

F Y 22

REP
ORT

INITIATIONS
SECTION
R



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 4 Letter from the Executive Director
- 5 About District Bridges
- 7 2022 Impact

CONTRIBUTORS

Brianne Dornbush
Madeleine Odendahl
Sara Rockefeller
Anna Claire Walker
Cassandra Hetherington
Amanda Moncaco
Michele Molotsky

FEATURES

- 9 We're Not Placemakers, We're Placekeepers
- 11 At the Corner of Language & Technology Access
- 13 Honoring the Past and Celebrating a Vibrant Future
- 15 Building Equitable Access to Small Business Technical Assistance
- 17 Nothing For Us Without Us: District Bridges' Impact on DC's Open Streets
- 18 Can Economic Development Combat Loneliness?
- 19 Innovative Design to Create Emotional and Physical Safety
- 21 Every Little Bit Helps: Leveraging Additional Resources on Main Street Corridors
- 23 Streatery Success on District Bridges' Main Streets
- 25 Economies of Scale < Economies of Impact
- 27 A Bright Idea: DC Holiday Lights
- 29 How Do You Build Community Development Ecosystems?
- 31 I Want To Change My Life. Before I Die.
- 35 Mount Pleasant Art All Night: Community Driven. Community Built.
- 37 Drag Queens, Zumba, and Lettuce, Oh My!
- 39 Setting the Table for Collaboration: Breadcoin Flash Table
- 41 In Practice: The Launch of Placekeepers
- 43 What's Next? Integration.

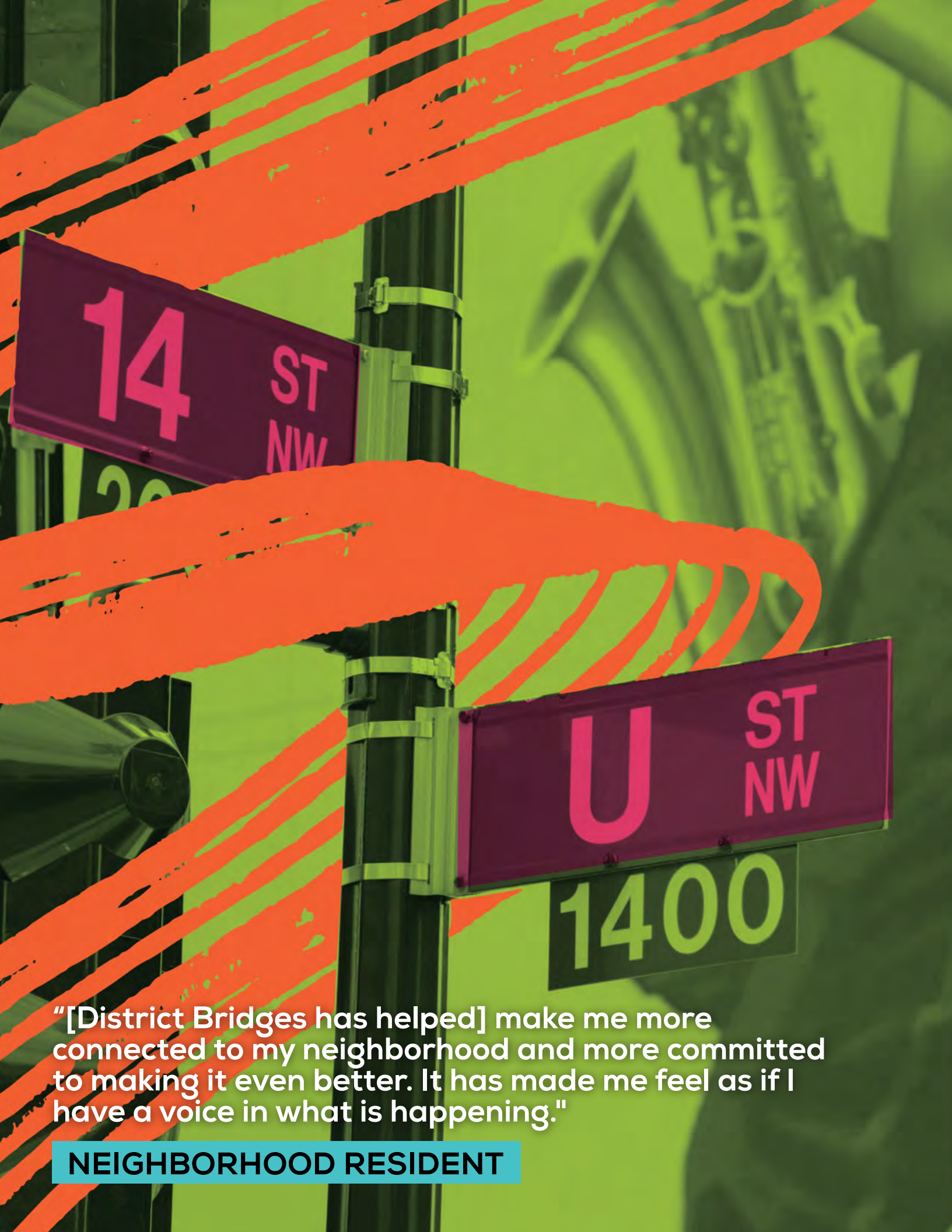
WHO WE ARE

- 45 Our Story
- 46 Team & Board



FINANCIALS

- 47 Statement of Financial Position
- 48 Revenue and Expenses



"[District Bridges has helped] make me more connected to my neighborhood and more committed to making it even better. It has made me feel as if I have a voice in what is happening."

NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENT

DEAR PARTNERS,

Since 2016, our organization has been on a rapid growth trajectory pioneering new models, programs, and ways to impact our communities.

In that time we have seen successes, failures, and many lessons learned. And while growth is important and has enabled us to develop into the organization we are today, it is equally important to periodically pause and focus on stabilization. That is precisely what we did in 2022. In the beginning of the fiscal year, we set strategic stabilization priorities in five key areas of the organization including financial, programmatic, policy, consulting, and leadership. The goal of these strategic priorities was to strengthen our internal systems, deepen leadership and engagement at every level of the organization, and position ourselves for future growth.

As you will see in our impact report, our focus on these strategic priorities has enabled us to increase our capacity, build new partnerships, and achieve a greater impact through our programming. As a values driven organization, we have invested in creating a culture that believes that our work impact is an outgrowth of living out our values of relationship, inclusion, diversity, story, collaboration, innovation, solution-oriented, and fun on a daily basis.

One take away from our year of stabilization was that we need to take more time to share about the incredible work we are doing.

To that end, I am excited to announce that District Bridges is launching our new annual publication called Intersections.

The articles that follow are a snapshot of the work we are most proud and excited by. These stories are meant to provide a behind the scenes understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and complexities our team navigate each and every day.



Intersections is not just a publication, it is also an invitation. We invite you to dig in and learn more about our work, and discover where you can plug in and what lessons you can bring back to your own communities.

Sincerely,

Brianne Dornbush, Executive Director



Enrich neighborhood vitality by bridging community engagement and economic development opportunities so individuals, businesses, and organizations can thrive together.

S

SION



WHO WE ARE

We are a community ecosystem development non-profit working to bridge community engagement and economic development opportunities to foster equitable, resilient, and connected communities in DC and beyond.

Founded in 2005 by neighbors in Columbia Heights, our values of **relationship, collaboration, innovation, diversity, solution-oriented, fun, story, and inclusion** have driven our mission and work.

Our holistic approach to community-based economic development utilizes strategic partnerships, small business technical assistance, volunteer opportunities, place management, events, resident outreach, and connective services. Our approach is different in that we start from a place of collaboration and capacity-building, looking to strengthen the whole ecosystem in which we work.

Our on-the-ground work happens in Washington, DC in Wards 1, 2, 3, and 4, and we support businesses across the District through Access Point DC, our online technical assistance platform. We also work with communities across the country looking to emulate our unique approach.

\$168,713

Grant Funds Awarded To Businesses

Funding to support rent/utilities, payroll, façade improvements, supplies, inventory, equipment, financial planning for sustainability and growth, security upgrades, marketing, and more.

857

Businesses Served

2,084

Hours of Technical Assistance Provided

Helping businesses navigate regulatory changes, grant applications, landlord challenges, and more.



2022 IMPACT SUMMARY

28,488

Social Media Followers

Local residents and tourists following our programs' social media channels to better connect with their local communities

250

Volunteers

Contributing to their communities and local small businesses

995

Hours Contributed By Volunteers

Directly supporting local neighborhoods and small businesses

115+ Events

Increasing foot traffic to the commercial corridors, and creating a positive image that attracts new businesses, investors, and visitors.



Of the businesses our team provided direct technical assistance and/or grant funding to:

25% Are Woman-Owned

37% Are Minority-Owned

WE'RE NOT PLACEMAKERS, WE'RE PLACEKEEPERS:

The Lower Georgia Avenue Equitable Development Plan



In 2019, DC was named the most rapidly gentrifying city in the country by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition. At District Bridges, we have seen that gentrification in real time along our Lower Georgia Avenue Main Street corridor—a corridor long known for its Black-owned businesses and historic Black institutions, like Howard University. Rapid and sometimes even predatory development practices have resulted in many Black and immigrant-owned businesses being actively displaced in favor of new businesses that will fit a changing demographic.

Often, conversations about gentrification focus on the displacement of residents and miss how the small business community is impacted. Commercial gentrification—the displacement of minority-owned, neighborhood-serving small businesses—has a profound impact on neighborhoods that can sometimes be harder to see. When rapid development takes place within a corridor, developers often build ground floor retail priced for traditional “credit tenants” like national chains rather than local small businesses. The reason is that “credit tenants” can typically afford high monthly rents, sign longer leases, and require less support from the landlords in terms of tenant improvement costs. Developers often will leave a space empty for years holding out for a credit tenant who will pay their price instead of leasing to a local business at a lower rental rate. As small businesses are pushed out in favor of national chains, there is a culture homogenization and disintegration of neighborhood identity.

Additionally, as developers buy and begin the process of redeveloping properties, many are opting to build “by right” rather than navigate the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process, where a developer agrees to provide certain community benefits in exchange for zoning variances enabling them to build larger developments.

¹The National Community Reinvestment Coalition. Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and cultural displacement in American cities. 2019.



The community benefits are agreed upon through a community engagement process, which in many cases becomes very contentious. The process can become so contentious, in fact, that some development projects landed in litigation or languished for years. This is why many developers are choosing to avoid the process all together. However, the result is that buildings are built in a way that does not maximize their full potential either for the developer or the community.

In 2022, District Bridges received a planning grant from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to create an Equitable Development Plan for Lower Georgia Avenue (LGA). **The LGA Equitable Development Plan is an initiative that aims to look holistically at the resources, concerns, and opportunities in the Pleasant Plains, Park View, and LeDroit Park neighborhoods, and convene community stakeholders to be involved in shaping the future of the area.**

The objective is to devise an action plan of policies, practices, and programs that will help ensure a more equitable future for the corridor, through a community-driven and ultimately community-owned process that balances the realities of development with the needs and desires of the community.

A top priority is elevating the voices of residents of color in planning the future of Lower Georgia Avenue. At the end of the day, the only constant is change and Lower Georgia Avenue will continue to be redeveloped with or without

the community's input. However, if the LGA Equitable Development Plan is successful, we hope that we can find common ground where the varied needs and priorities of the many community stakeholders the neighborhood serves are met.

