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Dear Dane County Henry Vilas Zoo Employees:

DETERMINATION OF DANE COUNTY HENRY VILAS ZOO WORKPLACE INVESTIGATION APRIL 14 – 26, 2022

This letter is to inform you that the investigation conducted from April 14 – 26, 2022 by Employee Relations (ER) Division's Human Resources Manager, Kabura Mukasa (KM) and Office for Equity & Inclusion's (OEI) Manager of Equal Employment Opportunity, Carrie Braxton (CB), regarding the Zoo's work environment have been completed. We appreciate your participation.

We have determined that the Zoo's work environment has challenges that are similar to other County work environments. While we cannot disclose the specific details of the individual discussions, we can provide some information on topics that were raised and expectations moving forward.

DETAILED LIST OF THEMES AND SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

1. WORK ENVIRONMENT / MORALE / RESPECT / PROFESSIONALISM:

- 1) The work environment was described as toxic. The predominant theme is that the toxicity is primarily the result of an "Us vs. Them" mentality created by some Staff toward Management.
- 2) Staff became emotional when talking about their experiences.
- 3) There were confidentiality and retaliation concerns about participating in the investigation interviews.
- 4) Fears about boundaries with certain Staff.
- 5) Employees gossiping and slandering Management and other Staff.
- 6) Constant complaining to coworkers about Management or other Staff.
- 7) Trying to Influence new Staff's opinions about Management or other Staff with negative information.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Use personnel management processes to correct behaviors causing intimidation and fears of retaliation and discourteous behavior toward others. This step is essential as a first step to improve Staff-Management communications.
- 2) All employees should remember that their coworkers are not their therapists and should consider using other avenues to heal, including the County's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services.
- 3) Bridge the gap between Management and Staff – maybe brainstorm together with Staff and all involved should focus on the positives, not negatives, as well as the present and future but not the past. Take what they have learned from the past and not repeat it in the future.
- 4) All employees should respect that their co-workers are busy and do not want to hear complaints about their colleagues. If one has an issue they should either resolve it directly with the colleague, Supervisor or Employee Relations. No gossip or disparaging remarks about Management or colleagues should be permitted.
- 5) Everyone should play their role in making the Zoo a welcoming, non-toxic environment for all employees and guests.

- 6) All employees are expected to treat each other professionally and respectfully and to follow all Civil Service Work Rules, Section 4, *Personal Actions and Appearance* in the Administrative Practices Manual. Examples of prohibited conduct include but are not limited to:
 - A. Threatening, making false or malicious statements concerning other employees, supervisors, officials or the County.
 - B. Failure to exercise good judgment or being discourteous in dealing with fellow employees or the general public.

2. EMPLOYEE GROUP (EG) REPRESENTATION:

- 1) Several Staff do not feel well-represented by current Employee Group (EG) 65 leadership due to the divisive, disrespectful, disparaging, acrimonious tone and manner of the communications towards Management in written and verbal communications during group presentations which takes away from what may be legitimate serious employee concerns that need to be addressed.
- 2) Some employees have either not joined, have stopped paying dues or want to stop but are afraid of intimidation or retaliation.
- 3) Staff who have experienced prior EG 65 leadership over the years commented that there wasn't the "Us (EG members) versus Them (Management)" mentality and they felt well represented. Several Staff and Management felt that continuing the "Us vs. Them" message plays a large role in making the Zoo a toxic environment for all.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Per Dane County Ordinance Chapter "18.06 EMPLOYEES RIGHT TO SELFORGANIZATION. (1) Subject to state law, and pursuant to Wis. Stats. 111.70, all employees shall have the right of self-organization and the right to form, join or assist labor organizations to bargain collectively, through representatives of their own choosing and to engage in lawful, concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection, and such employees shall have the right to refrain from any and all such activities . . . (3) All employees, within an employee group, shall also have the right, without interference, restraint, coercion or domination, of self organization and to form, join or assist in the creation and maintenance of one employee group's representative, that is not a labor organization and that does not collectively bargain, for the purpose of engaging, as interested stakeholders(s) . . . (4) All employees, within an employee group, shall also have the right to refrain from any and all such activities including the expectation of any aid, assistance or representation that an employee group's representative provides to its members. . . ."
- 2) If they are comfortable doing so, employees should talk to their EG leadership and voice their concerns. They can follow their EG policy for resolving issues.
- 3) If employees are concerned about intimidation or retaliation, they can consult with Employee Advocate Manager, Shannon Maier.

