



Walking the Talk

A lot of ideas come out of Greater Milwaukee Foundation's On the Table MKE.

By RICH ROVITO

This year, more than two dozen coaches across multiple youth sports will receive specialized training in how a child's brain develops and how trauma and stress affect their young players. Mothers from the Clarke Square neighborhood began gathering for regular neighborhood cleanups. A group is investigating ways to build self-efficacy and increase civic engagement among people with disabilities, particularly people of color.

And it all started with talking.

On the Table MKE began in 2017, giving residents throughout greater Milwaukee a forum to gather in small groups on a given day to break bread and

talk candidly about the challenges facing the community – and identify potential solutions. More than 5,000 people have taken part in each of the past two years.

Taking note of the racial, economic and political divisions in the community, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation created On the Table to build upon the region's diversity while ensuring that race and ethnicity are never barriers.

The foundation upped the ante this year by issuing a total of \$25,000 in "Ideas to Action" grants to fund 16 projects resulting from previous On the Table conversations. It plans to do the same next year, funding ideas generated at On the Table discussions this month.

"We fundamentally believe that our role is to bring people together for common good," says Ellen Gilligan, the foundation's president and CEO and the driving force behind On

the Table. "Many times, conversations that occur among people who don't normally talk to each other can be very meaningful and transformational."

The grants are a way to push the calls to action into positive change. "We've tried to deepen the conversations and move toward action," Gilligan says. "These are not meant to be monumental investments, but we have seen what a difference small grants can make when interested parties work together on something."

An On the Table MKE chat two years ago, about the role of sports in youth and community development, has blossomed into the Milwaukee Youth Sports Alliance, a group founded by America Scores Milwaukee, Bader Philanthropies, the Milwaukee Bucks and the Milwaukee Kickers.

The alliance, which already has grown into a 19-member organization, formally began operating July 1. It received an \$800 Ideas to Action grant to support its early efforts.

"It provides a kick-start to this conversation, and it also validates our work," says Kate Carpenter, executive director of America Scores Milwaukee, the community outreach program of the Kickers. "We have to change the mindset of the community about what sport can really do for kids."

The grant will support an online training series for 25 coaches on the Neurosequential Model of childhood development, trauma and stress, and the positive effects of sports.

"We want to see if the community is now open to looking at sport as an antidote to the stressors that kids experience so they can lead healthier and more engaged lives," Carpenter says. ●

ON THE TABLE MKE

LAUNCHED:

2017 by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation

PURPOSE:

A regionwide forum that brings together diverse sets of residents for breakfast, lunch, dinner or coffee at various locations throughout the Milwaukee area for candid discussions about the challenges facing the region and what can be done to address them.

NEXT SESSION: Oct. 10

TO JOIN A CONVERSATION:
onthetablemke.org



Students from Carmen Schools of Science and Technology and Hmong American Peace Academy (left) and affiliates of Next Door (right) talk during the 2018 On the Table MKE.

