

SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

Social justice is equal access to economic, political, and social rights and opportunities within a society. To achieve social justice means that all groups, especially historically marginalized and oppressed groups, have full and equitable participation in society. According to researchers Adams, Bell and Griffin, social justice is best understood as both a process and a goal: "The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure."

Social and racial inequity and injustices have been embedded in every system—education, healthcare, workforce/labor, economy, criminal justice, government, etc.— in our community and nation for hundreds of years. Therefore, a commitment to social justice is essential to dismantling the systemic oppression of racism and moving the needle of achieving a more equitable community. The mission-driven work of Make Way for Books and elements of our organization can contribute to achieving further social justice.

Make Way for Books is an early literacy organization. Our mission is to give all children the chance to read and succeed. By asserting that *all* children deserve this in our mission, we actually mean to emphasize our commitment to ensuring that especially under-served children deserve to be included in that *all*. This means a dogged commitment to serving economically-disadvantaged children and children of color to make sure they are part of the *all*. In fact, we exist as an organization to create further educational equity and to change the educational landscape for under-served children. We exist to create social change in our community via education and a two-generation method of change that builds the agency of and connections between our families and caregivers. Literacy is inherently life-changing. It is the foundational skill for education and career path. Even more than that, it is the foundation for lifelong learning, meaning-making, and a human right. Literacy and the act of reading itself builds awareness, empathy, and mindsets for handling multiple perspectives and developing critical thinking skills. Literacy is the foundation for engagement in and work towards a more equitable and realized society and democracy.

Specifically, early childhood literacy is directly connected to a child's entire future learning achievement and success. A child's vocabulary at age three is connected to that child's reading comprehension ability in tenth grade. By 18 months of age there are already disparities in children's language skills.





Children coming from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds typically start kindergarten nearly two years behind in vocabulary skills. Once children start behind, it is very difficult to catch up beyond kindergarten. Locally and nationally, we still face a great divide in early literacy skills when the data is disaggregated by race and economic disadvantage. Third grade is considered the end of a child's early literacy path. Beyond third grade, a child is expected to be able to read to learn instead of being given the opportunity to learn to read in school. If a student is reading below grade level in third grade, that child is four times more likely to drop out of high school. Learning simply gets more difficult to navigate if a child is a struggling reader. In Pima County in 2019, 62% of white third-grade children scored proficient in reading as compared to 38% of Hispanic/LatinX, 34% of Black, and 16% of Native American third-grade students scoring proficiently. Further, only 34% of economically-disadvantaged students scored proficient in reading. Starting early changes everything. By doing our work well and achieving our mission we are working to ensure that more and more children are given the right start and will go on to be empowered learners. Literacy for social justice means that all children have equal access to opportunities that build these life-changing skills, which leads to new learning possibilities and the ability to contribute to new learning for our community.

In our daily work at Make Way for Books, we have the power to help transform minds and hearts and to help achieve social justice with the guiding principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and access within our educational landscape. Most of all, the way we choose to do our literacy work and interact as an organization has the power to educate, to bring awareness, to connect, to empower, and to heal at the individual and community level. Toni Morrison said, "We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal." We are engaged in the work of bringing the gift of literacy to our youngest learners and helping their adults truly understand their tremendous gifts and power to educate those young minds and hearts. We are engaged in helping to seed the foundation of a child's learning, literacy, and meaning making journey of who they are, who they can become, and what the world is—and truly how the world will receive their unique gifts, their curiosities, their heartaches, their joys, their triumphs, and their dreams.

Today, the work of Make Way for Books is as important as ever. Literacy is a foundation for social justice - it is a dynamic, transformative, and empowering process which can lead to personal and wider social change. At Make Way for Books, we realize the power of books and stories to foster children's early literacy and language skills as well as to affirm children's identities, to build their potential to imagine new possibilities, and to empower children to be the narrators of their own stories. We provide the highest quality books because the stories we share with children matter. Books provide a framework for building essential literacy and language skills to become a competent reader, as well as skills beyond those: resilience, critical thinking, and empathy. Between the pages of a picture book, children gain an awareness of emotions and gain empathy for the emotions of others; they witness problem-solving and conflict resolution; and they observe friendships, differences, tolerance, and love. The best of books and



stories build an individual's sense of power, belonging, and value - they inspire agency and engagement not only in young children but in the adults who share these books with them. All young children have the right to meaningful, empowering, and dynamic literacy and educational experiences that prepare them as creative, resilient, and inquisitive readers and learners that can adapt, thrive, and dream new possibilities into our shared world. Book by book, child by child, family by family, we move forward towards a more equitable world by ensuring young children have early literacy and learning experiences they need to become thriving and empowered readers and learners, critical thinkers, and compassionate future leaders.

