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I DREAM DETROIT

The Voice and Vision of Women of Color
on Detroit's Future

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To obtain a copy of the report, please contact:
Institute for Policy Studies Communications Department
1301 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

Email requests for hard copies of the report to comteam@ips-dc.org or www.iDreamDetroit.org

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The Black Worker Initiative is a bold and exciting new effort launched by the Institute for Policy Studies, which is deeply committed to helping achieve both the historic and contemporary aims of the labor and civil rights movements. Black workers have been particularly hard hit by the rising tide of inequality in today's economy. We hope our Initiative will be part of the solution to helping expand opportunities for black worker organizing and thereby greatly aid the revitalization of the U.S. labor movement as a whole. Indeed, the Initiative operates under the belief that black workers hold a key role in union revitalization. Without a platform for their voices and perspectives, a vital piece of the progressive movement is absent from the greater public discourse on race and economic and social justice. The Initiative uses conferences, published reports, public education materials, and mainstream and social media in framing a road map to how black worker organizing can be an ongoing vehicle for the preservation of the labor movement and the promotion of civil rights and racial and economic justice.

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Project Director: Marc D. Bayard

Principal Investigator and Author: Kimberly Freeman Brown

Researchers: Susan Holmberg and Michael Paarlberg

Editors: Geri Coleman Tucker and Mike Tucker

Survey Analyst: Clary L. Brown

Focus Group Administrators: Clevette Malden Ridguard, Patricia A. Mason, Janet Lee Campbell

Advisory Committee: Keith Bennett, Linda Campbell, Joey Combs, Anika Goss-Foster, Devita Davison, Alicia Farris, Yodit Mesfin Johnson, Monica Lewis-Patrick, Raquel Castañeda-López, Angie Reyes, Kayln Risker, Sarida Scott, Shirley Stancato

Photographer: Jacqueline Hicks

Celebrity Makeup Artist: Letitia Thornhill

Graphic Designer: Deepika Mehta

Public Relations Specialist: Delora Hall Tyler

Project Assistants: Janaé Bonsu, John M. Brandon II, Nia Nyamweya, Marc Priester, Mandisa Routheni

Local Expert: Deborah Taylor

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For more information about IPS or the Black Worker Initiative or to make a tax-deductible contribution to support IPS's work, please visit www.ips-dc.org or call the development office at 202.234.9382.

Women of Color are Vital to Detroit's Revitalization

FOREWORD BY
La June Montgomery Tabron
President and CEO of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

A portrait of La June Montgomery Tabron, a Black woman with short dark hair, wearing a red dress and a multi-strand pearl necklace. She is smiling and has her arms crossed.

Rarely do we hear authentic stories about the instrumental roles that women of color play in the revival of Detroit. Our individual journeys and our paths to success are largely untold and unknown—a void frequently filled with misconceptions and false narratives about women of color. Yet, behind the scenes, largely away from the newspaper headlines and nightly news, we have a powerful presence, such as managing one of Detroit's largest food pantries, helping African immigrants adjust to an often-hostile new environment, serving as an adoptive mom and mentor to more than 300 vulnerable children. These are just a few of the unsung heroines who are committed to their work and are making sacrifices to protect and advance the well-being of Detroiters as the core to Detroit's successful future. We are also business leaders, social workers, public officials, architects, foundation presidents, and so much more.

In Detroit, African American, Asian, Arab and Hispanic women are more than 47 percent of the city's total population. Clearly, Detroit will not fully blossom into

the city of our dreams unless women of color are also progressing. Not surprisingly, there are many women of color who are leading the city's revitalization. They are working across the public, private and nonprofit sectors to lift our communities and provide opportunities for other women to succeed as mothers, family providers and role models. This is a continuation of the historic culture of women of color, who through the ages are often called upon to be larger than life, as they accept the core responsibility for supporting and nurturing their families, neighbors and communities.

What exists is a strong, unbreakable sister network, a connection with other women who can be relied upon in times of need and who help us soar to our full potential. This is a narrative known to grandmothers, mothers and daughters throughout Detroit and the country, a reality passed on from generation to generation. But even the strongest among us need support. We cannot leave them alone on an island, fighting impossible odds. Detroit and communities throughout this land must rally around them.

As a native Detroiter, I experienced this powerful network in my own home. My mother, Mary Louise Montgomery, followed the legacy of strong African American women—our spiritual and emotional center—who somehow raised her 10 children while also working outside the home to help dad provide for the family. Her virtues were passed on to her daughters; my quality teacher was my sister, five years older. She took me under her wing, helping me excel in school and inspiring me to study business at Cass Technical High School, become a CPA, and go into public accounting. I had not considered working for a foundation, but 30 years ago another sister convinced me to accept a surprise offer to work for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan. In 2014, I became the first woman and first African American president and CEO of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Many women are the backbones of their families and communities. For Detroit, a key measure of progress is the leadership positions that women of color hold

in public, private and nonprofit sectors, allowing them to shape and enact programs, policies and practices. Women of color are influencing the city in a variety of ways, often with an eye toward improving quality of life in our communities, and especially for women who live, work or raise families in Detroit.

I Dream Detroit: The Voice and Vision of Women of Color on Detroit's Future, a project funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, provides an important platform for unheralded women of color to articulate the challenges, as well as the accomplishments, they encounter daily in communities throughout the city. The project is consistent with the guidance from our founder, Will Keith Kellogg, who advocated for community-based initiatives, ones shaped by communities with an understanding that sustainable change only comes when reflecting the hearts and aspirations of people in communities.

I Dream Detroit is unleashing the untold narratives and powerful stories of incredible women of color. Their stories provide a baseline to gauge progress. By documenting these stories, *I Dream Detroit* is revealing anecdotes about life in our communities, the barriers that residents are facing, and the challenges faced by women trying to make life better. Their stories further the case for leveraging public, private and nonprofit resources to address these circumstances and make real progress.

Furthermore, these authentic narratives give our city a solid foundation, a place from which we can move forward and create more equitable communities. Through surveys and listening sessions, Detroit residents have identified their challenges, including structural barriers to employment, the impact of poverty and financial insecurity, the many needs of our children, the lack of support for entrepreneurs and business owners, and many others.

The Kellogg Foundation hears these voices. We strive to support community-driven initiatives that go behind the scenes and the headlines to identify and address the real problems, not superficial ones. For instance, Hope Starts Here: Detroit's Early Childhood Partnership is helping

to mitigate one barrier cited by women: insufficient early childhood education programs. In another example, the Kellogg Foundation partnered with JP Morgan Chase & Companies to launch a \$7 million Detroit Entrepreneurs of Color Fund to support minority businesses and those that primarily hire people of color. In 2016, the fund awarded \$2.75 million to nearly 30 minority-owned, neighborhood businesses. For Detroit to fully recover, it must receive investments that touch every neighborhood, that address the underlying causes of inequities. They must be inclusive initiatives that empower communities.

The Kellogg Foundation is implementing a multi-year, national and community-based effort to engage communities, organizations and individuals from multiple sectors across the United States in racial healing and addressing present-day inequities caused by conscious and unconscious bias. Our Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) framework is investing in the creation of more complete and accurate narratives that will help people understand how racial bias has been embedded in communities.

I Dream Detroit is demonstrating the value of truth-telling, and changing the narrative about women of color in Detroit, the work they do, and the conditions that they must overcome. The stories by these women of color can help change hearts and minds, opening new possibilities for progress as we seek a city and a country with people who have the capacity to see themselves in one another and transform structural and systematic racism.

What women of color in Detroit want is a more equitable society where their children will have opportunities to reach their full potential. These stories tell us much about where Detroit's women of color are today, and how much progress must be made to achieve that goal.

Their voices inspire a call to action, a need for resources and support that can strengthen these providers and their vital activities on behalf of their communities. Women of color are nearly half the population of Detroit. As they go, so goes the future of the city!

“The first time I ever heard the word “solutionary” was a few years ago on a ride from Detroit to Chicago. Barbara was driving and carrying on a lively conversation with Myrtle (who was in the back seat) about the way women and especially mothers multitask, solving one problem after another every minute of every day. I was in the passenger seat, listening, when I heard one of them say, **‘Women are solutionaries,’** and suddenly I recognized that everything that Detroiters were doing to survive in our devastated and deindustrialized city was not only making the next American revolution but changing the paradigm of revolution. [True revolutions] are about redefining our relationships with one another, to the Earth and to the world; about creating a new society in the places and spaces left vacant by the disintegration of the old; about hope, not despair; about saying yes to life and no to war; about finding the courage to love and care for

peoples of the world as we love and care for our own families. [Martin Luther] King’s revolutionary vision is about each of us becoming the change we want to see in the world.”

—GRACE LEE BOGGS,
*Solutionaries are Today’s
Revolutionaries*, October 23, 2013



Introduction: Meet the Solutionaries

BY

Kimberly Freeman Brown and Marc D. Bayard

Institute for Policy Studies

The *I Dream Detroit: The Voice and Vision of Women of Color on Detroit's Future* project works to bring the experiences and ideas of women of color from all walks of life more fully to bear in shaping Detroit's economic development plans. In Detroit, women of color (Black, Latina, Arab and Asian) make up more than 47 percent of the city's population; and a substantial portion of them live below the poverty line (56 percent of Latinas, 55 percent of Asians and 40 percent of African Americans). Though the odds may be against their success, women of color lead families; are self-employed and employ others as business owners; run nonprofits; hold public office; rebuild their lives after incarceration; and help those in need. Legendary Detroiter and social activist Grace Lee Boggs called these everyday way-makers "Solutionaries."

Conversations with the solutionaries profiled in this report and more than 500 other Detroit women have made one thing clear: Imagining and building a new Detroit without the meaningful participation of these women will prevent the city from fully coming into its potential and promise.

I Dream Detroit is grounded in the premise that amplifying the voices of women of color—both those

most affected by poverty and those implementing effective strategies for change—is essential to Detroit's long-term progress. Focusing on the economic well-being of women is a way of securing the well-being of Detroit's children in light of the fact that 61 percent of children in Detroit live in households headed by single mothers, according to 2015 data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Toward this end, the overarching objective of *I Dream Detroit* is to reimagine the city's approach to economic development by putting women of color and their children at the center. Those engaged in economic development must be committed to more balanced economic change in Detroit and seek counsel from those whose lived experience will surface effective strategies that can achieve economic security for more of the city's residents.

To surface these strategies, the project launched in spring 2016, convening a series of meetings with direct service providers, small business owners, community activists, union leaders, and elected officials from across the city who now serve as ongoing advisors and partners. That summer, *I Dream Detroit* held six focus groups with partner organizations in different neighborhoods and attracted 131 women. And in the fall of 2016, the project conducted a citywide survey. Through these efforts—paired with interviews of the women profiled in this report—the project has heard from more than 500 women.

MEET THE SOLUTIONARIES

It is our sincere hope that the *I Dream Detroit* report and the project bearing the same name will greatly inform Detroit's ongoing economic development planning—introducing to some, and reintroducing to others, new partners that economic development leaders should be working with more closely.

Imagining and building a new Detroit without the meaningful participation of these women will prevent the city from fully coming into its potential and promise.

The report is organized around four types of solutionaries—anchors, architects, advocates and entrepreneurs. Their deeply personal narratives of trials and triumphs all offer insights that reflect the perceptions and themes that emerged in the broader conversation with women through the focus groups and citywide survey. The report concludes with a series of recommendations to move the ideas within these pages to action.

The Anchors are women who make sure that the needs of Detroiters are met. Many are direct service providers—supplying food, youth mentorship, and other forms of support to Detroiters in need. Amazingly, many are financing this work themselves; and all of their operations are under-resourced. Other anchors featured in the report are proud Detroiters whose stories of struggle, survival and progress speak to the need for women of color in Detroit to be critical players in shaping the city's future. By circumstance, and on purpose, they have stayed in Detroit and are committed to the uplift of their families, their neighborhoods, and the city.

The Architects are women who are fueling economic development across the city. Community-oriented architects are building infrastructure in neighborhoods or are leaders in the economic development domain who work to ensure that the interests of the community are brought forward in spaces where the powerful are making decisions about the city's future.

The Advocates are women engaged in arenas where policies affecting Detroiters are made. From community activists to locally elected officials, these women build power among the people, or leverage their power for the people.

The Entrepreneurs are our socially minded business owners whose enterprises are bringing valuable products and services to underserved neighborhoods and communities. Our entrepreneurs leverage their enterprises for community uplift by hiring people traditionally denied access to jobs or young people in need of job training.

In our research, we discovered that many of these women defy a single category but operate in many spheres and represent only a fraction of the talent that women of color bring to the city.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The interviews, focus group conversations, and citywide survey results paint a picture of who women of color in Detroit are—a portrait that both brings them out of obscurity and belies the narrow and often negative images of them. A more accurate image is important because perceptions shape reality. Inaccurate perceptions of women of color, especially poor women, influence public policy decisions and choices about when and where development investments are made. *I Dream Detroit's* findings help to create a more accurate portrayal of women of color across the city.

Strengths of the Solutionaries

- **Women of color are tenacious and have a deep affinity for Detroit.** For some, circumstances keep them in the city. But many of those with whom we spoke have made a conscious choice to stay within the city limits despite challenges, such as the high cost of car and homeowners insurance, blight, lack of city services, and the scarcity of other amenities readily found in the suburbs.

- **There are many highly educated and skilled women of color in Detroit across all demographics.** Among citywide survey respondents 28 percent have some college education, 34 percent hold undergraduate degrees and 30 percent hold advanced degrees. Education, however, does not insulate them from experiencing economic insecurity. Despite high levels of education, only 50 percent of survey respondents report earning a living wage.
- **Women of color entrepreneurs and nonprofit leaders hire those traditionally shut out of the labor market.** Nearly 100 citywide survey respondents identified themselves as business owners or nonprofit leaders, representing 19 percent of the survey sample. Those that have employees hired more than half of them from disadvantaged communities, including 24 percent who were in need of a second chance and 19 percent who were first-time jobholders.
- **Retirees are an underutilized resource.** Detroit has a wealth of retirees, many of whom are former civil servants with professional experience. Almost a third of retired survey respondents were forced into early retirement—many during the Great Recession. Nearly half (49 percent) want or need to continue to work but say they believe that age discrimination or the perception by businesses that they are overqualified are factors in them being denied employment.
- **Women of color are focused on the next generation.** Across all demographics, the work and dreams of women of color in Detroit are intrinsically linked to creating opportunities for young people.

The Challenges They Face

In interviews, *I Dream Detroit* citywide survey responses, and focus group conversations, women of color identified a number of challenges that hindered their personal achievement and the growth of their for-profit and nonprofit enterprises. Some common themes:

Poverty creates insecurity in the lives of women and their families. They say a host of issues hinder their

employment, educational pursuits, and ability to meet the basic needs for themselves and their children. Among the 67 percent of survey respondents who self-identified as economically insecure, 22 percent say that they forgo food due to lack of income. Among economically insecure survey respondents who have experienced homelessness and housing instability, 60 percent report lack of jobs and income as a factor; 56 percent say they can not find affordable housing. *I Dream Detroit* participants also point to other destabilizing issues in their lives, such as water insecurity, safety issues, health and healthcare insecurity, overcriminalization for minor driving infractions and not having auto insurance, and a lack of support for those returning home from prison.

