



# **Incorporating an Anti-Racist Racial Justice Mindset in Your Organization and Plans for Liberation**

OAR of Arlington, Alexandria, and Falls Church



[www.OARonline.org](http://www.OARonline.org)

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Thank you

# OAR - All Positions



- Each position at OAR is operating with an anti-racist and racial justice mindset and lens. This is reflected in all of our programs, communications, events, classes, groups, etc.
- Each position at OAR has "Racial Justice Ambassador" included in their official position title and this is reflected on our website, e-signature, and all other communications.
- All volunteers at OAR that are more extensively involved with us (such as Emergency Services volunteers, volunteers who are working with us either on a weekly or daily basis, etc) are required to undergo anti-racism and racial justice training at some point in their journey with us. Right now, this would be the 3-Month Virtual Cohorts, or participating in one of the Caucuses and possibly Action/Advocation Network in the future.
- Straying away from White Corporate Culture and instead becoming a Collective Culture

# Pre-Release Services



- Important to note that through our **Pre-Release programs like Employability Readiness** we can help participants process the individual barriers they experience. This includes employment as well as developing interviewing skills, resume building, and building confidence around disclosure and articulating criminal history (should it come up during the interview).
- **Social Justice Group** is where we tackle real world problems by looking at them from multiple viewpoints through a **racial justice lens and mindset**. Real life experiences create discussions that are at times very stimulating and insightful. We create an outlet for our participants to express themselves, as well as learn how **social justice is linked to their reentry**. In this group we also learn that social justice is a concept that should infuse almost every academic subject. **As a result, we have looked at all our curriculums to be certain that they reflect the principles of Racial Justice.**

# Pre-Release Services



- In our **Conflict Resolution Class**, we build our communication skills and develop improved methods of handling conflict through in-depth discussions and our handbook which allows participants to work and do independent study in their free time.
- In our **Stress Management Class**, we learn all about the causes and effects of stress, what effects stress has on the body, our health etc. As you know, jail can be a stressful place and being incarcerated in general is an extremely taxing and stressful experience. We discuss ways to reduce that stress as we continue to support participants through this process. During these classes we learn meditation methods and breathing exercises. Most importantly it is an outlet for participants to exhale their past and inhale a brighter tomorrow. **Healing is essential to this process and for their racial justice journey.**

# Pre-Release Services



**“THE CHILD WHO IS NOT EMBRACED BY THE VILLAGE, WILL  
BURN IT DOWN TO FEEL IT’S WORTH”**

**- AFRICAN PROVERB**

*The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth proverb means that children desperately need connection, love, and community. If these needs aren't met, they'll cry out for help and even resort to destructive behavior. As members of the village, we're all responsible for the children around us.*

# Transition Services (Post-Release)



- At OAR we make it our **priority** to make participants feel **safe, comfortable**, and know they are **always welcome** even after receiving services.
- I like to tell participants “**treat the janitor like the CEO.**” I never want anyone to feel less than another because at the end of the day **we are all human** and everybody is here to work on themselves and support each other.
- Being **honest, genuine, and transparent** with participants helps participants trust our team and organization and builds **positive relationships** between us and the participants. It may be something so subtle as just treating someone with respect that could make a huge difference in their healing process.

# Transition Services (Post-Release)



- Part of doing this job/position with an anti-racist/racial justice mindset is to make sure that participants are feeling **included, important, happy, and confident about themselves.**
- Letting participants know that although I may not be in your shoes or have the exact same experiences, but what I can promise is that our organization will do the best of our ability to support you and keep you on a great, successful reentry path, and we will always be in your corner going forward. **For many participants, the OAR team is their only support system.** Reassurance and support goes a long way in not only supporting participants on their own reentry and racial justice journey, but their healing as well.



# Transition Services (Post-Release)



- We created a **Post-Release Support Group** that include some of the same individuals that were in our Pre-Release groups at the facility. Being able to provide a safe space for participants to connect with us and each other make a huge difference in their lives. Not only do they continue feeling supported from OAR, but they are truly excited to see each other every week in society thriving and are also there to uplift each other mentally and emotionally as well.
- The Post-Release Support Group is also a space where we can discuss topics of **anti-racism and racial justice** with participants. Get insight from their own lived experiences, and support each other in finding our own liberation and healing.

