



Dear colleague,

Today is the 5th Annual National Day of Racial Healing. This commemoration was established in 2017 by leaders in social services, faith-based organizations, government and private corporations from around the country to raise awareness and to recognize the need for racial reconciliation.

These last several months have certainly shown us that equity among races is a goal not yet realized. The pandemic has disproportionately impacted individuals and families of color, particularly Black and brown people as a result of discrimination, bias and prejudice in healthcare, employment, education and housing. In addition, incidents of social injustice, during which people of color are targeted by some in law enforcement or bigoted citizens because of the color of their skin, have deepened the division and mistrust in our communities.

We also see it in our own work. Families of color are more often reported, investigated and separated than white families. Our data tells the story.

Healing is an active verb, which means it is an ongoing activity. It takes time, patience, attention and care. When an injury is external, you can monitor the recovery progress and correct course if there's a setback. But when it's internal – deep within the DNA of families who have suffered hundreds of years of generational trauma and adversity – healing words, healing services, healing actions must be constant and enduring.

At DCF, we are having the hard conversations. We have created a Race Equity Steering Committee that is studying the data, identifying policy and practices that need changes and reviewing best practices. We've added a Diversity Officer in Human Resources and just recently posted for the position of Executive Director of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity. We have a webpage devoted to explaining race equity and our efforts underway to achieve it. And, this year, we'll be training all staff on race and racism. We also have a new Office of Resilience that will help guide the state's work in preventing, mitigating and eliminating Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

As a child- and family-serving system, NJ DCF understands that there is more healing in equity than in equality, and acknowledges that if we're committed to a path towards social justice, we need to stand up for people who have had to bear the scars of institutional racism, and stand against those who would paint over the sins of the past with a reductionist paint brush that gives equal status to all people's experiences.

I hope that today, and every day, we choose to be healers.

Christine