This week at Staff Exchange, inclusion was on the table. We gave an update as to where we were with Building Leadership For Inclusion (BLFI) and people in the Leeds office had access to a summary of the draft BLFI strategy on their tables. The videos by Sarah Bates (Everyday Sexism) and Robin DiAngelo (Everyday racism) triggered some deep thought, as did the anonymous quote about ‘The White Wall’ read out by Morvia (and printed below). The quote was one of over 600 plus responses, received from all over the system, to the UWE survey about staff experiences of inclusion and exclusion for BLFI. It is an account of lived experience.

***The White Wall***

*“My story is one of struggle. Struggle against a white wall of ignorance, privilege, dominance, fear and racialised projections. This white wall can choose never to look at my struggle if they don’t want to. The white wall can be pretty certain that no one will ever hold them to account for their poor treatment of people like me. The white wall is the many, and we are the few. The white wall is the judge, the juror, the arbiter, the appeals court. The white wall will always find itself to be innocent, unintentional and will even feel pseudo-pain when its many injustices are called out, but it will not break and it will not change. The white wall will tell us that we are the unjust because we name their many injustices. We know that at any time the white wall chooses, it can fall on us and crush us. No one from the white wall will come to our rescue, even if it is clear that there is a body beneath the wall that is still breathing. The white wall buried its conscience so long ago, that it is now incapable of empathy or compassion for us. Yet it speaks constantly about its commitment to inclusion. The white wall is impenetrable, and until some of those within that white wall decide to become fully human, the tyranny of the white wall will persist.*

*[BAME Female]”*

Many of us have been doing our personal work on inclusion over months and years, asking deep critically self-reflective questions, and exploring ideas with others, that disrupt our thinking, in order to build our capability and capacity to lead inclusion well. None of us have finished this work and none can claim that they have arrived.

This work of course is about leadership at all levels and requires people to choose to step into doing work that progresses inclusion, because inclusion cannot be commanded or controlled from the top. Inclusion work is both personal and professional, it is about morality and beliefs, it is both emotional and cerebral, and it requires us to commit for the long-haul and with our whole selves. This is work that we must embody, as words alone are not enough.

I just want to share with you three encouraging stories that have come about following the session at Staff Exchange on Wednesday. All the contributions below were from white men.

Firstly, after the event I was approached with a question about the white wall, *“Am I part of the white wall?”* Of course, this was not a question that I was best qualified to answer, but what encouraged me about it, was that such a curious question was being asked. Pursued in earnest, questions such as this can bring some useful insights in understanding how it is, that we who want to do the right things where inclusion is concerned, often find ourselves doing the opposite things, when viewed through the lenses of those who experience the greatest levels of exclusion in the workplace. Without this kind of curiosity, we might never know how to increase the levels of congruence between our values and our actions.

Secondly, I and others received an email, part of which is below…

*“Thank you too for sharing something of your journeys and some good challenges to us all. I want to say, "how can I help?". However, I'm very aware that I bring a lot of privilege and little real understanding of the problems. I’m both very solution focussed and very passionate about injustices. But I realise that me weighing in with a ‘roll up your sleeves and let's get this sorted’ attitude may not be what's needed here. If it is, pass me a shovel and let's start digging. I wonder if there is a better way for me to support this work? Can I somehow be a better white man, put away some of my desires to fix stuff and support you in a better way?”*

Simply beautiful.

The third was someone who had heard me talk about privilege before, he said words to the effect of *“I didn’t understand what you were saying before about privilege, so I went away and did some research. I liked the DiAngelo video, and I really get it now… I get what you were saying”*

These three interventions truly inspired me. They speak of a willingness to embrace courage, and to step into the territory of the unknown. To explore, to dig deeper and to connect with others (across difference) who might be able to support them in their discovery about themselves and about how to lead more inclusively.

We all have multiple identities, and we need to be aware of our advantages, our blind-spots and our development gaps in order to progress this work. Without this awareness, we continue to stumble around, with very little humility, and not appreciating how we are causing immeasurable damage to others. Compassionate and inclusive leadership begins with searching questions, and ends with deep, meaningful human connections and transformed lives.

I just wanted to share these stories with you, because they gave me hope. If you see yourself in them. Thank you.

Kind regards,

Tracie

Tracie Jolliff

Director of Inclusion