# Participant Comments/Quotes



"Hey Phil thanks for the help. I am starting get answers and more doors open because of your help and dedication to helping us that are in need and in situations such as mine and I really appreciate it. I just had it in my spirit that you don't get that enough. People demand and always want this and want that and demand this, that and so forth and no "thank you" is hardly ever involved. So again I say thank you and I appreciate. Keep up the good work!!! ;)" - **OAR Participant**

"I would like to thank everybody, especially Phill and Mike. I finally got my place Phil...I owe you so much gratitude because it all started with you and OAR. Helping me get my first job and seeing to it that I had all the tools necessary to make each situation better." - **OAR Participant**

"I just got hired today for a Security Supervisor position... I'm so blessed and grateful I'm crying right now things are starting to come along for me and now all I'm trying to do is find a place to get out of my uncomfortable living situation. Can't wait to see you all at 6pm and please tell Ms. Watkin I thought about her and how well I'm doing. Thanks Phil." - **OAR Participant**

# Events & Communications



- Using "**People First**" language in all of our communications and when we discuss our programs and participants. Language, words, and phrases that uphold white supremacy and white corporate culture can be very subtle and we want to be very careful to not use any language that diminishes the importance of our participants' lived experiences and the incredible work they are doing. We use language and phrases that are inclusive of all and exemplify a collective culture.
- For example, we do not call participants as "offenders or inmates," but instead "participants or residents of the facility." We have also changed our holiday program formerly known as "Project Christmas Angel" to "Project Winter Cheer" so we are not being exclusive to any group.

# Events & Communications



- **OAR's Ethical Storytelling Policy** - Again, we use people-first and strength-based language and see participants as experts on themselves and leaders for their own life and plans. We constantly seek feedback and guidance from participants and pride ourselves on having an ethical storytelling philosophy that respects the dignity and protects the privacy of each person we work with. We do not use the actual names, photos, or videos of OAR participants to protect their privacy.
- <https://vimeo.com/259176903>

# Events & Communications



- **Rethinking/Redoing the way we do our children/family programs** (Project Backpack, Project Winter Cheer, Project Connection) and how we can best support our participants and their families and what their needs **actually** are rather than us and volunteers **assuming** what their needs are and what may or may not be helpful to them at that time.
- Making it very clear and evident in our marketing/communications, on our social media, and on our website that **OAR is an anti-racist/pro-Black organization** that is doing both work both upstream with our racial justice work and downstream with our direct service work. In all of our events, Tours, meetings with partners, etc. we always want to include our racial justice work and explain that the prime issue behind mass incarceration is in fact racism which is why we must be doing racial justice work as well.

# Project Parent Quotes



“Thank you so much for these gift cards. I am not able to work right now and since the kids' father is incarcerated it's been a really tough time for us. The girls really loved reading the little note from their dad too. You all are awesome thank you so much for the support we really needed it.” - **Guardian who received gift cards on behalf of OAR's Project Backpack Program**

“Thank you for filling in a gap that means so much to me and my childs' education. This program has given my child a fresh start which all kids deserve. I commend all persons having any collaborations or dealings with this. Thanks again!” - **Parent in the Arlington County Detention Facility**

“Thank you for thinking of families that have parents that are incarcerated. It is so helpful to know that I don't have to worry about how my children will be able to get their school supplies, clothes, and services you provide. Thanks again.” - **Parent in the Arlington County Detention Facility**

# Organizational Plan for Liberation



- Examine how your organization functions
  - Take a deeper look into all of the policies, processes, etc. This includes:
    - Hiring structures, Remote work policies, Meeting structures, How you measure (or not measure) success within an organization, and how you decide when to promote, Sick and vacation policies, Communication tools, Compensation, and more.
  - "It's easy for a lot of people to think that they don't have any control over what happens because they see anti-racism as something on top of work, instead of embedded into work. If we shift that thinking, suddenly so many of us have things we can start to change tomorrow or next week, or push to change next year."
- Support your team members
  - What does your staff need to be able to respond to possibly negative messages, both professionally and personally?

# Organizational Plan for Liberation



- Create spaces in the workplace for healing and accountability
  - Not relying on solely the People of Color in the organization to be doing the racial justice work- must be everybody and especially White People need to take more accountability over this work as well.
  - Caucusing is one way of committing to regularly building anti-racism conversations into the work day and building in forms of accountability.
- Language
  - Making an intentional decision to use language that specifically names anti-racism work and doesn't just beat around the bush. It is a risk to take, especially from a fundraising perspective because some of this language may seem "threatening" to some, but we want to make our mission/vision as clear as possible and also challenge our supporters and funders and make sure we are getting the support we need from people who also believe in our mission and vision as well.



# Organizational Plan for Liberation



- Emphasis on a Collective Culture rather than White Corporate Culture
  - A culture where there is no "oppressor" and "subordinate"
  - Everyone in the team is heard, respected, and held accountable
  - Creating a safe work environment for all employees and addressing concerns and holding people accountable when needed
  - Not shying away from "difficult" conversations about racism and racial justice
  - Addressing racism in the organization upfront

# Personal Plan for Liberation



- Affirm and extend self-compassion
- Ongoing healing plan
- Intentional alone time to unplug
- Take care of your mind and body
- As you engage in the experimental work of racial activism, be gentle with yourself as you discover your role
- Create a good playlist
- REPEAT!!!