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Clyde Wilson Pickett (host):

(00:05):

Welcome to the Inclusion Interchange. I'm your host, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett, and I serve as Vice Chancellor for Equity Diversity Inclusion here at the University of Pittsburgh. I also serve as the university's Chief Diversity Officer on the Inclusion Interchange. We talk to people from across our community who are making a difference and having a positive impact in the fields of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. This time I'm pleased to welcome to our microphones with us, Lisa Upsher and Dr. Bee Schindler from the Office of Health Sciences Diversity and Inclusion, to share more about their work and their stories. So welcome, welcome.

Bee Schindler (00:42):

Thank you. Thanks so much for having us.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (00:44):

Glad you're with us. And so we'll start just an opportunity for you to introduce yourselves to our community. Lisa, I'll start with you. Talk to me more about your background and what brought you to the University of Pittsburgh. Well,

Lisa Upsher (00:59):

Thank you, Dr. Pickett. So my name is Lisa Upsher and I'm the director for the Office of Health Science Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. What brought me to, we'll start with what brought me back to Pittsburgh. Okay. So when I was a little kid, I grew up in West Virginia, and the big trip would be to come to Pittsburgh to go school shopping, and you would come through the Fort Pitt tunnels and the city would open up. So I fell in love. My goal was to live in Pittsburgh, but I didn't get to the unit University of Pittsburgh until 30 years later. I served in the world of nonprofit where I was a community advocate, very focused on maternal child health, organ donation, and what it affected the minority community. So when the opportunity to come here to be the director, it was like my job that I had been working for 30 years.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (01:49):

Very good. Well, certainly we're glad that you're with us and look forward to talking a bit more about the work that you've done specifically in organ donation as we think about health equity. Dr. Bee Schindler.

Bee Schindler (02:05):

Thanks so much. Well, I'm the assistant director in the health sciences Diversity Equity and Inclusion office. And actually, I came here to Pitt in 2018. I was actually working on a math equity project with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and one of their partnerships included the University of Pittsburgh Center for Urban Education. And so we came here one afternoon as a team, and I had met some of the folks from Q at Pitt, and I was so impressed with the pedagogy and the dedication to specifically spaces of humanizing sort of education and DEI work, and I

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just felt like a real true calling to come to the university. I hadn't really worked in higher ed yet, obviously in Pittsburgh public. I was in an education space, but realizing that it was a space of a lot of power that could maybe make some shifts. So I sort of immediately started looking for positions as the grant project that I was a part of was ending. Thank

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (03:09):

You. So you both have referenced this calling or connection to Pittsburgh. I certainly believe that our work, the work to advance diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility is also a calling. Talk to me about what that means for you and how you find the opportunity to share the work that you do, but more importantly, to connect with the calling.

Lisa Upsher (03:32):

I think it's important. I think it's just to make life a little easier for people to be kind to each other. My career, as I said, as far as nonprofit, we had women dying far as having childbirth. We just kind of got through doing the degrading around black maternal child health and all the things that were affected with that. And I think the calling is the fact there. There's a lot that happens in the minority unrepresented community, and when you spend time in the community, it lends you to want to make a difference. It lends you to make a change. And when you sit on both sides, when you look at the professional versus the community, that's that window that's in the middle that if you have an opportunity to make a change, that's the window you take.

Bee Schindler (04:20):

Yeah, absolutely. I think kind of leaning into what you're speaking to, I was a journalist for many years and what I realized quickly building off of my own younger childhood discrimination around some elements in my neighborhood, I started really forming this sort of understanding and awareness of narrative and how we talk about people's stories and how those stories then build toward microaggressions and implicit bias and how that then shapes policy and access and resource and all of those things. But as a journalist, I was sort of sent out to be this objective person telling this sort of sort of narrative of which of course I was benefiting by having a byline and not really understanding how to take that story to move the needle. And so my work is often very situated in understanding the true sort of complexity of people, community identity rate, so that we can start to build empathy and move things that way.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (05:35):

I want to lean in just a bit there. You talked specifically about the opportunity for us to share narrative and the importance of story as it relates to our interactions, our relationships, but certainly the work that we do. If you both would talk to me about the ways in which you're sharing the story of the office and the way that your work is transforming not only the, but in many ways, the social determinants of health. Talk to me a bit about that and for our listeners why that's important and some of the ways that you're having impact.

