs met and feel valued. Effective leaders allocate resources, responsibilities, and

## Figure II-C: Assessing the Family's Organization for Decision-Making

### BALANCE

How have critical decisions been made in this family/network in the past?

- ! Who in the biological family, extended family, kinship network participated?
- ! Did other informal and/or formal systems participate? (Church, Schools, Courts, Child welfare system, etc.)

What is the nature of the family's/network's relationship with its environment?

### LEADERSHIP

Authority issues: Who has the authority to make decisions? Is their authority sanctioned at all levels of the family/network and environment?

- ! Persons within the kinship network?
- ! Persons outside the kinship network?

Where is the leadership located in the family?

- ! Type of leadership expressed: instrumental(task oriented), affective (social-emotional), etc.
- ! Who deals with extreme positions or polarizations among members of the family/kinship network?

### HARMONY

What does the family/network perceive as constraints/obstacles to decision-making?

- ! Splits, feuds among family/network members?
- ! Loyalties or legacies that "automatically" rule out certain options?

How do members feel about the perceived authority for decision-making regarding the family/network and its members?

Concepts developed in Breunlin, D., Schwartz, R., and MacKune-Karrer, B. (1992). *Metaframeworks*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

influence fairly, and provide firm and fair discipline. Effective leaders encourage the growth of individuals while considering the needs of the whole system. Effective leaders represent the family in interactions with other systems and coordinate planning for the family's future (Breunlin, Schwartz & MacKune-Karrer, 1992, pp. 137-138). Effective leadership is characterized by flexibility to shift and adapt the leadership style as the needs and resources of the system change. Poor leadership creates imbalances which create polarizations in the system. When children are under the guardianship of the state, the child welfare system is initially in the most visible leadership position. The caseworker and the child welfare system should gradually relinquish leadership as families are better able to assume this role.

*Harmony* defines the relationships among parts of a system. Balanced systems with clear and flexible leadership "relate harmoniously--that is, they cooperate, are willing to sacrifice some of their individual interests for the greater good, care about one another and feel valued by the larger system, and have clear boundaries that allow a balance between belonging and separateness" (Breunlin, Schwartz & MacKune-Karrer, 1992, pp. 136-137). Feuds among family members are examples of disharmony which may need to be addressed to strengthen the planning and decision-making capability of the child's kinship system.

Sometimes we see disharmony in the relationship between a caseworker and the kinship network. The caseworker may hold an extreme position in relation to a caregiver or biological parent's ability to care for the children. This extreme position might be overly optimistic or overly pessimistic. An overly optimistic position might lead the caseworker to provide the caregiver or parent less help, support, or monitoring than is needed. An overly pessimistic position might lead the caseworker to inaccurately conclude that the caregiver or parent is incompetent and needs more help, support or monitoring than is necessary. Overly pessimistic views could also lead to inaccurate conclusions that the parent or caregiver should not be allowed to care for the children at all.

Using the concepts of balance, leadership, and harmony, child welfare caseworkers can not only assess the family's organization for decision-making, but can also assess the appropriateness of the relationship between the formal child welfare system and the child's kinship system. These concepts provide guidance to the caseworker in determining whether the resources of the formal child welfare system are being appropriately used to strengthen and support the informal caregiving system.

The framework for assessing family organization and functioning (Breunlin, Schwartz, & MacKune-Karrer, 1992) can also be helpful in generating questions for identifying strengths and helping traditions in families. Some useful questions are:

- ! Who are the leaders in your family?
- ! Do different people provide leadership in different types of situations in your family?
- ! Who are the persons who help settle arguments and disagreements in your family?
- ! Who are the persons in your family who are most willing to help other members of the family? Are there many people who help out?

## **Summary**

Societal conditions and residual child welfare policies contribute to the use of kinship care as a child welfare service. The conditions of risk that contribute to the placement of children in kinship foster care also create obstacles to the child's exit from state custody to a permanent home. The majority of children in kinship foster care are children of color and economically disadvantaged. It is essential that child welfare caseworkers engage in ongoing striving for cultural competence to become better equipped to work with families that are in many ways different from the families in which caseworkers were reared. This striving for cultural competence includes efforts to develop awareness of one's own assumptions and beliefs about healthy family functioning and to realize that many of these

beliefs are influenced by personal life experiences, family traditions, cultural beliefs, and customs. Striving for cultural competence also requires an appreciation and valuing of diversity within and between cultural groups and the ability to identify and assess cultural strengths and helping traditions. A framework for assessing family organization and functioning across cultures and various family structures was introduced. This framework is a helpful tool for identifying family strengths and helping traditions that may be tapped to facilitate development and implementation of a plan to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being for children in kinship foster care.

