



**Children's Law Center
of California**

Excellence In Advocacy

STRATEGIC PLAN

2022-2025

JANUARY 2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Executive Summary
- 02** Introduction
- 03** Vision, Mission, and Values
- 04** How We Got Here: Strategic Planning Background & Process
- 06** What We Learned: Insights From Data Gathering Process
- 07** The Plan
- 10** Implementation & Evaluation

APPENDICES

- 11** A: CLC Special Programs
- 12** B: Statistics on Disproportionality & Disparate Outcomes
- 14** C: Data Gathering: Youth & Stakeholder Feedback
- 17** D: Data Gathering: CLC Staff Feedback
- 21** E: Strategic Planning Staff & Leadership
- 22** F: Glossary of Terms

Children's Law Center of California 2022-2025 Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

CLC is proud to share with you our 2022 Strategic Plan. In a time of significant challenges both within the child welfare system and faced by the children and families we serve, the importance of these ambitious goals cannot be overstated. We recognize that we will likely face barriers along the way, and we are committed to working through these obstacles.

In furtherance of CLC's vision of **Excellence in Advocacy**, our year-long strategic planning process was a complex exercise which included reflecting not only on how we can best serve our young clients, but also on our role as part of a system deeply entrenched with racism and bias.

The collaborative process that led to the organizational goals below included input from staff, our Board of Directors, youth, stakeholders, and community members; the support of a strategic planning consultant and a research analysis firm; and in-depth analysis of what we learned, all culminating in the final product presented in the pages that follow.

CLC's Strategic Goals:



All three goals are supported by CLC's **foundational commitment** of continuous quality improvement through data-driven accountability, consistent and meaningful client input, and the strengthening and streamlining of internal processes.

CLC would like to thank our strategic planning staff workgroups and leadership team for their hard work and dedication. We are grateful to Gayle Northrop for her guidance throughout the process; to our Board of Directors for their support of our vision; and to all our committed staff who work tirelessly day in and day out on behalf of the clients we serve.

Children's Law Center of California

2022-2025 Strategic Plan



Children's Law Center
of California
Excellence In Advocacy

Introduction

Who We Are

Children's Law Center of California (CLC) is a nonprofit, public interest law firm that provides legal representation for children impacted by abuse and neglect.

CLC's highly skilled, passionate, and committed staff fight to ensure the well-being and success of our clients through a multi-disciplinary, independent, and informed approach to advocacy. CLC is a powerful voice for our clients – fighting for family reunification, permanence, educational opportunity, health and mental health services, self-sufficiency, and overall well-being. CLC's advocacy includes specialized programming and expertise in the areas of education; mental health; immigration; dual jurisdiction clients (children in foster care with juvenile justice involvement); sexual and reproductive health; Transition-Age Youth (TAY); Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC); and Expectant and Parenting Youth (EPY); see Appendix A for details on all CLC's special programs. We are a driving force in local, statewide, and national policy change and child welfare system reform.

Today, CLC and our staff of over 500 lawyers, social work investigators, peer advocates, and support staff represent more than 33,000 children and youth in the Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer county child welfare systems.

CLC is the largest children's legal services organization in the nation. Day in and day out, CLC strives to achieve our vision of *Excellence in Advocacy*.

CLC by the Numbers



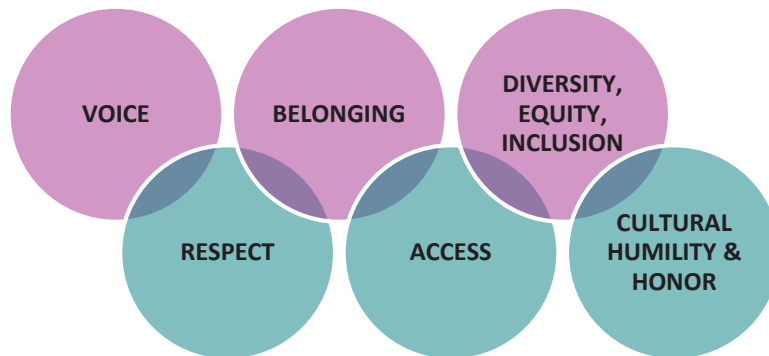
Note: As you review the plan, we encourage you to refer to the appendices included at the end of the document for additional information regarding terms and definitions, expanded data sets, CLC's special projects, and more.

Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision: “Excellence in Advocacy”

Our Mission: Children's Law Center of California (CLC) provides legal representation for children and youth impacted by abuse and neglect. We advocate for our clients by supporting families; fighting for reunification, permanence, educational opportunity, health, and mental health wellness; and empowering and strengthening children, families, and their communities. Our informed approach to advocacy makes us a powerful voice in local, statewide, and national child welfare system reform.

Our Core Values: We are committed to the holistic representation of our clients - understanding that positive outcomes are not determined solely by a legal outcome but also by a child’s overall well-being and experience within the child welfare system. To realize our shared vision of achieving excellence in child advocacy, we uphold the following principles:



VOICE. We are respectful and responsive to the voice of the client and advocate for our clients’ active participation. We ensure our clients have a voice throughout the legal process.

RESPECT. We are dedicated to promoting equality, respect, and dignity among all people. This includes understanding family dynamics and family history. We view children within the context of their families. We promote a trauma-informed practice.

BELONGING. We strive to keep families together. We believe every child deserves loving and permanent relationships. Every child deserves to feel safe, wanted, loved, and heard, and we accept each child for who they are and honor their individuality. We celebrate the communities with which they identify and foster community connections.

ACCESS. Every child deserves meaningful access to education, safe housing, health, and mental health care. We advocate for justice, inclusion, and full community participation, removing barriers, real or perceived, to encourage the widest possible participation.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION. We believe in racial justice and equity in the child welfare system. Through our practice, we strive to dismantle structural racism and implicit and explicit bias that leads to disproportionality and disparate outcomes for Black and Native American families in child welfare. We work to remedy structural inequities for Black, Latino, Native American, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, those living in poverty, and other individuals and groups that have been traditionally unheard and historically devalued or excluded.

CULTURAL HUMILITY AND HONOR. We honor each child’s heritage, culture, and traditions, and are committed to learning from and lifting the voices of our clients. We encourage our employees to bring their unique, whole selves to the work. Our workplace strives to reflect the communities we serve, and we seek dedicated professionals with varied backgrounds and perspectives, including those with lived experience. We recognize the impact of continuous exposure to trauma on our staff and encourage employees to maintain a regular practice of self-care.

