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Creating Supportive Organizational Culture and Infrastructure
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DAISY FEIDT: Reyma and I are going to be talking about creating supportive organizational culture and infrastructure, and Jesse and Liz are going to add in their experience as they see fit.

I introduced myself yesterday, but I'm Daisy Feidt. I’m the Executive Vice President of Access Living. We're the Center for Independent Living in Chicago. I am also very happy to have with me Candace Coleman, who I think a lot of you know. She's Access Living's Racial Justice Organizer, and has been… She has taught me a lot about racial justice issues, and she obviously has a lot of perspective to offer in this topic. So, I'm just going to ask her to add in information and thoughts as she sees fit, as well. This is a quote from Marca Bristo, who is our President and CEO. She says, “I feel like everything we do is a work in progress. We are a little uncomfortable with being raised as the icon or an organization doing best practices in this area, because we still have a long way to go.” So, I wanted to definitely start with that. I'll talk about some things we're still really working on at Access Living related to intersectionality, but this is definitely true.

So, a little background on Access Living. We were established in 1980. Our service area is the City of Chicago, so like, I think it was Ron, we don't even serve an entire County, we serve part of a County. We have about 60 staff, and we reach about 1800 consumers, that's our direct work. We also have a really robust advocacy department that does a lot of work that is not counted in those numbers and our budget is approximately 6 million. Okay, so Access Living started tackling the intersection between race and disability in a really intentional way in 2008, and this happened because we had two race‑related incidents occur at Access Living, and those incidents caused issues that were kind of below the surface, definitely there but below the surface, to kind of spill over in a big way.

And those incidents were there was a staff person who sent around an email that was very racist, and I mean very, very racist. There was no room for interpretation. So that was definitely a problem, and then we also right around the same time, happened to have somebody who was working on an art collection in our building that was art that was done by people with disabilities, professional artists with disabilities, to kind of show case in our building.

And one of the paintings was interpreted to be racist. And it was actually a painting that was done by a person of color. And, I thought it was interesting, this morning Stan and Brooke talked a lot about the difference between intention and impact. I don't think the painting's intention was to be racist. It was trying to point out racism in society, an aspect of racism in society, but the impact it was having on our staff was they perceived it definitely to be racist and a huge problem. So, we took it down.

So those were the two incidences. What we decided to do as a result of this, this was causing a lot of issues within the Center, so we developed a plan to take the organization through a process of learning, and of course, we hoped, growth. And I will talk a little bit about what that process was.

So, we immediately had staff discussions with a facilitator who could actually take us through a discussion around race. This was really important. We did it within a few days of when especially the racist email was sent around. And that just helped staff process what was happening. We also did trainings. This was a longer-term thing, but we did a series of trainings for staff on the intersection of race and disability, which was really important. And we also hired a consultant, who was actually the same person who did those trainings, who worked specifically with Access Living's management to think through kind of structural things that we were doing as an organization that were potentially problematic, and how to make progress on those things.

We also set up a staff‑led racial justice council that included all levels of staff from all departments, to discuss issues and create an action plan for improved cultural competency around race.

And that racial justice Council, like I said, it was staff led, and it was really important in identifying what were those things that staff saw as problematic that we needed to make progress on. And then, that kind of carried over into a staff retreat in which one of the main topics that we talked about was Access Living, what Access Living looks like in the context of race and things again that we needed to do as an organization to move us along in this journey.

All right. So, since we're talking about organizational kind of structure, I thought it was really important to talk about mission and values, and actually Access Living just redid our strategic plan. And I'll talk more about what's actually in the strategic plan in a second, but one of the things that it gave us the opportunity to do was re‑look at our mission, actually also vision, and values. So, I wanted to just talk about some of the things that we decided to address, or, you know, change about our mission, or how things ended up.

So, our mission now is: Access Living ignites the power and pride of people with disabilities, provides critical services, and breaks down systemic barriers to create a more inclusive, and therefore much stronger, society.

