

An important message from Mike Shaver: Facing two crises at once, together

Our world today is very different than it was just a few months ago – the peril created by the COVID pandemic has intersected with the outrage related to yet another inexplicable death of an unarmed black man, George Floyd.

Sadness and anger have been on display during nightly protests as black Americans mourn this loss of life and the countless times this scenario has played out on a national stage – and when no one is watching – with no real reform. We stand in solidarity with the countless peaceful protesters who have risen in every state, in small towns and large cities, representing a demographic diversity that lifts the soul. You remind us all that democracy is not for the faint of heart, and we are better for your courage.

I say this because the majority of the people and families served by Children's Home & Aid are black or brown as are many of the dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters. They see you and feel your support and at a time like this it really matters.

Personally, I've watched many around me – black, brown and white – grapple with the dysfunction and horror of what's not just playing out on television, but often right outside our doors as a result of the blatant lack of consequence and accountability for police brutality. They do all this while trying to push forward in their work and home life inside while the world changes around them.

Compounding this understandable anger and rage is yet another reality underscoring our failures as a society to address racial equity: the way in which the COVID pandemic has ravaged communities of color with disproportionately high rates of infection and death.

There is no mystery here. Where we live, attend school, work, and play is directly related to our health. For black and brown Americans, the impact of years of living in communities lacking health care facilities, healthy food options and supportive social structures is directly related to the increased prevalence of "underlying health conditions" resulting in a greater likelihood of death from COVID-19.

Illinois Department of Health director Dr. Ngozi Ezike laid it out for us clearly this week: coronavirus and racism are two public health crises that disproportionately affect people of color.

There is no quick fix here. We have serious work ahead of us. Right now, the most powerful thing I believe we can do is to listen—with intention—while we undertake our critical work as community partners.

Let's connect the dots between the ongoing fear and trauma these violent incidents reignite and the solutions that we provide. Let's continue to be innovative and data-driven in our approach, while advocating for policy and system changes that strengthen family and community assets for improved economic security, health and well-being. Let's also keep working together to bridge gaps and disrupt the cycles of human suffering with information and empathy.

This is how Children's Home & Aid will be part of the solution. Is it enough? I don't know. What I do know is that it is our time to listen and respond to the demands for justice, equality, safety and reform in black and brown communities. Moreover, we have a duty to rise to this challenge by transforming our work in a way that improves life trajectories at a generational level. Nothing less will do.

We will not look back again in another 50 years with a feeling that we have failed to do enough. We just can't.

Michael Shaver

President & CEO