

Recap: DIA, Inc. Town Hall Meeting

## **COVID-19 Pandemic and the Intersectionality Between Social Justice and Aquatics**

Wednesday, June 17th, 2020

Sandy's notes:

*The virtual meeting opened with a mindfulness exercise - a soft-belly breathing technique - to get us all focused and relaxed. It was led by Thaddeus Gamery, who reminded us that in the wake of the current crisis it is important to remember that participation in aquatics makes us conscious of the importance of breathing and the healing power of water.*

COVID-19 and the George Floyd tragedy exposed social injustice at a visceral level and revealed barriers to equal access in healthcare and civil rights protections. They created a unique opportunity for dialog and action.

Understand that at the federal level, water safety/drowning falls under the consumer products safety commission. That impacts policy and funding. The focus is not on social justice, public health, or diversity access (gender, mental ability, youth, etc.)

Be aware that structural bias is built into every community. Stereotypes are intertwined with social policy.

### **UPCOMING DATES:**

**Juneteenth - participate in Howard Bisons Swimming and Diving No Caps | Hands Up (details on Friday)**

**June 28th - DIA Athlete Discussion**

In answer to the question of what we can do to improve social justice at the USA Swimming LSC Level:

Do not expect an easy or quick answer. It will be a multi-sectoral effort over time. Here are some ideas:

- Show dedication to the entire community. Get connected to the community you swim in. Celebrate International Water Safety Day.
- Involve the whole family, not just the swimmer. Make sure swimmers and their families see other swimmers who look like them (skin color, body build)

- Develop relationships within the team and the community. Team building activities such as mentoring form relationships, build character in your athletes, and promote your values.
  - Consider a community service requirement for MDSI scholarships (is there already one?) Recognize community service investments from our members?
- Do not focus only on building competitive swimming opportunities. Invest in water safety in the community. Build the perceived value of swimming - it may save your life, it is fun, it is exercise everybody can do. Remind coaches to help kids and adult learners to stay in the playful curiosity mode for better retention in the sport and increased skill-building in the swimmer
- Understand the community values for the population you are working with. For example, some communities teach young children that making eye contact with an adult is disrespectful. In other communities children whose eyes are averted are told to, “Look at me when I am talking to you.”
- Do not be afraid to start the conversation just because it is difficult. If you take swimmers to a place where the culture is different from theirs ask them how they are feeling - address their discomfort.
  - Ask why we cannot retain a person of color to lead the DEI committee. What are we doing wrong?
- Do not tolerate bigotry. Make it clear that it will not be tolerated.
  - I was particularly taken with the phrase “That is not how we speak *swim* here.” I can see a social media campaign built around “How We Speak SWIM at MD Swimming.”
- You are not alone. There are organizations in your community who will partner with you to make improvements.
- Educate yourself about the barriers. Do not overlook the practical ones such as hair care (get a local beautician to address how to protect curly hair in chlorine.) Consider difficulties in transportation to swimming pools.
- Understand the history. Community history (such as the [Red Summer](#) in Chicago) and personal histories (called generational traumas) impact the likelihood a young person of color will swim. A child whose parents had a traumatic incident may not be taught to swim and may be encouraged to pursue other activities instead. In that case, free lessons may not be enough to entice non-swimmers to participate.

#### FURTHER READING as suggested by participants

Dawson, Kevin. *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

Wiltse, Jeff. *Contested Waters A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. Univ Of North Carolina Pr, 2010.

The CDC Social-Ecological Model

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/publichealthissue/social-ecologicalmodel.html>