



‘JUST HOME’: LEADING IN COLOUR
EVERYTHING STARTS
WITH HEART, HOPE
AND A HOME



‘IT’S A MATTER OF JUSTICE: THE COLOUR OF A CHILD’S SKIN SHOULD NOT DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THEY GET ADOPTED’¹

‘THERE IS NO SINGULAR EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN THE CARE SYSTEM AND WITH ADOPTION. HOWEVER, GENERALLY, CHILDREN FROM MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS ARE OVER-REPRESENTED IN THE CARE POPULATION AND WAIT LONGER TO BE ADOPTED THAN WHITE CHILDREN’²

‘TOO MANY HAVE, IN THE PAST, BEEN PUT OFF BY A SYSTEM THAT CAN BE TOO JUDGEMENTAL IF YOU ARE NOT THE RIGHT ETHNICITY, DO NOT HAVE A BIG HOUSE, ARE TOO OLD, OR PRACTISE THE WRONG FAITH. SOME LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND ADOPTION AGENCIES HAVE NOT DONE ENOUGH TO TACKLE PREJUDICE AND TO DELIVER EXCELLENT SUPPORT FOR ALL CHILDREN IN THE ADOPTION SYSTEM’³

‘THE ACHE FOR HOME LIVES IN ALL OF US, THE SAFE PLACE WHERE WE CAN GO AS WE ARE AND NOT BE QUESTIONED’⁴

EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HEART, HOPE AND A HOME

This briefing, Just Heart, Just Hope, Just Home, is simply but powerfully about global majority⁵ children in care, their lives and their life-chances, their traumas and their needs and the inescapable facts that:

- **Black⁶ children are over-represented in the care system**
- **Black children wait longer for adoption than white children**
- **Black children are the least likely to achieve the lifetime stability and permanency of a loving family through adoption**

It tells the story, importantly a shared story, of our Staff College partnership working with a Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption East Midlands, and its partner local authorities, Derby, Nottingham, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, to challenge these bleak statistics and start to put in place policy and practice which create enduring change for children.

Rose, Nadine and Jennifer

Associates with The Staff College, who facilitated the Permanence for our Global Majority children programme



Rose Durban



Nadine Boyne



Jennifer Williams

WHAT'S IN THIS PUBLICATION FOR YOU?

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FOREWORD FROM JANE AND SHELAGH

JUST HEART, JUST HOPE, JUST HOME: WHY ME, WHY US...AND WHY YOU?

WHY ME?

‘TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE, YOU MUST NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP. WE WILL FAIL WHEN WE FAIL TO TRY’⁷

For me, Jane, as Chief Executive of The Staff College, what matters personally and professionally is my passion, my ambition and my enduring commitment to make children’s lives and life-chances better. But I can’t deliver on this in a fair and equitable way because I know that children don’t all have the same chances or the same opportunities and that impacts on their outcomes. I can’t stand back and just let this happen. None of us can. More of the same simply won’t work. It’s not about adding in more tools or tick lists. We need a collective hearts and mind shift to achieve the seismic and enduring change global majority children need and deserve. It’s about being prepared to have courageous conversations, go into difficult spaces and talk about the realities of racial disparities for global majority children. We need to work to understand and get inside the issues and, critically and wholeheartedly, address what’s slowing and stopping permanence for them.



For me, Shelagh, as Group Manager Adoption East Midlands, across our region we all wanted to understand how we could be better for global majority children and global majority adopters. For us, the recent Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board publication ‘Ending Racial Disparity in Adoption’⁸ was long awaited. One of my colleagues contributed to the task and finish group which produced it. I couldn’t just let it land and go nowhere. I owed it to my colleague, I owed it to children. We’re here to make a difference. This programme gave all of us at Adoption East Midlands the space, time and above all the confidence to really think and talk about issues for Black adopters, for Black children and for Black colleagues. It raised challenges, provoked questions and enabled us to reflect on our practice. And we’re still using the resources, we’re still talking, still having those conversations that we’ve not had before, every day, at every level. We’ve not stopped and we won’t stop tackling it until we see change. It’s a healthy place to be on behalf of Black children. An important place. And we won’t stop or ever give up trying.



WHY US?

‘NONE OF US ALONE CAN SAVE THE NATION OR THE WORLD. BUT EACH OF US CAN MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IF WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO DO SO’⁹

What mattered to each colleague in Adoption East Midlands in our partnership is the very clear link to practice in the programme and the emphasis on how to make a difference at every stage of permanence. That combined with the wealth of accessible pertinent resources enables you to start having conversations, and begin to secure change. The programme was practical, accessible, driven by a sense of a shared moral compass for children. It helped us surface some polarised and hidden views, on for example interracial adoption. And it gave us a way of thinking and talking about what it means for this child, this adopter, this team and our practice in relation to culture, identity, heritage and race.

WHAT'S YOUR LEARNING FROM OUR COLLECTIVE WORK?

RICH VITAL
EMPOWERING SUPPORTIVE
CONFIDENCE CRUCIAL CHALLENGING HELPFUL
EMOTIONAL EQUITY INSPIRING
CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS
ENRICHING COLLECTIVENESS ENLIGHTENING
COURAGEOUS CHANGE
INFORMATIVE
CHANGING RACIAL DISPARITY
ALWAYS LEARNING
HOW TO ACTION CHANGE
CHALLENGE
INTERESTING REFLECTION
CONVERSATIONS
LISTENING

It's been a real privilege for The Staff College to pilot 'Just Heart, Just Hope, Just Home' with Shelagh and the wider Adoption East Midlands team. Productive partnerships take courage and commitment to take the first step. Shelagh was brave enough to put her hand up to having a go, with us, to end racial disparity in adoption. Our partnership was generous, rich and complementary. Together with her colleagues, Shelagh brought deep and nuanced insights and understanding of the issues, emotions and impact for children, families and workers involved in permanence. We brought skilful facilitation in anti-racist practice, concepts and resources to stretch and support participants, lived and living experiences to open up critical conversations on behalf of global majority children in care waiting for adoption, and most of all time and space to reflect, commit and move to action to secure enduring change.

SO WHY YOU?

Our message to you? The colour of a child's skin shouldn't determine their chances of being adopted. But currently it does. That simply isn't right, fair or just. Reading and reflecting on our partnership learning offers you the chance to start to explore, question, confront and commit to changing lives and life chances for our global majority children in care. **How can you not put your hand up to that?**

'THERE CAN BE NO KEENER REVELATION OF A SOCIETY'S SOUL THAN THE WAY IN WHICH IT TREATS ITS CHILDREN'¹⁰

Jane Parfremment, Chief Executive The Staff College

Shelagh Mitchell, Group Manager Adoption East Midlands



SO, WHAT'S EVERYTHING STARTS WITH HEART, HOPE AND A HOME: SPOTLIGHT ON PERMANENCE FOR OUR GLOBAL MAJORITY CHILDREN ALL ABOUT?

So what is **Everything starts with heart, hope and a home: Spotlight on Permanence for our Global Majority Children** all about? The quick cryptic version is that it's the combination of a conversation and a challenge, a proposal to and a blessing from a Board, a hands up and an openness to learning from a Regional Adoption Agency, and, most of all, the collective passion, purpose and power of 23 people who came together in several virtual and real rooms, with a shared moral compass and commitment to recognising barriers and identifying solutions to attract and motivate forever families to meet the needs of global majority children in the care system, now and in the future.

But there's nothing coded or cryptic about either the need in this space or the learning we'd like to share with you, on behalf of children. We know how important it is to every local area that children waiting for adoption find their forever home with a unique loving family, committed to them for life, despite whatever trauma they have faced in the past and whatever their futures may hold. **We also know that Black children wait the longest to be adopted, while other children are adopted instead of them, ahead of them and around them.** Adoption is just one important aspect of permanence work and we believe our learning is relevant across the care continuum, including fostering, kinship care and special guardianship.

Our story is one of positives and possibilities, heart and hope on behalf of global majority children, in partnership with colleagues across Adoption East Midlands. Between us, we shared lived and living realities of being adopted, adopting or wanting to adopt, fostering or wanting to foster, infertility, loss and grief, parenting solo and as part of a partnership, being of dual heritage or parenting dual heritage children, interracial adoption, the impact of lifelong everyday racism, leading care, fostering and adoption services and support for all forms of permanence, chairing Panel and a whole lot of other intersecting identities and experiences.

We hope our collective learning and insights resonate with you and help you in your work to find a forever family and a forever home for local global majority children: the place where you know you are visible, valued and loved just as you are, the place where you matter, the place where you belong.

As Esi, a proud and fatigued Black adopter and foster carer, grandmother and teacher, a member of the Expert by Experience board, contributor to the Care Review movingly says:

'AND WHILE I KNOW THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SHOULD NOT CROWD OUT THE EXPERIENCES OF OTHER MINORITY GROUPS, THE DATA ON THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK FAMILIES IS CLEAR AND I WANT TO USE MY VOICE TO DEMAND BETTER' "

Like Esi, we want to use our voice to demand better and our agency and our action to make better. We hope you'll be moved and motivated to do so too.

STARTING POINTS: HOW OUR PARTNERSHIP BEGAN ...AND HOW YOURS COULD GET OFF THE GROUND TOO

'THE COLOUR OF A CHILD'S SKIN SHOULD NOT DETERMINE THEIR LIKELIHOOD OF BEING IN CARE OR THEIR CHANCES OF BEING ADOPTED'¹²

In Lemn Sissay's memoir, 'My name is Why'¹³, he recounts his discovery when years later he accessed his records, that in 1967 his adoption agency asked for 'full information about this baby; in particular, details of his background and whether Ethiopian means that he is negroid or not' and he reflects poignantly in the book's Epilogue: *'I was alone, at eighteen, in an apartment on Poet's corner. I had a letter from my mother dated 1968 and a birth certificate with my name: Lemn Sissay. All the names which came before - Norman, Mark and Greenwood - were created to hide me from my mother and from Ethiopia.*

My mother is from the Amhara people of Ethiopia. It is a tradition of the Amhara to leave messages in the first name of the child. In Amharic the name Lemn means Why?'

We have moved on hugely in our understanding of what matters to children who for whatever reason aren't able to live with their birth parents, but there's still much to do to understand and act on what drives racial disparities across the care system and its workforce. **Most of all there's still significant work for all of us across Children's Services, and more widely, to really appreciate just how important race, heritage, identity and belonging are to global majority children.**

So let's expand the cryptic summary of our partnership and, more importantly, start to share what we did and what we learned.

A conversation and a challenge? Well, that would be the conversation between Jane, Chief Executive of The Staff College (TSC) and Krish Kandiah, Chair at the time of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB¹⁴), and under discussion was the challenge of how to end racial disparities across the permanence continuum, showing up as global majority children waiting longer than their white counterparts with many ageing out of care to no ongoing family connections and poorer life-chances.

