

## Cohort Bios



### **Barbara Goodall Meschino**

City Colleges of Chicago Malcolm X College Adult Education Program  
Adult Education Manager

I currently hold a Masters degree in Social Work with a concentration in Mental Health. I spent several years working as a Mental Health Worker prior to transitioning into higher education. I had the privilege of serving as an Adult Educator teaching GED and ESL classes to adult learners. My first assignment through Malcolm X College was at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, a Federal Prison in downtown Chicago. I taught there for three years. Here is where I had a firsthand view of how our black and brown men were being incarcerated at a despairing rate and all too often receiving life sentences for drug charges because of a three strikes law at that time. Many of the men inside were brilliant critical thinkers, as evidenced by us having the highest graduation rate for our off-campus sites, who were many victims of societal injustices. I believe this experience helped me to make a greater impact on the young men in my future classes when I shared the stories of the men who were incarcerated. Their stories hit close to home for many of my students. After instructing for nine years, I sought to become an Administrator in the Adult Education program. In this role, I have a greater voice to influence necessary changes within our department in the way of advocating for supportive services and resources for our students such as textbooks. I've lived abroad and learned a second language as an adult. This proved to me that anything is possible if you are committed to the process. This experience also helped me to be able to identify with some of the challenges that our adult learners often experience. I believe learning is continuous and as humans we are constantly evolving into our greater and better selves.

### **Carina Ruiz**

Audubon Great Lakes  
Community Engagement Manager

Chicago Native and Southsider, Carina Ruiz, brings 18 years of youth development experience as a former high school and early childhood educator and through informal education as a museum educator, program administrator of outdoor environmental-education programs. Currently, as the Community Engagement Manager for Audubon Great Lakes, she manages the development, implementation and expansion of the regional program, Wild Indigo Nature Exploration; a program focused on engaging communities of color with their surrounding natural areas through co-designed, informal, environmental-education, stewardship, and accessible



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outdoor recreation activities. She brings over 9 years of experience developing and managing multigenerational, programs that focus on engaging people of color, that are often under-connected with outreach to participants of conductive and special education. Before Audubon, her work supported the Student Conservation Association through the implementation of inclusive programs which engaged underrepresented youth of color with paid experiences that exposed them to a variety of conservation careers with in local, state, and national parks. As a former museum educator for the Chicago Academy of Sciences, her work developing bi-lingual, science-inquiry programs for Latino communities on the southwest and southeast side of Chicago earned her the “Urban Communities in Conservation Award” from the United States Department of Agriculture. At an early age of 19, Carina began her career as a high school teacher at an all-women Catholic school in the Little Village community. Carina developed her passion for the environment through an internship that certified her as an urban wildland firefighter. After her experience, she reflected on why it took her so long to find the field of environmental conservation. Acknowledging the lack of green space in her place of upbringing, in conjunction lack of youth science programs, she decided to dedicate her path to building experiences that expose young people to the field and ethic of ecological conservation.



### **Cason Brunt**

Chicago Scholars Foundation

Director of College Success and Post-secondary Leadership Development

I have committed my life to serving others. Dr. Martin Luther King stated that "everyone can be great, because everyone can serve", Oprah furthered this thought by stating that "service is the prerequisite to greatness". Given these thoughts, I am consistently intrigued by the universes' commitment to positioning me to serve and position others to serve and lead within their respective communities. As a born and raised native of the Southside of Chicago, I came to find a purpose for serving young people in educational spaces during my Junior year of College while at the University of Illinois. Ultimately, my purpose became a passion of serving College students in the Higher Education space. For 14 years, I invested in that work prior to recently returning to Chicago to work for Chicago Scholars as a Leadership Development professional. Prior to joining Chicago Scholars, highlights of my experience include being named 30 for the Future by the Akron Chamber of Commerce (2017), Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated, Chapter Advisor of the Year (2018) and Black United Students, Student Organization Advisor of the Year (2018). I am excited about having returned home to Chicago to invest in the work happening throughout the city, building upon the distinction of having been named a Junior Citizen by the Chicago Park District in 2004. An infusion of service, leadership and genuine care for people encapsulates who I am, what I see as important in the world and how I have lived my life. The old song "If I can help somebody, as I pass along... then my living shall not be in vain". Speaks well to who I am and what I do. I am Creative, Committed, Collaborative.

