

GROUP HEALTH FOUNDATION

December 12, 2019

Greetings from Group Health Foundation,

Last fall, a few days after Nichole Maher started as our CEO, we sat down and began a conversation about how we would approach building relationships with intention. We articulated the values we wanted to live by and the commitments to which we would hold ourselves as we began meeting with leaders from across the state.

We knew that building a statewide foundation that is both reflective of and responsive to communities would only happen through deep and sustained relationship building. We needed to build relationships with communities experiencing health inequities and learn from those at the forefront of powerful efforts to address the root causes of these inequities.

Over the last year, we have focused on meeting with tribal nations, people of color, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, LGBTQ people, and people experiencing poverty. We prioritized meeting with leaders and organizations in communities where philanthropy has been absent or less active—rural communities, mid-size cities, and communities outside of the I-5 corridor. We asked leaders and organizations to share what they felt we needed to know as we aspire to become a qualified and respectful partner.

During this time, we have had the gift of meeting with leaders and organizations who welcomed us into their offices, talked with us over coffee, and shared meals with us. We heard people define health as something far more expansive than a medical model of well-being. In our visits across the state, leaders shared their belief that achieving health equity would require organizing to build community power to guide decision-making about all that impacts people's lives.

A Year on the Road: Guidance from Community Leaders and Organizations Across Washington shares the insights and advice we heard from the hundreds of people we met with this past year. It highlights the importance of building strong relationships and strong networks, and profiles the work of amazing organizations across the state. The report also shares what we heard about the barriers to community well-being, including a lack of safety, structural isolation, and a lack of reflective leadership in positions of elected office and in government administration throughout the state.

We received a lot of guidance about how to be a better grantmaker. We share these recommendations in the report, which we are using to hold ourselves accountable, and we offer them so others might benefit from this guidance.

We have made mistakes along the way, and we also share these lessons and other reflections in the report.

Last fall, when we began traveling around the state to meet with organizations, we were still a small staff of six. We were scrappy and just getting started. As our staff grew over the year from six to 16, these trips had the unintended benefit of connecting staff with one another in a deep and more meaningful way. While this report is filled with a photo album's worth of cellphone selfies and blurred landscapes that will likely make our not-yet-hired communications director cringe, we love and cherish all of the relationships they represent.

The people we have met and the guidance they have given us has transformed who we are and the foundation we are becoming. There are so many organizational cultural practices that are different because of the wisdom, vulnerability, and trust imparted. We are forever grateful for what we have learned. We know we have so many people yet to meet, and we are so thankful to our first teachers.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brenda Anibarro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Brenda Anibarro
Community Engagement and Learning Manager