Lisa Upsher (06:06):

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Well, I think for our office, we're like the conduit for six schools where we're developing our pharmacist and we're developing our doctors and our nurses. That's a very optimal place to be because people don't realize the injustices will have just because they had no idea how to, as he has said, make it human on just dealing with their communities. And communities are very fearful. They talk about the fear of the white coat, and they have a lot of justified reasons why. And actually it's unfortunate far as the white coat, because they never got the education or the background on how to work with the community. So one of our biggest jobs is to lend ourselves to educate the professionals that we're developing on that community touch. And that's one of the things we want to make the difference with. We have a set of diversity deans that oversee all six of our schools, so therefore that is the jump off point for as matriculating information into those schools on why this is important what we do. The other is the fact that we have another group that we are bringing in far as physicians and doctors that are from underrepresented communities to even add to that touch, to bring their story, to also look at what things they have went through in order to share and make a difference with Pitt.

Bee Schindler (07:38):

Yeah, no, absolutely. I think getting to that why is something that our office really is focused on when we think about social determinants of health, we're thinking about, right? Of course there's that narrative. We're unpacking I think how we've reduced people and things to an essence. And we're sort of asking folks and through trainings, workshops, courses, we do curriculum review, that sort of stuff, or at least that's the role that I do mostly. But we're asking folks to sort of unpack why we've reduced folks to an essence and how that's easier than learning or relearning the person in front of us. And so I often remind folks, especially in the health sciences, if our North star is health equity, that we have to first see ourselves, how have we perpetuated those sort of inequities? And then how we can start to see that we've been reduced too.

We've been reduced from a very complex form of ourselves. And then how we can easily do that to other folks, especially in a professional space because we're just saying, okay, you are these couple of things and now we're just going to give you this treatment and then next, and we're going to do the same thing as opposed to tell me about yourself. Imagine if we treated all of our patients or the folks for whom we're working with on research, like a podcast interview where we're actually taking the time to be like, let's sit down and chat. I want to get to know you so that our stuff is relevant and sustaining and that we're not then just recycling the status quo.

Otherwise we're not really going to achieve any equity. We've barely even asked the good question to even think about meeting people where they are. It's just impossible.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (09:24):

Absolutely. So let's dig in there just a bit. So you were referencing and talking specifically about this idea of authentic connection, understanding each other, and specifically moving in a direction, and you referenced equity. And so Bee, I'll start with you. What does equity mean for you?

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Bee Schindler (09:41):

I think the classic definition is sort of identifying what people need and meeting folks where they are to get to that point. So equity is essentially building in the time to engage the transparency and vulnerability of self so that we can have reciprocal communication and an end and then rethinking and re-imagining I think solutions and resources so that we can truly get folks to, as we say, often in the university to thrive and not just survive. To me, that's truly equity.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (10:25):

Okay. Lisa, how about you?

Lisa Upsher (10:27):

I don't think equity is a one-stop shop because for equity for one person may be something totally different for someone else. And I think it's important for us to, when we're developing plans or thinking about how do we make a difference, we have to look at the whole picture. And it takes space and it takes time. And like I said, lending yourself to be a part of that picture just to see where it goes. So when I think about equity, like I said, it's not like say you may have someone that is four foot 10 and someone else six foot two, their equity far as trying to see over a fence will never be the same. So I think we have to look about what would be the difference on how we do solutions of equity for everyone.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (11:09):

So you talk about that impact for different communities. As you know, much has been made about the public headwinds associated with the attacks on the work for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Talk to me about the ways in which you are countering those efforts, but more importantly, telling the story of the work that you do. I think it's critical for us as we think about our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. And for those of us who are in this work to tell the story about how we're having impact, talk to me about the ways in which you are speaking to the folks who would question our work and the ways in which you're prioritizing how to get through to them, the ways in which we're having impact.

Lisa Upsher (11:50):

One of the things that we're really majorly talking about is language and communication. We just published, we wrote our mission and vision goals. So therefore, to be able to have the language to say, we're here, we're wanting to make a difference, and these are the things that we want to do, and the breadth of how we work our office. And as I was saying before, we have a very broad reach as far as even the collaborations that we have with the university. This is a community within itself. So the directors, the chancellors, all of us, we're having those meetings, we're having those conversations or what we can do to make a difference, to let everybody know that we are still supporting, we are not changing our philosophies. And Pitt's still a good place to call home.

