JUSTICE COLLAB NEWS

The Justice Collaboratives is an initiative of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century

In this special edition of Collab News we highlight the very successful retreat hosted by IBW's Black Family Summit (BFS) at the end of April at IBW's Baltimore office. Close to 50 participants attended the retreat, including representatives of the Justice Collaboratives in Washington, DC, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Baltimore as well as leaders of several member organizations of the BFS

Envisioning Just, Safe and Wholesome Black Communities

IBW Drug Policy Reform Orientation and Education Retreat

April 30 – May 2, 2015 - The Real News Network Building, Baltimore Maryland

The Third Annual IBW Drug Policy Reform Orientation and Education Retreat was convened in Baltimore against the backdrop of a major uprising which lied bare the crises of police brutality, the impact of the War on Drugs and decades of blatant neglect.   Therefore, nothing could have been more appropriate than deliberations on "Envisioning Just, Safe and Wholesome Black Communities." The crises in Baltimore and the ongoing crisis in Black communities across the country added to the importance of this year's Retreat.

Accordingly, the gathering of representatives from IBW's Drug and Criminal Justice Policy Reform Collaboratives from Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, representatives of the Black Family Summit (African-centered national Black professional organizations) and policy experts and resource persons engaged in a rich and inspirational process of information-sharing, networking, cross-fertilization of ideas, collective learning and the development of an action agenda. Equally important, the "bonding" which

occurred during the Retreat contributed to the continued "movement-building process" between the Justice Collaboratives and Black Family Summit organizations that IBW believes is crucial to overcoming the "State of Emergency" in America's "dark ghettos" that is devastating Black families and communities.

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Defining "Harm" in African-American Communities

Protecting Black Children and Preserving Black Families

Defining harm for African American children, families and communities is complex due to the need for a thorough and tailored assessment with consideration of its contextual factors (i.e., culture, level, target behaviors) and their potentially transactional nature. The parameters of harm depend on various factors, including culture, level (e.g., individual, community, and societal) and the constellation of targeted behaviors in the context of which harm is considered. From a cultural perspective, harm must be understood within the interlocking domains of person, family, neighborhood, community and history in which Black children are situated. Factors of harm include: 1) the continued impact of enslavement, contemporary and historical trauma upon the Black Psyche; 2) the disproportionality of Black children entering stranger foster care; 3) the negative social and community impacts upon the Black family of the War on Drugs, and the

subsequent mass incarceration of Black men and women; and 4) using limited cultural definitions of family and making that definition universal to all families. On a personal level, harm is reflected in historical, physical, emotional, and social contexts.

Historically, children who are cut off from their historical legacies experience harm from the perspective of foreshortened sense of value, purpose and identity. There are limited personal and/or community-based interventions used or developed dealing with the long or short-term effects of enslavement and historical trauma, leading to under-addressed and unresolved emotional and behavioral conflicts, lack of self and communal validation, and devalued senses

of dignity and agency. Physically, children often suffer from impoverished environments, poor or unhealthy food options, lack of exercise, and chaotic neighborhoods. Emotionally, children are cut off from supportive biological family contexts, extended families and healthy communities (removed from families of origins, placed in out-of-home pipeline, and discouraged from emotional expressiveness) leading to the suppression of IQ potential. Socially, children often have limited involvement in pro-social activities (including but not limited to art, music, exercise, other creative outlets), and viewing all families from a health perspective.

On a community level, harm is reflected in the quality of living environments – access to sustainable quality foodstuffs; adequate lighting, trash removal, transportation; and protection from negative environmental influences. On the societal level, harm is reflected in the lack of viable economic opportunities to provide

essential quality of life needs including available quality educational resources – safe schools, caring teachers, quality educational technology – and safe neighborhoods and communities.

Black families and communities often feel under assault due to the arbitrary and disproportionate removal of Black Children by foster care and other child welfare agencies on the basis of "protecting" them from "harm" by parents who may suffer from substance abuse or addiction issues. The Black Family Summit, the Institute of the Black World 21st Century (IBW) and the Drug Policy alliance believe that such arbitrary and culturally insensitive policies actually increase the harm to Black children and families. Therefore the definition of "harm" presented is intended to reverse this practice by suggesting a framework for policies which will be holistic, culturally appropriate and designed to heal Black families and communities.

"IBW and our Black Family Summit are pleased to collaborate with the Drug Policy Alliance on this press conference and media briefing about a critical subject that's key to the future welfare of Black children and families across the country," said Dr. Ron Daniels, President of the Institute of the Black World. "It is propitious that this press briefing is happening at a time when the great City of Baltimore is in the midst of a profound crisis where the question of public safety for African-American youth is front and center to the unfolding events."

VIEW VIDEOS FROM THE BLACK FAMILY SUMMIT

VIEW PHOTOS FROM THE SUMMIT