You know, as I was thinking about this mission, and somebody mentioned yesterday about making sure that your mission kind of speaks to the broad identity groups that your Center serves, I think we probably could have done better honestly with our mission, and speaking to that. We did test this with a lot of different groups, a lot of different, you know, people who identify with different races, LGBTQ, a lot of different people, and we did get positive feedback about it, but honestly, I think we probably could have done better.

The values. We definitely made sure that our values spoke to this issue around racial justice, equity, intersectionality. And so I just pulled out two that speak to this the best, and when we looked at our values, we tried to think of things that were really pretty unique to Access Living, not that we would be the only ones that would have these values, but that they weren't just things that sort of everybody kind of shares, as values necessarily. They were what makes Access Living, Access Living. So, one of the values we came up was we believe in our collective journey toward a healing and transformative justice. In order to advance this journey, we seek a diversity of voices and identities, equitable access to resources and opportunities for all, and full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society and life. And I wanted to specifically point here to the equitable access to resources section. That was really, really important for us to include in this value and I think it's something even when we do this kind of work in an intentional way, we're not always good about making sure that exists, even within the walls of our Center. And this is an area where I think Access Living has a lot of ways to grow, as well.

Also, I just wanted to mention here, I have heard people talk about the fact that we are on such limited budgets, that we don't have the resources necessary to start completely new programs and this is all nice in theory but can we actually implement something like this in our Center? And I do want to just point out to people that a lot of times, what we're talking about in terms of taking steps in this work is realignment of resources, and something we talk about as a movement a lot is making sure that other organizations and companies provide accommodations for people with disabilities. And we wouldn't take as an answer, "I don't have the money to do that." We would say, you need to find the money to do that. So, I think we just need to keep that in mind when we're thinking about this work. That there is a lot of room to realign resources to make sure we're taking steps, and it really doesn't also cost a whole lot of extra money to take meaningful, important steps in this work.

Okay, another value that we just came up with in our strategic planning process is Access Living is a cross‑disability organization governed and staffed by a majority of people with disabilities whose decisions are made by people with disabilities. People with disabilities are a significant part of every other identity group including age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, religion and ethnicity.

Access Living is committed to all members of our community, to the knowledge that intersectional identities matter, and that our work continually strives to be fully inclusive of all types of disabilities. And what this is trying to speak to is this idea that sometimes we hear when we start doing work around racial justice, which is: But we're a disability organization. Our primary focus should be disability. And what this is trying to say is: No, this actually is part and parcel of the work that Access Living does. It's very important to us as an organization, it's a value we have, and we need to treat it as such. All right.

Candace, anything to add up to this point? Okay.

Okay, so policies and procedures, actually, Reyma, I've gotten a chance to present with Reyma before and I read over her materials last night. She has a lot of great information on policies and procedures, so I'm going to let her talk more about it, because I think actually, you all are further along in some ways in this than we are. But I did want to mention a couple things. I have on this slide that Access Living has had a non‑discrimination policy since the '90s. I think it was Jesse who mentioned yesterday that that's the baseline, which I completely agree with. We're all supposed to have that. But we did, when we started this work in 2008, the staff-led racial justice council did take a look at our Human Resources policies through a racial justice lens and we ended up making a lot of changes to our policies as a result.

I want to just point out one specific example, which is the most significant change to me, was to our wage and salary determinations. And, here I'm going to admit something that I really wish wasn't true, but it is. Which is when we first started this work, and staff, mostly staff who are people of color, were raising issues around. We had some problems at Access Living around race equity. Staff raised an issue that they felt like our salaries were actually discriminatory against people of color.

And when they compared salaries among each other, they felt like the staff who were people of color were being paid less at Access Living than staff who were white, even when you controlled for things like the type of position, how long people had been at Access Living and that kind of thing.

