

## THE NATIONAL HOME VISITING NETWORK EMBARKS ON A RACIAL EQUITY LEARNING JOURNEY

With a commitment to lifting up conversations that deserve attention, in 2018, the Advisory Committee of the National Home Visiting Network (NHVN) embarked on a racial equity learning journey. Two years later and with six formal trainings under their belt, NHVN members reflect on the process and key learnings. Their hope is that others will be inspired to undertake a similar, intentional dive into better understanding racial inequities, communicating in ways that diminish unintended racism, and assuming responsibility for applying a racial equity lens when developing (and re-envisioning) policies, programs, research and evaluations. With this understanding we can begin the important work of eliminating structural barriers that perpetuate racial inequality.

A critical learning that the group embraced relates to the importance of engaging parents in the discovery and development of solutions related to racial equity. Fortunately, all recognize that this is an ongoing learning journey and the more we learn, the more we realize there is a lot more to understand, especially as it relates to including those with lived experiences in our work. The application of our learnings, and the realizations that surface, are gifts that will bring us closer to understanding structural racism and what we can do together to ameliorate it. We simply cannot get to a genuine understanding of the challenges and opportunities without including the very families who experience structural racism first hand.

This learning journey took place under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. That pandemic laid bare profound health inequities, with people of color (especially those of African American, Latino, and indigenous lineage) suffering more severe outcomes and disproportionate mortality. They suffered from the downturn in the economy too, filing for unemployment at higher rates. Seeing these and other disparities in real time sparked national awareness and discussion. This learning journey not only helps NHVN participants begin to recognize and commit to address inequities within home visiting, but it has a ripple effect as we take our newfound understanding of structural racism with us to conversations at work, at home, and in our communities.

The Network's racial equity goal is to optimize our collective performance through the systematic application of a racial equity lens.

## EARLY STEPS

In its first year, NHVN's Advisory Committee raised the issue of racial equity as a critical conversation that needed exploration. As an initial step, the Advisory Committee connected with Tamara Lucas Copeland<sup>i</sup> to lead us in a half-day session to introduce the importance of understanding structural racism and implicit bias, and to begin exploring how the NHVN might begin its racial equity learning journey. In this early session we were introduced to the work of David Williams, John A. Powell, and Robin DiAngelo and read several articles - most notably readings on Targeted Universalism and the Curb-Cut Effect - that sparked our interest and solidified our commitment to engaging in collective learning.

A cross-racial, cross-functional team<sup>ii</sup> -- the Racial Equity Work Group (REWG) -- was assembled to guide our deep dive and develop a plan. The REWG took advantage of our upcoming in-person meetings to embed relevant field trips that could provide another opportunity for shared learning. In Little Rock, AR we visited the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, and in Washington, DC we visited the National Museum of African American History and Culture, with facilitated discussions following each visit.

Recognizing that the journey needed an aspect of formal training, the REWG also connected with Angelique Kedem of the Annie E. Casey Foundation who talked with us about the importance of a shared language and level-setting as a first step - one required to get to shared solutions. She suggested we participate in an intensive training, followed by an ongoing facilitated process. We also met with Jann Jackson (also of the Annie E. Casey Foundation), to learn more about the process undertaken by the Kids Count Network to increase their attention to racial equity and how they applied their learnings, recognizing it might be a model for our network.

With financial support provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation and in partnership with the Alliance for Early Success, we engaged JustPartners, Inc. - Race Matters Institute<sup>iii</sup> to help guide our racial equity learning journey because of their ability and willingness to tailor their training and technical assistance for the NHVN and their belief that networks are most poised to make meaningful change. They took time to understand where we were individually and collectively, recognizing that some of us were new to deep thinking around racial equity and others were more aware. And they helped us think about how we could use the power of networks to ensure a ripple effect that would reach beyond our immediate centers of activity represented on the NHVN. For example, they encouraged us to allow each Advisory Committee member of the NHVN to select a colleague from outside the Advisory Committee who could join us for the trainings. This allowed us to learn together and discuss cross-functional, field-wide implications at multiple levels. It also ensured that our members would have a partner who they could engage with for further processing and planning between meetings. Regular attendance of members and partners was set as an expectation, and due to the nature of the work, the sessions were not recorded.

## FORMAL LEARNING SESSIONS

The training through Race Matters Institute was organized just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit. What was planned as a day-and-a-half session to be held in Lansing, MI needed to be re-tooled. The REWG consulted with our Race Matters advisors - Audrey Jordan and Paula Dressel - and together hatched a plan to parse the training into five two-hour virtual sessions spread out over multiple months with opportunities for learning and practicing built in. Prior to each training, the participants received an agenda and background reading material, and after each training, a follow-up note and additional resources were shared. Many of the participants were so taken by the teachings about backmapping that most volunteered to join an optional session for those who wanted to practice using the tool. All in all, we believe this design for training was actually more aligned with effective adult learning as it provided multiple touchpoints for engaging with the material and the critically important time needed for ruminating that does not typically happen when you attend a meeting and then hop on a plane and return to your “day job.”

The five training sessions took place between May 22, 2020 and August 14, 2020 and focused on the following topics:

1. *Building a Shared Race Equity Language:*

The importance of race equity as mission critical and results-oriented, and the need for a shared understand of key race equity terms.

