

March 30, 2022 #EquityChat

Nicole Lewis (@NicoleLynnLewis), Founder & CEO of Generation Hope and Author of Pregnant Girl

[@SDMesaPrez](#) It's Wednesday, and time for #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures - hosted by @SDMesaPrez & @lamkeithcurry. We've had awesome guests for #WomensHistoryMonth & tonight we finish strong w/@NicoleLynnLewis, Founder & CEO @SupportGenHope, Author "Pregnant Girl." Welcome Nicole!

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q1 @NicoleLynnLewis. Our education, background, and experiences make us who we are. Please share three things that we should know about you. @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) First, honored to be doing this! 🥰 Three things to know about me: 1) I'm a mama to five great kiddos - my oldest was 3 months old when I started college; 2) My second full-time job is running @SupportGenHope 💜; and 3) I love to laugh... a lot. #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Laughter is a big part of my life...

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) So important!

[@lamkeithcurry](#) Q2 @NicoleLynnLewis. What made you want to write Pregnant Girl and what do you hope readers take away from it? @SDMesaPrez @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) I wrote #PregnantGirlBook for two reasons. 1) Most people think teen pregnancy is a pretty simple issue, but it's much more complex. It's wrapped up in race, gender, and poverty, and all the things we don't want to talk about/face. #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) 2) I wanted to honor the journeys of anyone who has been impacted in any way by teen pregnancy. For too long, our stories have been silenced by shame and stigma, and I wanted to give voice to our experiences. That was really important to me. #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) I learned so much reading Pregnant Girl. It completely revealed my own biases and assumptions

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) I really appreciate that. It was an experience to write it as well. ❤️

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q3 @NicoleLynnLewis. As the founder of @SupportGenHope, you work with young men and women who are parents and also want to enter and succeed in college. What are some strategies used to ensure this happens?

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[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) We start from the premise that our Scholars - all young mothers and fathers - are brilliant and capable. Our job is to surround them w/ resources and then get out of their way. Our model is a holistic one that includes emotional & financial supports...#EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) and of course academic help. Mentoring, mental health support, coaching, fun activities, emergency funds, and more. And three years ago, we adopted an early childhood program for our Scholars' children to simultaneously help them start school ready. #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Whole family approach is the way to go.


[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) There really isn't anything we aren't able to help our Scholars through b/c we know the biggest derailments happen for them outside of the classroom. And we take this same approach with our national work on behalf of all #studentparents... #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) They're capable and brilliant and our job is to remove the systemic barriers to their success. We want to help #highered institutions and policymakers tear down those barriers to make a postsecondary credential a reality for more parents across the country. #EquityChat

[@lamkeithcurry](#) Q4 [@NicoleLynnLewis](#). How has the pandemic affected student parents in college right now? Has it made it easier for them or more challenging? [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Student parents were already in crisis before COVID. Food & housing insecurity, unemployment, trying to piecemeal childcare together, mental health challenges - we saw these things happening every day w/ our Scholars & student parents everywhere before March 2020. #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) The pandemic just threw these challenges into overdrive so they were among the hardest hit by COVID. Student parents are more likely to be Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Indigenous, low income, & single mothers - groups that have shouldered the weight of this pandemic. #EquityChat


[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Some things in the past 2 yrs have been helpful to parenting students like more online & asynchronous classes, which have helped alleviate transportation challenges, as well as more attention to basic needs insecurity among college students (this group has  rates). #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) The big things we stress to institutions are that flexibility is KEY (for ex: online courses aren't ideal for every student parent), and they must resist the urge to return to "normal" as COVID rates go down & masks come off. Normal was a hard place to be for MANY. #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q5 [@NicoleLynnLewis](#). What are some of the programs and policies that colleges and universities have initiated in the recent past that are helpful for student parents? [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) We love to see colleges collecting data on #StudentParents. That doesn't sound exciting but most colleges & universities don't track the parenting status of their students. It's such a key data point, but it's not happening, which means schools are flying blind. #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Have to shout out [@MonroeCC](#) and [@MaryAnnDeMario](#) for leading the way on this data collection as well as the schools in [@SupportGenHope's](#) #FamilyU Cohort that are starting to collect it: [@GeorgeMasonU](#) [@montgomerycoll](#) [@NOVAcommcollege](#) and [@TrinityDC](#).

