

Playing “The Race Cards” from 904WARD can create safe spaces for building understanding and advancing equity. Featuring Dr. Kimberly Allen.

“The Race Cards” is an interactive resource kit and activity designed for small groups. Working to end racism so that everyone thrives requires some uncomfortable conversations to be facilitated, because too often discussions about race either stay at the surface level or happen only among audiences steeped in knowledge about sociology, history, systemic racism, and privilege. The Race Cards create a safe space for an honest, authentic discussion in a way that is accessible to everyone.

Dr. Kimberly Allen is the inaugural CEO of 904WARD. Her organization evolved the Jacksonville 904 dialing code into a new nonprofit whose mission is to create racial healing and equity through deep conversations and learning, trusting relationships, and collective action. Episode host Sarah Hohman invites Dr. Kimberly Allen and 904 resident Sharon LaSure-Roy to reflect on the practical application of The Race Cards and report on their use in a workshop at the Movement is Life annual caucus.

Link to 904WARD resource page: <https://904ward.org/racecards/>

Sarah: Hello and welcome to another episode of the Health Disparities podcast, a program of Movement Is Life. My name is Sarah Hohman, and I'm a member of the Movement Is Life Steering Committee. And I'm also a senior associate with the health policy firm Capital Associates. We are recording this podcast live and in person at the annual Movement Is Life Caucus, where several hundred health equity advocates are receiving their annual booster of actionable ideas, insights, and inspiration. It's my pleasure to be joined today by two wonderful guests from the Sunshine state of Florida. In fact, both of my guests hail from the same dialing code 904, which has long been the zip code of Jacksonville, Florida. My first guest is Dr. Kimberly Allen. Her organization evolved the 904-dialing code into 9-0-Forward, whose mission is creating racial healing and equity through deep conversations and learning, trusting relationships and collective action, and Dr. Allen is the inaugural CEO.

Dr. Kimberly Allen: Thank you so much for having me.

Sarah: I am also joined by Sharon LaSure-Roy. She is Vice President Social Marketing with Vice Star Credit Union and has been for many years a member of the Movement As Life steering committee and deeply involved with community health initiatives in the 904 zip code as well. Welcome, Sharon.

Sharon: Thank you for having me. I'm very excited. This is going to be a great conversation.

Sarah: Dr. Allen. Your workshop here at the Movement is Life Caucus titled, “Playing the Race Card: Conversations on Racial Healing and Equity”, and your website describes your program as working to end racism so that

everyone thrives because too often discussions about race either stay at the surface level or happen only among audiences steeped in knowledge about sociology, history, systemic racism and privilege. But the goal of your race cards is to facilitate an honest, authentic discussion in a way that is accessible to everyone. So, could you walk us through the race cards concept and how it came to be and how does it work?

Dr. Kimberly Allen: Absolutely. So, we launched the race cards in 2018, but it was after about three years of us having conversations ourselves. We were colleagues, we were friends, we were coworkers, we were working together with each other in some way, shape or form and we were all grieved by the moments that were George Floyd like, but COVID was not a factor that stopped everyone. And we were asking ourselves a lot of the questions that appear on the race cards and we thought over some time, you know, people really need to have these discussions that we are having. They were hard, they were raw, they were honest. We cried. We asked the difficult questions, we said the quiet parts out loud. And we knew that our community could benefit from having a tool like the race cards. So that on a massive scale, as a community, we can start to address our challenges with race and racism.

And so, we went through this iterative process of writing down questions that we've been asking around our table of discussion. We worked with sociologists, we worked with you name it, educators, folks in the hospital and healthcare space to create the questions, and we launched our first deck and our first community conversation in January of 2018 with over 300 people showing up. We have three different types of questions. We have the personal questions. It's always easy to talk about yourself and your upbringing. So, we asked questions like, you know, what kinds of conversations did you grow up having at your dinner table about how to navigate people, places and systems because of your race? We asked philosophical questions, how do you think about race? How do you define it even? And then we asked the topical hot button questions like, is America a racist country? Those are conversations that we were having, and we figured there would be other people who want to have it too. So, we trained people to be able to facilitate those conversations, but ultimately, we wanted there to be no barrier to anyone being able to engage in our conversations.

