As Kelly Hurst kept listening, she couldn’t help but to speak up.

Taking Crossroads’ training in Understanding and Analyzing Systemic Racism as a teacher for District 186, Hurst was engaged for two-and-a-half days. Growing up in the diverse Hyde Park in Chicago before the “culture shock” of moving to a predominately white Springfield, she pushed forward on issues she saw needed addressed.

“It’s like, yes, we need complete transformation,” Hurst said. “We need to be honest about how this community got built, how we got an east side and a west side. It’s very similar to lots of cities.”
Pushing the Hard Conversations

It caught the attention of Kenley Wade, John Record and Robert Blackwell, members of Springfield Coalition on Dismantling Racism (SCoDR), the group that organized the training. So much so, they asked her to help further the work they started.

Record understood the feeling of the training opening one’s eyes to unrealized realities. Years before, he took part in the training as an employee of SIU School of Medicine. And after two-and-a-half days, he couldn't help but feel he needed to do more. So in 2011, Record and Wade helped establish SCoDR and became the initial co-chairs.

Record explains systemic racism as a form of racism that has been built into the policies and practices of our organizations and institutions over generations. To dismantle them requires organizational leaders willing to undertake a conscious analysis of where racism is present, and a persistent effort to transform themselves.

“We started looking at organizations in Springfield, with a particular eye toward how people are connected in this community. So if they’re in the workforce, their employer is a huge presence for them,” Record said.

“When we’re talking systemic racism, you very quickly have to talk about the issue of power. Who has power, who doesn’t, what does it mean to have power. Anti-racism, and doing it within the place of employment can be a real challenge because of the inherent power dynamics that play out in all organizations.”

Record and Wade established the Springfield Dismantling Racism Fund at the Community Foundation to help organizations have access to the training. While larger entities and organizations have the resources to train their employees, smaller nonprofits may not.

The Fund offers a place where the community can donate and grants can be awarded to make trainings possible.

Record pointed to the Springfield Dominican Anti-Racism team (SDART), born out of a Crossroads training in 2001, which laid important groundwork that enabled SCoDR to grow. Sister Marcelline Koch saw nearly 20 years ago the vast difference between changing the individual and changing systems.

“If you’re going to work on dismantling racism, you’ve got to be in for the long haul,” Koch said. “The enemy is racism, it’s not each other. When the work gets hard, it gets hard to remember that.”

Recently, organizations are diving in. In the wake of Black Lives Matter protests across the nation, Hurst, who is now a national organizer and trainer at Crossroads, said inquiries are up 600 percent. What she’s hearing is that organizations don’t know how to address systemic racism.

“If organizations are ready to do this work and reflect on how we operate, they have to ask the questions: Are we who we say we are? Are we doing what we say we do? Crossroads helps build the container for these conversations.”

For information on starting a field of interest fund, or how to contribute to the Springfield Dismantling Racism Fund, contact the Community Foundation at 217-789-4431 or visit CFLL.org.