



**OUR CIRCLE**  
Making a Difference Together!

Our Circle's Board Member Retreat Report

***Challenges and Choices***

***Framing the Our Circle Future***

Bocawina Rainforest Resort & Adventures

August 2<sup>nd</sup> – August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019



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## ***Retreat Participants***

### *Our Circle Board Members*

Lewis Wade – Director of Programming (Board President)

Danae Fairweather – Director of Publicity (Board Secretary)

Ruby Williams – Director of Finance

Taz Garcia – Director of Fundraising

## ***Facilitator***

Derricia Castillo-Salazar - Co-Founder (Managing Director)

# Introduction

Our Circle's Board of Directors has undertaken a strategic planning process that will provide them with an opportunity to evaluate where the organization is today considering challenges in the future and to develop new strategies and new initiatives to meet emerging needs. Our Circle's Board of Directors held a strategic planning retreat at Bocawina Rainforest Resort & Adventures, August 2<sup>nd</sup> – August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019 planned and facilitated by Derricia Castillo-Salazar, Co-Founder of Our Circle. Our Circle's Board of Directors discussed a variety of strategic issues and challenges facing the organization, and explored opportunities for strengthening the organization's success into the future.

At the board meeting held on the evening of July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 prior to the retreat, Lewis Wade discussed with board members their expectations of the retreat and the role of the board in the strategic planning process.

The planning process provided an opportunity for board members to engage with each other in deliberative dialogue and strategic thinking about Our Circle's future direction.

Prior to the retreat, Derricia analysed the concerns of the board members to assess their viewpoints on several issues, including the objectives they most wanted to accomplish at the retreat. The most critical objectives identified included:

- Leaving the retreat with a solid and well-thought out strategic direction;
- Developing a full understanding and support for what the strategic direction entails;
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of the board;
- Engaging in positive relationship building between the board;

The pre-retreat analysis also assessed ideas on a variety of key strategic issues such as:

- Relevance of Our Circle's mission and vision as a foundation for the future;
- effectiveness in the Board exhibiting Our Circle's core values;
- Desired strategic priorities the 2019 Board of Directors;
- Dominant issues and challenges facing Our Circle's Board;
- Major objectives to be achieved in the next five months;
- Significant organizational strengths and assets that contribute to mission achievement;
- Major weaknesses or liabilities that may prevent mission achievement;
- Critical factors in areas relevant to Our Circle's success; and
- Most needed and valuable areas of governance strength and knowledge building.

Based on the results of the strategic planning assessment, Derricia, in conjunction with Our Circle's Board, developed a retreat agenda to set the foundation for the strategic planning process.

Key questions to be addressed through the strategic planning process included:

- What should be the Board's overall 2019 goal?
- What is the Board's unique and distinctive value and role in meeting the community's needs?

- What assumptions can be made about trends, community needs, etc., that will drive strategic initiatives?
- What initiatives should the Board consider undertaking to achieve its goals?
- What resources will the Board need to have in place to help ensure future success?
- What factors are most critical to the Board's strategic success?

The work accomplished during this retreat provides the foundation and sets the direction and focus for Our Circle's continued strategic planning efforts.

# Shaping Our Strength Through Strategy

## *Where Are We: Critical Strategic Questions*

The Board began their retreat by responding to critical strategic questions. The responses indicate the Board's belief that governance leadership improvement is critical to Our Circle's success, and that the challenges the organization will face in the coming five months will require greater expertise and effectiveness from them than is required today.

Board members also believe that the two most critical factors to governance success is the ability to lead through the changes being created for the LGBT community and the need to be well-supported with knowledge and education about the challenges and issues that will most affect the organization's success. However, leaders also indicated they lack a good understanding of the aspects of legal and political reform that will have the most strategic impact on Our Circle and many do not believe they are as well-informed as they need to be to ensure the future success of the organization.

### *Board's Responses: Identify Strategic Governance Gaps*

- The Board indicated a need to improve their knowledge, understanding and ability to assess the impact of the organization in the lives of LGBT families in Belize.
- While the Board believes, the organization is somewhat prepared to respond to uncertainties that lie ahead, there is room for improvement.
- Many of the board members and senior leaders believe they are not as well informed as they need to be to provide the leadership that will be required from them.

The board was encouraged to access the LGBT Legal Guidebook as well as the other resources available to the public based on the previous works of Our Circle, as well as sharing this information and making it available to its members/volunteers.

## *Our Circle's Board Mission, Vision and Values*

### *Vision Statement*

By the end of 2019, Our Circle's Board members would have increased their knowledge to better assist LGBT families in Belize.

### *Mission Statement*

The Board will promote community engagement through effective advertisement of Our Circle's events.

### *Goal*

Our approach to excellence by the end of 2019 to support LGBT families in Belize will be met when the Board has increased its credibility in addressing LGBT Family issues.

Our financial foundation will be strengthened; the facilities at the Resource Center will be in renewal; and the work environment will promote satisfaction, wellness, productivity, and pride in meeting the needs of the LGBT families.

### ***Core Values***

Integrity, trustworthiness, respect for others, compassion, honesty

The Board indicated a desire to further discuss later how values are exhibited and what best practices would move the organization closer to exhibiting its values.

