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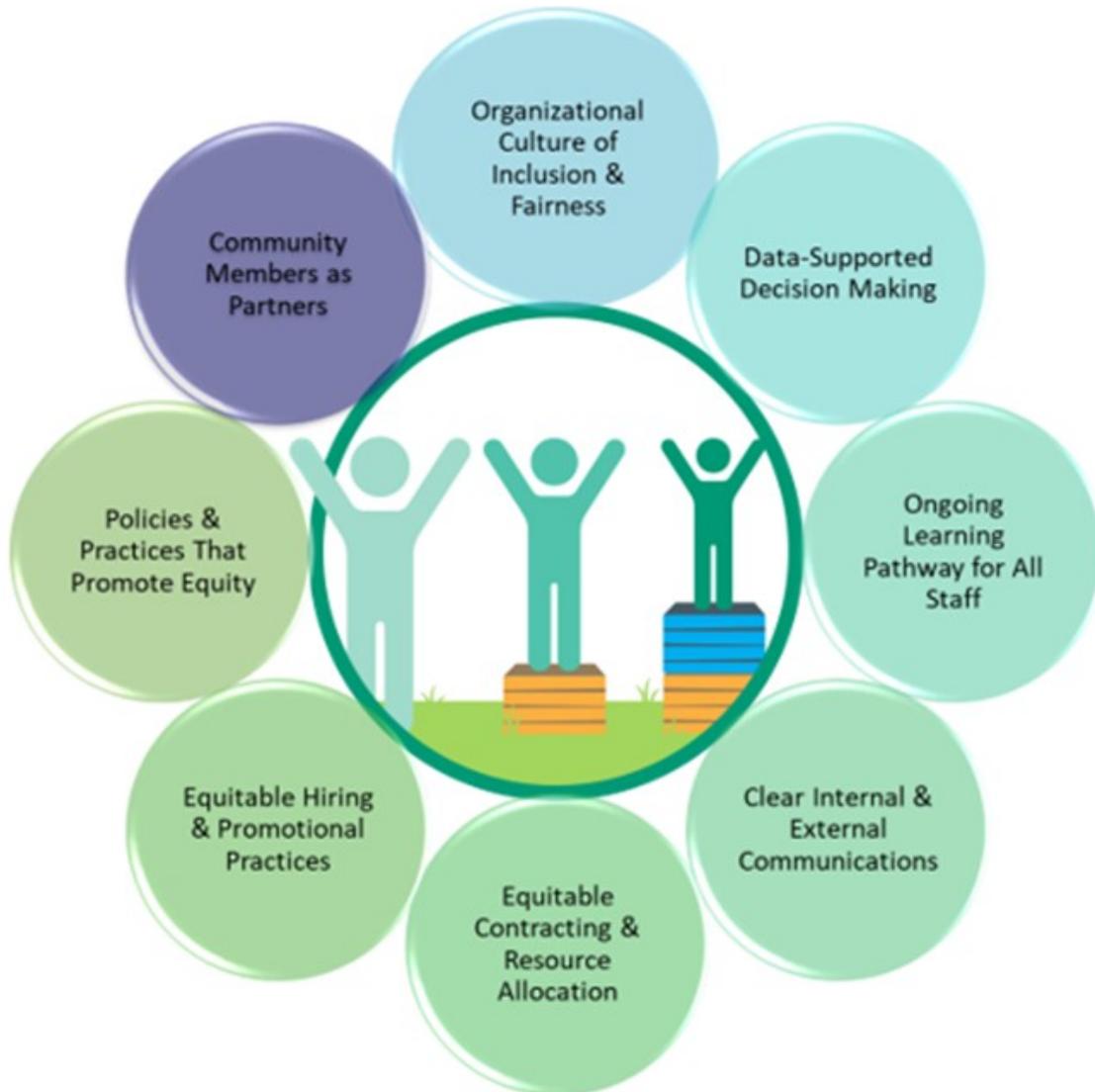
**DIVERSITY,  
EQUITY  
& BELONGING**

**STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025**

Florence Racine, Director

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# PROLOGUE

Historically and nationally, Black children and families have been, and are, disproportionately represented and experience disparate outcomes in New Jersey's child welfare system. No longer tolerant of explaining these outcomes as 'just the way it is,' or beyond our capacity to change, NJ DCF began investing time and resources in 2018 to disaggregate data by race, to determine root causes for these differences, to develop race equity training for all staff, to begin changing policies and practices contributing to these outcomes, and instituted a Race Equity Steering Committee (RESC) to guide these processes. We also realized that we could not limit our efforts to race - the focus must be inclusive of all historically marginalized and oppressed populations that have experienced inequity in our system. Among these populations are the LGBTQI+ community, people with English as a non-primary language, women of color, and the immigrant community. This marked the beginning of agency-wide, transformational change.

As our collective understanding and cultural humility has grown, and as we have listened to the voices of our workforce and constituents, we embrace the responsibility that we all carry for creating equity, from the inside out. We all come to serve, to help and not to harm, and we can each do our part to transform our agency by applying and evolving our equity lens and taking action. In so doing, we will transform our work culture, which will elevate our practice and inevitably transform the experience children, families have with us. By equitably addressing the unique needs and challenges for all populations (internal and external), regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age, ability, language, and nationality, we will realize our vision.

Dr. Maya Angelou once said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." This document reflects DEB's vision to live Dr. Angelou's words.

**"Do the best you can until you know better.  
Then when you know better, do better"**

~ Dr. Maya Angelou

## ***Acknowledgements***

The Office of DEB would like to thank:

**Dr. Carol Spigner, consultant, Casey Family Programs**, since 2018. Dr. Spigner was pivotal in the implementation and ongoing work of NJ DCF's Race Equity Steering Committee (RESC) and provided consultation in the development of this document.

**Joyce James Consulting, Inc.** Joyce and her team conducted numerous 4-day and 2-day structural racism, learning intensives and strategic sessions throughout 2022 with more than 300 DCF employees and system partners. Many of the ideas from staff in these sessions formed the foundation of this strategic plan and will guide the RESC's future work.

**The Race Equity Steering Committee (RESC).** The RESC has worked tirelessly since 2018 to establish structure and achieve results, above and beyond their regular duties.

We would also like to thank **all of you** who have shown up for and fully participated in all of the race equity trainings these last several years; those of you who have put your new knowledge into practice, and committed yourselves to ongoing learning and equity, wherever you are on this learning spectrum.

## 2023-2025: Office of Diversity, Equity and Belonging Strategic Plan (DEB)

The Office of DEB provides leadership, partnership, coordination and collaboration, internally (offices and departments) and externally (agencies, communities) to support and facilitate [DCF's vision, values, core approaches and transformational goals](#). This office was established in March 2021 to advance policies and approaches that prioritize a work culture that is respectful of the unique needs, perspectives and potential of every team member, and to advance policies and approaches throughout DCF that will lead to equitable outcomes for everyone we serve in partnership with divisions, offices and units across the department. DEB supports DCF's efforts to:

- Become an equitable and fair agency in which everyone views themselves as responsible for creating and sustaining equity, by addressing all forms of bias, disproportionality, and disparities in our personnel practices, agency programs, policies, and practices
- Address diversity and inclusion for all people (internal operations and external services)
- Create a culture of belonging for all people (inside and outside of the agency) that respects and embraces differences, treats everyone equitably and promotes psychological safety

## OUR STRATEGIC VISION

By January 2026 DCF is an anti-racist and equitable organization<sup>1</sup>. Equity<sup>2</sup> and anti-racism are embedded in our agency's DNA; it is who we are and the way we do business. This is reflected in our workforce, our operations, the communities we serve, and the agencies with which we collaborate and foster consistency in equity. As a result of changes to our agency's foundational structure:

**Our culture is transformed:** Our workforce looks, sounds, feels, and behaves differently:

- We are a culturally humble learning organization, that are "Critical Lovers of our System" and "Gatekeepers<sup>3</sup>," which means that we hold ourselves, each other, and our agency fully accountable to the highest standards of equity, continuous improvement, and respect.
- Our communications and behaviors are safe, necessary, brave, liberated, authentic, healing-centered, and transparent across all departments, with our children and families, and in how we engage with our communities, system providers and partner agencies.
- Diverse, collegial relationships exist across all levels of our agency that are respectful and empowering; where cultures and differences are openly and authentically celebrated, and all feel a true sense of belonging.
- There is a high level of trust in each other - in our processes and decisions, as power is shared throughout our agency and with the communities we serve.
- Our staff consistently experience the [five essentials for workplace mental health and well-being](#) (i.e., protection from harm, connection & community, work-life harmony, mattering at work and opportunity for growth).
- Our staff experience safety, well-being, health, healing, and job satisfaction through increased opportunities.

<sup>1</sup>Anti-racist institutions actively and intentionally work to change the policies and practices that produce outcomes which have chronically favored one group and/or put a racial group(s) at a disadvantage.

<sup>2</sup>Equity means that the policies, practices, and behaviors of an organization produce equal outcomes for all people.

<sup>3</sup>Gatekeepers is a term from the Ground Water Analysis (GWA) trainings which suggests that all staff at all levels perform "gatekeeping" functions of both allowing people in as well as keeping people out. We are all asked to consider our individual roles to be better gatekeepers for those people historically left out.

**Our operations are transformed:** Our agency's equity lens is firmly in place to address the root causes and barriers that have historically led to disparate outcomes for our staff and the diverse populations we serve, through:

- Ongoing robust data analysis, reduction and/or elimination of barriers, and inclusive decision-making when creating or revising policies, practices & programs.
- Elevating our direct-contact practice to improve the quality of our interactions and results for the people we serve.
- Working diligently to help our system partners and providers to also apply an equity lens to their service.
- Implementing initiatives that target healing and break the cycle of multi-generational system involvement.

**Our communities are transformed:** By elevating our practice, quality of interactions, fully partnering and sharing power with our communities in a Truth and Transformation process, and amplifying the voices of lived experience to advance this change:

- We have strong, trusting relationships with communities we serve.
- Communities have the resources they need and are shared regardless of geography or race.
- Our communities have voice and choice.
- Our families and communities share in the solutions, and the communities' strengths and talents are harnessed and leveraged to respond to their unique needs, which keeps all children and families healthy, safe, and connected .

## ***Our Strategic Areas of Focus and Goals***

Our vision will be sustained by prioritizing strategies that institutionalize change in the following areas:

### **1. Human Resources**

- All staff feel valued, respected, safe, supported and have a sense of belonging
- Our staff demonstrates cultural humility<sup>4</sup>
- HR policies and practices promote equity (e.g., hiring, pay, and promotions)
- Staff have the tools and resources needed for health, well-being, and healing

### **2. Operations**

- DCF's policies and practices are reformed with an equity lens
- Systemic barriers throughout DCF's array of programs and services are reduced or eliminated
- Effectiveness and outcomes are measured via data-driven analysis and systems of accountability, monitoring and continual feedback
- Equity in outcomes and opportunities exists for all

### **3. Communications**

- Transparency -- our work, data, progress, and results are shared regularly with the public and our staff
- Staff and communities have necessary and safe spaces to facilitate and hold difficult and healing conversations
- Continuous feedback loops exist for our systems and processes

### **4. Training and Ongoing Learning Paths**

- All DCF staff engage in an equity and antiracism learning pathway from entry to exit
- Our collaborative partners participate in ongoing training and development

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<sup>4</sup>Cultural humility is a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique whereby the individual learns about other cultures by starting with an examination of one's own beliefs and cultural identities. It requires an ongoing commitment towards examining and challenging one's own assumptions, beliefs, and values.

***We invite our collaborative partners  
(DCF/System Partners/Community)  
to help us achieve our vision.***

## Our Pathway to Equity

**Culture**  
Transforming our culture  
through commitment to  
cultural humility, new thinking,  
and new ways of being



**Community**  
Transforming our  
communities through our  
practice, partnership and  
healing



**Operations**  
Transforming our operations  
through **action**,  
revolutionizing policy &  
elevating practice



**Equity**  
All people in our agency and  
those whom we serve  
experience equity and  
fairness

