

Fall Newsletter

CEO LETTER

Dear Friends,

As I write this, I'm grateful to say that the number of COVID-19 deaths among Black Americans has finally significantly decreased due to an increase in vaccination rates.

However, the disparate impact the pandemic had on African Americans in its early days can't be ignored—especially in DC, where COVID hit particularly hard. The pandemic is waning, but the historical barriers to equity responsible for this disparity, are not.

At [CLIENT], we're dedicated to addressing the human-made link between race, poverty, and quality of life in the U.S., and especially in DC. And our efforts to end the racialization of poverty not only center the DC community—but they're most often facilitated *by the community*. That's why, at our Gala in May, we celebrated our community and all we've achieved, while acknowledging the work that still needs to be done.

Among those celebrated was [NAME], who, like many [CLIENT] members, saw our community through material, lasting changes. After getting out of prison in 2012, [NAME] became committed to increasing opportunities for the people around him, starting with his work with the Healthy Affordable Food for All Campaign upon his release. From there, [NAME] was determined to provide community members with the training they needed to organize and affect change in their own neighborhoods—free of charge.

While [NAME] has since passed away, we've founded the [NAME] Organizing Institute. And although we'd aimed to open the Institute in his lifetime, today, it continues to run in honor of his vision to inspire community members to advocate on their own behalf. Members receive the resources, technical support, and training they need to build grassroots campaigns in the neighborhoods they grew up in. And, this year, the Institute is moving forward with Cancel the Rent campaigns, making sure undocumented folks know their voting rights, and increasing access to fresh, healthy food.

Like [NAME], each person we work with is integral to our mission to create a community that does right by its members. And there's no better—or other—way to achieve that than by following the lead of community members like [NAME], who is both a Client Leader and CORE, or [GROUP], Member.

A returning citizen with two hip injuries and no place to live, being on parole made it difficult for [NAME] to find employment, though doing so was, ironically, one of her parole conditions. Thankfully, [NAME] got in touch with our Advocacy Director, [NAME], who introduced her to organizing work. After undergoing training, [NAME] was on fire. She went on to register community members to vote and testified in support of DC's Ban the Box housing initiative.

The initiative followed the 2014 passage of the original Ban the Box bill, which [CLIENT] helped pass. The first bill prohibits employers from asking applicants about their criminal histories on applications and in interviews—a major success, since many [CLIENT] clients are returning citizens, and almost all of DC’s returning citizens are Black.

Since then, [NAME] has created a training that empowers returning citizens to challenge discrimination by knowing their rights and sharing their stories with others in the community.

“It’s important that [CLIENT] follows the leads of community members because what we’re advocating and organizing and fighting for and involves the community,” [NAME] shares. “What is special is being heard with my voice...and I know now that my voice counts.”

Because of members like [NAME] and [NAME], we’ve able to appeal to public officials and, in doing so, open the public’s eyes to the work that needs to be done to end racial injustice. “We all come together, and it’s just magic,” [NAME] says, “like we’re finally being heard.”

And with the support of allies like you, we can continue to amplify the voices of community members as they shape their own futures. Thank you for being part of the [CLIENT] family!

Sincerely,

[NAME]
Chief Executive Officer

TRANSFORMING DC’S FOOD DESERTS

Roughly 324,000 DC households experience food insecurity. And while food deserts make up about 11 percent of DC’s total area, more than half of that area is in Ward 8—a community that is predominantly made up of Black and brown folks living with low incomes.

To address this staggering inequity, [CLIENT] opened the [REGION] Center in October 2021. Our goal with the new space is to provide clients with access to basic resources without the burdensome—and potentially prohibitive—travel costs of a trip to the [REGION] Center.

The new center will accommodate 20,000 additional clients in DC’s Southeast per year. Among other services, the space offers medical and legal clinics, a clothing room, jobs center, community organizing space, and, critically, a food pantry.

As with the food pantry in our [REGION] Center, the one in our new space will provide quality groceries—including fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats—to over 8,400 clients living near the federal poverty line. And, as a Grocery Plus distribution site, [CLIENT] offers an additional 30-pound box of healthy food to select seniors.

Our volunteers and donors make our food equity efforts possible. With the commitment of allies and friends, we're able to grow, harvest, and distribute thousands of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables per year while educating the community at our centers' rooftop gardens and three-acre orchard—all through our Sustainable Agriculture division.

