Conversations on Racial Equity

By William Clay II

At the beginning of July, I had the opportunity to talk with Tina Poston and Debra Townsend, two African-American women who are a part of the NCADA community, about the state of racial equity within the organization. Debra is a part-time prevention educator and Tina serves as a member of the Board.

When Tina joined the Board back in 2006, there was little diversity and much of Eastern Missouri was not represented. But throughout her years with NCADA, Tina has seen, “the organization transition from a Board with one African-American to one that reflects the region in which we live. There is diversity with more females, racial groups, professions, and age groups represented on the Board. I remained on the Board many years ago because I felt my voice was important and there was a lack of diverse opinions. Everyone needed to have different perspectives in the decision-making room.” Being board and taken seriously without being judged is a constant struggle for people of color in their careers and their lives. All voices must be heard in order for the organization to move forward and be effective.

In her time at NCADA, Debra has, “seen the physical growth of the organization along with the racial equity effort. From an educational perspective, I have witnessed the growth of our programs across all school districts regardless of racial demographics. We are hearing more from different groups about the need for education, prevention, and treatment.” Many Black communities struggle with substance use disorder. Reaching students in schools is effective, and the knowledge they gain can be shared with their families. NCADA’s prevention education programs are in more and more schools with diverse student bodies and the outcomes speak for themselves.

Both women have seen the identity of NCADA change. The work of Tina, Debra, and their peers has guided NCADA to an identity for more than 5 decades as a “National” organization. The organization has pushed to expand its reach and mission to more urban areas. The women look forward to continuing the need for education, prevention, and treatment.” Many black communities struggle with substance use disorder. Reaching students in schools is effective, and the knowledge they gain can be shared with their families. NCADA’s prevention education programs are in more and more schools with diverse student bodies and the outcomes speak for themselves.

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NCADA Rebrand Reveal - Training and Professional Development Opportunities - Conversations on Racial Equity - A Place to Turn

Throughout our history, our name has presented several challenges. The acronym “NCADA” is confusing because we are neither “National” nor a “Council.” To further complicate matters, the words “Alcoholism” and “Abuse” have fallen out of favor in our field over the past decade. I have lost count of the times I have been introduced as “Nicole Dassen, from the NCAAD.” Or “Nicole Dassen from N… D… ah, I don’t know. The drug place.” Take it from me that’s a rosy introduction to a sophomore health class.

When our Board of Directors voted to disaffiliate from our national organization in April 2019, we were presented with a tremendous opportunity to relabel our name. So for the past year, we have been interviewing staff, Board, funders, coalition leaders, clients, and volunteers to capture thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about who we are, why we do what we do, our challenges, and our opportunities. Side note: if you filled out a survey, attended a listening session, or agreed to be interviewed... thank you!

Obviously our staff were the first to know the new name, logo, and tagline. Next to know were our organization’s “royalty” (i.e. past employees whose legacy endures). We wanted both groups to have the time and space to understand the new name, ask questions, think through logistics, and warm up to the idea. And now we are entering the next phase of the launch: introducing our organization’s “royalty” to the new name, logo, and tagline. Next up: we will continue to socialize the new name with people who already know us. And then, beginning right after the November election, we will execute a robust launch strategy for people who don’t already know us. We are neither “National” nor a “Council.” And we do all of this without preaching or judging but by engaging in real, honest conversations.

It was this vital work that became our identity for more than 5 decades. We know that as we continue to advance our mission, PreventEd will soon be synonymous with the same life-changing programs and services.

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Our name, our logo, and our tagline have changed. But our mission, visions, strategies, activities and people remain the same. We are committed to you, and to the work. That hasn’t – and won’t – change.

PreventEd Leadership the drug conversations on alcohol & other drugs

If you know anything about you, you know we are championing “prevention.” In fact, it’s kind of “our thing.” We preach about the value of universal prevention—beginning as young as kindergarten—and believe that prevention is CRITICAL to any sound strategy to address substance use disorders. Upstream solutions must be as fully considered as downstream ones.

We also value education. We hire teachers. We LOVE professional development and fancy ourselves lifelong learners. We educate families about how to have tough conversations with their kids; we educate individuals about how and where to access treatment and recovery resources, we educate legislators about how to create public health policies that address substance; we educate teenagers on how to find their voice; we educate community members about how to conduct grassroots efforts that support young people; and we educate students in grades K-12 about how to make healthy decisions. And we do all of this not by preaching or judging but by engaging in real, honest conversations.

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March 18th through June 8th, our offices were closed due to COVID-19. This time was unprecedented for everyone at our agency and in our community, and while our offices were closed, our mission and our work could not stop. In our counseling department, our direct engagement with clients had to continue. Those struggling with substance use disorder became more at risk when faced with additional stressors and isolation. NCADA maintained our ability to connect with clients via phone and through telehealth services. Counseling staff counseled with clients and other area providers so that we could make referrals and knew what services were available in the community. Once we took the leap to virtual service provision, we quickly found that it allows us to engage more with some clients and is a viable option to help people in our community.

Community prevention and education work slowed in the early days of the pandemic, but once it picked up we at NCADA staff and Peer Support Advocates used social media and direct engagement to connect with community members and continue to educate on the dangers of substance use disorder.

As Plato said, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” This has never resonated more than during the time of COVID-19 as we quickly adjusted to meet the needs of our staff, clients and community. Our school counseling program is our usual style as we want to make sure we have everything lined up and we want to do things “right.” But, a pandemic with local lockdowns did not allow us the luxury of time or being able to complete a plan. So in true NCADA style, we “made it work,” and our dedicated, talented staff approached each obstacle as an opportunity.

