

Leading
Women In
Business:

MILWAUKEE

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O, The Oprah Magazine, Entrepreneur & Fortune

By Design and Not By Default

How one Milwaukee nonprofit is helping area youth achieve success at work and in life.

Lead2Change traces its origins back to a 1996 Greater Milwaukee Foundation youth philanthropy group. The group became so successful that the Foundation asked Dionne Grayson, then a Senior Program Officer, to spin it off into its own nonprofit. In 2011, Lead2Change was born.

It didn't take long for Grayson and other community leaders to notice that Lead2Change alumni are confident, philanthropic, and career-ready. For that reason, collaborators like Aurora Health Care are committed to providing opportunities for young people to explore health careers.

While the concept for *Dream.Explore.Build.*, Lead2Change's signature program, was designed 15 years ago in graduate school, after securing support from Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, Grayson officially launched the program citywide in 2014.

"Growing up, I've always known that I loved working with young people, had an interest in administration, and aspired to be an entrepreneur. Like many young people, I struggled with how to turn these varied interests into a specific career path. Things became clearer as a result of very focused internships, volunteering, taking assessments, and being coached. This journey led me to what I was designed to do," says Grayson.

A pipeline into the local business community and beyond, *Dream.Explore.Build.* works with greater Milwaukee schools and nonprofits to identify young adults who are interested in "finding their passion and following their paths," says Grayson. Participants receive 150 hours of career-readiness training prior to their internship experience. During that time, they are encouraged to explore their values, address and overcome their weaknesses, and enhance their inherent skill sets. *Dream.Explore.Build.* then helps participants choose potential career paths that "are in direct alignment with who they are," says Grayson, and places them in six-week summer internships that match their interests and abilities.

Some alumni go on to study at universities across the country. Others seek full-time employment or enter advanced training programs both locally and nationwide. Either way, *Dream.Explore.Build.* alums are well aware that successful lives are made "by design and not by default," says Grayson. "Nothing happens by accident. Our lives are composed of choices, beliefs, and actions."



Dionne Grayson
President

- A Cameron Impact Scholar at Harvard University
- Founder of an IT firm
- Diversity and Inclusion Manager at a top-ranked medical college
- Marketing and Communications Administrator for Lead2Change

What do these four people have in common? They're all alumni of Lead2Change, a career-readiness organization co-founded and led by Milwaukee native Dionne Grayson.

Bader Philanthropies is one foundation that has supported *Dream. Explore. Build.* since its 2014 inception. Former Program Officer Mary Osmundsen says the program's most impressive aspect is that it allows students to choose for themselves what their future paths will be. "I see a lot of organizations that don't trust young people, that make assumptions about who they are and where they should go," says Osmundsen. "Grayson gives young people a mirror so they can see clearly who they are and where they need to be, and then she provides the tools and skills for them to do it."



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