

July 13, 2020

The Grand Rapids Red Project has always believed, and *will* always believe, that BLACK LIVES MATTER. The main issues we address – HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, Overdose, and Substance Use – have been used to oppress the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

We have been a fixture in these communities for 22 years, and we realize there is more work to do. We are committed to raising and centering the voices, bodies, minds, and spirits of the people disproportionately impacted by the health issues we address. We are committed to putting power into the hands of those most marginalized; to dismantling the Drug War; to growth and change; and always, to Black Lives.

The Red Project is committed to building a staff that is inclusive of the diversity of the impact of the health issues we address to foster equity. We are committed to providing transparency with regard to current diversity metrics, and where improvement is needed.

As of our last staff/board roster in March 2020, our staff, leadership team, and board of directors identify as follows:

Staff is:	Staff Leadership is:	Board of Directors are:
17% Black	20% Black	71% White
62% White	40% White	14% Hispanic or Latinx
13% Hispanic or Latinx	20% Hispanic	14% Other
4% First Nations or Indigenous	20% Bi-racial, Black/White	
4% Asian		
58% cis male	60% male	14% male
29% cis female	40% female	86% female
13% non-binary		

We also seek to put people with personal experience of the issues we address in positions of power within the agency. We firmly believe in the concept of “Nothing about us without us” and will continue recruitment efforts in communities disproportionately impacted by the health issues we address.

We recognize that we have additional work to do. In particular, we would like to see the communities that are marginalized and experience disproportionate harm from both the drug war and HIV/AIDS overrepresented on our staff. This includes both the First Nations/Indigenous communities, and Black communities.

In 2017 Red Project adopted a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan, and developed a DEI Committee. The goals of this plan and committee are:

1. To ensure staffing at Red Project is representative of the health issues we address
2. To ensure we are reaching communities disproportionately impacted by the health issues we address
3. To increase the cultural humility of all staff and board members

From listening to our staff, the need was identified to work with an outside professional contractor to improve our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan and to create steps to meet the goals and stay accountable. In late 2019 our Executive Director secured funding to do so and we are currently in the process of selecting that professional. As we move forward in this work we will communicate action steps, and engage in continual dialog as progress is made and we adjust goals and set new ones.

We recognize additional progress is needed, and we are committed to this process of change.

The Red Project is committed to providing high quality, robust service delivery that reaches those most disproportionately impacted and heavily hit by the health issues we address. We are committed to collaborating with the people we serve and to providing opportunities for engagement beyond service delivery.

As stated before, the Black Community has suffered greatly from the Drug War and HIV/AIDS. These two things are used to further marginalize the community. Red Project is committed to Black Lives through providing access to tools and resources that promote Black Health. Our commitment also involves examining recruitment, retention, and policies that may hinder the Black Community. Red Project has taken the following actions over the course of the past few years, with regard to the reach of our programming:

- Our first Mobile Health Unit site in Grand Rapids was established in a predominately Black community, reaching primarily Black individuals who injected drugs
- We have established our central office location in a predominately Black community, providing drop-in service delivery 40 hours a week
- Our first Mobile Health Unit site in Muskegon County was established in a predominately Black community
- We have expanded our service delivery options, catering to non-injection drug use that exists in the Black community
- We have hosted an event for National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day each year, for the past 4 years.

Due to these efforts we continue to see a greater proportion of Black individuals at our drop-in service sites, as well as an increase in the number of Black Women we serve through our HIV care program. We fully realize there is more work to be done, and we will continue to do it. Some of that work is on the inside of Red Project – by improving our structure and culture, our programming will reflect that growth.

The issues we address at Red Project are highly stigmatized, especially in the Black community because they have been used as a means to oppress that community for so long. We want to work side by side with the Black community to address these issues as well as to advance Black members of staff into leadership positions. We want to create a pipeline to employment and leadership for people served by our programming.

We will go beyond previous efforts.

Sincerely,

The Grand Rapids Red Project Leadership Team and Board of Directors