

Memorandum

To: All Staff

From: Monica Montalvo-Rams, MS, Program Manager (Meriden) and Racial Justice Workgroup Member

Date: January 31, 2014

Subject: Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup Updates

The morning of January 8th was a morning that many here in the Department have looked forward to for many years. It was a morning that members of the Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup (SRJW) had looked forward to for many months. It was the morning where the discussions, the emotions, the vision and the preliminary goals that were set by the SRJW and the SRJW Subcommittees could be shared with The Senior Administration Team. This was the first major stop of "the train that left the station back in July of 2013".

On January 8th members of the SRJW met with the Senior Administration Team and shared all of the work put forth by the SRJW team since the Department made the commitment to address racial inequities in all areas of our practice. The morning consisted of a fully packed agenda that began with a Welcome, Overview and Welcome to our Ancestors. We were all given the time to sit and reflect and bring forth those individuals that helped shape us to become who we are today. This is also when the members of the SRJW expressed that this important work is not and can not be viewed merely as a new initiative. The work is a shift in culture and in our practices. Our vision is that the Racial Justice discussion becomes embedded in the framework and practice model of the Department. It was noted that staff at all levels needed to feel safe in order to begin having very difficult and at times uncomfortable conversations that challenge our current system of practice. The notion that this is not just a problem for a particular group of individuals but a problem for us all was made clear. We acknowledged past attempts to move forward in the area of racial injustice and we again expressed our commitment to bring the information, discussions, activities and passion back to our specific areas of practice and our Regional DAT/Racial Justice Workgroups.

The morning continued with an activity that was done at one of the early SRJW meetings. ...*"The walk of Privilege"*. It was evident that no matter the number of times this activity is done, it never loses its power and it always offers an opportunity for self reflection and awareness of the lives we had, the lives we live and the lives that those around us also live. Through this candid discussion and reflection, one of the team members mentioned the term "cultural humility". Not having heard this term before I did some research to ensure that I was able to know the difference between this and being culturally competent. Something that caught my attention and found to be fitting to the work we do came from the University of Michigan, School of Social work. *"The concept of "cultural humility" challenges child welfare staff to learn from the diverse people with whom they work, reserve judgment, and bridge the cultural divide between perspectives in order to develop and maintain mutual respect and a collaborative working relationship"*. One of the team leaders, Vannessa Dorantes, put it very simply...*"Cultural Humility + Cultural Competence = Responsiveness"*.

As we moved forward in our agenda the SRJW Subcommittees presented their preliminary goals. The subcommittees are comprised of 1) Disproportionality/Disparate Outcomes in

Practice and Policy, 2) Workforce Development, 3) Purchasing and Procurement, and 4) Community Collaborative. After sharing the goals of each subcommittee we broke up into the respective work groups. The Senior Administration Team was given the chance to join the committee that they felt resonated with them the most and where they believed they could provide assistance with moving the goals forward. As you looked around the room you were able to feel the excitement from the SRJW members as the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners', Regional Administrators, and Agency Directors all found their way into each of the respective groups. The goals that were just thoughts and wishes at the onset of this meeting were one step closer to becoming reality...outcomes, barriers, and action steps were all being brought to light in hopes of moving things forward.

A meeting such as the one that occurred on January 8th, 2014 with individuals from Central Office, different disciplines, Area Offices, Facilities, and different walks of life was a great start to the hard work and hard discussions that is yet to come. While SRJW and the Senior Administration team understand that there is still a lot of work to be done the commitment from all is present.