The Jed Foundation

Shared Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

Approved by the JED Board of Directors, June 2021

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Jed Foundation (JED) is to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation's teens and young adults. To best serve all youth and advise high schools, colleges, and universities, and other youth serving organizations on how to effectively promote mental health and prevent suicide, we commit to staying current and responsive to diverse communities. We will work to embody principles and practices of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism to strengthen our internal operations, programming, and community engagement. To help achieve this goal, we created this *Shared Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (DEI&A)* to guide our work by outlining specific commitments to our approach, team, environment, and programming. We believe that by clearly defining our intentions and steps, we will create the strongest organization - one that is particularly effective at carrying out our mission and is proactive, action oriented, culturally responsive, anti-bias, and anti-racist in our approach and actions to protecting emotional health and preventing suicide for teens and young adults.

Clear and pervasive disparities and inequities exist in mental health access and outcomes for teens and young adults in the United States that are exacerbated by experiences of racism and other identity related biases and discrimination.

> *Access:* Existing supports protecting emotional health and preventing suicide do not reach and serve all youth in a culturally responsive way. Cultural stigma and mores, as well as economic and other structural barriers can create additional hurdles to accessing high-quality care.

> *Outcomes:* Populations of teens and young adults may face different—and often additive—mental health stressors due to racism, bias, discrimination and related microaggressions, financial disparities, and inequities in the impact of social determinants of mental health. These are reflected in higher-than-average and/or rising mental health challenges and suicide rates among youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth, among other groups of marginalized youth.

These disparities and inequities highlight the need to bring tailored, evidence-based approaches to mental health services and supports for all teens and young adults. JED is committed to meeting this need and achieving equity in mental health access and care, equitable implementation of our programs, and culturally responsive care for potentially marginalized and higher-risk youth populations across JED's work, consistent with our mission and impact framework.

DEFINITIONS

We utilize a glossary of terms to help JED align on definitions of DEI&A terms and concepts. The following are the definitions for diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-bias, and anti-racism that we use:

Diversity: Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term "diversity" is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values. (Source: UC Berkeley Center for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity, "Glossary of Terms")

Equity: The term "equity" refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality. Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to address imbalances. The process is ongoing, requiring us to identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures. (Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers) Sometimes justice demands, for the purpose of equity, an unequal response. (Source: YWCA Social Justice Glossary)

Inclusion: Inclusion is an intentional effort to transform the status quo by creating opportunity for those who have been historically marginalized. An inclusion focus emphasizes outcomes of diversity rather than assuming that increasing the amount of diversity of people automatically creates equity in access/opportunity, or an enhanced organizational climate. Inclusion begins with the needs, wants, and quality of life of the historically minoritized population rather than the historically privileged. (Source: YWCA Social Justice Glossary)

Anti-bias: Opposing or prohibiting unfair discrimination against people based on race, religion, etc.: preventing or counteracting bias (as in hiring practices). (Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antibias#)

Bias: An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment. (Source: https://www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/education-glossary-terms)

Anti-racism: An active and conscious effort to work against multidimensional aspects of racism. (Source: Robert J. Patterson, professor of African American Studies at Georgetown University)

Racism: A belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. (Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism)

APPROACH

According to the National Council on Nonprofits, "embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion as organizational values is a way to intentionally make space for positive outcomes to flourish." There is extensive data that shows that organizations that clearly articulate and adopt practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion:

- Make better decisions;
- Encourage people to "be more creative, more diligent, and harder-working"; and
- Foster enhanced innovation.

We are intentional about DEI&A by being proactively inclusive in our strategic planning activities. We continuously educate ourselves on a variety of DEI&A topics that impact our work, and we include diverse perspectives as needed, when we implement, develop, and launch our programs and services. To ensure that our programming is attentive to DEI&A, we are committed to creating a welcoming and supportive work environment where all team members and volunteers feel they belong and can positively and productively contribute to carrying out our mission.

Given that structural and systemic racism and the discrimination and oppression that are perpetuated through those systems result in negative mental health outcomes, it is our charge to continue to strengthen our approaches and programs to bring equity to mental health and suicide prevention. We will help schools address how marginalization, bias, discrimination, and systemic racism show up in schools negatively impacting student mental health, and to continually strengthen JED as an organization committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. As part of this work, will actively work towards producing new research to create frameworks, programming, and actionable interventions to increase protective factors for positive mental health outcomes for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) youth and other potentially marginalized groups of teens and young adults.

TEAM

We strive to recruit, hire, and retain the best and most talented individuals possible. We are mindful and aware that teens and young adults we serve are diverse in all respects (including race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, disabilities, military service, and perspectives) and we will work towards having staff and consultants who reflect this diversity. We believe that a diverse team that represents the diversity of youth in the U.S. will result in a stronger organization that is better equipped to achieve our mission, and that staff members of all backgrounds who are provided the appropriate training and support can be successful and will produce excellent work in support of our mission.

ENVIRONMENT

We strive to create an equitable and inclusive environment that is respectful and collaborative and encourages the representation of all groups and staff perspectives. We recognize that bringing together a diverse group of professionals brings various viewpoints and perspectives. We work under a belief that multiple perspectives, debate, and dialogue are helpful for finding the best outcomes to serve our mission. We work towards ensuring that our staff is culturally responsive, aware, informed, and educated on behavior that may be perceived as biased, oppressive, or discriminatory, or that perpetuates systemic racism (e.g., microaggressions, discriminatory hiring practices, etc.). We stay current on topics that impact our diverse audiences by providing ongoing staff development and facilitating training on a variety of topics related to DEI&A. We are intentional about investing in professional development opportunities focused on growth for all staff and we expect and support JED team members to engage in critical conversations about DEI&A and include DEI&A as part of their individual goals so that they can appropriately incorporate it in their work.

PROGRAMMING

We strive to provide programs, campaigns, and services that are designed for and well received by as wide an audience as possible. In our work with schools, our Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention includes a framework of Equitable Implementation, which is our approach to using data more intentionally as we work with our schools to develop culturally responsive approaches to determine which student populations need additional resources and/or interventions. We also help schools develop focused Strategic Plans to ensure that schools are attentive to their unique communities and use data and data-informed promising practices to enhance their comprehensive mental health promotion, substance misuse prevention, and suicide risk reduction efforts in ways that address cultural considerations and diverse student populations. As we do this work, we engage subject matter experts on a variety of topics to address disparities and inequities in mental health resources. We are mindful about the timing of our offerings to ensure that we are scheduling programs and events during optimal dates with the least amount of impact on significant cultural and religious holidays to encourage as much participation as possible.

CONCLUSION

These principles are shared with key partners and incorporated into our overall strategic planning and practices. We believe that by aligning upon and following these shared commitments, we can ensure that we are inclusive and culturally responsive to the changing demographics and needs of the populations of young people we serve, which will in turn, better fulfill our mission to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation's teens and young adults.