



DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION: AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHELLE CHALMERS OF AMPERSAND FAMILIES

The mission of Ampersand Families is to recruit and support permanent families for older youth, and to champion practices in adoption and permanency that restore belonging, dignity and hope. Ampersand Families is a resource for youth, families, and professionals seeking to promote permanent relationships between teens and significant caring adults. Ampersand Families met Charities Review Council's Accountability Standards® in June of 2013. Their organization found the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Standard to be one of the most useful standards in helping them advance their work. As a result of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion standard, Ampersand Families is now more effectively delivering its mission by reflecting the community it serves. **Read about their journey:**

Tell us a bit about your experience with the Accountability Wizard review process. What was helpful about it?

My colleague, Jen Braun, was primarily responsible for walking us through the Accountability Wizard process. She thought it was very user friendly and it absolutely prompted us to tighten up a few policies. The most significant growth we've had, initiated by the process is our efforts towards inclusivity and diversity. Of course, we aren't clueless and have routinely talked over the years about how we need to do a better job reflecting the youth and families we serve. The Accountability Wizard process spelled it out clearly. We were not doing what we needed to be doing in this regard.

Did Ampersand conduct any type of demographic assessment before working on the Charities Review Council's Accountability Wizard review?

In an informal way, Ampersand Families has always been on top of the demographics of who we serve. We routinely collect data and consistently discuss the disparity of youth of color in the child welfare system. We serve pretty close to the same breakdown of kids (white vs. kids of color; boys vs. girls). What we haven't served is youth from the metro area in proportion to their representation in the total waiting kid pool. That's because the metro counties have not used help of agencies like ours. Next year at this time we will be serving a much more balanced group of youth in that regard.

How did you go about meeting the Diversity and Inclusion Standard? What processes or practices did you implement?

We have done a number of things to work toward the Diversity and Inclusion Standard. First, our board formed an Inclusivity and Diversity committee, and they have been busy. Those committee discussions have led us down a number of paths. A few of them include completing very strategic outreach with the aim of building connections for African American families in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and in Rochester, MN (a large number of the kids we serve are African American, Native American, Hispanic or Latino). We are also actively seeking board members from outside the Twin Cities. We currently serve about 40% youth referred from greater Minnesota, while all board members are located in the metropolitan area.

Finally, we have revisited our matrix of skills and attributes needed in board members and routinely discuss diversity as it relates to new member recruitment. We currently have 10 board members, but we want to be at 13 with a queue.

The demographics of our board have shifted significantly in order to deepen our commitment and ties to the communities we serve. In upcoming months we plan to add new board members, very strategically, to continue to improve the range of voices on our board.

How has this process helped you in your daily work?

In alignment with the strategic initiatives we put in place as a result of our work with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Standard, our pool of families has expanded from being exclusively white (that included a balance of straight, married/partnered, single and GLBT families).

Our pool now includes racially diverse families, mixed race families, blended families, and multi-lingual families.

Why is it important to Ampersand Families to be representative and inclusive of the population it serves?

There are 10,000 reasons. The challenge has been in figuring out which group(s) to represent, and what it means to represent them. We are already a significantly stronger organization due to this process.

With the revamped Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Standard and our newly launched Accountability Wizard 3.0 (a proprietary, cloud-based capacity building software – the only one of its kind nationwide), Charities Review Council is helping more nonprofits than ever to build their infrastructure of equity, while helping them access the resources they need improve their diversity, equity and inclusion practices.

When a nonprofit reflects the community it serves, it sees stronger results and a wider impact. Reach out to your favorite nonprofit and invite them to meet our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion standard today.