

Becoming a Student of Kalamazoo: Experiences in Learning, Community Connection, and Belonging

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Post Sabbatical Report

A. Original Statement of Purpose

I plan to delve deep into the city where I live - Kalamazoo - by physically exploring spaces and places and building connections with people and organizations within the community. Having on-the-ground experiences learning new things and making connections will help me grow roots, both personally and professionally, allowing me to reflect on and create a sense of belonging in the community and library.

B. Activities Performed

Please see the Appendix for a full list of sabbatical activities, categorized by Objective.

C. Introduction

My sabbatical proposal came from a place of feeling disconnected from my community. After living away from Kalamazoo for decades, I returned to a place that I had really only known as a child or summer visitor. Not long after I moved back to Kalamazoo and started my work at the Kalamazoo Valley Libraries, the coronavirus pandemic made an abrupt appearance and disrupted the typical opportunities for settling in and building community. Looking back, I had plenty of information about Kalamazoo - I am a librarian whose top CliftonStrength is Input, after all - but I was missing the ground-level experiences that happen when you truly dig into your community. I did have family, friend and work connections, but not the kind of deep personal and professional ties one might expect after living in a place for 7 years. At work, I was wholly involved in creating opportunities for learning, but there wasn't always the time and space for growing and thriving.

And, if I was feeling this way, how are Kalamazoo Valley Community College students feeling? Students who may only know their community from the perspective of childhood and not as an emerging adult. Students who spent formative years learning and socializing virtually, rather than in-person. Students who may not have the time or energy to build and connect with a supportive community. If KVCC students are experiencing disconnection, how does this affect their relationship to their community - at college or otherwise? Do they feel like they truly belong in a college environment? Do they feel like they are a valuable part of the wider Kalamazoo community?

Having a sense of belonging is increasingly being understood as essential to learning and the health of a community. “A substantial body of research has established that students who report a strong sense of belonging tend to be more motivated to learn, perform better academically, have better rates of attendance...and have higher self-esteem and mental health” (Cohen, 2022). Unfortunately, recent news articles have highlighted the opposite of belonging - a rise in loneliness and a drop in flourishing among young adults (Caron, 2025; Stipling, 2024). A 2025 report looking at Michigan community college students in particular - which included responses from KVCC students - indicated that 56% of respondents reported feeling lonely sometimes or always (Fletcher & Cornett). These reports comprise only a small part of the conversation about belonging. Yet, if students don’t feel like they belong, how does this affect their own ability and desire to learn, grow and thrive?

Thus, I wanted to learn experientially what it means to belong in my community, rather than rely on research that doesn’t fully address my own experiences or those of our students. Since I spend most of my work days online, doing research, I wanted to learn in an active way, with plenty of room for real-life exploration, relationship building, and reflection. Samuel (2022) writes that “the work of creating greater awareness and belonging **within oneself**...is also part of the work of creating belonging...in the wider community” (emphasis mine). I needed to figure out what belonging means for myself, in order to gain perspective on students’ experiences.

D. Objectives Accomplished

I proposed four primary objectives in my application for sabbatical leave and accomplished these goals in the following ways.

1. Continue to learn about and reflect on the concepts of community and belonging, and see where my reading and on-the-ground experiences take me.

While I did read some academic articles about community and belonging, I learned more from reading works focused on Kalamazoo. For example, I read the memoir *Black Indian* by Kalamazoo author Shonda Buchanan in preparation for a book discussion. Buchanan and I grew up in Kalamazoo at roughly the same time, but with vastly different experiences in the community. I learned from her story - what it was like to grow up on the East and North sides of town - and how intergenerational trauma and discrimination affected her own feelings of belonging in Kalamazoo. Buchanan was present at the book discussion and shared her personal journey toward belonging, which included exploration of her family history and connections to Native American communities and culture. I later explored the Eastside, having a better understanding of the history and challenges facing the neighborhood. As a result, I felt more connected to a part of town I knew very little about and had a more realistic and nuanced understanding of Kalamazoo history. In addition to Buchanan’s book, I read a lot of local journalism, particularly the daily newsletter from NowKalamazoo, and gained greater awareness of local people, organizations, events and initiatives impacting Kalamazoo.

