Upstander Ripple Effect Season 2 Episode 1: Self-Awareness

transcript

**Jackie Congedo** 00:00

Upstanding happens, one act, one moment, one strength at a time, and standing up changes everything. This is the upstander ripple effect.

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:14

Hello, everybody. I'm Kevin Aldridge,

**Jackie Congedo** 00:15

and I'm Jackie Congedo,

**Kevin Aldridge** 00:17

and we'd like to welcome you to Season Two of the Upstander Ripple Effect. Can you believe it? We're back.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:23

We're back, whether they like us or not, we're back. Yeah. And hope everybody had a good summer and are looking forward to a to a great, great year. It's back to school time, and it feels that way in the weather. It's been so nice the last couple days, and we thought that it was a good time to start the year, the season off with a discussion about this whole idea of self awareness. And actually, before I jump into some of the current events pieces, we're going to talk about, want to just share that we've learned a lot in season one, things that worked really well, things that you know we can adjust and maybe work rework a little differently, and so you'll notice some changes. In season two, we're going to stick with this sort of current events section, although our producer has challenged us to be more abbreviated about the current events section. The good news is that there's not a lot going on in the world, so we should just be able to, like, breeze right through that, right, right,

**Kevin Aldridge** 01:26

right. Nothing happening at all.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:27

No, it's all quiet. All quiet. So we're going to commit to ourselves and to you that we're going to try to to move through that with a little bit more expediency, and then we're, we're going to... for the second half of these episodes. Really excited about this as much as we can. We're going to actually feature a third sort of host who can tell us about the upstanding work that they're doing in the community, how they're using their character strengths, or, you know, what kinds of projects they're working on that lead to more upstanding in our community and in our world. So we have a great first guest to kick off this season. Will join us a little bit later, but for now, I'm going to set my watch. We're going to make a valiant attempt at sticking to some measure of brevity here and talking about current events through this theme, is sort of lens of self awareness. So I think I'm going to put Kevin on the spot, right off the right off the bat here. I think a good place to start on this conversation is the column that you wrote. Actually, maybe you want to. It's like if anybody who's been hiding under a rock for the last couple of months, hasn't heard about, or isn't aware of the ongoing, you know, I would say burning fire that that is, you know, what has the brawl that took place in downtown Cincinnati, and you know, the conversation around that that has continued to evolve and shift in ways that I think are some ways more not as constructive as they could be, or more destructive than constructive. I just think that your piece about reflecting on this and what it says about us, what it says about the way we need to look at ourselves in the mirror, was really poignant. And I'm wondering if you can kind of bring us into sort of how you thought about this piece, and the response you've got from it, you've gotten from it, from the community.

**Kevin Aldridge** 03:28

Yeah, I think you know, and I've said this before on this program and in many other spaces, I think the position that I sit in at the Enquirer gives me sort of like a unique perspective, because I get to hear and listen to the thoughts and feelings of a broad cross section of Greater Cincinnati. And so one of the things I've gotten really good at is like listening to what people are saying and trying to condense that into what is this conversation really about. And so as the the fight downtown at Fourth and Elm happened and and as it became this national thing that everybody was talking about, and all of the the side issues that came out of that and the conversations, I started to think about, you know, like, what, what could I say, or what could I bring to The table that would be constructive and kind of helping with the the community wrestle with this? And I was reminded of one of my favorite movies is called A Time to Kill. It's a movie that's based off a John Grisham novel, and it's essentially about a Black father whose daughter is raped in the in the south by a couple of white gentlemen, and he exacts his vengeance by shooting shooting him in the the whole story is about him being on trial, and Matthew McConaughey plays his attorney Jake Brigance, who is trying to do all of this great lawyering to try to convince this jury. Jury to let his client off. And ultimately, where he arrives at in his closing argument is when he realizes that all of his lawyering and fine, you know, legal counsel wasn't penetrating. He basically asked the jury, which was all white, to put themselves in the shoes of him, and he goes through the retelling of everything that this man's daughter had gone through with, with being violated. And then at the end, he asked them to imagine that the little girl was white, and you could see the eyes of the jury sort of open, and they wind up letting the guy off. So it was, it was sort of this notion that if we that, if we can imagine, you know, the victims or people of in a certain situation more like ourselves, we generally tend to have a different view on how we look at things. And it was kind of, it was kind of hard to not see how race sort of played into this, right? Like there's absolutely the truth of the public safety element of this, and the crime backdrop, all of that stuff is true. But the reason why this thing sort of took off, I think, nationally, the way that it did was not just merely sort of the brutality of it, but it was the race. It was a white woman being punched out, you know, by a black guy, a white guy being stomped by a group of of Black people. And I think we're being less than honest with ourselves if we try to pretend like that image didn't hit on all of us in some way that tapped into something that deals with our biases, prejudices, fears, and challenging ourselves to say, Why am I reacting to this in this way and being honest about it? Now, that's not going to be race for everybody, right? But I think if we really want to take a look at an examine why this thing took off, kind of like wildfire fire around the country, when other incidents, you know that are similar or other fights or brawls, for lack of a better word, that we've seen around the city and elsewhere, haven't gotten nearly the type of attention that this did. I think it's kind of hard to argue that the politicization and the racialization of the of the incident didn't, didn't play into it. And so I was just kind of appealing to readers to kind of be, you know, to the point of the topic, more self aware about why the and honest with themselves about why they were reacting the way they were reacting.

