A Letter From Interim Director Damschroder

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine has challenged all state agencies to review current practice and find ways to advance racial equity. In the August 2020 report, Ohio’s Executive Response: A Plan of Action to Advance Equity, Ohio’s children services system was highlighted. At the time, there were more than 16,000 children in the custody of children services agencies in Ohio. Of those children, 31% were African American, even though African American children made up only 16% of the population of children across the state.

There is no question that there is a disparity in the experience of African American children and families in Ohio’s children services system. In response to the Governor’s directive to address this issue, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) partnered with The Columbus Foundation* to embark on a human-centered design study. The study utilized in-depth qualitative inquiry and stakeholder input. The study provides a solid and compelling starting point for change.

This human-centered design approach allowed us to learn from those with lived experience in our children services system. The study allowed us to identify areas of opportunity to prioritize resources for next steps. The attached report summarizes consistent themes heard from children, parents, and system practitioners. Although these themes demonstrate the concerning realities of our system, awareness and transparency are necessary to make progress toward better serving children, families, and communities. The work to create improvements and equality must begin now.

I want to first thank those that participated by sharing their stories, candidly and courageously. I am also grateful to Heather Tsavaris and Dr. Mark Lomax of The Columbus Foundation and ChiByDesign for their partnership and dedication to creating a better and more equitable future for Ohio. Additionally, I want to thank our county partners for their day-to-day leadership and commitment to supporting and protecting our children. They are heroes on the frontlines. This work will only elevate our system to the next level. As Governor DeWine has said “Everyone – no matter where they were born or who their parents are – deserves the chance to succeed, to get a good paying job, to raise a family comfortably, and to be secure in their future.”

I know this work will move our system in the right direction, and we are committed to ensuring this happens.

Sincerely,

Matt Damschroder, Interim Director
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

* The Columbus Foundation is a community foundation dedicated to the well-being and progress of the region in which it resides.