Simply being in community with others on a regular basis also gave me insight about what it means to belong. Before my sabbatical, long days at work and family commitments kept me from deepening engagement with social and community groups. During my sabbatical, I was able to do things like join the YMCA and work with a trainer to create an exercise routine. I had been intimidated by gyms and workout equipment in the past, but forming a relationship with and learning from a friendly trainer gradually built my confidence with new activities in a new environment. I now feel comfortable and like I belong in a gym. Similarly, I had been taking one evening ballet class, but during sabbatical, I was able to attend 2-3 classes a week and get to know my fellow dancers through regular interactions. I began to see the dance school as a part of my community, and through those connections, I was asked to help backstage during a performance and participate in a fellow dancer's choreography. After dance class, I would stop by Sarkozy Bakery for bread, and I chatted with the same baker at the counter every week. These interactions - big and small - helped me feel like I am part of this community, that I belong here.

Throughout the entire sabbatical, I kept a written journal and took photographs chronicling my experiences, paying attention to moments and environments where I felt like I belonged (or didn't). I also created a bullet journal for the first time, which helped me to keep track of and prioritize my sabbatical activities in a creative way.

2. Physically explore the geography of Kalamazoo, with an emphasis on neighborhoods, natural areas, and public spaces, in order to further ground myself in the community.

I spent a lot of time exploring Kalamazoo - on foot, by car and bus and bike - solo and in the company of others. I wandered through downtown and made discoveries in my own west side neighborhood. I went on a driving tour with my uncle, revisiting places important to my family. I also spent time in nature, exploring favorite trails and hiking new ones. This slower, focused, on-the-ground approach allowed me to see my community with new eyes and pay greater attention to long-standing inequities. For example, I participated in a public art walking tour of downtown. The guide pointed out historic architectural features, artwork and murals that I had never noticed before. I then spent time on my own and with librarian Jim Ratliff, biking off-the-beaten-path areas of downtown and Edison, coming face-to-face with more art as well as the extent of homelessness in our city. Kalamazoo has incredible, accessible art for all to enjoy, yet, at the same time we struggle with solutions for housing and mental health challenges. The juxtaposition between two extremes - a city rich in the arts, but lacking in basic needs for all - has a seldom acknowledged impact on everyone and our collective feelings of belonging (or exclusion).

During my sabbatical, I wanted to have the experience of relying solely on public transportation, a daily reality for many KVCC students. I planned outings where I would only use the bus - the results were a good reminder of how difficult it is to be at the mercy of the bus schedule and the weather. I have been reliant on public transport in other cities, but it was disappointing to discover how difficult it is to rely exclusively on public transport in Kalamazoo. I missed buses

because they came earlier than the scheduled time. I spent hours getting to and from a location (15 minutes away by car) due to the time lag between transfers. I got cold and wet when it started to rain unexpectedly and I didn't have the right clothing. One time, I caved and called my husband to come pick me up when it started raining so hard, I would have been completely soaked by the time I made it to the bus stop (where there was no shelter or protection from the elements). I didn't ride the bus as much as I would have liked to during this sabbatical, because I often had appointments at certain times, and knew I couldn't rely on the timeliness of public transportation. Being able to have control over how you move through your community is foundational. Experiencing firsthand how transportation can be a barrier (rather than a tool) laid bare the challenges that keep many KVCC students from fully participating in the life of the community, making Kalamazoo feel exclusive, rather than inclusive.

3. Interact with and learn from community organizations in meaningful ways by meeting with organization members or staff, attending programs and/or volunteering.

Samuel (2022) describes belonging as building relationships with people, places, power and purpose. Exploring Kalamazoo, as noted above, helped to ground myself in a place. This third objective connected me with people in our community who are acting purposefully to educate and celebrate, solve problems and address needs. And, the more I participated in community events (e.g. co-facilitating a public art project or attending an election forum), the stronger my network became. I would run into people I had seen or met at different events, and even though we were technically strangers, we immediately had a common experience to talk about and connect us. People often say that Kalamazoo is a "small town," but I didn't experience that until I started meeting people through regular program attendance and volunteering.