Understanding the tremendous power of the work, we understand that our social justice work is intersectional. By creating this framework with the guiding principles of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access along with key action steps across the organization, we strive to achieve our goal for social justice to be ingrained into everything we do from hiring someone to choosing what book to share with a family to what businesses we approach to ask for support. Further, we commit to and understand that this work is continuous and dynamic work.

Equity, diversity, inclusion, and access are central to our purpose and two-generation theory of change as a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating social change via early childhood education and literacy. Further, we believe that equity, diversity, inclusion and access drive innovation. We acknowledge that growth and change are necessary, and we are committed to continuous improvement and the understanding that this work is a continuous, ongoing, and collaborative process. As an organization committed to social justice, we commit to specific benchmark goals moving from ally-ship into tangible and specific measurable actions that are outlined by organizational department in our Social Justice Framework to hold ourselves accountable to achieve and further realize our organization's social justice goals, learning, and practices.

EQUITY

Make Way for Books recognizes that deep disparities exist--especially for those at the intersection of marginalized identities. We believe and are committed to creating equal access to opportunity. We recognize that equity does not mean equal and that some people may need to receive different resources or opportunities in order to work towards and maintain fairness and access. We exist to create more equity with respect to education and see our work as a means to achieving social change, seeing our work as fundamental to helping to change the practices, norms, and structures that perpetuate inequities. Our mission to achieve educational equity can only be achieved when those most affected by inequity are able to be leaders in the change effort. We work with families, educators, children, colleagues and collaborators, and other key stakeholders to recognize our own implicit biases, to break down barriers, and to ensure all individuals have a fair opportunity to thrive. We create adaptive and effective strategies that help to break down systemic barriers so that equity can be achieved.



Our programs meet families where they are and have equity as the guiding principle. We recognize that our early childhood education system has perpetuated our society's deep inequities. We intentionally and explicitly break down barriers and ensure that we are engaging participants that will move our community to further equitable access to educational opportunity. We explicitly recruit and engage families with young children who have no access to and cannot afford preschool and childcare. Moreover, we work in early childhood spaces that serve our community's most vulnerable children, seeking to be a bridge to further equity by ensuring more children get the right start on their academic journey and grow to become thriving readers and learners.

DIVERSITY

Make Way for Books recognizes the incredible value that diversity brings to our work and its essential place in creating meaningful impact for those we serve. We believe that diversity is the commitment to and practice of including and ensuring that multiple perspectives, voices, and ideas are present at the table as we are all learners and teachers for each other. Diversity ensures that we embrace differences and see them as strengths in the creative nature of the work we do internally and externally out in the community. We embrace the voices, experiences, skills, knowledge, and different strengths that people of all races, backgrounds, ages, gender identities, and varied life experiences bring to our work. We recognize, celebrate, and integrate the holistic reality of diversity including valuing the domains of cognitive, social, emotional and physical diversity.

We actively seek out creating diverse learning communities and experiences for ourselves and the people we serve. When we work and learn with those who are different from us, we are able to solve problems creatively and develop our strengths together. Make Way for Books will champion and affirm diversity in our work with others and within our organization to promote meaningful inclusion of racial, sexual, gender, class, religious, ethnic, abled, and other social identities represented in our community. Our organization, who we are and who we serve, strives to reflect and embrace the differences among us. We are diverse in language, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, abilities, social roles, sexual orientation, education, age, and skills. We recognize there are countless other diverse domains in the human race and we shall embrace them all.

INCLUSION

Make Way for Books is a place where connections, relationships, and building community are the core mechanism of all we do and how we achieve our mission. We are a community that seeks to operate and create in the positive force of love. To that end, Make Way for Books affirms its commitment to recognizing, addressing and eradicating all forms of racism and ethnic oppression. We work to reduce racial injustices both within our work and in the broader community. Make Way for Books staff are united in the commitment to being an anti-racist organization. We commit to the development and implementation of strategies and best-practices that dismantle racism and ethnic oppression within all aspects of our work, community and society. We recognize the need to create intentionally brave



spaces that allow for authentic conversations. We recognize that individuals are at various points of the anti-racist journey and of learning what is appropriate. Thus, having these conversations require courage, respect and compassion, and may not always be or seek to be comfortable. However, as an anti-racist and ethnically unbiased community, we will purposefully strive to identify, discuss and challenge issues of race, color, ethnicity, and gender identity and the impact(s) they have on children, families, educators, and staff/board members.

