



# National Kinship Review

News, Networking & Information for  
Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Center of Child Welfare: A 21st Century Perspective on Cultural Relevance and Humility

The pervasive issue of racial disparity in child welfare has long presented troubling implications for children and families of color. The concept of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is essential in developing inclusive practices that work to dismantle historical and systemic racial biases in the sector. ASCI's founder, president and CEO Dr. Sharon McDaniel engages in crucial conversations with industry thought leaders to explore DEI in America's child welfare system and highlight the transformational work these leaders do to address the same.



### Installment One with Kimm Campbell Director of Human Services Broward County, Florida

**Dr. Sharon McDaniel:** Your structure is a bit different than other jurisdictions in terms of the lease with CPS [Child Protective Services] and then the child. Can you explain how your structure differs from other jurisdictions?

**Kimm Campbell:** Florida is a privatized child welfare system, but there are a few counties among the 67 counties in the state that have contractual agreements with local

sheriffs' offices. So, our system in Broward County is like a three-pronged stool. First, the Sheriff's office is responsible for responding to and investigating the allegations of abuse and neglect that come into the hotline; they are ultimately responsible for making the decision relative to preservation or removal. As part of that investigative process, [Broward County Human Services Department](#) partners with them through our Child Protection Teams; these teams conduct forensic evaluations on a specific set of mandated abuse and neglect cases, and our forensic evaluation results inform the decisions regarding whether or not the child or children should be removed. Finally, the state contracts with what they call "lead agencies." ChildNet is the agency that has the contract for Palm Beach and Broward Counties, and they have the case management, foster care and adoption responsibilities. So, the law enforcement sector, the government sector, and the private non-profit sector all work together collaboratively to operationalize our child welfare system.

**SM: Can you talk about, from your perspective, what makes this model work for child welfare?**

**KC:** I think one of the strengths of the model is the opportunity for shared ownership and responsibility for the safety of the kids in Broward. It's not necessarily a double-edged sword, but what happens when you have multiple agencies sharing responsibility, is that you have to work really hard at the partnership and relationships. So, it is not without challenges, and sometimes we think, "Gosh, it would just be easier if we were solely responsible or another entity was solely responsible," but Broward County is known as "Collaboration County"; we collaborate across all of our community issues, not just child welfare. So, it is nice to be able to have the shoulder of your colleagues to lean on when you're strategizing and unfortunately, sometimes it happens when you're dealing with a tragedy. So, no one system is responsible, and we're all in it together.

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**SM: Do you think there's racial bias in the child welfare system? And if so, why and how?**

**KC:** Racial bias and structural and institutional racism exists in the child welfare system, not unlike every other public system in the United States, because the country was founded on racist practices and a belief that black people are subhuman. And if you go all the way back to the framing of the Constitution and look at federal legislation over time, you can see the institutionalization of racism in our structures. It isn't until we take a conscious look at our structures and our policies and our subsequent practices that we're able to actually do something intentional about it.

None of us come into the child welfare arena to do further harm to children, and all of us are doing really great work and have seen some success. But we haven't seen the kind

of deep and broad transformational change that's necessary to protect all kids and families, because we haven't at this point been able to deal with, honestly, the structural and institutional racism that exists in the child welfare system. In Broward County, we have decided that we're going to take the blindfold off and have an honest conversation about the reality of institutional and structural racism in our community.

**SM: You have your own lived experience around this work, but what was the moment as a leader when you said, "Let's take the blinders off"? You had been working in the sector and saw some things, but when did you say, "Kimm, I need to challenge the status quo. I need to have the team really look at this and let's begin to have honest dialogue"?**

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**KC:** I can say exactly why I took action. There are local advisory committees in each of [Florida's] circuits, and ours looks at data every month. And the local lead agency, ChildNet, was facing a huge multimillion-dollar deficit. There were thousands of kids coming into care; they were staying in care way too long. It was a crisis point for us, and the state came down in a full contingent to ask Broward County what we were going to do about the crisis we

were facing. They had a complete set of slides to show us all the data and all the pain points, basically, that needed to be addressed. Unfortunately, a slide that clearly showed the disproportionality of the kids that were coming into care wasn't included, and it [upset me] because that is the crux of the issue with our system, and so I arranged a meeting with the president and CEO of the Urban League down here and said to her, "I'm not sure you're aware, but right down the street from you, the child welfare system is decimating black families, and you are an institution charged with serving this community, and it's happening right under your nose. You need to serve as the lead to mobilize this community and say we are not going to stand for black [families] being decimated unnecessarily in Broward County."

