

**Black Adoption Placement and Research Center at 25:  
Placing African-American Children in Permanent Homes  
(1983-2008)**

Sara L. Schwartz, Ph.D.  
Research Director  
Mack Center on Nonprofit Management in the Human Services  
School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley

&

Michael J. Austin, Ph.D.  
Center Director  
Mack Center on Nonprofit Management in the Human Services  
School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley

Special thanks to Japer A. Moses (School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley)  
for her assistance in developing this organizational history.

## ABSTRACT

Black Adoption Research and Placement Center (BAPRC) is a nonprofit organization delivering culturally-specific adoption and foster care services. BAPRC developed as a response to concerns in the African-American community about the high numbers of African-American children entering and not exiting the public foster care system. The organization has undergone significant transformations over its 25-year history in relation to social, political and economic changes that have altered the ways that the agency finances and delivers services. The history of BAPRC presents an organization that has weathered many challenges because of its strong leadership, its committed governing body, its external relationships, and its internal operations.

**KEY WORDS:** Organizational history, culturally-specific nonprofit, child welfare, African-American community

## **Introduction to Black Adoption Placement and Research Center**

The Black Adoption Placement and Research Center (BAPRC) was founded in 1983 as a nonprofit organization delivering culturally-specific adoption and foster care services. BAPRC is licensed to serve 14 Northern California counties by facilitating placements between children in county foster care systems and prospective adoptive and/or foster care families. The mission of BAPRC is to recruit, train, and certify families for the placement of African-American and all children waiting for permanent homes. In adherence with state and federal laws, BAPRC does not discriminate and offers its services to all children and families.

BAPRC has been physically located in Oakland, CA over its 25-year history. Since 2004 the agency has been housed in a large single story office building (7801 Edgewater Drive). The welcoming space includes furniture (donated by board member Odell Johnson), photographs of African-American children and families playing and laughing, and a resource center of books and videos related to parenting, the foster care and adoption process, children's books and videos on new families and the child's perspective of growing up without their birth families.

BAPRC is governed by a Board of Directors representing professional backgrounds that range from a college president to a CEO of a for-profit company to an Assistant City Attorney. The Board reduced its size from a high of 21 members in the 1990s to 9 members in 2008, reflecting the move from a working board to a policy board. The 21-member board helped restructure the agency and was involved in the daily operations. Once the agency was healthy, the Board was reduced in order to focus on its new roles and responsibilities (strategic planning, fundraising, marketing, and political advocacy).

The Board meets monthly and includes several standing committees. The Finance and Fundraising Committee develops and implements fundraisers including phon-a-thons, benefit

concerts, mail campaigns, and special events and celebrations such as holiday toy drives. The Development Committee seeks out funding opportunities and builds relationships with donors. The Child Welfare Committee keeps abreast of what is happening in the larger child welfare community and how policy changes could influence BAPRC.

The Executive Director, working closely with the Board, is responsible for board development, management and leadership. BAPRC has four employees (Executive Director, Associate Director, Accounting Manager and Receptionist/Program Assistant). In the past the agency has employed up to twenty staff; however, changes in financing have resulted in staff cuts. BAPRC contracts with several MSW social workers, a family preparation trainer, a recruiter, and volunteers play a critical role in agency operations.

#### *Description of Services*

BAPRC operates two programs: 1) Fost-Adopt and 2) Foster Care. In the Fost/Adopt program a child is placed with a family that is willing to adopt the child when s/he becomes legally available. This program offers a gradual transition to adoption for both the child and the prospective parents. The Foster Care program, called Bridge to Permanency, places a child with a family to provide a safe and structured situation in preparation for ultimate permanency (through family reunification or adoption). The Bridge to Permanency emphasizes the need to provide a therapeutic, healing environment while a permanent living solution is identified.

BAPRC is licensed to provide foster and adoption services for “special needs” children. BAPRC uses the term “special needs” for two types of children: 1) children who have or are at-risk for developing medical, emotional, mental or learning conditions that may require intensive or ongoing services or children who are over represented in the foster care system (e.g., minority children and children over two years of age), and 2) children who are part of a sibling group,

were prenatally drug-exposed, have experienced physical, emotional or sexual abuse and/or are children of color.

BAPRC has advocated for the inclusion of non-traditional families by delivering services to many different types of families such as single adults and couples, working and retired parents, homeowners and home renters, families with diverse levels of income, families of different races and ethnicities, and families that already have children or those who are seeking to become new parents. The families who are accepted into BAPRC programs are all assessed in terms of being stable, law abiding citizens, regardless of their individual characteristics.

