

# Putting Kids and Families First

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kids, and so she was fighting.”

So the root cause of the girl’s problems was not internal, but external, Overton said.

“All of her therapists were white, all of her social workers were white, and she didn’t have anyone to voice that issue to, so they all decided it was an intrinsic deficit in her when really it was completely environmental.”

Overton said she started working with the girl, but she couldn’t even begin their sessions until she agreed to do her hair.

“My direct supervisor said, ‘Why are you taking so long with this client?’ and I said, ‘I’m doing an intervention.’ It was her hair. I had to do her hair before we could even talk.”

Once word got out among the black

kids that there was an African American social worker, they all asked for Overton, which became overwhelming to the point that she started a group called Naime, her daughter’s name, which means peace, tranquility, healing and gifts.

“So I would tell my (white) colleagues, ‘You deal with their regular diagnosis, as you have it on paper, and then refer to my group where we’ll address the cultural issues,’” she said. “Because I can’t have kids waiting (for her) and lacking service, but at the same time, I realized the need for meeting that cultural piece.”

That realization inspired Overton to go a step further by writing a book about black girls’ experiences that can be used by her white colleagues, called “Aminah Brown Breaks it Down.”

“It’s about a girl in foster care in a very white city and how she navigates the sys-

tem,” she said, and it’s based on – and with the permission of – a former client who’s now 26 and whom Overton first met when the girl was 12 years old

She writes about real life situations in the book so others can better understand the experiences of young black girls and the difficulties faced by African American girls in foster care.

Overton said she often stays in touch with her clients, not to continue treatment, but as a referral source.

“With a lot of my clients, I’ll say we’re closing your case, you’ve met all your treatment objectives, but I know you don’t have someone around the corner who can give you resources,” she said. “So if you need resource, call me.”

Overton expects to finish her book in the near future. She hopes it will help white therapists expand their cultural

awareness.

The current model for social work practices is “very Eurocentric,” she said, which can sometimes be harmful to communities of color. If a white therapist is not prepared to work with kids of color, it can be awkward, she said.

“If they’re not prepared, they feel uncomfortable and turn all kinds of shades and they (the kids) see that,” she said. “But if they read the book along with the girls, it’s easy for a white therapist to say, ‘Have you ever felt like that in this situation?’ That gives them a foundational way to engage them without trying to pry and without them having to. It gives the therapist some insights, or maybe to get them someone to support them in this area, or find them a mentor. It might be eye opening for the therapist, but it might be affirming for the client.”

To learn more about Black Parent Initiative or to make a donation to its efforts, log onto [www.thebpi.org](http://www.thebpi.org).

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