



Nasaba Family Services & Consulting Inc.

**2023 FOCUS GROUP REPORT
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLUTIONS TO ENGAGEMENT AND
COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP BARRIERS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Per Inland Regional Center (IRC) Performance Report dated Spring 2022, approximately 37,760 consumers were served. Approximately 10% of consumers served by IRC identified as Black/African American. Per US Census Bureau, Black/Americans make up approximately 10% of San Bernardino population and 8% of Riverside County population as of 2022.

Historically throughout the nation and across institutions the Black/African American population have been underserved, unserved; and has faced barriers when attempting to access financial, educational, housing, health, and social supports.

IRC seeks to identify challenges within their organization, find solutions, and eliminate barriers that prevent Black/African Americans from accessing applicable resources, supports and services.

The purpose of this report is to give voice to the opinions and perspectives of those in the target population to guide person centered solutions to engagement and collaborative partnership barriers, as well as develop coordinated programs and interventions that meet the direct needs of this population. This report examines and incorporates understanding from the focus group participants to:

- Decrease purchase of service disparity for Black/African Americans
- Increase Black/African American engagement in IRC events and activities
- Develop a forum to empower Black/African American voices
- Create a collaborative partnership between the IRC and Black/African American Consumers

Nasaba Family Counseling & Consulting Inc. conducted a focus group targeting IRC Black/African American consumers and their families. The findings from this focus group highlighted not only needs but also strengths of the Inland Regional Center. Recurring themes from the focus group are:

Challenges

- Black/African American consumers identified lack of representation in key roles as a barrier to engagement
- Black/African Americans experience a disconnect in dissemination of information from agency to consumer
- Black/African American consumers experience barriers to Early Entry
- Black/African American consumers experience challenges related to cultural humility and understanding of consumer stories

Successes

- IRC has shown an ability to:
 - Listen to needs
 - Flexible to change
 - Seeks to understand diversity needs
 - Takes action and makes positive steps to improve when giving feedback
- Passionate staff

- Comprehensive and informative website (calendar)
- Willingness to defer to other entities or individuals' expertise, knowledge, and abilities when necessary

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedures

Participants engaged in a group session that lasted one half hour and a break out session that lasted two hours. The last 15 minutes participants completed a service satisfaction survey. Participation in the focus group was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. The participants were provided snacks at the start and lunch at the midway point to accommodate their participation in the focus group.

The participants were requested to be: 1) consumer of the IRC 2) identified as Black or African American.

Informed-consent and confidentiality procedures were explained at the beginning of the focus group. Video and audio recording of the focus group was explicitly denied to insure confidentiality of all participants. The anonymity of participants in the focus group is protected in this report.

Facilitators

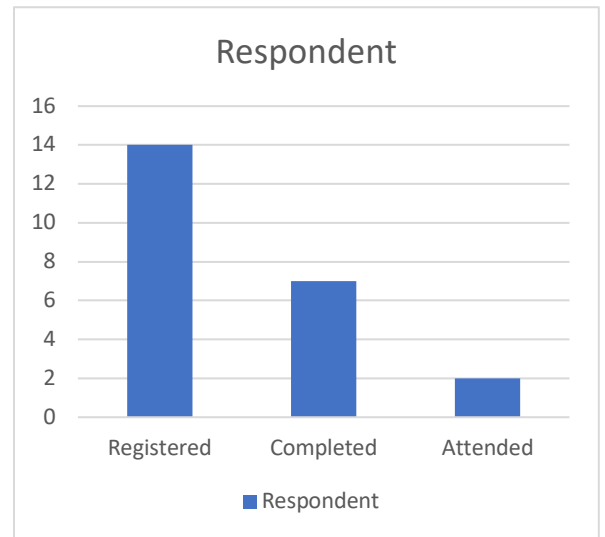
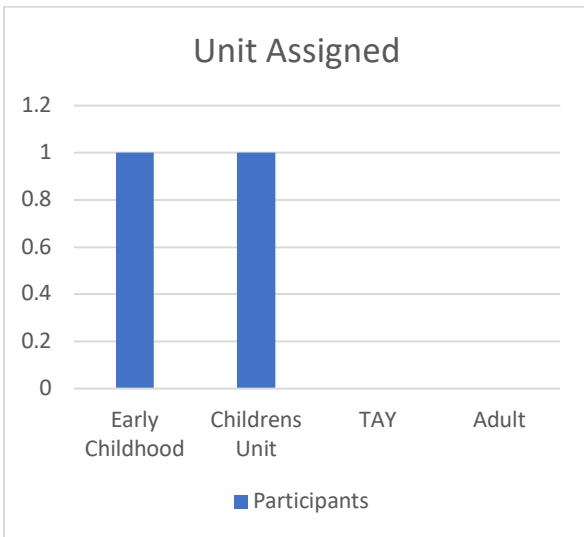
Using open-ended interview protocol, staff of Nasaba Family Counseling & Consulting Inc. facilitated the focus group. Interview questions were designed to elicit feedback on the strengths and needs of the IRC as related to the experience of Black/African American Consumers. Nasaba Family Counseling & Consulting is a non-profit organization specializing in social-emotional wellbeing for youth, adults, parents, and families with emphasis on serving the BIPOC community. They provide programs, services, interventions, and community building strategies to promote healthy social-emotional development and productive community engagement. These efforts are to create a collaborative partnership by equipping entities, institutions, individuals and families with the necessary tools for building collaborative partnerships.

