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#changetheconversation



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Change the Conversation with *Possibilities*



Have you ever been at a family holiday gathering and suddenly one of your relatives says something that hushes the room? An awkward silence ensues and meaningful glances and eye rolls follow. You realize that if something doesn't happen soon, someone may take the turkey away and people may not speak to each other for years. Most times, some smart relative changes the topic of conversation to something safer. Everyone lets out a sigh of relief, and the turkey eating begins.

Today, we need to be able to have different, and sometimes difficult, conversations with one another. Not only are our relatives saying things that cause conflict, our conversations as a society seem absorbed with anger, hatred and fear. There is really no escaping division and separation. Unlike with our relatives, we cannot just roll our eyes and take our turkey home. Our society is our home and we are living with one another. We need a different kind of conversation to connect and change.

Since 1995, *Possibilities* has worked with very diverse groups of people to create new and creative ways to talk to one another. To be true to our tag line, "Connecting People, Changing Communities," we base our conversations on our core values

and create a space where people feel safe. When people are safe, they are ready for meaningful conversation and open to change. A conversation full of dignity, trust, responsibility and service that includes everyone can and does create change. At a deeper level, these conversations prove that though our backgrounds, perspectives and opinions might differ, as human beings we all have value and really are more alike than different.

Each year, our magazine is full of stories about our work, our partners and how they make our communities better. As you are reading this time, we ask you to consider what kind of society you want. How would you change the conversation? There is no better place, and no better time, to begin.

#changetheconversation
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Our mission: To strengthen the ability of people to work together for community change.

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OFFICE:
5131 N. Classen Blvd. Suite 207
Oklahoma City, OK 73118

MAIL:
PO Box 60254
Oklahoma City, OK 73146

PHONE: 405-525-3131

EMAIL: info@possibilitiesinc.org

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Food for Thought

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Spend your lunch hour with people from our local community making a difference in our world. Hear stories of inspiration, hope and ideas for all of us. *Food For Thought* is food for our soul.

"thought provoking"
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Visit YouTube for past stories  PossibilitiesIncOklahomaCity
For the next event check our Events Page: possibilitiesinc.org/events



For People's Network dinners visit possibilitiesinc.org/events

Possibilities is proud to have People's Network dinners presented by Sunnyside Diner. Thank you Sunnyside!



Message from the President



From birth, we are schooled in the ways of behaving "nicely". For all practical purposes, this is a good thing. At an earlier and earlier age, our children are becoming a part of some social network, whether it be at pre-school or via Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Because of the excess of exposure that every random comment can now be subject to, we have become very sensitized to the offense we may cause to another group who may have a different set of beliefs. We have gone from being able to have candid, yet civil, conversations about all types of subjects, to having a lengthy list of taboos and an entire herd of sacred cattle. If someone should dare teeter toward forbidden territory, there is a general push to steer the discussion back to the safe zone. Thus, some very beneficial sharing never has the chance to occur under the cloak of being deemed to be less than socially acceptable.

This behavior pattern flies in the face of what we have to deal with today. We need to address problems head on and talk about them honestly if we ever hope to resolve them and, more importantly, reach a compromise with others. No permanent solution to an issue can be unilateral. We must have consensus to go forward. Conflicts that remain unsolved can only become worse or possibly hopeless if allowed to fester for a long time. Sadly, as we see more and more, they can also explode into consequences that create terrible outcomes for those involved, as well as innocent people who happen to be so unfortunate as to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. We need to remind ourselves that every conversation has a place and a time. The fact that it is very difficult to initiate some conversations need not be a deterrent to having them. Our society desperately needs us to have the critical discussions. The only way to change what we do not like is to face our fears by talking through these issues. But how does someone cross this barrier?

Possibilities has the tried and true methodology to work with diverse viewpoints and help groups of people come together and utilize new and creative ways to talk to one another. Our organization is very skilled at diffusing conflict, and pulling the conversation back to a place that is safe for all participants, without sacrificing the valuable, honest dialogue that needs to take place. When threats are eliminated or neutralized, people are then more prepared to open up and share their feelings. *Possibilities* knows how to support and encourage



this level of trust that is inclusive of all thoughts and opinions. In my experience, this methodology is unique to *Possibilities* and is truly a service that allows communities to develop permanent solutions to situations that may seem unsurmountable.

In these troubled times, we must make these conversations a reality. We so appreciate your continued support, and we truly need it to continue with our programs and even more importantly to support our alumni as they continue their growth as community leaders. The program is the first step to permanent change. Please say you will stand with us and support us to make this happen. For the fifth year in a row, we have a Founders Vision Match in honor of Linda Lambert and John Rex to match donations through December. No effort is too small, and all support is appreciated. The conversation has to start now.