Make Way for Books welcomes all populations and identities with the expectation that they contribute meaningfully in a positive and generative manner. With empathy, compassion, love, and humility, Make Way for Books relentlessly seeks to foster meaningful inclusion of the diverse narratives, backgrounds, experiences, identities, and the multiple visible and invisible dimensions that reflect the fluidity of human diversity, that we and those we serve bring to our work. We create spaces to understand and learn from each other, knowing that this is always ongoing work. In our programs with families and with educators, we create vibrant, inclusive communities of learning where all learners have a sense of belonging, feel respected and valued for who they are, and feel a high level of supportive energy regardless of any differences. We affirm our commitment to ensuring that all voices will be heard. We confront racism and discrimination. We work in a way that actively allows authentic engagement and to make change via co-creative strategies, that together are powerful mechanisms for building inclusive, compassionate, and thriving workplace and communities.

ACCESS

Ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities is a cornerstone of our mission. We strive to identify privileges as well as recognize and address systems of oppression that create barriers to access to opportunity. We hold ourselves accountable and analyze how we engage our community and implement our work to effectively create more access. We exist to break down barriers for families, children, and educators who have been marginalized or not part of the early childhood education system. Our theory of change is to meet people where they are. We strive to strategically create more access to our programs to those most in need of our services. Further, we make accommodations to be able to serve those of differing physical, cognitive, linguistic, and emotional abilities.

Make Way for Books will continue to strive to innovate and use resources strategically to break down barriers so those who need and want our programming can easily and successfully participate. We work to build and ensure access to literacy and biliteracy, understanding that language and modalities play a key role in creating access and effectively collaborating with and serving new populations and historically marginalized peoples. We define and communicate our core values, goals, mission and vision to the public clearly and consistently around creating more access to opportunity.

Commitment to Advocacy

As an organization we commit to supporting and strive to be a part of relevant and meaningful social



justice movements where appropriate to our mission. As such, this framework is the living document managed by the Social Justice & Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access (EDIA) Committee that is a cross section of staff and board members who meet regularly to make decisions about which current advocacy efforts make sense for the organization to devote communications and position statements around and other key action steps as appropriate per the advocacy effort/social justice issue.

SOCIAL JUSTICE GOALS & KEY PROGRESS INDICATORS

Each department has drafted their current goals and Key Progress Indicators (KPIs) related to achieving our social justice goals. The rest of the document is outlined by organization section and begins with an introduction and chart outlining key goals, action steps, metrics/KPIs as appropriate, and target completion date for achieving the key goals.

ORGANIZATION-WIDE GOALS

Organizational Culture Infrastructure

Make Way for Books strives to create an organizational culture that embraces inclusion, diversity, equity, and access through implementing policies and procedures that creates an environment of belonging. We will honor and give space for all voices, seek feedback and opinions, focus on retention and engagement after a thoughtful, slow, and inclusive recruitment process of team members, volunteers, and board members that reflect the communities we serve. We will celebrate our differences. We will seek out diversity in gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, abilities, socio-economic status, and experiences, while respecting the needs of the organization. We will utilize the Core Values of our organization to guide the processes of recruitment/hiring, supervision, program and volunteer development, internal and external communication, and team building.

Data Driven

We are strategic, purposeful, and resourceful. Across all levels of the organization we collect data to reflect on our impact, identify areas of growth, and learn from the community. Within the organization we collect data to ensure our staff and board reflects the community we serve. To ensure equity, access, diversity, and inclusion and the high quality of our programming, we reflect and analyze data from parents and educators. We analyze our ability to effectively recruit and retain participants. And, we collect a variety of data on change in caregivers' behavior that directly impacts children's development of essential, emergent literacy skills. This is paired with research from leading experts to understand the impact of our programming in culturally responsive ways. With this information, we pivot. We make data-driven decisions, to provide innovative programming for the families, educators and children we serve. Our Social Justice Framework will use data-driven processes and metrics to hold ourselves accountable and to track progress and challenges to achieving our intended outcomes.