

Arkansans Working to Close the Equity Gap

Part of a series exploring issues from
The Community Foundation's
Aspire Arkansas report.

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November 2021

ENGAGE

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We Are Not in the Same Boat



Over the past year, many have said we are all weathering the same storm, but we are not in the same boat. Some are in a luxury ocean liner while others are on a raft with no sail.

The data from AspireArkansas.org — Arkansas Community Foundation’s source of online data on education, healthcare, families and communities — details significant gaps for racial and ethnic minorities in our state.

AspireArkansas data shows more Blacks are incarcerated. Fewer Hispanics have a high school degree. More Blacks are unemployed. More minority children are living in poverty. You can find the details of these differences at AspireArkansas.org/racial-equity.

What are we doing to close these gaps? In this issue of *ENGAGE*, we explore how Arkansans are identifying inequality and moving toward racial equity.

Best regards,

Heather Larkin
President and CEO



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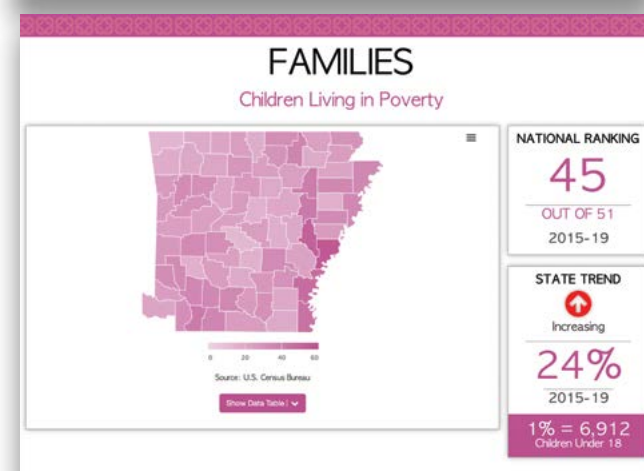
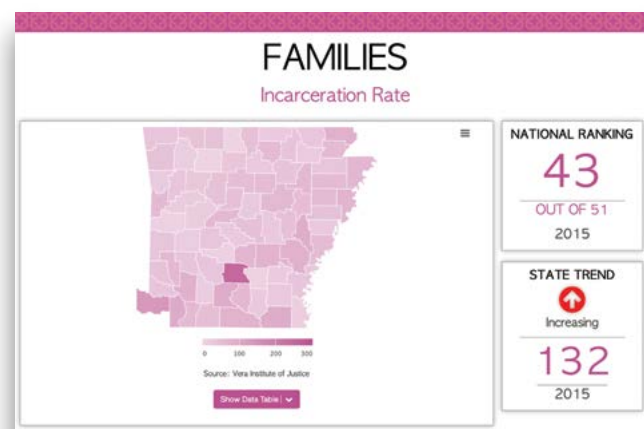
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Chief Communications Officer and Editor — Jessica Hughes Ford

Contributor — Jessica Szenher



Find data on racial equity at aspirearkansas.org/families/incarceration-rate and aspirearkansas.org/families/children-living-in-poverty

On the cover: Ruthie Pride and Sharon Washington, (front) Noni Ashanti, Patricia Ashanti and Laverne Sims encourage each other in their quest to increase their income, improve their credit, buy homes and save for the future.

Delta Circles is Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

By Kimberly Dishongh



Ruthie Pride, Laverne Sims, Patricia Ashanti, Sharon Washington and Noni Ashanti are involved with Delta Circles, a nonprofit organization founded by Patricia Ashanti. Pride, Sims and Ashanti have a standing 5 a.m. appointment for an inspirational phone call.

Birthdays weren't a big event in Laverne Sims' family throughout her childhood. Now she celebrates big, with some like-minded women she met through a nonprofit organization, Delta Circles.

"I didn't get a lot of presents growing up," said Sims, whose 63rd birthday was in September. She was one of seven children raised by a single mother in Marvell. Money was tight back then, she realizes, though fresh food from her family's garden was plentiful enough that she didn't realize they lived in poverty.

Two years ago, Sims helped kick off a birthday club, with each member of her Delta Circles group contributing \$25 to the birthday honoree on her special day.

"We started out collecting \$25 from everyone, to receive a gift of \$250 on our birthdays," Pride said, adding that the birthday club total has since risen to \$500.

It's not mad money, though. It's a boost to their financial health.

"It is actually money that we are saving by giving it back," she explained. "It's a gift to ourselves."

Saving money, spending smart and supporting one another are cornerstones of Delta Circles, founded by Patricia Ashanti in 2009 with a goal of breaking the generational cycle of poverty in Arkansas's Delta.