**Jackie Congedo** 05:31

Yeah, I mean, I think, I think you did a really masterful job trying to balance just just to try and appeal to everyone who's part of this discussion. And you know, what's interesting is, if you're white, you might have listened to what you just said and thought one thing. And if you're Black, you might have just listened to what you said absolutely not another thing. And that, in and of itself, tells us something about the need for some reflection, right? And why do we read the same facts and come to different conclusions? Oftentimes, it has to do with the bias that we live with and in our own the way our own biases are shaped by our own identity and our own experiences in the world. So I just think, I think that, you know, some of my favorite pieces, challenge, sort of challenge everyone to look inside and say, Wait a minute. Am I operating out of what Arthur Brooks likes to call "psychological immune system," right? Is this my? They're these, my, my is this was my defense mechanism is the rev up of my psychological immunity, because it's trying to protect my ego here, yeah,

**Jackie Congedo** 08:46

absolutely,

**Jackie Congedo** 08:47

trying to make me feel okay about not being so right maybe, or am I seeing things clearly. And so I think that there's lessons to be learned on both sides of this, and I think you beautifully put that in print for us, and you got some feedback about it?

**Kevin Aldridge** 09:05

Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, I think there was a line in there that I think encapsulates what you just said, where I said that, you know, "Bias doesn't just live in the people we don't like. It lives in the mirrors that we look in every day in our homes," and that's the truth. It's like we can always clearly see the bias in others, but we are conveniently oblivious to our own. And I think, you know, I experienced that myself, even when you talk about the feedback. I mean, I overwhelmingly got a lot of positive recognition from that column, much like what you said, if, if I got 100 if I got 100 emails on it, 85 to 90 of them were, hey, you nailed it. I appreciate it.

**Jackie Congedo** 09:53

I think in this environment of B plus is pretty good.

**Kevin Aldridge** 09:56

Yeah, yeah, no, no, no, doubt, but, but the interesting thing. Was, is that, you know, the handful that I got that disagreed with it were the ones that kind of stuck in my craw the most. And so,

**Jackie Congedo** 10:10

even though it was such a minority,

**Kevin Aldridge** 10:14

yeah, even though it was such a minority. And so I went through this, through this process myself, was just saying, like, why are these, why did this small percentage like they're they're overwhelmingly more people who have praised this than who have criticized it. Why am I so bothered by... Why am I more bothered by that than the the positive reinforcement? And what I had to do in my self awareness journey was sort of recognize that there was some, there was some ego in that. There was the there was the ego of wanting to be right and wanting everybody to agree with my rightness right. And that is that is as dangerous as anything right like in and it's once I came to that realization. I say, Well, what do I have to do with that now, right? Because it's one thing to be self aware, and then it's another thing. Well, now that I'm awake to these parts of myself that I don't like, what do I do with that? And yeah, and the reality is, you know, you got to embrace the criticism as well as the as well as the praise, and leave yourself open to the fact that, you know, maybe you got some room. Maybe there's some things you didn't get right, right, and maybe there's some room for you to expand, you know, your knowledge or try to understand somebody else's point of view who disagrees with you a little bit more, rather than just, you know, wanting everybody to join your little chorus.

**Jackie Congedo** 11:40

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, this piece Arthur Brooks wrote for The Atlantic back in April, was talking about the, you know, the sort of the most famous maxim of Greek philosophy, "Know thyself." And he says, Actually, no doubt, what they actually, "what they really meant was Know thyself accurately," you know. So it's not enough just to know thyself that thy thinks they are to know thyself in your full fullness and and you know, the piece is really it's really interesting. And talking about, again, he labels it this "psychological immune system. So integral to our being are these traits that, collectively, they have been called our psychological immune system." And these traits being, you know, the the sort of default we have to rationalize bad choices, to ignore information that reflects critically on us, because it is what protects our ego.

