Iowa Breakthrough Series Collaboratives (BSC) bring together diverse teams of public and private stakeholders to test strategies aimed at improving child welfare policy and practice. The purpose of the Polk County BSC is to eliminate disproportionality and disparity of Black/African American families involved in our child welfare system.

Of all Polk County children and youth in out-of-home placement, 20% are Black/African American, compared to 7% of the general population in Polk County.

Separating children from family is traumatic and compounds the historical trauma and systemic racism Black and African American families experience.

The Polk County BSC seeks to disrupt this cycle by

1. Building a culturally responsive workforce
2. Improving family engagement practices
3. Ensuring access to timely and appropriate services

Our Desired Result
All Polk County Black/African American children and youth who experience an out-of-home placement maintain a sense of belonging to family and community and achieve timely permanency through reunification, placement or guardianship with relatives or fictive kin or other appropriate person.

Measuring Success
The BSC tracks the number of Black/African American children and youth in out-of-home placement as its primary indicator. Additionally, data on length and type of placement, as well as other metrics, are used to inform policy and practice.

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Strategies and Activities to achieve result
(some activities may be cross cutting)

1. Develop and support strengths based, culturally responsive and healing centered culture and workforce.

**Activities**
- Recruit, hire and support workers of color and provide effective supervision.
- Incorporate continuous training and cross sharing for all sectors involved in child welfare (i.e. social workers, judicial, attorneys, GAL’s, etc.) in trauma informed/healing centered care, cultural responsiveness, and strengths-based assessment and practice.
- Creation of best practice guidance for working with African American families.

**Performance Measures**
- Increase number of social workers of color.
- Increase number of institutional training opportunities.
- Increase cross sector training and interactions.

2. Accelerate efforts to move youth of color to least restrictive, most appropriate level of care.

**Activities**
- Creation and use of culturally responsive family identification and engagement policies and tools.
- Provide case consultation through African American Care Review Team.
- Provide tools and resources to ensure all players share accountability to keep children connected to families and communities.

**Performance Measures**
- Number of policies/protocols changed.
- Shortened lengths of stay in group care and stranger foster care.
- Number of recommendations implemented in AACRT.

3. Increase investment in families of color who support and care for youth.

**Activities**
- Ensure assessments are culturally responsive and comprehensive and case plans are realistic and developed based on the individual strengths and challenges identified by families.
- Provide support for kinship caregiving.
  - Financial stipend
  - Connect to community and faith-based supports and programs
- Advocate for access to services and supports that meet the needs of African American families (EBP’s validated for African American families, access to specialized courts, etc.).
- Promote individual safety planning.

**Performance Measures**
- Increase number/percent of children placed with relatives.
- Increase number of concrete supports offered to kinship caregivers.
- Increase number of family reunifications.