

# Lend Your Voice Pierce County



## Final Report

### ON THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

for Amara's Pierce County Property with the Recommendation from the Community Leadership Team

FEBRUARY 3, 2020

#### PREPARED BY

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# Acknowledgments

FEBRUARY 3, 2020

We simply cannot express in words the immense gratitude we feel for every single person who played a role in ensuring that our community engagement process has been a success. Thank you to all the youth, families, community members, and professionals who shared your experiences, perspectives, recommendations, and dreams for the property.

First and foremost, we acknowledge the Coastal Salish People, sovereign Indian Nations, for whom this land has been home for untold generations.

To the youth, families and adults who have been impacted by foster care and adoption – Thank you for pouring out your hearts and allowing us to listen to your frustrations and heartbreaks, hopes and dreams. Your vulnerability and strength in sharing each of your stories have been a gift and have allowed us to be authentic and intentional in every aspect of the process.

Thank you to the community leaders, partners, and organizers who trusted us with their businesses and livelihoods. Thank you for filling our bellies, energizing our lives, and embracing our spirits.

Thank you to our partners who stepped up in ways we could not. For Sebastian Galindo (our survey and statistics expert), Brandi Yañez-Riddle (racial equity consultant and graphic artist), and Cierra Campos (writer extraordinaire who authored the Community Leadership Team bios).

Thank you to Amara's very own Maureen Sorenson and Chelsea Talbert – for your openness to a process never seen before at Amara and for your faith in four people who pushed and prodded each step of the way.



And finally, how do you thank 20 individuals who have been with us throughout it all? The Community Leadership Team has not only supported us in everything but has challenged us, moved us, taught us, and inspired us. They held each of us – the consultant team, the Amara Pierce County team, and the entire process – accountable to the community we serve. After countless hours of meetings and dialogue, their voices can be heard in every part of this report. Without the Community Leadership Team, all of this would not be possible.

We have been honored to work and learn with all of you, and hope that this report and recommendation do justice to what you all have shared and inclusive way. Brandi works at the intersections of food, racial justice, and environmental issues to build change at the community level.

*Jennifer, Adriane, Julia, and Rodney*



## Special Shout-Out

We also want to acknowledge the incredible people, community partners, and small businesses that nourished our bodies, brightened our events, and believed in our vision.

*Thank you, thank you, thank you.*

Aloha Island Treasures  
Big Daddy Yum Yum BBQ  
Black Empowerment Center  
Bricks 4 Kidz  
Career Team/Power Up Pierce  
Children's Museum of Tacoma  
Connie McCloud  
DJ Sidewayz  
Evergreen Empowerment Group  
Fish House  
Franklin Pierce School District "The Farm"  
Healing Herbal Skin Care  
Home Buyer Class  
Ike & Tash Photography  
Indigenous Youth Empowerment Team  
Juwana Banks, Spoken Word Artist  
Jasmyne Sims, Spoken Word Artist  
Jefferson Mok, Photographer  
Just & Healthy Food System  
La Fondita Taqueria  
Loak Tuong Thai Cuisine  
Los Tamales Restaurant  
Lumpia Love  
Mighty Good Sweets & Eats  
MSM Deli  
Paparazzi with Tamara Beason  
Pho King  
Puyallup Tribe  
Raven's Creations  
Rebuilding Together  
Rocío Covarrubias Translation  
Slater Museum of Natural History  
South Puget Sound Intertribal Planning Agency  
Tacoma Healing Awareness Community  
Tahoma Audobon Society  
The Rainbow Center  
Toast Masters  
WA Expungement Services  
Yellow Bird Catering  
Young Business Men & Women (YBMW)

# Community Leadership Team Members

The Community Leadership Team has been the heart and soul of this effort, and the power behind this recommendation. Twenty people participated in the Community Leadership Team, the majority of whom are people of color and the majority of whom have lived experience with foster care and/or adoption. They are people with big hearts who are good listeners and creative thinkers with deep roots in the community.

*The profiles below describe the **16 core members** of the team who put together the recommendation described here.*



**CIERRA CAMPOS**

**Cierra** is a graduate student who strives to promote self-empowerment and cultural representation in individuals, families, and communities. For Cierra, culture represents a deep-rooted identity that allows people to show genuine versions of themselves, acknowledging that without culture, we cannot fully understand who people are. With personal experience in foster care, Cierra understands the importance of creating space for cultural inclusion in the foster care system and has dedicated her research as a Master of Social Work student to finding ways the child welfare system can provide more culturally relevant and culturally responsive services for families of color. After obtaining her Masters degree, Cierra plans to work in the child welfare system, with the hope of shifting how the Department of Children, Youth & Families addresses culture and ensuring that children and families are adequately and equitably served. All in all, Cierra hopes that this project will offer a stable community for families of color, meeting cultural, social, and child welfare needs.



