

Dr. Michele Bria – Press Biography

Dr. Bria serves as Chief Executive Officer of Journey House, a community-based organization on Milwaukee's near-south side that empowers families to move out of poverty by offering adult education, workforce readiness, youth development, and family engagement programs. Journey House annually serves more than 8,425 low-income, urban youth and families at five locations. Under Dr. Bria's leadership of over 22 years, the annual operating budget increased from \$200K (1996) to \$3.2MM (2018) and secured over \$22.5MM in capital for catalytic economic development high-impact projects. Families served increased from 600 (1996) to 8,425 (2018) per year. Dr. Bria received her doctoral degree from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and earned her Bachelors of Arts and Masters of Arts from Marquette University.

She developed model state and national award-winning programs and partnerships. She co-founded a citywide collaborative, the United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee, which built a technological infrastructure via a web-based database portal and mobilizes resources for citywide community development. Dr. Bria cultivated neighborhood schools' relationships that designed a comprehensive economic and family development model to improve an economically challenged and culturally diverse neighborhood. She convenes partnerships with local universities, community organizations, and corporations to implement lifelong learning, workforce development, and youth development programs that increase the quality of life in Milwaukee neighborhoods.

Based on research identifying education as the most effective strategy to end generational poverty, Journey House provides a rigorous educational program coupled with workforce development and academic/arts/athletic programs that assist economically challenged youth to stay safe, finish high school and continue their education. Journey House also provides GED in English and Spanish and English Language classes for adult learners so that parents can earn livable wages for their families. In addition, the organization runs youth leadership and college-bound intensive programs, as well as the largest, most organized inner-city urban youth football league, the Journey House Packers Football Program, and the longest running little league in the USA with a living MLB player: the Felix Mantilla Little League and Criollos Travel Baseball Teams. Community Building Initiatives (CBI) and Youth Empowerment Seminar (YES!) are integrated into all Journey House Programs.

Dr. Bria successfully negotiated two innovative, ground-breaking development agreements with Milwaukee Public Schools and Milwaukee County, which provide land homes and partnership opportunities for new construction of a \$6MM 34,000 square foot Journey House Center for Family Learning and Youth Athletics (2012) and \$3MM Journey House Packers Football Stadium (2013). The football stadium is the only one in the United States that contains an NFL logo outside of a NFL stadium. The Green Bay Packers donated the former Green Bay Packers Ray Nitschke Practice Field to provide a safe place for urban low-income youth football. Both projects have provided substantial catalytic economic development to Milwaukee's Near Southside. In 2018, Dr. Bria is steering a community development of \$2.2MM for new playing fields for the Felix Mantilla Little League, which will include infield synthetic turf for 4 baseball diamonds and natural grass Tee Ball diamond.

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Dr. Bria currently leads the Journey House Campus Housing Initiative in partnership with the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative, Cardinal Capital Development, and a host of other community partners to renovate foreclosed, blighted/nuisance properties into affordable, quality housing for motivated youth who are homeless and aging out of foster care, which also increase public safety and beautifies the neighborhood. In partnership with Cardinal Capital Development, Dr. Bria is spearheading an initiative for a \$8.5MM Clarke Square Apartments for affordable housing for homeless youth aging out of foster care and low-income families, which will be the largest housing development in over two decades in the Clarke Square Neighborhood.

Dr. Bria has held several teaching positions, given numerous lectures, and is a member of many professional organizations and boards:

- Bublr Bikes (Board President)
- Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative (Board Secretary)
- Froedtert Hospital (Board Trustee, Chair of Community Engagement)
- Menomonee Valley Partners (Board Vice-President)
- Milwaukee Public Library (Board Vice-President, Chair of Building Committee)
- United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee (Founding Member)

In August 2016, Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele and County Board Chairman Theo Lipscomb appointed Dr. Bria to the Task Force on Mitchell Park Conservatory Domes. She also serves on the local advisory committees for Community Building Milwaukee and International Association for Human Values' YES! for Schools.

Dr. Bria has received numerous awards for her work in the community. In January 2017, Governor Walker presented her with the State of Wisconsin awarded her with the Martin Luther King Legacy Award for Service. In March 2016, Donald Driver awarded Dr. Bria with the Donald Driver Driven to Achieve Award for her outstanding community efforts. In 2014, Dr. Bria was awarded the Business Journal's Women of Influence Award for Nonprofit Leadership and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin's "Amiga Award" for her dedicated leadership to the Hispanic Community. In 2006, Dr. Bria received the Marquette University All-University Spirit Award for professional achievement of an alumni before the age of 40.