How We Got Here: Strategic Planning Background & Process

History

CLC's prior Strategic Plan was developed in 2013, with implementation beginning in 2014. At that time, our organization was much smaller than it is today and the plan identified goals that were primarily internal. There was a need for increased focus on: transparency in organizational decision-making; allocation of limited resources; increased funding to support operations; improved organizational structuring, including reduced attorney caseloads; improved client outcomes; and improved quality of service delivery. We experienced a widespread sense of low staff morale, largely due to fiscal constraints and heavy workloads.

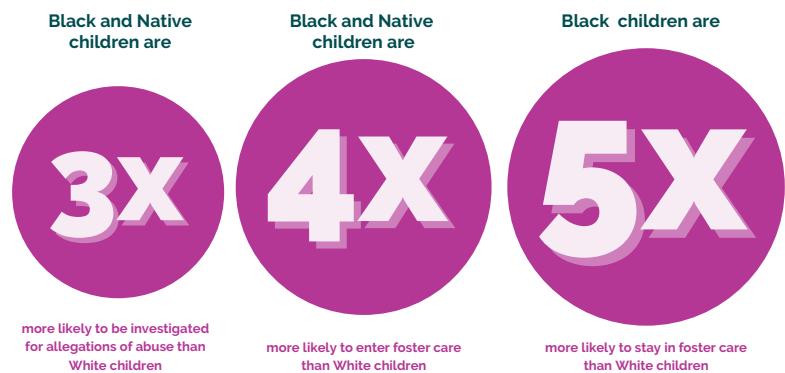
At the time, CLC's financial outlook was strained due to state budget cuts. There was a great need for additional income, and attorney caseloads significantly exceeded recommended standards. As a result, the 2013 Strategic Plan largely reflected the need to shore up internal support, stabilize our workforce, and reduce caseloads in order to better serve our young clients.

Since then, CLC has made great strides on a wide range of issues identified by our previous strategic planning process. Our budget has grown significantly - more than tripling since 2014 - through our series of successful efforts lobbying the Legislature to increase state funding for dependency counsel as well as our work securing grants from private donors. CLC also worked to implement a new methodology for distributing state funds to dependency counsel in California to more fairly and accurately reflect client populations served within different jurisdictions.

Collectively, these efforts led to a reduction in attorney caseloads by more than 50% - a significant improvement in workload, increased specialization, and staff ability to serve clients in a meaningful way.

Today

In recent years, child welfare has shifted to more fully recognize how entrenched our system is with the effects of racism and bias. Families of color are overwhelmingly overrepresented in the system, and outcomes for children of color are dramatically poorer than those for White children in foster care. Regardless of intention, in our role as child advocates working within this existing system, it is our obligation to both work to reduce racism as it impacts our clients and to look inward at our biases to improve our practice and long-term outcomes for the children we represent.



Data from California Child Welfare Indicators Project, University of California, Berkeley (2020)

**Many of the goals and strategies contained within the plan focus on Black and Native families, as they are the two groups who are overwhelmingly overrepresented in child welfare in California. However, Latino families are also overrepresented nationally and make up a significant portion of our client base. CLC aims to improve outcomes for, and the experiences of, ALL children and families served within the Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Placer county child welfare systems.*

While we are proud of the many steps we have taken thus far toward the critical work of anti-racism, we need to take bold action. Educating ourselves, our Board of Directors, and system partners - and ensuring their commitment to these ideals - is just the beginning. This work is more complicated than initially envisioned and led us to engage in the important process of organizational strategic planning to explore and ultimately implement the principles of a truly anti-racist practice.

Anti-Racism: Structural racism, implicit and explicit bias, and discriminatory practices pervade the child welfare and legal systems.

CLC is committed to fighting structural racism and being an anti-racist workplace. Being anti-racist means working proactively to create policies, practices, and procedures which promote racial equity and to consistently challenge biases and prejudice within ourselves and the system as a whole.

To learn more about the terminology that guided us through this process, please see Appendix F.

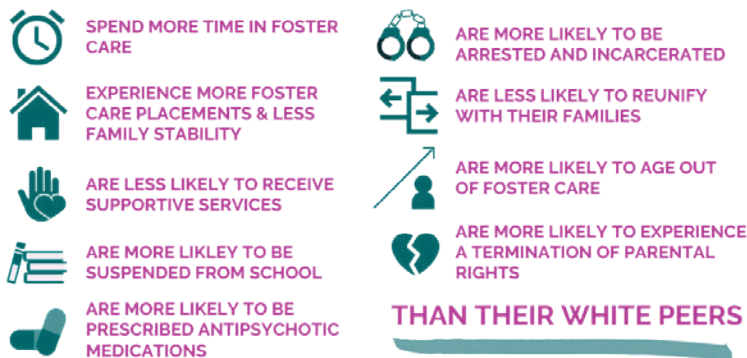
“Anti-racism” is more than the passive act of being “not racist.”

The result of this complex and sometimes uncomfortable process led us to the plan set forth below. In addition to working toward the outlined goals and objectives, CLC remains committed to our core principle of excellence in advocacy, including prioritizing keeping families intact; preventing unnecessary entries into the system; placement with relatives rather than unknown caregivers when families are unable to remain together; ensuring our clients receive needed supports and services in the least restrictive environment possible; continuous staff training to improve service delivery and client outcomes; and policy advocacy/system reform efforts to support the long-term success of our clients and their families.



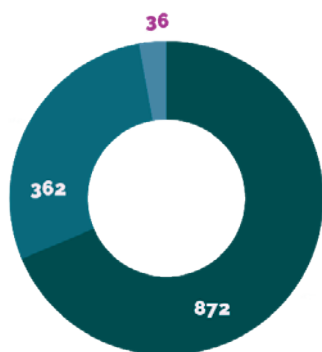
Half of Black and Native children experience a CPS investigation during the first 18 years of their lives, compared to nearly a quarter of White children.