Volunteering with local community organizations was one of the highlights of my sabbatical. Reading about local organizations was helpful in raising my awareness of the good work being done in our community. However, actually providing services as a volunteer allowed me to deepen my connections with people and organizations, and by extension, Kalamazoo. Volunteering provided deeper insight about community needs. Through weekly volunteer shifts at Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes - and the casual conversations that come along with it - I got to know some of the people leading and assisting with mission-driven work. Staff at Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes work tirelessly (and with a great sense of camaraderie) to "feed hungry people and engage our community in the fight to end hunger." Assisting the Program and Delivery Assistants with home food deliveries exposed me to the serious level of poverty and food insecurity in Kalamazoo. As a member of the Valley Food Share committee, I already knew how widespread hunger is for college students, but during my sabbatical, I was able to witness, firsthand, the wider community context around this need. Students aren't just experiencing food insecurity at college, for many, this has been a lifelong struggle. Volunteering showed me the extent to which hunger and poverty keep people from participating fully in the community.

4. Visit libraries in the area and talk with librarians about how they foster learning and build community in their libraries.

In keeping with the experiential focus of my sabbatical, I spent time as a patron in my local public libraries. I occasionally spoke with library staff, but mostly took advantage of the dedicated time and space to read, write, or develop my bullet journal, quietly observing at the same time. Each library had their own particular vibe, and so the opportunity to spend time in different neighborhood hubs gave me additional perspectives on the Kalamazoo community. In each library, I paid attention to the environment, staff-patron interactions and resources that affected my own sense of belonging. When possible, I took photographs of environmental cues that felt inclusive. For example, many libraries have resource areas or signage introducing patrons to services in the library or community services. In addition to observing library spaces, I also attended library programs and participated in Kalamazoo Public Library's Adult Reading Challenge.

Other types of libraries had an impact on my thinking as well. I visited three local high school libraries in Kalamazoo and Portage, and now have a better understanding of student exposure to libraries and information literacy instruction before students enroll at KVCC. High school libraries work hard to build a culture of reading with displays, reader's advisory, and class visits dedicated to book selection. Collections were diverse, and representative of student identities and interests. However, depending on the school district, students receive uneven introduction to information literacy and research skills, which will inform my teaching going forward. I also visited academic libraries in Kalamazoo, and further afield in Lansing and Ludington, and toured the Library of Michigan, which is a resource for libraries throughout the state. Academic libraries are doing important and creative work connecting students with campus staff and resources, as well as fostering relationships with the wider community. Libraries of all types are actively keeping their patrons in mind as they design mission-driven and belonging-focused collections, programs, services and environments.

Overall, conversations with librarians gave me lots of food for thought about community and belonging. Kate Langan, Engagement Librarian at Western Michigan University, is editing a book about student flourishing and we had several good conversations about community connections and what it means to foster belonging in libraries. Other librarians shared specific policies, programs, and collections they developed with student/patron belonging in mind. My sabbatical allowed me to build a much stronger professional network and foster my sense of belonging in Michigan's library community.

E. Conclusions Drawn

Four months of exploration does not make me an expert in belonging. If anything, I better understand that creating a sense of belonging for yourself and for others is both full of effort and effortless. Belonging depends on numerous factors - identity, environment, mood, etc. - and one's sense of it can change at any time. Feeling like you belong can be instantaneous or take a lifetime, depending on the circumstances. Throughout my sabbatical, I tried to define the

meaning of belonging. For me, belonging refers to the sense that you, as a person, matter. When you are in a space, you and your needs are acknowledged, either directly - through greetings, conversations, programs and resources - or indirectly - through signage, environmental choices, or services. Belonging can be active and purposeful. A person can create their own sense of belonging through relationship-building or decision-making. However, individuals and systems can also conspire - intentionally or not - to thwart a sense of belonging for individuals and groups.

Feeling like you belong does lead to greater learning and well-being. For example, my gym trepidation turned into gym confidence once I became more comfortable with people and places. Greater participation with Kalamazoo non-profit organizations led to a stronger sense of purpose and the feeling I had the power to effect change. Meeting librarians allowed me to connect the dots between sabbatical learning and application. However, it's important to note that I also experienced the opposite of belonging, making learning and well-being elusive. There were situations where I didn't feel like I belonged and felt uncomfortable and disconnected or wanted to leave. Paying attention to this discomfort allows me to empathize with what students may be feeling in various learning contexts. Hopefully, my personal experiences will guide me in the future, as I continue to cultivate a sense of belonging - for myself and others.