Because child welfare is not the core mission of the Urban League, I spent some time giving her a tutorial about child welfare and how the system runs, its history, and you know, just how it works locally, and we strategized about who needed to be at the table from a leadership perspective. We wanted our partners that are at our level in this community with decision-making authority and resources to bring to bear, and we convened the group using the weight of the Urban League as the lead entity, and I can talk to you about the process we've gone through to impact the removal of black kids; it's quite an extraordinary journey. But that was the impetus, the fact that everyone knew there was a disproportionality issue that was outrageous, and that they chose to ignore it was just infuriating, so I felt I had no choice.

**SM: Can you talk a little bit about the work? In other words, what policies and practices you believe child welfare should have in terms of employing diversity, equity and inclusion strategy.**

**KC:** We created the Child Welfare Race Equity Workgroup, a cross-sector of representation, nonprofit providers, governmental entities, the court system—including the public defender's office, state attorney's office and judiciary—and community members and began to have honest conversations on a monthly basis about the state of affairs in two ZIP codes in particular, 33311 and 33313, which are predominately African American, or black, because we have Caribbean Americans, too, and the highest number of removals in the state, not just in our local system.

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We decided that we needed to establish some guiding principles. We agreed on a set of six: Continuous Institution and Structural Analysis, Respectfully Confronting and Naming Racism, Courageous Partnerships with Families, Rigorous Self-Assessment, Shared Accountability and Commitment to Action, Innovation and Transformational Change. So, we decided in order to actualize the work, standing on our guiding principles, we had to have a common analysis and language to talk about the issue. So, we endorsed and agreed to participate in a two-day race equity workshop, Dismantling Racism—which is the broader initiative for the entire community. The Dismantling Racism Initiative isn't focused solely on child welfare, but rather on all of the human and social services sectors that I'm responsible for leading in Broward.

With this two-day workshop, we began to learn about the specious construct of race and how race and racism have been interwoven in the very fabric of the United States from its inception, and concrete examples of how racism plays out day in and day out in the public and private sectors that are responsible for serving the most

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vulnerable populations. We established an infrastructure of support, because the two-day training is very intensive, it's very raw, and people have extreme emotional responses. Some are thrilled at the new knowledge and it's liberating, and they finally have language to name their experience, and others find it shattering. It really challenges some people's core beliefs about who they are and their place in the world, and they can't handle it. And so, people fall anywhere on that spectrum. What we found quite essential is this infrastructure of support, such that after folks have had the training, they come back for a debrief

session so they can talk about the impact of exposure to the material. We usually schedule it two or three weeks after they've had a chance to talk to their family, their friends and their colleagues about what they've learned, and what's interesting about the debrief is that people talk about ways they now recognize structural, institutional and even interpersonal racism that before, they never would have noticed. It's quite phenomenal.

Once a person goes through the debrief, we then have caucus work happening where black people have a caucus, LatinX people have a caucus, and white people have a caucus on a monthly basis and then quarterly, we have a joint caucus where we all come together. The purpose of the caucus work is to deepen our analysis around our common understanding and language about structural and institutional racism, and [build] a support platform that allows people to talk about their ongoing experience with racism within their system so that we can strategize how to address it and support each other along the way. Members of the Child Welfare Race Equity Workgroup have participated in this process and use that lens to inform the work we're doing.



*Kimm Campbell at the Urban League of Broward County's Game On! Red Gala*

One of the things I am most passionate about, besides race equity, is this idea of family inclusion and parents as equal partners. And I don't believe we have the authority to make decisions on behalf of families without their voice at the table. I think that's true for decision-making at all levels, from a decision-making team or a child-and-family team meeting, all the way up to a board meeting where policy decisions are made. We said when we started the Child Welfare Race Equity Workgroup that we would have families participate with us, and then had a hard time getting families, so there were lots of

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intentional conversations about how you recruit and prepare families to come into the room with a voice that's respected as equal. So, we facilitated focus groups and other kinds of outreach and parent support activities to engage parents, and I'm happy to say that we have identified and supported two women who are mothers who went through the child welfare system and were successfully reunited with their children, now serving as parent leaders on our workgroup.