ONCE SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES, BLACK CHILDREN:



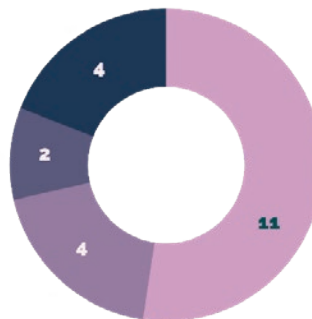
CLC’s preparation stage for the current Strategic Plan occurred over a 12-month period spanning November 2020 through November 2021. With the support of a strategic planning consultant as well as an established research analysis firm, we solicited in-depth feedback from former clients, all levels of staff, and external partners including foster parents and funders. Methods of information gathering included online surveys, in-person/virtual focus groups and feedback sessions, and telephone interviews. CLC’s internal strategic planning committees then synthesized the information gathered in a careful and detailed process which led us to our identified goals and objectives for the next four years.

Data from American Public Health Association, “Cumulative Rates of Child Protection Involvement and Terminations of Parental Rights in California Cohort 1999-2017” (2021) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children’s Bureau, Bulletin for Professionals (2021)



Survey Respondents

872 children,
362 staff,
and 36
stakeholders
surveyed



Focus Groups

11 staff focus
groups, 2
management
groups, 4 former
youth in foster
care groups, and
4 board member
groups

What We Learned: Insights From Data Gathering Process

Key Findings

Our comprehensive data gathering process (detailed in Appendix C and D) resulted in the following overarching takeaways:

- **Clients and Stakeholders**: CLC is highly regarded among current and former clients and external community stakeholders; CLC is viewed as “extremely effective advocates” for our clients.
- **CLC Staff**: Staff particularly applaud CLC’s creation of the ReDD (Reducing Disparity and Disproportionality) Committee and its “powerful and necessary” trainings. CLC is viewed as playing an important leadership role in statewide systemic reform efforts, and dedicated to addressing issues of systemic racism and the development of actively anti-racist practices.

The process also identified areas in need of prioritization going forward. These findings formed the basis for our Goals and Strategies framework detailed later in our plan.

1. Create mechanisms for consistent and meaningful client input



“Talk to me to find out how I feel, make sure I understand everything that’s going on. It takes more than five minutes to get that understanding.” - CLC client

2. Provide ongoing support to clients after they exit foster care/after their dependency case has closed

*“I felt like it took a toll on me emotionally and mentally being thrown into adulthood with so many unresolved issues and still having to move forward. It definitely caused my depression and anxiety.”
– CLC client*



3. Turn trainings into practice by using what we have learned about disproportionality and disparity to provide effective courtroom advocacy



“Teach attorneys how to use their legal skills to dismantle white supremacy in the courtroom by crafting and deploying arguments that directly address the structural racism that our child welfare system rests upon.” – CLC staff

4. Enhance communication and collaboration opportunities between different staff disciplines

“We need to take more time to learn from each other. Attorneys and investigators have such unique perspectives, and communicating more can only help our advocacy.” – CLC staff



5. Recruit, promote, and retain diverse staff, management, and Board members



“It would help to have more diversity on the Board itself and that those voices are being heard and providing new points of view.” – CLC Board Member

6. Prioritize review and accountability of CLC’s work and its direct connection to client outcomes, including concrete and improved methods of evaluation, data collection, and assessment

“We need to look at our cases with more critical lenses and see how race plays into them. Race is often at the forefront of many cases (though it is often hidden). Start to push for policies and practices that affect this population while continuing to check our own biases.” – CLC staff



7. Continually challenge sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and disability-related biases and provide opportunities for feedback and assessment



“CLC can create an environment that fosters open feedback and collaboration across all positions.” – CLC staff

The Plan: Where We Are Going from Here

**Please note that 'children' as used throughout the document refers to both children and youth ages 0-21.*

GOAL #1: Reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system, focusing on reducing the disproportionality of Black and Native American children

Strategy #1: Expand and Enhance Training

- Provide ongoing, interactive trainings for all staff
- Train on issues related to systemic racism, implicit bias, trauma, and multigenerational dependency involvement, among others
- Include mechanisms for self-assessment and application of trainings to case analysis throughout all stages of the client representation

Strategy #2: Strengthen CLC Practices and Advocacy Tools

- Develop anti-racist practice toolkit including quick guides, fact sheets, brief banks, sample motions, expert lists, and articles
- Explore alternate staffing models such as shared attorney/investigator caseloads and potential additional staff categories
- Implement process for increased information sharing between attorneys and investigators
- Explore the opportunity for cultural brokers to strengthen practices

Strategy #3: Increase Collaboration and Partnerships

- Work with other entities, including counsel for parents, county counsel, the child welfare agency, and the bench, to share promising / best practices for dependency stakeholders
- Develop a shared baseline understanding of the existence of bias in child welfare and its impact on families

Strategy #4: Advocate for Systems Change

- Engage in advocacy for needed legislative and system reforms to prevent unnecessary entries into foster care and in areas exacerbating the disproportionate overrepresentation of Black and Native families in the child welfare system

IMPACT

- CLC staff identify bias and racism in their clients' cases and master the tools necessary to counter the bias and racism
- All stakeholders within the child welfare system develop a deeper understanding of how bias and racism contribute to disproportionality in the system
- CLC's policy advocacy contributes to positive system-wide changes intended to reduce entries into child welfare over the long term
- More of the children who come to the attention of the child welfare system are supported within their family and community or are expeditiously reunified with their families, resulting in fewer children in foster care

GOAL #2: Improve the experience and outcomes for children engaged with the child welfare system, and address disparities based on race and ethnicity

Strategy #1: Expand and Enhance Training

- Provide ongoing, interactive trainings for all staff
- Train on issues related to poorer outcomes for children and families of color
- Provide evidence-based training regarding client interviewing to ensure genuine, accurate, and reliable communication and understanding
- Include mechanisms for self-assessment and application of trainings to case analysis throughout all stages of client representation

Strategy #2: Strengthen CLC Practices and Advocacy Tools

- Implement front-end family finding and case review process for every client not living with family
- Plan for comprehensive, frequent, developmentally appropriate client contacts to promote trust and meaningful communication
- Explore feasibility of engagement with former clients after they exit care
- Expand and deepen the reach of Peer Advocate Program
- Create mechanism to include client voice in internal decision-making and policy work

Strategy #3: Increase Collaboration and Partnerships

- Work with entities including community-based organizations (CBOs), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and Parent Partners; mental health, health, and educational/developmental service providers; and auxiliary legal services organizations to support clients
- Deepen knowledge, resources, and partnerships to better meet each client's educational, health, mental health, and developmental goals
- Work with schools to share promising / best practices for serving children involved with the child welfare system, especially as to students of color

