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2020-21 GRANTEE PROFILE

Black Women Build

Black Women Build-Baltimore (BWB) was founded in 2017 by Shelley Halstead, who combined a law degree, skills and experience as a master carpenter, and a passion for economic and social justice. A home ownership and wealth building initiative, BWB trains black women in carpentry, electrical work, and plumbing, as they restore vacant and deteriorated houses and are helped to buy them. The organization offers its holistic training program to capable women who are ready for change and would not otherwise have the opportunity.

Clients develop trades-related proficiency, as well as financial and home ownership skills. BWB partners with architects, engineers, the City and State Departments of Housing and Community Development, Neighborhood Housing Services, and other women-focused non-profits.

BWB's work is community-based, concentrating in one neighborhood, restoring houses that might otherwise be demolished. To date, BWB has completed and obtained use and occupancy permits for four homes in one block on Etting Street in the Druid Heights neighborhood, a block that formerly had only two occupied houses. Participants in the program are applying for home loans to purchase these completed houses. BWB is now stabilizing two additional homes in the same block and purchasing one more there, as well as obtaining two more houses nearby on Laurens Street.

Until late last year, BWB was a one-person operation. BWGC's 2020-21 grant provides funding for a second employee, who serves as Program Director and Materials Manager.

Due to its creative approach and effectiveness, this fledgling organization has been recognized nationally, as in "How Recycling Existing Buildings Could Solve the Urban Housing Crisis" in Metropolitan Magazine, and in interviews on CNBC, the Kelly Clarkson Show, and more.

2020-21 GRANTEE PROFILE

Martha's Place-Intersection of Change

More than 20 years ago, some West Baltimore residents met to address the problems of rising unemployment, addiction, and homelessness. Out of their concerns arose Intersection of Change (IOC). IOC provides arts programs, an urban farm, and Martha's Place (MP), a housing program that has renovated four row houses to provide long-term housing for up to 20 women, predominantly African American, who are recovering from addiction. The houses provide a safe, drug-free place to live, along with ongoing counseling and support that help residents become independent and financially stable. Residents are required to attend drug treatment and, once employed, pay rent and save toward financial independence. Residents also receive unemployment assistance, counseling, case management, and financial planning. MP has a remarkable long-term success rate of 75%. Graduates of MP become Martha's Angels, role models and sponsors for current residents.

As a past resident said, MP "helped me to regain my life" and showed me "how to have some structure, stability, management, love, and independence"; "I'm proud of who I've become." Program directors include a woman from the neighborhood who was one of the founders of IOC. MP program activities have spurred neighborhood development and have helped reduce drug activity in the area.

Read more about the work that Martha's Place has accomplished over the last 20 years [on its website](#) and on [Facebook](#).



Residents of Martha's Place on their front steps

GRANTEE UPDATE

Tahirih Justice Center

Tahirih Justice Center, a two-year grantee in 2018-20, provides direct services, including legal representation, to immigrant, refugee, and asylee survivors of gender-based violence. The organization recently announced the merger of its Baltimore and D.C. offices into one regional office. Kirisen Strain, who had been Executive Director of the Baltimore office, will become national director of pro bono services, and Barfonce Baldwin, who had been Executive Director of the D.C. office, will become Executive Director of the regional office. Tahirih will maintain an office in Baltimore.

Read more about the inspiring work that Tahirih is doing [on its website](#) and on [Facebook](#).

Digital Divide

The Circle's Education Committee presented a Zoom program on January 21 concerning the "Digital Divide." That term was coined 20 years ago to describe the gulf between those with and without access to the digital world, through computers and other electronic devices. Poverty, race, and geographical segregation have long been barriers to access to the internet, in Baltimore as elsewhere.

The Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition (BDEC) was created to respond to the digital divide, which was exacerbated to a crisis point by Covid-19. Without access to the internet, people cannot connect with educational, employment, health care, and other resources desperately needed during the pandemic. Representatives of four member organization founders of BDEC made presentations to the Circle: Chrissie Powell of Byte Back Baltimore, a current Circle grantee; Adam Edelman of Libraries Without Borders; Kelly Hodge-Williams of PCs for People; and Andrew Coy of Digital Harbor Foundation. Tia Price, the new Executive Director of BDEC, also addressed the group.