BAPRC employs a 7-phase program for prospective foster and/or adoptive parent(s) prior to being approved for placement. These phases are described in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: BAPRC's Family-Finding Process*

- I. Orientation and Intake: Informational meetings for prospective parents to complete an intake form, followed by an initial interview at a later date.
- II. Application: Completion of an application packet that includes a criminal record statement, fingerprints, employment verification, statement of income, a medical assessment form, CPR/First Aid certification for children and infants, copies of birth certificates, marriage licenses, divorce decree, home floor plan, disaster plan, and the contact information for four references.
- III. Training: Once a family is approved, they enroll in a 21-hour course facilitated by staff and a foster or adoptive parent and based on the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) Training that includes lessons on children and attachment, birth family connections, discipline, understanding the multiple impacts that fostering and adoption can have on families and children, as well as other topics.
- IV. Home Study: A series of scheduled interviews and assessments in the prospective parent's home are conducted by BAPRC social workers that culminate in a home certification if the home is determined to be an appropriate placement.
- V. Child Search: Prospective parents attend adoption exchange meetings with county representatives, look through county photo albums of children available for foster care and/or adoption, and view the television show *Adoption Today* which introduces families to children needing placement. This phase also includes the Pre-Placement Process in which the parents learn more about the background (family, medical history, etc.) of the child(ren) that they are interested in pursuing. Once a child has been selected for placement, the prospective parents are accompanied by a BAPRC representative to meet the child in person. If interest continues, regular visits with the child are scheduled and increase in length over time.

- VI. Post-Placement: Initiated after a child is placed in a foster and/or adoptive home using regular home consultations with a BAPRC social worker, referrals to community resources, invitations to attend family events, opportunities to attend parent education workshops and support groups hosted by BAPRC, and access to the BAPRC resource library.
- VII. Finalization: Child legally becomes the child of the adoptive parents with a new birth certificate and an official court hearing. Parents apply for and receive financial benefits from the Adoption Assistance Program as needed and an adoption tax credit is available once placement is finalized.

The history of BAPRC can be divided into four stages and begins with how a group of individuals concerned about the growing numbers of African-American children lingering in the public foster care system established BAPRC. The second stage involves a crisis and expansion through new leadership and the third stage is characterized by growth through strategic planning and marketing by new leadership. The fourth stage brings the history of BAPRC up to the present and includes program and staff reductions while continuing to deliver high quality of services.

### **Early Beginnings (1980-1984)**

In the late 1970s an ad hoc group of people living and working in Oakland's African-American community came together to discuss the large numbers of African-American children entering, but not exiting from, the public foster care system. Historically, formal adoptions were rare in the African-American community because an extended family support system was generally available for families needing assistance (e.g., putting an extra plate on the dinner table or inviting a child to live with relatives). In the late 1970s and early 1980s the African-American community saw a large number of Vietnam War veterans returning with drug addictions, contributing to the rise of drug dealing and violence, often making it unsafe for families to provide their traditional form of extended family support. Many veterans were unable to

reconnect with their families and thereby contributed to reducing the strength of the family units. The impact of drugs and violence on children was not unique to the Bay Area.

Around the country, African-American children were entering the public foster care system at high rates, related to institutional racism and lack of cultural competence. Public child welfare agencies were often unwilling to place children in homes that deviated from the norm of a two-parent family; for example, the mother needed to be under the age of 55 and the family income needed to be well above the national poverty level. African-American families interested in adoption were often not considered as viable placements because they did not meet these criteria. Other barriers involved adoption fees, extensive paperwork, and cultural insensitivity that kept African-Americans from adopting, ultimately leading to the perception of a lack of African-American family interest in adoption.

As a result of these challenges and the perception that there were few culturally-appropriate placements, African-American children were often placed in Caucasian families that were located outside of the Bay Area which made it even more difficult to maintain family networks. In addition, prospective African-American parents and those who had already adopted children expressed frustration with the approach of local adoption agencies and often went outside of the Bay Area to adopt children. This pattern was especially troubling because of the numbers of children available for placement in the Bay Area.

The growing number of African-American children languishing in the public foster care system stimulated considerable dialogue around the country. Oakland's response was to bring together a group of social workers and concerned citizens to develop a response to the need for foster/adoption placements. Two child welfare advocates, Alice Washington and Cynthia Turner, developed a concept paper in 1981 that described the mission and vision of a new

culturally-specific foster care and adoption agency. The concept paper was used in grant proposals to local foundations and reflected the following elements: 1) all children are adoptable and have a right to a permanent home, 2) all Black children can be placed in Black homes because, much to contrary belief, Black families do adopt, 3) a culturally-sensitive staff, a streamlined adoption process, a no-waiting policy, no costly fees, and convenient business hours are needed to assist families in completing the process, 4) once the placement is made, support services to the family are vital, and 5) since the capacity to love and rear the child as their own is our major concern, families need not own their homes, have large bank accounts or earn large incomes to adopt children.

Using the concept paper as a guide, the Bay Area Black United Fund provided a planning grant and the San Francisco Foundation awarded a matching grant of \$52,510 to hire an Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. The Beth Eden Missionary Baptist Church provided furnished office space and paid for their utilities for the first five years that the agency resided in this location. The group proceeded to build a Board of Directors and completed the tasks necessary for formalizing the agency. Identifying people and funders to publicly support the agency's mission was difficult given the controversial issues of race, culture and adoption. Meanwhile, pressure was coming from African-American professionals who were increasingly concerned about the number of African-American children adopted by white families and taken to cities where the African-American community was not well represented.

