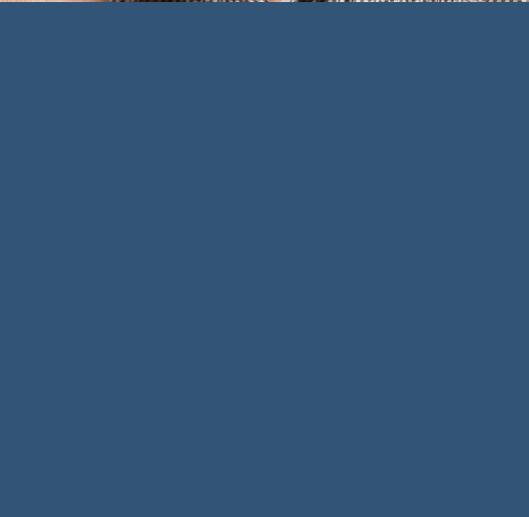


Creating Inclusive Communities

Harnessing the Power of Storytelling to Spark Dialogue
Around Diversity and Inclusion on Campus



I fight for my son. He's 9, and innocent, and doesn't have an aggressive bone in his body. I fight for him because he won't be able to grow up in the carefree, non-violent world that I did. He sees the good in everyone, sometimes even when they haven't shown him any. Raising a black man is so scary for me; I'm reminded every time I watch the news that I have to not only fight to keep him safe, but fight to keep him informed when there's so much noise around him. I fight to maintain his innocence by keeping as much of that hate and chaos away from him, until he's able to understand and process it for himself...without him losing faith in people and without him losing trust and belief that people can be good...while not being naive to the fact that in the real world everyone is not looking out for his good and interests.



Take a quick look around your office, or your department, or your campus. Every individual you see has a story — traits and characteristics and beliefs and perspectives that make them unique, that shape how they see the world and how they perceive the world to see them, that have influenced who they are, how they live, what they value and how they behave.

What has most shaped your story? Is it your life experiences? Your religion? The color of your skin? Your ethnicity? Your ability? Your sexuality? Your background?

What if we harnessed these different experiences and perspectives and stories to initiate conversations on campus about diversity and inclusion? Through CUPA-HR's Creating Inclusive Communities project, campuses around the country are doing just that.

Storytelling With a Purpose

Launched two years ago, CUPA-HR's Creating Inclusive Communities (CIC) project is a collection of videos and portraits that tell the personal stories of 24 higher education human resources professionals from around the country. They share their joys, their trepidations, their passions, their challenges — their own unique stories — and touch on topics including race and ethnicity, women in leadership roles, LGBTQ issues, microaggressions, poverty, immigrant employees, unconscious bias, bullying and more.

These stories and videos, along with the discussion and facilitator resources that accompany them, are designed to help faculty, staff and administrators understand the value that different experiences and perspectives can bring to the campus community. They are designed to spark dialogue around diversity. And they are a call to action to create more inclusive campus communities.

How Are Campuses Using CIC?