Sarah: Sharon, what do you like about this concept, the concept of race cards and engaging in these conversations, and how does it fit within the work that, that you do and that you're passionate about?

Sharon: I think the most important thing is that it, they allow you to have the conversation. You know, people think of things like a game, you know, they're comfortable with, oh, here are these cards. Is it like a game? So at least it gives you the ability to open up and look at it. When I was at Florida Blue, I led our ERG group called Aspire, which was the largest resource group for people of color. And we actually used the cards in an uncomfortable conversation, and we called them "*Living While Black*". That was the series where we tackled unconscious bias in healthcare. You know, at the time of George Floyd when that happened, we were already having these conversations called Livermore Black, so people understood and it was, it was pretty raw, but we took the cards and actually surveyed the people that would be attending one of the "*Living While Black*" sessions and used the cards and the conversations with Dr. Allen to help continue it. Because when you, when that first happened, it was dramatic. Like, everybody's like, what can we do even as an organization? Like what do we do? What do we do? And having the conversations and using the cards or, and I hate to say comfortable, because these are uncomfortable conversations, but it made it a safe space. At VyStar Credit Union, where I work now, we had a session with all of the, we call them VRGs because it's VyStar Resource Groups, but with our employee resource groups to facilitate the discussion. And now I'm going to lead it from my marketing department in the future because people are like, well, what are these cards? They come in my office, they see them, and it gives me the opportunity to explain it and why they're important. At first, people are like, what we're going to talk about race? Yes, because here is a safe space where we could talk about it, where you can understand how people of color feel or you know, of any class or gender, you can have that conversation. Whatever the cards is so meaningful because it's, have you ever had to talk to your child about what to do when the police stops you? Like I have a black boy. Like, I mean, he is a man now, and I'm so proud of him, but we have to talk to him about that. We lived in a country club once and he didn't want to put the sticker on his little sportsy car that he was working on. And I said, if you don't put that sticker on there, every time you're going to get stopped coming in the gate. You're like, they can't call us all the time. And well, they look at me funny. The race cards are so important for community dialogue and conversation. You can take it into the workforce. It's so much better than sitting around the water fountain or at VyStar, we get free coffee and water. So, we sit around there and talk about it. So that's how I feel about it.

Sarah: I've been struck by the ripple effect of these cards and the conversations that they spur as well. I mean, these are uncomfortable conversations when you have them, but it also empowers the people sitting around that first table to then take them and continue to have those conversations. And so just really facilitating additional conversations beyond the workshop, beyond that first conversation. Dr. Allen, how did you feel that today's workshop went? I was there and participated and found it to be very impactful. But what was kind of your takeaways from the conversation and how did today's groups do?

Dr. Kimberly Allen: I thought today's session was outstanding. Anytime people leave and they feel like they have another tool in their toolkit to help address what they see happening around them, that enlightens my whole world because that's what we have to do. We have to be willing to have the conversations, and folks, you know, it starts in that room with those folks who are sitting around the table, and they will take it out and it will multiply. And before long, we're having an entire country that's having these conversations and that warms my heart that we can do this and I believe we can. I know we can. And then, ultimately, what I really took away personally from the conversations today was even in talking about difficult topics, answering some really tough questions, sharing some really personal stories, people did not, one didn't want to get up from the table. They wanted to keep talking, they wanted to keep going. And I even kept them a few minutes later. But also, people laughed and I think life is hard. Talking about racism is hard. And if you can sit at a table with a group of folks and share some of the most intimate details about yourself and leave in laughter saying that you want to continue this, then I know it's going to keep going. So, for me, that was the key takeaway away that amongst all this difference, at the end of the day, people were able to express that we still want the same things and we're going to walk away from this experience still in community with each other, as we go out and build community in other places.

