

## Racial justice training

# How to succeed at DEI: Ronald McDonald House Houston's special sauce (#113)

On November 26, 2022, three members of Ronald McDonald House Houston (RMH) who were instrumental in implementing its diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative presented on their results to date at the 29<sup>th</sup> annual Power Tools for Nonprofits Conference, sponsored by CenterPoint Energy, United Way, and University of Houston Downtown.

Presenters were Cristina Vetrano (CEO), Philip Tenenbaum (Board member), Cheronda Rutherford (chair of DEI staff committee), and Jean Latting (consultant).

The presentation was audio-recorded.

### Cristina 0:05

Hi, my name is Cristina Vetrano. I'm the CEO of Ronald McDonald House and super excited to be here to talk about our journey. And if you all have questions that you want to ask in the midst of the presentation, please feel free. If they end up being a lot, we might ask to kind of wait maybe a little bit more towards the end.

You also have note cards in front of you, if someone doesn't want to ask a question out loud, but you want to put it on a piece of paper, you're welcome to do that, too. And we'll collect those a little bit later.

Our other panelists that we have here, so it's kind of our group effort of what we've been doing around DEI, we have Cheronda Rutherford, who is our DEI Task Force chair for our staff. And we have Phillip Tenenbaum, who is the task force for our board. And we have Jean Latting, who has been our consultant and been a part of our journey.

I have been with Ronald McDonald house for just about two years, I started right during the pandemic, I started in August. And so, we were locked down just like everybody else, even though Ronald McDonald House did continue to be serving families at that time.

I was going through the interview process as well during the pandemic. And an important part of my interview process, that Philip was actually a part of, was talking about how I would address DEI issues, George Floyd had been murdered. We were in this flux within Ronald McDonald House, it hadn't really been addressed real clearly on how we might move forward as an organization.

I knew that would be something that we'd need to talk about, right when I started, and to really kind of set the pace of how I felt about that, and where I stood on that. And so, that was really one of the first communications that I put out to the staff to help them know where I stood and how important DEI was for me.

And so, one of the first things that we did then was we put together a DEI committee, I asked for staff who wanted to volunteer that wanted to be a part of that journey with me, because within the organization, there was really just at that point, kind of this lack of trust.

We hadn't... it just because of this kind of turmoil we had within the organization, it kind of caused all the staff to be feeling that way. And so, I knew that it wasn't something that I could necessarily direct by myself, right? Like, I needed to know what was important to the staff and how they wanted to move forward.

And so, I was really fortunate that when I sent out the message and asked about having a DEI committee, there were a lot of staff that stood up and said, I want to be a part of this. And I want to be a part of helping you to find out how to move forward.

But we also knew, we knew as a group that we weren't exactly sure, like, you know, we could have said, hey, we're going to... let's go do some training, let's do training for everybody. But we didn't know if that's what we needed. And we didn't know where we were internally as an organization.

And so, what we knew we needed was, we needed a baseline, because I didn't really know where we stood, I didn't know how hurt people felt. I didn't know what they really wanted to communicate.

And certainly, I'm brand new, right? Like I may be walking in, and I'm saying, trust me, here I am, I'm this new person. But you don't get that immediately, right. It takes some time for folks to get to know you, for people to understand your intent. And you have to do things over and over again before people really believe. And they're really at a place that they're really going to tell you how they're feeling.

So, with the help of the DEI committee, that Cheronda is going to go into in a little bit more detail. And talking about how we picked Jean, as our awesome, awesome consultant. We went through a survey, and it was super important at that point that that survey was anonymous.

Now that certainly is not our long-term goal to be in an anonymous state, because that's not creating dialogue between us so that we can learn, but we knew to at least get a baseline we were going to have to do something that was very anonymous.

And not only could we say that it was anonymous, we had to explain to the staff and prove to them that it was going to be anonymous, because there were times in the past kind of back to this lack of trust that people thought they were doing an anonymous survey. And in the end, it wasn't very anonymous, not this particular survey, but ones in the past.

And so even if we were telling folks it was anonymous, that was back to our lack of trust. We were going to have to really prove to folks, we're not going to call you out because you make a statement that is not that everything's happy here. And so, Jean, which Cheronda will talk about, really helped us to lead us through that process.

And then the other piece that we knew that was super important is that we had to explain to staff that there was going to be follow up, and we were going to tell them the results of that survey. Nine

times out of 10, people will have these surveys and then they just kind of go to the side, right, you know, maybe one or two people look at it, and they might address something.

But we had to assure folks that we were going to be really transparent with this process. And that no matter what those results look like, we were going to share it back with everybody. And we were going to use that through a consultant. So that it wasn't us holding onto this info, someone was going to help shepherd us through and we were going to share back what we did.

