



## **CEDAR-RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

In fulfillment of its strategic plan, the CRCC addressed community-identified priorities this year in the areas of: *Community Safety, Vaccine Outreach, Opioid Outreach, Renter Assistance & Education, Youth Enrichment Programs, and Neighborhood Improvements.*

CRCC staff and partners conducted programs in 2023 that were supported with outside funding - leveraged by neighborhood-approved NRP (Neighborhood Revitalization Program) resources.

For the 2023 Annual Report we are featuring the following programs and events:

### **❖ Community Safety Specialist Program**

In the beginning of 2023, CRCC secured an extension of one (1) year - with an option for a second year - for a City of Minneapolis RFP to manage a program for "Community Safety Specialists" within our neighborhood.

After a long and arduous process, our team secured over \$450,000 to manage this second-chance employment opportunity program for our neighbors – and invest in them in a new, unique, and direct way.

The goal of this program is to "increase community, resilience, and workforce development in the Cedar-Riverside/West Bank Neighborhood by providing relevant and culturally competent certified community training, as well as providing needed safety services to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood."

Our program focuses on hiring young adults (ages 18-32) in the neighborhood in need of a "second chance" to enter (or re-enter) the workforce - and who need support due to challenges such as opiate addiction, criminal records, and homelessness.

The program aims to engage these young adults in the safety and care of our neighborhood - as well as equip them with skills to de-escalate conflict in the neighborhood at large.

Ambassadors are recruited from the neighborhood, aged between 18-32, many of whom are in sobriety from hard drugs or are recently released from incarceration.

Our program is designed to pay a full-time, living wage while teaching Ambassadors the basic skills of community engagement, organizing, and neighborhood stewardship. Ambassadors are empowered to use these skills to imagine projects that will improve Cedar-Riverside - and are then supported in making those dreams a reality.

Some projects engaged in include regular community cleanups, emergency response to graffiti and vandalism, support of the Cedar Avenue business corridor, and outreach to youth and addicted populations.

The program consists of two elements: 1) Job Training, Certification, and Mentorship; and 2) Ambassador Services.

This program offers three courses: 1) Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), 2) Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS), and 3) Security Officer certifications at the Brian Coyle Community Center to provide a holistic approach to community safety and resilience in the Cedar-Riverside and West Bank neighborhood.

The Job Training, Certification, and Mentorship element provides basic job training for the Ambassador program, continuing mentorship with job skills, learning opportunities about careers, as well as opportunities for certification for select programs.

All participants are paid to attend all trainings. All persons selected to participate in the CSS Program are required to complete basic training prior to starting work as ambassadors.

This training includes First Aid - including NARCAN training; safe unclean needle disposal training; youth outreach and basic de-escalation training; and basic job skills training. CRCC works with several community-based partners to provide these trainings.

The CRCC believes that engaging this at-risk community, in this manner, allows us the opportunity to offer emotional support and life-goal setting sessions.

While with CRCC, Ambassadors must make a "pledge of sobriety" - and engage in regular meetings to ensure that they are making choices that support their recovery and upward mobility. Further, "Ambassador Leads" use one-on-one sessions to identify case-by-case needs and build a targeted growth plan.

Many ambassadors gain access to social services and state aid through our advocacy of them and are educated on how to obtain future resources for themselves.

Upon graduation from the program, Ambassadors and leadership make a "next step transition plan" to ensure they leave our program employed and prepared for success.

The CRCC have been able to deploy Ambassadors throughout the neighborhood - helping community members and keeping areas clean, as well as engaging with folks in areas throughout Cedar Riverside.

We have deployed our Ambassadors at a number of events and programs for the youth, such as the Multi-Cultural Dinner, to help them gain skills in meaningful employment as well as giving them the proper tools to be significant members of our great community.

We also host a variety of inter-generational and inter-cultural forums and meetups to help bridge the gaps of communication that could be difficult if not given any understanding.

As an organization, the CRCC thrives on making our neighborhood a better place for everyone through our programming and involvement throughout the community.

The Ambassadors are working on a limited capacity now that it is December - but have been helping in the local food shelf, as well as doing light patrols and helping with the various homeless encampments that have popped up within the community. They will continue their work at full force around mid-March.

