

TRANSITIONS-MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

INTERNAL DIVERSITY
AND EQUITY AUDIT
REPORT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transitions-Mental Health Association (TMHA) seeks to enhance its diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in order to create an environment where all staff feel valued and included, as they serve the diverse needs of their clients. The agency seeks to attract diversity in its staff and create an inclusive environment where all employees feel supported and are thus, able to perform to their highest potential.

In order to evaluate and address areas where change is needed, TMHA hired a consultant with expertise in DEI, organizational change, and strategic planning. A Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee representing a cross-section of staff throughout the agency was formed. The DEI Committee reviewed the results of an Internal Diversity and Equity Audit that included 55 questions in five (5) key areas – Recruitment, Retention, Workplace Climate, Agency Operations, and Leadership.

Based on the audit results, the DEI Committee developed a set of recommendations on policies, programs, and practices through which the agency can support the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The recommendations were vetted by 15 focus groups, which were open to all employees. Participants in the focus groups reviewed the DEI Committee's recommendations, as well as proposed additional actions. From the numerous recommendations, suggestions, ideas, and feedback, the following themes emerged: (1) Recruit and hire more diverse applicants, (2) Build trust with senior leadership, (3) Create a more welcoming and inclusive environment, (4) Increase staff support, especially in Santa Barbara County, (5) Increase accessibility of services, especially offering more Spanish language services.

Emergent Themes:

1. Recruit and hire more diverse applicants
2. Build trust with senior leadership
3. Create a more welcoming and inclusive environment
4. Increase staff support, especially in Santa Barbara County
5. Increase accessibility of services, especially offering more Spanish language services

While this report outlines recommended action items, further efforts are needed to become a diverse and thriving organization where everyone feels valued and a sense of belonging. The first step is to develop an action plan that prioritizes and assigns these action items with measurable outcomes, timelines, and resources. Second, a DEI survey should be conducted to collect baseline data, gather demographic information, and identify opportunities for growth. Finally, the agency needs to continue existing efforts and ensure sustainability.

BACKGROUND

The TMHA DEI Steering Committee was formed in January 2021, solidified in response to events happening at the U.S. Capitol. The DEI Steering Committee plays an important role in the agency's overall commitment to fighting all forms of discrimination, removing barriers, and creating an environment of mental wellness and safety. The committee meets twice a month and includes representatives from all levels and geographic locations in the agency.

Based on the internal diversity and equity audit, the DEI committee developed a list of recommendations to make the agency more welcoming and inclusive. In September 2021, DEI Steering Committee members facilitated 15 focus groups across the agency to ask for feedback on the list of recommendations and asked for additional input. The following themes emerged from the focus group recommendations.

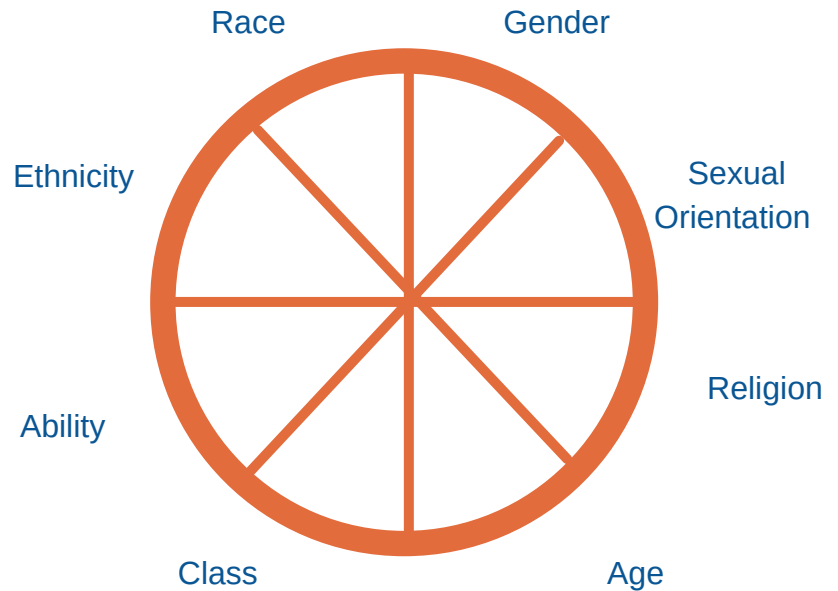
Since January 2021, the DEI Steering Committee has made significant progress in elevating diversity and inclusion in many facets of the agency, including:

- Reviewed the results of the internal diversity and equity audit*
- Developed a diversity statement*
- Published a diversity website*
- Created a process for raising awareness through agency-wide statements*
- Facilitated DEI activities for all staff, including all staff meeting*
- Implemented DEI trainings*
- Put into practice a monthly DEI article in newsletter*

DEFINING OUR WORK

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Transitions – Mental Health Association is committed to advancing social justice work that is intersectional in addition to acknowledging and appreciating diversity in order to embody a more inclusive organization. We strive to understand the negative effects of systemic injustice on marginalized populations. TMHA is dedicated to fighting against all forms of discrimination, removing barriers, and creating an environment of mental wellness and safety.