So really what our whole motto has been through this whole process is when we know better, we do better. And so, it was whatever we could do to help people understand that we have to know. And none of us can do better if we don't know.

And so, we'll talk to you guys more, I'm going to come back, I'm actually going to come back to the same quote in a little while and kind of talk about it in a different meaning. But we've done whatever we can to make sure that we know so that we can do better.

### **Cheronda 6:47**

Okay, so like Cristina said, my name is Cheronda. And I am the DEI chair as well as on the task force, the board task force for Ronald McDonald House.

And so, just to kind of pick up where Cristina left off as far as our plan of action, so for us as a DEI committee, when we started, we knew we needed some type of external help. Because as employees and also on the DEI committee, we knew we needed something, but we didn't actually know what we needed, we didn't know where to start, because we were in the middle of everything that had been going on.

And so, in order to get that external help, Cristina actually asked one of our colleagues to kind of chair the DEI committee before I even became the DEI chair. And so, one of the suggestions was, why not, you know, use a DEI consultant. And here are a couple of DEI consultants that I've researched. And also, this is the one that I think is going to work best.

And so, one of the things that we've learned, just being a DEI, a new DEI committee is that we can have all of these ideas, and they're wonderful ideas. But sometimes we do have to do research in order to assess what's best for the organization.

And so, the plan of action behind our DEI consultant was, let's do research amongst all of us as the DEI committee, and let's bring that research together. And then let's choose and narrow down our choices for DEI consultants.

So, we had consultants like Jean, to send us proposals. And we all reviewed the proposals, we looked at what we as an organization had experienced in the past and what we thought we needed. And we looked at the different proposals for the consultants and Jean just so happened to meet all of the requirements that we were looking for, for the consultant.

And so, as we were going through the process of choosing a consultant, we had in person interviews with each consultant, we also had time for us to reflect after those individual interviews, just to say,

"You know what, I think this consultant is great for this, but we need this or this is most important to us."

So, I think we... well, not I think, I know we chose the right consultant. And then the next thing after choosing Jean or Leading Consciously as our consultant or our external help, the suggestion was let's create a DEI survey to help us with forming that baseline that Cristina talked about. Because again, as committee members, we were not experts on DEI within the organization or just DEI in general, and we acknowledged that.

So, with the survey we used, we sat many nights after our meetings just looking at what questions should we add? What questions should we take away? And in order to get the response that we needed, or the answers that we needed, in order to start solving some of the problems that we have within the organization.

In the end, the survey went out, like Cristina said, and it was anonymous. And so, we were very strategic on the questions. And after the survey went out, we received that summary. And as a DEI committee, we had to look at the results first, and kind of take a few moments to say, "Woo!" I mean, these are, you know, these are some heavy results.

And so, for some of us on the DEI committee, we didn't realize the temperature of the organization was what we saw in the results. And for some of us, we was like, "Yep." We knew exactly, you know, that was there.

And so, it was an eye-opening experience for us as committee members. Just to know that we had been tasked with this job to move the organization forward in a better way in regard to DEI.

And so, the next thing is restoring trust within the organization. Like Cristina mentioned, there was definitely a lack of trust, not only from just the past experiences that my colleagues had, from just past events, or individual situations that had happened with them in their own job of work, but also just restoring trust within the organization, as a DEI committee.

Because whenever we first said, "Oh, we're the DEI committee, join us, help us do this work," some people were like, Oh, I don't know if I want to join. I want to join, but I don't know if I'm ready to do this work in fear of losing my job, or I don't know if I'm going to be able to bring my full authentic self to this committee.

And so, after a year, I want to say a year. I think we've gotten... we got to a point to where it was like, I would have questions from my colleagues. How's it been going with the committee? Have you been able to be real? Have you been able to, you know, share things that you've experienced? Or, what are some of the things you all have heard?

And so, being on the task force, as well as the committee, that's something that I myself have realized that has been helpful for the Committee's just being transparent. Because if me attending task force board, task force meetings, for DEI, whenever I take information back, I do my best to be very transparent and not pull out things that I don't think are important or add things that I feel like are the most important.

But being transparent, not only with the committee, but the committee being transparent with staff has helped us restore trust within the organization, as well as the DEI committee being transparent with the board as well.

So, we've had conversations that have been maybe kind of tough to swallow, but we've been able to move past that.

And then the last piece of restoring trust within the organization, the DEI chair. So, this is my first year as chair. But as I mentioned, previously, just being transparent, and me myself, taking the time to form the relationships and doing the work myself, with leadership, as well as the board, in order to be able to say, "Hey, I'm here, you can use me as a guinea pig or as an example."

