

Foster care cash cow for whites with black children

By Lloyd Nicholas

Special to Sentinel-Voice

MINNEAPOLIS (NNPA)—Mother Teresa may have only seen the color of love in caring for the homeless. The Biblical Christ wanted adults to embrace the young. So, too, for many White couples.

But according to Robert L. O'Connor, professor of social work, Metropolitan State University, the foster care offered by White folks to Black children is a mere business venture that chucks away the tax coffers.

"White people who provide foster care to children of color make big bucks from special payments—a difficulty of care rate which is prorated on the basis of the level of challenge a particular child presents and it is a very lucrative business, almost an industry, for a lot of European Americans.

"Some of them do not even work—all they do is take care of these kids, sometimes three or four kids at a time—and rake in \$2,000-\$3,000 per month per child," said O'Connor.

Bob DeNardo, adoptions and guardianship supervisor for the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), explained that total adoption assistance for all children adopted from the foster care system amounted to \$26.3 million for 2002, an increase on the \$23.2 allocated during the previous year.

In an interview with Insight News, he said: "Financial assistance (to adoptive parents) is offered in the form of a monthly cash grant calculated by adding a base assistance rate and a supplemental rate (subject to eligibility) based on the level of the preponderance of difficulties the child presents."

Foster parents are paid an average of \$17 to \$21 per day per child in addition to fees for providing special care to the kids under their charge. Basic foster care payments are based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates of the cost of raising a child.

And given this level of generosity by the state, O'Connor wants Black families to also cash in on the deal. After all, he says, people of color are more culture sensitive to the needs of their young.

On the point of trans-culture, psychologist John Taborn, of J. Taborn Associates psychological services, has "seen quite a few kids

having coping problems" in his practice. He agrees that Black children in White homes will eventually need help.

"White parents are just as loving as Black parents but Whites may have trouble in providing a culture transition for the kids of color in later life when the kids are older and no support system is available for these parents during this challenge," said Taborn.

And "at the time of dating or early college years the teenagers and young adults emerge into a world without a living history of themselves in a race tinged America and a culture not passed on, so when they experience negative racial attitudes in the 'real world' they end up in a tail spin," he said.

But few White prospective adoptive parents are now seeking to avoid the trans-culture hassle, says attorney Christopher O. Obasi, who is involved in a controversial court battle over the termination of parental rights from an African-American mother now serving time at a Shakopee correctional facility. "Some Whites go overseas now to avoid the hassle of adopting Black kids," he noted.

In 2002, Minnesota families adopted 383 foreign-born children, but this amount is significantly lower than the 548 in 2001, the 565 in 2000 and 551 in 1999.

The DHS is blamed for the trans-culture problems.

"The agencies responsible for (facilitating) adoptions and foster care are the same people who take away your children," O'Connor says: "The institutions are White and the people who work in these institutions are White, and they don't have healthy connections with the communities of color, so they do not do culturally competent recruitment (of adoptive parents)."

Human services officials, he claims, will say: "We can't find any Black parents, we can't find any Native American parents, we can't find any Hmong parents and as a result the children are labeled hard to place when the real deal is the agency is inept and communities of color get blamed for not coming forward."

O'Connor also noted that an investigation of 200 African-American family prospective adoptive parents conducted by Robert B. Hill for the National Urban

League showed only two of the families were successful in their bid.

Hill, in a publication titled, "Dispelling Myths and Building on Strengths: Supporting African-American Families," explained that social welfare policies and family support programs ignore the strong kinship networks among Black families.

He said that while some claim that the extended family in the urban areas is declining, the proportion of Black extended families con-

tinued to increase during 1970 to the 1980s. During this period, he said, Black extended households rose from 23 percent to 28 percent and in 1990, two out of five Black households were made up of three generations.

It is not known if this trend is continuing.

