Lend Your Voice Pierce County

Final Report

ON THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

for Amara's Pierce County Property with the Recommendation from the Community Leadership Team

FEBRUARY 3, 2020

PREPARED BY

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Acknowledgments

FEBRUARY 3, 2020

We simply cannot express in words the immense gratitude we feel for every single person who played a role in ensuring that our community engagement process has been a success. Thank you to all the youth, families, community members, and professionals who shared your experiences, perspectives, recommendations, and dreams for the property.

First and foremost, we acknowledge the Coastal Salish People, sovereign Indian Nations, for whom this land has been home for untold generations.

To the youth, families and adults who have been impacted by foster care and adoption – Thank you for pouring out your hearts and allowing us to listen to your frustrations and heartbreaks, hopes and dreams. Your vulnerability and strength in sharing each of your stories have been a gift and have allowed us to be authentic and intentional in every aspect of the process.

Thank you to the community leaders, partners, and organizers who trusted us with their businesses and livelihoods. Thank you for filling our bellies, energizing our lives, and embracing our spirits.

Thank you to our partners who stepped up in ways we could not. For Sebastian Galindo (our survey and statistics expert), Brandi Yañez-Riddle (racial equity consultant and graphic artist), and Cierra Campos (writer extraordinaire who authored the Community Leadership Team bios).

Thank you to Amara's very own Maureen Sorenson and Chelsea Talbert – for your openness to a process never seen before at Amara and for your faith in four people who pushed and prodded each step of the way.

And finally, how do you thank 20 individuals who have been with us throughout it all? The Community Leadership Team has not only supported us in everything but has challenged us, moved us, taught us, and inspired us. They held each of us – the consultant team, the Amara Pierce County team, and the entire process – accountable to the community we serve. After countless hours of meetings and dialogue, their voices can be heard in every part of this report. Without the Community Leadership Team, all of this would not be possible.

We have been honored to work and learn with all of you, and hope that this report and recommendation do justice to what you all have shared.and inclusive way. Brandi works at the intersections of food, racial justice, and environmental issues tobuild change at the community level.

Jennifer, Adriane, Julia, and Rodney

RECIPROCITY CONSULTING

TRUTH TELLER CONSULTING

KAGOCHI CONSULTING

OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE, LLC

Special **Shout-Out**

We also want to acknowledge the incredible people, community partners, and small businesses that nourished our bodies, brightened our events, and believed in our vision.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Aloha Island Treasures
Big Daddy Yum Yum BBQ
Black Empowerment Center
Bricks 4 Kidz
Career Team/Power Up Pierce
Children's Museum of Tacoma
Connie McCloud
DJ Sidewayz
Evergreen Empowerment Group
Fish House
Franklin Pierce School District "The Farm"
Healing Herbal Skin Care
Home Buyer Class
Ike & Tash Photography
Indigenous Youth Empowerment Team
Juwan Banks, Spoken Word Artist
Jasmyne Sims, Spoken Word Artist
Jefferson Mok, Photographer
Just & Healthy Food System
La Fondita Taqueria
Loak Tuong Thai Cuisine
Los Tamales Restaurant
Lumpia Love
Mighty Good Sweets & Eats
MSM Deli
Paparazzi with Tamara Beason
Pho King
Puyallup Tribe
Raven's Creations
Rebuilding Together
Rocío Covarrubias Translation
Slater Museum of Natural History
South Puget Sound Intertribal Planning Agency
Tacoma Healing Awareness Community
Tahoma Audobon Society
The Rainbow Center
Toast Masters
WA Expungement Services
Yellow Bird Catering
Young Business Men & Women (YBMW)

Community Leadership **Team Members**

The Community Leadership Team has been the heart and soul of this effort, and the power behind this recommendation. Twenty people participated in the Community Leadership Team, the majority of whom are people of color and the majority of whom have lived experience with foster care and/or adoption. They are people with big hearts who are good listeners and creative thinkers with deep roots in the community.

*The profiles below describe the **16 core members** of the team who put together the recommendation described here.*

CIERRA CAMPOS

Cierra is a graduate student who strives to promote self-empowerment and cultural representation in individuals, families, and communities. For Cierra, culture represents a deep-rooted identity that allows people to show genuine versions of themselves, acknowledging that without culture, we cannot fully understand who people are. With personal experience in foster care, Cierra understands the importance of creating space for cultural inclusion in the foster care system and has dedicated her research as a Master of Social Work student to finding ways the child welfare system can provide more culturally relevant and culturally responsive services for families of color. After obtaining her Masters degree, Cierra plans to work in the child welfare system, with the hope of shifting how the Department of Children, Youth & Families addresses culture and ensuring that children and families are adequately and equitably served. All in all, Cierra hopes that this project will offer a stable community for families of color, meeting cultural, social, and child welfare needs.

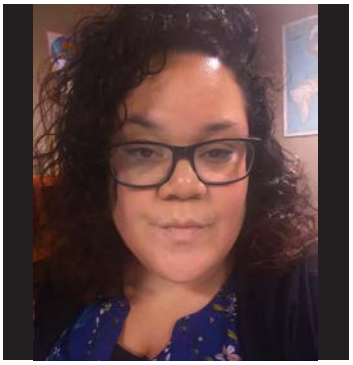
FELICIA DENNIS

Felicia is a Community Team Leadership member who prides herself with approaching her work with an equity lens. Felicia uses empathy and compassion to support individuals with reaching their fullest potential. These two values drives her motivation to serve the community. Felicia has been a public servant for over 12 years, with experience working with homelessness, employment services, higher education, and social services. Furthermore, her experience with being a part of a foster family and then a foster parent has allowed her to see the potential within each individual she encounters, which drives her desire to cultivate inclusiveness in all of her efforts to support families on their journey. Felicia has partnered with the fellow Community Leadership Team Member, Dominque Taylor, to develop Children and Family Unity Services, which supports families who are impacted by the foster care system to gain self-sustainability through authentic passion and care. For Felicia, culture is essential for children in care. Youth and families impacted by foster care should be empowered to own their individuality and culture.

Headshots taken by Ike Haynes of Ike & Tash Photography.

TARALEE ELLIS

Taralee is a nonprofit manager who uses her talents to bring indigenous youth together and build community with non-tribal members and tribal members, through dancing, traditions, art and native food and education. She believes that she can advocate for youth in foster care by encouraging them to see their strengths and talent, and making the effort to see things from their perspectives. When defining culture, Taralee believes that culture is the thing that gives people a sense of identity. Taralee, born into the foster care system, felt that at every home she left pieces of herself behind and with that, parts of her culture. With her experience, Taralee's resiliency shaped her core value of treating others with genuine hospitality and acceptance. As a strong believer in community engagement, Taralee's hope is that the work done with this project will offer a safe space for youth.



KEISHA HARRIS

Keisha is a passionate individual who brings her contributions to the Community Leadership Team from shared values around cultural inclusivity and meeting the needs of the community. Keisha is a Master of Social Work graduate and has previous experience working in the child welfare system. Firsthand, Keisha saw the lack of foster homes for children, specifically foster homes of color, and witnessed the unmet cultural needs of children and youth in foster care. These shortcomings in the foster care system motivated Keisha to become a foster parent and fueled her preexisting mission for cultural tolerance and expression. Every day, Keisha advocates to make others aware of cultural respect while helping to support self-advocacy in her foster children. In practice, Keisha honors culture in her role as a foster parent through embracing cultural differences, finding opportunities for cultural connectedness, and teaching her foster children how to celebrate themselves. All in all, she believes that children need to be healthy in all aspects of their lives, including cultural identity.

TOBY JOSEPH

Toby is a Native American Bahaī of Apache and Ute decent from Manitou Springs, Colorado. Toby has 25+ years of working in Coast Salish Tribal communities supporting indigenous sustainability through social-economic development, and spiritual growth through cultural pathways. Toby believes in a Cultural system of thought that focuses on investigation of truth, consultation, action, and reflection and the principles of being kind, loving, radiant, truthful, and just. He uses this ideology in his work, while focusing on interactions with community through a lens of culture. Toby strongly believes that culture is essential because it creates identity from an internalized place, highlighting who people are rather than what society expects them to be. Growing up hearing stories through a cultural lens and being a present day Storyteller, Toby believes that Storytelling and culture are a framework for wellness that allows people the opportunity to better understand and express their own personal narratives. Toby believes we can overcome even war through a greater thought of love. He finds strength in love and identifies love as his strength, highlighting his wife, 11 children, 18 foster children, and 19 grandchildren as sources of both.

COLLEEN LAUPOLA

Colleen is a mother and advocate whose work promotes the importance of family connectedness and empowerment, while highlighting the need for cultural inclusion. Colleen has seen the effects of how language barriers and lack of cultural understanding can impact children and families in the child welfare system. As a mother whose daily challenge and drive are her three sons, Colleen believes that family is the most important thing and uses that belief to inspire her work. Colleen advocates for children, families, the Pierce County juvenile justice system, and the Pacific Islander community, with the desire to be a voice for those in her community. As a member of the Pierce County Family Council and former parent peer support for the Best for Babies Team, Colleen works to challenge current systems and promote systemic change. Overall, Colleen believes that the inclusion and understanding of the diversity within cultures is vital to achieving cultural acceptance and hopes that this project will provide a safe place regardless race or color.

BRITTNEY LEE

Brittney is a college student with personal experience in foster care, who has the motivation to gain knowledge and experience in order to give back to youth in foster care and redefine child welfare. Brittney aspires to use her experiences, knowledge, and resilience to help children in foster care, as a role model and a source of support. Experiencing 17 foster homes in 17 years, Brittney was raised with other children from various emotional, mental and spiritual backgrounds, which has encouraged unconditional passion to give back to youth on local, national and global levels. Passionate about the intersection of race and child welfare, Brittney strives to educate herself on racial disproportionality, with the hope of developing solutions to address racial inequality and the institutionalized and structural racism that youth in foster care experience. Her continuous involvement in community conversations around child welfare, motivates Brittney to use her understanding, experience, and skill to be a representation of the role model she needed as a youth.

CLAUDIA MILLER

Claudia is an activist and advocate who is currently breaking ground as Foster Care Liaison in the Franklin Pierce School District. As a Foster Care Liaison, and Masters of Social Work graduate, Claudia's passion for people and communities is evident in her work, as she believes that youth in foster care are the most vulnerable and underserved population in the school system. Claudia identifies herself a "community hustler," describing her passion for community collectivism and building community driven systems. Claudia's drive to build relationships supports her belief that the relationships between systems are the intervention that communities need to be successful. Claudia stated that she finds strength in her experience as a first generation American, which has instilled a relentless work ethic, a desire to advocate for others, and the value of addressing social justice issues with compassion. Per Claudia, "a job is a job. As a person of color, it is a responsibility to stand up for justice, kids, and love. It is work of the heart."

TARA NEWTON

Tara is a Senior Advocate, who is driven by her passion for learning, grassroots efforts, and social justice. Tara's investment in the empowerment of individuals, families, and communities is accompanied by her desire to help shape supportive and healthy futures for families of color in Pierce County. Having experience in foster care, Tara strives to be a great role model for youth impacted by foster care by sharing her experiences, and advocating for and empowering them. Tara also aims to ensure foster homes are supportive and culturally/LGBTQIA+ competent, and that foster youth receive care through a trauma informed lens. For Tara, cultural inclusion is important, as it highlights shared experiences and spoken and unspoken understanding — all of which should be celebrated, welcomed and acknowledged. Tara hopes that this project will come to fruition, encompassing the hard work, passion, and vision of the Community Leadership Team.

KATHIE NGUYEN

Kathie is the youngest member of the Community Leadership Team, whose wisdom and inspiration surpasses her age. As a current foster youth, Kathie has survived her own experiences with abuse and is wanting to be an example of resiliency for other youth in foster care. Having been placed in 42 group homes and four out-of-state placements, Kathie has firsthand experience of how youth are affected in the foster care system; however, she has not let her experiences define her. While being passionate about seeing change in the foster care system, Kathie has attributed her resilience in having genuine conversations with adults, creating spaces to express herself, and finding therapy in singing and music. Along with graduating high school and then college, Kathie hopes to share her story with others, showing that youth in foster care can have a voice, while being a role model for those who feel they are not worthy.

RAVEN NYLAND

Raven is a Native American artist who values spirituality, diversity, and cultural interconnectedness. As an artist and healer, Raven is known for her beadwork and natural medicine and has used her skills to teach and mentor youth. Her ability to connect with people, especially youth experiencing hardship, allows her to build trust and use her work for healing. She believes that returning to the land and learning to use plant medicine for natural healing are important for young people, especially Native American youth, to connect to their culture, work through trauma, and support wellness. Observing that people are too often separated by culture, Raven believes in the power of sharing culture and embracing diversity to nurture a sense of belonging. It is her hope that this project will offer that, being a sanctuary and a spiritual place for a diverse community.

STEPHEN PERCER

Stephen is a community activist who uses his life experiences to foster peer-to-peer mentorship and cultural empowerment. Having two separate experiences in the foster care system, Stephen knows about the effects that foster care can have on a child of color. Adopted into home outside of his culture, Stephen acknowledges his search for cultural identity and representation as a youth, describing culture as being beyond race—living in all aspects of a person and their identity. With his experience in foster care, and as former incarcerated person, Stephen utilizes his life experiences to connect with others who have similar lived experiences, with the hope of providing individuals with the opportunity for personal connections and mentorship. Attributing his own resilience to his persevering nature and ability to thrive in chaos, Stephen believes that genuine connections through shared experiences can help support resilience in others. For this project, Stephen hopes that the intended vision of the Community Leadership Team is realized, and that he has the opportunity to be a part of the continued work.

LAURIE PUGH-LARSON

Laurie is a Community Leadership Team member who brings her 29 years of landscape architecture experience and a desire to help empower others. Her work on public projects has allowed her the opportunity to work with diverse groups of people, with the primary goal of incorporating group input and developing representative spaces that are unique to each group's needs. Like her work, Laurie is drawn to the Community Leadership Team due to its inclusion of community members and its desire to help the foster care community. Laurie, unable to have children and having considered fostering and adopting children, sees the benefits that this project can offer children and families impacted by foster care. While Laurie doesn't know her cultural background, she does acknowledge its importance in the lives of individuals stating that it can provides a sense of history, community and tradition. In the foster care system in particular, Laurie believes that cultural inclusion can provide youth with the opportunity to deeply connect with others through shared connections, while supporting the ability to find and embrace connections beyond cultural sameness. It is with this project that Laurie hopes children, families, and the planned community will be provided with the resources needed to be successful.

HANNAH STRICKLER

Hannah is an Afro-indigenous advocate and University of Washington Tacoma student who has a big heart for helping those in need. Though she has not personally experienced foster care or adoption, Hannah has witnessed the effects of the foster care system on family members, emphasizing the importance of protecting youth to allow them to be raised within their culture. For Hannah, culture is described as her identity, highlighting passed down and relearned traditions and familial connection while embracing change and cultural sustainability. Being grounded in her indigenous culture and having to learn about her African American heritage through her own self- determination, Hannah aspires to show others searching for cultural connection that they are not alone. As a believer of cultural autonomy, expression and representation, Hannah hopes that this project will create a safe haven for underprivileged children, where they are able to receive help from individuals who share their cultural values.

DOMINIQUE TAYLOR

Dominique is a businesswoman with personal experience in foster care who has not let her experiences define her. Her passion for giving back to communities, along with her lived experiences, has motivated her to model the success that one can achieve after foster care. Dominque's experiences have shown her that as a young person in foster care, it may be hard to get to your goals; however, she wants to model that despite obstacles, those goals are still achievable. Dominique is the owner of Heavenly Tiny Homes, a business that is designed to offer housing for families and youth impacted by foster care. The goal of Heavenly Tiny Homes is to equip families with long term housing stability, financial security, education, and life skills, while promoting self-care and economic empowerment. In addition, Dominique co-owns Children & Family Unity Services, alongside fellow Community Leadership Team member Felicia Dennis, which supports families who are impacted by foster care to gain self-sustainability through authentic passion and care. Overall, Dominique believes in the importance of culture in foster care, identifying that children in the foster care system can experience a loss of culture that, in turn, can result in "a loss of self." She stated that all in all, children want to be happy, and she strongly believes that culture is an important part of that happiness.

GEORGE ZANTUA

George is a Masters in Counseling graduate who brings his vast experience and education to the Community Leadership Team. With 40 years of experience working in the fields of human rights, education, employment, housing, and homelessness, George has seen how the trauma of foster care bleeds into these other social spheres. George is motivated to help children and families going through trauma and he believes that understanding culture is an essential part of this work. He believes that understanding the cultural background of others enhances communication and empathy and builds trust. Now that he is retired from full-time employment and because he believes everyone has the capacity to be creative, George uses his counseling skills as he teaches art and jewelry making at the Nativity House Shelter in Tacoma.

We would also like to recognize other Community Leadership Team members who contributed their spirit and creativity during a key part of our process.

JUWAN BANKS

EMILY SCHELL

ASH MAGER

JAMES RIDEOUT
Puyallup Tribal Council Member

***Juwan Banks** reciting his poetry at the June 29 kick-off event. Photo Credit: Jefferson Mok*

Consultant **Team Members**

*Four of the six **Consultant Team Members** are pictured here, left to right: Adrian Wilson, Jennifer Arnold, Rodney Robinson, and Julia Kagochi.*

(Image by Ike Haynes of Ike & Tash Photography.)

JENNIFER S. ARNOLD, Ph.D. RECIPROCITY CONSULTING, LLC

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Jennifer has more than 15 years of experience in facilitation and conflict management, stakeholder engagement and participatory social science methods with an emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion. She is fluent in Spanish and skilled at working in culturally diverse communities. Even when tensions are high and controversial issues bring out the most challenging group dynamics, Jennifer helps partners talk through their differences with civility and grace. She is also an affiliate Assistant Professor at the University of Washington Tacoma in Urban Studies.

ADRIANE WILSON TRUTH TELLER CONSULTING

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Adriane is an independent consultant specializing in equity and community engagement, particularly focusing on communities of color and low-income communities that are typically underrepresented in the policies, programs and services that seek to serve them. As a woman who identifies from the African Diaspora that has deep ties in Tacoma and has herself overcome personal and professional challenges, she is extremely skilled at connecting with people where they are and listening and motivating their engagement to bring about real change. With more than 15 years' experience working with nonprofits and government agencies, she excels at clearly articulating community concerns and creating suggestions for how to improve community engagement to ultimately improve outcomes and advance equity goals.

JULIA KAGOCHI KAGOCHI CONSULTING, LLC

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Grounded by compassion, racial justice and authenticity, **Julia** believes in learning alongside and growing with the communities and people she serves. These values manifest themselves in the effectiveness of her facilitation style and compassion-based approach. She has a gift for relational storytelling and utilizes both personal and professional experiences to engage others in difficult conversations. Julia has over a decade of experience working in various fields, including curriculum development, community-based programming, facilitation, and racial equity work.

Consultant **Team Members**

RODNEY ROBINSON OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE, LLC

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Rodney has spent the bulk of his professional career in human service and non-profit management. While working with both individuals and families that society would consider marginalized, he saw the importance of creating a self-sustaining economic base for communities and individuals. Through the process of learning about what it takes to create and sustain an effective business, he realized that the key components were mentoring, access to information and capital, and coaching. Rodney hopes to bring these components to perspective for established business owners, especially in communities of color. He hopes to bring a practical application of skills learned through both self-study and lived experiences to help people achieve the freedom associated with multiple streams of income and business ownership.

BRANDI YAÑEZ-RIDDLE

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Brandi is a professional facilitator and visual practitioner with a passion for food system work and racial justice. She is disconnected hñähño (Otomi from Guanajuato), and descend from other tribes throughout what is called Central or South America. She is an activist in the areas of First Foods, food sovereignty, and food justice. Her current focus is on helping people to gain clarity and understanding for how colonization and racism impact various social and political systems.