To achieve this, everyone will have to compromise a little but we hope the ultimate impact is the equitable development of a community that ensures that the identity and culture of these neighborhoods is preserved and celebrated, and equity is the driving force behind the inevitable change.



Lower Georgia Avenue deserves to be a place where people have social, economic, and health justice."

In 2022, the LGA Equitable Development Initiative:

Surveyed 74 community stakeholders

Conducted 45-minute interviews with 3 business owners, 4 residents, 3 District representatives, 7 community-based organization leaders, and 1 developer

Reviewed and synthesized the community and stakeholder feedback to capture key priority areas

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Purpose Possible
www.purposepossible.com



Purpose Possible empowers mission-driven organizations to overcome the roadblocks that prevent them from making their purpose possible.

AT THE CORNER OF LANGUAGE

Meet Dolores Yanes of DMC Beauty Salon. Dolores's beauty salon has been a fixture of the Columbia Heights neighborhood for almost 10 years. Her business started out strong, and she has long earned the respect and favor of her landlords, who, despite considering selling the building, assure her that they will make sure she can stay in her salon space.

Delores experienced a drastic dip in clientele during the pandemic and her bookings have not yet rebounded. When we visited her store in spring of 2022 to discuss our upcoming online marketing workshops, she had reached a state of hopelessness and was eager to try new tactics to help her business succeed.

Through District Bridges' Taller de Mercadotecnia 101 (Marketing 101 Workshop), Dolores worked with our team to launch a new website. This online presence will help draw customers so that she can see her salon full and busy once again.

DMC Beauty Salon is just one of the 24 businesses we were able to support this year. With funding from Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD), the Mayors Office on Latino Affairs (MOLA), and National Association of Latino Community Access Builders (NALCAB), District Bridges' Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Main Street supported Latino businesses in the corridor by creating opportunities for them to learn how to create and maintain a website, use social media marketing, and utilize Google My Business through workshops and one-on-one sessions in Spanish.

Often, Spanish-speaking business owners are proficient enough in English to run their business but sitting in a workshop entirely held in English can be a challenge and some of the content and context can be literally lost in translation.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

BrandGoat 84

www.brandgoat84.com

BRANDGOAT 84

BrandGoat 84 is a design studio focused on adding value through design. When it comes to design, go with the GOAT.

Additionally, small business owners work long and often unpredictable hours. We knew it would be challenging for many of our business owners to find time to attend the workshops. To help make it easier to participate, our team set the times and dates of the workshops based on when the business owners said they would be able to attend.



With the help of our partner BrandGoat 84, District Bridges conducted:

Three in-person Spanish-language digital marketing workshops

25+ hours of one-on-one conversations in Spanish with individual business owners and managers regarding the use of digital marketing for their business

In addition to the workshops, District Bridges underwrote the cost for 15 business owners to receive new or updated websites for their businesses.

Through this work, District Bridges strengthened our understanding of Latino business owners' online marketing needs and developed effective targeted resources to address those needs. Building equitable, resilient, and connected communities requires ensuring that the resources and support we provide to our small businesses is delivered in a way that meets them where they are at.

TECHNOLOGY ACCESS

Supporting Businesses and Language Accessibility



HONORING THE PAST & CELEBRATING A VIBRANT FUTURE

A chance for the city to celebrate the performing and visual arts, Art All Night highlights the intersection of art and business throughout DC's commercial corridors, placing artists on the center stage. First presented as Art All Night: Nuit Blanche DC in 2011 by Shaw Main Streets, Art All Night has grown to feature more than 20 participating neighborhoods, with over 120,000 attendees from across the DMV.

U Street Main Street (USMS) participated in Art All Night for the first time in 2022, hosting 10 unique activations that showcased the best of U Street in all artistic genres. From poetry readings and live painting to sculpture exhibits and hair art, Art All Night: U Street truly showcased the vitality and history of this phenomenal corridor.

The Black Broadway on U Immersive Experience in particular showcased Black excellence both past and present. Produced by Black Broadway on U's Executive Producer, Shellée Haynesworth, and Break Through Tech DC's Sprinternship™ program, with guidance from Joseph Cathey at Capitol

ACTIVATION HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED:

Main Stage at Frank D. Reeves Center featuring Imani-Grace Cooper, DJ Analyze, Akitech, and more

Live Art with Chris Pyrate and an ARTECHOUSE Pop-Up Exhibition

Afro Arts Pop Up with Zawadi featuring Adam Odomore exhibit, DJ Roots Tonic, and Spoken Word by Nina Brewton

Poetry Night with Busboys and Poets featuring KaNikki Jakarta and Simply Sherri

Hair Care Demonstration with Signature Image Salon

Black Broadway on U Immersive Experience

Community Mixer with Long Live GoGo and DC Vote



Interactive, the 360 virtual tour teleported viewers to historic locations throughout Washington DC's "Black Broadway." The experience invited participants to explore the area that birthed DC's Black Renaissance and served as a prominent symbol of Black culture and sophistication amid racial and political tension in America.

17 Artists

5K Attendees

\$14,495 Paid to local artists and vendors

Visitors got to enter this virtual reality at the Prince Hall Masonic Temple, which in itself is a celebration of Black talent and perseverance. Founded in 1825 by both enslaved people and free Black people, Prince Hall Masonic Temple became the headquarters to the nation's earliest and largest Black fraternity. When the Prince Hall Masonic Temple decided to move its original headquarters, the group purchased the lot on U Street, a significant cultural and social destination for DC's Black community. Albert I. Cassell (1895-1969), a prominent architect who was the third Black Washingtonian to be a registered architect, designed the building in 1928.

This immersive experience was juxtaposed with poetry performances by KaNikki Jakarta and Simply Sherri, and live mural painting with Chris Pyrate, each of whom explored the varied, and often traumatic, lived experiences of African Americans today.

As a cultural and performance hub for more than 100 years, U Street continues to inspire and welcome the best and brightest of Black artistry. While Art All Night was a single night of the year, this event captures the essence of the innovation that USMS tries to tap into year round. As we continue this work, we strive to increase the neighborhood's resiliency and ensure equitable access to resources so that U Street can remain a cultural beacon for the next 100 years.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Black Broadway on U
www.blackbroadwayonu.com



Launched in February 2014, the Black Broadway on U: A Transmedia Project is a groundbreaking multi-platform story and public history initiative created to amplify, chronicle, preserve and enhance, the under-told story, cultural legacy, local memories and voices of Washington, D.C.'s marginalized Black community along the historic greater U Street community when it was known as "Black Broadway", a city within a city.

BUILDING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SMALL BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The Challenge:

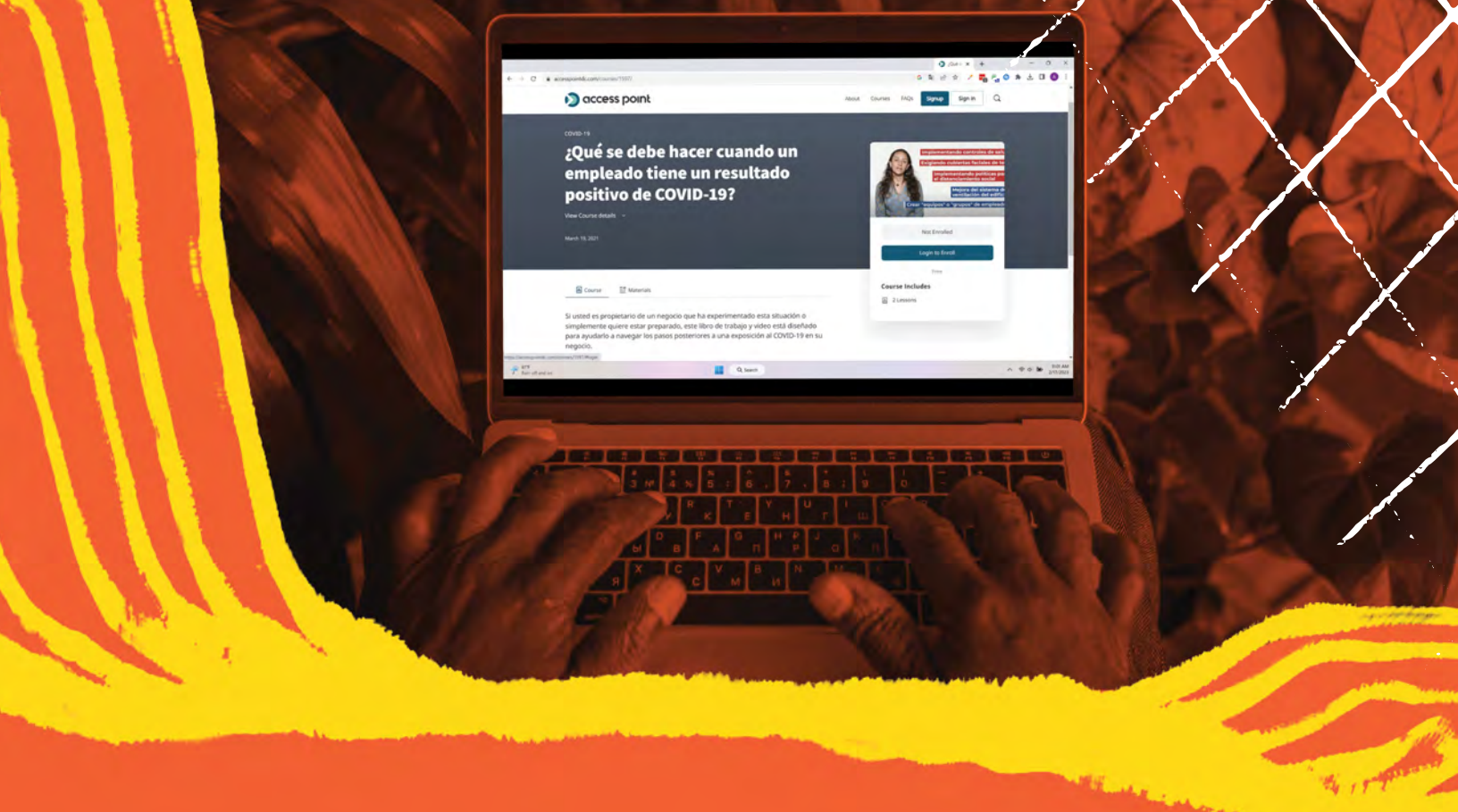
Ninety five percent of small businesses in DC employ fewer than 50 individuals. Yet the economic development and technical assistance models currently serving the District pose accessibility challenges for many small business owners. For example, while many providers have training on a wide variety of topics, these training sessions are often held during the day when a small business owner is otherwise working. The trainings can also be inaccessible for business owner's for whom English is not their first language or who do not thrive in a group learning environment. These challenges actively prevent small business owners from taking advantage of the wealth of training and resources available in the District to help them grow their businesses.

The Solution: Access Point DC

Launched in 2020, Access Point DC is an on-demand virtual learning platform that provides technical training solutions for small business owners. Its on-demand format provides a much-needed alternative to live training sessions, which are often difficult for small business owners to attend.

Developed by District Bridges with support from Rhode Island Avenue Main Street, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Small and Local Business Development, Access Point's educational videos can be accessed via any data-enabled device, at any time, covering a wide range of practical topics with immediate application, such as critical annual tax and licensing activities, leaseholder rights, step-by-step social media, and e-commerce tutorials.





Self-empowerment through virtual education is only one component of the greater vision District Bridges has for Access Point. In 2022, District Bridges worked with Enspire Creative to launch phase two of Access Point DC: a first-stop clearinghouse to connect small businesses to technical support, funding, and more.

