

Solutions for Success



Discussion Guide: Becoming Community Leaders

**An innovative, two-generation
approach to school success
for Hispanic families**

Becoming Community Leaders 'Saints' and 'Heroes' Among Us

At Southwest Solutions, we plant and we grow! In our early learning programs, we help children to grow in a wide range of skills and talents by planting positive approaches to literacy and social relationships in their classrooms. Over the years, our participants have literally grown community gardens and, through our many Southwest Solutions programs, we have grown healthy neighborhoods—one household at a time.

This Discussion Guide is just one of a series of 12 guides to spark community-wide awareness of early learning through books produced by United Way for Southeastern Michigan and the Social Innovation Fund. Turn to the catalog on the final page of this guide to learn about the other resources you might find helpful. Collectively, Southwest Solutions and the other nonprofit organizations featured in these publications are lifting up men, women—and children, too—to become our next generation of community leaders.

What is a “community leader”?

That phrase, “community leader,” is a label that doesn’t fully capture the personal chemistry—the values and strengths—that help people to step forward and lead friends and neighbors in a constructive direction. This Discussion Guide invites participants to identify and celebrate the core values and talents that often characterize effective community leaders. And, there’s more: In our other Southwest Solutions Discussion Guide, you’ll discover ways you can begin working together as emerging community leaders through a process called Family Service Learning. In this guide, we are showing you ways to start the discussion about the core assets in our personal lives that can help to inspire and guide this work.

Want to know more about our story?

For many years, Southwest Solutions has been a nationally known model of integrated services and neighborhood revitalization with more than 50 programs improving life in southeast Michigan. Within the overall scope of our work, Southwest Solutions has been providing family literacy programming for Spanish-speaking families in southwest Detroit since 2001. The particular effort we are inviting you to explore in our book started in 2012. You’ll enjoy the entire, inspiring story of how teachers and parents developed this program—and you’ll discover many more resources you can use in your community—by getting a copy of our book, titled: *Solutions for Success—An innovative, two-generation approach to school success for Hispanic families*. Our book is available in both print and eBook versions. <https://www.amazon.com/Solutions-Success-Southwest/dp/1942011466/>

In this Discussion Guide, we encourage you to invite family, friends, neighbors and co-workers to gather and talk about personal values and talents that can become a starting point for community renewal. If you gather people to discuss these ideas, then you may build enough local interest to help community-based programs to grow in your town. Now more than ever, such efforts need to be lifted up and encouraged nationwide. For its part, United Way for Southeastern Michigan is proud to highlight these six early learning programs because we know they work! Rigorous evaluation over a number of years proves that they shape children’s lives and the entire community in positive ways.

So, Let's Talk!

Planning your discussion:

Discussing these questions will be a richer experience if you have a copy of the book. The chapters are packed with helpful information—as well as inspiring stories from men, women and children who have shared their real-life experiences in these pages. This book will energize your efforts to get other people talking—and will spell out the specific steps you can follow.

The focus of this discussion is a section of our book called “Dreamers,” which includes profiles of Detroit’s Monsignor Clement Kern (1907-1983), a story that begins on page 7, and Sharon Darling, president and founder of the National Center for Families Learning in Louisville, a story that begins on page 13.

NOTE: Along with this Discussion Guide, you’ll find downloadable photos of Kern and Darling that you can show your group during your discussion.

Sharing these two stories:

This discussion is based on the stories of Kern and Darling, so the best way to empower your friends to take part in this process is to make sure everyone has a copy of the book. If that is not possible, you could have someone start your discussion by reading aloud these two inspiring stories. Plan ahead: If your small group depends on reading these stories aloud, give your readers plenty of advance notice so they can deliver these stories at their best.



Sharon Darling, founder of the
National Center for Families Learning

Learn more and download at:
www.TalkAboutEarlyLearning.org

Starting the Discussion

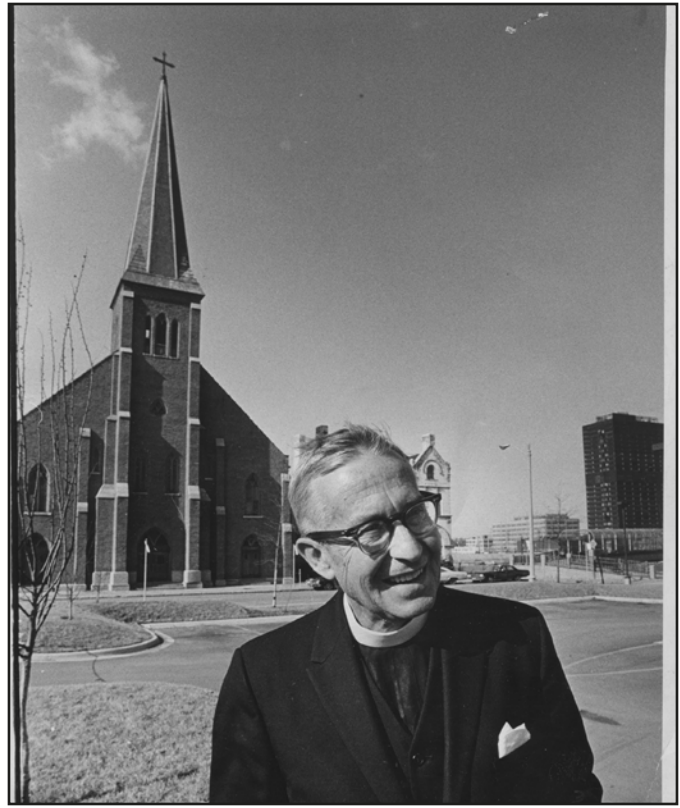
Around the world, millions of people look up to “saints” and “heroes” every day. As of 2017, more than half of the all-time, top-20, highest-grossing Hollywood movies include main characters who might be described as a combination of the qualities we associate with saints and heroes—or, as we prefer to describe them these days: “super heroes.” That may seem startling, but it’s true. Crowds around the world love super hero movies. Beyond that genre, we also note that nearly all of the top-20 films are stories involving heroes. This way of talking about admired leaders summons all kinds of hopes and dreams that we can identify, celebrate and encourage in our friends, our neighbors and ourselves.