**Kevin Aldridge** 12:36

Sure,

**Jackie Congedo** 12:36

right? It's a defense mechanism, and it's a preservation mechanism and

**Kevin Aldridge** 12:41

not only our ego, but our sense of a feeling like we're good people, right? Like, like, at the heart of it, we all, everybody, like, even the villains, right, believe themselves to be good.

**Jackie Congedo** 12:53

Yes, you know, I mean a lot about that, yeah, museum in the context of the history, yeah, yeah,

**Kevin Aldridge** 12:58

absolutely. So I think there's something within us that always says that we want to try to defend ourselves against negative portrayals of ourselves. So, you know, for example, if I say, Hey, I would never vote for a politician because they're they're Muslim like, it's easier for me to justify that in my own mind and admit that I might be a religious bigot, you know, on some level, because nobody wants to think of themselves is that way. So I'll find out another way to justify my truth for not voting for that individual rather than recognize that I might have a bias. Yeah, right, yeah.

**Jackie Congedo** 13:36

So yeah. I mean, I think, and when we think about self awareness, obviously we can start with the self. We can also think about our self being our community, and how we can kind of collectively as a community, can be more aware of our own sort of defaults and preconceived ideas. And then we can, we can think about the awareness that I think is is healthy in the context of sort of national awareness about our history. And so that's where I think I'd like to spend the last chunk of time here is thinking about how we can take these lessons about, you know, what is "Know thyself accurately" mean in the context of our you know, the conversation about reconciling national history and challenging national history. There is a movement, you know, in this in this country and really around the world, to be more selective, if I'm going to be selective about my words, about what is, what is taught, what's taught in schools, what's taught in museums, and what pieces we want, what parts of the story we're going to tell. And I think that, you know, when we think about the the challenging history that any country or community has to confront, you know, we can, we can learn a lot from the way Germany has has looked at their collective history. And we can, we can tell. Well, I think what yields a comp, a more complex story, that's that is, at the end of the day, a better teacher, right? It? You know, some have said, you know, when we lose track of the past being in conversation with the present like that's when we get in in a dangerous place. And I think in order for that conversation to remain intact, there has to be that space for for the reality, which is that some things were great and some things were not so great. And Germany has, Germany has wrestled with this and done some real work on it.

**Kevin Aldridge** 15:35

Yeah, I think, you know, it's as the old saying goes. You know, those who don't know their history are doomed to repeat it. So I think, like my view on that is not because we just want to rehash the worst parts of our history to make people feel bad or to teach people to hate America. I think it's actually quite the opposite. I think we want to love our country so much that we ought to learn from the mistakes of the past to make sure that we don't, we don't repeat them, and the only way that you can do that is you have to have full truth. Like full truth is never a bad thing, right? You you can't, you can't ever, we can't ever buy into or the belief that that holding back anything, but the whole truth is, is a good thing, because contrary to what Jack Nicholson said, and A Few Good Men, you know, I think most people can handle the truth. In fact, I think they, they want the truth and respect the truth. And so we have to do that with our history by explaining, you know, what actually happened, and that's, that's the good and the bad, right? We shouldn't focus on anyone too much, you know, trying to, you know, just tell the the nice, you know, clean parts of history that make us feel good. We shouldn't just tell that. And we shouldn't just tell, you know, the story of the hardships and the the negative things like there's, there's room in our telling of history for both. In fact, the the great times are enhanced by seeing what we've overcome to be where we are. That's part of what makes America great, is our ability, our ability to go from slavery and Jim Crow to a Black president like that's an amazing story that you can't tell in any other place but the United States, and that that should be celebrated, but you can only celebrate the Barack Obama if you understand where we've come from, where we've come from, right? Yeah, and that's what makes it significant,

**Jackie Congedo** 17:31

and the recognition that there's still room to go. I mean, I think about this in the context of the history we teach. And you know what? You know, we tell these stories of of survival and rescue and resilience and and the fact that these amazing people who endured the worst of humanity came here and rebuilt their lives and contributed so profoundly to the richness of our Cincinnati community, and had the strength of spirit and the hope to say, we're going to rehash, we're going to actually engage in the process of teaching about what happened to us, which is not an easy process, right, for someone who survived that, because we we actually believe that people are inherently good, or can, can be right, can rise to the challenge of being the best of humanity today. And so I think that's an incredibly empowering, important framing to be able to lift up those stories of contribution and resilience, and, you know, and and the triumphs of any identity. And it can't be at the expense of making sure that we do justice to the struggle, right?