Sharon: Yeah, that's, that's so powerful that you said that because you talked about building community, but you know, the workshop and even participating in 904, in our county, it's about being vulnerable and allowing yourself to be vulnerable, but then it makes you approachable. So now I'm listening, I hear what this person says because, well I may not have had to experience that, but to be at a table with people who are willing to understand and listen, that vulnerability makes it a homerun. It makes it approachable. And that's why people don't want to get up from the table because they want to continue the conversation. So what's great about

that conversation is we taking it, even if it's one small group at a time outside of a workshop or the why or Florida Blue or VyStar. That whole train the trainer thing is exciting for me because it's like, okay, we learned, so now we can have the conversation and it's an intelligent conversation and it's, yes, it's uncomfortable but it's approachable and people do have a level of vulnerability, because I know when we did it before it was like people got emotional and you know, sometimes you want to say bring out the tissue. And it's not just for the person telling the story, it's for the people listening realizing that, oh my goodness. And then they could say, I'm so sorry this happened to you, but they leave with a different understanding.

Sarah: Yeah, our table played four cards out of the entire deck and people did want to sit and stay even through lunch and continue to play. But it's spurred ideas for other people to flip a card over before they played cards with their friends, flip a card over from this deck and start their fun evening with that type of conversation. And so really just want to keep that momentum. Sharon, can you talk a little bit about the health disparities and inequities that you've seen and work to mitigate in the 904-zip code? And where does 904 fit into those efforts? You've mentioned that you've played these race cards and continue to use them, but can you expand a little bit more on that?

Sharon: Yes. I think that the one thing, if you don't talk about inequities, they don't exist and the race cards, I almost feel like wanting to call them more than just race cards because they're community cards to me, they spur that conversation, and I said earlier about making it approachable so that people are willing to have the conversation. Because a lot of times people don't want to have the conversation. And I know in the work that I've done at Florida Blue and continue to do at VyStar, it's about having those conversations and making sure that there's, what do I say, an atmosphere of acceptance, if that's the right way to say it, and the race cards help do that. You can't just come up to people and say, "Hey you guys, we need, this is a food desert here and like we need to do something about it. You guys suck because you're not doing it." Like, you just can't say it. However, if you have a community conversation and you start with questions that have been vetted by researchers, by Dr. Allen, the researcher, no it really helps know that it's coming from a viable source. And I think that's the key here, in getting back to what you were really asking about, how do these cards help eliminate health equity or even address social injustice, it's the fact that we have them, and we can utilize them as a base for the conversation. That is so key because you cannot

go accusing people of you are not helping in any form or fashion. They have to understand what's happening first. And sometimes it's going to take a little personal journey for them to help understand that. It's like people say, pull yourself up from your bootstraps. They need to understand I had no boots or I had no straps to pull up and why didn't I have any boots? Oh, because they put the highway through the major neighborhood where they were making the boots and the community was thriving. Like, oh, well why did they put that highway there? Oh well they put that highway there all around 95. They ran right through communities of color. So now they have to find a whole nother way, but having the cards helps people understand that a simple question that you ask could understand that because do you believe in redlining? Well, somebody with knowledge, because it's a community, right, everybody brings a different level of knowledge. Well, yes, because they put the highway through here or I'm in banking, well wait a minute, why aren't we helping? How do we help people get mortgages? Are we helping educate people or are we just denying them? Because the first step to even ending generational poverty is you got to have some real estate, right? You have to have something to pass on. You have to have a place to live. You have to have access to funds. So that's what I like about the race cards. You don't just jump into it because there's plenty ways to jump into the problem. We know, we live in Florida, but you have to come to a point where from understanding.