As a member of the founding group, Cynthia Turner became the interim Executive Director of the new agency on July 1, 1983. The mission of BAPRC was fourfold: 1) to place Black children of all ages in permanent, loving Black homes through foster care and adoption 2) to advocate for Black children languishing in public foster care systems, 3) to train child welfare

and other professionals in the area of special needs and, 4) to assist the state and other agencies with development of a comprehensive minority adoption program in the Bay area. In October 1983 the agency officially received its 501(C)(3) nonprofit status with the name of The Black Adoptions Placement and Research Center (BAPRC). Cynthia developed a brochure describing their services, established governance procedures with the Board and sought funding.

In November 1983 Cynthia Turner turned over the professional leadership role to a permanent Executive Director, Alice Washington. Alice left her job at Coleman Advocates (a local advocacy nonprofit) and stepped down from the BAPRC Board to assume the Executive Director position. On December 12, 1983 BAPRC was licensed by the State of California to “place Black and mixed Black children for adoption and to accept relinquishments for adoption.” At this time, there were 33,625 children in California’s foster care system (28% were African-American) and 54% of Alameda County’s foster care children were identified as Black. In its first year of operation, BAPRC had four employees that included the Executive Director, a Social Worker Supervisor, a Social Worker, and the Administrative Assistant.

In early 1984 Alice and the Board debated the merits of charging fees for placement. The arguments in favor included: 1) the need for revenue, 2) the use of fees would not alter the fact that some agencies ignore children waiting for placement, 3) people tend to value services that they pay for. Arguments against fees included: 1) child’s needs become secondary, 2) fees perpetuate the myth that one must always pay to adopt, 3) fees promote a class system, 4) fees cover a fraction of the agency’s cost in relation to placing children, 5) fees look like double taxation, and 6) fees create a link with the slave experience. While some board members viewed fees as a viable way to meet some of the financial burdens of the agency, others were sensitive to

the community perception of buying African-American children. The Board, split on the issue, ultimately established a fee schedule of \$1000 per placement.

In April 1984, BAPRC held its first informational meeting for potential couples interested in foster care/adoption and in May hosted a table at an Adoption Fair in Oakland. BAPRC made its first placement of a 5-week old baby girl to a San Francisco couple on June 12, 1984. By the end of 1984, BAPRC had received \$51,900 from the San Francisco Foundation for development and recruitment activities, generated \$5000 from the National Center for technical assistance, \$5000 from the Bay Area Black United Fund, and hosted its first fundraising event.

In 1984 the Board and Alice developed the agency's first strategic plan (1985-1988) that included the following six components: 1) engage in planning and evaluation of services, 2) recruit a full time social worker (in 1988) to manage a cadre of 10 volunteers, 3) promote resource development aimed at generating income from sources other than foundations and corporations, 4) create programs and services aimed at placing children, including certifying professionals to provide post-placement services 5) develop a training center for social workers related to special needs adoption in the Bay Area, and 6) engage in outreach to develop a comprehensive public relations program.

### **The Growing Years (1985-1993)**

By 1985 the financial resources of BAPRC included grants and gifts from local foundations and corporations and purchase-of-service contracts. For example, the agency received \$5000 from Van Loben Sels, \$5000 from the Hearst Family Fund, a two-year \$30,000 grant from the James Irvine Foundation, and \$1000 from the Maria Kip Orphanage. The Finance and Fundraising Committee received \$300 from Home Savings of America to create a three-year

development plan (approved July 1, 1985). By the end of 1985, after two years of operations, BAPRC had found permanent homes for twenty-two African-American children.

Everything changed when a child that had been placed by BAPRC died on June 13, 1986 after being physically abused. The State of California investigated the agency's cases and BAPRC's license was temporarily suspended due to their failure to get a criminal record clearance on one of the parents who adopted the child. During this troubling time, BAPRC received enormous support from the community. Community members established a support group comprised of adoptive parents, friends and professionals who developed strategies to maintain the agency's good reputation. Because the incident led BAPRC's funders to withhold funds until the investigation was completed, the agency closed temporarily.

In late 1986, Alice Washington resigned as Executive Director and the employee who made the controversial placement also resigned. The agency settled with the State of California and the Board sought ways to strengthen the agency "after the storm" by recruiting new board members, particularly people who were working in child welfare to increase the agency's credibility. Pat Reynolds recalls that she was working for the Children's Home Society and was recruited to the BAPRC Board during this time. After sitting on the Board for only a few months, she accepted the position of Executive Director. Pat recalls that she had worked closely with BAPRC in her position at the Children's Home Society and had mixed feelings about the causes of the child's death. Once she read the actual case record, Pat felt that she had the knowledge and experience to put systems into place to help the agency recover and prevent future incidents.

Pat hired two former colleagues to help establish policies and procedures, raise money, and re-build relationships with county social service agencies. Pat vividly recalls that when she

returned to the office located in the church after the agency had been temporarily closed, everything had been left in its place and the phone had been left on. People were calling and she noted that “black families had been waiting for the agency to re-open because they did not want to go to the county and wanted Black Adoptions.” Pat reflects that those phone calls fueled her passion to re-build the agency and provide a place for families who wanted to adopt but did not want to go to the county agency. In 1987 BAPRC was granted a probationary state license that allowed it to operate within a fifty-mile radius.