What's significant about that is that they get to participate with the rest of us around allocation and policy decisions. We decided we didn't want the traditional, big "gorillas on the block"

agencies to serve this particular issue we were trying to address in this particular corridor. We wanted small, indigenous agencies who already have relationships and a footprint in that community to be able to get access to the dollars to try to address the removal rates in that community. And so, we had a brief RFP procurement process, and agencies submitted applications, and we had family members on the rating panel to rate the proposals and decide who was going to be the agency to serve as lead to provide the family preservation services so that we can cut down on the removals. We're actualizing family voice and participation as equal partners at every level in our work, and it's rewarding, and it's exhilarating, and it's reaffirming to have that.

I've worked in a lot of communities where professionals get very frustrated having to partner with families. There's an approach that's condescending because some parents don't come with the educational background and professional savvy that professionals have, and it takes a dedicated investment to bring them up to the point where their voices are equal. But it's really not that difficult if you come from an orientation as a professional that the parents are actually the experts in their own lives and in the system because they are the victims of it. And so, their voice is invaluable to the policies and practices that we design because they're the ones we're directly impacting and putting upon when we roll them out. For me, it doesn't take a lot of patience. It's the work. It's very exciting.

**SM: That's excellent. Who is the facilitator?**

**KC:** I initiated the partnership with [Urban League](#) to be the lead because they're a neutral body with the charge of serving African Americans nationally. So, for me, because they were situated in that community it made the most sense politically and operationally for them to serve and be seen as the leader of this. They have a staff person who works in partnership with my staff person as co-facilitators of the

workgroup and together they put the agendas together, they have planning meetings between the workgroup meetings, and organize the work between meetings. But we really positioned this so that Urban League is seen as the leader in this, and when you hear people in the community talk about it, they'll say, "Urban League's race equity work for child welfare," which is fine with me because I'm not doing this for recognition. My ego is not attached to this. It is OK as long as black families are getting the services they deserve. So, it's worked out beautifully.

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**SM: What is our impact and what is our return on the investment in terms of the work that we're doing with the community, with the parents being at the center leading the work? What have you been finding? What causes you excitement? What gives you pause?**

**KC:** So, let me give you the frame for this. I've talked to you already about the community and systems-organizing work and the infrastructure for this work ... let me transition to the service side of this work. You heard me say that we issued an RFP and selected a local, indigenous provider to do that family preservation work using family strengthening as the model; that agency is [Community Based Connections](#). So, the staff that's employed by that agency obviously was trained in family strengthening, and they were also trained in race equity. Then on the child welfare investigations side, we identified what we're calling the "pilot squad" of people: investigators and a supervisor also trained in family strengthening and race equity. Now, in the child welfare investigation unit, the majority are going through the process of training their investigators in Strengthening Families and race equity so it's slowly spreading.

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Everyone will have that baseline, but what's different about the pilot for [ZIP codes] 33311 and 33313 is the overlay of the Dismantling Racism race equity training. So, in Broward, our baseline covers two years of removal data in these two ZIP codes, and we were removing an average of 25 children from these two communities a month. Since January and through September, we've had 12 removals for the squad that's using the race equity lens to implement Strengthening Families. We've had 41 removals for the rest of the squads that are implementing Peer

Strengthening Families. So, if you figure in a nine-month period ... under the old model, we removed 225 kids in a nine-month period. In this new model, for the one squad, 12 removals. And for the other, 41. So, that's a total removal number of 53 children as opposed to 225.

From the agency perspective, Community Based Connections is reporting that 100 percent of the families they served through this process maintained their lower levels or decreased their higher levels of parenting stress. Ninety-seven percent of the families reported that they feel like they've improved their functioning or family functioning. One hundred percent of the families who have participated have no verified abuse finding six months after program completion, and 97 percent of families have no verified abuse findings 12 months post completion.

