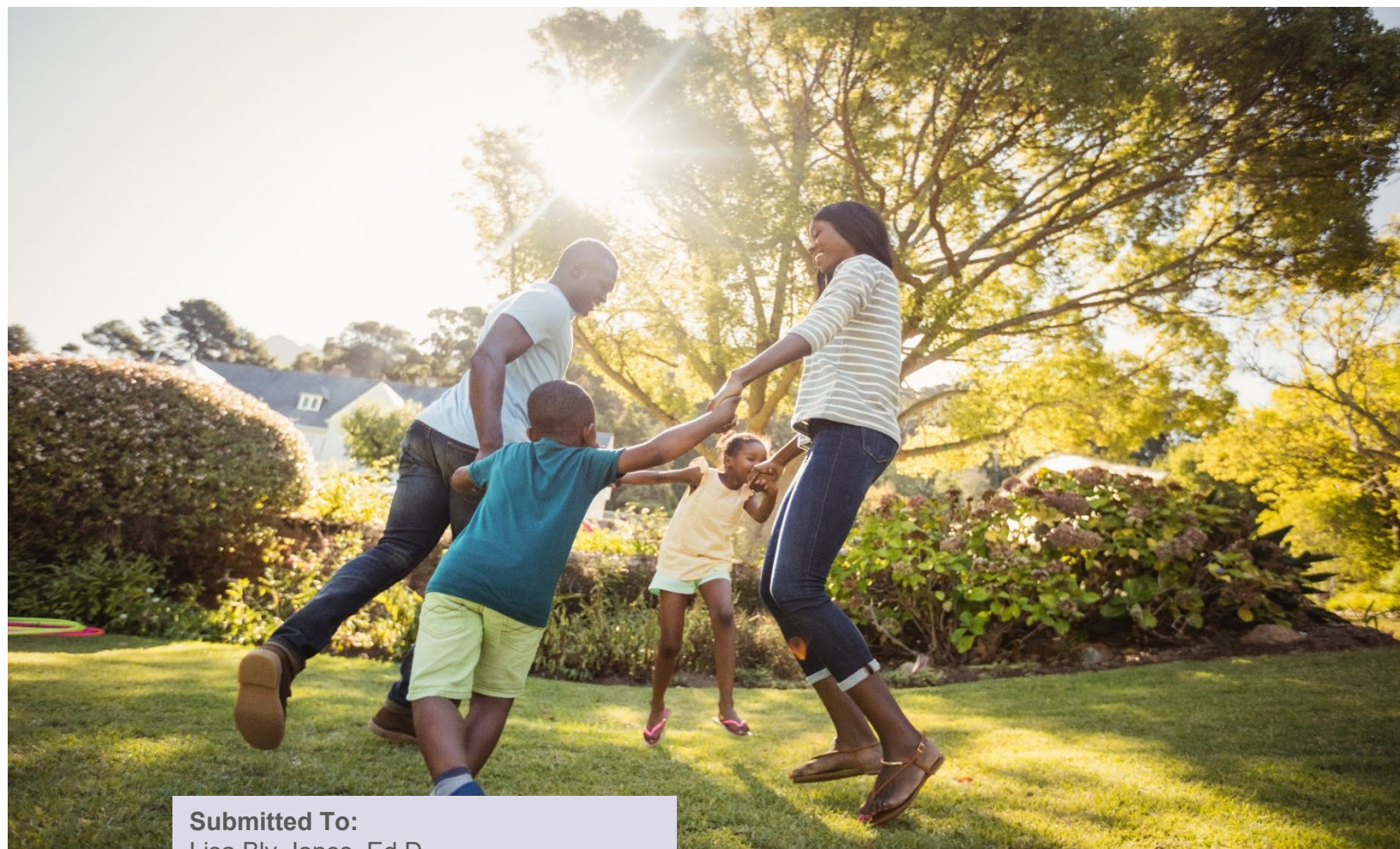


Lessons Learned from Manifestations of Racism in the Workforce Development System and Housing System Workshops

A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY



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1. Explore degree to which equity inclusion principles, as discussed in the Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop were present in the work of Employment Navigators and Housing Case Managers.
2. Delve into the process by which specific equity inclusion principles were shared.
3. Understand the overall perception of the workshop and affiliated messaging from the perspective of the intended audience.

