

UNITE Listens

Panel Discussion Summary

4-15-2021

The UNITE Listens Panel Discussion brought out University of Kentucky administrators, faculty, staff, and students on April 15th at 6:00 pm. The event was sponsored by the United in True Racial Equity (UNITE) Research Priority Area for the purpose of shaping research agendas that impact the communities served by the university. Dr. Danelle Stevens-Watkins, the UNITE RPA leader and host of the event, began with a brief overview of the history and purpose of the RPA before turning it over to the moderator to introduce the panelists and begin the discussion.

Dr. Camille Burnett – the moderator of the discussion – then introduced each of the six panelists, sharing their impact as community leaders in their individual areas of expertise.

- **Rosa Martin**- Co-Principal Investigator and Program Director of the Corazones Saludables study at the University of Kentucky (Dr. Gia Mudd-Martin) and recruiter of over 150 health promoters in Lexington and Nicholasville, KY.
- **Tiffany Clark**- Office Specialist for the Lexington Housing Authority, working closely with Dr. Brandi White on a UK-funded project involving barriers to physical activity for African American women in public housing.
- **Shameka Parrish-Wright**- Co-chair of the Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, manager of the Louisville Bail Project, and a candidate in Louisville's 2022 mayoral race.
- **Stephen Overstreet**- Founder of Our Park, youth advocate and a Health Disparities sub-committee member of the Lexington Mayor's Commission for Racial Justice and Equality.
- **Olga McKissic**- Executive Director of the H.L. Neblett Community Center in Owensboro, KY.
- **Donovan Taylor**- UK Law Alum, Case/Litigation Specialist with Williams & Associates, President of the Chickasaw Federation and manager of The Plan Room, a business accelerator for Black and minority businesses.

Following the introduction, the discussion proceeded with the following questions and responses.

- *What two unmet needs are most critical to the wellbeing of your community?*
 - Adequate food, housing, healthcare, and education
 - The lack of protection from environmental hazards and scarcity of opportunities to develop sustainable businesses and neighborhoods
- *How can scholars at the University of Kentucky use research to address needs respectfully in marginalized communities?*
 - Travel to community leaders and develop bidirectional relationships with an emphasis on the culture of the communities being served
 - Do not take data from community members without following up to share the results of the study and resources/referrals to help

- Be intentional with incorporating diversity and inclusivity when appointing candidates to leadership roles
- Amplify the voices and validate the lived experiences of community members through evidence-based advocacy
 - Give back to the community by taking findings from the studies and partnering with community members to help influence policy changes with local government
- *How would the community like to work with the University (and conversely like to see the University work with them) to pursue research goals/mission?*
 - Listen to community members who know what they need, but lack the resources and opportunities required to address those needs
 - Take an intergenerational, intersectional, intercultural approach to research projects
 - See the process through, even when challenged by community members who evaluate the success of the project differently
 - Do not allow data findings to undermine the lived experiences of community members

The question and answer session then followed with a query about the role teachers and school personnel play in creating equitable educational experiences. Panelists advised teachers to advocate for their students and create a safe space for children to communicate their needs. Teachers and school personnel were urged to keep students engaged by recognizing the power of their impact in the classroom and implementing a solution-oriented model in response to behavior problems.

Dr. Stevens-Watkins concluded the event by commending the panelists for their expertise, insight, and commitment to truth. She emphasized that the purpose of the event was to provide a launching pad for further discussions on the role of the University of Kentucky in the community. She encouraged all researchers to challenge themselves by joining UNITE in working for racial equity, irrespective of level of expertise and research area.