Lucy Fritts

President, *Possibilities* Board of Directors

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To tackle the tough challenges and divisions facing our communities, *Possibilities* continues to forge ahead with innovative and successful methods to connect people for positive change.

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fschonwald@schonwaldland.com

DALE WOLF
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Changing the Conversation with Katawna Stephens, OKCPS



When I first became involved in *Possibilities*, I was in a leadership position, but had not really accepted that role. I was not comfortable with being thought of as a leader, or expressing my opinions in certain situations. *Possibilities Innovation Program*, to my surprise, was totally not what I expected as a leadership training. I can't tell you how blown away I was and still am by *PIP*! It was so refreshing to go into this program with everyone on the same playing field, with no titles. I have met people from very different backgrounds but with the same heart for community, who I probably would have never met otherwise. They have become friends for life.

I have made great strides through *PIP* and am able to build toward a common goal with others. I am more apt to listen to others and not be so quick to judge. *PIP* gives a solid foundation of creating and reaching your goals. *Possibilities* has taught me how to have fun in the midst of work while getting the job done. The tools help you break down your walls, allowing you to receive all that is being poured into you. I am more creative and create better trainings. I can adapt to any situation and not be afraid of push back. The tools give you the stick-to-it-ness to reevaluate your goals, regroup and push through the process to create the product you want. The process is just as important as the product; the process stage is where most of your learning and growth come. I appreciate that *Possibilities* wants us to use their tools and pass them forward. I can see how the work of *Possibilities* carries on in others that have been through the *PIP* program at OKCPS. All of the OKCPS community, regardless of role or position, should go through *PIP* to gain these life and leadership skills. The *Possibilities* way of teaching is so different and creates positive change.

In order to gain and grow, you have to allow some vulnerability. *PIP* has given me the ability to put my fears aside and be confident in planning and carrying out different ideas as a leader. *PIP* has helped me blossom into what and where I should be, grooming me to

be an effective leader at work and at home. *PIP* is leadership training with HEART. The great thing about *PIP* is any and every one can, and should, go through it. In order to build true community, it takes everyone from different backgrounds, races and levels of life. We all have something in common, whether life experiences or the same desire to change community. We have to slow down and give ourselves the chance to see our similarities, rather than always looking to outside appearances to see difference. Everyone has an opinion that has value, even if I don't agree. *Possibilities* creates a safe space to learn and grow.

Everyone needs *PIP* to experience true growth as a leader. Everyone is a leader in one way or another. *Possibilities* is vital to our future. Just look at how our society is right now, with so much division and hatred. We need the *Possibilities* way being taught everywhere so that we can grow together as a society. To become a society that understands and looks at individuals as people, and looks to find the commonality. Oklahoma City has a lot of work to do and everyone is a part of solution. The *Possibilities* impact is thriving families and communities.



Changing the Conversation with Rufus Howard, North Highland Elementary



Before *Possibilities*, I was very scattered and easily provoked, not really listening to others before answering. When I first applied to *PIP*, I didn't totally understand what the program was all about and figured it was just something else the district wanted me to do. I am so glad I signed up because I have grown by leaps and bounds for the better. I've grown in ways that I didn't even know I needed to grow. I have self-pride and self-worth. I have gained more patience and am more focused. My perspective has broadened. I have learned to look at things through new and different lenses. Interestingly, as I have grown, I have lost some friends along the way because of the new direction I am going. I now understand my focus and I am more patient with my children. My significant other has commented on the changes that she sees in me.



