

Lesley Kennedy

Lesley Kennedy has dedicated over two decades of her career to fortifying Chicago's non-profit sector. In 2023, Lesley made a remarkable career shift to center birth justice as her main professional focus. Most recently she served as Director of Strategy and Organizational Development for the Chicago South Side Birth Center. Lesley is a student midwife, birth assistant, and doula. Lesley is the proprietor of a thriving consulting practice that predominantly centers on organization development, fostering positive organizational cultures, and providing leadership coaching. Lesley currently coaches systems change leaders across the country with the Obama Foundation's My Brothers Keeper Initiative. Lesley held key positions, including Chief Equity Officer for Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana, where she played a pivotal role in advancing equity initiatives. Additionally, she served as the Director of Strategy and Organization Development at Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA), where she provided invaluable support in shaping the organization's internal culture and strategic direction.

Lesley's extensive experience also includes her role as the Chief Program Officer at Youth & Opportunity United (Y.O.U.), where she oversaw the development of Y.O.U.'s comprehensive program strategy and managed a team of over 50 staff members across 11 program sites. Her contributions to the non-profit sector have left an indelible mark.

Prior to her tenure at Y.O.U., Lesley spent five years as a Senior Program Officer at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, where she spearheaded and managed the Foundation's Child and Youth Education as well as Health and Wellness Portfolios. She was instrumental in integrating a racial equity perspective into the Foundation's philanthropic initiatives.

Lesley's dedication to advancing racial equity also extended to her roles at Y.O.U. and CGLA, where she introduced racial equity training for all staff members. In 2018, Lesley served as an Advisory Committee member for Equity in the Center's report, "Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture." Her commitment to equity and inclusion is truly commendable.

Lesley holds a master's degree in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago and a bachelor's degree in English and Women's Studies from Stephens College. She is a certified Newfield Network personal and professional coach, offering capacity-building and leadership development consulting services to non-profit organizations.

In addition to her consulting work, Lesley served as an instructor on inclusive leadership at the University of Chicago's Crown School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice. She has also been a guest lecturer with the Baumhart Scholars Program at Loyola University's Quinlan School of Business.

Lesley resides happily on the south side of Chicago with her husband and three young people.