The following report will provide a brief introduction to the legacy of race in Chicago public housing, the origins of the Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop offering, the current study and findings, and future recommendations for continuing to address structure inequalities. We begin with the history of Chicago housing using the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) as a case in point example of the history of discrimination. To be clear, the CHA is just one stakeholder in the larger Chicago Housing Response System that serves as an illustrative example to help understand the context of systemic racism in the Chicago housing system.

CHICAGO HOUSING: A HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION

The Great Depression was the impetus for much of the U.S.'s social safety net. The idea that the government had a role in protecting U.S. citizens from social and economic harm in addition to defending life and property was a new, and offensive, concept to some. However, the advancement of a common social good for moral as well as politico-economic reasons has been championed by advocates throughout history. For example, Henry George laid out the civic dangers of inequity in his seminal book *Progress and Poverty* in the 1800's:

What has destroyed every previous civilization has been the tendency to the unequal distribution of wealth and power. This same tendency, operating with increasing force, is observable in our civilization today, showing itself in every progressive community, and with greater intensity the more progressive the community. Wages and interest tend constantly to fall, rent to rise, the rich to become very much richer, the poor to become more helpless and hopeless, and the middle class to be swept away. (George, 1905, p. 188)

By the time the world was plunged into the Great Depression in 1929, there was momentum for government aid to the citizenry, especially as formerly self-sufficient adults found themselves without stable housing and without employment opportunities to provide needed income. In his second inaugural address, President Roosevelt lamented, "I see one third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill nourished," (Roosevelt, 1937). In response, Congress enacted new laws including the Wagner-Steagall Act which established the U.S. Housing Authority (USHA), ushering in centralized federal support for public housing. The introduction of the USHA paved the way for the Chicago Housing Authority.



Figure 1: The homeless sleep under West Adams Street in 1931 Chicago
(Chicago Tribune historical photo)

From the start, racism and segregation were embedded into the U.S. public housing system. Race-based redlining (the practice of refusing to grant favorable mortgages in areas designated as high-risk and marked in red on area maps) and restrictive housing association covenants (clauses in home ownership deeds explicitly restricting ownership in the community to white families) are just two of the ways in which discriminatory housing practices were institutionalized even as laws against discrimination grew in number and reach. Chicago was not immune to this phenomena. Renowned Chicago economist and chief economist at the newly formed Federal Housing Authority (FHA), Homer Hoyt, provided the justification for discriminatory practices as a means of protecting land and property values. Even as he attempted to claim a race-neutral stance, Hoyt defined White Flight before the term was popular and provided a list of “racial or nationality groups” most likely to preserve property values (see figure 2). Moreover, he described the residences of so-called blighted areas in 1930’s Chicago as “lowest in economic status, intelligence, and ambition,” (Hoyt, 1933, p. 311).

Ranking of Races and Nationalities with Respect to the Beneficial Effect Upon Land Values (Hoyt, 1933, p.316)

1. English, Germans, Scotch, Irish, Scandinavians
2. North Italians
3. Bohemians or Czechoslovakians
4. Poles
5. Lithuanians
6. Greeks
7. Russian Jews of the lower class
8. South Italians
9. Negroes
10. Mexicans

Figure 2: Ranking of races and nationalities according to Hoyt

Post-war Chicago saw the expansion of public housing projects into the Black Belt. The Black Belt began as a narrow corridor on the South Side and then grew over the decades, further segregating Chicago’s population. By the 1960s-1970s, public housing originally developed for working families of all races and ethnicities was predominantly occupied by Black and LatinX families facing mass unemployment. Further, public housing communities were suffering from systemic divestment in maintenance, security, and services.