**Kevin Aldridge** 18:41

Yeah. Absolutely.

**Jackie Congedo** 18:45

So I think that like in every field of teaching challenging history, we're navigating the tension points of how we hold tell how we hold those in conversation with each other for the benefit of audiences and learning and and I, you know, I think there's a lot of, there's a whole other conversation we could have about, you know, different museums and how they're navigating this, how they're wrestling with this in this moment. But it is, it is also interesting to look at what Germany has done in terms of, you know, reckoning with this history. And interestingly, was looking at a piece written by Richard Evans about this, you know, basically how Germany came to terms with its past. And interestingly, a lot of really the deep reconciliation work related to how this past is memorialized and remembered wasn't really in terms of how we look at the landscape of remembrance in Germany today, yeah, didn't come about until the 90s. This is like Gen... it's not just years. It is generations. It's people who retired and the next generation that came after them who said, We want the stolpersteine Right? Which is these, this amazing, massive memorial in terms of, like, breadth, all over Europe, and it's these literal brass stumbling stones. Stolpersteine is what they're, what they're called in German, that are in embedded in sidewalks all over Europe and Germany where Jewish people once lived, right? And so you literally can't miss it. It is supposed to be stumbling. It's disruptive. The Berlin Memorial is the same way. It's these massive sort of granite pillars stones that sort of stretch for a distance, and the entire landscape of Berlin is shifted forever as a result of that. And I don't, I don't think the symbolism of that is lost on anyone who sees it. So, you know, Germany has, has obviously done a lot of work on this, and come a long way. And I think we see it in the way that, you know, it's not just about saying, Okay, close the book on that chapter. We're done with it. It's, how do we memorialize this and and continue the conversation about what it means for our world today, which is hard, it's, it's work that happens every day, I'm sure, in many conversations and across generations.

**Kevin Aldridge** 21:06

Yeah, I think, I think Germany did a lot of things. I think you see post apartheid, South Africa did a lot of things that America didn't do. America started, but they didn't finish the job. So when you talk about reconciliation, we call it reconstruction here in the United States, in that era, a lot of the work that they did included not just closing the book and moving on, but it was admissions of wrong. It was trials, it was reparations, it was it was all of the things that were necessary to kind of allow people who were on disparate sides to kind of come together and sort of heal. We've never really fully embraced that here in the United States, efforts that were began in terms of making economic restitution weren't fulfilled during the Reconstruction era, when when African Americans were able to gain political capital and some economic capital, we saw what happened with that you've heard, you know, the stories of white supremacists coming in, burning all of that down and reasserting control of government and all of these things when we had an opportunity to make progress. Historically, those things were shut down because the remnants of the the slavery system that was there, and those who were upset about that, they were allowed to kind of reassert themselves, and then that transformed into Jim Crow and a whole bunch of other things that, again, further debilitated and set back the ability to truly move toward racial reconciliation and healing in this kind and this is why the telling of history is so important, because you can't just, you can't just skip over those chapters and not understand why we weren't able right to fully mend and move in ways that some of these other countries did, if you look at the extent to which they went to to right the wrongs of what happened and and hold folks accountable, and give them an opportunity to to say, "I'm sorry," or move on or not, right? And that is, that is not what we have done here in America. We have, we have more or less sort of taken this approach of, hey, let's just turn the page and not really talk about it or deal with it, or it's too late to try to make restitution to, you know, to folks. And those are the things that are sort of underlying that that make this a challenge, you know. And when you talk about generations to get to where they are in Germany. We're not even hundreds of years later, right? We're so we're still, we're still in the infancy of that. And just imagine, you know, the greatness that it would add to the American story if we could somehow overcome that and expedite that process.