Lack of job opportunities and transportation are structural barriers to employment. When asked about obstacles to maintaining steady employment, 91 percent of unemployed respondents to the citywide survey identified lack of job opportunities and 43 percent pointed to lack of transportation. Their responses are buttressed by a 2017 report from Detroit Future City (DFC) that determined Detroit's economy has only 30 jobs per 100 residents—low compared to other cities in the U.S.—and only 25 percent of Detroit's households have cars.

Women of color do not feel included in Detroit's economic revival. Across all demographics, 71 percent of survey respondents do not feel like they are part of Detroit's economic revival, despite contributing to Detroit's revitalization as taxpayers, by living in the city, supporting locally owned businesses, and supporting local institutions that help those in need. Many also expressed a sense that current economic development in Detroit is meant to attract younger, whiter newcomers and not longtime residents.

I Dream Detroit is a call for those in power to see women of color in Detroit—who make up 91 percent of all women in the city—as Grace Lee Boggs saw them, as sources of hope, not despair; and as change-makers capable of creating a new Detroit “in places and spaces left vacant by the disintegration of the old.”

THE ANCHORS

“The only way to survive is by
taking care of one another.”

—GRACE LEE BOGGS,
Democracy Now! interview, 2010



‘What we do
offer is
hope’



The managing director of one of Detroit's largest food pantries combats food insecurity and builds clients' self-worth

REV.
ROSLYN
BOUIER

Lack of consistent access to food, known as food insecurity, is a greater problem in Detroit than most people likely know. According to a 2011 Wayne State University study, approximately 30 percent of Detroit households were food insecure, more than double the national average.

When such hardships befall families and social safety nets are inadequate, churches, community organizations and individuals like Rev. Roslyn Bouier, managing director of the Brightmoor Connection Client Choice Food Pantry, step forward to stand in the gap.

The pantry, which serves approximately 350 families a month, is in the Brightmoor neighborhood, home to the city's largest percentage of residents returning from prison and where poverty rates are higher than the city's average.

The pantry meets clients' basic food needs and Rev. Bouier feeds them a steady diet of encouragement, access to other basic human needs, and a sense of their worthiness to participate in Detroit's revival. Rev. Bouier uses her personal testimony of deliverance from a nearly 20-year drug addiction and a felony conviction to give hope to her clients. "At the worst of

my addiction, I lost everything that made me feel like I could be somebody,” she says. “My assignment from God is to renew and encourage them to know that they are worthy.”

Building a sense of worth and dignity includes use of the “client choice” model of emergency food distribution at the pantry. That allows clients and their families to select their own food as they would in a grocery store as opposed to supplying pre-packaged boxes or bags of food. In addition to instilling a sense of dignity, the client choice model contributes to less waste and therefore lower costs.

Innovation in providing emergency food distribution is only one aspect of Rev. Bouier’s vision. Her work is a stepping-stone for Detroiters who have fallen on hard times to see themselves as a vital part of Detroit’s revival. Removing the stigma and shame of poverty is a step toward poor Detroiters—who make up 40 percent of the city’s population—taking their seat at the table to help shape the city’s future. Rev. Bouier and food pantry clients have participated in efforts led by the nonprofit group Building Movement Detroit to develop and advance the goals of the Detroit People’s Platform, a network of community groups whose vision for the city includes good jobs, food security, access to public transportation, fair land use, and democratic governance.

When not at the pantry, Rev. Bouier visits her clients in hospitals, advocates against water shutoffs, and organizes stations where people can come and get clean water. She works overtime, but the stipend she receives to manage the pantry only covers part-time hours. She pays her three faithful volunteers out of the money she receives.

Channeling more resources into the work of people like Rev. Bouier is a sound investment in the revival of not just a city, but of the spirit and dignity of its people.

We see so many people whose lives have been broken. And I know what a broken life is like. I understand how it feels to get lost. I never liked me when I was on drugs. I despised me. I promised God if he let me out, I would help his people who were lost. Because if God could pull me out, I knew there were others who could be taken out as well. They needed to know that God could do it.

I was so hungry and thirsty inside for love, acceptance and self-worth. I didn’t feel like I could ever be anything. That’s why I can identify when my clients come in the door.

So often things happen and, especially for us women, we feel like we can’t find our way back. We feel like

we’ll always have that stigma of what was and what we did. I see so many women with their heads down and their shoulders rolled over because life has just beat them down.

No one ever plans on needing to come to a food pantry. It doesn’t make us irresponsible or bad people. It doesn’t mean that we’re not good stewards of our funds. But that’s the way people are made to feel.

At the Brightmoor Connection Client Choice Pantry, what we do offer is hope. My job is to renew and strengthen those whom God sends to me and encourage them to know that they are somebody and that they are worthy. The physical food is what is needed, but the spiritual feeding of hope and the belief in oneself again is what we feed them with the most.

At most pantries, people get a box or bag of food. I know some organizations say, “People should just be glad that they’re given food.” But at the Client Choice pantry, people come in to shop with dignity for what they want and need. You get to fill your grocery cart and make choices. In most cases, when you end up coming to a food pantry, most of your choices have been taken from you.

these jobs. These resources are not available to people in the community. But what does exist is water shutoffs and land-grabbing and housing insecurity.

If you want to do a revitalization of this city, you’ve got to include everybody in the revitalization. You have to look at what everybody needs. We need to make it where everybody has a voice at the table.



If you can make someone feel like they have nothing to offer, then you don’t have to worry about them coming and challenging you or taking you to task on things.

They come by appointment, so there’s that dignity of not waiting outside in line. I have a problem with people having to stand outside in long lines to wait for food. I feel like that is so demeaning. Our value shouldn’t be diminished because we’re in need.

We’ve been blessed to reach and touch and meet needs. Along with the food, we offer other resources. People come to us, and we have clothes. We do referrals for health care and for state emergency funds. We have people just come and sit and they don’t want anything. They just need a safe haven where they aren’t judged and there is no expectation of them.

And we do social justice. The food pantry is social justice work. Right now we’ve been fighting the water injustice; and we want a place at the table with the economic revival. What happens is that if you can make someone feel like they have nothing to offer, then you don’t have to worry about them coming and challenging you or taking you to task on things.

Detroit is coming back, but the economic revival and resurgence is not for the people of the city. It’s not for Detroiters. It’s for outsiders. It’s not for the women who come here. It’s not for their families. It’s not being planned for women who struggle in these poverty-level jobs. They’ve all but eliminated mass transportation, so if you don’t have a car, you can’t get downtown to

First of all, you’ve got to set up some training programs and make sure resources are available for families, for women and for men to be able to get these jobs and be part of the resurgence. You need recreation centers reopened, where kids can be trained for jobs and parents can go in and get the resources they need. Open it up where our families can have access to low-cost education.

My dream for the food pantry is that it becomes a place where we have resources. Maybe there’s not a need for food anymore, but we can do training for women, kids and men. It would be awesome if we could get people into programs so that families could be able to get jobs and get what they need to feel whole again. No one tries to address the real brokenness of what happens by the time you get to a food pantry.

I pray that we become a place where people can learn again, grow again and feel good again.

29% of low-income Citywide Survey respondents report that they forgo food.



FATOU-SEYDI SARR

Fatou-Seydi Sarr, proudly describes herself as an African immigrant and Black Muslim woman. She has lived in Detroit for 10 years and works to ensure that the concerns and interests of African immigrants in the city are considered and addressed.

Sarr's path to her advocacy work in Detroit spans three continents. Born in Strasbourg, France, and raised in Senegal, in 2001 while living in Paris she met her former husband, a native Detroiter. Two years later, after Sarr's father gave his blessing, the couple married and Sarr moved to Detroit with him. Now, a single mother of a 12-year-old daughter, she spends her days helping Detroiters from across the African continent navigate their new hometown.

The more than 14,000 African immigrants in metro Detroit face challenges, such as language barriers, and obstacles to getting their education abroad recognized at colleges and universities in the U.S. It is an expensive

Single mom works odd jobs
to finance advocacy work for
African immigrants



‘My dream for African immigrants
is for them to be **visible**’

and frustrating process that often forces highly educated men and women—43 percent have at least a college degree—to begin new careers in hair braiding, cab driving and other fields. Explains Sarr, “They come, they are in the language school, they are tired, they’re working as busboys at restaurants doing whatever they can to pay the fees to go to English classes.”

There is also constant fear of deportation because of Detroit’s location along the U.S. border with Canada. “Because we are at the border, Detroit is very policed,” says Sarr. “It doesn’t make anyone comfortable. Border Patrol can easily cross in for security reasons. So African immigrants are afraid.” Sarr recounts stories where even a minor traffic violation can lead to detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and possible deportation.

Her advocacy efforts range from helping young people gain access to federal aid for college to making sure social workers offer interpretation services. She even helps people find good lawyers or information on how to open a small business in Detroit. “I’m a connector,” she explains. “I connect African immigrants with resources that they may not know about and advocate for resources to be created where they don’t exist.” Sarr truly has a heart that understands the pain that immigrants face when trying to place themselves and their families in better positions to not just survive, but to succeed and excel.

Although her advocacy is her passion and mission, she is not paid to do it. She finances her work on behalf of others through a range of jobs including teaching African dance, serving as a French and Wolof interpreter, and taking on clients as a massage therapist. All that she does is to bring African immigrants out of the shadows of being a “minority within the Black minority.”


There’s huge diversity among West Africans in Detroit. People are from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Benin. You have a lot of Senegalese. So when I talk with the French Africans, it’s like a trail. They come to New York first. And when New York starts being overcrowded, they move from New York to Detroit.

For the women who are doing hair, Detroit is a nice hair capital. They could make a lot of money in Detroit. They had space. They could own a house in three or four years; and houses are bigger than in New York. Detroit gives them the possibility to come and be an entrepreneur and open businesses and work for themselves and make money for themselves. They saw an opportunity and they took it.

Africans in Detroit are not really able to be in the professions they had back home. African immigrants are the most educated as far as having a degree coming in because the restrictions on immigration to the U.S. were harsher on African countries. So it’s easier in Africa, when you want to come here, that at least you have a bachelor’s degree. Most of the educated people come here and, when they come to school and you give them your degree, they make an equivalence chart. Most of the time, some of your classes are not recognized, so you end up retaking some of those classes. We create a vacuum where when you come to the U.S. from an African country you have to retake classes and pay for those classes. You find out that your money or wealth isn’t worth anything in the U.S. So we have to make a decision. Are you going to pay for those classes? Are you going to pay for the equivalence for

you to continue to go to school? Or are you just going to try to do something else? The majority of people decide to try to do something else.

When I came here, I refused to pay for the equivalence. I came here in 2003. I decided to go back to school in 2006. My daughter had heart surgery, and that experience made me feel like I wanted to go into

 *It bothers me that no one thinks of services for them. We invest a lot in this community. We go to school. We pay taxes.*

nursing. At Wayne State University, when it came to the evaluation of my degree from France, they made me write an official letter saying that I was not going to use any of my French degree classes because I wasn't going to pay for the evaluation. I wrote an official letter and signed it and it was notarized saying that I was never going to use the equivalent of my degree that I brought from France. At that point, it didn't matter to me. I just wanted to finish school, whatever it takes.

Whatever it takes is more money—me being more in debt, me spending more time in school that I don't really need to spend.

Now I do a lot of advocacy work. I advocate for more resources. When African immigrants get on campus and they don't have access to resources, they don't know who to talk to. Walking into the Office of International Affairs, nobody pays attention to your plight. They give you the minimum explanation and then let you think for yourself.

Some of them are even scared of going to go talk to their counselor. I went through it, and that made me talk about it and speak up.

Same thing in the public schools. You have children in Detroit in elementary, middle school and high school whose parents are first-generation immigrants. They come here and they barely speak English. Their children are here going to school, and there's nobody who can help them with homework. But the school won't do anything. They tell you, "The parents don't ask for it." And the parents have several reasons. Sometimes they are ashamed. They don't want their children to be negatively labeled. But the school doesn't even think, "I have a bunch of black immigrant children. I have to make sure that they get the help they need in class or after class."

Then there's going to the Department of Human Services (DHS) to ask for simple help. You walk in there and people don't even make an effort to call your name properly. That's where it starts. A lot of women don't have good relationships with their social worker at the DHS, so that's when you don't have good service.

My dream for African immigrants is for them to be visible. It's painful to be invisible. It bothers me that no one thinks of services for them. We invest a lot in this community. We go to school. We pay taxes. I want us to have a shot and get all we need to succeed.

From 2000 to 2005, the number of African immigrants in Michigan nearly doubled to an estimated 30,898.

43% of African immigrants hold a bachelor's degree or higher—slightly more than immigrants from East Asia.

Source: U.S. Census.


Surrogate mom to over 300 young black men built and financed her own program to transform their lives

MINNIE DAVIS

Minnie Davis has made it her life's work to raise and empower at-risk and abandoned young black men in Detroit. In addition to her biological daughter, Davis has been a foster and adoptive mom to more than 300 children over the course of 30 years. Many of the kids that she has mothered did not officially come through the system even though Davis is a licensed foster parent. "I ended up becoming a surrogate mom to a whole bunch of kids because their parents just weren't in their lives," she says.

Born and raised in Bluefield, West Virginia, Davis says trips to Detroit to visit family throughout her childhood confirmed her desire to live in the city. Right after high school she made the move, initially living with her brother. Three weeks later, she had her own apartment, had enrolled in college and was working two jobs. She has called Detroit home ever since.

Over the years, Davis has held numerous jobs and pursued many different career paths. She worked as a nurse in hospital settings, as a school nurse, a caterer, a certified teacher and real estate agent. She even owned her own construction company for more than 30 years and used it to train young people. "Several of the young people who worked with me are now licensed carpenters and master electricians," says Davis proudly.



'I do the work
I do to try
to make sure
they don't
get left
behind'



The one constant in her life is her commitment to children. “I’ve always loved kids, so I always felt I had to protect them,” Davis says.

After years of supporting the children personally and running training and parent support programs, Davis created Young Men-N-Motion, a mentorship program for young black men. It is housed at the Mathis Community Center—a space created by retired Michigan District Court Judge Greg Mathis, a national TV personality and native Detroiter. The young men recently put their construction skills to good use by helping to remodel the center.

The year-round program pairs young men with mentors; offers life skills and job training; and hosts workshops and a variety of events designed to prepare them to become upstanding adults, fathers and citizens. The program also runs a six-week daily summer camp that includes video game design workshops; boxing, nutrition and cooking classes; and sessions on self-esteem, anger management and college readiness.

While Young Men-N-Motion has had official 501(c)(3) nonprofit status since 2011, most of the program is financially supported by Davis, who is disabled, and through in-kind donations. She also partners with other programs across the city. Just under half of the women of color nonprofit founders who responded to the *I Dream Detroit* citywide survey have officially registered their programs. More than half report that raising money is a challenge. Like Davis, they often finance their programs out of their own pockets.

In a city where more children live in extreme poverty than any of the nation’s 50 larger cities, we need more people like Davis, and for her to be positioned to lead strategies that serve young black men in Detroit. Further, we need programs like Men-N-Motion to be well resourced so that they are replicated and taken to scale to protect the greatest hope for Detroit’s future: young people.

