Training parents who care to become parents who lead
2021 was certainly not without its challenges, but one of the perks of being part of PLTI-KC is being surrounded by inspiring, determined parent leaders who, together, persist even and especially when it gets tough. Advocating for children is hard work. PLTI-KC prioritizes community; we focus on taking care of ourselves and each other so that we can be our best selves, advocates, and leaders.

The challenge of the pandemic did not slow us down. The third cohort--whose classes, all 21 of them!, were entirely held on Zoom--graduated in May. We celebrated for the first time in person and with our families at an outdoor graduation picnic. In this report, you’ll meet some of these parent leaders and learn about their community projects.

Our outcomes are still stellar. The pre/post evaluation conducted by NYU showed that PLTI-KC parent leaders grew in all four civic outcome areas and increased their participation in ten civic behaviors. And, more than 80 percent of the parent leaders made improvements to their mental, emotional, and physical health.

We added additional programming. PLTI-KC held three virtual Networking Nights with civic leaders to grow parents’ connections and influence in the community. We are thankful to these leaders and other organizations who see parents as assets and partner with PLTI-KC.

Demand for our program remains strong. PLTI-KC parents leaders are our best recruiters. Yet again, we had more applicants than we could accept. The fourth cohort of parent leaders started in October. PLTI-KC parent leaders represent the demographic diversity of Kansas City and now total 62.

Our parent leaders are an active constituency in Kansas City. In 2021 alone, PLTI-KC parent leaders performed 83 civic actions. They joined boards and commissions, testified in front of elected bodies, engaged with media, participated in additional leadership and advocacy training, and grew their PLTI community projects. A parent leader from the first cohort, Rachel Russell, was elected to the Kansas City, Kansas School Board.

We remain grateful. PLTI-KC is an affiliate of the country’s premier parent leadership organization: the National Parent Leadership Institute, which has a nearly 30-year track record of building parent power. We are thankful for their guidance as we grow a high-quality program in Kansas City. In addition, PLTI-KC is deeply appreciative of the funders who believe in our mission and our highly talented facilitators who make the program possible.

Sincerely,

Julie Holland
Site Director
THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Parent Leadership Training Institute-Kansas City is a sponsored project of Community Capital Fund (CCF)
Our Why: When parents are engaged in participatory democracy, child outcomes improve.

VISION:
Parents are an active and included constituency, enhancing the civic fabric of Kansas City.

MISSION:
Parent Leadership Training Institute-Kansas City trains and mobilizes parents to be leading advocates for children.

VALUES:
- Parents are Assets. Parents are assets and experts on issues affecting children.
- Nurturing Community. PLTI fosters a nurturing community built through deep and meaningful relationships that supports parents and their advocacy efforts.
- Stronger through Diversity. The diversity of our community fosters understanding, accountability, and inclusion. PLTI-KC brings together parents across differences (e.g., race, zip code, age, culture).
- Parents’ Agenda is Our Agenda. PLTI-KC is nonpartisan. We don’t tell parents which children’s issues they should care about or advocate for; they tell us.
- Two-Generational for Lasting Change: The civic activism of PLTI-KC parent leaders influences their children & grandchildren, who become leaders and advocates in their own right.

PLTI-KC believes that we strengthen families, communities, and our democracy when parents have the leadership skills to maximize child outcomes at home, in schools, in their neighborhoods, and in public policy. The program includes the following:
1. A 21-week leadership and civics course (transportation, childcare, and meals provided) with nationally trained facilitators,
2. A framework for parents to develop community projects, and
3. Individualized coaching and community connections to advance parents’ civic leadership during the program and after graduation.

“PLTI means parent leaders working together for positive impact for our children, our communities, and future generations.”
— Elizabeth Mounteer
PLTI-KC parent leaders represent the demographic diversity of Kansas City. They are racially, economically, culturally, geographically diverse, and diverse by age and by definition of “parent” (e.g., foster, mentor, grandparent, godparent). PLTI-KC selects a yearly cohort of up to 25 parents and supports a growing alumni network.
PARENT LEADERS IN ACTION

PLTI-KC parent leaders performed 73 civic actions. They are making a difference in their community in the following ways:

SEAT AT THE TABLE

27 parent leaders joined decision-making tables, directing policies that impact children and families in Kansas City and beyond.
- 10 participate in advisory boards or working groups for nonprofit or community initiatives.
- 9 are directors on nonprofit boards.
- 3 appointed to Jackson county and Missouri state boards or commissions.
- 3 appointed to City of Kansas City, MO boards or commissions.
- 2 serve as leaders on the PTA/PTO of their children’s schools.
- 1 elected to a public school board (Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools).

