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for Justice today!

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Buffalo, NY 14208

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Letter From The Executive Director



For Open Buffalo and the thousands of community justice allies with whom we have stood shoulder-to-shoulder over the last twelve months, the year 2022 will be forever etched in our collective memory.

This year has been incredibly difficult for Open Buffalo and our Jefferson Avenue community with the white supremacist act of terror that claimed 10 lives and wounded three others down the street from our office. Many have moved on, but we are still recovering after standing strong to meet the immediate needs of residents living in 14208 and neighboring ZIP codes.

Our small team was overwhelmed by the amount of local and national support we received this summer. Dozens of volunteers and offerings of support poured into our organization, equipping us to deliver thousands of relief kits and immediate supports to neighbors in need while also making continued investments in our long-term struggle to equip grassroots leaders with the skills, resources, and opportunities to lead Buffalo and Western New York into a bright and equitable future.

The pain that our community has endured this year has hardened Open Buffalo's resolve to build community resilience. It has increased our capacity to love. It has inspired us to double down on strengthening and uplifting the individuals and families who suffer racial, economic, and ecological injustices every day. In the following pages, I invite you to explore what that looked like in action in 2022.

FRANCHELLE C.H. PARKER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Who We Are

Our Mission

Our mission is to advance racial, economic, and ecological justice. We do so through skill building, network connecting, and activating leadership opportunities. Our goal is for all communities in Western New York to thrive free from discrimination and poverty.

Our Vision

People directly experiencing systemic challenges and inequities that we aim to address will always have a voice in identifying the problems and developing the solutions. An empowered democratic society is key to a joyful, culturally rich community and sustainable planet.

Principles for Action

Love

Responsibility and accountability

Forgiveness, empathy, and restorative justice

Collaboration

Healing

Open Buffalo Staff

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Muhammad Zaman



Who We Are

"Grieve. But don't stay stuck; together we MUST move forward."

Open Buffalo stands steadfast to our commitment to achieve racial equity in Buffalo. That means that families can afford to feed ourselves, we aren't living in a state of constant fear, and that we can actually have joy in our daily lives.

All victims of the Tops shooting and survivors, Jefferson Ave family, Black people, and the entire global family who has been devastated — we have been dealt a gut-wrenching blow. Our memories of the best fried chicken in the city, first jobs, or the last laugh we shared before saying goodbye almost seem too hard to handle. Grieve. But don't stay stuck; together we MUST move forward. I don't have all the answers. But I do know we need each other to create the changes in the streets we so desperately need.

Your grief is not in vain. The vibrant Jefferson Avenue will return. The Buffalo we desire will be created. Fear, greed, and evil will not have the last say.



**RACIAL
ECONOMIC
ECOLOGICAL
JUSTICE**



Statement above published on openbuffalo.org on May 18, 2022



Also, check out:
"Buffalo Is Still Reeling From Racist Massacre"
(VICE News)



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

15

\$500 ECONOMIC
HARDSHIP AWARDS
TO TOPS EMPLOYEES
ON JEFFERSON AVE.

5K

BAGS OF
GROCERIES
DISTRIBUTED

20K

PAIRS OF
DIAPERS
DISBURSED

In the spring of 2022, we shifted our focus to incorporate rapid-response direct service with all of our other leadership and advocacy work. We understood that the community needed resources to grieve and begin to heal.

For three months following the May 14 terrorist attack, we partnered with organizations like Black Love Resists in the Rust to canvas the neighborhood surrounding our office and offer services to the Cold Springs community in any way we could. If individuals needed mental health services, we were able to create access to counseling and other supports. And food was delivered to those who did not have transportation or did not feel safe leaving their homes.

At our headquarters, we distributed perishable and nonperishable grocery bags with our sidewalk engagements and tabling each week. Our goal was to make sure all our community members who came had everything they needed. Open Buffalo has built a brand of distributing free hot lunches in front of our office, so we brought out our grills and cooked, too. We created thousands of opportunities to receive support but also created spaces of trust to speak out and speak up about community issues.