PLAN FOR TRANSFORMATION

In 2000, the CHA embarked on a Plan of Transformation with a goal to transform public housing through 1) renovation and reconstruction, 2) restructuring property management, 3) increasing access to services for residents, 4) improving safety, 5) enacting new residency criteria, 6) expanding the Section 8 program, and 7) investments in the local economy (Chicago Housing Authority, 2000). The Plan for Transformation called for the demolition of thousands of housing units to be replaced with new construction and mixed income housing. Thousands more units were scheduled for renovations. It also



Figure 3: Redesigned Cabrini Green (City Hall Photo Services Division)

recognized the need to assist residents and potential residents in navigating multiple systems, public and private. Finally, the CHA confronted the legacy of structural racism and racist policies in public housing.

Though there have been improvements the Chicago CoC recognizes the historical context within which it operates, including Chicago and national practices related to public housing that impacts people's experience of homelessness to this day. The CoC is also mindful that people of color, particularly people who identify as Black or African American, are over-represented among those experiencing homelessness in Chicago. It is in that vein that the Chicago CoC set out to address the issues of race, ethnicity, and equity in Chicago's residential housing policies and practices. The CoC focuses on the intersection of systems via LOAs which coordinate the collective efforts of the CoC members. The current LOAs are Systems Analysis and Resource Development, Homeless Response System Front Door Services, Expedited Housing Initiative, Racial Equity, and Employment and Income. Projects such as the Employment Taskforce under the Pathways Forward Challenge and drafting a racial equity theory of change (RETOC) process are part of the racial equity efforts being undertaken by the CoC. These and other endeavors, served as inspiration to bring the Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop to the ENs and Housing Case Managers.


The Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop facilitated by Clair Minson of Sandra Grace LLC was designed to achieve the following specific goals:

- Deepen understanding of the manifestations and impact of race and racism in workforce and homeless systems;
- Explore the language of racism, oppression and the role of narrative in upholding racism and inequity in workforce and homeless systems;
- Start developing and strengthening the muscles needed for practical application of key terms and core concepts to our work.

The current study focuses on the experience of workshop invitees as well as the larger context of the efforts to end housing instability in Chicago. Specifically, the invitees were professionals working at the intersection of workforce development and individuals who are unhoused. We provide the lessons learned from the study as well as recommendations for the work moving forward.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop was a single 3 hour virtual session offered to ENs and Housing Case Managers three times in winter, 2022, and early Spring 2023. The workshop was optional and was sent as a professional development offering via email by All Chicago to staff in the RRH program and employment navigators that work with the RRH program.



During a visit to Chicago in December, 2022, the U.S. Interagency Council on homelessness (USICH) executive director, Jeff Olivet, stated that “people of color are far more likely to experience homelessness, and this inequity is all too clear in Chicago, where Black people make up 73% of the homeless population but only 29% of the city’s total population.”

The workshop was designed to identify the various ways racism manifests within housing services and workforce development. Through interactive discussion, storytelling and direct instruction, participants explored:

- Definitions of racism and systemic racism
- Racism in workforce development policy and housing systems
- The manifestations of racism in program design and service delivery, through engagement with funders, engagement with employers and the role of narrative in upholding racism in the field, and
- Where participants see these manifestations showing up in their work.

The purpose of the study was to explore participants' perceptions of the racial equity workshop and the ways in which lessons learned influenced their work following the training. Data collected from CoC members as well as the data collection process itself highlighted potential areas of focus to help understand the state of race and equity inclusion across the Chicago housing system.

STUDY METHODS

Qualitative

All Chicago invited partners in rapid rehousing to complete a short survey and/or participate in a focus group or interview regardless of attendance in the workshop. Where permitted compensation was offered for their time.

Interviews lasted up to 1 hour. Emergent themes were identified through an initial review and comparison of their notes followed by NVivo analysis. Further discussion and re-review of interview transcripts resulted in the final themes.