I often told people that I was grounding myself in the community. Due to the experiential nature of the sabbatical, it took a while to figure out what "grounding" meant for me. Samuel's (2022) identification of belonging as having connections to people, place, purpose and power helped to guide both my activities and understanding. What were the people-place-power-purpose interactions that would help me grow my sense of belonging? My experimentation led to an exploration of community and belonging in Kalamazoo that was wholly unique and based on my own personal biases and interests. I am typically drawn to the arts, natural areas, local businesses, multicultural spaces, organizations focused on the social good, and libraries to name just a few interests, these were then reflected in my sabbatical activities. However, I did push myself beyond those interests, particularly through volunteering. As a white, middle-class woman who also grew up in Kalamazoo, I continued to reconcile my childhood experience of Kalamazoo with a more complex understanding. For example, talking with parent literacy students at Interfaith Homes on the Northside of Kalamazoo showed just how different educational and life experiences can be, due to systemic discrimination and the many barriers I've mentioned previously. Over and over, I paid attention to the boundaries of belonging and exclusion and also tried to keep the experiences of KVCC students in mind as I moved through our community.

I was fortunate to have dedicated time to dig into my community, to explore the city and make connections. I now have a base from which to continue building my own sense of belonging. However, I remain very aware that not everyone has time to do things that would help them feel more grounded and connected. Students, in particular, are balancing classes, work and family commitments. And, on top of that, many students face food insecurity, and transportation and childcare challenges and these realities monopolize time. Time that is not available for developing interests and hobbies, making friends, engaging in civic life, all things that would

help students figure out who they are and how they belong. This has consequences, not only for individual students, but for our entire community. If people aren't feeling connected, will they be invested in making our community better? Samuel (2022) writes, "When we get to know our homeplace more intimately, we take a greater stake in its success. We feel rooted, and we want to preserve those roots." What happens when this rootedness doesn't have a chance to grow?

Libraries, especially academic libraries, can be part of the solution. Academic libraries support college learning, but they can also support lifelong learning and identity development. Academic libraries can develop instruction and programming, displays and collections, and environments that connect students with campus and community resources. Academic libraries can be purposeful in conveying to students that they - and their interests, challenges, goals - matter. This can be as small as consistent, welcoming interactions or as large as a student advisory board. Academic libraries can actively foster a sense of belonging for students while they are on campus (or online), by weaving a commitment to student belonging into everyday operations. Students may not have a lot of time, but if they are introduced to a campus place that is intentional about showing students that they matter - as students and as people - they will feel more connected to the college, community, and their own developing sense of identity.

It is important to acknowledge that not everyone might not feel welcome in a library setting, perhaps due to lack of exposure or access, previous interactions, or the sense that spaces and resources are not relevant. This makes facilitating belonging even more essential, as libraries are one of the last few community spaces open to everyone, and students will have access to libraries beyond their time in college. As placemaker and sustainable design advocate Dominic Richards wrote, "Either you design for belonging or you end up with isolation" (Samuel 124). Libraries can design their spaces and services in ways that will increase connections and rootedness for students.

F. Summary of Sabbatical Leave Criteria Fulfilled

1. Faculty member effectiveness

Spending my sabbatical learning through doing reinforced my commitment to active, authentic learning in the classroom. Authentic learning goes beyond a particular assignment and is relevant to real-world problem-solving and research. Having paid close attention to the ways in which relational and environmental cues contribute to belonging, I will be more aware of and proactive in the ways we can make library services and interactions more welcoming and inclusive. Being more connected in the broader Kalamazoo community will allow me to connect students with relevant community resources.

2. Mission

My community and library observations introduced me to innovative programs, services and environments that prioritized belonging. Taking this opportunity to personally learn,

grow and thrive will allow me to infuse those takeaways into my work at the library. How can library instruction and services go beyond learning and address student needs to grow and thrive? Focusing on community building and belonging will contribute to that mission-driven goal.

3. Exceed Expectations for Professional Development

I never would have had the opportunity to dig into my community without the support and time allowed by the college. I was able to accomplish far more than my initial expectations. It was especially valuable to visit and make connections with other librarians, beyond what I could do at a conference or meeting. I am grateful to the college and to my library colleagues for allowing me to step away for this sabbatical exploration.

4. Reflection and Renewal

The sabbatical encouragement to make time for rest and renewal allowed me to prioritize being in community with others. For example, I was able to help with meals for a new baby, send care packages to my kids, host a family friend just starting college, plan daytime coffee dates and hikes, take short trips to new places, and attend local meetings and public programs. Time away from the computer and out in the community was restorative. Having time to do everyday things around the house and in the community helped me to feel more grounded. I returned to my work in the library energized and ready to implement what I've learned.

