We acknowledge the Coastal Salish People, sovereign Indian Nations, for whom this land has been home for untold generations.

**THE OPPORTUNITY**
Amara is a 100-year-old organization focused on the well-being of kids in foster care, adoptees, and their families. Throughout our history, we have leveraged partnership and collaboration to impact the child welfare system.

In 2018, Amara purchased a 29-acre, undeveloped piece of land in Pierce County to bring together resources, partners, and supports for children and families experiencing foster care. With this expansive, undeveloped land, there is immense potential to ease burdens on families by co-locating critical services that will help prevent family separation, promote family reunification, and improve the life-long well-being of kids.

**ENGAGING COMMUNITY**
We knew taking on a project of this magnitude would only be successful with broad community support. Furthermore, this land has a long history in Pierce County and many before Amara have dreamed how it could be used to improve child welfare in our community. To imagine all the possibilities, we embarked on a nine-month community engagement process that centered the expertise of people most impacted by the foster care system. *Learn more on page 3.*

**LEADING WITH RACIAL EQUITY**
Child welfare, of which Amara is a part, is a system that has been built on and continues to perpetuate institutionalized racism. To create meaningful change in Pierce County through this project, we have committed to being led by and centering the voices of those who have been wronged by the system. *Learn more on page 2.*

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**PROJECT TIMELINE**

- **2018**
  - Amara purchases a 29 acre undeveloped piece of land in Pierce County

- **03.19**
  - Amara brings our community together to launch the dream of bringing organizations together to better serve kids and families

- **06.19**
  - Our community engagement process centered in racial equity and the voices of people most impacted by foster care begins

- **11.19**
  - The community engagement process concludes with a community event. During the process, we sought ideas through interviews, surveys, listening sessions, and house meetings

- **02.20**
  - The Lend Your Voice Report compiles all the community’s ideas and recommendations and is given to Amara’s Board of Directors

- **05.20**
  - Initial site planning for the property along with continued community engagement begins
Why We Lead With Racial Equity

Throughout this project, Amara, our consultants, and our community has centered community engagement in racial equity and anti-racism. While we welcomed everyone’s ideas, we invited people of color, who are disproportionately impacted by foster care and adoption, to lead the conversation.

Racism is one of the most persistent drivers of inequity, broadly in our society, and specifically in foster care and adoption. Unless there is an intentional focus on race and racism, advances in equity with respect to class, gender, sexual identity, abilities, etc. can and will allow disparities with respect to race to persist.

Defining Racial Equity
(Defined by Amara’s consulting team and adapted with gratitude from The Center for Social Inclusion)

We define racial equity as both an outcome and a process.

As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one’s socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive.

As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

When we achieve racial equity: People of color are owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives. We acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and provide all people, particularly those most impacted by racial inequities, with the infrastructure needed to thrive. Everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.

Racism in Child Welfare

Despite the fact that children of all races/ethnicities experience neglect or abuse at similar rates, children of color are more likely to be removed from their home, stay in foster care longer, and less likely to return home than white children.

Racial disproportionality in foster care is driven by institutionalized racism, linked with other systems, including criminal justice, mental health, and special education. Without reforms that specifically address institutionalized racism, including meaningful engagement by people of color in leadership roles and investment in programs and services specifically addressing the needs of communities of color, there is clear evidence that racial disparities will continue.

As a historically white-led organization ourselves, we knew we needed a diverse and inclusive group of leaders and consultants to help bring the vision for this property and project to life.

We sought help and received guidance from skilled community leaders, many of whom have lived experience with foster care and adoption. This team of dedicated, knowledgeable, and compassionate advocates supported Amara to center this process in racial equity in order to elevate the voices, lives, and experiences of those most impacted by child welfare.

Disproportionality in Child welfare

Throughout the US, WA State, and Pierce County, Black, Indigenous, and children of color are over-represented in child welfare.

Black children are \(2x\) and Indigenous children are \(3x\) as likely to be placed in foster care as white children.