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPARENCY – MANAGEMENT AND STAFF:

- 1) Tying all Zoo departments' Action Plans to Zoo's Mission and Vision statements.
- 2) Return to All Department meetings where all Staff and Management get to share what each department's doing, see how their departments are inter-related and how they can better work together.
- 3) Zoo Managers viewed by Zookeepers (Keepers) as a hurdle to communications, where they feel their requests may not be getting to the decision-makers – Senior Management.
- 4) Animal welfare/care emails sometimes not responded to timely by Management.
- 5) Some Zoo Staff should get out of individual comfort zones and interact with zoo guests - they appear reluctant to interact with children and/or adults.
- 6) Senior Management should walk around the Zoo more often to interact with Staff and guests and not just sit in the Administration building.
- 7) Staff should greet and interact with others who are not in their same unit/department - Some Zoo Staff feel isolated and ignored by other departments' Staff.
- 8) Some Staff ostracize or ignore new or current staff – new staff feel unwelcome.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Management should openly and honestly share information with Staff about why their suggestions are not being implemented, to whatever extent possible without breaking confidentiality or County policies.
- 2) Determine a better method to enable more timely responses via email or other modes of communication.
- 3) All Staff and Management are responsible for communicating cordially and respectfully with all others, and helping coworkers and guests feel welcome.

4. VALUING ALL EMPLOYEES AND THEIR INPUT IN SOLVING WORK-RELATED ISSUES AND ENHANCING THE ZOO ENVIRONMENT:

- 1) Management should involve Zookeepers in animal welfare information gathering and heed their suggestions during Management's decision-making.
- 2) Encourage Zookeeper input to better utilize their wealth of past and present experience at HV Zoo and other different zoos nation-/world-wide where they have worked. This is also important because they know their animal specialties and bring valuable perspectives to the conversation that can prevent mishaps.
- 3) Encourage all Zoo Staff to share their ideas with Management.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Management in the various Zoo departments should involve their various Staff in information gathering and suggestions on how to better run their programs and processes.
- 2) Allow Staff to be heard, without being made to feel incompetent.

5. MANAGEMENT / SUPERVISION / WORK RULES AND EXPECTATIONS:

- 1) Management should provide more structure/direction regarding work responsibilities or expectations.
- 2) Management should ensure all their Staff have the tools and resources to succeed in their jobs.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Need more consistency with rules. Leadership should create processes and procedures to be followed. This should include job-training processes and procedures, Office standards and operational procedures, so that all employees are aware of and follow the same rules. This will eliminate the feeling that some individuals are receiving preferential treatment.
- 2) Management should ask their Staff how they like to be managed and what they need to perform better – some may need overview while others need more detailed structure; e.g., they may want a checklist of things to do.

6. WORK ATTENDANCE:

- 1) Poor employee work attendance or absenteeism affects coworkers. When employees are absent from work, their coworkers have to do their tasks. They feel overworked, it takes away from their own tasks, as well as the opportunity to cross-train others (e.g., if the absent employee is supposed to be doing the cross-training, or the back-up is supposed to be cross-training other Staff in their position). This affects employee morale, leads to ill-will, hinders the advancement of those who are supposed to learn new skills, and is also detrimental to animal welfare and the Zoo. It also affects the other Zoo department Staff and programs if they are interacting or dependent on one another.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Follow the County's Attendance and Leave policies. When possible, be mindful of co-workers who have to back-up for you and schedule things like appointments at a time that is least disruptive.

7. EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND DISCIPLINE:

- 1) Staff perception that some Staff and Management are not disciplined equitably. Be consistent - hold all employees – Management and Staff - to the same disciplinary standard and provide, and equal/similar discipline to Management and Staff for comparable situations.
- 2) Historical focus rather than forward-looking focus by staff and management on animal welfare and staff mistakes.

