

Anti-Racism Movement Growing in Mental Health Sector

Theme to be Addressed in Upcoming Winter Issue of Mental Health News

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Paul Levine, Executive Vice President and CEO and Mary Pender Greene, Assistant Executive Director of The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCFS) have been leaders in what can only be described as a growing Anti-Racism movement within the local nonprofit community.

JBFCFS has fully committed itself to rooting out the structural and systemic racism which is endemic in our society and even infects well intentioned, highly functioning mental health and social service organizations. While it has played a leading role in this effort, JBFCFS is not alone. Over the past few years, more than 3,000 members of the local nonprofit human service provider community, including CEOs and senior executives at many agencies, faculty and deans of the schools of social work have attended Undoing Racism™ workshops and other presentations by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB).

Many leading organizational and professional associations have now established strategic partnerships with (PISAB) to further this effort. These include the Human Services Council of New York City (HSC), Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA), Black Agency Executives (BAE), The Black Equity Alliance (BEA), the National Association of Social Workers – NYC (NASW), a number of the metropolitan schools of social work, and the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA). Through the collective efforts of these organizations, human services staff, social work educators, and practitioners now lead a movement committed to transforming service delivery and undoing structural racism in



Paul Levine

the field of mental health and social services. During the Spring/Summer 2010 both COFCCA and the HSC are scheduled to sponsor Undoing Racism™ presentations for board members and executives of some of New York City's leading human service agencies.

With regard to the need to address issues of racism within the mental health sector, Paul Levine, states: "First, I would hope everyone would set aside the notion that we are all experts on issues of race in organizations because we have worked with a diverse staff for however long. My experience is that the more sensitive and complex any subject the more we have to be willing to expose ourselves to new perspectives on it. There is no subject that is more complex than race. I am well aware that there are always significant demands on overwhelmed executives. We



Mary Pender Greene

frequently butt up against deadlines, budget crises, and this year it will be the effects of the new RFP results, clinic restructuring or the social work licensing issue. I can predict right now that a good percentage of executives will want to postpone participating because of these and other competing issues. I also am willing to take a risk and say that it will always be difficult to get people to attend because of the subject of race. The struggles with race are so ingrained in us that we treat it as a "given" that is always with us and that permits us to ignore how powerful it is — sometimes on a level that is not conscious. The best evidence I can give for this is my own personal experience of how hard it is to keep engaging this issue."

Mr. Levine believes that the Undoing Racism™ workshops and other presentations will "open up more avenues for or-

ganizations to address race in ways which will improve morale and make us feel even more proud of the work that each of our organizations does."

According to Mary Pender Greene, "Understanding the impact of race and racism are essential guiding principles for mental health and social service agencies. Racism greatly burden and impact the lives of all people of color, which includes both our clients and staff. One cannot claim clinical excellence without the ability to recognize, analyze and discuss racism as it relates to supervision, clinical treatment, client outcome as well as staff relations, recruitment and retention. Cross racial dialogue is key to addressing structural racism, therefore as mental health providers we must develop a common language and become willing to examine our practice, policies and procedures. Additionally, the effort must be lead and endorsed by top leadership, encouraged in management/supervision, and embedded in clinical treatment."

Dr. Peter Beitchman, Chairman of the Board of Mental Health News Education, Inc. stated: "Mr. Levine's and Ms. Pender Greene's article initiates a compelling challenge to our mental health community. No issue has a greater impact on our clients, staff and organizational life than racism. We will continue to publish relevant articles and will devote the Winter issue of *Mental Health News* to a full exploration of the issues. In the meantime, to promote understanding and a meaningful dialogue on race and racism we highly recommend the indispensable training offered by The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond."

For information on trainings in the New York City metropolitan area go to www.antiracistalliance.com or call Sandy Bernabei at 212-957-5305.