The ASGLB had established a task group and identified 3 key objectives - the 3Rs:

- **Recruit Black adopters and match Black children**
- **Rebuild trust with communities**
- **Resource interracial adoption to provide the right knowledge and support for white adopters to equip them to meet the needs of the children they adopt**

The task group had also highlighted the workforce disparities across Children's Services particularly in senior leadership roles.

Both the 3Rs and the workforce disparities resonated with TSC, which has a track record of and ongoing commitment to developing and embedding equity, diversity and inclusive practice, by facilitating a greater understanding around anti-racist and inclusive leadership and cultural competence. **Our programmes are built around a shared sense of moral purpose, social value and compelling supporting narratives, underpinned by robust accountability and a passion to leave a learning legacy.**



So a conversation and a challenge turned into a proposal to work in partnership to explore barriers that may be widening racial disparities and making adoption a daunting experience for some communities. Between us, we were determined to come together with a fierce urgency, to share experiences and learning, and identify approaches which attract and motivate more Black and dual heritage forever parents and ensure they feel welcomed, trusted and supported to meet the needs of global majority children in the care system. Our proposal was driven by wanting to strengthen policy and practice of seeing possibility in prospective Black adoptive families as a moral imperative, a child's entitlement, and a community commitment. Our programme design principles were to:

- ✓ **Build on the importance of every child's need and entitlement to a unique, loving family committed to them for life**
- ✓ **Focus on establishing trust and cohesion with Black communities, understanding how we build and strengthen this**
- ✓ **Use good practice in co-production with Black communities**
- ✓ **Improve local ethnicity data collection and research to enable a more nuanced understanding of global majority children's needs**
- ✓ **Raise awareness of the cumulative impact of multi-dimension racism on the whole adoptive process**
- ✓ **Adopt a place based approach, personalised to the local context**

And our proposal gained both a blessing for developing the programme from the task group... and a partner to work with! Shelagh Mitchell, Group Manager Adoption East Midlands, the Regional Adoption Agency for Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire reached out and said 'Yes' to working with us to pilot the programme. She championed our proposal with permanence leaders across, as we quickly learned to call it, the D2N2¹⁵ footprint and made a huge contribution to what became a shared learning culture and space.

So we had a proposal, principles and a partner and the work now was to build and develop our programme to create a safe and supportive space which affirmed:

- ✓ **Every child in care has a unique personal story about their need for help, care and protection but, additionally, global majority children are experiencing the impact of racism daily**
- ✓ **Leadership for racial equality and inclusion is personal, disruptive and emotional**
- ✓ **Change is best enabled when participants are supported, challenged and encouraged to create and develop locally preferred inclusive and fair practice approaches**

Over the 2 half-day virtual and 2 full day interpersonal sessions we wanted, in the spirit of inclusive leadership, to explore interactively what was happening within the region for Black and dual heritage children, highlight possible blocks and barriers in reaching prospective adopters, identify potentially uncomfortable truths about and offer challenges to local practice and the wider system, and touch on:

- **The importance of identity, intersectionality and inclusion for children, now and as they grow up and grow older**
- **Listening and learning from Black care experienced young people**
- **Hearing from global majority staff and changing practice in response**
- **Recognising and acting on what might get in the way of Black and dual heritage prospective adopters coming forward, including:**
 - Impact of Racial Disparities
 - Multi-Dimensional Racism
 - Risk Adverse Processes
 - Lack of Trust
 - Myths and Misunderstandings
- **Appreciating the issues, opportunities and challenges in interracial adoption**
- **Understanding experiences of Panel**
- **Asking who champions Black children's needs and outcomes locally, and across the region**
- **Agreeing commitments and conditions for success**
 - A focus on what needs to happen next within and across localities and the East Midlands
 - Identifying the metrics that matter: approaches to tracking 'how well?' and 'what difference?'

Positive and productive partnerships start with reaching out, investing in relational approaches which build and sustain trust and understanding and staying action and outcome oriented. Shelagh and her D2N2 colleagues reached out, we came together with a shared moral compass for children, invested in each other and stayed focused on making a local, lasting difference.



WHAT WE DID AND WHAT WE LEARNED: SHARING WHAT WORKED FOR US AND WHAT WE HOPE WILL RESONATE WITH YOU

Our Autumn 2022 programme consisted of an online half-day introductory session, followed by two whole day interpersonal sessions, a week apart, and concluded with a final online half day session, several weeks later.

In our planning we were incredibly fortunate that Shelagh connected us with Theresa Peltier, who agreed to join us for the second whole day session. Theresa has made 2 deeply personal and powerful videos for Adoption East Midlands. The first is about her experiences of being one of four children, twins of Jamaican/ Seychellois heritage, a brother of unknown mixed heritage and Theresa herself of Bajan/Dominican heritage, adopted by a white couple with 3 birth children of their own. The second has her reflections and advice to permanence teams about what matters and what should change in interracial adoptions. The videos are profoundly moving, as Theresa describes in raw visceral detail some very terrible lived experiences, but she also, with an enormous generosity of spirit, offers hope, realism and focus on how it can and must be different going forwards. Having Theresa involved definitely added huge value and underlined the importance of listening and learning from care experiences locally.



Theresa, care experienced, local panel vice-chair and recently installed as High Sheriff of Derbyshire, 2023-24.

Participants had received a flier, briefly outlining our plans and also a welcome e mail inviting some reflections. But the acid test isn't ever about reading e mails, rather much more about how to connect, initially online, and create a shared space to talk about racially just leadership, knowing that:

'TRULY ENGAGING WITH DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION FEELS PERSONAL, DISRUPTIVE AND EMOTIONAL'¹⁶

We believe in the **power of narratives: stories matter**, they give us a sense of belonging, of being wanted and needed and heard. Stories connect us... so long as we're alert to the danger of a single story. As Chimamanda Adichie¹⁷ warns us:

'THE SINGLE STORY CREATES STEREOTYPES, AND THE PROBLEM WITH STEREOTYPES IS NOT THAT THEY ARE UNTRUE, BUT THAT THEY ARE INCOMPLETE. THEY MAKE ONE STORY BECOME THE ONLY STORY'

So session 1 was built around getting to know each other by sharing what matters to us personally and professionally; in essence starting to share stories, importantly stories plural. Participants bravely took a leap of faith and trusted each other in very real ways with what they chose to share, which helped create a space and an environment to begin to explore what equity, inclusion and belonging mean in relation to permanence and the difference we all wanted to see on behalf of children. **What was powerful and palpable was how much lived and living experience we had in the room... and how much hadn't been shared before.**

But it wasn't just about inviting participants to share – important that we did too. Nadine told us her story, a story of not being seen or heard as an aspiring global majority adoptive parent:

'NO-ONE'S TALKING TO ME – WHY AREN'T YOU SEEING ME? WHY AREN'T YOU REACHING OUT TO ME? WHY DOESN'T IT EVEN FEEL LIKE AN OPTION?'

Nadine described how, despite longing to be a mum and recognising adoption might be a path for her (as well as bringing significant professional knowledge of how children's social care works), she felt invisible to permanence services, as did many of her network of friends and allies. She received more approaches and reach out from car salespeople than adoption teams. Despite her professional experience and expertise, being proactive in a space where you don't feel visible or valued, where you don't feel seen or heard, takes huge courage and trust. Nadine's story initiated a rich plenary about what we could do to change the mistrust, help to reach out, and really understand what would make it better for her. Reflections and questions focused on:

- **Who, when and where: From the very earliest stages, do prospective global majority adopters see, hear and talk to people 'who look like me'?**
- **Open or closed: Do processes and approaches implicitly signal judgement and exclusion, rather than open up promise, potential and prospects?**

As Octavia E Butler says in 'Telling my Stories':

'WHAT WE DON'T SEE, WE ASSUME CAN'T BE'¹⁸

Stories were a theme throughout the programme as we wanted, over the sessions, to focus in on **'Who's in the permanence room?'**, starting with self, never forgetting children, prospective and current adopters and carers, practitioners, panel and policy makers.

It felt like a positive start and evaluations confirmed this, but critical that it stayed positive, principled, practical and action oriented. We recognised the commitment the Adoption East Midlands team was giving. They, like everyone who works on behalf of children, are busy people, so after each session we offered them relevant resources to support conversations back in the workplace. These and more are available in the **Resources to Help** section at the end of this publication.

It was good to actually meet in person for our first whole day session. There was an energy, a buzz and connectivity in the room that no amount of teams/zoom... or indeed any other provider can offer. The day was structured around the concept of **'Who's in the room?'** and what are they bringing with them, both assets and needs. During this session we explored:

- **Aspects of inclusive leadership practice**
- **The importance of identities and intersectionality**
- **Power, privilege and marginalisation**
- **Implications of the impact of multi-dimensional racism**
- **Links between racism and trauma**
- **Interracial adoption considerations**

Being and staying an inclusive and fair leader in a racially just and equitable system starts with self. It's about embracing truth and justice, as well as being honest about what you don't know. It demands courage, humility, constant learning with children at the heart, and an understanding of workplace and community realities. It means accepting dissent and welcoming challenge. Above all, it can be emotionally draining and yet so very necessary right now, for children, for colleagues, and communities. What was important for us was to focus on racially just leadership which:

- **Is bold, visible, present, vocal and doesn't sit on the fence**
- **Addresses indifferences to equity, equality, diversity and inclusion**
- **Challenges racism, bias and discrimination at all times**
- **Acknowledges in personal behaviours and practices the importance of everyone's entitlement to acceptance and agency, to belief and belonging, and to compassion, connection and contribution**
- **Speaks truth to power and challenges the status quo**
- **Asks authentically and often whether practices are making a difference to the lived experiences of those they claim that their work will benefit**

We used Sylvia Duckworth's¹⁹ illustration of Wheel of Power/Privilege as a way to introduce intersectionality and get to a more nuanced understanding of what marginalisation might mean: the further you are from power, the more unimportant and ignored you feel. But in reality no image can ever capture the messy, moral and shifting nature of where we might sit on any axis of power and marginalisation, what we are prepared to share and what we don't feel able to divulge, and where we might want to sit. Identities matter and intersectionality can be an important way to acknowledge this:

'IDENTITY IS COMPLEX AND BECOMING INCREASINGLY SO. IT CUTS TO THE HEART OF WHO YOU ARE, THE WAY YOU THINK AND FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF, THE WAY YOU ARE VIEWED BY THE WORLD AND THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT DEFINE YOU. IDENTITY IS NUANCED AND DEFINED IN A NUMBER OF CONSTANTLY EVOLVING WAYS' ²⁰

'INTERSECTIONALITY IS A LENS THROUGH WHICH YOU CAN SEE WHERE POWER COMES AND COLLIDES, WHERE IT LOCKS AND INTERSECTS. IT IS THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT EVERYONE HAS THEIR UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND PRIVILEGE' ²¹

We explored what the phrase 'white privilege' might mean in the context of permanence. It is a contested phrase which can evoke strong emotions, but it is important to consider that there are issues and topics that white people often don't have to think about, or choose to take action on, including the everyday realities and deep impact of racism. While we can't control our ethnicity, we can be more conscious of how racism does and doesn't affect other people, including children. As Afua Hirsh succinctly puts it:

'I DIDN'T FIND RACE, RACE FOUND ME; IN THE PLAYGROUND OR THE CLASSROOM, ON THE STREET, IN THE SHOPS' ²²

It doesn't mean as a white person that you don't experience disadvantage or challenges, rather that you will be afforded, as Peggy McIntosh puts it, unearned advantages and exemptions from racial discrimination. You're automatically provided with an 'invisible knapsack' that you can count on and draw from, full of social and relational capital.

