



Interview with Dr. Darjené Graham-Perez

DEI's Impact on Home & Family Services



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Meet Dr. Darjené Graham-Perez, Ed.D.

Career and Transition to DEI

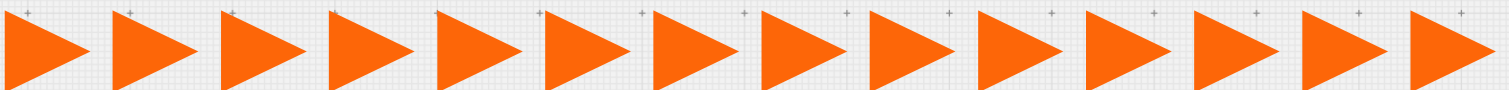
DEI Efforts at Walden Family Services

Measuring DEI Efforts

Challenges of Working for a Non-Profit

Trends in the DEI Space

Flexibility and Inclusivity in the Workplace



Meet Dr. Darjené Graham-Perez, Ed.D.

We're excited to share these interview highlights as part of our Top 100 DEI list. The interview discusses the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in organizations, particularly those that work with vulnerable populations like foster care and adoption agencies.

Dr. Darjené Graham-Perez, Ed.D., who transitioned from early childhood education to DEI and HR, shares her experience in bringing DEI practices to Walden Family Services. Dr. Graham-Perez explains that DEI is not a one-size-fits-all approach and requires a deep dive into policies and procedures.



To track and measure inclusion and equity efforts at Walden Family Services, several data points are used, including state exit interviews, HRIS to track demographics and turnover rates, employee engagement surveys, and DEI surveys.

Additionally, the video interview highlights the challenges and trends that impact the not-for-profit sector, such as keeping up with inflation and competitive wages, the emergence of AI technology, and the decrease in employee tenure.

Finally, the video interview emphasizes the importance of prioritizing flexibility, inclusivity, and employee well-being to succeed in today's rapidly changing landscape.

Keep reading to get the interview highlights or watch the video in its entirety.



Career and Transition to DEI

Dr. Graham-Perez transitioned from early childhood education to DEI and HR in 2020. Her experience in early childhood education made her realize the disparity between children in state-funded or federally funded programs and private pre-schools. She wanted to “do something about it” and bring diversity, equity, and inclusion practices to the next level.

Walden Family Services provided an excellent opportunity for her to transform their spaces and elevate the experience of their employees. Her leadership skills and board work with MADD have all come together at Walden. Dr. Graham-Perez’s transition shows her commitment to elevating the underrepresented and bringing DEI practices to the forefront.



DEI Efforts at Walden Family Services

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in organizations is about reflecting the population being served. This is especially important for organizations that work with vulnerable populations, such as foster care and adoption agencies. By having employees who can relate to the children and young adults they serve, they are more likely to make an impact on their lives.

DEI is not a one-size-fits-all approach and requires a deep dive into policies and procedures. Making small tweaks, such as increasing male employees in family services, can have a significant impact on clients' lives. Inclusive policies and procedures are essential for creating a transformative and supportive environment for all employees and clients. “We created a male affinity group because in social services we have low male attrition rates”, explains Dr. Graham-Perez.



Measuring DEI Efforts

To track and measure inclusion and equity efforts at Walden Family Services, several data points are used, including state exit interviews, HRIS to track demographics and turnover rates, employee engagement surveys, and DEI surveys. Additionally, town halls and supervisor leaderships are conducted to gather information. All this information is used to create a dashboard that highlights the focus and needs of the organization.

The leadership team uses this information to make decisions on how to assist employees and where to increase budget items. The organization also conducts a 12-part leadership series training on different facets of inclusion and equity, such as unconscious bias training and generational communication training. Walden Family Services is transparent in its efforts to create an inclusive workplace where employees feel comfortable bringing issues to the forefront.



Challenges of Working for a Non-Profit

Working for a non-profit organization presents unique challenges that differ from those of traditional corporate environments. Non-profits often operate with limited resources and rely heavily on donations and grants to fund their operations. Managing these resources effectively while fulfilling the organization's mission can be a daunting task.

Additionally, the landscape of the non-profit sector is constantly evolving, with new trends and developments emerging daily. As a result, nonprofit professionals must stay up to date with the economic and workforce trends and adapt to changes quickly to remain competitive and effective in their work.



Trends in the DEI Space

The not-for-profit sector faces several challenges and economic trends that impact their funding streams, workforce, and services. One of the significant challenges is keeping up with inflation and competitive wages, which affects the quality of candidates and services provided.

Additionally, keeping pace with emerging technologies, namely how AI is changing the work landscape. Another trend is the decrease in employee tenure, which affects the quality of the candidate pool. To address these challenges, not-for-profit organizations are exploring different opportunities and avenues to expand, such as affordable housing. Furthermore, the infusion of DEI components and KPIs into the performance management system is critical to ensure accountability and responsibility for all employees.



Flexibility and Inclusivity in the Workplace

In today's rapidly changing landscape, organizations must prioritize flexibility, inclusivity, and employee well-being to succeed. The new generation of employees, the Gen Zers, are demanding more from their employers. To meet their expectations, organizations must have open conversations, be open-minded, and committed to making work more inclusive and equitable.

“We are working hard to create an inclusive workplace so that people truly feel comfortable bringing issues to the forefront”, states Dr. Graham-Perez.

It takes a collective effort to bring about real change, and strong leadership is crucial in pushing for it. By focusing on employee well-being and inclusivity, organizations can create a positive work environment that benefits everyone. In conclusion, flexibility, inclusivity, and employee well-being are essential for organizations to thrive in today's world.