G. Benefit to the College, Students, and Colleagues

Upon returning to campus, I created an informal presentation, sharing photos and stories about the library portion of my sabbatical with library colleagues. This has inspired conversations about how we can incorporate some of the belonging-focused practices into our library. I've also begun connecting library and faculty colleagues with librarians and other people that I met during my sabbatical. Connections are being forged with Community Homeworks' Tool Library, Kalamazoo Public Library's Early Literacy program, and KRESA Education for the Arts, to name just a few. Strengthening connections between KVCC and community organizations will benefit students' sense of belonging both on and off campus, as organizations work in tandem to address student needs. I also plan to create a local news research guide for students, to assist in increasing awareness of community organizations and events. I will also provide an overview of my sabbatical findings at the Fall 2026 Summit.

Having a better understanding of pre-college library experiences will also inform my advocacy and outreach - promoting information literacy to students in creative ways. There is not always time and space during in-person classes for a library visit and many classes are online. How can I create additional online resources that introduce libraries and information literacy concepts in ways that promote belonging, even in virtual spaces? How can I share information literacy and research skills with students who may never come to the library? And, how can I solicit

meaningful student feedback and incorporate student ideas in library services? These are not new questions for me, but my post-sabbatical attempts to answer these questions will require new approaches. My sabbatical has given me time, space and opportunity to consider different perspectives and address challenges in new ways.

Kluane Adamek, Yukon Regional Chief at the Assembly of First Nations, said “Belonging is how you show up for your community” (Samuel, 2022). Thus, I am still pursuing volunteer work, which will continue to strengthen my knowledge of resources and deepen community ties. I completed adult literacy tutor training with the Kalamazoo Literacy Council, learning first-hand about techniques and resources that may benefit KVCC students in the future. I applied to be on the board for the Kalamazoo Drop-In Child Care Center - an organization that serves many students with children - and, if accepted, I anticipate creating stronger connections between our two organizations. I also plan to return to Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes this summer, assisting with home deliveries. Showing up through volunteering will deepen my own sense of belonging and agency within Kalamazoo.

Kimberley Brownlee, professor at the University of British Columbia, writes, “When we belong, it’s not just that we’re tolerated or accepted. Belonging signals that this person isn’t just accepted, they’re valuable, they have a purpose, they have a function, they’re useful to other people” (Samuel, 2022). I hope that my sabbatical work will allow me to work with purpose in the Kalamazoo Valley Libraries. Having a deeper understanding of what it means to belong - to matter - will better inform my work with students, as they too, figure out who they are - as scholars, athletes, artists, scientists, makers and doers, people - and the ways in which they belong.

H. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the college community for providing this sabbatical opportunity, and to my library colleagues for stepping in while I was away. I would also like to thank my family for their support, and the numerous library and community members who shared their time and expertise with me.

Appendix

Activities Performed

1. Continue to learn about and reflect on the concepts of community and belonging, and see where my reading and on-the-ground experiences take me.
 - Read books and articles exploring community and belonging
 - Attended [Reading Race](#) book discussion of *Black Indian* (Buchanan, 2019) hosted by [SHARE](#) (Society for History and Racial Equity) and the [Kalamazoo Public Library](#) at the [Ladies' Library Association](#)
 - Regularly read local news media, including [NowKalamazoo](#)
 - Kept a handwritten journal reflecting on my experiences and started keeping a bullet journal to keep track of local events
 - Had conversations with senior family and longtime friends, which led to stronger feelings of connectedness between growing up in Kalamazoo and today, as well as insight into the ways in which seniors create community
 - Explored new opportunities by creating community and a sense of belonging through exercise: joined YMCA and developed exercise routine with athletic trainer, deepened my participation in my local dance school
 - Participated in the KVCC Employee Art Show and explored new opportunities for creativity in a community setting
 - Enjoyed opportunities for everyday connection with family, friends, and community.