"I felt like my mission in life was to help people with their finances," said Ashanti, who initially wanted to be a financial advisor but realized she desired a broader, more social influence.

Ashanti learned about the book *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-by World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life* by Philip E. DeVol while she was participating in another training session. Delta Circles started off with workshops based on that book.

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Ashanti didn't set out to focus her efforts on Black women, but she has found that is the demographic most benefiting from her services.

"When you look in the Black community, you have more of the people who are barely making it – minimum wage, and that that's pretty much what we're making is the minimum," Ashanti said.

Phillips County, where 62.3% of the population in 2019, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, had a median income of \$29,320, the lowest in the state. The average median income for Arkansas between 2015 and 2019 was \$47,597, a number that puts the state third to last in the nation. "When it comes to generational poverty, some of the things that you do in life, you don't understand why you do it until you go back and think," said Ashanti. "Like, the reason I don't get things fixed is that when I was growing up things weren't fixed, so I don't know that's what I'm supposed to do. I don't even know that's a problem."

Small problems, she explained, can turn into bigger problems if they aren't fixed — a health issue, for example, that isn't addressed because there is no health insurance or disposable cash can turn into a chronic or critical issue.

"It's just feeling overwhelmed, feeling like you don't have enough, living in a state of lack and then sometimes even being comfortable with that," Ashanti said. "Understanding some of what we are living through is because that's, generational, what we came from. So now we have to shift, and we have to recognize why we think this way." Sims had recently moved back to Phillips County after retiring from Ford Motor Co. in Chicago.

She's an AmeriCorps Vista worker, with a job in community service with the Boys and Girls Club Adult Development Center in Marvell, and she grudgingly went to Ashanti's Getting Ahead class at her boss's direction.

"She wanted to teach us how to be financially secure, how to save money, how to buy your own house, how to come from under poverty. That was her whole thing," said Sims, who started enjoying the class in spite of her reservations. She had been looking for friends who, like her, wanted to be more financially stable. She found the group she needed through Delta Circles.

The importance of having alternate sources of income is one of the first things she learned about after joining Delta Circles in 2017. Alternate sources could include rental property, second jobs or entrepreneurial activities that allowed them to set aside additional funds.

"We talked about it, and we all got three streams of financing," she said. "I think we saved about \$10,000 together that year. We were shocked."

Sims has since raised her two-year savings goal to \$100,000. She is pursuing an associate's degree in science and has just bought a fixer-upper with an acre of land. She also enjoys donating money, to animal-related charities and to those that benefit children.

Residents in Phillips County give 1.4% of their salaries to charity, according to the Internal Revenue Service. Charitable donations are vital for nonprofits that can address needs within a community, improving life for the people who live there.

She is considering investing in other properties that she can flip as well, thus adding to her savings coffers.

She hopes to pass on her financial knowledge to her nieces and nephews. She gives them small jobs to do around her house and pays them for their work. She talks with them about how much to save and how much they might spend. "You just want your nieces and nephews to see things in a different way when you have grown up the way you have," she said.

Ruthie Pride, another woman in the group, is hoping to change her children's future as well, by leaving a house to each of her four children, either to live in or to use as rental property.

When she found her way to Delta Circles she had just decided to go to graduate school, hoping a master's degree in Library Science Advanced Management would increase her income potential.

She could pay her tuition and fees in \$800-\$900 installments, and she started selling cosmetics to help her reach that goal.