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## **Learning Activities and Resources for Unit II**

The following learning activities are contained in this section:

1. Questions for Discussion
2. Identifying Strengths and Helping Traditions
3. Identifying Strengths and Helping Traditions in Supervision and Case Staffings
4. Using The Training Videotapes to Identify Strengths and Natural Helping Traditions

## **Learning Activity #1: Questions for Discussion**

Sometimes our own biases prevent us from observing strengths in others. The following questions for discussion may help caseworkers identify biases that may influence their perceptions and evaluations. In a group training format, these questions can be distributed or written on a flip chart and displayed as a discussion guide. There may be other questions that would be useful to add. Training participants can also be divided into small groups with each group discussing one of the questions. A reporter from each small group could share results of the discussion with the larger group. These questions may also be used in discussions between the supervisor and caseworker or to guide self-directed reflection and learning.

- ! How is it possible for kinship caregivers to rear children who have been abused or neglected by their parents? After all, “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”
  
- ! Should children be reared by persons who are co-habiting, legally or informally separated, divorced, or in a conflictual marriage?
  
- ! Should children grow up in families that have a history of teenage pregnancy and children born out-of-wedlock?
  
- ! Who is included in your definition of family?
  
- ! What was your own experience with the type, frequency, and duration of contacts with your family and extended family members?
  
- ! Think of your own nuclear and extended family. Are there persons within your family who are struggling or experiencing great difficulty? Are there others who have greater strengths and more resources at this time? Are those with greater resources willing to share their resources and help other members of the family who are in need of help?

## **Learning Activity #2: Identifying Strengths and Helping Traditions**

The following questions may be helpful in identifying strengths and helping traditions in your own family and in the families that you serve. It is useful to answer these questions for yourself with respect to your own family and family experiences. This is one way of becoming aware of the biases you have about how families should or should not function. More importantly, these question may assist you in identifying family strengths and helping traditions with the families you serve--and to do so from their perspective.

- ! Who is included when you and your family celebrate happy occasions?
  
- ! Who is included when you and your family need comfort on sad occasions?
  
- ! How has your family solved problems in the past?
  
- ! Who in your family has been helpful to you when you needed support or help in solving a problem?
  
- ! Are there others who have been helpful to you and your family when you needed help?
  
- ! Who are the *leaders* in your family? Do different people *provide leadership* in different types of situations in your family?
  
- ! Who are the persons that help settle arguments and disagreements in your family? (*harmony*)
  
- ! Who are the persons in your family that are most willing to help other members of the family? Are there many people who help out? (*balance*)

**Learning Activity #3:      *Identifying Strengths and Helping Traditions in Supervision and Case Staffings***

Frequently supervisory sessions and case staffings focus on limitations of families and risks to children but exclude identification of strengths and helping traditions. Conducting a supervisory session or case staffing with the expressed purpose of identifying strengths and helping traditions is one way of helping caseworkers develop the capacity to identify them. The following steps can be used to facilitate identification of strengths and helping traditions of specific families on the caseworker's caseload.

- !      Display a genogram and an eco-map that was developed with the family.
  
- !      Describe the family and their situation using these tools.
  
- !      Discuss the following:
  - <      Who provides *leadership* in this family? Do different people provide *leadership* in different types of situations in this family?
  
  - <      Who are the persons that help settle arguments and disagreements in this family (*harmony*)?
  
  - <      Who are the persons in this family that are most willing to help other members of the family? Are there many people who help out or is there a lack of *balance* in this family?

## **Learning Activity #4      Using The Training Videotapes to Identify Strengths and Natural Helping Traditions**

The family depicted in the training videotapes that accompany this manual has many strengths. After watching each segment of the videotape it is useful to identify the strengths and natural helping traditions that were observed. Some of the strengths and helping traditions that can be observed are described below:

### *Natural Helping Traditions:*

- < This family has a tradition of informal kinship care, of helping care for children on a temporary basis when illness has prevented a parent from rearing a child.
- < Although there is conflict between the biological mother and the maternal grandmother, it is clear that the maternal grandmother really wants her daughter to complete substance abuse treatment and to be able to care for her child. She is reluctantly willing to provide a permanent home for the child but had intended to provide a temporary home for the child until her daughter recovered from her drug addiction.

*Leadership:* There are several leaders in this family. The strongest and most obvious is the maternal grandmother. However, the maternal aunt (Michele), the maternal uncle (James), and the paternal aunt (Minnie) display leadership abilities and are willing to provide leadership in specific areas of the family's plan to care for the child. This is most obvious in segment four of the videotape, where the family is making long-term plans for the care of the child. They discuss who would step in as secondary caregiver, if the maternal grandmother is ill, dies, or is otherwise unable to care for the child. They also discuss who will take leadership in providing educational and recreational opportunities for the child.