**FELICIA DENNIS**

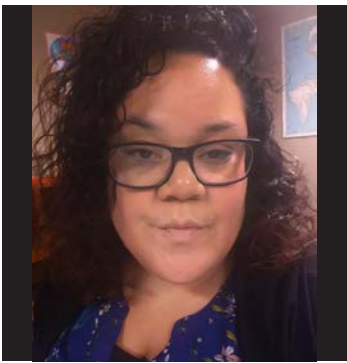
**Felicia** is a Community Team Leadership member who prides herself with approaching her work with an equity lens. Felicia uses empathy and compassion to support individuals with reaching their fullest potential. These two values drives her motivation to serve the community. Felicia has been a public servant for over 12 years, with experience working with homelessness, employment services, higher education, and social services. Furthermore, her experience with being a part of a foster family and then a foster parent has allowed her to see the potential within each individual she encounters, which drives her desire to cultivate inclusiveness in all of her efforts to support families on their journey. Felicia has partnered with the fellow Community Leadership Team Member, Dominique Taylor, to develop Children and Family Unity Services, which supports families who are impacted by the foster care system to gain self-sustainability through authentic passion and care. For Felicia, culture is essential for children in care. Youth and families impacted by foster care should be empowered to own their individuality and culture.

*Headshots taken by  
Ike Haynes of Ike &  
Tash Photography.*



**TARALEE ELLIS**

**Taralee** is a nonprofit manager who uses her talents to bring indigenous youth together and build community with non-tribal members and tribal members, through dancing, traditions, art and native food and education. She believes that she can advocate for youth in foster care by encouraging them to see their strengths and talent, and making the effort to see things from their perspectives. When defining culture, Taralee believes that culture is the thing that gives people a sense of identity. Taralee, born into the foster care system, felt that at every home she left pieces of herself behind and with that, parts of her culture. With her experience, Taralee's resiliency shaped her core value of treating others with genuine hospitality and acceptance. As a strong believer in community engagement, Taralee's hope is that the work done with this project will offer a safe space for youth.



**KEISHA HARRIS**

**Keisha** is a passionate individual who brings her contributions to the Community Leadership Team from shared values around cultural inclusivity and meeting the needs of the community. Keisha is a Master of Social Work graduate and has previous experience working in the child welfare system. Firsthand, Keisha saw the lack of foster homes for children, specifically foster homes of color, and witnessed the unmet cultural needs of children and youth in foster care. These shortcomings in the foster care system motivated Keisha to become a foster parent and fueled her preexisting mission for cultural tolerance and expression. Every day, Keisha advocates to make others aware of cultural respect while helping to support self-advocacy in her foster children. In practice, Keisha honors culture in her role as a foster parent through embracing cultural differences, finding opportunities for cultural connectedness, and teaching her foster children how to celebrate themselves. All in all, she believes that children need to be healthy in all aspects of their lives, including cultural identity.



**TOBY JOSEPH**

**Toby** is a Native American Baha'i of Apache and Ute decent from Manitou Springs, Colorado. Toby has 25+ years of working in Coast Salish Tribal communities supporting indigenous sustainability through social-economic development, and spiritual growth through cultural pathways. Toby believes in a Cultural system of thought that focuses on investigation of truth, consultation, action, and reflection and the principles of being kind, loving, radiant, truthful, and just. He uses this ideology in his work, while focusing on interactions with community through a lens of culture. Toby strongly believes that culture is essential because it creates identity from an internalized place, highlighting who people are rather than what society expects them to be. Growing up hearing stories through a cultural lens and being a present day Storyteller, Toby believes that Storytelling and culture are a framework for wellness that allows people the opportunity to better understand and express their own personal narratives. Toby believes we can overcome even war through a greater thought of love. He finds strength in love and identifies love as his strength, highlighting his wife, 11 children, 18 foster children, and 19 grandchildren as sources of both.