USING THEIR VOICE

17 parent leaders shared their expertise and lived experiences to influence policies and media coverage on children’s issues.
- 10 interviewed for news articles or community reports on children’s issues like child care, Medicaid, COVID impact, or their PLTI community projects.
- 4 testified at public meetings held by school boards, city council, and state legislature.
- 3 spoke on national and local panels related to advocacy and education.

GROWING THEIR LEADERSHIP

25 parent leaders took additional courses, certifications, and degrees to advance their knowledge and skills.

RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP

4 parent leaders received national, city, and school awards for their leadership and advocacy efforts.
The NYU Metro Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools is the independent, outside evaluator that assesses PLTI-KC’s outcomes using a pre/post-survey. The survey measures the program’s impact on parents’ civic skills, engagement, and knowledge, as well as their experiences with the program. The survey is statistically rigorous, consisting of constructs and weighted questions to measure changes in belief or behavior accurately.

Below are excerpts from the evaluation of PLTI-KC’s third cohort of parents who graduated in May 2021.

**Civic Behaviors**

Parent leaders increased their participation in ten civic behaviors over the course of participating in PLTI-KC.


— Lisa Bond
Civic Outcomes
Parent leaders showed growth in all four civic outcome areas.

Civic confidence
- Pre: 65.2%
- Post: 80.3%

Civic knowledge
- Pre: 63.1%
- Post: 77.6%

Knowledge of elected officials
- Pre: 68.6%
- Post: 80.4%

Social Media for civic or political purposes
- Pre: 68.5%
- Post: 70.2%

Personal Growth
A majority of parents made significant changes in their personal lives.

Running for public office
- 59% Have thought about it
- 41% Have taken steps

Starting a new group, club or organization in my community
- 58% Have thought about it
- 42% Have taken steps

Changing or advancing my career
- 58% Have thought about it
- 42% Have taken steps

Furthering my education
- 58% Have thought about it
- 42% Have taken steps

Making changes in my financial situation
- 58% Have thought about it
- 42% Have taken steps

Making changes in my family situation
- 58% Have thought about it
- 42% Have taken steps

Making changes in my physical, mental, or emotional health
- 58% Have thought about it
- 42% Have taken steps

Advocating for my child and for other children
- 58% Have thought about it
- 42% Have taken steps

PLTI is a fabulous opportunity to learn how to do more things that are bigger than yourself that will help our young people succeed and our communities be stronger!
— Val Posey
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS TO BE ADVOCATES?
We know our child best. Everyone else gets to see a piece of our child, but parents have the whole picture. We know everything about them. We also know and understand the barriers our children face and provide a different perspective on avenues to overcome such barriers.

WHAT LESSON DID YOU LEARN FROM THE PROGRAM?
The inequities in our system are deep. I am not going to solve everything, and it’s not within my power to solve everything. I think about it as a large rock, and we are all a chisel. If I can chisel away at it and bring others to help me, we can all have a greater impact. We all can chisel at it a little bit at a time to make huge systemic changes.

PLTI created a space for us to unlock our leadership potential through a lens of equity and inclusion and enhanced my skills as a leader in my community.

HOW HAS YOUR TIME IN PLTI INSPIRED YOU?
It created ways for me to stretch outside of my comfort zone and see how to be an effective leader for our children

HOW HAS YOUR TIME IN PLTI INSPIRED YOU?
It was a place where I was able to come together in community to understand systemic structures that impact our children, dig into the root causes, and find tools we can use as parent leaders to help dismantle and rebuild something better. It also gave me the confidence to take on more responsibility and be a leader in my community.

When I started in the program, I wanted to create a parent organization centered around the Mandarin program at Foreign Language Academy, but I realized the issues extended beyond that. With the support of my fellow parent leaders, I gained the confidence to instead run for office in the PTO (parent-teacher organization) and am now the PTO president. In this position, I have a platform to solve problems and make a greater impact.

