

*For Your Information and Inspiration*

## Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Confronting Organizational Racism

*By Paul Levine, LCSW, Executive Vice President and CEO*

This special issue of FYI&I gives us much to feel proud of as an agency committed to confronting organizational racism. In article after article, we appreciate the difficult and complex issues of race and culture that can only be effectively addressed if we do so together and with skill and sensitivity.

The stories clearly show the many levels that we are working on and reflect a wide range of concerns, including: staff of Kaplan House grappling together with the issues; Brooklyn teens from Break-Free Adolescent Services involved in an African American Consciousness Raising Group; expanding the conversation beyond the initial affinity groups to include Latinos and Jews of Color; even the impact on the mentor-mentee relationship among agency staff.

I am encouraged by the many ways programs and staff are embracing this initiative. To celebrate the progress we have made as well as to recognize the work which lies ahead, this winter a party is being organized by the affinity groups. See page 12 for more information on this event.

Although we have come far, we still have more distance to travel in confronting organizational racism. Under the direction of **Mary Pender Greene, LCSW-R**, Assistant Executive Director, a Confronting Organizational Racism (COR) strategic plan has been presented to the Executive Management team, and is expected to begin rolling out the plan this fall. The plan includes protocols for Training the Trainers seminars to be led by



Paul Levine

**Ken Hardy, PhD**, JBFCS Saul Z. Cohen Chair in 2008; **Joan Adams, LCSW-R** Director, Anti-Racism and Multicultural Consultation and Training Service; and **Paula Panzer, MD**, Director, Martha K. Selig Educational Institute and Center for Trauma Program Innovation. They will continue to train staff on how to apply anti-racism concepts to the work we do every day. Trainings are already under way with the Men of Color affinity group and Mishkon staff.

JBFCS remains committed to breaking through the barriers that embed racism in our organizational systems. I hope you will not only read this issue, but discuss the articles presented here and use the ideas as an inspiration for your own programs. The importance of this work is underscored as we, as a nation, grapple with the first nomination of an African American for president of the United States.

As the work moves forward, more challenges will no doubt be raised. But this difficult work has to continue, and I thank all of you for being part of these efforts.

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## “Beyond Diversity” – A Must Read

Why did the JBFCs diversity and multicultural initiative transform into one that addresses structural/ institutional racism? What are our agency's change strategies? Where are we going and how does this work support “best practices”?

Read “**Beyond Diversity – Building Anti-Racist Institutions**” by **Mary Pender Greene, LCSW-R**, Assistant Executive Director, featured in *New York Nonprofit Press*, June 2008, available at: [http://nynp.biz/current/archives/nynparchives/0608 June 2008%20 Edition.pdf](http://nynp.biz/current/archives/nynparchives/0608%20June%202008%20Edition.pdf) (page 11)

The article is concise, clear and powerful. It frames the challenges we face and it will make you proud to be a part of this work. We encourage you to share this article with all staff.



Mary Pender Greene

The *NonProfit News* article is an excerpt from a December 2007 article in the *Journal for NonProfit Management*, “Beyond Diversity and Multiculturalism: Towards the Development of Anti-Racist Institutions and Leaders.” You may request a copy of the full journal article by sending an email to Mary Pender Greene, [mpendergreene@jbfc.org](mailto:mpendergreene@jbfc.org).

*“Beyond Diversity” frames the challenges we all face and it will make you proud to be a part of this work. We encourage you to share this article with all staff.*

## Bringing Our Work to Outside Institutions

The Anti-Racism and Multicultural Consultation and Training Service was formally established in July 2007 to expand JBFCs’ work on this front, both outside and inside the agency. The program contracts with non-profit human service agencies, educational institutions, community groups and government agencies to provide consultation and training aimed at:

- Improving the effectiveness of services to people from all backgrounds
- Understanding the impact of race, culture, immigration and systemic racism on clients, students, staff, faculty, managers and trustees
- Improving the work environment for staff from all backgrounds, especially people of color

Our team can work with an organization’s executive, management, supervisory or line staff as well as make presentations to large groups.

Led by Director **Joan Adams, LCSW-R**, the training team includes direct practice staff, supervisors, program and executive managers, and visiting scholars. We can also offer consultation and training to JBFCs programs and departments.

**To recommend outside organizations who might benefit from these services, please contact Joan Adams at (212) 632-4710 or [jadams@jbfc.org](mailto:jadams@jbfc.org).**



Joan Adams

*The program contracts with non-profit human service agencies, educational institutions, community groups and government agencies to provide consultation and training aimed at: .....Understanding the impact of race, culture, immigration and systemic racism on clients, students, staff, faculty, managers and trustees*

## “The Only One” Article Generates Great Response

By Pamela L. Alston, LCSW

Senior Social Worker, The Harry Blumenfeld Counseling Center/Pelham

On February 28, 2008, in recognition of Black History Month, JBFC's Executive Vice President and CEO Paul Levine, sent out to the entire agency an article from the *New Haven Advocate*, “The Only One: Being Black in the White Working World.” Paul hoped the article would bring insight to White workers into the day-to-day experiences of their “clients and colleagues of Color,” and inspire further discussion about how we can improve the workplace and enhance service provision to “individuals and communities of Color.”



Pamela Alston

I decided to contact Paul to inquire about his personal reaction both to the article, and to the feedback he had received from his employees. He agreed to a face-to-face interview. I was hopeful that our discussion would prove to be candid and substantial—and it was.

I asked Paul to compare the staff reaction that this article had elicited to the reactions sparked by his other communications related to organizational racism, such as Barack Obama’s speech on race and comments on the Sean Bell verdict. While he received a few emails about the Obama speech and the Sean Bell memo, the “Only One” generated many more messages from both People of Color and from White staff members. He noted that the

responses were thoughtful and candid, and he was delighted that so many of us reached out to share our sentiments with him.

I was curious to learn if Paul had been surprised by the author’s account of her everyday experiences as a Black professional woman. Paul said that he was not surprised by her description of the painful mental, emotional and verbal acrobatics that she must perform in order to survive in the White workplace.

