



June 28, 2018

Group Health Foundation

Organizational Overview

Byrd Barr Place was founded as the Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP) in 1964, during the peak of the civil rights movement. For 54 years, Byrd Barr Place has been a force for change and a pillar of Seattle's Black community, and in that time we have gone from CAMP to Centerstone, and now from Centerstone we are opening our next chapter and unveiling our new name: Byrd Barr Place. Yet the heart of our work remains the same. We believe in the idea of helping neighbors help themselves—that if families have access to basic human needs and the tools to succeed, they are stronger. And strong people make for strong communities.

A lack of affordable housing, costly education, and scarce employment opportunities include many of the very issues Byrd Barr Place is committed to addressing every day by providing Seattle residents with rental assistance, energy assistance, personal finance education, and healthy food through our food bank. We're also working in partnership with Africatown, Black Community Impact Alliance, and Capitol Hill Housing to develop the Liberty Bank Building, which broke ground last year and will provide affordable housing in the Central Area. And we're gathering data to influence policy and shed light on issues critical to creating opportunities and prosperity within the Black community.

This newest chapter of our history is chance to re-root ourselves in community. Our new name honors Roberta Byrd Barr, a leader, educator and journalist, who once wrote for The Trumpet, CAMP's newspaper. Roberta woke up Seattle to the realities of poverty and the experiences of people of color through her moderated news program Face to Face.

Byrd Barr Place has a rich history serving the diverse populations that live in the city of Seattle. Our clients span a number of ethnicities including African American/Black (44%), Asian (26%), Caucasian (22%), Hispanic/Latino (6%) and American Indian/Other (2%), as well as the elderly and disabled. We focus on the poorest individuals and families that are struggling to survive, many of whom make less than \$1,000/month and live at 125% of federal poverty level and below.

Poverty is not an issue that can be solved overnight, and the challenges plaguing our clients are often a combination of many factors. Byrd Barr Place goes beyond fulfilling basic needs by providing clients the tools for self-sufficiency and the hope to live a better life.

Mission

Our mission is to nurture a more equitable Seattle through programs and advocacy that enable people to live healthier, prosperous lives.



Program Overview

The Seattle/King County Community of Practice (CoP) is an established community coalition that includes the four largest agencies serving African-Americans in the greater Seattle area. This is a very diverse coalition that initially entered the partnership with differing values and priorities. Established in 2013, the CoP has since aligned strategies, united in their vision for eliminating inequitable outcomes. The agencies have partnered on two research studies and implemented several strategic activities that have resulted in new, comprehensive asset-building programs and services specifically for African Americans. The CoP's first monumental research report entitled *Creating an Equitable Future in Washington State: 2015 Black Well-Being & Beyond* was released in March of 2015, sponsored by a coalition of agencies serving the African American community including Byrd Barr Place, the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs, and the African American Leadership Forum–Seattle. The report outlines some of the major ways that social, economic, and political systems in Washington State create barriers to opportunity that impede progress within the African American community.

These four organizations have worked together on issues important to African Americans in the past. For example, our combined efforts helped ensure the success of Washington's first race-based state wide initiative on education reform aimed to lower the African American achievement gap in public education. Each of the CoP partner organizations played an essential and distinct role: the Commission secured policy makers and the technical assistance needed to set the statewide agenda, Urban League led the steering committee and kept the team on task, Byrd Barr Place secured financial resources to offset campaign costs, and the NAACP provided ground support and community mobilization. As a direct result of our combined strengths and efforts, we made history when all of the education reforms were signed into law during the 2010 legislative session.

For too long in Seattle and King County, Black-serving organizations had not been as effective as they could be. Through this coalition, the CoP deepened our ties and advanced on a path toward trust, cooperation and mutual support, as well as building individual agency capacity and organizational effectiveness. A strong, capable, connected infrastructure of Black-serving organizations has given voice to our community and supported the ability to meet current and future needs in health, housing and economic opportunity.

Questionnaire Responses

1. How have you engaged, convened, and maintained relationships with your community/communities?

Through deep listening, ongoing conversations with clients, constituents, and Black community leaders, Byrd Barr Place and our coalition members have been building the foundation for this project for the past several years through expansion of our programs and services and development of key partnerships. The result is the recent publication of a quantitative research report which serves to identify the specific barriers that push Blacks off the paths to prosperity. This work has identified the root causes to Seattle's high rate of Black un(der)employment; the road blocks keeping Blacks from



taking hold of existing financial resources available for asset and wealth creation; and the policy impacts that have an unintended consequence of keeping African Americans in debt. Through this work, we have also gathered qualitative data specific to the Black community by assembling focus groups, in-person interviews, and case studies to discover innovative race-based solutions to overcoming challenges.

Understanding the urgency of now to address the disparities for Blacks throughout Greater Seattle, each partner organization is pulling the best of our individual resources toward the collective effort of improved health and economic prosperity to advance a unified, community-driven strategy.