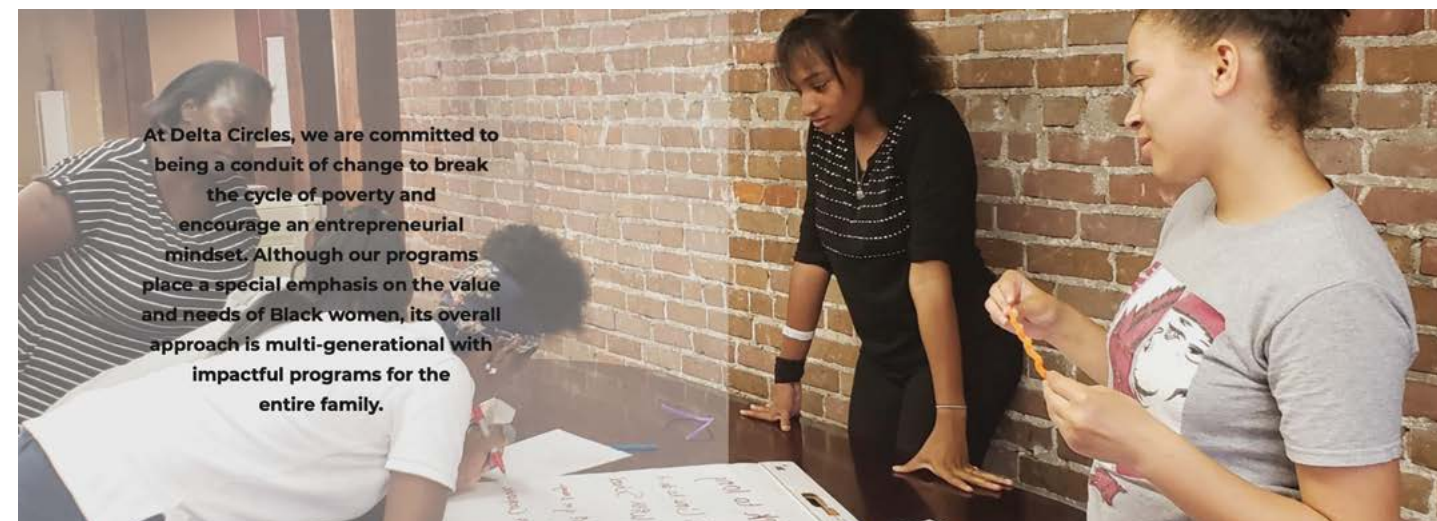
Her husband, a pastor, helped her reach her goal by letting his colleagues know about gift baskets she assembled for Christmas and Valentine's Day.

Pride, who got pregnant at 15 and dropped out of school, might have been destined for a life of poverty based on her circumstances. In Phillips County in 2019, Arkansas Department of Health records show there were 79 live births per 1,000 15-19 year old girls. Arkansas's teen pregnancy rate (30 per 1,000) is much higher than the national average (17 per 1,000), and statewide the rate is higher for Black and African-American teens, with 43 per 1,000, than for White teens, with 27 per 1,000.

Teen pregnancy often derails education plans, which can lead to young mothers taking lower-paying jobs, thus furthering the cycle of poverty in their families. Pride, though, had been influenced by an aunt, a woman who worked as a nanny all over the country and who made a habit of buying for Pride and her sister the things she saw her wealthy clients buy for their own children. As a child, Pride told her aunt she wanted a trailer and her aunt bought one.

Pride, now 56, moved away from the area for a couple of years, but moved back to care for her aunt after she suffered a stroke. She was so determined to get her GED that she walked five miles each way to take a class at Phillips County Community College to complete a program.

A teacher in the program complained about her tardiness at one point. Pride explained that she got up at 4 a.m. to bathe



her baby and dress him, then help her aunt bathe and dress so she could watch the baby during school.

"My teacher said not to worry about it after that," she said. Pride started college right after she finished her GED, not wanting to lose momentum, but still faced struggles. She lived in the trailer her aunt had bought until her growing family needed more space and then moved into low-income housing.

In Phillips County, 36% of occupied housing units are owned by Black or African Americans, well below the statewide average of 44%. Home ownership rates are linked to neighborhood stability and civic participation because property serves as a vital asset for a family as well as an investment in a community. The home ownership rate for White and Hispanic people in Phillips County is 67%. Pride had dreamed for years of owning a home but had been thwarted over and over, by self-doubt and credit issues, and she had all but given up when a co-worker pointed her to a house that checked off everything on her list. She got the keys 18 years ago, and last year she paid off the mortgage.

She and her husband had been planning to pay off the home, but he got sick with cancer. He passed away in January and she wasn't sure she would be able to do it alone.

"It really devastated me, but I wanted to continue on the plans that we had," Pride said. "We were going to pay off our house in March because that was my birthday and then our anniversary was on March 25," she said. "So then on March 23, I said, 'OK, come on Ruthie, you got some things you need to be doing.'"

She called around to all of the banks where she had set up accounts, checking balances and withdrawal information. "I always learned, a long time ago, to diversify, but not knowing what diversify means... I just thought that meant put money everywhere, in different banks and credit unions, just different things," she explained.

In the beginning of their Delta Circles journey, Ashanti

brought in experts to talk about finances — people representing credit unions, Southern Bancorp, Partners Bank and others.

With their newfound knowledge, the women in the Circle discussed financial savings strategies.

The \$10,000 they saved the first year was the beginning of the Women Increasing Net-Worth (WIN) program. While they saved, the women increased their credit scores by an average of 89 points that year. They explored the stock market and started doing some investing, excited about the possibilities for the future.