VOTING PROGRAMS

INCLUDING:

National Voter
Registration Day Cookout

Freedom Summer Symposium
Panel Discussion

20

People trained in voter
education, registration,
and phone & text outreach

15K

Phone calls to
educate WNY voters

60K

Personalized empowering &
educational text messages
sent to WNY voters

Civic Engagement is a key component of our work at Open Buffalo. We define civic engagement simply as any activities that inform, impact, & develop the skills, and knowledge individuals may need to have a voice in creating a more effective and empowered democracy. We take pride in our efforts to train community members beyond the basics of voter registration and civic education. Our methods are designed to restore humanity through democracy. In other words, not just asking people in the community if they plan to vote, but more so, asking questions like: What is important to you? How would you improve your community? It's our belief that once you make someone feel welcomed and valued, they are more willing to show interest and speak up.

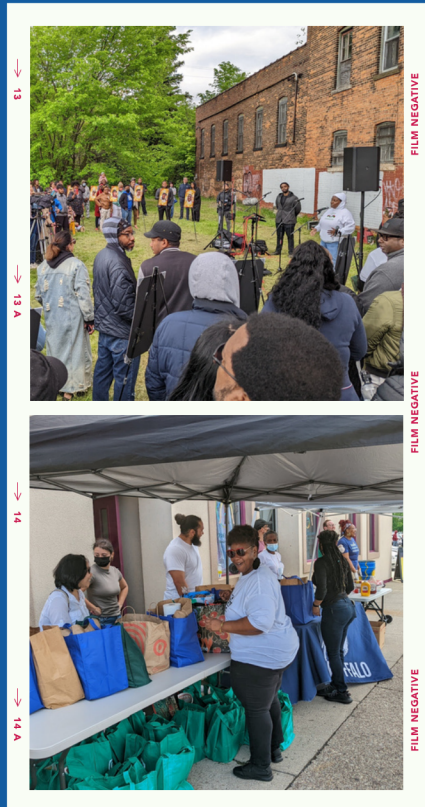


From our annual Sankofa celebration on March 24, 2022! Sankofa is a word and symbol from the Akan Tribe in Ghana. This fundraiser is a time to reflect on what we have achieved, discuss current challenges, and continue to build relationships



Left: Food & fresh produce collaborative community event on July 16, 2022

Upper Right: Community vigil honoring the victims & loved ones affected by the Tops terrorist attack



Bottom Right: One of our 15 pop-up BBQ's, taking place on May 20, 2022



Right: 2nd Annual Color Run with 80 attendees, July 30, 2022

Upper Left: Staff & Summer Youth visit the Providence Farm Collective, August 16, 2022

Bottom Left: 2022 Juneteenth Festival tabling



Left: Freedom Summer Symposium, what it means to be an empowered voter on October 6, 2022

Upper Right: Ecological Justice Training activity, December 3, 2022

Bottom Right: NY Renews Climate, Jobs & Justice Package Campaign Launch, November 16, 2022



RACE, POWER, & PRIVILEGE



Following the domestic terrorist attack on May 14, 2022, the growth and development of the Race, Power & Privilege (RPP) anti-racism training and assessment program was marked by the creation of a new full-time position dedicated expressly to combatting systemic racism.

Open Buffalo understands that oppression operates in insidious, nuanced ways that infect all areas of society. Our program is specifically designed to provide our clients an in-depth, functional understanding of the history of race and institutionalized racism, as well as tools to combat it in the workplace and society.

We believe relationship building to be the cornerstone in dismantling oppression, thus we design trust- and relationship-building activities that give participants safe spaces to think, talk, and feel in ways that they haven't been able to before. RPP and the discussions involved allow participating organizations to critically think about how they view themselves and others. Our unique combination of training and assessments allow institutions and agencies to better understand how "other" communities perceive and interact with them.

Generally, our five-step process takes three to four months and involves specific steps tailored to each client. We like to express it as "a season" that fits in an organization's yearly plan.

The Five-Step RPP Process



Scan to learn more about
Open Buffalo's RPP program

The Impact of RPP

There has been a heightened interest in our trainings from organizations in the community, among both nonprofit and for-profit agencies.

Open Buffalo has developed a key RPP partnership in 2022 with the Western New York Foundation. Under the inspiring leadership of Executive Director Beth Kinsman Gosch, the foundation shares our vision of a racially just nonprofit sector and broader community. In 2023, we will partner to enhance the WNY Foundation's well-respected Impact Capacity Assessment Program (iCAP) with RPP anti-racism methodology. With WNY Foundation's support, we will empower iCAP-participating nonprofits and consultants with knowledge and tools to implement real, anti-racist change.