Data Analysis

To begin the data analysis process, facilitators debriefed after the focus group to discuss session content, what was learned, and review satisfaction surveys. Themes and key findings were highlighted to create recommendations from the overall findings to improve the experience of the target population.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The focus group registration received fourteen responses. Six of the responses were incomplete and one disqualified. The one disqualified respondent did not agree to the time and date of the focus group. On the day of the focus group, two of the respondents were present.



KEY FINDINGS

Qualitative analysis revealed several overarching themes related to strengths and needs. Consistently IRC's flexibility, willingness to listen, and willingness to change was underscored. Challenges consistently highlighted issues with equity vs equality, representation, and access.

Strengths

- ◆ IRC provides a myriad of resources and supports.
- ◆ IRC makes it a priority to continually reevaluate the needs of their consumers and staff. They are constantly trying to provide opportunities for growth and expanding of knowledge.
- ◆ IRC staff are committed to high professional standards
- ◆ When made aware of needs, the IRC generally responds in an efficient and effective manner.

Key Finding #1: IRC provides a myriad of resources and supports.

Participants were asked to identify what IRC Services (supports) they would recommend to a friend. Participants listed the following:

“calendar for upcoming events... the calendar is really helpful”

They have a lot of good information on the website, and it's really informative”

“Family Resource Network”

Key Finding #2: IRC makes it a priority to continually reevaluate the needs of their consumers and staff. They are constantly trying to provide opportunities for growth and expanding of knowledge.

Participants were asked to discuss what they like best about the IRC as an organization. Participants responded with the following:

“They offer really good trainings and conferences.”

“They're willing to bring in knowledgeable community based partners and organizations to help facilitate trainings and getting services and supports to the community.”

“They do a good job of reaching and supporting families in the Inland Empire, given how large the (coverage) area is...”

Key Finding #3: IRC staff are committed to high professional standards

Participants were asked to identify a positive experience they had with an IRC staff. The following responses were given:

“Staff are passionate about the (supports) they try to provide.”

“Staff are flexible with coordinating with families... being accommodating... customer service.”

“All staff including managers are approachable... easy to reach.”

Key Finding #4: When made aware of needs, the IRC generally responds in an efficient and effective manner.

Participants were asked to describe a success story they had with the IRC. Respondents answered:

“(equity fair) A manager handled a situation with a parent very quickly... I approached him and shared my concern... he took the time in the middle of the event to make a phone call and handled the situation quickly.”

Needs

- ◆ More targeted outreach and engagement for Black/African American consumers/community is needed.
- ◆ IRC staff can benefit from more efficient and effective ways to use technology and ongoing trainings to better support the needs of Black/African American Families
- ◆ Black/African American families feel disconnected from IRC as a group, and believe more of a targeted effort can be made to meet their specific group needs.
- ◆ Black/African American consumers need support and advocacy in navigating the complex resources, services and supports.

Key Findings #1: More targeted outreach and engagement for African American consumers/community is needed.

Participants were asked what would they change about The IRC. Participants responded:

“Equity in access to information and resources. Our families aren’t adequately informed about what’s out there...”

“Service Coordinators can do a better job at informing our families about the services, supports and resources. Many families would have attended this focus group, but Service Coordinators did not actively recruit and inform...”

“Having adequate information regarding appeals process, and help with appeals. Up to date information on protocols and procedures”

“Less of IRC working in silos and more partnership with other IRC’s.”

“Need African American representation in the Equity Department, so that it is more culturally responsive.”

“Need to do a better job on targeted and responsive outreach to the African American Community.”

Better training and expectations for Service Coordinators to outreach connect with African American Families.”

Key Finding #2: IRC staff can benefit from more efficient and effective ways to use technology and ongoing trainings to better support the needs of Black/African American Families

Participants were asked to identify service(s) they felt IRC Is Missing

“An efficient database system to identify and retrieve important demographic information on African American consumers.”

“Specific ongoing training.”

“Accurate data base regarding race and ethnicity.”

“Support for foster families who have African American Children.”

“Culturally relative and sensitive conferences for families to attend that target the experience of African American consumers.”

“Timely and up to date information for African American families.”

“We need more Service Coordinators.”

“More training for staff on better and more efficient ways to case manage.”

“Service coordinators need greater training on how to effectively document to support and assist African American consumers with their needs.”

