

January 25, 2017

7 students

3 KCF

1 MYOI[

3 Campus Coaches

1 K-12 Educator

Welcomes:

Thanks to the Kalamazoo Community Foundation for providing space and Seita Scholars Program for cohosting this event!

- **Maddy Day**, Director of Outreach and Training, Fostering Success Michigan as host.
- **Nancy Timmons**, Kalamazoo Community Foundation Scholarship Program. The Kalamazoo Community Foundation was established in 1924 by a \$1000 grant from W. E. Upjohn. Support needs of nonprofits of Kalamazoo. Funds have grown and used to give grants. Focus is education and equity. Helping students in Kalamazoo County reach educational goals and full potential. 341 students last year. Scholarships have varying criteria.
- **Ceykeia Lee**, Director, Learning Network of Greater Kalamazoo. Initiative looks at cradle to career education projects: Kindergarten Readiness, KCAN Network, Adult Literacy Collaborative. Focus on being “village square” for student needs in Kalamazoo.
- **Tim Liggins**, Campus Coach, Seita Scholars Program. Serves students attending WMU as campus coaches, partner with students in each life domain to support them in college. Currently 150 students. Currently going through a transition in leadership, Chris Harris moving into new role as director of Boys and Girls Club. Ronica Hamilton taking over as director of Seita Scholars.

Identity domain overview (MD):

(supplemental paperwork available in toolkit)

- 7 Life Domains framework allows us to look at factors in each life domain that impacts access and success for young adults. Tool came from Casey Family Programs. The WMU Center for Fostering Success orients each domain around education.
- Identity Domain can be very complex. Identification/Definition of self. Often youth are moved out of or through spaces that may help youth define identity. Skill building in this domain is important as youth may have fewer opportunities to learn where they come from.
- Family Privilege: subtle privileges one enjoys from being a part of a family. Security, ability to fail safely, “a script” of “how we do things” in our family.

- For youth with experience in foster care: Give more space and room to explore identity— encourages self-esteem. Under researched area.

Panel Discussion

Question 1, MD: When you think of this life domain, how do you define it?

Candace: Define identity as my past, not my future; I know where I am going. The little things, overall who I am.

Amal: A work in process, my gender, my ethnicity, my religion, my language, friends, family, food

Tim: It's what makes you who you are. What do I value? It's a domain that can be a bit mysterious

Freedom: Get it mixed up with a representation; it's more like how you define yourself, every struggle you've been able to overcome. My son is a big part of my identity

Ronica: At Seita, we frame it like, who am I as it relates to foster care, academically, values, where am I going, what do I want, how does that relate to who I am?

MD: It's about where you've come from, what you've come through, and moving forward. It's aspirational, about values, about the people who help make you who you are. It's about what you like and don't like, what you find interesting and what you don't find interesting. It's not about what people think about you, it's what you think about yourself. Everyone has a different way of constructing it.

Question 2, MD: How does this domain impact your work/life?

Ronica: It impacts the work in Seita because we work to help students figure out their identity, and as they are forming and shaping their identity. There was a time when we didn't do a lot around the identity domain, so we looked at that, and now we have five identity groups: students who identify as males, females, LGBT, allies, parents, forming these identity groups help us frame questions. We have focused on making it a point to focus on identity.

Freedom: I'm a transparent person, I'm an open book, I mentor 25 students, and I had to find out who I was because I wanted to help them. I couldn't help someone if my hands were closed. It got really real for some of my students and for me, because I still deal with some of the struggles that they are dealing with in my life. I identified my strengths and weaknesses. The more I think about myself, the more I think about my son and who he is.

Tim: Getting a chance to partner and work with students, at its most core level it's one human being talking to another. My identity is with me all the time including while I am working.

Amal: I'm not the same person I was last week. For me, my identity and work impact my life, both of them are effective of each other.

Candace: I can really empathize with what I see, I try not to be like other people, I think

identity makes me more compassionate.

MD: past experiences help to inform identity, drawing on past experiences is a skill. Understanding that your identity is always evolving; kudos to you for being vulnerable to that experience. When we take the time to reflect and look at the identity of our program, are we actually incorporating this? What does that mean in making and having space that students can step into?

Question 3, MD: What challenges have you encountered related to this domain and how have you resolved them?

Candace: A big challenge is diversity in my classes, being a young black woman, seeing what I see in the media, what if I can't be who I am or what I want to be? Tim has been one of the best supports, he's been able to walk me through and push me to keep going.