**Jackie Congedo** 24:17

Yeah, yeah. I think it's about like acknowledging the psychological immune system of our country and thinking about how we, you know, how we account for that, and be honest and reflective as we, as we look in the mirror. As you said, because you're right. I mean, we allow those blind spots to run the show, and that's that's a dangerous place to be in. So I want to just sort of pivot from this segment with a reflection from a survivor, a Holocaust survivor, who so there's this really interesting program called the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace. This is a program that basically deploys German teenagers who've just graduated high school to serve as volunteers in civil service... Jewish civil service organizations all over the world. And so we've had the privilege of hosting a number of these amazing young people, young German people, and it is incredible. You should see the way kids when they come through the museum and have a tour led by an 18 year old German guy through a Holocaust Museum. They are just captivated, and they ask all the questions they want to know, all the stories about what were their grandparents doing in World War and the way these young people have, I mean, not just like begrudgingly, answer the questions they have committed they've put themselves in a position to do that work of reconciliation, of, you know, restorative justice. It's, it's actually like, so inspiring. And you know, one of the survivors, they do a lot of work also in survivor communities and with family Jewish Family Service organizations all around the world. One of the survivors said, "Remembering is important as a call for the future to do something against, in this case, antisemitism and prejudice. Young people should learn from the past, realizing that they are not responsible for then, but for the future. If they answer, we are all human beings, then I have achieved the most important thing."

**Kevin Aldridge** 26:18

yeah, yeah, that's, you know, I'm glad you shared that, because it it reminded me of one of the things that I read in the article about when they talked about one of the the turning points in Germany was when younger generations were coming up and they were demanding answers of their their parents generation about what had happened, and they wanted the the truth of those stories. And I think that that's kind of where I feel like, that's kind of where we are in America right now is, I think you have younger generations who are coming up and they they want these truths, they want that knowledge and and I'll just say I don't think that sits well with everyone, because it often gets cast as we're teaching young people to hate their country, and I don't think that's what it is at all. I think our young people, because it is their future, they want to know the truth about their past so that they can create a better future and tomorrow and not fall into the same traps that you know, those of us in our generation can't seem to escape. And so that is, that is where my hope is and where it continues to be. Unfortunately, I think for for many people of my generation and maybe a little bit older, we are part of the problem. And maybe our younger, maybe our younger generation can get right what kind of what we fail to

**Jackie Congedo** 27:40

Yeah, yeah. I think that's right. And I think also, as I try and do in so many conversations, it's like it doesn't mean we have to talk about those challenges at the expense of what's great about our country. Yes, we don't, you know, we don't have to... it's not a replacement of the story. It's just a telling of the full story. Yes, and I don't think we need to be so afraid of that. We have a lot to be proud of about this incredible country that we've come together to build, you know, and so there's, there's opportunities to, you know, to hold both. Anyway, how do we do I don't know who's timing us 20 minutes, 25 minutes, not it's it's better than it was.

**Kevin Aldridge** 28:18

It's better than it was. I mean, in our in our defense, we're not that much.

**Jackie Congedo** 28:23

And Anne, our producer, love Anne, but look at all this prep work she does.

**Kevin Aldridge** 28:27

That's right? I mean, that's not fair to give us this much stuff in many minutes, right?

**Jackie Congedo** 28:33

But there was no canes that came out, so we're appreciative for that, and thanks for thanks for being on the journey with us for the first episode and our current events work. We're gonna move to our sort of second segment where we bring an upstander into the fold to talk a little bit about the work they're doing in the space of character strengths. We have no better person to join us for episode one in that conversation than Carrie McCarthy. Carrie is the program coordinator of Pleasant Hill Middle School in College Hill, this is a Cincinnati Public Schools school and Carrie has also been a partner at HHC for many years, working alongside our team at HHC to facilitate the work we do with Cincinnati Public particularly the ninth grade, grade bands that come to the museum every year. But this is a really a new undertaking with a much more integrated model and and when we think about this idea of hosting up standards and talking about sort of different moments and movements of upstanding in our city as part of our conversations, you know, in this podcast, we just thought that highlighting the work that you're leading, really at Pleasant Hill is a great way to kick us off for that as we get back into school and into the swing of things. So welcome Carrie.

**Carrie McCarthy** 29:45

Well, thanks for having me.

**Jackie Congedo** 29:47

Yeah, absolutely tell us just you know, Kevin's a little newer to this concept, so sort of give us, like an overview of how this came about for you and how. How are the first how's the first week going?