It's an important concept to inform thinking and action in moving towards equity and justice.

We also touched on how pervasive and endemic racism is: in racial disparities evident in health and life expectancy, in employment, in criminal justice and community safety, in education, in housing and across the economy. It's neither right or ethical to adopt a 'not here' or 'not me' attitude, because as racially just leaders we can't stand back or stand by, even when it's uncomfortable. Asserting that 'you don't see race' or 'there's no problem here' is neither helpful, true or fair.

So, in the spirit of 'you can't unknow what you now know', discussion and activity focused on ways, without compromising a bottom line of children's entitlement to a safe, loving home, we could appreciate and address some of the barriers cumulative multi-dimensional racism erects and the myths that grow around them.

As one participant said:

'ADOPTION LEGISLATION FOCUSES ON EQUALITY, WE NEED MORE NUANCE ABOUT EQUITY. IT HAS TO BE ABOUT 'WITH REGARD FOR' NOT 'REGARDLESS''

And another:

'THE WHEEL OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE OPENS UP CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WHO MIGHT BE 3 STEPS AHEAD FROM THE START'

In relation to permanence children are front and centre and we couldn't have got to lunchbreak on the day without reflecting on why global majority children wait the longest to be adopted, while other children are adopted instead of them, ahead of them and around them. We looked at a clip of Leon's experiences highlighted so vividly in *'My name is Leon'*²³ and whether his experience might have been different if he'd been a 6 years old, a 2 year old or a 1 year old little boy.

We also looked at some issues within interracial adoption using a video stimulus, *'Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man'*²⁴ with a focus on a white family with one birth son and three adopted children, a Black son and daughter and a dual heritage son. Reflections from the family included the parental guilt at receiving unwarranted gratitude for such heroic behaviour in reaching out to adopt interracially, when the reality was that they had just tried to meet need: *'They've changed us for the better, not the other way round'*; their constant parental fear about safety for all four children, but most of all for their dual heritage and Black children: *'We can't ever let them go out alone.'*

From the children, pride and love for their parents, a nuanced understanding that while their ethnicity was different, what mattered most to them was love, care and championing from each other, and a resigned approach from their dual heritage son that he would get pulled over for no reason by the police and they 'would only see the Black, not the white in me.'

Key messages were the importance of:

- ✓ **Maintaining children's culture and heritage**
- ✓ **Identity and meaning of birth names**
- ✓ **The need to talk with children, have 'the conversation' about the racism they are likely to experience**

Plenary themes included the need to recognise that *'love may not be enough'*; how difficult it can be for children to articulate their feelings and the importance of children feeling settled, safe, loved, able to be curious... and not believing they need to be grateful.

'WE RECOGNISE THAT CHILDREN SHOULD NOT HAVE TO WAIT OR MISS OUT ON ADOPTION BECAUSE OF THE COLOUR OF THEIR SKIN, AND THEREFORE THAT INTERRACIAL ADOPTION SHOULD CONTINUE, HOWEVER WE MUST BETTER EQUIP BOTH ADOPTERS AND ADOPTES IN CULTURAL AND RACIAL LITERACY'²⁵

Jennifer shared her story, a story of how she and her partner had, over some while, gradually considered and started to explore whether fostering might be a way to offer love, hope and permanence to a child or a sibling group while they needed it. Her experiences of the barriers and blocks she encountered resonated strongly in the room: experiences of a communication void after building up the courage to reach out to fostering services, despite repeated calls asking what was happening; an invite to a buffet where, as a couple, they were an 'only' Black couple and her partner one of the few males present. An initial interview which felt like an intrusive 'no chance to pass' exam, *'they didn't really know who we were, they didn't try to find out what we could bring... They didn't speak with M'* (Jennifer's partner). An interview feeling full of negativity and judgement, not hope or possibilities. And an interview that shut down this option for Jennifer and her partner permanently. A chance for a child closed down, prematurely and permanently.

Colleagues recognised the need to change a premature rush to assessing 'out' into some initial relationship building and trust, without compromising the needs of the child. They understood the risk of an over-focus on the female at the expense of the contributions of the male caregiver. Explaining and exploring issues sensitively, such as fishponds or bamboo plants growing in a garden, self-employment or house décor, rather than a brusque 'that has to go' in ways that open up conversations and engages and includes, rather than shuts down and excludes.

Above all, appreciating that prospective global majority foster carers and adopters bring with them lived experience of the erosive impact of experiencing everyday racism. Without deep compassion and understanding, the adopting experience will feel judgemental and likely to fuel mistrust, trauma and pain.

Jennifer's story evoked a rich discussion about the power dynamics in social work conversations and interventions and highlighted the importance of shared relational capital and opportunities to include in, before rushing to rule out.

Participants then used their professional skills and experience and insights from the day to discuss what demotivates potential global majority adopters, the myths and misunderstandings around what they may believe and the barriers they might put up, as well as what are the genuine bottom lines that end an application. Groups used a multi-dimensional lens to look at these which provided a rich perspective on the cumulative impact around what is or isn't a deal breaker.



A flavour of the examples participants discussed:

- **Homeownership, size of home, benefits status aren't barriers, but excessive debt with no means of paying back is (Economy)**
- **Level of education or how articulate you are or what 'class' you may believe you belong to aren't blocks, but no commitment to children learning and achieving would be (Education)**
- **Size of property, type of heating, pets or neighbourhood aren't obstacles, but chronic home conditions or safeguarding concerns are (Housing)**
- **Age or race related health conditions or living with a disability aren't immutable barriers, but IVF in treatment is (Health)**
- **A criminal record doesn't automatically disqualify you, nor does experience of stop and search but sexual offences or offences against children do (Policing and Criminal Judgement)**

'TOO MANY HAVE, IN THE PAST, BEEN PUT OFF BY A SYSTEM THAT CAN BE TOO JUDGEMENTAL IF YOU ARE NOT THE RIGHT ETHNICITY, DO NOT HAVE A BIG HOUSE, ARE TOO OLD, OR PRACTISE THE WRONG FAITH. SOME LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND ADOPTION AGENCIES HAVE NOT DONE ENOUGH TO TACKLE PREJUDICE AND TO DELIVER EXCELLENT SUPPORT FOR ALL CHILDREN IN THE ADOPTION SYSTEM'²⁶

We ended the day exploring the cumulative and pervasive impact of micro-aggressions, which in reality are never micro, always macro, by watching a video together of a day at work for a Black male²⁷ and his lived experience of constant erosive micro-aggressions, and then spent time relating that experience to aspects of the adoptive process. We explored how he might feel after that day at work when he looked at publicity materials seeking adopters, when he considered reaching out and making an initial enquiry, if he was part of an initial visit or assessment, preparing to go to Panel or seeking post-adoption support. For any adopter all emotional parts of a life changing journey, for global majority adopters deeply so.

We left participants thinking and talking about what could be changed to make the process more inclusive, resources to support their work back at base, and four questions. Here's a flavour of their responses:

WHAT'S HAD REAL MEANING FOR YOU FROM WHAT YOU'VE BEEN HEARING AND THINKING TODAY?

- *'We need to engage with the Black community rather than expecting them to come to us'*
- *'Deeper understanding and thinking about white privilege and the difference it makes and the things I don't have to think about'*
- *'Cumulative impact of racism as trauma'*
- *'The clip in relation to conversation with a Black man was thought provoking about the understanding of white carers parenting black children and what is the experience of children as they get into adulthood'*

WHAT'S MISSING? WHAT HASN'T YET BEEN SAID THAT WOULD HELP US REACH A DEEPER LEVEL OF MEANING?

- *'Nothing. I do know that I am getting so much out of other people's stories and reflections. It becomes reality.'*
- *'All good so far – next session looks at our plans to take this learning forward in our practice'*
- *'More about allyship in practice'*

EVEN BETTER IF?

- *'Just more conversations like this'*
- *'Would have benefited from more time to discuss this (referencing 'Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man') but lunch got in the way!'*

WHAT ONE THING WOULD HELP CREATE CHANGE ON THIS ISSUE?

- *'This training for all staff'*
- *'Senior leaders engaged in this course'*
- *'Commitment to find resource to take this forward'*
- *'Better representation and awareness of the barriers at each part of the process'*

Day 2 was a week later and we were incredibly privileged to have Theresa Peltier with us all day.

We started the day by sharing reflections about the concepts introduced in the last session: the intersects between power and privilege, whiteness, cultural competence, equity and justice and began a theme for the day of **intentionality**, the notion of 'You can't unknow what you know, so what will you do now?' best summed up by Herman Ouseley:

'...I HAVE ALWAYS TAKEN THE VIEW THAT PEOPLE WITH POWER, RESOURCES AND DECISION-MAKING CAPACITY COULD END RACISM AND INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION, IF THEY GENUINELY AND SINCERELY WANT TO' ²⁸

And we also discussed the importance of being an **ally**, the benefits of reframing it as being an accomplice and avoiding the risk of bystanding and being complicit.

Theresa told her story: listening to her lived experiences of being adopted as a baby and growing up in a family with a different cultural heritage to hers in a predominantly white neighbourhood was hard and humbling. She shared with courage and conviction how her feelings of difference, difference in a negative sense, overshadowed her childhood.

Feeling and believing she was *'lesser than'* was highlighted by consistent racist abuse at school and in the community, especially name calling, finding herself trying to fit in by answering to some of the name calling and by being super friendly, while hurting inside. Her parents' response was to dismiss any distress as banter to be ignored, rather than trauma to be acknowledged and addressed. For most of her childhood she desperately wanted to be white, living for years off the promise her adoptive mum had made that she'd buy her a *'cream that would work'*.

A single paragraph can't easily capture the emotional power of watching the video she has made and listening to Theresa's recounting her experiences, reflecting on how *'lesser than'* permeated her whole being, the desolation of nobody hearing her or championing her, and the ongoing impact of trauma from her early childhood onwards. Theresa absolutely enhanced and enriched our collective learning in inordinately *'greater than'* ways.

'BELONGING IS ABOUT FEELING YOU HAVE A PLACE AND THAT YOU MATTER. IF YOU MATTER TO PEOPLE, IT GIVES YOU A SENSE OF WHO YOU ARE'²⁹ ...AND A BELIEF IN WHO YOU CAN BE

Our plenary discussion, with a focus on learning from Theresa and thinking about what does a global majority child need, was rich and wide-ranging about how and when identity, cultural heritage, trauma and everyday racism is addressed in practice. We moved from talk to actions through work on the **courageous conversations** and commitments needed at each stage of permanence, locally, regionally and nationally.