Strategy #4: Advocate for Systems Change

- Advocate for legislative and system reforms in areas related to disparity, such as changes to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), de-linking AB 12/extended care funding from housing status, and interdisciplinary trainings for hearing officers and justice partners
- Advocate for legislative and system reforms to uplift the voices of people with lived experience in all decision-making and policy implementation
- Foster a culture where the client's voice is welcomed, respected, and prioritized by the court, child welfare agency, service providers, and advocates

IMPACT

- CLC's policies and practices are informed by individuals with lived experience
- CLC staff understand disparities in outcomes for children of color and have the tools to improve the experience of children in foster care
- CLC has strengthened partnerships to support children in the child welfare system
- CLC's policy advocacy leads to positive system-wide changes, reduced disparate outcomes for children of color, and improved outcomes for all children in child welfare

GOAL #3: Create a workplace committed to anti-racism and actively engaged in anti-racist practices

Strategy #1: Diversify and Build Board Capacity and Collaboration

- Identify the desired Board composition and then increase diversity to reflect identified goals
- Provide Board members with educational opportunities to understand CLC's work, including mandatory bias and racism trainings during onboarding and on an ongoing basis
- Include discussions of bias and anti-racism in Board meetings regularly
- Consider external support mechanisms such as retreats or hiring a consultant to support Board development

Strategy #2: Foster Inclusive and Diverse Organizational Process and Culture

- Prioritize hiring staff with lived foster care experience
- Explore mentorship models for improved depth of staff training
- Create and activate a Youth Advisory Council

IMPACT

- CLC has a racially diverse board
- CLC has a deep and accurate understanding of our staff demographics and a roadmap to address gaps
- CLC culture is inclusive and actively anti-racist
- CLC's Youth Advisory Council informs decision-making

FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENT: Drive organizational continuous quality improvement to achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan

Strategy #1: Ensure Accountability

- Develop process for soliciting ongoing current and former client feedback regarding CLC policies, practices, advocacy, and client experience
- Track and analyze data to understand practice patterns and areas for improvement
- Establish process for regular review of caseloads, workloads, staffing model, management structures
- Conduct periodic organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) assessments or explore other methods of self-accountability for being an anti-racist workplace

Strategy #2: Strengthen and Streamline Internal Processes

- Ensure organization-wide baseline standards of practice
- Implement process for continuous information-based feedback loops among staff, management, and peers
- Formalize regular case review process
- Create an internal mechanism for automatic review by a specialized team to develop an action plan for any client separated from family (including siblings), not meeting their well-being goals, or lacking a clear path to permanence

IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION OF THE 2022-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Children's Law Center of California's Board of Directors approved and adopted this Strategic Plan on December 8, 2021. Additional plans and documents will be created to support its implementation. As needed, the annual budget, annual development plan and department/operational plans will be modified to meet the goals of the plan.

The Strategic Plan and progress toward its implementation will be discussed at quarterly Board meetings and more regularly by CLC's Leadership Team. The Board of Directors, Executive Director, and Leadership Team will conduct a formal review of the Strategic Plan at least once a year and make any necessary updates or adjustments. In this way, CLC's Strategic Plan will remain a relevant and useful document in guiding the priorities and activities of the organization in the years to come.

APPENDICES

- A: CLC Special Programs
- B: Statistics on Disproportionality & Disparate Outcomes
- C: Data Gathering: Youth & Stakeholder Feedback
- D: Data Gathering: CLC Staff Feedback
- E: Strategic Planning Staff & Leadership
- F: Glossary of Terms



Children's Law Center
of California
Excellence In Advocacy

CLC Special Programs

Appendix A

CARE Unit

The CARE Unit is an intensive case management program that provides critical interventions to children and youth in foster care who are dually involved with the juvenile justice system and expectant or parenting youth.

CSEC Team

Working at the intersection of child abuse and sexual abuse, our CSEC Team provides legal representation and intensive services to clients who have experienced commercial sex trafficking.

Educational Advocacy

Our in-house Education Team works to protect our clients' educational rights and to ensure they have appropriate resources to meet their educational needs.

Immigration

CLC's Immigration Team screens clients for immigration relief, assesses the need for immigration counsel, and works with case carrying attorneys to secure appropriate dependency court orders.

Mental Health Advocacy Team (MHAT)

Our MHAT Team focuses on improving the emotional well-being and functioning of our clients by working alongside the CLC attorneys to identify needed services, develop a treatment plan and make placement recommendations.

Peer Advocate Program

Our Peer Advocate Program provides case management services and guidance to thousands of transition-age clients.

Reducing Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Committee (ReDD)

CLC's internal ReDD committee is made up of staff from all job categories who work to understand and address the "why" behind racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system. This learning is the springboard to raise awareness, educate our staff and other stakeholders, and create policy and practice change.

Expectant and Parenting Youth (EPY)

Our EPY program provides intensive advocacy for our parenting or expectant clients before and after the baby is born so they have access to the services and resources they need to provide a safe and loving home for their young children.

Pre-Filing Intervention (PFI)

As part of our larger EPY program, our PFI team focuses on expectant or parenting clients who are at particular risk of losing custody of their own children – providing a full array of legal and non-legal interventions to break the intergenerational cycle of foster care.

**Please note that children refers to both children and youth ages 0-21.*



Statistics on Disproportionality & Disparate Outcomes

Appendix B

Children in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity

Rate of children in foster care per 1,000

	Los Angeles County	Sacramento County	Placer County
Black	28	19.1	<20
Native/American Indian	19.6	23	<20
Hispanic/Latino	6.9	4.4	3.4
White	4.4	4.8	2.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.0	1.9	<20
Total	7.6	5.4	2.5

Source: [Kidsdata.org](https://kidsdata.org) (2018)

Child Welfare Practice to Address Racial Disproportionality and Disparity

- In 2019, nationally: Black children were 14% of the national child population, but 23% of foster care population; Native children were 1% of the national child population, but 2% of the foster care population; White children were 50% of the national child population, but 44% of the foster care population.
- Black families are overrepresented in reports of suspected maltreatment and subject to CPS investigations at higher rates than other families.
- Black or Native children are at greater risk than other children of being confirmed for maltreatment and placed in out-of-home care.
- Black children spend more time in foster care, less likely to reunify with their families, and compared to White children, are less likely to receive services. They are also more likely to be removed from their homes and experience termination of parental rights.