#### ❖ **SEPD Cultural Community Art Program**

CRCC has partnered with “Support and Empowerment of People with Disabilities” (SEPD) to utilize a program written to help bridge connections with neighborhoods and other local organizations.

The Neighborhood Partnership Program with the City of Minneapolis has provided funding to offer culturally relevant art programs - tailored for individuals with disabilities, as well as youth, especially from the Somali and Oromo communities.

The project features a traveling band and short comedic skits - specifically designed to engage and entertain individuals with disabilities, youth, and seniors in Minneapolis utilizing the Somali and Oromo languages.

The culturally relevant art programs offered through this project not only provides entertainment but also serve as a means of fostering inclusivity, empowerment, and community cohesion.

By showcasing performances in the Somali and Oromo languages, the project aims to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of these communities and promote a sense of pride and belonging among participants.

The interactive nature of the traveling band and comedic skits creates opportunities for individuals with disabilities, youth, and seniors to actively engage, express themselves, and form meaningful connections.

This project seeks to promote social integration, break down barriers, and create a more inclusive and vibrant community that embraces and appreciates the diverse talents and contributions of its members. SEPD and CRCC have:

- Engaged over 120 residents/community members in culturally specific art programs/performances in their residences and the neighborhood, including seniors in public housing and other assisted-living facilities and youth in Currie Park and in other areas of the neighborhood.
- Hosted ~ 40 gatherings throughout the community in Oromo and Somali to perform and educate the community.
- Promoted programming to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and reported out results to the neighborhood partner at the end of the program.

❖ **2022-2023 Opioid Outreach & Study – “Understanding the Prevalence and Pathways of Opioid Abuse Among Somali American Youth in Times Of Covid”:**

In the past few years, there has been increasing concern about opioid addiction among Somali American youth in the Twin Cities – and our neighborhood. Community leaders, providers, and parents have been raising the alarm about increasing hospitalizations and deaths in the Somali community.

While community reports are valid and informed by on-the-ground experiences, it has been challenging to ascertain the rate of opioid abuse among this group of youth since cases are often recorded as African American rather than as Somali American.

This is problematic because Somali Americans have unique cultural and linguistic needs, and there is a great need to understand the experiences of Somali youth and their families in the opioid crisis, especially during COVID, which can exacerbate many of the problems that are connected to substance abuse such as mental health symptoms, homelessness, and job loss.

It is also very important to understand the pathways to use. At what age do youth start using? Who introduces them to these drugs? What are the risk and protective factors? What are the contextual issues related to addiction? These are all questions that we need to answer to address this crisis.

CRCC - along with Dr. Saida Abdi from the University of Minnesota - have provided funding and conducted a study that explores the rate of opioid abuse and the pathways to opioid abuse among Somali American youth aged 18-25 in Minneapolis.

Using an experience-based co-design (EBCD) approach, Somali American youth lead, shaped, and engaged in a participatory process to map their journeys with respect to opioid use. Previous research shows that there is great stigma attached to substance abuse.

With the study concluded, we will examine the relationship between COVID, stigma, and opioid abuse among this sample and publish the results shortly.

Our goal in funding the study was to gather experiences from multiple perspectives – youth, family/community, to come together and co-design solutions or recommendations from our findings.

Embracing a participatory, community-based approach to research, we have hired and mentored youth research co-leaders from the Somali American community in the Minneapolis community to lead and partner on this work.

The goal of the project is to provide a baseline for the prevalence and pathways of opioid use among this population to guide policy and practice.

The CRCC hopes to continue to work with the University of Minnesota and Dr. Saida Abdi to continue this work within our community, seeing this is a problem that isn't going away soon.

#### ❖ **Multi-Cultural Dinner 2023**

CRCC - along with Pillsbury United Communities - were able to host a Multi-Cultural Dinner for the community for the first time in three years.

This social gathering brought our diverse community together to share food, live performances, and most importantly were able to connect with each other - celebrating our unique neighborhood and the people who make it such a vibrant and colorful part of the city.

The Multi-Cultural Dinner event took place at the Brian Coyle Center and the adjoining Currie Park. The event was very well attended, bringing together ~400+ attendees from all walks of lives and cultures.

One of the biggest focuses of the Multi-Cultural Dinner was to bring all the multicultural community groups together.

