



Stars Response to Racial Injustice

Dear Stars Friends,

This is an extraordinarily difficult time for all of us. Just a couple of weeks ago I was planning on writing a letter to you to share everything we have been doing to support our children and families throughout the more than two months that we have been closed due to the pandemic and to inform you of our plans to reopen on June 29th. But now, confronted with the pain, anger and frustration that I feel as the result of George Floyd's killing, I am compelled to write a very different letter, sharing instead what the Stars response will be to support our children and families as they deal with the trauma and stress they are facing.

Stars was born 50 years ago during the era of the Civil Rights movement and the Great Society. It was a time of hope, and programs like Stars were established as a result of this fight for equity and justice. I am old enough to have marched on Washington to end the Vietnam War and to eliminate racism. The war ended in 1975, but systemic and institutional racism continues to create tremendous disparities in education, housing, employment and health care for Black, brown and immigrant families.

I have watched, as we all have, the protests throughout the country and in our communities, as people of all races and backgrounds have come together to demand change. I have been particularly gladdened to see and hear the youth who are organizing and leading many of these efforts. I truly hope that this will be the beginning of real change. The question I have been grappling with is: How can Stars contribute to this change? What is our role?

In response to another national crisis, 9/11, Stars staff and Board Members came together to develop a "Statement of Values," which includes: "We respect our families' many different cultures, welcoming and celebrating this diversity throughout our programs..." Over the years, we have come back to this "Statement of Values" as we think strategically about the ways we want to grow and to better provide services that meet the changing needs of our children and families, as well as the communities they live in. This is a time to once again to review this Statement with staff and Board, with the goal of strengthening our commitment to being an anti-racist agency that stands for racial equity.

In the immediate future as we plan for Stars reopening:

- We will start to have conversations with our staff about racism and social justice. We will listen to and gather their input and ideas to reach our goal of improving our work and furthering our mission.
- Our Social Workers will reach out to our families and older youth, helping them to deal with their trauma and stress and helping them to access needed resources.
- We will provide additional training to our staff on how to have age-appropriate conversations with our children about race and to continue to help them find their voices and to one day become leaders for change.
- As we reopen, our staff will help our children deal with their complex emotions as a result of both the isolation of the pandemic and the killing of George Floyd with a trauma-informed approach.
- As we reopen, we will even more intentionally focus our curriculum on developing empathy and understanding the importance of social justice and equity, even with our youngest children.
- We will expand our classroom libraries adding books about the history of the struggle for equity, the strength of diversity and all of our roles in creating communities where social justice is the norm.

We are here to be role models, teachers and learners with the children and youth we serve in our programs every day, as we navigate through the complex emotions being stirred up at this time. We are educators in the truest sense, and in Nelson Mandela's words, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world."

Stars stands in solidarity with everyone working for social justice and equity.

Sheri Adlin, Executive Director