*Balance:* It is clear in segments three and four that several members of the kinship network have been an ongoing part of the child's life. The maternal aunt and uncle and the paternal aunt make commitments to continue to be a part of the child's life and to assist the maternal grandmother in providing long-term care for the child.

*Harmony:* There are also persons in the family who contribute to harmony in the family. For example, the maternal uncle (James) sits beside the biological mother (Showanda) in the third segment. Showanda is clearly close to James and he tries to calm her and encourage her to listen when adoption is discussed as a permanency option. The maternal aunt (Michele) also expresses her support for Showanda, while supporting the grandmother's need to provide a permanent home for the child, since Showanda has not been able to complete treatment and demonstrate the ability to care for her child. In segments three and four, the family displays the ability to disagree yet make important decisions about the future of the child. While conflict is obvious, there is sufficient harmony to allow the family to come to agreement on a plan.

## Handouts and Overheads for Unit II

- ! Goals for Unit II
  
- ! Figure II-A: The Black Helping Tradition
  
- ! Figure II-B: Strengths of African American Families
  
- ! Figure II-C: Assessing the Family's Organization for Decision-Making

## **Goals for Unit II: The Sociocultural Contexts of Kinship Care**

This unit is intended to assist child welfare caseworkers in developing:

1. self awareness as a necessary skill for effective practice;
2. a commitment to ongoing striving for cultural competence;
3. the ability to identify and assess cultural strengths and helping traditions;
4. an appreciation of diversity within and between cultural groups; and
5. the ability to assess the leadership, balance, and harmony of systems across cultures.

## Figure II-A: The Black Helping Tradition

Martin and Martin (1985) describe the following major elements of the Black helping tradition:

- ! **Mutual Aid:** The reciprocal effort of family members to pool the resources necessary for survival and growth; also includes the emergence of mutual aid societies to support all Black people (e.g. the National Urban League, the NAACP, the Masonic Lodge, etc.).
- ! **Social Class Cooperation:** The endeavor of family members from different income, educational, and social class levels to down play class distinctions in giving and receiving aid.
- ! **Male-Female Equality:** Promoting the welfare of the family through an emphasis on sexual equality and a de-emphasis on matriarchy and patriarchy. This includes the expectations that both males and females will work, rear children, share leadership and responsibility.
- ! **Prosocial Behavior:** Attitudes and practices of cooperation, sharing, and caring that adults consciously strive to instill in children so the tradition of self-help will be passed on to future generations.
- ! **Fictive Kinship:** Caregiving and mutual aid relationships among nonrelated Blacks that exists because of a common history, ancestry and social plight.
- ! **Racial Consciousness:** Keen awareness of the history and condition of Black people and a sense of racial dignity and pride.
- ! **Religious Consciousness:** Deliberate attempts to live according

## **Figure II-B: Strengths of African American Families**

Robert Hill's (1972; 1997) research revealed the following strengths of African American families:

- ! Strong respect for elders and a tradition of caring for elders and children.
- ! High value placed on children as gifts from God and the continuity of Black people.
- ! High value placed on education and willingness to sacrifice to educate the younger generation.
- ! Work/achievement orientation as a prosocial behavior and a way to uplift self and others.
- ! Extended family relationships that provide its members with a source of connection, attachment, validation, worth, recognition, respect, and legitimacy.
- ! Elasticity of boundaries and flexibility of roles that allows the family to meet the needs of its members, particularly under conditions of hardship; expresses the value orientation of communality, kinship obligation, and male-female equality.

## **Figure II-C: Assessing the Family's Organization for Decision-Making**

### BALANCE

**How have critical decisions been made in this family/network in the past?**

**! Who in the biological family, extended family, kinship network participated?**

**! Did other informal and/or formal systems participate? (Church, Schools, Courts, Child welfare system, etc.)**

**What is the nature of the family's/network's relationship with its environment?**

### LEADERSHIP

**Authority issues: Who has the authority to make decisions? Is their authority sanctioned at all levels of the family/network and environment?**

**! Persons within the kinship network?**

**! Persons outside the kinship network?**

**Where is the leadership located in the family?**

**! Type of leadership expressed: instrumental(task oriented), affective (social-emotional), etc.**

**! Who deals with extreme positions or polarizations among members of the family/kinship network?**

### HARMONY

**What does the family/network perceive as constraints/obstacles to decision-making?**

**! Splits, feuds among family/network members?**

**! Loyalties or legacies that "automatically" rule out certain options?**

**How do members feel about the perceived authority for decision-making regarding the family/network and its members?**

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Concepts developed in Breunlin, D., Schwartz, R., and MacKune Karrer, B. (1992). *Metaframeworks*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.