Of the 50 housing case navigators and/or employment navigators who registered for the workshops, 27 attended. Three housing case managers were interviewed. Of those interviewed, one attended the workshop.

Quantitative

Invitations to complete an online survey were also sent to workshop invitees. Unfortunately, several attempts to engage respondents, including offering compensation for their time, did not produce a substantial sample suitable for quantitative analysis. The final study sample was limited to 12 respondents. Although we were not able to conduct a robust analysis, we have included statements from the open-ended questions in the survey as part of our overall assessment.

STUDY FINDINGS

In what follows, we highlight the most salient themes that emerged from the data.

ENs and Housing Case Managers need more support for understanding and using anti racist frameworks and culturally responsive strategies to inform client engagement and direct service.

Some participants cited that racism impacted their roles as direct service providers. One participant shared that she experienced clients with high levels of trauma and anger -- noting that structural oppression heavily impacted those she works with. She expressed wanting more training.

[Some of my clients] are not used to someone trying to help them or assist them with things. So some clients can be resistant to the help. But that component [structural oppression] is true, and so accurate. Some [of my clients] are really angry, because they're so used to being on the streets ... so when they get in the program it's almost like a shock to them. Some are open to the change. And then you have others that are not really open.

The participant wanted more strategies to support her in communicating with her clients, especially when they were distrustful of the system and angry.

Another participant stated that she desired to use the **SHARP Framework**, shared in the training, to inform her communications with clients. The SHARP Framework includes the following five components

- Structural oppression
- Historical context
- Analysis of role
- Reciprocity and mutuality
- Power

After being exposed to the framework, the participant believed that she now enters into conversations with her clients with a different perspective but would like more support for how to have deeper level conversations informed by this framework. She shared:

I just always want to be mentally prepared for when that hard conversations do arise. That's where I'm going to carry that SHARP framework with me when I go out into the field and see my clients, because that's going to really help me when a situation occurs, I feel like this SHARP Framework, it really helps me understand how to approach the work and how to look at it from a different mind frame.

One Black female participant struggled with how to work with clients who were combative towards her due to race. She shared, **“many of the clients who I encounter each day have bias against me and they are Caucasian”**. She continued to add that she was often the recipient of hostile language and often researches to find additional support to help her interact with her clients.

The SHARP Framework is a tool that direct service providers can use to view issues of oppression that may be impacting their clients. The 5 components are:

Structural Oppression

- What are the issues in the person’s physical, and social environment that impact his or her ability to be successful?

Historical Context

- What historical issues might be relevant?

Analysis of Role

- What will be the provider’s role in this service relationship?

Reciprocity and Mutuality

- What strengths and gifts can the person share with the provider and with his/her community?

Power

- What can the person do, along and/or with others to change the impact of historical and structural oppression?

Participants noted racism in the workplace and the lack of culturally diverse representation in leadership and in decision-making positions throughout their organizations.

A participant noted that it is difficult to be promoted within her organization. She shared that,

I have noticed that when I go to trainings or these workshops [at her organization], there's not a lot of [Black] people. There are other ethnic backgrounds but I want to see us being included in more things and not pushed to the side because we have just as much voice and thoughts as everybody else does."

Another participant shared that,

There needs to be more thoughtful collaboration between the decision-making realm and the practitioner especially where All Chicago is leading this work. Diverse representation in the policy realm would include culturally diverse representation, systems players, policy, direct providers etc. as well as more cross pollination between the work being done with other Lines of Action leading to more integrated discussions.

Workshop attendees said they checked their personal biases and questioned their assumptions more often after they had the training.

Participants noted that some change happened on the intra and interpersonal level after attending the training. Different participants shared the following thoughts:

I just try to have an open mind because I'm not here to make a situation worse. I'm just here to make it better.

I was able to take a step back and I was able to look at things through other people's eyes.

The history of direct policy. It opened my eyes to my own prejudices towards my clients.

Just listen. Be more open to inclusion. Be more open to have other inputs from different racialized backgrounds.

