

---

May 15, 2023

**To:** All RisingOaks Early Learning employees, families and volunteers

**Fr:** Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism (DEIA) Steering Committee  
- Lori Prospero, CEO  
- Kristine Parsons, Director of Operations

**Re:** Response to the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism (DEIA) Organizational Assessment Report offered by Credence & Co.

---

In October 2022, RisingOaks Early Learning contracted with Credence & Co., a Waterloo Region consultancy, to conduct an organizational review of current RisingOaks policies, programs, and partnerships with the aim of identifying barriers related to diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism (DEIA) experienced by employees, RisingOaks' families, and volunteers. The desired outcome for the assessment was to identify a set of recommendations to support RisingOaks to remove barriers and create more equitable outcomes across our programs, policies, and practices.

Credence & Co. issued its report on March 31 and presented it to the membership, employees and the board on April 11 at our Annual General Meeting. As discussed at the Annual General Meeting, the report provided areas of strength and areas of growth, and as is often the case, the lists look similar.

**Areas of Strength**

1. Sense of Belonging
2. Relationships
3. Visual Representation
4. Communication
5. Human Resources & Benefits

**Areas for Growth**

1. Visual Representation
2. Communication
3. Sense of Belonging & Connection
4. Professional Learning & Development
5. Human Resources
6. Addressing Sector Realities

This report – of findings from the listening process (i.e., interviews and focus groups) and the document review - combined with the quantitative data from the employee survey – resulted in two significant recommendations:

1. **Report Debriefing** with Leaders, Staff and Caregivers
2. **Development of a Comprehensive DEIA Strategy** that includes: group training, facilitated conversations, development of a DEIA Action Plan, leadership coaching, support for the Reference Group who will lead this work, a caregiver engagement strategy and policy development or refinement.

Upon first review of the report and the data, we were pleased to see that most staff and leaders report feeling like they belong at RisingOaks Early Learning. Many caregivers also reported a sense of belonging. We see this as a direct connection to the recent and continuing work on leadership development and building a resilient workplace culture.

Upon further reflection of the data, a few things stood out:

- Only 23% of staff participated in the survey. Was this due to timing and other factors such as the burnout and the workforce crisis? Does it mean that others haven't experienced equity issues or racism? Did others not feel comfortable participating? How might we encourage and leave space for more participation?
- While there is a high sense of belonging, staff living with a disability provided a score 20% lower than other respondents.
- 74% of staff respondents and 77% of leader respondents believe that leaders hold themselves accountable and act in relation to DEIA goals. However, staff living with a disability and staff from other equity-seeking groups are less confident in the leaders' ability to address DEIA issues.
- 49% of leader respondents indicated they felt confident talking about experiences with discrimination within their team.
- On average, 48% of respondents feel comfortable taking a day off for mental health reasons. Those from equity-seeking groups even less.
- Just under half of respondents identify that leaders may not understand the impact of societal biases on career advancement decisions.
- 54% of staff respondents and 29% of leader respondents report having witnessed anti-racist actions.
- In the open-ended listening process, a few staff describe feeling concerned about repercussions should they engage in tough conversations about lived experiences related to DEIA; these staff say they fear that their sharing may hurt others.

As an organization, we have turned our gaze internally and know that we have work to do. Our Mission speaks about giving parents peace of mind, and our values include advocacy, community and love, but we know that internal and external systemic barriers exist. As we reflect on this report, we acknowledge that we found it sometimes hard to read – to realize that some members of our team or families have experienced racism, bias or inequities within our organization.

This report reaffirms that we have further blind spots and, at times, may lack the expertise and lived experience to recognize and address them well. One such blind spot from the data is that 29% of staff respondents indicate being satisfied with the RisingOaks' DEIA actions and don't think we need to do more. In addition, 20% of staff respondents and 25% of leader respondents are neutral. We must consider how this might impact the implementation of a DEIA action plan at RisingOaks in the near future.



## Now What?

We are pleased to accept all recommendations from Credence & Co. While we are eager to move to action planning, we recognize that there is more discussion needed and that considerable time may be required to allow for proper consultation and planning, particularly amidst a workforce crisis and the transition of staff and children from the school year to summer camp. Appreciating the importance of the concerns that need to be addressed, we commit to proceeding as expeditiously as possible, and we will provide regular progress updates, with the next one being expected in late September 2023.

For now, the work continues with a focus on building foundational knowledge. To that end, the leadership team has recently completed a 5-hour workshop on Exploring Bias and the entire staff team engaged in discussion about what DEIA means to them – what it might look like, feel like and sound like in a healthy, equitable environment.

On May 9, the board engaged in a debrief of the report with Credence & Co., and we are in the process of transitioning leadership for this important work from Credence & Co. to the internal Reference Group.

### **A personal reflection from Lori and Kristine**

First, we want to thank each and every employee, member, board member and caregiver who participated in the DEIA listening process. Your input sets the benchmark for this important work, and there will be more opportunities for you – and the entire RisingOaks' community - to share and provide input. Your engagement in this process is important and so very much appreciated.

To the members of the internal reference group - Aysha, Eli, Emily, Necia, Rafaela, Vanessa and Velvet- thank you for your steadfast leadership in this process and for your thoughtful insights in our sense-making sessions.

We are excited about the work ahead, though we know that exploring our biases and actions as we work to become a more diverse, equitable, inclusive and anti-racist organization can and will impact us all differently. We are committed to supporting the RisingOaks' community along the way.

*Lori & Kristine*