

# *Upholding and Advancing our Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism*



The Shoebox Project recognizes that Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) in Canada and around the world have been subjected to hundreds of years of systemic racism and oppression. While we continue to work to become an actively anti-racist organization, we feel it is important to be clear about where we stand. The Shoebox Project is, and has always been, an unaffiliated, non-religious charity that celebrates diversity and stands firmly against racism.

We'd like to take this opportunity to share with you, our valued supporters, the ways we have promoted diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism in our organization to date, as well as the immediate steps that we will be taking to affect more meaningful and swifter change for BIPOC in Canada.

## **Fostering Inclusive Communities**

We continually strive to promote equity and inclusion through our gift drives. Though our primary focus is on working with local shelters, we deliver gifts and other in-kind donations to any community service agency that serves women who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Shelters serving families, single women, seniors, youth, LGBTQ, refugees, victims of abuse, etc.
- Immigrant, Refugee & Newcomer Welcome Programs
- Community Health Centres
- Indigenous Friendship Centres
- Food Banks
- Supportive & Transitional Housing Programs
- Homeless Outreach Centres and Drop-ins
- Mental Health and Addiction services
- First Nations reserves

Since The Shoebox Project began in 2011, we've distributed over 240,000 gifts valued at 12 million dollars to local women impacted by homelessness. Because Black and Indigenous women are disproportionately impacted by poverty and homelessness, our work has had a significant impact in those communities:

- In Canada, 28%-34% of shelter users are Indigenous
- 1 in 5 racialized families live in poverty in Canada, as opposed to 1 in 20 non-racialized families.
- 28.2% of those experiencing homelessness are members of racialized groups, compared to the Canadian average of 19.1%.

Through our community gift drives, donors have an opportunity to connect with, and offer solidarity and support to, women impacted by homelessness in their own community. It is our hope that through messages of empathy, compassion and empowerment, the women who receive our gifts feel seen, respected and valued.

### **Supporting Indigenous Women**

Over the past few years, we have increased support for Indigenous women across Canada. Our Aboriginal Women Fund, created in 2016, allows donors to support our efforts to get essential items to Indigenous women in more remote areas of Canada, where we have no volunteers on the ground and where rates of poverty, homelessness, suicide and addiction are particularly high. We also partner with a range of shelters and community organizations doing important work with Indigenous women to make sure we are contributing as much as possible to their advancement and success.

### **Responding to Crisis**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time since our charity's inception, we made \$50,000 in financial donations to Canadian shelters in lieu of in-kind donations. We became aware of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minority groups and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, we made the decision to direct all donations from our COVID Relief Fund to agencies serving Black and Indigenous women this summer, in addition to donations of masks, hand sanitizer and other essentials.

### **Learning, Listening, Growing**

We are proud of what we've accomplished so far, but understand that we are certainly not immune to the systemic injustices that pervade our society, and we must continue in our work in the spirit of continuous improvement. In addition to the above efforts already in progress, we are making several new commitments to our loyal volunteers, donors, and supporters:

#### *Improve Diversity at the Board Level:*

- We will immediately fill the vacant position on the Board of Directors and recruit one additional Board member for the 2020-2021 year – The Board will have an open call for applications, with a goal of recruiting two BIPOC candidates, whose voices are currently unrepresented on the Board.
- We will have five additional vacancies on our Board over the next three years, all of which will be posted externally and circulated widely to encourage a diverse, qualified pool of applicants who reflect the communities we serve.

- We will hire a third-party consultant as soon as financially feasible to review our organizational governance, to review and redefine our mission, vision, policies and procedures with an anti-oppression lens.

*Create a More Diverse and Inclusive Workplace:*

- By widening our recruitment focuses we are seeking to elevate our outreach for increased diversity among Local Coordinators, support staff and management.
- We are appealing for funding opportunities that support BIPOC employment to allow us to expand and diversify our team.
- We will make our workplace culture more inclusive. By creating more opportunities for open dialogue and discussion regarding race with all members of our team and volunteer base, we can ensure everyone's voice, views and ideas are accounted for.

*Foster anti-racist communities:*

- Within the next year, we will re-design and expand our Schools program to include more education and awareness for students of different ages around race & gender issues as they relate to poverty and homelessness across Canada.
- We will seek out Black & Indigenous owned businesses to partner with and promote.
- We will increase outreach to shelters and community agencies serving Black and Indigenous women impacted by homelessness to improve support across all communities.
- We will amplify Black and Indigenous voices through our social media and community partnerships.

The Shoebox Project has a long-standing commitment, with both impact and actions, to promoting supportive and inclusive communities but we know we have much more to do to create meaningful and lasting change for BIPOC - especially for women. We will continue to be guided by our values and we will hold ourselves accountable to our volunteers, donors, and the wonderful communities that we serve.