It helped me to not judge a book by its cover or be judgmental.

Participants noted wanting more racial equity training embedded in practice and systems support.

Though this was not a representative sample, all six survey respondents attending the workshop found the workshop relevant and a good starting point. All workshop participants who responded to the survey said they would recommend the workshop to a colleague.

However, interviews and open ended questions from the survey suggest that behavior and activity changed very little as a result of the training. Respondents wanted more training and time to process beyond the 3 hour workshop. One respondent shared that lack of time was a barrier:

Although I was not able to apply the knowledge gained from the workshop to my work because we are very busy. I would like to plan a meeting with [the facilitators] and discuss what we learned.

Another participant shared that she needed more support embedding the principles into practice:

I prefer one on one coaching because then I can get a better understanding of how I can navigate it. As a whole, because I feel like that this is not something that is talked about a lot in my organization, and I feel like it needs to be brought to the forefront. We are dealing with the community. I feel like that this is something that will help us understand what type of community we are dealing with. A follow up at our organization would allow us to really go in depth.

While another stated:

[I want] more support based on the work that I do with my clients.

This idea of ongoing training on racial equity embedded in practice was affirmed by the facilitator who shared that:

It's just one interaction, one three hour interaction with folks. There are some people who are ready to apply it and are actively doing that. However, most people need more than one interaction and a lot of support to then shift the way that they're working, especially as they interact with systems and institutions.

Ongoing, sustained, and integrated training is supported by the literature which underscores the idea that one intervention does little to change new routines and behavior (Mccluskey & Lavarini, 2005). Rather, integrated training as part of a “well thought out package or portfolio of diversity related efforts” has been proven to be a critical strategy for change (Bezrukova, et al., 2016, p. 42).

Evidence for further need for racial equity training is demonstrated by the unmet goals expressed by participants of the training suggesting that more is needed to push the needle towards racial equity for Ens and housing case managers.

Additional Insights: Communication and Coordination Challenges

Respondents reported receiving the workshop information in multiple ways. Some indicated they learned of it via direct email from All Chicago, some received messages from supervisors, and some don't recall receiving an email communication but learned of the workshop through word of mouth. Given the proportionately low attendance rates, it could be that cracks in communication across and between organizations may point to a lack of efficiency of communication. Messages may be distributed unevenly and inaccurately at times. If there is disruption in the flow of information about training offerings, it is reasonable to believe that there are similar disruptions for other messages, including those directly informing the adoption of racial equity principles.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The present study demonstrates that there is an appetite on the part of ENs and Housing Case Managers to learn more about racial equity issues as they relate to their professional duties. Similarly, data show an appreciation of the workshop as a training opportunity. However, the respondents reported that they felt many of the goals of the workshop were unmet. Whereas insights from those who participated in Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop suggest that the workshop provided a safe space for discussions and some strategies to allow for self-reflection, empathy and less judgment, it is also clear that it primarily served as stimulus for questions and the desire for meaningful follow-up.

Regardless of workshop attendance or prior knowledge, homeless response professionals indicated that race and equity matters impact their work on multiple levels. Staff want to be cognizant of structural racism that is negatively impacting the population without stable housing and they want to understand how systems perpetuate oppressive practices and policies. Moreover, some staff reported the challenges of unaddressed internal racist structures that impede their ability to perform at their highest capabilities. Finally, the housing system consists of human beings. Whether they are staff professional or part of the client population, they bring with them their own lived experiences, biases, trauma, and knowledge. It is important to provide racial equity training sufficient to meet the holistic needs of the entire system.