Theresa has also made a video from her perspective both as an interracially adopted child and as a Panel vice-chair, offering advice. She shares what she believes would have helped her to feel comfortable and confident in her own skin and valued for the child she was and the person she could become, a child whose identity, culture and heritage was visible and valued. **A childhood where you knew that you matter, you're important, you're loved and what you bring to the world is cherished, including the colour of your skin.**

Theresa makes the point powerfully and poignantly that 'giving a home to a child' while a big commitment isn't enough if you adopt interracially. What's critical is a deep acknowledgement that parenting in this context will be different, and comes with lifelong work and learning about what growing up as a Black child experiencing racism means and how to respond in ways that aren't summed up by *'just ignore'* or *'try and help white people understand'*. The commitment needs to be enduring and profound not just 'festivals and food' but building relational connection and capital through Black community honorary aunts and uncles – people *'who look like me'*. And most of all being honest about difference, about racism and about 'the black experience' – tell the truth: **'the telling is really important'**. Fairy stories about magic creams don't help.

Theresa ended with two evocative questions to panel members but applicable to every stage of permanence and to each of us in the room:

'AS AN ADOPTED CHILD, WHAT WOULD I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT MYSELF?'

'HOW WOULD I FEEL WHEN I HEARD MY STORY?'

The plenary was powerful, touching on how to support interracial adopters to prepare without perpetuating racism, how to have 'the conversation'. As Nadine highlighted, 'Who teaches your son to be a Black boy?'

Hearing from Theresa was truly 'greater than'.

Throughout the day there was ongoing work to capture the courageous conversations needing to happen which would lead to impact and change in relation to every stage of the permanence process:

- **Advertising**
- **Initial enquiry**
- **Initial visit**
- **Assessment**
- **Panel**
- **Matching**
- **Post adoption support**

As well as a range of practical 'quick fixes', there were some key themes that participants believe are key to irreversible change.

- ✓ **Work to embed culturally competent practice within children's social care and panel membership, and across partnerships for children so that at every stage:**
 - Help and support is responsive and respectful and available in ways that positively and proactively value heritage, individuality and difference
 - Sensitivity to children and families' ethnicity and culture is at the forefront of practice
 - The impact of racial disparities, racism and trauma are considered and assumptions are challenged
 - Children get the support they need to build a positive sense of identity and the encouragement to maintain and build relationships they need to be able to be fully themselves
- ✓ **Listening and acting from learning from lived experience is crucial: children, colleagues and citizens:**
 - Considering where and when prospective global majority adopters see 'people who look like me' ...and understanding the implications and impact of processes and stages where they don't
- ✓ **Sufficient time and focus at the matching stage given to:**
 - Balancing options against a global majority child's needs
 - Considering support needs and networks and lived experiences
 - The longer perspective for the child growing up
- ✓ **Work in relation to court preparations to ensure enough understanding of:**
 - Trauma and racism
 - Primacy of lived experience
- ✓ **Post adoption support:**
 - Does attachment currently trump culture?
 - Are schools racially equitable and inclusive?
 - Is there sufficient follow up?

What ran through all of the discussion was grappling simultaneously with the child's immediate and potential longer term needs and best interests: are there needs that 'trump' others? How do you find a balance between an outcome of a 'not perfect match' against no adoption... and the possibility of living in a white foster family.

We ended the day looking at every child and every prospective and current adopters' entitlement to:

- **Acceptance and agency**
- **Belief and belonging**
- **Connection and contribution**

And reflected where these were missing throughout permanence processes for global majority children. That led to individual work on a pledge by each participant to engender action and change over the 6 weeks before our final half day remote session.

Concluding the programme remotely wasn't easy. Being together interpersonally in a room added visceral value and we all would have preferred that. But we used the session to recap the concepts we'd covered and importantly listened to progress against their pledge from each participant. Colleagues shared some impactful learning and progress including:

- **Using the programme and resources with and across teams**
- **Initiating discussion about permanence for global majority children in supervision and associated personal development plan objectives**
- **Planning CPD for panel members**
- **Follow up discussions and planning with strategic leaders**
- **Conversations with fostering teams to build in use of a racial lens across children's social care**
- **Inviting Theresa to share her experiences locally**
- **Exploring at a regional and national level where this work and learning could have the most impact**

We then focused, in the context of our permanence principles, on next steps to effect enduring change and difference to global majority children's lives and life-chances through practitioners, through prospective and current adopters and foster carers and through strategic leaders. We used the concept of **'take what you need'**, a metaphorical wall of things that might help, including courage, a hug, time and connectivity. We added into this activity **'what can you offer?'** The offers were rich, collegiate and abundant, with compassion, belief, shared understanding and kindness featuring frequently. The needs clustered around 'permission to be and stay brave' in this space, time, stickability and confidence.

We shared next steps, including writing this! And invited contributions about how we could best help Adoption East Midlands RAA stay better together for global majority children.


Our learning has been collegiate, deep and rich and powerful. Each session used narrative and lived experiences to look at what matters to children, what matters to prospective and current adopters and what this means for leadership in practice. We've touched on concepts of power and privilege, equity, psychological denial, everyday racism and using both an intersectional and multi-dimensional lens in relation to policy and practice, and critically what global majority children may bring and may need. We've explored myths and barriers, missed opportunities and bottom lines in relation to each stage of the adoption process for everyone involved. Each session has been followed up with pertinent resources to draw on and use with others.

Sessions have been powerful and emotional, characterised by a shared moral compass and commitment to do more and do better on behalf of our global majority children and come up with creative and concrete ways to end racial disparity in adoption across the region. Recognising the void of support and strategies in this space, participants embraced the opportunity to come together, to learn with and from each other about the choices and challenges they have and share ideas, possibilities and actions: they absolutely exemplified in every way the 5 energies³⁰ of high performing teams!

The 5 Energies of High-Performing Teams


Social

Personal engagement, relationships and connections between people.



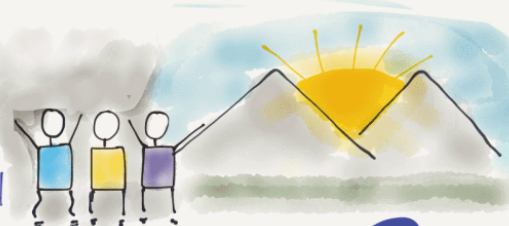
Intellectual

Analysis, planning, thinking.




Spiritual

Commitment to a common vision for the future, driven by shared values and purpose.



Psychological


Courage, resilience, feeling safe to do things differently... and take risks.



Physical

Getting things done!
Making progress.

@HorizonsNHS



SPACE, TIME TOGETHER, HEARING LIVED EXPERIENCE TOGETHER CREATED ENERGY, AGENCY AND CONFIDENCE TO TAKE ACTION

Even better would be a collective opportunity to feed back together to strategic leaders locally, regionally and nationally. And to roll out this training and share these resources across fostering teams and more widely throughout children’s social care and key partners.

WHAT WE'LL DO NEXT: SHARE OUR LEARNING AND WIDEN AND EXTEND OUR PARTNERSHIP WORKING ACROSS FOSTERING, SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Our aim is to leave a learning legacy in this space: one that grows local racially just leaders to champion the needs and priorities of global majority children and their prospective and current carers and adoptive families.

We plan to share our learning and the concepts and resources we have developed with the sector, through blogs, articles and webinars as well as interpersonally. We particularly want to extend our partnership across fostering, special guardianship and children's social care, as well as with schools.

'THE COLOUR OF A CHILD'S SKIN SHOULD NOT DETERMINE THEIR LIKELIHOOD OF BEING IN CARE OR THEIR CHANCES OF BEING ADOPTED'³¹

...but it also shouldn't stop you being loved, being known, being heard, having your unique identity, your culture, your heritage seen as worthy, valuable and valued. The colour of your skin should not pre-determine the likelihood of feeling 'less than'.

Our experience is that teams are hungry and keen to lead change but have lacked time, space, strategies and resources to do so. Simply but powerfully bringing teams together in a supportive safe space, facilitating reflections, conversations and practical action, offering possible 'how to' suggestions and take back resources, helped generate shared energy and a collective moral compass, which bodes well for effecting local longer lasting and irreversible change.



'THE ACHE FOR HOME LIVES IN ALL OF US, THE SAFE PLACE WHERE WE CAN GO AS WE ARE AND NOT BE QUESTIONED'⁴

We gained from a great D2N2 team of participants with the added value Shelagh's regional leadership and personal commitment brought to this work, and the powerful impact of hearing from Theresa about what happened to her and what needs to change. It's clear that change for the better for global majority children and prospective global majority adopters will happen in the East Midlands and this is replicable more widely.

So, let's end racial disparity in permanence. Let's seize 'the fierce urgency of NOW'³². We can, we should and we must on behalf of global majority children. It's their now, and their future. We owe them nothing less.

SO, WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW?: YOUR PERSONAL CHALLENGE TO REFLECT ON YOUR OWN CONTRIBUTION AND COMMITMENT TO LEADING SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN THIS SPACE

Are you brave enough to ask **and** answer, with heart, hope and humility, whether your leadership behaviours and permanence practices are making a difference to the local lived experiences of global majority children in need of a unique loving family to commit to them for life, despite all the trauma they have faced in the past? Are your permanence processes and approaches warm, welcoming and ethnically and culturally sensitive and respectful to prospective Black adopters? Does the ongoing adoption support, where you are, equip adoptive families to support Black children as they grow up?

From our experience, Myrons Maxims³³ may help:

- **People own what they help create...**

...so, across your RAA, where are the spaces where people with a diversity of views and experiences can come together, listen and learn with and from each other and co-create the future for better permanence outcomes for global majority children?

- **Real change takes place in real work...**

...so who's providing frontline staff and team leaders with the support, the challenge, the time and resources to share ideas, experience and grow inclusive and fair practice?

- **The people who do the work do the change...**

...so who's helping local leaders to develop and sustain racially just permanence practice?

- **Connect the system to more of itself...**

...so might using some of our learning help? It's there to be shared and personalised to where you are.

- **The process you use to get to the future is the future you get...**

...Leadership for racial equity and inclusion starts with self, it is upfront and personal, but it doesn't have to stay in a solo silo. Partnership working at best, is about 'getting to us': working together collegiately and inclusively, not leaving out global majority care experienced children, prospective and current Black and dual heritage carers or colleagues. Everyone has vital contributions to make. Together we can make a difference.

And simply but powerfully remembering that if you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together.

Go well, go in partnership, with hope and heart, on behalf of global majority children needing loving forever homes...NOW!



JUST HEART, JUST HOPE, JUST HOME

Nadine, Jennifer and I believe this was a powerful and positive partnership on behalf of global majority children. Everyone contributed and stepped up and in and between us we created a connected 'belonging' space where we could collectively explore, question, confront and commit with courage, integrity, and moral purpose.