Access Point has transformed into a robust, centralized small business technical assistance and resource platform. Rather than owners navigating separate sites and systems to access support—government, CBO, legal, financial, educational—the Access Point “central gateway” directly delivers information and promotes new resources, opportunities, and support from agencies and organizations across the city from one central starting point.

Additionally, Access Point is available regardless of ward or organizational affiliation—at every stage of business, at any time of day, with language translation, to any business in the District.

The Impact

Business owners with knowledge of their rights, access to resources, and connections to technical assistance are better able to pivot with the times and better positioned to counter unchecked commercial gentrification. Acting as an intervention tool, Access Point resources can empower small businesses to take ownership of business development and changing environments.

Beyond the daily challenges of operating a business, owners with limited time and resources can become quickly overwhelmed by siloed economic development systems. This contributes to regulatory non-compliance, lack of awareness of opportunities, and the disadvantage of non-native English speaking business owners. Access Point creates a central resource for communal problem solving, and offers economic and community development benefits to all stakeholders, namely, small businesses, providers, partners, funders and the greater community.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT
Enspire Creative
www.EnspireCreative.com **enspire**

At Enspire Creative, we deliver websites and online training portals that digitize the business growth strategy teams in transition, enabling increased productivity and profitability.

NOTHING FOR US WITHOUT US

District Bridges' Impact on Open Streets

In 2019, District Bridges applied for a DDOT grant to support the agency in their inaugural Open Streets event. Stretching along three miles of Georgia Avenue NW from Barry Place to Missouri Avenue, the goal of this massive event was to promote multi-modal transportation and to help residents envision their streets as car-free and pedestrian friendly.

While the concept seemed great, hosting this event on Georgia Avenue presented some significant challenges. Foremost among them was the lack of business engagement and involvement in the planning and execution of the event. For the inaugural event, DDOT did not allow any businesses along the corridor to participate or vend. The result? While many residents liked the event, our day-of and post-event surveys found that businesses across the board hated it.

Internally, we had many conversations about whether or not we would support this event in the future. Ultimately, we came to the conclusion that the event was going to be held with or without us, but if we were involved we could actively advocate for the small businesses to be included in a more meaningful way.

In the community development world, we often see how a government agency's best intentions do not always translate into positive outcomes on the ground. Open Streets is a perfect example. From the government's perspective, Georgia Avenue was a great location for this event because the street is wide, lined with businesses, and surrounded by residential housing. In addition, it had been the location of a major street closure event in the past.

However, DDOT overlooked two very important factors: First, many of the businesses along the corridor are automotive businesses and hair salons who rely on customers driving to them. This event meant that they lost business that day. Second, the major street closure events from the past were Georgia Avenue Day and the DC Caribbean Carnival—two events beloved by the community that are very much missed. By many in the community, Open Streets Georgia Avenue was seen as a “White gentrifier” event. In other words “this event is not for us.”





In 2022, Open Streets expanded beyond Georgia Avenue to include events in all eight wards. As a result of our advocacy, DDOT allowed the businesses along the corridor to vend on the day of the event outside of their storefronts. They even provided some small grants to businesses to support them in activating their storefronts in creative ways.

One of the constant challenges of community development work is how to effectively navigate the competing interests of community stakeholders. Or as in this case, the challenge of how to influence change with a government agency that is disconnected from the needs of the community and ensuring that voices in our communities are heard.

Can Economic Development Combat Loneliness?

By Cassandra Hetherington, District Bridges Cleveland Park Main Street Director



In 2018, the United Kingdom appointed a Minister of Loneliness as a third of people over the age of fifty reported experiencing loneliness compared to one-fifth of the American population. It is thought that this crisis of loneliness began when banks replaced tellers with ATM machines, grocery stores installed self-checkout lanes, and more. Human relationships are at the heart of our work as a Main Street Director. Whether it is with that struggling business owner, local government employee, or community volunteer, caring about people is the essence of Main Street.

The first day I met Sharon, she complained to me for thirty minutes about litter, abandoned newspaper boxes, and unwatered flowers. I understood that she cared passionately about her community and would make a wonderful volunteer for Cleveland Park Main Street (CPMS). What I didn't know was how much I would look forward to seeing Sharon, how I would learn something from her every time we spoke or how much her love of community would motivate me to try harder at my own job.

Sharon moved to Cleveland Park two decades ago with her husband Andrew who was hired by the State Department to bring peace to Ireland. He advised her to join the gym to meet her community while he was out of the country for long stretches of time. Sharon did make several meaningful connections by meeting people in her various exercise classes. Several of them would often get coffee after class. Foundation Fitness Gym continues to play an important role in her physical and mental health. She also developed a network of friends with the people working at the gym, the grocery store, the restaurants, as well as with the unhoused people in the neighborhood.

In September 2021, Andrew died and the community Sharon had created in Cleveland Park took on a more meaningful role. Sharon considers most of the people employed by these small businesses to be her extended family. Each one shared in the pain of her grief - the gym sent flowers, the grocery store gave gift cards, and there were so many hugs and tears wherever she went. Cleveland Park is a community where

many people know one another and share responsibility for each other. Sharon worries about the survival of small businesses and about the people who work in them who she calls friends and who helped her survive her first year as a widow.

Main Streets do not only help small businesses survive, they help communities thrive. District Bridges Main Street programs are able to support and invest in small businesses through our Main Streets so small business owners in turn can invest in their customers who then invest back into the business. From the outside, it may be difficult to see how economic development is tied to combating loneliness but having places to go, to connect with one another is vital to our well being.

¹How the digitalisation of everything is making us more lonely by Chris Allen, February 7, 2018.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN TO CREATE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY

You may have heard the phrases, "Dress for success" or "Dress for the job you want, not the job you have."

The general sentiment is appearance matters. This holds true for businesses as well. No matter how wonderful the service or product offerings of a business may be, the reality is if potential customers walk by the front door of your business and think negatively about it they are likely not going to come inside. Having a dilapidated facade does have a real impact on the potential revenue a business can generate.

In the District, the vast majority of commercial leases operate under what's known as a "triple net lease." In addition to rent, tenants are responsible for all repairs and maintenance, property taxes, and insurance for the property.



If a business owner wants to change or improve the look of their storefront, the cost of that will, most likely, be on them.

In 2019, District Bridges applied for funding through the DC Department of Housing and Community Development to establish a Facade Improvement Program. With this grant funding, we are able to support our small businesses with improving their storefronts. These improvements could include painting, repairing structural damage, windows, doors, signage, and lighting. Unfortunately, just as we were getting the program up and running, the Covid-19 pandemic hit and brought the program to a halt. The program fully relaunched in 2022, and we are excited to have completed 4 projects so far on our Lower Georgia Avenue Main Street corridor.

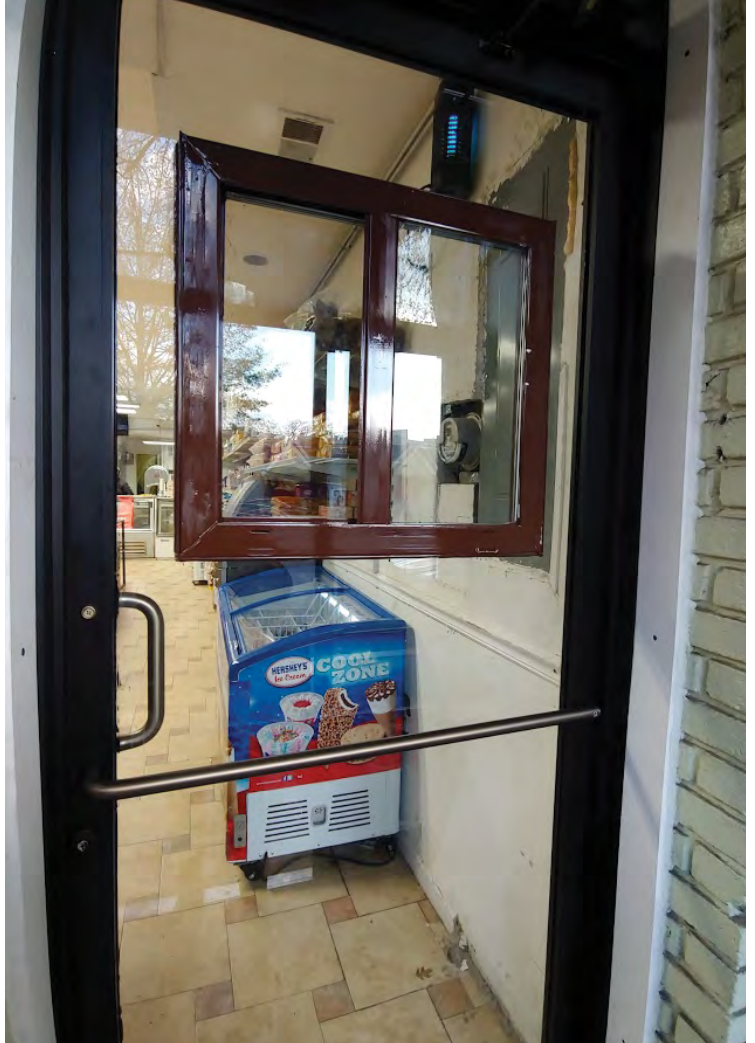
One of the businesses we supported was DC International Market. The shop owner, Menan, shared with us that during the pandemic she had established a take out business that helped her stay afloat through the toughest months of the pandemic. This service had become a vital part of her business model and a main driver of revenue. However, now that lockdowns were lifted and people were out and about, she felt unsafe opening her door to give take out customers their orders, particularly late at night. Additionally, due to the set up for her business, she had to walk all the way to the back of the shop, out of sight of the front door, to grab the take out orders from the kitchen.

The solution she proposed was the installation of a takeout window. But there was a challenge: she wanted the window built into the door. This meant it required a custom manufactured door to meet her specific requirements - but we got it done.

Today, Menan is thrilled. She feels safe knowing that when take out orders come to her window in the evening she can go back to the kitchen and grab the orders without the concern for her safety or the safety of her store.

The take out window was a creative design fix - and while the solution was important, the process to get to the solution was equally important. It takes time to develop enough trust with business owners for them to share their struggles.

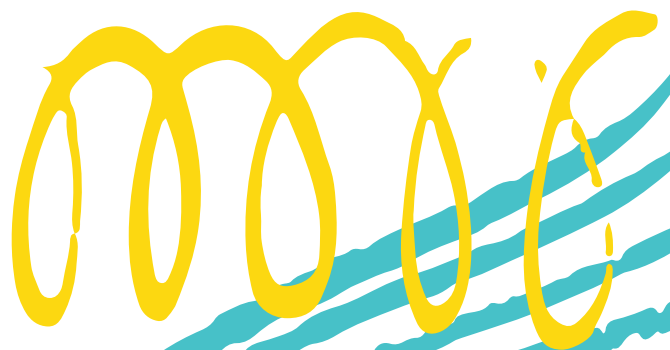
Through the process with our Facade Improvement Program, Menan felt heard and understood. The trust garnered through this successful project will enable us to support her small business in other ways.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT  **HARDHAT DIPLOMAT**

HardHat Diplomat
www.HardHatDiplomat.com

Helping people—especially women—confidently navigate the renovation process.



EVERY
LITTLE BIT
HELPS

Leveraging Additional Resources on Main Street Corridors

How did a small sweet shop turn into one of the premier destinations in Chevy Chase for high end stationary, housewares, gifts, desserts, and teas? Their website references this quote from Colin Powell: "A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work." June B Sweets owner June Drummond accredits her success to two other important factors as well; passion and the help she received from District Bridges.