In 1999, my daughter graduated from high school. I had my adopted son, Marcus, and seven kids in my house that I was taking care of. I was licensed as a foster parent, but the kids didn’t come through that system. A lot of my young men get put out of the house at an early age because parents don’t want to deal with them any more. Or their mothers are mad at the fathers and they take it out on the kids. A lot of the things the kids go through are no fault of their own. A lot of them fall out of school or get caught in the juvenile system, so I help them get back on track.

I started writing my vision and mission. I said, “I need something for these young men.” So I wrote my

mission statement, which is to provide a house and support for them because they really didn’t have a home. That’s why they were always in my house.

They needed training. My mission is to provide a house and support programs and training for the homeless and at-risk young people to ease the difficult transition to adulthood. I thought about what that needed to include, and it needed a leadership program. They needed counseling, anger management, mentoring. So I just started working on it.

Today, I’ve served over 300 young men and they have been successful. They have degrees, careers and families now, and I’m the only mother or grandma they have.

We've been doing a lot. One of my boys, he's a social justice professor, so we've been having a lot of conversations about social justice and what the kids are feeling. A lot of them are actually afraid of the police, so we had the police come in and talk to them.



*Everything I've done
has been out of my
pocket.*

We do trainings. I put on workshops and events. I run summer camps. This summer, in fact, we ran a video design camp that was excellent. Instead of just playing video games all the time, it helped them actually get to design and make video games so that they can get a job in the field and start off with \$70,000 a year. The training was taught by a video game designer from GM who makes and designs cars.

Detroit is coming back, but it is for a certain area and a certain population. It doesn't extend to the population I serve. A lot of our young people are being left behind. That's why I do the work I do to try to make sure that they don't get left behind. Especially as far as education and the school-to-prison pipeline goes.

I specialize in assessing their needs and hooking them up with a mentor who will help to address it. They will be able to get their high school diplomas, and they'll have a trade. I pull out some skill and find out what they like to do, and then make sure they do that. I help them find jobs. There are a lot of people and places that could hire them, but I think they are kind of discriminating even though they say they don't.

Although I do refer them to other places and help them find housing, I would really like to have my own housing support program where I could do trainings in one part of it and they could actually live upstairs. And then all of them that have been through the program, they could come back as alumni and live.

I just want to be part of the revitalization until they get to where they need to be and that they can be self-sufficient. That's my vision—to empower young people to gain self-discipline, a new work ethic, success and independent living. I really want that for everybody including young ladies. For families period. I wrote that vision back in 1999 and I'm sticking to it.

Everybody kept saying, "Well, you need to get your 501(c)(3) and I said, "We don't need to do that." I filed for the 501(c)(3) and got it, but I was already doing the work. Everything I've done has been out of my pocket.

When I do things and serve food, I ask for food. I ask for little giveaways. I ask for clothes, diapers and basic necessities. But as far as financial backing, I have not asked because God always provides.

As long as the Lord allows me to move, I'm gonna keep moving. I'm in so much pain, but I know somebody out here needs me and my phone is ringing nonstop. And as long as I can get up, I'm gonna keep getting up and saying, "Thank you, Lord." Because I know it's all about him. I'm a servant and I'm gonna keep doing what he wants me to do until he calls me home.

33% of African American and Hispanic/Latino males in Detroit do not graduate from high school. Detroit ranks the lowest in graduating its black male students among 50 districts with 10k+ black male enrollment.

50% of all African American males, ages 20–24, in Detroit were unemployed in 2013.

25% of all Hispanic males, ages 20–24, in Detroit were unemployed in 2013.

Source: My Brother's Keeper: Detroit report.



‘Without us, no revitalization will last’

SAJEDA AHMED

Bangladeshi American Sajeda Ahmed, was born and raised in Detroit and has a vision for the future of her community and hometown. Growing up in her neighborhood, which is home to a large Bangladeshi community, has given her great insight and perspective on the wants and needs of her fellow Detroiters.

She lives in the same house that her parents moved into in 1989 at the beginning of the wave of Bangladeshi immigration to their neighborhood and the small adjacent city of Hamtramck. Like Ahmed's parents, some move to Detroit after living in New York. Others come directly from their home country. Like other immigrant communities across the city, Bangladeshis come for roomier, less expensive housing and job opportunities in the factories tied to the auto industry. Today, 3,391 Bangladeshi live in Detroit.

Young Detroiters speak about the importance of community engagement in development plans

3,391 Bangladeshis live in Detroit.

Source: American Community Survey, 2011–2015

“Often the fathers are the breadwinners and the mothers take care of the home,” Ahmed says. Language barriers, limited education and the need to provide for large families, such as hers, often contribute to many Bangladeshi families living near, at or below the poverty line, she says. “Kids of these immigrant families really work to break out of the cycle of poverty. School is very important to us. A common theme among youth in the Bangladeshi community is, ‘I’ve got to graduate high school, go to college and get a job because I want to support my family.’”

For Ahmed and her family, their modest financial means have not limited their commitment to community service. Ahmed’s mother and other women from the community have strategized about creating funds to meet the needs of newcomers, who often find it difficult to navigate social services due to language barriers. She and her siblings all volunteer. Her brother works closely with young boys and teenagers in the community who are vulnerable to substance abuse and running with the wrong crowd. Her older sister is an elementary school teacher. She and the rest of her sisters volunteer at the local mosque offering educational services, such as tutoring and college preparation support. “Everything that my siblings do is as volunteers,” Ahmed says. “We volunteer our time and service.”

Ahmed was accepted to dental school, but decided to forgo that career path because of the cost. Instead she graduated from Wayne State University with a master’s in Public Health, a field that will enable her to continue to give back to her community. Throughout her studies, Ahmed worked for Meridian Health as a care coordinator.

Ahmed is giving back to her city in ways that need to be resourced more fully. Her story calls for those shaping Detroit’s revival to invest more in communities like hers, which can be the source of lasting revitalization for her hometown.

The first word that I can think of when it comes to Detroit’s revival is gentrification. Detroit is cool now. I remember back in the day when nobody wanted anything to do with Detroit. Now it’s trendy and everybody wants to be a part of it. Now you see people out in the suburbs wearing “Detroit vs. Everybody” and “Born in the 313” T-shirts.

I work downtown right now in one of the big financial buildings in the city where I overlook the city and think, “They’re building condominiums along the river that no one can afford. They’re opening up these organic food shops that no one can afford, and driving these fancy cars.” At the end of the day they drive home to

the suburbs. They come here and work here, but they are not Detroiters. In my company, we have about 2,000 employees and from what I know, I am one of only 20 who were actually born and raised in the city of Detroit.

My family and I feel like we’re excluded from the revitalization that’s happening. I think if you really care about the city then you’re going to do more than just come here, work here and go home at the end of the day.

Let’s look at the communities and all that’s been established here and figure out ways that we can build them up. Because that’s the more lasting kind of

revitalization—not like the trendy, “let’s build a couple of buildings and a stadium and call it revitalization.”

Definitely the first thing I’d do would be to make sure that women’s voices are heard. That’s something that we have not seen so far in this revitalization. It’s been big businessmen and policymakers making all these decisions. Nobody asked us if we wanted a new hockey stadium in the middle of the city. Nobody asked our opinion, and we’re the ones who have to live around it and deal with everything that comes along with it.

My siblings and I always talk about feeling burnt out. There are many times when new families come in and my parents want to support them, but we’re only making so much money and we’ve got a big family. We wish we had more people who were committed to helping others the way we are. The city should really invest in finding people who are willing to spend the time and energy in keeping these communities thriving. As Detroiters, we need to feel like we can have a support system for people to go to. I can’t help every person that comes to me, unfortunately. I wish I could, but I can’t. I want to be able to say, “I can’t help, but here’s someone who can.”



Business people forget that when they come in they can’t just cut off the communities. We are the lifeline. We are the blood that runs through the city.

Many Detroiters feel like we’re paying all this money in taxes but we’re not getting the services that we feel we’re entitled to have. If you call an ambulance in Detroit, you’re better off just driving to the hospital. You’ll get there faster. If you call a police officer in an emergency, it’ll take a good four to five hours for a cop to come. There’s no correlation between the amount of money that the city is asking us to pay in taxes and the services that we’re getting in return.

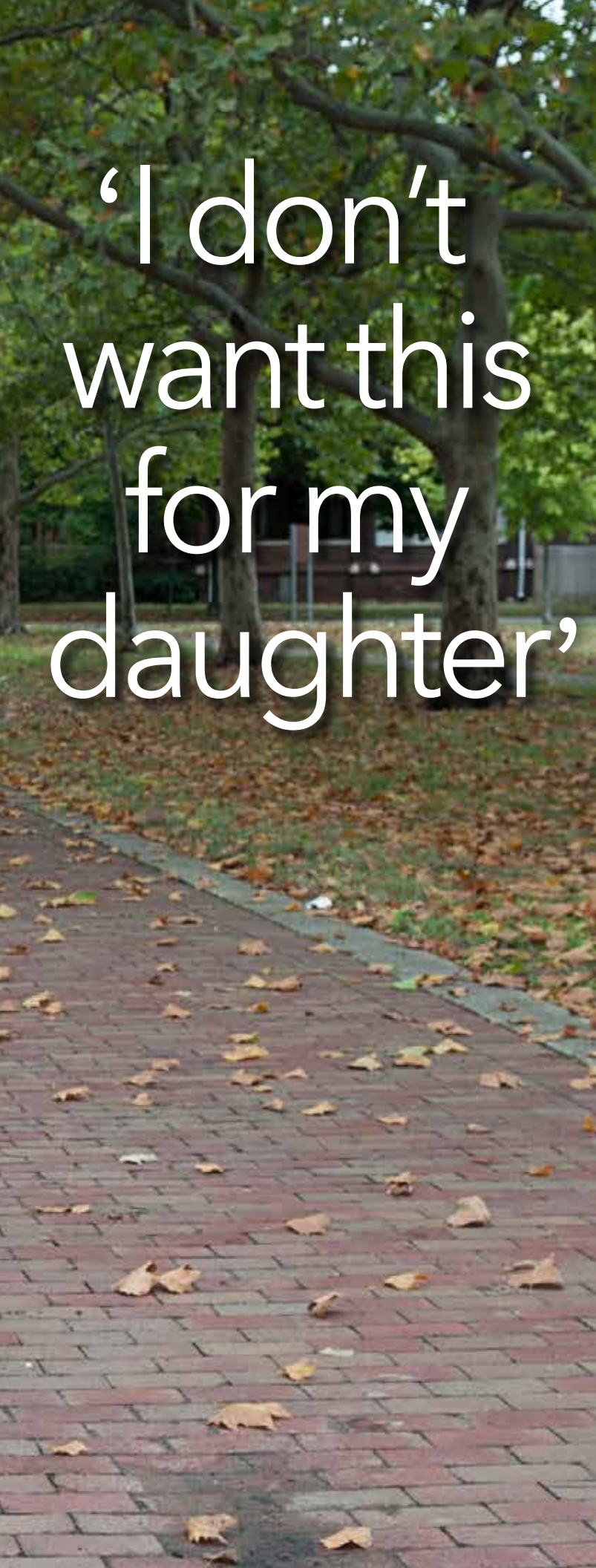
Our school system is in shambles. These hipsters who live in the city will shoot to the suburbs when they have kids. They aren’t sending their kids to a school where there’s 40 kids in the classroom, the walls are falling apart, and the floors are peeling off. Establish a top-of-the-line school system.

We should hold a public forum and say, “Tell us how we can help and work together without hurting you, your business or your family.” Business people forget that when they come in they can’t just cut off the communities. We are the lifeline. We are the blood that runs through the city. Without us, no revitalization will last.

In 10 years, I see myself still here in Detroit, doing community activism. Community activism is something that’s very important to me and my family. Detroit is in my heart. I grew up here and lived here through the ups and downs. We have had several opportunities to move out into the suburbs for a better house or a better area, but we stayed. There’s a sense of community here that you really can’t get anywhere else. We stuck it out, and I think that made us very resilient. We’ve seen the worst of Detroit, and we’ve seen the best of Detroit. There is no other place I would rather be.

I see myself working as a health educator. Hopefully, I’ll have a house of my own in the city of Detroit and be working here. I really want to keep the connection with the youth in our community and see them grow and become mature adults who are contributing to society. That would be like coming full circle for me. That would really mean a lot to me. We realize that they are the future. They’re a force that can continue to revitalize our community.





‘I don’t
want this
for my
daughter’

Young mother calls for investment
in the well-being of
poor and middle-class Detroiters

DENISE HAMPTON

When a young mother sees booming development downtown while she and her child go to bed and wake up hungry, what messages does she internalize about her value and her hometown’s priorities? Like the 40 percent of Detroiters who live below the poverty line, Denise Hampton spent too much of her young life navigating not having enough to eat, worrying about her mother’s health, meeting her baby’s basic needs, and wondering whether the unreliable bus would get her to and from work on time.

Since our original interview, things have changed for Hampton and her 3-year-old daughter. In May 2017, she married a co-worker from a previous job. They are expecting their first child in April 2018 and have moved into their own apartment. She also has changed jobs, working in a position that she was able to secure herself.

While things have improved for Hampton, the story she shared last year is not unique. According to a new report by Detroit Future City, 53 percent of Detroit residents live in areas of concentrated poverty; a staggering 57 percent of the city's children live below the federal poverty line. Poverty exposes many women and their children to food and housing insecurity, violence, and limited employment options. Of mothers with dependent children who responded to the *I Dream Detroit* citywide survey, 60 percent report not earning a living wage and 64 percent say that they have no money left after monthly expenses.

Thanks to the support of Goodwill Industries' Flip the Script workforce development program, Hampton gained the job skills to land previous employment in an auto industry training program doing a job she liked. She has a GED, ambition and dreams for herself, her daughter and growing family. Her insights about the barriers to attaining her goals highlight some of the structural impediments for the poor that can only be fixed with policies that create pathways to employment and the infrastructure needed for success, such as education, transportation and a solid social service safety net.

Hampton's story reflects the need for the concerns of mothers and families to be at the center of Detroit's economic development plans. Their inclusion will ensure that development plans prioritize safety, transportation, and workforce development needs for all Detroiters instead of profits for just a select few.

I actually got sick a month after I had my daughter because I wasn't eating enough and I was breastfeeding her. All of my nutrients were going to her. I got real sick and I couldn't feed her any more, so I had to use WIC (Women, Infants and Children nutrition benefits). That took two to three weeks, so I was asking neighbors for milk for her.

My mama takes care of me and my brother, so I try not to ask her for food so she could give to my brother and my daughter. She got sick and it was such a struggle to get by. My mama's the type of person who helps everybody before she helps herself. When she needed help after her surgery, nobody was there.

That's why I push so hard to work. I just try to push to do something so that my mom can stop working overtime and working herself to death. And I do it to take care of my child.

I make parts for cars. This is my third week working. I get my first paycheck tomorrow, actually. I like doing things with my hands. I like building stuff. It's the perfect fit for me.

The Flip the Script program helped me get the job and they helped me when I went on interviews and with how to conduct myself, and how to word my resume so that it sounds professional. They showed me how to dress for interviews. The people at Flip the Script go beyond. They'll go over the mountains and the moon. Whatever you need, they'll help you get it. If they can't do it personally, they'll help you to get to your dream.

Before I got this job, I was looking for work for over seven months. I was applying for different places, but I just couldn't get the jobs. I couldn't even get jobs at

McDonald's or KFC. Most of them didn't want me because I didn't have any experience.

