



# THE PRATT PROMISE

Why We Matter - Our Story

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## THE PROMISE

**THE SULLIVAN - DECKARD SCHOLARS OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM IS A BOLD NEW INITIATIVE. THE PROGRAM TARGETS YOUTH WHO ARE AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE AND HELPS THEM TO MAKE A SMOOTH TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENT LIVING, FACILITATE THEIR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF UNDERGRADUATE REQUIREMENTS TO EARN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE, AND REALIZE BOTH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH TO LEAD A SATISFYING LIFE...WE BELIEVE THAT THE SULLIVAN - DECKARD SCHOLARS OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM IS UNIQUE AND INNOVATIVE WITH POTENTIAL TO BECOME AN EXEMPLAR MODEL FOR OTHER INSTITUTIONS AS THEY CONSIDER STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGING NEEDS OF YOUTH WHO AGE OUT OF FOSTER CARE, GO ON TO COLLEGE TO PURSUE AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE.**

CHARLEYSE S. PRATT, PH.D.  
TAKEN FROM 2015 SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS  
OCTOBER 12, 2015



## FOSTER ACTION OHIO

### EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW WITH LISA DICKSON

**Q: How does your organization improve the community?**

A: The work of Ohio foster care youth and alumni has contributed to the Ohio Reach initiative to support former foster youth pursuing higher education, Ohio's extension of foster care to age 21, and national FYI housing vouchers to help end the Foster Care to Homeless Pipeline. Ohio foster care youth have written a Youth Rights Handbook, which has been shared throughout the state. Legislative testimony by our members led to Ohio police being designated as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.

**Q: How is your organization different from others of its kind?**

A: We provide a voice for statewide foster care youth and alumni and empower them to improve outcomes for their brothers and sisters, in and from foster care. We work continually behind the scenes to ensure that the voice of those with lived experience in foster care is included in state and national policies and decision-making.

**Q: What are some things that people may not know about your organization?**

A: ACTION Ohio has been in existence since 2006, and is manned entirely by volunteers. We channel all of our fund-raising efforts into ways to directly help and empower current and former foster youth, such as early Thanksgivings, annual trips to DC, youth conferences, college events for foster youth, and supporting the

the OHIO Youth Advisory Board.

**Q: How do you unite the mission of your organization with the community?**

A: Our ongoing partnerships include, but are not limited to ODJFS, Ohio CASA, the Ohio Supreme Court, County Children and Family Services Agencies, Junior League (Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus), National Council of Jewish Women (Cleveland and Columbus), Adoption Network Cleveland, Community of Hope, The Purple Project, St. Ignatius High School, and My Very Own Blanket. Our joint efforts support early Thanksgivings for foster youth and alumni, statewide conferences and local/regional/state Youth Advisory Boards.

**Q: With the global and national events of this Spring season, how do you create opportunities to assemble a dialogue surrounding the persistent issues of race, inclusion, respect for health and life?**

A: Ohio foster care youth and alumni share their voices on panels, in workshops, and during in-person and virtual meetings. They express their insights and recommendations in legislative meetings, written/video testimonies, and letters to Governor DeWine. They have advocated behind the scenes for dorms to remain open in the midst of COVID-19, and for foster care supports to be extended for those who "age out" of the Bridges program.



Lisa Dickson of Foster Action Ohio enjoying a Zoom cooking class with foster care youth!

**Q: In your interactions with humanity at large, what one or two fundamental components have you learned about people?**

A: There is a vital difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness takes one person; reconciliation takes two. It is healthy for former foster youth who choose to forgive their abusers to also establish boundaries in order to maintain safe distance from them, in order to avoid further abuse in the future. It is also vitally important to label abuse for what it is, rather than having a cognitive dissonance by denying it happened or making excuses. Looking reality in the face is an important step in seeking healing from what occurred.



SCAN THE CODE TO HEAR THE ENTIRE INTERVIEW. YOU WILL NEED TO DOWNLOAD A FREE QR CODE READER APP ON YOUR SMARTPHONE, IPAD, OR TABLET



Photo Credit: Hopecle.org

## EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AMBER DONOVAN

**Q: What is your connection with the Sullivan-Deckard Scholarship Opportunity Program?**

**A:** Community of Hope's mission is to build long-lasting relationships with youth impacted by foster care. We do this by recruiting adult mentors from around the community and putting them in teams (called Communities). Youth then get to pick who is on their team--who they spend time with, and they launch the team with a meal filled with the favorite foods of the young person. It is a celebration of coming together to journey together through life by meeting weekly (on zoom currently). It is about being together more than goal attainment. Goals come after trust is established. We have served 13 of the Sullivan Deckard scholars.

**Q: How does your organization improve the community?**

**A:** We bring people together from all over Cuyahoga County (soon to be Lorain county as well) and we teach them how to serve a young adult who has been impacted by trauma in childhood. We support our volunteers and our youth throughout the time that they are in relationship. Young people who age out of foster care need people to stick around, so we are working to

create the foundation in the first year, upon which a lifetime of support is created.

**Q: How is your organization different from others of its kind?**

**A:** I don't know that there is any other organization that engages community members around a team approach to mentoring. We believe in bringing people together from around the county to work together with the shared purpose of helping a young person. We have 500 volunteers from all over, who come together for a transformative experience rather than a transactional one. Many "service projects" are "one and done." We don't believe that changing lives and breaking family cycles can be easily accomplished without long-term commitment to being consistent and showing up for young people.