But I too have had experiences and I'm also having those conversations as well. So just as a DEI chair, just being transparent is it's something that helped us restore trust.

### **Philip 14:12**

Excuse me, thank you, Cheronda. It's good to see everybody today. And I want to talk just for a few minutes about the role of the board.

I'm guessing all of you have boards that you have to work with. And as you know, the role of the board is somewhat external. It helps deal with the donor community, the volunteer community, but it also has a very important role in interacting with the staff, supporting the staff, and most importantly, you know, fulfilling our mission to our clients.

The first thing we did, and I imagine many of your organizations did this and certainly companies all over the country did this, is put out a public statement of some type, talking about DEI commitment.

So, if you go to our website, you'll see a tab that says DEI commitment. And what we were very conscious of is that everybody was doing this. And it's most important that we follow through with what we said. Because there's... it's almost worse to put something out, and then it just be words.

And so, we were very conscious, we needed to make it more than words. So, in order to do that, we first worked closely internally, and then began working externally on each of the items that if you went to the website, you'll see in the DEI statement.

And one of those activities was to put together a board Task Force. Because what we quickly realized, as we looked at setting goals, and I'm not sure if all of you know this acronym, SMART goals, but specific, measurable, aligned -- in this case, to the mission of the Ronald McDonald House, Houston -- realistic, and time based.

So, we wanted to make each of the items that we set as goals to be SMART. And we wanted to ultimately make each of the items in our DEI statement SMART. So, you won't see that on the website. But that's what we're working on to make sure we follow through.

Most importantly, in order to measure something, you need to know where you're starting. So, we needed to understand our baseline. And in many cases, with diversity, equity, and inclusion, that's easy.

You can measure race pretty easily -- Black, White, Asian -- but you can't measure certain things that you can't see or unless somebody self identifies. So, we're working more easily on the items we can measure and see. And then we're working on how to measure the items that aren't as apparent.

The other thing that we were very conscious of is if the board and its goals decided to go right, and the staff decided to go left, then you're going to have a problem. So, we needed to make sure that we were aligned.

And so, Cheronda mentioned, I don't know if you heard it, but we actually have a board task force that Cheronda sits on. And that way, you know, we can stay in close communication. I've been invited to a number of the DEI committee meetings as our board president has. So, we're staying in close communication, just to make sure, you know, we don't have to have identical goals, but they need to be aligned.

The other thing we talked about -- and Jean was very good in advising us in this -- is you've got to decide: are you're going to try to conquer the world here and go very broad with a definition of what you mean by improving diversity, equity, inclusion? or are you going to go narrow?

So, we decided to start narrow and work -- specifically at the board level -- on getting the number of Black board members increased. And so that was sort of our step one, and I'll talk about where we are today, and where we're going next in a second. But we didn't want to spread ourselves too thin. And that's why we settled on that narrow definition.

The other thing is we talked about board goals. We have really three different boards: we have a main board, and then a board of advisors, and then an emeritus board. So, when you add all that up, you've got probably 40/50 people. And it's similar to setting 40 or 50 goals.

If you have 50 people that have a goal, then really no one's accountable, even if everyone's accountable. What I'm going to show you in a minute is where we end up in setting goals that attempt to deal with that specific issue.

These are the goals that we came up with for the board. Goal number one is to continue to diversify the board itself, acknowledging and celebrating the current diversity.

To get a little more specific there, what we mean is, we've made progress. We've increased the number of Black board members over the past year and a half. And we're continuing to do that. But the task force decided we're ready to take that next step and make sure that we begin to broaden that definition of diversity.

For example, on a recent task force call, you know, one of the individuals mentioned, you know, I'm half Mexican, I'm half Caucasian. And you know, I want that to be recognized. And it's important that we consider diversity from every angle. And again, the harder part for that will be when we have to ask people to help identify, you know, how they're diverse and what that means to them.

The second goal is what I was talking about, trying to get something down to a personal level. So where we narrowed that focus was on diversifying our donor base. And the concept would be that everyone on the board has some group that they're affiliated with: a social group, a business group, or other.

And we asked each of them to have as their individual goal to bring two individuals over the next year from their group into our community, whether it's directly as a donor or otherwise, but if they bring two individuals of diversity, then you multiply that by 40 or 50, you begin to make a difference. And so, that's how we narrowed in on it.

Let me pause at this point before I turn over to the next speaker. Any questions from a board perspective? Because we're really not going to come back to that. Yes, ma'am.

**Speaker 1 20:46**

Was the entire board on board from the get go, or was there any pushback? Or, was it like, okay, we're open?

**Philip 20:57**

Yeah, I think there's probably a two-part answer to that. Part one is, if there was any pushback, people sort of suppressed it. And so, what we were looking for was active support as opposed to neutral, and I think we got all the right words. And that's why we now wanted to follow that with these actions.