Dr. Kimberly Allen: Sharon, I love that you say that because I think what it also does is take the pressure and the attention off of the individuals, because so often we are accusing the individuals of not being interested in their healthcare or not being interested in, you know, creating generational wealth when people are seriously and severely limited in their ability to do some of those things because of systems and structures that were put in place to keep them from doing it in the first place or doing things well. And so, the ramifications of that are still present with us today. And so that's why we say you have to be willing to acknowledge that history, right, because the history takes sort of the individual players out of it and says, okay, how did we get here? What were those rules, those laws, those policies, those practices, that highway, what was that highway that was put in the way that split that neighborhood up and really drove the disinvestment in those communities? The reason we don't have grocery stores, the reason that the sidewalks are not functional, right? The reason that they're septic tanks and things like that, that just are harmful to the communities, and it really takes the onus off of the individual and says, no, we have a bigger

- responsibility here to really understand these communities and understand how these communities have survived and thrived despite these things.
- Sharon: You know, when you pull out the cards and you start talking, people think, well I'm not responsible, it wasn't me, it wasn't me. And it's like, no, it wasn't you, we're just acknowledging things happen. There's a law in place. Did you realize that even though people were supposed to be protected from discrimination and housing that didn't happen, or we only could get a loan or certain people can only get a loan to live in a particular zip code that's next to the industrial plant. So how does that help? Like now my health is impacted. My kids can't walk to school because they've got to walk past the industrial place. So, the cards help us understand from experiences and what's going on right now, not holding you individually accountable or me because you know, obviously I can't be held individually accountable. And I think that's the conversation people are afraid to have. And maybe it's because once you realize what other people did, you might have a sense of guilt. And sometimes it's okay to have a sense of guilt, just tackle it and realize, okay, I'm not personally accountable, but I can help move us forward. And if a person that is not even a person of color says I'm going to be a train the trainers, that's even more powerful for they're taking that knowledge on so that they can help other people.
- Sarah: So, a little bit of guilt spurs a bit more action then.
- Sharon: Yes, well, that may be. Sometimes it does. It's like if you are a kid and you touch the hot stove and because your mom told you don't touch it, you're going to feel guilt, but then you won't go back and touch the stove again.
- Sarah: And Dr. Allen, how have you seen this approach or the race cards spread beyond Jacksonville and across the country and across the world?
- Dr. Kimberly Allen: I think we're just seeing the beginnings of it. It has been a local phenomenon then it, sort of spread out into state. Once we created the app, we saw the cards go in places that we have not even stepped foot in some of these places. Even when we were selling the physical decks people were ordering them from Washington state, from Canada, like from all over that we haven't been. And so, you know, I think in the moment that we're in right now, I think we have barely begun to scratch the surface of what these cards will enable people to do and the conversations that people can have. But I'm excited for this opportunity here at the conference to even be able to share it because there were people from California, from New York, from Philly, from all over the place who are going to take these cards and they're going to have a life of their own in these places and that excites me. So, I think, I think there's so much, so

much we can learn from this. We're like going to plan for some updates to the app to like start getting people on a question of the week sort of thing. Just to engage those folks who, who downloaded it over in London, you know and then ask for feedback too about, you know, in your particular neck of the woods, wherever that might be, what are those questions that are top of mind for you that we can include so that people can start to see themselves and their culture represented in these questions too. We've done and we're getting ready to even ramp it up more, but we've done a good job of not making this just a black versus white sort of conversation. But what does it look like to have an international conversation about race? What does it look like to have a regional conversation about race? Because we are talking about it in a southern context. What does it look like on the west coast? What does it look like, like I said, over in the UK, you know, I think we got a lot of possibility.

Sarah: Earlier you mentioned the, the physical deck of cards and perhaps some digital resources. Can you expand upon what resources 9-0-Forward has and how folks may be able to access those?

Dr. Kimberly Allen: Absolutely. So, you heard me mention the app and that is the digital version of the race card. So, we worked with some fantastic sponsors Mayo Clinic being one of them in addition to Black Diamond. Helping to help us create take the cards that were in a physical form with all of its questions, all of the instructions, all of the cool graphics and we've created the 9-0-Forward race cards app. And it's in all of the Apple stores, the Google stores, and I'm an Apple person, so I apologize for not knowing the Google store's name, but it's in all of the major stores where you can download it onto your phone. It has a timer built in to help guide discussion. And you can shuffle the cards. It looks very identical to the physical deck, but we just have the ability to update it more frequently. Take some feedback from, from folks who are using the app and make it better and make the questions better, fine tune the questions in real time. So, it's a really fantastic tool that we have. In addition to on our website, we have a resources page where we are saying, here are things that you can read, you can listen to, you can watch that can help you on your journey. We breakdown a lot of terms and lingo and jargon that we tend to use when we're talking about racial equity work. We breakdown acronyms, a lot of the ABCs and Q123s of the DEI space, we break those down. In addition to, I love reading, so we, we have lots of books that we recommended. I recommended a few in our workshop today, podcast videos that we're watching, but one of the things that we encourage people to do on this journey, you're starting with the race cards and I