“I think that in the case of people who are African American, it’s probably different... from other people, even other People of Color,” he added. “It’s my general sense that African American people feel distant from the mainstream White culture in this agency—not just this agency, but in any job. It’s a subject of conversation in the lives of African Americans in this country... quite a bit.” He highlighted the contrast between this reality and that faced by White Americans. “I think that you are probably aware that it is not the subject of conversation among Whites,” Paul continued. “They don’t discuss feeling different or feeling that they were uncomfortable in a situation, or that they didn’t know what to say—as long as they are in the majority.”

“I feel that it’s a more powerful issue of self-censorship on the part of African Americans than any other group that is not

(Continued on page 4)

### About “The Only One”

Written by African American staff writer **Camille Jackson**, the *New Haven Advocate* article described the author’s experiences as the only Black person in her present workplace, and in past professional and academic settings. It also included accounts from Blacks who are one of very few African Americans at their companies.

Ms. Jackson addressed salient concerns common to most Black “Only Ones.” “Only Ones” are typically charged, explicitly or implicitly, with the responsibility of educating their White colleagues about issues of race

and difference. “Only Ones” know that they are the only Persons of Color in the room, in the agency, in the administration and are hyper-aware of skin colors, while White colleagues have the privilege of not even noticing their own race. “Only Ones” vigilantly seek clues as to how Whites perceive them and expend untold energy on presenting the best possible appearance, so as to not bring any disgrace to People of Color. “Only Ones” often represent all Black people for those White colleagues who have little to no interaction with People of Color outside the workplace.

It is an exhausting and often

maddening endeavor to “integrate without compromising ourselves or our beliefs,” says Ms. Jackson. The “Only One” must be able to move fluidly between the White workplace and the comfort of home. In order to do so, so many don a “mask” that obscures the true self and presents an innocuous, non-threatening image that is likely to be more palatable to White co-workers. Or “Only Ones” may be distant, choosing to appear aloof or unrelated rather than being exposed to ignorance and condescension.

*For a copy of the article, “The Only One: Being Black in the Working World,” email Pam Alston, [Palston@jbfcs.org](mailto:Palston@jbfcs.org)*

## “The Only One” Article Generates Great Response (Continued from page 3)

dominant,” he said. “I think that African Americans know that there’s not any real basic empathy for their perspective... they don’t really think that there’s an empathy for their views about issues of racism. They assume there isn’t.”

Paul’s perceptive and frank assessments suggested a mindset reminiscent of Ken Hardy’s oft-mentioned “healthy paranoia.” I shared that perspective with Paul, and added that paranoia certainly helps me to be able to negotiate the various worlds I must interact in as a Black professional woman.

So what is Paul’s vision of what the Jewish Board will look like once we have accomplished our mission of becoming, in my words, “an actively anti-racist organization?”

Paul identified changes in communication about race as a desired outcome. He expressed hope that issues of privilege and racism could be spoken about more “openly.” For White employees, he hoped this would mean an ability to consider how a Person of Color might perceive an issue and not dismiss their voice. He would like to see White staffers push past initial resistance to the subject and truly listen.

For employees of Color, Paul said, “We want to end up with somebody being able to say ‘I think we should raise that issue with somebody in power who’s White.’” He would like to see employees of Color feel empowered to state in unambiguous terms that a particular situation seems to reflect a racial issue. He hopes that eventually there would no longer be a need to “talk around” the subject.

Demographic diversity among staff that reflected the population of clients [served] in particular locations is another important goal Paul wants the agency to achieve. He recognizes that while upper management has become more diverse in some ways, “racially, we’re not there. I think I’ll feel better when we’re more diverse racially, [and] I think I know how we can move that along a little bit.” Paul also expressed interest in diversifying program and division directors as well as the Executive Management Team.

Paul’s willingness to engage in open and honest dialogue about race and privilege, which for so many people is sensitive subject matter, offers an important direction that JBFCs can continue to build on.

The article inspired positive responses from JBFCs staff members who sent their comments directly to Paul. With their permission, we share excerpts of their reactions here:

*“Having been an ‘Only One’ many times in my academic and work life, it truly validated my experiences. . . It is great to see that positive change, along with self-reflection, is being encouraged in a top-down manner.”*

**Aurea Morgan, MSW Intern, Manhattan West /Alan & Kathryn Greenberg Counseling Center**

*“I hope it helps our staff members of Color by validating the experiences of the micro-aggressions attached to race that are experienced daily while raising this up in a new way for White staff members about the experience of People of Color.”*

**Rene Chapman, MA, MSW, LCSW, Coordinator of the Clinical Consultation Program**

*“Supervision has changed since we began the racism initiative and I have begun to hear (or perhaps be open to listening to) similar feelings and experiences from supervisees of Color for the first time.”*

**Judith Levitan, LCSW, Director, Clinical and Community Support Services, Rita J Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs**

*“My hope is that this . . . story will be eye-opening for our White colleagues... and that they will fight the impulse to close their eyes in response.”*

**Pam Alston, LCSW, Senior Social Worker, Pelham Counseling Center**

## Kaplan House Staff Looks at Issues

In 2007 Kaplan House — an independent living facility for young men located in the East Village — began working with a consultant who specializes in staff development and training to address a range of issues including communication, morale, and teamwork. Once the foundation was set, staff began to look at issues of race. At one meeting, staff members broke up into small groups where everyone shared an experience in their life where they felt picked on or persecuted for who they were. The stories shared were truly revealing and helped staff get to know one another on an entirely new level.

This work helped staff to talk about and process issues that are happening in New York City, such as the Sean Bell case, so that they are better able to process these events with residents. In the discussion about the Sean Bell case, staff grew to have a better understanding of each other's perspective and feelings. Staff also shared poems they wrote as a response to the case.

We are pleased to publish the poem of **Ralph Peterson**, Recreation Coordinator – see sidebar.