I just moved from the neighborhood where I grew up a year ago. It was so bad. My street would be quiet, then all of the sudden you come out of the house and there's a car accident right there, or somebody drunk, or somebody shot. Dead bodies in the grass. My

If I was running the city, everybody would have free healthcare. They wouldn't have to worry about food. They wouldn't have to worry about transportation. Transportation sucks! And the police. They don't care about the people. They mainly harass.

It's clear as day that the government doesn't care. They tax you. The money they're taking out of your check is

not even going where it's supposed to go. All they are doing is putting it straight into their pockets.

I want to make life better for the people—better for the middle class and the poor people instead of being all about the wealthy.

People have to stop being so greedy and being about themselves and care about coming together.

For my daughter, I want her to be an intelligent young woman...No going to jail or selling her body. I want her to get her education and go off to college and do something with her life.

mama was walking to the bus stop and saw a dead body. And that's not even the bad part. Four years ago, I got raped. That's how I have my daughter. I always thought, "This is not going to happen to me. I'm going to be ready for the moment." But when the moment came, I wasn't ready. I froze because the way I thought it would happen, it didn't happen that way. Once I had my daughter, I'm like, "Ma, we've got to move. I don't want this for my daughter."

Sometimes I get mad at my mama for not letting me put her up for adoption because I knew she would have a better home. But then I look at her, and know I needed her. If I didn't have her, I'd probably be locked up or dead because that was my mentality.

My dream is to be a wildlife veterinarian. I want to help animals in the wild, travel and help animals on different continents. I like animals a lot. For my daughter, I want her to be an intelligent young woman and not be no hood out here. No going to jail or selling her body. I want her to get her education and go off to college and do something with her life.

Of Citywide Survey respondents with dependent children:

60% say they do not earn a living wage.

52% say childcare would help them maintain steady employment.



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‘It literally takes
a village to help
our young people
thrive’

NADA
DICKINSON

Community health
worker helps address
the social conditions
of vulnerable moms

The future of Detroit is literally in Nada Dickinson's hands. She is a community health worker with the Henry Ford Health System and works on reducing infant mortality. The infant mortality rate in Detroit is double the national average and rivals that of developing nations. Detroit's investment in improving the chances of its most vulnerable residents is a reflection of the kind of city it will become.

Before taking a training course on infant mortality, Dickinson—mother to a 12-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son—was unaware of how dire things were, especially for black mothers and children. The training turned out to be a life-changing experience.

“I went through the training and it was just mind-blowing. I didn’t really know anything about the infant mortality rate among African American women,” she recalls. “It didn’t matter what your education level is. Our babies are dying, and some women are falling through the cracks. It’s vicious.” Dickinson soon got a job in the field.

Now she focuses on changing lives by finding and enrolling women between 18 and 34 in the Women-Inspired Neighborhood (WIN) Network: Detroit program. The program takes an innovative approach to its mission by addressing health from the perspective of the social needs of at-risk mothers. WIN facilitates better coordination of care and services across several agencies that serve women, children and families. “We make sure moms have the right skills, the right knowledge, and baby items that they need,” shares Dickinson. “Some are homeless and in shelters, so we help them find housing and transportation.” The women stay in the program until their babies reach one year of age.

Dickinson loves the work that she does and it often causes her to reflect on how different things are for the women she serves compared to her own upbringing in Detroit. “It’s so different to see what these young women go through. They just don’t have the support.” Dickinson speaks of a range of barriers facing women in the program, including lack of education, housing and transportation; limited employment opportunities; living in neighborhoods with high crime rates; and tension with the fathers of their children.

In addition to prenatal care and education, Dickinson focuses on improving the women’s sense of self-worth. “They need an education about how a woman should be treated and how they should treat themselves.”

Dickinson’s story highlights the importance of direct service providers taking a broader approach to changing lives by looking at the social causes of infant mortality. As Detroit sharpens its vision for success, the city should make improving the prospects for babies and families a key metric.

Lack of cars, lack of transportation, public schools going through hell. If you go through that on a daily basis, you feel like, “I don’t get a break. I can’t get a break from home. I can’t get a break from school. I can’t get a break from my neighborhood.” It plays with someone’s mind—especially a child. A child needs to feel safe. If you grow up in an environment like that and now you’re a teenager, now you’re a pregnant mom, chances are you haven’t had opportunities. No one ever showed you because everyone else was going through their own struggles.

I’m seeing women in my community and seeing why things happen. I get it, you know? The stress. I have a younger sister and I’m twelve years older. And I’m seeing her friends go through the struggle that I’ve never seen my friends go through. These women are going through so much that I never experienced in my early 20s. They’re worrying about life and the baby and working.

There are different things that take part in the development of our young people. It literally takes a village to help our young people thrive. If you have

a secure environment where you feel safe, you can thrive. If you have places you know that you can go for information, you can thrive. But if you have no access to any of that, you feel lost. And in cycle after cycle, that's what I've been seeing.

About 80 percent of the women that we serve work. And some of them are degreed. For women that have small children, lack of babysitting is a barrier. They're at a job and may not have daycare, and if they do, they don't have reliable transportation. If you don't have a reliable babysitter then you lose your job. Maybe they didn't finish high school and so now



If you have a secure environment where you feel safe, you can thrive.

they have to find a different job that will accept you without degrees or high school diplomas. So now they can't really bring in the income that they need for their families, so they rely on different programs to supplement the income that they're not getting. It's just always a struggle. And they feel defeated.

People don't understand why they are not taking their insulin for diabetes, but they don't know that these women don't have refrigerators, or they don't have transportation. There are just so many factors that the physicians don't know or don't have time to deal with.

In Detroit we use community health workers who take the role of social workers in group prenatal care. We're all in the room together. The midwives are sectioned off and once they see all the moms, we have two hours to talk more about health concerns and to talk about social issues. After group, I see the women one-on-one. They just talk about a program and I help them find resources. And we do home visits to make sure they are thriving throughout the pregnancy.

The city can provide some type of free training to young men and women in our community. Something that they can put in place for these young people to feel independent and confident that they can make it. Programs where they can get skills and start working and then go back to school. That would help turn things around. Finding employment now is scarce. To get what is available that pays really well, you need skills. The more employment, the more people working in the city—that's more tax dollars for the city.

I would like for this program to grow. I know every city does their own infant mortality work, but I would like

for us to have a one-stop shop in our own satellite building where people can address education, jobs, daycare, transportation—all these issues and social deterrents that stop these young women and young people from thriving. We could have all the experts there, and give directions of what to do, where to go. It would

take money, negotiating and partnering with people, and with some organizations. It's possible.

Detroit's infant mortality rate (14%) is double the rate in the state of Michigan.

Source: "Infant Mortality By Selected Cities." State of Michigan, n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2017. <<https://midashboard.michigan.gov/Michigan-Dashboard/Infant-Mortality-By-Selected-Cities/tcka-5cwj/data>>.

Of Citywide Survey respondents with dependent children:

48% find it difficult to maintain steady employment.

57% say it would help to keep full public assistance benefits until they earn a living wage.

Advocating for safety and opportunity for transgender women of color as part of Detroit's future plans

CIERRA BURKS & TAMISHA REMBERT

Detroit's story is being rewritten, and two of its authors are working to make sure that it includes those who have been written off and undervalued. Detroit native Cierra Burks and Tamisha Rembert, who was raised in the city from age 11, are transgender women who work for the Trans Sistas of Color Project (TSOCP), an organization founded in 2015 by transgender activist Bré Campbell, other trans women of color and their allies. "Basically we uplift and celebrate black trans women in Detroit. A lot of times, we're looked over," says Cierra Burks. "We need to be seen in a positive light because trans women of color are being murdered nowadays."

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) reports that in 2016 at least 22 transgender people were murdered in the U.S., the most ever recorded. According to a 2015 national survey of nearly 28,000 transgender people conducted by the National Center for





‘At the end of the day,
we all bleed the same’

Transgender Equality, 19 percent of transgender people in Michigan are unemployed, more than triple the national unemployment rate. Further, 30 percent of transgender people in Michigan are poor, more than double the national poverty rate. Trans women of color are disproportionately represented among those murdered, unemployed and poor. They are more susceptible to fatal violence and other vulnerabilities including discrimination in employment, housing, and healthcare due to the intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, HRC reports.

Burks and Rembert see participation in Detroit's comeback as an important part of building a better future for trans women of color and all of the city's residents. "Trans women of color should be part of Detroit's story," says Rembert. "We are trying to do something to better our community instead of just letting it die." Both women want to see trans women of color participate in Detroit's economic comeback. Says Rembert, "We're trying to build the community back up, and we're trying to get everyone's head in the game to want to do better for themselves and to want better things in life."

Burks and Rembert want Detroit to be a place that benefits and protects all residents. They both advocate in hopes of making their city a story of renewal for the most vulnerable not just the most successful.

CIERRA BURKS

There are a lot of trans women in Detroit that don't have legal jobs because of their name change, so they go into sex work. And with them going into sex work, a lot of them don't even have real homes because they're being excommunicated by their family members. They're being tossed to the streets with nowhere to go; and they feel like the only way to get by is to do sex work. All this causes a lot of girls to get caught up in drugs and the fast lifestyle.

I did my transition at 21. My mother was not too accepting until I was around 25. Since we got over that hump, our relationship has been good. I've held down jobs as a trans woman—like working at a boutique, doing freelance makeup, as well as cleaning. So sex work was something I didn't feel like I needed to do. My transition has been pretty much pretty good. I'm still working on my name change and on my GED because I want to further my education to become a licensed esthetician.

I happen to be one of the founding members at Trans Sistās of Color Project. When Bré called me, I didn't know exactly what I could do with the organization, but once I got into it, I found out that my voice could really be heard and I could really help somebody out. It's not about helping oneself, but helping the community.

We need more community involvement like how it used to be. Communities used to get together and work on projects to clean up and better the neighborhoods and make sure that children were safe going to school. I just want to make sure that we're building a future for my nephew and other children.

We've got to bring back working together and showing that we might come from different neighborhoods, but we're willing to work with each other. For programs in Detroit, we need to think, "Would there be an LGBT program or a women's program?" Whatever program that has to do with the people of Detroit has to be a lot more inclusive and get a lot more knowledge on everybody's background. I mean at the end of the day, we all bleed the same.

TAMISHA REMBERT

I'm a project assistant at Trans Sistās of Color Project. We provide health services to trans women of color. We're trying to make a difference in our community to have better opportunities for us in housing. I basically help and assist on projects or go speak at different programs when I'm asked to. I'm enjoying work very much.



It's not about helping oneself, but helping the community.

I started doing this work because at a point in time in my life, I was struggling; and I was one of the statistics out on the street. I was doing a lot of bad things. I would sleep all day and be up all night out on the streets and drinking and doing all different types of other stuff. I had a bad experience that was a wakeup call. I had too many close calls and near death situations, and I just wanted something better for myself. I think other girls listen to my story and see that I've been through all that, and it gives them the strength and the courage to make it.

I think people forget that trans women of color are actually human beings. There are various stereotypes, and if you are what you are, you won't get certain things. I just don't think that's fair. You try for opportunities for housing and things of that nature, and they are quicker to help guys than they are with trans women and women period. So, you know, I think that's something that we're up against. I think we're doing a pretty good job of fighting through it right now.

Instead of trying to segregate people, Detroit should be trying to bring people together.

They try to break it up into parts like, "If these people lead a certain type of lifestyle, they shouldn't be mixed in with these people." They should want to help the less fortunate instead of getting rid of them or trying to shut them out.

We are people too, not entertainment. You should treat us like you would want to be treated.

My dream for myself and my work is to be in a position where I can give people opportunity. I want to have my own nonprofit organization where I can give back to the community that I came from.

Transgender people in Michigan have an unemployment rate triple that of the national unemployment rate.

34% of transgender people in Michigan say they experienced homelessness at some point.

26% of transgender people in Michigan say they experienced housing discrimination, either eviction or being denied a home or employment.

Source: Lacy, Eric. "National Transgender Survey Shows Danger in Michigan." Lansing State Journal. Lansing State Journal, 26 May 2017. Web. 22 Sept. 2017. <<http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/2017/05/24/national-transgender-survey-shows-danger-michigan/343311001/>>.



‘I have faith in the city of Detroit, and I’ve got faith in the residents’

LYNNETTE BOWENS

Community leader encourages civic participation as a path for residents to shape Detroit’s decision-making

Lynnette Bowens’ roots in Detroit run deep. At family reunions, this great-grandmother and family matriarch is often surrounded by six or seven generations of cousins, nieces, nephews and her own children and grandchildren. That love for family extends to her block, neighborhood and city. A lifelong Detroiter and 51-year resident of her west side neighborhood, Bowens’ commitment to the city is a conscious choice. “I love my city,” she proudly proclaims. “I’m not here because I can’t move. I just decided that as long as I live in Michigan, I am only going to live in the city of Detroit.”

That commitment has not come without sacrifice. Although she has worked in accounting for decades and holds a college degree, Bowens has had limited

opportunities to work within the city limits. She has also been creative about combatting challenges such as the city's auto insurance rates, which are the highest in the nation. While Bowens' neighborhood has remained stable, she has witnessed other neighborhoods ravaged by blight and gentrification. She also shares the concerns held by many native Detroiters—that the economic development happening in the city is not intended for them.

Her commitment and concerns for her community drive her involvement in community activism and local politics. She has helped lead programs that empower women and encourage them to support each other; and who worked on a community garden to help residents take control over what they eat. She has served as the secretary for her neighborhood block club since she was in her 20s and represented her neighborhood as a precinct delegate for over 20 years. Bowens is a strong proponent of residents advocating for the changes they want to see in their neighborhoods and city. "Your community cannot be more than you make it," she says. "People have to take ownership of their community and own their block. If you see things happen and you never say anything about it, then it will probably continue to get worse." She believes strongly in city residents participating more in local politics to shape public policy. "It's very important who we elect to office. I believe firmly that the vote cast today will affect your life tomorrow." And while she holds residents to a high standard, she also recognizes that spaces where decisions are made often do not accommodate residents' work schedules.

Her story is the story of countless other women of color who anchor their communities and are incredible assets that need to be more fully engaged in conversations about Detroit's future plans.

I got laid off in 2012. In the two years I was unemployed, I only applied to jobs within the city of Detroit. I may have gotten three interviews and two callbacks. I did not get those jobs. Two weeks before my unemployment ran out, I started applying to places that were outside of the city. I got an interview that week. I work that job today, and that's sad. And no, I don't just have a high school diploma. I have an associate's, I have a bachelor's and well over 20 years of experience. But I have always worked in the suburbs. In my whole working career, I have only had a job inside the city of Detroit maybe two, three times.

I haven't bought a new car since 1988. I do not support Ford, GM, Chrysler, or any other carmaker. I support the people who work at AutoZone. I support people who work at the junkyard. I drive a hooptie,

and my hooptie was more economically beneficial because I'm not paying GM and Chrysler \$10,000 or so a year to drive a new car. I'm not paying State Farm or AAA another \$5,000 because I live in the city of Detroit. I generally buy a car for anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,000, and they last me four to five years. I pay myself a car note of \$100 every month. Just in case my hooptie breaks down, I'm gonna need some money to fix it.

For me, I've not really seen true economic development across the city. In all my life, economic development in the city of Detroit has meant that somewhere between the river and the boulevard, something's going to happen. Between the river and the boulevard is nowhere representative of who or what the city of Detroit is. You have left out 95 percent of the city.