**Carrie McCarthy** 30:02

Yeah, last year, we as part of trying to get our grant renewed for our ninth grade field trips, we had invited the superintendent, Shawna Murphy, she was interim superintendent at the time, but for a tour with our administrator day that always happens in the fall sometime, and she couldn't make it that day, but we were able to bring her down to visit HHC and take a tour. And she was, I don't even know what the right word is, she really was struck by the magnitude of the local stories that she that are told within the museum and the humanity gallery touched her in this way of like looking at upstanders. And so she asked Lauren Karas, at the end of the meeting, we were just looking for permission to work for five more years of field trips for ninth graders. And she said, What's your scale? And then said, How about we start a school? And so I was excited, because the notion of middle schools was on the horizon, and I live in College Hill, so I love the idea that we turn an elementary school that is kind of in our neighborhood about to be a middle school. Kind of use the neighborhood of College Hill, which has its own history of being an upstander in a lot of ways, that we kind of give that school sort of a brand, and she went along with it, and she's been really supportive ever since. So the... team who was part of this, we sort of got the ball rolling in terms of working on some logistics and kind of getting some curriculum pieces together, until we got a principal in place and a staff in place. And we're now on day five of school, so we have started the year, and these children are coming every day.

**Jackie Congedo** 31:44

So yeah, it's really, it's really cool. We were there for the like launch last Friday, when parents came back here, two Fridays, two Fridays ago now, yes, yes, two Fridays ago now, which will be more than two Fridays by the time people listen to this. But regardless, the Friday before school started, there was a community launch, and it was just like the enthusiasm was actually really pretty bubbly. I mean, it was amazing to see people embrace this culture and this idea, just from, like, negative day three.

**Carrie McCarthy** 32:16

I mean, it was, it was we had so many more people, I think, than we expected, to show up, and they got to see the beautiful mural that we've that has been painted, and walk the building and meet their teachers. And it was just the parents were excited. The kids were excited. It was really, it was a great event.

**Kevin Aldridge** 32:30

Yeah, so kind of tell us a little bit about the framework and what the curriculum is like, and just kind of take us inside of the school.

**Carrie McCarthy** 32:38

And yeah, so we have built in an advisory flex bell into the schedule of these middle schoolers. So they have a bell each day where one day a week, or like this week, there might be more than one day, but they are doing lessons in a class that we're calling Upstander U so they are these are aligned with SEL - the social emotional learning standards. They are focused on character strengths to the VIA Institute, and focused on how can we use our strengths to be an upstander and just sort of getting them used to the language. So we have a curriculum writer who's working on these lessons in conjunction with the HHC team, and I've been part of that throughout the summer, as my schedules allowed, but trying to create a three year cycle of lessons where the kids first learn about their strengths, and every year revisiting that process. And then we'll be moving forward to like, how can... how did these lessons kind of reflect in history, and then how are we using them to do good in the world and kind of take action? So we're in beginning stages. The kids have kind of started a couple of different lessons. They are meeting daily and and we have so many teachers who are on board and are so excited to be part of this. So it's really kind of been fun to be a part of,

**Kevin Aldridge** 34:01

yeah, that's awesome. I think, I mean, I think that's that's so needed, particularly at that level, you know? I think that that middle school, junior high school level, is where you kind of start to move into more adulting, or real world life, where you've got some, yeah, yeah, some decisions to make, and you're trying to figure out where you are. And I think that social, emotional work and character development, I think, is so critical and so needed for our young people these days. So I'm glad to see that they're getting a getting a healthy dose of that, because, you know, that's part of helping them become, you know, good, productive, constructive citizens and making good decisions. So I applaud you guys for the work you're doing there.

**Jackie Congedo** 34:46

Yeah, what's been the response? I mean, you're a weekend at this point, less than a week, I guess. You know, thinking about four, four or five days, I guess four, yeah, four or five days at this point. What are students and teachers? You're saying. I mean, I know it's all new, it's all early. I heard a lot of really positive I mean, I feel like, at the back to school, evening or afternoon, the staff was just like, couldn't believe that, almost, that there was a green light on this project to advance, you know, an upstander school. So just wondering what you've heard in the hallway since then.

**Carrie McCarthy** 35:25

Well, today, a lot of classes were taking the character strength survey. So we were having kids actually do their survey, and it's long, it's about 96 questions, but I was floating classroom to classroom, and it was funny because the teachers, some of the teachers told me, they said the kids were so excited to see what their strengths were, and it was really interesting to see how different they were, kind of across just a classroom of kids. And so it's, I think that positive like spirit, I think if we start, start using the language like, Thank you for being respectful, like turning things, like turning things around, so that you kind of create a more positive atmosphere in the school as a whole. And this is, we're five days in, so we are just getting started, and it's gonna it's, it's a process. So the kids have to get used to this kind of language. I think the the littlest ones, the little sixth graders, who are so short. I'm so used to high schoolers. So these kids are just so tiny, but I think they are like, I think this is where we're gonna see, like, the most growth as we go through is taking these youngest kids and, like, having them grow into this building.

