Without question, 2020 has been a year unlike any other at Shaw Community Center (SCC). The arrival of the pandemic turned everything upside down, but through the hard work of SCC’s staff, the center has continued to provide quality programming to children and youth.

~ When DC Public Schools shut down in March, **SCC developed a distance learning protocol** to assist students with homework. In addition to academic support, the protocol includes a socio-emotional component called the Black Mister Rogers (BMR) platform (see p. 6) and enrichment activities all broadcast from a set in SCC’s instruction space. Using grant funds, SCC purchased 15 laptops and paid our IT contractor to visit each household to help with setup, and establish cybersecurity and parental controls.

~ SCC was able to give out $13,000 in scholarships to deserving students. This is especially helpful in a year when academic programming is so dramatically different and resources are uncertain.

~ The DC government selected SCC to provide childcare for first responders and essential workers during April and May. As the only community-based organization selected to do so, we quickly adapted DC Health, CDC, OSHA and EPA protocols for social distancing, medical check-ins, enhanced cleaning and food preparation. Our staff worked 12+ hours a day for over a month. While grueling, it was also exhilarating to be able to provide this service to our community.

~ SCC continued to use its BMR platform to engage students in *a 7-week long virtual summer camp*, broadcasting both live and prerecorded programming for 3½ hours over a five hour period each day (taking breaks for down time and lunch). Students participated in a number of activities each week including physical movement/sports, journalism/digital media, storytelling/fact v. fiction discussions, virtual game tournaments and virtual field trips (the San Diego Zoo and Disney World were favorite destinations!) — all centering around a theme of The Real News, COVID Edition.

~ Our youth provided the valuable service of food delivery to both hungry families and patrons of local black-owned businesses through **$ Burger — a home-grown cottage industry** imagined and brought to life by youth in the SCC workforce development program. Each week, they deliver 200 meals repackaged from DC Central Kitchen as well as those from SCC’s Cultural Asset Incubator partners (see p. 6). They’re busy!

~ With nation-wide pressure to provide “hybrid” academic programming, SCC assessed the plausibility of conducting a combination of virtual and in-person-but-socially-distanced *afterschool activities in the new school year*. It became clear that the demands of a hybrid program would not only stretch SCC’s staff resources beyond our current financial means, but also force us to choose 32 students for in-person services from among the 125 enrolled. While our distance learning protocol has not been
seamless, our number one priority is that no student gets lost in the cracks. We are, therefore, refining our distance learning protocol as we identify new needs, and continuing to communicate with our families to make sure all students have access to a computer and the opportunity to participate in our online program.

~ SCC held a virtual Harvest Festival on October 30. In costume, Miss Michelle, Miss Melissa, Ma G, Delonta Howard, D’Andre Lukes, Ronette Hinton and Sudi West broadcast Halloween antics to Shaw Community residents. Greg Windley did a cooking demo and Khadijah Huggins made “smoking drinks” with dry ice. Ma G (Gwen Howard) delivered candy to Channing Phillips apartment residents (candy was mailed to those who do not live near the Center). Best of all, we gave out prizes! The top prize, a laptop, went to DeNasia Thurston. Giovanni Washington and Samuel Price received hover toys. Rayne White received a google mini. Others received new merchandise, House Points and costumes.

Youth Voices

How do you feel about the pandemic?

Latrell T. (8 yrs): I like being around my family because it has helped me a lot to get through this. I miss seeing my friends at school and going to Shaw Community Center.

DeNasia T. (8 yrs): We have to keep track of our own schedule for checking in online every morning and evening.

Luviah F. (12 yrs): I miss everyone and want to return to an in-person program.

Mckenzie J. (8 yrs): I get to spend time with my family but I can’t go to school and see my friends. We have time to talk during our virtual school time but it’s still not the same.

Briana J. (17 yrs): I have more time to focus and self-reflect during these trying times. However, it is harder for me to actually learn and grasp the information I’m supposed to obtain.

Kristopher H. (8 yrs): I like not having to wake up early in the morning to go to school but I miss being in school and not able to see my friends and teachers.