Social Identity Wheel

The Social Identity Wheel demonstrates the various identities that individuals can hold. It also highlights that one's identities may differ from others in the workplace, and it shows where individuals may or may not have privilege.

TERMS

Building a shared vocabulary has been an important aspect of working collectively towards common DEI goals. These terms and definitions have been used throughout the organization's DEI trainings.

Diversity

The unique differences among individuals in a group based on which we may be treated differently in society.

Equity

Approach that ensures everyone is given equal opportunity; this means that resources may be divided and shared unequally to make sure that each person can access an opportunity.

Inclusion

Embracing, leveraging, and celebrating the strengths of our diversity and ensuring everyone feels welcomed and valued for who they are. Diversity is what we are, and inclusion is what we do.

Implicit Bias

Unconscious biases held towards others or associated with stereotypes.

Systemic Racism

Also known as institutional racism, it is a form of racism that is embedded in every social institution, including schools, workplaces, churches, and the justice system. Evidence includes the distribution of wealth, employment rates, education, housing, and health statistics.

METHODOLOGY

Acknowledging that systemic barriers to DEI may be embedded within policies, practices, and programs, the primary method used to assess TMHA's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts was the Internal Diversity and Equity Audit (IDEA). The purpose of the audit was to identify policies, programs, and practices that support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organization, as well as areas for improvement.

The TMHA Admin Team responded to the audit questions, and the responses were reviewed by the DEI Committee. Based on the results of the audit, the DEI Committee developed a set of potential actions for the organization. The recommended actions were shared in focus groups that took place September 2021.

Participants in the focus groups reviewed the DEI Committee's recommendations, as well as proposed additional actions.

The following examples demonstrate the types of questions in each section of the audit.

Recruitment

- How does the agency attract a diverse applicant pool?
- Is cultural competence a required qualification for all jobs?
- Do applicants submit a diversity statement?

Retention

- How does the agency ensure that projects and assignments are allocated equitably?
- Does the agency have a mentorship program?
- How is DEI incorporated in the onboarding practice?

Workplace Climate

- Does your agency conduct regular climate surveys?
- What opportunities does your agency have for employees to participate in discussions about race, privilege, and implicit bias?
- How are complaints handled?

Agency Operations

- Is diversity, equity, and inclusion part of your mission statement?
- How is diversity, equity, and inclusion reflected in your marketing materials?

Leadership

- To what degree does the leadership of your agency represent the diversity of the community being served?

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 RECRUIT AND HIRE MORE DIVERSE APPLICANTS

“If we want to diversify TMHA, we need to advertise to a variety of markets and take chances on people who are ‘different.’”

A diverse applicant pool is critical in order for the agency to reflect the clients who are being served and increase the overall diversity of the agency. In order to attract a diverse applicant pool, it's necessary to increase and broaden advertising, accept and request referrals from diverse community-based organizations, and target outreach. When diverse candidates apply for positions, the interview and selection process need to be standardized and objective. Additional steps are also needed to demonstrate the agency's commitment to diversity, such as including a diversity statement on the website, updating agency materials to reflect the emphasis on diversity, and establishing minimum qualifications for applicants to demonstrate cultural humility.

Recommendations:

1. Utilize more remote opportunities when possible, Zoom options may allow us to recruit from more diverse groups
2. Utilize Spanish speaking radio stations to post for jobs
3. Translate job descriptions into Spanish
4. Increase required bilingual positions
5. Participate in job fairs in both counties, including Allan Hancock, Cuesta, and Cal Poly
6. Present about TMHA at Allan Hancock, Cuesta, and Cal Poly clubs
7. Recruit from stakeholder meetings and programs, i.e. Hope House
8. Provide interview training, with standardized scoring
9. Consistently use cultural humility questions, develop a list that can be used by committees
10. Assign a hiring committee member trained in DEI to every recruitment

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

#2 BUILD TRUST WITH SENIOR LEADERSHIP

“We want more transparency with upper management.”

During the focus groups and committee discussions, concerns were raised regarding the Board’s commitment to DEI, their high expectations of the programs, and lack of support. These comments demonstrate an opportunity to build trust between the Board and staff. In addition, many of the concerns raised regarding the Board can and should be addressed at the senior leadership level. This presents an opportunity to clarify the Board’s role and the need for more Board education. More trust is needed at all levels of leadership.

Recommendations:

- 1. Share outcome of pay audit
- 2. Include program managers in contract negotiations/feedback
- 3. Allow program managers opportunity to negotiate salaries for staff retention
- 4. Increase participation in mandatory trainings (i.e. ProAct) among Directors/Admin
- 5. Increase DEI trainings for leaders, include training on undocumented, seniors, and veterans
- 6. More active engagement by Directors, “go first, do research, put up tents,” not just “show up”
- 7. Include DEI questions in board member interviews
- 8. Add board members who have lived experience, i.e. navigated public mental health services in either SLO or SB county
- 9. Provide DEI training for board

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

#3 CREATE A MORE WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

“Our pictures do not represent the people we serve.”

