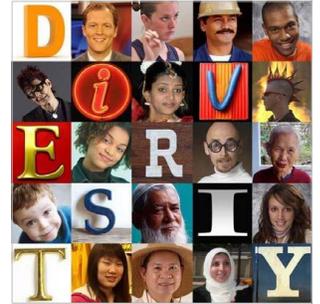


INCLUSIVE INQUIRY

Community Conversations Project 2016



After hearing from people that they wanted an inclusive community, we wanted to go deeper into the topic of inter-cultural friendship by exploring:

- People's aspirations for connection
- What kept them apart
- What might bring them together

After nine conversations with 77 people, the answer we heard was:

People want a sense of their shared humanity, but are kept apart by fear. What brings us together is courage.



Shared Humanity

People want a sense of human connection across the boundaries of culture and language. They feel grateful and proud to be part of a society where inclusion, acceptance, and diversity matter. They find delight in learning about the food and customs of another culture. That exploration results in an enriched and expanded vision of themselves and their world.

On a personal level, people said that friendship across culture helped them to grow in empathy and understanding.

"It's nice to know you are part of something bigger."

"You learn their hope and their understanding."

"Humans need each other, always."

Fear

Fear of judgement, failure, and embarrassment can keep us from creating the connections that give us a sense of shared humanity.

Cultural Misunderstanding

We heard many stories about cultural misunderstandings, where attempts to connect and assist were met with rejection, leading to a sense of shame and isolation. Both newcomers and long-term residents told stories of avoiding cross-cultural interactions that might end in rejection.

We heard that pursuing new friendships makes us feel vulnerable. As one participant said, "We have to be conscious of the difficulty involved for anyone in connecting with strangers."

Isolation

And so people find safety in familiarity. Newcomers find it easier to bond with people from their countries of origin, and with other newcomers who are facing similar challenges. Long-term residents can be too time-pressed to make new friendships across the barriers of language and culture. This isolation leads to the perception that immigrants aren't integrating, which reinforces fear and difference.

Racism

Teens talk more openly about the overt racism they face in school, movies, and in social media. They spoke about the frustrations they feel in fighting to limit stereotypes. Adults spoke about their concerns about different cultural groups, but worried they appeared racist.

Courage

People told us that the way to a sense of shared humanity is through courage. We all have a responsibility to make a step towards connection.



Safe Spaces

People talked repeatedly about the need to create safe spaces where they can take risks — try out an unfamiliar language, make mistakes, and have the space to play. They want spaces where we can build trust and empathy by sharing our stories.

Community service organizations can help create places where participants have the opportunity to meet each other often, in small groups, and share their experiences - places where people have the opportunity to see one another's vulnerability and difficulty, and understand that it mirrors their own. Individuals talked about the importance of sharing food together in neutral spaces like a coffee shop, and in the more intimate spaces of their homes.

Safe Actions

We also need to become aware of HOW we are interacting with people. We need to make ourselves into safe spaces. Language barriers can be overcome with a will to communicate. In order to connect, we have to make that effort, to slow down our speech, to take the time to listen and understand. Perhaps most importantly, we need to challenge the assumptions and judgements we make about people, every day.

By creating safe spaces in the world, and within ourselves, we can develop a sense of our shared humanity: we can make new friends who challenge us and help us grow; we can develop a larger vision of ourselves and our world; and we can contribute to continually building a society that values diversity and acceptance and inclusion.

SAFE SPACES = FRIENDSHIP = INDIVIDUAL GROWTH = BETTER SOCIETY = BETTER WORLD