**COLLEEN LAUPOLA**

**Colleen** is a mother and advocate whose work promotes the importance of family connectedness and empowerment, while highlighting the need for cultural inclusion. Colleen has seen the effects of how language barriers and lack of cultural understanding can impact children and families in the child welfare system. As a mother whose daily challenge and drive are her three sons, Colleen believes that family is the most important thing and uses that belief to inspire her work. Colleen advocates for children, families, the Pierce County juvenile justice system, and the Pacific Islander community, with the desire to be a voice for those in her community. As a member of the Pierce County Family Council and former parent peer support for the Best for Babies Team, Colleen works to challenge current systems and promote systemic change. Overall, Colleen believes that the inclusion and understanding of the diversity within cultures is vital to achieving cultural acceptance and hopes that this project will provide a safe place regardless race or color.



**BRITTNEY LEE**

**Brittney** is a college student with personal experience in foster care, who has the motivation to gain knowledge and experience in order to give back to youth in foster care and redefine child welfare. Brittney aspires to use her experiences, knowledge, and resilience to help children in foster care, as a role model and a source of support. Experiencing 17 foster homes in 17 years, Brittney was raised with other children from various emotional, mental and spiritual backgrounds, which has encouraged unconditional passion to give back to youth on local, national and global levels. Passionate about the intersection of race and child welfare, Brittney strives to educate herself on racial disproportionality, with the hope of developing solutions to address racial inequality and the institutionalized and structural racism that youth in foster care experience. Her continuous involvement in community conversations around child welfare, motivates Brittney to use her understanding, experience, and skill to be a representation of the role model she needed as a youth.



**CLAUDIA MILLER**

**Claudia** is an activist and advocate who is currently breaking ground as Foster Care Liaison in the Franklin Pierce School District. As a Foster Care Liaison, and Masters of Social Work graduate, Claudia's passion for people and communities is evident in her work, as she believes that youth in foster care are the most vulnerable and underserved population in the school system. Claudia identifies herself a "community hustler," describing her passion for community collectivism and building community driven systems. Claudia's drive to build relationships supports her belief that the relationships between systems are the intervention that communities need to be successful. Claudia stated that she finds strength in her experience as a first generation American, which has instilled a relentless work ethic, a desire to advocate for others, and the value of addressing social justice issues with compassion. Per Claudia, "a job is a job. As a person of color, it is a responsibility to stand up for justice, kids, and love. It is work of the heart."



**TARA NEWTON**

**Tara** is a Senior Advocate, who is driven by her passion for learning, grassroots efforts, and social justice. Tara’s investment in the empowerment of individuals, families, and communities is accompanied by her desire to help shape supportive and healthy futures for families of color in Pierce County. Having experience in foster care, Tara strives to be a great role model for youth impacted by foster care by sharing her experiences, and advocating for and empowering them. Tara also aims to ensure foster homes are supportive and culturally/LGBTQIA+ competent, and that foster youth receive care through a trauma informed lens. For Tara, cultural inclusion is important, as it highlights shared experiences and spoken and unspoken understanding — all of which should be celebrated, welcomed and acknowledged. Tara hopes that this project will come to fruition, encompassing the hard work, passion, and vision of the Community Leadership Team.



**KATHIE NGUYEN**

**Kathie** is the youngest member of the Community Leadership Team, whose wisdom and inspiration surpasses her age. As a current foster youth, Kathie has survived her own experiences with abuse and is wanting to be an example of resiliency for other youth in foster care. Having been placed in 42 group homes and four out-of-state placements, Kathie has firsthand experience of how youth are affected in the foster care system; however, she has not let her experiences define her. While being passionate about seeing change in the foster care system, Kathie has attributed her resilience in having genuine conversations with adults, creating spaces to express herself, and finding therapy in singing and music. Along with graduating high school and then college, Kathie hopes to share her story with others, showing that youth in foster care can have a voice, while being a role model for those who feel they are not worthy.



**RAVEN NYLAND**

**Raven** is a Native American artist who values spirituality, diversity, and cultural interconnectedness. As an artist and healer, Raven is known for her beadwork and natural medicine and has used her skills to teach and mentor youth. Her ability to connect with people, especially youth experiencing hardship, allows her to build trust and use her work for healing. She believes that returning to the land and learning to use plant medicine for natural healing are important for young people, especially Native American youth, to connect to their culture, work through trauma, and support wellness. Observing that people are too often separated by culture, Raven believes in the power of sharing culture and embracing diversity to nurture a sense of belonging. It is her hope that this project will offer that, being a sanctuary and a spiritual place for a diverse community.