**SM: I want to talk about what gives you hope for child welfare moving forward, and if you were to talk to your colleagues across the nation, what would you tell them about your journey as you sit at the table?**

**KC:** Let me speak first locally. We started this as a pilot in these specific communities, but obviously people of color live everywhere in our community, and the reality is that white people are victims of institutional and structural racism, as well, even in their privilege. We are all victims of this machine. So, my vision for local child welfare is to bring to scale the pilot so that all investigators, their supervisors and their managers, all case managers in the private lead agency, and all the workers [on the] child protection team and the nonprofit communities that serve them—that all of us are trained in race equity and it serves as the backdrop, foundation, and overlay for the work that we do day in and day out with families. Because now our numbers are demonstrating that that's where change happens. That's the point.

I established the first-ever Office of Equity and Community Investment in Broward County and fortunately, I have a very supportive group of commissioners who believe in the work. I've reached out to the Sheriff and gotten a partnership with him, since it's his section that is responsible for investigations, but it's also his deputies that provide the majority of policing for the entire community. They are on board with the race equity

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work. He's committed \$500,000 to getting all his deputies trained in our framework. The vision is to roll this out so that when I'm gone, the institution is stable and remains, and the work continues, because we're growing new professionals in the framework and new leaders in the framework across all the sectors, so maybe Florida will take note, and they'll bring to scale what we're doing in Broward all over the state.

It's an interesting question, because regardless of political affiliation or background, people don't necessarily enjoy talking about things like racism. It's an uphill battle, and



I guess what I would say to other leaders who want to engage in this work is that you can't be doing it because you want to add something to your resume. It is exhausting sometimes to continue to have to educate others, and white leaders in particular about the impact of policies and their decisions on people of color. And in your exhaustion, you have to find other people who get it and can reinforce you and take care of you so that you can reemerge ready to fight another day.

When you're in the trees, you can't see the forest. Sometimes when we go to the workgroup meetings, people are negative about the progress we've made, and they're frustrated that the people they're talking to don't get it, and won't buy in and won't come on board, and you can fall victim to the misconception that what you're doing isn't making a difference.

So as leaders, we have to stay above—at 30,000 feet—and really have a solid grasp about the entire picture so that when the people on the ground doing the work get frustrated, and burnt out, and tired, we can remind them of the amazing success and accomplishments they're having every day that they can't see because they're dealing with the barriers. So, it requires long-term commitment—it is a journey. What I said to the Sheriff to get him to agree, I think, is that this is a legacy work. This is not quick work to get reelected. It's not quick work to get an award. This is long-term, legacy-building and leaving work. What do you want it to look like when you're gone?

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**SM: Do you see the LGBTQ community as a part of this work, as well?**

**KC:** I'm going to say this to you, and it might be controversial and I'm fine with that. The LGBTQ community needs a specific set of resources and support. For me, it is dangerous to combine that movement with the race equity movement because they are not the same. While the LGBTQ community has been the target of hate crimes—gay folks particularly, you know, have been the target of hate crimes for many years—there is no other group in the United States that has the legacy of terrorism that the African American group has. There is nothing that compares to the experience of slavery, of reconstruction, of Jim Crow, of police brutality ... there's nothing. So, to water it down with women's rights, with LGBTQ rights, takes the focus away from race equity and allows people to escape dealing with the issue that is the legacy of the United States. I don't allow the conversation about women's rights or gay rights or any of the other isms in the race equity space. We have other work happening to address their particular and unique needs, but I don't want any distractions.

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Because you don't understand how quickly the conversation around the table can move off of racism. I mean, people are so uncomfortable talking about it, that as soon as you

bring up something else, we're off to the races and that's not the point of this work. It isn't LGBTQ kids that are being removed from their families at an alarming rate. It's black kids. While their issue is important, that's not why we're here.

We've trained over 2,000 people in Broward County across all sectors in this Dismantling Racism Initiative. So, we're building a groundswell of people who have a common analysis and language with which to tackle this issue and make progress in dismantling it.

