



PROBLEMS THE PRACTICE MODEL WAS DEVELOPED TO SOLVE

Despite caseload decline, improved placement stability, and kinship care increases in the California child welfare system and many other states since 2000, the number of children that age out of the system—often facing uncertain futures with too little adult guidance—has actually risen since the beginning of the decade. In California, and mirrored in many other child welfare jurisdictions nationally, data show that the youth who are most likely to age out of care without permanency are African American and American Indian.¹ The federal Permanency Innovations Initiative provided a unique opportunity for the California Department of Social Services to bring four child welfare jurisdictions and their partners together to define the most serious barriers to permanency for these children and to co-create solutions that could improve child and family outcomes.

Barriers reflected in the literature and identified through community dialogue and system reviews lifted up critical gaps in understanding and responsiveness to the needs of children disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. At both practice and system levels, the historical trauma and cultural traditions, beliefs, and values of families, communities, and Tribes were being disregarded. Implementing jurisdictions and their partners agreed that the historical impact of racism, which tore African American and American Indian families apart and limited opportunities for higher education and the accumulation of wealth, continues to be deeply felt in our society.

Many families receiving child welfare services deeply, and justifiably, mistrust public systems that have historically been unwilling to acknowledge the history of racism and discrimination in our communities and the impact of the ensuing historical trauma on our institutions, communities, Tribes, families, and children. Additionally, those systems have failed to work in partnership with families, communities, and Tribes to address the unequal distribution of power and resources that affect child and family engagement and service planning and delivery. The problems the partners were attempting to solve in developing and implementing the Practice Model included:

- Child welfare system practice and policy does not adequately understand, engage, or value the strengths and resources of communities and Tribes whose children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system due to mutual mistrust (at both the individual and system levels) and a lack of understanding of the differences in the lived experiences of these children and their families and communities;
- Child welfare system practice and policy has not consistently partnered with communities and Tribes to address the underlying grief, trauma, and loss their children and families are more likely to experience in their lives and to identify, develop, fund, and make available culturally-based and trauma-informed support services.

It became clear that supporting the kind of practice transformation needed to address the problem would require significant system alignment and organizational change that could only be accomplished in partnership with local communities and Tribes who understood the strengths, needs, and trauma histories of the children and families being served. The Child and Family Practice Model was inspired and co-created by four California counties and their agency, community, and Tribal partners to address these problems through a comprehensive and culturally responsive approach to both practice and system change.

¹ Public Policy Institute of California. (2010). *Foster care in California: achievements and challenges*. Retrieved from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_510CDR.pdf.