2. How have you co-designed or co-created solutions with your community/communities?

There are major systemic barriers facing the African American community, and though this effort cannot solve all of them, opening avenues of communication and program coordination between the partner agencies and their stakeholders has been critical. As explained in *Creating an Equitable Future*, “While we know that in many ways the findings here will raise more questions than provide answers, we are looking forward to a robust, respectful, and ongoing conversation throughout our communities to answer those questions.”

The CoP’s prior research has certainly uncovered many insights, both quantitative and qualitative. But the key outcome from this research is that it has sparked needed conversations among Black leaders which led to peacemaking circles; between community agencies and policy makers, leading to conversations about racial inequities and the need for systemic change; and between agencies and their communities, helping them to think beyond traditional measures and develop breakthrough service models to overcome these inequities. The solution hinges on the idea of weaving our resources together, rather than turf building.

To do this, we focused our peacemaking circle work on relationship and trust building to inform a shared leadership practice. This process involved acknowledging, healing and celebrating our individual and collective experiences as a people, to learn and create solutions together. Individuals from all partner organizations participated with the expectation that those individuals would institutionalize what they learned within their respective organizations and the organizations then begin to reframe how they interact in community.

For example, within the CoP we identified unhealthy patterns of individual and community interactions and developed our own framework for being in community and resolving conflict. The shared values statement and communication guidelines we created together guide all our conversations, projects, and activities. As a result, our team is more comfortable having hard conversations, stepping into and making hard decisions, and constructively collaborating to achieve solutions.

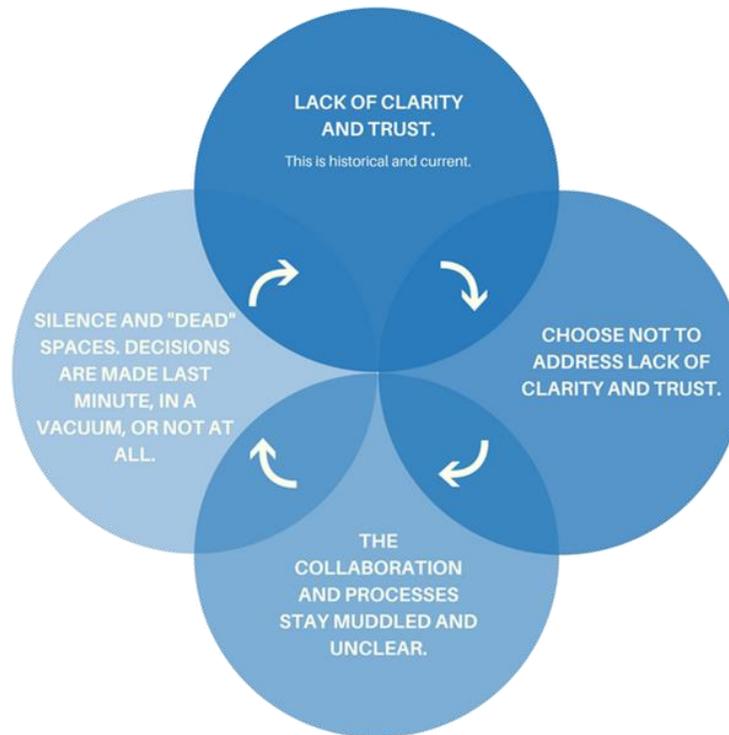


3. How have you addressed systematic inequities that affect health (such as racism) as part of your community engagement work?

The current phase the Seattle/King County CoP is focused on is healthy communities. The key question is: How can we foster a groundswell of positive change within our community to increase resilience against the intersection of inequities in health, economic opportunity and housing? The CoP believes that focused research and a strategic initiative underscoring the following can help us eliminate these inequities. The CoP is deepening its understanding of the ways in which health disparities are manifested in people's daily experience through an iterative series of community sessions and our competency in deep listening. CoP leaders will reflect the empirical data back to community members and capture their responses, insights and ideas for solutions. Additionally, the agencies are advocating to expand the coalition to include emerging organizations in economic development (Central Area Collaborative) and housing (Africatown) as well as partnering with well-established agencies in health (Center for Multi-Cultural Health and Meredith Mathews YMCA) and anchor institution partners, Odessa Brown Clinic, Seattle University College of Nursing and Swedish Medical Center. The CoP is seeking their expertise and technical assistance, as the coalition develops and implements health strategies for the Black community. We are utilizing the trust and partnership building framework to ensure we're successful at community engagement and crafting culturally-relevant health programs. Then, the coalition will take actions to improve health outcomes for our community: The CoP will motivate the community to understand the interdependence of their health, basic needs, and stability in society to improve their health, healthcare access, education, employment, family support, and civic engagement. The CoP will also craft an advocacy agenda for just and equitable policies and practices from state and local government and policy institutions.

4. What about your organization's way of working has made you successful? How has your organizational culture or structure changed to allow for authentic community relationships? Include examples.