Unfortunately, as schools closed down and faced their own challenges, NCADA’s school-based prevention services came to a quick halt. While our educators missed their time with students, the work did not stop. Our educators began developing lessons for virtual platforms and different learning management systems so that we will be at the ready, no matter what “back to school” looks like in the fall.

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As Stéphane said, “Life is what happens when you’re busy making other plans.”

In this ever-changing environment, we recommend visiting our website for up-to-date information on NCADA’s training offerings and registration. Most of these trainings are available at no cost. For the most up-to-date information on NCADA’s training offerings and codecs, visit our website and register for these trainings, or sign up to receive email updates about upcoming trainings and webinars.

Staying on Track: Training and Professional Development Opportunities

By Stéphane Zélîn

When you hear us talk about education programming, your mind probably jumps to images of schools, students, classrooms, activities about resiliency, information about alcohol and other drugs, and incredible Prevention Educators leading the conversation. School-based prevention education is one of NCADA’s largest programs and, if without a doubt, a unique service that our agency provides to St. Louis and surrounding areas.

But in another department of NCADA, other staff are just as busy working to provide substance-use-related trainings and professional development opportunities to adults as well. Not only does NCADA regularly offer trainings at our agency, we can also accommodate training requests from outside organizations.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 abruptly halted our ability to host in-person trainings. Despite this, our staff found ways that we can still meet the challenge of quickly moving these trainings and education training opportunities to an online format. We have not only continued to offer this service to professionals and the general public, but we’ve also increased the number of trainings offered. This is particularly important, as many of our recent programs have highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on substance use prevention and treatment.

So what do these trainings look like, and how can community members access them? Here is a brief guide to NCADA’s most common training offerings:

General Substance Use Education

Our most frequently requested trainings are presentations related to substance use and substance use disorders, and we receive these requests from organizations looking to fulfill training requirements for staff, to provide professional development for essential workers, and to meet training requirements for certification.

Most mental health and substance use professionals require ethics training as a part of their practice. NCADA offers online professional development trainings, such as Ethics and Coalition on Addictions, to webinars. In offering webinars, we are able to customize a training designed to meet the needs of individual agencies and organizations. For more information, visit trainings@ncada.org.

Coalition on Addictions

Coalition on Addictions is a monthly lunch-and-learn style event (at least, we used to have lunch pre-COVID) in which we feature a guest speaker. This event takes place on the 3rd Wednesday of every month from 12pm-1pm. These trainings are appropriate for professionals in substance use-related fields, mental health clinicians, and anyone else who has a general interest in that month’s topic.

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)

YMHFA is designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent (age 13-25) who is experiencing a mental health or addiction challenges or crisis. Youth Mental Health First Aid is primarily designed for adults who regularly interact with young people.

YMHFA is a nationally accredited training program, we have recently received guidance on how our trainees can conduct this training virtually. We are excited to be offering these trainings in the coming months.

Ethics

NCADA’s most frequently requested trainings are presentations related to alcohol and other drugs, is an incredible reward. Knowing that I have been effective in increasing knowledge, raising awareness, and empowering individuals to make informed decisions related to alcohol and other drugs, is an incredible reward. Most of these trainings are available at no cost. For the most up-to-date information on NCADA’s training offerings and codes, visit our website and register for these trainings, or sign up to receive email updates about upcoming trainings and webinars.

Upcoming Events

In this ever-changing environment, we recommend visiting our website for the most up-to-date information and registration.

ncada-sfl/events

Grad Bags

The HOPE for Franklin County Coalition recognized the achievements of eighth grade graduates from area schools by providing complimentary “Grad Bags.” These bags contained helpful items students can use as they enter high school as well as educational information to support their children during this critical time of transition. Staff members brought the assembled 130 Grad Bags and provided complimentary yard signs to schools for drive-up graduation ceremonies held in June.

Fostering Love

By William Clay III

We have a building authored amongst our staff, The Foster Care, Community Strategies of Missouri. Fostering Love, In May of this year. After graduating from the University of Missouri-Columbia, Heather worked as a foster care case manager and later began founding to aid in the shortage of foster homes in her area. She is a passionate supporter of the child advocate to child well being and hopes to encourage Black families to be more open to accepting foster children into their homes.

The book, told from her children’s point of view, describes the foster experience from their perspective. The book is truly a must read for many who do not understand, and likely doesn’t even consider the perspective of the kids in the welcoming family.

The journey of becoming fostered and trained as a foster parent at least 3-6 months, includes background checks, health screenings, financial discussions, and home assessments to make sure that families are a good fit for foster children. Those interested in opening their homes and providing stability to children’s lives are encouraged to attend workshops and become foster parents. For more information, visit NCADA’s website.

Fostering Love highlights foster care, but if one is unable to foster there are still plenty of other ways to contribute to a child’s life. Volunteering or donating to the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition at www.foster-adopt.org is a great place to start. The book promotes the importance of, educational, and inspirational, and will hopefully encourage more families to provide life-changing support for children in need.

Although they are a temporary, each foster child brings a permanent impact on the Craig family, and they know they have changed the trajectory of a young person’s life.

As Jenny Armbruster, Deputy Executive Director, said, “March 18th through June 8th, our offices were closed due to COVID-19. This time was unprecedented for everyone at our agency and in our community, and while our offices were closed, our mission and our work could not stop.”