After two years (in early 1989) Pat Reynolds announced that she would be leaving BAPRC to take a job with the Stuart Foundation in San Francisco. She helped the Board recruit and hire Glendora Patterson as her replacement. When Pat left, so did the two employees that she had hired; therefore, the agency experienced 100% turnover in the summer of 1989. BAPRC held a community potluck in July for staff farewells, to welcome the new Executive Director, and assure families that the turnover would not affect service continuity. By October the agency was fully staffed again.

Glendora’s top three priorities for the agency were: 1) to promote permanency planning, 2) to build an ethnocentric strategy for recruiting families, and 3) to develop an appropriate system of assessment for use with interested families. Glendora also had plans for staff development and building a stronger board. With rebuilding and restructuring in mind, Glendora was aware that the community and professionals associated with BAPRC needed to go through a ‘healing process’ from the bad press that the agency had received. Glendora, her staff, and the Board began doing outreach to community agencies and churches to inform people that BAPRC had reopened with a new team that had the same dedication to the agency’s mission as its founders.

In 1989/1990 BAPRC continued to experience difficulties in getting county referrals so they did outreach to departments in other counties to educate them about the agency and encourage their workers to refer children to BAPRC. They also helped public child welfare workers appreciate the strengths of BAPRC families and support the state-approved adoption fee schedule that BAPRC required. Glendora and the Board also held several successful fundraisers and began to develop their next strategic plan which was adopted on November 1991.

The strategic planning process engaged both staff and the Board in a unique opportunity to plan for BAPRC's future. The first planning session involved an agency self-assessment and a review of the mission and organizational goals. BAPRC staff and board members were urged to address the following questions: 1) Where do we want to be five years from now?, 2) What will it cost to get there?, and 3) How do we get the resources to get there? This process resulted in a 5-year strategic plan (1991-1996) that addressed the following four themes: 1) organization development (systems for planning, policy formation, management and evaluation), 2) finance (long-term, reliable, diverse, independent sources of revenue 3) programs and services (locate and provide permanent homes), and 4) community outreach and community impacts (communicate locally and nationally about the organization, its goals and services).

In 1990 Gloria King was hired as a clinical consultant but within three months was promoted to Clinical Director to address multiple program issues related to the process of qualifying African-American families for adoption. The county preferred to place children in two-parent households that were financially stable and located in preferred neighborhoods. Although these standards may have been sufficient for the average family waiting to adopt, they were too narrowly defined for the pool of African-American families. Furthermore, the county workers that were making placement decisions were often not culturally-competent and did not

understand the concept of “kinship support” in the African-American culture, where an extended family includes both relatives and non-relatives or friends living together under one roof.

Gloria’s job was to help BAPRC staff acquire clinical interviewing skills in order to more adequately document the strengths of African-American families. Gloria recalls that when she was hired in 1990, there were seven or eight staff members, their morale was low, and there was considerable tension between the mental health and the social work staff. Her job was to bring these two groups together with a shared goal of connecting families.

Gloria served as BAPRC’s Clinical Director from 1990 to 1994. She recalls that working with an older staff required her to be creative in terms of providing support and positive reinforcement. Gloria acknowledged their practice wisdom and experiences and sought to facilitate change by observing and seeking advice during her early years with the agency. She recognized that, although she had book knowledge and knew clinical techniques, the staff had considerable experience and credibility with families. Another challenge that she faced was providing facilitative supervision to help staff report on what they did in the field, what worked or what did not work, what challenged them and what made a difference in their work with families.

In order to expand the interviewing skills of the staff, Gloria instituted several instruments to build rapport with families to help them talk about their background while also helping staff maintain professional boundaries. Staff role-played different situations and Gloria accompanied them into the field to model clinical practice skills. The agency emphasized both careful assessment and documentation that were critical to maintaining BAPRC’s license.

In 1991 Glendora proposed that the agency change the \$1000 fee-for-service policy to a no-fee policy. Glendora’s rationale was that BAPRC was only attracting middle and upper

income families rather than the full range of income levels because low-income families may be discouraged by the fees. Glendora also noted that BAPRC was the only African-American agency charging fees and that African-American professionals were advocating for the removal of fee-based placements. Her final argument was that the agency's income from fees was minimal. The Board approved the decision and worked to attract new donors and raise money to offset the projected loss of fee revenue.

During the early 1990s Glendora and the Board focused on raising awareness about the agency and developing diverse sources of funding. One fundraising event instituted by the Board was called *Pieces of a Dream*. Board members sold calendars that represented children in future occupations (e.g., children dressed as firemen and school teachers). The fundraising activity brought in over \$7000 and raised community awareness. The organization also used bus-stop bench advertisements, with its first being strategically located next to the Children's Hospital in Oakland where parents, volunteers and other community members passed by daily. The agency also increased its visibility and income by providing fee-based workshops, partnering with the San Francisco Department of Social Services and the Children's Services Center of Monterey, and seeking reimbursements for special-needs adoptions from the State. Furthermore, they raised annual board contributions, planned fundraising events, encouraged community organizations to make donations throughout the year and sold promotional items like t-shirts.