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### **Cecilia Mendoz**

Family Focus  
Citizenship Specialist



Cecilia Mendoza currently serves as the Citizenship Specialist with Family Focus Nuestra Familia in Cicero, IL. She coordinates local citizenship workshops and DACA renewal clinics, as well as, refer people to trusted attorneys and organizations for immigration legal advice. She has worked in the immigration field for the last 6 years. Prior to working with Family Focus, she worked and learned from the attorneys and staff at Tapia-Ruano & Gunn P.C. for five years. As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, the experiences of her family are part of what drove her to a career in the immigration field. Cecilia was recently elected Co-Chair of the Welcoming Committee of the Cicero Community Collaborative (CCC). The CCC is made up different groups and organizations that serve the Town of Cicero and the Welcoming Committee is focused on serving immigrants and their families. As a Co-Chair she is responsible for establishing the committee's goals and carrying out its implementation. Cecilia also dedicates time to the Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC) who fundraises for Mujeres Latinas en Accion. Crucial work is done by community organizations who are always in need of funding. Giving back in this capacity allows her to use her skills for another organization that works to advocate and empower its participants. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, IL and her Master's degree in Public Policy from DePaul University School of Public Service in Chicago, IL.



### **Cesar Nunez**

Enlace Chicago  
Director of Organizing

My entire professional experience has been working in the not-for-profit field. From starting with Pilsen/Little Village Habitat for Humanity, to the City of Chicago and now again at Enlace. I have always enjoyed being part of a community and working together with others to support positive community development. The majority of my experiences have been based in the Pilsen and Little Village communities. Not only professional but residency as well. Living and working in your community is a blessing. Part of the last two summers have been consumed with coaching my son's baseball team. How could I not, in the same park I grew up playing in, and just down the street from my parent's house. Especially knowing that additional kids would be given the opportunity to join the league if I volunteered to coach. I'm not a real coach but the 4-9 year old kids, from the last two years, don't know that. Our team came in second place this year, not that it matters, and the kids seemed to enjoy themselves. Running into one of the parents from last year and learning that her some kind of missed me because I always put a smile on his face

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was nice. Not sure how long I'll keep doing this, but it has help me as much as my son and other children enjoy the summer and contribute to positive community development.

Today, my focus is my family, family at large, and Enlace/Little Village. Being privileged to have been raised in Little Village by my parents, continuing to work in the community I grew up in, and now trying to incorporate my own family unit into what I believe to be community is pretty awesome.

### **Diana Rubi**

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Program Coordinator



My family and I came to the U.S. when I was a year old. Like many families seeking a better life, we came undocumented. I wasn't old enough then to understand what was happening, but as I grew, I became familiar with being undocumented. When I was in primary school, I remember my mom dropping me off at school and telling me to learn as much as I could. She would say, "They can take our things and deport us, but they will never take away your knowledge." I never disclosed my status to anybody. In high school, I was in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program which has a rigorous curriculum. I was only admitted to that high school because I was in the IB Program and most of my peers came from rich, white families. In my IB Communication class, I chose to speak about immigration. As I was giving my first speech, I announced that I was undocumented. I looked around the room to see shocked and confused faces. In December 2012, my family and I received our green cards. My mom picked up the mail and hid it from us. On Christmas Eve, she brought us all together in the living room and ran to get the envelopes with our names. My parents started crying before I could even read who the mail was from. Then, it hit me. This is what we had been waiting for. In 17 years, I would only hear of stories about my land and my family. I only had a faint image of what I thought my grandmother looked like, but now I could go see her, hear her, and hug her. My immigration story is what makes me, me.

