PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE-KANSAS CITY

Training parents who care to become parents who lead

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 2019-2020

PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE
Kansas City
Transformational, generational change. Those were the words that came to mind when I first learned about Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) in 2015. I was attending a workshop for Mayors’ education advisors hosted by the National League of Cities showcasing best practices to strengthen early childhood systems. At the time I was education advisor to Kansas City Mayor Sly James. Family engagement was touted as an essential ingredient for high-quality early childhood systems and PLTI was featured as a model program in that area.

Researchers have declared for years that family engagement is central to a child’s healthy development. Yet, family engagement is often limited to family participation in schools or programs. While “parent as participant” is an important start, it is just that, a start. At the other end of the family engagement continuum is “parent as advocate.” And this is where transformational, generational systems-change occurs. This is where PLTI does its work. “Parent as advocate” is civic engagement. Parents influencing upstream policies and systems can improve all aspects of children’s lives.

At the workshop, I met PLTI graduates who shared how PLTI built their confidence and sense of purpose by expanding their civic toolkit and networks, and by opening doors to new civic, personal, and professional opportunities. They shared how their personal transformations strengthened their relationships with their children, who now see their parents as leaders and advocates and are following in their footsteps.

I knew a program solely invested in parents’ potential as change agents would have ripples of impact in Kansas City. But before bringing PLTI to Kansas City, Mayor James and partners held a “Taste of PLTI” for over 150 community leaders and parents to see if there was interest in and a need for the program. The response was overwhelmingly positive and the pilot cohort of PLTI started in the fall of 2018.

As we close out 2020, PLTI-KC has 25 alumni and 25 fellows working and advocating on behalf of children. Some of them and their community projects are highlighted in this report. You will also find in this report the 2019-2020 cohort’s outcome evaluation.

We couldn’t do this transformational work without support and a great team. PLTI is deeply appreciative of the funders who believe in the mission of PLTI and our phenomenal facilitators who make PLTI possible. And to the many organizations that have partnered with PLTI because they believe parents should be an included constituency on behalf of children, we sincerely thank you.
THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

LIVE UNITED
United Way

Parent Leadership Training Institute – Kansas City is a sponsored project of Community Capital Fund (CCF)
Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) believes that families, communities, and democracy are strengthened when parents have the skills to maximize child outcomes at home, in school, in their neighborhood, and in public policy. PLTI includes the following: 1) a 21-week leadership and civics course and curriculum (childcare and meals provided) with nationally trained facilitators, 2) a framework for parents to develop their own community leadership projects, and 3) individualized coaching and community connections to advance parents' civic engagement during the program and after graduation. Over the course of the program, PLTI-KC parents start to not only see themselves in leadership positions, but know they can take collective action to solve problems that affect them, their families, and their communities.

When families are engaged in participatory democracy, child outcomes in health, safety, and education will improve.
What are your most pressing concerns for your children and others?
As a mother of a child who had Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) and later died of a brain tumor, I advocated for the legislation that required all babies be tested for SMA. Missouri was the first state to pass this legislation. I continue to lend my voice and activism toward Medicaid expansion in MO.

In MO, there are no services to support working families of children with special needs. I only qualified for services if I didn’t work. There’s the Sarah Lopez waiver to become eligible for Medicaid, but Jaelah died waiting for a waiver to get home health care. And there was no daycare to take her to that I could afford. We had to pay out of pocket for all of her equipment and specialists.

What impacted you the most about your experience in PLTI?
I’ve been asked by the Missouri Public Charter School Association to go to Jefferson City and advocate to legislators to #FixtheGlitch and KCPS asked me to participate in focus group on factors that affect local families’ school enrollment decisions for their children.

Where do you see yourself leading as a parent advocate?
I believe my calling is to help parents of children with special needs navigate systems, so they get the right support for their children. My goal is to create a KC Metro Special Education PTA.

Jillian is the mother of three girls. She graduated from PLTI in 2020.
What are your most pressing concerns for your children and others?
It's important to me that all families feel welcome at schools regardless of race. I also really care about how schools create a sense of community for parents and children since children often aren't attending the same school as other kids from their block, so the traditional progression of relationship-building at schools is missing. Schools should help foster those relationships.

Why PLTI?
What drew me to PLTI was the sincere focus on equity in education and meeting the many needs of families, not just students. Everyone in my Cohort brought different gifts to the experience, and that was cool to be a part of.

What impacted you the most about your experience in PLTI?
PLTI gave me the background and confidence I needed to be able to step up. As a parent to two bright and unique thinkers, I have a passion for meeting the needs of gifted students - not just their academic needs, but primarily their social and emotional needs.

Where do you see yourself leading as a parent advocate?
After PLTI, I enrolled in a program to earn my gifted education certification, and I hope it will give me the knowledge I need to better advocate for gifted learners, especially those from typically underrepresented backgrounds, in our school and community.
What are your most pressing concerns for children?
I'm passionate about advocating for freshman high schoolers. I have concerns that there isn't very much accountability at the school and district levels for advancing students without enough credits to graduate. We have high school students who don't have enough credits to graduate with their cohort class. I am passionate about increasing the graduation rate as well as decreasing the dropout rate in KC.

What impacted you the most about your experience in PLTI?
I already had a passion to advocate for children. PLTI helped me see my ideal was a realistic thing; the connections and network helped me get to where I needed to be.

Where do you see yourself leading as a parent advocate?
I'm researching solutions to why students are credit deficient in high school. I want to be on site at the schools to actually see what a typical day looks like by interviewing and shadowing the counselors at high schools to collect data to help me define the problem. My focus will be on foster kids or those in juvenile detention centers who are at risk of losing credits due to being in transition, moving or transferring mid-semester.

