

New York State Senator Shelley B. Mayer (right) attending WJCS' Sukkot luncheon for Holocaust survivors.



**“One of the things you learn with DEI work is that it’s not something you start and then stop. It doesn’t end; it’s a continual effort.”**

—SETH DIAMOND  
CEO, WJCS

says. “We confront every ‘ism’ possible and empower people to do better.” Fisher is also quick to point out a local exemplary organization. “The Westchester Center for Racial Equity of the YWCA of White Plains & Central Westchester is positioned and has the expertise to lead the way and be the resource for businesses and other nonprofits,” she says.

The Center, which is just over a year old, is a place for Westchester organizations “that are either currently doing the work or desire to do the work of equity, inclusion, and belonging, to get the resources they need,” explains Hamilton, the YWCA CEO.

Those resources often entail workshops and development courses tackling such topics as systemic racism, microaggressions, and antiracist best practices.

The YWCA provides these curricula to everyone from governments to school districts, Hamilton explains — anyone who wants to take a more intentional look at themselves. Hamilton adds that many organizations, especially nonprofits, are increasingly applying an equity lens not just in their external work, but to their internal structure too.

“How are salaries equitably distributed across roles? Who’s being advantaged? How do we communicate our mission?” Hamilton says, listing the important questions that local nonprofits are beginning to ask themselves.

Hamilton notes that a lot of DEI work is long-term, something that can take years to bear fruit. But there’s still a way to measure success in the shorter term. “When we think about the workforce that’s here in Westchester County,

are we representative of our community?” she asks, rhetorically. “Not only in our entry-level positions but also our managerial, our director, and our senior leadership positions? And how do we memorialize and institutionalize that as a practice and in our policies?”

One nonprofit that has tapped into the YWCA’s expertise is Westchester Jewish Community Services (WJCS), the White Plains-based organization focusing on mental health, developmental needs, and family and children services.

“People think we serve only the Jewish community, but we [operate] throughout the county,” explains Seth Diamond, CEO of WJCS. “Our primary investments are in Mount Vernon, Yonkers, and Peekskill.”

For 20 years, WJCS has run an “Undoing Racism” program, which focuses on education efforts around the challenges of racism in our society, Diamond explains. The initiative unpacks topics like voting rights, the school-to-prison pipeline, and encounters with the criminal justice system.

In May 2020, after George Floyd’s murder, “we started thinking more about not only what we were doing externally but also internally,” Diamond says. “Were we living our values to the extent we wanted to?”

WJCS began an introspective process, working with the YWCA to survey staff and gauge organizational strengths and weaknesses. “Did people feel comfortable, fulfilled at their jobs?” Diamond recalls, “or did they feel held back by issues that were unintentional but present?”

Since then, WJCS has dug into those results

PHOTO COURTESY OF WJCS

**“When we think about the workforce that’s here in Westchester County, are we representative of our community?”**

—TIFFANY HAMILTON  
CEO, YWCA of White Plains & Central Westchester



and is working to address key findings, like increasing diversity at the leadership level. “We are committed to being an antiracist agency,” Diamond says.

It’s a process that will continue. “One of the things you learn with DEI work is that it’s not something you start and then stop,” Diamond notes. “It doesn’t end; it’s a continual effort.”

### Cautiously optimistic

While some small and medium-size businesses across Westchester are getting DEI work right, there’s still a long road ahead. “All of this is a good start,” says AJ Woodson. “I would like to see this continued and built upon, and not just in the aftermath of George Floyd. That’s going to be the real test. Is this something permanent — or is this just something for now?”

Fisher, of Nonprofit Westchester, agrees. “We’ve had superficial conversations in our so-

ciety about DEI, but we need to dig deeper,” she says. “We need legislation; we need training; we need systems in our businesses and organizations that are really going to confront centuries of this work.”

And even when organizations have the will, the way isn’t immediately clear. “Everybody wants to do something, but not everybody is clear on what that something is,” Diamond says. Dorf & Nelson’s Andrieux concurs, noting that some businesses may mean well, but some of them don’t even have a DEI statement on their websites.

Still, Andrieux says there’s a growing momentum within the county’s borders. “Every organization’s reaction is like throwing a rock in the water... there’s a ripple effect. Everyone who is trying and succeeding at DEI in this county, they are impacting the next organization, the next person.” ●

Kevin Zawacki is a frequent contributor to 914INC.

Founding members of the YWCA 1000 Leadership Circle who helped to fund YWCA of White Plains and Central Westchester programs, including the Westchester Center for Racial Equity.



PHOTO COURTESY OF YWCA