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**Ernesto Saldivar Jr.**

Acero Schools  
School Principal

Ernesto Saldivar, Jr. is a first-generation, bilingual, bicultural, Latino dedicated to transforming the landscape of education for our comunidades. He believes that all students and their families deserve access to schools that are safe and inclusive - schools that provide high quality culturally relevant and socially just opportunities so that students can self-actualize and recognize themselves as powerful human beings. He is part of the Acero School Network serving as Principal of Torres Elementary in Chicago's Archer Heights neighborhood. Prior to his current role, he served in Chicago Public Schools since 2003 as a classroom teacher, teacher leader, and Assistant Principal. His professional competencies have been demonstrated by his performance as an educational leader and passion for Ethnic Studies. He maintains that Ethnic Studies is a way of life - it is love, it is liberation, it is empowerment through the unveiling of the covert oppression that students of color and other marginalized individuals are enculturated into through "traditional" educational experiences. In addition to being an accomplished educator, he is a Chicago Surge Fellow, a Golden Apple Scholar, and Golden Apple Teacher of Distinction.

**Farah Dioro Tunks**

Chicago Park District  
Area Manager



I was born in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti and only spoke Kreyol and French. Attended public school in the Grand Crossing area and would have to force away my accent to fit in with Americans so I wouldn't continue to get bullied or teased for not being understood. I started to fit in by participating in sports and dance at an early age. I was a phenomenal in dance and started teaching toddler classes at the age of 14! I used to deny my heritage to keep from getting teased until high school. I went to an All Girl Catholic school and noticed the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans would get upset if you got their heritage mixed up. This is where I became proud to be Haitian. I saw that they accepted their culture no matter what and even though there were only a couple of Haitian girls I knew, I stood proud to say "I'm Haitian!" It wasn't the norm and people would ask what a Haitian was and didn't have a clue where to find Haiti on the map. The struggles of my parents to move to the US not speaking English and open the doors of opportunity for my brother and I made me work even harder. I obtained a Masters Degree in Education from UIC at the age of 25 and never stopped teaching dance. Now, the first couple of things you hear about me is that I am proud single parent of 1 and am 100% Haitian! My culture and history should be told more so that everyone knows

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why the Haitian Revolution is so important for us all! This is why I am so hard working and dedicated. I know where I come from!



**Floyd Stafford**

Heartland Alliance

Senior Field Building Project Manager

Floyd Stafford's values revolve around faith, family, community and justice. Floyd is currently the Community Project Manager for Heartland Alliance's READI (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative) Chicago Project. READI engages high risk individuals impacted by gun violence with transitional jobs and cognitive behavioral therapy. Previously, he worked for the Cook County Justice Advisory Council (JAC), where he engaged in the mission of safely reducing the population at the Cook County Jail and the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center while preserving public safety, reducing recidivism, and promoting fair and equitable access to justice. He is also the co-founder of The Alumni Association a 501 © 3 peer support network for the formerly incarcerated. Floyd is one the former leaders of FORCE (Fighting to Overcome Records and Create Equality) and has engaged in community organizing and cause advocacy on the local and state level to restore rights for people with criminal records. Floyd graduated with a BSW from NEIU IN 2013, and then went on to receive his Master's degree in Social Work and Health Administration and Policy in 2015 from the University of Chicago - School of Service Administration. Floyd is a father to four wonderful daughters and interests include: traveling, sound engineering and coaching football.

**Ja'Neane Minor**

Advance Illinois

Director of Government Relations

Since I can remember I enjoyed learning about different cultures. I would read encyclopedia Britannica to learn about different foods, and language, and dress. For Christmas, when others were asking for toys, I asked for a globe. I attended a magnet high school. One of the areas of concentration was languages and world cultures. I took Arabic, Spanish and French and continue with Spanish and French through my undergraduate studies. No matter the location or the position, my career has allowed me to work with diverse communities, not just racial and ethnic diversity but also social economic classes. I have enjoyed working with these communities to change systems while also working with communities to understand and utilize their personal grit and passion to succeed at their long-term goals in spite of these systems. When I'm not working to improve systems and communities, I'm working on improving my Spanish, watching all things that have



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to do with crime on TV, traveling, reading (but not enough), and spending time with family and the cutest grandbaby every born.

