WE INVEST IN HEALING & POTENTIAL

BLACK YOUTH LEADERSHIP FUND

CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON 1851

FEBRUARY 2022 TO MARCH 2023

IMPACT REPORT

Prepared by Dr. S. Renee Mitchell

A Visionary HeARTivist

This initiative was done in partnership with:

I AM M.O.R.E.

Making Ourselves Resilient Everyday

CREATE · ENGAGE · NURTURE · TEACH · EMPOWER · REMEMBER

THE SOUL RESTORATION CENTER

This report reviews our programming through the lens of our mission and goals, offering a deeper than typical analysis of the results of our impact. It acknowledges what we learned, need to improve, change and/or keep; and offers perspectives on how we have deeply impacted Black youth and the Black community.

INTRODUCTION

In late 2021, I was approached by then-City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty about her idea to create a Black Youth Leadership Fund (BYLF), with nearly $1 million in city funding. I had just completed my Doctor of Education degree from the University of Oregon. And my nationally award-winning youth organization, I Am MORE *(the subject of my dissertation research)*, was two years old. By that time, I had solidified a three-step, evidence- and strength-based process that had proven it could unearth the internal woundedness that Black youth carry, reconnect them to ancestral resilience and joy, and provide opportunities for them to serve as empowering advocates of racial justice.

My intention was to leverage the impact of my research by writing books and facilitating culturally relevant, trauma-informed trainings for educators and youth advocates around the country. Then, one Sunday, I received an invitation to have lunch. Hardesty had ideas about what she wanted the BYLF to accomplish, but there was no clear roadmap for what success would look like. I agreed to leverage my research knowledge, skills, and experience to join her on this journey. She and **Mayor Ted Wheele**r co-introduced the BYLF proposal to the Portland City Council in February 2022. In March, the council unanimously approved funding. And I was hired as BYLF's inaugural program director.

I began this journey with an impressive resume and multiple community-based awards - including the **2019 Spirit of Portland Award** and the **2021 Gladys McCoy Lifetime Achievement Award** from Multnomah County. I was an award-winning former columnist for The Oregonian newspaper; a co-founder of the city's first drop-in resource center for Black female survivors of domestic violence; a co-investigator of an OHSU, 7-year research study that lowered depression scores in Black women; and the only Black teacher for several years at Portland's most diverse high school.

> ***I couldn't be prouder to bring this investment in Portland's Black youth forward during this Black History Month ... To create a more equal and just Portland, we need to invest in the communities that have been historically disenvested in ... This enriches our entire city.***
>
> Portland City Commissioner
> **Jo Ann Hardesty**
> JoAnn.Hardesty@portlandoregon.gov

So, I embraced the BYLF invitation with excitement, considering the task I was being asked to accomplish had rarely been done in Portland using a scientifically measured approach. Most youth-development organizations, for example, focus primarily on offering youth something to do, i.e. giving them a pen or a paint brush; a soccer ball or basketball; a feel-good "You're so great!' award or a college scholarship. Unfortunately, those short-term accomplishments rarely lead to meaningful transformation for Black youth, in particular, which research documents as THE most prodigiously traumatized adolescent group, as racism often takes a daily toll on Black youths' emotional well-being.

So, it is critical that the city of Portland support those organizations who have (a) "cultural authority," which makes vulnerable youth feel safe and valued, and can increase their feelings of belonging and self-esteem; *and* (b), a documented track record of helping Black youth alleviate signs of racism-related stress, which according to research, starts to show itself in middle school. Without a research-based intervention, Black youth violence can quickly become a chronic condition that leads to a disproportionate engagement with guns.

Although I Am MORE's nationally award-winning programming is only a few years old, it is creating its own lane and gaining national respect. It not only expands Black youths' leadership potential, but our approach also generates an internal shift that helps Black children heal from the inside-out. We also have a trifecta seal of scholarly approval, as our programming is grounded on evidence, research and scientific theory. I am grateful to be given this opportunity to help Portland blaze a trail of hope and healing that lets Black youth know that they are so much MORE than the worst thing that has ever happened to them!

OUR STORY SO FAR

WE INVEST IN HEALING & POTENTIAL
BLACK YOUTH LEADERSHIP FUND

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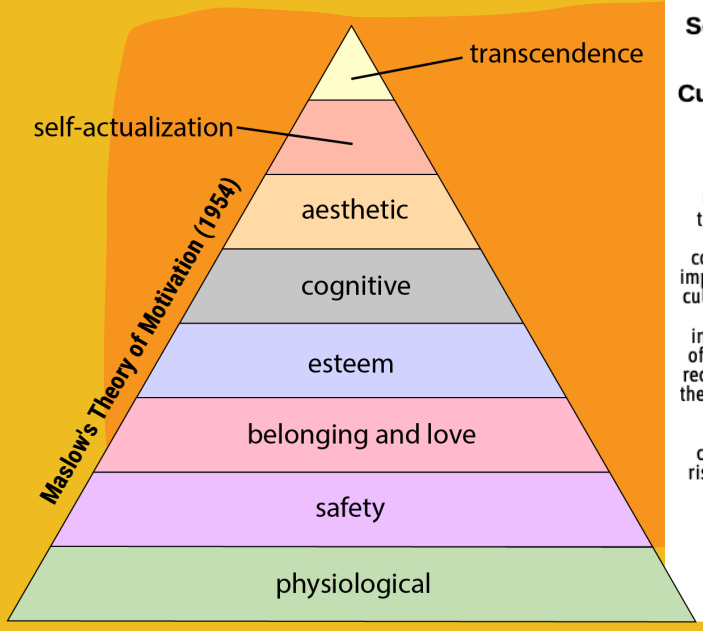
OUR MISSION

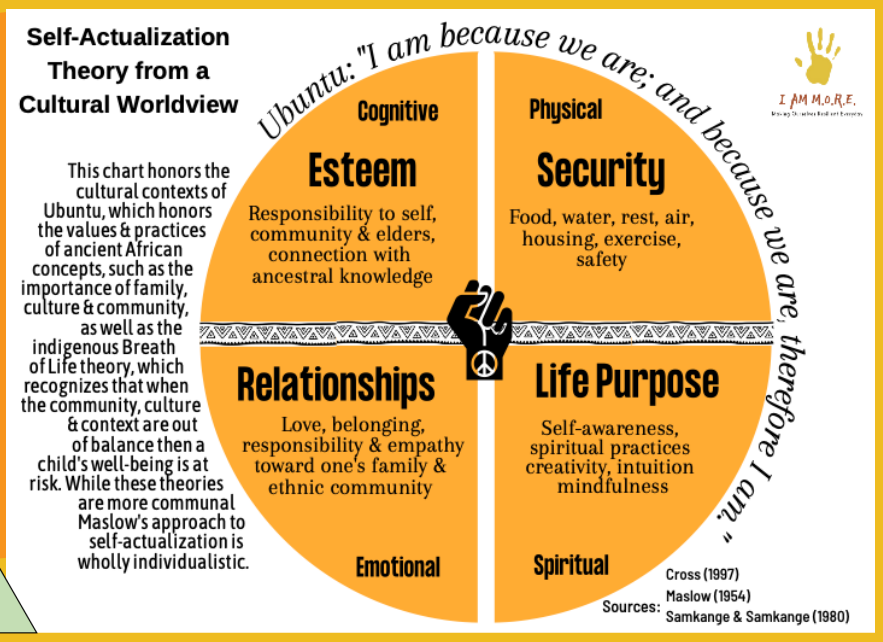
is intrinsically linked to I Am MORE's mission - which is to empower Black youth to look more critically at the life experiences that have shaped them; to give youth access to opportunities to lead, influence and positively change themselves and others; and to heal from racial trauma, so that they can begin to walk through the world, not as victims, but as heroes of their own re-imagined story.