Source: Children's Bureau, "[Child Welfare Practice to Address Racial Disproportionality and Disparity](#)" (April 2021)

California Child Welfare Indicators Project - CWS/CMS Reports

	Black	White	Hispanic/Latino	Asian/PI	Native
% of population	5.6	30.9	51.2	11.8	.4
% of in care	21.2	22	53.7	1.9	1.3
% of allegations	14.2	26.5	53.8	4.6	.9
% of investigations	14.7	25	55.1	4.3	.9
% of substantiations	15	24.1	56.6	3.3	1.0
% of entries	17.9	23.6	54.6	2.6	1.3

Disparity Indexes:

- Black children are 4x more likely to enter care than White children, 5x more likely than White children to be in care, 3x more likely to have allegations substantiated, 3x more likely to have an investigation, and 3x more likely to have an allegation made regarding them than White children.
- Native children are 4x more likely to enter care than White children, 4x more likely than White children to be in care, 3x more likely to have allegations substantiated, 3x more likely to have an investigation, and 2.5x more likely to have an allegation made than White children.

Source: *School of Social Welfare, University of California Berkeley, [CWS/CMS Reports: Presentations](#). California Statewide Specific Data. (2020)*

National Foster Care Facts

- Nationally, 53% of all Black children and their parents will experience a child abuse or neglect investigation before their 18th birthday. Black and Native children experience higher rates of placement disruptions, longer times to permanency, and more frequent re-entry than their White counterparts.¹
- National Data: Black children spend an average of 29 months in out-of-home placement, Hispanic/Latino children an average of 23 months, and White children an average of 18 months.²

Los Angeles County Specific: Black Youth in Foster Care

- More than twice as likely to be chronically absent compared to the county average
- Suspended at a rate of 17% compared with overall county rate of 2%
- Highest representation in special education placement – 37%
- Only 51% of Black foster youth graduated on time during 2018-2019 school year
- Only 12% were eligible to attend a UC or CSU campus upon completing high school in the same year

Source: *UCLA Black Male Institute Study [UCLA Study Details Educational Experiences of Black Youth in Foster Care](#) (2018-2019)*

Fostering Youth Connections

2+ foster care episodes	Black	White	Latino
California	41%	35%	36%
United States	35%	30%	31%

3+ foster care placements	Black	White	Latino
California	52%	52%	47%
United States	55%	49%	55%

- In California: 71% of Black youth aged out of foster care without permanence, compared to 67% of White youth. Nationwide: it was 53% of Black youth, compared to 48% of White youth.
- In California: 29% of Black youth still in care on 19th birthday, vs. 17% of White youth.

Source: *Annie E. Casey Foundation, [“Fostering Youth Transitions”](#). California Specific Data (2018)*

¹ Bryan Samuels, Chapin Hall, “Addressing Systemic Racism in our Child Welfare System,” (2020) [Addressing Systemic Racism in Our Child Welfare System \(imprintnews.org\)](#)

² American Bar Association, “Better Outcomes for Older Youth of Color in Foster Care” (2015) [Better Outcomes for Older Youth of Color in Foster Care \(americanbar.org\)](#)

Youth & Stakeholder Feedback

Appendix C



Children's Law Center
of California

Excellence In Advocacy

Overview

Input was solicited from current and former CLC clients, and from stakeholders with whom CLC interacts (collaborative organizations, colleagues, funders, etc.) via both online surveys and focus groups:

1) Online survey*:

- Criteria:
 - Current clients of at least 2 years, and at least 13 years of age; and
 - Stakeholders with a minimum of 2 years' relationship with CLC

2) Zoom focus group sessions facilitated by LRW

- Criteria:
 - Former foster youth over age 18 previously represented by CLC whose dependency case is now closed

Respondents:

- Online survey: 872 youth*
- Online survey: 36 stakeholders*
- Focus groups: 14 youth over four virtual sessions

Youth Feedback – Primary Takeaways:

(1) Attorney interaction:

- A majority of responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with communication and access to their attorney.

*"I felt like my CLC attorney was **the only person truly on my side**, continuously advocating for me. For them, it was always about what was in my best interest. Not my mother's, the system's, just me."*



- Experiences spanned the spectrum, from 'I don't remember having an attorney' to 'I only spoke with my attorney once or twice' to 'my attorney was amazing, he/she went above and beyond, and I am still in touch with them to this day.' Some youth didn't want to come to court because it would entail spending the whole day there. A number of positive experiences included 'my attorney was a beast in Court for me' and said she 'loves her to this day'. Another youth had a very close relationship with her attorney, indicating that her attorney drove her to the hospital when she had her baby; it 'broke her heart' when her attorney left CLC.
- An issue of note relates to youth reporting that their lawyers were changed to someone new without any notification.

Potential action item: Develop policies designed to: reduce frequency of attorney changes; minimize negative impact on clients when their attorney changes; consider buddy system; 'warm hand off' rather than little to no communication regarding changes.

(2) Challenges in transitioning out of care:

- The four items ranked as areas of highest need by youth all relate to support in transitioning out of care: (1) Understanding mental health issues; (2) Finding employment/life after foster care; (3) Help preparing for college; (4) For youth who also have a probation (delinquency) case, managing that case was a significant concern.
- Most of the focus group participants shared stories of difficulties faced when leaving care, even when transitioning into a college dorm, including a lack of resources for basic things like schoolbooks, and placement plans that would easily fall through. Their agency Independent Living (ILP) Coordinators were difficult to reach and not particularly helpful.
- Many of the youth talked about feeling unprepared for independence, and that because they were accepted into college, there was an assumption that they were already a 'success story' and did not receive much, if any, support.
- One youth described exiting care as a 'black hole...I was cut off from everything.'

Potential action item: Create 'aftercare' process to track/follow up with youth after case closure; continue to advocate for improved and increased resources for foster youth.

(3) Unmet needs/issues mentioned by many youth:

- Overmedication; need for post-system mentorship; lack of financial literacy education; housing insecurity/instability; subpar mental health services; need for a forum for former foster youth to network/connect/share resources; lack of awareness of services available to them (driver's ed; financial aid); need for more accountability for social workers.
- Identity issues: clients noted a lack of awareness/consideration of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Potential action items: Examine opportunities to help youth find and engage with financial literacy resources; advocate for more intensive mental health services; support attorneys in exploring all in-court opportunities for increased DCFS accountability; advocate for youth in restrictive placements to have more liberal visitation with relatives and other trusted adults; ensure a focus on/inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity issues into DEI work.