When I first heard this information, I was like: That can't be true. And ‑‑ but obviously, like people, this was a very strong contingent of people who were saying this. We wanted to take a look at it, and it was true. And one of the things I want to point out here, you know, we talked a lot this morning about structures, and how racism is structural, and there's structural things in the world that allow racism to perpetuate. And one of the things that I think we have to be really cognizant about at our Centers is when you're dealing with a world that ‑‑ where structural racism exists, that's going to carry over in your Center, unless you're doing intentional, specific things to try to combat it.

And so, nobody was purposely trying to pay people of color less at Access Living. I don't believe that. But there were systems in place in the world that we’re carrying over in our Center that were allowing that to be true. And so some really important things that there was actually a specific group of people at Access Living that worked on wage and salary, and our system, and looked at our system and ways in which that structural racism was carrying over into our own system in our Center. And we ended up deciding that we needed to make some changes, like, more emphasis on experience of people coming on, a less emphasis on potential education levels. Less ability for job candidates to negotiate salary.

One of the things, this was back in 2008, 2009, probably, but one of the things people pointed out is that white people, because ‑‑ and this is not true for everybody ‑‑ but a lot of us have a lot of generational wealth. We have more of a cushion that we can fall back on if we're in a tough spot. That we're more likely, there's like actual research that we're more likely to negotiate salary. Because if it doesn't work out, we have other things we can fall back on.

So we've just made a more sort of strict system where it's not that people can't negotiate at all, but there's much less wiggle room, so we're not as likely to end up with disparities in salaries, because of the people who can negotiate versus people who can't.

And then finally, we don't ask people's salary history because both from a gender perspective and from a race perspective, that tends to just keep salaries for those folks lower.

And a lot of states now it's illegal to ask for a salary history, so it’s becoming less of an issue. But if it's not illegal in your state and you're still doing it, you shouldn't be doing it. Oh, and I just wanted to raise — since we're in this section on policies and procedures, another thing that really came out when we were looking at these issues is that our staff who are people of color felt like there wasn't a process that they could trust was going to be fair, if they were raising issues of discrimination. And so, we also looked at that process and really tried to make it a very legitimate process where people felt like if I raise an issue that I feel like I'm experiencing racism within Access Living, it is going to be listened to, it is going to be heard, there's going to be a very specific process that occurs.

And I think ‑‑ I mean, again, this is all a work in progress but at least compared to where we were in 2009, we've made some strides in that area so it's another important thing to look at.

Anything you want to add so far, Candace? Okay.

Okay, so I want to move to engaging board and staff, the board and staff during strategic planning. I just mentioned that we just redid our strategic plan. It started taking effect July 1. And in our strategic plan, one of three strategic areas now is -- one is around intersectional justice with a specific focus on race equity and cross‑disability work.

And I really see not just this current strategic plan, but past strategic plans ‑‑ by the way I've been at Access Living for 20 years -- so I have a lot of history. I've been through a lot of strategic planning processes and we've definitely addressed issues around race and diversity in a lot of strategic plans. I think we're going even further in this strategic plan.

Lorrell mentioned the idea yesterday of wanting to make sure our organizations are becoming more anti‑racist, which is another sort of level beyond diversity, which is also a good goal. I feel like that's what we're trying to get with this current strategic plan. But the main point I want to make here is that I think for us, strategic planning has been a really good way to get everybody in the organization on the same page about the importance of these issues. Because you're asking for community input, consumer input, partner input, and if you're getting input that these are things you need to be focusing on, and then you, in the strategic planning process, are working on these issues, it just can be a really important way for everybody to kind of get on the same page.

It gives people a say on this. It gives people in the organization permission to focus on diversity and inclusion, with some accountability measures in place. I wish people didn't feel like they had to have permission, but it does sometimes provide a structure that's helpful.

It helps change the dynamic from something people in the organization think of as important, but is somewhat tangential to your key goals, to something that becomes part and parcel of the work that you're doing. And it can also, like it did for us this last time, create an opportunity to refresh values, vision, and mission.