SEBASTIAN GALINDO, Ph.D. SGalindo@ufl.edu

Sebastian is a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) at the University of Florida. Originally from Mexico City, Galindo earned his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Universidad Veracruzana in 2001. He then attended the University of Florida where he received his master's degree studying Animal Sciences (2004) and later his Ph.D. from AEC (2009) with a focus on extension program development and evaluation. Galindo currently focuses his research on the use of mixed methods for the evaluation of research, teaching and extension initiatives. He serves as Director of the Evaluation Program for the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety and as Technical Monitoring and Evaluation Supervisor for the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems. With over 10 years of experience as evaluator, he has worked in more than 30 projects funded by agencies such as NSF, CDC, USAID, USDA, and NIH, which have collectively received over $140 million in funding. Galindo also teaches graduate level courses on Program Evaluation, Qualitative Research, Mixed Methods, Statistical Thinking, and Methodology of Planned Change.

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For this report, we use the term "youth" broadly to refer to children and young adults from 0-25 years of age.

We fully acknowledge that future planning will need to take into account the distinct needs and developmental stages within this broad category.

Report design:

Casey Davis
www.caseydavisdesign.com

Executive **Summary**

BACKGROUND

Amara is a not-for-profit organization based in Washington state focused on the wellbeing of children and families who experience foster care and adoption.

In 2018, Amara purchased a 29-acre property in Pierce County to develop needed resources and support for children, youth, and families impacted by foster care and adoption. Pierce County has a much higher rare of children entering foster care than King County, and Washington State overall. Amara saw this property as an opportunity to support stronger families and prevent youth from entering foster care. Recognizing that this is beyond the focus of Amara's mission, they knew they would need to bring in people, organizations, and resources to develop the vision for this property and bring it to life. They also wanted to center racial equity knowing that youth and families of color are disproportionately impacted by foster care and adoption.

In May 2019, Amara hired our team of consultants to lead a community engagement process centered in racial equity. Amara is a historically white-led organization that has committed to grounding their work in racial equity.

CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY

Throughout this project, we have centered racial equity and anti-racism. While we welcomed everyone's ideas, we invited people of color, who are disproportionately impacted by foster care and adoption, to lead the conversation.

Racism is one of the most persistent drivers of inequity, broadly in our society, and specifically in the foster care and adoption systems. Without an intentional focus on race and racism, advances in equity with respect to class, gender, sexual identity, abilities, etc. reinforce disparities with respect to race.

DEFINING RACIAL EQUITY

*(Adapted with gratitude from **The Center for Social Inclusion**)*

We define racial equity as both an outcome and a process.

As an outcome, *we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live.*

As a process, *we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.*

When we achieve racial equity: *People of color are owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives. We acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, the infrastructure needed to thrive. Everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.*

The recommendation for Amara's Pierce County property was developed by people of color who have lived experience in foster care and/or adoption and who lead with equity. The end goal for their vision is self-reliance and resilience for youth and families of color. Their recommendation describes a holistic vision for how the property can address the historic and ongoing injustices in the system to achieve that end goal, along the same lines as the "when we achieve racial equity" statement above.

The **Community Engagement** Process

The community engagement process extended from June 29th to November 9th, 2019. The steps are outlined briefly here with fuller descriptions and reflections on our practice of community engagement in the report.

- Our process began with a community **kick-off event** on June 29th, and formation of the **Community Leadership Team**, which has provided guidance and a firm grounding in racial equity throughout the process.
- With the kick-off, we launched an **online survey**, which remained open for three months and was publicized broadly by Amara and other community partners.
- Our consultant team worked with families, youth, parents, adults and various community partners to organize a series of **house meetings, listening sessions and interviews.**
- The Community Leadership Team developed a prioritization framework and synthesized all the ideas shared from these different sources into a **holistic vision** for the property.
- This vision, including a focus on how racism surfaces in foster care and adoption, was translated into a series of **graphic posters** and showcased at the community celebration on November 9th.
- The November 9th **community celebration** marked the end of our community engagement effort.
- After this, the Community Leadership Team refined their prioritization framework and identified **top priorities** to include in the recommendation.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF WHO WE ENGAGED

We had a majority of people of color in the Community Leadership Team (90%) and interviews and house meetings (62%) so we centered the themes and comments from these sources first in our analysis and synthesis. The listening sessions had 34% people of color, and the survey had the least diversity with just over 20% people of color of the 339 people who responded. With respect to personal experience with foster care and adoption, the Community Leadership Team had higher representation of people who experienced foster care as a young person (50%) and parents whose children experienced foster care/adoption in the Community Leadership Team (13%) along with interviews and house meetings (30% as a young person and 22% as a parent). In the listening sessions with professionals and survey, these groups represented only 4-6% of the people who participated. Similarly, we found the highest rates of youth participation (25 years old or younger) in the Community Leadership Team (19%) and the interviews and house meetings (24%). For the survey and listening sessions, youth participation ranged from 5% to 12%.

Findings

The following list represents the breadth of ideas that came up repeatedly throughout the house meetings, listening sessions, interviews, and survey comments.

The full list is described in the report, including suggestions for each categorized as programs and activities versus built environment.

A A welcoming space

B Diversifying leadership, sharing power, and being accountable to community

C Training and shared values

D Mental health care

E Visitation and post-adoption Support

F A hub for wrap-around services using people-centered planning and peer-to-peer advocates

G Art, music, and performance

H Hair care

I Family events, special occasions, birthdays, and holidays

J A park, a playground, sports, a ropes course, and a trail around the pond

K Housing, independent life skills, and an intentional community

L Food, meals, and a community kitchen

M A farm, community gardening, and a medicinal garden

N Economic opportunities

O Transportation

PREFERENCES FROM THE SURVEY

In the survey, we included several lists of ideas for the property already gathered from Amara's initial outreach. Ideas were grouped into several categories:

What to Build on the Property

Emergency Services

Health Services

Support Services and Activities, and

Wellness Activities

People were asked to rank their top choices in each category. **Notably, the items we asked people to rank in the survey did not include some top priorities that came out of community discussions and open survey responses, for example alternative healing and housing for youth aging out of foster care.**

Care should be taken to use these rankings to inform future work, not to directly guide priorities without following the equity-based process recommendations outlined by the Community Leadership Team.

Top Ranked Ideas from the survey

1 **Health Services:** Mental and behavioral health[1]

2 **What to Build:** Communal Dining Center

3 **What to Build:** Family Support Center

4 **What to Build:** Short-term housing for families at risk

5 **What to Build:** Communal Activity Center

6 **Health Services:** Domestic violence and trauma recovery

[1] This was by far the top choice from all categories in the survey, including among people of color and people who had experienced foster care as a young person.

tie for 7th

7-12 **Emergency Services:** Access to a team of support, such as social workers and case managers

Wellness: Creating art, stories, music, performances

Support Services: Parenting classes

Emergency Services: Food

What to Build: Farm

13 **Support:** Youth mentorship programs

14 **What to Build:** Health Clinic

15 **What to Build:** Housing for parents in recovery

16 **Support Services:** Respite childcare for relatives and foster parents

17 **Support Services:** Tutoring and homework help

18 **Wellness:** Community Gardening

19 **What to Build:** Outdoor play space

tie for 20th

20-29 **Emergency Services:** Crisis nursery

Wellness: Physical activities and sports

Wellness: Play groups

Support Services: Training for foster parents

Support Services: Visitation

What to Build: Indoor play space

What to Build: Nature area

Top Ranked Ideas from the survey

tie for 30th

30-32 **Health:** Medical Health Services

Emergency: Clothing

Emergency: Free Store

tie for 33rd

33-34 **Health:** Substance treatment

Support Services: Job resources

35 **Support:** Information hub with resources and appointment reminders for parents

36 **Health:** Prenatal health care

37 **What to Build:** Classroom space

38 **What to Build:** Campground

Summary of **Findings**

Overall, we found that people had similar ideas and suggestions for the property across all the different venues for community engagement, whether they were people of color or white people and whether they were personally impacted or professionals working in foster care and adoption.

However, there were a few exceptions. With the survey rankings shown above, the strongest difference in preferences was with communal dining. By far, communal dining was more preferred by people of color and people who have experienced foster care as a young person than the rankings which accounted for all responses (79% were white people). In the list above, we adjusted the rankings to reflect preferences by people of color and people who experienced foster care as a young person and ensure we grounded our process in racial equity.

Recommendation to Amara

The Community Leadership Teams' recommendation for Amara's Pierce County property includes:

A PRIORITIZATION FRAMEWORK
which embodies racial equity as a process and practical considerations.

A HOLISTIC VISION
for the property, which embodies the vision for achieving racial equity.

TOP PRIORITIES
to advance that holistic vision.

Prioritization Framework

This framework articulates the fundamental values and key questions that should drive planning and development for Amara's Pierce County property to reach the ultimate goal of resilience and self-reliance for youth, adults, and families, **centering people of color who are most impacted by foster care and adoption.**

Importantly, this framework emphasizes a **strength-based approach**, which focuses on the inherent strengths of youth, adults, families and communities to take charge of their own healing, growth and empowerment. Bringing this vision to life is not possible without the **leadership of diverse people who have an equity focus and lived experience**, emphasizing people who have experienced foster care or adoption as a young person and also parents whose children have experienced foster care or adoption.

Doing this work requires grace to learn and grow and courage to take risks and be vulnerable.

A FOUNDATION OF SHARED VALUES

A commitment to shared values builds a foundation of trust. Each of these values is described in detail in the report.

- **Strength of youth and families**
- **Racial equity**
- **Cultural competency**
- **Joy and Creativity**
- **Belonging**
- **Shared leadership, power and decision-making**
- **Accountability**

1 AN EQUITY LENS: A FIRST STEP FOR PRIORITIZING ACTIONS

In proceeding with master planning, fundraising, communications, property development, and property operations, Amara should use this equity lens as a first tool for prioritization to ensure their actions are grounded in racial equity and moving toward the holistic vision for the property. Guiding statements are included here. The report includes questions under each to promote reflection and creativity.

- Amara's activities should provide **opportunities to empower** youth, adults, and families most impacted by foster care, emphasizing black, indigenous, and people of color.
- Amara's activities should be actively and intentionally oriented toward healing cycles of intergenerational trauma.
- The values and benefits associated with the property should address gaps in services and opportunities in the County. Specifically, benefits should be distributed to address the gaps in investment, services, and opportunities for youth and families of color.

2 A LENS FOR PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS: A SECOND STEP FOR PRIORITIZING ACTIONS

This second lens is a series of questions designed to guide planning and assess practical considerations and feasibility for property development, including the built environment and the services and programs offered there.

- Are there youth, peer advocates, community-based organizations and businesses that can share leadership and practice cultural competency?
- What other projects and initiatives are going on now that could complement and leverage impact?
- What are the costs and how would it be funded and sustained, for example income generation, paid services, voluntary, etc.?
- What infrastructure is needed and how well could the property meet those needs?
    - What zoning changes might be needed?
    - What are transportation options?
- How much time is needed for planning, fundraising and implementation? What are short-term versus long-term actions?

A Holistic Vision for the Property

A holistic vision for the property includes calling out the long history of racist policies that impact youth and families of color and continue through today.

People of color have felt these chains back to colonization, yet they have not let this history define them. There is also a long history of resilience and strength. People have pushed against false narratives to reveal the truth, the present reality of why we are here and what is possible for the future.

For white people, everyday practices that normalize white superiority are often masked by "good intentions," which lead to white people taking on the role of "white saviors." In order to "pop the bubble" of the white savior complex, people of color and anti-racist white people need to challenge the underlying assumptions of what led to the inequities, shine light on the racist policies and practices, and take action to restructure the power relations and re-distribute power and opportunities. The report and a series of graphic posters provide examples of what this looks like in the foster care and adoption systems.

Top Priorities
to Advance the Vision

LEADERSHIP FOR TRANSFORMATION

Having diverse, equity-focused leadership makes it possible to implement all other parts of the vision for this property. Leadership for transformation brings black, indigenous and other people of color to the decision-making table, including youth, families, volunteers, and staff. The metaphor of a table is used to show the diversity of leaders at the table who are needed for transformational leadership. The table top is also described using another metaphor – it is a magnifying glass that keeps those diverse leaders focused on an equity analysis grounded in anti-racism and anti-oppression. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just buzz words, but should be genuinely practiced through trainings, ongoing discussion, and action.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Leadership for Transformation should be the first and top priority throughout planning, development, and ongoing management of the property.
- Diversify leadership with an emphasis on people who have come from foster care and adoption. This is needed to break the chains of slavery and indigenous genocide and to work toward resilience and self-reliance.
- Create a long-term advisory committee for the property with people like the Community Leadership Team members.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Mental health care, emphasizing alternative healing and community-centered healing, were identified as top needs in the community, especially considering youth and families of color impacted by foster care and adoption. Art, music, performance, and play were also emphasized as key components of wellness and therapy, without having to call them therapy.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Prioritize mental health and healing.
- Embrace a diversity of cultures and communities.
- Healing, learning, and growth happen through play. Create opportunities for play.
- Create opportunities for alternative healing.
- Create a call center with peer-to-peer counseling from parents with lived experience who can prevent crisis and make an early intervention– instead of calling Child Protective Services.
- Provide transformative justice counseling to empower people to prevent incarceration.

PLAY, RELAXATION, ART AND STYLE

Engaging in creative activities – like art, beading, music, drumming, dance, and other types of performances – brings people together and allows for deeper personal reflection and community building without having to be explicit about it. Similarly, sports and outdoor activities provide opportunities to work out emotions and promote renewal and reflection. Youth we talked to especially emphasized their interest in arts, performance, sports and outdoor activities.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Healing, learning and growth happen through play. Play, relaxation, art and style, including African American hair care, need to be a part of this property.

SPIRIT OF PLACE

Although intangible, the spirit of the place is centrally important to the holistic vision for the property and overlaps with Health and Wellness. When people walk onto the property, they should feel that it is a sanctuary, a spiritual place, where everyone is welcome, and everyone can participate in services, programs and events. It should be a place where the diversity of people and cultures is celebrated and brought together, not separated. Cultural empowerment should be at the center of everything, building each person's capacity to discover and connect with their cultural heritage as a profound source of identity and belonging.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- This should be a sanctuary, a spiritual place.
- Cultural empowerment should be at the center of everything. Knowing who you are, your identity, and your cultural heritage is central to health and wellness.
- Flags from all countries and languages spoken in Pierce County should be prominent.
- This should be an inclusive space focused on whole parenting – everyone is welcome. You don't have to fit a certain category (homeless, foster care, disabled, etc.) to be here.

TRANSPORTATION

Ensuring access to the property is a near-term priority. Otherwise, people will not be able to take advantage of all the great benefits or participate in creating community and diversifying leadership.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Explore transportation options and figure out the best way to increase access.

STABILITY AND COMMUNITY

Housing, food, economic opportunities, education, and independent life skills are at the core of promoting stability and community, which is central to the holistic vision for this property. The highest priority identified was developing economic opportunities for youth experiencing foster care, although recognizing families need economic opportunities too. Jobs or student work experiences should be prioritized for youth and young adults who have aged out of the foster care system alongside mentoring to explore future leadership positions. Priority should also be placed on developing other forms of income for youth and families, such as selling beadwork, art, produce or medicinal herbs produced on the property and starting small businesses. Independent life skills, such as financial planning and banking, and childcare are also key to developing economic opportunities for youth and families. Communal dining, food, and a communal kitchen were valued. An intentional community could integrate these different threads of economic development, stability, community and wellness using a multi-generational model and peer-to-peer advocates and mentors with the end goal of resilience and self-reliance for youth aging out of foster care.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Provide authentic opportunities for economic development and community empowerment. Give a "hand up," emphasizing skill building and advocacy, not a "hand out," which feels denigrating and rests on stereotypes and simplistic assumptions.
- Build wealth among youth who have been in foster care so they can become self-reliant and give back to the property.

Conclusion

Everyone we engaged from the community recognized that this holistic vision for Amara's Pierce County Property is ambitious and that it will take a lot of hard work, funding, and social capital to bring it to life. They also appreciated Amara for asking them to think big and for listening. They recognized that this took courage.

Throughout this community engagement effort, people have acknowledged that some elements may take substantial time to develop and some may not be feasible considering the second lens of practical considerations. However, people are willing to step up and invest that time because of the spirit established through this process and the potential to meaningfully work toward racial equity. As evidence of this, community members have offered their time, skills, services, and social networks in support of this vision, most importantly community members of color. They are eager to hear how Amara receives their recommendation and how the work will proceed.

"We left our humanness at the door when we walked into this project, and there are high expectations at this table. It will take all of us to make it happen. We are stronger together." **RAVEN** *Community Leadership Team Member*

Centering **Racial Equity**

Throughout this project, we have centered racial equity and anti-racism.

While we welcomed everyone's ideas, we invited people of color, who are disproportionately impacted by foster care and adoption, to lead the conversation.

Racism is one of the most persistent drivers of inequity, broadly in our society, and specifically in the foster care and adoption systems. Without an intentional focus on race and racism, advances in equity with respect to class, gender, sexual identity, abilities, etc. reinforce disparities with respect to race.

Racism is uncomfortable and difficult to talk about. Recognizing that racism exists and that actions need to be taken to dismantle it goes against the dominant, white culture in the US, including the culture of historically white-led non-profits. As a result of this, most people don't have experience having productive conversations about race in mixed racial groups. Throughout this project, we kept the focus on racial equity and sought to model how to have productive conversations and translate ideas into actions. We did so within our own team, our collaboration with Amara, and throughout our community work.

Defining **Racial Equity**

Adapted with gratitude from
The Center for Social Inclusion

We define racial equity as both an outcome and a process.

As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live.

As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

When we achieve racial equity: People of color are owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives. We acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, the infrastructure needed to thrive. Everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.

WHAT TO EXPECT
WITH THIS RECOMMENDATION TO AMARA

Continuing our focus on racial equity, this recommendation was developed by people of color who have lived experience in foster care and/or adoption and who lead with equity. The end goal for their vision is self-reliance and resilience for youth and families of color. Their recommendation describes a holistic vision for how the property can address the historic and ongoing injustices in the system to achieve that end goal, along the lines of the "when we achieve racial equity" statement above.

Their recommendation includes both what is tangible and can be built, such as buildings and programs, and what is intangible, including a foundation of shared values and the spirit of community, which can be harder to grasp, but absolutely essential to realizing this vision. Centering racial equity as a process, the recommendation includes a prioritization framework and priority action steps to put shared values into practice and center racial equity in how decisions are made about the property as Amara continues with planning, fundraising and implementation.

Project **Background**

Amara is a not-for-profit organization based in Washington state focused on the wellbeing of children and families who experience foster care and adoption.

In 2018, Amara purchased a 29-acre property in Pierce County to develop needed resources and support for children and families impacted by foster care and adoption. From the beginning, Amara described their vision for the property:

- Every young person that steps onto the property should feel welcome and safe.
- The property should celebrate the diversity of ethnicities, cultures and languages in Pierce County, and every young person should see a part of themselves reflected here.
- The spirit and joy of childhood should be infused in every acre, reminding us what a family can do for a child and what a child can do for a community.
- The property should provide holistic services and activities that heal the mind, body and spirit.
- The property should be a center of strength for Pierce County children and families.

Pierce County has a much higher rate of children entering foster care than King County and Washington State overall, and Amara saw this property as an opportunity to support stronger families and prevent youth from entering foster care. Recognizing that this is beyond the focus of Amara's mission, they knew they would need to bring in people, organizations, and resources to develop the vision for this property and bring it to life. Amara also sought to center racial equity in developing a vision for the property knowing that youth and families of color are disproportionately impacted by foster care and adoption.