Looking further into the future, Open Buffalo envisions scaling RPP up to have a deeper impact, across all sectors of society. With the backing of the WNY Foundation and the John R. Oishei Foundation, we have also begun stakeholder conversations about what a long-term, holistic, and region-wide RPP initiative might look like. We are incredibly thankful for these organizations' guidance and support.



As part of our greater mission of skill-building, network connecting and activating leadership opportunities, Open Buffalo had the pleasure of working with the International Institute of Buffalo to host delegates and journalists from Germany and Pakistan in the months of September and December. Critical components of the RPP program played a role in giving our visitors an understanding of race in historical and contemporary contexts, particularly in the Buffalo area.



Leadership Development



At Open Buffalo, we believe that leadership development is the key to unlocking the power we hold in our communities to transform systems of oppression into systems of opportunity and abundance. The long-term objective of our multi-tier leadership development framework is to ensure that decision-makers in our institutions are reflective of every part of our region, value equity, and are committed to eliminating disparities.

We develop leaders from communities directly impacted by racial, economic, and ecological injustice; resource them with tools and networks to drive systems change; and create pathways for them to take on leadership roles in community, nonprofit, and government sectors.

"Ensure that decision-makers in our institutions are reflective of every part of our region, value equity, and are committed to eliminating disparities"

Our innovative curriculum combines historical knowledge of Western New York, community organizing, media and public speaking, research and analysis, legislative advocacy, mentorship, relationship building, and creative problem solving designed to overcome racial, economic, and ecological issues throughout WNY.

Emerging Leaders

T

he Emerging Leaders program has trained nearly 150 WNY change makers in 6 cohorts since its inception in 2015. In 2022, the program was temporarily paused to allow for review and updates, so our energy was focused internally on building up and strengthening the program so that it continues to deliver the exemplary leadership development it has become known for across the region.

The work of revamping the program has been led by the nine alumni on our Emerging Leaders Advisory Board.

Emerging Leaders Advisory Board:

Melissa Archer, Jimmy Darby, Kenya David, Donna Edwards, Bianca Gonzalez, Jelicia Jimenez, Shantelle Patton, Michael Weidrich, and Octavio Villegas

These leaders have met semimonthly since October to review and update the curriculum. The group has designed and facilitated three focus groups to collect alumni feedback on the program and identify areas of the program to improve. The group is currently reviewing the focus group data and identifying program recommendations based on the feedback received. One area that has been identified as an area for improvement is in alumni engagement. The Advisory Board planned and hosted an alumni holiday happy hour in December, the first in a series of upcoming engagement and networking events to reinvigorate relationships among Emerging Leaders alumni.

The new Emerging Leaders 2023 cohort is set to launch in late spring. The application process is currently in review and will be opening in March.



Youth Action



Youth Action is a cohort of young people ages 14-24, in or out of school, who receive free leadership and professional development training, organize service projects in their community, research and analyze issues of concern, and design and implement campaigns to win systemic change on the issues that matter most to them. Since the program began in 2019, we have engaged more than 70 young folks per year and have sustained a pivotal, core leadership group of 12 members.

Youth Action has continued its evolution, training our changemakers in capacities that include trauma-informed care and suicide prevention, combatting human trafficking, creating social change through advocacy, and introduction to organizing. Most recently, the group launched a campaign to create the nation's first text line service for missing children in the city of Buffalo.

This year, Open Buffalo offered a Youth Action Fellowship to three of our most engaged young leaders, Byron Chavis, Temara Cross, and Jontae Griffin. Byron and Jontae worked hard all summer and into the fall on voter engagement and recruiting more Youth Action members. Temara focused her efforts on designing a training guide for young leaders to use to engage their peers on advocacy and civic engagement.

Two of our Fellows, Byron and Jontae, had an opportunity to travel and represent Youth Action at the national Opportunity Youth United Community Action Team convening in Miami in August. They were able to showcase all of Youth Action's efforts in the past year, highlighting some of our most memorable accomplishments like the Color Run or Save Our Children Alert Line. Beyond the presentation, Byron and Jontae had an amazing opportunity to network and witness the brilliance of other young folks across the nation.

80

People attended our 2nd annual Color Run, a paint race!

