



Finding Direction

Rev. Jeff Jackson and Rev. Chad Delaney
2016 NBA Incubate SENT Seminar Participant



Past the entryway of the Marillac Center in Leavenworth, KS, the elevator to our room was marked “S *”. Street level? Start here? Inside the elevator, the choices are S*, 1 and G. We wondered in bewilderment: aren’t Street Level, Ground Level, and the 1st floor all the same? Will this elevator actually lead to somewhere? Is it an elaborate joke? We weren’t about to ask for directions (it’s a real thing), so instead we pushed each button to explore and find our way.

Ironically, the NBA Incubate SENT Seminar gave us an opportunity to work with other ministerial entrepreneurs, church leaders, marketing, and fundraising experts who helped us determine a direction towards a goal we have imagined. For the past nine months, we have been working on an initiative to offer a positive place of support and growth for teenagers in our community. Both of us have dealt with the grief and hurt the whole community feels as the result of deaths of young people. Chad came to the seminar having just officiated a funeral service for a person who died of a heroin overdose. A young man Jeff has known died by suicide as he struggled with trying to support a family while also venturing out to begin a new business. We felt called to do something.

We had a passion, but not a direction. So, we met with community leaders in the local school district, government offices, and social service organizations. As we listened and researched the health data for the community, we began to envision three possibilities for gaps in preventative services: a Teen Cafe with supplemental programming available, a Dry/Juice Bar for young adults, and an Incubator to support social enterprise initiatives. At first, we imagined the possibility for shared space and separate times. And as our creativity began to percolate, we envisioned many possibilities for intergenerational and multidisciplinary crossovers! So, rather than three different entities, we determined to roll all three ventures into one inclusive ministry. Now we had passion and a goal!

Trying to communicate our excitement proved to be very unsatisfying—lots of affirmation, but few folks easily grasped our vision. We lacked the path that would get us where we envisioned we could be. So, we sought help from the NBA and applied for the SENT Seminar. At the Marillac Center we learned the basics of nonprofit ministry startups and received growth and development skills for leadership and change. It gave us exactly what we needed to move forward from an idea to a tangible transformative ministry.

We have returned to Hiram-Mantua focused and clear about our path and our vision. We are establishing a ministry that offers teens and young adults a healthy community space to build positive peer and mentor relationships and explore new opportunities, hobbies, and career paths. As a result of this precision, we have been able to expand who are our potential partners and are negotiating how these relationships can offer both space and support programming.



The SENT Seminar empowered us to move forward in ways that we had not imagined and with resources we had not reached for. Instead of finding our way by indiscriminate exploration, we are confident in a pathway and process for reaching our goal and making a positive impact on our community.

The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at awatkins@nbacares.org.