



The inhumane and senseless murder of Mr. George Floyd and the many others who have gone before him provide a painful reminder of the racial injustices that pervade American life. Staff and volunteers at CASA programs know this too well. The higher rates of incarceration, poverty, and unemployment, and the poorer health outcomes among Blacks manifest themselves in disproportional representation of Black children in the child welfare system.

In Washington state, Black and Native American children [are placed into child welfare at far higher rates than white children](#). We know Black children are 2.2 times and Native American children are 2.9 times more likely to be placed into foster care than white children. Systemic and structural racism is inherent in many of our institutions and the child welfare system is one system of many that perpetuates structural racism and causes disparities. The decision-making processes of agencies, biases of workers and volunteers, governmental policies, and economic injustice have all contributed to racial over representation. We recognize that people do not seek out a career in child welfare with the intent to cause harm, and that it can be challenging to acknowledge that despite good intentions, our child welfare system often does more harm than good. And yet if our intent is to serve and protect children, then we must examine the harm that system causes and change it.

We also recognize that viewing these disproportionalities as statistics, in the abstract, can dehumanize people and flatten the experience of Black America to an undifferentiated narrative of poverty, crime, and dysfunction. This stereotyping denies people of their dignity and reduces them to stereotypes, as happened with George Floyd, when the police saw him as a threat rather than a human needing to breathe. When the daily insult of denial of self builds up enough, it can result in retreat or it can spill out in protest. As Bayard Rustin observed, “when an individual is protesting society's refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a human being, his very act of protest confers dignity on him.”

We at Washington CASA do not and cannot work in stereotypes – we recognize that each person has a unique and valuable experience. In the work our programs do on behalf of children and families, they recognize that each child has a voice. The CASA volunteers have a critical role in making sure that those voices get heard. In this moment of honoring the life of George Floyd and others who have experienced similar fates, we

pay particular attention to Black voices, but we also acknowledge other voices disproportionately represented in the child welfare system – Native American, LGBTQ, and those experiencing poverty. We work on behalf of them, and all children who have experienced abuse and neglect so that families can receive the help they need and children can have a safe and permanent home.

Washington CASA Association is committed to disrupting the systemic and structural racism in the child welfare systems. As a new nonprofit state association, we will do everything in our collective power to right historic and present-day injustices so that we build an anti-racist future where children thrive and race does not predict their life outcomes. We will work with our local CASA/GAL programs towards justice and equity in these systems, ensuring that our policies are informed by those disproportionately impacted by them. Equity means carrying out our work so we center race in the fight for child welfare justice.

We have much have serious work to do and we are committed to becoming anti-racist in our daily work, training, and policy advocacy. We will continue to learn and deepen this commitment as we live our values and mobilize our network to challenge systemic racism in the child welfare system and advocate for policies that are informed by the people most impacted by them, and that prevent disproportionate entries into the system altogether.

In solidarity,

Angela Murray
Executive Director