

Aging and People with Disabilities

A message from the Director



February 23, 2015

To: All APD employees

From: Ashley Carson-Cottingham, Director, APD

As we enter the last week of February, I want to reach out to each of you to raise awareness around African American History Month.

As a program, Aging & People with Disabilities, and the staff that make our work possible, continuously strive toward cultural competency and overall service equity. We believe that these two issues are central to our work and our ability to better serve vulnerable populations.

This month, the District Managers and Central Office managers met to go over our quarterly business review metrics. During that discussion, one of our managers told a story of being approached in the parking lot by a family of Somali immigrants to be asked for help. Our manager believed that the family approached her due to the fact that she is African American and they likely felt more comfortable approaching her for assistance.

Hearing this story made an impact on me. As a program, we need to remember how important cultural competency is to create a welcoming environment and communication style that works for all of the Oregonians we serve.

Additionally, this month, a program manager in Salem subtly placed information about several historic African American leaders on the outside of her cube. Each time I walk by, it reminds me how much I need to learn. One of the leaders she posted is the author of one my favorite quotes,

"How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong -- because someday you will have been all of these."

~George Washington Carver
US horticulturist (1864 - 1943)

I've read this quote hundreds or thousands of times over my life, yet I knew very little about the man behind it.

I hope you'll join me in learning something new about African American History Month and carry that knowledge with you throughout the course of the year. Continuous learning and curiosity are key to cultural humility. Hopefully they can result in improvements in how we serve older adults and people with disabilities.

To continue with this learning culture, [here's more information about African American History Month](#).

Thank you!

— Ashley