



**Agency narrative explanation inclusive of the following:**

**1. Insights gained from completion of the agency DEI assessment:**

- *Organizational Commitment, Leadership and Governance:*
  - Together has been actively working on incorporating race equity into our mission, vision and values not only through words, but with our actions. Through recent rebranding work, Together has identified that “Inclusion” will be one of its five values going forward.
  - Together has completed environmental scans and made adjustments with wages to ensure staff are receiving a living wage and receive regular increases that at minimum meet the cost of living regionally.
- *Equity Policies and Implementation Practices:*
  - Together works hard to ensure equity in practice and regularly problem-solves issues as they arise when individuals seeking or receiving services are struggling to obtain them. Examples include: housing staff meet their participants in their home to provide case management, may take them to appointments, and if funding allows we may provide a bus pass to an individual who needs a ride to access services. All participants in our housing programs receive referrals to appropriate community partners or resources regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age or any other difference they may have.
  - Together’s *Employee Handbook* includes a policy on *Non-Discrimination and Harassment* including sections on complaint procedure, investigation and responsive action.
- *Organizational Climate, Culture and Communications:*
  - Together has developed an informational brochure that includes diverse images that reflect many cultures and populations.
  - Together is in the process of identifying and implementing means to adapt our intake forms and processes to better serve the needs of non-English speaking participants as well as individuals with other barriers such as vision. In addition, role-playing has been done with staff and lived experience staff to gather information on how we can better improve our intake process.
  - Together has written policies in the *Employee handbook* to address complaints, harassment and discrimination.
  - Our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) committee is actively working on creating a safe space to discuss issues of race, racism, gender identity and sexual orientation through bi-weekly meetings and activities.

- Together currently survey participants of our Short-Term Emergency Housing Program (STEHP), Crisis Engagement, and both of our Choice pantries to gather feedback from participants. Together engages in activities that allow for feedback from all stakeholders including staff, volunteers and others with lived experience (which also includes many staff). Feedback is analyzed and used to determine if changes need to be implemented. We are working on expanding this to ensure we are getting feedback for all of our programs as well as from community partners.
- Education and training are in progress to train staff on what inclusive and culturally responsive language is and how to use it.
- *Service-Based Equity:*
  - Together provides interpreter and translator services to the best of our ability. We employ staff who speak Spanish and if other languages are needed, we utilize Google Translator or Language Access.
  - Intake forms for both pantries and STEHP are available in Spanish and English
  - We are exploring which additional languages are most needed so we can provide intake forms and services to meet participants' needs.
  - Together considers all aspects of access, if possible, when planning events. When planning for events that include our STEHP participants we consider culture when selecting what foods will be served. When providing a food demonstration at one of our Choice Pantries, we have staff available to provide translation either in person or through Google Translator or Language Access.
  - Our housing teams meet the participants where they live to provide case management, thus removing the barrier of transportation. If they have ambulatory issues, we will deliver a pantry to them. The pantry will be based on their dietary needs, choice and take into consideration their cultural likes/dislikes or needs.
  - If participants in our housing programs have barriers getting to appointments our staff will either provide transportation or a bus pass to assist.
  - Our DEIB committee is actively working on providing training for all staff to ensure they understand and interact with our participants, each other, and the community with cultural sensitivity and humility.
- *Service-User Voice and Influence:*
  - Surveys are utilized in both of our Choice Pantries and STEHP to gather feedback from participants. Feedback will be analyzed to determine if adjustments need to be implemented to better serve all of our participants. We will be expanding this to all departments in the near future.
  - Together's website allows for written feedback on our services and programs.
  - Together is working to incorporate more lived experience feedback to utilize in setting priorities and decision making in all aspects of our organization. We currently employ several staff and a Board Member with lived experience.
  - Together has been very purposeful when determining how to improve access to services. Adding an additional pantry in Council Bluffs expanded access outside of Omaha. In addition, we varied hours of operation to include hours that are outside of other pantries. Participants are surveyed to determine what foods they would like

available. We provide several different types of services at each location and provide resources to better serve the population.