OUR PURPOSE

is to create an environment where heart-centered youth tap into their ancestral resilience, brilliance, and joy while shaping a community and world where Black youth have shaken their cloak of unworthiness - which has been embedded within them from multiple layers of racial trauma's physical, emotional and psychological effects - and reclaim their healing, belonging and leadership potential.

** WE INSPIRE YOUTH MOTIVATION THROUGH A CULTURAL LENS **





The translation of a traditional greeting among the noble Maasai tribe, known for having warriors more fearsome and intelligent than most, is:

"And, how are the children?"

The expected response is:

"All the children are well."

That is because this East African tribe prioritizes the care of those who, over multiple generations, would maintain a productive and peaceful society.

It's an **inside out** journey.

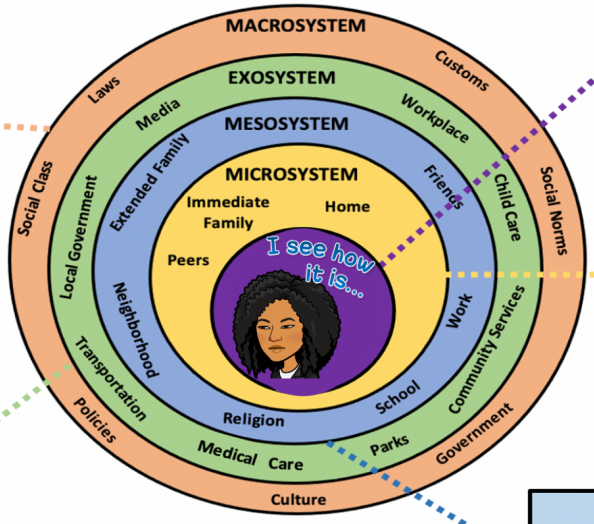
HOW MY RESEARCH GROUNDS OUR METHODOLOGY

During my dissertation process, I was the first scholar in the country to tease out a more culturally relevant interpretation of Brofenbrenner's well-known ecological systems theory. This framework, developed in the late 1970s, views child development as a complex system of influences, from family to neighborhoods to laws, policies and customs, which end up shaping and impacting every child's life experiences. This framework is commonly used to shape thought and educational practices. However, no researcher had previously looked at this model from a Black child's point of view or experience. So, I developed a modified version that has major implications for how each interconnected system exacerbates racial trauma, which makes it even more difficult for healing to take root without some intentionality, consistency and community support.

This chart below also reinforces I Am MORE's argument that programming must focus more on helping youth *heal* from racial trauma, while *holding the ecosystems that reinforce racial trauma accountable* in order to reduce community violence.

MACROSYSTEM
Society, laws, customs and policies are socially constructed to favor whiteness and justify racial oppression in the lie of Black inferiority. Government engages in financial disinvestment, negligence and injustice in employment, housing, health care, law enforcement, land use, child welfare, transportation, and privatization of public services. Gentrification disrupts historically Black neighborhoods. Prisons serve as free labor.

EXOSYSTEM
Anti-Black messages are perpetuated in media. Black families work more hours and earn less. Schools lack sufficient resources. Affordable child-care centers are limited. Community services provided from deficit lens (*reduce violence, increase academic achievement*) that reinforces stereotypes. Bias of medical care providers contributes to health disparities. Absence or underfunding of community-based, culturally specific services. Limited access to safe, neighborhood parks. Over-reliance on public transportation.



Source: Adopted from Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979).

Here's what the research says works:

- Black children find meaning & belonging when engaged in creativity and interdependence.
- Black children need to build critical consciousness to understand how to navigate around the pro-White, anti-Black social systems designed to oppress them.
- Using storytelling, creativity and naming of anti-Blackness provides necessary context for healing.

INDIVIDUAL
Anti-blackness organizes the social context of each Black child's life. *Impacts:* Prolonged grief, self-hatred, shame, hidden rage, aggression, helplessness, frustration. Unhealthy eating, sleep impairment, paranoia, alcohol & drug use, fatalism.

MICROSYSTEM
Race based traumatic stress intensifies. Grief from repeated Black death. Poverty. Police bias. Family dysfunction breeds child abuse, sexual and physical abuse, divorce. Neighborhoods lack safe places to play. Subconscious racial bias of white educators make schools "a site of Black suffering." School to prison pipeline.

MESOSYSTEM
Gang violence & peer victimization. Family dysfunction shuttles Black children toward a culturally deficit foster care system. Racially disproportionate health issues lead to higher death and infant mortality rates. Lack of connection to neighborhood and friends because of gentrification leads to depression and disconnection.

I AM M.O.R.E
Making Ourselves Resilient Ever

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This graphic is the first to acknowledge the experiences of African Americans within each ecosystem identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This graphic was published within Dr. Mitchell's dissertation, titled "In My Power, I Empower: Moving Black Youth from Spirit-Murder to Emotional Emancipation."

OUR 2022-23 GOALS

1 Find a place where we could affirm and inspire Black youth and community.

In February 2022, we signed a two-year lease at the former **Albina Arts Center,** 14 NE Killingsworth / Williams. In the 1960s and '70s, this was a safe, cultural space for Black youth to take classes in music, dance, art, Swahili and other topics. Over the years, it also housed **In Other Words** bookstore, **Don't Shoot PDX**, a social-justice nonprofit, and other organizations. But, the building eventually fell into disrepair. So, we fixed it up and filled it with color, art, and cultural items that reinforced belonging and Black joy. We wanted this location to, once again, be a place of respite for Black youth, community members, and elders who still hold an emotional attachment to what once was.

2 Create a culture that unapologetically focuses on healing, joy and creativity.

As we named our space **The Soul Restoration Center**, we publicly declared a commitment to leverage our cultural authority to help Black people soothe, heal and restore their wounded souls. We wanted our visitors to feel safe, like they were visiting grandma's house. So, each employee had to reflect a positive, welcoming energy and individually embrace a daily commitment toward healing from their own racial trauma. Through trial and some errors in our hiring process, we learned to be protective of the grounding energy that would help us stay true to our mission. So, when we started getting requests from healing practitioners, yoga instructors and mental health therapists to use our space, we welcomed them in.

3 Connect with schools, parents and organizations to engage Black students.

In late Fall of 2019, I disconnected from the high school I had previously been associated with and had recruited students from for several years. So, we had to work harder to build partnerships and reciprocal relationships that would bring us into schools to support the academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) needs of Black students, recruit for our 2022 summer internship, or offer our trauma-informed parent and teacher trainings. Given that schools were still managing a pandemic-related revolving door of substitute teachers, it was difficult to get educators' attention. Though we focused on Black Student Unions, many were not actively operating, which complicated recruitment and outreach efforts.