**Kevin Aldridge** 36:33

Yeah, no, go ahead. Yeah. No, no. I was just gonna make a statement. I was just gonna say, I love the idea of kind of familiarizing the kids with the vocabulary, helping them be able to assign specific words to certain actions or certain character strengths or traits, I think is really good, and doing that at an early age, right? Is, is, is really, really critical. What's something that and I and again, I know it's early. What's, what's something that's kind of been unexpected so far

**Carrie McCarthy** 37:08

with this work, or the school as a whole,

**Kevin Aldridge** 37:10

both, yeah,

**Carrie McCarthy** 37:12

school as a whole, there's just a it's a new building for all of us. So it's we are. The staff is almost 100% new to this building. So it is kind of just learning how a building works and the flow of things, and those logistics are, those are logistics, and those will get ironed out and figured out and fixed. Most surprising, I don't know if anything has surprised me yet, and I say that only because I know how excited the teachers were, and I was expecting kids to get into this. So I think I don't know that. I've been surprised. I've been happy to know that the work that we've spent months working on is actually coming to fruition, and it's happening, and that we're, we're moving forward with the project. So, I mean, I I'm not, I haven't been surprised yet, which is good, because I'm a veteran teacher, so I don't like surprises. Surprises are not my thing.

**Jackie Congedo** 38:13

Yeah. And I will, just like, put a plug in that. You know, you have been so beautifully leading on the integration of this work with within the Cincinnati Public School framework for the past five years. And so, you know, some of those aha things, or some of those just like, wow, I can't believe what I just witnessed. I feel like over the last five years, they've become more, dare I say, commonplace for you, because but, but these things, I mean, when they first happen, are are almost miraculous, like when you see kids recognize strengths in each other, or you see a student recognize strength in another student, that the student who was strength spot right, who was told, Wow, you're a leader, didn't think they were a leader, right? Didn't think they were funny, and all of a sudden they're getting that positive feedback from their peers. It's like, really, it's actually kind of emotional to watch.

**Carrie McCarthy** 39:05

Yeah, we have, we actually have some strength spotting cards that we're going to roll out, first to teachers, and then eventually for the kids, that if they see something in other students, they can give that kid a shout out of I saw you doing this today, so that we can really work on that, and they can even keep them like, with them, like, collect like, almost like their cards that they that they have. So I'm really excited to roll that out in a couple of weeks, once they get a little more familiar with the strengths and they can start seeing it in others, because that'll be really fun. I think that will be surprising when I start seeing them in the hallways. That'll make that'll surprise me.

**Kevin Aldridge** 39:42

Do you have any? Are there any, like, measurables or benchmarks or anything that you're looking at to sort of evaluate the yeah like, yeah like, how would you determine success, and how would, how are the teachers or CPS even looking at their benchmarks for success? Assess for this. Like, how does that show up? Academic improvement, community work around the schools. Like, how are you guys measuring that?

**Carrie McCarthy** 40:08

So we are looking at this as a multi year plan, and we're and I think Jackie may be able to talk to this better than I but we are partnering with UC to do some surveying of both students and teachers to track like, what is it that they know? And starting off with an off the top of my head, I can't remember the different categories, but we're starting off looking first at, Are we recognizing what character strengths are? Are we acting upon it appropriately? Do we know what do are we seeing these things happen in the school as a whole? We know that getting school wide change will take time, because that is the way change works, especially in schools. It's a it's a cyclical process. So I think we have other goals slated for the following years, and please tell me if I missed anything.

**Jackie Congedo** 40:56

I think that's right. I mean, we're really speaking on behalf of HHC. We are grateful to the University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center, which has been working with us from the very foundations of this to think about. I mean, you asked the exact exactly the right question, which is, how will we know we've been successful, right? Is it? And how can you actually demonstrate it's one thing to quiz kids on. You know, five times four is 20, but it's it is 20, right? Yes, thank you. Humanities background over here, but it's another thing to say. How can we measure, you know, our kids in touch with their own potential. Are kids engaged in the work of, you know, seeing the value of themselves and the value of other people. Are kids is, Oh, do we have a more empathetic culture built in the school? Are kids better? Do they have more leadership capability, more you know, aptitude in terms of contributing positively in a community way, or to a community. And so, you know, the good news is the folks at UC who are experts in how we, you know, fashion tools, surveys to measure for these things, have been really helpful in thinking, helping us think through how to do that. And then that, that work is underway as well. So we hope to have some really positive stories, not just what we would call qualitatively, right, anecdotally, what we're hearing and seeing and kids are telling us and teachers, but also from the data standpoint, to prove that this is, I mean, it's really exciting. It's, I think, one of the first sort of deeply integrated models like this, using this positive psychology, character Foundation. And I was just going to hit on it's it's not just about what's being taught in the language, but it's also like place in space. You sort of reference generally the connection that College Hill has, and specifically this piece of land that the school is on. I'm going to let you share the significance of this.