talked about this sort of spectrum of being involved in racial equity work. And I really do believe that starting with the race cards is a fantastic way to dip your toe in that water and start to build the muscles necessary to be swimming out in the deep end, which some of our work goes into the deep end, but really, you know, educating yourself along the way is a must. We can never stop reading and learning and hearing different perspectives. And so, we host book clubs and things like that just to keep people thinking about this ever-evolving world that we're in and how we can address racism together.

Sarah: And the race cards are intended to be that first step, right, this is the first conversation. Perhaps it's that initial thing that gets people around a table and has them with a physical deck of cards, perhaps gives them something to physically hold and start that conversation. But I know even today I heard things mentioned that I wasn't educated on and hadn't heard those perspectives and so that leads me to go read or listen to an additional podcast or something like that. So, I think that's an additional piece of these cards is it really is just a first step, but in gathering people and you know, you just want to continue to expand upon that in your own knowledge too.

Dr. Kimberly Allen: Absolutely. And you can, you can ask those questions, the same question a hundred times and get 200 different conversations when you have it. That's how I think powerful the tool is. And as long as folks are I don't want to say not afraid because I think you do it afraid, I think that's what courage is you do it afraid but don't run from the discomfort or the fear or the anxiety that might come along with having these conversations. We have to flex that muscle too. And what I like to say is, you know, I don't believe in no judgment. I know folks say like this is a judgment free zone. I'm a stickler for words. And so, saying that there, I think we all make judgements all the time because that's just the nature of our brains and how it works, but what I would encourage us to do is to call those judgments out and I say, say the quiet part out loud. Call those judgments out so that you can start to work through where they come from, why you might be apprehensive about engaging in a conversation like this. Is it the location? Is it the people? Is it the setting? Is it the time of day? Whatever it is, let's try and pinpoint that so that we can get you engaged, but we have to talk.

Sharon: The fact that you can talk about that judgment or that perception or why you feel that way in an environment using the cards and all the digital tools to help with the conversation that's it. You got help. You know, sometimes

you're like, well actually in, you know, 1619, this is what happened. Just factual, but the cards help us do that. It just really does.

Sarah: As a facilitator, you set a few ground rules earlier, just a few, but it stuck with me because you said, you know, it's a safe space but it's also a brave space. And so, people were really encouraged to come and be authentic and know that there aren't wrong answers, but if, you know, again, if there's a factual wrong answer, then you know, you're surrounded by people that you're willing to have those conversations with and feel brave in that space.

Sharon: Absolutely. And I'm really even particular about the safety word because I want to say, I can't say that what happens in the space won't prick you or make or you feel uncomfortable, that's not the safety I'm talking about, but I want you to feel safe enough to be vulnerable and open up because there is a level of intimacy that comes from being involved in these conversations. And what we don't want to do is have these conversations and someone goes and says, you know, well, Sharon said this is part of our conversation and it becomes punitive to her. That's not a safe space, right? And so, in terms of safety, making sure I say I operate by Vegas rules, what happens here stays here. Right, but it's funny and it gets folks loosened up, but the idea being we need to create as many spaces as possible where people can bring their authentic experiences to the table without worrying about it being punitive or coming back to in some way antagonize them when what we're trying to do is create and build bridges. So that's one of the spaces. And being open-minded, there's a responsibility on the other side of hearing some of those things. And we have to be open-minded to what we're hearing. I've heard people say things like, my grandfather was a Klan member, right? That can't be easy to share in spaces, right? So, we, how do we give people the, the space to be able to even share that and as the, the listener be responsible enough to have and hold that in that space, in particular, if I'm telling you, you know, I have a real fear of Klansmen and you have, you drop this information in this space. So, we have to also be open to hearing some things that are difficult. And if we do it in a respectful way. I'm never going to advocate for people being disrespectful, but our spaces, what I say is not conflict free. There is good conflict to have. We can healthily disagree on some things and that's okay, too. But what we can't do is if we offend someone, we got to say sorry. We can't allow hurt to sit, right? We've lost the art of saying I'm sorry that, you know, and leaving it there. So, creating those conditions I think allow people to feel like they can be open and honest and sharing them themselves and then that creates new, that

