



EVANSTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL

DISTRICT 202

Evanston Cradle to Career appoints Sheila Merry as Executive Director

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Evanston Township High School shares the media release below on behalf of the Evanston Cradle to Career partners.



Sheila Merry will be the Executive Director of Evanston Cradle to Career beginning February 16, 2015.

EVANSTON, IL (January 26, 2015) — The Evanston Cradle to Career initiative announced today the appointment of Sheila Marie Merry as Executive Director. Evanston Cradle to Career is a collective impact effort by local organizations, schools, businesses and the faith community to make a lasting difference in the lives of children, youth and families.

"I am thrilled to have this opportunity to work with the amazing group that has pulled together this important initiative for the children and families in our community," Merry said.

Merry is passionate about this work, believing that "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," she said.

Merry joins Cradle to Career following a successful career working to improve opportunities and resources for youth and families. Merry has a long history of growing organizations from the ground up, most recently serving as the head of the Illinois Mentoring Partnership (IMP), a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships for children and youth in Illinois.

Prior to IMP, Merry served for 13 years as Executive Director of the Jane Addams Juvenile Court Foundation (JAJCF), an organization created to refocus attention on the Cook County Juvenile Court and to support and stimulate its ongoing reform. Merry has 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. She also brings experience and expertise in collective impact efforts, having worked with Chicago's Thrive initiative.

Merry has a long-standing relationship within the Evanston and the surrounding community. 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 (SSA) at the University of Chicago. Merry permanently moved to Evanston in 1987 and raised two children that attended Washington Elementary School, Nichols Middle School and Evanston Township High School.

As a long-time resident of Evanston, Merry has been active in the community through PTA, as a Girl Scout leader, and many years on the board and associate board of Youth Organizations Umbrella (Y.O.U.), serving for seven years as Vice President of Programs.

"We are excited that Sheila Merry will be the executive director for Cradle to Career," said Eric Witherspoon, Superintendent of Evanston Township High School District 202. "She 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.

In searching to fill the role of Cradle to Career's Executive Director position, nearly 50 qualified candidates were considered and the top three candidates participated in a public forum where they shared their proposed plans for Cradle to Career and engaged with audience questions about their planned efforts. Individuals at these forums provided direct feedback to Cradle to Career's 26 organizational partners who utilized the feedback in making the final hiring decision.

"Sheila is exactly who we need at this point in time," said Marcia McMahon, Regional Chief Professional Officer, United Way North-Northwest. "Critical to successful collective impact models is thoughtful planning, relationship building and creation of a common agenda, all of which requires sophisticated planning among stakeholders. Sheila demonstrates the skills needed to continue to move Cradle to Career forward on all of these fronts."

Merry will officially start with Cradle to Career on February 16, 2015 and she looks forward to meeting with committee and community members to begin developing a more comprehensive strategic plan for moving the initiative forward.

About Cradle to Career

The Evanston Cradle to Career initiative is a collective impact effort to mobilize our community assets to make a lasting difference in the lives of our community's children, youth, and families. A broad and deep group of community organizations and individuals have committed themselves to a bold vision: 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.

To date, partners include:

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
Y.O.U.
YWCA Evanston/North Shore

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