Luviah F. (7 yrs): I want to go back to school so I can play on the new playground.

Arianna H. (9 yrs): It’s been hard getting used to wearing a mask every day. I would rather be in school because the computers we use don’t work as well.

Ian H. (6 yrs): I like spending time with my family because it helps me. On some weekends, I get to see my dad and sister but I miss seeing my friends. I see them on the computer but it’s not the same. Making sure I wear my mask when needed has been hard.

Derek H. (12 yrs): I’m mad and happy at the same time because of the pandemic. I’m happy because I get to spend more time with my Dad. Also because SCC offers virtual after-school, I can attend. When SCC met in-person, I could not attend.

Arykah C. (17 yrs): I have more time to focus and self-reflect during these trying times. However, it is harder for me to actually learn and grasp the information I’m supposed to obtain.
Shout Out and Thanks to our Major Grant Funders!

SCC extends a HUGE thanks to:

The Hattie M. Strong Foundation for general operating support to buy laptops, software and set up for distance learning; The Meyer Foundation for general operating support in our never-ending quest to end racial inequity. Meyer, thank you for weekly workshops on the Payroll Protection Program, auto-renewal of our grant, and waiver of 2020 grant reporting; The John Edward Fowler Memorial Foundation for general operating support in addressing social and racial injustice in our community; The District of Columbia’s United Way Out of School Time and Youth Outcomes office for the 3-year continuation grant allowing us to plan for this year and the next two years; The Nita Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Center grant for waiving the carryover amount and being so flexible; The DC Government’s Essential Workers grant for funding childcare services for the families of DC’s First Responders and Essential Workers; and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities’ Projects Events and Festivals grant for our Lee on 11th Art All Night event.

SCC would also like to thank other institutional donors — including the Potomac Association of the United Church of Christ, the Lincoln-Westmoreland Housing Association, and area UCC churches — as well as the many individual donors whose generosity warms our hearts and keeps our doors open, but who are too numerous to name here.
Dear Friends of SCC,

While SCC has been an anchor in the Shaw neighborhood for nearly 30 years, it has never been so important to nurture connections with our youth and families at a time when they are disproportionately affected by a pandemic and a recession. I have been concerned about our students because we cannot physically engage them and I’m afraid they are in dangerous situations, neglected and depressed.

Black youth in our neighborhood are not socially distant because they have no place to go, or their homes are suddenly filled with people who are not normally there. Already disconnected and disengaged, they spill out into the streets with no opportunities to fill their time. They are idle. Some have expressed suicidal thoughts. Others experiment with drugs and alcohol. Domestic abuse has skyrocketed.

Feelings of disconnection are not limited to our Black youth. This summer, I learned that one of our Latino students and his two siblings had contracted COVID-19 and/or who has died from it. Yet COVID testing is viewed with suspicion (harking back to the Tuskegee Airmen experimentation with Black people) and they don’t wear masks because Black people risk their lives when wearing masks -- they are viewed as suspicious threats or gang members even when unmasked.

Accordingly, maintaining close contact with our students and their families is our top priority. Because of our community’s needs, we did not close for even one day over the past 9 months and have adopted new means of supporting Shaw youth using texts, social media and digital conversations.

My vision for the next year is for SCC to remain open, be able to maintain a steady stream of revenue, and refine what it means to be a Community Anchor Institution. Our success will depend on our ability to successfully adapt to the changing circumstances around us, and our ability to adopt a viable hybrid distance learning (DL)/socially-distanced in-person program model.

In today’s uncertain and ever-shifting world, stability and calm are desperately needed. Our staff has stepped up despite being confronted with many new challenges, including mastering a steep learning curve for DL and setting up (with assistance from our IT contractor, Ron Nicholson, of BeauseiCan), a Google platform for sharing both pre-recorded and livestreamed content. We also continue to use the hugely successful Black Mr. Rogers methodology to gauge student emotional temperatures during the new school year.

Working through the challenges of the past 9 months, we have learned the importance of a localized, community-based self-reliance. This self-reliance facilitates conversations, raises awareness of issues, and brings all stakeholders, including Shaw youth, to a common (virtual) table to coordinate, innovate, and advocate community-stances that speak truth to power, and effect change.