Glendora sought to build a board of high-profile, well-respected and well-connected people from the African-American community. The re-opening of BAPRC, the transition to new leadership, and the development of new policies and procedures had created tension in the Board. Some board members were frustrated by the lack of interest and commitment exhibited by other members. In 1993 the Board hired a consultant to facilitate discussions about the extent

to which the tensions produced less engagement and commitment by the members. The consultant identified three primary issues that interfered with the Board's productivity: 1) low level of board engagement and commitment, 2) the need for board leadership, and 3) the need to define the relationship between the Board and the Executive Director. The consultant urged the board to re-establish a culture of effective relationships among the members, noting that trust and commitment of individual board members was needed for the group to feel a sense of purpose and competence.

During this time, Glendora and the Board recognized the need for someone to be the voice of BAPRC in the community and the media. The agency hired a part-time recruiter to arrange for speaking engagements and radio public service announcements. Within two months of hiring the recruiter, BAPRC received 49 telephone inquires (double the number of telephone calls received in the previous two months). A past board member, Kathy Massey, recalls hearing the radio advertisements on one of her favorite Sunday morning gospel shows, which led to her and her husband to become adoptive parents through BAPRC (1994) and Kathy joined the Board (1995). Sylvia Joyner, the Associate Director, recalls that the advertisements also led her to BAPRC, where she became an adoptive parent, a volunteer and ultimately an employee.

As the staff grew and the agency changed, the Board reviewed their budget and approved fringe benefits totaling \$55,000 for full-time staff that included health insurance, dental insurance, and life insurance, and free parking. Funds were designated for staff development, staff retreats, retirement planning, and reimbursement for vision, child and eldercare services. Although the salaries were modest in comparison to other nonprofits, these changes recognized the staff and their passion for the BAPRC mission. Agency growth also resulted in the need for a

new location to support the expanded services. In March 1993, BAPRC leased a space 1801 Harrison Street.

Given BAPRC's origins in the African-American church, Glendora helped the agency incorporate the practice of rituals to recruiting and preparing families for adoption. These rituals focused on African-American pride based on a high regard for their heritage and how to transfer this respect to children waiting for adoption. BAPRC held its first annual Kwanzaa celebration in December 1989 and continues to host this event as an opportunity to educate families about African-American heritage and instill pride and self-esteem in parents and children.

During the early 1990s, BAPRC built a community education program to help African-American families understand the benefits of adopting children. Gloria noted that African-Americans felt uneasy about separating a birth mother from her child (a feeling that goes back to the time of slavery when children were taken from their families and sold to plantation owners). While the African-American community recognized the issues facing children in foster care, they were conflicted about becoming a family that would be contributing to the removal of a child from his/her birth parent. As a result, the agency made extra efforts to help adoptive families stay connected to birth families. At the time, this was a significant innovation in the world of adoptions, although now it is a common practice.

In 1992 Sylvia Joyner, an adoptive parent, was hired by BAPRC as the parent trainer. She was certified in facilitating the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) training developed by the Child Welfare League of America and shared her experiences and knowledge about potential placements. At the same time, BAPRC was awarded a two-year federally-funded grant called Project SNAP (Special Needs Adoptions Program) in partnership with the Alameda County Department of Social Services. Project SNAP focused on African-

American males (ages 0-5 years) who were waiting for placement and were considered the most difficult to place. In 1993, BAPRC and another local agency, Family Support Services of the Bay Area, collaborated to expand supportive services for adoptive families living in Alameda, Contra Costa, and Solano counties. The venture was called the Parent Support Project and offered parents the opportunity to join support groups with people who shared similar experiences of foster care/adoption.

Giving back to the African-American community meant transforming the family support groups into peer groups. In 1993 BAPRC was awarded a two-year \$200,000 federal grant to fund Project-In-Touch, a program that provided post-legal support services in collaboration with Alameda County. Project-in-Touch recruited experienced adoptive families to serve as mentors to new adoptive families. Under this program, BAPRC provided several hours of training so that the parents could become leaders of their own peer support groups. As mentor families guided new parents, BAPRC provided materials and resources.

### **New Leadership (1994-2000)**

In June 1994 Glendora retired as the Executive Director of BAPRC and the Board initiated a national search to fill her position. Gloria King, the Clinical Director, applied for and was ultimately offered the Executive Director position in July 1994. Gloria had worked for BAPRC since 1990, knew the internal and external community, had the necessary talent and skills, and was passionate about the work. She immersed herself in staff development, expansion, and made an effort to diversify the staff to reflect the families and children served by the agency.

Gloria continued the cultural work that Glendora had started by developing new programs that incorporated African-American heritage to help children explore their identities

and build self-esteem. In 1995 BAPRC hosted its first annual camp (Camp Nguzo Saba) to provide a safe place to talk about identity, belonging and self-esteem issues from a faith-based perspective. At the camp, parents and children celebrated together the richness of the African and African-American traditions, cultures and histories based on the principles of Kwanza.