Okay, so I just wanted to mention some specific kind of strategic planning goals that could be included. Yeah. Go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just want to add some context, an example to the last slide. One of the things I wanted to talk about is that it was definitely not a top‑down effect, that each staff person that had direct contact with consumers and advocates were very key in making decisions about how this mission would go, and that really helped with the vision around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

And the way that the meetings were structured allowed the people who were at the ‑‑ not the top level to actually host a series of the meetings to make those strategic planning goals, and our voices were heard and taken up to the top to actually make some key changes in Access Living's strategic plan.

DAISY FEIDT: Yeah. That's a really important point, and something that carried over, has carried over at Access Living beyond the strategic planning process. A lot of people have brought up how important it is you have leadership that's on board with addressing these issues. I completely agree with that. It's almost as important that you have people on the ground level pushing you from under, underneath. Or maybe even more important. I mean, that has really been I think one of the things that's allowed Access Living to have some progress in this area. So, thanks for adding that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. This is Anita. So, my question is, or my thought is, is that how, then, do you implement this? Because you could have the most well‑written, well thought out plan and everything, and it remains just that, a plan. Because it's not implemented. How, then, if you're ‑‑ I would imagine you'd have to have a genuine want or desire to do this rather than something you feel like you have to do.

Because like I say, I've seen the most wonderful thought out plans for intersectionality, anti‑racism and what not and it remains just that, a plan. And when you try to push to put that forward, you get pushback and I think that may need to be addressed and how people deal with that, if that happens.

DAISY FEIDT: Yeah. That's a really important point. I think you definitely have to have people who are super‑committed to making sure that these goals and stuff that are in your strategic plan are followed through on. I can't say that in every single strategic plan goal that's around issues of racial justice that we have completely followed through on. I have some personal disappointments on some things that we haven't, but we definitely ‑‑ at Access Living it's important for us to have a strategic plan that is a living, breathing document. We have evaluation metrics that we're tracking every quarter. We have a process in place to measure how we're doing on those evaluation metrics, so I think that helps.

But also, Anita, you're bringing up a really important point, which I was going to say a little bit later, but let's talk about it now. I think that has absolutely been the experience of Access Living, and I don't say this to scare anybody from starting this work if you're just at the beginning of the process, but there will be a lot of things that try to get you off track. One of the things that's happened at Access Living is we ‑‑ people will raise things like, for instance, we just recently had relatively recently, had a training on systemic racism. And it raised a lot of issues, things that we need to continue working on at Access Living. It created some tensions among staff. People bringing up different perspectives. And a lot of people will come to you after those trainings and say: See? We shouldn't have done this training. Because it caused a lot of tension. And you really have to be prepared to just push past that and for people to realize that that is going to be part of the process, and if you are doing this work right, it is going to raise tensions, and it's going to feel uncomfortable for a lot of people, and that's got to be okay as an organization, or you're not going to get through this.

So, I don't know if that's exactly what you're talking about, Anita but that's definitely something that has been Access Living's experience and you need people who are going to be willing to push past this.

Okay, so just really quickly, some of the strategic plan goals that we've done are, I just wanted to give people kind of some specifics, could include things like increasing your board diversity to match the service area. Increased outreach to underserved communities, such as Latinx communities. Creating strategic partnerships with organizations who serve specific identity groups or underserved constituencies. Or, what’s in our most recent strategic plan, which is apply a racial equity framework to the work that we do to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. This really again speaks to becoming a more anti‑racist organization and that's looking internal. Very important to look internal on that work, as well as external.

And, I just want to mention some things that have literally come out of this work being in Access Living's strategic plan. So, we have a Latinx’s with disabilities project that is run by an organizer that actually Candace mentioned in the lunch discussion who was focused on immigration issues, actually now more broadly beyond the Latinx community. We have a Racial Justice Organizer. Candace has been at Access Living before she became a Racial Justice Organizer, but that was initially out of a strategic plan and we also have a much more racially diverse board. Not doing as good at Access Living on racial diversity of our leadership, especially our senior leadership team.

And so that's something we need to continue to work on and it's something that staff at Access Living continue to push us on and it's important.