**SM: Aside from those 2,000 people, do you have another group you might be thinking about in terms of moving the work? What about some of the members of the community? Were members of the community involved at all?**

**KC:** One of our sister organizations and co-funders of the Dismantling Racism Initiative is the [Children's Services Council](#). They have facilitated several participatory action research projects to engage the community. Also, we have hosted several youth sessions where we've taken groups of high-school kids through our workshop to gain an analysis, and we've had some parents in the room. It's challenging because it's a full two days, eight hours each day, and you can't miss any of it. And you know a lot of folks have to work in jobs that don't allow them the flexibility to be able to come, so we're talking about doing a Saturday and Sunday session, so we can get more parents and kids trained. Again, we're building a legacy. The parent engagement subcommittee of the Race Equity workgroup has decided—just yesterday, actually—to have their meetings on a Saturday afternoon, and all the professionals agreed to meet on Saturday because that's what was best for the parents. It's because of the intentional work and relationship-building and just really sticking with it ... and it's over the last 18 to 24 months that the group has gotten to this point. It's a process; that's why you've got to keep coming back. You've just got to keep coming back.



*Kimm Campbell accepting the Margaret Roach Humanitarian Award at the Red Gala*

**SM: Tell me about your award.**

**KC:** The award was the Margaret L. Roach Humanitarian of the Year. Margaret Roach was the woman who helped cofound the Broward County Urban League affiliate, and it's awarded to people who have significant contributions in social justice and race relations work over the previous five years in the local community. I was awarded this because of the Dismantling Racism Initiative broadly, and more specifically, the race equity in child welfare work. For our community, it's a big deal and I didn't expect it, number one, and I was very humbled by it. And I said in the video they shot for the awards ceremony that I feel so fortunate to live in a community that actually would acknowledge and award race equity work, because it is the most challenging and pressing issue of our time. There are many communities who won't even have a conversation let alone strategize about what to do about it. So, the fact that it's recognized as something positive really speaks volumes about our community, not that it doesn't have its challenges, but the groundswell of support for the work is awesome, which allows me to continue pushing forward. I said to people, and I say it all over town, I'm going to do this work until I'm successful in dismantling racism in the systems in Broward County, or I'm run out of town on a rail whichever one comes first.

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**SM: What personally keeps you in the work?**

**KC:** I'm really compelled to do the work. I think it comes from my own personal experience—the fact that I'm a product of the child welfare system myself. That a Swedish woman and a German man wanted me enough to threaten to sue the state of Illinois to get me. The fact that they had already adopted a Native American son long before the [Indian Child Welfare Act](#), I might add. That they raised this multi-cultural family with an eye towards equality. This family spent a lifetime in and out of communities all over this country, working towards equality. Both my parents are 89, still married, living in Charlotte, and when I saw them in July, we had a conversation about the need to move from working towards racial equality to working towards race equity. That was a very hard conversation for them to have because they didn't have a concept of what equity means, so I broke that down for them and my dad got a little bit offended thinking that I was discounting his lifetime of work towards race equality. He tells stories as a white man going into the south side of Chicago knocking on doors in order to build relationships with people of color in his effort towards equality. Then I had an opportunity to explain to him this concept of white fragility and what that looks like and how that impacts people of color. So, even at his age and stage, there's opportunities for growth and advancement of the work, so I do it, Sharon, because I have to; I was raised to, under the mantra, “Be bold and audacious in the face of adversity and fearless in actions.”

*Kimm Campbell has 25 years of experience in human services within state and local governments. She has provided leadership, direct services and consultative services in adult and child mental health, child welfare, special education, juvenile justice, domestic violence, homelessness and substance abuse. Ms. Campbell has designed family support services frameworks for housing authorities, standardized supportive services within school districts, and created detention transition services for incarcerated youth. At the time of this interview she was the Director of the Broward County Human Services Department, responsible for the leadership and administration of approximately \$160 million in local state and federal funds across a wide range of services to impact the lives of Broward County's most vulnerable residents. She has since been promoted to Assistant County Administrator. Additionally, Ms. Campbell is a national consultant working with the U.S. Department of Justice, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and various state disability rights firms. She serves as a member on the Board of Directors for Broward Behavioral Health Coalition and OIC of South Florida and is a member of the Coordinating Council of Broward. She serves as a national board member of Black Administrators in Child Welfare.*

*Ms. Campbell is most passionate about social justice and race equity and approaches the work of human services from these perspectives in order to create lasting community change. She was recently recognized as the Margaret L. Roach Humanitarian of the Year for her implementation of the Dismantling Racism Initiative in Broward County, in addition to her work dedicated specifically to race equity in child welfare.*