This fall, **Joan Adams, LCSW-R**, Director, Anti-Racism and Multicultural Consultation and Training Service, will continue confronting organizational racism work with Kaplan House staff. Joan and other members of the team will meet with the staff twice a month to facilitate discussion and provide training about the impact of race, culture and structural racism on the staff and residents. Joan will also consult regularly with the program's leaders about integrating and sustaining the work done with the staff.



Ralph Peterson wrote *Just Us/Justice* in response to the Sean Bell case.

### JUST US/JUSTICE

J-u-s-t us, are a four and two letter word  
That speaks of me and you

But J-u-s-t-i-c-e is a word dispensed  
To the privileged and the few

J-u-s-t us can leave us shot and killed  
By cops who roam our streets

J-u-s-t-i-c-e is like a figment of our  
imagination  
That in the halls of justice we as a people  
continue to seek

J-u-s-t us strips us of our human rights  
And we are treated as animals and prey

J-u-s-t-i-c-e is a rainbow that  
comes out  
After a dark and rainy day

J-u-s-t us are words we swallow  
In addition to words, we never seem  
to speak

We are a strong and proud people  
Why do we pretend to be so weak?

JUST US SEEKING JUSTICE

## Consciousness Raising Helps Teens

**“B**e proud of who you are, for you come from a history rich and varied,” **Guare X, LCSW**, told 14 African American young men and women who participated in a year-long African American Consciousness Raising Group. Part of the JBFCS Brooklyn-based Break-Free Adolescent Services, the group was led by Guare, Senior Social Worker, and fellow staff members, **David Figueroa, MSW**, Social Worker and **Derek Howard**, Case Associate.

At weekly lunch meetings during the school year, teens learned about their heritage of leaders and innovative thinkers and were empowered to look beyond the negative images and racist messages they all too often experience. Thanks to philanthropic funding, the group was also able to attend the Broadway production of “The Color Purple,” based on Alice Walker’s novel, and the movie “The Great Debaters,” a film about a debate team from a historically Black college in Texas competing against a team from an Ivy League White college in 1935.

“The play and the movie inspired



African American Consciousness Raising Group led by (l to r) Derek Howard, David Figueroa, MSW, and Guare X, LCSW

a lot of discussion in the group about being Black and having a voice,” Guare noted.

In the course of the year and the weekly discussions, the group leaders saw a great deal of positive change in the teens.

“The youngsters were much more respectful to each other,” Guare says. “And as they began to feel better about their African American identities, their grades improved.”

With the completion of the year-long program, a special dinner was held for the youngsters and their parents. Several teens also read essays they had written about being Black in American society. (See below “What I’ve Learned.”) The dinner also included an

award ceremony with each youngster receiving a Brandon Graves Award of African American Consciousness certificate. The certificate is named in memory of Brandon Graves, a 16-year old African American young man who attended Break-Free and was murdered in June, 2007. The group was initiated as a tool to help prevent further violence in the community by creating a deeper understanding of African American history and identity.

The group will run again in the 2008-09 school year and plans include a trip to the Latimer House Museum in Queens which features the life of Lewis Latimer, the African American inventor whose carbon filament made possible the invention of the incandescent light bulb.

*“The youngsters were much more respectful to each other. And as they began to feel better about their African American identities, their grades improved.”*

*As part of the African American Consciousness Raising Group, members were asked to write essays about how the group helped them. One group member shared excerpts of her essay below.*

What I’ve learned in this Black group is to accept myself for who I am and not have anybody make me feel less as a person because

of my skin color. I’ve learned how society made Black people look stupid...I’ve learned to have respect for each other and

stop the petty fighting with our brothers and sisters. I’ve learned not to judge someone by their skin color.

# Dr. Kenneth Hardy Meets With Employees of Color

By Pamela L. Alston, LCSW, Senior Social Worker, The Harry Blumenfeld Counseling Center / Pelham

**O**n January 25th, 2008, an agency-wide gathering of approximately 200 JBFCs staff members of Color was held at the UJA-Federation of New York headquarters in Manhattan. The meeting, "Unity in the Struggle: The Impact of Internalized Racial Oppression among People of Color," was facilitated by Dr. Kenneth Hardy, JBFCs Saul Z. Cohen Chair, from 2005 – 08. The purpose of this assembly was to provide a forum for employees from every setting to discuss how we, as People of Color, at times internalize structural racial oppression and allow our differences to divide us.

I write this article, admittedly, with a measure of ambivalence. I aim to provide both a factual account and a subjective discussion of the meeting from the perspective of this Black female attendee. Additionally, I have called upon other employees of Color to offer their thoughts in this piece—I am indebted to them for their thoughtful and thought-provoking reflections. However, I do feel reluctant to say "too much" about what was a rare and truly precious opportunity to begin to tear down false barriers that separate us from one another. Such gatherings are absolutely necessary

to foster a sense of fit, belonging and community for People of Color at JBFCs. I feel protective of my brothers and sisters who spoke so honestly. It is due in part to their demonstrations of courage that I am emboldened to bear witness to this historic occasion.

Dr. Hardy opened the forum by defining the concepts of primary and secondary oppression—the former requiring the physical presence of the oppressor, the latter occurring when the subjugated oppress themselves and one another. He sparked lively reactions when he offered up the definition of silence as "the stripping away of one's voice due to oppression," distinguishing it from mere *quiet*. Any plans of forming neatly structured small-group discussions were promptly discarded as attendees cast off shackles of silence and spontaneously began to testify about their own experiences.