Overall, the client feedback received was very valuable; integrating a consistent and ongoing process for soliciting client feedback- both current and former - as part of CLC's effort toward continuous improvements in quality of service should be considered.

Stakeholder Feedback – Primary Takeaways:

- (1)** The four areas ranked by stakeholders as highest need were (1) Maintaining family relationships; (2) Life after foster care; (3) Community connections and supportive relationships; (4) Help improving emotional well-being. *Interestingly, the item identified by stakeholders as highest need – maintaining relationships – was ranked lowest by youth.*
- (2)** Overall, stakeholders were most familiar with CLC's policy advocacy work. Second to this, familiarity was highest with CLC's social work investigators and CSEC work. Least familiar was CLC's ReDD work, though not surprising given its internal focus and relative newness as compared to other programs. The Peer Advocate program was praised as very effective and should be expanded.

One stakeholder suggested that CLC should: "Check own internal biases about keeping children of color within their own racial groups but (are) not concerned about **placement of Spanish-speaking**

children with non-Spanish speaking caregivers such that child loses that language and can [no] longer communicate with parents/relatives/siblings.”

Potential action item: Ensure DEI work integrates and prioritizes cultural identity and language issues.

- (3) Stakeholders see CLC as ‘extremely effective’ advocates for clients, with a high level of knowledge of the law and a great deal of care and concern for foster youth.



*“In my experience, CLC attorneys have gone **above and beyond** for many of their clients, traveling long distances to meet with a caregiver in support of stabilizing a placement, providing legal advocacy at school expulsion and manifestation hearings and making sure they have access to reproductive health services. It's **also obvious they have a real heart for their clients.**”*

*“CLC continuously **pushes the envelope** on behalf of children.”*

- (4) In line with youth feedback, stakeholders also noted support for youth after leaving care as an important area of need.

Study Limitations:

- It is important to note that the online survey included a monetary incentive; upon review, it was apparent that a number of the responses were submitted by ‘bots’. While this was considered in the analysis, it is difficult to know precisely how many responses were authentic, and therefore the information gleaned from the survey should be viewed within that context.
- In addition, unfortunately - though not surprisingly - many of the youth conflate broader system issues with representation issues. For example, difficulties with the social worker, accessing ILP services, or dissatisfaction with placement/housing.



Overview

Overview

Systemic racism and racial disproportionality continue to plague the child welfare system. The result of this continued racism is the over-representation of, and disparate impact upon, Black, Latino, and Native American children and families. CLC is committed to working to end systemic racism in the child welfare system as well as its disparate impact on children and families. Toward this end, CLC solicited anonymous feedback from staff regarding their strategic ideas for the next 3-5 years.

Based on the input gathered from the 362 participants, the following strategic themes emerged:

- 1 The importance of staff, management, and Board diversity at CLC:** Responses identified increasing the hiring and promotion of diverse staff, and especially BIPOC staff, as a priority. Multiple staff highlighted the importance and benefit of having staff that are representative of the clients we work with and included suggestions about specifically assigning staff to work with clients of the same background. Others suggested that a specific focus on ensuring diverse membership on the Board of Directors and in management was critical to developing and maintaining an anti-racist practice. Many suggestions were provided about how CLC could increase its recruitment of diverse staff, including creating a task force to focus on engagement with local organizations, bar associations, law schools, and the development of additional fellowship and internship opportunities.
- 2 Space and encouragement to continue the hard work of recognizing and combating systemic racism and disproportionality:** Staff stressed the need for ongoing acknowledgment and recognition of systemic racism and disproportionality within the child welfare system, and explicitly identifying the implicit biases all people hold. Staff recommended that CLC's internal policies be audited as a way of holding ourselves accountable and suggested the facilitation of safe spaces for difficult conversations about race with each other and our clients. Staff suggested that creating regular opportunities for self-reflection, solicitation of feedback, and recognition of microaggressions could help staff address feelings of defeat, burnout, and resistance to change. CLC staff recognize the difficulty of sustaining a long-term commitment to the goal of fostering an anti-racist practice and highlighted how open dialogue, continued compassion, and drawing public awareness to the issues, are some ways to build on the momentum of the work already started.
- 3 Reduced caseloads, more time, and improved communication within CLC:** CLC staff identified large caseloads, lack of time, busy court schedules, extensive administrative work, and lack of uniformity and communication across the firms as some of the barriers to achieving the goals of our strategic plan. They suggested that reduced caseloads, additional funding, more case management supports, additional collaborative courts, and improved accountability for those who deviate from CLC practices could make a difference. Staff specifically explained how, in creating more time, they would engage in more meaningful interactions with clients and caregivers, more collaboration between attorneys and investigators, and have more of an ability to work their cases with intention. Some suggestions also included building more specialized units within CLC, including additional mental health resources, family finding staff, and NMD/EPY specialists.

4

Ongoing education for judicial officers and county social workers: Staff recognized that to achieve our goal of decreasing disparate outcomes and disproportionality, it is imperative that we work with the County and the bench. Staff would like to see a more diverse and well-educated bench. The judicial officers need to receive training (ideally mandatory) on systemic racism, implicit bias, racial disparities, generational trauma, and the various other obstacles met by the families that we serve. Additionally, CLC staff would like to collaborate with court partners, specifically parents' counsel organizations, in our pursuit of a more educated, aware bench. Staff are confident that if the bench better understood the barriers faced by the families we serve, it would be more likely to hold more regular hearings and truly hold the County accountable for providing reasonable services.

5

Increased collaboration and partnership with other agencies: Collaboration with court partners and outside organizations is paramount to achieving our goals. CLC identified parents' counsel as the most important partner in our pursuit of decreasing disparate outcomes and disproportionality. CLC would also like to partner with mental health services, such as the Department of Mental Health, and housing programs, including the Department of Housing. While relationships with The Alliance for Children's Rights and Public Counsel are valued, staff would like to see us forge relationships with additional California legal services organizations, as well as educational and developmental programs. Staff also believe that more formal connections with the greater community by partnering with LGBTQ+, BIPOC, Native American, and Community Service organizations such as Homeboy Industries, Project Fatherhood, and Big Brothers Big Sisters would be beneficial. By partnering with local organizations, we can promote a focus on intersectionality, support of marginalized communities, and increased outreach in lower socio-economic communities. Through these partnerships, CLC will be able to avoid detention/separation, promote family stability, and remove barriers to relative placement and reunification.

