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July 9, 2020

Being Anti-Racist: A Commitment to Action

Dear CFL Patrons, Friends, and Community:

In the last several weeks, the uprisings across the country calling for an end to anti-Black racism have marked an inflection point in many communities, including our own. Instead of simply responding to this moment with a statement of recognition, we have chosen to share with you a statement of commitment to action. We believe that actions speak louder than words, and it is through action that we will make real change. **It is through action that we show our enduring belief that Black Lives Matter.**

We are deeply disturbed with the constant violence Black people experience as a result of systemic racism. We value the fundamental humanity of every Black person. We celebrate the cultural and intellectual richness and spectacular diversity in Black communities. UIC CFL was founded over 25 years ago to dismantle inequities that exist for Black and Brown people in Chicago. CFL's humble beginnings started by providing adult education workshops in partnership with public housing residents at their local library. Collectively, CFL grew in recognizing the power of partnership and what is possible when we stand in community. Today, CFL continues to partner with community members in fostering rich multigenerational educational experiences and professional support to communities that have been systematically under-resourced. CFL acknowledges the Black and Brown employees, also Chicago community members, who experience racial injustices everyday and recognizes the ways in which they mindfully integrate equitable practices in their work.

Yet, like organizations across our society, we recognize that we exist in a system steeped in a history of white supremacy. The violence and injustice against Black people is not new, rather, it has been amplified in this moment. This moment in our nation is yet another powerful addition to hundreds of years of Black-led escapes, rebellions, sit-ins, strikes, marches, legal battles, teach-ins, and other courageous acts of liberation. With this in mind, we at CFL write this letter to reassert our commitment to being part of the movement to end systemic, institutional, and interpersonal racism through our work.



It's taken 500 years for us to come to this point in our society. Unlearning and dismantling white supremacy is a continual and lifelong process. We believe that this can only happen when we thread anti-racist practices throughout everything we do, all the time. In the past three weeks, we have had serious conversations with each other to explore how we can live out our values and grow in ways that help us to achieve a more just society. Through these conversations, we have learned that we have work to do both internally and externally. We write this letter to let you know that we commit to this work, and to hold ourselves accountable to it.

Below are the actions and commitments that we are taking at CFL to intentionally center anti-racist work throughout our organization:

#### Leadership Team:

- Participate in a series of facilitated meetings to develop shared language and communication protocols, particularly in regards to anti-racist work, so as to more efficiently and explicitly address racism in and through our work.
- Commit to develop Standard Operating Procedures across departments so as to ensure equity and fairness for our staff.
- Make time in our meetings (and additional meetings if necessary) to build community by getting to know each other's complex backgrounds and histories.
- Support and encourage each other to develop public programming that is explicitly anti-racist and provides education and strategies to fight racism.

#### Administrative Team:

- Commit to host a Speaker Exchange series that focuses on dismantling systemic racism and invites Black scholars and community members as primary speakers.
- Support the integration of our work to be more anti-racist into our strategic planning and evaluation measures so as to embed this work in our DNA and create real accountability structures.
- Related to this, develop our budget in a transparent way and in accordance with our organizational goals, so as to ensure that we put our money where our mouth is.
- In our website, social media, and newsletter, seek to share more educational resources that promote anti-racist work and encourage community engagement.
- Prioritize purchasing from Black-owned, community-based businesses.



#### Social Service Department:

SSD ensures that we meet patrons/students where they are. We provide services in their first language. We are mindful of their diverse learning experiences and integrate various ways to understand and apply information that meets their learning styles. SSD designs curriculum specifically for the communities we serve. This design process includes ensuring community members are at the decision-making table. SSD current structures and practices to eliminating the impact of racial injustice include:

- Bringing into our learning spaces, speakers, community organizations, and experts that reflect our whole community
- Being mindful of how we provide our services. We understand the efficacy of using strengths-based approach and practices. This includes acknowledging the assets, talents and strengths of our patrons/students.
- Staying abreast of professional development opportunities to ensure that we approach the work in transformational cultural competent ways.
- Regularly engaging in reflective practices to ensure that we are constantly improving and listening to feedback.