Bee Schindler (12:36):

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Yes. I keep wanting to echo you. That's why I love working with you. No, but absolutely language and thinking about communication. Last week I was doing back to back to on-boardings for new students coming into Pitt, and I really truly, I brought to the forefront this trying to be transparent, this conversation that's happening, this sort of ongoing conversation about is this de i stuff needed? Can we just sort of get this stuff away already? Could we just sort of end this conversation? And one of the things that I brought up was language, but through the framework of misinformation, I just think there's some misconceptions around what DEI, what social justice really truly looks like. And so I start to unpack that with folks. So with the students that are in front of me like we're doing here, what does it mean to you? And then we start hearing the collective definitions around the room and starting to wonder, oh, it seems like there's certain different camps of understanding. How can we give example to those things? How can we start finding pattern? How can we start to disrupt some of those maybe sort of misaligned misconceptions or misaligned conceptions so that we can start getting to what we're really talking about. Again, going back to the why, which is we are just trying to humanize this work. We all want the best for each other, and if we really truly do, what does that look like? Correct. Right? How does that facilitate?

Lisa Upsher (14:11):

We had a communications meeting the other day and it was interesting. They were like, well, we didn't think that you all were allowed to talk about that. And I said, me and Bee can have a conversation and never mentioned a word and still discuss the whole situation. It's not what you say, it's how you say it. And they were kind of like shocked. Well, I didn't know. I said, well, you're not quite ready yet, so we're not going to let you talk, but we'll talk about it and we'll take it from there.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (14:34):

Well, we're going to take a break. You're listening to the Inclusion interchange. I'm your host, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett. Be right back and you'll hear more from Lisa Upsher and Dr. Bee Schindler.

(Break)

Welcome back to the Inclusion Interchange. We're talking about Pitt's wide ranging efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, and specifically in the schools of health sciences. And of course, our guests are Bee Schindler and Lisa Upsher. And so we'll lean in just a bit to what you offered before we took a break, specifically the conversation about social justice. I know that you're working proactively to apply a social justice focus to your work. Talk to me about that focus and the ways in which it's having an impact on what you do.

Bee Schindler (15:45):

So social justice in the health sciences, diversity, equity, inclusion space is not necessarily new. Some of the colleagues on our team really position social justice as being actually very similar to this concept of equity, which is again, social justice is really just meeting the needs of those for

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whom we're working alongside or working for. And with social justice is ensuring that folks have what they desire to move forward and to progress. That's individually, that's on a community sort of basis, that's societally. And so the explicit attention to social justice has recently in the past couple of years, sort of come up through a couple of various programs. We have a social justice fellowship that is finalized last year and we're moving into the second iteration. The concept of the fellowship, which felt exciting, was that we would have a faculty from each of the six schools of health sciences folks who were dedicated to this process of social justice and wherever they were on the spectrum, either they've been doing that work for many years or they're just kind of budding that.

Then we would pair this faculty with a community partner to really engage outside of the campus space, understand how does their practice in the health sciences, how does that actually manifest in real life when working on the day-to-day with the community, what are your needs? What are your joys? But what we found after that year, even though it was successful, what we found is that we also want to insert this interdisciplinary approach because how cool is it that our department is working with the six schools of health sciences, but where we were sort of falling short was actually intersecting those. So this iteration, we're thinking about partnering with one community partner and the six schools of health sciences. One faculty from each of those schools would then be working with one partner so that when we come together on Mondays to just talk about the work, how's it going out there, that there's sort of a shared universal understanding of, okay, we're all talking about this community partner. I'm seeing it from this medical lens, I'm seeing it from the public health lens, from the pharmaceutical lens. And so then folks in that way can start to see the multiplicity of an issue and then sort of attack that issue from the social justice component, which is, well, we can get what you need medically through this way or through public health sort of this way. And so that way we're modeling how that could really look.

Lisa Upsher (18:34):

So that's really attacking the determinants of health from a holistic point of view as be shared before, I said the other year was the first time we did the fellows and they were in different spaces. One dealt with autism, one dealt with community, one dealt with the community health center. They all brought different adventures or journeys, shall I say, into the community. But the time spent was not long enough. It was a little too short for them to actually get what we wanted them to get. Because the other part to it is even though you're helping the community, what did you get out of it? And again, that's where we're talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Was your walk away? Did you become a different person? How did you feel about it? Was what you thought it was, or did you be able to immerse into the community and become a part of it?