For the next two-and-a-half hours, men and women took the floor to address issues such as invisibility, accepting responsibility for one another's care and survival, tensions between and within groups of Color, skin color, gender and sexuality. As I looked around the room, I was heartened to see familiar faces, and



Dr. Kenneth Hardy

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## Staff responses to meeting with Dr. Hardy

"...Even looking around and seeing a room full of people that looked like me was exciting.....one of the best things about such meetings is that they strengthen the sense of community among People of Color within the agency – with so many people and so many sites, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that there are a large number of people experiencing the same internal and structural challenges. It's easy to feel alone in 'the struggle,' and these meetings illuminate the fact that we aren't alone and that we do in fact have a strong and influential community within JBFCs."  
**Michelle Harris, LMSW, Social Worker, Child Development Center**

"Dr. Hardy has been instrumental in addressing issues of race and racism. It is important for all People of Color in the agency to come together to address issues of race, culture and organizational racism. Although there are clear cultural differences among People of Color, we share many similar issues and we need to work together to address those issues. We should especially work towards equity in resources and services for all clients."  
**Carmen Collado, LCSW-R, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations and Latino Affairs**

"That day was very special in that it was about us as individuals and a collective. It was valuable in that it made me feel like an integral part of the agency. The forum allowed us to

reflect on how we as clinicians have experienced subjugation and [its] impact on the work that we do."

**Shawna J. Beasley, MSW, Social Worker, Pelham Family Center**

"...It was tremendously moving for me to be at the staff of Color meeting... It was moving not only because of the amount of honesty, strength, and courage exhibited by the people at the meeting, but also because of the community building taking place between the staff of Color in the agency. . . this sort of meeting should be done again as a way to improve the overall agency and the working environment for People of Color."

**Mwaniki Mwangi, Second-Year Intern at the Harry Blumenfeld Pelham Counseling Center**

awed to see so many new faces of innumerable and beautiful hues.

I was touched by my brave Asian American sister who spoke emotionally of being a minority within the minority community at JBFCs—of some messages that suggest that she neither fits into the White conversation, nor those People of Color groupings that narrowly define “of Color” as exclusively Black and/or Latino. I laughed with recognition as Dr. Hardy referred again to his “healthy” paranoia, a mindset (and survival mechanism) shared by so many People of Color. I felt unspeakable pride when my African American sister identified herself as a minority within a minority within yet another minority as a bisexual Woman of Color.

Several women of Latina descent spoke eloquently of their insistence that they be addressed at their sites by their given Spanish names. Owning one’s name is a courageous act of pride and defiant self-definition in the face of a society that demands that People of Color conform to Eurocentric language and norms and thereby make it easier and more comfortable for White people.

I was encouraged by the fact that milieu and support staff members were expressly included in this event. Their voices have been typically absent from those formal discussions of racism and diversity in which I have participated over my years at JBFCs (such as Interdivisional Meetings and In-Service courses). Their inclusion served as an important acknowledgment of a woeful “false barrier” perpetuated in the agency: that which separates so-called “professional and paraprofessional” employees. This particularly serves to divide staff of Color in the agency.

A Latina female supervisor shared with me that she “laughed... cried, and... understood.” She acknowledged the absence of some staff of Color and expressed hope that even more of us will attend future forums. A number of staff members mentioned that there were employees of Color who wanted to attend the meeting, but did not do so because they were intimidated at the prospect of asking their managers for time to meet off-site. Others were not given the time off after requesting it. I remain curious about the absence of other People of Color, and am interested in hearing more perspectives on why they either chose to stay away or why they felt that they could not attend the meeting.

An African American male clinician acknowledged that he, along with “some of my colleagues here at JBFCs [is] tired of talking about issues of race with the White majority” and highlighted the need for us to focus our energies upon “healing ourselves.” He emphasized that People of Color “have to

*“Our latest meeting with Ken Hardy was a powerfully pivotal step towards unbinding the voices and spirits of JBFCs employees of Color.”*

move away from fighting each other,” and suggested that this event was an opportunity for People of Color to begin to come together at JBFCs.

Dr. Hardy closed the event with an unexpectedly affecting exercise. He instructed all of us to leave our seats and self-select into discrete, gender-specific groups of men and women of African American, Caribbean, Asian and Hispanic heritage. I was moved almost to tears by the effortless elegance and dignity of the two women who identified themselves as African. I smiled as a number of us danced back and forth between groups, attesting to the experience of multicultural individuals of Color. At Dr. Hardy’s invitation, we reconvened in the center of the room to embrace and meet face to face. My pride in our stunning beauty was bolstered significantly as I surveyed the multitude of bold naturals, elaborately plaited dreadlocks and braids, freshly shorn cuts and other cleverly styled locks of all lengths and colors. I saw gorgeous faces of caramel and coffee, buttercream and sparkling sand. Different accents and inflections were heard throughout the room as we indulged in this opportunity to truly see and hear one another.

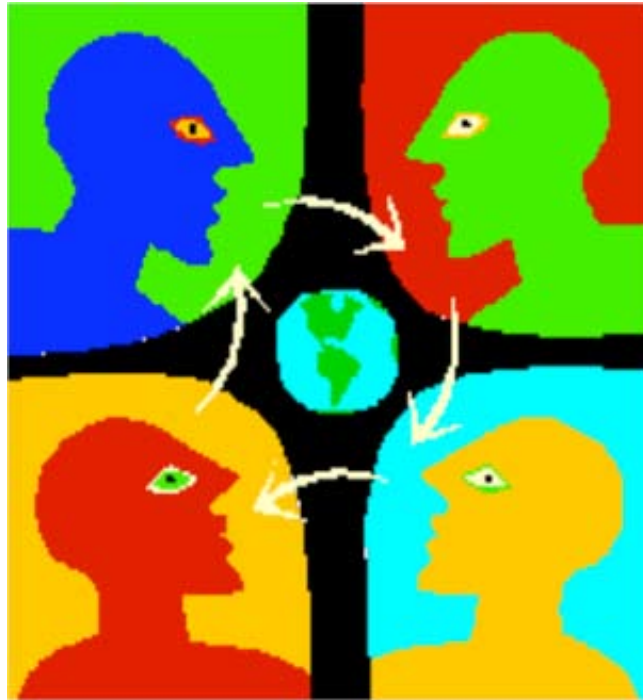
Our latest meeting with Ken Hardy was a powerfully pivotal step towards unbinding the voices and spirits of JBFCs employees of Color. It is important to acknowledge the work done by JBFCs Assistant Executive Director and Chief of Social Work Services **Mary Pender Greene, LCSW-R** in tirelessly promoting and advancing these anti-racist initiatives as well as by **Paul Levine, LCSW**, Executive Vice President and CEO and the executive administration for offering this and similar venues for People of Color to convene and thereby make room for an intimate collective in the agency. In so doing, JBFCs stands to make real progress towards the creation of an agency that is nurturing of staff of Color in word and in deed. As employees of Color are nurtured by the agency we will use our voices, creativity and full selves to provide exceptional service to clients and other staff, and excellent supervision and leadership to the organization.

