

## A Message from Our Chair

June 2023

As we celebrate the beginning of a busy summer, our Ys are highlighting opportunities to be more inclusive and more aware of all the dimensions of diversity. I wanted to share some thoughts about the work of our Alliance's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Committee and the YMCA of High Point's journey.

I'm a member of the Alliance's relatively new DEI Committee; this may be my own bias, but I think the committee is doing a good job of serving as a resource to our Ys, including building awareness of DEI resources and providing access to workshops like the [Racial Equity Institute's Groundwater Approach](#) and insight from other YMCAs' experiences.. Last week, the Committee launched a DEI baseline survey to our CEOs to help others support the Committee's efforts.

Here in High Point, we certainly have not "figured out" or solved diversity, but we have found a path and are making progress on our journey to be more inclusive. As some of my colleagues know, our Y has worked with [Dream Builders Communication](#) to help us find our path and grow. As we started this journey, I made it clear that this wasn't an "initiative" where we check a few boxes and are done, but that this work becomes part of our DNA, part of our effort to serve all. What we really began with was a conversation about leadership, not diversity.

Dr. Kenston Griffin with Dream Builders asked our leadership team how they defined leadership and teamwork. There were multiple answers. Then we asked about how they define inclusion, access and belonging. There were more varied answers. This all led to our collective work on this journey.

Some of the major outcomes of this work for our Y have been around facilities, training, and overhauling our membership model. We recently completed a renovation and expansion of our Carl Chavis YMCA. This branch is in a housing authoring neighborhood and, quite frankly, wasn't up to standard of what a Y needs to be. I wanted to be sure that we were being consistent in the product we are providing to the community; we are the High Point Y, not just the Hartley Drive Family Y or Chavis Y. We're one Y, and everyone should feel good about walking into any of our facilities. We also have updated our other branches in terms of accessibility and areas for people with special needs.

In terms of our staff, we wanted to be more aggressive about training opportunities. We are providing and encouraging staff with the opportunity to attend training such as Groundwater. We are more intentional to ensure that all training integrate diversity as part of the discussion to emphasize that diversity means many different things. As an example, we just finished working with a group that trained our staff to help us better understand the autism spectrum so we are better equipped to serve people with autism.

Another huge change for our Y is that we have done away with our traditional model of membership in terms of what defines a family or household. We now have membership rates based on the participating individuals within a household; there's

a fee for the first adult to join, and then a fee for each additional adult and a fee to add a child. There is no fee for additional children after the first child

Each Y is different and will approach this work differently. For our Y, we didn't hold a retreat for our board or staff on diversity, for example, but we did commit to making diversity a component at each of our monthly board meetings. Sometimes Kenston joins us and shares about his work for maybe 15 minutes, or I will share about the recent autism training for our staff, for example. We also utilize Dream Builders at multiple staff meetings each year. The diversity component has naturally become part of the conversation over time for us.

I know there are plenty of flaws with our Y's path, more than the successes. I know we still have a lot of work to do to address our biases and blind spots, but we continue to progress and are seeing positive outcomes as a result.

Our North Carolina Ys are at different places along the journey to be more inclusive. Our Alliance DEI Committee will continue its work to support. My advice is simply not to overthink this work. Just start and be intentional as you move forward. Together we will grow.

Lynn Lomax  
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Chair, NC Alliance Board of Directors