Thank you for attending the 2023 Inclusive Excellence Symposium. As a way of helping to continue the impactful conversations begun at this year’s event, we have created this Small Group Facilitation Guide. The intention of the Guide is to provide support for folks interested in expanding their learning within the community of their workplace through guided discussion and engaging with further resources. Should your area need in-person support for these ongoing conversations, please reach out to us and we will do our best to accommodate that need should capacity allow. In the meantime, we hope you will use this Guide to practice the values of Our Common Ground together and explore the impacts of this year’s incredible speakers on your individual and shared understanding of respect, justice, openness, innovation, integrity, and responsibility.

FACILITATION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Consider the space in which this discussion will take place and how many people may be in attendance; how might you situate the room; will it be virtual or in-person; are there accommodation needs
- We recommend allowing for a discussion of at least 60 minutes if possible
- There is no need to include every question below in your conversation. You may discover new questions that arise or topics of connection that are not addressed in the questions offered here.
- Open the space with a sharing of names, pronouns if folks are comfortable, and a brief overview of some Group Aspirations (we have some recommended below, but feel free to create your own!).
- As the facilitator of the space, you are there to manage time and offer connections and structure. No one in the space is an expert in anything other than their own experiences, so no need to feel like you have “all the answers”.

GROUP ASPIRATIONS:

- Lead with love – recognize that we come to the space with the intention of learning together; no one here is trying to cause harm, but instead we intend to come together in a spirit of compassionate curiosity
- Low ego = High impact – while we will all have our own thoughts, experiences, and reactions in the space, the more we are able to decenter ourselves and recenter the collective, the higher impact we might have as a group learning together
- Move at the speed of trust – give ourselves grace as trust grows in the space; these conversations can be very vulnerable and there is no expectation to share beyond what feels comfortable
BUILDING COMMON GROUND THROUGH UNCOMMON STORIES

FEATURING: RABIA CHAUDRY

HIGHLIGHTS AND CONNECTIONS

- Rabia Chaudry time with us highlighted the Our Common Ground themes of justice, integrity, and responsibility as she shared stories about her work for folks who have been wrongfully convicted of crimes, most notably Adnan Syed.

- She spoke to the ways we all tell ourselves stories about who we are and are told stories by others about who we are and can become. She shared narratives about the “American experience” from the lens of immigrant families like her own and the expectations of what Americans are “getting right” in our criminal legal systems and beyond.

- Rabia highlighted the realities of a post-9/11 world for folks in her communities and the ways the targeting of brown people perceived to be Muslim (recognizing that many non-Muslim brown folks, Sikhs, Hindus, etc. were also impacted) impacted the story she had told herself about her career – finding herself called upon to use her law degree in service of her communities and not in the corporate sphere as she had imagined.

- Notably, Rabia asked us all to really consider who is in charge of the stories we hear; the stories we tell ourselves about people different from ourselves; the stories we seek out and the stories we ignore. The power of storytelling to uplift humanity is profound; but its counterpart, in service of division, is equally strong.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- This talk references building common ground through uncommon stories – what was uncommon about what Rabia shared with us? What stories surprised you? Felt familiar?

- What stories have you been told about people who hold different identities than you? Who told those stories? How have you interrogated that storytelling and/or explored alternative stories?

- The power that journalists and storytellers wield in American culture is profound. What can we do as a community to make room for multiple stories while also maintaining a responsibility to facts? What is the role of higher education in the crafting and telling of stories?

- Rabia stressed the importance of authenticity and vulnerability in hearing one another’s stories; listening quietly and learning from the stories people tell about themselves. Practice authentic listening with one another – share a story of a time in your life/career you were misunderstood.
FURTHER RESOURCES:

- Rabia Chaudry’s website: https://rabiachaudry.com/ including links to purchase Adnan’s Story and Fatty Fatty Boom Boom

- Rabia has hosted the Undisclosed podcast, along with her colleagues Colin Miller and Susan Simpson, for several seasons. The podcast investigates wrongful convictions and unpacks the complicated U.S. Criminal Justice system from the perpetration of a crime through to the verdict and the evidence that often doesn’t make it to court.

- Rabia’s talk mentioned a couple of films whose storytelling have had a profound impact on her, and on members of her community, including the problematic 1991 film “Not Without My Daughter” and the 2012 documentary “West of Memphis”. You can stream “West of Memphis” on many platforms. For a breakdown of the ways “Not Without My Daughter” has perpetuated a harmful narrative about Muslim folks, check out this episode of the Keeping it 101: A Killjoy’s Guide to Religion podcast (co-hosted and created by UVM professor Dr. Ilyse Morgenstein-Fuerst).