

Mosaic Partner Pairs Highlight

Written by Carol Christiansen, Board Secretary

On the surface, my new friend Brandi Turner and I may not seem to have much in common. She is Black. I am white. She works fulltime as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer for the Kansas Department of Children and Families. I am retired and am an active community volunteer. Brandi is married and has one child, a son in high school. I am married with eight married children and a lot of grandchildren. In fact, I have some children who are older than Brandi.

But, despite our outward differences, we have discovered a lot of similarities. Our lives are focused on family and faith. We love music and other arts. And we both are passionate about working to bring about racial justice.

We have Mosaic Partner Pairs (MPP) to thank for our friendship. MPP is an initiative of Topeka United, a group created in 2019 that works to bring full inclusion and lasting social change to Topeka, one relationship at a time. It does so by pairing people from different races, cultures, and professions so that they can have ongoing one-on-one conversations on “safe” topics—but also on sensitive and uncomfortable subjects—in order to build understanding and unity—and the realization that we are more alike than different.

Individuals who want to sign up for MPP fill out an online survey, which is used to generate a computerized pairing of people who have very different backgrounds but similar personalities, values, and interests. This year’s class includes people from all sections of the city and different socioeconomic classes. Participants include government and nonprofit administrators, educators, ministers—and, yes, retirees, community volunteers, and grandmas—like me! After being paired with Brandi, I have a lot of confidence in the computer algorithm that MPP uses!

To be honest, when I was first told about Mosaic Partner Pairs, I hesitated to apply, wondering if I had the time to devote to a nine-month program, which would include a big inaugural kickoff event in April, one or two visits a month with my partner (with suggested questions to discuss), monthly small group meetings (and some “homework” to read first), and a celebratory event in December, at the end of the program. Besides, I already had many friends from diverse backgrounds and talked with many of them about race and what I can do to work against racism.

But I am so glad I signed up and am participating in MPP. The time commitment has not felt demanding. I have enjoyed and learned a lot from the readings and meetings with the people in my “cluster” group. I’ve especially enjoyed my conversations, discussions, and social get-togethers with Brandi. (We usually meet up at the Classic Bean. My husband and I really enjoyed watching her son star in his middle school’s musical and meeting some of her other family members.) I feel that Brandi and I are honest and open with each other and

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Pictured: Brandi Turner and Carol Christiansen

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have a trusting relationship. We share our hearts and perspectives without fear of judgment. Though I felt I was fairly knowledgeable about blatant and subtle racism, its impact on my brothers and sisters of different races, and their perspectives, my discussions with Brandi and my small group have helped me expand my understanding, broadened my social justice network, and given me information that I can share with others to educate and enlighten them. I also have additional ideas of things I can do to help bring about more positive social change.

MPP has been a good experience for Brandi too. She said, “The Mosaic Partnership has introduced me to a new friend, actually, a new group of friends. I have enjoyed knowing that we all come with one unique perspective but with like spirits, which have allowed us to blend in a very organic way. My partner, Carol, and I have found our natural path making the building foundation of our friendship almost effortless. I am thankful to call her my friend.

“The Mosaic Partners has allowed us to comfortably network within our community. This is special to me because I find it overwhelming to go out on my own to be amongst people I do not know. I feel safe and secure with the Mosaic process, and I am confident of a positive outcome at the end of the year.”

Mosaic Partner Pairs was introduced to Topeka in 2021. Thanks to some generous corporate sponsors, MPP is currently funded through 2023.

If you would like to apply to be in the 2023 MPP class or would like more information about the program, please go to www.topekaunited.org. The upcoming membership drive will begin in November. People who sign up for the 2023 class will be contacted beginning in February, and the kickoff event will be in early-April



Dana King

Communication Specialist

Dana King has joined the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice (TCPJ) team as a contract communication specialist. Dana has over 30 years of experience writing, editing and designing communication materials. She has worked as an editor and writer in the book and magazine publishing industries, as well as in the marketing department for a mental healthcare chain and a business seminar company. Dana has worked as the office administrator for West Side Christian Church for the last four years, doing occasional editing projects on the side. Dana and her husband, David, have three grown children and two senior cats. We look forward to collaborating with Dana at TCPJ!