

**Diversity Practice Paper**

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In recent years, the idea of diversity and inclusion has been brought to light in the workplace by highlighting and embracing differences. In foster care, children often come into care at different points having experienced discrimination based on their gender, sexual orientation, race, and more. It is imperative that diversity and inclusion issues are addressed by social workers so that children and foster families are afforded ample opportunities to grow and learn. In many agencies, there are diversity teams who strive to better the workplace by educating about diversity and inclusion. At UMFS, there is not only a dedicated staff of people to achieve this but employees are also aware and trained to an extent to look for problems that may arise.

Specifically for the social workers present in this organization, education is arguably the most important tool available. Though at UMFS there is a push for diversity and inclusion, there is little to no education to support the workers. Much of the training given to staff suggests that it is up to the child to teach both the worker and the foster parent about their beliefs and culture. While this can be beneficial in some circumstances, it may be difficult for other children to share especially at young ages or in vulnerable categories. By teaching social workers the history of foster care for marginalized groups they may be better equipped to handle different situations. Learning comes from experiences as well. By simply being out in the field social workers are able to learn about diversity and inclusion in a real-life setting. Through learning about these topics, workers may be able to address their own biases in order to better the experiences of all parties. Everyone has biases, however, it is imperative that individuals are aware of these biases because they can directly affect diversity and inclusion.

There are many ways that people are oppressed and discriminated not only within the agency but in the overall system of foster care. Some of these include the children being a certain

race or being a part of the LGBTQ+ community. At UMFS there has been a push to explore these factors and how they affect not only the children but also the foster families. Many of the children entering the system have already been oppressed or discriminated against. In this way, it is important to listen to their stories and how they would like to celebrate their differences.

A social worker in the agency may push the diversity and inclusion team to present education on topics that the workers may not understand. Furthermore, these educationals could be provided to the foster families so they could better understand the individual needs of the child in care. Education is specifically important to social workers because it is a competency listed in the NASW code of ethics. Social workers must be lifelong learners. Though what they may have been taught in a master's program or bachelor's program may differ, times will continually change meaning social workers need to stay up to date on current issues, diversity and inclusion policies, and education.

On a macro level, a push could be made to put in laws and policies that not only protect children receiving care but also celebrate differences. Once policies are in place, agencies like UMFS would be able to adopt them and put them in place. Though this would not be an easy solution, it may be beneficial in changing the system and putting into place strict guidelines for everyone involved in these situations. Many laws and policies have already been put into place however, more can be enacted based on time and circumstances. On the micro level, the social workers could work with families and other staff in order to enact the education put into place. The workers could also further train foster parents on specific needs with specific groups.

Diversity and inclusion are a large part of foster care and it is dealt with on a daily basis. There are many actions that may be taken by workers to ensure that foster families and children are receiving the support that they may need. At UMFS specifically, the workers are aware of

diversity and inclusion and understand the importance of it as related to foster care. Having the team members in this agency recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion, allows social workers to educate foster families with the information they have about inclusion and equity.

In foster care, there are many different children. These children may look different than the foster parents or have different needs. In this instance, it is the social worker's job to address these concerns. While this is the plan that is put in place, it does not always have the intended outcome that it should. Some children may still feel that they are not represented or that they are misunderstood. Though support groups for foster families are available, some families may not utilize this tool. Overall, the agency displays great movement in the realm of diversity and inclusion.

There is still a lot of work that must be done in order to create a safe space for diversity and inclusion however, at UMFS, there has been an attempt at this through a workforce, policy and change, and more. Change can be made at many different levels at this agency. Change can be made at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels in order to make a well-rounded change that not only changes the system but helps people to recognize their own personal biases.