6

Continued trainings and guidance on how to turn it into practice: Overall, CLC staff appreciate and value the ReDD trainings that address these issues. They believe that in order to further our anti-racist work, more focus is needed on how to put these trainings into action and how to incorporate the lessons learned into everyday advocacy. Staff felt that more diverse and expanded training topics would assist them in identifying and eliminating racist practices within the child welfare and court systems. Suggestions included collaborative trainings with outside agencies that share our goals, trauma-informed practices on culture and biases, and culturally informed understandings of risk. There was also a desire for more user-friendly self-study options and enforcement of mandatory sessions.

7

More focused and intentional courtroom advocacy: In addition to the policy and legislative changes discussed below, CLC staff also recognized the need to bring this advocacy into the courtroom. They emphasized the need to challenge assumptions and hold ourselves, other stakeholders, the agency and the court accountable. Staff want to advocate for more dismissals, holistic case assessments, an increased voice for children and families, fewer detentions and removals, and increased relative placements. They highlighted the need to advocate for elimination of fees for court ordered services to achieve the goal of reducing disproportionality and a focus on individualized, targeted, and culturally affirming case plans. CLC attorneys indicated that a brief bank including social studies, facts, and figures to support the arguments mentioned above would be useful for presenting arguments to the bench.

8

Regular review and sharing of data and resources: Staff welcome the sharing of information and specifically expressed interest in learning more about outcomes for clients by race/ethnicity and

ongoing analysis of JCATS (Juvenile Court Activity Tracking System) demographics. They also highlighted the need for regularly updated comprehensive lists of services available to our clients and their families that recognized geographic area and racial and cultural focuses.

9

Legislative and policy reforms: CLC staff would like to see the CLC Legislative Committee pursue reforms aimed at decreasing disproportionality in the dependency system. Prior to court engagement, staff would like to see more robust pre-filing services (legal representation at the time of referral or onset of an investigation), including housing support, increased use of voluntary family maintenance agreements (“VFM”), utilization of a blind removal strategy when deciding to separate a family, and more accountability for pre-filing and pre-removal efforts by the child welfare agency. Once a family is before the court, staff would like to see better access to the court system, such as flexible court hours and ways to participate (in-person or virtually), more frequent court hearings, and more specialized courts. CLC would like to reduce barriers to case plan compliance by consolidating services, eliminating fees, and providing programs and testing sites with increased hours. Staff would also like to see a change in the law allowing families more time to reunify, restricting the ability to remove children from a victim of domestic violence, modifying RFA (Resource Family Approval) standards to better support relative placement - especially when the placement is delayed or prevented due to a relative's past criminal history, expanding home-based therapeutic services, and further reducing the use of STRTPs. Staff identified our clients ages 18-21 (non-minor dependents) as a particularly vulnerable group that would benefit from significant policy reform. Specific suggestions for reform include pursuing legislation that eliminates the possibility of Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) for parenting youth under 18; the expansion of extended foster care (to age 21) to include eligibility for all youth previously declared a dependent child and removed from their parent; and funding for non-minor dependents to no longer be predicated on the youth residing in approved housing. Furthermore, staff believe that youth would be better served by more robust implementation of required services for all transition-age youth approaching independence, including ensuring receipt of vital documents, financial planning, and mentorship opportunities. Since any legislative or policy changes must be supported by meaningful social work practices, staff would like to see legislation that imposes more accountability for social workers, better case management by supervising social workers, lower social work caseloads, increased client contacts, and greater repercussions for failing to comply with the welfare and institutions code - particularly when it comes to placement in the least restrictive setting.

Key Themes from Staff & Management Focus Groups 2021

Staff and management focus group priorities:

1. Training to include staff engagement and breakout room discussions; role playing; case review with a focus on anti-racist advocacy. Culturally informed trainings on actual risk of harm, with a focus on preventing detentions based on poverty.
2. Prefiling support services and procedures to prevent removal, directed at teen and NMD parents. Post-jurisdictional follow-up and supportive services to prevent future detentions.
3. Improved communication between attorneys and investigators; a team approach to serving clients. Attorney-investigator case assignments to span the duration of court jurisdiction, to build rapport, trust, and familiarity.

4. Trainings on courtroom anti-racist advocacy, providing staff with practical tools and empowering and supporting staff to argue that bias and discrimination impact individual cases.
5. Focus on upfront advocacy, assessing for actual risk of harm and creating thoughtful and creative safety plans that maintain children with family and counter the prevailing presumption for removal.
6. Intentional collaboration with LADL, County Counsel, DCFS, CASA, and other organizations to support keeping families together and effectuate policy and legislative change.

Strategic Planning Staff & Leadership

Appendix E



**Children's Law Center
of California**
Excellence In Advocacy

Strategic Plan Leadership Group

Name	Title
Leslie Starr Heimov	Executive Director
Susan Abrams	Policy and Training Director
Phyllis Stricklan	Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Jody Green	Grants Director
Dara Barker	Board of Directors
Scott Langley	Board of Directors
Jennifer Perry	Board of Directors
Cindy Cain	Investigator Supervisor, SAC 1
Rebecca Ingerman	Attorney Supervisor, SAC 2
Rory Jackson	Investigator Supervisor, LA 5
Brenda Robinson	Attorney, LA3
Chris Taylor	Attorney Supervisor, LA1
Rosalee Villalobos	Associate Director of Operations
Gayle Northrop	Northrop Nonprofit Consulting

CLC Strategic Plan Staff Workgroup (**Member of Strategic Plan Leadership Team*)

Name	Title
Cindy Cain*	Investigator Supervisor, SAC 1
Rebecca Ingerman*	Attorney Supervisor, SAC 2
Rory Jackson*	Investigator Supervisor, LA 5
Brenda Robinson*	Attorney, LA3
Chris Taylor*	Attorney Supervisor, LA1
Rosalee Villalobos*	Associate Director of Operations
Javier Barraza	Attorney, SAC2
Ronnie Cheung	Training Coordinator, Admin
Aveli Clay	Investigator, LA1
Sean Connolly	Coverage Attorney, LA2
Elizabeth Genatowski	Attorney, LA1
Andrea Gleaves	Communications Manager, Admin
Lakai Hampton	HR Manager
Mary Keenan	Attorney Supervisor, LA2
Anitra King	Investigator, LA2 (Lancaster)
Toni Lambert	Attorney, LA4
Terence Lewis	Investigator, LA2
Enrique Miramontes	Office Manager, LA5
Maire Mullaly	Attorney, LA1
Erika Murillo	TAY Coordinator, LA4 (Lancaster)
Kelli Robertson	Attorney, LA3
Britta Roosendahl	Attorney, LA3
Lori Schroeder	Attorney, LA4
Erika Williams	Attorney, LA1