June Drummond is not only passionate about her business, but also about the Chevy Chase neighborhood. Her business is located on the corridor of the Chevy Chase Main Street, one of District Bridges' six accredited Main Street programs, and she shares the Main Street's desire to see the small businesses in Chevy Chase thrive.

Originally a lawyer from Brazil, June first had the opportunity to spend a memorable summer in Chevy Chase Village as a teenager, hosted by a lovely local family, never thinking that some three decades later she would be back living in the Village and making her dream come true. Supporting a small business is to support a dream, a philosophy that June learned years ago working at the Inter-American Development Bank, where she had the opportunity to help many small NGOs in Latin America achieve their own dreams, whether through funding or by helping write about their potential projects. June was no stranger to the challenges of starting a small business, but in 2020, a global pandemic began to threaten her dream.



JUNE DRUMMOND
Owner, June B Sweet

"I could close my doors feeling sorry for myself and intimidated by my own thought that I would be one more store in the community that closed its doors due to Covid. But, this was not my personality. I was raised to fight and run after your dreams. I had to go beyond my own reach to find financial support to survive the gaps and holes that Covid had created in the finances of both our big and small businesses."

After a community member mentioned the Great Streets Grant to June, she took advantage of her and her husband's background as lawyers to navigate the confusing world of grant applications. Even with their combined expertise, however, the application process proved itself a challenging undertaking so she turned to Chevy Chase Main Street for help.

"I already had received some successful grants, but nothing up to the standards of the Great Streets program. It was beyond my capacity and ability to keep up with the due diligence, the paperwork, and the preciseness of the documentation. In the middle of Covid, I found the grant process overwhelming, but I got tremendous support from District Bridges."

Main Streets in DC operate with lean budgets, but that doesn't have to correlate to lean impact. Instead, we focus on leveraging funds and staff to bring additional resources to corridors through promotion, advocacy, and working with businesses to apply for funding for capacity-building projects like the Great Streets Grant from the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED.)

June B Sweets was awarded a Great Streets grant in 2021 for \$50,000. The grant enabled June to make significant improvements and repairs to the facade of her building, as well as invest in impactful seasonal decorations to draw customers to the corridor. She does not just see it as simply individual

success. Her vision is not only to see her own business grow, but to see all the businesses on the corridor collaborating and supporting each other to elevate the corridor as a whole; a vision she shares with the Chevy Chase Main Street.

"I must say that I would never have done anything like that if it was not for District Bridges, which is always providing encouragement and the opportunity to succeed. I am proud of my landlord who helped us, of Chevy Chase Main Street, of our community, of my team, and of my clients. I am proud that my business made it through the toughest moments of Covid."

"I would never have done anything like that if it was not for District Bridges."



Streatery Success on District Bridges' Main Streets

Profit margins are thin in the restaurant business in the best of times and the past two years have certainly not been the best of times. In 2020, after the initial shutdowns in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the District allowed restaurants to re-open at 50% capacity for seated patrons with tables placed so that patrons are at least 6 feet apart. However, this didn't take into account that, with the 6 foot rule, many restaurants couldn't reach 50% capacity and people were reluctant to eat indoors.

District Bridges staff immediately jumped in to support businesses in taking advantage of this opportunity. Our Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Main Street Manager worked closely with the District Department of Transportation staff to develop the city's streatery guidelines, which resulted in DC's first approved streatery for Makan and Queen's English in Columbia Heights.

Over the next 6 months our six Main Street Managers helped more than 75 businesses understand the permit process, post emergency no-parking signs, figure out order processes, and install fences, outdoor furniture, umbrellas, and plants.

Another particular success was the ambitious block-long streatery facilitated by Logan Circle Main Street. The streatery provided seating for six businesses - Logan Tavern, Stoney's, Number 9, Commissary, SweetGreen, and Blue Bottle Coffee. Not only did LCMS manage the permitting process on behalf of the businesses, but they also hired a design firm to create an inviting, cohesive space with an iconic DC theme.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Secured the permit for DC's first approved streatery, Makan and Queen's English in Columbia Heights, in June of 2020
- Obtained 37 streatery permits in support of 60+ restaurants, representing 39% of all streatery permits in the District - more than any other organization in the city
- Supported 15 additional businesses outside of our Main Street boundaries with the permitting process
- Directly supported 49 businesses with \$77,000 dollars to create and maintain streatery structures



Since 2020, District Bridges' Main Streets programs have secured 37 streatery permits in support of over 60 restaurants, representing 39% of all streatery permits in the District - more than any other organization in the city. Our Main Streets directly supported these businesses with more than \$77,000 dollars in funding to create and maintain streatery structures.

Additionally, Logan Circle Main Street and Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Main Street were instrumental in advocating for funding to support businesses in winterizing their streateries. Their efforts resulted in the Mayor's Office of Nightlife and Culture (MONC)

awarding \$2,568,000 as part of a Streatery Winter Ready Grant program. 57 of the recipients were located in District Bridges Main Street corridors. Even with all of this quantitative data, it's hard to capture the true impact of this work.

Many restaurant owners have expressed that the streateries were the difference between staying open or closing permanently during the pandemic - we can't begin to imagine the number of vital DC businesses we wouldn't have today without District Bridges' streatery support.

ECONOMIES OF SCALE



ECONOMIES OF IMPACT

By Brianne Dornbush, Executive Director District Bridges

In October of 2019, we launched three new Main Street programs all at once, taking us from being a staff of three with two Main Street programs to a staff of nine with six Main Street programs. We also took on a seventh Main Street program through a management contract with Woodley Park Main Street, following a crisis the organization faced that resulted in the firing of their founding executive director. We were excited to really kick the wheels of our multi-Main Street model. Growing from one program to two had its challenges and on a regular basis it felt like we were building the plane as we flew it. But scaling from two to seven was a whole new game.

My hope was to see us develop greater economies of scale, comprehensive organizational systems that streamlined work, more technical assistance hours provided to small businesses, broad-based community engagement at a grander scale, and

fundraising numbers jump substantially because our reach would increase. Some of those things panned out, but not as I expected.

In the traditional Main Street model there is one executive director that serves in multiple capacities including: executive, development director, program manager, events coordinator, volunteer manager, small business technical assistance specialist, and general catch all for anything and everything else. The District Bridges Main Street model has not changed the nature of the Main Street work itself. However, because our organizational structure has greater division of labor across the organization, our Main Street program staff can focus on developing their Main Street programs rather than the administrative responsibilities of the organization.

District Bridges multi-Main Street model is not the nonprofit equivalent of Costco. We are not saving money on these programs at scale. In fact, the cost to manage each of District Bridges Main Street programs costs the organization 23% more than we receive in grant funding each year for the programs. This cost is almost exclusively administrative costs. Our grant funding caps the allowable administrative cost for these programs at \$75,000. So for the average Main Street organization, they have to set their salary, benefits, and general administrative costs to fit within the \$75,000 or raise additional funds to cover the difference. The result is that executive directors are underpaid, often do not have benefits such as healthcare or retirement, and they have to limit their other administrative costs such as office space and equipment like cell phones and computers.

The basis behind our model is sustainability – we provide 100% healthcare coverage to our staff, we have created a tiered compensation structure that promotes equity and transparency and gives staff room to grow within the organization, and we also have an unlimited PTO policy that enables our team to take time off when they need it so that they don't burn out. Our team environment enables us to leverage the collective knowledge of our team members to better and more comprehensively serve our communities.

Looking at the realities of the traditional Main Street model, it is clear why the nonprofit sector is plagued by the "Scarcity Complex." The Scarcity Complex is the belief that there are limited resources to go around and support the nonprofit work in our communities. That belief spawns a spirit of competitiveness that leads people to falsely believe that if one organization gets support that means there is less support for their organization. This mentality leads people to guarding their resources, knowledge, tools, and assets fiercely – afraid that if they share what they have with others they will have even less.

District Bridges fundamentally believes the Scarcity Complex is false. We operate, instead, from an "Abundance Mentality."

THE ABUNDANCE MENTALITY
is the belief that the resources to do the work necessary to serve our communities are not finite. It is the belief that we can achieve together far more than any of us could achieve on our own. It's the belief that when we collaborate, sharing resources, knowledge, assets, and opportunities that our collective work is more impactful. And most importantly, it helps us work smarter, not harder, to achieve the impact we wish to see.

We've learned this lesson so many times through the years to the point where we actually made a strategic organizational decision in 2020 to not directly pursue any additional Main Street programs. Instead, we have started to invest in building more capacity into our community ecosystem by supporting other organizations with the knowledge, tools, and resources that have enabled us to succeed.

Since making this shift we have been able to support our colleagues in exciting ways. Over the last 2 years, we have written successful Main Street grant applications on behalf of Uptown Main Street to pursue the Petworth Main Street and Palisades Community Association in pursuing the Palisades Main Street. We supported three DC Main Street organizations in implementing our custom Salesforce Platform designed specifically to help Main Street programs collect, store, and report their data more accurately. We supported Georgetown Main Street in a strategic planning process with their Board of Directors, and supported Foggy Bottom Community Association in advocating for funding for a feasibility study to explore a Main Street/BID hybrid to serve the communities of Foggy Bottom & West End. These are just some of the highlights of the capacity building we are doing.

Building resilient, equitable communities here in DC and beyond is our vision. Community ecosystem development and capacity building is "the how."

A BRIGHT IDEA: DC HOLIDAY LIGHTS



The holiday shopping season poses numerous challenges as small businesses try to compete with national chains, big-box stores, and online retailers. One of the ways District Bridges has worked to draw more foot traffic to our commercial corridors and entice residents to shop local is through a promotional campaign, DC Holiday Lights.

What started out as a neighborhood event on Lower Georgia Avenue Main Street in 2018 has now become a city-wide event bringing together over 230 businesses across 14 corridors. The citywide initiative strengthens the connection between residents and local businesses by getting residents to explore corridors outside of their immediate neighborhoods, enter businesses they had never visited before, vote for their favorite holiday displays, and connect with business owners through an interactive scavenger hunt and Award Ceremony.

The initiative has also strengthened the small business support ecosystem in DC, bringing together Main Streets and BIDs in support of shopping local during the holiday season. Since 2020, participating programs have included Adams Morgan BID, Chevy Chase Main Street, Cleveland Park Main Street, Columbia Heights Main Street, Eastern Market Main Street, Georgetown Main Street, The Historic Dupont Circle Main Streets, Logan Circle Main Street, Lower Georgia Avenue Main Street, Mount Pleasant Main Street, The Parks Main Street, Petworth Main Street, Uptown Main Street, U Street Main Street, Upper Georgia Avenue Main Street, and Woodley Park Main Street.

We hope that DC Holiday Lights will continue to be a positive example of how organizations can work together to pool resources, increase impact, and raise the profile of our neighborhoods.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Megan Flynn Marketing

www.MeganFlynnMarketing.com



Megan Flynn Marketing is a mission-driven, full-service marketing agency dedicated to helping small businesses thrive.



In 2022, DC Holiday Lights resulted in:

22 earned media stories in publications including Washington Post, Washingtonian, DCist, KidFriendly DC, and HillRag – generating 286K views

An additional 290K impressions through paid media with Washington City Paper, 730dc, and Google Ads

87 participants in a citywide Scavenger Hunt – completing a collective 617 actions and at least 215 in-person visits to the participating corridors DC

\$3,700 in prizes awarded to local residents that directly drove customers back to local businesses

161,100+ impressions generated on Facebook promoting content related to Holiday Lights, shopping local, and a curated local gift guide

36,000 unique visitors to the event website between October 25, 2022 – January 8, 2023, double the foot traffic from 2021





How Do You Build Community Ecosystems?