## Affinity Groups Lead Planning Efforts

In 2006, three racial affinity groups, Men of Color (MOC), Women of Color (WOC) and the White Anti-Racist Caucus, were convened to address issues and plan activities which advance our anti-racism work. Each group has held agency-wide meetings to provide a forum for voicing concerns about organizational racism; to identify ways the groups could help the overall agency; and to identify and meet educational needs of each group and of staff at various sites.

The response to the groups has been positive. **Gemelyn Philogene, LMSW**, Social Worker, JBFCS Clinical Consultation Program in Brooklyn, noted, "As a Woman of Color, I feel secure and safe having a place to brainstorm professional concerns and ideas with other Women of Color."

**Jonathan Mclean, LMSW**, Social Worker, Southern Brooklyn Family Services, found the Men of Color and People of Color meetings insightful and inspiring. "The MOC/POC meetings have given me the impetus to critically analyze and challenge manifestations of institutional racism, while drawing strength and inspiration from the individual and collective experiences of other profes-



sionals of Color committed to ending it.'

**Berkis Pena**, Case Associate, Bronx Domestic Violence Programs, mentioned how she as a Latina and her colleagues, "look forward to every meeting to see what information there is to learn ...to know how others are participating ...and how integrated are we (the POC caucus) as a group." She and her colleagues spread the word about the meetings to staff members who were unable to attend.

The MOC and WOC have developed active Steering Committees which guide the work of the two caucuses. In the Fall of 2007 these steering committees began meeting together as well. Two agency consultants, **David Billings, DM**,

and **Ken Hardy, PhD**, have provided critical support to both groups. (See articles in this issue on the People of Color meeting in January 2008 with Ken Hardy, PhD and the White to White meetings in Spring, 2008 with **David Billings, DM** and **Cheryl Franks, PhD**.)

Starting this past Spring, a POC regional monthly meeting was established in the Bronx. A network of regional POC and White anti-racist caucuses is in formation for Brooklyn, Westchester, Manhattan, and Staten

Island. Co-facilitators for each region have been identified, and training for all the facilitators and members of the Anti-Racism affinity groups will be led this fall by **Joan Adams, LCSW-R**, Director, Anti-Racism and Multicultural Consultation and Training Services and **David Billings, DM**, Pauline Falk Chair in Community Education and Research for 2006-2008.

If you are interested in participating in People of Color or White Anti-Racist Caucus groups, please contact **Mary Pender Greene, LCSW-R** at (212) 582-9100, ext. 1800 or email **Mary at mpendergreene@jbfcs.org**.

## Latino Workers Address Issues of Identity



Carmen Collado

**T**he young student with coffee-colored skin raised his hand. He wanted the teacher to call on him, hear what he had to say about identity, the day's social studies topic.

"Yes, Luis, what can you add about being Black in New York City?"

"Black? I'm not Black. I'm Latino."

And there it lay, the core identity issue for many Latinos: Latino identity is often defined more by language, heritage, country of birth or ancestry than by skin color. For Latinos, the barriers of racism are linked to barriers of language, culture and immigration. For many Latinos who are immigrants there may be issues about being undocumented which result in feeling invisible. And often immigrants are separated from families in their country of origin which creates stress and complicated relationships.

As we continue to confront organizational racism at JBFCS it is important to address the common issues of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians as well as the unique ways that racism affects the various groups that are not identified as White.

That's why in 2005, our Preventive Services division decided to create the Latino Preventive Social Work Task Force. The Task Force began meeting monthly to explore tensions between Latino culture and dominant cultural values.

The Task Force discussed key issues, including:

- Immigrant experiences
- Bilingual/Bicultural identity
- Shared values and diversity in the Latino community
- Professional development and leadership skills
- Dressing for success

- Creating systemic change
- Improving availability and access to advanced professional education for all Latinos

For members of the group, the meetings offered vital support.

"We developed our leadership skills with peers who understand our issues around culture and language," said **Shirley de Peña, LCSW**, Social Work Supervisor, Co-Op City Family Services. "It has empowered us to bridge those skills to the larger community."

The Task Force also led to better treatment for clients.

"Positive mentor relationships inspired me to think through ways to bridge the gap in cultural attitudes about mental health that affected the families in our program," noted **Miriam Penas, MSW**, Social Worker, Staten Island Family Services. "It's wonderful to use those skills to help consumers."

After meeting for three years, in June 2008 the Task Force decided there was a pressing need to expand the group to Latino bilingual/bicultural JBFCS staff from all programs, not only from the Preventive Services programs. This expansion will become effective this fall and the new name of the group will be decided.

"The Task Force provided support and encouragement I needed as a Latino professional to seek out advancement opportunities," explained **Celso Lavergne-Rivera, MSW**, Staten Island Family Services. "My milestones with the group included organizing our peer conference in 2007, *Culturally Competent Social Work Practice with Latino Families/Quienes Somos*, and sitting on a public panel. I'm very eager to share those experiences with an expanded group so we can increase our positive impact."

For **Carmen Collado, LCSW-R**, Director, Public Policy and Government Relations and Latino Affairs, the group achieved important goals. "Three members of the group are pursuing advanced degrees. This is my vision for Latino staff and for the larger Latino community," Carmen said. "I have always believed that higher education is the key to advancing Latinos—and it's a measurable outcome for redressing disparity."