SCC has been prescient of today’s challenges and is centered in the needs of the community. Some believe that direct service provision is an ineffective way to bring about systemic change. Yet, as a human systems engineer, I believe that working directly with our youth informs grass root systemic change. So much of what SCC does serves as “proof of concept” and should be used as a model upon which critical changes to policy and existing systems can rely and reference.

To this end, I have maintained a role as a community convener and mouthpiece on behalf of the greater Shaw community by meeting with program officers at the DC OST and the 21st Century Community Learning Center offices, our two largest government grant funders, to discuss coordinated afterschool and DL policies. After completing the Essential Workers grant, I consulted with the DC government and shared lessons learned. And I now sit on DC’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Council to discuss disconnected youth workforce issues. None of this would have been possible or credible without taking the initial steps of working with our youth and family members.

Stay safe and healthy.

Warmest regards,
Sudi West
**Meet Board Member Carolyn Lowery, MSW**

Carolyn Lowery joined the Shaw board in February 2020. She is an expert in and firm proponent of racial justice, racial equity, and racial liberation. Currently, she is employed at Racial Justice NOW! in Maryland and is also a freelance consultant through her own company, Roots to the Future LLC. As a racial equity professional, she brings experience, insight, training, openness, and commitment to racial justice, racial equity, and racial liberation, which she understands as steps in a process.

She understands racial equity as just one step in the broader trajectory of racial justice (the first step in trying to repair harm, as understood within the broader history of race and inequality in our society) and racial liberation (the last stage). To achieve racial equity, the second stage, outcomes can’t be determined by race. Racial liberation would be a society where the transcending of race occurs (along with that the dissolution of all forms and institutions and systems of oppression, inequality) and where all lives are valued.

When asked what the board of a non-profit organization, like SCC, should look like if it is said to be focused on/concerned with/working toward racial equity, she believes that the organization must have the openness and willingness to go deep, to be introspective, and expect growth. By fostering an environment where these challenging conversations can be held somewhat mitigates the harm of inequities. She believes that SCC board’s must be more representative of the community it serves, bring more diversity and inclusion to less represented voices/perspectives, and hear from our youth and other community stakeholders.

Welcome, Carolyn!

**Congratulations to Marquetta!**

Program Coordinator Marquetta Washington has received her Child Development Associate certificate. She studied with the advanced class online — a course that typically takes 5 months to complete but she completed in a month. Her immediate goal is being tested on course content but due to the pandemic, it has been difficult to find a testing site. Her long-term goals include opening her own daycare center for children 3 -5 years old and earning B.A. from the University of Phoenix in Early Childhood Development. Congrats Marquetta! Thanks for being a role model to our children and youth.

**Notes From the Board**

The Board would like to recognize the tremendous work that SCC staff has put in – especially that of Executive Director Sudi West – to keep the program running during this very difficult pandemic. They are not only exhausting themselves but also risking their health to provide much needed services to the Shaw community. They are true heroes!

The Board is also delighted to announce that Compass – a non-profit consulting group – has selected SCC to participate in a board development project. Through the project, the SCC board will implement engagement and effectiveness strategies with the goal of sustaining high-performance. We are looking forward to this journey.
**Why Black Mister Rogers?**

Inspired by Rev. Fred Rogers’ fundamental approach that “[a]nything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable, less scary,” SCC has developed a socio-emotional learning platform through which students can openly express their feelings about issues that concern them. SCC introduced the platform in March to help students process the trauma and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has severely affected the social, emotional, and mental well-being of our children and youth, and the trauma they face now will have long term consequences. Challenges include: changes in routine; a break in continuity of learning; a break in the continuity of health care; missed significant life events; and the loss of security, safety and structure.

Accordingly, the CDC recommends practices that provide stability and support to children, maintain a normal routine, encourage discussion and expression, recognize changes in their emotional well-being, and help youth stay socially connected. SCC’s “Black Mr. Rogers (BMR)” platform implements these practices.