When I do see true economic development in the actual neighborhood, it's going to mean people getting forced out of their homes. They're putting up the new Red Wings stadium. In the '80s and '90s I watched those people over there basically forced out of their homes. I watched the people go over there and basically strong-arm the people out. Fast-forward to today, and you just gave \$400 million of school aid funds to build the stadium. That stadium is not going to do anything for residents.

meetings, or going to sit in a courtroom and see who these judges really are. And I've been trying to think of a way to get an investor or a builder to work with our community to do some infill development that might include apartment buildings, open play spaces. But while I'm sitting at my job, I can't get out there and present my idea. There's a conflict between when the people who make the decisions are making decisions and when you have to be at your job.



We've got to cause people to think about where they live and change the mindset from, "it doesn't matter" to "it does matter" and "this is how we're going to make it better."

I'm open for change, but one thing I just don't agree with is government subsidies and public-private partnerships. None of those things are actually a benefit to tax-paying residents. Tax-paying residents kind of get the short stick.

I look at my immediate community and my immediate block. We've got some houses that we've been trying to figure out why they haven't made it to the demolition list. They've been that way for like 20 years, but they're presentable. People try to keep them up as much as possible. Outside of my own block, I find our community remains pretty much intact because we have people like me who have been here 50 years and live in the house that they grew up in. Then we have newcomers and we have a lot of long-term renters.

I used to be a precinct delegate. I did that for over 20 years. I put my name on the ballot to represent my neighbors, the ones that live down the street or around the corner from me. And I really got way more involved when I got laid off about five or six years ago. A lot of stuff goes on between 9 and 5 that most other people don't get to participate in, like going to city council

When I see my city being bashed across the national news, or when I look at communities and the destruction in them, I don't blame that on Detroit the city. I blame that on the people who live here and work here. The people who play here. My favorite saying is, "Your community cannot be any more than you make it." We've got to cause people to think about where they live and change the mindset from, "it doesn't matter" to "it does matter" and "this is how we're going to make it better." We're losing our spirit of family and community. Once you have a spirit of family and community, then you don't have so much of me, myself and I. We become more attached as a group. I have faith in the city of Detroit, and I've got faith in the residents.

Metropolitan area jobs in Detroit:

1970 = 40%

2011 = 16%

Source: Urban, Noah. "Blog." Data Driven Detroit. 2015. Web. 22 Sept. 2017. <<https://datadrivendetroit.org/economy/uphill-both-ways-where-are-the-jobs-in-metro-detroit/>>.

THE ARCHITECTS

“We can begin to do small things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously.”

—GRACE LEE BOGGS,
PBS Interview, 2007





‘People deserve to have healthy food in Detroit’

The Farmer’s Hand grocer
is determined to bring fresh food
infrastructure to her hometown

KIKI
LOUYA

Kiki Louya, co-owner of Corktown’s corner grocery store and café, The Farmer’s Hand, is on a mission. The native Detroiter, who grew up on the west side in Rosedale Park, is committed to bringing quality, fresh and healthy food to her fellow Detroiters without having to cross 8 Mile to get it. Her resolve to develop a grocery store infrastructure for a city that has historically been underserved by national supermarket chains reflects the joys and the challenges of growing up in the city. While she loved her neighborhood, access to fresh food in the city was a challenge.

Louya left Detroit and spent years away in New York, working in event-planning and fundraising, and in Chicago, attending culinary school and

working in restaurants. While in New York, Louya started focusing on cooking and healthy eating and began volunteering at a farmer's market in Brooklyn. The experience reacquainted her with fresh food, and introduced her to farmers and ways to help an underserved community. "I learned about how people could use SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits, double up their food dollars and get all this beautiful fresh produce," she recalls.

When she began hearing about Detroit's resurgence, she knew she had to be a part of it. "All of the sudden, Detroit was cool again," says Louya. "People were investing money into it. I didn't want other people investing in my city without me investing in my city, too."

Everything about the Farmer's Hand is intentional. It is based on models in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Wooster, Ohio. Louya and her partner, Rohani Foulkes, decided they would do business in a way that honored their customers and the farmers and the market partners whose produce and products stock their shelves. At the Farmer's Hand, low-income shoppers have access to fresh vegetables and meats not often available at typical urban corner markets. The Farmer's Hand sells all Michigan produce and gives a higher profit margin back to the farmers and market partners—70 cents on the dollar versus the national average of 17 cents. The Farmer's Hand has 100 dedicated food and market partners, including people who make jam and tortilla chips and chocolates. "It affords farmers and other small business owners the option to really make a living doing what they love to do—which isn't always easy," Louya says.

Her dream of changing the landscape of access to healthy food for all Detroiters is one that could significantly impact the health and well-being of Detroit residents and expand homegrown economic opportunities across the city and state. Her model should be a cornerstone for reimagining the city.

The grocery store idea was on my mind when I moved back to Detroit. Even though I saw this resurgence and I saw all these different restaurants and stores opening, the one thing that I did not see were grocery stores.

They were still few and far between. When I lived in New York and Chicago, I'd seen these neighborhood grocery stores that existed but were small. They were a quarter of the size of bigger grocery stores and they had more quality on their shelves than these other stores. I knew it was possible to create a smaller, neighborhood grocery store. And I knew that people deserved to have healthy food in Detroit. The bottom line is people need to eat.

When I first moved back, a lot of grocery stores that I would go to would have rotting meat on their shelves. They would still have expired goods; and they would still be able to call themselves a neighborhood grocery store.

As black people, who are the majority in Detroit, we've been conditioned to believe that we don't deserve something of quality. And if you see something that's beautiful in the city somehow that's not for us. It is. That's a lot of the reason why I wanted to start the Farmer's Hand.

To me, that was very reminiscent of my childhood. There was a grocery store a block from where I grew up, and it was actually the biggest black-owned grocery

store in the entire city of Detroit. We supported it because it was in the neighborhood, and because of who owned it. But they still didn't have fresh produce. They still had meat that you couldn't really rely on. It wasn't the highest quality food. So you'd get what you could get there; but if you wanted to get fresh produce or good meat or cheese, you'd have to go to either Eastern Market when it was open, or you'd have to cross 8 Mile and go to a bigger grocery chain.

As the city of Detroit continues to grow, we have to continually appreciate the people and the cultures that currently exist here. I would really love for Detroit to take control of its own narrative and embrace who it is without trying to become cookie cutter.

On the one hand sometimes it seems and feels like the cards are stacked against us. But I also think that we can't go into it with that mindset because if we do, then



I think that putting the strength and capital back into small Detroiter-owned businesses is what will make us unique.

As a grocery store, I want to embrace the fact that there are so many different cultures and people of different ages and socioeconomic backgrounds that currently live in the city. I want them to feel as though they have a voice and that they matter. For us, that's about sharing and breaking bread with each other.

I get a little bit afraid when I hear about these big business projects that are happening around us. People with a lot of money are coming in and buying up neighborhoods and buying up farms and making it really difficult for people that have had their own land and homes for a long time. People whose families have lived in neighborhoods for generations are being bought out of their own homes. We've got to grow without losing their stories too. In order for the city to continue to grow, there has to be expansion in various areas.

This big business mentality of "we're just going to take" has to stop. I hate that because at the end of the day, all that we're going to see are these cookie-cutter same kind of stores. It's going to be like every other city, and we don't have to look like that. I think that putting the strength and capital back into small Detroiter-owned businesses is what will make us unique.

that's what we're going to see. We have to see these opportunities as being there for us and believe it and ask for it and ask for what we want because otherwise they're not gonna give it to us.

In five years I would like to see the Farmer's Hand in at least two additional neighborhoods, meaning two additional stores. Which also means we're spending the same amount of money almost, all over again, on these two additional stores.

We're not in it to make a trillion dollars. We are in it to give Detroiters better access to healthy food and, if we can, to help small businesses in the city do the same thing. If we do that, then it's a win-win.

50% of Detroit's population travels "twice as far or farther to reach the closest mainstream grocer as they do to reach the closest fringe food location," such as a fast-food restaurant or convenience store.

Source: "Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Detroit" Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group, n.d. Web. 2007. <<http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/policy/DetroitFoodDesertReport.pdf>>.

‘If I’m not here, who is going to say something I might say?’

SOMMER WOODS

For more than a decade, native Detroiters Sommer Woods has been at the center of discussions about economic development in her hometown. She is vice president of external relations and marketing for M-1 Rail, the owner and operator of the QLine—a 6.6-mile circulating streetcar loop from downtown Detroit through Midtown, New Center and the North End. Woods helps bring Detroiters into the conversation about one of the most heated topics in the region—transportation. “I oversee all of our community relations, minority procurement, our government relations as well as our marketing,” explains Woods. “My job is always making sure that the project is diverse and everyone knows that it is a project for everybody.”

QLine is the first major transportation project financed by the business and philanthropic communities in partnership with local, state and the federal government. Those behind it see QLine as a model for future endeavors.

Transportation executive
brings all perspectives
into the conversation
on transit



While those most affected by Detroit's broken transit system desperately want and need change, they also have concerns that the economic development that is under way—including the QLine, which opened in May 2017—is not for them. They fear that it is another sign of the city's commitment to meet the needs of newcomers and not those of Detroiters whose families have been in the city for generations.

Woods says her background and experiences keep her grounded in the realities and needs of her fellow Detroiters. She grew up in a home headed by her single mother and grandmother. In 1995, she left her beloved hometown to attend Talladega College in Alabama on a golf scholarship. Post-graduation stints in Atlanta, Houston, Philadelphia and New Jersey included managing the PGA Tour's Senior Players Championship, when it was sponsored by Ford.

She came home in 2003. Woods served in Mayor Dave Bing's administration as the film, culture and special events director and as sponsor services director for the Super Bowl XL Host Committee. Those experiences inform Woods' perspective on urban planning and economic development. So does her nearly 10 years of participating in a mentorship program for Detroit youth.

The city needs more people like Woods in spaces where Detroit's future is being shaped. She represents the kind of leader that can help Detroit make principled decisions about its development that appropriately leverage the burgeoning economic boon for the benefit of Detroiters from all walks of life in all parts of the city.

When I came home, people were really interested in figuring out ways to do collaborations for development and to make the city look good for Super Bowl XL in 2006. You started to see more buildings getting bought or storefronts that were temporary popups. Events like the Super Bowl are so pivotal to an aging city that needs to be developed. They get people rallied around the same idea of making sure that we represent our city well. Detroit experienced that. Everybody was putting their best face on. All of these things were happening in the city, and I wanted to be part of it.

It is imperative as Detroit is coming back that you have people at the table who are sensitive to our city and what we have because we're like no other city. That's the reason why I stayed after the Super Bowl. I want

to be a part of this. If I'm not here, who is going to say something I might say?

I think there's a lot of value when you have some of our talent that went away, got some intellectual capacity, and brought it back to the city. I'm the product of all of that—growing up in Detroit, living in the South, going to an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), working in fields and environments where I didn't see a lot of African Americans. It shapes you.

In terms of development, people come in and say, "Oh my goodness, Detroit is a blank slate." No it's not. Don't think it's blank. We're here. We've been here. We have rules and processes. You can't just come and do what you want to do. To strip that fabric isn't the answer. Instead, we should be trying to figure out how to make things better instead of acting like things never existed. So let's not just change the fabric of our city.

Living in the city and being a part of these conversations as a resident is sometimes hard. I think, “I don’t want to see another brewery. I don’t want to see another dog park.” Why don’t we have a good Indian restaurant downtown? Why don’t we have an African restaurant downtown? Why don’t we have authentic Mexican food from southwest Detroit downtown? It’s very important that the development is intentional and includes all demographics of people. I don’t think that we always do the best job of making sure of that in the approach to economic development.



It’s very important that the development is intentional and includes all demographics.

The government is key from an economic development perspective. It can set the standard and the expectations with developers who are coming to work in the city. Our elected officials should say, “We want to make sure that the citizens who elected us to be in these spaces feel like their voices are in the room. They should feel like we’re looking out for the people.” And they should also monitor and make it clear to developers that before you can even come in, you have to have a plan that’s inclusive and attractive to all demographics, including residents that are currently here and not just a population that you feel the city needs.

Because many long-term Detroiters wonder and ask, “What does this mean?” They wonder, “Are we going to get boxed out of our homes in order for this development to happen?” And then you have another group of people that are excited by the idea that if we start with something like our project, it can lead to other things. There should be room for both.

One thing that’s important about our project is that it’s catalytic to even have a conversation about regional transit. Our project was a starting point for that. Transit is such a broken model here; and there are people that are trying to change that. The question is, how do we make sure that transit projects are informed by everybody—vendors, people working on the project, and patrons?

We’re hoping to figure out connectivity with other modes of transit. We’ve got to figure out how we tie into the SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority For Regional Transportation) or suburban bus lines. We know that we are not the end-all solution. We also know that we can be a part of trying to connect and expand.


When we talk about transit, we need to do a better job of really having a conversation about what transit is for all people. There has to be a conversation about transit rolling into development. You have to have good transit and make sure that there is development that’s economical and affordable for all people to access.

You can have great transit all day, but if you go to a neighborhood and have to walk eight or nine blocks without streetlights, it doesn’t make transit very attractive. You have to make transit attractive through infrastructure improvement so that people feel safe.

30% of Citywide Survey respondents share transportation to make ends meet.

Economic development
leader calls for inclusion
that fosters shared
prosperity





‘We can only strengthen
Detroit if we’re
working
together’

ANIKA GOSS-FOSTER

As executive director of the Detroit Future City (DFC) Implementation Office, Anika Goss-Foster's job is to actualize the hopes and dreams of Detroiters. Since January 2016, Goss-Foster has led the nonprofit's efforts to realize the DFC Strategic Framework—a 50-year vision designed to guide current and future decision-making and investment in the city.

Goss-Foster is personally and professionally well-suited for her position. Detroit is her mother's hometown. And even though Goss-Foster was raised in California, her connections to the city and state contributed to her decision to raise a family in Detroit. “I went to graduate school at Michigan, and then I’ve stayed and worked here ever since,” she says.

From her home base in Detroit, Goss-Foster has worked for nearly 25 years in national and local roles in community and economic development. At DFC, Goss-Foster directs all of the organization's partnerships, project initiatives, investments, and funding opportunities toward Detroit's 50-year vision. She is as committed to the process of how Detroit moves forward as she is to the outcome. "People should feel that they have a voice and an opinion about everything—from civic matters to investment to open community matters," she says. "Using a racial-equity lens and leading with community engagement are the ways we want developers to understand how to work with us for the next 50 years."

The need for such an approach was confirmed by DFC's recently released report *139 Square Miles*, which grounds the swirling narrative about Detroit's revival with concrete data on the city's population and economy. The numbers confirm what many residents of color have long expressed—that recent development and economic advancements are concentrated downtown and not in their neighborhoods. Says Goss-Foster in a recent interview with weekly newspaper *Detroit Metro Times* about the report, "There needs to be more than just talking about economic inclusion ... there actually needs to be strategic and direct action."

Goss-Foster and DFC's approach has led to prioritizing issues such as rental housing. "Nearly half of Detroit residents now live in single-family rental housing, largely because of the foreclosure crisis," she says. "We want to be able to understand and strengthen the system, which includes the wealth-generation opportunity of being a landlord yourself." Additionally, she is committed to the growth of jobs created by and businesses owned by people of color.

