

## **Deaf Community Services of San Diego (DCS) Organizational Healing Revised Report for Community, Clients, Staff, and Board - October 15, 2021**

### **Preface**

DCS initiated an organization healing process in 2020 which has continued through 2021. In late 2020, DCS felt that it needed greater investment in the organization's healing process with its community to support the upcoming Executive Director search process. DCS contacted Innivee Strategies, Inc. to provide consulting services to achieve both outcomes, facilitate progress in its organizational healing, and support the process of hiring the new Executive Director.

Organizational healing involves openly assessing past harms caused by the organization and guidance toward repairing interpersonal relationships, practices, policies, and structures, making the organization more compassionate, resilient, and united going forward. Brandon "BL" Williams [he/him, Black Deaf man] and Liam Esposito [he/him, White Deaf transman] were brought on to the project to provide organizational healing support and facilitation.

Separate listening sessions were established via Zoom for community members, clients, BIPOC staff, staff, the Deputy Director/ Acting Executive Director and HR manager, and the board of directors respectively. Open invitations were issued to the community at large. Attendance during the Zoom sessions by the community members ranged from 5 - 25. Most of the sessions were held twice with each group so that individuals could have ample time to digest and process the conversation topics and convey their experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, some individuals were unable to participate in the first session but were able to participate in the second one. In addition, we received several thoughtful emails.

These conversations, held in groups and one-on-one, were an opportunity for the DCS community to share some of their personal feelings, opinions, and perspectives about the organization's challenges. The consultant's approach to the group facilitation and listening sessions was organic. They started with introductions and a statement of purpose, then allowed the dialog to flow in the direction that the group wanted. People shared their experiences where trust was lost and people were hurt. They expressed their opinions on situations where they thought communication broke down, and what they would do differently if they could do it all over again.

Innivee Strategies issued an organizational healing report on June 25, 2021. The report was intended to document the next steps forward. We realize that without the proper context, the information in the original report inadvertently framed the organizational healing process as a fact-finding project. The information in the original report was based on information shared with the organizational healing facilitators. It was not intended to be presented as facts. The themes identified and healing steps outlined below and in the original report are based on the

experiences, perceptions, and assumptions experienced by DCS and its stakeholders. Innivee Strategies' goal was to provide DCS with an understanding of the current mood, and what DCS can consider doing to move its community, and organization, forward. The report provides the board with the information that it needs to take the necessary steps and communicate these steps with the community.

We hope that this revised report gives DCS and its constituents an opportunity to reflect on the discussions that took place during the listening sessions, and serves as a guide to building a path forward. While much work and healing lies ahead, the organizational healing sessions revealed that DCS is unquestionably a much-needed and much-valued part of the San Diego community. We want to thank the DCS board, staff, and San Diego community for entrusting our company with the information, experiences, lessons learned, and collective hopes for the future that resulted in our report.

## Themes & Healing Steps

Below are the common themes from the listening sessions and healing steps, as a starting point, for DCS to consider adopting as it works to transform its organizational culture and conditions. These are not exhaustive but are imperative to the ongoing process:

Themes	Healing Steps
<p><b>Accountability:</b></p> <p>Trust between DCS and its various constituents has been eroded.</p>	<p>Building trust begins with a community-wide acknowledgment of the gaps in leadership and issues to date, with a stated commitment of accountability that is reinforced by ongoing action and communication. This is an ongoing process and the journey is an ongoing process. The journey will be one where steps are taken forward, while also sometimes taking steps back. This consistency in communication and accountability will be necessary in order for the organization to demonstrate its commitment to acknowledging and addressing issues raised by the community, staff, clients, supporters, and stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Communication, Language Justice, and Accessibility:</b></p> <p>Community and staff members indicate that there is a lack of consistent, transparent communication on DCS' behalf.</p>	<p>Improving the relationships between the Board, Executive Team, Administrative Team, and the staff within DCS, as well as the Deaf San Diego community at large, is essential to DCS' success. One of the key steps toward attaining this goal is frequent, regularly scheduled, and transparent communications. DCS' key stakeholder groups have indicated they welcome the opportunity to engage the</p>