In May 2019, Amara hired our team of consultants to lead a community engagement process centered in racial equity. Amara is a historically white-led organization that has committed to grounding their work in racial equity. This report describes the community engagement process and the community's recommendation for this property.

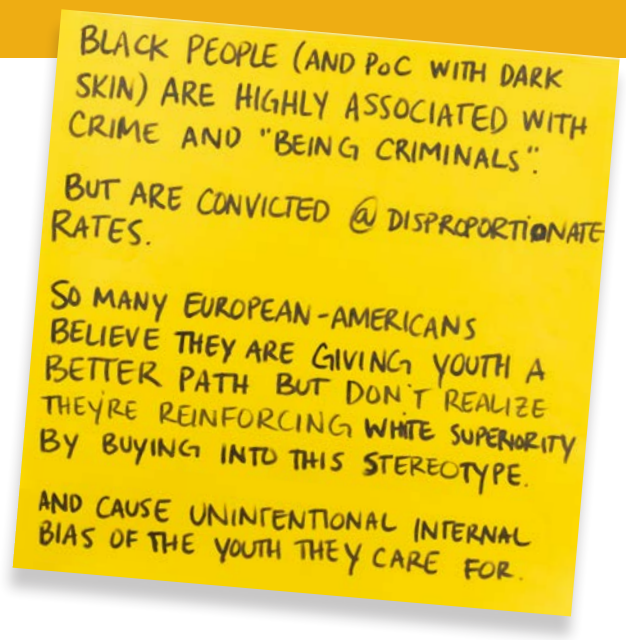
AMARA'S PIERCE COUNTY PROPERTY

The 29-acre property has a rural character and includes wetlands and wooded areas. It is located at 3501 104th St. East in Summit-Waller, an unincorporated community in Pierce County that roughly sits between Tacoma and Puyallup. The closest bus service is Pierce Transit Route 4, which requires a ¼-mile walk. The property includes Amara's Pierce County office, along with older, unused buildings, animal pastures, an orchard, and garden plots. Any new buildings will require time and money for construction and must meet Pierce County zoning regulations, which define the type of development and number of housing units allowed. Although the property is currently not zoned for some of the uses discussed in this report, some of those uses have been allowed in the past, for example residential housing. Amara is involved in ongoing discussions with Pierce County about zoning and planning.

Background on **Racial Disproportionality**

Throughout the US, Washington State, and Pierce County, black, indigenous, and children of color are over-represented in the child welfare system, referred to as disproportionality. This means that the percentage of youth of color in foster care is much greater than the percentage of youth of color in the general population.

In 1969 and 1974 based on documented surveys, between 25 and 35 percent of all Native American children were placed in foster or adoptive homes or institutions. (Minoff, 2018.)



We start from a place that ***racism exists.***

We stand on the shoulders of a long history of well-respected scholars and peer-reviewed published studies *(See References for a sample of key works)*. Racial disproportionality in the foster care system is driven by institutionalized racism, linked with other systems, including criminal justice, mental health, and special education.

For clarity, we define **institutionalized racism** drawing from some of the classics in the child welfare field:

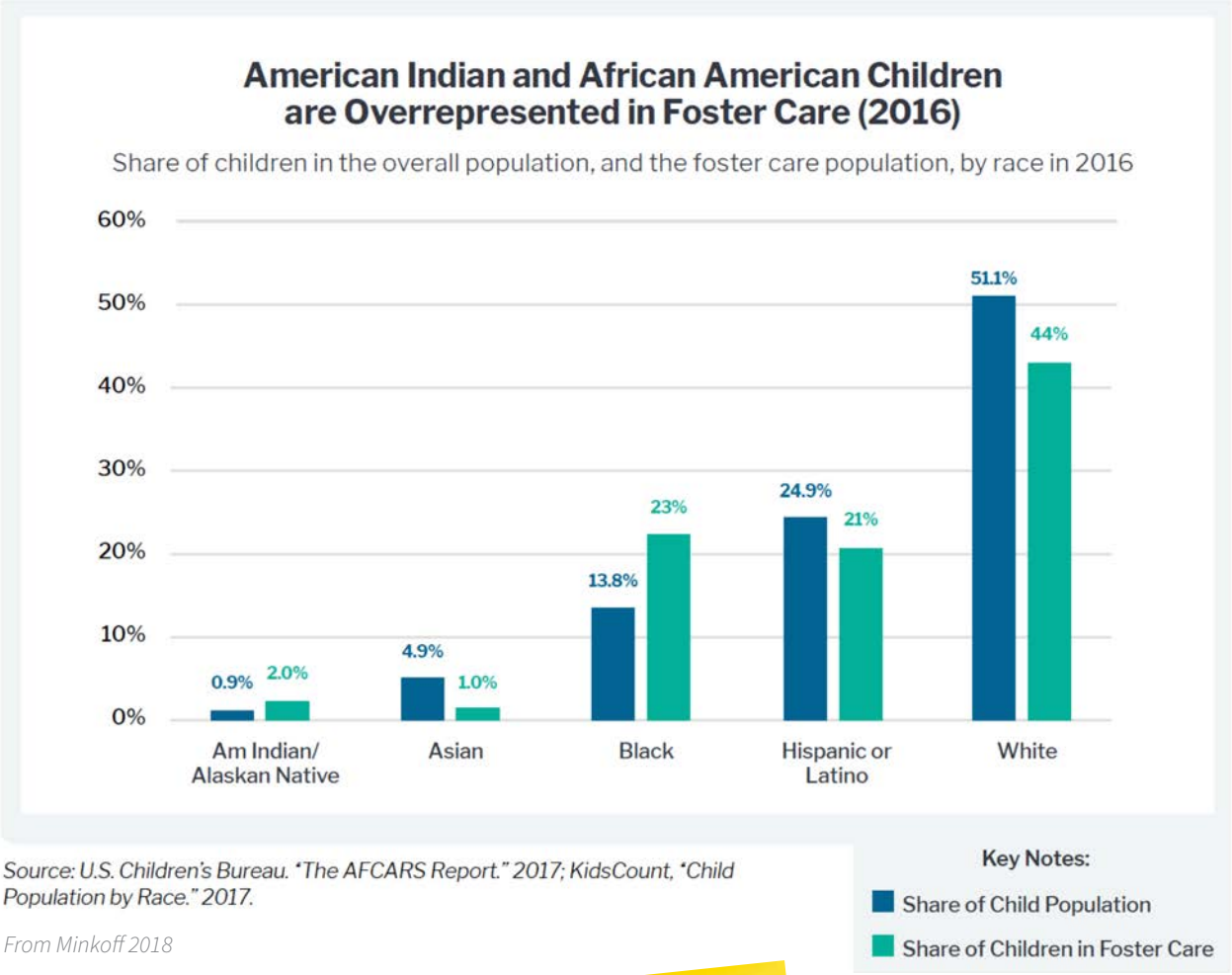
It is the systematic oppression, subjugation and control of one racial group by another dominant or more powerful racial group, made possible by the manner in which the society is structured. In this society, racism emanates from white institutions, white cultural values, and white people. The victims of racism in this society are Black people and other oppressed racial and ethnic minorities. *(Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972, p. 8)*

Racism can occur even if the people causing it have no intention of subordinating others because of color, or are totally unaware of doing so. Admittedly, this implication is sure to be extremely controversial. Most Americans believe racism is bad. But how can anyone be "guilty" of doing something bad when he does not realize he is doing it? Racism can be a matter of result rather than intention because many institutional structures in America that most whites do not recognize as subordinating others because of color, actually injure minority group members far more than deliberate racism. *(Downs, 1970, p. 78)*

Most policies in child welfare have been developed by persons and groups with good intentions and who are genuinely concerned about the "best interests" of children. This is a major reason why the policies have endured so long. Nevertheless, many of these well-meaning policies continue to have adverse effects on poor children in general, and disproportionately on children of color, because of the influence of systemic racism. This form of racism is also strongly correlated with classism and sexism. Some of the most serious manifestations of institutional racism can be found among poor children who live in families headed by women who are members of a racial minority *(Hill, 2004, p.19).*

Institutionalized racism in child welfare is particularly acute for African Americans, going back to systems of slavery and mass incarceration (See Hill 2004), and American Indians, going back to systems of colonialization and genocide, but also for other communities of color, for example Chinese and Mexican immigrants (See Minoff 2018). A film titled *How We Got Here: A Reckoning with U.S. and Tacoma History* highlights how institutionalized racism has played out specifically in Tacoma and Pierce County (See City of Tacoma 2018).

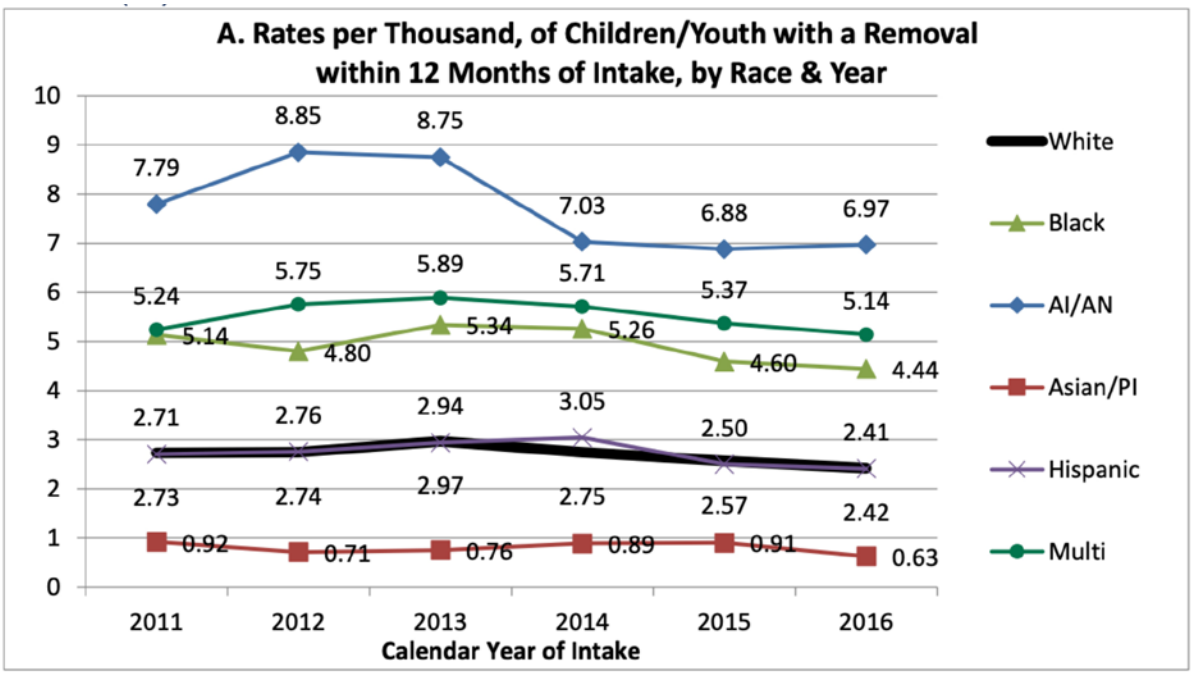
We present some summary statistics as a back drop to this community engagement effort to highlight the extent to which we see racial disparities and thus institutionalized racism in the foster care system in the US, Washington State, and Pierce County. In the US, African American and Native American youth are overrepresented in foster care.



Source: U.S. Children's Bureau. "The AFCARS Report." 2017; KidsCount, "Child Population by Race." 2017.

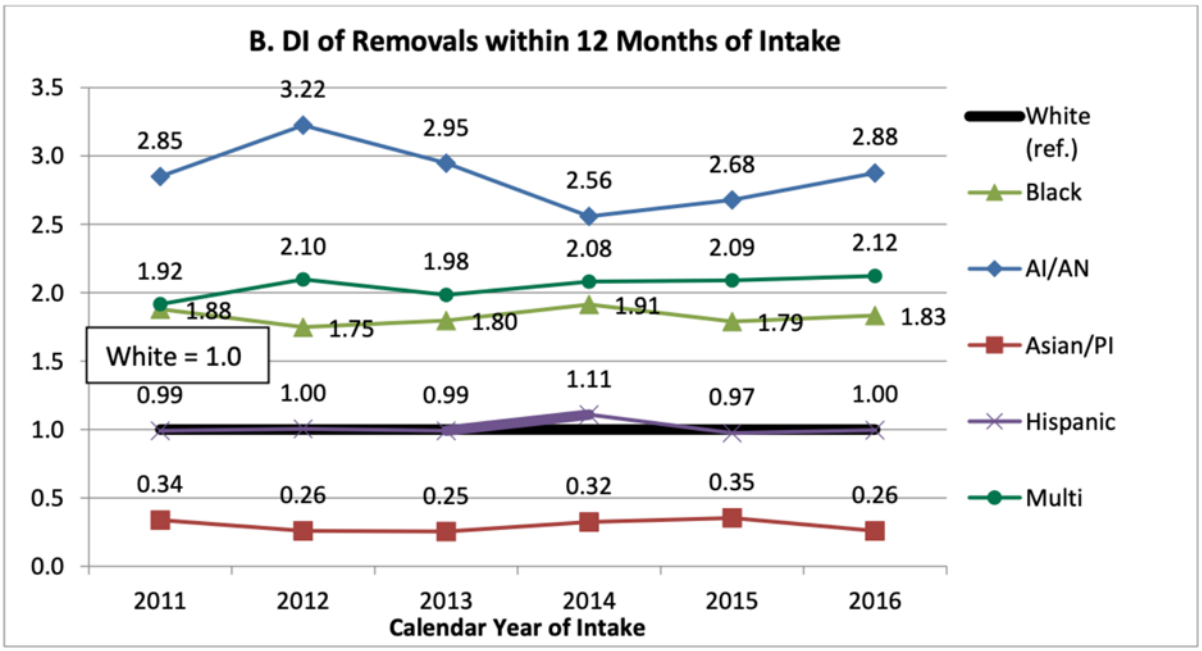
From Minkoff 2018

In Washington state, racial disproportionality in the child welfare system is seen most clearly in rates of children and youth removed after one year of intake for: **Native Americans** (blue in the chart below), **African Americans** (light green in the chart below), and **multi-racial children and youth** (dark green in the chart below) (Washington State DCYF 2018). The chart titled "Rates per Thousand" shows the rate of children and youth removed from their families per 1,000 children and youth in the general population.



From Washington State DCYF Racial Disparity Indices Report 2018

The second chart shows the **Disproportionality Index**, which measures rates of removal for racial groups relative to white youth and children. An index score close to 1, for example for Hispanic children and youth, means that there is no difference and no racial disproportionality relative to white youth and children. An index score of 2 or 3 means that a racial group is 2 or 3 times more likely to be removed thana white child or youth, in this case for Native Americans (AI/AN), multi-racial children and youth, and African Americans (black).



From Washington State DCYF Racial Disparity Indices Report 2018

Racial disproportionality in child welfare for Pierce County is similar to statewide trends. Although specific demographics for children by race in Pierce County were not available for this report, we highlight some general comparisons between demographics of the adult population and demographics for children and youth in foster care acknowledging that the demographics of children in Pierce County may be somewhat different than the demographics of the population as a whole. In 2018, the white population in Pierce County was 86% of the total population, yet only 42% of the children and youth in foster care were white. The opposite of that statistic is that only 14% of the Pierce County population is non-white, and yet non-white children and youth account for 58% of the children and youth in foster care.

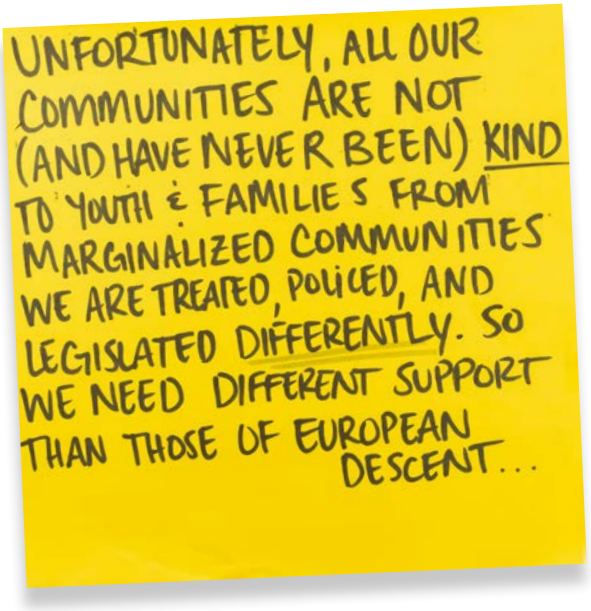
Number of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care by Race and Ethnicity as of 1/1/2019		
	Pierce County	WA State
White	569 (42%)	4,421 (49%)
Black	194 (14%)	783 (9%)
Multi-racial Black	187 (14%)	795 (9%)
Native American	26 (2%)	337 (4%)
Multi-racial Native American	157 (12%)	958 (11%)
Hispanic	121 (9%)	1327 (15%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	48 (4%)	197 (2%)
Multi-racial - Other	40 (3%)	235 (3%)
Unknown	<10 (<1%)	15 (0%)
Total	1343	9,068

From Pierce County Help Me Grow, 2019. Source: Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families, *InfoFamLink Report*, 2018.

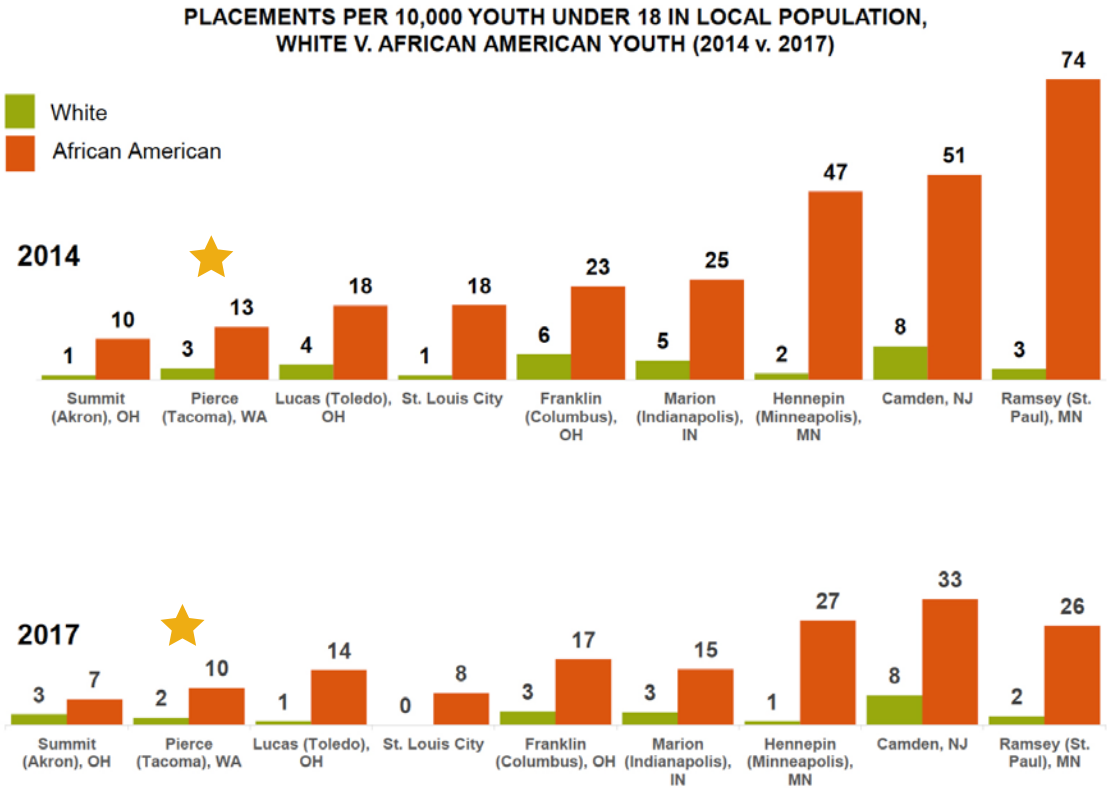
When comparing children and youth in foster care, Pierce County has a much higher rate (7.1 children in foster care per 1,000 children in the general population) compared with King County (2.9 children in foster care per 1,000 children in the general population) and Washington state (5.8 children in foster care per 1,000 children in the general population) (Washington KIDS COUNT 2017).