### ***Closing Strategic Gaps***

Retreat participants identified several strategic gaps that should be addressed between now and the end of 2019. The subject of strengthening community relations, trust and confidence was quickly identified, as was a continuing focus on improving quality of care. The Board also discussed the need to ensure strategic direction “buy-in” at all levels of the organization.

Engaging in a discussion of governing leadership, the board noted its need for continuing education regarding governance best practices and the need for all board members to be fully engaged in committee work as part of the board’s on-going education. Members encouraged each other to attend meetings even if they are not formal members of a committee.

The Board identified several discussion points regarding quality, including the need to:

- plan and implement a mobilization campaign;
- increase personal empowerment between LGBT families and persons;
- ensure information about Our Circle is widely available;
- monitor and review the implementation of the Strategic Plan
- continue to develop position and make submissions on behalf of the LGBT community and their families.

Board members acknowledged their role as advocates in the community for Our Circle and the quality of services that Our Circle provides, but noted the need to better understand how they might work more effectively on behalf of the LGBT community. The board also noted a need to consider how the Board might better leverage social media to engage younger individuals in the community.

Continuing the earlier discussion of public perception, trust, and confidence, the board questioned what is critical to evaluate to accurately assess community members’ experience with Our Circle. The participants noted that the organization’s financial status is the foundation that enables all else. With this perspective, leaders then discussed the need to improve efficiency, make tough decisions and maintain the oversight necessary to ensure Our Circle’s long term financial stability and viability.

## *Shaping Our Circle's Strategic Focus: Strategies and Objectives for 2019*

Retreat participants discussed a variety of questions about Our Circle's strategic pillars. The group also identified the following initiatives to be considered to successfully achieve this goal based on their roles and responsibilities:

1. Director of Programming
  - a. Create meetings with LGBT families to remain current with their priority issues
  - b. Facilitate more mental health and wellbeing sessions and discussions
  - c. Develop more family oriented events
  - d. Ensuring effective monthly Board meetings are conducted
  - e. Enhance collaboration with other organization
2. Director of Finance
  - a. Maintain and report the expenses of the organization monthly
  - b. Ensure more engagement in financial monitoring
  - c. Ensure there is set budget for family events
  - d. Identify ways to develop financing skills as well as train Board members in understanding and developing financial reports
  - e. Educate the Board about the internal financial policies in place
3. Director of Fundraising
  - a. Identify grants/funding available to execute LGBT families' initiatives
  - b. Identify ways to enhance the Board's knowledge in grant writing
  - c. Identify local sponsors to support the Board's work
  - d. Ensure monthly fundraising events
  - e. Develop sustainability plan
4. Director of Publicity
  - a. Ensure all events are effectively publicised through media so that the Center has more visibility
  - b. Create/publish weekly social media posts which addresses specific LGBT-family issues
  - c. Identify ways to gather timely feedback from the community
  - d. Create brochures and other materials which provide local information for LGBT families

### ***Proposed Action Plan***

<b><i>Objective</i></b>	<b><i>Responsible</i></b>
plan and implement a mobilization campaign	Director of Publicity
increase personal empowerment between LGBT families and persons	Director of Programming
ensure information about Our Circle is widely available	Entire Board
monitor and review the implementation of the Strategic Plan	Director of Programming
continue to develop position and make submissions on behalf of the LGBT community and their families	Managing Director

### ***Participants Viewpoint***

Retreat participants provided their viewpoints about the most beneficial outcomes of the retreat, ideas for future retreats and next steps to sustain Our Circle's strategic momentum.

Overwhelmingly, participants viewed the engagement of members of the board in strong, strategic discussions as the most beneficial outcome of the retreat. The exchange of thoughts and ideas, and the identification of clear direction and goals were also noted as primary benefits of the retreat.

The Board expressed repeatedly in their comments that the organization must focus on its retreat follow-up, follow through and monitoring of progress to sustain the strategic momentum generated by the retreat. Suggestions for future retreats included more opportunity for discussion and additional breakout group time to focus on specific issues. Leaders would also like a review of the service analyses.

Verbatim answers follow:

#### Most Beneficial Retreat Outcomes

- Trustees talking frankly and openly about significant issues
- The opportunity to do an in-depth discussion of critical topics and to have everyone participate
- Good exchange of ideas
- A good opportunity to focus on strategic planning and gain better sense of how the board members viewed the future of Our Circle
- Clear direction
- Direction
- Excellent sharing of ideas, alignment of goals
- Open dialogue, need for teamwork and consistent messaging

#### Ideas for Future Strategic Planning Retreats

- Continue reassessing our strategy and movement toward our goals, including changes in the environment
- Follow up to this one
- Focus more closely on one of the issue areas
- Service analysis—help us understand and use the data
- Focus on specific issue or topic to get to fuller understanding
- Pre-retreat information should be read by participants 2 weeks prior to retreat

#### Next Steps That Should Be Taken to Sustain Strategic Momentum

- Follow up on the suggested initiatives
- Follow up at board meetings on key goals identified
- Create a plan for further developing the specifics of the strategic plans in each of the pillars
- Follow up with “mini-retreats,” dedicate an hour during subsequent board meetings
- Follow up on goals and how to achieve them
- Follow up on plans at future board meetings
- Review our thoughts and conclusions, set up systems to achieve goals
- Develop an action plan to implement strategic objectives
- Teamwork
- Identify clear plans to achieve stated goals
- Strategic planning initiative should be put to a calendar and pursued vigorously