So, you know, diversity. As we all know, diversity, equity, inclusion is a very current issue, and everybody's trying to do the right thing. But you know, we need to make that actionable as opposed to just a nice thing to say. Any other final questions? Yes, sir.

**Speaker 2 21:36**

What was your board made of before you decided to shift over to inviting more African American board members?

**Philip 21:42**

It was largely Caucasian. A good number of male/female diversity. Maybe a good way to answer that is we have a good amount of diversity other than racial diversity, and we have some degree of ethnic diversity.

And we may have more diversity than I'm giving us credit for. We certainly have diversity of age. But again, we wanted to start with Jean's advice, narrow and really go at one issue that we felt was very important.

Where we ultimately want to end up, you know, I think we all live in the most diverse city in the world. And we want to reflect the diversity of our city in our board. Okay, let me turn over, I want to make sure everybody has enough time. Am I going to Jean now? Okay. Great.

## Jean 22:32

Hey, everybody. Okay. So, to give you a little bit of information about my background. I'm Professor Emeritus at the University of Houston and also president of Leading Consciously.

I have a bunch of students out there, and one of them, Rosalyn Rhodes, called me and said, "We're considering this initiative at my organization Ronald McDonald House. Are you interested in talking with me about it?" And I said yes.

Ronald McDonald House was a coveted field placement; students vied to be placed there. So, I already knew about the good work. And you all know it has an international reputation. So, to do this work in Ronald McDonald House? Yes, I am seriously interested. And shout out to Rosalyn, if any of you all know her, give her my regards.

Okay, so with that then, she connected me with Cristina. And it's in five minutes of talking to Cristina, I knew that this was going to be a great opportunity. Cristina had everything I as a consultant was looking for in a CEO.

She understood immediately that this was going to be a journey. Not a one stop. She didn't say, will you do a one hour talk to us about diversity, and then I'll check the box? No, she wanted a real thing, a real plan.

She realized there were going to be mistakes, and that people would have to be willing to learn, and that the name of the game was getting people open to actually learning rather than oh, yeah, I know that already. Or to be quiet and pretend that everything was fine. She understood that. So, I said yes.

And then the third thing was, she said she wanted to begin with a survey. Now, I'm in the tradition of what's known as a scholar practitioner. So, I'm both a researcher and a consultant. And so, when she started talking survey, that was music to my ears, yes, let's collect some baseline data.

Now, I already had a DEI survey that I've prepared and used in other organizations. And I said to Cristina, I'll give you all a copy of the survey. We can customize it for Ronald McDonald House.

Cheronda was talking about all of those hours they spent going over the items. This was my original survey, they took away this item, they said, "Can you add this?"

We had a huge issue with confidentiality, because it's a small organization, we did want to do comparisons across groups. But to do comparisons across too many groups, all of a sudden, if you're the only Black director at this particular location, you're outed, right?

And so, we had to figure out the demographics in a way to make sure everybody's confidentiality was protected.

Here are the main items that's on the survey: three areas, and I've given you sample items for you to refer to. One was the general attitudes, you know, are you afraid to disagree with other groups? That's a sample item.

Secondly, what is DEI like at Ronald McDonald House? Can you even talk about diversity? You all probably know, in some organization, people are scared to say the word Black. So, you know, what's your level?

And then the third was, do you have a personal experience of feeling treated unfairly? And last, what's your recommendations? And last sample item, would you welcome classes and workshops?

We did that, we got the results back, we compiled them into tables, and presented them to the DEI committee, along with the open-ended comments. The way I do this work, I don't do recommendations, I work with the organization's internal group to look at the data, do their own interpretation of the data, do their own recommendations, and guide them through the process, that's what we did.

The recommendations were, as you might guess, more diversity in higher ups, more diversity on the board, which Philip has addressed. And the other was, how committed were people to this process. I was really astonished because I don't usually get that high responses on questions about how interested are you in furthering diversity in an organization, and they scored quite high on that. So, the results were really great.

One of the recommendations was, one of the things that came out of it, yes, we do want more training. In my consultant role, we offer a program called Pathfinders which Cheronda is going to talk about. And we were in the very early stages of launching Pathfinders. And we pioneered it with the DEI Committee.

Pathfinders provides an opportunity for people to talk about topical areas, and then apply it to themselves and to their organization. Some people took to it like a duck in water. And for others talking about this stuff is quite a journey, is quite difficult. And so, there were rough edges that we had to smooth out.

I'm most appreciative to Cheronda and her committee, because they kept saying you need to change this, we need more of this and less of that. And so, through their support, we were able to come up and improve the program.

