



Notes

Thursday, June 11, 2020

Welcome and from Response to Regeneration – Jason Purnell

We took a break last week as the nation and the world responded to the killing of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department. Jason sent a statement at that time that he hopes everyone had a chance to read that included observations not just on the current COVID pandemic but how systemic racism led to the disproportionate burden borne by African Americans in St. Louis and across the country.

Jason announced a commitment by the RRT to commit to recovering in an equitable and just manner from C19. However, recovery is an inadequate response. We are shifting from response to regeneration – not a return to the status quo or baseline but a reimagining and renewal of what is possible when we finally address the inequities in our community. This means a shift from the providing of services to working in partnership with the community. We will be guided by principles from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which aims for true and meaningful integration in the most impacted communities, and looks at policy on the local, state, and federal levels. We will need to work together in new ways, having intention and commitment to working in partnership and solidarity **with** communities and not just working on behalf of communities.

For this first meeting after last week's break, Riisa Easley, who has been involved in a number of community efforts and is Chief of Staff at the Regional Health Commission, will open up a conversation with Jason, and then everyone will be invited to join. The RRT will discuss what this moment requires of us with an explicit focus on racial equity as our north star in this work.

Authentic Integration of Community – Riisa Easley, Jason, and RRT members

Riisa and Jason opened the conversation and others joined in. A summary of the comments includes:

- “Nothing about us without us.” We need to reframe our understanding of what a panel of experts looks like. We know that science, research, and data all ground our work, and that executive leadership and funders are needed to sustain that work. We must continue to have frontline staff, the boots on the ground, in the conversations and engaged in leadership with us. They understand the work in a way that is different because they touch it every day.
- We have a tremendous opportunity to approach this moment in a way that allows us to hold ourselves personally and collectively accountable for moving forward with completely transformed systems and processes by including people with lived experiences

at the table. We are required to listen deeply to the lessons from those who are living the things we seek to address.

- There is a spectrum of people understanding and responding to race issues. The good news is, there are existing roadmaps that can guide us to teaching and learning (Forward Through Ferguson resources, for example). Take a look at your own network and see who you know who is doing work in this area instead of going outside and maybe straining the resources of others.
- Working on issues of race is all about building and maintain authentic relationships. There is untapped talent and wisdom and resources in the community, and sometimes we need to just sit and listen. If you are serious about doing the work, that means being serious about going in not knowing and being open to learning from those who do know. Do not go in with a fix-it attitude but with a collaboration attitude, thinking about what resources you have that will support those boots on the ground to do what they need to do, not by creating something new. A lot of times our role is to get out of the way. "If you've come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." - Lilla Watson
- We need to build community, and if this table is that community we should center it around the blueprint for 2039. We can advance it to 2022 because of COVID-19 if we choose to. It is a choice.
- The moment we are in is absolutely exposing our blind spots. The blind spots are now seeing. I have seen amongst my white colleagues a willingness. We are in a metaphoric infancy right now in that this is a critical period where we can impact. We need to identify who has the will.
- How can we connect the RRT members in a virtual way, now that we can't break bread together? We have to be creative. We can't just be tiles on a screen or voices on a phone call. There needs to be trust and true team building that needs to happen before tackling some of these larger issues. RRT members are interested in caucusing both by race and in mixed groups.
- It will be our commitment to each other that will determine if this moves beyond responding to COVID-19 to actually changing the reality on the ground in our region. Who's up for that?
- We can begin by having conversations on how to unpack the toxic nature of information sharing and resource allocation. The inherent nature of the work we do as non-profits, funders, and health care organizations is at its core political. We need to recognize that, call it out and try to fix that.
- It's about philanthropy showing up in a different way. Sometimes there is a power dynamic. Sometimes there are endowed funds that can't be touched. Often it is about relationships, again, and when there isn't an existing relationship the funding won't come as easily (Deborah Patterson). Often it's about changing who is in the foundation and having more people from the community in a decision making role.
- It's important to remember that it's not because black people don't have the skill, it's because they've historically been denied resources and support. In addition to building relationships, we need to ensure that the systems are held accountable.
- Is this a safe place to do this work? Doing this work isn't safe – the truth hurts. This will be about creating not necessarily a safe place, but a courageous place.

Discussion Takeaways:

1. It's all about building trusting relationships.
2. We need to hold the systems accountable.

Communications Update – Kelly Ferrara

Ways to stay engaged and in contact with other RRT members:

- RRT Directory
- The “Get Engaged” tab on the c19rrt.org website, which allows us to drive discussion and conversation (almost like a Facebook group) and can post pictures of work you are doing where people can comment: “Join the Discussion” and “Share Your Ideas” tabs.

There are also racial equity resources available as one large PDF under the resources tab on the website.

Adjourn

There were 65 people on the call at 3:50; 45 people still remained at 4:10.