The JCC of Central NJ

The Inward and Outward Shift of an Agency

The JCC of Central NJ is a 503c community non-profit organization, open to everyone, whose mission is to, “Educate, enrich and empower our community- from generation to generation.” We offer programs and services to infants through senior citizens and extend a wholehearted welcome to community participants. Our agency makes purposeful efforts to provide accommodations for individuals with disabilities, provides financial assistance to break down monetary barriers and offers programming that provide educational, advance educational and allyship opportunities to reduce intolerance and promote civic engagement.

What were the objective and the goals of the project/endeavor? How do they reflect the mission of the Council?

This year, The JCC committed to actively address and support diversity, equity and inclusion as an agency from the ground up, ultimately creating a community of doers and upstanders. Our Mission, Vision, Values, Strategic Plan and website were recently revised to capture our inclusive mindset that drives all of our internal and outward-facing efforts as a community organization. Parallel to the mission of the Council, our mission is firmly rooted in principles of acceptance, inclusion and creating a sense of belonging for staff, lay leaders, members and the community at large through education and allyship opportunities.

Agency goals (September-present):

1. Form a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) task force composed of senior management, staff, lay leaders from our Board and JCC members to identify agency and community needs
2. Foster synergistic community partnerships and provide educational and allyship opportunities to our staff, board, membership and the community at large
3. Provide a series of mandatory professional development opportunities to our staff on various topics related to diversity, equity and inclusion (implemented by Sarah Coykendall from the Kean University Diversity Council on Global Education and Citizenship)
4. Identify gaps in our own agency around diversity, equity and inclusion and implement department-specific initiatives to close these gaps

Describe in detail your plan. What successes and challenges did you face in implementing your plan?

The agency created a DEI task force in September that met monthly to complete an internal audit of our diversity and inclusion practices, structure staff education and training, explore synergistic community partnerships including the Kean University Diversity Council on Global Education and Citizenship, and eventually implement an agency-wide DEI Department Challenge to make REAL CHANGE in our agency and the wider community we serve. These action points began in September 2020.
Through an internal audit completed by our Executive Director, the newly hired Director of Inclusion and Diversity and Human Resources Manager, we immediately identified gaps in education and programming that reduce intolerance by highlighting diverse populations and offer educational and allyship opportunities. The identification of these internal gaps immediately prompted us to partner with other community agencies focused on social justice education and community programming. In September, we became members of the Diversity Council on Global Education and Citizenship and enlisted staff training from Sarah Coykendall for our agency. Sarah expertly delivered our staff of 250+ employees a series of 3 training sessions on anti-racism, disability history and the LGBTQ+ experience, delivered at 2 different times during the day and via recorded webinar to ensure that all staff had the opportunity to participate at their convenience. The below pre and post data from our staff training documents significant growth as an agency related to our efforts around diversity, equity and inclusion. These indices were shared with executive staff and our governing board.

As the result of open discussion and staff training, we began to plan and offer community events supporting diversity and inclusion. Listed are some examples of resources and programming that our agency has provided highlighting diversity, inclusion and social justice which were free of charge and open to the public since September 2020.

- Racial Equity 18 Day Challenge in partnership with the Community Relations Committee of Greater MetroWest NJ
- MLK Day of Service in partnership with the Scotch Plains – Fanwood Ministerium- Collected over 1000 cans of soup for local food pantries in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. and his life work
- Discussion panel on “How to Talk to Your Kids About Race”
• 3-part film series highlighting the Black-Jewish Partnership for Social Justice • Discussion with film subject Tamar Manasseh and director Brad Rothchild
• Webinar: Shared Legacies: The African-American Jewish Civil Rights Alliance • Conversation with Social Justice Matters- Rabbi Joel Abraham and Leland McGee • Featured webinar from the Kean University Holocaust Resource Center on “From Segregation to Liberation: African American Soldiers and the Holocaust”
• Curated anti-racism book lists by age from the Scotch Plains library and Be’Chol Lashon • From Moses to Marlee: Celebrating Jews with Disabilities and Diverse Identities through Conversation, Creativity and Music
• Community Inclusion Shabbat Service
• JCC Association of North America Webinar entitled A Culture of Belonging: At the JCC, At Camp and At Home
• Enhancements and expansion of inclusion and dedicated adaptive programming for individuals with disabilities
• Published our first ever Special Needs Resource Directory
• Youth training on being an inclusive ally to peers
• Discussion panels of female authored books
• Events and resources available to support people with Autism and their families • Upcoming events and resources to celebrate Pride Month planned for June! • Check out all of our programming and resources supporting inclusion and diversity at www.jccnj.org