“We are all leaders.”
WHY DID YOU JOIN PLTI?
I grew up with that mindset of giving back to others. My parents are refugees, and a Jewish organization in NY sponsored them to come to America. So, growing up, I was taught to give back to others. Unfortunately, giving back to others is lacking now. I’m hoping to make a difference somehow.

HOW DOES PLTI CONNECT PARENTS?
PLTI gives parents a good perspective of other parents. You’re in your comfort zone and tend to stick to your social circle, people similar to you. PLTI gives parents the chance to see things from a different perspective, from different cultures. You learn about the various challenges and opportunities that other people have.

HOW HAS PLTI IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?
Being a part of PLTI has given me more confidence to believe that I can make a difference. It was a genuine space, that I personally needed, where my thoughts and experiences were encouraged and valued. The most special piece for me is the relationships made, and a few re-connects which is awesome.

“We need to challenge rules when they are not fair or equitable.”
WHAT DID PLTI TEACH YOU?
It made the city bigger for me. It made other issues real. Every parent in PLTI had a story and a kid, and it made you care. Not just about the kids in my school district but across the city. We are a city that is connected. If KCMO doesn’t have successful kids, it impacts us all.

With the pandemic and political climate, PLTI helped me survive and focus on the best of what I can do and control to impact my community for change.

WHAT ARE YOUR PASSIONS?
People pay a lot of lip service to children and education, but the real work comes in our communities, the real work is in our schools, the real work is on our streets. If you can get involved in your local school, the impact is wide-ranging. And the schools should be the focus of our communities because they impact us today and in the future.

HOW HAS PLTI IMPACTED YOU?
Other parents in the group were able to help me navigate the IEP (individualized education plan) process for my daughter. It was the perfect storm of something that I needed, and PLTI offered all of the information. We cried together; we connected on a human level. I have real friendships now from this group because we care so much about what happens to this city.

“Everyone has a story to tell. Everyone has something to contribute. You can learn something from everyone.”
WHY SHOULD PARENTS BE ADVOCATES?
Parents know their children better than anyone, their skills, dreams, and aspirations. Their role as advocates comes down to ensuring that their children get the necessary support and personal attention they need to succeed in school. Every parent wants the best for their children, but sometimes families feel unsure how they should engage in their children’s schools, and schools sometimes lack the capacity to bring parents on board.

WHAT WAS YOUR PLTI EXPERIENCE LIKE?
Since we were in lockdown during the program, PLTI was a great way to connect virtually with other people I wouldn’t have met otherwise. Even though we came from different places and backgrounds, we all had the same goal and fire. I learned a lot. There were things I thought I knew and they got refined and there were things I had no clue about. It changed the way I look at things and what is possible. I learned at a deeper level that change can happen and we can make an impact when we do it together. During the classes, I felt comfortable contributing and the facilitators created an inclusive, supportive environment for parents to be themselves and share their views.

WHY SHOULD OTHER PARENTS PARTICIPATE IN PLTI?
PLTI is a great learning experience and opens your horizons; it’s an opportunity to meet other passionate parents. It opens you to others’ perspectives. Parent leadership has a ripple effect. It benefits you, but you then influence other parents, your children, and your community. While a lot needs to be done to improve outcomes for children, it’s good to have the tools and knowledge to know how to engage and advocate at the different levels of government. For example, I should call or write to my representative’s office if I really care about something. I didn’t know that elected officials take constituents’ messages into consideration.

“Find common ground if you want to start something.”

PARENT LEADER: PAOLA VERA
PARENT LEADER:
REGINA HEATH

WHY DID YOU JOIN PLTI?
The initial reason I joined PLTI was that, at the time, I was a parent liaison at an elementary school, and I thought it would make me better at my job. Little did I know what an impact it would have on me. PLTI opened my eyes to policy and how it impacts my community. I learned how a bill becomes a law, who my state legislators and council people are, and how to contact them.

HOW DID PLTI IMPACT YOU?
I adore PLTI. As part of the program, we did 1:1 check-ins with Julie, the site director. She gave me resources and made connections to help me develop my community project. Talking with her was encouraging.

The PLTI classes stretched me. I never thought that I would make it through a class on policy, for example. But, I learned that to be a good leader, you have to examine yourself first, know you can grow, and know you can break cycles that previously defined you.