**STEPHEN PERCER**

**Stephen** is a community activist who uses his life experiences to foster peer-to-peer mentorship and cultural empowerment. Having two separate experiences in the foster care system, Stephen knows about the effects that foster care can have on a child of color. Adopted into home outside of his culture, Stephen acknowledges his search for cultural identity and representation as a youth, describing culture as being beyond race—living in all aspects of a person and their identity. With his experience in foster care, and as former incarcerated person, Stephen utilizes his life experiences to connect with others who have similar lived experiences, with the hope of providing individuals with the opportunity for personal connections and mentorship. Attributing his own resilience to his persevering nature and ability to thrive in chaos, Stephen believes that genuine connections through shared experiences can help support resilience in others. For this project, Stephen hopes that the intended vision of the Community Leadership Team is realized, and that he has the opportunity to be a part of the continued work.

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**Laurie PUGH-LARSON**

**Laurie** is a Community Leadership Team member who brings her 29 years of landscape architecture experience and a desire to help empower others. Her work on public projects has allowed her the opportunity to work with diverse groups of people, with the primary goal of incorporating group input and developing representative spaces that are unique to each group's needs. Like her work, Laurie is drawn to the Community Leadership Team due to its inclusion of community members and its desire to help the foster care community. Laurie, unable to have children and having considered fostering and adopting children, sees the benefits that this project can offer children and families impacted by foster care. While Laurie doesn't know her cultural background, she does acknowledge its importance in the lives of individuals stating that it can provide a sense of history, community and tradition. In the foster care system in particular, Laurie believes that cultural inclusion can provide youth with the opportunity to deeply connect with others through shared connections, while supporting the ability to find and embrace connections beyond cultural sameness. It is with this project that Laurie hopes children, families, and the planned community will be provided with the resources needed to be successful.

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**HANNAH STRICKLER**

**Hannah** is an Afro-indigenous advocate and University of Washington Tacoma student who has a big heart for helping those in need. Though she has not personally experienced foster care or adoption, Hannah has witnessed the effects of the foster care system on family members, emphasizing the importance of protecting youth to allow them to be raised within their culture. For Hannah, culture is described as her identity, highlighting passed down and relearned traditions and familial connection while embracing change and cultural sustainability. Being grounded in her indigenous culture and having to learn about her African American heritage through her own self-determination, Hannah aspires to show others searching for cultural connection that they are not alone. As a believer of cultural autonomy, expression and representation, Hannah hopes that this project will create a safe haven for underprivileged children, where they are able to receive help from individuals who share their cultural values.





**DOMINIQUE TAYLOR**

**Dominique** is a businesswoman with personal experience in foster care who has not let her experiences define her. Her passion for giving back to communities, along with her lived experiences, has motivated her to model the success that one can achieve after foster care. Dominique’s experiences have shown her that as a young person in foster care, it may be hard to get to your goals; however, she wants to model that despite obstacles, those goals are still achievable. Dominique is the owner of Heavenly Tiny Homes, a business that is designed to offer housing for families and youth impacted by foster care. The goal of Heavenly Tiny Homes is to equip families with long term housing stability, financial security, education, and life skills, while promoting self-care and economic empowerment. In addition, Dominique co-owns Children & Family Unity Services, alongside fellow Community Leadership Team member Felicia Dennis, which supports families who are impacted by foster care to gain self-sustainability through authentic passion and care. Overall, Dominique believes in the importance of culture in foster care, identifying that children in the foster care system can experience a loss of culture that, in turn, can result in “a loss of self.” She stated that all in all, children want to be happy, and she strongly believes that culture is an important part of that happiness.



**GEORGE ZANTUA**

**George** is a Masters in Counseling graduate who brings his vast experience and education to the Community Leadership Team. With 40 years of experience working in the fields of human rights, education, employment, housing, and homelessness, George has seen how the trauma of foster care bleeds into these other social spheres. George is motivated to help children and families going through trauma and he believes that understanding culture is an essential part of this work. He believes that understanding the cultural background of others enhances communication and empathy and builds trust. Now that he is retired from full-time employment and because he believes everyone has the capacity to be creative, George uses his counseling skills as he teaches art and jewelry making at the Nativity House Shelter in Tacoma.

We would also like to recognize other Community Leadership Team members who contributed their spirit and creativity during a key part of our process.

