

Umoja

By FPS Director of Equity and Inclusion Dr. Tamara Uselman and Umoja developers Frederick Edwards and J'Neil Gibbs

Umoja Helps Bring Unity to Fargo Public Schools

By its dictionary definition, Umoja means “unity.” Umoja developers Frederick Edwards and J’Neil Gibson engaged with FPS principals in a rigorous process which resulted in offering Umoja to students as a non-credit bearing elective chance to learn about themselves and their voices in making a better world. Read on to learn what Umoja means for over 200 Fargo Public Schools youth.



In the words of Umoja’s designers, Frederick and J’Neil:

Over the past three years, Umoja Writing Workshops have experienced significant growth. Our events, initiatives, and workshops have assisted more than 125 students in becoming whole individuals and leaders in their schools. It is common for our classroom to have two facilitators (Fred & J’Neil) and 15 to 40 students. There are discussions, games, competitions, and most importantly, opportunities for writing and self-expression during class. Each year, students are given the opportunity to create projects that have a positive impact on their mental health and wellness, their school, community, or the world at large. The leadership abilities of these individuals have been further enhanced by the initiatives and mindsets created through these projects.





The work we do does not end in the classroom, however. Here are a few highlights from the past two years: We provide students with access to resources, opportunities, careers, and other students with similar values. As part of Youthworks, we have developed wrap-around services for students in need of food and shelter, and more recently we have created events that our youth have been able to plan and/or perform at. Additionally, we have worked with the United States

Department of Education, Warrior Circle, the City of Fargo, The Human Family, Prairie Public Radio, and many other organizations. We are grateful for the connections we have made so far and look forward to forming new ones in the future. Umoja is now in its third year with over 200 students. A successful organization is built upon its foundation, its core values, and its pillars. The most important thing we want others to take away from our program is this.

Core Pillars

1. Unity in action and in mindset
2. Leadership in action and in mindset
3. Motivation in action and in mindset
4. Cultural Transcendence in action and in mindset

Terms Defined:

Unity: *Unity* is being together or at one with someone or something. This is a word for togetherness or oneness. When a bunch of people act as one and are on the same page, they're displaying unity. When people are bickering and disorganized, there's no unity. In any group or cause, unity can be hard to find and maintain.



Leadership: *Leadership* is the ability to respond, how leaders interact with one another and their team members. It's the way leaders operate, communicate, and make decisions. And it's about the everyday working environment: their behaviors, interactions, beliefs, and values.



Motivation: *Motivation* is a driving factor for actions, willingness, and goals. Motivation is derived from the word *motive* or a need that requires satisfaction. These needs or desires may be acquired through the influence of culture, society, lifestyle, or generally innate. An individual's motivation may be inspired by outside forces (extrinsic motivation) or themselves (intrinsic motivation). The difference between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation depends on the actions behind it

Cultural Transcendence: *Culture Transcendence* refers to learning about our culture and others' cultures. It is the process of shifting cultural expressions and practices typically confined to the individual and family to various sectors of social life. Through exploring cultural transcendence, youth can form ideas regarding how they can express and exemplify the wonders of their culture in educational, societal, and professional settings. Our exploration through learning about cultures [1] allows us to see that competence and reproduction is the beginning. Transcendence is what navigates us through. [2]



[1] Guthrie et.al (2017)

[2] Thrash & Elliot (2004)