Shelagh and Theresa and each participant generously gave so that everyone gained: we know that as facilitators we absolutely did by working with such a wholehearted group. We hope that each participant was able, personally and professionally, to refill their reservoir of hope, ambition and energy on behalf of our global majority children. And as promised, this publication is our pledge to build on our learning with and from you and share it more widely, having checked back with you and credited all you've collectively contributed.

So a huge and deserved shout out to each and all of you:

Shelagh and Theresa - you are both amazing, as are all the colleagues from Adoption East Midlands:

- **Jane Bolan**
- **Lisa Drummond**
- **Laura Poxon**
- **Bev Lawson**
- **Sam Perry**
- **Melissa Adams**
- **Maxine Bennett**
- **Michelle Rice**
- **Toni Martin**
- **Vicky Pike**
- **Claire Elms**

And those from Nottingham City:

- **Clare Hewitson**
- **Audrey Taylor**

And those from Derby City:

- **Judy Levitt**
- **Vicky Pealing**

And from Nottinghamshire:

- **Kaneez Naqwi**

And last but definitely not least those from Derbyshire:

- **Luke Impey**
- **Christy Knowles**

We absolutely couldn't have learned so much without each and every one of you!

And what it's meant to one participant:

'...this resonates with the journey we are making as AEM and through this training I have felt encouraged by the willingness of my colleagues to engage with it despite how vulnerable it may have made them feel. I found this training a breath of fresh air and much needed, especially since George Floyd. As one of the few Black managers within AEM, I found this whole programme has made me stand a few inches taller & reminds me of that saying: "you never know you're thirsty until the well runs dry."

With heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Nadine, Rose and Jennifer'

To find out more about this programme, our overall work or any of our Associate team, please contact hello@thestaffcollege.uk



THREE RESOURCES TO HELP



- ✓ **Conversations to support leaders in this work**
- ✓ **Resources to dip into - read, reflect, watch, talk about...and most of all, use to stimulate and support action and change**
- ✓ **Policy round up - just the recent and relevant stuff**

We hope ‘**Just heart, Just hope, Just home**’ offers you and colleagues some constructive challenges about systemic racism. Notice and acknowledge your own instincts to resist or minimise issues, instead stay with your uncomfortable feelings and use them to fire up racially just leadership across your local permanence partnership.

1 CONCEPTS: sets out all the key tools we used to offer challenge, ask questions and initiate reflection and action. Can you use and build on any of these to effect change for the better in the 3Rs?

- **Recruit Black adopters and match Black children**
- **Rebuild trust with communities**
- **Resource interracial adoption to provide the right knowledge and support for white adopters to equip them to meet the needs of the children they adopt**

2 RESOURCES: offers a curated set of resources, books, blogs and videos to suit your personal learning style. Whether you like to watch, listen, read or discuss, please use these to galvanise and grow your leadership influence and impact to create the change global majority children need to secure their forever family.

3 POLICY ROUND UP: definitely not a Mastermind specialist ‘go-to’ but a quick overview of some key recent documents.

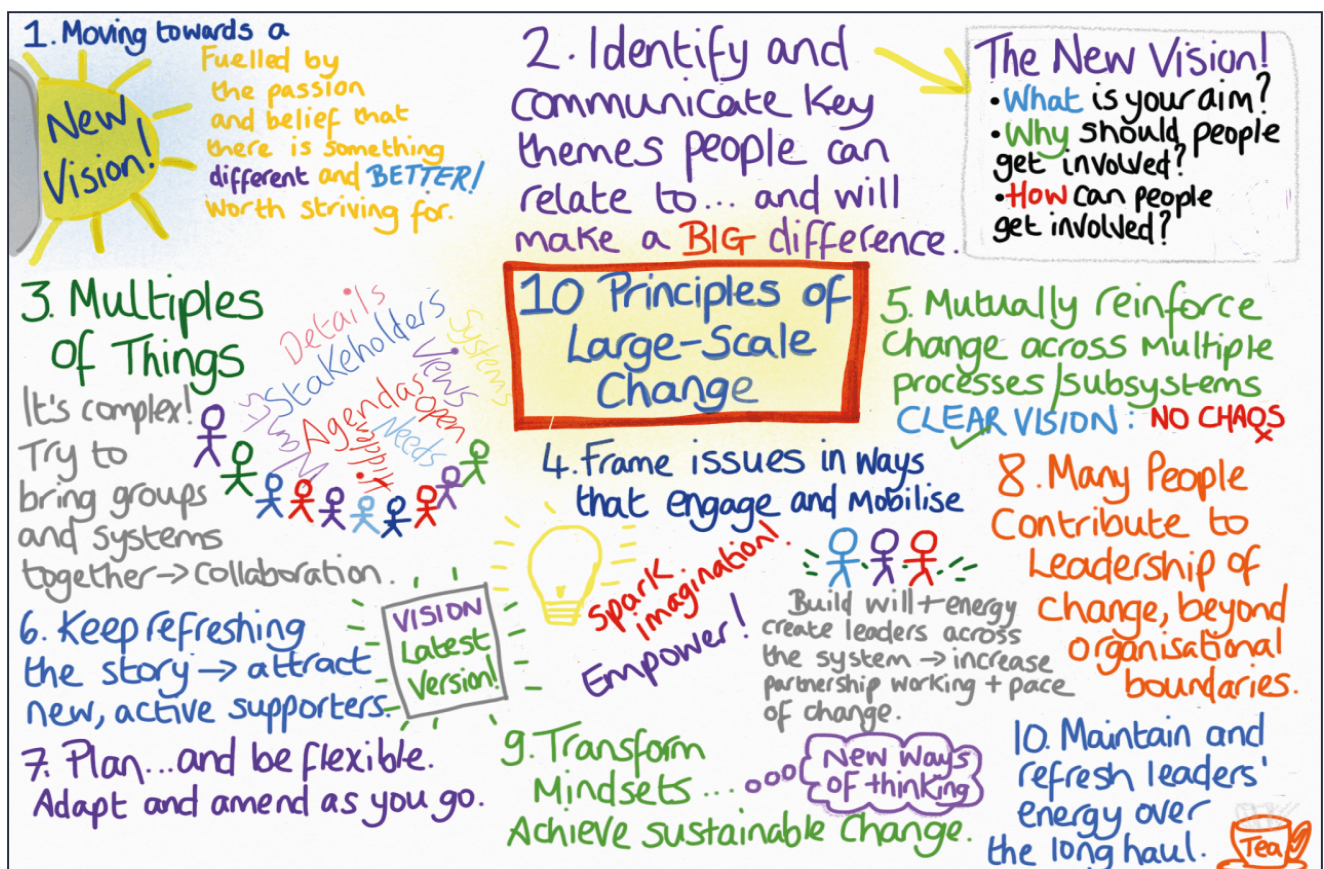
RESOURCE 1. CONCEPTS

These are the concepts we used: do they resonate with you? How will you use them?

POSITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Positive and productive partnerships start with reaching out, investing in relational approaches which build and sustain trust and understanding, and staying action and outcome oriented. Achieving more and better together, 'getting to us' requires some deep thinking and talking together about what leading in partnership will look like, feel like and behave like... and then having a go! **Simply and powerfully because challenging and changing racial disparities for children can't and shouldn't wait.**

10 PRINCIPLES OF LARGE-SCALE CHANGE ³⁴



Partnership principles³⁵ that might help:

- ✓ **Prioritise rigorously:** with ambition for the best outcomes for global majority children now and in the future
- ✓ **Invest productively:** time, energy, people, resources
- ✓ **Think strategically:** appreciating what matters locally
- ✓ **Learn constantly:** from children and families, each other and more widely
- ✓ **Collaborate effectively:** work together collegiately at every level, 'no decision about us, without us'
- ✓ **Motivate more:** give generously to gain

Is this a commitment you can make and evidence across your RAA?

‘AS SYSTEM LEADERS, WE PROMISE TO FIND WAYS TO ENABLE GLOBAL MAJORITY CHILDREN TO GROW UP SAFELY AND WELL, IN A FOREVER HOME WITHIN A LOVING FAMILY COMMITTED TO THEM FOR LIFE: A PLACE WHERE YOU KNOW YOU ARE VISIBLE AND VALUED AND LOVED JUST AS YOU ARE, THE PLACE WHERE YOU MATTER, THE PLACE WHERE YOU BELONG. IN RESPONSE TO OUR COLLECTIVE LOCAL LEARNING, AS RACIALLY JUST LEADERS, WE PLEDGE TO ESTABLISH SERVICES AND SUPPORT WHICH ENABLE CULTURALLY SENSITIVE AND RESPONSIVE PROVISION WHICH REFLECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF RACE, HERITAGE, IDENTITY AND BELONGING FOR THESE CHILDREN’

Within the teams you lead or are part of, across the RAA you belong to:

- **Who’s reaching out? Could you?... Will you?**
- **Are conversations, commitments and change happening in this space?**
- **How do you know?**
- **What’s different for global majority children waiting for their forever family?**

THE POWER OF NARRATIVE

Sharing stories is powerful. So long as people feel they are in a safe space, it can help create trust and mutual confidence. It’s a way of listening to lived and living experience. Beware of the danger of single stories or creating echo chambers but narrative can be powerful. Draw on the work of Marshall Ganz³⁶ about the importance of the power of the:

- **Story of self** (sharing your values)
- **Story of us** (connecting your values with those of your stakeholders)
- **Story of now** (the need to create a sense of urgency for change along with a sense of hope that change is possible)

If you have 20 minutes then watch Barack Obama compellingly demonstrate this in action at the 2004 DNC convention, ‘The speech that made Obama President.’³⁷

And the dangers of echo chambers are well exemplified by Margaret Heffernan in her TED talk, ‘Dare to Disagree’³⁸:

One of the most powerful stories of all was from Theresa, both through her videos and in the room. Her two videos:



 **Watch Theresa’s Story**



 **Watch Theresa’s Advice**

Available to watch at: <https://thestaffcollege.uk/just-home-videos/>



THE INTERSECTS OF IDENTITIES, POWER AND PRIVILEGE

‘IDENTITY IS COMPLEX AND BECOMING INCREASINGLY SO. IT CUTS TO THE HEART OF WHO YOU ARE, THE WAY YOU THINK AND FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF, THE WAY YOU ARE VIEWED BY THE WORLD AND THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT DEFINE YOU. IDENTITY IS NUANCED AND DEFINED IN A NUMBER OF CONSTANTLY EVOLVING WAYS’³⁹

‘INTERSECTIONALITY IS A LENS THROUGH WHICH YOU CAN SEE WHERE POWER COMES AND COLLIDES, WHERE IT LOCKS AND INTERSECTS. IT IS THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT EVERYONE HAS THEIR UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND PRIVILEGE’⁴⁰

‘PEOPLE’S COMBINATION OF IDENTITIES MATTER’⁴¹

Thinking and talking about where power and privilege reside, connect and collide is a powerful strategy to start to consider the importance of identity, heritage and culture through life. We used Sylvia Duckworth’s ‘Wheel of Power/Privilege’⁴²:

Important to make the point that diagrams always look neat and tidy whereas reality is usually much more messy and infinitely moral. But as a concept it helped segue our focus towards white privilege and what that can mean in the context of permanence. Peggy McIntosh’s original article⁴³ is worth a read and her accompanying list of daily effects of not having to think all day and every day about the colour of your skin.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DENIAL

We used Charlice Hurst’s work on ‘The ‘Not Here’ Syndrome’⁴⁴ to highlight you can’t unknow what you now know and the dangers of denial.