Racial disproportionality is also prominent in the juvenile justice system, which is closely linked to the foster care system. National statistics highlight that:

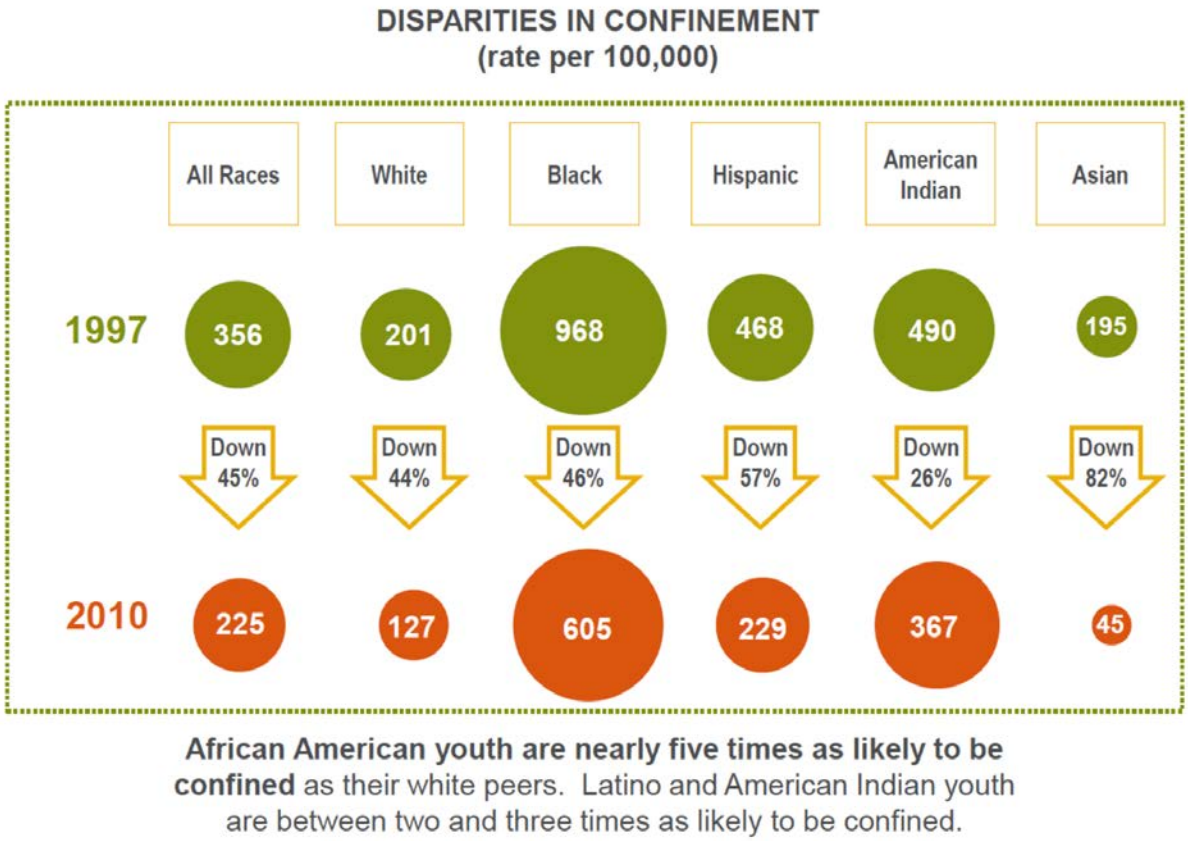
- more than 60% of African-American and Latino youth in foster care have crossed paths with the criminal justice system and
- African-American youth are over 1.23 times more likely to age out of foster care without a family than are their white peers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018).



We see similar patterns of racial disproportionality among African Americans in Pierce County when compared with other cities across the US.



From Pierce County Juvenile Court 2018, Annie E. Casey Foundation 2018



From Pierce County Juvenile Court 2018, Annie E. Casey Foundation 2018

In Pierce County, there is also evidence of persistent patterns of racial disproportionality for African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinx. Even though juvenile justice reforms since 2003 have led to significant improvements, such as an 86% drop in the average daily population in the juvenile detention facility and a 47% drop in the average length of stay, reforms have not addressed institutionalized racism. Youth of color are still very much disproportionately impacted (Pierce County Juvenile Court 2018).

Without reforms that specifically address institutionalized racism, including meaningful engagement by people of color in leadership roles and investment in programs and services specifically addressing the needs of communities of color, there is clear evidence that racially disparities will continue.

This community engagement process, grounded in racial equity and anti-racism, attempts to crack open the underlying problems driving these statistics to acknowledge and account for these disparities while building the infrastructure and social capital for everyone to thrive, particularly those who have been disproportionately impacted.

The **Community Engagement** Process

We engaged the community various ways to intentionally reach specific audiences and cultivate creativity and authentic dialogue. Our efforts took place from June 29 to November 9.

- Our process began with a community **kick-off event** on June 29th, and formation of the **Community Leadership Team**, which has provided guidance and a firm grounding in racial equity throughout the process.
- With the kick-off, we launched an **online survey**, which remained open for three months and was publicized broadly by Amara and other community partners.
- Our consultant team worked with families, youth, parents, adults and various community partners to organize a series of **house meetings, listening sessions and interviews.**
- The Community Leadership Team developed a prioritization framework and synthesized all the ideas shared from these different sources into a **holistic vision** for the property.
- This vision, including a focus on how racism surfaces in foster care and adoption, was translated into a series of **graphic posters** and showcased at the community celebration on November 9th.
- The November 9th **community celebration** marked the end of our community engagement effort.
- After this, the Community Leadership Team refined their prioritization framework and identified **top priorities** to include in the recommendation.

Each of these steps are described in more detail below.

Community Leadership Team members discussing racial equity at June 29 event. Left: George Zantua. Right: Felicia Dennis, Tara Newton, and Dominique Taylor. (Photo Credit: Jefferson Mok)

Community events were the book ends of our process, kicking it off on June 29th and celebrating the richness of community ideas on November 9th. These events, organized by our grand master of events Adriane Wilson, showcased local artists, caterers, grassroots organizations, and vendors of color. They centered the stories and experiences of people most impacted by foster care and adoption and lifted up the voices of people of color in every aspect of the events.

The kick-off event was held at The Farm, a working, educational farm owned by the Franklin-Pierce School District, just a few blocks from Amara's property. Spoken word and personal stories filled the space with emotion and depth. Fresh produce was featured at a free farmer's market table for people to take home.

In small group discussions on **June 29th**, community members talked about the focus on racial equity and explored the potential for this property.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

A young man was walking through The Farm during our June 29th event on a short-cut to talk to his pastor down the street. He stopped to talk with Raven, one of our Community Leadership Team members, at her booth where she had healing medicine and beadwork. He sat down and began opening up his heart to her writing out his story and his trauma on a small notepad she handed him when he said he wanted to share but had trouble saying the words.

His parents were from Mexico and immigrated here, then his father had a work accident, became physically disabled, and addicted to drugs. His mother couldn't care for his siblings, and he ended up in foster care. He was now homeless in his early 20s trying his best to stay sober. When he learned what the event was about, he got a plate of food and gratefully shared his story and welcomed hugs and acceptance from the group.

Juwan Banks, Raven Nyland and Oscar at our June 29th event. (Photo Credit: Jefferson Mok)

Raven Nyland leads folks in prayer at the end of the Nov. 9 event, while Tiffany Hammonds showcases her live art piece. (Photo Credit: Ike and Tash Photograpy.)

On November 9th, community members shared dance and music, storytelling and art, healing and play, organized by our grand master Adriane Wilson to bring the spirit of the Community Leadership Team's recommendation to life. The event emphasized unity, embracing diverse cultures, and empowering individuals to share their stories.

See list of artists and vendors from the events in the Acknowledgements.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

An Amara volunteer was willing to capture some drone footage of their property, but they weren't sure how to present it at the November 9th community event. Toby Joseph, a film producer and Community Leadership Team member, stepped forward to create a video that captured the spirit of this effort and the community's hope for the property. For the audio, he recorded the voice of Kathie Nguyen, another Community Leadership Team member, singing "Read All About It" and also used his own flute music.

Angelina Nokai and dancers from the Indigenous Youth Empowerment Team. (Photo Credit: Ike and Tash Photography)

DJ Sidewayz (Photo Credit: Ike and Tash Photography)

Community Leadership Team meeting at the People's Center

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Community Leadership Team was created to guide our process and weave together all the community input received into a recommendation for Amara's board of directors, who will ultimately make decisions about the property and provide leadership for fundraising. The Community Leadership Team includes youth, community members and professionals, almost all of whom are people of color and almost all of whom have personal experience with foster care and/or adoption.

The Community Leadership Team members actively participated in the community events and over the course of six meetings, they established a charter and shared values, a framework for prioritization, and their recommendation for Amara's property.

Each meeting included a meal from local POC-owned restaurants and opportunities for people to share – including stories, songs, poems, blessings, and original artwork expressing their values and experiences central to this effort. Community members invited each other to share and slowed down to really listen to each other.

POINT OF LEARNING

From the beginning, we aimed to have youth ages 17-25 make up a third of the Community Leadership Team members, but we found it was challenging to engage youth and keep them involved – because of the challenges of their current situation for the teens, and their commitments to work and higher education for the young adults. However, we have continued to have at least two youth or young adults engaged at a time, and we have many adults engaged who have experienced foster care and/or adoption as a young person.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

The Community Leadership Team has dedicated so much energy and life into this process. They have filled this effort with the spirit of community and belonging, even from the beginning when their journey began as strangers sitting around a table. At the very first meeting, one of the young adult members who had experienced foster care shared a personal poem about his family, expressing the emotions he felt from being unwanted to finding a place he can call home. The whole team was moved by his words, and he asked that everyone find a way to share at every meeting. From that moment, the team committed to the norm of beginning and ending their meetings with a spiritual practice – whether through poetry, song, storytelling, artwork, or prayer.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

A teen member with experience in foster care, who participated in an early meeting, but lost housing and had to move out of county, remarked in the meeting that he was used to being talked over and not heard. Throughout the meeting, other members made it a point to ask him and other youth to respond first and create a sense of deep listening. He said he had never had an opportunity to participate in a leadership opportunity like this, and he thought it was good for him. He was excited to tell people about the project and hopeful for what the property cold become.

HOUSE MEETINGS

House meetings were intimate conversations hosted by community members with a personal connection to foster care and adoption. Hosts invited people from their social network to talk about what is really needed to support strong youth and families, and how Amara's property can be developed to support what is needed. There were six house meetings held in different geographies including East Tacoma, South Tacoma, Hilltop, and Parkland.

One house meeting was hosted by Parents for Parents, a peer-to-peer network, where "parent allies" who have successfully navigated the juvenile dependency system help parents new to the system understand what they must do to successfully reunite with their children. This group met twice, and after the second session, a parent remarked how these two meetings made her feel truly heard. There was shock in her voice. She shared that while telling a friend about her excitement from the first meeting, her friend cautioned her to be wary of yet another organization wasting her time and energy. However, this parent responded that this process was different. She felt like her voice mattered and that real change was going to happen; she left that second meeting full of smiles and embraces.

Another house meeting was hosted by Pioneer Human Services at their J Street Group Home for teens who receive Behavior Rehabilitation Services. As the conversation began over pizza, our team asked about their interests and explained about the project. Although we emphasized that we wanted to hear from them, the teens had been sizing us up and appeared not sure if they wanted to engage. As we listened, they began to share more and open up. The ideas flowed, and they ended up pulling their chairs together in a circle. One teen, who had been talking about the importance of art, went up to his room and brought down his artwork to share with us. Another teen, about to turn 18 and age out of the system, thanked us for listening with tears in her eyes, explaining that no one ever asks her what she thinks. After the meeting, this teen, Kathie Nguyen, became a member of the Community Leadership Team.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

The Parent for Parent conversations were vibrant and passionate. The parents were so engaged in the initial hour that we did not have a chance to go through all of the discussion questions. A request was made to continue the conversation in a second session. We responded by supporting a second facilitated discussion.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

One participant at the health care listening session asked us, ***"Are you really serious about hearing from youth?"*** We explained that we were, but that it had been hard to reach youth especially being sensitive to their situation. He responded, ***"You can come to our J Street group home and talk with our teens."*** We followed up the same day and arranged a house meeting.

Interviews were in-depth one-on-one conversations with people of color who had deep personal connections to foster care and adoption. They shared their stories and their advice for what would make the most difference. We interviewed six people who we identified as having a story to tell, including one person who shared parts of her story in the survey and made a request for a follow-up conversation.

Sept. 9 listening session with service providers. (Photo: Chelsea Talbert)

POINT OF LEARNING

We originally intended to do more individual interviews, but we found the house meetings and listening sessions yielded a lot of energy and creativity, where people built on each other's ideas. We ended up putting more time into group dialogue than individual interviews.

Listening sessions were facilitated with different groups of professionals, including court-involved professionals; community health care and coordinated care; foster agencies and service providers; and Amara staff. There was a lot of energy and appreciation for the topic with specific suggestions and programs that complemented a lot of what we had been hearing in the house meetings and interviews.

An online survey created the opportunity for broad participation asking people to rank sets of ideas for the property along with open-ended questions for suggestions and comments. The survey was open for three months from June 29 through September 20, 2019, and it was publicized broadly, including among Amara's contacts and other partner organizations and foster agencies. As a result, we received 339 complete responses, many of whom were professionals working in foster care or adoption and/or foster parents or people who have taken care of children when their parents were unable.

AMARA LEADERSHIP, STAFF, AND STAKEHOLDERS

Our consultant team provided two opportunities for input from Amara staff, including one listening session in each of their offices. We provided updates to Amara's directors, Amara's Pierce County Advisory Board, and Amara's African American Advisory Board. We also concurrently were contracted to lead two trainings on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, one for Amara's Board of Directors and one for Amara's full staff, which included approximately 45 people. We highlighted the foundational pieces from this community engagement effort in those trainings.

POINT OF LEARNING

Although we translated the survey into Spanish and publicized it through partner organizations among Spanish-speaking audiences, we did not receive any responses in Spanish. However, from the English version of the survey, we did hear from 24 people who spoke Spanish, which is 8% of the survey respondents, compared with 5.7% of Spanish speakers in Pierce County. However, this is not unusual for Spanish-speakers in an English-dominant culture.

Sebastian Galindo, our survey specialist, has found that particularly younger Spanish-speakers in the US prefer to take surveys in English. From his experience, Sebastian believes that it may be related either to a social stigma of not selecting English or that even though people speak Spanish, they don't consider themselves as proficient as they are with English as a result of living and/or being educated in the US. It is also likely that an online survey with long, complex questions is not an effective way to communicate with people who primarily speak Spanish and may have lower levels of education and comfort with reading complex materials. We informally spoke with Spanish-speaking community members within our networks, and we brainstormed some ideas for a Spanish language house meeting with Claudia Miller, a Latinx member of the Community Leadership Team. Although we were not able to organize a Spanish language house meeting within the timeline of this project, this would be a good opportunity for future outreach and engagement.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

Toby Joseph, a member of the Community Leadership Team, asked everyone in the team to watch 13th, a movie which makes clear linkages between the history of slavery in the US and the ongoing mass incarceration of black Americans, as a foundational context setting piece to our work. It highlights the impact on black youth and families and the internalized assumptions among white people that black parents are unsuitable to raise their own children. Our consultant team took this to heart and asked Amara's Board of Directors to watch 13th, which we discussed during their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training, along with two other videos Bringing Our Children Home and White Fragility, which highlighted other foundational racial equity concepts, including the history of Native American boarding schools leading to forced family separation and the impact of white savior complex. We also used some survey comments from this process in the Amara board training to discuss how the white savior complex surfaces specifically in the foster care and adoption systems.

Our Practice of **Community Engagement**

As we reflected on our own practice of community engagement and points of feedback and dialogue within our consultant team and with Amara over the course of the project, we identified some that have been essential to our success, described below. Yet we emphasize that our practice of community engagement comes from who we are and our relationships in the community. These are not elements that can be easily reproduced without deep intentionality and long-term commitment to the underlying values of equity and community.

STORYTELLING AND TALENTS

Get to know people, their stories and their talents. Create a welcoming space, not a space that just caters to white dominant culture, and provide different types of opportunities for sharing. Highlight the voices of those most marginalized, specifically black, indigenous, and people of color. Create opportunities to celebrate and showcase people's stories and talents in ways that are affirming and empowering. Let people tell their own story in the way that they want to tell it. Organizations need to move out of the way and position themselves as listeners and learners. Integrate storytelling and sharing into the substance of the work, not just as an add-on.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Invest time and energy in getting to know people and supporting their interests and challenges, whether or not they line up with a particular project or your own interests. Invest time in attending other people's events. Show up when you don't have to and when you don't have any agenda of your own. Be attentive to invitations to participate in community. Take people up on their invitations and invite people into your life. Create opportunities to share joy and build mutual support. Share your own story and your own vulnerabilities to build connection, mindful that you are not dominating the relationship, especially for white people.

FOOD

Include meals and food in all community meetings. Food brings joy and fuels creativity. Food helps people slow down, build community, and get to know each other in ways that allow you to do deeper work together and go farther over the long-term. Local small businesses of color offer lots of affordable options.

COMMUNICATION

Tailor communication to match what works best for each person. Some people may only respond to text or Facebook messenger, while others may prefer emails and reading more detailed information – for example meetings notes when they are not able to attend. Although it's more efficient to use only one communication method, you will end up with a less diverse group. Even if some community members respond to email, we find using text or Facebook messenger in addition to email helps build personal relationships and open up deeper, informal communication – for example sharing feedback, ideas or personal challenges that may or may not be related to the project. It is especially important to point out to professionals who seek to do community engagement that if you only use email and Doodle to set meeting dates and communicate between meetings, you will tend to engage professionals more effectively and shift the culture of engagement away from a community culture.

COMPENSATION AND BUDGETS

Provide fair compensation when community members provide their time and talents.

Question typical budgets and look for opportunities to shift money from "professional" providers or mainstream, established businesses to "community" providers and businesses of color, emphasizing small businesses. Often community members who are directly impacted and can speak powerfully from their experience do not have the professional standing or credentials to be able to monetize their contributions in the ways that professional employees or consultants can. Challenge that assumption within your work.

Yet, also take care not to fully monetize the relationship, which can feel transactional and tokenizing for people of color. When establishing expectations for compensation, it is important to appreciate the personal connection and community spirit of community members and small businesses and have open conversations about what's expected and what fair compensation looks like.

Create consistency within budgets to compensate community members similarly, given the available budget. Yet, also consider the individual challenges and situations of community members and make adjustments as needed. For example, some community members might need additional support for transportation to participate in addition to a standard stipend provided to everyone.