<p>Community members have also expressed concern that the majority of DCS communications are in English and therefore are not fully accessible to the communities that they serve. They have also expressed the importance of DCS increasing the number of utilizations of its pool of trilingual and BIPOC interpreters.</p>	<p>organization publicly and provide information for DCS to build upon if it continues to engage its stakeholders in groups and in gathering individual input and feedback.</p> <p>The San Diego Deaf community is composed of diverse members who use languages that primarily include, but are not limited to Mexican Sign Language (LSM), American Sign Language (ASL), Spanish (written), and English (written). Determining and publicly sharing DCS' language access expectations can bring this diverse community of different language users together. Once these language access expectations are adopted and embraced, communications and content such as announcements, reports, programs, services, etc. can then reflect the organization's values.</p>
<p><b>Racial Equity and Inclusion:</b></p> <p>DCS is a place where the leaders and staff are complicit in perpetuating oppression, violence, and harm - especially towards Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian employees.</p>	<p>When white staff members hold each other accountable when racist comments are made, rather than keep silent and therefore perpetuate white supremacy, DCS will be on a path toward collective accountability in achieving equity.</p> <p>An external equity auditor can identify matters to act upon by performing an equity audit and examining equity across governance, operations, culture, programs, human resources, access, compensation, as well as other disparities between race, gender, and Deaf/hearing.</p> <p>Through this process, DCS can adopt an equity lens including a racial equity lens. This will provide clarity when identifying where challenges and opportunities exist. Leaders and staff can take intentional steps to ensure more equitable outcomes for all individuals and communities.</p> <p>One component of continuing the healing process is to obtain the services of mental health counselors, ideally BIPOC, who have a</p>

	<p>Power, Privilege, Oppression (PPO) framework training and can offer ongoing counseling support to DCS employees.</p>
<p><b>Leadership and Culture:</b></p> <p>BIPOC staff expressed that historically, they have not trusted and have not felt safe expressing their concerns to the Board and executive team. Some have also expressed that they feel unappreciated, or white employees receive more recognition and praise than BIPOC employees.</p> <p>There has been a longstanding disconnect between the Board and staff at all levels, which has resulted in miscommunication and mistrust.</p>	<p>Building an organizational culture where all employees including BIPOC and other historically marginalized groups feel valued and appreciated is a key step toward healing. The Board and executive team need to make themselves available and to continue this practice to regain trust. Proactive initiatives to hold space for BIPOC individuals will make them feel safe and valued, in sharing their perspective and contributions to the organization.</p> <p>A sense of fairness and respect among staff members can be cultivated through the recognition and compensation of their work in an equitable and inclusive manner. The organization's culture could be bolstered by the development of organizational values which clearly articulate the beliefs and principles that guide the behavior of all individuals involved in the organization.</p> <p>Connections are formed through engagement and increased buy-in within decision-making processes. One example of a step that can be taken is to identify staff liaisons (ideally, one BIPOC, one white) as a means of improving communication and transparency between the Board and staff. Another is to actively cultivate and engage the Deaf Services Advisory Council (DSAC) and the Collaborative Advisory Committee (CAC) in roles that increase the group's value and involvement in the organization.</p> <p>Frequent training is a necessary ingredient on the path toward accountability. Mechanisms that build upon the training will facilitate the application of the training content. Accountability can be strengthened when the information learned during the training, as</p>

	well as subsequent actions, are openly shared with the community.
<p><b>Human Resources and Hiring:</b></p> <p>There is a significant amount of mistrust and uncertainty surrounding DCS' human resources management, especially when it pertains to BIPOC applicants and employees.</p>	<p>Hiring practices and HR processes can directly affect an organization's trajectory and become a reflection of its values. They can impact staff morale and affect recruitment and retention efforts at DCS. There were a significant number of perspectives and opinions about DCS' HR. Current HR practices, operations, and processes need to be reviewed, communicated, and updated to adopt and incorporate an equity lens. The steps toward healing need to include discussions and decisions that lead to increased oversight of HR by the Board through its collaboration with, and support for the new Executive Director.</p>

## Closing

In proceeding with the organizational healing process, DCS has indicated its commitment to remedying existing harms and damaged trust within the organization and community. To actually remedy these harms and repair trust, it will be necessary to confront, address, and communicate about these conditions and situations within the organization and community on an ongoing basis and in a proactive manner. The organization will not be able to enact each and every healing step listed above, whether due to time, resources, or existing priorities; however, DCS will benefit from acknowledging what it is actively working on, as well as openly communicating about any future challenges or concerns that arise.

Innivee Strategies is now supporting the executive search process. We have designed this process to include various stakeholders (community, clients, executive team, staff, DSAC, and board) and perspectives on the criterion and qualifications sought out in a new Executive Director. Continuing to utilize open processes that are transparent and collective, with all participants having equal say in decision-making, is instrumental in restoring and rebuilding trust and credibility within the San Diego Deaf community and DCS.

*“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”*

*Angela Davis*

## **Additional Information/Resources**

**White Supremacy Culture** (Tema Okun, 2021)

**Organizational Healing** (Sonnentag, Niessen, & Neff, 2012)