### **Janella Curtis**

16<sup>th</sup> Ward Administration  
Community Diversity Liaison



Native to San Diego, CA, Janella Curtis has a mixed heritage of African American and Mexican roots. She was raised in a single parent household in San Diego with her mother and two sisters where she became an independent thinker at a young age. Now a staunch community development advocate and former aldermanic candidate, Janella Curtis founded Green Tech Summer Camp, a summer employment program that teaches young people principles of horticulture and coding as well as business soft skills. Janella was inspired to organize and implement a program that would expose inner-city youth to urban agriculture and computer programming - both highly in-demand industries for the coming future. To this end she has plans to create Vertical Farms in urban areas on a national level.



**Jaunita Pye**  
YMCA-YSVP  
Senior Operations Director

I'm a product of a single parent female household and the eldest grandchild. Growing up my mother utilized alcohol as a coping mechanism for the brutal domestic violence she endured. I was a victim of community violence as an adolescent overcoming drug dealing, recreational drug use, frequent street brawls and the resulting arrest associated with them. I'm an alternative high school valedictorian. I'm a single mother to my seventeen-year-old son, Tavaris. Tavaris is currently a senior, football, track and Rugby star at Marist Catholic High school on scholarship with a 4.8 GPA. I spent a little over ten years in Retail loss prevention before transitioning into a career in education as I returned to college. The condition of my neighborhood coupled with my passion for change and equity in my community led me to quit my Monday-Friday 8am-4:30 pm account manager position to embark on a journey to engage our youth. I'm a communication team member for my church and parents club member for my son's school and sports teams. I'm the grandmother of my family and the rational mind to all that know me. I'm a Peace academy graduate and facilitator for Metropolitan Family Service's street outreach sector. I was recently promoted from site case manager to the YMCA's Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Senior Operations

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Director overseeing five sites and little over twenty personnel. I love utilizing research-based practices to provide direct service and I truly enjoy creating Trauma Informed programs and options for the communities we serve.

### **Jennifer Baquedano**

Erikson Institute  
Birth to Three Monitor



I am on a first-generation daughter of immigrants. My identity is influenced by my family's experiences - both good and bad. I cannot begin to imagine what it took to leave everything behind and take a huge risk to live a better life. The strength that they had to do this has had a great impact on my identity. I feel the need to pay a debt to my parents. I started having conversations with my family about our history when I was about 16. This is when I began to understand the harsh realities of the world and what poverty really means. In this way, I began to reflect more about who I am in this world and what impact I wanted to make. In the last few years, I've realized the privileges in life I have had and the power I can use to create change. My family calls me *inqueta*, because I am constantly moving and always doing something (e.g., volunteering, going to events, studying). I don't mind them calling me this because it's true, I hunger for learning and connecting with others, but also know how to prioritize my goals. This restlessness has led me to learn more about myself through listening to other's narratives. It's given me the ability to become more mindful of where I am in the world and reflective of the world. When I travel, I have conversations with local people. I realized how often we can be misinformed about our world. So, I've learned to be more open to participating in tough conversations. I am no longer a timid person, I no longer fear being called outspoken. However, I am mindful of saying things in a way that causes others to think or form an alliance, because change cannot happen alone.



### **Jonathan Fair**

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Assistant Director of Campus Architecture

Jonathan Fair is an architect that works at the University of Illinois at Chicago as the Assistant Director of Campus Architecture and Campus Learning Environments. A Chicago native, Jonathan would go on to receive his Bachelor of Science in Architecture from Florida A&M University before completing his Masters in Architecture at Illinois Institute of Technology.