DISCUSSION

Start where you are, but don't stay there. For housing case managers and employment navigators recognizing their bias and identifying their assumptions is a starting point. However, given the history of housing policy and its disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities, a great goal of the CoC could be to design policy and practices which support an active commitment to the daily analysis of self, systems, mindsets, ideologies, practices, and policies to dismantle structural inequality. This begins with common language and deep understanding of how racial history impacts systems. Although this report investigated individual level change through the workshop participation, the push to end housing instability must be done in conjunction with an integrated approach to racial equity training on multiple levels – training embedded in practice, cross cultural communication, systems and practices, workplace policies like onboarding etc. This begs the support of a centralized position that will lead the charge in ensuring full integration throughout the organization and a dedicated staff who lobbies at local and state levels and who makes sure that racial equity principles are fully integrated and that all stakeholders are included in the conversation.

More racial equity training is needed. Study participants noted that the Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop offered an opportunity to intentionally and directly explore and discuss issues related to race, racism, housing and workforce development. The workshop was a good step towards providing a language and context for making sense of racism directly related to some strategies for direct service as well as a launching pad for understanding and analyzing systems level racism. Prior to this opportunity, some participants reported that they were left to their own devices to figure out what to do when there was a miscommunication or

hostility with clients or when they observed systematic racism. According to Bezrukova et al. (2016) effective diversity training requires an integrated systems approach alongside a multiplicity of programming and methods to make more sustained change in behavior and practice.

Mutual goal/Aligned practice. Developing common vision for principles and practices for the CoC around racial equity goals is essential. The CoC has embarked on this work through the Racial Equity Line of Action subsequent to the workshop discussed above. A systems approach and analysis moves away from focus on the individual and places attention on the racialized history, policies, and experiences that caused the individual's conditions. This common vision would ensure that case workers apply a shared framework and language to address structural inequality and promote alignment across the experiences of clients being served the CoC.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS¹

Provide training/coaching and resources addressing race and equity across areas of service and job descriptions.

Prejudice and discrimination have been methodically embedded into all areas of the public housing system for more than 100 years. Its reach is not limited to the individuals and families pursuing stable housing. Racist ideology exists within housing policies (national, state, and local), workforce development, wraparound services and affects professionals working to end housing instability.

Chicago long ago recognized the ubiquity of racism in public housing, both implicit and explicit. As stated by a workshop attendee, "A condition in which whiteness is prioritized and maintained...can happen unintentionally, however, when it continues to be unaddressed it further perpetuates systems of oppression that dismiss BIPOC experiences." (Grace, 2023). For that reason, all of those who touch the system, whether as employee or client, direct service provider or administrator, should receive intentional training/coaching embedded in practice with accountability systems in place in fundamental equitable principles. Addressing equity issues in silos ignores what has been learned by Chicago officials and scholars about the insidious nature of structural racism.

Leverage the existing infrastructure and relationships of the CoC.

The Homeless Response System is complex. There are numerous public-private partnerships, the influence of multiple levels of government, thousands of employees moving throughout, and an infinite number of personal circumstances experienced by those interacting with the system at various points. Implementing a high-

One participant shared, "Racial equity is not a stand-alone. It should be embedded or there should be direct conversations about how racial equity is woven into the other Lines of Action."

¹ Sandra Grace administered pre and post webinar surveys to attendees before and after each workshop. Sandra Grace collected those data for a different purpose than the current study and used different methodologies. Thus, we choose not to combine the data into a single study. However, significant insights were revealed from the Sandra Grace data. Qualitative data from those surveys have been incorporated into the Future Recommendations, where appropriate.

quality, comprehensive training agenda is a formidable challenge. The CoC provides an established infrastructure through which to mitigate a portion of those challenges.

The primary stakeholders engaged in ending housing instability in Chicago have the CoC as a central, organizing entity. The CoC has existing channels of communication, ongoing relationships, and the capacity to house and distribute training and resources. Moreover, the CoC is an authoritative voice in the Chicago public housing space and, as such, a concerted racial equity effort by the CoC will signal the city's commitment to the issues at hand.