As one of only a few women of color in the upper echelons of development, Goss-Foster has the important and sometimes unenviable task of bringing people with different points of view and interests together. Her story speaks of the enormous potential to develop a city in ways that allow all to prosper if people can come together.

I came to Detroit Future City because I thought that it was the right time for me to take a position helping to shape the economic future of the city where I'm raising my children—and that they call home.

I have been in Detroit and working in community and economic development for about 25 years. I was living here, but I was working at the national level in other cities; so I've seen how cities work. I know that in other places, there isn't nearly the level of African American leadership and power. I've worked in Chicago, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and in Pittsburgh, where there's

one or two of us at each of those tables. And everybody loves those one or two of us, but they're not making investment decisions at nearly the same rate as we would potentially have the ability to do here in Detroit.

I really love that there is opportunity here for everyone. Unlike in other cities that I've worked in, here you have chances to open a business or to work for an organization that's creating real change in a community. You can actually be a part of the change. You can see your business open within a reasonable timeframe. You can see your investment in action. That's Detroit's real value. It's part of the culture here. Detroit tends to be a "maker"

city. You can make something happen here that you may not be able to in other places.

139 Square Miles shows that we're making clear economic gains that we didn't know a year ago. The impact of investment has resulted in Detroit leading the region economically and leading the nation in job growth. But the stark reality is that there is a gap between those who are living in poverty and those who are

opportunity to be located in a commercial corridor in their own neighborhood as anybody else.

We have to look at why there is such a deep racial disparity in how businesses grow. It starts with the financial markets and how capital is deployed. Businesses also have to help evaluate and shape our education system so that students in our schools can get the new jobs that are being created.



If we don't do things differently, we will see a divide solidify where there are no opportunities for low-income and black and brown Detroiters and only opportunities for those who are new, highly educated and white.

making decisions about Detroit's economy and benefitting from its growth.

We're not really seeing the kind of economic inclusion and opportunities for everyone to participate in all of that growth. Only our intentionality will make a difference in whether that does or doesn't happen.

We're at a critical time. If we don't do things differently, we will see a divide solidify where there are no opportunities for low-income and black and brown Detroiters and only opportunities for those who are new, highly educated and white.

There's a clear opportunity here to be much more comprehensive. And it's going to take collective leadership in education, community and neighborhood investment and job opportunity and access. People and organizations working on these things can't operate in silos.

Businesses have to take a higher-level view and embrace the idea of economic inclusion. The corporate community has to think about how they attract and retain African American and Latinos in the business community. We want local businesses to have as much

And for the community, it can't just be about "pick my neighborhood for development, or nothing." When we think that way, we miss opportunities for prosperity pathways for the city as a whole. We have to think, how do we actually get ahead of what's happening? How do we buy property by understanding what the business plans are very early? What are the investment opportunities that the city has?

Some of the problem is that we don't want to work together. We're not good at creating one collective voice. There's a whole host of ways that we can strengthen Detroit. But we can only strengthen Detroit if we're working together.

What would help me do our job better at Detroit Future City is to figure out how to be that connector. We should really be that convening resource and the distributor of information for everybody.

71% of Citywide Survey respondents do not feel included in Detroit's economic revival and development.

THE ADVOCATES

“We urgently need to bring our communities the limitless capacity to love, serve, and create for and with each other. We urgently need to bring the neighbor back into our hoods, not only in our inner cities but also in our suburbs, our gated communities, on Main Street and Wall Street, and on Ivy League campuses.”

—GRACE LEE BOGGS,

*The Next American Revolution:
Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First
Century, 2012*





‘I’m going to keep doing my best
to help make sure people are
treated equitably’

Former community organizer
brings commitment to social justice
to the Michigan State Legislature

STEPHANIE CHANG

State Representative Stephanie Chang is serving her second term representing Michigan’s 6th District, which includes part of the city of Detroit. She is the first Asian American woman to serve in the Michigan Legislature. Chang was born in Detroit to parents who emigrated from Taiwan to pursue work in the auto industry. “I’m the daughter of Taiwanese immigrants, which I do think has really shaped my values,” says Chang in a March 2017 interview with *Elle* magazine. “I was taught to notice when things weren’t fair for us or for other people, to notice when things weren’t equal. As I got older and began to explore my own Asian American identity, it brought my attention to civil rights and social justice issues.”

Before she became an elected official in 2015, Chang worked as a community organizer for nearly a decade. The decision to run for office was not an easy one. “It was an emotional process, deciding whether or not I wanted to do it,” she recalls. Over the course of her organizing career, she has worked for a number of nonprofits including NextGen Climate Michigan as the state director, the James and Grace Lee Boggs School as the community engagement coordinator, and with Michigan United/One Michigan as an organizer. She was also an assistant to beloved civil rights activist Grace Lee Boggs.

Her passion as an organizer for civil rights, police accountability, economic justice and the environment has become central to her legislative work. Responsive to the needs and interests of her constituents, Chang focuses on issues, such as access to birth control, air quality, affordable water, and quality education. Chang, in partnership with Detroit City Councilwoman Raquel Castañeda-López, also works with residents through the Mary Turner Center for Advocacy, her district’s neighborhood service center, on issues ranging from saving homes from tax foreclosure to supporting low-income pregnant women. In 2015, Chang organized a hearing that led to the introduction of bills establishing access to water as a human right for all Michigan residents. A vocal advocate, Chang has spoken out about the impact—on more than 6,000 young people in Michigan—of the planned repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

Raising her daughter with her husband in Detroit gives new meaning to her work on behalf of the city and its residents. Chang’s story speaks to how the presence of women of color in elected office helps to bring issues of equity and fairness for all of Detroit’s residents and families to the forefront of public policy.

I first ran for the Statehouse in 2014. Now I am in my second term and it’s a great experience. I had been working as a community organizer on a bunch of different issues—civil rights, voting rights, women’s rights, and criminal justice reform.

Running for office wasn’t something I had planned to do, but I saw it as an opportunity to continue being an organizer and to keep working on issues I cared about and affect my community. It was a way to have a bigger impact. Now I’m in the Legislature; and I still bring that same organizing mentality. It’s the same idea as in organizing—of building a coalition of supporters and mobilizing around an issue.

I have about 90,000 residents in my district, which includes a little under half of Southwest Detroit, all of downtown and the east side over to Indian Village. It’s a

very diverse district in terms of needs and demographics. It’s mostly an African American district, with a large Latino population and growing populations of others with wide ranges of socio-economic status. I have some neighborhoods like Indian Village and downtown, and then I have some of the poorest neighborhoods as well.

In terms of what people care about, I think it depends on the neighborhood. There are a lot of issues—everything from dealing with abandoned homes and the blight in some neighborhoods, to ensuring that every child gets a quality education, to making sure we have safe neighborhoods and a criminal justice system that is fair. Then there’s the high cost of car insurance. In Southwest Detroit, we work on basic quality of life issues. Environmental protection is a really big issue across the board. I think a lot of people are increasingly concerned about housing issues.

I represent a district where there is a lot of development happening. That is something people watch—sometimes with excitement and other times with fear. People really want to make sure that everyone is benefitting as Detroit changes. For example, we're going to have another international bridge coming from the U.S. to Canada in my district; and we're working hard to make sure residents of that community get access to jobs and are protected against pollution. There's a lot happening, and I'm going to keep doing my best to help make sure people are treated equitably.

Detroit women. There are a lot of people who have to make the decision: Do I go to work sick because I don't earn paid sick time, or do I stay home and try to get better but lose part of my paycheck? Or, if you have a child that's sick: Do I send that child to school sick since I can't afford to take time off work, or do I stay at home and lose part of my paycheck? These are decisions that people should not have to make.

I have a 2-year-old daughter, and my dream for her and the city is that Detroit is a place where you can have



There's a lot happening, and I'm going to keep doing my best to help make sure people are treated equitably. I'm working on a lot of the same issues that I worked on as an organizer.

I'm working on a lot of the same issues that I worked on as an organizer. Some of the things we are working on right now, like affordable housing, are going to become bigger issues in the future. I have a bill related to protecting seniors in assisted-living facilities. It's loosely based on a model in New York where you are basically able to freeze the rent if a senior has lived in the building for a certain amount of time. A lot of seniors are on a fixed income. The rising rents aren't really fair to them.

I'm also working on issues related to the police, like transparency around officer-involved shootings and abuse of force. One of the first bills I got passed was related to making sure that people who were wrongfully convicted and then exonerated were able to receive re-entry services in the State of Michigan. We're also working on immigrant rights and voting rights.

Another bill I'm working on is paid sick leave to make sure that every worker in Michigan has access to earn paid sick time. It's very important. It affects a lot of women—a lot of women of color and definitely a lot of

the best education possible, and have neighborhoods that are safe, and where everyone has a good quality of life. I want Detroit to be a place where people have clean air to breathe, access to affordable water, and a place that's welcoming to everyone. I want Detroit to be a place where everyone's needs and views are being heard and respected by their government.

A 2015 study by the National Conference of State Legislatures and Pew Charitable Trusts found that Michigan's legislators skew older, male, and more white than the state's general population.



‘This is visionary work’

LINDA CAMPBELL

Linda Campbell wears many hats—all dedicated to Detroit residents’ full participation in improving their communities and molding the city’s future.

She leads Building Movement Detroit, a nonprofit group that provides technical assistance and supports other resident-led organizations across the country. She is also a leader with Detroit People’s Platform, a diverse network of social justice organizations and individuals across Detroit, which fosters civic participation that can influence policymakers.

A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Campbell has called Detroit home since 1972. She came to the city at 22 to take a job at the local health department. Her early years significantly shaped her personally and continue to shape her activism. “I grew up as a professional here in Detroit,” she recalls. “I was trained and groomed by African American professionals who had a sincere commitment to community.”

Through her work today, Campbell gives to others what was given to her—confidence in the knowledge that when Detroiters lead, there is

Organizing to ensure all
Detroiters benefit from
economic revitalization

59% of low-income residents
participate in community organizing
for social and economic change, according
to the Citywide Survey.

innovation that produces racial equity, access to opportunity, and shared prosperity. She reminds everyone of the importance of Detroit on the national landscape. Historically, ideas and activities birthed here have been replicated across the country. Says Campbell, “A lot of cutting-edge groups, programs and perspectives came out of Detroit.”

Working in deep collaboration and coalition with others, Campbell has contributed to efforts to increase the minimum wage, ensure access to affordable housing, and leverage public investments in economic development for jobs and education.

Community organizing around these issues is having a significant impact. In January 2017, the city enacted a comprehensive community benefits agreement (CBA) that requires developers who get tax breaks in Detroit to negotiate on jobs, affordable housing and other community benefits when pitching major projects. The CBA is the result of the People’s Platform putting up a robust ballot measure that was countered by another measure crafted by Detroit Councilman Scott Benson. The community-led proposal would have applied to more development projects and included stronger provisions to enforce the agreement. While the community’s ballot measure lost to Benson’s, the community’s organizing effort likely played a significant role in moving the city to adopt a measure of this kind. In a post-vote interview with the *Detroit Free Press* on November 8, 2016, Benson said that the new ordinance “makes Detroit the first city in the nation with such a sweeping requirement.”

The CBA is one of countless examples proving that Campbell’s work and leadership—along with that of other advocates and activists across the city—is critical to Detroit creating pathways for authentic community participation in building a stronger, more equitable city.

The work that we focus on now is through the Detroit People’s Platform, which includes our work on affordable development, affordable housing, and transit justice. We’re trying to ensure that Detroiters have access to affordable and accessible public transit. Through our partnerships with some of our emergency food pantries, we work to ensure that there’s greater access to fresh and affordable food for families who are low wage or low-income earners. We also do our democracy, good governance work. We’re part of collaboratives that organize and promote a pro-democracy agenda. We also have a good jobs platform through the Economic Justice Alliance group. We worked to get an increase in the minimum wage here in Michigan; and we are working on fair wage and paid sick time.

There are five of us; and our team serves as the institutional anchor for several local coalitions. Right now, two of our strongest coalitions are around the housing trust fund work and the citywide community benefits agreement.

Through the housing trust fund, we’re trying to get the local government to set up a fund that would support affordable housing for low wage, low-income families and provide homeowner assistance through grants and loans. We also want to see a community land trust and policies that ensure that low-income families in the city have quality housing.

The CBA coalition’s goal is to make sure Detroiters have a voice in the revitalization that’s going on in the city. A lot of that revitalization is economic development for

private development, such as stadiums and market-rate apartments. The problem is that they're using a lot of public resources, like tax abatements and below-market-rate land. Our job is to monitor the development and support the organizing in neighborhoods impacted by development. We want to make sure that residents in these communities have access to jobs, education opportunities, and quality of life amenities that should be made available to residents who are supporting these developments through public investments.

Also it's about challenging ourselves to create a new vision of what the next generation of leadership should look like. I think there are some creative and talented young people out there in communities. As a member of the boomer generation, we need to figure out how to work more effectively with young people and provide opportunities where we can support their vision for change in the city and make opportunities for them to assume leadership roles in our work.

 *Our job is to monitor the development and support the organizing in neighborhoods impacted by development. We want to make sure that residents in these communities have access to jobs, education opportunities, and quality of life amenities.*

In 2016, we helped to put a proposal on the ballot, which would have mandated legally binding community benefit agreements, only to have one of our city council members put forth a competing ordinance that eliminated the mandatory and legally binding agreement. We managed to get almost 100,000 votes. They beat us by about 15,000 votes. So we didn't get our proposal, but we did get the proposal that the councilmember supported. So we have on the charter a community benefits agreement. And we now have the opportunity, after a year, to go back and advocate having it amended. So we're going to build on that.

Detroiters have organized and fought hard against emergency management, against state takeover, dismantling of our schools; and we haven't always been successful in those fights. I think there's a need to reinvigorate community with a sense of urgency and purpose that these are fights we can win. But it will require a rededication to our civic life and civic engagement responsibilities. It will take organizing within our communities and participating at the neighborhood level around important policies—and advocating to create the kind of community we all want to live in.

I think we're starting to see all of these things happen. When I look at the way Detroiters have organized around the water justice work and the way Detroiters have organized and fought emergency management and foreclosures—those movements and fights are often led by everyday Detroiters. And we have sustained those fights over a number of years. I think about the fact that nearly 100,000 Detroiters came out and voted for the community benefits agreement. Detroiters were like, “We get this. This is about fairness. This is about us having some say over our public resources and public investment.” That was so exciting. Detroiters came out and supported it. That lets me know that it's in the DNA of Detroiters. You just have to trigger it.

And that means more dialogue, more assemblies in neighborhoods, more talking across neighborhoods. That's what they're doing with water justice; and that's what has happened around emergency management—stepping outside of our silos and building a compelling vision for Detroiters. This is visionary work. That water will be available for all households. That all Detroiters will benefit from economic revitalization. That every Detroiters has the right to a safe and affordable home. Those are visionary outcomes that Detroiters can get behind and embrace.

‘We’re cultivating residents to become the advocates and the leaders’

MARIA SALINAS

Born and raised in Southwest Detroit, Maria Salinas has been active in leadership and community development for more than 35 years. Her father came to Detroit from Sicily to work in the auto industry and met her mother, who emigrated from Mexico. Salinas is the youngest of her siblings—all of whom are activists. She tagged along with her brother, a regional leader of the Brown Berets, in her youth and crossed paths with legendary labor leader and civil rights activist Cesar Chavez and his family. “I didn’t know he was going to be the hero that he became,” she recalls. “Being around all of them contributed to my passion and ignited my activism.”