leaves room for new relationships to bud. In cases where folks may have been strangers walking in there exchanging numbers on the way out the door.

Sarah: I would love to hear from you both on this question. Could you share with, with our listeners a call to action? I know it's hard to find just one, but, if possible, just one call to action that you suggest they keep in mind throughout the next year,

Sharon: If it's about the race cards, I'd say order them and open them. Don't let them just sit there with the package wrapped up waiting for some weird time. Like order them, open them and be open to the conversation with whether your colleagues and sometimes your family because it's a good conversation to have with your family. What you, we talk about our own perceptions and then we go to work and then we, why not do it with your family? I just think that'd be the one takeaway or something that I would say order the cards, open them and then be open-minded. That's three, isn't it?

Sarah: I'll give you a pass. Dr. Allen.

Dr. Kimberly Allen: This is the same sort of call at the end of the workshop that I did and it sticks with me because I hear people and I hear we have some folks who sort of regularly are sort of poking at us about the work that we do and the way that we do it. And they'll say things like, well, you know, if white people created this problem, white people are responsible for fixing it. That's not my problem. Like, I'm not going to get involved. And I say, if after all this time we have not received the level of treatment, equity and things that we are looking for, it is time that we have to tell people how we expect to be treated. And what that means is we have to, as people of color, as black people, Asian, native Americans indigenous, as Latinx, we have to tell our stories. We got to tell them because we've been making the assumption all this time that they know what they're doing. White people know what they're doing when they offend me, when they, when that microaggression shows up at work and they're telling me my hair looks professional and not realizing that that's a double-sided comment, right? We, but really and truly a lot of people don't know, and we have to take the time to share stories. On the other side of that, I think white people who have become allies in this work who have had their awakening moment have to also tell their stories.

A young lady in the workshop shop session brought up about white abolitionist and how they've largely been excluded from the stories of civil rights and things. And in part, part of the reason I think we have such a challenge with having white allies is because they don't see themselves in

the allyship role. They haven't historically seen themselves in that role because they've been left out. And so, that means that as a white person who has come into the role of ally, you also have to tell your story about how you got to this place. We don't get to liberation sitting on our stories because in our stories is a lot of history, there's a lot of how to, there is a blueprint for how we make progress and there are little ingredients in the recipe that we get every time we hear a different story. And it's the hearing multiples of those stories that we start to okay, so this is what we need to do and then we come out with this amazing cake on the other side, this delicious like cake. And I think that's what liberation is, but we have to start to tell the stories to understand those little pieces, so that we can start to create them again and again and again and we scale it so that we get to the point where we're not having to fight these same battles.

Sarah: It's like having a recipe.

Dr. Kimberly Allen: It is, it is. The best carrot cake.

Sharon: No, the best. You just keep passing it on and the more you make it, the better you become at it. That's right.

Sarah: Well, I think our cake is about baked for today. Thank you so much Dr. Allen and Sharon LeSure-Roy for sharing your insights with us here on the Health Disparities Podcast today. It truly has been a pleasure and we hope that you can join us again here in the future. A quick note to our listeners, you'll be able to access Caucus presentations on our website in the coming weeks at www.movementislifecaucus.com. And if you liked the episode today, please do let your friends and colleagues know about the Health Disparities Podcast. Until next time, I am Sarah Hohman saying, thanks for listening. Be safe and be well.

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