

Caring for Children of Color

For BeAnka Masefiade it all began soon after she started working at a Grand Rapids non-profit organization.

“I witnessed time and time again Black and Brown children in foster care being placed predominantly in the care of white families,” Masefiade adds.

Witnessing children of color being placed with white families who despite their best intentions didn't often know how to care for the specific needs of these children sparked a desire for action in BeAnka.

“A lot of those white families were struggling with certain things like haircare, and skin care for the children they were fostering and taking care of and there were many who really wanted to do it well,” she says. “I realized there was a disconnect.”

For parents caring for children of color, there's often what BeAnka calls a cultural competency disconnect -- and helping children of color be better cared for by their foster parents is what birthed this project.

The project will provide a four-part virtual webinar event centered around caring for children of color in transracial foster care and adoption for 100 families.

“There's a cross cultural experience happening between the child and the parent and my goal with the series is to make sure that the experiences are as healthy as they can be for both the parent who is taking care of the child and for the child,” she explains.

BeAnka says children in foster care have already experienced extensive trauma and there's no need for that trauma to be exacerbated by families who might not be ready to deal with the specific needs and care children of color require. According to her it's about empowering these parents and helping them learn healthy allyship.

“Healthy allyship is the ability to have a certain level of cultural competency and understanding that will develop a lens of cultural humility of which they can holistically serve Black and Brown vulnerable children in the social welfare system,” she says.

The four topics of the series will consist of: haircare, skincare for children of color throughout Michigan's four seasons, cultural competency, and advocacy.

“The ultimate goal of foster care is reunification, and we want the foster parents to support these children through that and that means advocating for them and their parents in the way they are able to,” she says.

The curriculum of the program is being developed in conjunction with adults of color who have experience in the foster care system or were adopted by white families. BeAnka says having their perspective will help inform exactly the right information these families need to help meet the needs of the BIPOC children they are entrusted to care for.

“We want parents to rethink how they can place the children in a space that is more conducive to the things they are used to, whether its food, or music, or a trip to their neighborhood or beauty salon,” she says.

This project aims to help cushion the secondary trauma BIPOC children may be experiencing when they are placed in a home away from home -- where they are no longer surrounded by familiar places, sounds and smells -- often a place where no one looks like them.