**Q: What are some things that people may not know about your organization?**

**A:** We became known as Open Table in 2018 after time in Cleveland.com, but we became our own nonprofit that year and changed our name to Community of Hope. So, I think that was confusing to people initially. We continue to surround youth who have aged out of foster care with a team of

mentors that they choose. We created our own youth informed trauma-focused program since then.

**Q: How do you unite the mission of your organization with the community?**

**A:** Our mission is to build long lasting relationships for youth. We focus on restoring dignity and nurturing hope that life can be better, dreams can be achieved, and there are good people out in the world who are interested in supporting and loving youth exactly as they are. We believe that investing our time helping youth learn about the world and figure out how to organize and implement the steps to their goals benefits the community at large. Young people are the future of our community, and we need their leadership.

**Q: In your interactions with humanity at large, what one or two fundamental components have you learned about people?**

**A:** Most humans want to help others—but most people understand that young people are our future. It is an investment in our future when we come alongside and help young people grow into who they want to become. In our current world, social isolation is not great for anyone. We all need community. We were created for togetherness.



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**Fall 2020 Fireside Chat Series**  
**Dr. Jamie L. Bennett - Guest Speaker**  
**Dr. Royel Johnson - Guest Speaker**

**FIRESIDE CHAT DEFINITION:**

A solution driven community-based conversation about how to best support aged out youth and persons who have experienced foster care. Discourse on supporting and aiding them in returning to institutions of higher learning across the state of Ohio and the country, because of the COVID-19 global Pandemic in the 2020-2021 academic year.

“Nineteen days ago, I successfully defended my dissertation and earned my Doctorate in education. Nineteen years ago, when I failed out of Community College, I began waiting tables to support myself.”

In case you missed this Fireside Chat event, Dr. Jamie Bennett explained the contrast of her personal experiences and how she turned it all around. From a neurological standpoint she details how our brains develop habits, pathways, and patterns through reinforcement, and how the brain naturally prunes away idle information so that our pathways become solid.

Scan the QR codes to hear excerpts from Dr. Bennett's, and Dr. Johnson's discourses. You will need to download a free qr code reader app on your smartphone, ipad, or tablet.



“I study students, and my work primarily aims to improve educational opportunities to focus on students who are not always well served. Whether it's racially underrepresented students, or those who are racially minoritized, or those who are first generation, or those who have been impacted by the foster care system, criminal justice system, and so forth.”

In case you missed this Fireside Chat event, Dr. Johnson - who himself was in Kinship Care during his youth - provided a compelling presentation regarding why his life's work focuses on humanizing the lives behind the numbers of research and statistics which support a false narrative about what minorities and people of color are destined to become.

By age 26, Dr. Johnson had earned his Ph.D. According to statistics, a man like him was never supposed to accomplish this.



**CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR SULLIVAN-DECKARD  
SCHOLARS  
FALL 2020 GRADUATES**

**THE SCHOLARS CREED**

Excerpt from The Marva Collins Way

SOCIETY WILL DRAW A CIRCLE  
THAT SHUTS ME OUT. BUT MY  
SUPERIOR THOUGHTS WILL  
DRAW ME IN.

I WAS BORN TO WIN, IF I DO NOT  
SPEND TOO MUCH TIME TRYING  
TO FAIL. I WILL IGNORE THE  
TAGS AND NAMES GIVEN TO ME  
BY SOCIETY, SINCE ONLY I KNOW  
WHAT I HAVE THE ABILITY TO  
BECOME. FAILURE IS JUST AS  
EASY TO COMBAT AS SUCCESS IS  
TO OBTAIN.

EDUCATION IS PAINFUL AND  
NOT GAINED BY PLAYING  
GAMES. YET IT IS MY PRIVILEGE  
TO DESTROY MYSELF, IF THAT IS  
WHAT I CHOOSE TO DO.

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FAIL, BUT I  
DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO  
TAKE OTHER PEOPLE WITH ME.  
GOD MADE ME THE CAPTAIN OF  
ONLY ONE LIFE - MY OWN. IT IS  
MY RIGHT TO CARE NOTHING  
ABOUT MYSELF, BUT I MUST BE  
WILLING TO ACCEPT THE  
CONSEQUENCES FOR THAT  
FAILURE.

AND, I MUST NEVER THINK THAT  
THOSE WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO  
WORK, WHILE I PLAYED, RESTED,  
AND SLEPT, WILL SHARE THEIR  
BOUNTIES WITH ME. MY  
SUCCESS AND MY EDUCATION  
CAN BE COMPANIONS THAT NO  
MISFORTUNE CAN DEPRESS, NO  
CRIME CAN DESTROY, AND NO  
ENEMY CAN ALIENATE.

WITHOUT EDUCATION, MAN IS A  
SLAVE. A SAVAGE WANDERING  
FROM HERE TO THERE,  
BELIEVING WHATEVER HE IS  
TOLD. TIME AND CHANCE COME  
TO US ALL. I CAN EITHER BE  
HESITANT OR COURAGEOUS. I  
CAN SWIFTLY STAND UP AND  
SHOUT: THIS IS MY TIME AND  
PLACE. I WILL ACCEPT THE  
CHALLENGE.



**Dejamiah Brown**

Major: International Business  
Minor: Anthropology & Marketing  
B.A. Business Administration  
Plans: Grad school and employment



**Jayland Peebles**

Major: Film, Television & Interactive Media  
Bachelor of Arts

"Failure is not an option to take. Being petrified of it only fuels the energy needed to be the best one can be. Never limit, and never stop trying. Even when something seems impossible, one must show that the word 'impossible' is impossible itself. Change the words from 'impossible' to 'I'm possible.'"

**Shajuana Gaston**

Major: Social Work  
Minor: Non-profit administration  
B.A. Social Work

Photo Unavailable