This article is adapted from an article written by Brianne Dornbush that was published by The Brookings Institution for their Placemaking Postcard Series.

Like many cities, Washington, D.C. has a siloed approach to community development. While there are countless community-based organizations and city agencies doing tremendous work in their fields—whether that be economic development, social services, housing, or education—these actors rarely work together on assessing where community strengths lie, where stakeholder connections may be missing, or where service gaps exist. This fractured approach hampers neighborhood progress and can result in unintended consequences with cascading impacts on neighborhood residents and small businesses.

In an environmental ecosystem, the absence or introduction of a single organism or element can devastate the entire system. This reality also holds true in neighborhood development, but may be less apparent. By applying an ecosystem approach to community development, we can start to understand how to solve many systemic challenges facing neighborhoods.

We have seen this reality play out in the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza: a public space in the heart of Columbia Heights, one of the city's most diverse neighborhoods by race, age, socioeconomic status, and cultural identification. Civic Plaza was built in 2008 during a major redevelopment of Columbia Heights' commercial district, with the vision of it being an activated, vibrant space for residents to socialize, play, and build community.

However, that vision soon fell apart due to ownership and responsibility issues. While the plaza itself is a fairly small public space, there are many different stakeholders and agencies with responsibility or ownership for parts of the space. For instance, the District's Department of Transportation controls the sidewalks, but because the public realm design utilizes a special paver stone that only the Department of General Services (DGS) has access to, neither agency had clear responsibility for making repairs when needed. The plaza's splash pad was meant to be physically maintained by DGS, but it was also part of the Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) portfolio—meaning that if the fountain was turned on or off at the wrong time, DPR was supposed to address the issue, but if it was malfunctioning, it was DGS' responsibility.

Because there was no clear citywide plan for how stakeholders would resolve such issues, the plaza fell into a significant state of disrepair, with challenges ranging from dangerous sidewalks to malfunctioning fountain sprockets shooting water onto the surrounding area. This lack of care for the space had ramifications for the community. The plaza where kids and families used to play became dilapidated and under utilized. There were attempts to bring the various stakeholders together and try to address the issues but because there was no single entity leading the charge these efforts soon fizzled.

Then in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, a group of individuals began hanging out in the plaza on a daily basis, all of whom were experiencing acute alcohol dependence. These individuals were often passed out on the sidewalks and in front of the doors of businesses. Ambulances were regularly at the plaza picking up individuals to take them to the hospital or to detox.

In 2021, the plaza reached a point of crisis that was drawing the attention of many in the community. District Bridges was approached by the property owner of the building on the plaza and asked if there was anything we could do. Fortunately, a grant opportunity with the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) made it possible for us to pilot a program to try to address some of the challenges we were seeing in the plaza. The pilot revealed that chronic disconnection, lack of communication, and lack of accountability led to the multi-faceted issues now facing the plaza.

We discovered that there were two primary issues that needed to be addressed. The first was the physical maintenance of the plaza itself and the second was understanding and addressing the needs of the vulnerable residents who were hanging out in the plaza.

To tackle the first challenge of maintenance, we leaned on Ward 1 Councilmember Brianna Nadeau who convened an in-person stakeholder meeting at the plaza with all the right people from each city agency that had a role to play. At the meeting, many of these agency stakeholders were meeting for the first time. Having everyone together in the plaza enabled us to get the collective buy-in we needed and identify immediate concerns. We assigned action items to everyone and then scheduled a meeting for the following month to hold everyone accountable to the tasks that were assigned.

Tackling the second challenge of supporting our vulnerable residents was not as straightforward. In 2022, Councilmember Nadeau secured funding for District Bridges to continue and expand the pilot, specifically to learn more and begin to address identified issues. Our team started with daily street outreach and simply spent time getting to know the individuals at the plaza and developing trust. As we learned more about their lives and began to understand why they were there, we started to see ways we could support.

We convened a second stakeholder meeting with all the organizations and agencies who were providing social services in the area. Again, this meeting was revealing as we learned that not only did many of these service providers not know one another, they were also unaware of each other's work in the plaza for this specific population. While the social service providers came to the stakeholder meeting, it took time to build trust among the partners. We needed to prove that we were here to help, not point fingers. We wanted to understand the complex challenges and

limitations of each organization and agency. The power of the stakeholder meetings was that slowly we started to build deeper connections and ways to work more collaboratively.

In a few short months, these convenings started to have an impact on the plaza and broader community. We have made progress, but the task at hand is monumental. The work is emotionally and physically taxing, and for every success we can point to at least a dozen setbacks. It can feel like the successes we see are simply a drop in a bucket, but this is what a community ecosystem is all about. Our work is to identify and connect hundreds - maybe thousands - of tiny drops in the bucket to build communities that offer dignity and hope.

In 2022, we were able to:

Host over 90 free and accessible community events;

Develop 43 partnerships with community organizations, agencies, small businesses, and faith groups;

Conduct over 900 hours of street outreach at the Civic Plaza with residents experiencing substance use disorders and housing insecurity;

Support 34 Columbia Heights residents experiencing housing insecurity in obtaining identification documents;

Make 16 direct referrals resulting in appointments for residents in need of legal assistance;

Connect 11 residents with inpatient residential rehabilitation treatment;

Connect 67 residents with withdrawal management for alcohol use disorder;

Establish relationships with 170 individuals in need of social services support.

**I WANT
TO CHANGE
MY LIFE.**

BEFORE

I met Juan* for the first time in 2011

when, together with another passerby, I pulled him out of the middle of 16th Street because he was repeatedly trying to lie down in the middle of traffic. I called 911 and rode in the ambulance with him to interpret for the EMT and he sang me a song called "Mariposa de Amor."

I remember how it felt to learn that he wouldn't be sent to rehab. That they would not keep him because he needed to drink to stay alive. That they would give him bus fare in a few hours and, while I was "sweet to care," there was nothing I could do.

Flash forward to 2022, when I had recently started a new job with District Bridges as the Columbia Heights Community Navigator, focusing on ecosystem development in the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza. The first few times I saw Juan at the plaza he was very drunk, but he was calm, kind and funny. He sang me a song and I knew - it was him.

The very first time I met him at the plaza he approached me for help. He wanted to enter a rehab program for alcohol and he was very insistent about that. The first time he asked, we walked down 14th Street to Unity Healthcare. They turned us away with a flyer to go to La Clinica del Pueblo.

We set out to La Clinica on 15th Street. It took us an hour and a half to walk the four blocks because Juan was too dizzy. We passed Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) and then stopped to sit on the steps at the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC). Next we crossed to sit on the step at Centronia. Then at CARECEN. Stepping stones of Latino service organizations with their doors still closed for the pandemic, towards La Clinica. Juan joked and sang the whole way.

We stayed in the waiting room at La Clinica for two hours, but the person from the "volviendo a vivir" substance use program was not in, and was not answering the phone.

I called my contact at LAYC, who had been planning to connect me with the program director at La Clinica, but we didn't have any luck. I walked Juan back to the plaza and left.

The next week I emailed my Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) contacts directly about Juan. I explained that he was regularly and consistently asking for help to enroll in detox and an inpatient substance use disorder program. I received an immediate response from Sharon*, at DBH's Assessment and Referral Clinic (ARC). She was very helpful and suggested we get in touch the next morning and said she would send a car to pick Juan and I up to take us to ARC for evaluation. And that's what we did.

I arrived at the plaza around 9:30 am, canceling all my meetings for the day. He wasn't there, so I waited in the area until I saw him, closer to 10:30 am. Juan was ready to go when I found him and looked much better than I had seen him before. He had spent the previous night at the Salvation Army shelter, but had left at 2am and had been walking the neighborhood all night.

He was tired and didn't want to eat. He has stomach problems from drinking and has been on the street since before Christmas 2021 (which he recalls because he spent that Christmas alone on the street). Juan has been drinking for about 15 years, but for many years it was just on the weekends and he was able to hold a job during the week. For the past several months he has been drinking multiple bottles of cheap liquor and beer every day. He's a regular at the ER and is often passed out in the plaza. He doesn't use other drugs and never has.

As promised, Sharon sent a van for us and they took us straight from the plaza to ARC on P Street NE. The wait was not long and he was seen by a nurse and a social worker consecutively. When asked why he was seeking treatment, Juan responded, without hesitation, "I want to change my life. Before I die."

We were at ARC for about 4 hours. He was given a TB and COVID test. Everyone was kind and Juan was very grateful. He spoke excellent English, which I hadn't heard him use before.



I DIE.

A few hours in, I noticed Juan's clothes were covered in fleas, which I began to pull off of him. None of the shelters have showers, and he had not been able to wash his clothes for months. The closest showers he knew of were next to Metro Center, about two miles away. The hardest moment of the whole day for me was watching him, sober enough for the first time in at least four months to become self-conscious about his appearance. He began apologizing repeatedly for the bugs, saying he wanted to get a haircut and a shave. He asked to go to the bathroom and then called out for me to bring him the extra sweatshirt he had been carrying. He had taken off his other shirt and thrown it away, horrified at having realized for the first time that he was covered in bugs. He was embarrassed and ashamed. ARC didn't have any clothes due to a flood last year that ruined everything.

The nurse at ARC had explained there were two options for detox Juan had qualified for through his assessment: PIW (Psychiatric Institute of Washington) or RAP (Regional Addiction Prevention). RAP was preferable according to everyone at ARC - as they were known to be better at transferring patients into one of the four inpatient rehab options. However, the ARC nurse suggested PIW because of Juan's diabetes. PIW has the capacity to do a full physical evaluation and prescribe his medication - and they had a bed available. At about 3:30pm, the car arrived to take him to the Psychiatric Institute of Washington (PIW) on Wisconsin Street NW - almost four miles away. Juan told me he was proud of himself.

I got out mid-trip, since I wouldn't be able to accompany him into PIW due to their Covid precautions. I gave him my card. At ARC my name had gone on all the paperwork as his emergency contact and they assured me many times that I would be able to visit and to get information about Juan once he entered PIW. I was concerned that I wouldn't know when he was transferred out of detox and to which program. I asked him for his brother's contact, just in case, and I watched him consider it, but he said no. He doesn't want his family to see him like this. We said goodbye and I said I would bring him some clothes to PIW tomorrow.

When I got home I called PIW to check in. The receptionist told me that no visitors were allowed due to Covid. She also said she couldn't tell me whether he had been admitted or share any information because this wasn't like other hospitals and I would have to present at the door with an official photo ID from my organization and documentation stating that I was Juan's case manager, and even then I probably wouldn't be told whether he was admitted or not.

While home and in the shower washing the fleas out of my hair, I missed two calls from PIW. While making dinner for my kids, I called back and the person who picked up told me that Juan had tried to call me but that he had just left. I asked what happened, imagining that he had not wanted to stay, was feeling alone, and wanted to go back to Columbia Heights. She told me that he had wanted to stay and had begged to stay, but that they didn't have any open male beds so they had turned him away.

He was turned away from the place he had been driven to directly from the Department of Behavioral Health's Assessment and Referral Clinic, where we had been told they were holding a bed for him.

Juan had zero money on him, no ID, no backpack, no change of clothes, and no food or water. I was told he was directed

toward the bus stop. I don't know if they gave him fare. I advocated for him, but they told me there was nothing they could do.