4 Prepare/establish a Know Thyself Rite of Passage Summer Internship experience.

Our 2022 leadership-development curriculum was shaped from a case-study evaluation of two previous I Am MORE internships *(in 2020 and 2021)*. The updated syllabus would also serve as action research to document whether Black youth were not only better prepared for leadership opportunities, but they would intentionally engage in their own healing process. So, in addition to summer classes on financial literacy, Black history, art creation, entrepreneurship, and other topics, we offered yoga, sound meditation, and cognitive retraining of the brain, which helped youth no longer be negatively affected by the trivialities that had previously burdened their heart and minds. They, then, could, take charge of increasing their own happiness.

5 Leverage impact by welcoming individuals and organizations looking for respite.

Even though Commissioner Hardesty advised us to take our time developing programming during Year One, we were overwhelmed with the number of Black elders and Black community members who flooded into The Soul Restoration Center as soon as we opened our doors. Due to the 2012 closure of **Reflections Coffee** and the **Talking Drum Bookstore,** many Black people had been longing for a similar gathering space where they felt safe and culturally affirmed. What's more, looking through a cultural and research-validated lens of how to encourage self-actualization within Black youth, we knew we couldn't just serve their needs without embracing community members, as well.

However, we were quickly overwhelmed by the frequency of requests to use our new space for social events at little to no cost, though their presence required staff to set up and clean up afterward. For example, we hosted monthly book club meetings with elder **O.B. Hill**, former owner of the Talking Drum Bookstore. We allowed a Jewish co-founder of a new organization to meet Black clients in our space to help expunge their criminal records. Elder and artist **Bobby Fouther** organized multiple art shows. Several well-known local Black musicians scheduled live performances, as well as blues legend **John Primer**, who was visiting from Chicago. We partnered with **Friends of Noise**, to organize what became the city's most popular monthly, youth-led open-mic poetry event. **Black Futures Farms** taught young children how to grow plants. We allowed the **Albina Rotary Club** to host a talk from an out-of-town visitor known for helping white people disengage from the Ku Klux Klan. We hosted a hybrid online/in-person book reading by **Sen. Avel Gordly**, Oregon's first Black female senator. And during one of our larger events, we allowed children of deceased community matriarch **Johnnie Obina Maxey** to sell her designer hats.

Eventually, we came up with policies and systems to keep access to our space manageable, without overwhelming our staff, while also reaffirming our intention to prioritize serving Black youth. Done with intention and integrity, anything is possible.

6 Honor Hardesty's intentions to share BYLF funding with others.

Commissioner Hardesty also gave us several guiding expectations: One was to create two advisory boards: One for youth who would make suggestions on youth programming, and one for adults, to track progress on our initiatives. Another expectation was to set-aside money at the **Black United Fund** for Black youth entrepreneurs. A third request was for the **Oregon Community Foundation** to distribute money to youth-serving 501(c)3 organizations. A process was completed to do both but we also added some visionary strategies to help those initiatives be congruent with existing research, and deepen the possibility that both the youth and the selected organizations would be encouraged to align with our intention to build community and not just receive money without accountability.

Also, as I Am MORE was encountering so many organizational leaders who didn't have the emotional support, funding or training they needed to thrive, a visionary concept started to take shape of a mutually beneficial ecosystem that values interconnectiveness, community uplift and collective healing. We are calling this pilot project **The V.I.B.E.-In Collective,** an acronym for **Valuing Intuitive Black Excellence**. Unfortunately, the Black community often operates in silos because of the generations of racial trauma that we have absorbed and then regurgitate. So, I created a visionary framework to help demonstrate what is possible when we collectively decide to rise, heal and empower - together. In addition, as part of our greater vision, we came up with **R.I.S.E.**, which stands for **Radically Empowering Spaces of Empowerment**, to acknowledge our intention to help others develop their own cultural gathering spaces that serve Black youth, while allowing the youth advisory committee to evaluate whether the services are actually meeting the needs of youth.

Systemic healing involves addressing our emotional and physical health. We believe VIBE-In and R.I.S.E. have the potential to be replicated in other Black communities who want to do more than survive but to thrive - intergenerationally.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF AFFIRMATION

I felt warmth and love. I felt this was where I belong. Thanks for putting this together a safe place.
DAP.

As we started our BYLF journey without a map, we often had to think like an entrepreneur, make bold moves, take risks, assess the impact and, then, sometimes regroup and try something different. As long as we stayed committed to our true north, we remained authentic to our grounding and healing mission. It has been a continuous learning process to evolve toward a life-changing model.

As we are intentional about our healing vibe, The Soul Restoration Center also offers its visitors access to foot massagers, weighted heated blankets, a vibrating meditation cushion, natural pain relievers, scented oils, a library of culturally relevant books, calming water features, and an ancestral wall of community members' pictures.

INTENTION	DETAILS	OUTCOME
We spent a lot of time - and quite a bit of money - trying to intentionally transform this neglected space - which held only book shelves - into a welcoming, colorful, cultural retreat for Black youth and elders.	The Black art, fake fireplace, books, large couch, and colorful rugs all send a message: *"You are safe and welcome here."* We incorporated multiple social-emotional activators and healing strategies into the decor.	We collected an overwhelming amount of feedback that our investment in decorations, art and furnishings reinforced most Black people's feelings of safety, love, peace, joy and cultural affirmation.

LEVERAGING MOMENTUM

FOR HOPE, HEALING & JOY

Because of the visionary decision to redirect almost $1 million in police funds to support the leadership development of Black youth, it didn't take long for the media to start sharing the news - *locally and nationally* - of the **Black Youth Leadership Fund**'s mission and the participation of its inaugural program director.

The74

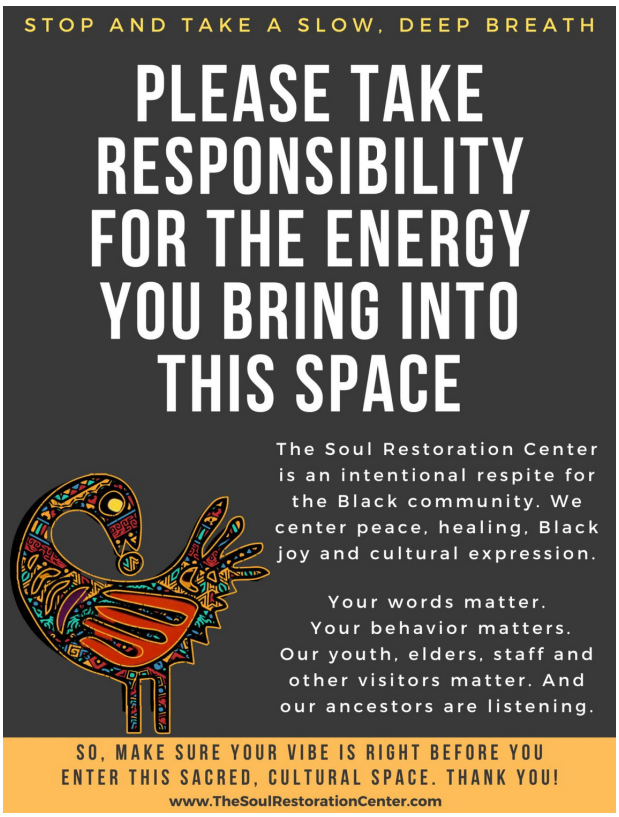
A Former Journalist Reignites an Intergenerational Haven For Portland's Youth

She once fled Oregon, her teenage home. Now, S. Renee Mitchell has etched out a safe space for generations to heal from trauma through art & community

By Marianna McMurdock | June 6, 2022

This is one article in a series produced in partnership with the Aspen Institute's Weave: The Social Fabric Project, spotlighting educators, mentors and local leaders who see community as the key to student success. See all of the profiles.