Special thanks to **Marilyn Johnson, LMSW**, Director, Preventive Services, for her support of this initiative.

**For more information about the expanded Latino affinity group, contact Carmen collado@jbfcs.org or (212) 632-4778.**

## White To White Meeting Confronts Organizational Racism

By Natania Kremer, LMSW, MEd, Assistant Director, Early Childhood Support Services, Child Development Center

I am writing as a White woman committed to actively resisting and striving to eliminate individual, institutional, and systemic racism. I am also writing as a social worker and an early childhood special educator passionate about infusing anti-racism into my professions. I am grateful to be involved in the White Anti-Racist Caucus at JBFCS and to have participated in the “White to White: The Role of White People in Confronting Organizational Racism,” discussions held for White employees at JBFCS headquarters in May. (Other White to White meetings were held at Brooklyn and Bronx locations in April.)

My introduction to the anti-racism efforts at JBFCS was as a social work intern in 2005. The agency’s priority had evolved from diversity to multiculturalism and was moving toward anti-racism. There were several components of the anti-racism efforts at JBFCS which informed my growth and learning. I participated in an anti-racist discussion group for clinicians facilitated by **Lisa Blitz, PhD, LCSW-R**; in the research on race conducted by **Ben Kohl, PhD, LCSW**; and in a social work intern group led by **Rene Chapman, MA, MSW, LCSW**. More recently, I have been inspired and encouraged by anti-racist leaders **Joan Adams, LCSW-R**, and **Hillel Hirshbein, LMSW, MPH**. These experiences, combined with the energy that **Mary Pender Greene, LCSW-R**, channeled into the anti-racism initiative, shaped my respect and appreciation for the agency.

Prior to these experiences, I participated in an *Undoing Racism™* training with the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond. This training opened my mind and heart to my responsibility as a White person in eliminating racism. The People’s Institute equipped me to embrace the anti-racism opportunities at JBFCS. I chose to return to JBFCS this



Natania Kremer

year after graduating social work school so that I could work at an agency that has anti-racism as a key priority.

In my professional roles, I am sitting on the racist histories of the mental health and education fields. Unless I consciously become anti-racist, I will perpetuate the systems of privilege and oppression that have developed throughout history. The People’s Institute has taught me to recognize myself as a “gatekeeper” and learn how to be anti-racist in this role. My status as a White person grants me access to resources and information which I can use to change people’s lives. Using this power responsibly enables me to be an anti-racist ally to my “clients” of Color. Contrary to the notion of social work and

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David Billings and Cheryl Franks, leaders of White to White Meetings

### Reflections from the White to White Meeting

*“In 1994 I sat in my JBFCS in-service group class listening to a woman from Columbia University who was going to help us ‘get in touch with our Whiteness.’ My first thoughts were, ‘Who is this woman and what type of White liberal rhetoric is being perpetrated?’ Fast forward 14 years. I sit with 50 White colleagues in a group led by David Billings and Cheryl Franks, eagerly awaiting a discussion about how to further the anti-racism work with the agency, our lives, programs and neighborhoods and realize Cheryl Franks is the same woman I had disparaged in 1994. My thinking had changed so much as a result of the agency’s initiative to address racism.”* **Valerie Mitchell Fadil, LCSW**, Assistant Director, Morris Black Counseling Center, Staten Island

*“This is a first for me – being part of an organization committed to an antiracist agenda. After the facilitators offer information, history, their own experience, we are asked to share. I hear in the voices fear, courage, amazement, relief and hope. I lend my own voice. . . I listen carefully...this discussion is painful and difficult...but I am humbled and honored to be part of it.”* – **Susan Baydur**, Senior Development Officer, External Affairs

## Jews of Color Forum Wrestles with Identity

By Alisha Goodman, LMSW, Deputy Director for Program Operations  
The Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs

On March 20th, The Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs organized a Lunch & Learn program with The Women of Color Caucus, The Men of Color Caucus, and The White Anti-Racist Caucus.

**Joel Sanchez, LMSW**, presented the findings of his master's thesis from the Smith College School for Social Work, **Wrestling With the Angel of Identity: Jews of Color**. In the thesis, he explored the identity obstacles faced by Jews of Color within the mainstream White Jewish community and within their own core racial/ethnic communities in the



Alisha Goodman

United States. Some 20 JBFCS staff attended the event, as well as guests from the JCC in Manhattan.

Jewish Connections Programs, as part of the JBFCS anti-institutional racism discussion, have been exploring issues related to Jews of Color. To enhance our learning, we have hosted a variety of speakers in our staff meetings. However, because Joel is a social worker and had academic material to present, this was an ideal forum to invite the larger agency to join us in our exploration.

In his thesis, Joel addressed the question: What are some of the specific obstacles related to identity that Jews of Color face within the mainstream White Jewish community and within their own core racial/ethnic communities? His findings suggest that White Jews demonstrate a lack of awareness of multi-ethnic Jewish populations and that Jews of Color face scrutiny, negation, questioning and racism from

White Jews. Within their communities of Color, Jews of Color also face a lack of awareness of multi-ethnic Jewish populations, as well as incidences of anti-Semitism and accusations of race betrayal.

Joel also focused on areas of strength for this population, including the ways they have prevailed by working successfully to claim and integrate their multiple identities in the context of environments that are less than generous in viewing them as multi-identified. He finished with the implications for practice and some final thoughts for clinicians.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of Joel's presentation, a copy of his thesis, or other materials related to Jews of Color, **please contact me at, [agoodman@jbfcs.org](mailto:agoodman@jbfcs.org)**.

We welcome Joel to the Manhattan North Counseling Center. He joined JBFCS in May, and we are happy to have him aboard.

