

CAREER PATHS

**FIND A MENTOR
BE A MENTOR TO OTHERS**

Western North Carolina Diversity Engagement Coalition

Buncombe County Health and Human Services interviewed Kelly Goins, Joseph Fox and Leslie Council, who work to engage a diverse and inclusive workforce in WNC.

Kelly Goins

Professional Development and Coaching



The work of Western North Carolina Diversity Engagement Coalition (WNC DEC) is important to me professionally and on a personal level. An organization

is stronger and more powerful when they represent all of the people in their community. It is also an opportunity to broaden the conversation about diversity and make it more than just about ethnicity.

I think the greatest thing WNC DEC has done is have those conversations, truly listen, and turn those conversations into action by offering pro-

grams and becoming a regular part of the community. As a result of our work, there are advances that have been made that are encouraging. Approximately 167 diverse individuals have been promoted within DEC's member organizations in 2014 and that is intentional progress.

Everyone doesn't start their career at the same point nor have family members who had the same professional opportunities. With the Professional Development Series, DEC is moving that conversation toward the realm of equity and providing tools to help people succeed in the workforce. It is personally satisfying to teach people how to take control of their career. Professionally, my background is in building curriculums for consumer education. I recognize the power in education and was impressed there was a program providing resources that people can use.

I'm excited to be a part of DEC and look forward to working with the participants in the Professional Development Series. I can relate to the challenges that

take place in the corporate landscape and help people take responsibility for their career. Even though there are barriers, they can certainly be overcome. It's just a matter of how much initiative a person wants to take to make it happen.

Come to our networking socials and participate in the Professional Development Series to get involved. DEC also provides a platform where business professionals can talk to their employees and colleagues. Organizations that adopt our mission and community members addressing their own biases can really help make a difference. We are making a difference and it feels great to be a part of a movement.

We will have to remain active and not rest when we see things start to progress



Dr. Joseph Fox, Kelly Goins, and Leslie Council work for the Western North Carolina Diversity Engagement Coalition.

and change. We will have to come back to the drawing board and figure out new ways to add to the progress that we've made and always answer the question, "We have hit this goal so now, what's next?"

We know that we have tons of work to do in Asheville, historically, but seeing leaders embrace all of the initiatives in our community in a collaborative effort, that gives me hope.

Dr. Joseph Fox

Coordinator



Any time that we are embracing diversity in the workforce and in the community it is a wonderful thing, and it's important for organizations to have the skill

sets that our multicultural employees bring to the workplace.

I think the main thing that makes WNC DEC different is our intentional focus. We are very intentional in our strategic approach to provide professional development and networking

activities both for participants as well as our member organizations. We feel it is important to look at our benchmarks for how we are going to promote multicultural employees.

Personally, as an African American male, diversity and the upward mobility of multicultural employees have always been important for me so it's great to be a part of something that engages people of color in Asheville. I bring insight from both sides of the table – the person looking toward upward mobility and the person in the hiring role promoting individuals. When you can bring both of those points of views together, you have a better chance of succeeding. The work that DEC is doing is at the heart of who I am – giving back to the community and helping people of diversity move up.

Community members and organizations should get involved by participating in our networking and social events and through our professional development courses. We are looking to bring on three community members to the Steering Committee to provide insight. Individuals with a passion and commitment to diversity and inclusiveness would be a perfect fit.

DEC will definitely have an impact on the community because we have been intentional, we will evaluate benchmarks to determine the success of our program, and we will make adjustments to move the initiative forward.

In the future, I see DEC becoming the hub for diversity and inclusiveness train-



ing, branding our organization and creating a model that can be duplicated in other cities.

The openness and receptiveness of the community to engage a really difficult and sometimes uncomfortable topic (diversity and inclusiveness) makes me hopeful. Our Steering Committee and our members are very open and the community seems to be ready to embrace our initiative.

Leslie Council

Professional Networking and Communications



As an African American professional who was born and raised in Asheville, I have experienced the reason for why there is a need for an organization like

WNC DEC. It is important for me to be a part of something that engages people of color in Asheville and that's why I am thrilled to do this work. I have never seen a group of HR pro-

fessionals from major organizations come together because they recognized a problem in their community and actually work to do something about it.

The DEC Professional Development Courses began February 11 and it is a great way for people to get engaged and involved. Its grassroots and progress is clearly being made. This is a chance for multicultural people to grow professionally within our area. We hope that other organizations will get involved and adopt organizational standards that promote equity that give everyone an equal opportunity to be hired and promoted.

With the progress we are making, I hope to see more people who move to Asheville actually stay here because they see themselves represented at all levels

within the workforce.

DEC's social events and professional mixers have been a success. We also plan on partnering with the YMI Cultural Center to have forums, and hopefully, this will be a platform for people to come and share their thoughts about professional development and workforce related matters to help enhance their ability to get promoted and build a career.

I have noticed that there are many organizations doing more things geared toward engaging diverse groups and different ethnicities. You didn't even hear about these types of initiatives until the last few years. That gives me hope and that alone, says a lot. Seeing this firsthand by being a part of it – that's really awesome and its needed. It's about time.

Get Involved. Join Us.

The Western North Carolina Diversity Engagement Coalition (WNC DEC) is a network of organizations dedicated to increasing diversity and inclusion. WNC DEC brings people together to collectively support the professional development, engagement, and inclusion of people of color within the member organizations in Western North Carolina.

If you are an organization and would like to join or if you would like to become a community representative on the steering committee, please email info@wnccdec.com or call (828) 421-7580.

Learn more. Visit wnccdec.com and like us on [facebook.com/wnccdec](https://www.facebook.com/wnccdec)