And we touched on how important psychologically safe spaces are in which to be able to live, learn, work, be and become. Amy Edmondson coined this phrase with a particular focus on workplaces, but it’s more generically applicable throughout permanence processes. A quick insight (there are lots more available) is this King’s Fund video with Amy.⁴⁵

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RACISM

Using a multi-dimensional lens to look at the cumulative, pervasive and erosive impact of racism in relation to how it might impact global majority children and prospective global majority adopters proved to be a really powerful concept for participants. See more on this in ‘Leading in Colour: the fierce urgency of NOW.’⁴⁶

We linked this to the impact of micro-aggressions that are never micro, always macro and can become a hostile and constant surround sound. The under 3 minute video, ‘All the little things’ highlights just how undermining and triggering an endless stream of racist assumptions and stereotypes is, and how that feeds into mistrust, anxiety and fear.⁴⁷

RACIALLY JUST LEADERSHIP

Racially just leadership underpinned our programme.

‘TRULY ENGAGING WITH DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION FEELS PERSONAL, DISRUPTIVE AND EMOTIONAL’⁴⁸

To be and stay an inclusive, racially just leader across the system, we have to start with ourselves and reflect honestly on our attitudes and experiences. For all that we might believe in the importance of inclusion and anti-racism, it doesn't mean we won't have blind spots or biases or that our practice is making a positive difference to the lived experiences of those we claim our leadership will benefit. Leadership for racial justice is about facing up to the *'ugliness and realities of racism'*,⁴⁹ hearing, understanding and, critically, acting on the truths of the local lived experiences of children and families exposed to it.



Leaders can't sit on the side lines in relation to their social justice responsibilities and local racial disparities, but must, as Tracie Jolliff⁵⁰ simply but powerfully puts it, reflect and act on whether their own leadership genuinely and authentically:

- **Is bold, visible, present, vocal and doesn't sit on the fence**
- **Addresses indifferences to racial justice**
- **Challenges racism when black people are not present**
- **Will not stand for racial separateness and segregation**
- **Supports Black people of all ages who speak truth to power and challenge the status quo**

So, what is important is to ask and answer, hand on heart, are you a leader who is known for vocally standing up for racial justice and who is clear about what they will not stand for? Someone always alert to racialised assumptions and practices, who calls out all and every form of racism. A leader who welcomes voices and views that provoke and challenge everyone to become more ambitious about racial justice and promotes decision making spaces that are rooted in racially just thinking and practice? A leader who asks, authentically and often, whether practices are making a difference to the lived and living experiences of those you claim your work will benefit?

‘WHEN WE REFLECT ON OURSELVES WE CAN WORK ON OURSELVES AND ENSURE WE WON'T INADVERTENTLY DISCRIMINATE AGAINST OTHERS OR LIMIT WHAT WE OFFER TO CHILDREN’⁵¹

We linked this to always thinking **‘Who's in the room?’** - whose needs and priorities are being supported and served through permanence processes on behalf of global majority children.

CONVERSATIONS AND COMMITMENTS

‘THERE CAN BE NO KEENER REVELATION OF A SOCIETY’S SOUL THAN THE WAY IN WHICH IT TREATS ITS CHILDREN’⁵²

‘Just Fair’: Leading in Colour⁵³: looks at what localities can do to change the deep, life-diminishing and present reality for many global majority children in or the edge of our criminal justice system. It highlights the system challenges, conversations and commitments to change, starting with self, across early years services, with schools, in family support services, across children’s social care and within youth justice partnerships.

These conversations and commitments are just as applicable in relation to children’s journeys into care:



CHILDREN NEEDING FAMILY SUPPORT

Additional support is provided easily, quickly and responsively to every child and family, with no additional barriers or racial disparities. Ethnically diverse families are guided towards early help and family support from first contact. Consideration of children’s and families ethnicity and culture at the earliest opportunity characterises family support services interactions and interventions. Regular reviews of families’ experiences of navigating services and getting help effectively capture the experience of Black children and families.

CHILDREN KNOWN TO SOCIAL CARE

Equity is an important factor throughout children’s social care decision making, together with a good understanding of individual journeys and reasons for racial disparities in decisions about children entering care. Support at all stages is responsive, respectful and effective in meeting needs and addressing disparities. Ethnicity, race and culture are reflected in assessments and care planning. A racial lens is applied to quality assurance and auditing processes. Trends over time show a levelling in relation to the over-representation of Black children in Children in Need, Child Protection and Children in Care statistics.



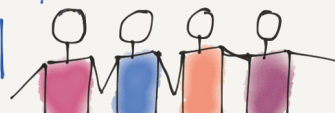



What’s are the conversations to have and work to do together on a commitment for Children known to Permanence teams?

TAKE WHAT YOU NEED

System leadership is about 'getting to us', about giving and gaining, about the agency to make a difference
- this sketchnote⁵⁴, '10 ways to build change agency' might help:

10 Ways to Build Change Agency.

The **POWER** to make a **POSITIVE DIFFERENCE.**

1. Create **Small Changes** one step at a time. 
2. Emphasise **progress**
3. Reframe your **Thinking**
- failed attempts are **Learning opportunities.**
- **Uncertainty becomes Curiosity.** 
4. Find your **Crew** (a group unified by a provocative idea)
5. Get **social support**. 
You can't be a great change agent on your own!
6. Make Change **ROUTINE** (rather than an exceptional activity) 
7. **Learn from the Best!**
8. Think **STORY**. 
What are we/I doing? Why?
How do we/I tell our story?
9. Build a **Spectrum of allies.** (not just people who support what you do!)
10. **PERSIST!** 
"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then - you WIN." Gandhi.

List created by members of @HorizonsNHS

EVERY CHILD NEEDS LOVE, HOPE, HEART AND A HOME

And in permanence, as in life, a culture of belonging and trust is critical. Additionally, everyone has a core need and entitlement to acceptance and agency, to belief and belonging, and to connection and contribution. And most of all global majority children need enduring racially just leadership to champion their lives and life-chances.

NO CHILD SHOULD GROW UP FEELING 'LESSER THAN'



RESOURCE 2. RESOURCES TO DIP INTO

Here's a collection of resources we used on the programme.

HAVE 10 MINUTES?

Dream On: Take 5 minutes to look at this animation on what every child wants and deserves from care: 'Dream on: A new animation challenging people to think differently about what care should be':

<https://imohub.org.uk/dream-on-a-new-animation-challenging-people-to-think-differently-about-what-care-should-be/>

and consider what may be always there or often missing for Global Majority children.

Watch the short animation 'Ian':

- A short wordless film about a small boy who just wants to play but keeps being bullied. Highlights his struggle to achieve something he wants, something other children have readily available and accessible to them.
- Made by his mum, it won an international award in 2019.
- Provides a tool to start conversations with people of all ages.

<https://www.respectability.org/2018/12/short-film-about-playground-inclusion-wins-international-acclaim/>



 **Watch 'Ian'**

'The Danger of a Single Story', Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TEDGlobal 2009:

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?utm_source=tedcomshare&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=tedsread

- An early reader and writer, Nigerian author, Chimamanda, tells a personal story about the dangers of a single story: *'when I began to write, about the age of 7, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations ...I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: all my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out'...* *'this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I'd never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.'*
- Later she discovered a few African books and started to realise *'that people like me, girls with skin the colour of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature ...It saved me from having a single story...'*
- Moves through this short entertaining talk to explore power, the single narrative and its easy descent into a single stereotype that can dispossess and disenfranchise.

'Clio, a young Black Londoner, has recently won the annual **'Show Racism the Red card'** competition with a powerful just under 3 minute spoken word YouTube piece, 'The Journey', https://youtu.be/XBXD_7V4KbA

- Listen and be moved as she asks us the questions that define us: *'Black, white, well, which one's right? If this is a race, who's first and who's last?'*
 - She leaves us with a choice of turning a blind eye or showing racism the red card... no contest!
 - But relate it to permanence for global majority children and, currently, they are usually last, with other children adopted instead of them, ahead of them and around them. In this context let's show racism the red card.
-

'A poem on the UK's history of Racism', by Keith Jarrett:

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/a-poem-on-the-history-of-racism-in-the-uk-by-author-and-playwright-keith-jarrett_uk_5ee37333c5b68e7cd8590790

- Keith Jarrett, a poet and author, in a compelling mix of words and images, 'Underneath the Skin of Anti-Blackness' conveys the weight of oppression experienced by Black families in the UK that shapes individuals and communities today. He uses recent events to explore how it feels to not belong, not be believed, *'a failure to see my skin without just seeing migration... forgetting the human citizen under the skin.'*
 - And leaves us with *'I cannot speak for any skin than my skin, which I've had to grow thick. For just being Black, for answering back.'*
 - Multi-dimensional racism is a really helpful lens both in terms of its legacy of mistrust and current issues of trust and confidence when your everyday experience is of racism.
-

'Where are you from?': A short video produced by Anti-Racist Cumbria: <https://youtu.be/eSyqOGxkleQ>

- Highlights the not so hidden assumptions and sub-texts behind many questions. Being asked these questions feels (and hurts) like endless and cumulatively painful paper cuts. 'Where are you from?' feels and often is a sub text for 'where are you really from?'
 - Anti-Racist Cumbria is free to join network with some useful resources: <https://antiracistcumbria.org>
-

Don't tuck in your labels: A quick read about labels and feeling able to let them show or not...

<https://www.diverseeducators.co.uk/dont-tuck-in-your-labels/>

Which labels are we enabling global majority children to feel proud to show?

Doctors without Borders: A compelling acknowledgement of the importance and affirmation of 'seeing people that look like me.' <https://youtu.be/41eR4WD1xwU>

And watch the trailer: **'The Little Mermaid 2023'**:

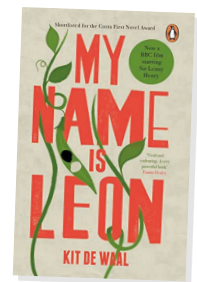
<https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=the+little+mermaid+2023&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en-gb&client=safari#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:9facd25c,vid:0-wPm99PF9U,st:0>

and reflect on your thoughts and feelings.



