

## **VNR Anti-Racism Pilot Project**

### **REPORT**

March 2021

#### **Overview**

As part of its response to the coronavirus pandemic, Valley Nonprofit Resources (VNR) created in July 2020 a 2020-22 Recovery Initiative, which is providing education and information to San Fernando Valley nonprofits - helping them plan and take action on what comes next as the pandemic evolves, including partial reopening and the positive impact of vaccines. Recovery needs to include dealing with the challenges and opportunities for addressing racism and social justice, highlighted by recent protests and national advocacy for major change. Nonprofits can integrate their COVID-19 recovery strategy with renewed positive attention to racism as it affects their own organizations and communities.

Under VNR funding and coordination, CSUN Social Work Associate Professor Allen Lipscomb, an expert on the topic, developed and led VNR's anti-racism training and technical assistance pilot project. Anti-racism work focuses on directly and positively opposing racism, discrimination, and prejudice. It includes taking an unapologetic stance and utilizing interventions that directly call out racist and discriminatory practices, policies and behaviors through advocacy, activism and allyship.

For the pilot project reported here, Professor Lipscomb led three educational workshops on the topic, and worked individually with four Valley nonprofits, helping them develop or enhance an anti-racism policy and offering training to Board and staff. These pilot project activities were supported by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation (some support also was provided by the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, through its general operating support grant to VNR). Professor Lipscomb also has received two research grants from the HIRI Nonprofit Research Fellowships (created by VNR ED Dr. Tom Backer), one to study African American male social workers and the other supporting a just-completed research study of anti-racism activities in the nonprofit space, which will be discussed briefly here.

#### **Educational Workshops**

Three educational workshops were conducted by Prof. Lipscomb as part of this pilot project:

**Anti-Racism Learning and Action for Nonprofit Leaders (10/6/20)** This free workshop was intended to help nonprofit leaders, both staff and Board, learn about these concepts, and apply them through staff training, written policies, and collaborative work in the communities they serve. It was open to all nonprofits in the San Fernando Valley.

**Health and Human Services Nonprofit Leaders Roundtable Special Session on Anti-Racism (10/20/20)** This special session of the Health and Human Services Nonprofit Leaders Roundtable

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aimed to help nonprofit leaders in turn help their patients or clients to better handle the complex challenges of anti-racism. The Roundtable is in its fourth year of bringing together nonprofit leaders in health and human services to learn, share and build networks in the San Fernando Valley. The Roundtable is coordinated by VNR, Valley Care Community Consortium and The Children's Burn Foundation and facilitated by Janet Levine of VNR and Levine Consulting.

Health and Human Services Nonprofit Leaders Roundtable (1/21/21) Based on feedback from the October 20 Roundtable evaluation surveys, this meeting focused on the concept Professor Lipscomb shared at the previous event - creating for nonprofits a AJEDI Committee (Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion) for handling and leading the challenges and opportunities the nonprofit has with respect to anti-racism training and policy.

### **Technical Assistance Consultations**

Four technical assistance consultations were conducted as part of the pilot project. Each TA included the following steps:

1. potential recipients were identified through self-nomination by nonprofits after attending one of Prof. Lipscomb's workshops, or nomination by VNR ED Dr. Tom Backer
2. each TA recipient was offered a half day consultation, done by phone or Zoom after initial conversation with Prof. Lipscomb to define needs, and focused on staff or Board training and policy development
3. a key contact person (the nonprofit's ED) was identified for each of the four nonprofits
4. TA was offered November 2020-January 2021 (entirely paid for as part of Professor Lipscomb's consulting contract with VNR).

The four nonprofits receiving the TA were:

AWOKE

Child Development Institute

Strength United

YMCA Burbank

Due to it being near the end of the year (plus complications resulting from the pandemic) it was difficult for two of the nonprofits to get a training scheduled, despite wanting to do so. The other two did receive trainings for staff (and for one Board members were included as well). All four received policy consultation and planning (including planning for possible future training).

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Professor Lipscomb summarized his four TA interventions as follows:

### *AWOKE*

Met with ED to discuss unique needs of organization and what anti-racist practices could look like based on their mission and population served (Board training was identified as a future need). Did a two-hour training for Board and staff Sunday 1/17/21.

### *Child Development Institute*

Met with leadership team and provided two anti-racist trainings (two hours each) for supervisors and direct service staff.

### *Strength United*

Met with ED to discuss ways to implement anti-racist practices and provided tools to guide next steps in developing an anti-racist vision for organization.

### *YMCA Burbank*

Met with leadership team to discuss needs and plans regarding anti-racist practices and trainings. Provided information to consider and discuss with their Board regarding anti-racism work. They are interested a training later in 2021 on anti-racism.