Okay. So, I wanted to talk about intentional staff engagement, which has been really important. And I do want to mention, and I know this can be kind of uncomfortable to talk about, but there's ‑‑ Darrell mentioned this book around White Fragility yesterday. This term of white fragility, if people aren't familiar with it, is the discomfort and defensiveness on the part of white people when confronted about info related to racism. It does, at least again, in Access Living's experience, come out every single time we talk about race. And this is one of those things that can derail conversations. Although I wasn't at the NCIL listening sessions, I read the transcripts word for word and I saw a lot of it come out there.

So I really do feel like this is important to recognize, important to know that you're likely to see this at your Center and know yourself, especially if you're not a person of color that this is an issue, and have an idea of how to deal with it. At our Center, this has looked like things -- like when staff were very legitimately pointing out that it was a problem that we had, our senior leadership was too white -- we had a senior leader get up and tears coming down her face and saying things like: What do you expect me to do? Should I quit? And I've been fighting for social justice all my life, and you're making me feel like I'm not included.

And those ‑‑ I don't want to discount those feelings. Those are real feelings people are feeling, but if you lean into those comments too much, and those feelings too much, you're going to get derailed from the conversation that needs to be had at your Center around racial justice.

So, you need to be prepared to deal with it, help the white folks in the room know what's going on, and be able to process it themselves, and move on.

So, at Access Living we've trained our staff on intersections of disability and race. We've changed our recruitment practices so that we can hopefully attract more candidates of color. We did not ‑‑ we have always, since I've been there, had a pretty racially diverse staff on the non‑management staff, but again on the leadership staff, we have work to do, so I wanted to offer this as a specific suggestion. It was very helpful to us. A lot of companies in your area have specific staff on diversity and inclusion. They already have worked on this, and for us, they literally told us their process and what they've done, and who they reach out to, and we could just copy a lot of what they've done, or at least the stuff that works for us.

We've changed the onboarding process to reflect the importance of this intersectionality work and set the tone from the beginning. Another person mentioned this yesterday, a speaker, but we ask questions in interviews with prospective staff to let them know this is important to the work we do and make sure the fit is right.

Oh, and we respond to race‑related events that are occurring in the world. So, I do not want to say we do this perfectly by the way, but this has been really important. We used to have the idea that you, as a disability organization, we're only going to respond to events that had a specific disability connection. And we no longer think in those terms. If there's an event that's happened in the world that we know a section of our community really cares about and is thinking about and it's on their mind, we will put out a statement about it. We've brought staff together to process it. We've done different things that I think have been really helpful.

Okay, so another thing on staff engagement I just wanted to offer as a suggestion especially if you don't have a lot of people of color on your staff or leadership, creating an internal committee to address issues around racial justice, intersectionality I think is a really important step. There's some specific actionable goals around increasing racial diversity of a staff to reflect the demographics of your CIL location. Talked about that a lot during this conference. Also, potential examples could be conducting town halls on the intersection of race and disability.

I want to say a little bit more about getting the board on board. One of the action items the staff‑led racial justice council set was to increase the racial diversity of our board. This also became a strategic plan goal. This was again back in 2008. At that time, our board was very, very white. So, we set a target for the race diversity to match the make-up of the City of Chicago.

We attended trainings, with key board members, on how to increase board diversity. And our nominating committee chair developed nomination guidelines that made it clear our intention was to focus on increasing the diversity of our board, and again, that just gets everybody on the same page, and says we're all going to focus on this and it's important.

I think this first thing of setting targets, and for this, I mean anything, but I'm talking specifically here if you're working on increasing the diversity of your board. To me, setting targets is really important. If we didn't do this, it was a little too easy to get everybody off‑track, and because we had a specific goal, it allowed me at every single board nomination meeting to say: Remember, we have this target. We need to keep talking about this.

You need to make sure that your board is trained on the importance of this, and how and, like, why are we increasing the diversity of the board?

Use available resources. Sometimes in an area United Ways can actually help you identify potential board members who can increase the diversity or potential board members of color. There are sometimes consultants that specifically do this work.