Further, trust built through existing relationships among the CoC provides a ready platform for launching difficult conversations. Stakeholders, including staff of CoC membership organizations will not all be entering into discussions about the role racism and housing with the same perspectives or opinions. When asked *In what ways would workforce services change if its practices and policies were equitable?* One respondent answered "our organization treats ALL fairly and equal. No change is necessary" while another responded to the same question with "Women would make the same salary as men. Blacks would be able to be judged by their intelligence, qualifications, and experience instead of their color" (Grace, 2023). These are almost diametrically opposed positions. Each is valid and represents actual perception and experience. And the staff recognize the need for a safe place stating so repeatedly in response to questions about concerns about speaking up and engaging in the workshop even as they were interested in receiving the information being shared (Grace, 2023).

Leadership must demonstrate their commitment to racial equity at all phases.

Reversing decades of entrenched racism is a tremendous effort, one in which enmeshed issues must be untangled, unpleasant truths must be confronted, and entirely new ways of working must be implemented. Significant resources of time, money, and human capital are necessary. It is not practical to expect frontline workers and lower management to take on this degree of culture change without full support from their leadership. Similarly, staff must be given authority to make appropriate shifts in their practice in response to lessons learned through training opportunities.

Leadership should also be transparent about how race intersects with leadership. In response to being asked how racism "shows up" in programming and service provision, one attendee offered "Not everyone is at the table of decision-making, therefore, it's hard to understand where people are coming from. Bosses and directors are generally white and have not hardships of finding work" (Grace, 2023). While another shared that "We need to see more people of color in higher positions and roles. How we approach and work with people of color, understanding that some are coming with experiences of oppressive practice and more is required to support those folks" (Grace, 2023).

Incorporate community voice in decision-making that directly affects them.

Chicago has a rich history of inviting public comment on housing policy. Resident Advisory Boards, community task forces, and public hearings are just some of the ways Chicago communities have been and are currently engaged in discussion. Decision-making specifically centered on race equity should be no different. infantilizing Black and Brown communities through top-down governing that takes away all agency from the individual is a part of Chicago's dark racial past. Current efforts to end housing instability

seek to avoid repeating that history. Placing the voice of the community on equal footing with those that direct practice and policies that impact the community is an important step in that process.

Institute a change management strategy for implementing a system-wide anti-racism framework.

Ultimately, tearing down structural racism in Chicago housing must be met with the intentionality and purpose with which it was built. While individual tools such as single workshops, resource centers, and data sharing are important, they are insufficient for the scale of the challenge. It will take a coordinated sustained effort to achieve the race equity goals laid out in documents such as the recent facilitation of the Race Equity Theory of Change (RETOC) process by Clair Minson.

A change management process acknowledges the many stages of implementing and then maintaining an anti-racist framework. It also places people's needs at the center of organizational change. A typical change management process follows an arc (see Figure 4) of awareness, to planning, to behavior change. In the context of using a change management process to implement an anti-racist framework, the arc will move people and organizations from an awareness of embedded racism and their roles and proximity to it through the introduction of new and modified behaviors to the ultimate goal of changing the race-based barriers to housing equity and economic stability.

The Change Arc

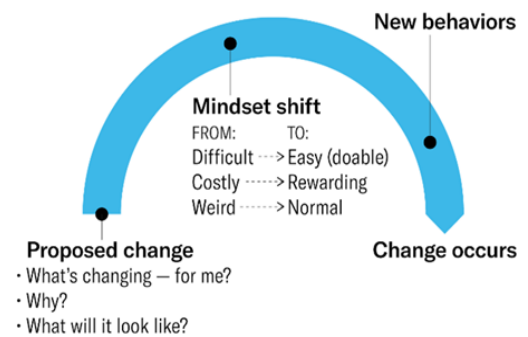


Figure 4: The Change Arc (Anderson, 2020)

CONCLUSION

The commitment to eradicating racial inequity is clear. Efforts such as the Workforce Development, Homeless Systems and Racism: Exploring the Manifestations workshop is an important step towards acknowledging how systemic racism impacts the lives of those in the ecosystem. This important work can be done with sustained effort, shared responsibility on all levels, and dedicated leadership.

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