BAPRC also engaged in a collaborative with Adopt a Special Kid (specializing in special needs adoptions) and Family Builders of Adoption (specializing in Hispanic adoption) to develop an annual ceremony called “It Takes a Community: Calling Out the Names of Children Who Wait.” The annual event is based in the African-American tradition of “calling out” or “lifting up”. On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, from 10am-6pm, the names of children in need of permanent homes were called out by community members, parents, staff, and anyone else who wished to participate. The event was held in Jack London Square for ten years and was attended by religious and civic leaders, choirs, families, community members, public representatives and others who came regularly to observe National Adoption Awareness. Another thing that raised awareness was the advertisements for the event that were funded by the City of San Francisco and the Port of Oakland. Large photographs of children were strategically displayed around town and contributed to an increase in adoptions. Gloria particularly recalls an eleven-year old girl who was adopted by a Port of Oakland employee who walked by her picture everyday and contacted BAPRC. This groundbreaking project received significant local and national attention. Adoption agencies around the state were encouraged to raise public awareness about adoption during National Adoption Month, especially raising the profile of children in need of permanent homes.

The agency’s budget in 1994 was \$1,706,393. BAPRC had secured several multi-year federal grants, including Project-in-Touch and Project SNAP. Gloria began to work on a third

project funded by the county of San Francisco and the Stuart Foundation that focused on very young children in foster care who did not have a plan for adoption and were returning to their biological families. A collaboration was built between four adoption agencies: 1) BAPRC in Oakland, 2) Kinship Center in Monterey, 3) Sierra Adoption in Sacramento, and 4) Future Families in San Jose. With support from the Stuart Foundation and the San Francisco County Department of Human Services, the collaborative called itself Partners-in-Placement. While the four nonprofits were located in different areas, they could provide a larger pool of families to recruit for the 80-plus children who were waiting for placement in San Francisco County.

Since most of the children involved in the Partners-in-Placement program were African-American, BAPRC was in a unique position because they had expertise in recruiting African-American families for African-American children. At the same time that this was happening on the local scene, new state legislation (AB548) on same-race placements was passed (encouraging same-race placements) and subsequently challenged to allow non-Black families to adopt African-American children (related to the high numbers of children of color entering but not exiting the child welfare system). This was in the context of drugs and violence that contributed to the practice of not certifying African-American families for the placement of African-American children.

The passage of the federal Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 prohibited the delay of any adoption or foster care placement due to race, color or national origin of the child or of the foster or adoptive family. While AB548 would not allow for trans-racial adoption, MEPA disallowed discriminating practices in adoption and allowed for mixed-race adoption. The national interest in adoptions raised the profile of BAPRC and other agencies providing foster

and adoption services. MEPA helped BAPRC demonstrate to policy makers and public agencies the process of achieving effective non-discriminatory good child welfare practice.

In 1996 the federal Inter-Ethnic Placement Act was passed to reaffirm and expand the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act. This happened just as BAPRC was in the middle of the Partners-in-Placement Project (PIP) and trying to place 80 mostly African-American children in adoptive homes. Both MEPA and the Inter-Ethnic Placement Act helped the PIP project qualify the foster parents in the program and allowed for the children to remain in their foster homes and to qualify the families for permanency.

The four agencies came together as partners but had no prior experience together and struggled to develop a mission and vision. The collaboration was challenging on multiple levels (e.g., old mindsets, the need to re-train agency staff, and meeting accountability requirements). When the Partnership came up for funding renewal in 1996, BAPRC became the lead fiscal agent of a two-agency collaborative (with Family Builders by Adoption) that was called the San Francisco Child Project (SF Child). The collaboration was streamlined to focus on the more specialized services delivered by the agencies. BAPRC had experience and expertise serving African-American families and Family Builders served the Hispanic community; thereby expanding the partnership to include Latino children.

By the late 1990s BAPRC had 17 employees and had secured funding for a new Family Outreach Service Team in Alameda County based on their success with targeted recruitment in San Francisco. As BAPRC grew, its management responsibilities increased and changed. Gloria enrolled in a nonprofit management certificate program at California State University as a way to compliment her clinical background and strengthen her management skills.

Gloria worked hard to help BAPRC build relationships to improve child welfare services by joining such organizations as the California Association of Adoptions Agencies and the Bay Area Association of Adoption Workers. These relationships provided a platform for BAPRC to involve themselves in discussions about African-American children in the child welfare system, raise the profiles of families who were waiting to become adoptive parents, and influence larger system thinking about how to evaluate the strengths and needs of African-American children in the system. These relationships helped to re-shape child welfare practice related to children of color and also led to increased requests for BAPRC home studies.

In the wake of the press on the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, BAPRC's forward thinking anti-discrimination policies brought the agency to the forefront of trans-racial adoption in the Bay Area. Gloria was invited to make presentations about BAPRC's adoption practices. The passing of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 helped to expedite the adoption process by shortening the time-frames for making permanency planning decisions. This Act introduced adoptions agencies to concurrent planning, in which reunification and adoption plans could occur simultaneously and begin as soon as the child enters care.

With respect to media relations, recruitment and marketing, BAPRC developed a half-hour cable television show that was funded, in part, by the SF Child Project. The show was called Adoptions Today and was in collaboration with the Alternative Resource Center. The first show aired on Cable channel 26 in San Francisco and Oakland in April 1998 and included interviews of families who had gone through BAPRC and a segment (Kids' Corner) that introduced children who were waiting for adoption. The show was a successful recruitment strategy and numerous children were placed based on viewers seeing them on television.