These non-profit members of BDEC all work, in various ways, to bridge the digital divide. Byte Back provides accessible, inclusive technical training to women, people of color, and others, to help them gain skills and certifications that will lead to living-wage careers. Libraries Without Borders, an international provider of books and digital resources, has provided computer access and training in Baltimore in a variety of locations, including laundromats. PCs for People provides affordable computers, donated and refurbished, as well as low-cost internet and affordable computer repair, to income-eligible individuals and non-profits. Digital Harbor Foundation is dedicated to fostering learning, creativity, productivity, and community through education; in 2013, the Foundation turned a retired Baltimore City recreation center into a technology education hub for students and teachers.

To help achieve the equity goals of BDEC, the group is supporting a number of bills in the General Assembly and would welcome advocacy efforts by the Circle and its members.



Identify This Photo

This is a photo from the BWGC archives taken in 2010. Kudos to anyone who can identify it!

Send your answer to Barbara Portnoy Spector:
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BWGC 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The Start of the Journey

The traditional 20th anniversary gift is china, but the Circle decided to “gift” itself with a series of five Zoom meetings, detailing our beginnings, our educational offerings, our communication methods, our membership growth, and our grant-making process.

The first Zoom program, “The Beginning,” was held on January 27. In preparation for that meeting, the current co-chairs got the unique opportunity to speak with many of our Founders, who shared memories, perspectives, and reflections on the impact of the Circle on their lives.

The first of many conversations were with Pam Corckran and Shelley Goldseker, our first co-chairs, who established the Circle in May of 2001. When asked what motivated them, Shelley responded, “women hungered to be authentically engaged and not merely entertained, as we had been in traditional women’s organizations.” Pam, having read about a giving circle in Washington, D.C., hosted the first informational meeting. As our current co-chairs spoke with many of the 52 founding members, they realized that what linked them was a common philanthropic goal of responding to the needs of the greater Baltimore area, particularly by increasing the self-sufficiency of women.

A Special Edition of the newsletter, devoted exclusively to the 20th anniversary, will be published in the spring. In the meantime, mark your calendars now for the next meeting, on Education, at 5:00 p.m. on February 17. Other scheduled meetings are: March 24, April 21, and early fall (date TBD).



Pam Corckran



Shelley Goldseker

Why I Became a Member

I became a member of the BWGC in 2019 to join a community of women with the common goal of giving back to Baltimore. Little did I know how welcoming the group would be, and how many opportunities there are to be involved in supporting the organization and its mission. I am grateful for all the women I have met, and for learning about all the great work that is happening around us. I have enjoyed my experience so much that I encouraged a dear friend to consider joining, and I am happy to say that she is now a member too.



Melanie Hagan

REDI Committee

The Circle has established the REDI (Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Committee to help guide the Circle toward greater racial diversity. The committee has listened to Circle leadership, gathered questions, and created a framework to move ahead. Its first initiative will be a Guiding Language workgroup, composed of members of the Steering and REDI Committees, that will focus on a common vocabulary for describing the Circle's mission and values and will prepare Vision and REDI statements.

Thanks to a generous memorial gift by Kay Terry, funds have been budgeted for building the capacity of the REDI Committee to pursue its work. The Circle hopes to expand the breadth and depth of understanding of Circle members regarding racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as to make alliances with diverse partners having different perspectives, while continuing to pursue the Circle's overall goal of providing needed funding to deserving charities in the Baltimore area.

Zoom Hints

- There are two ways to view Zoom sessions - Gallery and Speaker. The view options are either in the top left or top right of your screen.
- To see all participants in a meeting, use "Gallery View." In a large meeting, select the arrow to the right or left of your gallery view to see the next pages of viewers' photos.
- During presentations, use "Speaker View."
- Silence your phones and mute yourself unless you're speaking. The "mute" and "unmute" buttons are usually at the bottom of your screen.
- If you don't want to be seen, use the "Stop video" option at the bottom of your screen.
- Try copying a meeting link as soon as you receive it into your calendar for the meeting day, so it is easily available.
- Make sure the lights are on in your room, so people can see your face.
- To add an interesting background, select the Video tab and then select "Choose a Virtual Background." Pick a new background from the ones shown or insert one of your own photos. This feature is not available on all computers. [Check Zoom support services for more information.](#)

NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER

Mary Azrael, Carter Brigham, Lynn Brynes, Judelle Campbell, Kate Cleary, Wendy Davis, Susan Fenimore, Elizabeth Foxwell, Nancy Kass, Susan Scarborough

E-NEWS CONTRIBUTORS:

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