Attendees included residents, business owners, institutions, state, county, and city elected officials and their employees, and other service providers who are living, learning, and working in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood to come together and share delicious meals from all cultures, share stories, while networking and getting to know one another.

This is also a unique opportunity for all those connected to the Cedar Riverside community to enjoy international cuisine from local restaurants, watch live performances, and most importantly connect with each other.

The event is where partnerships and collaborations are made that bridge the gap between Residents, Business Owners as well as Government Officials, these relationships will help build on community assets and increase opportunities for full participation of people and organizations of West Bank in the arts, culture, the local business community, and society at large.

#### ❖ **Somali Independence Day 2023**

During the Summer CRCC was able to host a celebration of Somali Independence Day at Currie Park.

The outdoor event had live performances from local artists which included dances and spoken word poetry. There were also games and attractions for the kids to participate in as well as a dunk tank and many food truck vendors.

The event attracted many people throughout the area and helped educate people who weren't aware of Somali Independence Day as well as helping us celebrate the occasion.

#### ❖ **2023 Vaccine Outreach and Education for COVID-19**

With funding from the Minnesota Council on Foundations, CRCC executed an educational and promotional project to encourage members of the East African community from Cedar Riverside and around the Twin Cities to receive their COVID vaccination shots.

Although people of all ages were engaged, our outreach teams focused their efforts to encourage school-age young people to get their shots before, or as soon as possible after returning to classes in the fall.

During the project, we enjoyed the benefit of particularly strong partnerships with Brian Coyle Center/Pillsbury United Communities and People's Center Clinics and Services - with whom we met weekly to discuss project progress and strategies for encouraging people of all ages to get vaccinated.

Over the course of the project, our team of six East African project outreach workers made one-on-one connections with more than 1,500 people by tabling at community functions/celebrations, community vaccination and flu shot clinics, soccer tournaments, mosques, retail and grocery stores, and restaurants.

Our team reported an additional 20,000+ contacts with people through a variety of channels including Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram. Though counts are not available, more

community members were reached through culturally tailored programs shared on East African media outlets.

❖ **2023 Ward 6 Candidate Forum:**

On September 14th, 2023, Cedar Riverside Community Council along with Seward Neighborhood, Elliot Park, Ayada Leads and League of Women Voters Minneapolis, hosted the Ward 6 candidate forum.

The event was held inside the Brian Coyle Gym - and televised on MCN cable channel 6. Candidates Guy Gaskin, Jamal Osman, Kayseh Magan and Tiger Worku fielded questions from community members present, as well as receiving questions from online attendees.

The questions and event were moderated by the League of Women Voters. The livestream and unedited recording can be viewed at [lwvmpls.org](http://lwvmpls.org).

❖ **2023 Community Safety Meetings:**

CRCC has been conducting regular Community Safety Meetings with various community partners - virtually and in-person at Brian Coyle Community Center.

These meetings have facilitated many conversations that go on throughout the community concerning overall safety and well-being.

The meetings consist of community updates on crime and safety - usually facilitated by Carla Nelson from the Minneapolis Department of Crime and Safety. Carla often brings in Police Officers from the MPD, as well as the MPRB Park Police, to give updates on crime that has happened throughout the community, as well as providing resources to people to help deal and cope with these issues.

Community members are also provided time to voice their concerns and speak directly to officials who attend these meetings - from police officers, council members, and owner-operators of businesses and residential complexes in the Cedar Riverside area.

The meeting serves as a forum to get all these people together that normally would be in the same space to talk to each other. The CRCC believes these meetings give community members a place to speak and voice the concerns that have a direct impact on them and their families in a safe and welcoming place.

The CRCC has also worked to expand these meetings to include educational and enrichment programs dealing with things like nutrition and mental health. We have partnered with Nawal Hirsi - the Community Engagement Manager at M Health Fairview - to do specialized 1-hour sessions every quarter highlighting different aspects of health that fall into the overall scope of general safety – and the CRCC believes health is in an important part of community safety.

These meetings are on a range of subjects - anything from eating healthier to overcoming stigmas of mental health to learning how to deal with stress. Hopefully, by doing this, we can answer questions or takeaway the misconceptions of a lot of these issues so we can get to helping people in all aspects of life.

**/END 2023 CRCC ANNUAL REPORT**