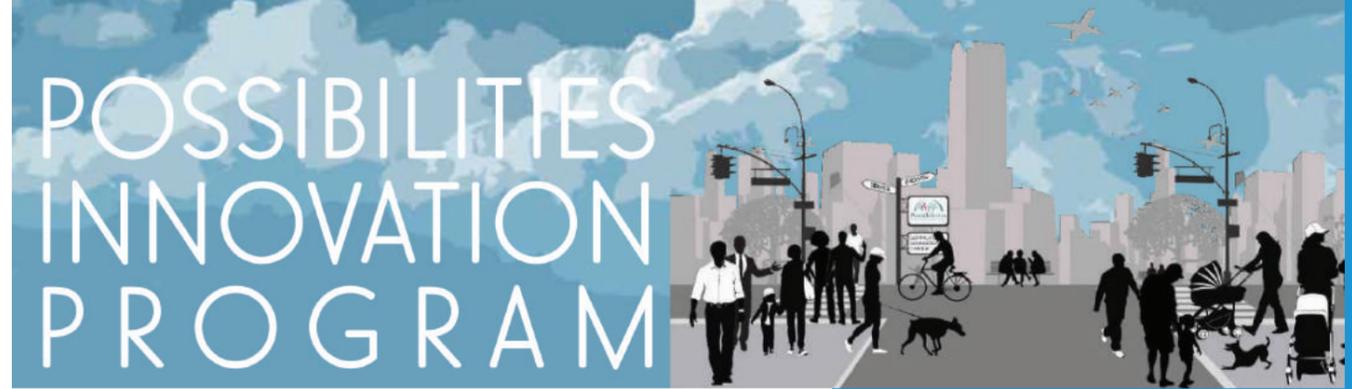
This year has been a big change for me. I transitioned to North Highland Elementary from John Marshall Mid-High. I have a special place in my heart for North Highland because I grew up in that neighborhood and went to school there. I want to be a piece of the changes happening throughout the school. We had a community health fair at John Marshall and I plan to bring something like that to this school to provide resources to the school and community. This program has given me the tools to help me step into my new position. The tools that are being taught are not just tools for now, but life stepping stones. Tools for wherever you are. They are life principles, something you can use and take with you forever. I believe in building relationships with students, parents and community. I know that it is going to take all of us working together to keep this school open for many years to come.

There are powerful tools in *PIP* that allow you to truly see people and see commonalities. I have had experiences that remind me that you never know what someone has been through. We are able to talk about tough subjects together, like race and obstacles we face. There are tools that make me look at myself, how I got to where I am now and what I can do to advance in my journey. This was painful and powerful. I understand growth comes with pain. I began to not look at the race of others, but the person as a human.

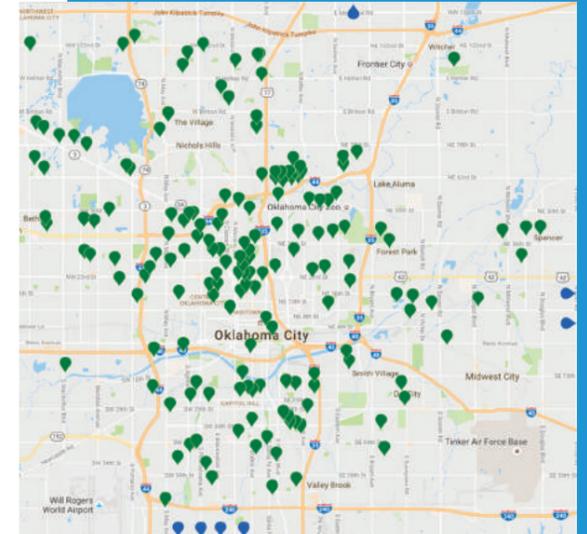
I appreciate the district for introducing me to *Possibilities*. I have grown in so many ways



personally and professionally. I believe if everyone in the OKCPS system would go through this program, the district would be so much further along in accomplishing goals and developing great leaders. *PIP* is about meeting you where you are and building a better leader. There are always new possibilities in the world, so we will always need the tools to go and grow on a personal and community level. Everyone truly need the tools that *Possibilities* teaches. If everyone, or even half of Oklahoma City, could go through *PIP*, I know our city would be greater for it. By investing in *Possibilities*, you are investing in invaluable tools. You are pouring into the lives of each person who goes through the program and by doing that, the lessons and tools are paid forward in their communities, spreading throughout greater Oklahoma City and beyond. The more people *Possibilities* can work with, the greater the change and lifelong impact. It's growth that can't be measured. I will never forget the tools and lessons I have learned.



Possibilities Innovation Program (PIP) is an ongoing leadership development journey that inspires community involvement and teaches tools for transformation. Participants, known as Community Innovators, are local citizens who range in age from teens to senior citizens and represent multiple cultures, economic and education levels. Community Innovators are leaders who transform through projects and communities as diverse as they are. Through *PIP*, people gain resources, the ability to connect to others, navigate through conflict and tough issues, and directly address issues of difference that divide communities. *Possibilities* helps build meaningful, authentic relationships needed for change. Sharing *Possibilities* philosophy and tools, Community Innovators help others reach their full potential through partnership and collaboration. This creates a cycle of people viewing themselves as confident, capable leaders who achieve their own vision for themselves, their family and community.



PIP Community Innovators' Communities

The progress 374 graduates, representing 158 communities, make in our neighborhoods, schools, houses of faith and business districts is impressive. A snapshot of just a few recent examples:

Engage and empower the community through thought provoking, inclusive art, piloting with a public art piece through the global Inside Out, The People's project (insideoutproject.net) at the former OKCPS administration building that is now vacant. The photo mural highlights hopes of individuals impacted by public education in central Oklahoma and serves as a rally cry to ensure quality public education.



