



Riverside Community Care First Step – The Strategic Plan!

BACKGROUND

Riverside Community Care is a non-profit behavioral health and human services organization that helps over 40,000 people in the Massachusetts area. Examples of services provided include: mental healthcare; early childhood and youth programs; developmental and brain injury services; addiction treatment; and programs to address trauma in the aftermath of tragic events, such as a natural disaster or a community crisis. Through these services, Riverside works directly with children, youth, and families, as well as individual adults, schools, colleges, workplaces, and communities. In the Massachusetts region, Riverside partners with local hospitals and physicians and works with most insurers and MassHealth in support of meeting these individual and collective needs.

Riverside's behavioral health consulting, screening, and suicide prevention programs for schools, communities, businesses, and organizations are extending their reach to more than 3.5 million people around the globe. With headquarters in Dedham, Mass., Riverside has had a long history of being committed to advancing **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)**. In early 2020, Riverside brought in Dr. Angela Crutchfield, whose sole responsibility was to advance diversity and inclusion. Prior to Dr. Crutchfield joining the organization, Riverside had previously launched a number of important activities, including a DEI committee and a *Hate Has No Home Here* campaign that was prompted by an

uptick in incidents in which intolerant language based on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation was used by some of Riverside's clients to its employees. Updates had been made to the organization's Mutual Respect & Responsibility Statement, creation of the position of the Diversity & Inclusion leader, and an initiative to incorporate the use of pronouns in the email signature lines for employees. All were important initiatives, however, Crutchfield immediately noticed, that Riverside had no overarching plan – there was no structure to the DEI work in alignment with the organization's goals.



What Riverside needed was a strategic plan that laid out goals, activities, deliverables and intended impacts. The need for this plan was made more urgent by the tragic death of George Floyd in May, 2020.

What is the DEI Approach?

George Floyd's death triggered many organizations, including Riverside, to ask what do we do? how do we fix this? how can we make change? People were moving fast trying to address racial inequities. Riverside decided its priority was to expedite the development of its strategic plan that had as its primary goal building an organization that is diverse, inclusive and culturally competent. Crutchfield likens "diversity to being invited to the dance, inclusion is being asked to dance, and cultural competence is not judging anyone's dancing." To build the strategic plan necessary to achieve cultural competence, Riverside followed a model that Crutchfield had

developed as part of her consulting practice, what she calls the **LEPAS** model – **L**isten, **E**ducate, **P**lan, **A**ct, **S**ustain. First step of the model involves listening to everybody and taking in information. To that end, Riverside held listening sessions, which gave employees the opportunity to have conversations about their experiences and needs for diversity and inclusion. Second step emphasized the importance of education – of people taking the time to learn more about what it means to create a diverse and inclusive organization that is culturally competent. The third, fourth and fifth steps involved laying out a strategic plan that is actionable and sustainable. Riverside is now in year 3 of its 5-year plan. (Riverside’s strategic plan can be found here <https://www.riversidecc.org/flipbook/diversity-inclusion-2021/?page=4>)

Riverside’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) strategic plan lays out five goals to be achieved through a variety of trainings, activities, and programs coordinated by the relaunched Diversity & Inclusion Committee:

1. Leadership & Workforce Diversity;
2. Client Care Diversity, which is based on the *Hate Has No Home Here* Campaign;
3. Leadership and Staff Professional Development on what it means to culturally competent as an organization;
4. Employee Engagement, which involves employee resource groups (ERGs); and
5. Leadership Accountability.

What was the Process?

The process of getting approval for the strategic plan required a well-thought-out communications plan that would ensure buy-in throughout the entire organization. In 2021, Riverside started rolling out its plan to its executive leadership team, including the President, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Chief Human Resources Officer for their review. From there, the plan went to the organization’s full leadership team, consisting of 20-25 Vice-Presidents, Assistant Vice-Presidents, and Directors, representing all the divisions of Riverside. Having received buy-in from both levels of leadership teams, the plan was then taken before the Board of Directors, who reviewed and approved it. Finally, the plan was presented to the entire organization because that is where the accountability comes in – it enables all employees to see and know how Riverside holds itself accountable to make sure it is truly driving toward sustainable culture change. Riverside sets time for Crutchfield or the chief human resources officer to give input on diversity at the weekly leadership meetings. While something need not be said every week, it is important to know that that time is available to share and communicate D&I information.

What Were the Lessons Learned?

- Designate D&I Champions for each of the strategic goals. Champions need to be drawn from across the leadership of the organization.
- Engage the Champions along with representation of the board of directors, and the employees (ERG leads), to serve as the D&I Committee to ensure each goal is accomplished and all are engaged.
- Establish key measurements of success in meeting the goals.
- Be sensitive and thoughtful about how components of the strategy are rolled out and focused on fully engaging and keeping everyone informed.
- Coach employees to help them understand how best to communicate their D&I concerns.
- Emphasize the importance of calling out inappropriate behavior. Provide training on effective behavior callouts that reflect the importance of giving and receiving feedback to improve behaviors.