IF YOU'VE GOT LONGER AND A CHANCE TO READ, TRY:

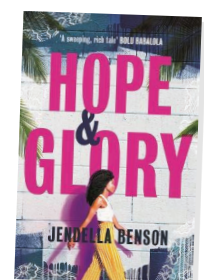
'My name is Leon' by Kit de Waal (Penguin 2017), a powerful novel set in 1980s Britain about a little boy separated from everyone he cares about. Leon begins to think race has something to do with it, and when he starts to share this with tenants at the local allotment, Tufty, a charismatic Jamaican, offers him an inside take on the realities of police brutality, racial prejudice and Black protest movements. When Leon suggests he's more of a brown colour, Tufty sets him straight: 'trust me, star, people out there; they see Black. It doesn't matter what you think'.



'Without warning and only sometimes: scenes from an unpredictable childhood' is also by Kit de Waal (Tinder Press 2022) and her personal memoir of growing up in a household of opposites and extremes. One of 5 children with an Irish mum and a Caribbean dad and a very cross gran, Black nana. Her mum is a converted Jehovah's Witness convinced the world will definitely end in 1975, her dad splurged money he didn't have on cars, suits and shoes and stuff to send back to his relatives in the Caribbean and both parents are waiting for Paradise ('where no one looks at her like she's no good for having black children' and 'black people with enough to eat are living next door to white people with enough to eat') which never arrives.



'Hope and Glory' by Jendella Benson (Orion 2022) is rich novel about a Nigerian family life, love and loss and belonging. Glory returns to South London after the death of her father and tries to reunite her family and discovers hidden issues around 'farming' or private fostering.



USE TO PROMOTE OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK, PERHAPS IN A TEAM MEETING?:

Coram working with the ASGLB published this report in December 2022: **Ending racial disparity in adoption report** – a moving read about why the 3Rs matter so much for children:

- **Recruit Black adopters and match Black children**
- **Rebuild trust with communities**
- **Resource interracial adoption to provide the right knowledge and support for white adopters to equip them to meet the needs of the children they adopt**



Simply, powerfully the right thing to do.

<https://coram-i.org.uk/resource/ending-racial-disparity-in-adoption-report/>

‘Born to Stand out: An autoethnography about Transracial Adoption’ by Sydney Parkhurst, University of Tampa: is a moving personal account of an interracial adoption with a focus on the impact of trauma, race, identity, abandonment and parenting, together with suggestions on what can help.

<https://sydneyparkhurst.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Autoethnography-1.pdf>

‘Being adopted comes with its struggles, but being transracially adopted can make you feel like an alien in your own community... Transracial adoptees find out that most of the other kids resemble their parents.’

It’s a short but powerful read which is deeply personal: *‘The adoptee was there’* throughout. She cites her two favourite picture books: *‘Owl Babies’* by Martin Waddell and *‘Just You and Me’* by Sam McBratney, both about a deep longing to belong. While struggling deeply with identity and race and racism, she believes that the issues facing Black male transracial adoptees present greater challenges and references *‘having “the talk”, a conversation about how to survive as a Black man in America.’*

‘Code Switch’: Transracial Adoptees on Their Racial Identity and Sense of Self’, is a short (8 minute) podcast by NPR, hosted by Gene Demby and Shereen Marisol Meraji:

<https://www.npr.org/2018/10/13/657201204/code-switch-transracial-adoptees-on-their-racial-identity-and-sense-of-self>

It looks at race and identity, and the trauma of realising that you are different from others in your family, *‘and when I found out I wasn’t [a little white girl], it wasn’t just a revelation. It was an identity crisis’*. It touches on white saviourism: *‘the narrative about my adoption was really centred around my mom being a savior’; adoptive parents whitewashing children’s culture and heritage, and trying ‘to minimise, if not completely erase, their racial difference’* which denies the *‘longing for, like, a deep connection to people that are like you.’*

‘Diversity Acrostic Poem: working with diversity and developing culturally sensitive practice in social work and social care’ by Vivian Okeze-Tirado (VOT training, 2021) offers principled and practical actions for social care practitioners around cultural sensitivity.

Research in Practice (RIP) Equality and Diversity resources, over summer 2022 there have been a number of briefings and resources on **'Promoting anti- racism in children and family services'**.

'Just Fair', free to download from The Staff College, sets out the context, conversations and racially just commitments for self, early years, education, family support and social care colleagues as well as youth justice partners, which help to find collective ways to enable Black children to grow up safely and well in local communities and stay out of the youth justice system:

<https://thestaffcollege.uk/just-fair-leading-in-colour/>

Are these possible commitments to work towards in relation to children's journeys into care?

- **Children needing family support:** 'Additional support is provided easily, quickly and responsively to every child and family, with no additional barriers or racial disparities. Ethnically diverse families are guided towards early help and family support from first contact. Consideration of children's and families ethnicity and culture at the earliest opportunity characterises family support services interactions and interventions. Regular reviews of families' experiences of navigating services and getting help effectively capture the experience of Black children and families.'
- **Children known to social care:** 'Equity is an important factor throughout children's social care decision making, together with a good understanding of individual journeys and reasons for racial disparities in decisions about children entering care. Support at all stages is responsive, respectful and effective in meeting needs and addressing disparities. Ethnicity, race and culture are reflected in assessments and care planning. A racial lens is applied to quality assurance and auditing processes. Trends over time show a levelling in relation to the over-representation of Black children in Children in Need, Child Protection and Children in Care statistics.'



IS THERE WORK TO DO TOGETHER ON A COMMITMENT FOR CHILDREN KNOWN TO PERMANENCE TEAMS?

- Working in partnership with schools and education focused colleagues, what are the conversations to have about the importance of schools as places of belonging for all children? **'Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging'** (Kathryn Riley, UCL Press, 2022) is available as a free download:

<https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/171324>

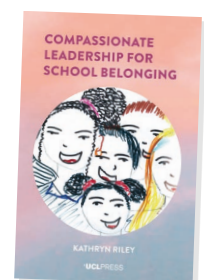
and you can read an article about the book:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2022/apr/new-book-examines-importance-school-belonging>

Accompanying videos and materials:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centres/ucl-centre-educational-leadership/creating-place-and-belonging-schools>

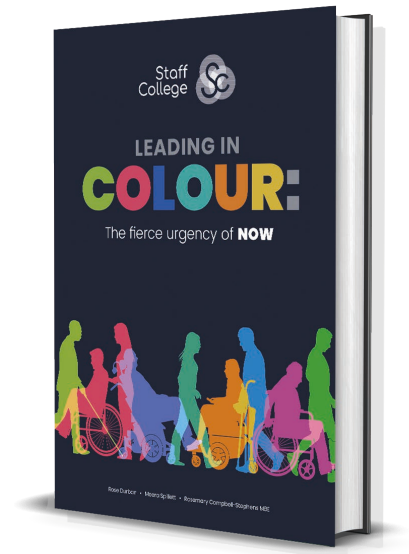
<https://www.theartofpossibilities.org.uk>



‘Leading in Colour: the fierce urgency of NOW’, Rose Durban, Meera Spillett and Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, MBE, The Staff College, 2021, is free to download:

<https://thestaffcollege.uk/leading-in-colour-the-fierce-urgency-of-now/>

- ‘Leading in Colour – the fierce urgency of NOW’ is primarily aimed at white senior leaders across the public sector and is of interest to all leaders. In particular, it offers Chief Executives, Council Leaders, Partnership Boards and their teams strategies to combat racism, create and sustain fairer workplaces and communities.
- It provides easily accessible context, direct questions to challenge and channel your thinking and action and resources to support you in your next steps to achieve enduring change.
- ‘Staff look to their leaders to lead the charge and champion the change towards fairer workplaces and fairer communities. The reality and disappointment for many is that this doesn’t seem to be a corporate priority and, for them, it feels like their top leaders are missing from the debate and its ensuing action.’
- ‘Perhaps one of the hardest things for any of us to do is to explore and acknowledge our own values, beliefs and attitudes and how they consciously or unconsciously affect our leadership on issues of racism.’
- Concludes with four sets of resources to draw on to meet your learning needs:
 - Conversations to support leaders in this work
 - Assurances local leaders might wish to seek
 - Glossary of words and phrases in this space
 - A curated resource of key blogs, books, and podcasts for you



‘Cultural Competency: promoting leadership and organisational change’, by Meera Spillett, The Staff College, 2018: free to download: <https://thestaffcollege.uk/publications/cultural-competence-toolkit/>

Sets out a powerful approach and offers a tool kit towards creating the context for increased equity in the workplace and supporting improved service provision for diverse communities.

Peggy McIntosh, **‘How to recognise your white privilege – and use it to fight inequality’**:

https://www.ted.com/talks/peggy_mcintosh_how_to_recognize_your_white_privilege_and_use_it_to_fight_inequality

Powerful Ted talk about the way Peggy gradually realises the head start and ongoing advantages she’s been given and what she does and encourages others to do with this growing recognition of white privilege and ways it can be used by those with power to ensure a fairer life for others.

We talked about **being and becoming better allies**. Ally and allyship are words that are easy to say, actually standing up for and alongside and actively supporting anyone experiencing discrimination is hard personal work, starting with a deep self- awareness and intentional anti-racist practice. Anti-Racist Cumbria has a rich range of resources in this space, including a video interview with Nova Reid, author of ‘The Good Ally: a guided anti-racism journey from bystander to changemaker’:

<https://antiracistcumbria.org/intersectional-allyship-resources/>



RESOURCE 3. A QUICK POLICY ROUND UP

IT'S A CROWDED POLICY SPACE SO HERE'S THE RECENT AND RELEVANT 'STUFF' (TECHNICAL TERM!):

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE, MAY 2022 ⁵⁵

The Review overall is a generally good and thoughtful read overall. In this space two aspects are really relevant: The annex: **'Racial and ethnic disparities in children's social care'**⁵⁶ sets out the key racial disparities across 6 themes: Supporting families and keeping children safe, Children in care, Children in the justice system, Unaccompanied asylum seeking children, Social care workforce and Improving data and evidence.

Key points:

- *'There are ethnic disparities in children's social care intervention in family life that cannot be explained by deprivation alone'*
- *'When families are referred to social care, there is variation in the response they receive depending on ethnicity'*
- *'Social workers do not always understand and respect the cultural differences of families, and this can prevent them from understanding the needs of young people and families and working with them effectively'*
- *'There was little understanding and awareness of different communities' ethnic minorities cultures and family dynamics which had negative impacts on me'*
- *'The local authority know families really well – but the vision of family tends to be white and middle class ...Doesn't work with people that have different cultural norms around the idea of family'*
- *'Children from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to enter the care system later and this impacts their experiences of care'*

Reaching out for help and receiving it in a way that works for you is key to effective early help for children and families. The Review highlights that when Black families seek help early on, despite repeated attempts to get support, many don't receive it until things reach breaking point. By the time this happens, concerns are significant and often their experience is of being escalated swiftly through the system to either become long term children in need or placed in care, frequently out of area and away from any support networks.