Sudi West is Mr. Rogers to our students. He begins virtual learning sessions encouraging them to engage in discussion at their own comfort level, and lets them know that equity of voice, inclusion and agency matter in this confusing world.

The BMR methodology is applied by staff members in every distance learning session with our younger students, starting with an “emotional temperature” check-in, where highs and lows of the week are voiced aloud. Although students may take a pass when it’s their turn to speak, staff members follow up privately to ascertain their well-being. Staff members finish every session with an “optimistic closure” such as “I am looking forward to tomorrow because...”

The methodology is also applied in SCC’s Real News program to both combat misinformation on social media (COVID-19: Fact vs. Fiction) and to facilitate cultural and community-centric discussions about racial inequities among those infected and racial tolerance toward Asians. Our students participate in discussions, conduct research, and comment through online journaling.

Beyond its application in the COVID-19 context, the BMR methodology will help our children and youth acquire an array of skills (paying attention, setting goals, collaboration, planning for the future), attitudes (internal motivation, perseverance, sense of purpose), values (responsibility, honesty, integrity), and abilities (to think critically, consider different views, and problem solve) to succeed in school, careers, and life.

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**The Cultural Asset Incubator**

People often ask, “What can one small nonprofit like SCC do to bring about racial and economic equity?” Contrary to the neo-liberal/conservative philosophies informing the last several decades of public policy, SCC knows that change can only come by lifting from the bottom UP. At SCC, this means developing programs that put the needs of the Shaw neighborhood community at the front and center.

In our neighborhood, there are many entrepreneurial youth, who have promising business ideas but lack the opportunities – the means, access, or sheer luck – needed to get their ventures off the ground successfully. We at SCC believe that our community shares a cultural aesthetic, unique to the world, and that we should value and support these homegrown businesses, as the assets they are. Thus, SCC designed a workforce development program called the Cultural Asset Incubator (CAI) to help members of our community confront the challenges they face in a largely-white financial world; challenges which have only intensified over the last 8 months of the COVID-19 pandemic.
The CAI program consists of two main programmatic components: mentorship and financial education. In a 15-week program of entrepreneurial training, Shaw youth are partnered with the owners of local (Black-owned) businesses, Cultural Asset Businesses (CABs), who will serve as their “Credible” Mentors. Youth will be paid small stipends during CAI training as a show of our commitment and belief in their value. The 15-week program will culminate in a capstone event, Youth Shark Tank, which, true to its namesake, will offer youth who complete the CAI program and successfully present their business idea to the Shark tank access to capital for their burgeoning businesses.

By pairing youth with local entrepreneurs whose businesses have long supported and anchored our neighborhood, SCC will cultivate the next generation of cultural expression in the Shaw neighborhood while also actively supporting and investing in the CABs that have long served as the backbone and lifelines of the Shaw neighborhood community.

One thing we have learned by talking to our CABs is that a significant barrier to black entrepreneurial success is their lack of access to banks, which greatly limits their ability to exist and operate as a business! Therefore, SCC has also connected with nearby Industrial Bank (IB), enlisting their expertise to anchor the financial education component of CAI. This link was purposefully cultivated as IB, a Black-owned business, also finds itself limited by the systemic nature of racial inequality in the United States. Despite being local and Black-owned, IB has had difficulty connecting with potential new customers: there are gaps between the bank and the community, and between the bank and the businesses. IB has voiced its interest and support of our vision/program because they lack the pathways to bridge these gaps themselves. Forging these connections integrates our programmatic needs with our support for the #BankBlack movement.

To this end, SCC is scheduled to convene two roundtables in February and April 2021, to bring together CABs, Industrial Bank, youth, and other key community members/stakeholders. We know it is important to bring all stakeholders to the table -- not just those with money and power. SCC is actively seeking multi-year grant funding for CAI, so that we can convene these necessary meetings, during which CABs will discuss underlying root causes of financial disparity, and articulate talking points/testimony to be used in advocating for policy change before the DC Council, Mayor’s office, Small Business Administration, and other local and federal government agencies. By helping CABs raise their comfort level with Black community banks, like Industrial Bank, and build an information and resource base, SCC hopes to ensure that CABs will not be shut out of economic opportunities, like the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), simply because they lack the financial savvy and access to networks/opportunities needed to put the prerequisites in place.