Empower and engage individuals, families and communities by linking people to life-changing resources at Gatewood Elementary. Efforts began with a block party partnering with the neighborhood for Neighbors Night Out to assess needs, engage Hispanic families, and link with resources.

Bring people together with a connection event and bring resources to Thelma R. Parks Elementary beginning with a Thanksgiving themed community event and supply drive.

The Oklahoma City Educare School Celebration continues to bring families and the community together to connect in support of the school. This partnership of parents and school staff replicated the end of year celebration success with a fall carnival celebration.



A great part of *PIP* are the regular People's Network dinner gatherings. People's Network is an opportunity to share a meal with amazing leaders and stay in touch with local grassroots efforts, presented by Sunnyside Diner. 80 community projects were shared in the last year! Anyone interested in community work is welcome and the whole family can attend. Interested in *PIP* or People's Network? Call 405-525-3131 or visit possibilitiesinc.org.



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Changing the Conversation with Anesha Mason, Canadian Valley Nursing



I first became involved with *Possibilities* when I was a teenager and helped provide childcare during meetings. I have carried the identity of *Possibilities* so long, I don't know when it wasn't a part of my life. *PIP* has helped me overcome my shyness and I am now more interested in social change and making changes in my community. I have learned ways of networking and communicating with people who are different from me. The tools I have learned are important for my future to tackle any milestone I may face. For anyone who wants to be involved with something bigger than themselves, *Possibilities* is the answer. In fact, for anyone who wants to take a stand without it getting involved in politics, *Possibilities* is helpful. It is very important that the mission of *Possibilities* continue. By having conversations that start with our commonalities, instead of our differences, we can build change.



Changing the Conversation with Jennifer O'Neal, St. Anthony Hospital

I am a Surgery Nurse Manager at St. Anthony hospital in Oklahoma City and a *Possibilities* investor who makes a monthly financial investment. *Possibilities* has helped me to work with people on a more meaningful level and widen my circle of people to be around. I have learned to look at people in a deeper and different way. I always assumed people were one way, but I can now see that people are much different than how I picture them in my head. For instance, by attending the Food for Thought OKC lunches, I have a chance to see the speakers in a different way. I am able to see the process of what made them who they are. To see them not just as a personality on television or as their role at work, but to look at them uniquely. When I heard the Food For Thought talks from The Curbside Chronicle and Sunnyside Street Team, they gave me a practical way to not need to turn my back on the homeless, even if for me, that just means looking them in the eye and saying hello. *Possibilities* is about helping people, connecting people, and developing people at a grass roots level.



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Changing the Conversation with Elizabeth Chappell, Gateway Church and Rhema Church

I first heard about *Possibilities* through my church, where they were helping to plan a community event. *Possibilities* changed my world. I had never before been in a place where things were developed, things were said, and things were done without fighting. It was amazing. Before *Possibilities*, I would say I was a little fearful and timid. I was wanting to better myself to help others. Through *Possibilities Innovation Program*, I've become more outspoken. I see the world differently. Meaning my efforts can equal a lot in the end. It is unfair to not give my part because of fear. I am more open to help without wanting something in return. I am also instilling values in my family of how important it is to help someone or something in need.

PIP has helped me to be more open. Great communication skills are important. To me, words are powerful. They can build up or tear down. I choose to build up and grow. I am less judgmental. Most of all, I can help! I am not idle anymore. I have realized that I am not alone. I have like-minded people

around me that want to see this world as a better place to live in. We can make that happen by doing better, living better and knowing people. The sky is the limit with *Possibilities*, and we can all make a difference. I see *Possibilities* as being kindness givers, increasing skills and making success possible for all. *Possibilities* is very humble. They do all of this "undercover" or "behind the scenes." I know that if there is a need, *Possibilities* will be there.



Changing the Conversation with Natalie Johnson, Oklahoma City Public Schools



I am Associate Director of Elementary Schools and a *PIP* graduate. I like how *Possibilities* is about transformation. As I became a part of *PIP*, *Possibilities* has made my life better both professionally and personally. I was going through some things in my life and I began thinking reflectively about improvements I needed to make for myself. Transformations are about changing yourself. I knew if I could change myself, I would be a better leader for OKCPS. *Possibilities* was a key player in that process. *PIP* has helped me grow in the community by being more connected to people. We should be working in unity trying to improve our area that we live in. As I work in schools, I try to build trust with my staff. *Possibilities* has a set of values they live and teach. We can talk a big talk,

but if our words don't match our actions, then it's just talk. The best way to work with people is to make a connection. Imagine, if we model this to our children, what a difference we can make.



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| Jack in the Box | Pie Five Pizza Co. |
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