200

Pairs of sneakers distributed at a back-to-school event

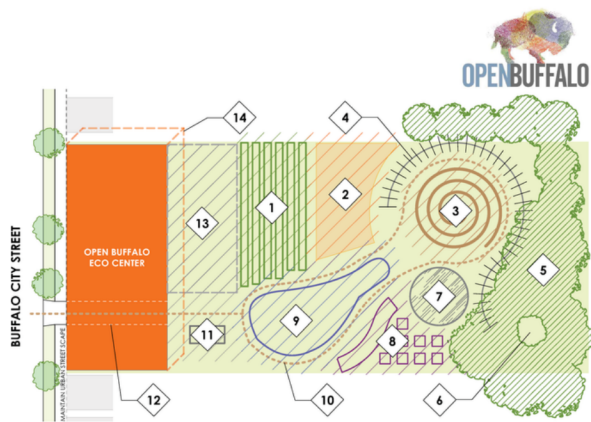
250

Bags of groceries & gifts given to families at our Holiday Toy Drive

Ecological Justice

OPEN BUFFALO ECOLOGY CENTER

The idea to build an ecology center was formed in 2016 after a racist encounter with a local hotel that compromised the safety of our Emerging Leaders and Open Buffalo team. We have designed the Open Buffalo Ecology Center to be a grassroots campus that will allow people to be their authentic selves in a space that prioritizes mental, physical, and spiritual wellness for all visitors.

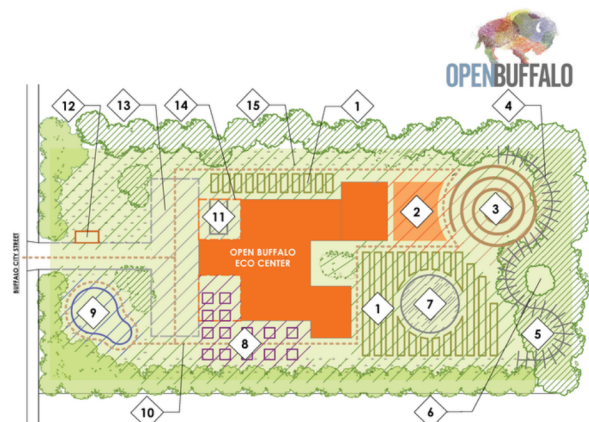


CONCEPT SITE PLAN 1: CONNECTED

SITE ELEMENTS KEY:

1. GARDEN
2. PLAYGROUND AREA
3. LABYRINTH
4. ROPES COURSE OR ECO TRAIL
5. WILDERNESS FOREST
6. SMALL CLEARING/ GATHERING PLACE
7. OUTDOOR CLASSROOM PAVILION
8. COMPOSTING AREA
9. POND/BIORETENTION AREA
10. SITE CIRCULATION
11. BIKE STORAGE
12. DRIVE THRU ON GROUND FLOOR
13. PERMEABLE PARKING AREA
14. FUTURE BUILDING EXPANSION

eco logic STUDIO



CONCEPT SITE PLAN 2: SELF-CONTAINED

SITE ELEMENTS KEY:

1. GARDEN
2. PLAYGROUND AREA
3. LABYRINTH
4. ROPES COURSE OR ECO TRAIL
5. WILDERNESS FOREST
6. SMALL CLEARING/ GATHERING PLACE
7. OUTDOOR CLASSROOM PAVILION
8. COMPOSTING AREA
9. POND/BIORETENTION AREA
10. SITE CIRCULATION
11. BIKE STORAGE
12. ECO SHED COMMUNITY RESOURCE
13. PERMEABLE PARKING AREA
14. FUTURE BUILDING EXPANSION
15. WILDERNESS PLANTINGS

eco logic STUDIO

The Ecology Center is a holistic solution to address the intersecting and systemic challenges faced by Buffalo residents, particularly those on the East Side. The Eco Center model is rooted in environmental sustainability, resident empowerment through leadership development, and economic development that benefits disinvested community members first. The Eco Center will provide much-needed outdoor green space to promote personal and community wellness. It will also feature outdoor recreation and cultural assets that may include an amphitheater, a ropes/activity course, hills for winter sledding, and a hiking trail. Our goal is to develop neighborhood-level climate resilience strategies, prepare communities of color for new green sector jobs, and utilize community-building strategies that create more just, and joyful neighborhoods for us all.