**JUWAN BANKS**

**EMILY SCHELL**

**ASH MAGER**

**JAMES RIDEOUT**

*Puyallup Tribal Council Member*



*Juwana Banks reciting his poetry at the June 29 kick-off event. Photo Credit: Jefferson Mok*

# Consultant **Team Members**



Four of the six **Consultant Team Members** are pictured here, left to right: Adrian Wilson, Jennifer Arnold, Rodney Robinson, and Julia Kagochi.

(Image by Ike Haynes of Ike & Tash Photography.)

**JENNIFER S. ARNOLD, Ph.D.** RECIPROCITY CONSULTING, LLC  
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**Jennifer** has more than 15 years of experience in facilitation and conflict management, stakeholder engagement and participatory social science methods with an emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion. She is fluent in Spanish and skilled at working in culturally diverse communities. Even when tensions are high and controversial issues bring out the most challenging group dynamics, Jennifer helps partners talk through their differences with civility and grace. She is also an affiliate Assistant Professor at the University of Washington Tacoma in Urban Studies.

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**ADRIANE WILSON** TRUTH TELLER CONSULTING  
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**Adriane** is an independent consultant specializing in equity and community engagement, particularly focusing on communities of color and low-income communities that are typically underrepresented in the policies, programs and services that seek to serve them. As a woman who identifies from the African Diaspora that has deep ties in Tacoma and has herself overcome personal and professional challenges, she is extremely skilled at connecting with people where they are and listening and motivating their engagement to bring about real change. With more than 15 years' experience working with nonprofits and government agencies, she excels at clearly articulating community concerns and creating suggestions for how to improve community engagement to ultimately improve outcomes and advance equity goals.

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**JULIA KAGOCHI** KAGOCHI CONSULTING, LLC  
**KagochiConsulting.com**  
KagochiConsulting@gmail.com | 562-673-3604 (cell)

Grounded by compassion, racial justice and authenticity, **Julia** believes in learning alongside and growing with the communities and people she serves. These values manifest themselves in the effectiveness of her facilitation style and compassion-based approach. She has a gift for relational storytelling and utilizes both personal and professional experiences to engage others in difficult conversations. Julia has over a decade of experience working in various fields, including curriculum development, community-based programming, facilitation, and racial equity work.

# Consultant Team Members

**RODNEY ROBINSON** OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE, LLC

**OutsidePerspectiveLLC.com**

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**Rodney** has spent the bulk of his professional career in human service and non-profit management. While working with both individuals and families that society would consider marginalized, he saw the importance of creating a self-sustaining economic base for communities and individuals. Through the process of learning about what it takes to create and sustain an effective business, he realized that the key components were mentoring, access to information and capital, and coaching. Rodney hopes to bring these components to perspective for established business owners, especially in communities of color. He hopes to bring a practical application of skills learned through both self-study and lived experiences to help people achieve the freedom associated with multiple streams of income and business ownership.

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**BRANDI YAÑEZ-RIDDLE**

**BYanezRiddle.weebly.com** | BYanez@pwi.org

**Brandi** is a professional facilitator and visual practitioner with a passion for food system work and racial justice. She is disconnected hñähño (Otomi from Guajalajara), and descend from other tribes throughout what is called Central or South America. She is an activist in the areas of First Foods, food sovereignty, and food justice. Her current focus is on helping people to gain clarity and understanding for how colonization and racism impact various social and political systems.

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**SEBASTIAN GALINDO, Ph.D.** SGalindo@ufl.edu

**Sebastian** is a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC) at the University of Florida. Originally from Mexico City, Galindo earned his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Universidad Veracruzana in 2001. He then attended the University of Florida where he received his master's degree studying Animal Sciences (2004) and later his Ph.D. from AEC (2009) with a focus on extension program development and evaluation. Galindo currently focuses his research on the use of mixed methods for the evaluation of research, teaching and extension initiatives. He serves as Director of the Evaluation Program for the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety and as Technical Monitoring and Evaluation Supervisor for the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems. With over 10 years of experience as evaluator, he has worked in more than 30 projects funded by agencies such as NSF, CDC, USAID, USDA, and NIH, which have collectively received over \$140 million in funding. Galindo also teaches graduate level courses on Program Evaluation, Qualitative Research, Mixed Methods, Statistical Thinking, and Methodology of Planned Change.

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**For this report, we use the term “youth” broadly to refer to children and young adults from 0-25 years of age.**

We fully acknowledge that future planning will need to take into account the distinct needs and developmental stages within this broad category.

### *Report design:*

Casey Davis

[www.caseydavisdesign.com](http://www.caseydavisdesign.com)

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