

Racial Justice & Equity Statement



Our Vision

All youth feel safe, accepted, and supported.

Introduction

The Bridge for Youth intentionally (re)focuses, (re)invests, and (re)commits to personal and organizational transformation as we center youth voice, justice, and equity in all that we do to fulfill our vision of “all youth feel safe, accepted, and supported”. In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, The Bridge for Youth [recognized the critical need](#) for self-examination. Almost immediately, we formed Racial Justice and Allyship Cohorts, as well as response teams, to embark on a soul-searching journey to understand where and how we need to [improve upon the ways we support and work with youth](#) and staff, most of whom identify as Black, Indigenous and/or People of Color (BIPOC).

Liberation is Love at The Bridge for Youth when we create spaces and opportunities so that we can all show up as our true and authentic selves without concern for conflict, judgment, or oppression. We believe when one thrives, we all thrive. This is *heArt* work, wherein we possess and invest in these intrinsic values:

- **Patience** – We give space for youth to make decisions on their own timeline in their own way.
- **Love and Caring** – We believe in acceptance, empathy, and non-judgment.
- **Communication** – We engage in intentional dialogue to understand each other’s truths.
- **Integrity** – We actively learn, grow, and change to align our actions in equity and justice.
- **Co-Creation** – We seek connection to amplify the voice of youth and each other.
- **Community** – We stand together for youth and for each other.

Our Truth

Collectively, The Bridge elects the definition of racial justice as the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice and equity, and/or *racial equity* goes beyond “anti-racism.” The Bridge commits to not only the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures. Here, we recognize bell hooks’ philosophy that interlocking systems of domination determines our socio-political reality. We understand that intersectionality of identities compounds oppression and/or harm. Therefore, we stand together against the harms to - and discrimination of - our BIPOC *commUNITY* of youth, peers, friends, and family.

In recent years, the State of Mni Sota declared “racism a public health emergency.” It is with this acknowledgment that The Bridge seeks a resolve that is human centered and representative of youth, staff, and *commUNITY* through a transformative [Strategic Plan](#). This plan 2022 – 2024 has racial justice and equity embedded throughout all goals and strategies, aligning expanded holistic service delivery with the voiced needs of youth, significant investments in our staff, and an eye on driving necessary organizational, community, and systemic change.

Whereas these human services, as well as resources were garnered for adult demographics. Whereas the nature of human services exemplifies white saviorism and prioritizes profit(s) above people. With the consideration of the stark, historical context of Black and Indigenous communities, in relation to the development of these

United States, The Bridge for Youth remains committed to the disruption and/or expulsion of white supremacy and settler colonialism.

Whereas blatant examples of racial injustices and atrocities to recognize and acknowledge include:

- forced assimilation, removal/relocation, erasure of Indigenous/Native communities; forced sterilization of Native Womyn; economic exploitation of migrant laborers; colonization/settler colonialism, which seeks to eradicate and/or terminate Native / Indigenous people; the genocide and/or ethnocide of Indigenous culture(s); and all other anti-Indigenous rhetoric...
- exploitation/extraction of Black people; the Jim Crow Era; racist medical research; police brutality; targeted red lining; the school-to-prison pipeline in relationship to the new Jim Crow; as well as the explicit history of Slavery, be it the social construction of race to deliberately protect the enslavement of Black people, as well as perpetuate anti-Black rhetoric, both longstanding and today...
- forced detainment in internment camps; economic exploitation and/or the enslavement of Asian people throughout the development of United States; “yellow peril” imposing extreme limitations of immigration; manifest destiny to infiltrate the Pacific Islands; militant aggression on AAPI communities; and all other anti-Asian rhetoric...
- And all and yet to be uncovered/unearthed...

Whereas this is Native Land and Mni Sota Makoce is Dakota homelands and there exists a deeply rooted significance for Native/Indigenous populations to protect the Sacred by honoring the common belief throughout Indigenous culture(s), namely here on Turtle Island, that Children are Sacred; they manifest as Royalty, entering this realm, self-actualized and Sacred. *Wakaneja* is Lakota for Children (English translation: *sacred beings*). Whereas The Bridge for Youth engages Youth to seek their wisdom to inform and design programming and centers them in planning for the future, we have learned this simple measure - respect the Sacred.

Whereas racism, in any form, is persevering and constantly discriminatory, producing disparate outcomes for Black, Indigenous and/or People of Color. Be it resolved by The Bridge for Youth, a *commUNITY* youth centered human service agency, that these acknowledgments seek to recognize the severity of racism and its profound impact upon *yOur commUNITY*, especially youth.

Our Commitment

We resolve our *rEvolutionary* commitment - as individuals and as a BFY *commUNITY* - to end racism as we:

- Center and prioritize youth voice and respect their journey and timeline
- Identify, interrogate, dismantle racism in systems, institutions (including our own, community)
- Stand up in *commUNITY* with - and for - our Black and Indigenous youth, peers, friends, and family
- Hold ourselves and others accountable; call out wrongs and clap for “rights”
- Emulate a *Liberation is Love* culture where when one thrives, we all thrive
- Value and celebrate cultural differences with reverence and empathy
- Experiences and identities of Staff, Board of Directors, and partners represent those of youth in program
- Recognize and acknowledge harm and trauma – current and historical – to Black and Indigenous peoples
- Assure knowledge and resources are equitably available and distributed
- Invest in our strategic plan which prioritizes voice, justice, and equity throughout

Our Mission

The Bridge for Youth centers youth voice, justice, and equity in all we do, and empower youth experiencing homelessness through safe shelter, basic needs, and healthy relationships.