So with this new thought and how we're looking at it, this would be a six year span that whenever the fellows graduate, the next as, but fellows would take over. So therefore we would have a time span to see what that did. Plus it's giving back to the communities. So that's where we're kind of looking at that far as really attacking those determinants of health, matching the six

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schools with it, and then seeing how it turns out. Because the other part too is I kind of laughed because I showed up when they were first starting this program and I said, oh, this is going to be good. Because I wanted to see, because there was a few that I'm like, ain't never been no further than Fifth Avenue in Pittsburgh. So I want to see what they do when they go to the rural community. So it was good. It was a learning experience, but it taught us some things too that we needed to do more around that because how we started this conversation, we're developing professionals that will work and enjoy the communities. Sure.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (20:30):

I want to talk just a bit about your partners. Who's helping you with this work? And so talk to me about some of the ways you are working collaboratively across the university and how that's making a difference in the work that you do.

Lisa Upsher (20:43):

Absolutely. Like I said, this is DEI. So DEI is everywhere. We have our relationships with RECI. We have our —

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (20:51):

And for those who might not know, RECI is ... ?

Lisa Upsher (20:54):

Racial Equity ...

Bee Schindler (20:55):

... Consciousness Institute.

Lisa Upsher (20:57):

Thank you.

Bee Schindler (21:01):

Really led by Ron Odoko and the Center for Race and Social Problems in the School of Social Work.

Lisa Upsher (21:06):

And we work with the Provost's office. We work with your shop —

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (21:10):

The Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Lisa Upsher (21:14):

OEDI. Thank you. But anyway, the whole thing is we have to come together as a unit. None of us can stay in silos. None of us can stay in our own houses. It takes all of us to come together as a full unit to make this thing work. And me was talking a little earlier about pushing the needle.

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Can't push it by yourself. It is a team effort. They was like, where's the teamwork? We have to do a team. And the fact that we communicate well with each other, we sit down and we come to the table together. That is something different that a lot of colleges don't do, and it's very important. We spent some time at an institute a few months ago and just talking to them and trying to understand how their DEI programs worked. At that point, they were really scared because some of them were fearful that they weren't going to have a job because some things were going to be phased out, that they were going to have to change titles. And to be able to be very proud to say, well, we come to the table and we talk together. It wasn't just one person sitting alone trying to figure it out.

Bee Schindler (22:20):

Yeah, I know. I feel like one of my favorite partners, although it's a collaborative, right, but they're affectionately called the "Diversity Deans" in the health sciences, which is essentially one of these deans with varying titles, but essentially that's some justice component dean in each of the six schools of health sciences. Every month this group comes together and it's like a twofold thing. One is like a, oh, we're in good company, and you can see that that's happening of this is happening in my school or my space, or there's just the need to breathe with each other. And then there's also problem solving in that space, or what have you done to address this type of concern? Or I'm coming up against this group who doesn't quite believe in this work. How have you sort of pushed that story? And it makes me super excited. I mean, it's a built-in partnership and collaboration that we do, but it has so many beautiful components to it. It does make me really happy.

Lisa Upsher (23:25):

One of the things we're really working with them is to find the commonalities between them to start lining in that because even though they're in different houses, they have different shops, they have different professional backgrounds, there's a threat of commonality that is running amongst them to be able to share into the rest of the community of the students and the staff that they serve. So that's a big project we're getting ready to take on to look at the job descriptions, compare the commonalities, and how do we bring them together to speak one voice. So that's a big project we're taking on for as to diversity. Things are concerned because they need that, because bringing stuff to the table, but we need to be able to tie it together to go back out.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (24:08):

Absolutely. Well, you point to the need for consistency and connection in our work. And so as we look at this as a university community, I think that's critical for us to prioritize how we are moving consistency and equity in many ways forward in terms of the work that we do. Two references for the listeners that I want to make sure we share. One you referenced NADOHE — the National Association of Diversity Offices in Higher Education, and specifically the standards of Professional Practice Institute, which is a preparatory opportunity for aspiring senior diversity officers. And of course RECI, the Racial Equity Consciousness Institute, made famous by Ron

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Odoko, who is of course quite connected to our office, as this was brought forward during his time with the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Ron will be a guest with us in a future podcast. So we're excited, but you are with us today. We'll take a pause here. Right now, you're listening to the Inclusion interchange. I'm your host, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett, and we will be right back.

(Break)

And so we're back with the Inclusion Interchange with me are my guests, Lisa Upsher and Bee Schindler, and so just a few more questions before we conclude our time, and I'll tease this one up for you and give you an opportunity to respond. Certainly. We're at the beginning of a semester, the academic year. What are you excited to share with the listeners for what's ahead for the year?

