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Virtual Launch Event
COLOR OUTSIDE THE LINES

Community Action Lehigh Valley And Partners Launch Color Outside The Lines Initiative

5- to 7-year strategic plan addresses racial inequities and disparities in the Lehigh Valley

By Dannah Hartman

BETHLEHM - Yesterday, Community Action Lehigh Valley staff, committee members, and community partners, announced the launch of the Color Outside the Lines initiative. Color Outside the Lines is a 5- to 7-year strategic plan that seeks to address racial inequities and disparities in nine areas of focus: housing, education, criminal justice, economic opportunity and employment, and quality of life (which encompasses health, mental health, arts and culture, and recreation). The plan's communities of focus are Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and all other underserved communities.

The initiative's name refers to the act of removing barriers that have historically been drawn to erase the value of people of color or thwart their access to opportunity, education, housing, a meaningful quality of life, employment, and equal rights. Dawn Godshall, Executive Director at Community Action Lehigh Valley said, "The Lehigh Valley is becoming increasingly prepared to break down these barriers. Community Action Lehigh Valley has engaged people across the Valley to embrace an inclusive and equitable way of life."

Godshall noted that the foundation of the plan began in November 2018 as a Racial Equity Committee of 8-10 community leaders and has since grown to involve hundreds of community members over the years. Some institutions involved in the process include: Lehigh Valley Partnership, Lehigh Valley Justice Institute, United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley, FACES International, Ortiz Art Foundation, Unidos Foundation, Project Equity, The Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, Lehigh Valley Arts Council, and more.

Scott Blair, M.Ed, Associate Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at DeSales University is the Chair of the Color Outside the Lines Initiative. Blair mentioned that 300+ people participated in the development of the strategic plan, noting that the plan focuses on, "fostering an equitable environment that centers the existence and aspirations of our communities of focus in a way that is chosen by them, and not for them."

Blair explained that each of the nine sections of the plan has strategies and goals, and year one goals were shared during the event. The Education Committee, for example, will be working with

Lehigh Valley school districts to adopt Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Anti-Racist initiatives that include focusing on the important of representation through employing and retaining teachers of color as well as training and engaging teachers, administrative and support staff in Cultural Humility and Implicit Bias.

Quanesha Johnson, LPC, Founder of BTG Counseling & Educational Services is a member of the Mental Health Sub-Committee. Thanks to a generous donation from Truist, the Mental Health Committee will be launching a program that provides free to low-cost mental health services to Black, Indigenous, People of Color and all other underserved communities. The committee has partnered with several mental health clinicians who reflect the communities of focus, thereby increasing cultural understanding. The program will open on March 1.

Members of the initiative are looking for more community engagement through people joining committees, reviewing the plan, and providing feedback. From March to May, the committees will hold public information sessions for community members to provide feedback to the plan.

For more information or to get involved, please contact cotl@communityactionlv.org.

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