Pride, Ashanti and Sims have daily 5 a.m. prayer calls, talking and praying together before they start their workdays. They pray for each other, for themselves, for their families and for city and state leaders. They feel blessed to have connected.

"Being in an impoverished community, so many people have that poverty-mindset and when you're trying to work hard to come out of that norm, you don't find a lot of like-minded people," Pride said. "When you're around like-minded people, the skies are the limit for me, because when I'm talking to somebody that thinks kind of like me, they aren't looking at me crazy, looking at me sideways like, 'Oh, she's just a dreamer, that's not what's going to happen.' When we come together and we listen to each other, we feed off each other's conversations. It just empowers us all the more and even when we get off our prayer call at 5 in the morning, we are just so excited for the day."



DELTA CIRCLES
ENDING POVERTY • CHANGING MINDSETS



100 Black Men Nonprofit Helps Communities Rise Up



UA Little Rock student Jordan Grice has been mentored by 100 Black Men of Greater Little Rock Vice President Wendell Scales for two years, since Grice first attended the Smart Academy.

Health and wellness, mentorship, education and economic development are the focus for 100 Black Men of Greater Little Rock as they volunteer to fill the gaps in their communities that allow all to rise to their greatest potential.

These are big goals. And the members of 100 Black Men are up to the task. They consistently engineer and execute programs that move — sometimes quickly and often inch by inch — toward a better outcome for the individuals and communities they serve.

This summer the organization partnered with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock; Ambitious Girls, Inc.; Central Arkansas Water; and the Arkansas National Guard to hold the H2O Leadership Institute. This is a weeklong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) program for 15 students in grades 7-12 from eight schools.

“We know our community needs to provide skill development for the next generation of leaders and the H2O Leadership Institute is a gateway for life-changing exposure,” said Wendell Scales Jr., vice president of 100

Black Men. “We believe this could be the very piece our organization was missing to advance economic development with a commitment to our youth.”

The program provided career access, regional exposure, skill development and networking opportunities to H2O participants hosted at partner locations. According to Vernard Henley, assistant dean of the Donaghey College of STEM at UA Little Rock, there are plenty of programs for exceptional students, but there are limited opportunities for other students who do not have perfect ACT scores and 4.0 GPA. H2O Leadership Academy is unique in providing academic and leadership opportunities to academically capable students who are often overlooked.

A new 100 Black Men initiative, funded by a grant from the Building Black Communities Fund at Arkansas Community Foundation, is a partnership with Electus Global Education that provides a unique financial literacy tool — Life Hub Learning Center — to 40 mentees and middle school participants.

“Each student receives a laptop equipped with Microsoft Suite and a tool that deposits funds to their debit card for every financial micro-task completed,” said Scales. “The

participants have the ability to earn a total of \$300 in an eight-week period as they earn financial literacy certification.”

The backbone of 100 Black Men, which today numbers closer to 40 than 100, is the Smart Academy, an annual fall leadership development program that not only helps young Black men mature and progress toward college and careers, it also serves to add more members to the organization. The motto is, “What you see is what you’ll be.”

Take Jordan Grice, 19, who first met Scales two years ago after Grice’s sister was a part of a STEM program sponsored by 100 Black Men. The Maumelle High School student and baseball player heard about the Smart Academy from his mother, and Scales became his mentor in the program.

“The best lesson I learned as a Smart Academy scholar was to be myself,” Grice said. “It gave me a chance to meet people like me in a friendly environment and taught me communication and social skills.”

A year after he attended as a scholar, Grice came back to the Academy as a peer mentor, helping other young men 13-17 navigate the curriculum. He didn’t use a heavy hand with the younger boys, rather he took the position of an older brother and friend.

“I knew some things they did not know, and I helped them. But they helped me, too,” said Grice. “I wanted to be someone they could trust and to be understandable to them, not tell them what to do or dictate their actions.”

That’s a pretty good definition of a mentor.

Now a scholarship student at UA Little Rock and a member of the prestigious Chancellor’s Leadership Corps, Grice has continued to participate in Smart Academy activities, giving the perspective and example of a college student to younger participants. His chosen career as a high school baseball coach will put him in line as an excellent potential member of 100 Men of Greater Little Rock when his time comes.

“From the first week of orientation a couple of years ago to now, my goal has been to create a pipeline that will continue the work of our organization into the future,” Scales said. “We can’t function without the next man stepping up. I hope when Jordan is ready to become a member, he can become one of the leaders of our organization to continue serving our community.”

That seems likely as the serious and deep-voiced

college student describes his vision of himself as a high school baseball coach. “There are lots of factors that go into who plays on a baseball team, and I want to play the best players, not just the ones advocated by politics or boosters. I want to help others, and to make the system fair to everyone,” said Grice.