This poster below is one of the first things visitors see before they enter The Soul Restoration Center



OPB DEC. 3, 2022

In The News | Portland Thorns head coach resigns | Oregon's hospitals struggling

THINK OUT LOUD

Historic Albina Arts building gets new life as Soul Restoration Center

By Allison Frost (OPB)
Feb. 24, 2022 10:41 a.m. Updated: March 3, 2022 1:28 p.m.

Broadcast: Thursday, Feb. 24

Outside the building housing the new Soul Restoration Center

FOX 12 | First Alert Weather | News | Traffic | Sports

RE-ALLOCATED POLICE FUNDS

PROGRAM	
PORTLAND STREET RESPONSE	$4,800,000
EXPAND TRIBAL RELATIONS PROGRAM	$198,705
EXPAND OFFICE OF EQUITY & HUMAN RIGHTS	$787,233
EXPAND OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION	$271,260
GENERAL FUND STABILITY RESERVE STILL TO BE ALLOCATED BY COUNCIL	$333,820

The Portland City Council voted in 2020 to cut roughly $15 million from the police budget.

By Simon Gutierrez
Published: May. 9, 2022 at 6:23 PM PDT

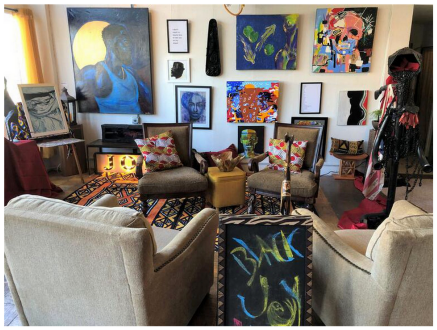
PORTLAND, Ore. (KPTV) - When the Portland City Council voted to cut millions of dollars from the poli bureau's budget, some of that money was earmarked for community-based programs that would serv black Portlanders.

Two years later, a picture is beginning to emerge as to how some of those funds are being spent.

OREGONLIVE The Oregonian

Portland City Council approves launch of Black Youth Leadership Fund

Published: Mar. 09, 2022, 1:28 p.m.



Black Youth Leadership Fund programming takes place inside the Soul Restoration Center in Northeast Portland. Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty's Office

LPSCC executive committee members hear moving testimony on work

Healing and recovery work are part of Multnomah

The Portland Observer

HOME | PHOTOS

Elevating Black Youth
City approves outreach for healing

Story by Beverly Corbell
3/8/2022

In a ground-breaking move that could become a model for cities across the country, the Portland City Council has earmarked $950,000 to improve the lives of Black youth while giving the young people of color themselves the ability to decide where the money goes.

OREGON ARTSWATCH
ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

Restoring the Soul: A center for Black life

The Soul Restoration Center, begun by Darrell Grant and carried forward by Dr. S. Renee Mitchell, revives a key cultural space for Black Portlanders.

JUNE 24, 2022 | BOBBY BERMEA

CULTURAL HUBS, CULTURE

Dr. S. Renee Mitchell, outside the Soul Restoration Center. Photo: Bobby Bermea

One of the most dynamic and impactful artists in the Portland scene is 2019 Spirit of Portland award winner Dr. S. Renee Mitchell. Mitchell's efficacy stems from always knowing why she's doing what she's doing, and those reasons are always about community, especially the Black community.

KOIN 6 | News | Newsletters

NEWS

Program to invest in Portland Black Youth using PPB funds goes to city council vote

Posted: Feb 24, 2022 / 01:03 PM PST
Updated: Feb 24, 2022 / 01:03 PM PST

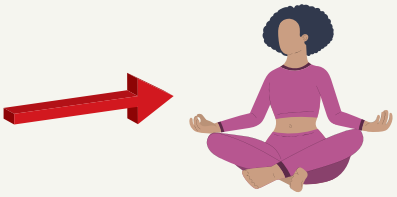
Program to divest PPB funds to advance Portland Black youth

SHARE

PORTLAND, Ore. (KOIN) — "Defund the police," a demand heard on-repeat at protests in Portland and across the US throughout the summer of 2020 – but will reallocating funds from Portland police to invest in communities of color pass the city council vote?

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty has put this question to the test, as she presented the Portland Black Youth Leadership Fund to the council in a preliminary hearing on Wednesday.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF HEALING



INTENTION

We wanted to draw attention that we were open and eager to build deeper relationships with the community, so people would frequent our space of respite. These activities would help build trust and recruit for our internship.

DETAILS

In order to promote The Center, we invited in community-based artists and healers to offer programming. We also organized events, movies and distributed free tickets to attend dance, theatre and cultural activities.

OUTCOME

We eventually invited many of the adult healers who offered programming for the community to also provide classes during our summer youth internship. We also built deep, lasting partnerships.

A Black mental health therapist *(left)* held weekly classes for adult women to discuss self-care issues. A yoga teacher offered free individual and family exercise classes. These activities helped solidify our reputation as a place of healing, and cultural and emotional support. Through building relationships with trusted community-based mental health and wellness providers, we were able to build the foundation of our 2022 summer programming on emotional healing and wellness.

Once we built community trust, some of our elders would drop by to check on our welfare and encourage us. Mama **Shafia Monroe** *(top right)*, an internationally known midwife, gives Renee an impromptu head massage. Another elder, **Graciela Teofield** *(right)* provided us with healing sound bath experiences. We later hired her to provide her signature services for the youth internship. Elder **Bobby Fouther** *(bottom center)* also was a frequent advisor and artistic and event collaborator.

In April 2022 *(left)*, we hired **Shalonda Menefee** to conduct a spiritual and ancestral blessing of The Soul Restoration Center.

We also intensified our **"Spreading the Black Joy Virus,"** campaign, passing out free t-shirts *(right)*, stickers, buttons and greeting cards to visitors and at community events. We wanted to encourage Black people to be intentional about reclaiming their joy during the ongoing pandemic, despite the loneliness, fear and depression many were feeling from being forcibly isolated from family, friends and their routines.

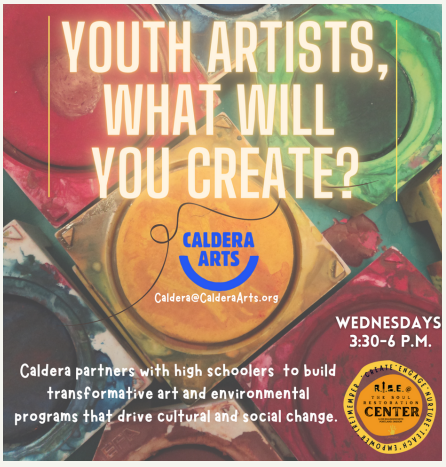
GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF SUPPORT

BLACK STUDENT UNION

INTENTION	DETAILS	OUTCOME
To build trust, we dropped off weekly baskets of bagels and cream cheese at different schools and asked teachers to let us visit classrooms. We also compiled a list of advisors of Black Student Unions, though many chapters were inactive.	Getting students' and teachers' attention initially was very difficult. The pandemic was making it hard for students to feel safe coming into a new gathering space with people they didn't know very well.	Our persistent outreach led to visits from a few high school BSU groups, and one from Warner Pacific College. We provided food, games and discussion groups. Some signed up for our internship.