WHY IS PLTI IMPORTANT TO THE COMMUNITY?
PLTI is just an awesome growth experience. Parents will become better advocates and more aware of the policy and social issues happening in the community.

“Sometimes advocates are needed to be the voice for children who cannot speak up for themselves. We need to be their voice.”
HOW DID PLTI EMPOWER YOU?
As a kid, I received a lot of negative messages. Messages that have caused me to doubt myself. PLTI provided me with validation and reminded me that I don’t have to hold specific credentials in order to advocate for my children or others. PLTI gave me the confidence to network and use my voice.

HOW DOES PLTI HELP THE COMMUNITY?
PLTI helps the community by building stronger, more focused advocates. These advocates become strong leaders in our community.

WHAT DID YOU GAIN FROM THE EXPERIENCE?
PLTI provided me with a safe place to learn and grow. It provided me with new opportunities to network and meet new lifelong friends.

“It’s time to find something new.”
WHAT IS AN ISSUE YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT?
My passion is mental health in young children. We can have a mental health issue, but that doesn’t separate us or take away from our worth and value; it makes us strong. The more we talk about it, the more we can normalize it.

WHY SHOULD SOCIETY INVEST IN CHILDREN AND PARENTS?
Because they’re children, they are our future. We need to invest in them. There is power in parenting; the purpose of parenting is to protect our kids and help them thrive in this world. We need tools and skillsets to better ourselves so we can better our children. If you don’t take care of yourself, then how can you take care of your kid? PLTI helped me gain those fundamental tools of claiming my voice.

HOW IS PLTI IMPACTING YOUR COMMUNITY?
For change to begin, it does take a community. Where there are people, there is power. I was constantly blown away by the things my cohort was doing in the community.

PLTI has significantly altered my view of the world, in regards to my internal superpower for advocacy. It has truly been fascinating to collaborate with a group of diverse and passionate individuals. As parent leaders, we are connected by the singular notion of improving children’s lives within our community.

“When we come together, we can make unforeseen change.”
CIVIC PARTNERS

It takes partnerships to make lasting change. PLTI-KC partners with other organizations and individuals to support parents on their leadership journey. Our partners serve as guest speakers, mentors, recruiters, connectors, and resources. In addition, PLTI-KC parent leaders are sought out by our partner organizations to serve on their boards, commissions, committees, focus groups, speaker panels, or featured in articles & interviews. Thank you to the following organizations for their partnership:

• BikeWalkKC
• City of Kansas City, Missouri
• Community Capital Fund
• Connection Coach KC
• EarlystART
• Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
• Empower Missouri
• GreenLight Fund Kansas City
• Hall Family Foundation
• Kansas City Public Library
• Kansas City Public Schools
• KCUR
• Kids Win Missouri
• KMBC
• Latinx Education Collaborative
• LEANLAB Education
• Missouri Budget Project
• Missouri Public Charter School Association
• Missouri Equity Education Partnership
• Parent Power Lab
• SchoolSmartKC
• Shirley’s Kitchen Cabinet
• Show Me KC Schools
• Shumaker Family Foundation
• Sosland Foundation
• Start at Zero
• The Transition Academy
• Turn the Page KC
• United Way of Greater Kansas City
• United WE
• Urban League of Greater Kansas City

In a year of disconnection from the “normal” ways of gathering with people, PLTI has given me a regular opportunity to connect with a community of passionate, brilliant, and inspiring parents and caregivers. I have learned so many new avenues through which to engage in my community and advocate for kids.”

— Hallie Richardson
A CONVERSATION WITH CASEY HANSON, DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT WITH KIDS WIN MISSOURI

WHAT IS THE MISSION OF KIDS WIN MISSOURI?
The mission of Kids Win Missouri is to further child well-being by advancing the health, education, safety, and development of Missouri children and their families, especially those who are at-risk because of poverty, abuse, neglect, racial inequities, or other risk factors. We do this by advocating for policies at the state level related to early childhood education, Medicaid, child care, and supporting youth at every stage of their development.

HOW HAVE YOU PARTNERED WITH PLTI?
PLTI parent leaders provided input on Kids Win’s policy reports on Medicaid and child care. Since they are parents, hearing how these issues have impacted their lives and their children was critical. The Kids Win Missouri team has been guest speakers at PLTI classes, providing tips on how to advocate with elected officials. The partnership with PLTI helps get parents in the Kansas City area at the table to talk to state legislators about policies that affect children.