In addition to grant funding, 100 Black Men of Greater Little Rock is also supported by events. Attending or becoming a corporate sponsor for the Christmas Gala planned for Dec. 17 is a way to further the goals of the organization. For more information about volunteering or membership email littlerock100@gmail.com or follow 100blackmengreaterlr.org.



Wendell Scales and Jordan Grice have developed a friendship and mentoring relationship that Scales hopes will one day result in Grice's membership in 100 Black Men.



Feed Your Brain — Alimenta Tu Cerebro: Filling the Literacy Gap in Northwest Arkansas

Third grade is an important educational milestone. Reading proficiency by the third grade is directly correlated to whether a student will graduate high school, proving that early literacy skills are critical to a successful school experience.

According to the 2021 Kids Count Data Book published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 69% of Arkansas students entered the fourth grade are not proficient in reading. Data from the Arkansas Department of Education shows that this number is even worse for Black students at 78% and Latinx students at 72%.

OneCommunity, a nonprofit in northwest Arkansas, is working to change these statistics through their Feed Your Brain program. Started in 2013, Feed Your Brain — Alimenta Tu Cerebro (FYB) is a seven-week, summer family literacy program that promotes reading bilingual books through fun, interactive experiences. This program was started thanks to the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-level Reading, an initiative of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

“It helps reduce summer learning loss,” said Dr. Diana Gonzales Worthen, director of OneCommunity. “This loss is a common occurrence for children in low-income families

who don’t have the same access to educational opportunities over the summer. Our curriculum is designed to encourage parents and kids to read as a family at home.”

The program is being implemented in Springdale and Fayetteville. One of the more innovative and impactful ways the FYB summer program works is by providing culturally responsive books. “Because we serve so many Latinx and some Marshallese families, having books in their native language is important for promoting reading at home,” said Worthen. “Because the books are culturally appropriate for the families we serve, it really brings families together.”

The program uses prizes and reading goals to encourage participation. Worthen laughs as she recalls a parent named Carla sharing that her three children only read 90 books between them. “As if 90 books isn’t a lot! These reading incentives have been a great way to encourage participation,” said Worthen. “There are prizes every week and we have a party at the end of the summer to celebrate. This is good, free fun for families.”

In 2013 when the program first started, 10 families read 270 books. In 2021 there are over 180 families and 478 children participating who have read 9,677 books. They hope to reach 10,000 books soon.

Special relationships have developed between the staff and volunteers and the families they are helping. “The children are learning another language, like Spanish. And some

“Oh, this program is excellent. My little girl learned to read during the summer with all the books from the program, and she just started first grade. Every night I hear ‘Mommy, we have to read a book.’ We read 40 books this summer.”

— Maria, parent of a student in the Feed Your Brain summer program



Maria Olivarez participated in the Feed Your Brain program at Parson Hills and reads lyrics to one of the bilingual nursery rhymes to her daughters.



Anja participated in the Feed Your Brain program in Fayetteville at Lewis Plaza. Celebrating at the end of the year program, Anja got to pick her favorite book to keep.

moms are also learning English,” said Lulu Lopez, a staff member working with the FYB program.

“This year was a little different because of the pandemic,” said Miriam, a parent in the program. “I was looking for help for my kids so they could continue being educated over the summer. I went directly to Lulu’s office to look for books my kids to read. They read 240 books! It helped them, but it also helped me.”

One unique aspect of the program is that it goes where the families are instead of making them come to the center. “We go to HUD housing areas and partner with summer lunch programs to make sure that families can still get books and resources even if they don’t have transportation,” said Worthen. “One family would literally be waiting on the front lawn for us to arrive to start reading to them.”

Keiko Yoshiki has volunteered for 61 hours in the FYB program. “I like it because I get to help out our community. It is not just improving literacy for kids, but also helping with whole families,” said Yoshiki. “If they aren’t available to come get their books, we take books to their houses. Many families don’t have adequate transportation. This gives us a chance to meet and talk with them about other issues.”

“We were getting food at the school lunch program, and we received a flyer,” said Melissa, a parent in the program. “My kids loved it. It gave us something to do to keep the older one up on his reading for school. We all got to sit down and read together. My oldest son would do most of the reading. When my middle child would watch the older one read, it made him more interested in the books.”

The FYB program partners with Scholastic and local funders so that books are either donated or less expensive. “We have such great partners. We’ve received grants from the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame, a Fayetteville Community Development Block grant, and we also get funds from Raising Cane’s restaurant in Fayetteville, among other funders,” said Worthen.