We created a safe space for Black students to talk about their racial experiences at school.

In addition to our BSU outreach, we partnered with healers who used our space for their events to build relationships with Black parents from nearby **KairosPDX Elementary** *(right)*. Our intention was to get more youngsters into the building. We also partnered with a well-known arts organization, **Caldera**, which offered free drop-in activities after school on Wednesdays. Slowly, we increased numbers of youth visitors.

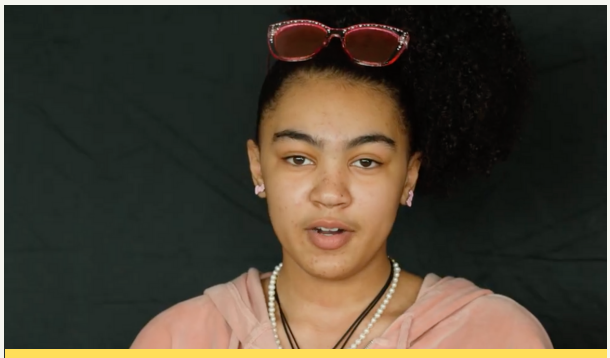


GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF EMPOWERMENT

the child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth

-african proverb

INTENTION	DETAILS	OUTCOME
Desperate to get access to youth, we tried to partner with Portland Public Schools (PPS) but the substitute teacher crisis was a huge distraction. Based on advocacy from two parents, we were invited into a middle school toward end of the 2021-22 school year.	We came into an environment in full crisis mode. Black students were clustered in the hallways and not attending class as a way of protesting how they were being treated by substitute teachers. So we listened, and then empowered them to be in charge of telling their own stories.	As it was toward the end of the school year, we had only three days *(one day a week)* to work with 7th & 8th graders at Tubman Middle School. After we helped them create a film, we invited them to The Center to hang out.



Watch the full video at https://youtu.be/YH7Z145MLYU

There were other community-based programs that had been working at this school and had years-long relationships with Black students. But in this moment, those groups weren't influencing youths' behaviors. Students were feeling angry, disconnected and unheard, and we had to quickly figure out how to build trust. So, we hired an award-winning filmmaker to empower youth to tell their stories.

Students learned to operate high-end cameras, set up lights, microphones, etc., plus direct the scenes. Afterward, the principal said he noticed a difference in attitudes and behaviors of students *and* teachers. A week later, students hung out at The Center. The graphic recordings above reflect how youth felt from treatment by teachers *(left)* vs. treatment from I Am MORE *(right)*.

NOTE: Several Tubman students ended up joining our summer internship.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF CREATIVITY

INTENTION

Just four months after we moved into The Center, we started our 2022 summer internship based upon previous evidence-based programming. We also added classes and benefits, such as free bus tickets, outings and Food Truck Fridays.

DETAILS

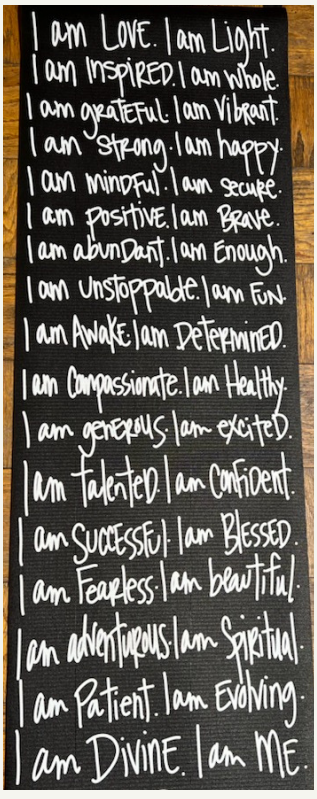
Because we had worked so hard to get the word out - including partnering with PPS, which included us on its email outreach, we initially had over 80 youth sign up for our paid summer internship.

OUTCOME

Due to some reluctance because of pandemic concerns, about 45 middle and high schoolers and a few young adults showed up to daily classes that contributed to their healing, creative expression, and leadership development.

Our Black history class *(above)* offered interns an opportunity to research, write, and process their connection to their own interpretation of Blackness. Each intern presented research projects that reconnected them to knowledge of self.

"Black history class taught me about the people who built the people who built me. I learned to lead, trial and triumph. I learned to voice, to make connections to the world and connect the world to who I am."
~ Laya, age 16



As Black youth are in need of healing from the physical and psychological effects of racial trauma, we offered a variety of ways to reconnect them with moments of creativity and reflection that could help them process their own emotions.

Classes included weekly drumming with **Aaron Nigel Smith**, a Grammy-nominated artist *(top left);* art classes from an internationally traveled artist that led to a public art sale *(top right)*; daily stretching, breathing, self-care, meditation, and/or sound bath classes. We also offered a class on cognitive retraining of the traumatized brain. As we did everything with intentionality, our interns even absorbed messages of their positive potential through our black yoga mats *(pic on left)*. Daily, youth were expected to write inside their gratitude journals.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP

Reclaiming Black Joy:
A PARK-BASED, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING INITIATIVE
June-September 2022

INTENTION	DETAILS	OUTCOME
We included youth interns in multiple community-based projects over the summer, including a monthly gathering in Dawson Park, in partnership with Multnomah County. Youth set up and supported opportunities to advance their videography and creative skills.	We regularly created space for youth interns to lean into and engage in activities that interested them, whether that was reciting poetry, drumming, interviewing people, handing out food, volunteering to support elders or helping children at our art stations.	Our summer-long monthly "Reclaiming Black Joy" activities at Dawson Park highlighted our interns' natural leadership abilities. We believe it was important for adults to see Black youth in roles as problem solvers, not just as as problem creators or gang members.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF PARTNERSHIP

INTENTION	DETAILS	OUTCOME
We believe giving is an act of intentional community building. Our youth interns benefited greatly from the generosity of adults, who offered their perspectives, products, creativity, knowledge, and smiles.	Our interns were gifted with various forms of generosity from Black community members, entrepreneurs and those who believe in our mission. One shy youth blossomed after being gifted an expensive Fuji camera.	When our youth experience a generous outpouring of love from us or adult community members, it helps confirm their own sense of worthiness and self-love. We also emphasized their need to give back.

Our partnership with **Ethos**, a music training program, led to us giving away over 40 used instruments, valued at over $7,000, including a miniature drum set to a 2-year-old. We also had musicians offer free music lessons to youth.

Every Friday, we would have a different Black-owned food truck park in front of our building and serve lunch. In addition, Black entrepreneurs, including the two co-owners of the **bproud** clothing line *(both former I Am MORE facilitators)*, would speak to youth about how to run a business.