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Working in higher education, Jonathan is committed to fostering student success through the development of a vibrant and energized urban campus. Through his planning and design work, Jonathan has helped to redefine the university's approach to land use and the design and function

of campus grounds and facilities alike. As the university's first WELL AP, Jonathan is a champion for designs that promote occupant wellness and healthfulness on campus. In his free time, Jonathan volunteers with several social-impact focused organizations, including Global Shapers and the National Organization of Minority Architects. A steadfast believer that all people have authority in the design of architecture, Jonathan has also provided pro-bono architectural rendering services for numerous non-profit organizations in Chicago.

### **Lisette Arzuaga**

Latin United Community Housing Association (LUCHA)  
Development Associate

Lisette Arzuaga serves as Development Associate for the Latin United Community Housing Association (LUCHA) in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. Raised by Puerto Rican grandparents who migrated to Chicago in the 1970s, Lisette carries with her the legacies of struggle and resilience she has witnessed in family and community. Lisette's experiences growing up in Logan Square and eventually being displaced from her childhood home have influenced her professional and personal trajectories as a resident and community advocate. Lisette earned her B.A. in English and Women's Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and her M.A. in Women's & Gender Studies from DePaul University.



### **Lyzeth Mondragon**

American Heart Association  
Community Impact Director

Lyzeth Mondragon is the current Community Impact Director for the American Heart Association in Chicago. In her 7 years with the American Heart Association, Lyzeth has been responsible for initiatives and campaigns focusing on multicultural communities, national chronic disease campaigns, and supporting the Go Red for Women campaign. Currently, her priorities include contributing to existing collective impact projects in the city but specifically in Chicago's westside. Lyzeth hopes to connect resources of the American Heart Association to improve life expectancy and the quality of life of communities. As a native Chicagoan, she has resided on the southwest side and has seen neighborhoods go through transformations. Taking what she has learned from

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DePaul University she strives to foster stronger communities throughout Chicagoland. Has studied social justice through a Christian lens and looks for opportunities to share and implement her learnings. Lyzeth is an active associate board member and helps raise funds to support Esperanza Health Centers.

### **Maria Pike**

Chicago Survivors  
Member of Board



My name is Maria and I started my work while walking on the streets of Logan Square looking for answers as to why my son was killed, waiting for detectives at the bench on the police headquarters to see if they had found clues, praying I would not be a member of the 80% unsolved cases. I learned so much about humans in the last 7 years. I learned that there are no good or bad people, no black and white, just shades of grey. We are all flawed, and we must ignore the biases we are born with in order to connect because that connectivity is the most unique and valuable asset we will ever have. When I lost my child the shy in me left and the fearless was born. I had lost the most precious gift I had ever been given and I am now not scared to die. I raised my voice because I now speak for my son and my legacy will be what Ricky would have wanted for his beloved city of Chicago. I only wished I had been younger so that I could watch the new generations hopefully enjoy a life they deserve and not the life that the ones in power built to keep minorities disenfranchised. This is me, Maria, the one who loves the hard-working people of Englewood who in turn refuse to be dismissed as helpless as they are proud of their piece of geography that they will always call home and never leave.



### **Militza Pagán**

Shriver Center on Poverty Law  
Staff Attorney

I was born in Puerto Rico and raised in Chicago. My experiences growing up in Logan Square led me to pursue a career in social justice in Chicago. But one experience led me to decide that the way that I wanted to make change was to become a lawyer. While a sophomore at Yale, I worked at Junta for Progressive Action, an organization serving the Latino community in the Fair Haven neighborhood of New Haven. I was young, idealistic and had the sense that I wanted to help those in the margins of our society. On June 4, 2007, ICE agents burst into the homes of Latino families. They took men and women away from their sleeping children, packed them into waiting vans, and transported them to detention centers in two different states. My commute to work was eerily quiet; but inside Progressive Action was chaos. Families crying, huddled together hoping to find comfort with each

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other. As lawyers spoke with a woman whose husband was taken, I watched over her children. They barely spoke; we sat at the table coloring. The youngest stopped coloring and asked, “Why is my mom talking to the lawyers?” “To find your father.” “Did my father do something bad?” “No, your father did not do anything bad.” “So why did the policeman take my father?” I just looked at her with nothing to say. For all my good intentions and desire to serve, I had no answer—I felt powerless to help. That was a feeling I did not want to experience again. This experience gave me focus in my commitment to serve my community and advocate against unjust laws and policies.