“The pandemic really showed us how deep the needs were locally. When we partnered with local summer food distribution programs, we were able to offer families more than just something to eat. It went from ‘grab and go’ to ‘grab and read.’ Especially for children and families in quarantine who were struggling. We were able to give them something meaningful to do — read.”



Blackbelt Voices Fills Gap in What It Means to Be Southern



Adena White, Katrina Dupins and Kara Wilkins, producers of the BlackBelt Voices podcast.

What comes to mind when you think of the word Southern?

For Adena White, a native Arkansan raised in the small community of Center Ridge, the word Southern was not an identity she believed she could fully claim despite her upbringing in rural Conway County.

“Being Southern is something that is obviously part of my cultural identity by virtue of where I grew up but labeling myself as such did not feel consistent with how people generally used the word,” said White.

White said that when people both inside and outside the South refer to Southerners, they tend to have white folks in mind. Whether it’s a negative stereotype about people from the region or the “heritage, not hate” adage used in defense of the Confederate battle flag, white Southerners are typically the unspoken subjects when it comes to defining the people and culture of the southeastern United States.

This became more evident during the 2016 election season and the months following the election. “Presidential candidates on the right spoke of Black people in terms of the ‘inner cities,’ particularly Chicago,” White recalled. “And people on the left expressed disdain for the South after the election of Donald Trump. I read tweets that said, ‘throw the whole South away,’ even though most Black people in the U.S. live in the South and overwhelmingly did not vote for Donald Trump.”

A public relations and communications professional by trade, White wanted to use her writing skills to share the stories of Black Southerners with a goal to change the narrative about the South. She decided on the name Blackbelt Voices for the blog, a word inspired by the Black Belt region that stretches across hundreds of counties in the southeastern U.S. The term describes both the dark, fertile soil that is prevalent in the crescent-shaped area and the large population of Black Americans who reside there.

“I wanted to use this platform to share more stories of Black folks beyond what we typically see in mainstream media,” White said. “The medium changed from a written blog to a podcast, but the message



remained the same — to tell stories from and about Black folks down South.”

The Blackbelt Voices team consists of White; her sister, Katrina Dupins, a PR professional and former TV news producer; and Kara Wilkins, a consultant with whom White became acquainted through their membership in a PR industry association. The trio launched the first episode of Blackbelt Voices on September 25, 2019. They have since published 23 episodes spanning two seasons with plans to release the third season this fall.

Since its inception, Blackbelt Voices has been featured by Apple Podcasts, attracting the attention of Vanity Fair and O, The Oprah Magazine, the latter sharing the podcast in a roundup of “The 15 Best Educational Podcasts for You to Expand Your Mind.”

“We never imagined this podcast would attract the attention it has,” Wilkins said. “There is an appetite for this content, and we are delighted to be able to share these stories that center Black Southerners with a large audience.”

Dupins said it’s fulfilling to produce a show that challenges listeners’ existing ways of thinking. “People have shared with me that they learned something from the podcast, or it gave them a new perspective they hadn’t considered prior to listening to our show,” she said.

She referenced the podcast’s third episode that featured Carmeon Hamilton, a Memphis-based interior designer and social media influencer who provides design services and plant consulting to clients.

“I know of a few people, myself included, who began decorating their homes with plants based on the recommendations Carmeon provided in that episode,” Dupins said. “It wasn’t hard-hitting journalism or deep, thought-provoking content, but it inspired people. And that means a lot.”

Another episode that has impacted the Blackbelt Voices team is the story of Marvin Leonard Williams, a Black man who died in police custody in 1960 after being taken to the Faulkner County jail for alleged public intoxication. Twenty-five years later, the family received a letter from a jailed witness that revealed that Marvin’s death resulted not from falling down a flight of stairs but from being beaten by officers. Marvin’s brother, Ronnie Williams, helped get the case reopened in 1985. He spoke to Blackbelt Voices about his brother’s death, the 25-year cover-up and the murder trial.

“Marvin had worth; he had value,” Williams said in the podcast interview. “He had tremendous potential, and he didn’t get a chance to realize his potential.”

Ronnie Williams retired from University of Central Arkansas last spring after serving the institution for more than 30 years, most recently as its vice president for student services and institutional diversity. He is a pillar on campus and in Conway; UCA renamed its student center in his honor in August. Despite his active involvement in the community, Williams said it has not always been easy to work in the city where his brother was murdered.