A 2022 gathering of (re)membrance, resiliency & Black joy!

In May, we offered the community hundreds of free tickets to see the world premiere of **An African American Requiem** in downtown Portland. Then, in November, someone who had gotten a few of those tickets sponsored 100 Black youth to watch the "Wakanda Forever" movie at a downtown theater.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF ENTREPRENEURISM

One of the interns, **Magnus Graham,** organized a free event at The Center to help Black youth - and himself - learn more about how to style Black hair.

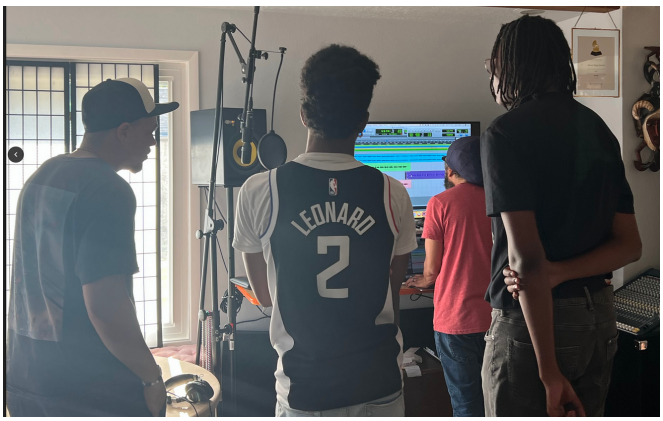
Manny also attended Magnus' "Beauty In Black" event and painted portraits of some of the attendees.

Research positively links Black-owned businesses to:

- A reduction in gang violence
- Positive role models
- Safe havens for Black youth
- Social buffers that reshape how youth view own possibilities
- Reinforcement of values
- Strengthening of local economy

High schooler **Manny Dempsey** *(in hoodie)* was one of several youth invited by the internship's art teacher to set up at a pop-up art show. He ended up with the most sales of any of the adult vendors, over $700.

During the internship, youth who learned to use professional sound recording equipment ended up recording and selling a music CD, and also created their own music videos.



GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF COMMUNITY

CALL & RESPONSE

ME: I teach.

YOU: I learn.

US: We build.

This picture, taken after our graduation ceremony in August 2022, is intended to reflect how adults are emotionally lifting up the youth, who are rising up to their greatness. Interns also nominated youth for awards based on inspirational skills, leadership and creativity.

As I Am MORE heavily leans on research and scholarly evidence to frame its youth-development strategies, the notion of honoring community was seamlessly embedded into our practices. For example, when community members would enter The Center unexpectedly, we would shift the current activity so youth could benefit from the elders' wisdom. We would welcome families to visit and see what was happening for themselves. And culture was centered in the food, conversations and the ways of being. Interns were encouraged, for example, to have frank discussions about respecting women, toxic masculinity and other difficult subjects. Most importantly, many of the interns made life-long friends.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

The short evaluations below about how interns identified what had changed within them confirm that the I Am MORE staff - *as self-proclaimed Spirit Gardeners™* - exceeded our own expectations. And, we did it with intention, love, and a focus on self-healing.

- I am learning how to feel and voice my feelings. I am gaining friendships, learning how to breathe and learning/gaining a new perspective about things I did not learn in school, specifically in Black History. ~Gui
- I Am MORE is something I needed for awhile. My focus is better and I am taking time for myself. ~ Geslande
- I am learning new information in the classes and I plan on using it in the future. ~ Derrick
- I am becoming more social. ~Delphin
- I have more energy and more happiness. ~ Chanelle
- Being able to better deal with my emotions and overcoming the fear of putting myself out there. ~ Iyanu
- My perspective of how I carry myself and how I am in touch with my emotions has changed. I am making changes to better myself by reading more and soul searching. ~ Jayanna
- My mood has been changing. I have been very positive and it's been helping me mentally. ~ Jayshaun
- This program is enlightening and enjoyable. I am changing and becoming more understanding. ~ Jonathan
- I have changed the way I deal with my emotions and I have learned to accept them. ~ Kaya
- My thought process has changed. I enjoy financial literacy and learning things not taught in school. ~ Kierra
- My concept of community and connections are changing. I am no longer gatekeeping information. ~ Kendell
- I am being more social. ~ Kiki
- I am really paying attention to my feelings. ~ Leaha
- I am more aware of my own Blackness. ~ Magnus
- At first, I didn't want to come, but now I am excited to be here. I am grateful for the community in The Center. ~ Manny
- I am more comfortable around people and having good conversations. ~ Nathaniel
- My opinions on other people's feelings have changed. ~ Nimo
- My connections and bonds with the people here have grown immensely. ~ Rae
- I am better understanding the bigger picture on being an adult and being financially responsible. ~ Reba
- I am being mindful of the things I react to and how I react to them. ~ Rahma
- I am opening up to people. ~ Sanijah
- I am more comfortable being myself. ~ Shelissa
- I am more confident within my community that I have never experienced before. I would love to work with I Am More and The Soul Restoration Center after the internship. ~ Shiloh
- I am more at peace . ~ Sumaia
- My confidence increased with my abilities and my talents. ~ Susanna

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF CONNECTION

As an inaugural member of the **Oregon Black Student Success Network** (OBSSN) - which was envisioned by Oregon Community Foundation's **Marcy Bradley -** we have been able to tap into a statewide network that supports each other's goals to empower Black youth. In September, through a partnership with **AT&T** and the **Oregon Community Foundation**, I Am MORE and numerous other OBSSN organizations were each given 10 new computers to offer to Black students in need.

This single father of six had recently moved to Portland several weeks before, and was walking by The Center when we infused his day with Black joy, by passing out t-shirts, offering food and providing free haircuts for his sons.

In October, we allowed the Black librarians to hold their retreat at The Center. In December, we supported the librarians by setting up a table at their Kwanzaa celebration.

A youth sewing project we did with financial support from the **City of Portland**, titled "***Together, Stitching Hope: Peace by Piece***," was led by internationally known Portland quilter **Adriene Cruz**. She sewed the individual pieces together into a large quilt that is now part of our permanent decor.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF UBUNTU

YOU ARE INVITED TO DROP BY THE SOUL RESTORATION CENTER TO HONOR THIS HISTORICAL MOMENT.

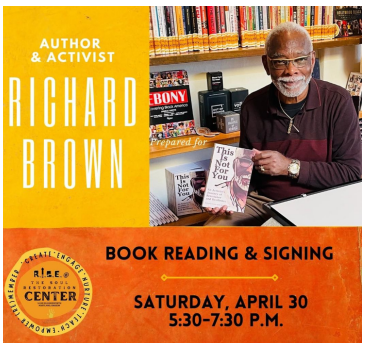
Celebrating HER story

JUSTICE KETANJI BROWN JACKSON

Come on through and join us!! We will be serving up a cultural celebration of SWEET surprises!

DATE: Friday, April 8, 2022
TIME: 4:30-7:30 pm
14 NE Killingsworth * Portland

In April, The Soul Restoration Center acknowledged the appointment of the first Black female U.S. Supreme Court Justice. We specifically asked elders to attend this event because we wanted them to explain their generation's perspective about what this historical moment means for Black progress. We also were intentional about providing food, music and creating space for an elder acknowledgement, as it aligns with best cultural practices for how to build Black youths' self-esteem.