Again, creating a unifying vision statement is really important, and we definitely did this at Access Living because we had some board members who weren't necessarily on board with this. If needed, garnering support from key board members who you do know are going to be, think this is important, can be really important because they can kind of be primed to bring this up at board meetings and get everybody else on the same page.

A few other things here. You can't lose focus on the goal even when the goal is reached. One of the things that happened at Access Living and a lesson learned for us was, started this work in 2008. We really worked on increasing the diversity of our board. We got to a point where we were matching the demographics of our area which is the City of Chicago and we were like: Yay, we did it!

And then we kind of lost focus those next couple years and the numbers went way down again, and we had to increase focus. It's just got to always be a focus. Seems obvious but I think it's important. Constant networking is required. I'm sure, at least for most of us, we have organizations that focus on the groups we're trying to reach out to. You need to be at the events of those groups.

Obviously, this gets easier once you have a critical mass of people. And while recruiting, you need to be explicit about what you are looking for and why. I think we can all relate to the experience, or a lot of us can anyways, of being the sort of like token disabled person on the board. You don't want to recreate that for people of color that are joining your board. But I do think it's important for the people to know one of the reasons you're reaching out to them. Of course, you're not only reaching out to them because they're a person of a specific race, but you just I think do want to be up‑front about that.

And because it's likely to be ongoing conversations at the board meeting, so you don't want somebody to come in and be like: Oh, now I get why they wanted me on their board and be surprised by that. And obviously, a way for people not to feel tokenized is to not have them be the only one from that identity group.

Candace, anything to add?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I lost it but go ahead.

DAISY FEIDT: Oh shoot, I'm sorry. So, achieving organizational culture. I wanted to say just a few things on this. Obviously if you're a mostly white organization on your board and your staff, it's really important to change that makeup. The leadership must model shift in mind set, but I definitely want to prop up what Candace said, that it's equally as important to have people within your organization who are pushing you from kind of the ground‑up.

Expect that you're going to have some resistance, that there's going to be tension. And have a plan to address and keep your eye on the prize, your eye on the goal.

Intentionally hire people who will keep the organization accountable. I loved one of the things Reyma said yesterday about the fact that we are kind of okay within the disability ‑‑ we're definitely okay, we love it when disability advocates are like hard‑core, go after something, they don't back down.

And I have definitely seen this that when we see people doing the same thing on racial justice issues, that we're like: Whoa, that's a little too strong there. So I think when we see that maybe people in our community have done that kind of hard‑core activism on racial justice issues, we can be a little nervous about it or scared about bringing it into our organization, and it's really important to fight that urge to be scared of it, because those are the people who are going to keep you on track.

I said this before, but it's worth repeating, you must have a mindset that intersectional issues are disability issues. And you have to be open to doing the work, and you're probably going to be surprised about how much work there is to do. It can feel really like, man, I thought we were doing good here. Now we have all this work to do and that's just the reality and you've got to keep working on it.

That's it.

Anything more to add, Candace?

Okay, that's all I've got. Thank you, everybody.

[ Applause ]

TIM FUCHS: Any questions for Daisy before we take our break? We have a couple minutes. Have several minutes. Yeah?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, when you were talking about trying to change the genetic makeup of the board, it sounded like you were getting -- was it passive resistance? Or just nobody ‑‑ were they nodding their head and not willing to pull the trigger and make these moves? Or what was causing that delay?

DAISY FEIDT: Yeah. You know what it was? It was people who ‑‑ I'm trying to pinpoint exactly, but it was people who felt like: Why, like, we shouldn't just be ‑‑ it was sort of this issue like targeting people. We shouldn't be targeting people of color to come on our board. Everybody's important. Everybody has value.

It also ‑‑ and this makes me uncomfortable to talk about, but I'm just going to say this is real conversations we were having at Access Living, people were saying: But we need ‑‑ the bigger focus needs to be on people who can fundraise for our organization and this is going to take us away from that goal, so there was that.