Initial slowness in identifying and assessing need is often replaced by accelerated timelines with Black children having less time between an initial social care referral and entering care.

Black children wait the longest to be adopted, while other children are adopted instead of them, ahead of them and around them.

Permanence arrangements aren't always culturally or ethnically sensitive: *'When I went into care at 14, I had no idea how to look after and wash my hair...There wasn't anyone in my placement that could support me with this'*

And the Review's Young people's summary of what matters: **'Youth Summary'**⁵⁷: and the accompanying infographic: **'What children and young people wanted to say to the Care Review'**⁵⁸.

No surprises, but vital to always have these in our hearts and in our practice:

- *'Love, stability and safety – most children and young people agree that it is important for children to be connected to people important to them, to feel a sense of belonging, and strong sense of identity'* (Youth Summary)
- *'The way that children and young people from other ethnic backgrounds experience the care system isn't always good enough. This has been highlighted in terms of matching children and carers and keeping in touch with communities'* (Youth Summary)
- *'A home is where you feel safe. It's homely, comfortable, and decorated nice. You feel part of the family, you're listened to and you have your own space'* (What children and young people wanted to say to the Care Review)

'STABLE HOMES, BUILT ON LOVE: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY AND CONSULTATION' ⁵⁹

While the consultative focus is spot on, *'This strategy is about focusing on what really matters to children – family, love and a safe, stable and reliable place to call home'*, the response overall is disappointingly light on the importance and impact of persistent and pervasive racial disparities for children in the care system and waiting or being adopted.

Centred around a phased approach to 6 pillars of reform:

- **Family help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families**
- **A decisive multi-agency child protection system**
- **Unlocking the potential of family networks**
- **Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care**
- **A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one**
- **A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data**

Each of which will make a difference to children getting the right help, protection and care when they need it, nevertheless there are significant missed opportunities to really set out ways to embed the promise, *'We are committed to addressing racial disparities in children's social care'*, particularly in relation to permanence. The consultative response is clear and unambiguous that *'Adoption can provide children with a loving stable family life and boost their life chances'* and reaffirms a commitment to the current Adoption Strategy (plus improving digital ways children can communicate with birth families), but doesn't specifically focus on reducing and removing existing inequities in adoption.

The commitments set out in the page and a bit specifically addressing racial disparities have potential to reduce the current accelerated journey many global majority children have through the system, with emphasis on, *'non-stigmatising community-based family Help'*, a stronger focus on *'sustaining relationships and putting families first ...and new corporate parenting commitments.'*

Alongside this, an Early Career Framework and a Children's Social Care National Framework and Practice Guides and a clearer apprentice pathway may enable a more diverse workforce and embed more culturally aware practice and consistent expectations which enables children and families to access meaningful help which meets needs in a supportive and welcoming way.

Good to see references to research and inspection better focused on building and affirming culturally competent practice.

Helpful too to see an emphasis on much needed kinship care reforms which will better reflect the realities of the role so many carers have in children's lives and the importance of family networks for children, particularly in relation to developing and sustaining a *'healthy sense of identity and belonging.'*

It's a long read, but perhaps the areas to consider a response on behalf of global majority children are in relation to both the Equalities impact assessment and the Children's Right impact assessment. Is this package of measures enough to make a positive impact on behalf of global majority children. Taken overall will it mean that the colour of a child's skin does not determine their likelihood of being in care or their chances of being adopted?

INCLUSIVE BRITAIN: THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES ⁶⁰

The initial report did not have a soft landing, with many feeling it offered an over optimistic perspective with significant missed opportunities, but the government response does include three pertinent recommendations in this space:

- **Action 26:** *To increase the number of ethnic minority children who are adopted, and to reduce the time they have to wait to be adopted, the DfE, together with regional adoption agencies, will work to launch a new drive to match children with adoptive families. DfE will work to ensure that potential adopters are not discouraged to apply because of their ethnicity.*

We also need better data about the adoption process and the use of Special Guardianship Orders (when children cannot live with their birth parents and adoption is not right for them). A more detailed understanding of the demographic profile of looked after children will enable better planning around providing the right permanence options for children, such as adoption, special guardianship, long-term fostering, or return to parents. It will also inform and support the recruitment and approval of the right adopters, Special Guardian or foster parents to meet the needs of the children.

- **Action 27:** *In line with commitments in the adoption strategy, the DfE will start to modernise data collection and information sharing so that Regional adoption agency leaders have access to data which can be used to speed up matching of ethnic minority children with new adoptive families.*
- **Action 28:** *To improve the existing evidence base, the RDU will work with the DfE and other stakeholders to develop and publish, in 2022, a strategy to improve the quality and availability of ethnicity data and evidence about looked after children and their routes out of care.*



INCLUSIVE BRITAIN: UPDATE REPORT ⁶¹

The Government provided an update on these promised actions in April 2023. While the numbers of global majority adopters has increased from 450 at March 2020 to 670 in March 2022, as 'Ending Racial Disparity in Adoption'⁶² highlights there is still a very significant shortfall and global majority children, particularly Black boys, are still over-represented in the care system and wait longer than white children, with many ageing out of care:

'BLACK CHILDREN ARE THE LEAST LIKELY TO ACHIEVE THE LIFETIME STABILITY AND PERMANENCY OF A LOVING FAMILY THROUGH ADOPTION'

Importantly the update report signals the need to improve the quality and availability of ethnicity data⁶³. This has potential, at local and regional levels, to inform better permanency planning for global majority children, with more nuanced recruitment and approval of adoptive parents to meet needs and provision of earlier help and intervention for families.

Data has to be both useful and used. Metrics matter, and really can make a difference, if they encompass real time granular data on multi-dimensional outcomes for this group of children to support permanency workers to use a racially just equitable lens in their decision making...**never forgetting the stories, the individual stories behind the statistics: a child waiting for his or her forever family and lasting home.**

'THERE CAN BE NO KEENER REVELATION OF A SOCIETY'S SOUL THAN THE WAY IN WHICH IT TREATS ITS CHILDREN'

(NELSON MANDELA)

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ACT 2014: 'A FAILURE OF IMPLEMENTATION'

Published by the House of Lords, December 2022⁶⁴.

- In essence the Committee highlighted all the promise in this landmark Act which has been significantly undermined by a lack of focus on implementation and monitoring impact on improving the lives and life-chances of children and families
- Wide ranging scrutiny but focus on adoption, family justice and employment rights
- Recommendations include:
 - Establishing an outcome focussed task force, accountable to the Secretary of State, dedicated to addressing ethnic and racial disparities in the adoption system
 - Improving post-placement support for adopters and kinship carers
 - Developing safe, digital contact system for post adoption contact

OUT OF THE SHADOWS: A VISION FOR KINSHIP CARE IN ENGLAND'⁶⁵

Offers helpful insights into a shadowy area for most children's services. Key points:

- From an invisible base, 'Kinship care is finally being understood as a hidden but invaluable resource...' meaning that many more children remain part of their family, connected to siblings, their heritage and identity
- Makes link to and positive noises about Care Review
- Builds a moral and business case for kinship carers
- Highlights that most take over at a point of crisis and there is a profound impact on people's lives, *'kinship care is not a life choice; it is a reaction to circumstances'*
- *'Kinship care is also far more prevalent in Black and minority ethnic communities'*. Little current data but that from 2015 indicates 32%
- *'Inequalities within the care system and kinship care based on race and ethnicity are complex'* - need for much more nuanced understanding of demographics, needs and outcomes.
- *'Currently support is based on the legal status of the child rather than their level of need'* meaning that often special guardians get better support than informal kinship carers. Current statutory guidance calls for LAs to create some parity between financial support for Special Guardians, foster carers and adopters; in practice kinship carers usually receive much less than foster carers. Guidance is open to post code lottery interpretation
- Social worker response is often 'love trumps everything' rather than emotional and practical support. Many kinship carers report a lack of trust between them and Social Workers, with latter 'judging' them. What's often missing is a deep understanding of kinship care, a lack of empathy and sensitivity to what an emotive situation this is for families



‘THE COLOUR OF A CHILD’S SKIN SHOULDN’T DETERMINE THEIR CHANCES OF BEING ADOPTED. BUT CURRENTLY IT DOES. THAT SIMPLY ISN’T RIGHT, FAIR, OR JUST’

SOCIAL WORK ENGLAND: PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS ⁶⁶

Together the Standards reflect the value and diversity of social work practice and the positive impact it can have on children and families lives, in particular the importance of:

- Recognise differences across diverse communities and challenge the impact of disadvantage and discrimination on people and their families and communities (1.5)
- Promote social justice, helping to confront and resolve issues of inequality and inclusion (1.6)
- Recognise and use responsibly, the power and authority I have when working with people, ensuring that my interventions are always necessary, the least intrusive, and in people’s best interests (1.7)
- Assess the influence of cultural and social factors over people and the effect of loss, change and uncertainty in the development of resilience (3.14)

END NOTES

We have used Global Majority, an inclusive term, (see note 5 below), and also Black, the inclusive and political definition (see note 6 below) throughout. Quotes are referenced below and use the terminology in the original.

1. 'Ending Racial Disparity in Adoption': a report from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Adoption Leadership Board, 2022: <https://coram-i.org.uk/asglb/ending-racial-disparity-in-adoption/>
2. 'Children and Families Act 2014: A failure of implementation', House of Lords, 6 December 2022
3. 'Inclusive Britain: Government response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities', HM Government, March 2022
4. 'All God's children need Travelling Shoes', Maya Angelou, first published in 1986, and in paperback Virago, 2010
5. Global Majority, an inclusive term coined by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens: see: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=D_8bnTiUGl0
6. Black, the inclusive and political definition
7. Rosa Parks
8. 'Ending Racial Disparity in Adoption: a report from the ASGLB', Op. Cit.
9. Cornel West
10. Nelson Mandela, 8 May 1995
11. 'Esi's reflections as an adopter and foster carer', blog by Esi Cathline, a member of the Expert by Experience group that contributed to The Independent Review of Children's Social Care by Josh MacAllister, published in May 2022. The dedicated Independent review website has now closed but all the resources can be accessed via Gov.UK and are now housed in The National Archives: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care>
12. Ending Racial Disparity in Adoption: a report from the ASGLB', Op. Cit.
13. Lemn Sissay, 'My Name is Why', Canongate Books, 2019
14. Adoption and Special Guardianship Board, established in 2013 and closed in December 2022. Set up initially to oversee the government's adoption strategy and refocused in 2018 to cover previously looked after children subject to adoption or special guardianship orders.
15. D2N2 is the shorthand for Derby City and Derbyshire, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)
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A FOREVER FAMILY AND A FOREVER HOME:

**THE PLACE WHERE YOU KNOW YOU ARE
VISIBLE, VALUED, AND LOVED JUST AS YOU
ARE, THE PLACE WHERE YOU MATTER,
THE PLACE WHERE YOU BELONG**



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