

**Notes from “A Crooked Piece of Time” State of CASA Conference Address
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Diversity and Inclusion

It is true that inclusion is not just about race. Race is certainly part of it, but so are geography, religion, region, socio-economic status, neighborhood, political persuasion, experience, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, personality, learning style.

Understood in this broad way, inclusion is important for us, for our cause, and for our young people because it:

- Helps prevent mistakes. A greater diversity of colleagues helps us know what we don't know.
- Enlarges our expertise.
- Keeps us open minded and less partisan. Child welfare is so buffeted by ideologies that someone needs to keep things more grounded.
- Makes us better thinkers. Intellectual diversity helps us avoid the very real dangers of group think, cascading information, and confirmation bias.
- Makes us better advocates, inspiring us to our highest performance.

Philanthropy in the 21st Century Is Likely To Be:

- Results oriented.
- Possibly more hesitant about social change.
- More concerned with issues of equity and poverty.
- More likely to expect applicants for funds to align closely to the funder's specific program directions.
- Less likely to fund infrastructure organizations or support capacity development.
- Unlikely to fund general support.
- Making fewer new grants and few multi-year grants.
- Looking for more systemic impact for their dollars using more integrated approaches.

Older Youth: A Strategic Priority

Those who recently aged out are a fairly optimistic and resilient group; most appreciated foster care and feel they benefited. They are not tracked to failure, but the risks are high. Systems can both fail to give them what they need and give up too soon. Our Fostering Futures initiative aims to help give young people who may soon age out of care the strength to successfully manage and succeed in life.

Sources of Bias in Decision Making

- Our brains can only hold limited information in our rational decision-making areas
- This can force us to oversimplify, often falling back on stereotypes and other potential biases
- Strong personalities distort the information around them
- Researchers know of many different kinds of bias that are hard-wired into our brains and can interfere with effective decision making. These include
 - Comfort zone bias

- Risk aversion
- Confirmation bias
- Stereotype bias
- A bias toward negative information
- Framing bias with the danger of “cascading information”

Disproportionality and Disparity

- African American and Alaska Native/American Indian children are overrepresented nationally in foster care compared to their presence in the general population.
- Hispanic/Latino children are not overrepresented nationally, but they are in many states.
- Lesbian, gay, transsexual, bisexual and questioning youth may or may not be overrepresented (the data are unclear), but they are clearly subject to forms of disparate treatment that can lead to poor outcomes.
- Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to certain types of maltreatment, including the risk of serious injury or harm.
- Children of poor families are overrepresented in the system, which probably contributes to some of the disproportionalities listed above.

Our strategic plan calls for us to advocate for fairness, equity, equal opportunity, and justice for all children in the system.

Conclusion

We are all struggling to make the world better for children. Three things that can help:

1. A CASA/GAL volunteer for every child
2. Full party status for all volunteers so you can advocate from a position of strength.
3. Fairness and equal opportunity for all children. We will be vigilant in ensuring that no child with whom we work will be treated unfairly, disadvantaged, or hurt because of race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, age, or disability.