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[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Once you collect the data, you have to do something with it. Taking a good look at policies to ensure you're being inclusive of #studentparents is important. Getting rid of "No kids on campus" or requiring all freshman to live on campus are good examples. #EquityChat



[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) We also want to see schools engaging #studentparents in this work. As opposed to making decisions FOR them, ask them to help you MAKE the decisions. These students are often left out of engagement/leadership opportunities, but they're the experts. #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) I could go on & on, but I'll just add that student parent work is racial justice work. Connecting these efforts to your institution's DEI strategies is extremely important. It can help you move from RE statements to RE actions in a tangible and impactful way. #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) And that we haven't made that connection is puzzling-we have an image that once people become parents that it's all smooth sailing and picket fences...

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Agreed

[@lamkeithcurry](#) Q6 [@NicoleLynnLewis](#). What's a favorite book that you've read last year and why? [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) I had a baby 10 months ago, so honestly, I haven't been able to read a book.  

BUT I have started listening to [@BreneBrown's](#) "Dare to Lead" podcast, and I love it. Can I cheat and use a podcast instead!? #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Absolutely! I love her series with her sisters too

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Ooooh, I need to look into that one...

[@ahandsintheair](#) Definitely not cheating. That's a great podcast!

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) [GIF: <https://twitter.com/i/status/1509683668654112768>]

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q7 [@NicoleLynnLewis](#). As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career? What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders? [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) #EquityChat
[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) As a female leader, ppl make a lot of assumptions about you & discount your talent, intelligence, & capabilities before you even enter the room.

I launched an org 12 years ago with nearly 30 employees, released a book that was named one of the best books of 2021... #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) by [@NPR](#), speak all over the country, etc., and STILL one of the top questions I'm asked is if [@SupportGenHope](#) is my HOBBY?!

Be prepared to be your own biggest cheerleader AND find a crew of people who will join your squad b/c you'll deal with this a lot. #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) And if you're a woman of color - particularly a Black woman - the road will be even more difficult. People will question your WORTH.

So, cheer yourself on, cheer on other women, assemble your squad, and walk in your brilliance every day. #EquityChat

[@SDMesaPrez](#) And as accomplices we must step up to cheer, support and as

[@BLoveSoulPower](#)

says #holdthepole

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) YES.

[@ahandsintheair](#) ❤️ #WalkInBrillianceEveryday 🙌🏾🙌🏾🙌🏾🙌🏾🙌🏾 Excellent advice!

[@ahandsintheair](#) And....a strong squad is EVERYTHING!

[@lamkeithcurry](#) Q8 [@NicoleLynnLewis](#). Last question for the evening. What gives you hope? [@SDMesPrez](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) #EquityChat

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Our Scholars, their children, people who are doing GREAT work in this space every day, and of course, my babies. I want them to have a better world so I have to get up every day and make it happen. #EquityChat



[@SDMesaPrez](#) Beautiful

[@Kellymotivates](#) What a beautiful family!! I still can't believe how quickly they're growing!! Congratulations on all that you do!!

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Aw, thank you! I know, I'm still trying to find a way to make time stand still... 🙏

[@SDMesaPrez](#) TY @NicoleLynnLewis @SupportGenHope for sharing your work - go get #PregnantGirl today! Join us next wk. for Best of #EquityChat @CollegeFutures - we share our episode w/ @Fharris3 @SDSU & @DrKingTina @swc_news & @SDCCEEDU President-elect! @lamkeithcurry @equityavengers OUT!

[@NicoleLynnLewis](#) Thanks for having me!

[@SDMesaPrez](#) ❤️❤️❤️