#### SSD commits to, moving forward:

- To being fully-staffed to ensure all patrons/students can get what they need
- This includes having a Spanish-speaking professional learning specialist for our Family Engagement Professional Learning Network and ensuring that our adult sites have a case manager and transition specialist.
- Looking for funding opportunities to find emergency support for patrons, including: emergency food resources, clothing for job interviews, transportation support, scholarships for education or professional development and personal family resources.

#### FAST - Adult Education and Career Transitions:

##### FAST West & South are committed to:

- Giving students access to computers and hotspots to pursue their educational, job, and family goals,
- Collecting and distributing resources in the community,
- Provide supportive space for our Black and POC (people of color) community members to share their insight, needs, and have access to a supportive educational environment
- Highlighting Black scholars and their achievements by integrating this work throughout our coursework.



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#### FAST - Bilingual Literacy:

- Educate ourselves on anti-Blackness and the impact of colonialism on our communities through regular reflective practice.
- Seek and compensate underrepresented community experts on content, materials and methods in integrating racial justice into our curriculum and program.
- Strengthen community partnerships and collaborations across adult education sites on the South and West sides of the city to participate, advocate, and contribute to change.
- Gather and develop culturally-relevant curriculum centering Afro-Latinx/ Black voices.

#### RCADD:

- Identify local and nationwide Black-owned businesses with whom we can create an ongoing purchasing relationship specific to the centers lending library checkout items.
- Continue to design customizable and culturally sustaining curricula and materials.
- Commit to working with Black-owned and run autism service providers, professionals and families to ensure the Black ASD community has a stake in the development of all of the above products and services. Collaborative service providers may include: Chicagoland Autism Connection (CAC) and The Answer Inc.
- Create visual support curricula that address the rich history and experiences of Black people, including, but not limited to: African tradition and history (including African diaspora), Black influence on music and art, Black excellence, overt & institutional racism, civil unrest & protesting, police interaction protocols & civil rights under the law.
- Conduct advocacy from the position that special education rights are in fact a civil rights issue.

#### Research & Evaluation:

- Be more cognizant and diligent about the use of anti-racist language in the development of evaluative questions. This will allow the CFL Research & Evaluation Department to shift the focus from what's "wrong" with the individual, to what's wrong with societal factors and/or policies that affect/impact the individual. Through this change, we hope to be able to recognize and change covert, and overt, racist policies and practices that directly, and indirectly, affect the communities that we serve.



- In recognition that research has been used to do harm in the Black community we aim to repair and heal this trauma through concrete action steps, which include:
  - **Prioritize community-driven research partnerships.** We will let the community lead the way in deciding what we research and how the research should be done. That we will rely on the community to tell us what the issues, questions, problems, or topics of interest are and help us identify appropriate ways of conducting the research. Partnerships will be developed in intentional and culturally competent ways that ensure a level of self-awareness and awareness of others. We will invite the community to engage in this work along with us as co-researchers.
  - **Be transparent in communicating the process and product of research.** We will allow all stakeholders in the community to see, share, and understand totally the process of our research and the results. We will be upfront with what we are doing and how we are coming to the conclusions of our research, plus who it will benefit.
  - **Use our research to advocate for long-term local and national community development.** Our research will be action-oriented and will be used to make a difference in the communities we serve. We will communicate that research to advocates and decision makers. We will collaborate with other communities doing this work with the knowledge that large-scale change only happens if we work together.

#### Community Engagement

- Increase our collaboration with community-based organizations in order to bring opportunities for career growth and job training to Black communities
- Increase internal program design such as trainings and workshops that will highlight and support conversations around racial equity
- Create an internal pipeline from student to national service member so that individuals participating in the Adult Education program can continue developing career skills and increase success towards transitions into higher education through the CFL's AmeriCorps program



We commit to these actions as a next step to our growth. We know we always have room to grow, and we invite you, our community members and patrons, to join us in a community conversation on thinking together about how we can work to dismantle systemic racism through CFL's work with special guest facilitator, Ms. Stephanie Ghoston Paul. Date and invitation for this event to follow soon.

In Solidarity,  
The CFL Leadership Team:  
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