



Everyone needs a home

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To the Staff and Community of Homes First:

Over the past few months, there has been an increased global awareness brought to the kinds of senseless violence and racism that Black and Indigenous people experience. The voices and experiences being shared in the media are not new, but the spotlight is now shining brightly on these issues. Anti-Black and Anti-Indigenous racism has long been woven into the fabric of many cultures – so much so that these same acts of racism and injustices have repeated for generations. Acknowledging systemic racism in our culture is the first step toward effective racial justice.

At Homes First, we have been committed to providing supportive housing and shelters for over 35 years to all populations. We were the first and remain one of the largest providers of shelters and housing in Toronto for people with the fewest options. However, we must acknowledge that the environment we all work and live in is not experienced the same way by all populations. In Canada, 28-34% of the shelter population is Indigenous, and Indigenous people are over-represented amongst the homeless population in virtually all urban centres in Canada. In Toronto, 62% of all persons living in Poverty are from racialized groups (colour of poverty, 2019).

Members of the Board and Management at Homes First Society are committed to supporting staff and residents in this urgent and important priority of reducing the disparities linked to race. We recognize this extraordinary moment and express solidarity with our Black, Indigenous, and marginalized communities, whose anger and grief must be acknowledged and addressed if we are to achieve our vision of a healthy and thriving community for all.

Of course, such statements, while important, are only meaningful when linked to action. Homes First believes that access to education of all forms is important for the continued success and development of Black and Indigenous communities. However, there can be barriers in place, reducing access to education. One action Homes First will immediately take is to create a scholarship program to address some of the gaps and needs we have identified in order to increase access and to support Black and Indigenous staff. More information about this initiative will be shared in the coming weeks.

In addition, the Homes First Board and Management Team is committing to the following actions:

- We will review our current existing strategic plan with a view of continuing to be aware of ways that we can address systemic racism and oppression; and
- We will invite meaningful input from Black and Indigenous stakeholders in Homes First's future strategic planning.

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The Board of Directors and the Management Team of Homes First is committed to address these issues through some of the following actions:

- The Board is to have a more active role in being part of the solution. One of the ways is to study converting the ad-hoc sub-committee on Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression Sub-Committee into a Board standing committee, or some other form of Board involvement to facilitate the planning of other concrete future action steps, with opportunity for staff and tenant involvement and input; and,
- The Board members will engage in training opportunities to assist in learning of their biases, and reflecting on these in order to minimize these biases in themselves and in the workplace. In addition, Management and staff will continue the training that assists staff in learning of their biases and reflecting on these in order to minimize those biases in the workplace.

The Board commits to reflecting on our own services and contributing to change in the Homeless sector.

To learn more about anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism or if you are looking for places to find support, please see: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/get-involved/community/confronting-anti-black-racism/> for more information.

More information about the scholarship initiative will be forthcoming as the Homes First Society Board of Directors and Management Team endeavours towards a health and thriving community for all.

Sincerely,



Jose Querubin, Chair

on behalf of the Board of Directors and Management of Homes First



Patricia Mueller, Chief Executive Officer