- 3) Performance appraisals are too generic and not customized to the Zoo work environment (e.g., various departments, so that evaluations are relevant.)
- 4) Equal Expectations for Back-up Staff – they should perform all the duties they are acting as back-up for and not just do the minimal amount of work.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) **Documentation:** Document the disciplinary procedures taken for all employees within the Zoo and in the individual Zoo departments to ensure consistency in discipline and that Managers in different departments are not disciplining their employees differently than others.
- 2) **Focus on Present & Future, Not Past:** Management and Staff need to be forward-looking; everyone gets a clean slate no longer looking at the past to blame others or expect that past behavior is going to be repeated in the present and future. Allow all to change and improve. Determine what resources (e.g., training, tools, etc.) are required for all Staff and Management to succeed and excel in their jobs, animal welfare to flourish and guests to feel welcome.
- 3) **Staff Misconception that Staff /Management Not Disciplined Equitably:** Staff should understand that sometimes they do not have all the information when a coworker or Manager is going through the discipline process because that information is confidential and per County policy, no personnel actions are shared with complainants. Additionally, sometimes, Staff might hear only the details the complainant wants to share with them, omitting other crucial details that may have led to the discipline. For times when Management may have disciplined Staff inappropriately, they too are disciplined with the same confidentiality rules followed for their situation as well.

8. DISPARATE TREATMENT AND EMPLOYEE FAVORITISM BY MANAGEMENT:

- 1) Some Managers appear to favor some Staff over others, as seen in job assignments, ease of approving their requests, etc.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Provide all Staff equitable (fair and impartial) treatment – all Staff should experience the same equitable treatment in rules expectations, training approvals, required responsibilities/tasks, etc.
- 2) All Zoo employees should be provided with the tools and resources they need to be on equal standing as their counterparts/coworkers.)

9. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESS AND INCLUSION (DEAI) EDUCATION AND ACTIVE PRACTICE FOR AND BY ALL MANAGEMENT AND STAFF:

- 1) Zoo Management and Staff feel they need to do better in this area.
- 2) Past and present DEAI Committee members conducted research and made valuable contributions that need to be followed up on.
- 3) Some Managers and/or Staff exhibit micro-aggressions (i.e., definition: “a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.”)

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) The Zoo’s DEAI Committee will team up with the County’s Office of Equity and Inclusion and Employee Relations to determine how to make the DEAI Committee more effective and help the Zoo succeed in it’s DEAI efforts with employees and guests.

10. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF STAFF OF COLOR:

- 1) The Zoo is sorely lacking in Staff of Color.
- 2) The Zoo has a problem of retaining Staff of Color.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Management should make a concerted effort to recruit Staff of Color that are representative of the Zoo clientele/ guests served.

- 2) Advertise Zoo positions on diverse professional sites like the Association of Minority Zoo & Aquarium Professionals and the Minorities in Aquarium & Zoo Science.
- 3) Work with the County's Diversity Recruitment Specialist.
- 4) Make presentations to schools – Elementary, Middle and High Schools throughout Wisconsin - with particular focus on locations which have higher People of Color populations.
- 5) Determine which other Colleges/Universities to partner with apart from just UW Stevens Point's Zoo Science Internship program which provides only Caucasian students.

11. DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, BULLYING AND RETALIATION:

- 1) All Zoo employees (Staff and Management), should be able to experience a workplace that is free from any form of discrimination, harassment, bullying and retaliation.
- 2) Some in Management and/or Staff make insensitive, sexist, and racist comments.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Employee Relations and Office of Equity & Inclusion can provide coaching and training to Zoo Management and Staff on these issues.

12. ANIMAL WELFARE COMMITTEE:

- 1) Apparent conflict of interest because the individuals heading the committee are also the decision-makers who have final say on what can and cannot be done for the welfare of the animals.
- 2) Some committee members not feeling heard and therefore stepping down.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Research Zoo industry best practices in terms of the representative members of Animal Welfare Committees (what areas do they usually represent, e.g., Zookeepers, Managers, Financial Analyst, etc.) and other items to consider.

13. EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:

- 1) Provide adequate training to all new and current Staff. Some Staff have received minimal training while others who have been hired not long after them have received much more training.
- 2) Sometimes Staff do not understand why they are being denied training/development opportunities.
- 3) Sometimes Staff do not understand why they cannot be trained in other specialty areas.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) New Employee Orientation (NEO) and Training – provide well-rounded NEO where employees are introduced to all departments, learn about the Zoo's Mission and Vision statements and how the individual's work ties in not only to their unit but also all other departments.
- 2) Provide adequate cross-training to all employees so that coverage is not an issue due to employee absenteeism.
- 3) Explain to Staff why they are not receiving training they have requested.

14. WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR MANAGEMENT AND STAFF:

- 1) Staff and Management want to experience a healthy work-life balance. Sometimes their personal time is interrupted by Management when they are not on-call or in non-emergency situations which can wait.
- 2) Staff seeking more consistency with scheduling - some Staff are forced to work on holidays and weekend and would like to have a holiday and/or weekend off.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) When not On-Call or during non-emergency situations, Management should allow all employees (Staff and Managers) to be off-line (phone/computer) and do not call or send them emails and texts expecting them to respond. **NOTE:** Management and Staff may be required to share communications e.g., texts/emails/voicemails with Employee Relations to determine if this rule is being followed and whether or not the communications are bordering on harassment.

15. MANAGEMENT AND STAFF HONORING LINE BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:

- 1) Concern was raised about some Staff trying to Friend new or current Staff on Social Media who may not be comfortable with those invitations or overtures.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) All Staff and Management should respect one another's boundaries.

16. ZOO FACILITIES:

- 1) Invest urgently in zoo facilities' renovations for welfare of Staff, animals and guests.
- 2) Employee parking facilities - why are LTE/Interns/Part-time Staff being given parking spots while current Full-time Staff have to park far away from their work area and have resorted to parking on the street?
- 3) Fix Women's Locker Room Door – No handle - Staff of all genders walk through that locker room to get to a backroom that contains chemicals and cleaning supplies, often leaving the door open. The men's locker room door handle locks. There are signs that say "Knock" but many do not.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:

- 1) Management should interact with Staff to determine what their concerns are regarding the facilities are and find a way to improve them.

CONCLUSION

All staff have been advised of Dane County's *No Retaliation* and *Harassment* policies. It is expected that all staff abide by these policies. If you believe that you are experiencing any retaliatory or harassing behavior, contact HR Manager, Kabura Mukasa (Mukasa.Kabura@countyofdane); (608) 283-1665) immediately.

This letter concludes this process. We will follow-up on some allegations that arose during this investigation that warrant further review. While details of the outcome will be kept confidential ER, OEI and Corporation Counsel will be consulted to ensure the necessary steps are followed.

Our goal is to support your efforts in improving the Zoo's workplace environment. So, we will also team up with Senior Management to determine what HR, Diversity, Management or Staff coaching/training is required and will provide it or recommend other sources. We will follow up every few months with Management to find out the status and ensure action items are being implemented. In six (6) to 12 months we will conduct All-Employee survey so you can provide feedback on whether the Zoo Workplace Environment has improved; and we shall follow-up with Senior Management on what if any changes need to be addressed/amended.

Since we are now moving forward, the concerns that have been covered during this process will no longer be investigated by Zoo Management or Employee Relations (ER). If there are new questions/concerns regarding the work environment at Henry Vilas Zoo, you should first speak with your supervisors to attempt to work through them. It is everyone's responsibility to play their part in making the Zoo work environment conducive, welcoming and peaceful for all.

Thank you, in advance, for your commitment to the Henry Vilas Zoo. Please continue to display the level of professionalism that Zoo is known for, and follow the work rules that facilitate teamwork and mutual respect among coworkers and supervisors.

Sincerely,

Kabura

Carrie

Kabura Mukasa & Carrie Braxton