Fast forward a year. Cristina said, let's have a follow up. I'm thinking, you know, have I died and gone to heaven? Here's an organization that not only wanted a baseline, but now is coming back for a follow up measurement. The researcher me just was tickled pink over that.

So yes, we can do a follow up and this time she wanted focus groups and not a survey because she said she wanted to hear the voices. So, we set up the focus groups. Got people's comments, divided them into two categories, the positive comments and then the recommendations.

The positive comments was an overwhelming endorsement of leadership for embarking on this journey, just sheer gratitude. And the other was people said, I am ready, I am willing to step up, I raise my hand, we are willing to do this work. DEI is important to us.

Recommendations: we want tools, we want tools, we want tools, we want tools and resources. And the other, which I thought was extremely insightful, is let's give each other grace. This is a hard journey, not everybody can do it. And some of us will make mistakes. So, people who are not comfortable yet, let's give them grace.

I have to say in my work, this is one of the first times this has been generated from the staff members themselves, the awareness that they have to give each other grace.

Change is in the physical structure. And one of the recommendations was a mixture of hair products. Now, you all know Ronald McDonald have people coming in from all over the world, and they have locations where people can stay, they wanted a mixture of hair products. I have yet to go into a hotel, and be able to use their conditioner and shampoo. And so, for this to come out as a recommendation was so cool.

And then they wanted to see more culturally inclusive spaces. And the other thing, which again, shows the importance of the data, there was a recommendation that we'd have pulse checks, so they check and see how things are going. Okay, back to Cheronda.

### **Cheronda 31:42**

Alright, so, recommendations. After we completed the DEI survey with assistance from Leading Consciously, like Jean said, we had all of these survey results, as well as the opportunity from Cristina and the board to provide recommendations for assistance to kind of help with some of these comments and the results that were received from the survey.

And so, being tasked with this as a DEI committee, we were like, "Oh, my goodness!" I feel like us as a DEI committee, if I can just say this, candidly, we had to go through the process of becoming "woke" to what was really going on in the organization, because we felt like, not only do we have the responsibility of, you know, honoring the results from the survey from the staff, but we also had to think about our families.

Because like Jean said, we are an organization that is a home away from home for families with seriously ill children. So, whenever you think about that home away from home, we have tons of different people, or tons of different races that represent so many different cultures.

And so, we had to think about that as well. What are the cultures that we have within Ronald McDonald House? The families that we serve, as well as the staff? And how can we incorporate those cultures in the recommendations that we plan to make, or that we plan to give to the board?

And so, we did spend many nights again, on looking at the recommendations that we had come up with from the survey results. And we went back and forth with the board on several different things. Because being a new DEI committee, not only were we new to DEI as a committee, but we were new to the organization as well.

And so, we had to, like Jean said, provide grace to the board, whenever they came back, slide the paper back to say, hey, maybe we should rethink this or give us a little bit more assistance on how we can make this happen, or what do you mean by this?

And so, that has also been a learning experience for us as a committee as well, because it's not easy. It's not just a mouse click to you know, make some things happen. And so, we also had to take a moment.

And that's where Pathfinders came in, really, is we had to take a moment to say, hey, we as committee members, we need to do some research as well. We need some training as well. And so, it was a great opportunity, Pathfinders. Ms Jean presented it to us, but it was a great opportunity for

us as a DEI committee to sit down and have some conversations around race, around gender, around diversity, equity and inclusion.

And so just to kind of break down Pathfinders, like Jean said, Pathfinders is a way for us as the group that you're having in front of you, to sit down to talk about racial issues or things that are happening in the world.

And so, for the committee as a whole, some of the committee members saw Pathfinders as it wasn't really what I thought that we were going to do, I want information on how we can, you know, move the organization forward.

And some of us looked at it as, oh, this is good for me, because I'm not used to having these conversations in my home, I'm not used to having these conversations at work. I'm not used to having these conversations period. So, I've been looking for skills and ways that I can have these types of conversations with the people that I'm around.

And so, I saw Pathfinders as an individual to be very helpful, because there was a lot of the stories that we did research on or did homework on, I had no idea that were even existed. And it gave me an opportunity to learn as well as have some of these conversations with some of my colleagues who did not look like me.

And so that was a very, very impactful experience for us as a committee, because we were able to go through that training and look at this as, oh, if the organization were to take this, you know, what is the best way that we can present this to the organization to where they feel like they're getting something out of it.

Because being in the nonprofit space, you know, time is money. So, we wanted to make sure that we valued our colleagues' time. And so that's when we sent the recommendations to Jean about, you know, Pathfinders and how we could possibly adjust it for the organization.