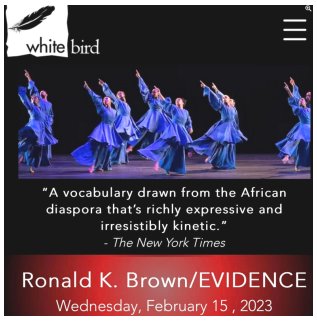
Because of our intention to build community trust, we were able to capture this historical picture of three beloved elders: *(left)* The honorary Mayor of NE Portland **Paul Knauls,** in his 90s, and former bookstore co-owners **Gloria McMurty** and **O.B. Hill.** Gloria and O.B. were celebrating their 81st birthdays at The Center that day.

Elder **Richard Brown,** an experienced photographer known for his black and white images, had been a prominent figure in Portland's civil-rights activism since the 1970s. But, he made his most significant impact starting in the 1980s, on the issue of community policing as a way to reform the caustic relationship between police and the Black community. Mr. Brown initially was guarded in his interactions with us. But we kept inviting him to events, trying to earn his trust. He is now a stable presence at The Center and was helpful during the summer to regularly give our interns his historical perspective, encouragement and advice. Mr. Brown's pictures from the early 1980s are also a permanent fixture on The Center's walls. He smiles a lot more often. And his regular greeting when he enters the space is: ***"Hey I'm home."*** This is an example of inter-generational healing in action.

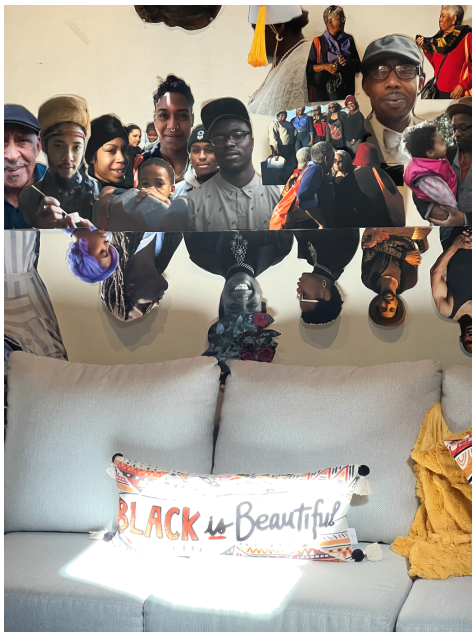
GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF MOVEMENT

Several youth who attended a conversation at The Center with the **Dallas Black Dance Theatre** were given tickets to attend the performance at PSU's Lincoln Hall.

Through our longtime partnership with **White Bird,** a nationally award-winning dance presentation company, we were able to offer free tickets to youth, their parents and community members to attend the **Ronald K. Brown** dance performance at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall and the **Kyle Abraham** dance company at the Newmark Theater, as well as spend time with the Black dancers.



GOAL: CREATING INTERGENERATIONAL WELCOMING VIBES



The Soul Restoration Center may be the only place in Portland where Black people of all ages feel welcome as soon as they walk in the door. What visitors feel - from those who are elderly to those who have been around only a few years - is palatable because we are intentional about maintaining a welcoming space that makes all ages feel culturally affirmed, safe and joyful.

"Love our Black children. Love the ways they are silent, loud, and all the spaces in between. Love their culture and Blackness...Don't treat students of color as if they have deficiencies or as if you need to save them. We need to see the genius in them and start their stories off with genius and not with the things the system has created."

~ Dr. Gholdy Muhammad

Author of the books "Cultivating Genius" and "Unearthing Joy"

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

By leveraging our involvement with community partners, we have increased opportunities for Black youth to access high-profile, leadership-building and speaking opportunities. For example, I Am MORE is a community-based facilitator of conversations shaping PPS's **Center for Black Student Excellence (CBSE)**. In March, we held an expo (which we named **Black S.E.E. M.E.:** ***Black Student Excellence Expo of Mastery and Empowerment)***, where Black youth were celebrated for their genius and creativity. Youth were also a part of planning and set up.

Youth and adults were invited to engage in shaping the attributes of the CBSE.

Our former summer interns were a part of these planning processes and were also featured participants. Five teenagers *(far left)* led a panel conversation about how they are treated in school and in society, and what adults can do to better support youth. We also featured a dance performance by **Hobbs Waters**, a 14-year-old college student who was recently invited to train with the world-renowned NYC-based Dance Theatre of Harlem.

In a separate room, youth advocate **Rain Ezra**, who performed at the Expo, then invited young people to join her in another room to learn how to create and record their own beats and music. We also offered several opportunities for youth to engage in various forms of expression, such as art, drumming, and how to create & record their own podcast. We also provided free food, music and about a dozen tables hosted by community-based, youth-focused organizations who offered resources, and youth entrepreneurs who sold their items.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURE OF EXPANSION

After the summer internship, **Shiloh**, then age 19, was hired as a full-time youth organizer. In late 2022, he spoke at an Atlanta convention about investing in youth equity and leadership.

Two youth leaders, **Kendell Brown-Clay** and **Shiloh Day**, were invited to perform poetry at a live streaming online fundraiser for **Morrison Child & Family Services** in March 2023. They were also able to meet former **Gov. Kate Brown** who received an award, and **Dr. Christine Moses**, Morrison's incoming board chair.

Dr. S. Renee Mitchell was the keynote speaker.

In January 2023, at the 38th annual **World Arts Foundation**'s annual MLK Jr. tribute, titled "*Passing The Torch: Still We Rise,*" two of our youth leaders, **Shiloh Day** and **Laya Rajee,** a high school student, were invited to interview the event's featured guests, which was televised live. It was the first time young people had been given an opportunity to serve in this role.

I Am MORE leaders **Marshall Goss Jr.**, and **Dr. Mitchell**, and youth leaders **Kendell**, a high school sophomore, and **Shiloh** attended the NAACP's regional meeting, and then were welcomed into the VIP room with civil-rights attorney **Benjamin Crump,** known as Black America's attorney general.

Through our connections, we were able to introduce former interns **Shiloh** and **Magnus** to the new president of the University of Portland, **Robert D. Kelly**, and his wife. As Magnus is now attending UofP, the two have developed a strong mentoring relationship, regularly having lunch.

GOAL: CREATING A CULTURAL (RE)CONNECTION

In late December/early January 2023, the I Am MORE team visited Ghana for two weeks in order to prepare us mentally to take a group of Black youth there in late 2023. Visiting places where enslaved African ancestors were warehoused, starved, died, or had their last bath before they were forced onto slave ships to be sold was an emotional and humbling experience. We believe visiting Africa will help intensely prepare Black youth for the depth of leadership, perspective and commitment they will need to make an impactful difference in a community still deeply wounded by generations of trauma. We intend to raise money to take youth on this unforgettable journey back to their African ancestral roots. ASHE!

vibe IN

I Am MORE has applied for funding from Meyer Memorial Trust and other sources to establish an inaugural **V.I.B.E.-In Collective (VIBE = Valuing Intuitive Black Excellence)**. From this partnership of heart-centered individuals and organizations, we will establish a mutually beneficial, ecosystem that values community uplift, healing and collaboration. Trauma scholarship indicates that culturally effective healing is that which transitions a person's private pain into a collective framework with those who hold a shared ancestral memory of historical trauma. So, this pilot project would allow VIBE-In partners to collectively share access to resources, benefit from thought-partners, and no- to low-cost professional services, including:

- Access to event space, grant writing, leadership training in research-based practices, liability insurance, printers, graphic design, marketing, HR services, etc. to Black individuals and smaller community-based organizations who sometimes lack the access or skills to produce professional-level outputs.
- Classes that teach data collection, measurement and research-based practices to track progress of goals., and document one's impact.
- Thought partners who hold each other accountable by regularly meeting to discuss programming needs, challenges and ways we each are committing to self-care.
- Opportunities for collective growth that benefits the Black community.
- Center individual/community healing.