Today, Salinas serves as executive director of Congress of Communities (CoC), a nonprofit organization founded in 2010 to serve Southwest Detroit as a “cross-community collaborator and connector between youth, stakeholders and residents.” The organization works

Fostering collaboration
to address safety issues
in Southwest Detroit



on safety and health advocacy issues as well as preparing young people and other community members for success in college, the skilled trades and the workforce in general.

In all of CoC's advocacy work, leadership development is at the core. CoC provides monthly leadership skills training and activities for the presidents of parent associations in Detroit's public and charter schools. The commitment to leadership development is reflected in CoC's governance model. "The residents are at the top," says Salinas. "The president of CoC's board could never be a stakeholder."

Salinas holds a master's degree in Community Leadership Development from Michigan State University and has authored many publications with the University of Michigan School of Public Health, where she worked for more than 18 years. She remains active in mentoring students and supporting interns there.

In Salinas, CoC and the communities it serves have an incredible example of what leadership with and on behalf of communities should look like. She knows the struggle of those she works beside. "My environment and the conditions were lining up for me to fail," she says. "I humbly say, not with arrogance but confidence, that I beat the barriers and environment."

Congress of Communities has become an advocacy model where we also do leadership development. The vision is to have an infrastructure where we're cultivating residents to become the advocates and the leaders. We are in the role of being a facilitator, mediator and conductor of the community. So that as projects, initiatives and programs want to come into the community, there's a table where people can go to vet their projects and kind of get the blessing. That's what we've ended up becoming.

Right now, we're concentrating on safety. That's our platform. We're actually working with the chief of police, FBI, DEA, immigration, and border patrol—all the spaces where law enforcement agencies work together. For the past two years, we've been able to facilitate collaboration with all law enforcement. Our little agency has been able to get every single head of these law enforcement departments to come together. We mediate to address issues and the mistrust that exists between residents and law enforcement as


Ferguson and all these things were happening. We've been facilitating conversations with our local precincts, and then going to the city level and the state level and even working with Barbara McQuade when she was our attorney general. We've been able to shift our work into system change—to change the conditions and not just put Band-Aids on the problem.

There's a real bad opiate and prostitution problem. What we've been able to do in about a year is kind of just say, "No more." We're cleaning up this area very intentionally and very visibly. Now, other areas are coming to us; and we're helping them to create efforts in their communities.

We're working on changing the conditions in our community around a lot of infractions that are happening where law enforcement's hands are tied. They're driving by prostitutes and drug dealers; and they don't arrest them. And then you have residents that see them, and all it does is create this vibe of "Look at them—they're not doing anything." Officers

are like, “We can’t do anything because we can take them in and they’re out in a half an hour.”

We’re working on a couple of ordinances and policies in response to when they pick up prostitutes, drug dealers and the people who are soliciting them. We’re working with our state representative and our representative for city council on policies that will help our police department when they arrest people.

 *We’ve been able to shift our work into system change—to change the conditions and not just put Band-Aids on the problem.*

The other part is that we are aligning the health department, Salvation Army, and Community Corps with these law enforcement department heads. So we’ve been facilitating conversations to now have a viable process so that when they arrest them, these entities will be there to take them to rehab. And it’s working. It’s actually a model that the rest of the city is looking at.

We are also going to be a Project Green Light district. It’s a new crime-prevention effort in the last year or two where you put \$8,000 into it and the city puts up \$8,000; and there are cameras all around and they’re monitoring. It’s mainly at gas stations and liquor stores. And my little nonprofit agency—out of the whole city of Detroit—is the only agency that’s going to be a Green Light district. This is huge! And it’s going to open it up to other agencies. And it’s happened because we have legitimacy because we have all the partners who have signed on. We have all of the justification documented. And we have the residents engaged in all the reporting. So that’s what we’ve been able to do in our safety work.

My dream for Southwest Detroit is to have a safe neighborhood where we don’t see violence as a way of life. I want us to have quality schools and a pipeline to alternative education where you can get skills in a trade and not just think college is the only option to have quality of life. I want our children to have opportunities that will take them beyond their neighborhoods to see other cities and countries.

And we must have respect for the land and work on environmental issues so that we have air quality standards, so that pollution isn’t impacting our kids’ health.

We have to work together more and be more connected with the African American and Arabic communities—working more intentionally together.

I also want to see more leaders of color as directors and CEOs and principals. We have to see ourselves in these roles.

72% of Southwest Detroit’s residents are Latino.

Source: Statistical Atlas



‘If water was seen as a respected and revered resource, everyone could benefit’

Water-crisis activist calls for building an economy built on putting people first

Detroiters with skin and soft tissue diseases are nearly 1.5 times more likely to live on a block that has experienced water shutoffs.

Source: Henry Ford Global Health Initiative.

MONICA LEWIS-PATRICK

Monica Lewis-Patrick is a mother, educator, entrepreneur, human rights activist and advocate. Best known nationally and internationally for her work in response to the water crises in Detroit and Flint, Lewis-Patrick’s fight against water injustice is only one facet of her tireless work with and on behalf of Detroit residents.

Soon after arriving in Detroit from her hometown of Kingsport, Tennessee, Lewis-Patrick started organizing and co-founded We the People of Detroit in 2009. Recalls Lewis-Patrick, “We the People of Detroit was birthed out of the concerns of women, mothers, grandmothers about the mayoral takeover of the schools.” Concerned for her children’s education, she and four other women—Phyllis (Chris) Griffin, Aurora Harris, Cecily McClellan and Debra Taylor—started attending city council meetings daily. “We’d take turns taking care of each

other's children so we could wait out the council members," says Lewis-Patrick. Their efforts forced the council to vote against mayoral control. That was just the beginning. The five women stayed together to work on other issues. They made a name for themselves—showing up at meetings on a range of issues and participating in unexpected ways. "Because grassroots folks had been known as disruptive, we started preparing and circulating white papers and proposed model legislation of our own," says Lewis-Patrick. "They weren't used to that tactic."

Their organizing efforts launched offshoot organizations including Free Detroit-No Consent and Vote VIP Slate to fight against emergency management. "In 2012, we ushered in 50,000 votes to help defeat a statewide referendum for the emergency manager law."

In 2014, Lewis-Patrick was unanimously elected by the We the People of Detroit board of directors to become its president and CEO. Today, the nonprofit organization builds on its history and strategies. In 2015, it started a research collective with six college professors and scholars in the U.S. and abroad. In 2016, the collective produced a seminal report, *Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods in Detroit*. Additionally, the organization nurtures the next generation of activists and advocates. It provides stipends to 10 social justice fellows every summer and supports a youth-led program that organizes students around school issues.

Lewis-Patrick's activism is a testament to the power of women to make a difference not only for their families but for families across communities, cities and nations.

What brought me to Detroit was the convergence of a few things. I'd just gone through a divorce and finished grad school. I'd recently lost my job and a distant cousin had dropped off her baby, who became my youngest daughter, on my doorstep. It was like the universe opened up to tell me that it was time for a change. So I came to Detroit with my two youngest children and immediately started a job and began piecing my life together.

I had always loved Detroit. I grew up in Kingsport, Tennessee, but Detroit was always a second home. My great-grandparents moved here in 1952. We were always in Detroit for holidays and summers. We were constantly coming. It was nothing for my grandfather to put us kids

in the car and drive all night. We'd wake up at 6 a.m., and we'd be here. We never saw ourselves as separate from Detroit—from the struggles, the successes, the art, and the culture.

Back in Kingsport, we tried to emulate things we saw happening in Detroit, like the access and equity. My husband and I ran a nonprofit modeled after my uncle's Police Athletic League program. We replicated it in our hometown in response to the over-policing and police brutality that we were beginning to see—and saw a reduction in recidivism.

What keeps me here today is a sense of family and belonging. Detroit has truly embraced me as a granddaughter of the city because I came in with a love

and respect for the community and the leadership that was already here. No door has been closed to me in the community.

Today, We the People of Detroit fights for the human right to water. We have a water rights hotline and provide water assistance. We also have relationships with 11 attorneys who help residents negotiate with the water and sewerage board about their bills.

effort to leverage all resources to invest in community; and young people being able to fulfill their dreams. We have the capacity. We sit on one-fifth of the world's fresh water.

I want to see a blue economy built on providing technical expertise on infrastructure, management, and recreation. I want to see new pathways to hydrogen energy



You can live without lights and gas, but you can't live without water.

You've got health, water quality, and affordability issues working against the poorest.

A preliminary study by the Henry Ford Global Health Initiative discovered that people with water-related illnesses were one and a half times more likely to live on a block with water shutoffs. That's even if you have water and live on a block where your neighbors are without water. We have doctors admitting to the press that if there continues to be water shutoffs, there will be a health crisis.

You can live without lights and gas, but you can't live without water. Eminent domain can remove you from your property. You can lose your children if you don't have water for more than 72 hours.

Water shutoffs are the quickest way to gentrify. You have people who have gone two to four years without running water and sanitation. They don't want them to get their water on. They want them to vacate their property.

My dream for Detroit is to see the human right to water implemented in the city and see Detroit model water equity and justice with water affordability. My dream goes beyond basic needs. It's about seeing a concerted

and entry level high-tech jobs. There should be no way that any young person should not see themselves on a pathway to prosperity. If water was seen as a respected and revered resource, everyone could benefit. Detroit could be a model for renaissance rooted in humanity and people first. If we started there, there would be an overflow of the spirit touching other aspects: People would be able to pay more taxes and spend their money, and go to restaurants.

The city is being branded just for some. But we're Detroiters. We shall live and not die.

Between 2014 and 2016, the water department shut off over 76,000 delinquent residential accounts; 30,000 of those shutoffs were in 2016.

Source: Chambers, Jennifer. "Experts: Water Shutoffs Causing Public Health Emergency." Detroit News. DetroitNews, 26 July 2017. Web. 22 Sept. 2017. <<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2017/07/26/detroit-water-shutoffs-health-study/104016812/>>.

THE ENTREPRENEURS

“Real poverty is the belief that the purpose of life is acquiring wealth and owning things. Real wealth is not the possession of property, but the recognition that our deepest need, as human beings, is to keep developing our natural and acquired powers to relate to other human beings.”

—GRACE LEE BOGGS,

*The Next American Revolution:
Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First
Century, 2012*

‘Wealth without community is no wealth’

East Side’s Just a Bit Eclectic
Tea Shop prioritizes
job training opportunities
over profit

DARLENE ALSTON

Darlene Alston grew up in the projects on the east side of Detroit. “The east side gets this bad rap now,” she says. “But when I grew up, we always balanced the scale.” She recalls everyone being equal and a community where everyone looked out for each other. “Poverty breeds sharing,” she says. “To some that may sound very sad or very poor, but for me that was rich.”

That east-side sense of community has become the business model for her Just A Bit Eclectic tea shop on the west side of the city. The shop is both the fulfillment of a lifelong dream and a divine curveball. In her 20s, Alston worked for the U.S. Postal Service and began shared with her coworkers her dream of opening a tea shop. Soon she began putting aside half of her \$10-an-hour paycheck to save for the





shop. While she saved, she bought things here and there for her future business. When she retired after 35 years of service, she'd saved enough to buy two rental properties and the building that houses the tea shop. Her building was paid for and her dream was fulfilled—or so she thought.

As she prepared to open, she says God threw her a curveball. “God told me it’s going to be a nonprofit,” she recalls. At first, the news hit her hard. For decades she had endured cynical remarks about her business plans. She was excited about finally opening a shop and becoming a financial success. She wanted to prove all the naysayers wrong. “But I’m a Christian and I love God, so I dried my tears and said, ‘Okay God.’” Saying okay meant seeing her business more as a place to build up young people in need of job skills and a chance to break into the labor market.

Like the other entrepreneurs profiled in *IDream Detroit*, Alston calls for Detroit’s growing business community to leverage profits for the uplift of young people and underserved communities. She calls her business a nonprofit, but she is the sole benefactor. Similar to others profiled in the report, all that she pours into the young people at Just a Bit Eclectic comes out of her pocket.

Her determination to give back is not limited to training young people. She lets up-and-coming entrepreneurs sell their artisan soaps and other products at the shop.

She firmly believes that the city’s economic development plans should include an expectation that Detroit’s burgeoning business community adopt her policy of mentoring and providing job opportunities to Detroit’s young people. Further, she believes that socially minded businesses like hers should have equal access to opening and maintaining a presence downtown, where the majority of Detroit’s growth and gentrification are occurring.


I love children. I want to change their lives. I don’t want people to look at them and say they’ll never be anything. People ask, “Why aren’t our children learning things about working?” Why? Because they don’t have any way to learn them. So they come here. You work here, and you learn how to work.

I want them to get the same experience that everybody gets. Our children see so many other people doing things that they believe are out of their reach. Nothing will be out of their reach. I tell them, “You don’t have to think, ‘Why won’t anybody hire me?’ I’m going to train you and hire you.” I’ll pay them. Nothing will be denied to them because I want them to have the same feeling—the same access as everybody else.

50% of Citywide Survey respondents who run nonprofits do not have tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status.

And I’m not an easy person to work with. I have a standard. You’ve got to know the health code. I quiz them on the inventory. I believe in all children having a standard and reaching a goal. You can’t just come in and not do anything. You’ve got to work.

I have hired children and they have gone on to do well. Some come in and maybe they want to do something other than food. Okay, we change the store around so that you can do what you want to do. So every child that comes in has an opportunity to be successful in what they want to be successful in. We rearrange things so that everybody can try to experience their goal. I set up this tea shop so whatever you want to be, you can be it here. You don't have to beg anybody.

 *Our children see so many other people doing things that they believe that are out of their reach. Nothing will be out of their reach. I tell them, “You don’t have to think, ‘Why won’t anybody hire me?’ I’m going to train you and hire you.” I’ll pay them.*

They’re going to be successful no matter what. If a child comes in and they want a job and I don’t make enough on the cash register, I got some money. I don’t claim it as a deduction on my taxes. That’s what I’m here for. I’m here so that they can be successful.

I pay all my taxes, all my fees and whatever else they want me to pay so I can maintain the place for kids to go in the summertime and get some work experience.

It disappoints me that business owners are striving to be successful without the knowledge of what true success is. They’re trying to be better than the next person. People are asking, “Who’s my competition? Who’s my biggest threat?” I believe they’re aiming very low. I’m not doing it like this. I grew up on the east side of Detroit where we believe if I make it, you make it.

They’re supposed to be trying to build a community. You can’t do it by taking people out. We’ve got to work together to build the city. In the city of Detroit, we’re proud of what we do. If I get a little bit and you get a little bit, that will sustain all of us. But if I get it all,

everybody else starves. That’s no way to do business and that’s no way to build a business community. It’s about building a community as opposed to building wealth. Wealth without community is no wealth.

The city of Detroit is trying to create a different culture in the city, and they’re excluding and segregating people from downtown. Why can’t I come downtown?

They are dividing the city as opposed to bringing it together; and then they say its economic growth. There are businesses that have actually closed down. It wasn’t because their business wasn’t successful. People have been kicked out because they can get a higher price with someone else. It’s not fair. But that’s

economic growth. That’s why you need to buy the property like I did.

