



To the Black men, women, and children who have long been the victims of racist brutality and systemic inequity:

**YOUR VOICES MATTER.
YOUR STORIES MATTER.
YOUR LIVES MATTER.**



We stand with you, now and always.

Black Lives Matter—to us

As a community-based organization, we were founded on the principle that Black Lives Matter. Long before it was a hashtag, families came together on the West Side of Chicago to start their own education community, when the local host school closed. It was one of our first students who chose our name, after she heard the song “Birmingham Sunday”. The song tells the story of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing by the KKK in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four young Black girls, including Carole Robertson. Our name is a reminder to foster social justice and to help ensure that every child has opportunities to reach their potential—opportunities denied Carole Robertson, by a community that did not believe **Black Lives Matter**.

We acted, demonstrating that **Black Lives Matter**

The Carole Robertson Center for Learning, 44 years later, is a beacon in the community, trusted for high- quality early childhood and out-of-school (prenatal to age 17) programs and services across the West Side of Chicago, in communities facing racism, systemic inequalities, and systemic disinvestments decade after decade.

Together with our students and families, we have seen the fits and starts of community and police relations, school closures, businesses shutting their doors, and lack of funding for services to aid in social change. Most heart wrenching is seeing again and again the broken promises, dashed hopes

and dreams, and the light lost in our families and youth as they face the societal truth that one's worth and life trajectory can be defined by skin color and zip code. The message has been clear: no matter the rhetoric, all lives don't matter.

This has only strengthened our resolve. Carole Robertson Center remains a strident partner, change agent, and ally to our Black and Brown communities.

We continually strive to do better, but are proud to continue to rely on community leadership.

- 90% of our staff are Black and LatinX women, and most live in the communities we serve.
- Our Board of Directors is diverse: 43% Black; 36% White; LatinX 21%.
- Our Executive team of 7 members includes 6 women; 4 are women of color.
- We partner with our Black and LatinX community members and constituents to address local needs with local solutions.

Confronting privilege starts with me

To our families, staff, and supporters--you are hearing this from me as CEO--CHECKING THE BOXES IS NOT ENOUGH, given our legacy and all that we stand for.

As someone who is of Indian descent and humbled to lead this organization, it is not lost on me that my family and I are here due to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, and that the Civil Rights Movement played a critical role in allowing immigrants of all colors to enter this country. I am on my own journey of reflection, asking myself the hard questions first.

- What are my own biases?
- How am I showing up? Am I listening?
- How do I, then WE, do better?
- What are further actions I/ We must take?
- Do I/we step outside our comfort zone when our communities are literally and figuratively burning due to the dream snatchers who have stolen the hopes, dreams, and assets of Black families for generations during this nation's history?

This was a hard and painful exercise, but I know leadership sets the tone and this was my first step.

How we'll do it better

My contemplative exercise led to a few initial next steps:

1. We convened a 'Standing Together' staff conversation that revealed sadness, deep rage, fear, and profound individual and collective exhaustion. It was also a step to support our Black colleagues, showing that they do not bear the sole responsibility of deconstructing and reconstructing new systems and structures. We are as Carole Robertson Center, Standing Together.
2. A new Social Justice and Equity Staff Committee will be an all-out gut check that allows us to deconstruct Carole Robertson Center's internal systems that perpetuate privilege and power. This leadership will bring us together to build a new way of doing and being. It's a step to heal, dream, and create together.
3. We took a day off as an organization to reflect and contemplate on our own and rededicate ourselves to being accomplices in the **Black Lives Matter** effort. A step to say loudly to everyone on our team: YOUR WELL-BEING MATTERS!

We've begun our personal and professional journeys with these baby steps. We want to hear your ideas on how we can further these efforts to build a stronger, more inclusive, and equitable community.

For Carole Robertson, Laquan McDonald, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many other victims of racist brutality and systemic marginalization, this is our work now, every day.

Our lives and our mission depend on it.

Sincerely,



Bela Moté
Chief Executive Officer
Carole Robertson Center for Learning