“I was hurt in 1985. I was disappointed in 1985. And I really



“From the former jail cell where Marvin Leonard Williams was found dead 60 years ago, Ronnie Williams displays military photos of his older brother. Ronnie shared Marvin’s story on a two-part episode of the Blackbelt Voices podcast.”



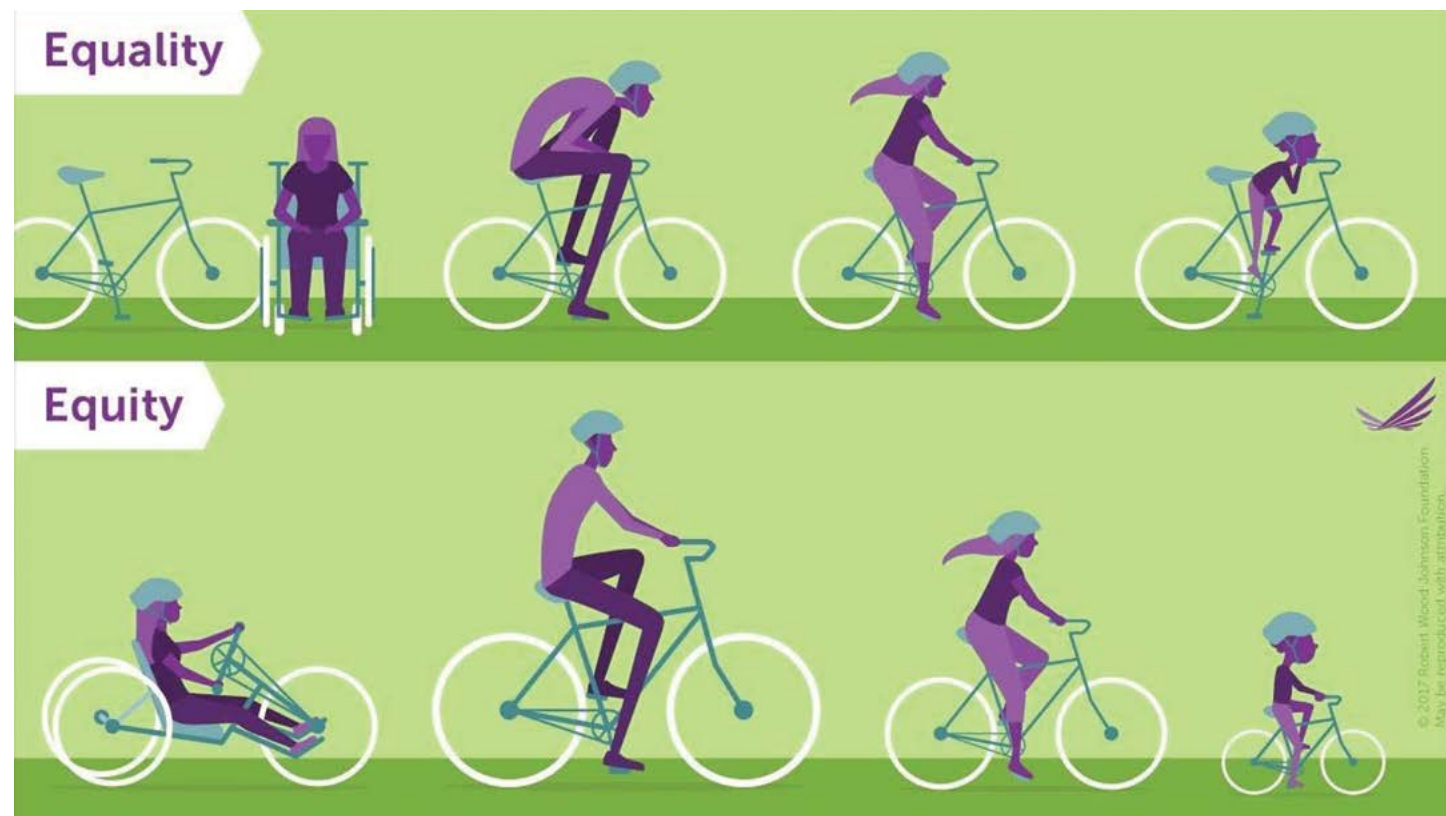
wanted to leave and did for a short period of time,” Williams said. “But I’m a person of faith, and God has a way of bringing us back to those places that we really want to run away from.”

“Over the years, I’ve witnessed a city that has grown and has progressed and has embraced diversity now in ways that I never dreamed it would. And that has really kept me connected. ... [Conway] is not the same city that it was in 1960. It doesn’t change what happened in 1960; 1960 happened and 1984-85 happened. But the city is a better place now.”