"I already had a passion to advocate for children. PLTI helped me see my ideal was a realistic thing."

GLORIA WILLIAMS

Gloria is a grandmother of 13 children, ages 1 to 15yrs old. She graduated from PLTI in 2020.
What are your most pressing concerns for your children and others?

Raising a child with special needs. My son was diagnosed with ADHD and ODD (Oppositional Defiance Disorder), but it was not until he was 11 that we received the Autism diagnosis. Nothing about my adult life has been about what I wanted to do, it’s been about obligations I felt I owed to others and, more specifically, about being a better parent than the ones that made me. I imagine that’s why it makes me happy when I’m making others happy.

What impacted you the most about your experience in PLTI?

My new descriptive word for myself is "advocate." Until PLTI, I did not know that the word “advocate” and I had anything in common. I was introduced to PLTI at a time I didn’t know I needed it, or that using my voice and speaking up or speaking out mattered. I had recently lost my dad, and was struggling to get services for my son, and, at the same time, teaching this young black man with disabilities how to navigate the world. PLTI taught me how to use my voice, make valuable connections, and garner the support I needed.

Where do you see yourself leading as a parent advocate?

To date, my family has done an interview with KC PBS about the nexus of being black and autistic. I’m working on gaining local support to help law enforcement and medical professionals understand and better communicate with adults with disabilities. I volunteer for organizations like High Aspirations and Connections to Success and have also participated in a podcast with The Transition Academy sharing my experiences raising a young black man with an invisible disability.

"My new descriptive word for myself is advocate"
What are your most pressing concerns for your children and others?
I am disturbed about events that promote sexism and racism and I struggle engaging with parents who are not engaged on racial lines.

Why PLTI?
After my 7 yr old was born, something changed in me. I wanted to be more involved in education and in the community, as a leader and participant.

Why is it important for parents to be advocates?
Parents will have a huge impact on the lives of kids, and on array of issues in community. I wish more than 25 parents could be trained a year in PLTI. I see a lack of fathers in every volunteer leadership team I’m involved with, so I would love to see fathers get more involved in school and community opportunities. PLTI is critical to learning about those opportunities in KC.

What impacted you the most about your experience in PLTI?
PLTI has had a huge impact on how ambitious I’m thinking.
COMMUNITY PROJECTS

PLTI 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. Below are some examples.

Leading for Inclusion and Literacy. Cheryl Hampton's (PLTI 2020) community project became a published children’s book, Just Like Me! It’s the first book in the “Everyone is Someone” series she created with co-author ZaKiya Wilson and illustrator and local artist Adrienne Clayton. The book follows the story of six-year-old Charlize as she experiences her first race-related moment. The book is available at Rainy Day Books & Amazon.

Leading to Support Teachers. Kirsten Brown (PLTI 2020) created the social media campaign "Pay MO Teachers" for her community project. It’s purpose is to raise awareness about the teacher shortage crisis in Missouri and that Missouri ranks 49th out of 50 states for average teacher salary. Ultimate goal is to build a coalition advocating to legislators in Jefferson City for increased teacher pay. You can follow @PayMOTeachers on Facebook and Twitter.

Leading by Building the Skills of the Next Generation. For her community project, Liz Williams (PLTI 2019) researched and developed a life skills & leadership course for middle schoolers. The program focuses on self-discovery, responsibility, and conflict resolution, among other topics. Piloted at Hogan Preparatory Academy, the course became so successful (improved students' classroom engagement and self confidence), it is now taught as a continuum of stand alone courses from 6th -12th grade at Hogan.

Leading for Girl’s Self-Esteem & Breast Health. Tiffany Price (PLTI 2019) turned her community project into a 501(c)(3). Hold Em Up 4 Care considers properly fitted bras an essential school supply. The organization measures girls, provides them with bras (especially in the hard to find sizes), and teaches them how to perform breast self-exams.
The NYU Metro Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools is the independent, outside evaluator that assesses the outcomes of the PLTI program using a parent survey. The parent survey measures the impact of the program on parents’ civic skills, engagement, and knowledge, as well as their experiences with the program. Parent surveys were completed at the beginning and the end of the 21-session initiative. The survey is statistically rigorous, consisting of constructs and weighted questions to accurately measure changes in belief or behavior. Below are excerpts from 2019-2020 evaluation.

**Personal and Civic Action**

The overwhelming majority of parents reported that PLTI inspired them to think about or take steps to change their personal and civic lives.
**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.

**Crystal Everett, Phase II Facilitator.** Crystal Everett, a Kansas City native and graduate of Lincoln College Prep, currently serves as the Real World Learning Coordinator 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 program director for American Public Square. 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.
PLTI is connected to the Kansas City community. Other organizations and individuals play an integral part in the success of PLTI. They serve as guest speakers, mentors, recruiters, and resources for additional trainings and civic engagement. In addition, PLTI is sought out by organizations looking for PLTI parent leaders 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
- Crossroads Preparatory Academy
- Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
- GreenLight Fund
- Kansas City PBS
- Kansas City Public Library
- Kansas City Public Schools
- KC Regional COVID-19 Response & Recovery Fund
- KCUR
- Kids Win Missouri
- LEANLAB Education
- Missouri Public Charter School Association
- Parent Power Lab
- Race Equity and Inclusion Project
- SchoolSmartKC
- Set the Schools Free
- She Should Run
- Shirley's Kitchen Cabinet
- Show Me KC Schools
- Start at Zero
- The Transition Academy
- Turn the Page KC
- United WE
- Women's Employment Network

If your organization is interested in partnering with PLTI parent leaders, contact Julie Holland at pltikcmo@gmail.com.