Ensure payments are processed promptly to show respect and fair treatment to community members and small businesses. Compensation should be received on the day that services are provided for vendors delivering a specific product or service, like caterers or DJs, and within a reasonable time after invoicing for consultants. Some organizations have a complicated series of steps to approve payments and issue checks, most infamously universities. Mainstream established businesses are familiar with this and can manage delays within their larger budgets. However, delays can create a feeling of disrespect among community members and small businesses of color and, in some cases, can even create economic hardship. If there are questions about delayed payments or difficulties receiving payments, organizations need to lead with empathy and a "can-do" problem-solving attitude to resolve the problem as quickly as possible emphasizing appreciation and respect.

Seek out talent in the community, raise the visibility of those talents to promote future opportunities for community members, and provide fair compensation and acknowledgement.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Empower small businesses, especially new or growing businesses, by providing support and resources so they can navigate the infrastructure of larger organizations and continue to grow as people and business owners. At each step, get creative with how to build the capacity of community members and small businesses so that their involvement in this project contributes to their confidence, skillset, and/or visibility and springboards them into other opportunities for leadership and economic growth. Outreach and support to small businesses may include helping to package their services for different audiences, establishing market rates for their services and products, creating invoices and publicizing their business name and logo. This could include announcements at events, handouts and targeted emails to partners.

Considering the other side of the coin, facilitators of community engagement need to be mindful of our own privilege and growing opportunities for professional development relative to the recognition and opportunities awarded to community members most impacted by the issues of concern. This is especially true for white people and professionals, who are often embedded into dominant, white institutions and social networks, where they are more likely to receive praise alongside opportunities for promotion or advancement. Recognizing the long history of white privilege within this country, it is important for white people to step aside in their professional development journey, even to turn down promotions or redirect awards to go to people of color, in order to disrupt dominant, white power structures and create new opportunities for others. It is also important for people of color to consider colorism, which is discrimination based on darker skin tone, and opportunities to disrupt anti-black racism and the invisibility of indigenous people that permeate power structures and economic opportunities in mainstream US culture.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

Through this community engagement process, we dedicated the majority of our budget to people of color, including direct funding to 25 small businesses of color and stipends to 35 community members, all but 2 of whom were people of color.

MUTUAL AID

Involving community members directly impacted by the issues of concern means that those same community members may experience near-term challenges during a project or initiative. The concept of mutual aid emphasizes the importance of pitching in to address immediate needs of individual community members as they arise, while continuing in tandem to engage them in the long-term, big picture work to address core issues and change systems.

RESPONSIVENESS

Adapt the agenda when people are inspired to tell a story or go off script. Welcome suggestions and feedback and be ready to respond and take action. Take people up on their suggestions, and thank them. Acknowledge what you did differently and what you learned. Embrace this as an opportunity to build engagement and center community voice. Pay particular attention to feedback from indigenous, black and people of color and people most impacted by the work.

COURAGE AND GRACE

Lead with courage to speak your truth, call things out, and share feedback. This requires being vulnerable, not knowing how people will react and not being fully aware of our own limitations and privilege. Practice grace to learn and grow. We recognize that there is no one way to do this work, no right answer. We are here to work together and learn together. Check-in with people when something does not feel right, and open up the conversation to figure out how to move forward.

SELF-CARE

Take care of yourself, your team, and your community. There is a lot of work to be done. Racial equity work and community engagement can be extremely fulfilling and rewarding, but also overwhelming, exhausting, and traumatic. This is emotional work. Recognize when you have privilege and take on the emotional work of calling out racism and oppression targeted at others, for example white people calling out other white people expressing white supremacist views or straight people calling out other straight people for expressing homophobic views. Be mindful of your own emotions and when the work is draining you or taking you to the breaking point. Take time to renew and reenergize, whatever that looks like for you. Ask for support from your team and your community. Help them understand your boundaries and the support you need to stay healthy.

RESPONSIVE TO COMMUNITY

When our youngest member of the Community Leadership Team was about to turn 18, a stressful time for youth aging out of foster care, she said that most of all she wanted a big birthday party surrounded by lots of people since she had never had one before. Our consultant team and Community Leadership Team members pitched in to organize her party, which was well-attended by people from all different parts of her life. In addition, several community members who met her through this project offered housing options knowing that she had to transition out of the teen group home where she had been living.

The Demographics of **Who We Engaged**

Each time we spoke with people about the project and noted their ideas, we asked them to fill out an anonymous demographic questionnaire, which consisted of seven questions on a quarter-sheet of paper. This allowed us to aggregate demographic information without it being personally identifiable. Even in the large listening sessions, people could discretely fill out their individual sheets and hand them to the facilitator without revealing potentially sensitive information to other people in the meeting. We matched these same questions on the survey.

RACIAL IDENTITY

We had a majority of people of color in the Community Leadership Team (94%) and interviews and house meetings (62%), so we centered the themes and comments from these sources first in our analysis and synthesis. The listening sessions had 34% people of color, and the survey had the least diversity with 21% people of color of the 339 people who responded.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH FOSTER CARE/ADOPTION

We also asked everyone about their personal experience with foster care and adoption. Again, we saw the greatest representation of people who experienced foster care as a young person in the Community Leadership Team (50%) and in the interviews (30%) and house meetings (22%) with much lower representation in the listening sessions (5%) and survey (4%).

YOUTH

Although we collected more detailed data on age, we specifically tracked youth participation because of the importance of centering youth voice and the real challenge of hearing from youth. We divided participants into two categories: youth (25 years-old or younger) and adults (older than 25 years). Again, we found the highest rates of youth participation in the Community Leadership Team (19%) and the interviews and house meetings (24%). For the survey and listening sessions, youth participation ranged from 5% to 12%.

GENDER

We also looked at gender, recognizing that women overall are highly overrepresented among professionals working in child welfare, including at Amara, and overrepresented among foster parents and volunteers who work with youth in foster care. We found slightly higher representation of men in the interviews and house meetings (38%) and the Community Leadership Team (19%). The listening sessions had 20% male participation, and the survey had only 13% male participation. However, we had 3% transgender participation in the listening sessions and survey with no transgender participation in the interviews and house meetings or the Community Leadership Team.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

We also looked at sexual orientation, recognizing that LGBTQ+ and two-spirit youth in foster care experience higher rates of suicide, and LGBTQ+ and two spirit foster parents are excluded by some foster agencies. Somewhat similar to the pattern with transgender participation, we had greater diversity with respect to sexual orientation in the survey (26%), Community Leadership Team (31%), and listening sessions (15%) than the interviews and house meetings (3%), which had very low diversity with respect to sexual orientation.

LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME

Languages spoken at home was another demographic question we asked, recognizing that families who speak a language other than English at home may be at greater risk of having their children removed once Child Protective Ser-

POINT OF LEARNING

Surveys are known for being culturally comfortable for white professionals, and we found that we had the greatest response to our survey among white professionals. To center people of color in this process, we analyzed the survey data to identify if there were different preferences and trends based on demographics. We also analyzed the qualitative data from the house meetings, interviews and listening sessions first and compared it to the survey results. Overall looking at the trends, we found that people of color and white people generally agreed on the issues that should be addressed and ideas for the property with only slight nuances and a few prominent differences. Similarly, people with personal experience in foster care and/or adoption and professionals generally agreed. However, the way they expressed their ideas differed. People with personal experience more often spoke about the whys with powerful explanations and personal stories, while professionals more often spoke in terms of specific programs and practices that could be targeted to address the issues identified.

vices gets involved, especially if there are linguistic barriers. Youth who speak another language can also experience additional trauma from discrimination and/or cultural isolation when taken from their family and placed with a foster family or group home that does not understand their language and cultural practices. With the survey, we had 37 responses (11%) from people who spoke languages other than English, including 13 different languages. In the Community Leadership Team, 37% of members spoke another language, including six different languages.

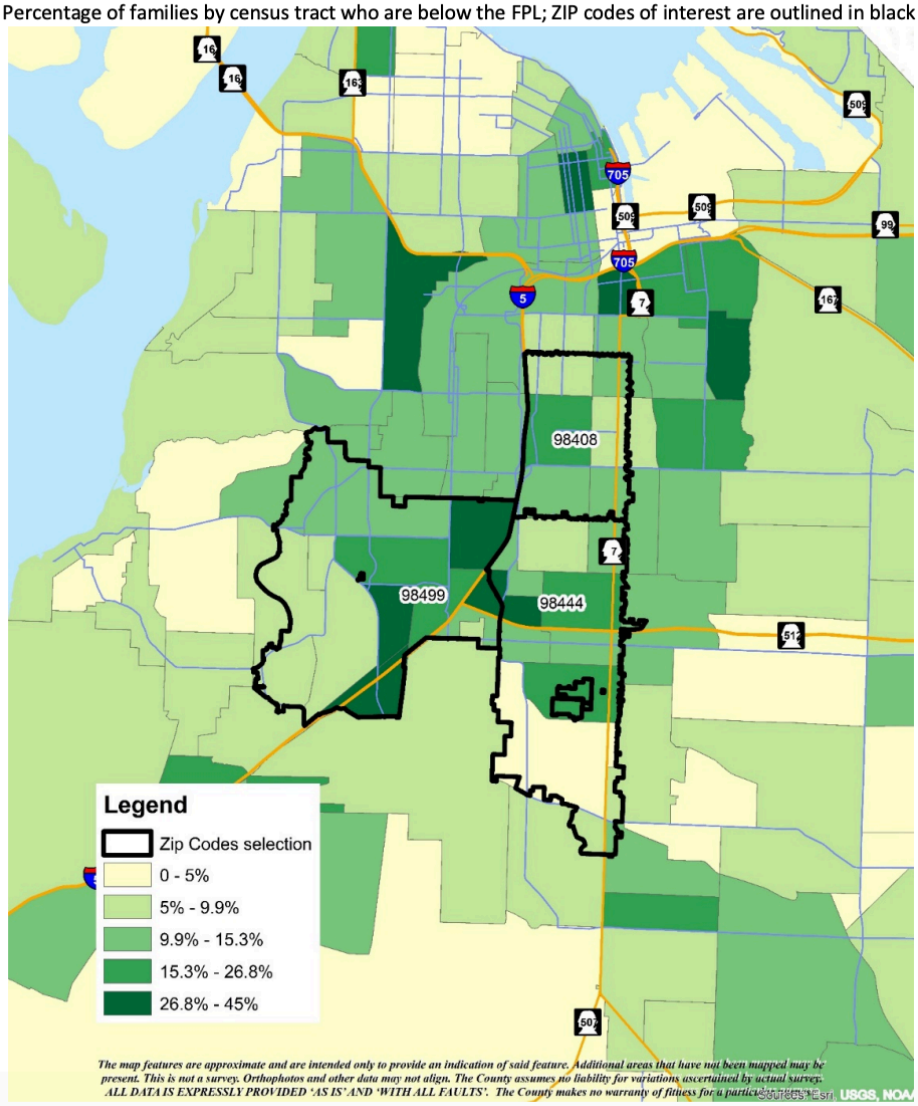
GEOGRAPHY

Within Pierce County, three zip codes reflect higher poverty rates, lower life expectancy and higher rates of children entering the foster care system – 98408, 98444, and 98449. They are also more racially and ethnically diverse. We had relatively few responses from these three zip codes, which likely reflects what we already know that surveys such as this tend to be more culturally comfortable for professionals who are middle class, white people.

Zip code	**Responses** (% of total)	**Identified connection to foster care and adoption** (people could select more than one)
98408	4 (1%)	➢ Parents who have children impacted by foster care or adoption ➢ Professionals working with foster care or adoption
98444	5 (1%)	➢ Experience with foster care as a child ➢ Foster parent ➢ Someone who cared for children when their parents were unable ➢ Professionals working with foster care or adoption ➢ Interested community member
98499	3 (1%)	➢ Foster parent ➢ Professional working with foster care or adoption ➢ Interested community member

Families Below 100% of Federal Poverty Level

Percentage of families by census tract who are below the FPL; ZIP codes of interest are outlined in black



Map provided by Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department with data from the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2017.

Target Zip Codes:

98408 South Tacoma, Fern Hill
98499 Lakewood, Springbrook
98444 Parkland

Summary of Demographics by **Method of Engagement**

Demographic Info	Community meetings and interviews 50 people	Listening sessions 77 people	Survey 339 responses	Community Leadership Team 16 core members	Total 482 total responses
Experience with foster and adoption					
Experienced foster care as a young person	15 (30%)	4 (5%)	12 (4%)	8 (50%)	39 (8%)
A parent whose children have experienced foster/adoption	11 (22%)	5 (6%)	16 (5%)	2 (13%)	34 (7%)
Foster parent or person who has cared for children when their parents were unable	12 (24%)	5 (6%)	173 (51%)	8 (50%)	198 (41%)
Volunteer with foster care/adoption	1 (2%)	8 (10%)	50 (15%)	6 (38%)	65 (13%)
A professional working in foster/adoption	9 (18%)	68 (88%)	143 (42%)	7 (44%)	227 (47%)
An interested Community member	17 (34%)	14 (18%)	121 (36%)	9 (56%)	161 (33%)
Racial Identity					
Person of Color	37 (62%)	24 (34%)	63 (21%)	15 (94%)	139 (32%)
White	13 (26%)	47 (66%)	232 (79%)	1 (6%)	293 (68%)
Gender					
Female	31 (62%)	59 (77%)	218 (84%)	13 (81%)	321 (80%)
Male	19 (38%)	15 (20%)	34 (13%)	3 (19%)	71 (18%)
Transgender or non-binary	0	2 (3%)	9 (3%)	0 (0%)	11 (3%)
Sexual Orientation					
Straight/Heterosexual	31 (97%)	52 (85%)	177 (74%)	11 (69%)	271 (78%)
LGBTQ+	1 (3%)	9 (15%)	63 (26%)	5 (31%)	78 (22%)
Age					
25 years or younger	10 (24%)	9 (12%)	12 (5%)	3 (19%)	34 (9%)
Over 25 years	31 (76%)	63 (88%)	230 (95%)	13 (81%)	337 (91%)

Community Leadership Team discussing the recommendations at their last meeting.

Analysis and Synthesis

PRIORITIZATION BY THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TEAM

In September, just as our survey closed and all our listening sessions wrapped up, themes and ideas for the property were presented to the Community Leadership Team on flipchart paper that covered the walls of our meeting space. Small groups looked at the ideas and came up with suggestions for how to organize them and how they wanted to make their recommendation. We came together as a full group and developed the skeleton for the holistic vision for the property and their prioritization framework.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

We conducted a thematic analysis on all the qualitative data, including notes from the house meetings, listening sessions, interviews, and survey comments, to create a master list of codes. We began first with all of the notes from meetings that were majority people of color or youth currently in foster care and with survey responses from people of color. Color coding was used to track which themes and suggestions were made by people of color versus white people, those which were made by professionals versus people personally impacted, and those that were made by youth currently in foster care. We organized these codes around the themes created by the Community Leadership Team as part of the initial development of their holistic vision for the property.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize quantitative survey results and demographic information and to conduct cross-comparison analyses based on demographic attributes, such as racial identity. We also standardized rankings across categories to end up with a single list in order of preference. When comparing rankings by demographic attributes, such as racial identity, we found one prominent difference in preference, where people of color and people who had experienced foster care as a young person ranked communal dining far higher than white people and all survey respondents overall. There were also similar but slight differences for 15 other proposed ideas. Looking at the standardized rankings separately for these two groups, we adjusted the final rankings to prioritize preferences by people of color and people who had experienced foster care as a young person.

GRAPHIC POSTERS

Members of our facilitation team and a member of the Community Leadership Team, Toby Joseph, met with graphic facilitator Brandi Yañez-Riddle to turn the holistic vision of the property into a series of graphic posters. We met several times and presented the posters to the Community Leadership Team to discuss and refine them.

CONSENSUS BUILDING

The Community Leadership Team built consensus using a fist-to-five decision-making tool. They built consensus for the holistic vision on October 16, 2019 before it was showcased at the community celebration. Then, they refined and built consensus for the prioritization framework and top priorities at their final meeting January 8, 2020.

Findings

The following list represents the breadth of ideas that came up repeatedly throughout the house meetings, listening sessions, interviews and survey comments. The full list is shown here with each described below in some detail, including suggestions separated for programs and activities versus built environment.

(The full list of detailed ideas from our community discussions and survey comments can be found in the Appendix.)

A A welcoming space

B Diversifying leadership, sharing power, and being accountable to community

C Training and shared values

D Mental health care

E Visitation and post-adoption Support

F A hub for wrap-around services using people-centered planning and peer-to-peer advocates

G Art, music, and performance

H Hair care

I Family events, special occasions, birthdays, and holidays

J A park, a playground, sports, a ropes course, and a trail around the pond

K Housing, independent life skills, and an intentional community

L Food, meals, and a community kitchen

M A farm, community gardening, and a medicinal garden

N Economic opportunities

O Transportation

A) A WELCOMING SPACE

The property should feel welcoming, like home. It should create a sense of belonging and inclusion, even when parts of your family are not there. It should be a sanctuary, a spiritual place, a judgment-free zone. The moment you walk in, you're in therapy, but without knowing it or saying explicitly. It should be a place where people really listen to youth and nurture self-advocacy and self-reliance. It should be a place of intentional joy and hope.

The space, events, and programs should be for everyone. They should embrace tight-knit families and large extended families. The property should bring different people and different cultures together, creating unity not separation. The philosophy of "whole parenting" should be embraced. You don't have to fit a certain category (homeless, foster care, veteran, disabled, etc.) to be here. Services should be free. It's important that the whole community embrace this space and not separate youth and families impacted by foster care. Kids in foster care want to feel like any other kids. Everyone should feel safe. There should be a check-in and security process, but one that doesn't feel like security. Kids of all ages, adults and families should be free to come and go. The property should be open on weekends and evenings.

People greeting you with a warm welcome when you come in should look like the youth and families served and speak the languages they do. People should get to know youth and families and take time to learn their trauma. People should use "person-first" language to emphasize the person, not the disability or challenge. Artwork by youth and kids should be hung on the walls, including messages of affirmation and belonging.

The property should nurture a sense of accomplishment and pride. Flags from all different counties and artwork celebrating different cultures and LGBTQ+ and two-spirit imagery should be prominently displayed.

A) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

- Free services open to all.
- Trauma-informed security that doesn't look like security.
- Person-first language.
- Reduce the requirements and application steps to access services and also to become a peer advocate, mentor, kinship caregiver or volunteer.
- Provide flexibility with the resources available.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Buildings and interior décor should mimic a home as much as possible with carpets, sofas, lots of window and natural light, colors, curtains good smells, plants and animals. Create separate spaces indoors and outdoors that are comfortable for people with different need, ages, history of trauma and triggers, but also create large communal spaces to bring people together and emphasize unity. A welcoming garden. Translate signs into the top five language spoken in Pierce County. Consider different cultural needs of families, for example Muslim breastfeeding women need a separate sink, not in the bathroom. Prioritize Universal Design for disability justice and awareness in the physical space. Name buildings to reflect values or respect community leaders, not wealthy people who donate money.

B) DIVERSIFYING LEADERSHIP, SHARING POWER WITH COMMUNITY AND BEING ACCOUNTABLE

Lots of community discussions focused on the importance of Amara diversifying leadership, sharing decision-making power for what is developed on the property and how it is managed and staying accountable to people of color impacted by foster care and adoption. Specifically, Amara should embrace a deep understanding of the culture of black and indigenous and communities of color, recognizing that these are not the same, and engage the Puyallup Tribe.

Amara should create a long-term community advisory council for the property, populated by youth, people of color, and families who have been directly impacted by foster care. This body should set community guidelines for Amara and all co-located organizations on the property. Amara should focus on relationship building and retaining staff and community members for the long-term, not on splashy events and marketing to attract new people. Have community organizations organize and lead social events sponsored by Amara. The best investment in the community is a person who is already in and invested in the community, already out there doing outreach. Amara needs intentional outreach to parents of color in their communities, and they need people who lead with racial equity. Hiring or compensating peer advocates and community mentors for their work in the community should be given preference over hiring professionals to lead meetings.

