

MARCH 2024 BIPOC AFFINITY GROUP MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



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1. What does the word "community" mean to you? How would you describe your community?

For me, "community" includes larger macro-level communities and various more intimate and personal communities with which I engage. The larger communities are those of the state, regions, and neighborhoods. Those that are more personal are comprised of the individuals I work with, my family, and my faith.

Looking specifically through a BIPOC lens, as it pertains to my family and faith, there is an emphasis on strengthening relationships within the BIPOC community. I am recognized as a resource, ally, and person with whom people can deliberate dilemmas as they perceive those experiences.

2. Can you please talk about your involvement in the communities you are a part of?

The communities I am part of and interact with are deeply integrated within my day-to-day activities. I am readily available to partake in opportunities as they present themselves where I can directly impact, however small or large, in real-time.

I participate in events that allow me to educate community members regarding mental/behavioral health, particularly those within the BIPOC and faith communities. I make it a priority to adjust my schedule whenever possible to ensure I am present at community events and gatherings that afford me the prospect of enhancing community knowledge of resources available to them within mental/behavioral health.

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3. What is your primary responsibility at your job?

At TPCP, the CEO is responsible for assuring that responsibilities are carried out subject to the policies established by and for the approval of its Board of Directors. Responsibilities also include, but are not limited to:

- Developing proposed budgets for approval of the Board of Directors,
- Monitoring and periodically reporting the budget status to the Board of Directors,
- Acting as ex-officio member of the Board of Directors standing or special committees as appropriate,
- Negotiating and implementing contracts/leases and recommending action be taken by the Board of Directors,
- Developing relevant grant applications,
- Analyzing problems of the mentally disabled community,
- Creating an agency work plan that addresses the needs of the mentally disabled adult community,
- Educating lay and professional community people regarding the need for programs for mentally disabled adults

4. Who has been the most influential person in your career?

First and foremost, as part of my faith, Jesus has been the most influential person in my career. He, alongside my late wife, Yvette Rowlett, has genuinely guided my career trajectory, resulting in where I am today. I do my best to live by Yvette's mantra: it is better to be kind than to be right. I apply these words to my approach to being a better mentor, leader, and human being.

5. What's an interesting fact about you and/or your organization most people don't know?

I have been on more than a dozen mission trips around the world. As part of those trips, two water wells have been dedicated in honor of myself and my late wife in the African continent in Ghana.

As for the organization, I am honored to be the first BIPOC Chief Executive Officer in Turning Point Community Program's (TPCP) 47-year-long history.

6. What motivates you in your field? What inspired you to get involved in this field initially?

When I started, the biggest motivator was needing a job and to be able to feed my family. TPCP gave me that opportunity. I achieved outcomes that made a difference in the client's lives, and I understood what a privilege it was and continues to be to serve them. I have always believed people should have opportunities to flourish in their chosen communities. Further, working in the behavioral health field in the capacity of a leader from the BIPOC community matters not only to me but also to those who may or may not realize that leadership is and should be a reachable goal within their own personal careers. For me, leadership, specifically servant leadership, is a crucial motivator.

MARCH 2024 BIPOC AFFINITY GROUP MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

7. What was it like when you were just starting out in your field? What obstacles did you have to overcome to get to the position you have?

When I started at TPCP, there were no role models or opportunities to engage people from the BIPOC community in and outside the agency. I was in the unique position of forging my path within the field of behavioral health. Despite the obstacles I faced, even more so as I progressed up the career lattice, I stayed true to an internal belief that it was essential to make sure I made myself available as a mentor to encourage others. I wanted to support those in similar positions so they would not encounter the same challenges I had.

8. What has been your favorite or most meaningful project so far in your career?

I need help choosing from the various projects I have supported over the past 40+ years. There is simply no favorite. I was honored to be selected as CEO of TPCP, be elected to the Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD) Board of Education, be a member of the board of regenerative medicine, serve on the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC), heading up recovery-oriented leadership training, and working with TPCP's Senior Leadership team to advance the growth of the organization. Further, expanding the presence of peers within TPCP, especially in leadership roles, has been a project of pride. Acknowledging, honoring, and valuing the role of people with lived experience in our organization has been crucial to successful service delivery and outcomes. Lastly, being a part of CBHA and CIBHS have also been meaningful to me.

9. What initially inspired you to join the CBHA BIPOC Affinity Group?

My colleagues. I want to continue to pave a path for those within the BIPOC community while encouraging them to take on leadership roles that they may not have been afforded otherwise.

10. Do you feel you have faced challenges as a BIPOC leader that others might not have?

Of course. I continue to face overrepresentation regarding the most disparaging and adverse outcomes while being underrepresented in areas of leadership.

11. Do you feel that BIPOC folks are adequately represented in executive/leadership positions in the behavioral health realm? If no, what do you feel needs to change?

No, I do not feel that BIPOC folks are adequately represented. They need mentorship opportunities and are taught how to navigate career lattices that result in leadership opportunities. They also need to be paid a commensurate wage with their counterparts. Lastly, they should be afforded the same privileges as others: leadership opportunities, career advancements, and salary adjustments.

MARCH 2024 BIPOC AFFINITY GROUP MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

12. What advice do you have to BIPOC individuals as they work towards becoming leaders in their own communities? Any lessons learned?

The most significant piece of advice I can offer is to remain humble. I never assume that I have independently arrived at an answer. As leaders, in whatever capacity that may look like, we embrace the unique diversity of the communities we are privileged to serve. For example, I recently sat in a meeting where I began commenting on a topic. After I spoke, the facilitator commented that I was code-switching in the middle of my sharing. I adjusted my statements from "I lead" to "I work without leaders." Code-switching in this example was a direct reflection of humility as a leader. I am comfortable with not having the spotlight on me and allowing others to assume leadership roles and responsibilities. I subordinate myself to them.

A second lesson learned is to choose not to be offended or become defensive in tense situations. I chose to take a different path and focus on being a better BIPOC human being. I have found this skill particularly useful as a member of the BIPOC community. If I were to become defensive, I quickly become an example of how "those people" are, and my words and actions are easily generalized to the rest of the BIPOC community. I do not have the privilege of being easily offended and expressing my frustration without being considered an example for all those who look like me.