Visualized below is an example of what commonly occurs in community or in partnership among Black organizations. The illustration stems from the tension between the very important work of creating a thriving Black community and investing in each individual or organization's capacity to be able to carry it out.



However, with time invested in trust and team development, with a focus on group dynamics, we were able to push past the above to realize success.

There are nearly 240,000 Black people in Washington State. We share a history and identity as the descendants of survivors of the middle passage who became enslaved in the antebellum south and began migrating to the Pacific Northwest as far back as 1788 to pursue opportunities in the urban centers of the north. Our identity and experience as a community, described in the outcomes data in health and other areas, has been shaped by extraordinary resilience in the face of pervasive racism over generations. Through the CoP's work around research, capacity-building, leadership development, and partner readiness, the regional Black community's support infrastructure has reclaimed our time to attend to our constituents through an equity lens that has enabled our progress through this work. This has brought to light the community's challenges, which include poor health outcomes; and as King County grows and real estate prices outpace income, Black homeowners, renters and businesses have been displaced from our historic neighborhoods. We risk losing the place-based critical mass of people, and culturally-relevant businesses and services that keep us connected to one another. Our community's opportunity for financial stability has been reduced, exacerbating existing trends of social, economic and health inequity.

The CoP believes strongly in our work, our individual capacity and the organizations we lead. We are resilient, resourceful and flexible. A key aspect of our work to date has been to be a better partner. Out



of this commitment to be a constructive partner spurred our collaborative to expand our partnership to be able to develop a health equity frame, adding housing and neighborhood-scale economies as the foundation for a healthy community.

5. **What have been your most significant challenges, obstacles, and missteps?**

The following have been challenge areas that we have worked through, which has also delivered to us key learnings and insights:

Listening: In our early work, we were so focused on the plan and the goals that we didn't slow down enough to listen carefully to each agency leader, our partners or community. We learned that we must listen to each other through frequent meetings and collaborative activities. We learned we must listen to our clients and engage them in all aspects of this project. And we learned we must listen to other agencies that interact with African Americans in King County through meetings and collaborative sessions.

Capacity-Building: We struggled with using standard techniques to engage different audiences; the key learning was that we must adapt to diverse learning styles to facilitate our learning and development. Through team-building and agency capacity-building activities, we learned we can increase our individual capacity to deliver support and services, as well as the capacity of the CoP to develop and launch new services in the future. Moving forward, it is our role to design and implement tools that will uncover that capacity so it can be leveraged more strongly to meet community change goals and outcomes.

Community Engagement/Involvement: To better understand the motivations, behaviors, and desired services of our community, we learned to include them at the table during strategic points in the planning stages (i.e. survey creation, dissemination and program design). We learned that each organization has different approaches of engaging varying segments our Black community and we learned to honor the differences each CoP participant takes in achieving the combined outcome. We learned that including input from community members builds trust, fosters communication and reduces any feelings of resentment or exclusion. Our goal is that our work frequently incorporates community input to ensure we are meeting the needs of those we seek to serve.

6. **What changes have you seen that give you hope about a future that is more equitable?**

As a direct result of our success in leadership, capacity building and partner development, our CoP participants were able to achieve the following collaborative outcomes that gives us hope about a future that is more equitable: NAACP and Urban League co-partnered on the Hope for Homeowners with Ocwen which served to keep distressed Black homeowners in their property; and Byrd Barr Place and Africatown co-partnered on acquiring ownership of Liberty Bank, a historically black owned building located in a gentrifying area of the community; NAACP and Africatown co-partnered on the Central Area Collaborative serving the business needs of Black owned businesses. In addition, the CoP completed our



first collaborative project to gather stakeholder input on the most important needs for local African Americans. We conducted surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups which involved 543 of the 143,965 African Americans throughout King County including the Central District, South Seattle, and Kent. The report, “Economic Security Amongst African Americans in King County, Washington,” provides an extensive narrative for how African Americans live, work, and play in Seattle and King County and identified their needs for community support. The sample from the community includes a mix of residents, low-income blacks, public and private funders, and state and local policymakers. The report has been published and distributed throughout King County to help guide community conversations and projects. We also provided Personal Finance courses to 256 African Americans; the curriculum focused on learning, earning, saving, owning and protecting wealth. This program incorporated financial education with the process of Homeownership, we view clients as being financial managers and navigators in all aspects of their finances. The program curriculum was structured to assist clients in confronting and managing economic challenges while providing them with knowledge and resources to make better financial decisions about purchasing major assets such as a home or creating a business.

The work of the Community of Practice is bold, exciting – and challenging. In coming together, the partners took on a large scope: both to build joint leadership and coalition as an asset for the community, and to create a durable asset for the community to use over time. While the challenge is large, the Partner agencies are more than up for the challenge. What is needed in this moment is the boldness to unequivocally address the challenges and embrace the opportunities articulated in this report. This is what will propel the work forward exponentially in the future and create a new kind of collaboration for the African American community.