



September 28, 2020

Courageous Conversations –Abbott House’s Commitment to Courageous Conversations

Dear Friends,

In my last note, I shared with you that many individuals impacted by the effects of racial inequality make up the very communities that Abbott House was founded to serve – and include our own essential workers, who serve quietly and courageously on the front lines of caregiving. Courageous Conversations grew out of that discussion and this is my second note to update you on where we are.

Our very first Courageous Conversations forum was a powerfully moving experience for all who participated. In recent weeks, our upper management team agreed that the Courageous Conversations should continue and expand on all levels of the agency as we remain committed to moving Abbott House to a place that feels safe and supports the efforts to help change the systemic and structural racism we see and confront each day.

To achieve this, our upper management team has been broken down into two smaller groups and has begun their own Courageous Conversations. We have engaged an outside facilitator tasked with helping to ensure that we can all find our voice to better share our experiences with both systemic and structural racism. The team anticipates the discussion about race and inequality will be difficult and will bring up uncomfortable feelings; however, we are committed to making this forum a safe space for supporting the conversation.

The goal we set will be to address racism and improve the personal lives of all of us, including those we serve who face these issues every day. We will go to emotional, experiential, and other places that are uncomfortable and difficult for all of us to face. This effort will be agency-wide and will continue for as long as these issues remain in our society. I believe our exploration will lead us to places that, when recognized and discussed, can change our behaviors and therefore help ensure that those we serve experience less systemic and structural racism in their lives. We support the changes, both individually and agency-wide. It is our greatest hope to help heal and ensure all feel a true part of America’s promise.

To date, each group has met three times totaling 37 staff members. The groups consist of individuals from various background and race. Participants have begun sharing their feelings, experiences and other issues related to understanding systemic racism and the conversations have been both meaningful and powerful.

In taking a pulse of the group, we have found emotions of fear of the police in both adults and their children with reactions ranging from enagement to numbness. However, most struggle with what can I/we do to effectuate change in this incredible polarized country in which we find ourselves. Some of us want action now; voting marching, etc., while others want to learn about “white privilege micro aggressions” and other forms of racism. However, all of us want to strengthen the relationship and bonds between the staff here at Abbott House.

Although the sessions are 1 ½ hours long, the time flies and is emotionally taxing for the members. Deeper conversations and sharing have occurred, as the groups having the Courageous Conversations become comfortable and feel safe discussing their experiences. The nicest feeling so far is that there are no recriminations or put-downs as we all struggle to share our own unique experiences.

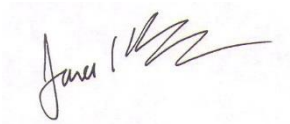
The management team also will be proactively engaging with their supervisors by having meaningful and supportive conversations. All efforts will be made to ensure staff feel safe and comfortable to discuss their feelings on race and inequality.

As we at Abbott House continue to have Courageous Conversations, I believe the agency will get stronger, staff will advocate more effectively, and support for our clients will improve, as will our own relationships..

The age-old question is still on the table, "If not now, when"? At Abbott House the answer is "NOW".

I hope this note conveys a sense of what it is like to put 37 people together to discuss systemic racism and what can be done about it. Courageous Conversations will continue as well as my notes to you all.

Continue to be safe, healthy, and above all, courageous.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

James