We are partnering with Portland entrepreneur **Stephen Green,** founder of **PitchBlack,** which has created space around the country for Black entrepreneurs to vie for investment funding for their businesses. We are planning to create a youth-version of this initiative that will provide budgeting, finance, credit and other classes to prepare youth for successful business ownership.

ULTIMATE GOAL:

USING RESEARCH TO INSPIRE CHANGE

The Indignities of Racism Take Their Toll On Black Children

Internalized Devaluation contributes to Community Violence!

"Unless rage is properly channeled, it can be all-consuming, displaced, and destructive to self and others. Those who have rage are often enraged for good reasons. Thus, the goal is not to rid them of their rage but instead to help them be aware of it, gain control of it, and ultimately to redirect it."

~ Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy

In an attempt to leverage research to help educate our community about the obvious connection between Black youth gun violence and their increasingly internalized devaluation and hopelessness - which is fed by systemic racial injustice - we partnered with artist **Elijah Hasan** to create a series of thought-provoking and attention-getting billboards. The intention was to stimulate a deeper conversation that addresses the root causes of gun violence. Although the campaign made national news and was embraced in cities like Chicago and Atlanta, the local Black community wasn't ready for this context. However, until we more deeply understand the connection between hidden rage and gun violence, we will continue to put flimsy Band-Aids on gaping wounds.

IN CONCLUSION: I AM M.O.R.E. IS THE COUNTERNARRATIVE

We don't just give Black youth something to do.

We nurture the ground that helps blossom their potential.

*It was a lifetime of trauma that inspired me to develop I Am MORE's culturally nurturing, strength-based program, which is grounded on research, evidence and theory. Our programming also invests profound love into a 3-step, transformative process that is proven to help Black youth move through the world as joyful and empowered change agents for themselves and others. Our approach provokes the appearance of their hidden genius and ancestral resiliency. We guide youth to (re)discover what is already inside of them, but is crusted over by racial trauma within each of American society's ecosystems, ultimately influencing whom they will become. I am hopeful the city's **Black Youth Leadership Fund** will continue to invest in programming that supports healing from the inside-out, so that our future Black leaders can influence from a position of healing and inspired leadership rather than unconsciously projecting unhealed trauma onto themselves and others.*

OUR 3 STEPS TO SUCCESS

STEP 1 – INSIDE-OUT	STEP 2 – OUTSIDE UP	STEP 3 – UP & BEYOND
Critical consciousness + SEL	Critical consciousness + SEL + Social Action	Critical Consciousness + SEL + social action + public sharing
Recognize that Black youth's **negative feelings are *justified*** & their inner rage can be rechanneled.	Set up a structure to help youth **find their sense of purpose.**	Give youth public platforms **to share their knowledge and wisdom**

I Am MORE's Garden of Emotional Emancipation

It is said that if a flower is not blooming, you fix the environment where it is growing, and not the flower. I Am MORE insists both need addressing: The flower *and* the environment. However, we cannot wait until systems that were created to maintain racial inequality become racially just. So, we take our commitment to Black youth and our role as culture bearers seriously because we recognize that the future livelihoods of Black youth and our larger traumatized Black community are at stake. We cannot continue to repeat the same practices and expect to get empowering results.

So, no matter what, I Am MORE will continue to focus on nourishing Black youth with *what the research says* will help them thrive - IN SPITE OF! We call ourselves Spirit Gardeners™, as we are helping Black youth heal from the spirit-murdering they are experiencing within American society's various ecosystems, and then shifting them closer toward emotional emancipation, toward hope, and toward joy. We are doing what we know works in order to authentically answer this important and pressing question:

And, how are the children?

When Will We Learn?

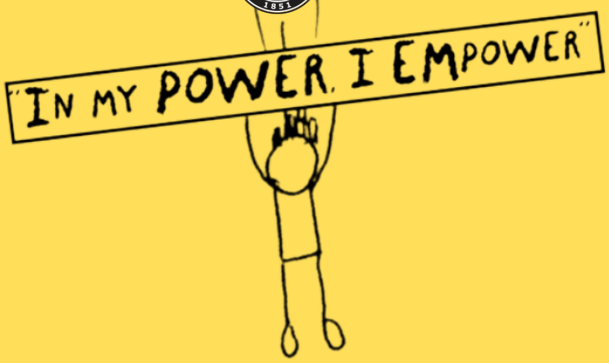
It's not their heads, it's their (broken) hearts!

Help them heal their hearts
then, hope, joy, self-empowerment can arise!

"I felt like I was learning a lot of things that I don't think I was ever learning in school. Really, just getting a hands-on experience has been a game changer. I feel like a lot of people, especially people of color here in the U.S. kind of go through the same trauma and having a place where they can express their feelings will be a great place. And I Am MORE is definitely one of those places here in Portland."

Japhety Ngabireyimana
Co-founder of bproud clothing
I Am MORE intern (2020/21)

WE INVEST IN HEALING & POTENTIAL
BLACK YOUTH LEADERSHIP FUND



I (IN MY) POWER™

STUDENT AGENCY

I AM M.O.R.E.
Making Ourselves Resilient Everyday

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the Portland City Council for unanimously agreeing to invest in the potential of Black youth. We have had a successful engagement so far and we look forward to taking the lessons we have learned and the future plans we have formulated to have an even greater and wider impact.

The Black Youth Leadership Fund
C/O I Am MORE LLC
The Soul Restoration Center
14 NE Killingsworth / Williams
Portland, OR 97211

971-276-2982
www.TheSoulRestorationCenter.com
BlackJoy@IAmMOREresilient.com

Advisory Board for Portland's BYLF

- **coleReed,** Artist, Entrepreneur, OpenHAUS co-working space
- **Renee Anderson,** Oregon Black Student Student Success Community Network
- **Antonio Jackson,** Founder, Building Blocks 2 Success
- **Shiloh Day,** youth organizer/ former summer intern
- **Imani Muhammad,** Founder of Youth Organized & United to Help (Y.O.U.th)

PLUS representatives of

- **Portland City Commission**
- **Oregon Community Foundation**
- **Regional Arts & Culture Council**

I Am MORE / BYLF staff

Dr. S Renee Mitchell - Program Manager
Marshall Goss Jr. - Youth & Family Advocate
Shiloh Day - Youth Engagement Specialist
Sunshine Dixon - Community Connector
Linda Mitchell-Duncan - HR/Office support

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR OUR PROGRAMMING

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