

Black Child Development Institute Stands Up For Children

By Eddie Davis
Samuel (not his real name), 11, has lived in foster homes for ten years. Primarily because of his age, but also because he's black, odds were that Samuel would never be adopted. But he is being adopted, and much of the credit for this and other adoptions can be traced to efforts by groups such as the Black Child Development Institute.

Launched in Durham last year as the local affiliate of the National Black Child Development Institute, this organization has dedicated itself to advocating for a better quality of life for black children. The national group was started 12 years ago and is headquartered in Washington, D.C. BCDI advocacy takes many directions, such as workshops, public awareness projects and research. These are all to help show the problems facing black children in North Carolina, and to encourage action to solve those problems, according to the group's president, Mrs. Nellie Riley.

One of the most recent projects was a public awareness program last month when BCDI members manned booths at area shopping malls, giving out information on black children in the state who are available for adoption. This project was also in connection with November being National Adoption Month.

According to Mrs. Riley, more than 100 people got information during the three Saturdays in November that the booths were in the shopping malls.

"In addition to the information we dispensed," Mrs. Riley said, "twenty-five people completed applications to get additional information on how to adopt children." It is not clear exactly how many black children there are in the state like Samuel who are usually six years old and older and therefore not quite as "adoptable" as younger children. Mrs. Riley said, though, that probably more than 75 per cent of them are boys.

Traditionally, according to most experts, potential adoptive parents have been reluctant to accept the older children, and thus organizations such as BCDI work to erase whatever stigma exists either concerning the children themselves, or the difficulty of the adoptive process.

"We hope to raise the awareness levels in the minds of people on the issue," Mrs. Riley said. "Perhaps we can be the incentive for people who have been thinking about adopting. At least they can get their questions on the subject answered."

According to Ms. Lottie Sneed, another member of BCDI, "Adoptive parents are just regular people. They are people who can give the child a loving home and provide a family environment. One does not have to meet the traditional stereotype of adoptive parents."

Ms. Sneed went on to say that many single people adopt, and that age is not as much of a factor as it used to be. "One lady who is in her 60s," Ms. Sneed said, "and who is single, has adopted and raised several children and continues to do so. Adoptive parents also do not have to be rich. The key element is the ability to provide an adequate home life for the child."

A case in point is Jay Joyner, a single parent. Joyner, a public school teacher, has adopted two boys and is completing the process to adopt a third child. He is one of a relatively small group of single black men in the country who have

adopted children. "My boys and I have an excellent home life," Joyner explained. "As in every family, there are ups and downs, but we are able to talk out our problems and enjoy the great times we share."

In each case, according to Joyner, there has been some initial uneasiness in the relationships. "The children and I had to warm up to each other," he said, "but after the initial uneasiness, we all became comfortable with each other."

On questions from the children about their natural parents and relatives, Joyner says: "I am completely honest with them. If questions arise, I answer them to the best of my ability and then we move on."

But working in the area of adoptions is not the only way BCDI advocates the cause of

black children. The organization recently published a research report on "The Status of Our Children". The report covered areas such as child health, child care, child welfare and education. According to Mrs. Riley, the information in the report is the basis upon which the organization adopted certain goals and objectives.

"We have sponsored a mini-career day for sixth grade students at Fayetteville Street School," Mrs. Riley continued, "a conference entitled 'Black Survival Into the 21st Century'; a calendar of black children and National Adoption Month."

The group is also interested in pushing legislation favorable to improving the conditions for black children in the state. Therefore, at the group's December

meeting next week they will discuss legislative concerns with State Representative Kenneth Spaulding.

The meeting is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Tuesday in the third floor conference room of the Durham County Library on Roxboro Street. Anyone interested in learning more about the organization is invited to attend the meeting. For additional information, contact Mrs. Riley after 6 p.m. at 493-3277.

The local organization now has 28 members, according to Mrs. Riley. Membership dues are as follows: individual, \$15; student, \$10; organizations, \$25; and sustaining, \$50. For more information on adoptions, contact Mrs. Ann Lockman at the Durham County Department of Social Services at 683-3500.



GETTING INFO—Ms. Minnie Lockett, gets information on adoptions from members of the Durham chapter of the Black Child Development Institute, an affiliate of the national organization by the same name. BCDI members manning the information booth at the Northgate Mall are: Mrs. Nellie Riley (left) and her daughter, Jenelle; and Mrs. Lottie Sneed. (Photo by Mayfield)

Durham County 4-H Council Elects Officers

The Durham County 4-H Council recently elected its 1983 council officers. Serving the council in 1983 will be James Cousins, 15 years old, of Russell Hot Shots senior 4-H club as president. Bryan Hubbell will serve as vice president. He is 14 and a member of the Bahama Bunch senior club. Ms. Melanie Daniels is 13 and also from the Russell club. She will be the 1983 secretary. The treasurer will be Molly Davis, 16 years old and a member of the Nelson Senior 4-H club. Nedenia Parker will be reporter. She is 17 and a member of the Russell Hot Shots.

These youths will have the task of governing the 4-H's in Durham County by giving leadership to the council which consists of all 4-H members in the county. The council is active in planning and conducting county 4-H events. Meetings, committee work and other activities are ways for the council to involve youth in the affairs of 4-H.

Council delegates improve knowledge and skills in democratic meeting procedures, working cooperatively in groups, personal relations with others, representing the interests of others, solving pro-

blems, and accepting responsibility.

They also volunteer time and effort to explain and promote the 4-H program, help raise funds to support program activities, conduct 4-H activities, and help others. One of the council's projects will be involvement in the state 4-H project: Safety. 4-H is a component of the Agricultural Extension service — serving youth ages 6-19 and adult volunteers. The program develops career skills, citizenship, and leadership ability in Durham County for youth and adults.

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