



Greater Omaha Attendance and Learning Services

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan**

**July 2022**

### **What is a DEI Plan?**

A DEI Plan is an internal tool which provides guiding questions and prompts for our organization to help identify opportunities or areas of strength and challenges or areas in need of additional examination as we move toward creating a more inclusive agency.

GOALS is a diverse community of employees, staff and board members and we collectively work to reduce student absenteeism and at-risk behavior through direct advocacy, student and family engagement, and the development of community partnerships and coordinated efforts to improve student attendance and learning. GOALS partners with caregivers, school personnel, formal system organizations, fellow non-profit providers, and a family's "community" to overcome any barrier that would keep a child from attending school and leveraging an inclusive and equitable educational experience.

In line with our mission, we must think critically about the ways in which we are different from one another and embrace those differences: how our community is welcoming to and respectful of everyone regardless of their identities, and how we ensure all have access to the opportunities offered.

### **How do we define diversity, equity, and inclusion?**

GOALS is committed to building and sustaining an organization and a community-of-service that is broadly diverse with regard to social identities; equitable, so that all individuals, regardless of their identities or circumstance, are positioned to benefit from all that the agency has to offer; and inclusive, so that all are and feel welcomed and have a strong sense of belonging. We embrace the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, defined as follows.

*Diversity* = Diversity refers to all the many ways in which people differ, encompassing varying characteristics that make one individual or group different from another, including, but not limited to race, ethnicity, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religion/spirituality, age, (dis)ability, and military/veteran status. We believe it is important to understand how aspects of a person's identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege, paying special attention to underserved and underrepresented groups in our community and to uneven dynamics of social power.

*Equity* = Equity refers to the ways we intentionally ensure all individuals can thrive. We recognize that the members of our community have unique and different circumstances and may need different support at different times. Equity is different from equality in that equality implies treating everyone as if their experiences are exactly the same. Being equitable means acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities — historic and current — that advantage some and disadvantage others. Equal treatment results in equity only if everyone starts with equal access to opportunities.

*Inclusion* = Inclusion encompasses the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can participate fully and is welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. In some ways, inclusive efforts demonstrate our commitment to celebrating differences among and diversity of our community. An institution can be both diverse and non-inclusive at the same time, thus a sustained practice of creating inclusive environments is necessary for success. We achieve these principles in a variety of ways, including but not limited to: facilitating educational access/removing barriers that hinder school and community participation, collaborating with constituents (students, families, community partners, school systems) across Douglas and Sarpy Counties, and holding ourselves and each other accountable when necessary.

### **DEI goals**

1. Recruit, hire, and professionally develop employees that reflect the communities we serve.
2. Identify opportunities to strengthen engagement with diverse groups to improve collaborative partnerships and the effectiveness of our recruitment strategies.
3. Maintain and improve knowledge of & access to training opportunities for DEI awareness/implementation.
4. Develop and maintain opportunities for dialogue that encourage employees, board members, community partners, and students and their families to acknowledge DEI accomplishments, identify key challenges, and highlight future areas of focus/need.
5. Foster and maintain a work environment without barriers to opportunity, where all employees feel welcomed, valued, respected, and engaged and can effectively participate and bring their unique talents, skills, and perspectives.
6. Work to ensure that our data isn't racist. By this, GOALS is committed to the practice of "decolonizing" data. This means that when we collect data, it is never gathered simply within the mindset of creating a deficit-based framework, or to only show the gaps in our communities (thus creating a sense of inferiority). Rather, the data is collected in the mindset of capacity building and for the purpose of "serving the people."

### **Questions and Areas of Reflection:**

*(a) How does our organization's thinking about racial equity and social justice inform how we develop and implement programs? How has this evolved over time?*

Our thinking about racial equity and social justice has impacted our program development in profound ways. First, due to the lingering social-cultural, economic, and psychological (i.e., trauma-related) effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, GOALS created a short-term intervention program. Here GOALS helps students and families with resource identification, accessibility assistance, financial stability (and of course, aiding students to re-engage with school).

Second, GOALS recently partnered with several community organizations (Concord Mediation Center, Charles Drew, and the Urban League) to form the Elevate Program. The Elevate Program is a pilot program designed specifically to serve BIPOC youth and combines the strength of multiple and unique community service agencies (i.e., conflict mediation, mentorship and mental or physical health needs). Third, a Native American outreach program—designed specifically for members of the American Indian community—is also under design.