**Carrie McCarthy** 43:02

So this land where Pleasant Hill Middle School and the College Hill Library sit actually used to be a farm owned by the Crawford family. And Mr. Crawford fought in the Civil War, and he was down south and was injured, and on his way back, he because he was injured, he was trying to make his way home, and was helped by African Americans along his journey home. And when he got home, he changed his will to will the land to create a retirement community, a nursing home for African American men. And it sat on that land until the 19 I want to say the 60s, 70s, is approximately the time, and then it merged with a retirement home, I want to say, in Bond Hill. It's - forgive my not having all the facts. And then the land was turned over to build the original Pleasant Hill that sat on the site and the library. So this is land that has sort of this, like I am turning this over for because of what happened to me, type of thing. And College Hill was also stops along the Underground Railroad. There's houses that were used for, I think it was the flight of the 28th there were 28 that made it through to Canada at one point, through College Hill. So it's we, I think our neighborhood, this the great school to be looking at in this neighborhood in particular. I think we're proud to have it like housed, housed here.

**Jackie Congedo** 44:28

It's really special to connect with the authenticity in that space and the stories that came before. And so we're, you know, we're excited to elevate that in part of the work we do with students and teachers. And then the other piece that I just, I'm gonna maybe end on here, because 10-15 minutes goes too fast, is the beautiful murals in the school I was so, I mean, I really like was so moved by. We actually have some pictures we can probably show of some of the artwork in this school. Example, the character strengths that are all over the walls. Be an upstander is all over the walls. There's quotes from survivor families talking about Charles Heiman, I think, who said, You do good. It will come back to you twice, two or two fold, or double me double. That's what it is, double. And Rosemary Oglesby Henry, who was one of our Upstander Award winners, who's the, you know, the force behind Rosemary's Babies. This incredible work, you know, to support teen parents. A quote from her on the wall talking about turning boundaries into blessings, I think, is what it was, or basically seeing every hurdle as an opportunity to bloom. So awesome. And you know, as I was in there on Friday, I'm like, selfishly saying to the, you know, the kids who are milling but I'm like, stand there so I can take your picture. And they were like, thrilled to take a picture in front of these quotes.

**Carrie McCarthy** 45:54

It was really cool to see the cafeteria looks beautiful. The mural just covers this windy wall that was just a brown and now it's just full of color and the character strength logos. And it's really, it's beautiful,

**Jackie Congedo** 46:06

yeah, and it really counts. I mean, the environment,

46:09

and it's right in as the kids enter every day, that's what they see. So it is, that's how we're bringing kids in, and that's what they see. First thing,

**Jackie Congedo** 46:17

It's awesome. Well, thank you for all the amazing, transformative work that you're leading in College Hill and beyond, for all you've done to be a great partner at HHC, you know, in CPS, and also just for the betterment of kids in our city. It's awesome.

**Carrie McCarthy** 46:32

Of course,

**Jackie Congedo** 46:33

It's really cool. And thanks for being our first guinea pig guest on this new format for for this season. I think this wraps it for episode one season two. So if you have questions, comments, if you aren't engaged with Pleasant Hill Middle School, and you have kids and you would like upstander curriculum, enrichment, trainings, opportunities, reach out to us. All that information is in the show notes, and we can certainly provide that. We do that off site as well. So looking forward to another good season. We'll see you next time.

**Jackie Congedo** 47:05

The Upstander Ripple Effect is a production of the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. The Center's mission is to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust inspire action today. This series is part of the Cynthia and Harold Guttman Family Center for Storytelling. Visit us in person at historic Union Terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio, or online anytime at Holocaustandhumanity.org. The Managing Producer is Anne Thompson. Technical Producer is Robert Mills, and Technical Director is Josh Emerson. Select music is by Kick Lee, and this is recorded at Technical Consulting Partners studios in Cincinnati, Ohio.