To clarify our use of the term “saint”: We are not promoting any religious agenda. “Saints” are part of most of the world’s religious and cultural traditions. While the concept of a saint is historically associated with faith groups, it now has become a term in popular culture to identify men and women who have become guiding lights—examples who inspire our own best instincts. There is evidence of this in annual

Gallup Poll results that you can find online to share with your group. Broadly defining “saints,” Gallup finds that contemporary saints like Pope Francis, the Rev. Billy Graham, the Dalai Lama and St. Teresa often make the annual list of Americans’ “most admired men and women in the world.”

In common conversation, the terms “saints” and “heroes” help us identify people who embody values, skills and talents that we wish we could emulate. These are people who inspire and motivate us. Politicians, journalists, singers and media celebrities frequently lift up people who they regard as saints and heroes. These stories fuel the attention of news media as well as social media. Talking about these ideas in your small group can help your friends to identify qualities that can aid your growth as community leaders wherever you live across our continent.

Note: Feel free to share these introductory paragraphs with your group, either in advance of your discussion—or by reading them aloud as you gather.



Monsignor Clement Kern, founder of
Southwest Solutions

**Learn more and download at:
www.TalkAboutEarlyLearning.org**

Discussion Questions

We have organized this discussion into three clusters of questions—plus a suggested activity. If you have plenty of time, talk about all of the questions and then try the activity. Depending on the makeup of your group, some questions may spark more interest than others. Feel free to pick and choose among these discussion starters—or to adapt this process and add your own questions. *Note: If you add your own questions or activities, please get in touch with us and let us know about your innovations in this process.*

What makes a saint?

Both Kern and Darling have been described in popular terms as “saints.” Down through the centuries, that word has been used to describe people whose life story demonstrates exceptional virtues—so much so that they can inspire others to follow their virtuous example. What exceptional virtues can you identify from these brief biographies of Kern and Darling? What choices did each one make that confirmed and strengthened those virtues? Which of these virtues identified by your group inspire you today? Which virtues would you personally like to develop and strengthen? Can you name some contemporary “saints” who inspire you today? As you suggest names, explain why you are inspired by their examples. *Note: Especially in a larger group, consider posting newsprint sheets on the wall with names of the contemporary saints you have identified and then invite participants to walk around and add notes about their own thoughts and associations with these men and women.*

What makes a hero?

Both Kern and Darling also have been described in popular terms as “heroes.” Traditionally, the strengths and talents of a hero are proven through a challenging journey. The lives of Kern and Darling can be described as examples of the classic “hero’s journey.” They certainly faced many challenges along the way. What challenges can you identify from these short biographies? What strengths and talents helped Kern and Darling to face those challenges? What big challenges do you face in your community? What strengths and talents would you like to develop in your own life? Can you name some contemporary “heroes” whose examples you would like to follow? As you name these heroes, explain why you are moved by their stories. As in the earlier cluster of questions, consider putting newsprint on the wall with names of your group’s heroes, especially if you are raising these questions in a large group. *Note: This is a great opportunity to begin identifying shared goals that could be rallying points if you go on to use our ideas about Family Service Learning in our other Southwest Solutions Discussion Guide.*

How are heroes lifted up in media?

The core question here is: How can we use media to lift up our saints and heroes? This is a fun challenge, fueled by the enduring popularity of heroes in media, today. You might start discussing this theme by telling your group: “As of 2017, more than half of the all-time, top-20, highest-grossing Hollywood movies include super heroes. Nearly all of the top-20 films are stories of heroes.” Sharing that information is likely to spark a lot of curiosity. You can find up-to-date lists of all-time, top-grossing films both on Wikipedia and IMDB.com. If you have movie-lovers in your small group, sharing a top-20 movie list will take the discussion in the direction of heroes we already enjoy in popular culture around the world. Then, you could ask: In our list of heroes from these movies, what qualities do we like to celebrate? That can lead you back to core questions about the quality of heroes living in your own community.