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*(b) Is there diversity (i.e., racial identity, gender identity, age, etc.) in staff and/or board leadership? Beyond board and staff makeup, what other steps has your organization taken to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across the organization?*

As stewards of the public good, and in service of our mission to remove the barriers that hinder school attendance and participation, our staff and board membership reflect the organization's values and beliefs. For example, Board members include public school superintendents, experts in delinquency prevention, and additional youth welfare and justice-for-youth advocates and professionals.

We also embrace staff diversity and recognize that the different life experiences and cultural backgrounds of our team members strengthens deliberations, decision-making, and the ability to make unique and meaningful social connections with members of the community. To this end, team members identify within a spectrum of racial and ethnic identities (54% of current staff members identify as BIPOC) as well as within varied gendered and sexual orientation diversities. Further, GOALS is equity-focused (with over 70% of its workforce female-led) and we strive to create an organizational culture that is aware of the systemic inequities that have affected our society. Our inclusive culture welcomes and celebrates differences and ensures that team members are equally

engaged and invested, sharing power and responsibility for the organization’s mission and the advancement of the public good.

*(c) What forms of diversity (gender, racial, cultural, religious, immigrant/refugee background, linguistic, etc.) do you think are important for strengthening the quality of the work proposed and why?*

GOALS believes that fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion is essential to the realization of our mission, vision, and values. As such, we seek to cultivate a supportive, healthy, and respectful community, free from harassment, disruption, violence, and intimidation. We aim to continuously improve our program culture, policies, and operations, guided by a framework of harm reduction and the understanding that identity markers (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, gender) intersect to create systems of access and marginalization shaped by social and cultural contexts. Like any social, cultural, and racial identity different from our own, listening without judgement and asking questions to understand are critically important to our ability to effectively serve and work with all people.

Please note that GOALS does not specify race, ethnicity\*, or income as a requirement for working with the Family Advocate program. However, we understand that the greatest need for services lies with the population of students who are experiencing poverty, and those students who are within the BIPOC community.

\*The one exception would be participation in the Native American program at GOALS. Here, students would need to identify as Native American or Alaska Native (NA/AN) – but the program will serve NA/AN students and their families regardless of tribal affiliation. Further, students may identify as multi racial and multi-ethnic and be either directly enrolled in a Tribe/First Nation or claim lineal descentance.

*(d) What are your anti-racism and racial equality practices?*

We acknowledge that racism and racial inequity pervade all aspects of society – and racism is well-documented to be both institutionalized and personalized. Given this reality, an anti-racism and racial equity framework is vital to the success of GOALS moving forward. As such, GOALS will continue to engage in RED (Racial and Ethnic Disparities) work and training. For example, over the past several years, GOALS has worked with the Douglas County RED (Racial and Ethnic Disparities) Coordinator to ensure that the culture and work of GOALS is funneled through the RED lens. Further, to this end, GOALS will continue to work with local leaders and experts on seeking constant education, feedback, and opportunity to ensure our work is inclusive and transparent, with a focus on equitable outcomes for marginalized students, families, and communities. Lastly, GOALS will continue to engage in training initiatives that promote inclusivity and equity across all programs and in all aspects of our community engagement work (e.g., programs, processes, and (perhaps) curriculum).

**What we are Currently Working On:**

(a) Short Term Goals

- \*Update this document to include an appendix of DEI key concepts/terms/definitions.
- \*Update website to reflect staff diversity
- \*Review and update Strategic Plan and Handbook to include DEI goals/plans
- \*Review, update and expand community partner list for DEI assurance. \*Review staff annual staff trainings (including safety trainings) for quality DEI assurance.
- \*Review Student and Caregiver Survey and Stakeholder Survey for DEI initiatives.
- \*Update our telework, work-in-place, and remote work policies to better support inclusion by increasing, as appropriate, flexibilities available to meet employee needs.
- \*Review Onboarding procedures and actions steps for quality assurance.

(b) Long Term Goals

- \*Continue to recruit and retain a diverse staff (and Board of Directors).
- \*Solidify and institutionalize both the Elevate and Native American programs.
- \*Continue to craft/provide toolkits and other educational and learning opportunities on issues related to (but not limited to): trauma, empathy-based engagement, anti-poverty initiatives, gender identity, sexual identity and other key identifiers to provide a fuller understanding of diversity in the community.
- \*Review and work to enhance assessment tools to measure success, attrition, and gaps of service.
- \*Work on expanding benefits to staff/employees.