PLENARY SESSIONS

Plenary Session 1
The African American Family Experience: The Black Family in the 21st Century

Moderator: Joyce A. Thomas, Regional Administrator, ACF Region 11, New York, NY

Speaker: Alvin Poussaint, MD, Director of Media Center of the Judge Baker Children's Center, Professor of Psychiatry, Faculty Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Harvard University Medical School, Boston, MA
Lorraine C. Blackman, PhD, Professor, Indiana University, School of Social Work. Author, "Making Your Good Thing Better" IN

Dr. Poussaint cited sobering statistics. Today, one in four (23-25%) of Black children live in poverty. Blacks have double the unemployment rate of other ethnic groups. In 2007, 72% of Black babies were born to single mothers; a higher rate than Native American (65%), Latino (51%), or White Americans (28%).

Building better parenting skills is a must. Parents should read to children, restrict TV time, play games and interact with their children. The more TV a child watches, the poorer a student he becomes. Incarceration is another factor in poor performance. We have 2.4 million people in prison; 44% are African American. We must get young people through high school and college so they can earn jobs. Physical punishment of children is another risk factor. Twenty-three countries don't allow parents to beat their children. Physically and sexually abuse causes permanent changes in the child’s brain.

Dr. Blackman believes we need to stop looking outside of ourselves and look inside for solutions. Because of drugs, we have too few marriageable men. Sisters can't find the brothers they need. The men are locked up; children need their fathers.

Seventy-five percent of our children are born out of wedlock in relationships that last “15 minutes.” In such unwanted pregnancies, babies are sometimes killed. Those that are born are angry; have no interest in school; and many go into foster care. Boys don't learn what a father or a husband is. Dr. Blackman pleaded for young people and elders to come together. Elders have the wisdom; young people have the energy; together we can make a difference.