



A United Way Agency Partner

Families**FORWARD** Statement of Commitment to Social Justice and Equity

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice," Theodore Parker, a Unitarian minister, said in an 1853 sermon on justice and conscience and later quoted extensively by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as early as 1953.

Families**FORWARD**, with roots dating to 1875, started with a focus on social justice. With each phase of its existence through the past 145 years, the agency focused on helping others, especially the less fortunate.

Its first protection was for horses and the abuse they suffered, but within two years, the agency began to focus on the protection of children. It became an agency with services to prevent juvenile delinquency and its negative life impact. It later added "The Children's Protective Service" to its name, to promote the prevention of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children, with a focus on adoption services. Now known as Families**FORWARD**, the agency provides school-based services to ensure positive family engagement, academic success and social-emotional development, leading to resilient children and youth.

The day-to-day barriers placed in front of our families can be overwhelming to navigate. The families we serve are 93% black and brown; 97.3% are below 200% of poverty. The institutional racism that is faced by black, brown and marginalized people in our community and country became publicized with a video of the death of Mr. George Floyd on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, forcing self-reflection and hard conversations.

The events of the past four weeks are bringing hope for breaking down the walls of institutional racism, which have separated us as human beings for more than 400 years. The only way things will improve is to trust in the values that we have as Americans, with the Constitution as our common foundation. In a recent conversation with our staff, it became apparent that we are committed to continuing the journey here at Families**FORWARD** by ensuring a high-quality education for our more than 2,600 students in four schools—whether they are black, brown, yellow, red or white. We will serve each and every student, many of whom remain marginalized by both race and poverty/low wealth.

Our students need hope while we all face the uncertainties of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. We will continue to be true to our mission of assisting them to become productive, independent, responsible citizens through the services that we provide. Our mission and practices create the beginnings of self-worth. Our culturally competent staff members and our social-emotional skill-building in students help address the inequities. Langston Hughes, a Harlem Renaissance poet, yearns for equality in his poem, "I, Too":

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed-

I, too, am America.

We can have the hard conversations and work together, being sure that the future is not marginalized for our black, brown and socioeconomically challenged children due to circumstances beyond their control.

Deborah Mariner Allsop,
Executive Director/CEO
June 25, 2020

On behalf of Families**FORWARD** staff members:

- Leslie Henry, site manager, Bond Hill Academy of Math and Science Discovery
- Sheila Jenkins, after-school coordinator, Carson School
- Victoria Matchett, after-school coordinator, Hays-Porter School
- Richara Richardson, resource coordinator, Hays-Porter School
- Josephine Steagall, administrative assistant
- Larry Westerfeld, volunteer coordinator for special events/YPQI coordinator
- Tonya Williams, assistant after-school coordinator, Carson School
- Rhonda Wright, interim parent engagement coordinator, Bond Hill Academy
- Bill Ferguson, consultant

Unanimously endorsed by the Families**FORWARD** Board of Trustees at its regular meeting June 25, 2020, and entered into the board minutes