In 1998 BAPRC introduced its new logo and mission statement. The goal of the new logo was to accurately reflect the role that the agency played in the community. Gloria and the Board believed that the new image evoked a sense of creativity in their approach to finding permanent homes for children as well as provided a new way to market the agency's services. The mission statement was revised to make it more concise and reflective of their work (*Our mission is to recruit, train and certify families for the placement of African-American and all children waiting for permanent homes*).

In 1997 the Executive Director and the Board developed and approved a five-year strategic plan for 1998-2003 as noted in Figure 2.

*Figure 2: 1998-2003 Strategic Plan*

- 1) **Organizational Development:** To develop the capacity of the agency to implement its mission into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Performance objectives addressed board development, staffing, facilities, technology, policy revision and evaluation.
- 2) **Finance:** To raise adequate revenues to sustain the organization over a five year period and beyond. Performance objectives addressed resource development, planned giving and generating independent income.
- 3) **Programs and Services:** To develop programs and provide services to meet the changing needs of the community. Performance objectives addressed establishing BAPRC as an MSW practicum site, developing a faculty resource center, family recruitment, agency research, the Bridge to Permanency Program, hosting a national conference, and involvement in public policy.
- 4) **Community Relations:** To educate and involve all segments of the community in the resolution of the problem of waiting African-American children who are disproportionately represented in the foster care system. Performance objectives addressed the development of a multi-faceted marketing plan.

In March 1999 BAPRC relocated from 1801 Harrison Street to 125 Second Street in Jack London Square. The new two-level office space was more than twice the square footage of the previous location and accommodated the agency's expansion. In addition to a change in location, BAPRC underwent a change in its management structure when Sylvia Joyner was promoted to the new Associate Director position. This position supervises recruitment staff, coordinates special events, develops funds (e.g., writes grants with the Executive Director), and is responsible for marketing, facilitating trainings and providing support for the staff. BAPRC ended the 1990s with a staff of 20 full-time employees, 400 families, and an annual budget of \$1,505,087

### **New Challenges (2000-Present)**

BAPRC entered the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as a thriving nonprofit organization. It was as large as it had ever been, was making successful placements, and was expanding its presence in the local and national community. Collaborative relationships led to training other nonprofits that served African-Americans. Gloria received invitations to make local, state and national conferences. For example, the Child Welfare Institute invited Gloria to present a series of workshops instructing Southern California child welfare workers on BAPRC's empowerment model and the 31<sup>st</sup> annual National Association of Black Social Workers featured BAPRC's multi-level recruitment model.

In 2002, the Board focused its attention on the BAPRC's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. The staff had declined to 17 full-time employees and a core group of volunteers who assisted with family recruitment. BAPRC's financial support came primarily from fees, contracts, grants, individual donations, fundraising and gifts from local organizations and corporations. In 2002, BAPRC's \$1,000,000 contract with the San Francisco Department of Human Services to fund

the SF Child Project was renewed for 3 more years and they contracted with Alameda County for a targeted recruitment program called the Family Outreach Service Team (FOST Project). The agency also developed their post-placement services by providing over 35 activities for families and children, including two teen workshops, a two-day culture camp and a parent training. In 2002, BAPRC also sponsored a parent conference, hosted a parent forum to identify family needs after placement and expanded Adoption Today to Channel 44.

In 2003 national interest in BAPRC grew and Gloria was invited to speak at a number of conferences. These speaking engagements provided good publicity for the agency as Gloria was interviewed and quoted in a Washington Post article, interviewed by the Chicago Tribune and NASW asked Gloria to submit an article for their May 2003 newsletter. Despite the positive visibility, the agency continued to experience difficulties. Gloria sent a memo to the Board and staff with a plan to reduce the agency's expenses related to the nation's economic downturn because: 1) external funding from foundations and corporations was declining, 2) prospective families were not stepping forward to adopt, and 3) public agencies were cutting staff that ultimately slowed the process of placements. BAPRC made several changes on July 1, 2003 (eliminating a position, reducing two staff to part-time, raising fees, reducing newsletter costs, eliminating the reception portion of the Board meetings, and hosting fewer events). These changes were in response to a projected loss of \$158,925.

BAPRC's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration was held in the fall of 2003. At this time they employed a staff of 14 and worked with 450 families. The budget had declined from \$2,222,659 in 2002 to \$1,239,694 in 2003. Despite the layoffs, BAPRC maintained a high level of service with the primary focus on the children. In 2004 the Board held a series of planning meetings to develop a new strategic plan that reflected the changing environment. The biggest challenge was

raising enough funds to maintain the level of operations. The agency applied for grants and moved to 7801 Edgewood Drive in October 2004 (where BAPRC still resides).

Also in 2004, Gloria was nominated and elected to be the Chair of Northern California Adoptions Agencies. During this same year BAPRC applied for and received a \$150,000 contract from First 5 of Alameda County. This contract funded services for children ages 0-5, and was based upon BAPRC's prior work with Project SNAP. In 2004, BAPRC renamed its foster care program to Bridge to Permanency to reflect the agency's belief that foster care is only a bridge to permanency. The staff of 13 worked with over 500 families and the agency hosted multiple symposiums, workshops and activities centered on post-placement support. While BAPRC applied for many grants in 2004 and 2005, only a few were awarded. Gloria and the Board decided to not fill vacant positions, instituted a salary and hiring freeze, restructured the agency's workflow and continued applying for more funding.