Amal: Breaking the stereotype about being a Muslim and being in foster care

Tim: Going back to when I was 6 and when my parents divorced, how my identity shifted, my mixed background, going to counseling for that and having space to talk about family roles and what my role could be. I think that was a great outlet for me. It started at a young age.

MD: It's great thinking about how early on this identity work starts, I think for young people with experience in foster care, how able are you to do identity work when there were transitions and disruptions and challenges, and how vital it is to give that space now.

Freedom: I struggle with loving myself. It took a very long time. I had to stop hating myself for being in foster care. I wouldn't disclose that kind of information. I would lie to myself and I had to break that. I was becoming someone who I wasn't, an imaginary person. I had to break that down. It started when I became pregnant in high school and all those stereotypes. Now I'm a proud foster care alum, I didn't place myself in foster care. I'm a control freak and I had to let go and come to peace with that.

MD: You don't know what foster care is like until you've experienced it. We have to look to you all and learn from you all to begin understanding.

Ronica: My identity probably starts in my 20s, it was then when someone said something to me about my complexion. It was something about dark skin. It wasn't until then that I realized. I had a long conversation with my mother about race and racism and intra-racial kind of things. She helped me identify as a strong woman. I try and make a space for that in my work with students.

MD: some of the aspects about our identity come at us from the outside. That drives our space of reflection; you can really draw strength from it.

Freedom: When we tell people (about foster care) and they say you don't look like you're from foster care, it makes us upset, like, show me what someone who has been through foster care looks like, what struggle looks like. What does that mean? This is us, this is me.

MD: What do you think people mean when they say that?

Freedom: I think on accident we fall into 'troubled youth' when you tell someone you've been in foster care they want to sympathize and diagnose you, you put that in your identity, like I'm not capable of doing these things, you do it unconsciously. When I was in MYOI

and people said that I didn't look like I was from foster care, I took it as a compliment. I knew what I was but I couldn't accept it.

Amal: I get that a lot, like no seriously I have been through foster care. I'm not sure if it's because I'm Egyptian. There's a lot of stereotypes. I have not seen any movie that represents foster care. Everyone ends up a murderer or on drugs or didn't go to college. What it means to me, I don't know, because it can happen to anyone, any group, any age. I also have stereotypes so I cannot judge them for having these ideas, so I don't know.

Candace: If I do something right or good, it's surprises people.

MD: Strengths you want to share?

Candace: Resiliency and advocacy for myself, I can really advocate well for others after 22 years of doing it for myself. Being in foster care has been a blessing

Freeom: Resiliency

MD: I'm curious about resources, do you have ideas about resources?

Ronica: There's a book based off Myers-Brigg. I hope Tim knows what it's called. We used it with campus coaches. Engaging the space and building a community, having students talk with each other on a peer-level so they're not feeling as alone or isolated.

Tim: What Type Am I. we use it in our identity groups now.

Candace: Counseling at WMU, it's free, it's one of the most amazing things. You don't have to have a disease, sometimes you just need someone to listen.

Amal: Syndecuse counseling, to not forget myself as a source for my own identity.

Freeom: Love Does, Bob Goff, he was telling us this story, he's such a down to earth person with his struggle. Holistic Medicine, I take two holistic classes. How are you really, what are your struggles. Congratulating little steps. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou. And I Rise.

Question 4, MD: Advice for students or young people who are owning and navigating their identity, particularly around foster care?

Candace: I try and do what feels right and if it doesn't feel right, I change it. Be yourself as much as you can be, and don't be afraid to let some things go. Lady Butterflies. Being around other young women. Being allowed to be myself. Intentional community.

Freedom: Congratulate myself on the little stuff. Allow yourself, give yourself permission to be you. It's okay to not be okay. It's not normal to be okay all the time, to have everything under control at all times.

Amal: Listen to yourself. Hear your breath, love who you are, work hard. Find a good group of friends who will challenge you.

Question 5, MD: If you could make any collaboration happen to improve outcomes in this life domain, what would it be?

Ronica: Collaboration between various companies and organizations for career mentoring and exposure. Hands-on exposure before they graduate or do an internship.

Freedom: Getting Seita scholars to get together to do homework and work together. We are

going to graduate and we know that, so just having that unity.

Tim: Tapping into networks for young professionals.

Amal: Jump on with any resources you see available

Candace: Mentoring, college-age fc students paired with middle school fc students.

Reflections from panel:

Panel did a great job representing foster youth.

Professionals indicated ideas they could use with used based on panel discussion.

Life Domains Passport Activity:

(Supplemental material available in toolkit)

Put yourself in center with what type of domain you are best associated with. Find others in the room (in your network) who you can contact within the other life domains. Contact information goes on the back.