“Service coordinators need enhanced CEU trainings.”

Key Findings #3: Black/African American families feel disconnected from IRC as a group, and believe more of a targeted effort can be made to meet their specific group needs.

Participants were asked to identify how IRC could create a more inclusive experience for Black/African American Consumers. Participants answered:

“More humility and empathy from staff when addressing the needs and challenges of African American consumers... understanding their stories is key.”

“Make sure we have access to the services and supports available.”

“Make sure our experience is equitable and not just equal.”

“Some form of family mentors.”

“Specific targeting of African American children for Early Entry. More outreach training regarding hospitals, schools, and families. African Americans get late entry. More focus on Black infant health”

“Use of IRC facilities to hold parent engagement and related community events, which is often denied.”

“Service Coordinators can improve their outreach and connecting with African American Families.”

Key Finding #4: Black/African American consumers need support and advocacy in navigating the complex resources, services and supports.

Participants were asked to share a time when they experienced a mishap or unsuccessful experience. They responded:

“Getting children who were placed in another home previously, finding out the children were significantly behind on crucial supports and services they should have already had.”

“trying to get ahold of the service coordinator, but because their caseload was so large, I couldn't get in contact with them and I became frustrated because I had deadlines to meet.”

“Going to Departments with a specific issue and not feeling an effort to be engaged.”

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this focus group highlight the complex and systemic challenges experienced by those who identify as Black/African American. Many of the challenges identified in this report are not unique to the IRC but are consistent with the experiences Black/African Americans experience in various institutions (i.e. housing, education/academics, law enforcement, and employment).

IRC's willingness to acknowledge the experiences of Black/African American consumers, listen to their stories, and implement change is a testimony to their committed efforts to effectively support the diverse populations they serve.

Strengths

Overall, the IRC is viewed as a progressive agency that is sensitive to the needs of their consumers. They have an abundance of resources and supports. They have an organized and professional presentation, particularly for an agency of their size in coverage area, consumers served, and staff.

Needs

IRC has room for growth in outreaching, engaging, and meeting the specific needs of their Black/African American population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a forum to empower Black/African American voices

Black/African American Inclusion and Engagement

1. Black/African American Advisory Committee. Nasaba Family Counseling & Consulting Inc. can facilitate and provide trainings.
 - Family Mentorship
 - Collaborative Partnership with Community Based Organizations and Partners
 - Ongoing Trainings and Support Services
 - Build a responsive working partnership with IRC

Increase Black/African American engagement in IRC events and activities

1. Staff Professional Development
 - Encourage and train staff on the importance of actively including and engaging Black/African American consumers and families for participation in services and supports.
 - Encouraging and training Service Coordinators to actively recruit Black/African American consumers and families for participation in IRC activities.
 - Encouraging and training Service Coordinators to promote to Black/African American consumers and families' resources and supports made available by IRC
 - Encourage and ensure Service Coordinators inform Black/African American consumers about IRC website updates and pertinent information, and that consumers and families are aware of how to navigate the website and events calendar.

Create a collaborative partnership between the IRC and Black/African American Consumers

Early Childhood Entry and Access

1. Culturally relevant Trainings for Point of Contact Organizations and Institutions. Nasaba Family Counseling & Consulting Inc., can facilitate ongoing trainings.
 - Hospitals
 - Schools
 - IRC Families

Culturally Relevant Supports

1. Culturally relevant orientation and trainings for foster families with Black/African American children
2. Conferences and trainings with focus and emphasis on Black/African American group specific needs
3. Black/African American representation in the Equity Department
 - Insuring equitable access to resource and supports for Black/African American consumers/families
 - Insure equitable access to information
 - Insure Black/African American consumers and families have a voice and access to provide input on relevant decisions, policies, protocols, and decisions as applicable.

Decrease purchase of service disparity for Black/African Americans

Enhanced Staff and Consumer Trainings

1. Updated and ongoing trainings for consumers and families on the appeal process, forms, and documentation.
2. Enhanced workshops and trainings for parents and families on available services and supports.
3. Effective documentation training for Service Coordinators to ensure families and consumer needs are identified and recommended for appropriate supports and services.

CONCLUSION

Black/African American consumers tend to be generally happy with IRC and its staff. Specifically, leadership and responsive customer service were areas of general happiness.

However, respondents did not feel that the IRC understands the needs of Black/African Americans. Respondents also disagreed that the specific needs of Black/African Americans are adequately represented by the IRC.

IRC's self-reflective approach to the process represents a sincere effort to begin bridging the gaps in access, engagement, and participation for Black/African Americans. Participants also noted that even before this focus group, IRC has already begun to implement planning, strategies, resources, and partnerships to better meet the needs of their Black/African American population. As stated by one of the participants, "the IRC usually doesn't wait for the state to mandate change, they initiate change on their own when they see a need..."

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