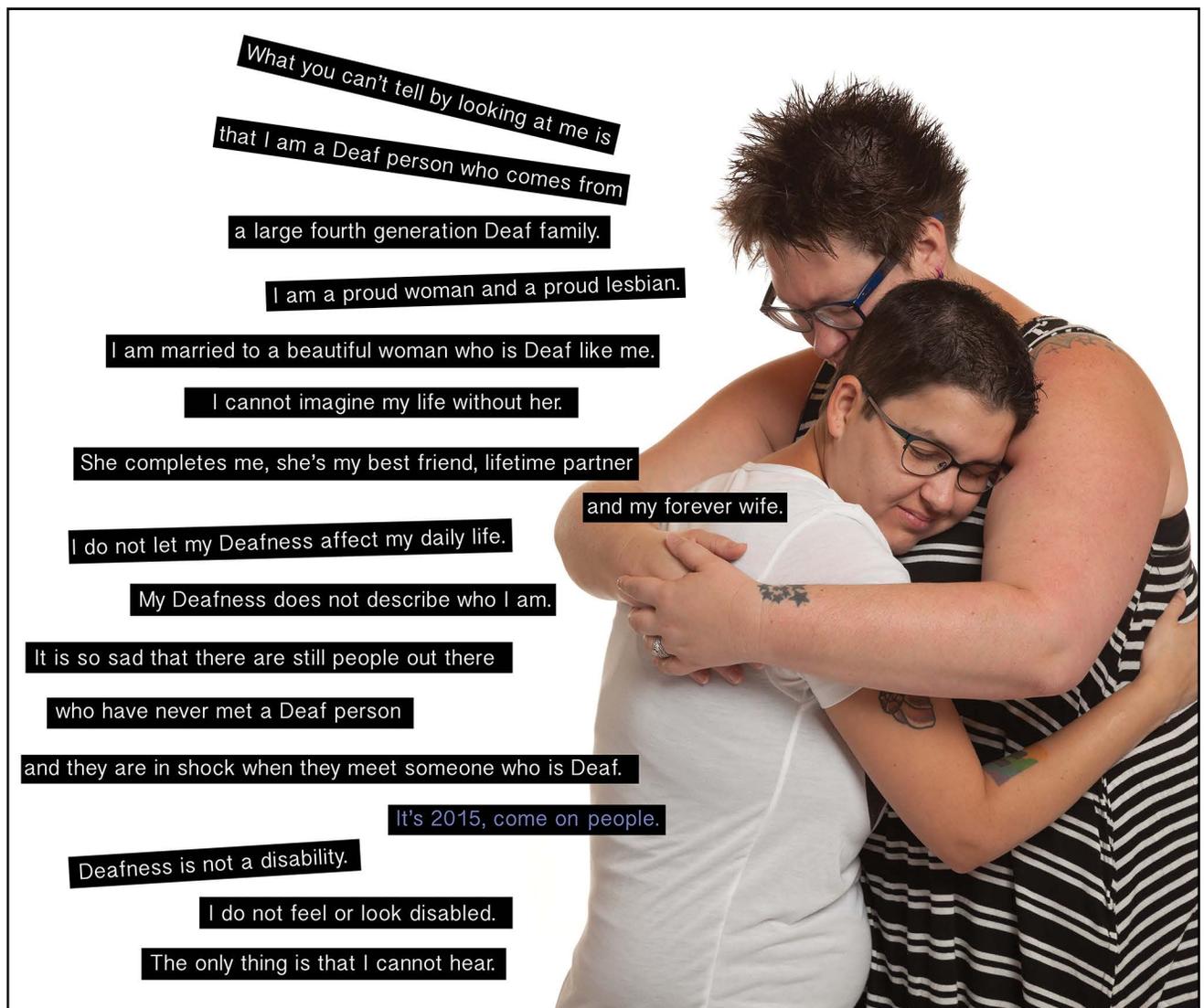
HR organizations on several campuses are using the project in creative ways to engage employees, initiate conversations around DEI and facilitate collaboration. Here's what they're doing:

Facilitating Conversation Within HR: University of Wisconsin-Madison's HR Communities of Practice Office used CIC as a kick-off for discussion around its own diversity and inclusion efforts. Explains HR Competencies Program Coordinator Sarah Carroll, "During a recent meeting of the university's HR representatives, we hung posters of the stories around the room and asked folks to mill around, see which of the stories resonated most with them, and then engage in dialogue in small groups. We used this exercise to foster relationship-building and to kick off subsequent conversation about our office's vision and mission around generating an engagement-inclusion-diversity mindset as we work to facilitate the transition of

HR from a compliance- and transaction-oriented model to one of business partnership."

Feedback from the session was promising, says Carroll. Some of the comments:

- "The stories inspired personal sharing about ourselves, starting from issues raised by the people who were profiled. We were then able to dive more deeply into the challenge of bringing our whole selves to work so that we can be there for our clients, and how our working relationships can be limited without that more complete type of understanding. It was a very rich discussion."
- "The posters definitely helped to provide a starting point for the conversations. It was helpful to read other people's stories to spark thinking about diversity and inclusion and what that might look like. I think having others' anecdotes as a base made it easier to





The year was 2003, when I received my first phone invitation for my first real job interview.... And I was terrified. I wasn't scared because it was my first real interview; I practiced so much public speaking on campus as a student that meeting with a few people at a bank seemed easy. I was terrified because though that employer thought that I may be a "good fit" on paper, they would soon learn at our meeting that I was a Muslim. In 2003 the media had really begun to create a scary narrative as it relates to Muslims. Muslim = Terrorist... Muslim = Un-American... Muslim = Oppression... Muslim = Extremist... and a host of other untruths that were completely unrelated to the Islam that I knew and loved and practiced. I hated myself for being afraid! I wanted to be an advocate and fight the stereotypes and the rhetoric, but I was in such a vulnerable position. So even in my embarrassment, I called my parents for guidance. My parents encouraged me to be myself and recognize that in my career an organization should fully accept who I am...or they are not "a good fit" for me. Even today I am very aware when meeting new people that the first thing that they see is my hijab, which no longer gives me the same level of fear, but instead an opportunity to openly educate.