In 2022, we have done foundational work to advance our concept, including: forming a powerful Eco Collective to guide design and public engagement; and gaining acceptance to the national Justice40 Accelerator Program, which "supports climate and environmental justice organizations in building their capacity, partnerships, and readiness to access government funding to implement community-designed solutions."

Eco Collective



After years of planning, Open Buffalo hosted a retreat in November where the Eco Collective convened for the first time. The Eco Collective is an inclusive, diverse group of 18 local visionaries and ambassadors who will help to craft the strategic direction of the Open Buffalo Ecology Center and move its development from ideation to reality over the course of 2023.

While distinct from the other bodies in this group, it includes Open Buffalo Board Members and staff representatives in addition to community partners. The Eco Collective is the primary group of ambassadors for the Eco Center project and gathering place for community guidance and direction.

2023 Eco Collective: Arthur Hall Jr., Athenia Cyrus, Dayatra Hassan, Daycia Clarke, Deirdre Wright, Devon Patterson, Dr. Kush Bhardwaj, Franchelle Parker, Jim Golden, Gregory Glover, Ladaisha Williams, Leslie Nickerson, Max Anderson, Niasha Hamilton, Rachel Orton, Ras Jomo Akono, Sherman Webb-Middlebrooks, & Win Thant



Special Projects

Get The Lead Out

Get The Lead Out (GTLO) is a two-year water equity campaign that we have taken on thanks to coordination, technical support, and resources provided by WE ACT for Environmental Justice. As part of this campaign, Open Buffalo and Citizen Action of NY are responsible for educating city residents on Lead Service Lines (LSL) and how they are detrimental to public health, exceedingly so in low-income areas.

We partner with Heart of the City Neighborhoods, National Resources Defense Council, and BlueConduit, a water analytics company that will be developing an interactive online LSL inventory map. This tool will enable communities to advocate for equitable replacement of these pipes, affecting an estimated 40,000 homes.

Throughout this project, we will not only call on our elected officials to immediately replace all LSLs in Buffalo, but also ensure that BIPOC residents and workers are prioritized in municipal replacement plans.

If you, or someone you know has been impacted by lead, please visit our office and ask to speak with Rachel Orton. You may also contact her at (716) 243-8777 ext. 109 or rachel@openbuffalo.org.

Clean Mobility

This project, *Centering People, Place, and Policy for Buffalo's Clean Mobility Future* (Clean Mobility), is a NYSERDA (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority) funded project focused on addressing inequities in the green energy and green mobility space. The team working on Buffalo's Clean Mobility Future have been convened by Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) WNY and is made up of Heart of the City Neighborhoods, Open Buffalo, the East Side Bike Club, Shared Mobility Inc, Mobility Development Operations, GObike Buffalo, Coalition for Economic Justice, and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus.

The project incorporates unique and innovative investments in the East Side to address important needs, collaborate with additional investment opportunities, and co-create a creative, inclusive, and comprehensive strategy for clean mobility solutions.

These solutions will actively reduce air-pollution, improve transit access, promote mobility programs and infrastructure, while improving health outcomes.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE...

Retiring Board Members: Grace Tate, Paul Vukelic, and Tommy McClam

John Vines, AmeriCorps VISTA 21'-22'

2022 Summer Youth: Kiearra Brown, Nuzhat Bushra, and Omarion Rush

UB Social Impact Fellows: Alex Bakke, Kiara Owen, and Michael Mankiewicz

2022 Volunteers: Amy Crosson & Daughter, Arlene Husband, Ashley Ferrentino, Athenia Cyrus & Children, Brian Webb, Britt White, Courtney Smith, Dublin Chira, Evan Jackson, Hayes, Jeff Jolten, Joita Patterson, Kathleen Piske, Red Murdock & Teammates, Regina Beeman, Rosalyn Hawkins, Samantha Pierce, Sheila Webb, Shelbi Molin, Stephanie Peete, Tarshawn Thompson, Tim Webb, and Triniti Fritts

#JeffersonAveStrong Partners: African Heritage Food Co-Op, American Arbitration Association, Deloitte, Every Bottom Covered, Parent to Parents Board, Pastor Arthur Hall Jr., Rich's Products, Social Change Chicago, and Tops on Jefferson

Special Thanks:

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THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF
OPEN BUFFALO