- *Workforce Composition and Quality:*
  - Staff at Together either have, or are in the process of, receiving education and training in the areas of racial, gender and income inequities as well as cultural sensitivity, humility, responsiveness, and trauma-informed approaches. These will be included in the future onboarding process.
  - Our HR Manager is providing training in addition to exploring additional training that would benefit staff related to these topics.
- *Community Collaborations:*
  - Together is actively involved in the community and works very closely with numerous community organizations through collaboration, joint goals and objectives to end homelessness and hunger, referrals and connections, participation in meetings and coalitions, memberships and strong partnerships.
  - Together is part of the Continuum of Care and adheres to the MACCH Standards of Assistance.
- *Data, Metrics and Continuous Quality Improvement:*
  - This is an area we will explore.
  - We currently review and report Quantitative data quarterly.
  - Data is collected at intake from pantry participants as well as program participants; the data is currently used for reporting purposes with no analysis of demographics or success based on those. We will move toward analysis and action steps.

## **2. Steps currently being taken internally to address racial, ethnic and/or LGBTQIA+ disparities:**

- Together believes in, and works hard to create, an inclusive, equitable, and inspiring workplace. We are taking steps to be more intentional with a DEIB strategy and plan. Staff were provided with a confidential survey including the following questions:
  - What does DEIB mean to you?
  - Do you feel comfortable talking to your supervisor about DEIB related issues?
  - Do you feel heard? If not, please explain.
  - Do you feel included? If not, please give an example.
  - Do you see underrepresented groups involved in decisions being made in leadership roles?
  - Do you see underrepresented groups involved in hiring and promotion decisions?
  - What is your current experience regarding DEIB at Together?
  - Do you have any suggestions on how Together can improve how DEIB strategies are implemented within the agency?
- DEIB meets bi-weekly
- Training:
  - Has provided 14 hours of DEI training in 2022 and 32 hours in 2023 thus far.
  - Implicit Racial Bias Workshop attended by 3 staff.
  - Racial, Religion, and Social Justice Conference – attended by 2 staff.
  - Microaggressions

- Using Person First language
- Trafficking
- Mental Health
- Created DEIB Mission Statement
  - “At Together, we value and respect the unique lived experience of every member in our organization and community. We base our values on acceptance, understanding and authentic connection. We celebrate the differences that allow us to make progress and create change. We advocate for equitable opportunities for growth and stability for the individuals and families that make up our community.”
- MLK Day
  - Homeless kits were assembled by Together employees and committee members labeled “Packed for you by Together in honor of MLK Day.”
- Day of Silence
  - A safe space was created for staff to meet and sit in silence to protest the harmful effects of harassment and discrimination of LGBTQIA+ people in our community.
    - Staff was encouraged to write into the Legislature against the LB574 bill that if passed would prohibit doctors from providing puberty blockers, hormone therapy or performing gender-altering surgery to anyone under the age of 19 in the state of Nebraska.
- Juneteenth – Education and awareness was shared with staff prior to observance.
- Black History Month
  - Daily education and awareness were shared with staff agency-wide the entire month.
  - A raffle was held using gift cards from locally owned black-owned businesses.
  - Each black-owned business was highlighted on our website.
  - Content was on the big screen in the pantry lobby all month.
  - Literature was placed in the lobby at all locations.
  - Coloring activities for children were available at both Choice Pantry locations.
- Staff participated in the PRIDE parade and a resource table was at the event.
- Preferred pronouns were added to the “Getting to know you Questionnaire” for staff.
- Pronouns were updated in the Employee Handbook to represent our inclusive culture.
- Food planted in the Together garden to reflect our community’s needs as well as culture.

**3. Steps the agency plans to take in the next 9 months to address disparities as listed above:**

- Improve translation services for additional languages including blind and deaf.
- Provide more recipes and diverse foods/spices in our Choice Pantries to fit the population and ethnicities we serve.
- Seek a more diverse leadership team as positions become available.
- Continue recruiting and hiring diverse staff to reflect the population we serve.
- A DEIB policy will be added to the staff handbook in 2024.
- DEIB information will be added to the website and have its own page. It will:
  - Track the number of training hours associated with DEIB

- List events in the community associated with diversity holidays that are available to participate in.
- Research more substantial avenues for Together staff to participate in related to MLK and Juneteenth and other diverse populations in our community.
- Develop additional surveys and tools to gather information from our stakeholders and participants.
- Analyze data from surveys to address any issues identified and determine next steps.