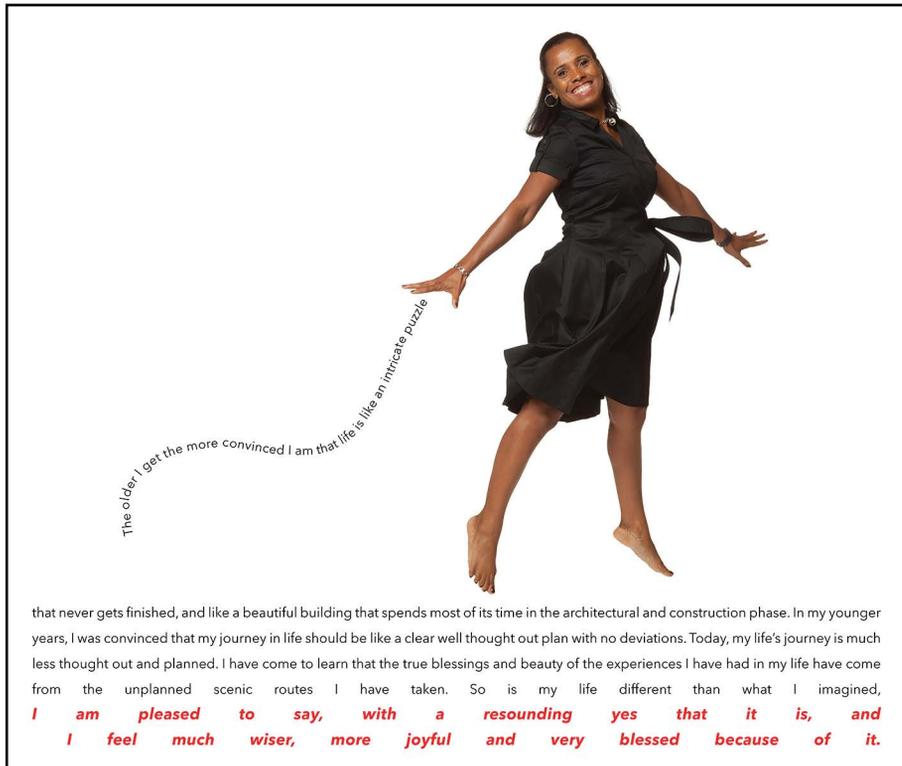
talk about this topic in a group setting, especially for those who may not want to share their own experiences, or for those who haven't thought much about the topic and need a way to be 'invited' into the conversation."

- "The stories were powerful and reflected how important it is as HR professionals for us to think about our own identities and our own stories so that we can have a better understanding of others and their experiences."

Sharing Across Campus: Many HR organizations have shared the resource campus-wide. In a survey of how institutions are using CIC, several respondents indicated that they'd shared the resource with campus administrators and leadership, hiring managers, search committees, diversity task forces, academic affairs, student services, faculty affairs, the office of institutional equity

and more. Said one survey respondent, "This no-cost resource has helped HR bridge the staff/faculty gap. We've promoted and offered it widely to various groups across campus, which has resulted in increased dialogue and discussion related to diversity and inclusion. And it has allowed us to initiate collaboration amongst various campus groups."

Laurita Thomas, chief HR officer at University of Michigan (who is also one of the individuals featured in the CIC project), has shared the resource widely on her campus. In addition to ensuring that her human resources team has watched the videos, read the stories and engaged in conversation around them, she's also shared CIC with the university's DEI strategic plan implementers (70+ faculty and staff) to use as resources for DEI work in their respective units and with the School of Social Work Women's Leadership program. And UMich's DEI Resources web page includes a link to the CIC project.



And earlier this year, Zajchowski and a colleague facilitated a lunch-and-learn session using the microaggressions video and facilitator guide.

A Companion Piece: Several HR organizations have added CIC to their existing diversity and inclusion programs, using it in search committee training, implicit bias training, individual and departmental consultation services and new-hire orientation.

Making It Personal: The project has also inspired a few institutions to create their own versions using individuals from their campus community, making it that much more powerful and personal.

At Rollins College, two HR team members shared a portion of the CIC project last year at the school's annual campus-wide summit on transforming learning. The summit's theme was on racial justice and focused on race at Rollins, in the nation and throughout the world. "This summit provided the perfect opportunity to introduce CIC to the campus community and encourage them to use it to initiate conversations within their teams, divisions and student organizations," says David Zajchowski, assistant director of HR for talent management at Rollins. "Our chief HR officer, Maria Martinez, is one of the individuals featured in the project, so she was excited to be able to share her story with her colleagues in this way." Zajchowski says the college's diversity advisory council is currently exploring ways in which it can leverage CIC in its work.

Celebrating Our Differences, Connecting Through Our Sameness

Personal stories are powerful. They can help us connect with and better understand one another, they can motivate us, they can inspire us, they can instill in us compassion and empathy, they can help us feel not so alone, and they can open the door for conversations and dialogue we may never have had the opportunity or courage to have engaged in otherwise. By sharing our own stories, and being willing to listen to (and really hear) others' stories, we are better able to bridge divides, see one another for who we really are and celebrate our differences while connecting through our sameness. And all of those things make for a more inclusive, accepting and diverse environment. 

To learn more about CUPA-HR's Creating Inclusive Communities project, visit diversity.cupahr.org. If you're already using this resource on campus, we want to hear how! Tell us at diversity.cupahr.org/share/.