Lisa Upsher (26:14):

I think we're real excited just to kind of let them know that we are here. The fact that they don't know the office exists unless we put out something on social media. The fact that we just did something really great. We did a student affairs job fair, and we met like 200 kids put in for applications to work in our office. It gave us the opportunity for the kids to know that we're there, we're here to help them, had a lot of different conversations. That was something that was really new that we hadn't done before, is just spending time down in the student union, being within the breath of the students. So we're trying to get a student to be assistant because that is a community that we really want to spend time in. We want them to do the tabling events. We want to hear from the students. We want to hear what they're thinking, what their needs are, what their concerns are, because we realized that that was a piece that we were missing. We hear when the complaints are going on, but we don't hear when things are good going on. So therefore we want to have a student be a part of our team. So that's something new that we're going to be doing.

Bee Schindler (27:21):

Yeah. I'm also doing some student focused work. I'm grateful to be doing the facilitating the Racism and Medicine course that just started this past week, and I'm also doing academic foundations this year, which comes through the Dietrich School. But they asked me to do a social justice component to their typical academic foundations, which is essentially a 12 week class where you're guiding undergraduates on how to be successful in college. But what I'm bringing to it since I'm allowed to build my own curriculum, especially through the social justice lens, is, and it's the same for racism in medicine and some other work that we're doing, which is again, modeling the idea of having dialogue as a way to think about your learning. So that a lot of spaces around the university that we're a part of, they're doing this idea of a flipped classroom front loading some of the more didactic work so that when we're actually in connection, we're having conversation and reflection. How did that relate to you? Or what did you think that that meant? And I know that that feels so sort of foundational, but we have to recommit and it seems

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that we are to bringing it back to that space of reflection and narrative. And again, I think that is how people start to understand how to make the change that we're really sort of fostering or we're hoping to foster. So I'm so excited. this is a fresh year. This is a fresh start as far as even just what we are doing this year. So like I said, we're doing the student networking, the training, the mentoring, big things that we're doing in the community that we hadn't did. And when I reflect to the community, I'm talking about the University of Pittsburgh community, this is what we're doing far as just getting more information out to continue to build on that equity, diversity, and inclusion that we bring to the community.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (29:16):

Well, of course we appreciate all that you do for the community, but as you know, it can't just all be about work. And so I want to take the opportunity to ask you both a question as we think about this work, and specifically, we referenced early that this work is a calling as practitioners, as scholars, as researchers. We are immersed in this work, but there needs to be balance. So my final question to each of you is how do you find balance? How do you reset and make sure that you're recharging?

Lisa Upsher (29:46):

Couple things. First of all, I think it has to be a lifestyle, so therefore it's a part of who you are and what you do. I think the other part, as far as me recharging, I'm big in to self-care, so nails, hair, whatever. That's where I invest my time when I want to get a break. And then I'm grandma, so therefore I hang out with my grandson and I'm going to WWE wrestling. So I say I do some stuff that's kind of off the main track because I have a grandson.

Bee Schindler (30:15):

I try to do a couple of things. I mean, really in the moment tool offering is that I really make sure that I take the time between my actual work building and the bus say I tend to take the further bus stop so that I have time to transition. It's really important to me that I transition between a workspace and I'm going home space and to that end, because it's so entrenched right in myself, this work, I have an almost seven year old, he will tell you he is six and three quarters, and so there's a lot of joy in that space because we are silly. But I also get the chance to, I'm not really off. The lessons that I'm trying to impart are always rooted in being a good person and having this concept of social justice be threaded through everything that he does. But we get to do that in super silly ways with magnet tiles and releasing him on his bike and just thinking about his own way that he takes up the world and how we're interacting. That really brings me a lot of joy and fills my well, and that's an everyday thing. Thank goodness.

Lisa Upsher (31:29):

One of the things I tell the whole team is, and when you're on vacation, be on vacation. I don't want to hear from you. I don't want to see you. I don't want you. Well, I'll just lean into a coffee, be on vacation.

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Clyde Wilson Pickett (host) (31:39):

Well, Lisa, Bee, we thank you for spending time with us and being on the Inclusion Interchange. More importantly, we thank you for the work that you do for our community. We really appreciate all your efforts, the effort to make a difference, and on behalf of the entire community, thank you. To our listeners, thank you for listening once again to an episode of the Inclusion Interchange. We will see you soon. Take care.