

Dear AHEAD Members,

During the opening plenary of the AHEAD International Conference, AHEAD President Bea Awoniyi put voice to our collective pain, grief, and frustration over the tragic events and loss of life over this summer. Her remarks served to remind us that, as professionals dedicated to advancing the civil rights of students with disabilities, our work is firmly rooted in social justice and the activism of other communities similarly marginalized. Just as disability advocates recognized the importance of joining other groups to demand equality in the 1960s, we must stand in solidarity with those communities today.

As higher education professionals, we are well-positioned to join forces with students and colleagues to foster significant social change on our campuses and in our communities. Most of our campuses include diversity as a core value and institutional objective. And, as we work to include disability in those important conversations, we must also challenge exclusion and discrimination wherever it exists. The students we work with have many identities and experience exclusion and marginalization as a result. Our work is furthered when our campuses acknowledge, learn from, and value the experiences and perspectives of all the members of our communities. Therefore, we must work in the service of social justice and strive for the effective removal of any barriers that marginalize individuals and groups on the basis of difference.

AHEAD recognizes that many of us don't come to our roles with a background in this broader work of social justice and activism. As an Association, we are still working to better understand, infuse, and advance these goals. We look forward to continuing to learn from each other. For now, we are pleased to share ideas with you suggested by members already engaged in the work for how we can each work to advance social justice on our campuses.

- Attend and support campus events sponsored by cultural centers, the LGBTQ office, the women's center, etc.
- Partner with colleagues who are poised to lead campus discussions about oppression, exclusion, racism, and other forms of discrimination directed at any marginalized community.
- Amplify the voices of marginalized groups: disabled people, people of color, LGBTQ people, etc.
- Interrupt discrimination, marginalization, and stereotyping of minority communities, including publicly challenging racism and injustice against people of color. Take risks. It is scary, difficult, and may bring up feelings of inadequacy or fear of making mistakes, but ultimately it is the only ethical response. Intervene in situations where racism is being passed on.
- Learn as much as you can about power and privilege, the intersection of race and disability, racism and ableism, and white privilege. Explore your own privilege whether based on your skin color, your professional status, or other aspects of your identity. Check out some great resources like:
 - <http://www.blackdisabledandproud.org/for-faculty-and-staff.html>

- Privilege, Power and Difference by Allan Johnson
- Consider the ways in which shame or fear of vulnerability may be affecting your own reflections, conversations, and actions. Watch Brené Brown's TED Talk: Listening to Shame or check out her written work to explore further.
- Talk with your colleagues, family, and those close to you about racism, sexism, equality, and inclusion.
- Download the postcard sized sign that we encourage you to post in your offices - on your door or bulletin board. This can be a visual representation of your commitment to creating and maintaining safe spaces on campus for all students. The tagged, downloadable image is available at: <https://www.ahead.org/safe-space-word-cloud>

AHEAD is committed to continuing and facilitating this conversation, and to advancing this broader agenda. If you have ideas and input for how we can move forward in raising the voices of students and AHEAD members who are members of marginalized groups as we all work for equity, please contact ahead@ahead.org. Furthermore, if you would like to get involved, we encourage and welcome your participation in this effort. Again please contact Adam Crawford crawford.843@osu.edu, Chair of the Diversity Standing Committee and/or Crystal Hill crystalh@uca.edu, Chair of the R.E.D.D. SIG to let us know you are interested in effecting positive change.

Sincerely,

The AHEAD Board of Directors

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