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**We must rededicate ourselves to dismantling systemic racism and white supremacy in our community**

June 5, 2020

The Center for Community Solutions joins the Greater Cleveland community and the world in mourning the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and too many others at the hands of law enforcement. It is an all too familiar and cruel ritual – one that’s well known to those of us in Greater Cleveland. For it was just six years ago that 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot and killed by officers of the Cleveland Police Department. What is clear is that our law enforcement officers - who are tasked with serving and protecting us all - are in many cases failing to protect - and sometimes actively harming - our Black and brown neighbors. Black and brown lives should matter to all of us.

Racism is woven so tightly into the fabric of our community that it can be nearly invisible, but its harmful presence is felt and experienced daily by our Black and brown colleagues, friends and family. It’s often experienced daily through indignities, insults and micro-aggressions; other times it’s more blatant racist words and actions. All are harmful and can be physically and emotionally challenging for those who experience them. In addition to these displays of interpersonal racism, we have seen that our systems, institutions and public policies often - intentionally or unintentionally - perpetuate racism and create outcomes that disproportionately impact Black and brown lives in a negative way. Community Solutions sees the consequences of historical and present-day racism in every issue that we work on and write about.

The mission of Community Solutions is to improve health, social and economic conditions through nonpartisan research, policy analysis, communications and advocacy. None of these conditions will improve if we don’t make fighting racism and supporting racial equity a key part of our work. We are a 107-year-old organization, and our track record on race and racism isn’t perfect. It wasn’t until 1972 that the organization selected an African-American board chair and it wasn’t until 2004 that an African-American was selected to lead the organization.

But over our history, hundreds of volunteers and staff have led important efforts to combat racism and intolerance. Community Solutions created a biracial committee in 1917 to deal with issues that arose from the **wartime migration of African-Americans to Cleveland from the South**. In 1946 we adopted **Principles for Interracial and**

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**Intercultural Relations, and in the 1960s we worked to help health and human service agencies improve their employment policies, client outreach and board representation. After World War II we helped resettle Japanese Americans in Cleveland who had been imprisoned in internment camps during the war. We've also helped to support and create the Urban League of Cleveland, and the City of Cleveland's Community Relations Board. In the 1970s we wrote and distributed a handbook that was used nationally to help community groups plan desegregation activities. That we've been working on these issues almost as long as we have been in existence reveals how deeply embedded racism is in our country.**

But that's why we must rededicate ourselves to challenging and dismantling systemic racism and white supremacy in our community and country. Community Solutions' staff and board have engaged in activities over the past two years to increase our understanding and awareness of the effects of systemic racism in our community and to identify and advocate for policies that address those effects. We started to regularly write and speak more explicitly about the negative and positive implications of existing and proposed health and human service policies on people of color. Last December, the Community Solutions board approved a strategic plan that said we would "embolden Community Solutions' commitment to racial equity in all aspects of the organization, internal and external." We said we would develop a "broad organizational plan for advancing racial equity." Now we have to put our words into action, and we should be held accountable for the results of those actions.

Last week I told my colleagues that the events of the last few days had left me feeling hopeless; but I said that if I felt that way, I couldn't imagine how my Black and brown colleagues, friends and family felt. But what has inspired me are the acts of courage and kindness I see being played out on the streets of Greater Cleveland and across the country. Taking action and working for change is a core value of Community Solutions; that's why we support the right of all people to exercise their constitutional rights to protest and seek redress. I'm inspired by my younger colleagues at Community Solutions who are determined to lead us towards a different path. This gives me hope that the unjust killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice - and so many others - will open our eyes to that better path forward. I hope you will join us in this work and in this journey and welcome your comments as we move forward.