## **Evaluation Data**

Post-workshop evaluation surveys were administered for each of the three workshops. Averaging the three sets of survey responses together, 100% of participants reported they definitely or for the most part got what they wanted from these events. All 100% rated Professor Lipscomb's presentation as excellent or good, as they did the workshop's content, including handout materials.

The four main topics participants in the 10/20/20 Roundtable discussed were:

1. Antiracist practices currently being conducted at their nonprofit

About 75% of organizations present for this Roundtable have made some movement already towards anti-racist practices.

2. Challenges specific to Board members not representing the population being served

Participants indicated that a particular challenge to diversifying their Board of Directors was the difficult time they had getting buy in from their various stakeholders on how to accomplish this goal.

3. Forming a committee to ensure accountability on anti-racism

Professor Lipscomb suggested forming a AJEDI Committee, which serves to represent the organization in its inclusion efforts. A JEDI Committee is comprised of both staff and consumers (i.e., former clients/patients) who make up a diverse group; it seeks to hold the organization

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accountable as it relates to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) efforts, policies, and practices.

#### 4. Barriers their organizations face when implementing DEI/anti-racist efforts

Barriers to implementation participants discussed centered on convincing leadership to move in the direction of anti-racist practices for the long haul. Some past efforts by these organizations were not sustained due to losing momentum over time.

In addition, write-in comments included:

*The discussion for this Roundtable was very insightful to what everyone is struggling with now, and the resources available. I feel if there were more folks involved it could've added more perspectives. We are currently at a pivotal point to be more innovative with our solutions as the world has changed and doing things differently is necessary. Going back is not an option. Conversations like these that build new ideas are important, and I would love for the conversation to include new types of funding opportunities out there to address the emotional aspect of how this is all affecting us. How can we create more uplifting projects and programs that engages the community not just virtually but out in the world, connecting to places and people from all areas? It was a great conversation and would love to see it continue.*

*Maybe make this a seminar series that has a training and development trajectory to it...this is hard work which workshops like yesterday's can contextualize, but supportive spaces for folks to securely engineer their own self transformation process among supportive others is stronger. Something that unfolds over 6-9 months would likely achieve the "dosage" and frequency that would support self-transformation.*

*I think this is a good beginning, but more is needed. We need tools to approach change in our Boards. How to best educate someone at the time of a racial innuendo or comment.*

*Moving a JEDI initiative forward will take more than one training. An ongoing JEDI support group might be really helpful.*

*4-item TA evaluation survey was constructed and emailed to the ED of each of the four participating organizations, after which VNR Project Coordinator Ashley Wright scheduled telephone interviews with each (several of the interviewees provided input by email instead). The responses are attached, showing generally a highly favorable rating of the TA provided.*

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### **Next Steps**

This pilot project has been successful in demonstrating the potential for relatively low-cost interventions (free workshops, targeted technical assistance) to have significant impact on the anti-racism practices of San Fernando Valley nonprofits - when conducted by an appropriate expert in this field. VNR intends to continue and expand these efforts, in partnership with Professor Lipscomb. Further educational workshops and expanded technical assistance opportunities are being planned, along with the development of guidelines and materials which can be posted on the VNR website for all to use. Additional funding support will be needed for these activities to occur.

In the work to follow in 2021-22, findings from Professor Lipscomb's study, *Exploring the Utilization of Anti Racist Practices Within Nonprofit Organizations Serving African American Clients* (February 2021) will contribute to planning. This study sent a 10-item survey to nonprofits providing internships for graduate social work students at CSUN, and also the study was announced through VNR. There were 23 responses, almost all social service agencies and 80% located in the San Fernando Valley. Respondents included both managers and direct service providers. A copy of the full report is available on request.

While most respondents said they had made some sort of effort to address racism, they also see a need to continue discussion and action focused on anti-racist work. In addition, most respondents want outside training on this topic. Professor Lipscomb's report concludes with this statement: It is vital that organizations truly know what anti-racism is and is not for anti-racism work focuses on directly opposing racism, discrimination, and prejudice. In addition, antiracism work is something that must be attended to in an ongoing way. On the other hand, antiracism is about action. It is understanding that there are problems of racial injustice and inequities in various systems and must actively work to create a more equitable and inclusive space. It includes taking an unapologetic stance and utilizing interventions that directly call out anti-racist and discriminatory practices, policies and behaviors through advocacy, activism and allyship.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **TA Consultations with Allen Lipscomb - Feedback**

Pierre Ivan Arreola - CEO, AWOKE

1. Overall, what was the impact of the technical assistance provided to your organization by Allen Lipscomb?

Our Technical Assistance session with Dr. Lipscomb was an extremely informative and reaffirming experience. We invited Board members, staff, and interns to participate. Dr. Lipscomb's presentation and facilitated dialogue helped ground us all in a shared understanding of racism, and how to actively embody and promote anti-racism in the work we do.