## Celebration of Work to Date

Plans are under way for members of the three affinity groups and other invited guests to join together to celebrate the accomplishments of the groups and the agency as a whole and to recognize some of the individuals who inspired and led the way in building a strong foundation for our work to undo organizational racism. Among those to be recognized are past and current scholars-in-residence **Nancy Boyd-Franklin, PhD; Anderson Franklin, PhD; Ken Hardy, PhD and David Billings, DM**. For more information, contact event Co-Chairs **Warren Price, LCSW, at [wprice@jbfcs.org](mailto:wprice@jbfcs.org)** or **Shirley de Peña, LCSW at [sdepena@jbfcs.org](mailto:sdepena@jbfcs.org)**.

## Meeting with NYC Council Member



Joan Adams (l) and Carmen Collado (r) meet with New York City Councilman Mathieu Eugene to discuss JBFCS' effort to confront organizational racism.

# Outreach to Jews of Color

By Judith Levitan, LCSW, Director, Clinical and Community Support Services  
 Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs

When the agency began its anti-racism initiative, our division spent a great deal of time thinking about how we could make a difference. There is a growing Jews of Color community in the United States which mirrors the experiences of other People of Color and also adds its own slant. Yet while our

division serves Jews experiencing death, illness, divorce, single parenthood and addiction, we have very few Jews of Color in our client base. We decided to reach out to organizations and individuals within the Jews of Color community and learn more about their experience and perspective.

## Who did we speak to?

- Jews from Ghana, Uganda, the Caribbean, Latin America and Ethiopia
- African Americans who have converted on their own or after a marriage to a Jew
- White parents who adopted babies or children of Color
- Adult children who were the offspring of an interracial marriage

## What did we learn?

Many people identified themselves as cultural Jews and enjoyed the holidays and customs. Others have found a place in a synagogue community. But a consensus emerged that it is challenging for Jews of Color to find a place in our society:

- Many in this community experienced inadvertent micro-aggressions on a routine basis
- Jews of Color often feel they are asked to speak about their experiences at lectures and workshops but never feel fully accepted
- Some feel that their Jewish pedigree is often questioned
- White parents of Jewish children of Color get a quick education in what it means to be Black in the United States. Often these parents become the most heartfelt White allies
- Young adult Jews of Color struggle with multiple identities, questions about where they belong and concerns over who will accept them as they move to form adult friendships and love relationships

The pervasive attitude within the American Jewish community seems to assume that all Jews are White. But Ephraim Issacs, Professor, Princeton University Institute of Semitic Studies, astutely quips, "...There are multiple

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**Population estimate of ethnically and racially diverse jews in the United States\***  
 Source: In Every Tongue: the Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People  
 \* For further clarification of the definitions, see In Every Tongue.

<u>Population Type</u>	<u>Percent of U.S. Jewish Population</u>	<u>Individuals</u>	<u>Source</u>
African American, Black, Asian, Latino or Hispanic, Native American, mixed-race or some race other than white (non-specific)	7.3%	435,000	National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000/ Institute for Jewish & Community Research Study (IJCR) 2002
African, South American, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Caribbean foreign-born	1.0%	65,000	NJPS 2000
Israeli with Sephardic or Mizrahi heritage	1.7%	100,000	U.S. Census 2000
Subtotal	10.0%	600,000	
Sephardic heritage	10.0%	600,000	NJPS 1990
Total (of 6 million U.S. Jews)	20.0%	1,200,000	IJCR 2002

## Current Jewish and associated populations

<u>Population Types</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Diverse Population</u>	<u>Percent Diverse Population</u>
Currently Jewish	6,000,000	1,200,000	20%
Jewish Heritage	4,200,000	700,000	16%
Connected non-Jews	2,500,000	225,000	9%

## White to White Meeting Confronts Organizational Racism (Continued from page 11)

teaching as “helping” professions, I try to reframe the relationship with my “clients” as one in which we are liberating each other. Rather than functioning as a paternalistic keeper of knowledge and skills, I aim to work *with* rather than *over* people.

Confronting organizational racism means being an anti-racist ally to my colleagues of Color. This means challenging White colleagues when perspectives seem racist and when they maintain White culture as the norm. This means bringing an awareness of my White privilege into supervisory relationships. This means engaging the children and adults with whom I work around their understandings, beliefs, and questions about race. I must resist the tendency to silence or avoid these conversations. Being an anti-racist ally also means struggling with my own racism and transforming my ways of being White in the world.

*“This means engaging the children and adults with whom I work around their understandings, beliefs, and questions about race. I must resist the tendency to silence or avoid these conversations. Being an anti-racist ally also means struggling with my own racism and transforming my ways of being White in the world.”*

I strive to become actively anti-racist with my White colleagues and clients as well. My department of special educators is a group of eight White women working mostly with privileged White children and families. While it is more common for White clinicians who are working with People of Color to see the need for anti-racism, anti-racist dialogue and action is just as vital in my department. We, as White people, have a stake in ending racism.

At the recent White to White discussions, Reverend David Billings inspired a deeper understanding of how Whiteness came to be in the United States and how those of us who are assigned membership in this group enjoy innumerable unearned privileges that have compromised our humanity. Dr. Cheryl Franks offered a theoretical framework within which we could better understand our White racial identity development. Moving forward from these discussions, I am hopeful and excited about continuing the anti-racism efforts with colleagues and clients at JBFCS.

## Outreach to Jews of Color (Continued from page 13)

references to Ethiopia in the Old Testament and, as of yet, I haven’t been able to identify one reference to Poland.”

Jewish people from other countries are often surprised by the American attitude. The Jewish population in Israel and worldwide is far more racially heterogeneous and acknowledged as such.

### Where do we go from here?

As we begin to better understand the experiences of Jews of Color, we are identifying ways to make a difference with our staff as well as within our community network. One outreach effort is to develop more educational programs for the White Jewish community.

Gary Tobin, noted sociologist and founder of The Institute for Jewish and Community Research, feels that “there is a tremendous amount of curiosity about the evolving Jewish Community. But rather than blame that curiosity on racism alone, we need to acknowledge that lack of awareness also plays a part.” With this in mind, we are working with our JCC in Manhattan partners to develop programs that will highlight issues of the Jewish community and race in America.