I emailed Sharon again—three times in two minutes just in case she was still in the office and was able to offer advice. She called me back at 7pm from her personal cell phone and said that, even if he did not have Medicaid (which he does), if PIW had reserved a bed for him (which they had) they should have held it. She would call in the morning and find out what had happened. She asked for me to update her when I found him tonight or tomorrow, and if I couldn't find him tomorrow morning she would send her team up to help try to locate him.

“...the amount of time, effort and luck that is needed to **not even** be successful with the current system...

[it's] more than a social worker or a full-time dedicated case manager has the capacity to do for a single person in a single day.”

She said we could send him directly to RAP (the other detox option) if they had a bed in the morning and not have to go through the ARC assessment again.

When my kids fell asleep, I drove back to Civic Plaza with a backpack and clothes I bought with our program budget. It was 8pm and I was hoping Juan was in a shelter. I drove by the plaza on 14th Street and saw about eight men still out there. There was Juan crossing 14th Street.

I decided to park and run back to find him. I parked in DCUSA and by the time I came back there was an ambulance on the plaza with several police and EMTs talking with another regular. The other men had scattered. Juan wasn't there.

I walked around for a few minutes and then I spotted him across 14th Street, heading west on Park Road. I shouted at him and, upon hearing me, he turned back. I ran to meet him. He was still sober. He was with a friend and they were going to walk around and then spend the night at the Salvation Army again. His friend, who was in a good state, promised me that Juan wouldn't spend the night on the street.

Juan fought back tears as he told me he had felt discriminated against the night before. He said they had turned him away almost immediately and he had watched as many people came in after him going straight through to beds. He had been the only Hispanic person in the waiting room and, from his view, the only one turned back on to the street. He noted that it had been far away and he took the wrong bus and was lost for several hours. I could feel his frustration and sadness. He told me to go home, that I shouldn't be out on the street at this time of night, and we agreed to meet tomorrow morning.

Juan is from El Salvador but has been in the US for four decades. He has Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which means he's lawfully allowed to live and work here. He has a Social Security Number, his TPS is up to date, and he has Medicaid. He has no criminal record. He finished 9th grade at home and took some high school classes in DC. He speaks fluent English and has four adult daughters in the US, as well as a brother in Virginia who owns his own construction company and home. Besides his alcoholism and suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure,

Juan is in good health. He is 57 years old and strong. I mention all of this because many at the plaza do not have all of these things. Many have none of these things.



Juan also had multiple people who were able to take him through the whole process. I advocated for him.

Where I insert myself into this story is only to show the amount of time, effort and luck that is needed to **not even** be successful with the current system. This is more than a social worker or a full-time dedicated case manager has the capacity to do for a single person in a single day. And Juan WANTS to get better.

It would be easy to read this and point blame in any number of directions - Juan, DBH, PIW, RAP, or the government. But the reality is the problem is complex and complicated. I truly believe that all the actors in this account are doing the best they can with the resources, knowledge, and ability they have, but the complexity of this problem is daunting and the possible interventions fragmented.

That is why our work is unique. We are not social workers or case managers - my title is Community Navigator - and that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to map ways that the stakeholders in our community can coordinate and cooperate to address the needs of individuals like Juan.

**Note: Name has been changed to protect privacy.*

A person is seen from the back, wearing a dark hoodie and a bag strap. They are looking towards a crowd of people at an art event. The scene is overlaid with several thick, bright yellow brushstrokes that sweep across the image from the bottom left towards the top right. The background is a blurred crowd of people in a dimly lit space with some lights visible.

ART ALL NIGHT MOUNT PLEASANT

2022

MADE IN MOUNT PLEASANT

For decades, the Mount Pleasant neighborhood in Washington, DC has been a tight-knit, progressive, and diverse community. Mount Pleasant feels like a small town, a place where neighbors greet each other and time seems to settle into the red sidewalk bricks. It has a rich history and a thriving community of local artists. In September 2022, District Bridges tapped into that rich culture and brought thousands of people to Mount Pleasant to celebrate the neighborhood's history, people, and art through Art All Night.

After navigating across blaring intersections, stepping onto Mount Pleasant Street feels almost as if the city noise has been swallowed up by an invisible barrier. Things come into focus again: people, store signs, trees overhead. Local business owners take time to greet customers. To shop and dine in Mount Pleasant is to savor the sweetness of slowing down and connecting.

That's not to say that Mount Pleasant is quiet, or blandly pretty. On the contrary, this neighborhood has proudly been home to a riotous blend of humanity. The air is alive with bachata music, children calling out, and the hubbub of the farmer's market on the weekends. Its history is colorful too: at one point it was owned by a Southern sympathizer; in 1991, it was the center of a protest decrying the police shooting of a young Salvadoran man.

While the neighborhood's demographics have shifted over time, Mount Pleasant residents are proud to live alongside people from many different races, nationalities, and income levels. In college, I learned about the concept of "convivencia," or many races living together in relative harmony. To me, we could all learn something about convivencia from Mount Pleasant.

The unique vibrance and grassroots organizing has drawn artists and activists of all types to the neighborhood. For many years neighbors have organized local artistic performances, arts & cultural events, protests, and advocacy campaigns. Neighbors have produced a plethora of amazing films, music, paintings, sculptures, pottery, and more. The artistic expression that is infused in the vibrating activity of the neighborhood both represents the diversity and connectedness of this community.

When the opportunity arose to apply for funding from the DC Department of Small and Local Business Development to host Art All Night, applying for Mount Pleasant was a no-brainer. Art All Night was truly a work of love.

While District Bridges served as the event coordinator, the event was, in every way, homegrown Mount Pleasant

80+ neighbors and businesses contributed their talent, artwork, indoor space, manual labor, time, equipment, and more

15 local businesses advertised specials that night

20+ local musical and dance groups performed

50 Mount Pleasant-based artists displayed their artwork

2 film screenings hushed crowds with the power of their neighborhood's history and talent

I put months of work into organizing the event, but nothing prepared me for the pure joy that I saw on Mount Pleasant Street that night. Crowds clustered around local artists' booths, and families packed around sidewalk performances. My stomach growled for two hours because the lines were so long outside of all of the restaurants. One memory that rings particularly sweet is when I overheard someone whisper to a friend, "Wow, this is incredible - I am so glad we can all be out together like this again." After the pandemic, connection with our communities is what we all need.

The event flowed with a life of its own, and I was in awe of the amazing neighborhood we get to serve. But the event also reminded me that we are better together. Without the incredible volunteers and neighbors willing to give of their time and talents an event like this would fall flat. As an organization, District Bridges has the unique opportunity to tap into the passion and vibrancy of our communities and empower and unleash neighbors to give of themselves and celebrate together what makes community powerful and beautiful.






DRAG QUEENS, ZUMBA, & LETTUCE OH MY!

Collaborations often fail, but not because partners don't have the desire to work together. More often than not, stakeholders have the best of intentions and truly do want to achieve common goals. But intentions are worthless without action to back them up. True collaborations result in win - win - win scenarios where each partner gets something out of the deal.

In 2022, the DC Department of Parks and Recreation put out a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a \$50,000 grant to activate three public parks in Ward 1: the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza, 14th & Girard Park, and Unity Park in Adams Morgan. District Bridges was already consistently activating spaces in Columbia Heights so this grant provided a great opportunity to fund some of the activities already in our plan. As with many grants, we knew this one would be competitive and we had a pretty good idea of who might also be interested in applying. Instead of just putting forward our application and hoping we would win out, we decided to take a different approach.



The two organizations we assumed would apply for the funding were FreshFarm and the Adams Morgan BID Partnership. I knew that the RFP was asking for activations in all three locations, but that these two organizations each only had programming in one of the locations. I called the Executive Directors of FreshFarm and the Adams Morgan BID Partnership and pitched them an idea. I said, "I know you are probably thinking of applying for this grant. What were you planning to do with the money you won?"

Once I heard from them, I shared what we planned to do if we won and then I said, "I'd like to write you into our grant proposal."

Sure, we could have used all \$50,000 of the grant funds for ourselves, but that would have meant doing more of the work in all three of the locations. Instead of us working harder we decided to invest in our partners and bring something to the table to enable the collaboration to move forward. And it did!

Too often, nonprofit organizations operate from a scarcity mentality. This mentality stifles collaboration

and partnership because it operates under the premise that if one organization wins it is at the expense of another. District Bridges is actively trying to dismantle this mentality.

We fundamentally believe "the pie" is not finite – meaning that if you get a slice then my slice will be smaller. In fact, there is enough pie to go around and when we operate from a mentality of abundance we can start to see where opportunities for partnership and expansion lie.



We ended up winning the DPR grant. As a result:

District Bridges hosted more than 100 events at both Girard Park and the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza

FreshFarm hired the DC Peace Team to support descalation at the Farmers Markets and hosted live music every Saturday

Adams Morgan BID Partnership funded their Drag Queen Story Hour monthly and purchased equipment to make the event a huge success, and hosted live entertainment at their weekly farmers market

SETTING THE TABLE FOR COLLABORATION: Breadcoin Flash Table

Ms. Victoria is a resident in one of the senior assisted living units in a building down the block from the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza. She appears reserved at first, but as soon as I handed her a plate of food, the stories about her 35-year career as a school teacher in the District began to flow. Ms. Victoria spent her childhood in southern Italy, where it's considered blasphemous to eat alone.

There, if you see someone eating alone, you scold them for the unhealthy behavior and invite them to join you at your table—she explained as we sat across from each other at a pop-up dinner on the Plaza. In fast-paced DC, where it's the norm to eat at your desk, in your car, or while walking to the metro, it's easy to forget the importance of sitting down to a meal together.

As part of District Bridges' vision of more equitable, resilient, and connected communities, we have been engaging residents at the Civic Plaza since 2021 in a pilot program aimed at creating a healthier, more vibrant public space.

In 2022, our Columbia Heights team staged more than 90 free and accessible community events at the Plaza, consistently engaged more than 100 resident volunteers, and connected 170 residents experiencing substance use disorder, mental health challenges, and housing insecurity with social service support.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Los Hermanos
1426 Park Road NW
Washington, DC 20010
www.loshermanos-dc.com

Los Hermanos specializes in authentic Dominican Cuisine.



Several years back, our Executive Director crossed paths with the soon-to-be Executive Director of Breadcoin Foundation, and both immediately recognized the potential for collaboration. Breadcoin Foundation feeds underserved communities experiencing food insecurity with food tokens, while supporting local businesses who sign up as vendors and while sourcing community groups to disseminate the coins within their community. Breadcoin Foundation began hosting flash tables in 2014 as a way to create a space where everyone is welcome and can share in a hot meal. The Foundation is all about providing food with dignity, and their events center around kinship and connection.

District Bridges has been supporting the Columbia Heights small business ecosystem through direct technical assistance, facade improvements, promotion, marketing support, and events since we began running the Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Main Streets in 2016. We are resource brokers, and with roots in the neighborhood reaching back to 2005, we have an extensive network of community partners. So several years after their first encounter, with the plaza ecosystem work in full swing, the two organizations came together to plan an epic flash table, feeding over 100 residents from all walks of life. We had teenagers eating with the elderly, tables with multiple languages being spoken, and a businesswoman dressed in a fancy suit breaking bread with a man who had slept outside at the Plaza the night before.