Transparency is important. Amara needs to keep the open dialogue going. Create "listening parties" for program staff and community members to share concerns. Youth need to see that dialogue and be able to participate.

Positive spaces motivate youth to do well and want to give back. They bring their friends, and over time, they become mentors and staff. Create opportunities for youth and students of color, such as internships and student work experiences. Provide sufficient pay and mental health support so staff stay and take on leadership positions. If done well and focus stays on positive experiences for youth, the property can become a multi-generational model led by the community.

B) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

A long-term Community Advisory Council for the property; hiring and compensating community member and peer advocates to do outreach, coordination and management for the property instead of just hiring professionals; sufficient pay and mental health support to retain staff; internships and student work experiences for youth of color impacted by foster care; "listening parties" with Amara, youth, families, and community members to share concerns and keep dialogue going.

C) TRAINING AND SHARED VALUES

Provide leadership and training for co-located partner organizations and also volunteers, families and youth. Trainings should emphasize anti-racism and undoing institutionalized racism, implicit bias, de-escalation, trauma-informed care, LGBTQ+ and two-spirit allyship, transgender allyship, how to work with developmental disabilities especially for medical providers, religious diversity, and youth development and empowerment. Develop shared values and accountability with organizations and people involved with the property, including regular trainings, commitments and mechanisms for feedback and accountability.

D) MENTAL HEALTH

Lack of mental health care for youth and families came up frequently recognizing that if struggling families had access to mental health treatment options, they would have a greater chance of managing challenges and keeping their families together. People also recognized that this is part of a larger regional health care crisis. Some people pointed to fewer mental health care resources in Pierce County, which ranks one of the lowest in the state compared with King County as one of the highest for mental health resources, as part of the reason why there are much higher rates of children entering foster care in Pierce County than King County. Suggestions for what mental health care would look like included a peer-to-peer crisis hotline, drop-in appointments with a therapist, animal therapy, art therapy, healthy coping skills, connection with your cultural heritage, and alternative healing, including a medicinal garden.

C) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Trainings, commitments, and mechanisms for feedback and accountability with organizations and individuals involved with the property.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Indoor and outdoor spaces to hold trainings.

D) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

A peer-to-peer crisis hotline would receive calls from parents in distress and provide support and problem-solving to avoid things escalating and having Child Protective Services get involved. Alternative healing emphasizes spirituality and natural medicine. Mental health therapists, including drop-in therapists, available to help people process whatever tensions or trauma surfaces. For example, someone who had a difficult visitation or experienced conflicts with other residents could drop-in to talk through the experience with a therapist. Opportunities for people to practice self-coping skills, such as meditation, and to express emotions, including grief, abandonment, and loss. Animal therapy could range from simply having animals for people to interact with to a more structured program of people working with animals developing skills and confidence. An art therapy program could similarly range from an open studio, a graffiti wall, and/or art classes to a more structured therapeutic program. Developing connections with your cultural heritage, including ideas mentioned in other Sections of the Findings, such as preparing culturally relevant food, engaging in arts, music, dance or storytelling, and participating in culturally important events and holidays, most importantly with community members who share your heritage.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Rooms with windows for drop-in therapy sessions that don't feel like offices; a padded safe room and punching bags for safe release of frustration; a sensory room for people who get overstimulated; kennels and play areas for therapy dogs; stalls and a pasture for therapy horses or goats; an art studio; a large room indoors and an arbor and gathering space outdoors for community events, celebrations, drum circles, etc.; and a medicinal garden.

E) VISITATION AND POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT

Create more opportunities for meaningful visitation and connections among families, including youth with parents and foster parents or adoptees with first families and adoptive families, including in both cases grandparents and extended families. Offer opportunities for play, relaxation, art, and health and wellness visits during visitation. Create the opportunity for supervised and unsupervised overnight visits. In the context of foster care, promote increased communication and understanding, including flow of information from social workers and foster parents to help parents and kids understand why they are in foster care, what to expect and how to voice concerns. In the context of post-adoption, promote the flow of information to adoptees and their families to provide understanding and connection. Provide support for co-parenting and encourage mentoring to build parenting skills. Offer good-bye visits for closure when adoption takes place. Offer on-going support and mentoring for adoptees, including mental health support and increasing connections to their cultural heritage and ethnicity as described in other sections.

F) A HUB FOR WRAP-AROUND SERVICES WITH PEOPLE-CENTERED PLANNING AND PEER-TO-PEER ADVOCATES

Youth and families in need of support often do not have time or transportation to follow up with all the appointments and services available to them in different parts of the county or region. Some services, like a Premie Intensive Care Unit (PICU) for infants experiencing withdrawal from narcotics, are not even offered in Pierce County preventing family stay to encourage bonding. Having access to a range of support services and a continuum of care in one place increases the potential that youth and families are connected with the resources they need. (See a model for this with the Puyallup Tribal Health Authority's Kwawachee Counseling Center and the Puyallup tribal elders housing.) Services desired included medical and dental care, mental health care, someone to navigate Medicaid paperwork, in-patient substance abuse treatment where the whole family can go together, PICU care, case workers, domestic violence resources, wellness resources, voluntary prevention services from DSHS offered by a third party like Amara, parenting classes, anger management, transformative justice counseling, classes on sexuality and sexual health, etc. People-centered planning emphasizes that the young person or family should be at the center of care. They should direct planning with service providers orienting around their needs. The value of peer-to-peer advocates and support groups should be emphasized recognizing that youth and parents at times feel overwhelmed and not sure who to trust. Having a peer advocate who has been through a similar situation can help build confidence, capacity and self reliance.

E) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Trainings, commitments, and mechanisms for feedback and accountability with organizations and individuals involved with the property.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Indoor and outdoor spaces to hold trainings.

F) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

A peer-to-peer crisis hotline would receive calls from parents in distress and provide support and problem-solving to avoid things escalating and having Child Protective Services get involved. Alternative healing emphasizes spirituality and natural medicine. Mental health therapists, including drop-in therapists, available to help people process whatever tensions or trauma surfaces. For example, someone who had a difficult visitation or experienced conflicts with other residents could drop-in to talk through the experience with a therapist. Opportunities for people to practice self-coping skills, such as meditation, and to express emotions, including grief, abandonment, and loss. Animal therapy could range from simply having animals for people to interact with to a more structured program of people working with animals developing skills and confidence. An art therapy program could similarly range from an open studio, a graffiti wall, and/or art classes to a more structured therapeutic program. Developing connections with your cultural heritage, including ideas mentioned in other Sections of the Findings, such as preparing culturally relevant food, engaging in arts, music, dance or storytelling, and participating in culturally important events and holidays, most importantly with community members who share your heritage.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Rooms with windows for drop-in therapy sessions that don't feel like offices; a padded safe room and punching bags for safe release of frustration; a sensory room for people who get overstimulated; kennels and play areas for therapy dogs; stalls and a pasture for therapy horses or goats; an art studio; a large room indoors and an arbor and gathering space outdoors for community events, celebrations, drum circles, etc.; and a medicinal garden.

G) ART, MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE

Healing, learning, and wellness happen through play and art. They also bring people together and build community. An art room, stage, and instruments create opportunities for people to use the medium that best fits them to express their trauma, grief, joy, or whatever they are feeling. Youth are particularly motivated to get creative with performance, music and art. Youth and families could also sell their artwork in a small gift stop on the property to generate income, for example beadwork or paintings. Making art is therapeutic without having to be called therapy.

H) HAIR CARE

Hair care, which blends personal style and cultural heritage, is especially important for African American youth in foster care who are placed with care givers from other races who do not know how to style their hair. African American girls and young women especially experience social stigma and judgment from their physical appearance when their hair is not styled, and they may be too young or do not have access to the products and support to get their hair styled on their own. There are also culturally important Native American practices for how to care for hair that are typically not understood or practiced when Native American youth are placed with care givers from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Overall, youth in foster care and people who experienced foster care as youth expressed the importance of style, haircuts, and even color for all youth of all genders, races and ethnic backgrounds. Style and physical appearance are particularly important to youth who are developing their sense of identity and looking for ways to express themselves.

I) FAMILY EVENTS, SPECIAL OCCASIONS, BIRTHDAYS AND HOLIDAYS

Celebrations provide an opportunity for youth and families to have fun and take their minds off everyday stress and challenges, for example free family fun nights. They also are an opportunity to build positive memories together. Low-income families may not have many options for free or low-cost celebrations or family activities. Also, youth impacted by foster care and adoption often feel disconnected from their families and cultural practices, which can be especially isolating during holidays and birthdays when everyone else is with their family. It is important that everyone feel welcome at community celebrations so that youth in foster care feel just like any other young person.

G) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

An art program could include an open studio, graffiti wall, and/or art classes managed by a community artist or mentor, similar to the art program at Nativity House. It could have beading or wood carving programs led by Native American artists. A music program could include an open studio and/or classes managed by local musicians representing different music traditions. It could include Native American drumming and storytelling. A performance program could be run by community members or youth, which could include talent shows, storytelling, dance, theater, music performances, spoken word, etc.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

An art room with multi-media supplies. A music room with instruments anyone can play. A stage and performance space, including big mirrors and seating for an audience, indoors and potentially outdoors, too.

H) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Beauticians and barbers provide free hairstyles and cuts, especially African American hair, also classes for foster parents on African American and Native American hair care.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A beauty shop and barber shop set-up for African American hair care.

I) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Family fun nights, which could include movies, games, building something together or spa treatments; teen nights. Community groups representing different ethnic communities could host cultural events and special occasions allowing opportunities for youth from that culture to reconnect.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A community room would provide indoor space to hold social events and a pavilion would allow for events outdoors. A game room would provide activities for families, and “teen cave” would allow a space just for teens. An arbor could be used for community ceremonies, like baptisms or naming ceremonies.

J) A PARK, A PLAYGROUND, SPORTS, A ROPES COURSE AND A TRAIL AROUND THE POND

Many people appreciated the natural, rural setting of the property and the value of being in nature for healing and managing stress. Kids of all ages appreciate a playground. Sports are very popular as well, especially among teens, boys and men. A ropes course could be used for team building and stress relief among youth and families. Similarly, classes that promote fitness and wellness were recommended, such as yoga, self-defense and martial arts. A fire pit and summer camp activities bring youth together in ways that encourage self-confidence, positive role models, and building strong relationships with other youth who have similar experiences.

J) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Free play, ropes course, sports, indoor gym with fitness classes like yoga and self-defense or martial arts, summer camp (See model Camp Tend Trees for LGBTQ+ youth), birdwatching.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

An ADA-accessible playground made for all ages with a separate area for birth to three years-old; a spray park; soccer field, football field; a basketball court; an indoor gym; space for martial arts and yoga classes; a ropes course; trails for bikes and horses; benches or a viewing area overlooking the wetlands; a fire pit; and a trail around the pond for walking.

K) HOUSING, INDEPENDENT LIFE SKILLS AND AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

Housing was often prioritized as an important use for the property, especially housing for youth transitioning out of foster care and housing for families at risk of being separated. Housing for teen moms, transitional housing for people recently released from incarceration, and family housing for parents undergoing substance abuse were also suggested. A village of tiny houses was an idea that many people liked because the tiny houses would provide some amount of independence, while still benefiting from belonging to a larger community, including mentoring and community support. An intentional community would go a step further and apply a cooperative model where the people living there would establish rules, roles, and responsibilities that they would follow to keep things running smoothly. (See models for this with Bridges Village, a partnership between Tahoma Indian Center and Catholic Community Services, also Frank's Landing and Brighton Creek at Nisqually.) Mentoring and classes focused on independent life skills would help people build capacity and self-sufficiency. In this context, an intentional community could also engage in cooperative economic activities, such as running a farm or other small business to generate income for operations.

K) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

A housing program with mentoring and classes to build independent living skills, such as laundry, grocery shopping, budgeting, financial planning, filling out rental house applications; an intentional community engaged, potentially in some type of income generating activity.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A village of tiny homes or other housing units, comfortable beds, showers and lockers, laundry facilities, places to hang out and meet friends indoors and outdoors, a communal kitchen, and a dining room.

L) FOOD, MEALS, AND A COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Food is central to health, wellness, cultural connection and celebration. Some families are at risk of separation because Child Protective Services has found there is a lack of food. Providing food, meals and an opportunity to eat in community with others can bridge the gap and support families staying together. When people regularly come together to eat together, it provides an opportunity to talk over challenges and successes and support each other. Cooking and access to a community kitchen can also help to build community. Some youth in foster care miss eating foods they grew up with or culturally important foods related to their heritage. Having a community kitchen would provide opportunities to cook their favorite foods from home or learn how from other community members from similar cultural backgrounds.

L) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

An open pantry with free food, free community meals and communal dining, where cooking duties are rotated among community cooks. A community kitchen, stocked with foods and spices representing a diversity of cultures and ethnicities. Cooking classes and cooking competitions. Celebration of culturally important foods, including first foods from Native American cultures and other cultures and ethnicities represented in Pierce County.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A large, accessible pantry; a large dining space with family-style dining tables; potentially dining tables outside; and a kitchen set up for teaching classes.

M) A FARM, COMMUNITY GARDENING AND A MEDICINAL GARDEN

Growing vegetables, fruits and medicinal herbs on the property and making it available to youth and families is empowering. Some people know how, but may not have access to a farm or garden. They enjoy being able to grow specific varieties of produce and herbs to prepare culturally important foods and medicines. Other people may want to learn how to grow food and may especially value the opportunity to learn from other community members.

Some food can be eaten by the growers, some can be prepared for community meals, and some can be sold to bring income to the growers and potentially also operations of the property. Medicinal herbs can be grown to make teas and salves for healing and also for sale. Animals such as chickens or goats could also be raised for eggs and/or meat.

M) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

A working farm would produce vegetables, fruits and potentially eggs and meat, while building skills, providing business experience, and generating income for growers, similar to The Farm run by the Franklin Pierce School District Community and potentially in conjunction with their operation. Growers could either work for hourly wages or participate in all aspects of the business, such as business planning, sales and marketing, etc. applying a cooperative business model. Community garden plots could be granted to individuals with some type of system for shared maintenance and mentoring. A medicinal garden could be managed by individuals or collectively.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A working farm building from existing hoop houses and fields, an orchard and food forest potentially building from the existing orchard, community garden plots and a medicinal garden.

N) ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Offering jobs, childcare, jobs training, education, independent life skills, such as financial planning, and access to banking supports greater economic opportunities and a path toward self-reliance for youth and families.

Childcare should be affordable. Suggestions include drop-in childcare, crisis or respite childcare, 24-hour childcare for parents who work the night shift, and childcare for parents who have to serve a short-amount of jail time.

Development and operations of the property should include a diversity of different opportunities for directly generating income for youth and families, for example managing the grounds and property, working in an on-site coffee shop or beauty shop, selling artwork, produce or medicinal teas, leading trainings, and participating in an internship program or student work experience that could lead to full-time jobs.

Jobs training and education should be supported with a resource center and mentor, who can talk with people about college, scholarships, loans and opportunities to go on a college tour, more than just a rack of brochures.

Independent life skills, such as financial planning and helping people understand benefits they may qualify for such as food assistance, is key toward building economic empowerment. Access to banking, especially free checking, small personal loans, and business loans, is also key.

For youth, the space should include a place to do homework and a library with books representing diverse cultures, races, family types, genders, abilities and ages. This promotes literacy and positive associations with learning when youth see themselves in the things they are learning. Driver's education is also a gap for many youth and young adults who have experienced foster care, which can limit their access to job opportunities.

N) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Jobs on site with Amara or co-located partners, childcare, financial planning, banking, education and job resource center, mentoring, a library, and driver's education.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Childcare facility including a nursery for infant care, a jobs resource center, desks and computers, banking, a library, a coffee shop, and a gift shop.

0) TRANSPORTATION

Access is a challenge that will have to be addressed for people to benefit from all that's offered at the property. Sidewalks are needed for anyone accessing the property by bus, which is a ¼ mile walk, and street lights are needed if there will be activities at night, which has been suggested with many of the ideas for the property. Additionally, there were lots of creative suggestions about improving access, for example bike lanes with loaner bikes at the bus stop; a vanpool; a partner agreement with Lyft, Uber, or Enterpise; a ride-share system; and a scheduled shuttle bus or a shuttle bus that picks up from schools, transit centers, and downtown Tacoma at regular times.

There was also excitement around having a trauma-informed shuttle or bus driver who could make the trip smoother for a youth or parent who may have had a very stressful visitation or a triggering incident. A trauma-informed driver could empathize and deescalate the situation. Without this, a driver or other passengers may escalate and eventually get law enforcement involved. There was also interest in having a kid-friendly shuttle bus.

0) SUGGESTIONS

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Trauma-informed drivers, shuttle bus, rideshare, vanpool, partner agreement with Lyft, Uber, and/or Enterprise similar to Pierce Transit's Last Mile Program.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Sidewalks, street lights, bike lane and bike racks, a kid-friendly shuttle bus, closer bus stops.

Findings: Preferences from the Survey

In the survey, we included several lists of ideas for the property already gathered from Amara's initial outreach before this project started. Ideas were grouped into several categories:

Care should be taken to use these rankings to inform future work, not to directly guide priorities without following the equity-based process recommendations outlined by the Community Leadership Team.

What to Build on the Property

Emergency Services

Health Services

Support Services and Activities, and

Wellness Activities

People were asked to rank their top choices in each category (from top three to top five depending on the number of items to rank). **Notably, the items did not include some top priorities from the community discussions, for example alternative healing and housing for youth aging out of foster care.**

Top Ranked Ideas from the Survey

1 **Health Services:** Mental and behavioral health[2]

2 **What to Build:** Communal Dining Center

3 **What to Build:** Family Support Center

4 **What to Build:** Short-term housing for families at risk

5 **What to Build:** Communal Activity Center

6 **Health Services:** Domestic violence and trauma recovery

[2] This was by far the top choice from all categories in the survey, including among people of color and people who had experienced foster care as a young person.

tie for 7th

7-12 **Emergency Services:** Access to a team of support, such as social workers and case managers

Wellness: Creating art, stories, music, performances

Support Services: Parenting classes

Emergency Services: Food

What to Build: Farm

13 **Support:** Youth mentorship programs

14 **What to Build:** Health Clinic

15 **What to Build:** Housing for parents in recovery

16 **Support Services:** Respite childcare for relatives and foster parents

17 **Support Services:** Tutoring and homework help

18 **Wellness:** Community Gardening

19 **What to Build:** Outdoor play space

tie for 20th

20-29 **Emergency Services:** Crisis nursery

Wellness: Physical activities and sports

Wellness: Play groups

Support Services: Training for foster parents

Support Services: Visitation

What to Build: Indoor play space

What to Build: Nature area

tie for 30th

30-32 **Health:** Medical Health Services

Emergency: Clothing

Emergency: Free Store

tie for 33rd

33-34 **Health:** Substance treatment

Support Services: Job resources

35 **Support:** Information hub with resources and appointment reminders for parents

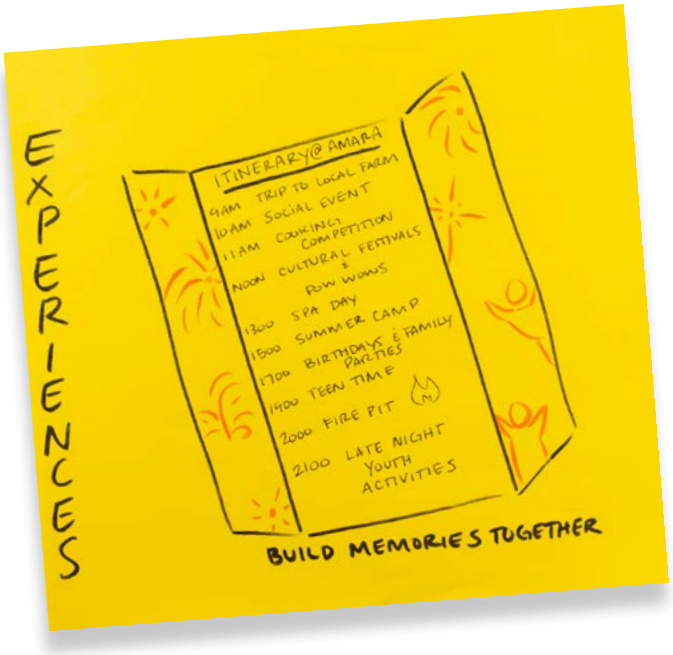
36 **Health:** Prenatal health care

37 **What to Build:** Classroom space

38 **What to Build:** Campground

Findings, cont.