Consider steering this discussion in a more personal direction about media: What media, including social media, gets the most time in your life on a weekly basis? Facebook? Twitter? Pinterest? Instagram? In larger groups, consider putting charts of the group’s collective answers on the wall. Continue with questions such as: How is the media we consume, including social media, changing our awareness of

heroes? Are we more likely or less likely to celebrate people who make heroic choices today? How can we contribute to lifting up real-life heroes among us? As you discuss this, make a group list of “local heroes,” people in your community who you would like to follow more closely on social media. *Note: Consider downloading the Discussion Guide called “Transformative Power of Performing Arts” from Living Arts’ Detroit Wolf Trap. That guide offers suggestions for organizing community support groups that can boost local arts groups, including through the use of social media. The ideas in that guide could be adapted to your discussions on these themes.*

An Activity: Visualizing Our Heroes

Here’s where you can adapt this basic discussion and consider expanding it into either a small-group activity or a community-wide project. Many community nonprofits nationwide offer workshops or classroom exercises in which participants visually represent their aspirations in handmade sketches or murals or collages. As examples, there are popular programs in southern California—where cultural representations of heroes and saints often adorn the walls of family homes—encouraging local men, women and children to create images of contemporary saints and heroes. Actually visualizing these inspiring figures is a powerful way to keep these examples in front of us on a daily basis. You have probably also seen pictures of huge wall-size murals in neighborhoods coast to coast that celebrate regional heroes and saints. You’ll find lots of images online that you could share with your group. Consider a small-group activity of visually representing these inspirational figures in your community—either personally for home use or perhaps in a larger project.

Expanding the Conversation

If you get involved, you can have an ever-expanding impact on promoting community leadership. Remember that a second Discussion Guide, based on *Solutions for Success*, describes the step-by-step process of organizing a Family Service Learning project.

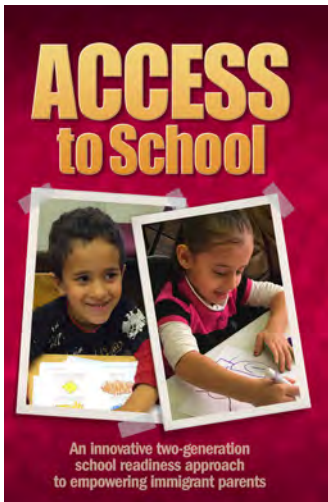
Now more than ever, Americans need to be reminded of the challenges we face in continuing to lift up families living in vulnerable neighborhoods. As wealth inequality grows in our nation, millions of families are living at or below the poverty line. Many men and women feel isolated in their concerns for the wellbeing of families and particularly the young children in these communities. Simply letting other people know of your concern can help to touch off a growing community-wide awareness. This kind of activism is self-empowering and downright fun!

One way you can expand the conversation is by visiting the book’s Amazon page and adding a review of our book. Of course, we hope you’ve found this book helpful, so we welcome Amazon reviews that may prompt others to pick up a copy and extend the discussion.

But that’s not all! Share your thoughts on Facebook or in your own newsletters. *(Note: You are free to quote from our book. You could include an excerpt of our book in a blog post or column you might write about your experiences in reading and discussing the book. All we ask is that you properly credit the source. We hope you will share these important ideas far and wide.)*

**Learn more and download at:
www.TalkAboutEarlyLearning.org**

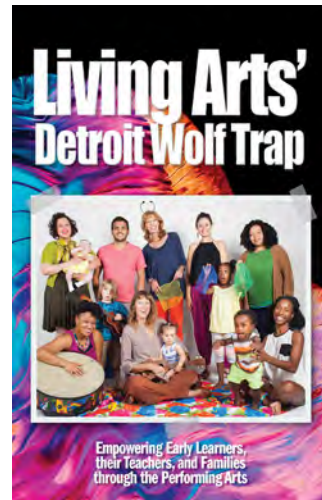
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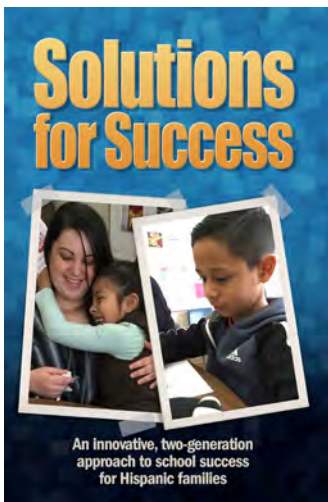
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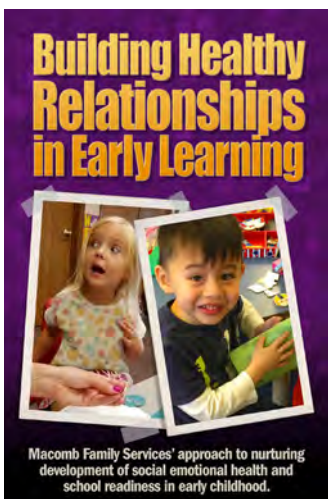
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