If I was in charge, I’d say allow people to actually do business. Let everybody have equal access to the playing field.

And let all young people get a job. You’ve got enough places in Detroit where young people can go into a business and be mentored. They need to set it up where each one teaches one as opposed to a business saying, “Well, there are no qualified applicants.” And they need to teach job preparedness training at school. They’re not teaching it, so I’m teaching it.

I’m not selling the amount of tea that my husband said I have to sell. If anybody is going to take a hit, I’ll take it. The children are not going to ever suffer any kind of indignity. I’m keeping the door open. It’s not about me being successful. I’m already successful because I set it up.

God has blessed me to sustain for about three years. I don’t even think of it as a sacrifice. It’s a pleasure for me to do it.

Formerly incarcerated
single mom leverages her
skills and good job as a
union millwright to buy homes
to house people in need

INGRID YOUNG

By every definition, Ingrid Young is a Detroit-made success story. Yet her journey has not been easy. Although she made straight A's in high school, she ended up using and selling drugs after a failed relationship left her with low self-esteem and a baby to raise alone. In 2005, she went to prison.

While incarcerated, Young received vocational training in the building trades. "I learned how to use power tools," she says, and realized that she enjoyed making things. Before long, she'd passed a number of classes. "I was extremely proud of that. I don't know that I would have gotten into the building trades had it not been for me going to prison."

After her release from prison in 2009, Young joined Goodwill Industries' Flip the Script women's program, which teaches job and life skills to women who face challenges that result from being single mothers, victims of violence, or incarcerated. The program helped her connect with job opportunities and led to an apprenticeship that put her on the path to becoming a millwright and proud member of Millwrights Local 1102,





‘If you’re building downtown, why not rebuild in the neighborhoods?’

the largest millwrights local in the nation and part of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. As a millwright, Young is part of an elite, highly skilled workforce that installs, maintains, and demolishes complicated industrial machinery. As a union member, her past, gender and race do not prohibit her from earning the same good union wages and benefits as any other hard-working millwright. “You have so much pride when someone is paying you what you don’t even always believe you’re worth,” says Young.

As soon as she was able, Young started giving back. She tutored others in Flip the Script so that they could pass the math requirements necessary to get into the building and construction trades. Then she decided that she wanted to buy and rehab homes that could be used for transitional housing for women coming out of prison or who had fallen on hard times. In 2012 she bought her first home.

Today, Young is on a mission to pay it forward and thank those who helped her. She is leveraging her carpentry and construction skills to help restore neighborhoods and the lives of Detroiters in need. Her commitment to her community makes her daughters—a 20-year-old student at Western Michigan University and 13-year-old high school student—proud.

Young has ideas about how Detroit’s resurgence should include expanding opportunities for countless Detroiters like her to contribute to the city’s comeback.

Imerely wanted to be able to take care of my family, provide them with healthcare and just not have to care about some of the small needs. If my child wanted to go to a game at school or on a school trip, I wanted to be able to send her. So I was satisfied with what I made and what I did for a living. Everything else I put into my community.

I wanted to be able to use my home to provide housing for someone who needed it. I didn’t know how much money I wanted. I just wanted to do it. I kept saving my money, and I finally got an opportunity to purchase a home. I started to do work on the house. I was sanding floors, putting down polyurethane, and hiring people in the neighborhood to help me. I really wanted this house to look and feel like a home.

I finally got my first client through the Disability Network. A homeless lady had surgery, lost her apartment, and had no place to go. Every day, she was

taking the bus to the Disability Network and Michigan Works just to eat.

One of my barriers at that time was that I couldn’t provide my service to women who were coming out of prison because I was recently out of prison. Having a felony prevented us from being able to live together without me being in an official state-certified program or transitional program.

Now I contract with an organization called Oasis Home. They lease the property and run the day-to-day operations at the transitional home. I also bought a second home next door. I rent it out to a family in need until I can find some more resources and help to develop what I’m trying to do.


My children see the things that I do, and I make them proud. I make them think of things like, “What if our neighborhood could be this way?”

We're living at a time when the Motor City is blazing. People are starting to talk about Detroit. Part of reviving Detroit should include bringing our neighborhoods back to livable neighborhoods. If you're building downtown, why not rebuild in the neighborhoods? No one millionaire or city official can provide the amount of money that it will take to rebuild our inner cities. There has to be a plan to engage the community and make them be part of the solution.

you. I've experienced and come through too much—from prison to cancer—not to think this way. We've got so much, let's try to help somebody who doesn't have.

Ultimately, I would like to see my city come back full circle to be a beautiful place to visit like Florida, New York or Chicago. I want to leave my children something that they can live off of and pass down to

their children and grandchildren and say, "You know what? Not only do we have a piece of the city, but we're able to do something good with it."

 *There are so many people who are willing to come out and help if we provide the programs—where we get investors to buy homes and get the members of the community to fix these homes up.*

I see so many people who love the city and have always wanted to see it do better, but they haven't had the opportunity to come together to make it happen. We all want to be part of bringing Detroit back, but the city hasn't always had people who share the same dream. We've been looking to do this for so long without people who cared enough about us to help us do it.

There are so many people who are willing to come out and help if we provide the programs—where we get investors to buy homes and get the members of the community to fix these homes up. We could clean up the neighborhoods and, in exchange, give them training in the trades. There are so many families that need places to live. Why not design programs around rehabbing homes and allowing people a chance to acquire their own homes?

When you have a dream, you just keep putting your foot forward. Every day I look to do some good. I try to teach my children this and live by example. I'm blessed with a great job, and I live a pretty comfortable life. I have to find a way to pay that forward and say thank

49% of Detroit households owned homes in 2015, down from 55% in 2009 and the lowest rate in more than 50 years.

Source: Clark, Patrick. Bloomberg, 23 Mar. 2017. Web. <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-23/renters-now-rule-half-of-u-s-cities>>.

In 2014, banks in Detroit were six times more likely to deny mortgages to black applicants than to white applicants.

Source: Stamm, Alan. "Redlining Is Alive, Well and Dangerous in Detroit," Blocked Mortgages Suggest."—Deadline Detroit. N.p., 7 Dec. 2015. Web. 22 Sept. 2017. <http://www.deadlinedetroit.com/articles/13812/redlining_is_alive_well_and_dangerous_in_detroit_blocked_mortgages_suggest#WYHrAoqQy4>.

Seller financing, lease-to-own and other types of land contracts are making a comeback in Detroit. In 2015, more homes were bought using land contracts than with traditional mortgages. Would-be buyers often end up with eviction notices, not deeds.

Source: Kurth, Joel. "Land Contracts Trip up Would-be Homeowners." Detroit News. N.p., 29 Feb. 2016. Web. 22 Sept. 2017. <<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2016/02/29/land-contracts-detroit-tax-foreclosure-joel-kurth/81081186/>>.

A smiling woman with short dark hair, wearing a blue denim jacket over a white t-shirt. The t-shirt features a green circular logo with the word 'VEGA' and 'ORGANIC' visible. She is standing in front of a brick building with large glass windows. The windows display green signs that say 'SOUPS SALADS' and a large green circular logo with 'VEGA' and 'ORGANIC'. The text 'We know what we are building' is overlaid in white on the image.

‘We know what
we are
building’



Nationally recognized
Detroit Vegan Soul
cooks up healthy food
and career pathways

ERIKA
BOYD
&
KIRSTEN
USSERY-BOYD

Erika Boyd and Kirsten Ussery-Boyd did not grow up dreaming of owning and operating a restaurant. Boyd was a successful master barber; Ussery-Boyd was a public relations professional. Their journey toward opening Detroit Vegan Soul was born of their desire to be healthier. “We became vegans ourselves in an effort to achieve longevity and to avoid some of the pitfalls of diet-related illnesses that run rampant in our families and community,” says Co-Owner and Executive Chef Boyd, whose mother had breast cancer and whose father died from prostate cancer in 2010.

Transforming family recipes into vegan delicacies eventually led to a meal delivery service for family and friends in 2012, sold-out popup events and catering jobs. The success of these ventures led them to open Detroit Vegan Soul in 2013 in the historic West Village neighborhood on Detroit’s east side. “When you discover something that’s really good for you, you’re really excited about it and you want to share that with others,” says Co-Owner and General Manager Ussery-Boyd.

The restaurateurs availed themselves of every obtainable resource to get the restaurant open. They entered business competitions, applied for and received grants from neighborhood associations, emptied their bank accounts, took on extra work, and accepted financial support and help from family and friends.

Detroit Vegan Soul is a success story that has garnered national attention from CNN and *The New York Times*. The restaurant's role in Detroit's comeback story is well known. Less known is the owners' commitment to hiring young African Americans and introducing them to careers in the restaurant industry.

Despite their success, the women have faced many of the challenges common to entrepreneurs of color—lack of access to capital, vulnerability to escalating building lease costs, and skepticism about their business concept. But they are wholly committed to avoiding pitfalls and silencing naysayers. In August 2017, they opened a second location on Detroit's west side in the Grandmont/Rosedale neighborhood. This time, they own the building housing their restaurant.

Their story is an example of what is possible and a prescription for leveraging Detroit's comeback for community uplift. Their story raises questions about how the city can and should remove barriers and expand opportunities for socially conscious, homegrown businesses.

On our opening day, we were met with a line of people down the block waiting to get into the restaurant. It was an overwhelming response. We've been very busy ever since. Our place is that place where you see everybody. Even beyond just black and white. Asian people, all kinds of ethnicities and sexual orientations. It's all ages.

Most people assume that our customer base is mostly vegan or vegetarian. There are carnivores that have discovered the food. They either want to try to get healthier and move to a plant-based diet, or they just like the food and treat it as another type of cuisine, like going out for Italian or Chinese. Everyone is attracted to our spot.

We're giving people that bridge from a standard American diet to a plant-based diet. There's so much research that has come out proving that our standard heavy animal-based American diet is killing us. And in urban communities, there is no access to healthier

options. In our communities, we're dying sooner than we should. We want to be part of helping people to break the cycle of disease.

I don't know about other cities, but here in Detroit, if you look at the staff of restaurants, particularly in the kitchen, you're going to find mostly white males. You find some black people back there, but what are they doing? They're washing dishes or they're prepping. They're not chefs, sous chefs or kitchen managers. They don't have high ranking in the kitchen.

We've been able to employ young black people in the kitchen; and some of them don't have previous restaurant experience. We look for people who are open to learning a new skill set and are dedicated. We try to create opportunities within our restaurant for people to advance. People can come in and they can start as a dishwasher and move up to become a cook and actually make dishes. They can even move up to management-level positions.

We've been able to train them; and now they have skills that will allow them to excel in this industry and move up if they want to. That's what we envision. And if they decide to leave Detroit Vegan Soul one day, they can now get a job in another kitchen. They have skills that not a lot of people have in knowing how to work with vegan food and how to work with meat substitutes.

We wanted to establish our own foundation and that was through property ownership. So even with our flagship location, Detroit Vegan Soul East, if something was to ever change and the landlord decided to flip the script on us, we would always have a home base to operate from and we wouldn't wind up being displaced.



If it's done the right way, I think Detroit has an opportunity to be a model for the country growing the community businesses and giving opportunities to people.

That's a particular skill set; and it's growing in restaurants across the country now. Restaurants are seeing that they need to have vegan options. Chefs aren't taught how to deal with this type of food in culinary schools, but our staff will know how.

We've been experiencing a tremendous amount of growth. We're in Year 3 and are in the process of building a second location on the northwest side that should be opening in 2017. Right now, we employ about 23 people at (each) location. We know what we are building. This is not just a game for us. This is our whole life that we're talking about. We're all in with this.

If it's done the right way, I think Detroit has an opportunity to be a model for the country growing the community businesses and giving opportunities to people.

All of a sudden there are companies that are moving from outside of the state and from the suburbs. They're coming to the city and looking for spaces. Businesses that have been here for 13 years are being kicked out of their spaces so that these other businesses can come in. Seeing that, we definitely knew that if we were to open another location, we had to own it.

We want to grow. We want to expand even beyond Detroit. We would love to be able to open a Detroit Vegan Soul in North Carolina. We would love to open a Detroit Vegan Soul in L.A. Although L.A. has many vegan options, they don't have an option like ours. And they don't have enough options for black people and other people of color who grow up with certain diets that are really culturally based. That culturally based diet can be a barrier to the idea of a healthier diet. So we want to expand around the country and maybe even get into some other things. People ask us all the time about cookbooks and packaged products and all those types of things, and we see all of those things in our future.

2% of all Detroit businesses are minority-owned businesses owned by women.

44 of 32,000 black-owned businesses in Metro Detroit are downtown.

Source: Taylor, Kimberly Hayes, "Gentrification of Detroit Leaves Black-Owned Businesses Behind." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, 01 Nov. 2015. Web. 22 Sept. 2017. <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/gentrification-detroit-leaves-black-residents-behind-n412476>>.

Recommendations: Sustain the Solutionaries

Detroit owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to its remarkable “solutionary” women. By definition, these are women of color who lead families, businesses and nonprofits; who serve others in public and private life; and who find ways to make the world a better place than they found it. Their devotion and dedicated service to Detroit’s most vulnerable residents—often at great personal sacrifice—raises an important question. If these women with limited resources can do so much for Detroit with so little, why is so little invested in their success?

I Dream Detroit: The Voice and Vision of Women of Color on Detroit’s Future, both the project and report, is a clarion call asserting that for the city to achieve a revival designed to prosper all Detroiters, **Detroit must sustain its solutionaries**. Yet women of color in large numbers say their voices and vision are not being seen and heard by those in power. The *I Dream Detroit* Citywide Survey, along with six focus groups held in 2016, found that 71 percent of survey respondents did not feel that they were included in Detroit’s economic revival and development.

Major investments of every kind must be made to adopt, implement and take to scale their ingenious programs, businesses and policy prescriptions that have successfully created pathways out of poverty, stabilized communities, and nurtured children.

Further, the solutionaries should be in the driver’s seat of defining what these investments looks like. Through *I Dream Detroit’s* yearlong conversation, two core recommendations emerged from the solutionaries themselves:

- **Capital investment in their enterprises.** Lack or limited access to capital is the No. 1 barrier to businesses and nonprofits fully actualizing their potential as economic engines in communities that have been cut off from opportunities and as job creators for Detroiters who have been shut out of the labor market. Of those responding to the citywide survey, 67 percent of business owners and nonprofit leaders say they are challenged by lack of access to capital.
- **Creation of a solutionary space for cross-community collaboration and mutual support.** There is a deep need to develop space for solutionaries from all walks of life to come together to build community, trust, and systems of support—spaces where they can share and replicate successful models and set citywide policy priorities.

To these recommendations from the women themselves, *I Dream Detroit* adds the following proposals:

- **Solutionaries should be engaged in all economic development decision-making spaces.** The women featured in this report and their peers are thought leaders and strategists who should be fully engaged by government, the business community, and philanthropic enterprises in all areas where decisions about Detroit’s future are being made. Yet 73 percent of survey respondents say big business owners and investors are the ones shaping Detroit’s economic development.
- **Creation of a pipeline for the recruitment of solutionary women into key positions of leadership.** Women of color should be recruited into key positions and onto the boards of directors of businesses, nonprofits, and foundations.



www.ips-dc.org • www.iDreamDetroit.org