

Operationalizing Philanthropy

At Trillium Family Services

By Kim Scott

In a world that is becoming increasingly complex –where polarization, division, and outrage are dominating the social landscape – is it possible that love really is the answer? Is love the key to bringing us together, to unifying our spirits, to building a collective effort to achieve new heights, strengths, possibility and discovery? At Trillium Family Services, we believe the answer is YES! – and we know in our hearts that this simple notion of *love as an answer* to the turbulence being experienced by society is truer today than ever before.

Philanthropy can be broadly defined as the love for humankind. It is derived from the Greek words “Philos” which means loving and “Anthropos” which means humankind. The love of humankind is foundational to the work of Trillium Family Services. First and foremost, as individuals – board members, leaders, mental health practitioners, direct service staff, support staff, volunteers and investors – we have answered the call to making a difference in the lives of individuals, families and communities who are impacted by trauma and related mental health and wellness challenges.

Our mission of “Building Brighter Futures with Children and Families” and our vision of “changing the national narrative around health and wellness to include mental health and the social determinants of health” have galvanized and unified a collective approach that not only addresses our programs and services, but compels us to focus on our social impact, and on being relevant to the communities we serve - always with a focus on working within community and not upon community. Where does this come from? A spirit of love. At Trillium, we embrace the knowledge that “the love of humankind” must include being an organization that is anti-racist, and trauma informed.

On our journey we are heeding the words of Ibram X. Kendi, who reminds us “One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an anti-racist.” Being an anti-racist organization calls us to work with others in removing barriers that stand in conflict with the love of humankind. We believe that a core aspect of being anti-racist is simply committing to being a better human being (or organization) so that we can care better for others.

Internationally known philanthropic thought leader Jim Lord says, “Where we choose to stand shapes what we see as possible.” We choose to stand as willing and ready to confront racial inequities as an anti-racist organization, and to attend to the trauma of racism among other forms of trauma. Our commitment to philanthropy compels us as individuals and as an organization to stand against racism in all its forms. We understand that this requires a commitment to ongoing learning as well as the ongoing evaluation of culture, systems, policy and practices in order for us to be the organization we must be to fully embrace diversity, equity and inclusion and frankly, how we create a better world.

At a practice level we aspire to stay in difficult and uncomfortable conversations; to partner courageously in ways that fully support people and communities of color; to support organizations whose work directly engages culturally specific communities; to be strong collaborative partners and advocates for policy and system change; and to acknowledge that Trillium’s vision is only possible if it is truly embraced and viewed as relevant by communities. While we focus on mental health and “putting the mind and body together again” through a more holistic perspective, we understand that the context of people’s experience in community is a critical part of overall health and wellness. We envision a world where there is equity and one’s zip code is not the best indicator of one’s health.

We at Trillium also have long embraced the notion that “the love of humankind” must include the **understanding of trauma**, acknowledging and honoring people’s lived experience and deep need for safety. We have played a significant role in changing the national narrative about people experiencing challenges to their mental health moving from a focus on “*What’s wrong with you?*” to a more accurate and compassionate lens of “*What has happened to you?*” Our engagement of philanthropy requires us to go further and ask, “*What is possible for you?*”, at the individual, family, community and system levels. We know that our ability as individuals “to love humankind” is greatly enhanced when **ALL** of us are experiencing physical, emotional, social, moral and cultural safety. We believe organizationally that we create healthy, safe and healing environments when we practice our 7 trauma-informed commitments:

1. Growth and Change
2. Open Communication
3. Democracy
4. Non- Violence
5. Emotional Intelligence
6. Social Learning, and
7. Social Responsibility

While all the commitments are fundamental to how Trillium operationalizes philanthropy, so too is our commitment to build on strengths and see the possibilities that exist all around us and in the individuals, families and communities we serve. At Trillium we believe that “Heroism Happens Here.” This concept is bolstered by our commitment to being our best selves, and by seeing, supporting and expecting the best in others. We understand and accept that there is a capable hero in each one of us, and that our duty in our work is to support the heroic journeys of people who want to make an incredible difference in the world.