2. What were the challenges associated with this TA (scheduling, limited resources, etc.)?

Dr. Lipscomb masterfully navigated the challenge of meeting participants where they were at. Participants in the TA session represented diverse backgrounds (including Latinx, Armenian and API) and ranged in their lived experience (including students, nonprofit directors, legal advocates, artists). Dr. Lipscomb's approach was fluid and open to conversation, he sought to illustrate linkages to our work and lived experiences as he shared his knowledge of the subject matter.

3. What do you plan next in development of your organization's antiracism policy and practice?

A youth participant uplifted the need to present the history of Hip Hop culture so as to demonstrate the unity that was and is displayed through this expressive form. Conversations ensued regarding efforts from within the Hip Hop dance community to build a singular racialized narrative of Hip Hop's history. Dr. Lipscomb advised us to use our global platform to collect the stories that make up the authentic fabric of Hip Hop. This effort is a programmatic start, and our Board and staff are committed to exploring further opportunities to integrate anti-racist policies and practices into the organization. One such way that was proposed after the TA at a Directors meeting is to ensure evaluation metrics and methodology are crafted with an anti-racist lens.

4. How might Allen Lipscomb and VNR support those next steps?

Due to our limited organizational resources and capacity, development of an evaluation framework for our organization and programming efforts has been delayed. We intend to find academic/community partners willing and able to assist us in thinking through what an effective evaluation framework would look like for our organization. Further, we desire for this framework to be trauma-informed and centered on anti-racism. With VNR and Dr. Lipscomb's support, we would be given the unique opportunity to work together with our local university to develop a place-based approach to program and organizational evaluation.

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Mary Cutone - CEO, Burbank YMCA

1. Overall, what was the impact of the technical assistance provided to your organization by Allen Lipscomb?

Allen helped give us the terminology and definitions to describe racism so we can continue the conversation and lead us to additional resources for the development of our anti racism strategic plan.

2. What were the challenges associated with this TA (scheduling, limited resources, etc.)

Timing has been difficult as everyone is working with reduced staff, overburdened staff and anxieties related to the pandemic.

3. What do you plan next in development of your organization's antiracism policy and practice?

We are rebooting our Diversity, Inclusion and Global Issues Committee, we passed a board resolution to become an anti-racist, multicultural organization, and we have reengaged with our organization's African American Employee Resource Group for in going support and direction.

4. How might Allen Lipscomb and VNR support those next steps?

We are struggling for a training "map" if you will, for different segments, i.e., young adult staff vs older board members and how we might map out an ongoing training plan. It would be helpful if we could look at a menu of options/curriculum/training in developing our plan. In some ways, we are not sure what we need as we don't know what we don't know.

Joan Maltese - CEO, Child Development Institute

1. Overall, what was the impact of the technical assistance provided to your organization by Allen Lipscomb?

The content and timing of Dr Lipscomb's consultation was exactly what our team (of 90 staff members) needed to round the corner into 2021. Since early last spring with BLM and heightened awareness of pervasive inequities including systematic racial biases and white privilege there has been much interest, concern, and confusion about how to address these issues in open and safe dialogue. We shared this along with specific questions and concerns submitted by our team before each of our 2 zoom meetings with Dr. Lipscomb. He provided a clear, well organized, and very meaningful presentation. We divided our staff into two groups so that we could engage more individuals in the conversation which turned out to me lively and provocative. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with request to continue the dialogue with Dr. Lipscomb if possible. His presentation inspired us to revisit our strategic plan to be more explicit and proactive in our internal and external communication and action.

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2. What were the challenges associated with this TA (scheduling, limited resources, etc.)?

Minimal challenges but with a large staff, we needed 2 presentations, which Dr. Lipscomb accommodated.

3. What do you plan next in development of your organization's antiracism policy and practice?

We are adding an additional goal to our SP to define our commitment and action for proactive communication and advocacy action addressing the vast inequities facing families of color in our community. We will also continue to develop internal learning and sharing around race issues and focus on creating a safe space for our team to be "called in" to awake to unconscious bias and white privilege conditioning.

4. How might Allen Lipscomb and VNR support those next steps?

We would like to have additional in services on action steps to improve our communication and response to systemic biases. We would also like to consult with Dr Lipscomb on our strategic action plan to advocate anti racism in our workplace, community and through social media.

Kim Roth - CEO, Strength United

1. Overall, what was the impact of the technical assistance provided to your organization by Allen Lipscomb?

Assisted in the direction of an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plan the organization is creating.

2. What were the challenges associated with this TA (scheduling, limited resources, etc.)?

None

3. What do you plan next in development of your organization's antiracism policy and practice?

To coordinate with the CSUN campus on finalizing our actions.

4. How might Allen Lipscomb and VNR support those next steps?

Deepening the conversation, taking the original presentation, and perhaps drilling down on some of the topics.