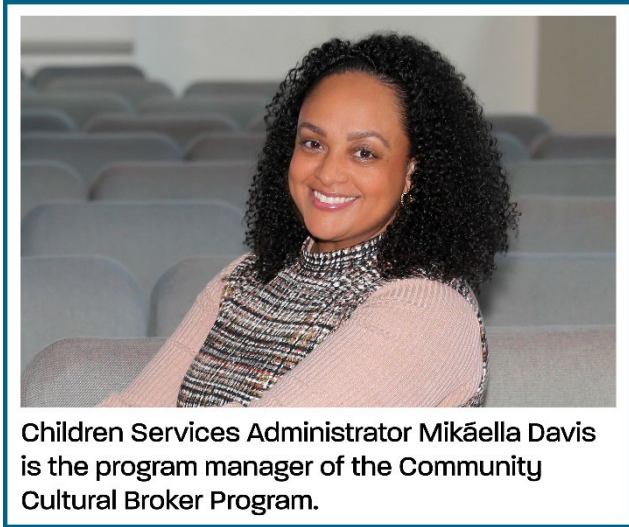




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**Children Services Administrator Mikāella Davis is the program manager of the Community Cultural Broker Program.**

Data shows that African American children are entering foster care at greater rates. Understanding this reality and recognizing that it is rooted in long-standing systemic inequities, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is taking steps to boldly evaluate practices and identify strategies to safely correct course.

Established in 2008, the Community Cultural Broker Program (CCBP) offers African American families a community volunteer to help them navigate the child welfare system and reduce cultural misinterpretation between families and DCFS.

“Black and African American children make up eight percent of the general child population, but 27% of those in out-of-home care,” said Mikāella Davis, a children services administrator who manages the CCBP.

“Collaborating with persons with lived experience, like cultural brokers, to advocate for families prior to entering the system or to shorten their length

of involvement can help DCFS reduce disproportionality and disparity and move toward racial equity,” she said.

For Pastor John L. Jefferson of Del Aire Baptist Church in Hawthorne, the decision to partner with DCFS as a cultural broker was an easy one.

“Everyone needs somebody on their side, and that’s where cultural brokers come in,” said Pastor Jefferson, who has been collaborating with DCFS for more than a decade to help bridge the gap between the department and the African American community.

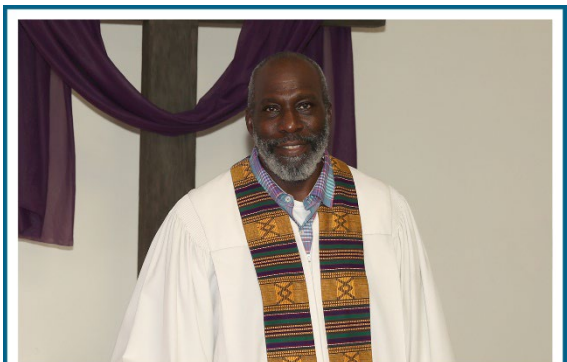
“We listen to where the family is coming from and help them fully grasp what the department is asking them to do,” he said, noting that his role is also to help social workers understand how a family’s story can provide insight into their strengths, struggles and support system. “Our purpose is to stand alongside parents to prop them up and help them figure out how to be better.”

According to longtime champion Kimala Lewis, cultural brokers are members of the African American community with knowledge of the child welfare system who volunteer their time to amplify families’ voices and help them navigate the process. As liaisons between DCFS and families, cultural brokers work closely with parents, children and social workers to dispel misinformation and provide clarity where needed to move families toward their goals.

Kimala further explained that cultural brokers must be able to authentically understand and appreciate the needs, desires, fears, sorrows and virtues of individuals without prejudice or judgment. They help families feel seen and give them a space to be heard.

She said, “The African tribal greeting ‘sawubona’ means ‘I see you,’ a concept that is foundational to the idea of cultural brokers.”

Cultural brokers wear a variety of hats, depending on the circumstances of each case. They attend case-planning team meetings, provide transportation, supervise family time and provide emotional support. With their strong community ties, they link families with local resources to address specific needs, such as counseling, housing, tangible goods and parenting services.



**Cultural brokers like Pastor John Jefferson bridge the gap and improve relationship quality between DCFS and African American families.**

Like the pastor, many cultural brokers are members of the faith-based community and use both a practical and spiritual approach to connect with parents and help them build upon their strengths. They also strive to keep the lines of communication open even after a family's case with DCFS is closed.

Pastor Jefferson recalls one instance where a young mother struggled to maintain her job and child care after her partner left, taking the vehicle and car seats with him. Because she was still in touch, her cultural broker was able to connect her with a donor who generously purchased a car for her to use.

"This isn't a short-term tactic," he said. "We're in this for the long haul, and we make a commitment to stick with families."

"When others turn their lights off at the end of the day, that's when cultural brokers' lights go on," Pastor Jefferson added.

Interested in becoming a cultural broker? Email: [erdd@dcfs.lacounty.gov](mailto:erdd@dcfs.lacounty.gov).

## **Report Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect to 800-540-4000**

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