While the primary goal of the Columbia Heights flash table event was to provide an opportunity for neighbors of all different ages, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds to connect, another goal was to spread the word about Breadcoin in Columbia Heights and support our small businesses through participation. District Bridges' Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Main Street Manager worked hard through several months of outreach to sign up new restaurants in the neighborhood who now accept Breadcoins and are part of their growing network of vendors. One of the newest vendors, Los Hermanos Dominican Restaurant, not only signed up as a vendor, but agreed to provide and serve the food for the flash table.

Raymond and Aris Compres, the brothers who own Los Hermanos, have been cooking delicious Dominican dishes in the neighborhood for decades, taking after their mother who sold mofongo and stewed chicken out of the back of the family bodega when they were boys. They came out to the plaza early on the Saturday of the event to set up their tents, greet

residents, and join in conversations about issues critical to the neighborhood. The Compres brothers have been actively engaged in the community for years and are known for offering free food to residents in need on a regular basis. Their participation with Breadcoin is the latest way that they are giving back, and they have since sponsored several other District Bridges events at the plaza.

On the day of the flash table, our teams worked together to bring local volunteers to set up the event, serve food, sit in kinship, and eat and talk with their neighbors. It was truly a special coming-together. District Bridges Civic Plaza Stewards, members of the community who are experiencing housing insecurity and who work with our staff to support events and steward the space throughout the week, joined as well, inviting passersby to sit at the tables and assisting in creating an environment where everyone felt welcome.

Both organizations invited important community partners who regularly engage with residents experiencing food and housing insecurity to network and share in the magic of the flash table. Members of the DC Peace Team, FreshFarm Farmers Market, the ANC, the Latin American Youth Center, Good Trouble Cooperative, New Song Community Church, and Foundation for a Drug Free World all came out in support.

All in all, the Columbia Heights flash table was the perfect embodiment of collaboration towards a more connected neighborhood ecosystem. With strong mission alignment, our two organizations were able to support each other, local businesses, residents, and community partners, all while having a truly good time. As Ms. Victoria has always known, sharing a meal provides an opportunity for neighbors to get to know one another, while connecting over a basic human need; one that reminds us that we have more in common than we often remember.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT  | Breadcoin
BreadCoin
www.breadcoin.org

A Food Token Connecting the Community



The term placekeeping is an evolution of the idea of placemaking, acknowledging that the communities we serve have long and deep histories – place and place identity already exist. Placekeeping is the recognition that our work builds upon the legacy and heritage of the communities where we work, and actively seeks to preserve and protect the cultural fabric that make “a place” unique.

Columbia Heights is a perfect example of where we are actively building upon a rich cultural history and trying to harness the strength of our residents,

businesses, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups to build a stronger, more connected community.

In 2020, we piloted a new community ecosystem approach focused on the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza. One of the programs that has emerged from that pilot is the Columbia Heights Placekeepers Program where we organize neighbors to take an active role in supporting our neighborhood.

Every resident has their own unique set of skills and experiences, and we believe that every single resident has something to offer as a neighborhood steward or placekeeper. The Columbia Heights Placekeepers Program leverages the unique skills and interests of our neighbors to create interventions for our community that address public safety, access to social services, maintenance of public space, and engaging the broader community.

Our Placekeepers regularly meet for community clean-ups and happy hours that support local businesses. They work to engage the community in public art and tactical urbanism approaches to public space improvements. During the summer they created opportunities for connection by hosting bubbles and popsicle parties for neighborhood children at the splash-pad in the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza. Placekeepers take an active role in spending time checking in on neighbors who are housing-unstable, celebrating their birthdays with them, and helping to connect vulnerable residents with services and support they need most.

IN PRACTICE:

The Launch of District Bridges Placekeepers Program

When our team is out in the community they often hear from neighbors about their fears and frustrations with their neighborhood. Many neighbors shared with us that they felt unsafe and helpless to do anything to address the needs they saw of vulnerable residents in the plaza on a daily basis. Many residents expressed anger at the state of the Civic Plaza, but also didn't know what could be done or who was responsible for caring for the space. The beauty of the Placekeepers program is that it gives residents who care about their community a direct and actionable way to get involved and make a difference. Over the next year, we look forward to strengthening and expanding this program to continue providing an on ramp to community connections.

5

We have five key goals of the Placekeepers program:

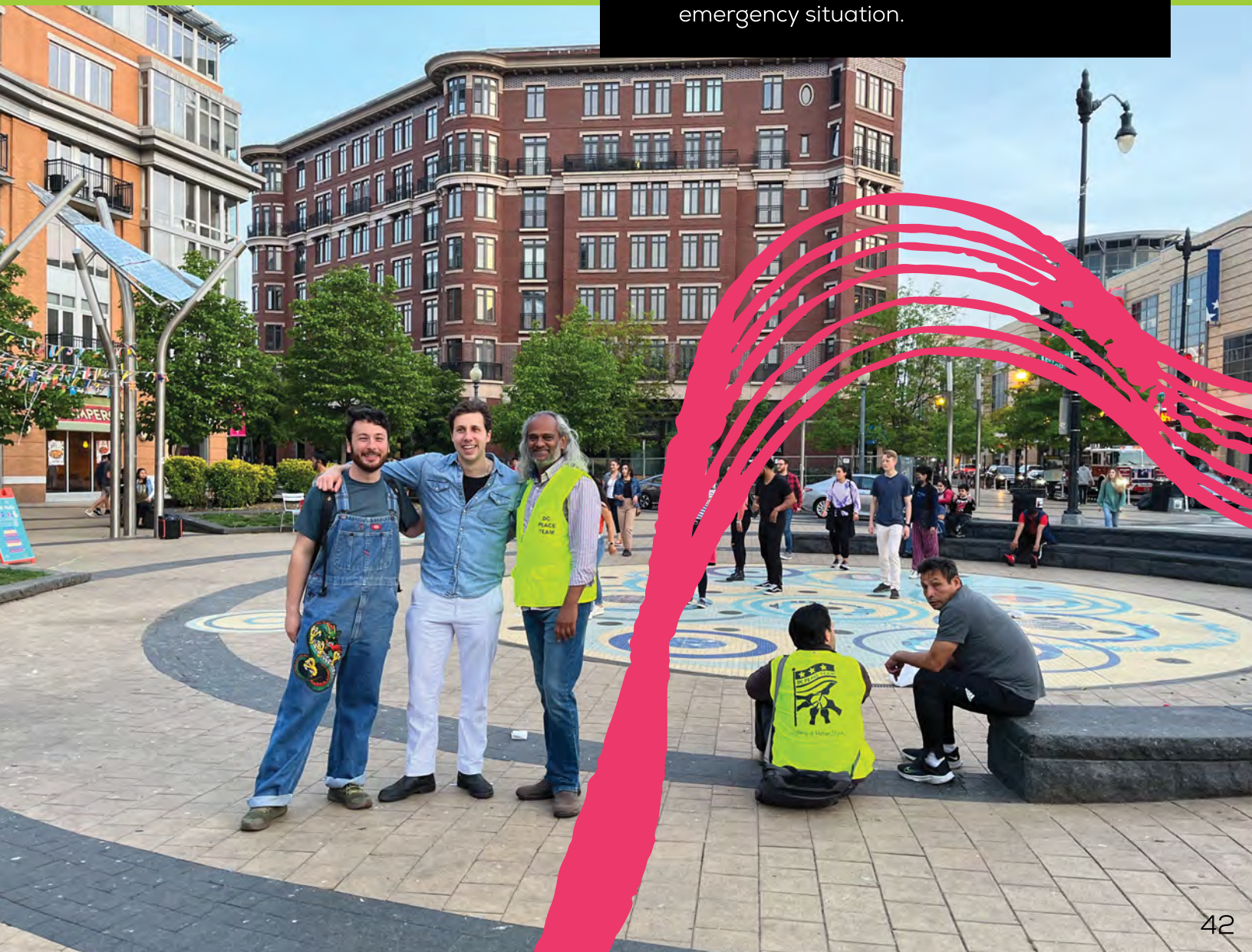
Create and maintain a cleaner, healthier environment for everyone, inspiring all neighbors to become custodians of public space;

Foster and sustain intergenerational relationships between neighbors of diverse backgrounds who come together in service, community, and for fun;

Improve safety and the perception of safety at the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza through regular positive space activation and by drawing on existing neighborhood resources;

Provide critical supports to vulnerable individuals who frequent the Civic Plaza;

Increase awareness among neighbors, allowing more people to feel empowered to assist vulnerable residents in an emergency situation.





WHAT'S NEXT?

INTEGRATION.

By Brianne Dornbush, Executive Director, District Bridges

“Most people overestimate what they can achieve in one year but underestimate what they can achieve in ten years.” In my seven years with District Bridges, this sentiment has rung true. We often talk about how our work is a marathon, not a sprint, and that our impact is revealed over time and through consistency. It can be easy to lose sight of the big picture in the midst of an endless to-do list and the challenges and obstacles that inevitably arise. Not to mention the curveballs no one can expect, like the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am proud that at every turn and every curveball District Bridges has risen to meet the need and face the challenges head on. It is a testament to implementing our organizational values on a daily basis. The pandemic forced us to drastically change how we did our work. It created unprecedented challenges, but also opportunities to reevaluate and innovate. It brought into sharp focus how siloed our city operates and the negative impact that fractured approach has on our community. One thing the pandemic did not change, however, was the tremendous need that underpins our mission. If anything, this work has never been more needed than it is today.

The reality is that no single organization or government agency has the secret to solving the systemic challenges DC faces. They are collective action challenges and will require all of us to work together to strengthen our ecosystem.

It will require **Integration**.

Integration is an audacious goal. Simply put - we humans are not very good at it. It's not how we naturally think or how our systems are set up to operate. We are inherently self-interested - we want to ensure that our interests, priorities, beliefs, and wellbeing are protected and prioritized. We have a hard time understanding large and complex systems - especially when we have little to no ability to influence or implement any change. AND let's not forget that working in groups and teams is really hard!

But that is also what makes this goal so exciting.

“MOST PEOPLE OVERESTIMATE WHAT THEY CAN ACHIEVE IN ONE YEAR BUT UNDERESTIMATE WHAT THEY CAN ACHIEVE IN TEN YEARS.”

Imagine what our city would be like if it were operating as a healthy community ecosystem. Imagine what it would be like if our systems operated in a way that put our most vulnerable residents or small businesses at the center - breaking down the barriers to accessing the support and services they need.

Imagine what your work would be like if colleagues were as committed and invested in the success of your organization or program as they were in their own. What would it feel like to work collaboratively toward collective success while enabling each individual to achieve their goals? How would working in a truly integrated team change your workload? Your work/life balance? Your investment in our work and the broader community we serve?

If you're reading this, you're already at the table. **I want to challenge you to reflect deeply on what role you play in building a strong community ecosystem.** How would our city be different in a year if our community ecosystem was more connected, more collaborative?

INTEGRATION

District Bridges' vision is big and audacious and if we were responsible for achieving it alone, it would be impossible. But we are not in this alone. Our goal is to build bridges of partnership and collaboration, increasing capacity and impact across the board.

If this sounds like the utopian ideal, let me quickly burst that bubble. What I'm describing is extremely hard. It will be uncomfortable. It will require compromise and patience. It will require a tolerance for failure and conflict. More than anything else, it will require our absolute resolve and belief that this vision is possible - knowing there will be frustration and sometimes near insurmountable challenges and obstacles that we will face.

ARE YOU UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

IF THE ANSWER IS YES, LET'S GET TO WORK.