A welcoming and inclusive environment allows staff and clients to feel valued and a sense of belonging. It also demonstrates the agencies commitment to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. Several areas for improvement emerged during DEI committee discussions and focus groups, including interpersonal relationships, printed materials, and physical space.

Recommendations:

1. Know people’s names, provide TMHA badges (including pronouns)
2. Include staff highlights/interviews in the newsletter
3. Encourage use of pronouns
4. Include option to list preferred name and pronouns on application
5. Add a photo directory on the T Drive
6. Create an employee development position to proactively build relationships across the agency
7. Improve Lunch & Learn – offer Zoom options, give advanced notice, be more flexible with timing
8. Expand Collaborative Conversations - add to diversity website, new employee training, and ongoing professional development
9. Offer implicit bias training
10. Send an agency-wide email when there is free/available stuff at the main office.
11. Include representative photos in brochures
12. Create a TMHA decal that identifies offices as BIPOC/LGBTQ+ safe spaces
13. Add heritage art to physical spaces
14. Ensure all workspaces are accessible, including Hotline

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

#4 INCREASE STAFF SUPPORT, ESPECIALLY IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

“We are always feeling like we are sandwiched between Santa Barbara County and TMHA SLO but not ever belonging.”

When DEI Committee members checked in to the bi-weekly meetings, they often described themselves as “frazzled,” “tired,” “worried,” and “overwhelmed.” Many committee members described the multiple hats they wear in the agency, especially in Santa Barbara County. Many programs have very small teams (1-2 staff), and when they are asked to take on extra tasks there are not enough people to pull from. Staff expressed feeling silo-ed in their areas and disconnected from the agency. Retention and upward mobility also emerged as concerns.

Recommendations:

1. Provide additional support for outreach events and/or provide stipends/overtime
2. Develop succession plans
3. Implement mentorship program
4. Create path to promotion opportunities
5. Consider staff retention bonuses and/or annual salary increases
6. Increase mental health services for staff, consider an onsite therapist rather than utilizing insurance
7. Increase awareness of EAP, and improve EAP process (difficult to get an appointment)
8. Provide agency-sponsored opportunities to debrief traumatic incidents
9. Improve exit interview process, ensure that feedback is shared with supervisors
10. Organize activities outside of work to foster community among staff
11. Improve communication/education on the “compliance line” – how to report, encourage reporting, what happens next
12. Adopt a workstyle assessment to help managers understand how staff want to receive feedback

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

#5 INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES, ESPECIALLY OFFERING MORE SPANISH LANGUAGE SERVICES

“Our monolingual clients need therapy too.”

Transitions-Mental Health Association serves a diverse client population. During DEI committee discussions and focus groups, staff shared that their vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion included Spanish speaking groups at Wellness Centers, more outreach to Spanish-speaking communities, and more Spanish language services. Many action items were proposed to increase accessibility of services.

Recommendations:

1. Standardize agency protocol for bilingual competency testing
2. Offer more monolingual therapy for Spanish speakers
3. Provide Spanish speaking staff at the front desk
4. Print all documents in Spanish
5. Compensate staff for translating documents
6. Ensure quality control regarding translating documents
7. Pay a bilingual differential for any bilingual speaker
8. Offer resources for staff to learn different languages (Spanish, sign language)

NEXT STEPS

A cultural shift is needed to transition the agency into a diverse and thriving organization where everyone feels valued and a sense of belonging.

The information provided in this report is a culmination of significant effort contributed at all levels of the agency. Over a dozen focus groups engaged staff across the agency. And the DEI Committee spent over 30 hours compiling and analyzing data, listening, and discussing issues related to DEI. While this report outlines well-supported recommended action items, a cultural shift is needed to transition the agency into a diverse and thriving organization where everyone feels valued and a sense of belonging.

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

The first step is to develop an action plan that prioritizes and assigns these action items with measurable outcomes and timelines. Successful implementation of these action items will require collaboration and resources. The action plan should include input from the executive director, human resources, admin/directors, program managers, and the DEI committee. The action plan should identify immediate actions that can be executed in 1-6 months, as well as long-term goals. If, after further exploration, it is decided that an action item cannot be executed, feedback should be shared with the DEI committee. The action plan should be consistently updated and reviewed.

CONDUCT DEI SURVEY

The agency needs more data to 1) establish a baseline to assess whether changes are making an impact 2) identify gaps and opportunities for growth. A DEI survey should be conducted to collect baseline data, gather information, and identify opportunities for growth. The DEI survey should be regularly administered to compare data year-to-year.

ESTABLISH SUSTAINABILITY

Finally, the agency needs to continue existing efforts and ensure sustainability. The DEI Committee instituted monthly newsletter articles, trainings, and a process for supporting the executive director to share agency-wide statements related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Considerable effort and time have been spent on these initiatives, and the agency should consider creating a DEI position in order to guarantee there are appropriate time, skills, and staffing to advance these efforts. Many organizations are hiring these types of positions to ensure that DEI is at the forefront of an organization's goals and mission.

DEI COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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***No longer serving on the committee**