And even if the organization was ready for, you know, these types of conversations, because one thing that we'd noticed as a committee is, we would receive responses from our colleagues about different situations that have happened to them, but they could not, and still, we're working on education, but just being able to put a name to some of the things that are happening to them.

So, what are microaggressions? How can I say, oh, what I experienced was a microaggression, or I have a bias? And so, Pathfinders was a great way for us to even say, you know, if we did do it in person training, how would we approach that.

The next thing is DEI takes ownership. So grateful to Cristina as our CEO, she has given us so many opportunities to be able to do this work within the organization. And I'm no stranger to being micromanaged, I guess is what you could say.

And so, having Cristina as well as the board, be flexible and allow us as DEI committee to do the work and do it and have their trust, that we're going to do it with not only the families in mind, but also the staff has been very rewarding.

And so, us as a DEI committee, we have started doing different things. We brought in a speaker for our second-year anniversary event, just to say, you know, DEI has made two years within the

organization. So, we brought in an external speaker to talk to us about, you know, the experiences that she's had at her organization.

And that was very helpful, because I know sometimes we can kind of feel like, as a committee, that we were alone, like, this is not happening in other organizations, this is just at our organization, or sometimes what are some other things that have worked at another organization that we could possibly take and use it within ours.

So that was a wonderful experience, having an outside speaker to come in. And then also just providing constant communication to staff. So, we started a DEI corner, which is just a monthly, it's not necessarily a newsletter, but it's just a monthly communication that brings education to staff around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

And then we also have a DEI email, where if you have experienced, or if you would like to share a suggestion or recommendation to the DEI committee, you can do that as well.

So that's been awesome because sometimes I'll look at the email box and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, this is awesome." And sometimes I look at it I'm like, "Okay, we still have work to do. All right, what's, what's our next step?"

And so just having those different things in place has been a way that we have begun to create a presence within the organization.

And then lastly, employee education. And so, we are still brainstorming, we're still brainstorming on what's best for the organization as far as education because anybody can sit in front of a newsletter, or sit in front of an email and read it. But do you really understand what that email or what that communication is trying to say?

So as a DEI committee, we're still working on what's the best way to help staff not only understand what diversity, equity, and inclusion is, but also how can we apply it? How can we assist you with providing you the skills you need to be able to apply it to where we are able to have those candid conversations and you're not feeling uncomfortable?

Like, you know, oh, I don't know if I said the right thing. And you're going home, we've all probably done it, went home. And a few hours later, even maybe the next day, you're still thinking about did I say the right thing? Or how did I offend that person? So, we're still working on how to educate our staffs on that.

And so, the last thing I have is, successful organizations understand that the spirit of DEI doesn't live with the DEI committee, the committee ultimately serves to help all staff and stakeholders become true DEI champions.

And because of the work that we do, being a home away from home for families, this right here is super important. And we've been placing it on our communications that we have, because it's not just about us. It's not just about the DEI committee. It's about us as a whole working together for the overall mission.

**Cristina 41:49**

I don't know if Cheronda is really giving themselves enough credit. It's really this scorecard is what the DEI task force has driven so as the survey was complete, and we had the first set of recommendations, this is what the DEI task force really worked to see what they would prioritize and really try to help lead us.

When Phillip talks about the board statement, it came because of the survey. And because the DEI committee said that that was important to them.

There was even something that has been a game changer for us. It was really both from an employee survey, as well as the DEI survey, we saw that was really important to have an HR person on staff. And so that changed our budget this year.

We hired an HR person to be internal. So that there was someone neutral that folks could go to, that could help us really think through competencies and make sure everyone was getting what they needed internally and that it was a very fair process for folks to be advanced.

We say here, what the codes are, is that green, we feel like we've completed, Cheronda talked about the DEI mailbox. We established Juneteenth as an agency holiday, we have an anonymous way for people to provide input. We have the statement that defines DEI.

Many things have happened because of what the DEI task force has been able to drive. We do have an annual review process now that had kind of been a hit and miss thing. You know, it's easy for that to go to the backburner when there's lots of things that we all do as a not-for-profit, right. But as we have an HR person on staff now, that is something that's still very, very important, we make sure we'll do on a yearly basis.

We continue to drive with what we have on our task force on this scoreboard to be able to see how we're doing and that's really a check based on what the task force is willing to say yes, Cristina, we can say that is checked off or nope, we're still considering that to be red. That's a dialogue that we have on a regular basis.

And so now they're analyzing that again, based on the dialogues that Jean talked about that we did, we moved from anonymous feedback to being able to have conversations with one another. Still not perfect, right? Not everyone is still completely comfortable to have those dialogues, but we know that we're going through the work.

And so, then based on the dialogues that we had, the task force has now come up with a new scorecard they're reviewing this to say hey, what needs to then move to our next year that we're evaluating and seeing how we're doing, but they're clearly driving to help us as an organization as a whole to say what's important.