OUR STORY



District Bridges was born out of a collaborative grassroots effort, known as the Columbia Heights Initiative (CHI). CHI started as a group of neighbors who shared a vision for preserving the cultural diversity that made Columbia Heights vibrant while also celebrating local businesses and building a more inclusive and connected community! In 2005, these founding members organized the first Columbia Heights Day Festival.

After ten years, the CHI board set out to develop an organization that could serve the community year-round, laying the foundation for what District Bridges has become today. Since then, District Bridges has developed into an organization focused on community ecosystem development, developing the first multi-Main Street model in the country and now serving over 1,000 small businesses across Wards 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Washington, DC.

“[District Bridges has] made a huge positive impact on individuals in need in the Columbia Heights Plaza, and I think this has significantly enhanced the safety and attractiveness of the Plaza as a public gathering space.”

COLUMBIA HEIGHTS BUSINESS OWNER

OUR TEAM

OUR BOARD

Andy Steinem Board Chair

Liz Furgurson Treasurer

Katy Chang

Matt Lapin

David DeSantis

Dominque Peterson

Brianne Dornbush Executive Director

Madeleine Odendahl Deputy Director

Gladys Kamau Senior Director of Economic Development and Policy

Sara Rockefeller Community Navigator, Columbia Heights

Michele Molotsky Main Street Director, Logan Circle

Cassandra Hetherington Main Street Director, Cleveland Park

Kay Pierson Main Street Manager, Lower Georgia Ave

Paco Ramos-Meyer Main Street Manager, Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant

Anna Claire Walker Main Street Manager, Chevy Chase

Will Cochran Placekeeper Program Coordinator

*as of February 23, 2023

17%
Senior

33%
Minority

83%
Women

DISTRICT BRIDGES STRIVES TO BE AN ORGANIZATION:

that reflects the communities we serve and acts on our commitment to diversity and inclusion; that acknowledges institutional and systemic factors contributing to oppression and privilege and actively seeks to dismantle them, both internally and externally; where persons of color occupy and retain senior leadership and decision-making positions; and that actively works internally, across our communities, and with partners to promote anti-racism.

DISTRICT BRIDGES

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

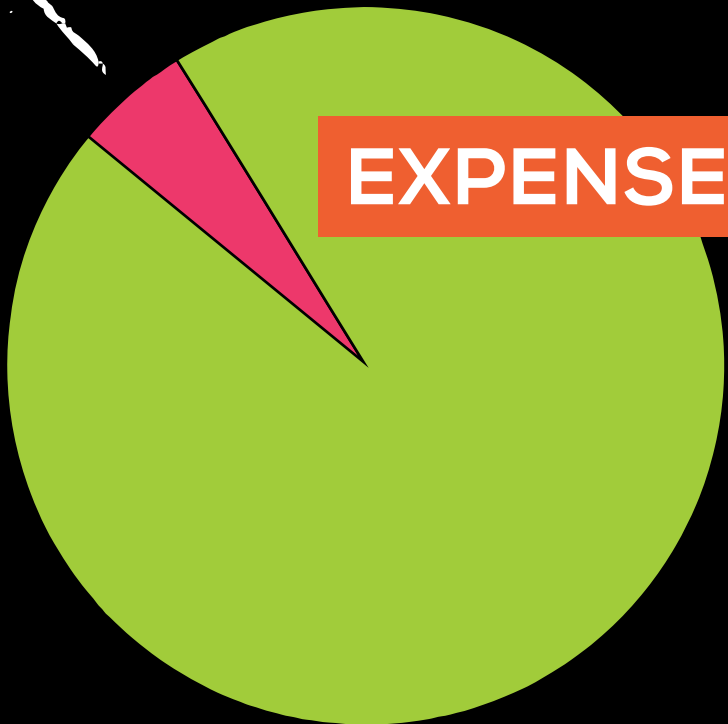
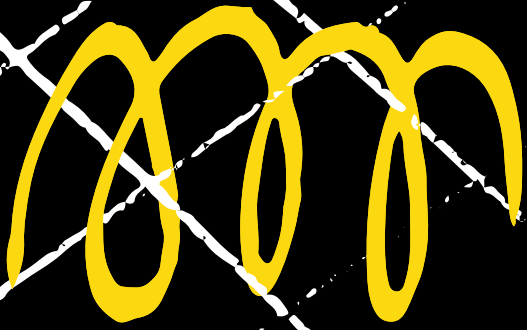
As of September 30, 2022

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$11,629
Accounts Receivable	\$21,483
Grants Receivable	\$582,985
Prepaid Expenses	\$20,865
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$636,960

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

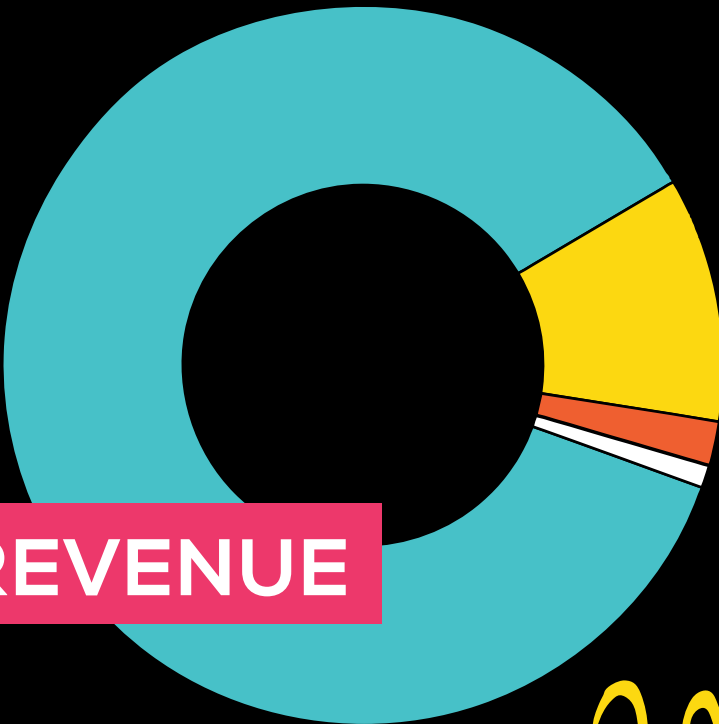
Total Liabilities	\$563,090
Total Net Assets	\$91,804
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$654,894



PROGRAMMING	96%
SUPPORTING SERVICES	4%

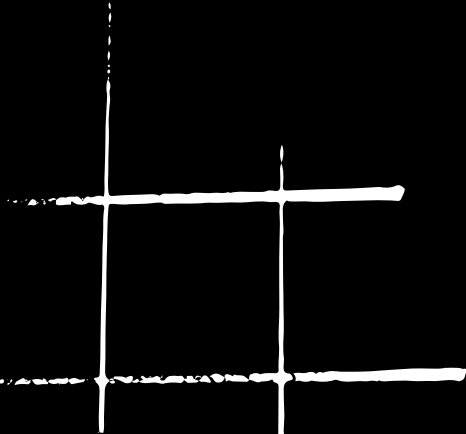
EXPENSES

FY 2022



GOVERNMENTAL GRANTS	87%
DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS	9%
EARNED REVENUES	3%
OTHER TYPES OF INCOME	1%

REVENUE



DISTRICT BRIDGES

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY BY CLASS October 2021 - September 2022

REVENUE	TOTAL PROGRAMS	TOTAL SUPPORTING SERVICES	TOTAL
Contributions & Support			
Total Revenue from Direct Contributions	\$138,109	\$85,960	\$224,069
Total Donated Goods & Services Revenue	\$0.00	\$1,300.00	\$1,300.00
Revenue from Governmental Grants	\$2,021,431	\$0.00	\$2,021,431
Total Contributions & Support	\$2,159,540	\$87,260	\$2,246,800
Total Other Types of Income	\$356	\$12,781	\$13,137
Total Earned Revenues	\$38,962	\$26,397	\$65,359
TOTAL REVENUE	\$2,198,502	\$113,657	\$2,312,159

EXPENDITURES	TOTAL PROGRAMS	TOTAL SUPPORTING SERVICES	TOTAL
Expenses - Personnel			
Grants & Direct Assistance	\$208,929	\$0	\$208,929
Salaries & Related Exp	\$582,176	\$33,219	\$675,259
Contract Service Expenses	\$580,784	\$20,000	\$600,954
Total Expenses - Personnel	\$1,371,889	\$53,219	\$1,425,108
Total Non-Personnel Related Expenses	\$651,192	\$23,881	\$675,073
Total Other Expenses	\$4,613	0	\$4,613
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$2,027,694	\$77,100	\$2,104,794

NET REVENUE	TOTAL PROGRAMS	TOTAL SUPPORTING SERVICES	TOTAL
Net Operating Revenue	\$170,808	\$36,557	\$207,365
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	-\$115,561	\$0	\$0
NET REVENUE	\$55,247	\$36,557	\$91,804

DONORS

\$10,000+

AMAZON (C)
ANDY STEINEM
DHCD

DPR
DSLBD
DONATELLI DEVELOPMENT
PARK 7 LIMITED PARTNERSHIP
EDDIE SUAREZ

LISC
MOLA
NALCAB

\$2,000 - \$9,999

ANC 1A
ASANA PARTNERS
BIRD HELBIZ
CHASE BANK
CHRIS MARTIN
EASTBANC
EXCELON
FWD.US
KATY CHANG
MARILYN AND SCOTT SATIN

MATT LAPIN
NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT COMPANY
NEUTRON HOLDINGS, INC. DBA LIME
PATRICK'S PET CARE
PEPCO
PETER FORTNER
RYAN DASILVA
SAATVA MATTRESS
UIP PROPERTY MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON GAS

\$100 - \$1,999

CAMILLE HAY
CHAD SHUSKEY
CHRISTINA HERNANDEZ
ELIZABETH BLAKESLEE
HALEY RUSSELL
JANE THURBER
LAINE SHAKERDGE
VICKI ROBINSON
ALLISON MCELLIGOTT
AMY BELL
ANDREE WYNKOOP
ANNE BENNETT
CHASE HAHN
CHRISTINE KULUMANI
CRAIG COBINE
DORA CURREA
ELEANOR HOPKINS
JANET CYPHERS
JEAN CIBUZAR
JESSICA BARAKAT
JUDITH PERES
KELLY DINARDO

LENDA WASHINGTON
MATT HIGGINS
MICHAEL SOZAN
RAYMOND GONZALEZ
REGINA MASCIOTRA
ROBERT FREER
TRANSFORMER INC
ZACHARY RYBARCZYK
MONICA MACADAMS
ANTHONY ULYSSES HOLMON
BRADFORD SHELLHAMMER
GAVRIELLA KEYLES
HILARY HANSEN
TOMMY LISIAK
ANDREW SFORZINI
KAREN HARBERT
PAUL FRICK
DAVID WINER
MAX KULLER
PIXIE WINDSOR
TRACY ROSSIN
JOHN MALARKEY
EVETTE BANFIELD

GLENN KELLOGG
LAUREN RICE
MATT MALARKEY
RALPH BRABHAM
SARAH SLOAN
BOBBY BOONE
CAROLINE QUEEN
DAVID DESANTIS
PETER DUDKA
ROSE PREVITE
REBECCA FUNK
CARA CIULLO
ANN STEINEM
CASSANDRA HETHERINGTON
LISA RESCH
MARYANN LUONGO
DONNA EVERS
MATT SUISSA
SHARI WILSON
JOSEPH SHERWOOD
ROBERT WARD
ANDREA VIEIRA



**WE ALL WORK BETTER
WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER.**