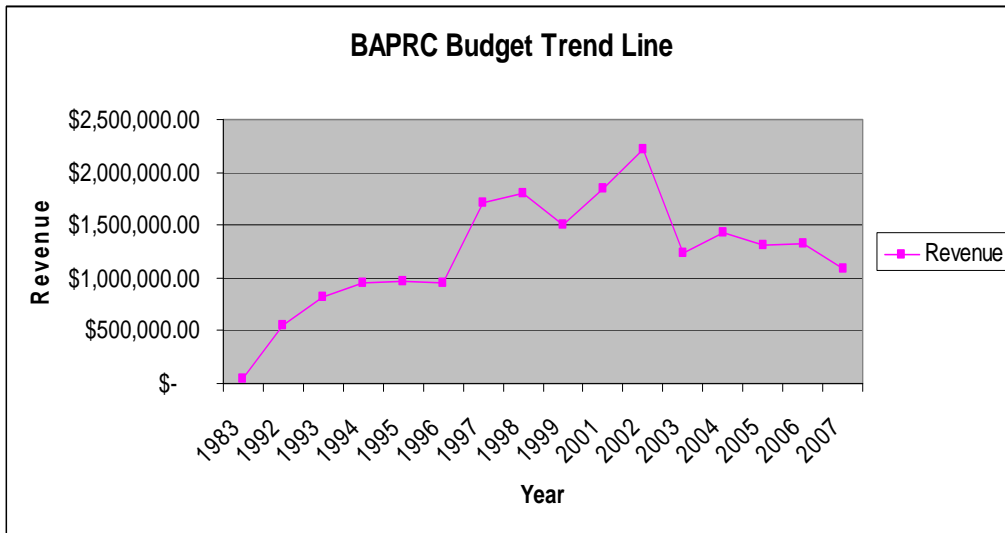
In 2005, the agency instituted the Black Adoption Community Center program that facilitated informational meetings in churches to educate and recruit adoptive families. Using advertising in Sunday morning church bulletins, the Love Center Ministries was its first partner. Gloria hired a recruitment team and developed a format for approaching the faith community. The program identified churches in different communities by assessing their size, community orientation, and level of political and social involvement in the community. In the first year of operation, they were successful with five congregations.

In 2006, the funding issues continued to be a challenge. After ten years, the SF Child grant was not renewed, reducing the agency's revenue stream by \$1,000,000 over three years. The Clinical Director and Program Assistant positions were eliminated as was one-half of the recruiter position. Outreach and promotional materials were printed in house and location sites

for informational meetings were increased from 4 to 7 to provide families easier access. Despite the financial setbacks, the Board raised \$40,000 in 2007 through multiple fundraising events and the agency pursued grants. Community donations in 2006 increased 150% and recruitment for classes were 50% higher than expected.

BAPRC continues to struggle with financial challenges. The 2007 annual budget was \$1,088,444, which is similar to the agency's budget in 1997 (see Appendix A). The Executive Director and Associate Director continue to seek grants and contracts; however, as the staff gets smaller, the staff resources to write and manage grants or solicit donations are reduced. In 2008, BAPRC employs 4 full-time employees and contracts with staff on an as-needed basis. Despite multiple challenges, BAPRC continues to maintain its reputation for delivering high quality culturally-responsive foster and adoption services and education. As they plan to celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in the Fall of 2008 with a concert and fundraising event, both the staff and board are optimistic about the agency's future. Everyone associated with BAPRC feels confident that 2009 will bring new and diversified funding opportunities as well as the first African-American President in the history of the United States. As Gloria King notes, the most challenging times brings out the creativity needed to produce wonderful outcomes.

Appendix A: BAPRC Budget Trend Line



*Appendix B: Sources of Information*

**Interviews**

Odell Johnson – Current Board Member and adoptive grandparent

Sylvia Joyner – Current Associate Director and adoptive parent

Gloria King, M.S. – Current Executive Director

Kathy Massey – Past Board Member and adoptive parent

Glendora Patterson, Ph.D. – Previous Executive Director

Pat Reynolds – Previous Executive Director

Lillian Roberts – Current Receptionist/Program Assistant

Toni Sander – Past employee and current contractor

Dr. Evelyn Wesley – Current Board Vice President

**Documents**

BAPRC Board of Director's Meeting Minutes (1983-2008)

BAPRC Annual Reports and Financial Statements (1983-2008)

BAPRC Policy and Procedure Manual

BAPRC Publications and Newsletters

BAPRC Strategic Plan (1998-2003)

Beggs, M. (1992). Preserving the cultural legacy: Black adoption placement and research center.

San Francisco, CA: Zellerbach Family Fund.

Child Welfare (1984). *Child Welfare Research Note #3*

Turner, C. (1984). Philosophy – Mission Statement for Black Adoption Placement and Research Center.