



THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION

Understanding Racism and the Foster Care System

*A collaborative design sprint with
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*



From October through December 2020, the State of Ohio's Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) engaged with The Columbus Foundation and ChiByDesign to better understand how racism and inequities are experienced in Ohio's children services system.

Ohio

Department of
Job and Family Services

THE PROBLEM



It is wrong that Black and multiracial children are disproportionately represented in the children services system. We need better solutions to this problem, and where better to start than with the young people, biological parents, and others who have experienced the system first hand.”

— Governor Mike DeWine

This project sought to identify how systemic racism showed up in the policies, practices, and experiences of those involved with Ohio’s children services system.

THE APPROACH

This project was a collaboration between The Columbus Foundation and the ChibyDesign research firm. The design team included Chris Rudd, Christina N. Harrington, Jiani Sapathy, Surbhi Kalra, Heather Tsavaris, and Mark Lomax from The Columbus Foundation. Co-designers included Tryshanna Garraway and Sabrina Niezgoda.

This project included extensive interviews with stakeholders throughout the child welfare system to include: emancipated youth, foster parents, and Internal / External Program Administrators.

THE IMPACT

Key themes we heard during the project included:

- A lack of valuing youth and Black voices/experiences. Study participants said they raised concerns for care and their needs for assistance but were not heard.
- Ill-equipped foster parents. Foster parents did not feel well trained to raise children in multi-racial settings, while some foster youth experienced racism because of a lack of cultural competency training for foster parents.

- Gaps in support. Foster youth shared that they felt unprepared for adulthood, and foster parents expressed the need for more readily available supports.

At the conclusion of the project, ODJFS took immediate steps to launch a new approach to recruiting, retaining, and racial equity training for children services caseworkers via virtual reality headsets to help them be mindful of possible implicit racial bias in their decisions affecting children. In addition, ODJFS committed to continuing to incorporate the voices of minority children and families in all planning and policy decision-making.

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