Following our successful series of staff trainings, the Director of Inclusion and Diversity extended an agency-wide DEI Department Challenge in January to turn knowledge into ACTION! This initiative prompted each department to complete the following tasks through an internal program or initiative:

1. Identify departmental areas of need in diversity, equity and inclusion
2. Create opportunities for change
3. Expand diversity and/or increase equity
4. Lead inclusively

The DEI Department Challenge runs from January through June 2021, so our agency is currently immersed in this work. At the end of the challenge, we plan to share outcomes with staff and our governing board. Below is a list of each initiative that our departments are implementing that support some aspect of diversity, equity or inclusion.

• Early Childhood- Diversifying our early childhood library and classroom materials to reflect various races, genders and abilities and engage in child-led discussion (ex: diversify book lending library, puppets with different abilities, selection of skin toned crayons, etc.)

• Camp Yachad (our summer camp)- creating opportunities for teens with disabilities to engage with their typically developing peers in the social and vocational environment of summer camp • All Day with the J and After Care- Project entitled, “How to Change the World” where children learn about different cultures and make connection to themselves including African-American and female activists. Children then created a mobile exhibit bulletin board, shared with the JCC Community, on how they can leave their handprints on the world through embracing diversity and each other

• Adult Enrichment- Senior program will be offering closed captioning services for virtual programs to better support the changing needs of our senior population aging in place • Arts and Culture-
Planning out resources and activities for Pride Month in June in collaboration with other community agencies and groups

- Aquatics- Creating opportunities for students with disabilities to complete training to become a lifeguard when provided with extra supports and accommodations
- Fitness and Wellness- Created adaptive fitness and yoga classes for youth so they can more fully participate in recreational fitness and wellness to the best of their ability
- Membership- Expanding financial assistance to cover more cohorts so they can equitably access our membership and fee-for-service programs
- Operations- Highlighting their diverse, and oftentimes overlooked workforce through a ‘getting to know you’ staff activity

Our successes have been measurable this year around diversity and inclusion. We have provided our staff with ongoing education and a safe place to explore challenges, offered numerous educational and allyship opportunities to our members and the community at large through well attended programs and events and created meaningful and lasting partnerships with symbiotic community organizations. Our view of community is inclusive of our staff and lay leaders, our membership and the community at large who contribute to our evolving agency profile. Most importantly, we have taken our knowledge and turned it into real action which has resulted in a complete culture shift for our agency.

Our greatest challenge was implementing staff training and making it accessible to everyone. We employ a large staff, many of whom are hourly or seasonal contractors (ex: teach a single fitness class once a week or are employed as summer camp counselors). By offering a daytime and evening webinar as well as a recorded webinar, we were able to provide professional development to all staff at their convenience through the power of virtual meetings. We also provided closed captioning services to anyone who needed the accommodation to support their participation.

How did you succeed in creating a culture of upstanders in your school? (agency)

We are so incredibly proud of our tremendous learning curve and trajectory this year that has propelled us forward to make such a positive and widespread impact on our community. Our success is driven by a deeply rooted communal willingness, from staff to board, to dig deep into our agency’s guiding mission, honestly identifying gaps and then taking purposeful steps to close those gaps with dedication and determination through ongoing community partnership, staff education and innovative programming with an eye towards social justice. Guided by our Executive Director and Director of Inclusion and Diversity, our staff has wholeheartedly leaned into this learning process with enthusiasm and an open mind and embraced the values of our shared missions, resulting in an agency-wide culture shift of inclusion and belonging both internally and outwardly with the community we serve.