### **Paul Callejas**

Chicago Center for Arts & Technology  
Youth Program Manager



I live in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago. My mother has always been a very hard worker and has always set that example for me. She instilled the belief that with hard work and dedication anything is possible. Being a product of the public-school system, I believe that all youth deserve an equal chance of success. I graduated from the University of Illinois at Chicago where he earned a bachelor's in Business Administration and a minor in Entrepreneurship. I defeated many economic barriers. I am the first one in the family to receive his bachelor's, purchase real state, and achieve other accomplishments. I have over six years of youth development and project planning working with various non-profit organizations. I aspire to help as many Chicago teens reach their potential and become global citizens. For fun, I love to go to Latin dancing. At UIC, I used to be in a dance team. Other fun hobbies are hiking, reading, and fundraising for a good cause.



### **Ray Arroyo**

Enlace Chicago  
Youth Engagement Coordinator

I became a community advocate because I am the result of it. As a struggling youth, I didn't thrive well until I started getting involved in my community. I was able to receive the support and guidance I lacked as a young adult through other leaders in the community. This cemented my need to provide for others and help those who help themselves. I am involved in cultural affairs as an annual contributor to Villarte Community Arts Festival and hold a seat in the Villapalooza Music Festival board of directors. This festival serves as a celebration that highlights the community's richness in culture, talent, arts, health sectors and local leadership. Additionally, I am a member of the Little Village Gardener's coalition, a group that is

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invested in nurturing and developing accesses to green spaces by supporting local community gardens like Jardincito, Sembrando Bajo el Sol and La Calabaza community gardens. As a member of the Violence Prevention Coalition, I work with 47 local organization to develop best practices, develop subcommittees that address specific needs such as the Public Spaces subcommittee I sit in. This is an initiative that identifies underused spaces to reactivate and improve usage with the aim of curbing zones of crime or desolation. All these groups encompass my experience as a community member. They nurture my necessity to build community and a culture of care. It is what I know and what drives me to pursue a better future for our community and those who live, work, and love here.

### **Roberto Mendez**

La Casa Norte  
Volunteer Coordinator



Queer Latino born and raised in Logan Square/Humboldt Park who is passionate about race/LGBTQ politics both personal and systemic. Went to high school at Roberto Clemente Community Academy while my siblings went to Lane Tech which allowed me to see a difference between institutions being well funded and underfunded/over policed. Personally, witnessed neglected school systems, housing instability among my peers and race/gang violence within those four year to ultimately be selected in a competitive leadership scholarship, Posse Scholar, which transported me to California to a predominately white wealthy institution. There I experienced a culture shock but also realized how behind I was academically compared to my peers. At times feeling imposter syndrome to later reflect and realize I was as qualified as any peer, some who paid their way into this selective higher academic institution. During college I learned to accept all my identities and studied rigorously to acquire the language and pedagogy

necessary to communicate and advocate for myself in systems created to maintain my intersectional identities and communities oppressed. Once I graduated, I wanted to work in a place where I could create genuine impact which steered me to non-for-profits and in the communities where I grew up. Presently, I find myself wondering; what is next after working entry level positions in the nonprofit industries and straying away from the educational institutions? My answer is hopefully taking on leadership roles as the next step in my career.