At Jewish Connections, we have taken these steps:

- Held staff meetings with guest speakers including a White Jewish mother and her adopted bi-racial, college-age daughter; an African American clinical psychologist who converted to Judaism; and a Yemenite Israeli scholar
- Sent representatives to the Jewish Communal Service Association annual event on diversity in the Jewish community
- Provided our staff with copies of the book *In Every Tongue: The Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People*
- Begun to develop groups for Jews of Color and their families to discuss the challenges in relationships and community in an intimate and validating environment

We also plan to reach out to synagogues and community centers that have been successfully inclusive and learn from them.

Our staff is committed to continuing to explore this issue and develop programs for Jews of Color who represent a significant group within the American Jewish community. We are not yet certain where this process will take us, but we are sure that there is no turning back.

## The Mentor Relationship: Finding a Common Language

When Barbara and Janet (not their real names\*) decided to participate in the JBFCS mentor/mentee relationship, each brought with them an openness to being involved in an important learning experience, which in this case was also an interracial relationship.

Barbara, an African American who has worked at JBFCS for one year after earning her masters degree in social work, had checked the box on the mentee application that she would accept a mentor of any ethnicity.

"My priority in this relationship," Barbara explains, "was having a connection with someone who would help me build clinical skills, navigate the Jewish Board system, work through getting promotions or a supervisory position, and dealing with students. For me, a mentor didn't necessarily have to be the same ethnicity as I am."

Because JBFCS offers affinity groups such as People of Color, Men of Color, and Women of Color which provide a support system to address issues of ethnic and racial identity, Barbara felt there were alternatives to address those concerns outside of the mentor relationship. "I had other outlets," she says.

### Open attitude not without anxiety

Although Barbara brought an open attitude to having a white mentor it was not without anxiety. "I wondered if I'd feel comfortable saying certain things, if my mentor would understand what I was talking about, would I have to over-explain certain things, would she

think I was paranoid or too sensitive, would I offend her? A lot of things that People of Color get hit with in the work world. A part of me was concerned about how open I could be with her and whether she would be understanding and receptive to what I was saying."

So what was the response?

"Janet was open and very understanding and didn't pretend that she knew first-hand some of the experiences and feelings I was talking about – her authenticity made me feel more comfortable. The environment was safe between us and we had an understanding that if anything the other person said was offensive we would be able to talk about it. There was definitely a respect from where I was coming from."

*"The environment was safe between us and we had an understanding that if anything the other person said was offensive we would be able to talk about it."*

As for Janet, a White licensed social worker who has worked at JBFCS for many years, the relationship also brought some concerns. Janet was open to the prospect of an African American mentee as part of the responsibilities of being a mentor, but she worried that Barbara would not get all that she needed from her and that the relationship would not work out.

"Yet if I hadn't been involved with the workshops at The People's Institute and the Undoing Racism program at JBFCS," Janet adds, "I'm pretty sure our relationship wouldn't have developed as it did. Not because I didn't care or want things to be better, but because the workshops gave me a context for understanding some of the things Barbara and I discussed. Going to the workshops gave me more of a language and framework for understanding issues about race. And certainly more comfort talking, listening and really hearing the issues."

### Transforming misunderstanding into real change

As the relationship developed over the months with phone meetings on an as-needed or as-wanted basis, both Barbara and Janet recall a pivotal moment when one of Barbara's clients, a young African American male, was discharged from the program because of a physical altercation he had with another client.

Barbara describes how her emotional radar rose. "I felt concern that he was a young Black male with mental health issues, little formal education, and no family support and how all of those things historically compounded to make him a prime candidate for ending up in prison,"

She adds, "At the time, I didn't have the language to express it as objectively as I do now. What originally came out was more the emotional side, which other social workers of Color understood immediately, but some of the White members of the team viewed as an over-reaction. By talking to Janet, I was able to have her reflect back to me what I had said meant to her, and often times

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\*The names have been changed in this story to protect the confidentiality of the mentor/mentee relationship.

## **The Mentor Relationship: Finding a Common Language** (Continued from page 15)

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her understanding was closer to that of my supervisors and directors who are also White. She gave me a framework and way to articulate my concerns so that I could be better understood.”

And this made a profound impact on the treatment of the client. “We still had to discharge him,” Barbara says, “but we took a number of factors into consideration by creating a different set of referrals for this young man.”

Barbara’s concern also made a profound impression on Janet.

“Hearing her heartbreak and great despair at how our systems work, really struck me,” Janet says. “Yes, Barbara understood all of the guidelines and how we can’t have people be violent in programs—but the implications of the discharge were so crushing for her, and I don’t think I’d really heard anybody talk like that before.”

### **Making effective interracial mentor/mentee relationships**

Janet’s experience also has shaped her philosophy of changing relationships between People of Color and Whites. “One thing I can say is that in a predominantly White work environment, the opinion of those from different backgrounds are often discouraged or thought of as wrong. We need to create

an environment where workers of Color feel comfortable expressing their honest thoughts and opinions. Whites need to not only listen but also learn from colleagues of Color. This is the only way we can have genuine relationships and offer better care to our clients as well,” Janet pauses. “It’s a big responsibility for People of Color looking through their lens. It takes courage to speak. We all have to find the language. I think JBFCS is helping people to find the language and not feel dismissed or looked at as a troublemaker. I’ve learned a lot from Barbara and she added a tremendous amount to my understanding what it is to be a social worker of Color.”

The mentor relationship created a unique bond for Barbara as well. “Having a mentor who I could reflect with I found to be very valuable,” she says. “It showed that there was someone at JBFCS who cared and was really there for me. She wasn’t doing my evaluation so I was really able to bring my feelings even if they were raw at the moment and still process it through with her.”

Barbara’s final suggestion?

“Consider an interracial mentor relationship because in this world we’re dealing with people from diverse backgrounds. I think the more comfortable and more exposure we get dealing with each other and appreciating each other, the easier the communication process becomes, which in turn makes the clinical process flow better.”