June 14, 2020

The YouthLink Board of Directors condemns the former Minneapolis police officers who murdered George Floyd. We call for immediate reforms within the Minneapolis Police Department, as well as long term solutions to protect the safety, rights, and dignity of the young people served by YouthLink, who are disproportionately black and brown.

We have heard from a range of community members and young people about this tragedy; and, we appreciate the thoughtful input and observations. We want to first and foremost assure everyone in this great community that we hear you. We welcome and encourage your engagement with YouthLink and, more importantly, with the youth it serves.

As YouthLink board members, we must act with care, loyalty, honesty and intentionality, through the lens of what is in the best interests of the organization and youth served. We will intensify our conversations and prioritize our actions to reduce the systemic barriers of racism and oppression which prevent black, indigenous and all youth of color, who experience homelessness, from access to housing, jobs, health care, education and justice in the legal system.

For 50 years, YouthLink has been dedicated to ensuring that young people experiencing homelessness receive what they deserve — to live free of racism, disparities and oppression.

We are not content to stand on our history, however, because we understand this moment in history is an opportunity to take meaningful and lasting action. With this in mind, the YouthLink Board of Directors will:

- Engage in strategic conversations with fellow-board member, Minneapolis Chief of Police, Medaria Arradondo, to explore how to give the voices of our youth influence in police reform. Having Chief Arradondo on our board also gives our youth the important opportunity to voice their lived experiences to a respected member of the Black community and Minneapolis's first Black Police Chief.
- Start critical conversations with black leaders, youth and staff to explore how we can deepen our commitment to inclusion and equity through our strategic direction, policies and strategic goals.
- Invite two youth of color to sit on the Young Professionals Board.
- Continue to diversify our board of directors, whose members are 42% Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (33% Black); and, do everything possible to ensure that part of the Board come from the community YouthLink serves
- Dedicate funds for youth stipends to initiate a voices of youth advisory council with black, indigenous, LGBTQ and other youth of color represented
  - Recommend to Chief Arradondo that the Voices of Youth Advisory Council be an engaged voice in the reform of the Minneapolis Police Department.
  - Commit resources annually to sponsor a “Voices of Youth” listening and training session for board, staff and community leaders.
- Conduct an annual board and organization audit of diversity.

The board, staff, and our community are at a critical point, where healing is needed. Ending racism, disparities and the status quo will not be easy. We believe, however, that working together with the passion of collective voices will result in transformational change.

We stand in solidarity to ensure that George Floyd’s murder results in systemic change in the entire criminal justice system, as well as in law enforcement.

We will always remember George Floyd, and his life will be a light to a safer and more equitable future for the young people served by YouthLink.

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