Hill also argued that African-American extended families often extend beyond a household and may include significant persons who are not related by blood or marriage. These kinship net-

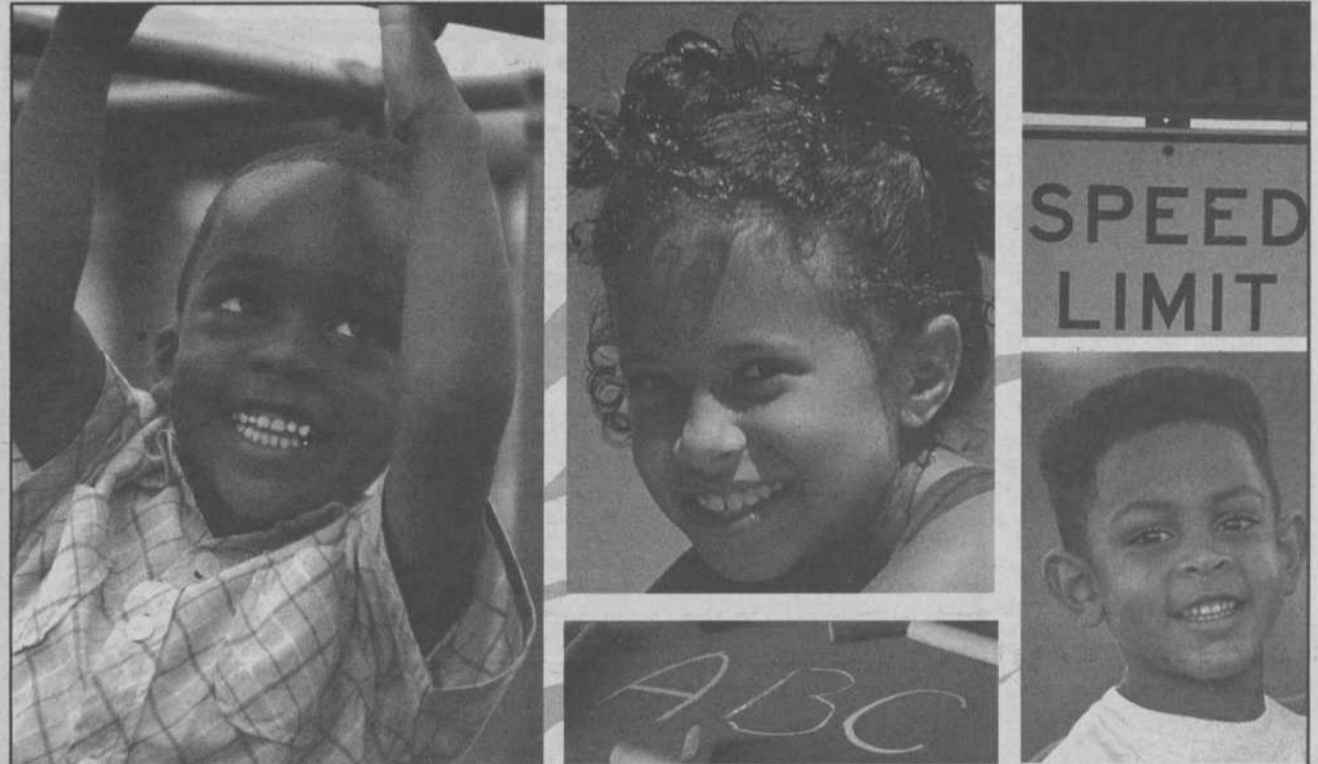
works, Hill claims, already provide a wide range of support services such as daycare, services to unwed mothers, informal adoption and foster care.

Across the United States, about 80 percent of the one million Blacks who live in households without parents are informally adopted by kin, the remaining 20 percent are in foster care.

"While the government could not find permanent homes for the 200,000 foster children, the Black kinship

succeeded in finding homes for 800,000 children yet children of color still account for the majority of children in foster care in many cities," Hill concluded.

Officials say 1,069 children under state guardianship are in the Twin Cities' seven-county metropolitan areas. In the Twin Cities, 68 percent of the 504 total are children of color while for the entire state, 53 percent of the 1,569 children under the control of the Minnesota Department of (See Care, Page 15)



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