



THE GEORGETOWN PROJECT

Leaders In Youth Development Since 1997



Dear Friends,

Those of you who know me best know I am a thinker. I try to weigh all sides of a problem or issue before responding because I know that our words matter. I believe our words, at times like these, should be authentic and reflect character and substance.

The last two weeks have stirred so many emotions. I am simply heartbroken over the senseless murder of George Floyd and the fact that his precious children will live the rest of their lives without their father. That type of brutality and injustice has no place in our society. The Georgetown Project stands firmly against racial discrimination of any kind toward anyone.

I have much listening and learning to do. However, I have learned from youth in our community that the statement Black Lives Matter does not imply that other lives do not matter, but instead spotlights the injustice and violence Black Americans face in our country. I am inspired by the young people who choose to peacefully stand up for racial equality and condemn brutality. And I appreciate the youth we serve sharing their perspective. My hope is that youth will now be a big part of the solution.

Our vision is that ***“Georgetown will become a community where no child is hungry, hurt, alone or rejected and where all children and youth feel loved, respected and treated with dignity.”*** The Georgetown Project has always strived to be an “all” organization, believing that young people, families, and communities thrive when we work together for the common good. Our work over the last 23 years has been to increase positive relationships, opportunities and experiences for young people from birth into young adulthood so they have a voice about issues important to them, build skills for their future and grow up caring, capable and resilient. The vision was created by our community. It has never changed, although many have had the opportunity to wordsmith. We believe that a common community vision for children and youth tells the world that young people are high priority and encourages a unified responsibility for a community to nurture its young.

So, I’ve been thinking about the “all” in our vision statement. Are we as an organization—and

as a community—being intentional enough to ensure that all children and youth feel safe, valued, and have opportunities to thrive? If not, how can we do more to ensure all have a seat at the table? I admit ours is a big, bold vision, but the hopefulness in these words challenge us to always do what is best for kids. We must join with our community to do more for youth and families who feel marginalized and unheard, including Black youth and families and other families of color.

Between 85%-90% of the children and youth we serve each year at The Georgetown Project have beautiful brown and black faces, and are considered at-risk, underserved and other terms the world uses to define their life's circumstances, most of which are beyond their control. Their diversity goes beyond skin color to their fears, strengths, challenges, talents, and successes, as well as their hopes, dreams, and plans for their future. We believe uniqueness is to be celebrated and is the essential ingredient that makes a community special.

But we know that young people of color don't always have the same opportunities. We also know that there are equity and opportunity gaps in almost every measure of health, wellness, safety, educational achievement, economic opportunity, and other youth development outcomes. As youth-serving organizations, we must stay committed to collectively improving outcomes for all children in Georgetown, with intentional focus on the opportunity gap for youth of color.

In the coming months, The Georgetown Project will turn a lens inward to ensure our policies, practices, programs, and people are aligned with our vision. We will also look outward to our community engagement initiatives to be sure we are inclusive, caring, compassionate and collaborative. We will undertake transparent reflection with feedback from stakeholders. We will listen to and learn from young people and families with lived experience from all walks of life, including Black youth and families and other families of color. We will continue to provide safe spaces for the youth voice. We will strive to do more for all by prioritizing and improving our collaborations with The Georgetown Project Collaborative for Children & Youth, Afterschool Alliance, and other community partners. And we will be accountable by providing updates to the community along the journey.

In recent days, we have been listening to young people in our programs. They have had a lot to deal with in the first half of 2020. A global pandemic, parents losing jobs, isolation from friends, family, and school. And they have watched our nation confront racial injustice 24-7 on every television, radio, and social media platform. Youth we talk with want to feel safe again. Young people are incredibly resilient, but they need the trusted adults in their lives to talk with them about the big things going on in our world, listen to their feelings, share family values, and above all, make sure they feel safe and can focus on something positive and hopeful as well.

I love this community, and pray that as we move forward together, we find many ways to respectfully:

- Listen to one another
- Learn from one another
- Lift up one another
- Laugh with one another
- Love one another

The kids are watching.....

Leslie

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