

Insights

NICHQ Employee Spotlight: Ashidah Baker

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Ashidah Baker, NICHQ Associate Director of Human Resources

Full name and title: Ashidah Baker, Associate Director, Human Resources

Years with NICHQ: 5 years 10 months

How has your background led you to join a national children's health organization?

Ironically, what was interesting is I've always done HR, but I've also done a lot of human services work. I was an intensive care coordinator and began coordinating services for children who have severe emotional or behavioral problems. As a children's health organization, NICHQ has always been interested in children's health, so while I wasn't doing the same exact work as NICHQ, it's similar work in a different way. I'm so happy that I just happened to be able to work at this place.

It's great. I love explaining where I work because human resources can be boring and standard, but when I say I work at NICHQ, people ask more questions, and I can talk about the work we do to address disparities in children's health. I'm able to say I work for a meaningful organization that has a wonderful mission, and I haven't always been able to do that.

What is one of the most rewarding aspects of your role as Associate Director of Human Resources?

Working in HR, you're typically one of the first people someone deals with when they're starting a new position at a company, and when they're leaving, you're often the last person they experience as well. I enjoy making people's onboarding experience warm and welcoming and inclusive, as well as their exit. Ensuring that employees are handled with respect and dignity throughout their entire time at NICHQ is key and a responsibility that I welcome.

How are NICHQ's HR policies and practices reflective of the organizations equity journey?

When I first came to NICHQ, the majority of staff were white. It was me, and maybe 2-3 other minorities, who were not necessarily Black. It seemed like Everyone had degrees from Harvard or Boston University School of Public Health. I wasn't connected to public health, and I don't have a degree from either of these places, so as I began hiring for NICHQ, I reached out to my network to try to understand if there was a lack of representation of BIPOC in the public health field because we weren't always getting a diverse applicant pool and our staff all looked the same and had similar backgrounds.

Sometimes, as an organization begins diversifying, they struggle to get diverse job candidates. At NICHQ, one of the solutions required us to look at our job descriptions and decide if some of the layers we were adding contributed to our limited pool of applicants. In some cases, we were requiring master's degrees in specific subject areas, and we found that it wasn't a necessity for the position and people may be coming in overqualified. Often, minority applicants see that they're missing some qualifications and no longer apply, but they're capable of doing the work. So, we changed some of those things and loosened up in certain areas, and then that slowly opened our pool.

Another thing we do is an ongoing equity salary review. We maintain a spreadsheet, and it includes how long each staff member has been at the company, what their salary is, what their title is, and how many years of experience they have. This allows us to look at each role in our organization and see if people with similar titles and responsibilities are receiving equitable pay, and when we're hiring, we can ensure we make offers that are equitable to our current employees.

What are some of NICHQ's 2022 HR Equity goals?

In 2022, our HR department will continue to focus on diversity and equity. One of our major department goals is to attend DEI training.

Additionally, we will continue to reinvigorate our job descriptions and ensure they are up to date and inclusive to all folks. And that's not just with our full-time positions. We're also looking at the job descriptions for our internship program and working to receive diverse applicants.

We also want to be very intentional about maintaining a diverse staff. One of our strategic goals in 2022 is to continue the five-year trend of increased staff diversity while retaining 75% of BIPOC staff year-over-year.

Our commitment to reduce turnover and retain BIPOC employees is so important because it truly reflects NICHQ's leadership and board's dedication to being an equitable organization. People

may not always see the behind-the-scenes, but it's not just HR watching out for equity within our organization, and it's not even just our executive leadership team. We also have a board that is interested in making sure this is happening at all levels, and we're really walking the talk at NICHQ.

Having that support has been great, because sometimes when you work for an organization, you're forced to do things how they've always been done. It's wonderful to have supervisors who share the same values and who empower me to push back. The first time I could say, "We can't move forward and this won't work because we don't have any diverse candidates," I thought, "Wow, I can do this?!"

We've come a long way, and NICHQ has evolved so much by diversifying our staff – we know diversity is not just race and gender. We're really seeing people join our team from different backgrounds, and I think that's amazing. It brings a different spark to the organization, and it helps everyone think out of the box and be more innovative.

What are some of your hobbies and areas of interest outside of your work?

I'm really interested in the human services field. I love to help in our community with mental health awareness, making sure people have the tools and resources they need. I'm also really into real estate and I'm hoping to secure my real estate license.

Spending time with family is always a priority for me. I have twin boys and a daughter who is in college, and I just love hanging out with them and having a good time. They are a ball of energy!