2. Physically explore the geography of Kalamazoo, with an emphasis on neighborhoods, natural areas, and public spaces
 - Visited the [Discover Kalamazoo](#) downtown visitors' center and talked with staff about exploring Kalamazoo as a "tourist"
 - Explored the [Kalamazoo Valley Museum](#), including exhibits about Kalamazoo advertising/businesses and history
 - Visited [Local History Room](#) at the Kalamazoo Public Library, studied historical maps of my childhood and current neighborhoods, read about local Native American history, talked with librarian about digitizing a piece of family history
 - Rode the [Metro Transit](#) bus in Kalamazoo
 - Rode my bike through local neighborhoods and downtown, on bike lanes and bike trails
 - Explored Downtown and the Edison neighborhood via bike with Jim Ratliff, KVCC Librarian
 - Attended Public Art Tour of Downtown Kalamazoo with Lynn Houghton, Public Historian, Western Michigan University

- Took a family history driving tour of Kalamazoo with my uncle, David Bogen. Visited houses, neighborhoods, businesses, and cultural spots important to my family. Learned more about my family's part in the local music scene of the 1960s.
- Attended a neighborhood porch concert and mutual aid event in West Main Hill
- Took photos of iconic Kalamazoo landmarks and art, as well as interesting things and places that I discovered
- Explored [Kalamazoo Nature Center](#) exhibit on forests, with a section on urban tree cover and neighborhood inequities in Kalamazoo
- Visited local bookstores, small businesses, and farmers markets throughout the city, many of them new to me, such as [Asifisiwe Supermarket](#), La Azteca Bakery and the [Portage Farmers Market](#)
- Hiked trails and nature preserves, including:
 - [West Lake Nature Preserve](#)
 - [Bishop's Bog](#)
 - [Eliason Nature Preserve](#)
 - [Kleinstuck Preserve](#)
 - [Kalamazoo Nature Center](#)
 - [Al Sabo Preserve](#)
 - [Woollam Nature Preserve](#)
 - [Lillian Anderson Arboretum](#)
 - [Portage Bike Trail](#)
 - [Kalamazoo River Valley Trail](#)
 - [Fox River Forest Preserve, Illinois](#)

3. Interact with and learn from community organizations in meaningful ways by meeting with organization members or staff, attending programs and/or volunteering.

- Attended and participated in programs offered by local organizations
 - [Bird Banding Program](#), Kalamazoo Nature Center
 - Open House, [Kalamazoo Drop-In Child Care Center](#)
 - Power Lunch, [Community Homeworks](#) and [Tool Library](#)
 - Living History Tour, [Mountain Home Cemetery Association](#)
 - Open House, Drake Homestead, [Oshtemo Historical Society](#)
 - "Closing the Literacy Opportunity Gap," Adult Literacy Symposium, [Kalamazoo Literacy Council](#) (KLC)
 - From Prompt to Practice: AI Tools for Adult Educators, Abbey Weathers (KLC) and Elizabeth Isidro (WMU)
 - Research in Adult Learning, Joseph Kretoivics (WMU)
 - Tutor Strategies for Community Literacy Centers, Michael Evans (KLC)
 - Adult Learning Strategies for Family Literacy Adventures, Michael Evans (KLC)
 - Adult Learner Advisors, Panel Discussion

- Family Literacy Night, Kalamazoo Literacy Council
 - Parent Literacy Class and Parent Literacy Forum, Kalamazoo Literacy Council
 - Adult Education and Training Program, Goodwill Industries
 - Interfaith Homes Community Center
 - Reginald Dwayne Betts, poet and founder of [Freedom Reads](#), a prison library project, Lecture and Performance, [Kalamazoo Institute of Arts](#)
 - Community Rope-Making Project, [KRESA Education for the Arts](#) Students at ArtBreak, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts
 - [Town Hall Field Trip](#), Kalamazoo Township Board Meeting with NowKalamazoo
 - Kalamazoo Election Forum, Mayoral and Commission Candidates, sponsored by the [League of Women Voters](#) at the [Douglass Community Association](#)
 - Exhibits, Free Thursdays, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts
- Talked with staff from the following organizations through formal meetings, volunteer opportunities and/or community events:
 - [Kalamazoo Promise](#), Coty Dunten, Senior Director of Scholar Engagement and Franki Hand, Reconnection Specialist
 - [ISAAC](#) (Interfaith Strategy for Advocacy & Action in the Community)
 - [Kalamazoo County 4-H](#)
 - [Michigan Conservation District](#)
 - [Kalamazoo Literacy Council](#)
 - Kamaria Snell, Parent Literacy Navigator
 - Roeshell Ollie, Neighborhood Network Center Coordinator, Interfaith Homes
 - Michael Evans, Executive Director and Chief Literacy Advocate
 - Mike List, Early Learning Support Specialist
 - [Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes](#)
 - [Kalamazoo Arts Council](#)
 - [Kalamazoo Nature Center](#), Ezra Montero, Adult Program Coordinator
 - Volunteered with local organizations
 - [Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes](#)
 - Mobile Delivery Volunteer
 - Donation Station Volunteer
 - Kalamazoo Arts Council, [Brush the Block Mural Festival](#)
 - [Imagine That! Community Art Project](#) Volunteer, [Northside Association for Community Development](#)
 - Information Table Volunteer, Kalamazoo Mall
 - [Tye Chua Dance](#)
 - Backstage Volunteer, *Nutcracker*
 - [Kalamazoo Nature Center](#)
 - Holiday Gift Fair, Raffle Table Volunteer
 - [Face Off Theater Company](#)
 - Front of House Volunteer, *Mahalia: the Voice of a Movement*