WHY DO YOU THINK IT’S IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS TO BE ADVOCATES?
Whether they think about it or not, parents advocate for their children from the time they are born, whether at doctor’s appointments or within their school. Some of the skills you get naturally from parenting translate well to advocacy. Parents are a vital group to advocate for children’s issues because they understand these issues personally.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A PARENT WHO IS THINKING OF APPLYING TO PLTI?
If you’re a parent thinking about leadership, PLTI is a great way for you to develop those skills and figure out what areas you’re interested in and so you can go on to be a leader in your community. PLTI is an impactful program that empowers parents to make a difference for their kids on a bigger scale.

Learn more about Kids Win Missouri at https://kidswinmissouri.org/

“Parents are natural advocates.”
PLTI-KC community projects are opportunities for parent leaders to apply what they are learning in class to their passion area. The projects are as diverse as our parent leaders, from growing their knowledge on a particular children’s issue to expanding their network and connections to testifying before public officials to launching an entirely new initiative. While diverse, all projects are focused on improving the lives of children.

- Mandarin Immersion Parent Group
- EDquitable KC: Creating equitable access to college and career resources, scholarships, internships, and jobs for Kansas City youth via an online tool
- KCMO Landlord Housing Voucher List: Adequate housing for families on a housing voucher.
- Live-stream Belton School District school board meetings to increase access and transparency to parents
- Reimagining family engagement in schools through co-creation
- Deaf and hard of hearing education
- Creative writing afterschool program for youth
- Creative curriculum for classrooms
- Walk like Ajamu Webster, Be Part of the Solution: Civic Education for Youth
- Equity in school communication for ELL families
- Knowledge is Confidence: educating students about misinformation in the media
- SolidarIEP: mutual support for parents of special education students
- Solar Up MLK Park: Solar lighting to improve safety and reduce environmental impact and cost
- Connect the Dottes Reading Program: local, minority-owned businesses offer incentives to encourage children to read
- Generational wellness empowerment
- Growing Together: Connecting the dots between community gardens and the neighborhoods that surround them.
- Interpretation services offered at school board meetings to increase parent engagement
- Girly Inc: The Underwear Project.
- Reading Matters: Advocating for scientific-based structured literacy curriculum and instruction in all classrooms.
- Pink Tie Promotions LLC presents The Children’s Art Fair & Festival (TM)
- Just Like a Hero: increasing diversity in children’s literature while presenting mental health themes accessible by children of all ages and their families
MEET OUR TEAM

Crystal Everett, Phase II Facilitator. Crystal Everett, a Kansas City native and graduate of Lincoln College Prep, currently serves as manager of career and technical education for Kansas City Public Schools. Crystal is also the founder of Everett Consulting Group LLC, an organization focused on educating and empowering both students and their supporters about college and career related opportunities. She holds a BA from Drake University and a Masters of Education from Northern Arizona University.

Julie Holland, Site Director. In addition to leading PLTI, Julie Holland is regional director for Urban Leaders Fellowship. Previously, Julie served as education advisor to Kansas City Mayor Sly James. She has also worked at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and congressional offices in Oklahoma and Washington, D.C. She holds a BS from Oklahoma State University, MPA from Syracuse University, and a doctorate in law and policy from Northeastern University.

Denesha Snell, Phase II Facilitator. Denesha Snell, a Kansas City native, is director of programs for American Public Square at Jewell. Denesha has devoted her career to addressing community issues including parent advocacy, cultural diversity, causes of health disparities, violence prevention and improving relationships with community and civic partners. She holds a BS from Tennessee State University and a Masters of Education from Rockhurst University.

Annie Watson, Phase I Facilitator. Annie Watson is senior associate with School Readiness Consulting. Annie has a wide range of early care and education experience including having served as a classroom teacher, education coach, pedagogical consultant, and nonprofit leader. Annie is an advocate for high-quality early education and learning environments with a passion for intersectional equity and anti-racism work. She holds a BA from Park University.

Elizabeth Williams, Phase I Facilitator. Liz Williams has over 20 years experience as an executive in operations, sales, marketing and training in the corporate and government sectors. She’s an expert in inspiring large teams to embrace change and deliver world-class customer service. She holds a BA from UMKC.