For each category, people were invited to share any additional ideas, which were summarized in the previous Findings Sections A-O. We found the ideas from the survey comments largely overlapped with the ideas shared in the house meetings, interviews, listening sessions and Community Leadership Team discussions.



DIFFERENT PREFERENCES BY DEMOGRAPHICS

Overall, we found that people had similar ideas and suggestions for the property, whether they were people of color or white people and whether they were personally impacted or professionals working in foster care and adoption. However, there were a few exceptions, mentioned briefly here.

The strongest difference in preferences was with communal dining. It ranked second among people of color and second among people who experience foster care as a young person, and yet overall including 339 responses (with 79% white people), communal dining ranked 33 out of 38 ideas. In the list above, we adjusted the rankings to reflect preferences by people of color and people who experienced foster care as a young person to ensure we grounded our process in racial equity.

Other ideas that were slightly more preferred by people of color (63 of 339 responses), which moved up slightly in the top ranked ideas from the survey above include:

- Short-term housing for families at risk
- Support groups
- Creating art, stories, music and performances
- Parenting classes
- Food
- Farm
- Youth mentorship programs
- Health clinic
- Housing for parents in recovery, and
- Social events.

Ideas that were more preferred by people who had experienced foster care as a young person (12 of 339 responses), which moved up slightly in the top ranked ideas from the survey above include:

- Tutoring and homework help
- Training for foster parents
- Free store
- Medical health services, and
- Clothing.

People who speak a language other than English (47 of 339 responses) and white people (232 of 339 responses) preferred play groups more than the overall survey results, but this was not adjusted.

Dancers from the Indigenous Youth Empowerment Team at the November 9th community celebration. (Photo: Ike and Tash Photography)

Recommendation for Amara

The Community Leadership Teams' recommendation includes:

A PRIORITIZATION FRAMEWORK
which embodies racial equity as a process and practical considerations.

A HOLISTIC VISION
for the property, which embodies the vision for achieving racial equity.

TOP PRIORITIES
to advance that holistic vision.

Prioritization Framework

This framework articulates the fundamental values and key questions that should drive planning and development for Amara's Pierce County property to reach the ultimate goal of resilience and self-reliance for youth, adults and families, **centering people of color who are most impacted by foster care and adoption.**

Importantly, this framework emphasizes a strength-based approach, which focuses on the inherent strengths of youth, adults, families and communities to take charge of their own healing, growth and empowerment. Bringing this vision to life is not possible without the leadership of diverse people who have an equity focus and lived experience, emphasizing people who have experienced foster care or adoption as youth and also parents whose children have experienced foster care or adoption.

Doing this work requires grace to learn and grow and courage to take risks and be vulnerable.

A Foundation of **Shared Values**

STRENGTH OF YOUTH AND FAMILIES

We believe in the inherent strength and value of youth and families to take charge of their own healing, growth and empowerment. Everyone needs a "hand up" sometimes, especially people who have experienced racism and trauma, but at every step, we should make sure that what we are doing celebrates and lifts up the dignity, beauty, and strength of youth and families.

RACIAL EQUITY

Racial equity is a process and an outcome. As a process, it means that people most impacted by the structural inequities of racism are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the policies and practices that impact their lives. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive. To achieve this, we must acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly people who are most impacted by racial inequities, emphasizing black, indigenous, and people of color, the infrastructure needed to thrive.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Cultural competency refers to the ability to understand, appreciate, and engage effectively with people across cultures. It includes self-awareness of your own cultural identity and worldview and a positive, learning stance toward cultural differences. Care is taken to consider language, norms, cultural metaphors, and culturally specific meanings, for example consider how different cultures view health, safety, and loving parenting. Instead of making assumptions about other cultures, it is important to build authentic relationships and learn about diverse cultures in community with people from that culture.

JOY AND CREATIVITY

We come from a place of love. We find joy in youth, families, and community. We put intention behind slowing down to celebrate and be joyful. Joy gives us strength to get through challenges, to promote learning and growth, and to heal from trauma. Young people in particular need to experience joy.

Creativity is an attitude. When you paint a picture, there's no one right way to do it. If you make a mistake or don't like it, you can always paint over what you did. There is a sense of purpose and self-discovery in being creative that brings joy and opens the door to new possibilities.

BELONGING

We believe in a world where everyone belongs. We nurture a culture of belonging. We get to know each person, their story and their trauma. We ask people not to be apologetic about their experience or story. Live your truth. We are all triggered by different things. Sometimes what triggers one person brings another person joy. It is our job to take a learner's stance, and lead with belonging.

SHARED LEADERSHIP, POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

We believe that shared leadership, power, and decision-making with the people most impacted will lead to better decisions and better outcomes. We emphasize black, indigenous, and people of color as those most impacted by foster care and adoption. The people most impacted have experience, insights, and social capital in the community to transform how we approach problems in the system and make a real difference in the lives of youth and families. This step is key to transforming the system and building resilience and self-reliance, rather than just offering services as "handouts" that do nothing to change the power imbalances in the system.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We believe that accountability begins with transparency and honesty. We believe in being candid and keeping dialogue going. We show up with positive energy and ready to work, and we expect the same from Amara and partner organizations. We expect learning to translate into action, and we're willing to do our part and bring others in to make it happen. In the words of Colleen Laupola, a Community Leadership Team member, *"Don't call on God to guide your path if you're not willing to move your feet."*

1 AN EQUITY LENS: A FIRST STEP FOR PRIORITIZING ACTIONS

In proceeding with master planning, fundraising, communications, property development, and property operations, Amara should use this equity lens as a first tool for prioritization to ensure their actions are grounded in racial equity and moving toward the holistic vision for the property. Guiding statements are included with questions under each to promote reflection and creativity.

Amara's activities should provide opportunities to empower youth, adults, and families most impacted by foster care, emphasizing black, indigenous, and people of color.

- How are youth, adults, and families included in making decisions?
- Are there economic opportunities to hire or train youth, adults, and families to take on responsibilities related to the property?
- Are there ways to shift resources internally to provide a greater percentage of budgets to youth, adults, and families, including peer advocates and community mentors representing the diverse cultures in Pierce County?
- Are there ways to engage youth, adults, and families in the creation of communications and fundraising materials in ways that increase their visibility and access to social networks, while also engaging them in the substance of planning and development so that they aren't tokenized?
- Is preference given to contractors of color, including youth, adults, and families impacted by foster care and adoption who have started their own businesses?

Amara's activities should be actively and intentionally oriented toward healing cycles of intergenerational trauma.

- Are images and language used by Amara in communications, fundraising, and programming scrubbed clean of white savior references? Does Amara use language that is explicitly anti-racist?
- Is Amara prioritizing outreach and partnership building with community leaders and organizations representing black, indigenous, and people of color most impacted by foster care and adoption?
- Is Amara attending diverse cultural events, meeting with grassroots leaders of color where they are, and finding ways to support led by people of color that serve youth and families impacted by foster care and adoption?
- Are staff, volunteers and foster parents trained in anti-racism, cultural competency, and implicit bias? Is there a filter for not accepting staff, volunteers, or foster parents who express implicit bias and lack of cultural sensitivity and are unwilling to learn and change?
- Are there ways Amara can ease the bureaucratic burden of becoming a foster parent for people of color and extended family?
- Are there ways Amara can recruit and ideally compensate community mentors and peer advocates to support parents at risk for having their children removed by Child Protective Services?

The values and benefits associated with the property should address gaps in services and opportunities in the County. Specifically, benefits should be distributed to address the gaps in investment, services and opportunities for youth and families of color.

- Are youth and families of color asked what services, programs and opportunities they would like, rather than white administrators making decisions for them based on simplistic assumptions?
- Are youth and families of color engaged in making decisions about what services and opportunities should be funded?
- Are there ways to open up dialog and feedback with youth and families of color to adjust investment, services, and opportunities based on feedback?
- Are there ways to track investment specifically directed toward youth and families of color and the benefits they receive?

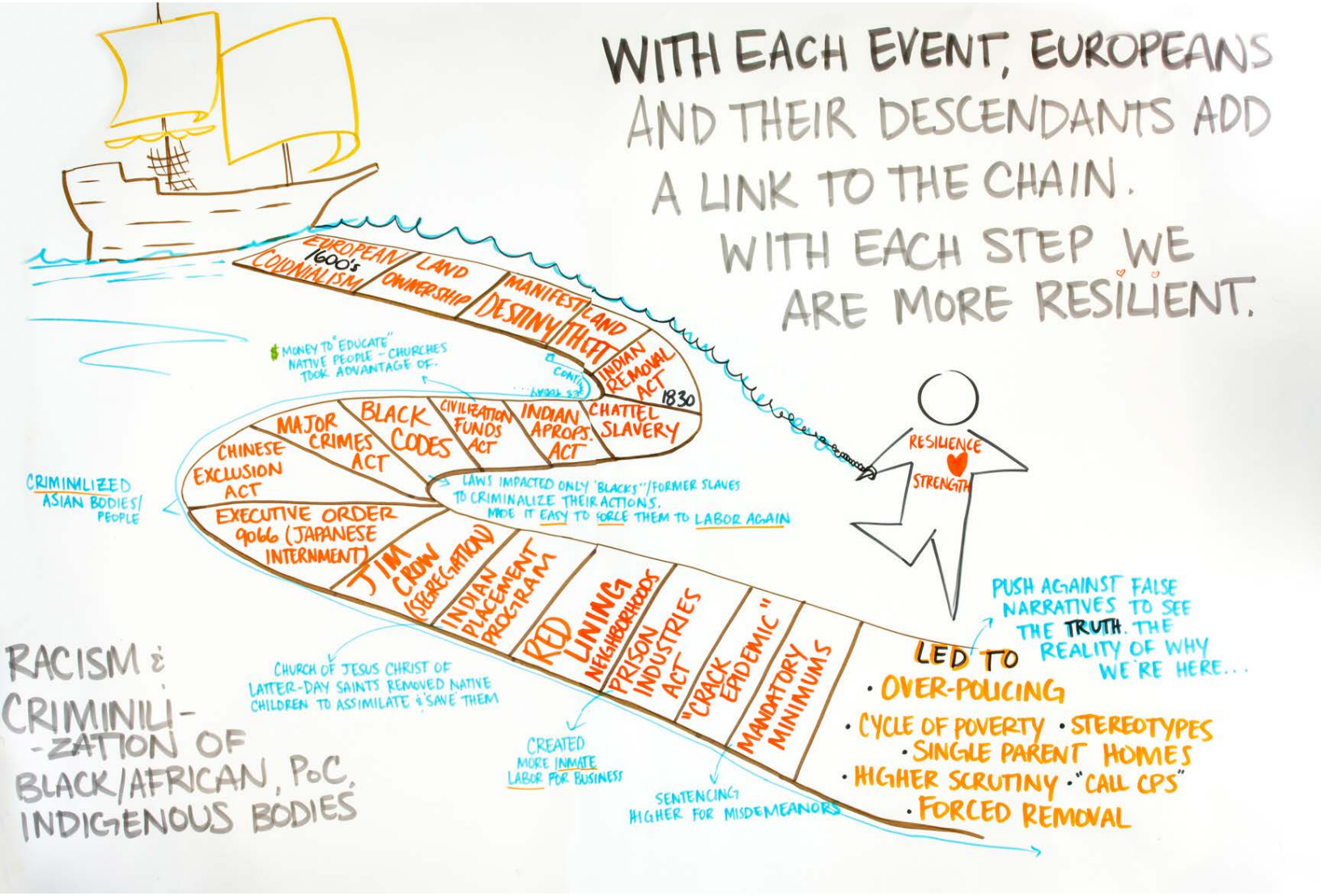
2 A LENS FOR PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS: A SECOND STEP FOR PRIORITIZING ACTIONS

This second lens is a series of questions designed to guide planning and assess practical considerations and feasibility for property development, including the built environment and the services and programs offered there.

- Are there youth, peer advocates, community-based organizations and businesses that can share leadership and practice cultural competency?
- What other projects and initiatives are going on now that could complement and leverage impact?
- What are the costs and how would it be funded and sustained, for example income generation, paid services, voluntary, etc.?
- What infrastructure is needed and how well could the property meet those needs?
    - *What zoning changes might be needed?*
    - *What are transportation options?*
- How much time is needed for planning, fundraising and implementation? What are short-term versus long-term actions?

A Holistic Vision for the Property

The Community Leadership Team synthesized the ideas for the property that came out of the community engagement process (See Findings Sections A-O) and worked with graphic artist and racial equity consultant Brandi Yañez-Riddle to design a series of posters that graphically depict their holistic vision for the property. The posters were laminated and given to Amara. Photos of them are included here along with a brief description reflecting the Community Leadership Team's discussion.



A LONG HISTORY OF RACISM AND RESILIENCE IN THE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION SYSTEMS

Hundreds of years of policies intentionally targeted to control people of color in the US have led to racism and the criminalization of black/African, and indigenous bodies. People of color have been "chained" through over-policing, cycles of poverty, stereotypes, single parent homes, higher scrutiny, knee-jerk reactions to "call Child Protective Services," and forced removal of kids from their families. Over time, while the specific policies may change, shift, or use different language, the disproportionate impacts to black, indigenous and people of color have largely remained the same without addressing how this long history of policies and practices has consistently benefitted white people to the detriment of people of color.

The policies highlighted here represent a short list from a much longer history:

- European colonialism from the 1600s
- Land ownership
- Manifest Destiny
- Land theft
- Indian Removal Act 1830
- Chattel slavery
- Indian Appropriations Act
- Civilization Funds Act – money to educate native people, which churches took advantage of
- Black Codes – laws that impacted only blacks and former slaves criminalized their actions and made it easy to force them to labor again
- Major Crimes Act
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Executive Order 9066 – Japanese internment during World War II
- Jim Crow
- Indian Placement Program – Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints removed native children from their families to assimilate and "save" them.
- Redlining neighborhoods
- Prison Industries Act – created more inmate labor for business
- "Crack Epidemic"
- Mandatory Minimums

In the context of the foster care and adoption systems, we put special emphasis on the racist policies that have separated black and Native American children from their families. We share some additional detail about this history for these two groups.

NATIVE AMERICANS

In the late 1800s, the US created a boarding school system where native American children were forcibly removed from their families in large numbers and forbidden to speak their language, practice their religion or keep their hair long. One of the largest boarding schools was founded in 1879 and run by the philosophy, "Kill the Indian, save the man." Some were run by religious ministries, paid for by the US government, while others were run directly by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The last of the residential board schools wasn't closed until 1973.

Studies revealed that large numbers of Native children were being separated from their parents, extended families, and communities by state child welfare and private adoption agencies. In fact, research found that 25%–35% of all Native children were being removed; of these, 85% were placed outside of their families and communities—even when fit and willing relatives were available.

To address this problem, The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was enacted in 1978, which gives preference in order of priority to family members, extended family, members of the same tribe and members of any tribe before native children are fostered or adopted to non-native families. Native communities have felt that the situation has been much better with this legislation, especially in states like Washington where judges are recognized for their ability to understand and enforce the law effectively. However, this law is currently under siege with three states (Texas, Indiana, and Louisiana) and some private parties challenging the constitutionality of the Act The Fifth Circuit Court will hear oral arguments at the end of January 2020.

Statistics and research provided by the National Indian Welfare Association (www.nicwa.org/about-icwa). To learn more, see *They Call it Prairie Light; the Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Loma Waima 1995) and *Intangled Roots: The Role of Race in Policies that Separate Families* (Minoff 2018)

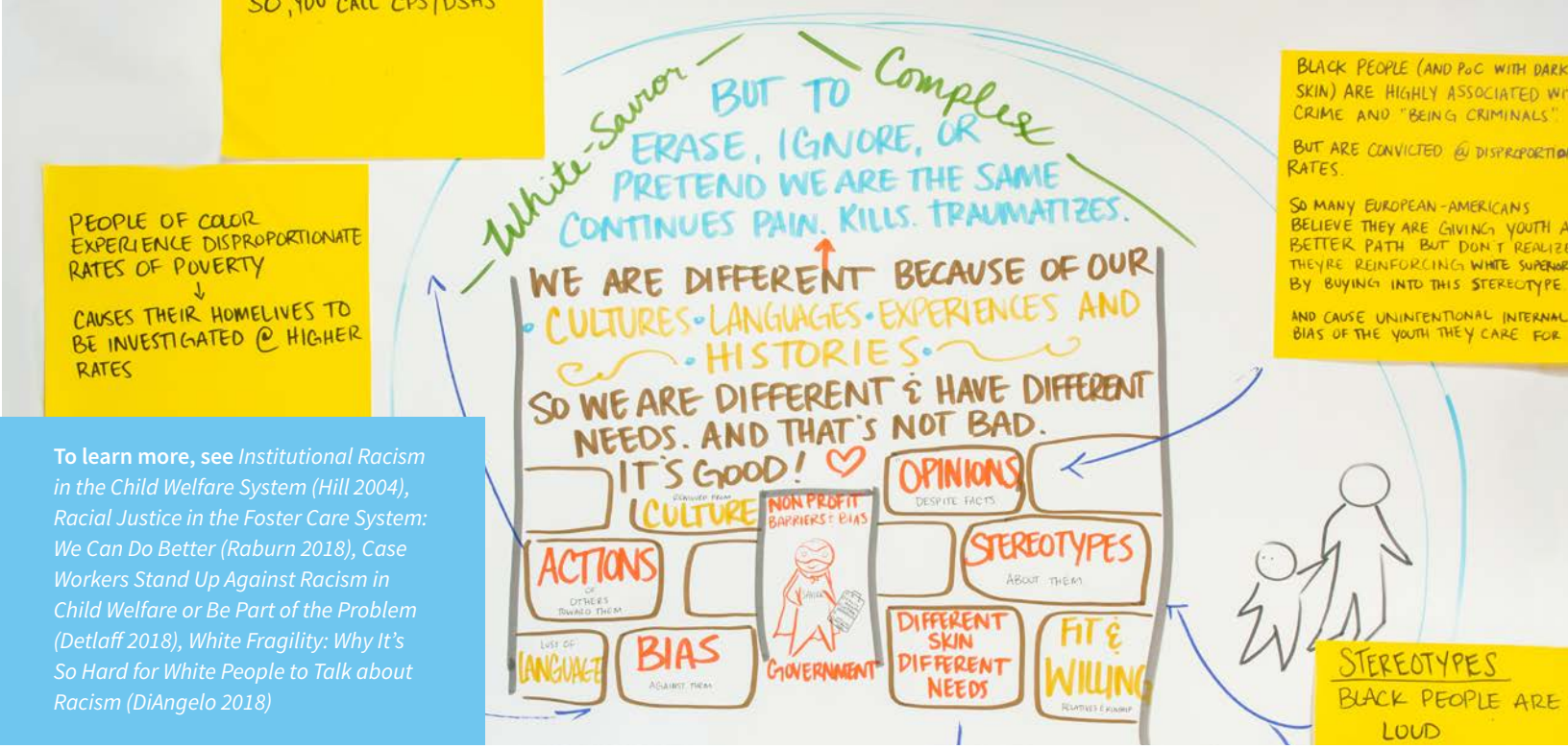
AFRICAN AMERICANS

When slavery was abolished, the Thirteenth Amendment prohibited slavery, except in the case of punishment for a crime. Policy experts and researchers have traced a detailed history showing how intentional policies and practices have criminalized black people, especially black men. This has effectively continued slavery to the extent that, "The US Justice Department reports that 1 in 3 young black men will go to prison during their lifetime. Black men make up about 6.5% of the US population and they make up 40.2% of the prison population" (13th 2016).

