

“SURJing Into The Future”

By Melissa Leiden

Spending an afternoon grocery shopping at the West Side Market you wouldn't expect to see a group of citizens protesting for racial justice. Or, if you're at an Indians game on a sunny day, you wouldn't imagine crossing paths with protesters at the entrance of the gate, yet this is exactly what Dave Lima of Mentor, Ohio advocates for.

Dave Lima is a member of Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ) where he and others work to dismantle white supremacy in the community by responding to the requests of various groups that are seeking social justice. There is a chapter of SURJ here in NorthEast Ohio made up of 400 members lead by a steering committee of 8-10 individuals who take responsibility to chart a course. SURJ takes crucial steps to change inequality by providing a space to build relationships, conduct political investigation and develop skills.

As a community leader, Mr. Lima feels very strongly that every human must be treated equally and he shows his support through SURJ. As someone who stands up for what he's passionate about, Mr. Lima did not hold back when expressing his thoughts on our immigration laws. He described our laws as bad laws and explained how they can cause good people to be labeled as bad.

SURJ campaigns for every human to be treated with respect and kindness, yet when people use terms such as “illegal aliens” for a way to describe immigrants, Lima states this is, “not a way to describe another human being, it's a way to describe someone that you dehumanize by virtue of the label you choose.” Mr. Lima's words speak to how boldly he will show his support for those who are oppressed and how he will not back down to opposers. SURJ especially steps in when dealing with immigrants whose families are torn apart. Members of SURJ were also asked to support immigrants who are seeking to escape the violence in their lives by connecting them with volunteers from the United States. This gives immigrants a much deserved chance to get out of detention and the hope for a better life.

While discussing how immigration laws have changed under President Donald Trump, Lima explains how many poor laws resulted from defining a group of people as others. He explained how, “there's us and then there's these others, and that's exactly what's happening in our immigration situation today.” People fail to realize that they can be similar to a person who resides in a different country, and this way of thinking is how the injustice begins. Lima is a strong believer of the power a person has over the way they think, and how it can make a difference in their actions.

When asked who has made an impact on him the most, Mr. Lima spoke very profoundly in an excited manner about a past colleague Albert Ellis. He trained with Albert whilst becoming a psychotherapist and was able to take away many great lessons from him. Mr. Lima was able to learn from Albert that when an event happens, whether it's good or bad, you think about it then you respond. Yet, many different people have contrasting views, perspectives and theories which ultimately causes controversy. “We can't control the world around us, not nearly as much as we can control how we think about the world.” By learning this from Albert Ellis, Mr. Lima was able to apply this way of thinking not only to himself but when he is out campaigning for justice.

With this perspective, Mr. Lima is able to open the eyes of those who disagree with him about the topic of immigration.

Another great lesson Mr. Lima was able to take away from Albert Ellis is that there isn't a label you can apply to a person that is complete. Mr. Lima explained this by stating, "There are no good people, there are no bad people, there are people that act good or bad based on their values. We can judge people on people's behavior but we should never judge people." Based upon Mr. Lima's efforts with SURJ, a mindset like that will take him far with his great work.