Glossary of Terms

Appendix F

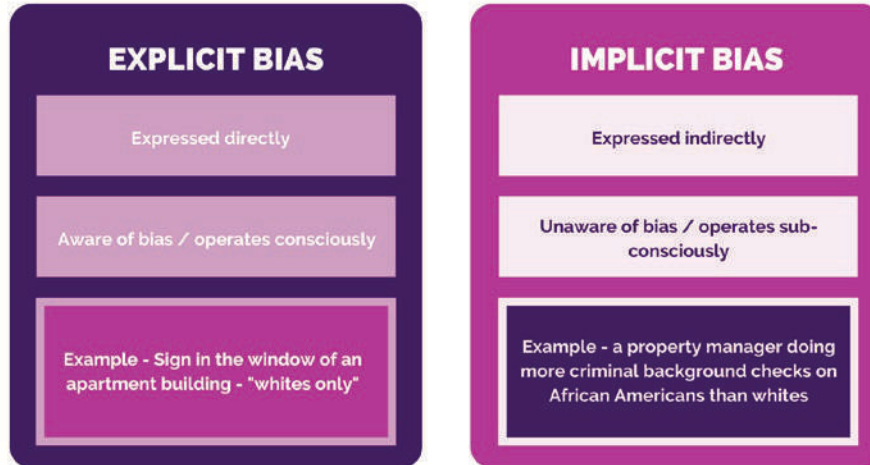


Children's Law Center
of California

Excellence In Advocacy

Glossary of Terms

BIAS: a predisposition in which a person looks at things through a certain lens and forms impressions which are sometimes in contradiction with a person's own value system. Having biases does not mean that a person is racist, bigoted, prejudiced, or sexist:



- **EXPLICIT BIAS (OR CONSCIOUS BIAS):** refers to the attitudes and beliefs about a person or group on a conscious level.
- **IMPLICIT BIAS (OR UNCONSCIOUS BIAS):** social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their conscious awareness. Certain scenarios can activate unconscious attitudes and beliefs. For example, biases may be more prevalent when multi-tasking or working under time pressure.
- **CLASSISM (OR SOCIO-ECONOMIC BIAS):** differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class, for example, prejudice against poor people; the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class.
- **SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY, AND EXPRESSION (SOGIE) BIAS:** the negative regard, inferior status and relative powerlessness that some accord to any non-heterosexual behavior, identity, relationship or community.
- **ABILITY BIAS:** bias against persons due to their physical conditions, mental conditions, or perceived disability; the assumption that able-bodied people are the norm in society, and that people who have disabilities must either strive to become normal or keep their distance.

CULTURAL BROKERS: trained individuals who act as conduits between families involved in child welfare systems and the courts, providing families with culturally sensitive support, and explanations of terms, court processes, and community resources. Cultural brokers help families develop their own strengths and capacities.

CULTURAL HUMILITY: a process of reflection and lifelong inquiry; self-awareness of personal and cultural biases as well as awareness and sensitivity to significant cultural issues of others.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE: the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of one's own culture as well as those from other cultures.

DISPARITY: the unequal and usually worse outcomes of one racial or ethnic group as compared to another.

DISPROPORTIONALITY: the level to which groups of children are present in the child welfare system at higher or lower percent/rates than their presence in the general population.

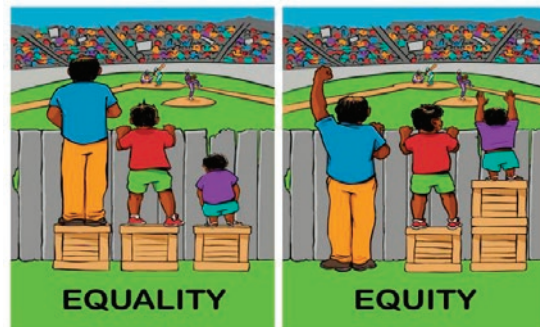
DIVERSITY: the range of human differences including race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability, or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs; any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another.

EQUALITY: sameness or equal distribution; equal treatment in society.

EQUITY: the provision of different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes.

EQUITY VS. EQUALITY: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

EQUALITY means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. **EQUITY** recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.



**Original Graphic Courtesy of The Center for Story Based Strategy*

“FAMILIES/CHILDREN OF COLOR:” refers to populations including Black, Native American, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, and other non-white races, ethnicities, and cultures that experience disproportionality and disparities in outcomes in child welfare.

INCLUSION: a state of being valued, respected, and supported; not being marginalized and not being the “other;” Inclusion is the process of creating a working culture and environment that recognizes, appreciates, and effectively utilizes the talents, skills, and perspectives of every employee.

RACISM: the belief or practice backed up by institutional power that subordinates people because of their race.

- **ANTI-RACISM:** working proactively to create policies, practices, and procedures which promote racial equity, and to consistently challenge biases and prejudice within ourselves, systems, and institutions.
- **STRUCTURAL RACISM:** the complex combinations of factors that produce and maintain racial inequities; ways in which public policies, institutional practices, and cultural stereotypes produce and maintain unfair outcomes; aspects of culture and history that have allowed the “privileges” of being white and the “disadvantages” facing families of color to adapt and endure over time.

For a deeper dive into these terms and others relevant to anti-racism, please see:

- <https://www.storybasedstrategy.org/>
- <https://www.raceforward.org/reporting-guidehttps://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>
- <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/adoption-fostercare>
- <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Key-Equity-Terms-and-Concepts-vol1.pdf>



CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER OF CALIFORNIA

101 Centre Plaza Drive
Monterey Park, CA 91754
Phone (323) 980-1700
Fax (323) 980-1708
www.clccal.org

**QUESTIONS? EMAIL DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES,
JODY GREEN AT GREENJ@CLCCAL.ORG.**