

Town of West Hartford

50 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107-2431

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Inspiring Equity: A Multi-Media Exhibit unveiled on December 14 & 16, 6:30-8:30 PM, Town Hall

WEST HARTFORD, CONN. (November 27, 2017) –When Roszena Haskins and Kerry Jones first heard that their proposed storytelling grant application was approved last November, they were ecstatic. With a \$50,000 Inspiring Equity grant from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, the grant coordinators set out to find a unique approach to bring the community together through the lens of individual and collective stories.

Now, one year later, the product of this initiative will be unveiled in a high-tech, multi-media exhibit that will be shared on December 14th and 16th, 6:30-8:30 PM, at the Town Hall Auditorium, 50 South Main Street. The exhibit is free and open to all.

Entitled “We All Have a Story to Tell: Inspiring Equity through Community Conversations,” this project of the West Hartford Public Schools builds upon collaborative community partnerships and aligns with the district’s mission which emphasizes the importance of equity, diversity, and global citizenship.

Engaging community dialogue through the use of storytelling and a multimedia exhibition builds upon the community’s cultural capital, which includes many active organizations and groups invested in issues of leadership, equity, and community dialogue.

“Through this project, we have begun to learn about the bridges and barriers to equity that exist within our community,” said Kerry Jones, director of Elementary Education, West Hartford Public Schools.

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“Authentic conversations about the reality of racial, economic, and social-cultural inequity are often difficult to even begin, particularly in an increasingly polarized environment. Hearing other’s stories brings new consciousness about the feelings and perspectives of others and new awareness of what influences our sense of identity and community,” said Roszena Haskins, director of Adult & Continuing Education, West Hartford Public Schools.

“Our first order of business for the grant was to select a grant coordinator,” said Ms. Jones. Enter Michelle Tremblay Lacroix, Special Education Teacher at Norfeldt Elementary School. An experienced community organizer, Michelle was selected for the coordinator position due to her vision for the project, passion for connectedness in the community, and commitment to the West Hartford Public Schools vision to “Clear Paths for Bright Futures with No Limits.”

“Through the narrative strategy of storytelling, we are scaffolding social change: removing negative assumptions, creating curiosity about people we deem different, and allowing for empathy, kindness and compassion into our community,” said Ms. Lacroix.

Stories from sixty-one groups of people from diverse backgrounds were collected over a four month period. “My interactions with community members have been a gift. During this project, I was inspired daily by the stories I heard,” said Ms. Lacroix.

Ms. Lacroix also had the responsibility to create a venue in which to share the collection of stories. “Rather than a typical one-time community conversation, I discovered a multi-media technique that would be tangible, long lasting, and part of our history. A tool for continued growth in cultural competencies,” she said.

As the organizer, Ms. Lacroix engaged the talent of several local professionals to create a book which contains 77 pages of black and white portraits and biographies of 61 groups and individuals who inspire equity in West Hartford. In this book the diverse community of West Hartford shines through the photography of art educator Jamie Kaminski, filming and sound of Jennifer Evans, Jitu Huntley and the crew of West Hartford Community Television, and interviews and audiotaping of Ms. Lacroix.

But that’s not all.

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Through the use of Live Portrait® app, which is free and available at the Apple App Store and Google Play, users scan the portrait with their mobile device and watch it come to life with video and sound. Each page has people moving and talking, telling their stories in 30-to-90 second clips.

“The portraits come to life like the Harry Potter movies,” Ms. Lacroix said.

“We are so excited to share the culmination of the inspiring equity grant with the community and encourage everyone to come to the exhibit on December 14th and 16th in the Town Hall Auditorium, 6:30-8:30 PM,” she said.

The books will be available for sale during the exhibit for \$35 hard cover and \$25 soft cover, while supplies last.

Following the exhibit, copies of the book will be used in the public schools, libraries and throughout the community. Also, in the near future, the exhibit will have a permanent home.

For more information, contact Michelle Lacroix at michelle.lacroix@whps.org.

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