You know, I think it's just people ‑‑ not everybody got the importance of it was the bottom line, and so…

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did you end up having to ‑‑ because I know at CORD, we forced the change. CORD is known on Cape Cod as more of an organization that will happily throw elbows if we think we're right. We do it for the consumers. We do it to protect the business owners that are hiring people with disabilities, as well. So, our reputation has become much more overt, and it's certainly helped us by shooting a couple of board members that were standing in the way of exactly what Coreen saw years ago. I've been with the company 8 years and our diversity really started about 7.5 years ago as far as real integration, not just to people with color, openly gay, other women on the board, as Coreen had said. What we wanted and we were demanding right up front was we wanted that lightning strike to happen right where we were in a very nondiverse area. We knew it wouldn't make us immediately popular, but what we are finding is because the discussions that we're having in this room now, are old discussions for us in an odd place like Cape Cod. I was just curious as to where that resistance ‑‑ because we ran into that, and the first thing we did was shoot a few people and set an example for the board for exactly what the expectations were for CORD and what our mission is, what we're about, so those that were in the way got crushed. And those that weren't in the way and understood what was at stake and what they needed to bring to this party, we made that very clear up front what our expectations were. This is something for something. It's not just a place to hang your hat. There are no extra layers in an organization like CORD. There's no place to hide. You can't kick it upstairs. There's no extra Jerseys, call it whatever you want, but everybody that's part of the company has to be willing to pull on the same oars in the same direction. So we really did have to do a couple of roundhouse kicks at a high level and help some people out and that was the best decision we made as a company. We've never looked back, so if anybody's stalling or stuttering or having those problems, it takes one or two people at a leadership level to wring a few necks and set the example and the tone that needs to take place, because like we tell our staff, if not us, who? And if not now? When?

It's about us getting that job done, so I applaud you and everybody else that's going through this as well.

DAISY FEIDT: Thanks for sharing that experience.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm curious, so what I've seen and found in different organizations is that as people of color, we tend to hold back our experiences and our thoughts, when it comes to the discrimination, the harassment, just like the disparities that we see from particularly leadership in the board. And, I'm curious, from the changes that y'all have been making with getting new people in and I guess like the intentional trainings and things of that nature that y'all have been conducting, what have been the implications for that in terms of organizational culture? Has it been more of a safe space for people of color? And what does that mean for opportunities to evolve and to just a more advanced place, I don't know if that means job description, I don't know if that means different opportunities. I know, Candace, you're now leading a new department, but I'm just curious of what have been the impacts of these changes that y'all have been making, particularly as to making a safe space.

DAISY FEIDT: That's a really good question. I'm actually going to ask Candace to share her experience and telling you, you can say the good, the bad, and the ugly.

CANDACE: If I understand your question correctly, Daisy talked a little bit about some of the uncomfortable challenges of feeling unsafe. And one of the things that we've been intentional about is creating space for people with various identities to have their space to discuss what has happened and how they feel, and be able to implement that in a way that it actually impacts. Most of these conversations or changes happen within our staff meetings and so voicing what has happened, how it has impacted, and really going back to the drawing board and figuring out what can we do better to address the changes, the harm. We're even now looking into more transformative justice and trauma-informed practices, so we can practice that as a staff, as well as how it's impacted our consumers and our advocates in our organization, as well.

And so, Access Living has been doing a good job of listening to what it is that we need and want, and really trying to pull together resources and time to make that happen. And so the cultural committees, we have events ‑‑ I know when I get back on Friday, most of the people of color are actually going out together, so that we can be in community with one another knowing that this is a very dominant white space, but it's changing tremendously, and I can even say that. I've been at Access Living for almost 9 years. And if you look at the history of our pictures, we slowly but surely have added more people of diverse backgrounds. And, our consumer and advocacy spaces have changed with people as well. I don't know if that answered your question.

DAISY FEIDT: Thanks, Candace.

TIM FUCHS: All right. Thank you, Daisy.

[ End of Session ]