And after a hiatus during the pandemic, we're also excited to have resumed our twice-monthly Farmers Markets during the summer. On the first Friday of the month, the events were held at our [REGION] Center, and on the fourth Friday, at our [REGION] Center. This seasonal effort, which is free of charge and operates under COVID-safe restrictions, provides community members with access to fresh produce throughout the summer months.

“The Farmers Market is a symbol of this renewed commitment to growth and planting in our communities,” shares [NAME], [CLIENT]'s Food and Clothing Director. “We look forward to offering fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as access to a variety of services.”

Finally, with the baby formula shortage that has taken hold of the nation since the summer of 2021, [CLIENT] has continued addressing community members' baby needs through our Diaper Room, which runs on Tuesdays and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Through the program, clients receive not only formula, but also baby toiletries, clothing, cribs, strollers, car seats, and more—in addition to 50 diapers per household each month.

No matter our nation's evolving barriers to food security, [CLIENT] is committed to ensuring every DC resident receives healthy, quality food year-round—and we couldn't do without the continued investment of friends like you. On behalf of the [CLIENT] family, thank you!



BREAKING BREAD SERIES: SOCIAL JUSTICE

On March 30th, Executive Director of Critical Exposure [NAME] led a conversation on housing advocacy and public policy in DC. The discussion, which took place at the end of Women's History Month, centered on the needs of the DC community throughout the heightening housing crisis. Each participant spoke about balancing leadership responsibilities with the obstacles that are often posed by gender, race, and poverty.

“What we need is structural and policy change,” says [NAME], Senior Fellow of the Social Policy Institute at Washington University in St. Louis. “The communal experience of COVID, which hit some people harder than others, led many Americans who weren't previously interested to believe in the need for a structural change.”

“My hope is that that is a permanent shift, but we're starting to see some signs that that is temporary, because some folks have moved on, and some are still struggling.”

[CLIENT]’s Managing Attorney in the [PROJECT], [NAME], spoke about the often-unaddressed impacts of that continued struggle. “At [CLIENT], we talk about trauma-informed care,” she says, “and when people walk in our doors, we don’t know what trauma they’re facing. And eviction is trauma, but [society doesn’t] treat it that way—[it’s treated] as a legal case.”

From housing to food security, the effects of poverty in DC are felt intimately. “[In] Wards 7 and 8, we only have two grocery stores for over 150,000 residents,” says [NAME], Community Organizer and Secretary of [CLIENT]’s Client Advisory Council.

[NAME], who has worked with ONE DC and Thrive DC and, as a participant in the Cancel the Rent campaign, collected over 4,000 signatures, hopes to get a grocery store open in the community within the next year or two.

“Advocacy is my life—I do this 24/7,” she says.

Hear more from the women who are fighting inequity in our community every day by watching the full discussion here: [RAW LINK]

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

*** VOLUNTEERS WANTED ***

We need you! [CLIENT] is feeding more families than ever before—and our ongoing efforts would be impossible without the dedication of the volunteers who help us provide food, clothing, delivery services, and more to our clients. Each weekday, we need at least 10 volunteers at our [REGION] Center to pack bags of food for distribution. And at our [REGION] Center, we’re expanding the services we offer, such as our diaper delivery program, which runs every Tuesday and Thursday.

Whether you’re a medical or legal professional, are interested in helping out in our food pantries or clothing rooms, or have linguistic experience that’d be valuable to our clients, there are plenty of opportunities to make a tangible impact on your community.

Visit [RAW LINK] to get involved today.

(NOTE: All volunteers are required to be fully vaccinated. To ensure public safety, social distancing and masks are also required while volunteering. If you have professional experience (medical/legal), please be sure to view the unique sections for work in your field.)

[NAME] VISIT

From losing wages for time off to trying to afford childcare when school is out, the holidays are often rife with obstacles for families living with low incomes. As we work to remove those obstacles, we want to make sure, first and foremost, that having enough to eat isn't one of them.

In December 2021, [NAME] and his team visited the [REGION] Center. With the [CLIENT] staff, [NAME] and his team participated in a holiday service project wherein they packed grocery bags to distribute to community members.

We hope additional community members will follow not only the example of [NAME] and his team, but also, of our current [CLIENT] family. Together, we can ensure that our *Holiday Helpings* program, through which each client receives a \$75 debit card to spend as they choose, continues to be successful in helping community members who are still impacted by the pandemic.

“I encourage all of you out there to work in your communities and help other people because that's what the holiday season is all about,” [NAME] says.

We're grateful to [NAME], his team, and every member of the [CLIENT] family—during the holidays and beyond.