

A message from the Second Step Board: No Room for Racism

In the summer of 2020, the experiences of our colleagues of Black, African, Caribbean and Asian descent working in Second Step were given long awaited focus and attention due to low trust and poor experiences. This was the start of a process where we faced our past with honesty and planned a future with hope and integrity. Through the expert help of external consultants, we carried out a 'Listening Exercise' (Summer 2021) for our Black, African, Caribbean and Asian descent colleagues as we started to find our way to improve their experiences. We prioritised improving their experience, knowing that ultimately this will improve the experience of all staff, volunteers, board members and service users in Second Step.

We are making real progress with our Addressing Racism Strategy (agreed December 2021), focussing on key priorities. We are grateful to champions across the organisation who have stepped forward to inform, support and lead the changes we are making. We thank our Black, African, Caribbean and Asian descent colleagues for staying with us through this process.

To realise the ambitions within our strategy we recognise that the majority group (in this case our white colleagues) must raise our awareness and must act in solidarity with our colleagues. We recognise that we must not look to our Black, African, Caribbean and Asian descent colleagues to educate us. To move the organisation into the equitable and inclusive space that we have promised each other, and everyone who works in and gets support from Second Step, we will support our white colleagues in stepping up and accepting responsibility, personally and collectively, to act as anti-racists and not to perpetuate racism, so we can work effectively and respectfully with our colleagues of Black, African, Caribbean and Asian descent.

Focusing on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion provides us all with many opportunities to celebrate - it also demands we examine uncomfortable biases and truths about ourselves, the communities and the broader society in which we live. These implicit biases are 'hard baked' into how we see the world, through our upbringing, education, and wider society messages and become internalised. We must consciously examine how we see and respond to race with integrity, a compassionate but critical eye, acknowledging that we will make mistakes along the way.

It is right that our focus now is the experiences of our colleagues of Black, African, Caribbean, and Asian descent, confidently knowing that this commitment and work will serve us well with longer term ambitions to be an inclusive employer and an excellent service provider across the broader Equality Diversity Inclusion sphere. This work will be the foundation of improving the experiences of service users.

For white, and all colleagues, it requires a strong partnership (Board and staff) to address these challenges. This means equipping ourselves with the skills and confidence to shift from 'Non-Racist' to 'Anti Racist' and appreciating what it will demand of us. Silence or denial of racism is no longer an option if we are going to make this shift. Our new Anti-Racism Policy demonstrates this shift. The commitment we must make is to continually educate ourselves about racism and better understand the perspective of those not able to

enjoy the embedded privileges and advantages of the white majority. We must accept that racism is embedded in who we are— and we must actively re-educate and counteract this, so we are not complicit. We can then be accountable to those we work with and support, who have lived with overt and insidious racism throughout their lives.

This is no small ask and such a shift in thinking can feel uncomfortable. Assuming we have nothing new to learn, that we do not act unwittingly in racist ways, is no longer an option. We will know that we have moved forward when we can all support behaviour changes by developing our knowledge and awareness rather than depending on our colleagues or external consultants to do the challenging, but eventually we believe this will be rewarding work for us all, individually and collectively.

We will be developing a **Building Bridges Programme** - an educational framework and cultural development programme - for staff to actively engage and learn through.

One of our core values is '**Celebrating Diversity**': We want an inclusive and collaborative culture for everyone connected to Second Step. This is the direction we are heading in. Join us. Join the conversation.