37% of all children experience CPS investigations by age 18. For Black children, that rate increases to 53%.

Why Pierce County?

Children enter foster care in Pierce County at 1.7 times the rate of kids in King County.

- 7.1 children in foster care per 1,000 in Pierce County
- 2.9 children in foster care per 1,000 in King County
- 5.8 children in foster care per 1,000 in Washington

When we invest in youth in foster care

- High school and post-secondary completion rates increase
- Children have a stronger sense of identity
- Youth become advocates for change and are leaders in the community

Read more in the Lend Your Voice Report

About systemic racism and disproportionality in child welfare on pages 24-29.

About the Community Leadership Team and our advisors on pages 4-9.
The Community Engagement Process

The community engagement process extended from June 29, 2019 to November 9, 2019. The steps are outlined below with fuller descriptions and reflections on our practice of community engagement in the full report (pages 30-43).

- Our process began with a community kick-off event on June 29, 2019, and formation of the Community Leadership Team, which has provided guidance and a firm grounding in racial equity throughout the process.

- With the kick-off, we launched an online survey, which remained open for three months and was publicized broadly by Amara and other community partners.

- Our consultant team worked with families, youth, parents, adults, various community partners, and local funders to organize a series of house meetings, listening sessions and interviews.

- The Community Leadership Team developed a prioritization framework and synthesized all the ideas shared from these different sources into a holistic vision for the property.

- This vision, including a focus on how racism surfaces in foster care and adoption, was translated into a series of graphic posters and showcased at the community celebration on November 9th.

- The November 9th community celebration marked the end of our community engagement effort.

- After this, the Community Leadership Team refined their prioritization framework and identified top priorities to include in the recommendation.

The Demographics of Who We Engaged

We had a majority of people of color in the Community Leadership Team (90%) and interviews and house meetings (62%) so we centered the themes and comments from these sources first in our analysis and synthesis. The listening sessions had 34% people of color, and the survey had the least diversity with just over 20% people of color of the 339 people who responded. With respect to personal experience with foster care and adoption, the Community Leadership Team had higher representation of people who experienced foster care as a young person (50%) and parents whose children experienced foster care/adoptive placement in the Community Leadership Team (13%) along with interviews and house meetings (30% as a young person and 22% as a parent). In the listening sessions with professionals and survey, these groups represented only 4-6% of the people who participated. Similarly, we found the highest rates of youth participation (25 years old or younger) in the Community Leadership Team (19%) and the interviews and house meetings (24%). For the survey and listening sessions, youth participation ranged from 5% to 12%.
The Community Engagement Report Summary

The recommendation from the community includes a prioritization framework, holistic vision for the property, and top priorities to advance a vision for how to best use the land to support children and families experiencing foster care. As Amara moves forward with the development of the property, we will use the prioritization framework and continue to engage the community to ensure that we honor the vision outlined in the community recommendation.

At the Core: Our Prioritization Framework
The prioritization framework outlines the values and key questions that will drive planning and development for the land with the ultimate goal of reaching resilience and self-reliance for youth, adults, and families, while centering people of color who are most impacted by foster care and adoption. Learn more about the framework on pages 18-19 and 58-59 of the final report.

An Equity Lens: In proceeding with master planning, fundraising, communications, property development, and property operations, Amara should use an equity lens as a first tool for prioritization to ensure decisions are grounded in racial equity and moving toward the holistic vision for the property.
- Activities should provide opportunities to empower youth, adults, and families most impacted by foster care, emphasizing Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
- Activities should be intentionally oriented toward healing cycles of intergenerational trauma.
- Values and benefits should address gaps in services and opportunities. Specifically, benefits should be distributed to address the gaps in investment and opportunities for youth and families of color.

A Lens for Practical Considerations: This second lens is a series of questions designed to guide planning and assess practical considerations and feasibility for property development, including the built environment and the services and programs offered there.

Top Priorities
Leadership for Transformation: Diverse, equity-focused leadership makes it possible to implement all other parts of the vision for this land.