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Samantha Sherrod  
Mars Wrigley Foundation  
Grants Manager

While growing up on the South Side of Chicago, I didn't understand why I couldn't attend the neighborhood. Traveling to and from elementary school and high school shaped me in a way that would become evident during my college years. It was on these routes that I unknowingly developed a passion for community. I was able to articulate this desire when I learned about urban planning while studying Sociology at Illinois Wesleyan University. The major that helped me to cope with the culture shock of attending a predominantly White institution led me to a passion that ran deep. So, I pursued my Master of Regional Planning degree at Cornell University and completed the program having more questions than answers. I eventually returned to Chicago and reconnected with the community by participating in Public Allies, an AmeriCorps program. After pursuing nonprofit work, I entered the planning profession, where I spent eight years in the public sector. In 2014, I relocated to St. Louis and served as a funding manager at the United Way of Greater St. Louis. At this time, I pursued my desire for racial justice and developed a racial equity lens for United Way's community investment process. Returning to Chicago in 2017, I created my consulting firm, CoCreating Transformation, which involves me partnering with organizations to facilitate interactive exercises about bias and inequity. I have continued my life work's in philanthropy as the Grant Manager at the Mars Wrigley Foundation, where one of the focus areas is community improvement.

**Shelby Chaney**  
Gary Comer Youth Center  
Leadership Development Coordinator



I am a native Detroitter with a passion for travel, cultural exposure, and Black youth empowerment. Throughout my travels in Latin America, what has resonated with me the most is the overlapping histories and struggles of Blacks and Afro-Latinx people. I find it empowering to have been exposed to traces of my African ancestry through food, music, clothing, and other cultural aspects that have been preserved in Latin America but not in the United States. Having had these experiences, it is very important for me to integrate the

crossing of cultural barriers into my work. Black youth empowerment is centered in my work because I recognize how Black people, including myself, are not exposed to our culture and history. Research has shown cultural elements to have the power to impact socio-political statuses. Therefore, I look to the power it has to unite people and to bring peace within myself. I am a Spanish speaking, music loving, vibrant individual that loves to have new experiences. Detroiters

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may be looked at as surviving, but my goal is to thrive in this world. I am able to do so because of the people and resources around me and for that I am thankful.



**Te'Aira Malone**  
Metropolitan Family Services  
Clinical Program Manager

Te'Aira Malone, LCPC, ICDVP is postgraduate therapist committed to understanding and treating complex childhood trauma and its lasting impact on children, adolescents and adults. Throughout her career as a therapist and clinical supervisor, she has been an agent of change. Te'Aira supports her client's resiliency and growth, fostering relationships that create trust, safety and healing. Te'Aira was raised in the Roseland community by two parents that worked hard to provide for their children. They taught and modeled for her cultural responsibility to help others in need. Te'Aira has been committed to working with children and families in her community, reinvesting into the people and neighborhoods that assisted in molding her into the person she is.

**Yaacov Delaney**  
Lt. Governor Stratton's Office  
Re-Entry Coordinator: Justice, Equity & Opportunity Initiative



I am a social justice advocate, with lived experience inside of the criminal justice system. In 1991 at the age of 19, I was arrested and charged with felony murder. I was subsequently sentenced to serve a 45-year prison term within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). During my time of incarceration, I earned a GED, a Law Clerk Certificate, an Electronics Technology Certificate, a Food Service Certificate and an Associate of Liberal Studies Degree. I functioned as a prisoner-paralegal inside of the IDOC for approximately 16 years, advocating on behalf of myself and others similarly situated for prisoner rights. I strategically researched solutions to remove systemic collateral consequences that were directly hindering formerly incarcerated people from becoming productive citizens. Soon after my release from prison, I began volunteering at the Ohio Justice & Policy Center (OJPC) in

Cincinnati, OH, which led to a full time Paralegal position. I helped to run a Second Chance Clinic that assisted people with criminal records to have their records sealed/expunged and remove

systemic barriers that prevented employment and state issued licensing. I helped to develop a Restorative Justice Coalition that provided restorative trainings for social workers and public-school teachers in the Cincinnati region, formed my own holistic support group (Breaking Cycles)



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for directly impacted people to have a safe space to deal with the effects of trauma and structural racism and organized formerly incarcerated men/women for advocacy work that helped to pass the Ohio Statewide Ban the Box legislation in 2015. I'm a zealous advocate for healing people/family members who have been impacted by systemic trauma of the criminal justice system and continuously work on issues to increase viable employment, housing, and educational opportunities for marginalized communities.