With criminalization, comes removal of children and separation of families. At the scale of mass incarceration in the US, this also means lack of black men and role models in communities. It also leads to societal judgment and stereotypes that black people are unfit for parenting, all of which has a multi-generational impact on families, parents and youth. In addition, several states permanently remove voting rights for felons creating lasting impacts on the functioning of our democracy.

Considering this long history including policies that continue through today, people of color have felt these chains back to colonization, yet they have not let this history define them. There is also a long history of resilience and strength. People have pushed against false narratives to reveal the truth, the current reality and what is possible for the future.

To learn more, see *13th* (2016), *Pushout* (Morris 2018) and *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2012).



To learn more, see *Institutional Racism in the Child Welfare System (Hill 2004), Racial Justice in the Foster Care System: We Can Do Better (Raburn 2018), Case Workers Stand Up Against Racism in Child Welfare or Be Part of the Problem (Detlaff 2018), White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism (DiAngelo 2018)*

Created by local graphic artist and facilitator Brandi Yañez-Riddle.

POPPING THE BUBBLE OF THE WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX

These policies create a racist power structure that disproportionately benefits white people to the detriment of people of color. However, it is not just the official policies and laws that hold up these unjust power structures. It is also the everyday practices and actions that individual people take that internalize, normalize, and reinforce these inequities.

For white people, everyday practices that normalize white superiority are often masked by "good intentions," for example white people "saving" native children from their inferior family and culture to provide a "better" lifestyle and more opportunities. Other examples are called out in the posters, including:

- **Over-diagnosing and over-medicating youth** in foster care, especially youth of color, instead of dealing with the trauma, which would require adults to ask how do we need to change how we are interacting with this youth. There is an economic incentive to diagnose youth with "behavioral issues" since a diagnosis can lead to more resources allocated and more placement options.
- **People of color experience higher rates of poverty,** which causes their home lives to be investigated at higher rates. Living in smaller housing units with closer neighbors creates more opportunities for scrutiny and reporting, as compared with wealthier families who have more resources to hide their problems from the outside world.

The internalized assumption in many cases is that a family of color does not have the economic status or healthy habits to provide the best for a child, and so the white person should make the sacrifice to step in and help. This phenomenon is referred to as the "white savior complex," where white people assume the role of "helpers" or "saviors" relative to people of color and communities of color. White, dominant society lifts them up for their generosity and selflessness. White people tend to internalize their superior economic standing, culture, understanding, problem-solving abilities, etc., referred to as internalized white superiority, and do not tend to confront the fact that this superiority is a product of the racist system.

However, ultimately this role translates to an unhealthy and unjust power relationship between white people and people of color, where white people remain in superior positions with respect to decision-making and economic opportunities, while they condescendingly offer "handouts" to people of color. An alternative approach that people of color and anti-racist white people take is to challenge the underlying assumptions of what led to the inequities, shine light on the racist policies and practices, and take action to restructure the power relations and re-distribute power and opportunities. In the context of the foster care and adoption systems, we refer to this as "popping the bubble" of the white savior context. First steps include lifting up mentors and leaders of color who are already supporting youth and families in their communities but may not be recognized or compensated for the work they are doing by historically white-led organizations and white leadership.

Created by local graphic artist and facilitator Brandi Yañez-Riddle.

Priority Actions
to Advance the Vision

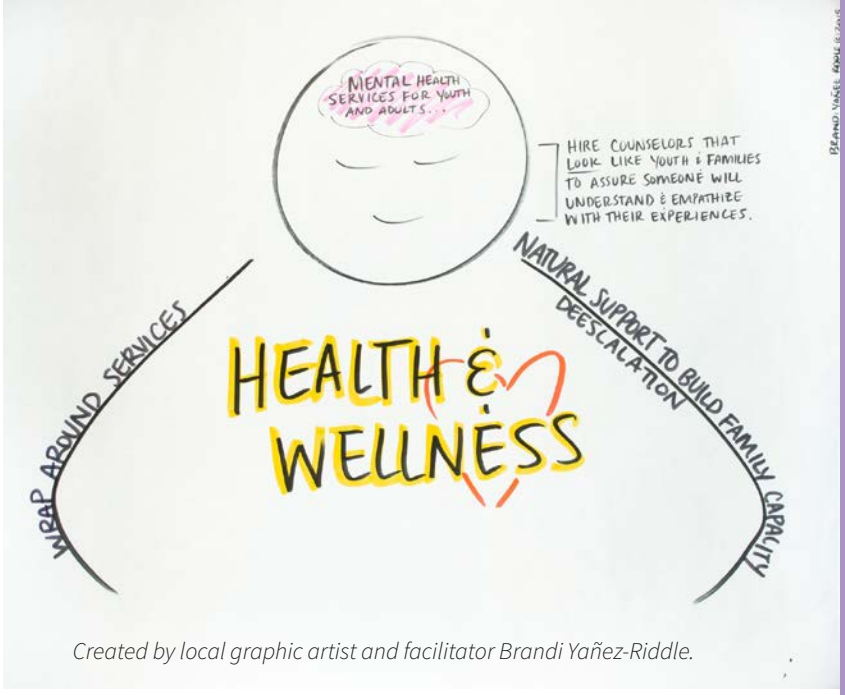
LEADERSHIP FOR TRANSFORMATION

Having diverse, equity-focused leadership makes it possible to implement all other parts of the vision for this property. Leadership for transformation brings black, indigenous and other people of color to the decision-making table, including youth, families, volunteers, and staff. The table is also graphically depicted as a magnifying glass that keeps leaders focused on an equity analysis grounded in anti-racism and anti-oppression. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just buzz words, but genuinely practiced through trainings, ongoing discussion, and action.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Leadership for Transformation should be the first and top priority throughout planning, development, and ongoing management of the property.
- Diversify leadership with an emphasis on people who have come from foster care and adoption. This is needed to break the chains of slavery and indigenous genocide and to work toward resilience and self-reliance.
- Create a long-term advisory committee for the property with people like the Community Leadership Team members.

Additional ideas and suggestions for Leadership for Transformation are described in the Findings – Sections B and C.



Created by local graphic artist and facilitator Brandi Yañez-Riddle.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Mental health care emphasizing alternative healing and community-centered healing, were identified as top needs in the community, especially considering youth and families of color impacted by foster care and adoption. Art, music, performance, and play were also emphasized as key components of wellness and therapy, without having to call them therapy.

Cultural empowerment and increased connection with one's cultural heritage was identified as centrally important to wellness for people of color and healing inter-generational trauma, especially for people impacted by foster care and adoption.

Peer support, such as mentors and advocates from the community who have been in the shoes of youth or families and who look like them, was held up as being a source of support that is more empowering and trustworthy than professionals for youth and families who may feel like the whole system is against them. Ideally, peer mentors and advocates would be compensated for their role.

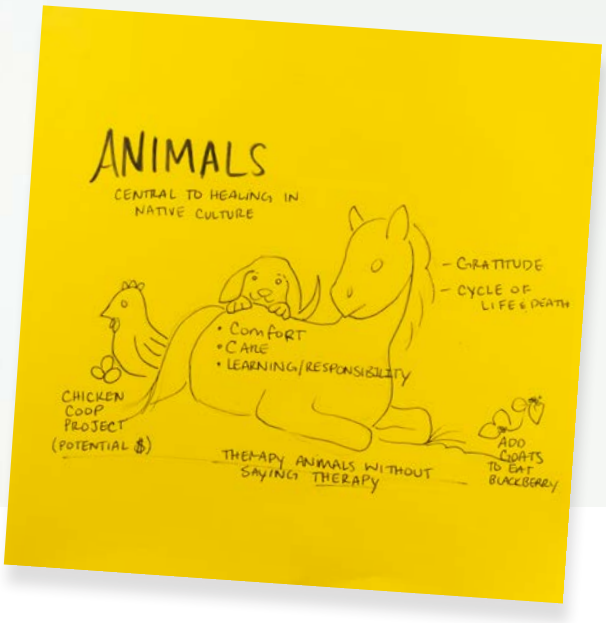
Meaningful visitation that brings together parents or first parents, youth, and foster or adoptive parents to increase communication and connection was also valued.

Overall, it would be ideal to create a hub for community-centered healing, professional health services, crisis support and resources and trainings, for example transformational justice counseling, de-escalation strategies, and sexual health education.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED by the Community Leadership Team:

- Prioritize mental health and healing
- Embrace a diversity of cultures and communities.
- Healing, learning and growth happen through play.
- Create opportunities for alternative healing.
- Create a call center with peer-to-peer counseling from parents with lived experience who can prevent crisis and make an early intervention– instead of calling Child Protective Services.
- Provide transformative justice counseling to empower people to prevent incarceration.

Additional ideas and suggestions for Healing and Wellness are described in the Findings – Sections D, E, and F.



Created by local graphic artist and facilitator Brandi Yañez-Riddle.

PLAY, RELAXATION, ART & STYLE

Engaging in creative activities, like art, beading, music, drumming, dance, and other types of performances, brings people together and allows for deeper personal reflection and community building without having to be explicit about it. Similarly, sports, and outdoor activities provide opportunities to work out emotions and promote renewal and reflection. Youth we talked to especially emphasized their interest in arts, performance, sports and outdoor activities.

Key to advancing equity in this area is to engage local artists, storytellers and performers representing diverse cultures and ethnicities to take leadership in the activities and programs offered. There is overlap here with diversifying leadership for transformation. An emphasis on cultural empowerment in this area can further create an inclusive, welcoming space, where youth and families can increase connection to their cultural heritage. Specifically, hair care, which combines personal style with cultural heritage, was recognized as a glaring gap for most youth in foster care, especially for African American girls and Native American youth.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Healing, learning and growth happen through play. Play, relaxation, art, and style, including African American hair care, need to be a part of this property.

Additional ideas and suggestions for Play, Relaxation, Art & Style are described in the Findings – Sections G, H, I, and J.

Created by local graphic artist and facilitator Brandi Yañez-Riddle.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED by the Community Leadership Team:

- This should be a sanctuary, a spiritual place.
- Cultural empowerment should be at the center of everything. Knowing who you are, your identity, your cultural heritage is central to health and wellness.
- Flags from all countries and languages spoken in Pierce County should be prominent.
- This should be an inclusive space focused on whole parenting – everyone is welcome. You don't have to fit a certain category (homeless, foster care, disabled, etc.) to be here.

Additional ideas and suggestions for Spirit of Place are described in the Findings – Section A.

SPIRIT OF THE PLACE

Although intangible, the spirit of the place is centrally important to the holistic vision for the property and overlaps with Health and Wellness. When people walk onto the property, they should feel that it is a sanctuary, a spiritual place, where everyone is welcome, and everyone can participate in services, programs and events. The spirit of the place emphasizes getting to know each person, their story, and their trauma. People should feel warmly welcomed and see flags from different countries and artwork from youth and families and representing different cultures prominently displayed. It should be a place where the diversity of people and cultures is celebrated and brought together, not separated.

Cultural empowerment should be at the center of everything, building each person's capacity to discover and connect with their cultural heritage as a profound source of connection and identity. A focus on cultural empowerment is needed to counter the long history of cultural oppression and cultural appropriation, where dominant, white culture has treated other cultural traditions as inferior and worthy of erasure, or superficially attractive and worthy of consumption. A racial equity focus requires that people from particular cultural traditions are engaged as leaders and decision-makers in the programs, services, and/or operations of the property, not simply purchasing artwork from different cultures. Through the genuine engagement of people from diverse cultures, their cultural practices and values will be integrated into the spirit of the place, where it will be profoundly felt by youth and families from those cultures.

Created by local graphic artist and facilitator Brandi Yañez-Riddle.

STABILITY AND COMMUNITY

Housing, food, economic opportunities, education, and independent life skills are at the core of promoting stability and community, which is central to the holistic vision for this property.

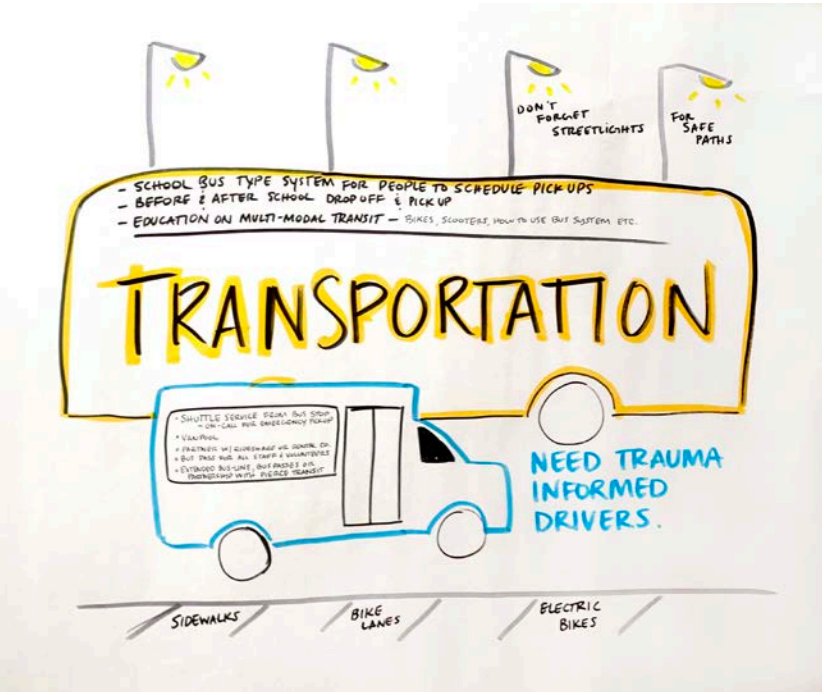
The highest priority identified was developing economic opportunities for youth experiencing foster care although recognizing families need economic opportunities too. Jobs or student work experiences with Amara or co-located organizations should be prioritized for youth or young adults who have aged out of the foster care system with mentoring to explore future leadership positions, which overlaps with the theme of diversifying leadership for transformation.

Priority should also be placed on developing other forms of income for youth and families, such as beadwork, art, produce or medicinal herbs produced on the property – retaining some for personal or community use and selling the remaining to staff and visitors on the property. Independent life skills, such as financial planning and banking, and childcare are also key to developing economic opportunities for youth and families. Communal dining and a communal kitchen bring people together and create community and support over shared food. Food from different cultures can support youth connecting with their cultural heritage, including cooking classes, cooking competitions, and communal meals prepared together. An intentional community of tiny houses or other housing units could integrate these different threads of economic development, stability, community and wellness using a multi-generational model and peer-to-peer advocates and mentors with the end goal of resilience and self-reliance for youth aging out of foster care.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED
by the Community Leadership Team:

- Provide authentic opportunities for economic development and community empowerment. Give a "hand up," emphasizing skill building and advocacy, not a "hand out," which feels denigrating and rests on stereotypes and simplistic assumptions.
- Build wealth among youth who have been in foster care so they can become self-reliant and give back to the property.

Additional ideas and suggestions for Leadership for Transformation are described in the Findings – Sections K, L, M, and N.



TRANSPORTATION

Ensuring access to the property is a near-term priority. Otherwise, people won't be able to take advantage of all the great benefits or participate in creating community and diversifying leadership.

PRIORITY ACTIONS RECOMMENDED by the Community Leadership Team:

- Explore transportation options and figure out the best way to increase access.

Additional ideas and suggestions for Transportation are described in the Findings – Section O.

Conclusion

Everyone we engaged from the community recognized that this holistic vision for Amara's Pierce County Property is ambitious and that it will take a lot of hard work, funding, and social capital to bring it to life. They also appreciated Amara for asking them to think big and for listening. They recognized that this took courage.

Amara has acknowledged that they are a historically white-led organization that has a lot of work to do internally with respect to racial equity and building stronger connections and accountability with communities of color. They have recognized that our consultant team, the Community Leadership Team and these community conversations have pushed their learning forward.

This vision includes tangible elements, like buildings and programs, and intangible elements, like the spirit of the place, cultural empowerment, and leadership grounded in racial equity. This community engagement effort and specifically the Community Leadership Team have already begun giving life to this vision. They have modeled how to practice their shared values, for example at the Community Celebration November 9th, and they have created a path forward to realize the holistic vision with their prioritization framework, including a first lens for equity and a second lens for practical considerations to guide Amara's future planning and development.

Throughout, people have acknowledged that some elements may take substantial time to develop and some may not be feasible considering the second lens of practical considerations. However, people are willing to step up and invest that time because of the spirit established through this process and the potential to meaningfully work toward racial equity. As evidence of this, community members have offered their time, skills, services, and social networks in support of this vision, most importantly community members of color.

Racial equity is both a process and an outcome. This community engagement effort has kept racial equity front-and-center, both in terms of our process – practicing equity within our team, with our community, and with Amara – and in terms of the outcomes we are aiming for. We hope that we have done justice to the depth and breadth of ideas shared and the spirit behind them. We know the community is eager to hear how Amara receives this recommendation and how the work will proceed.

This project has been a powerful experience that has deepened our own learning, practice of community engagement, and community relationships. We welcome any feedback on what is presented here and look forward to lending our support to continued progress toward this vision, whether as consultants or community members. In the words of Raven, a Community Leadership Team member, ***"We left our humanness at the door when we walked into this project, and there are high expectations at this table. It will take all of us to make it happen. We are stronger together."***

When we achieve racial equity:
People of color are owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives. We acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, the infrastructure needed to thrive. Everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.

Adapted with gratitude from
The Center for Social Inclusion

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RESOURCES SUGGESTED FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PROFESSIONALS

Person Centered Planning tool called My Life Plan: https://mylifeplan.guide/

Person Centered Planning videos via Development Disabilities Administration (DDA):

Part One: Introduction https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gCqSOCMgiQ
Part Two: An Overview of Person Centered Values
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXMWAPixni8
Part Three: Tools and Approaches
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMjZyKFiTow&feature=youtu.be
Part Four: A Person-Centered Approach to Assessment and Individual Support Plan (ISP) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKsfkR8qNWM&feature=youtu.be
Part Five: Conversational and Assessment Style Planning:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYSP6ojF8jg&feature=youtu.be

Implicit bias test: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

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Youth at our Nov. 9 community event. (Photo Credit: Ike and Tash Photography)

Healing and wellness booth by Tara Newton, A Community Leadership Team member, at our Nov 9 community event. (Photo credit: Ike and Tash Photography)

List of Appendices

Available by request **connect@reciprocityconsulting.com**

- One Page Project Overview in English and Spanish
- Community Leadership Team Charter
- Small group discussion guide
- Demographic quarter sheets
- Full list of themes from house meetings, listening sessions, interviews and survey comments
- Simplified Survey Results
- Cross-Comparison Analysis of Survey Results Based on Demographic Attributes

Thank you
Gràcies
Köszönöm
Merci
Danke
Děkuji
Gracias
Дзякую
Dankon
спасибо
Thank you
Merci
Grazie
мерси
благодарам
спасибо
Paldies
Danke
Obrigado
teşekkür ederim
Dankie
Cám ơn
Kiitos
Merci
Grazie
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