



Action Learning Fellowship – 2020 Final Shareout Series

By Julie Weinstein, ALF Fellow

Back in October, when I first joined the BKF fellowship, I had 2 kids out of the house and a third in his last year of high school. My schedule was opening up and I was looking forward to refocusing my life on myself and my community projects. This fellowship presented that opportunity.

I had ideas of what I wanted to do. Civil Conversations, the group I had started in 2017, was ready for a larger audience. I wanted to explore the idea of creating classroom curriculum to teach the 'Art of Conversation' or perhaps partner with the local library to help them start their own conversation groups. CollectivePower, my other project, was nearing it's 20 year mark and I was toying with the idea of starting a micro-lending branch of the philanthropic group.

It's a bit of an understatement at this point but - 2020 didn't go as planned. Rather than my time and space opening up, my days overflowed with new obligations to our small business, my family and my community, as we all tried to navigate the unforeseen changes to our lives.

So here we are at the end of the cohort and I still have a lot of work to do. In response to COVID and with the foundations help I did move my conversation group online and increased our meetings to every week. This allowed me to expand our reach out of state and to new people. ZOOM was a different and challenging platform yet the meetings provided community and consistency as we all learned to navigate our new normal. Those who weren't comfortable switching to the online format continued to follow the conversation through our email group.

As for the micro-funding idea for CollectivePower, with the country struggling with Covid-19 and the reality of racism, it seemed like the ideal time for such a venture. However, after conversations with three of our past organizations (Street Fraternity, Project Worthmore, and Greenhouse Scholars) all of whom work with underrepresented groups and disenfranchised communities, I have decided that the idea needs further refinement. I really value the partnership we have created with these organizations over the years and I want to ensure that whatever we do continues to provide direct support in the most beneficial manner.

While I didn't get to see my ideas come to fruition, I gained a lot from this experience.

First, my community work has always been my side gig and not my job. It is my work in the world that I can not, not do. While it grew up right alongside my children, I never had the opportunity to examine the 'why's' or 'how's' of it but rather it just always was. This cohort invited me to sit at a table with amazing woman who are doing profound work in the world.



I learned from hearing their voices and experiences and was challenged to find and listen to my own as well. I now move forward with a better understanding of what it is I have to offer, the area of the community that I want to work to strengthen and why that work is important to me.

Secondly, I enlarged my skill set and resources. From our retreat, group meetings and one-on-one conversations I learned skills that helped me create a better space that is more accepting, productive and responsive to those enclosed within it. From the mentors and other cohorts I gained new perspectives, poems, stories, ideas and books not only for myself but also for me to share with my discussion groups.

Lastly, the group provided me a space of sanity in a topsy-turvy world. Our meetings served as a gentle reminder of the good in the world and the possibilities that exist when we work together.

So to Jonathan, Anna, Mansi, Yi, Cecily, Cheri, Heera, Maya, Meg, Renee, Rose, Valentina, and all of the BKF community who made this cohort possible ... thank you. I will continue to do the work that I can not ... not do and you all have helped me create a well tilled, nutrient rich soil and made myself a better gardener so that whatever I chose to plant in the future will have a better chance to flourish

Connect with Julie:

People who are interested in joining the group, finding out more information, or starting their own group are welcome to reach out to me via email. I have participated in many different groups and am familiar with different formats.

In addition, below are other conversation groups to look into:

[Socrates Cafe](#), [Living Room Conversations](#), [Braver Angels](#), and [Ben Franklin Circles](#)

As for CollectivePower, people can check out our website that lists all the organizations that we have sponsored over the years or they are welcome to reach out if they are interested in starting their own philanthropic fundraising event or for any reason :)