We have a board DEI task force now because the staff said this was something that was super important. And then to have the staff, Cheronda and myself, sit on that board task force. As Phillip said, that we know that we're aligned, and that we're all doing something to do our work together.

And the piece that I'll really end on is back to this; when we know better, we do better. And the reason that I bring it up again, is because sometimes when we know better, it's hard to hear it.

You know, I'll have days where I feel like we are making progress. And we are having dialogues, and we're learning from one another, and then I'll hear from a staff person that they think we're doing awful.

So, then I'll call Jean. And Jean will say, but Cristina, that's awesome. Really? It didn't feel so awesome. It's awesome. Because someone's willing to share that information with me, right.

And so, I've got to be ready for that like, as hard as that is some days because I want to say, we're moving forward, and I'm doing right and we're having it, it's not always how everybody feels.

And so, if we can't have an honest enough environment, to where we can do that work together, we can't expect that it's going to be perfect every day, we can't expect that we all go through a training, and then we know exactly what we're doing.

But if we can build, if we can build an organization where everyone feels safe enough to know that they can have that conversation, and they can be honest about how they're feeling, then we've won.

And so, our goal is this, people feel comfortable discussing DEI, people feel comfortable raising and solving issues together. And the more that we can do that together, that is when we can be better.

You know, one thing Cheronda talked about earlier, was that's what we do for our families every day, right? Like we are a safe environment. We are serving our families, we have diverse families from all over the world.

But what we learned as Ronald McDonald House is that we were really good at doing that for our families. But we weren't so good about doing that for ourselves. And so that's what Ronald McDonald House is working really hard to do now, is that everyone feels safe.

You know, I was really taken by that when I first came to the organization, and meeting the families and talking to them about staying at Ronald McDonald House. And I was surprised at how often that word came up, is that families were so appreciative that they felt safe at Ronald McDonald House.

Well, I want everyone in our organization to feel safe. And so that's what we're really working towards. And it's because of our DEI task force and because of Jean, and because of the work that Philip's done, to help lead the board to get to a board statement that everyone feels comfortable, that can be on our website.

That's what we're all doing, to try to make sure we're all feeling really safe together. And that we can learn and move forward together. And that's what we're doing. Yeah.

### **Speaker 3 48:09**

I have a question. And I don't know if you guys have any suggestions or input. But just as you guys were talking I was kind of thinking of my own experiences. And I think when it comes to DEI, there's a lot of assumptions or kind of presumptions in regards to race and in regards to gender.

Looking at myself personally, I started my career very early. And so while I'm grateful for the strikes, and I see many organizations that I've worked for, or work with, there's representation, you know, a person as a Black person, there's representation as a female, but age is kind of what I'm seeing is lacking, because I am Black, I am a female, but I am one of the youngest, if not the youngest in my particular type of role within my organization.

And I've found that to be true with a lot of the roles that I've had. And so, I'm just curious what research, resources, recommendations came up in regards to age, or if that even came up at all?

I feel like it's very easy to say, you know, diversify it like this, put more African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, let's add more females, transgender, whomever, but it's not very much talked about with age.

And there's a very big stigma right now around Millennials, about what Millennials are willing or not willing to do within the workforce, what they can and cannot do. And so, I'm finding that that is my hardest challenge. In regards to all of the diversity and equity and inclusion, my age creates the biggest barrier.

#### **Cristina 49:52**

Well, you know, I think that was what Philip was talking about earlier that we kind of started with one focus but intentionally with discussions with the staff task force as well as the board task force now that we really wanted to make sure we were broadening that this year.

And so, when we're thinking about kind of our intentional recruitment onto the board, that we're making sure that we're representing all of the different sorts of diversity that we're talking about that are represented in that board statement.

And age is certainly one of those, you know, that we want as much diversity as we can have there as well. And so that we're looking like, every single category that we're talking about on our board statement that we're looking for representation for at least two people for all of those.

Now, one person may represent two or three. But we want to make sure we're thinking about all of those.

You know, like, for example, one thing that the DEI task force had talked about, certainly an age example, to be able to think about recruiting for the board like that Project Blueprint is a great way to do that through what the United Way does.

And that's certainly something that I will be at this year, you know, looking for thinking about board, but we're looking for diversity also in like, our volunteers and all of that. So, all of those matter for us. Absolutely. Yeah.

#### **Kimberly 51:08**

Kudos to you all for doing this, this is phenomenal work. And I'm so appreciative that you all are sharing this with us. I did have a question regarding funding. A lot of organizations have been asked,

you know, from a funding perspective, what's your DEI statement, you know, I know United Way included that in their ask.

