

A Message about Allyship from SoDP on Valentine's Day –

When middle and high school students in New Castle County are charged, criminally charged, by their SRO as a result of their school discipline experience (for which they've already been suspended), they'll go to Family Court at least once (and miss more school), and from there they're most likely referred to us. On one level, we are another touch point in their unfolding lives, meeting with them (after school hours), validating the context of their conduct (and more) with the expectation that they will soon get their criminal record expunged.

On another level, our everyday work is about telling their stories by bringing their voices into a larger space where policy makers and decision makers hear from them – rather than about them. Last spring, SoDP intern Rebekah Schrier and I planned for a short film documentary to highlight our SoDP students' disciplinary experiences. *School Discipline: Stories Behind the Numbers* was a huge accomplishment.

Prior to her SoDP internship, Rebekah knew she wanted to work with children from marginalized communities. Since her internship, Rebekah has been spending a year volunteering in an under-resourced school in Washington, DC. And in the fall, she's heading for grad school – unsure her “dream job.” And while I'm completing my MPA from UD in May, like Rebekah I'm unsure about where this journey is leading me.

None of this work – serving our SoDP youth under a pretense of justice – has been inconsequential for either of us. Reconciling our depth of connection with our SoDP students and the structural and systemic violence embedded in their school discipline experience traps us in a thin space. These forces, juxtaposed with the power dynamic of our whiteness during our SoDP visits, create a source of great pain for both of us.

Against all odds, we're persistent in efforts to listen first before speaking with confidence about the difficult topics we've experienced in this work. After all, it is in connection with our SoDP students that we are able to find our own voices. Nonetheless, we consistently question whether our well-intentioned, but still privileged positions, perpetuate such a system of injustice.

However, when we pause – assured in our awareness and in the midst of this internal tension, we find insight and inspiration. And it becomes our work to facilitate restoration and transformation in all ways both innovative and bounded in causes that explore new models – structural and systemic. As Audre Lorde says, *you do not have to be me in order for us to fight alongside of each other.*

Rebekah & Cindy