2. *The Power of a Structural Lens on Race:*

How to apply a structural lens for understanding how racial inequities evolve and are perpetuated. Using a tool to “backmap” from a specific indicator (e.g., higher rates of black infant mortality) to the drivers of inequity that cause the disparity.

3. *The Essentials of Disaggregated Data for Advancing Racial Equity:*

The need to disaggregate data to understand how different groups are situated and the importance of looking at the structural indicators that explain individual outcomes.

4. *The Power of Using a Racial Equity Impact Analysis:*

How to apply a racial equity impact analysis to identify needed changes to policy and practice in order to achieve greater results for all groups.

5. *Effective Communication:*

Understanding word choices, messaging challenges, and strategies for communicating about racial equity.

## ESSENTIAL EARLY LEARNINGS

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This journey has been transformative for individual members and the collective.

"I thought I knew a lot, and I didn't know a lot at all. Just being a woman, a black woman, or someone of color doesn't make you an expert. As we went through the backmapping and saw the root causes of inequities, not just for people of color but for a lot of other people, we realized a system that doesn't work for so many people doesn't work for anyone."

-Karen Howard, Network Advisory Committee, Crossover Partners

"It's a journey, and one that continues. And we are not done yet. It's changing us – our interest, perceptions and work."

-Jill Filene, Network Advisory Committee, James Bell Associates

"We are on a racial equity journey, so it's more than just racism or anti-racism. It is more than looking at the world through an equal lens. We are looking at racial EQUITY."

Carrie Peake, Network Advisory Committee, Administration for Children and Families/Tribal Home Visiting

Three essential learnings will surely shape all that we do in the future:

- ◆ **Structural racism.**

We understand better than ever before that structural racism is deeply embedded in our systems and likely accounts for the health disparities we see and the misalignment of program intent and parent needs.

- ◆ **Disaggregated data.**

We realize the absence of disaggregated data in the home visiting space and how that prevents the field from truly understanding what works for whom and why. Fortunately, the move towards precision research and evaluation may help us make speedy progress in this area.

- ◆ **Parent voice.**

We have long said that it is important to include parent voice in our work, and we have been slow to do this. Now we finally appreciate that incorporating parent voice and engaging parents as co-creators of home visiting program, policy, and research is essential. No more excuses; now is the time to find ways to authentically engage parent voice in all we do.

## NEXT STEPS

The NHVN members recognize that they are still at the very beginning of a journey to understand structural racism and to act upon it. The more we learn, the more we uncover additional questions or inspirations that need to be investigated. For example, how can we center the voices of parents so that their lived experience shapes how we talk about home visiting as a service that is racially-equitable? And where do we start with our desire to collect and use disaggregated data to conduct backmapping and apply the Racial Equity Impact Analysis? While our learning has sparked valuable intrapersonal and interpersonal growth, it has also elevated the need to think about how the work can be embedded within members' respective individual networks as well as the broader home visiting field.

Several next steps - within the collective and individual centers of activity -- are already in play. A sampling of these include:

- ◆ Race Matters Institute will provide additional guidance via webinars and resources to the NHVN focused on communications and strategies for embedding racial equity into the broader home visiting field.
- ◆ Racial equity task forces are being established within many home visiting centers of activity.
- ◆ Health equity is being integrated into some strategic plans.
- ◆ A “Big Think” Convening on February 3, 2021 created a space for the NHVN and parents to generate ideas for how home visiting can be more responsive to families and the structural changes (practice, policy, finance, administration, evaluation) that would be needed for a re-envisioned home visiting that embraces family voice and racial equity.
- ◆ Equity has been braided throughout the precision home visiting toolkit.
- ◆ Local research is looking at how to increase participation in home visiting and barriers to engagement as well as workforce diversity.
- ◆ The NHVN was accepted into the National Leadership Academy for the Public's Health and will work throughout 2021 to implement an Applied Health Leadership Project. The project will be aimed at applying learnings from the racial equity learning journey and testing new approaches relating to communication, data disaggregation, and identifying practice-based opportunities. The hope is that this work will surface promising approaches for centering parent voices as a means of advancing equity.
- ◆ Conversations are underway about the development of a paper on the history of home visiting, as an opportunity to uncover the origins of this service delivery modality.

***Written by: Deborah Roderick Stark, National Home Visiting Network  
February 2021***

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<sup>i</sup> Tamara Lucas Copeland had recently retired as President of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers where she launched a learning and action series for Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia foundation CEOs to build a deep awareness about racism.

<sup>ii</sup> The Racial Equity Work Group was initially led by Karen Howard (formerly of the Alliance for Early Success), Jill Filene (James Bell Associates), Nancy Geyelin Margie (Administration for Children and Families), and NHVN facilitators Melissa L. Kelley and Deborah Roderick Stark. It was later expanded to amplify both the parent lens (Bryn Fortune, Early Childhood Investment Corporation) and tribal lens (Carrie Peake, Administration for Children and Families) in planning for the training.

<sup>iii</sup> Just Partners, Inc. is an African-American-led 501c3 national consulting firm established in 2003. Their Race Matters Institute (RMI) began as a program within the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which later provided the resources for RMI to become a self-sustaining consulting entity.