

Dear Edwards Center Families,

Last week I sent a notice to our staff. *I will copy that notice below, unedited.* It's important you know where Edwards Center stands regarding the messages conveyed in local and national demonstrations. Prior to reaching out to staff, I sent my comments to both our Founder, Jean Edwards, and our Board President, Ken Karalus. I wanted to ensure that I wasn't just speaking for myself; that the values I claimed were embraced by the most senior people in our leadership structure. Both heartily endorsed my comments.

In my message to staff I shared the story of Charles Kinsey, a staff member in a group home in Florida. Since Mr. Kinsey's experience in 2016, law enforcement agencies around the country have received extensive training regarding interaction with people with developmental disabilities. Although it's rare that we need to interact with law enforcement during the course of our duties, when we do, law enforcement personnel typically defer to our staff's expertise.

On another note, I'm still very pleased to report that we have had no diagnosed or presumptive cases of COVID-19 among our residents or staff. We're only able to keep saying that because of the efforts of a committed group of Direct Support Professionals. I spoke with a DSP on Friday who talked about the steps even her two children are taking to ensure Mom doesn't bring anything to work. Extraordinary efforts like this aren't limited to her and her family. I just can't speak highly enough of the very real dedication of every one of our Direct Support Professionals! It's probably predictable that, as the state begins to open back up and our testing capacity improves, we're seeing an increase in the number of reported cases around the state. Let's not let our guard down. This isn't over yet. All the restrictions put in place by the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) remain in place.

We remain ever grateful for your continued support. My notice to staff follows.

Respectfully,

Allen

Dear Team,

I've drafted and re-drafted this message countless times this week. It's time I publish it and accept the outcomes.

This has been such a powerful and enlightening time for all of us; for our entire nation. Sometimes it takes powerful and enlightening times to force us into making difficult, necessary corrections.

We may feel somehow sheltered here at Edwards Center. We are not. We are inextricably part of our broader community. Our own declared Vision references helping the people we serve become "...integrated into the community."

Do you remember the story of Charles Kinsey? In 2016 he was working in a group home in Florida supporting Arnaldo Rios Soto, a young man with Autism. Arnaldo had run from his group home with a toy truck. Mr. Kinsey followed him to provide support, much as any of us might do for the people we serve. Police officers arrived, concerned that Arnaldo's toy truck was a gun. Mr. Kinsey lay down on the ground, put his hands in the air and tried to explain to the officers that neither he nor Arnaldo were armed. One of the officers on scene then shot Charles Kinsey in the leg with his rifle. The whole incident was captured on video, which you can see here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYhPIs0T3Ok>. Mr. Kinsey, in a very literal way, took a bullet for the person he was supporting. I know many of you would willingly do the very same thing. I've always wondered whether the outcome might have been different had Mr. Kinsey not been a black man.

That wasn't the first or the last incident that, for me, drove home the point that racial and social injustice are real. It affects all of us in one way or another. We cannot turn a blind eye.

Let me be clear: We at Edwards Center value diversity! Diversity make us stronger as an agency and as a community. Obviously, we support and defend and champion the rights of people who experience disabilities. We can't stop there. We must put our actions where our claims are, and demonstrate that we value all members of our community regardless of race, religion, color, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or disability. How can we do that?

- For one, we can become a partner. To be a real partner, we must be "willing to bear one another's burdens...mourn with those that mourn...comfort those that stand in need of comfort."*
- Have you experienced fear with protests, sometimes violent, right down the street? Me too. Let's replace that fear with education and understanding. Since long before the inception of our nation, protests have been an effective and sometimes necessary means of real change.*
 - We would also benefit from better understanding the role race has played in the history of our country, and how we got to where we are today.*
- Consider donating to, partnering with and/or learning from organizations like:*
 - Urban League of Portland: <https://ulpdx.org/>*
 - NAACP: <https://pdxnaacp.org/>*
 - Coalition of Communities of Color: <https://www.coalitioncommunitiescolor.org/>*

*We all have a role in this. We are all affected by this. I recognize many of my comments and the intent behind them are likely to make some people uncomfortable. That's fine, maybe even necessary. At the end of the day, I want every Edwards Center stakeholder to know this: At Edwards Center **WE VALUE DIVERSITY**. It is through the diversity of our team – our backgrounds, our families, our experiences, our upbringings, our very identity – that we become qualified to support a diverse group of people who live with intellectual and developmental disabilities.*

As an organization it's time we take very deliberate steps to address our part in this. Please stay tuned as we develop and refine our efforts.

Stay safe!

Very sincerely,

Allen

Allen Cress, Executive Leader
acress@edwardscenter.org
Cell: 971-236-7434

Share this email:



[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt out](#) using TrueRemove™

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

View this email [online](#).

4375 SW Edwards Pl
Aloha, OR | 97078-2116 US

This email was sent to .
To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.