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By [Bill Smith](#) on January 26, 2015 - 10:22am



Sheila Merry.

Sheila Marie Merry today was named executive director of the Evanston Cradle to Career initiative, a collaboration of local schools, businesses and other groups to improve the lives of children, youth and families.

Merry previously headed the Illinois Mentoring Partnership, a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships for children and youth.

She said in a statement, “Evanston is uniquely positioned to realize the promise of this kind of collective impact initiative to provide children and families with the supports they need to allow our youth to

realize their potential and prepare them for a lifetime of contribution and leadership.”

Prior to IMP, Merry served for 13 years as executive director of the Jane Addams Juvenile Court Foundation, an organization created to refocus attention on the Cook County Juvenile Court and to support and stimulate its ongoing reform.

She also served as a senior research associate with Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago where she was involved in research on child welfare, youth development programs, juvenile court practices, community supports for healthy youth development, and community-building initiatives.

Merry earned a bachelor’s degree in human development and social policy at Northwestern University and her master’s degree from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. She has lived in Evanston since 1987 and raised two children who attended Washington Elementary School, Nichols Middle School and Evanston Township High School.

She's been active in the PTA, as a Girl Scout leader, and many years on the board and associate board of Youth Organizations Umbrella.

ETHS Superintendent Eric Witherspoon said Merry "is highly qualified and brings the experience we need to spearhead this important work.”

“With Sheila’s leadership and the commitment of all the partners and our community, Cradle to Career will be a game-changer in Evanston as we work collectively on behalf of all our youth so they have positive life outcomes,” Witherspoon said.

The group considered nearly 50 candidates for the executive director's job, and the top three participated in a public forum where they shared their proposed plans. Forum participants provided feedback to Cradle to Career’s 26 organizational partners used in making the final hiring decision.

Merry will officially start with Cradle to Career on Feb. 16.

Cradle to Career claims as its mission assuring that by the age of 23, all Evanston young adults will be leading productive lives, building on the resources education, and support that they and their families have had to help them grow into resilient, educated, healthy, self-sufficient, and socially responsible adults.

Participating organizations are Allowance for Good, Center for Independent Futures, Childcare Network of Evanston, City of Evanston, Connections for the Homeless, Evanston Chamber of Commerce, Evanston Community Foundation, Evanston Scholars, Evanston/Skokie School District 65, Family Focus, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Society, Evanston Township High School District 202, Infant Welfare Society of Evanston, Learn to Work/Work to Learn – Evanston 150 Task Force, McGaw YMCA, Moran Center for Youth Advocacy, NorthShore University Health System, Northwestern University, Oakton Community College, Peer Services, Reba Early Learning Center, Second Baptist Church, St. Nicholas Parish, United Way North-Northwest, Youth Job Center, Youth Organizations Umbrella, YWCA Evanston/North Shore.