Health and Wellness: Mental health care emphasizing alternative healing and community-centered healing, art, music, performance, and play.

Spirit of the Place: When people walk onto the land, it should feel like a sanctuary, a spiritual place, where all are welcome and can participate in services, programs and events.

Play, Relaxation, Art, and Style: Engaging in creative activities, like art, beading, music, drumming, dance, and other types of performances for personal reflection and community building. Youth especially emphasized their interest in arts, performance, sports and outdoor activities.

Stability and Community: Housing, food, economic opportunities, education, and independent life skills are at the core of promoting stability and community, which is central to our holistic vision.

Transportation: Access to the property is a near-term priority to ensure people can take advantage of all the great benefits, participate in creating community, and diversify leadership. Read more about the top priorities and action item recommendations on pages 20-21 and 63-68 of the final report.

A Holistic Vision
The holistic vision includes a commitment to the shared values of strength of youth and families; racial equity; cultural competency; joy/creativity; belonging; shared leadership, power and decision making; and accountability. The end goal for the vision is self-reliance and resilience for youth and families of color. More information about the shared values can be found on page 57 of the final report.

Findings and Priorities
The following list represents the breadth of ideas that came up repeatedly throughout the house meetings, listening sessions, interviews, and survey:
- A welcoming space
- Diversifying leadership, sharing power, and being accountable to community
- Training and shared values
- Mental health care
- Visitation and post-adoption support
- A hub for wrap-around services using people-centered planning and peer-to-peer advocates
- Art, music, and performance
- Hair care
- Family events, special occasions, birthdays, and holidays
- A park, a playground, sports, a ropes course, and a trail
- Housing, independent life skills, and an intentional community
- Food, meals, and a community kitchen
- A farm, community and medicinal garden
- Economic opportunities
- Transportation
Dreaming Big with Pierce County

As Amara moves forward with the development of the property, we will use the prioritization framework and continue to engage the community to honor the vision and top priorities outlined in the recommendation. Every member of the Community Leadership Team expressed a desire to remain involved in the project. As we move forward into the next steps of master planning, fundraising, building, and co-location of partners, we are working with the Community Leadership Team members to engage them in opportunities that link up with their interests and expertise. For example, members are serving on the master planner selection committee.

**Next Steps**

- In partnership with members of our community, we are putting together the plans for the types of services that will be on the property and are beginning conversations with organizations and partners to plan for co-location and coordinated programming.
- Amara is working with the Community Leadership Team and volunteers from Absher Construction and the Tacoma Housing Authority to interview and select a master planner.
- The master planning process will take 6-12 months, and will offer options that align with the community vision for the full 29 acres. The plan will include property and zoning feasibility, options for multiple phases of construction and development, and estimated costs for each phase.
- Amara is working to raise funds for pre-development expenses, which include the master planning process, continued community engagement, and land-preparation costs.
- As the master plan comes together, Amara will explore the next steps in campaign fundraising to begin bringing together the community to make this vision a reality with children and families.

**Thank you**

We simply cannot express in words the immense gratitude we feel for every single person who played a role in ensuring that our community engagement process has been a success.

Thank you to all the youth, families, community members, and professionals who shared your experiences, perspectives, recommendations, and dreams for this land. Thank you to our elected officials and funders for your commitment and investment in this process. We also want to acknowledge the incredible people, community partners, and small businesses that nourished our bodies, brightened our events, and believed in our vision. See pages 3-11 of the report for the full list of community members and leaders who supported this process.

To read the full report, please visit: [https://bit.ly/PCEngagement](https://bit.ly/PCEngagement)

To stay up-to-date on the project, please visit: [https://bit.ly/AmaraPCProperty](https://bit.ly/AmaraPCProperty)

To get involved, please email Chelsea, Pierce County Partnership and Engagement Manager, at [chelsea@amaramutskidsfirst.org](mailto:chelsea@amaramutskidsfirst.org)