



**Jordon Javier Lebron**

10th Grade

Holy Name High School

*Lead*DIVERSITY's Promote Change Competition

\$1,000 Cash Prize Winner

## **How can you promote change in your community based on issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?**

**Diversity** is defined as understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences ([gladstone.uoregon.edu/~asuomca/diversityinit/definition.html](http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~asuomca/diversityinit/definition.html)). Diversity includes keeping people equal and included with no judgement based on race, gender, and personality. Diversity promotes the idea of, "You are who you are." **Equity** refers to the fair and respectful treatment of all people (*Webster's Dictionary Definition*). **Inclusion** means that all individuals feel respected, accepted and valued (*Webster's Dictionary Definition*).

My thoughts on promoting an avenue for communities to become more aware of Diversity issues is to host Lunch and Learn Diversity program events. This is a great way to allow the community to come together to learn about the variety of cultures residing in their respective neighborhoods. Working with local community leaders, which can include school administrators, community organization leadership, and the local business community foundation can offer support for a program to initiate awareness and understand why people are who they are.

The program can create a pathway for individuals to open up to understand any current issues, challenges, and community concerns regarding equity and inclusion that various people encounter every day. Sparking thought and open communication can allow ideas to flow and create an opportunity to implement change.

I feel I can play a role in spearheading a program to bring together people who may never have taken the time to learn about their neighbors.

A few activity ideas can include, learning people's backgrounds, finding out their feelings on different topics, confronting stereotypes, and bringing bias and non-inclusive statements forward. In order to learn someone's background, ask everyone to think about the three most defining moments in their

lives and write them down on a separate Post-It Note. Have each person present these moments to the group, and share their story to whatever degree they feel comfortable.

Secondly, to find out different thoughts on a variety of topics, go around the table and ask everyone to finish a sentence. For example, "I like my favorite food because . . .", "I think the government right now is . . .", "I like superheroes because . . .", etc. Understanding how people feel about certain topics allows their participation to become acknowledged and appreciated by the rest of the table.

Thirdly, everyone at the table can recognize stereotypes by writing an anonymous "I am \_\_\_, but I am not\_". For example, "I am Latino, but I am not Mexican", "I am Asian, but I am not good at math.", "I am African American, but I am not good at basketball" , etc. This activity is a great way to break down misconceptions and stereotypes by allowing individuals to share on how they identify themselves.

Lastly, to call out bias and non-inclusive statements, start what is called a Bias Jar. This activity has people write biased sentences and put them in a jar. A sentence is then pulled out and decided if the sentence is biased and if so, what type of bias the sentence is and why it is considered biased. Similar to the examples I shared above, the exercise will help everyone reduce their bias a bit more everyday by bringing feelings to the forefront.

Lunch and Learns can be held once a month and with promotion options like online social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc), local community newspapers, flyers (in different languages to include everyone), or a story with local news channels (Fox 8, 19 News, etc), can be used in order to create awareness and participation.

Local business sponsors can help to provide goods and services, such as local restaurants. Depending on the ethnicity, cultural dishes can be offered to sample. Corporate sponsors is another avenue to obtain program support. Many corporations have Diversity Officers and community relations departments for community programs. Donations can also be collected to help with the program costs and invest in new innovations, such as parks, camps, and buildings that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In conclusion, a Lunch and Learn Diversity Program will allow great conversation with activities to educate individuals about stereotypes, and bias, while at the same time allowing everyone to share about themselves and how they feel about a variety of topics. As a hispanic male, I personally would benefit from such a program to develop open dialogue and cultural understanding. Lunch and Learns can be achieved through great sponsors, communications, and promotions to create awareness and participation within local communities.