Through CAI we hope to achieve the following:

- Increase youth confidence in themselves as entrepreneurs by leveraging community relationships and knowledge;
- Increase youth and CAB access to equity;
- Increase banking opportunities with Black community banks;
- Increase knowledge/awareness of COVID-19 resources, such as PPP;
- Build youth and CAB confidence to organize, advocate for and effectuate change;
- Reduce the wealth gap of Black families and encourage the passing of intergenerational wealth;
- Shatter the myth of presumed financial incompetence by Black families; and
- Create a model for community and national replication.

While we are happy to act as a trusted community convener, CAI is not simply about having conversations. In convening these meetings and deliberately cultivating these connections, we not only provide services to our community, but also we put into practice our theory of action. SCC hopes to demonstrate the efficacy of the CAI as a model for systems change. In this instance, convening a coalition of youth and CABs can become an effective change mechanism for eliminating one segment of systemic racism while also prioritizing the well-being and future of our neighborhood and community.
Why a Youth Black History Curriculum?
From the Desk of Sara McDonough*

Recently, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order #13950, which cancels all efforts, programming, and funding for much-needed trainings related to historically marginalized, oppressed, and exploited groups in the U.S. Despite this mandate, SCC remains committed to providing quality, community-centered, culturally responsive education to Shaw youth -- in the style of distance learning because of the pandemic. We believe that a culturally-responsive, quality education is critically necessary because it provides:

- A vocabulary to talk about and question the world
- History and framework to see how the world has been structured and works
- An understanding of self; a sense of positive identity
- Socio-emotional learning targets as well as empathy and respect for others
- Knowledge of how to understand, talk about, respect difference

I propose using Kadir Nelson’s book and audiobook, *Heart and Soul*, in conjunction with students’ existing social studies/history curriculum, to teach about the historical and legal contexts that affect Black Americans. When I teach, I use history as a lens through which you see the world; history is the context from which the present and future arise. I have found that providing a common language at the beginning of the course can help students better engage the material and each other.

I draw on Mills’ notion of the sociological imagination to implement my philosophy. Developing a sociological imagination requires not only an awareness of one’s social location, but also the language and tools to be able to talk about it, or through it. Getting students to develop a critical and reflexive language for understanding and describing their positions relative to the margins, centers, and relations of power encourages better and more respectful ways to see and engage surrounding worlds and realities.

My pedagogical approach is “critical thinking/consciousness, by any means necessary.” The underlying philosophy that guides my pedagogy and teaching is a belief that the job of an educator is to help facilitate students’ ability to engage their own critical faculties, abilities, and skills—as agents in the learning process. And I feel that I should and can do so by whatever means necessary. I do not believe that teaching is simply the unilateral transmission of sanitized and state-approved information/“knowledge,” from instructor to students. Rather, the processes of learning and teaching are interactive and dynamic, and that a (politically) relevant education has both a purpose and a function. I approach teaching from the perspective that education should be critical and practice-based, providing students with the tools necessary to be more cognizant, active and responsible citizens. My pedagogy is one invested in mutual and reciprocated trust, respect, effort, and dedication to the collective learning process.

Students will leave this DL course with a richer, deeper, more complicated understanding of the social dynamics and histories that inform their lives and the lives of others.

*Sara McDonough is an award-winning educator who will be working with Shaw youth in the virtual classroom. McDonough received her B.A. in Sociology from the College of William and Mary (2005) and her M.S. from Virginia Tech (2009), where she specialized in Africana Studies and Indigenous Studies. She enjoys small class settings that can be tailored to the flow and interests of her students and is looking forward to meeting everyone virtually!

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Our mission is to enhance the lives and expand the opportunities of children, youth and adults residing in the Shaw neighborhood.

If you have questions about Shaw Community Center, please contact us at info@shawcommunity.org.