- [Care Collective](#)
 - Product Packaging Volunteer
4. Visit libraries in the area and talk with librarians about how they foster learning and build community in their libraries.

When possible, I took photos of spaces, resources and services illustrative of efforts to foster community, connection and belonging. This was not always possible, due to respecting the privacy of people using the spaces or attending programs.

Academic Libraries

- [Upjohn Library, Kalamazoo College](#), Kelly Frost, Reference and Instruction Librarian
- [William M. Anderson Library, West Shore Community College](#), Scottville, Michigan, Patti Skinner, Library Director - discussed collaborations with local public libraries and other campus departments to support student and community learning.
- [Mary Idema Pew Library, Grand Valley State University](#), Allendale, Michigan, Hazel McClure, Head of Research, Instruction and Outreach
- [Lansing Community College Library](#), Lansing, Michigan, Kelli Herm, Reference Lead and Liaison Librarian
- Discussions with Kate Langan, Engagement Librarian at [Western Michigan University](#), architect of [A Framework for Flourishing with Information](#) about student belonging, confidence and connectedness.

High School Libraries

- [Kalamazoo Central High School Library](#), Tonya Colvin
- [Kalamazoo Loy Norrix High School Library](#), Michele Coash
- [Portage Northern High School Library](#), Megan Hall

Public Libraries

- [Kalamazoo Public Library](#)
 - Observations at all branches
 - Conversation with Elissa Zimmer, Head of Branch and Community Services and Amanda Raklovits, Lead Mobile Outreach Librarian
- [Portage District Library](#)
- [Grand Rapids Public Library](#),
 - Observations at West Leonard, Van Belkum, Ottawa Hills, West Side branches
- Discussions with Natalie Ziarnik, Assistant Director of [Ela Area Public Library](#) (Illinois), about specific steps she takes in planning for belonging

Special Libraries

- [Community Homeworks](#), [Tool Library](#), Rachel McCartney, Tool Library Manger and Emily, Tool Librarian

- [Michigan State Capitol](#), with Capitol Historian, Valerie Marvin - author of a book about the first female State Librarian, Harriet Tenney
- [Library of Michigan](#), Andrea Vernola, Continuing Education Coordinator and Adam Oster, Community Engagement Librarian
- [Meader Fine Arts Library](#), Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Jacqueline Thompson, Librarian
- [Ladies' Library Association](#), Kalamazoo

Community Resource Areas

- I was drawn to areas within organizations that featured community resources and took photos of these areas:
 - Libraries of all types
 - [YMCA of Greater Kalamazoo](#)
 - Kalamazoo Literacy Council
 - Kalamazoo Drop-In Child Care Center
 - Kalamazoo Nature Center

Library Programs

- Attended book discussion of [Felon: Poems](#) (Betts, 2019) at Meader Fine Arts Library, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts
- Attended Reading Race book discussion of *Black Indian* (Buchanan, 2019) hosted by SHARE (Society for History and Racial Equity) and the Kalamazoo Public Library at the Ladies' Library Association
- Attended webinar hosted by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) First Year Experience Discussion Group, Topic - Fostering a Student Sense of Belonging
- Attended [The Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee](#), fundraiser to support Ready to Read early literacy program at the Kalamazoo Public Library
- Participated in the Adult Reading Challenge at the Kalamazoo Public Library
- Attended the [Human Library](#) at Portage District Library and checked out two human "books"
- Attended Power Lunch education program at Community Homeworks, with tour of Tool Library

References

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