But because you all actually have like a plan and actual things. Has that increased engagement for you all? Are there funders that are more open to you know, kind of supporting Ronald McDonald House because you all have done this massive two-year work towards this? I'm just interested if that is something you're seeing as a result.

**Cristina 51:49**

Actually, not yet, like this has been really important internal work for us. But we haven't used it necessarily promoting any sort of funding.

In fact, it was interesting. I had a funder, though, say today, Cristina, I really want to listen to that. I'm really interested to know what you guys are doing, that is, but it has not been something that we've emphasized yet. It's really been work that we've done internally, but I expect that it can be a part of our story as we go into next year.

**Kimberly 52:18**

I expect it can be so, I'm so appreciative of you all sharing that because we...I think again a lot of groups have statements...

**Cristina 52:24**

Yeah, exactly.

**Kimberly 52:27**

We include statements.

**Cristina 52:27**

That's right.

**Kimberly 52:28**

That's all we have.

**Cristina 52:29**

That's right. That's right. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

**Speaker 4 52:34**

Yeah. I'm just curious about how your DEI committee is set up, because one of the things that I've noticed in some of the organizations that I partner with, is that we have a DEI statement, we say that it's really important to the work that we do, but we don't tie any type of compensation or we don't take things off of the plate, for people who are really deep in this work.

And so, we say, do this kind of an extra thing that's on your plate that's really a burden for people who want to push this work forward and we have leadership that doesn't say, we're going to take these things off your plate, or we're going to compensate you this way.

What have you guys done to make it kind of a part of your core work, as opposed to kind of an extra something?

**Cristina 53:26**

Yeah, well, I mean, part of it, and Cheronda will be able to speak to this. Now, any of our part time employees that choose to sit on this committee, I mean, we pay them extra to do this specific work that's DEI, it's not anything that they're doing on top of, and this is those DEI hours are paid for specifically for what they do.

And then we stay on a pulse with all of our DEI folks, even if they're full time, that if they do have too much on their plate, then we'll work with them to pull something off. I mean, I think that that's why it's important for us now to have the HR person.

The HR person also sits on this DEI committee. So, she's also able to help us manage that if for some reason something's too much for someone. We always monitor that, but I don't know, Cheronda, what would you add to that?

**Cheronda 54:14**

Yeah. Cristina said we are paid for our DEI efforts, even though it is after hours because our meetings are on Thursdays at 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm. But that's usually when our meeting time is. So, every time I'm doing something with DEI, I am getting paid for it.

And then also, but you were mentioning something about the DEI committee and the makeup of it? No, no, I want to answer your question too. But yes, we are compensated for it.

**Cristina 54:53**

And one thing just context for us. We have about 56 employees, half are full time, half are part time. And the interesting thing for me, which I didn't understand when I started, the majority of our part

time employees have other full-time jobs. So, they just love doing some Ronald MacDonnell housework, and we appreciate them so much.

I mean, they're a researcher at MD Anderson during the day, and then they work part time at Ronald McDonald House. So, there's a fair amount of like committee work, even our quarterly staff meetings are in the evenings, so that we can accommodate both our full time and our part time staff to be able to participate.

Often, we have a fun team as well, our fun team also meets in the evenings, because a number of the folks do have another full-time job. And so, for us, we'll do virtually, which is nice now, but to allow everyone to participate, we often do some of that committee work in the evenings.

### **Cheronda 55:51**

Cristina, I wanted to address both of the questions in one. One important thing that was very important to us as a DEI committee is to make sure that we have representation of all races that we could within our colleague group.

And so, we kind of, you know, marketed ourselves as, hey, we're the DEI committee, we're not just, you know, some little really cool committee that's out here, you know, doing the work, we are serious.

So, we also put policies in place, and we put a committee agreement in place that talks about what the commitment is. So that way, not only do you know that, hey, like, I'm getting paid for this. But this is what's expected of me. This is how many hours it's going to take to dedicate to this work.

And then also looking at the diversity of our committee, we have all ages, we also have representation from each group, but also, we have representation from different backgrounds as well, as well as cultures. So, we're able to share the workload.

So, like we have an LGBTQI+ initiative that we're getting ready to work on, we have someone that's on our committee that's a part of that group, and they're willingly open to work on that goal. So, we're able to share the responsibilities because we do have that diversity within our little small community of eight, I think we're eight now.

So, we looked at that at the beginning. And we were like, man, a lot of this work is falling on, you know, just being transparent, it's falling on three, and we're a committee of, you know, six. So how can we make sure that we're balancing that work out amongst ourselves, and it is good quality work that we're producing in order to recruit other committee members as well?

### **Cristina 57:48**

Other questions? Well, great, thanks for listening. We appreciate it.