Those interested in listening to more stories like these can download episodes of the Blackbelt Voices podcast on most streaming platforms, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify and Google Podcasts. To learn more about Blackbelt Voices, visit blackbeltvoices.com and follow [@blackbeltvoices](https://twitter.com/blackbeltvoices) on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Arkansas Minority Health Commission Increases Awareness of Health Disparities



Arkansans need to increase awareness of racial and ethnic health disparities, improve cultural competence in the healthcare workforce and increase diversity in the healthcare workforce. These recommendations come from the Arkansas Minority Health Commission's 2019 Arkansas Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Survey.

"Close to half of Black and Hispanic residents think constantly about race in healthcare situations, whereas white people almost never do. More than 90% of healthcare professionals are White, leading to differences in attitudes about personal health issues and delivery methods," said Beatriz Mondragon, Grants Coordinator and Program Manager at the Arkansas Minority Health Commission.

Most minority patients see healthcare professionals who are not minorities. And often minority patients come out of an appointment with medication prescriptions and more questions than answers, according to Mondragon. Doctors and other healthcare professionals who don't understand cultural differences are unable to successfully communicate critical healthcare messages.

The 2019 survey was undertaken by the Minority Health Commission at the direction of Arkansas General Assembly

legislation as an important tool to help understand health differences, commonalities, behaviors and practices among racial and ethnic groups. In partnership with the University of Arkansas Little Rock Survey Research Center, the commission gathered data on the perceptions, opinions, attitudes, behaviors and knowledge of Arkansans within specific racial and ethnic groups through telephone interviews with 2,330 residents in Black Urban, White Urban, Black Rural, White Rural and Hispanic groups.

The survey reported significant differences among the five groups with Black Urban Arkansans having the lowest percentage of respondents viewing relations as "very good." The White Urban group is significantly more likely to rate their health "excellent" or "very good" compared to other groups. The Hispanic group is significantly more likely to seek healthcare at a public clinic, whereas White and Black groups are more likely to go to a doctor's office. Minority groups are more likely to view their choices as limited on where to go to receive care.

The survey report states that "where a person lives, works and plays has an impact on attitudes and perceptions of race relations, personal healthcare practices and healthcare delivery. Residents in mostly minority communities continue to have lower socioeconomic status, greater barriers to healthcare access and greater risks for, and burden of, disease compared with the general population in our state."

The commission aims to help bridge the gap between the health status of minority populations and that of majority populations. They want to address the health disparities in minority communities, educate minority communities on healthier lifestyles and promote awareness of services and accessibility within the healthcare system.

"Our first audience for the report was state legislators and the governor, who received the information so that they can make changes to improve our state's healthcare system," Mondragon said. "We also provide the survey on our website at arminorityhealth.com, commission events, health fairs and annual conferences open to the public on the State of Minority Health."

A culturally competent system is one that is capable of delivering the highest quality care to every patient regardless of race, ethnicity, culture or language proficiency. Barriers indicated in the survey include lack of interpreter services and a lack of diversity in Arkansas' healthcare workforce. The survey declares, "Knowledge of cultural factors impacting health and the standards of care in treating diverse patients must be understood by all providers, including support staff in clinics and hospitals."

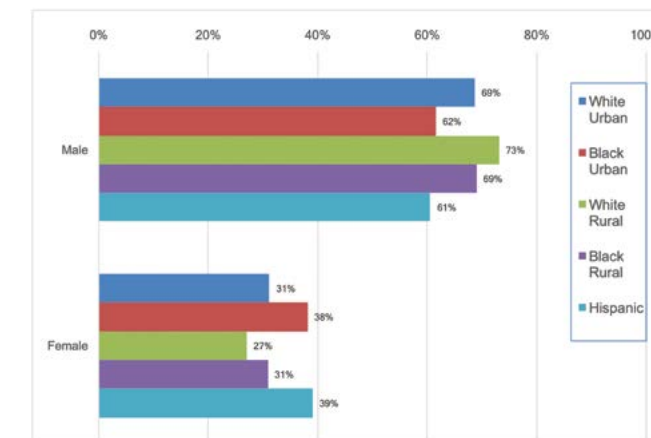
An additional survey of the state's healthcare workforce revealed that racial and ethnic diversity found in the state's population is not reflected in the healthcare system. "Increased diversity in the state's healthcare workforce could have positive effects on both the health of minority population and the quality of care in Arkansas," stated the report.

"We are moving the wrong way in access to primary care physicians in our state," said Mondragon. "One of the things that really surprised me is that a few years ago we had only one in 75 counties without a PCP. Today there are more than 30 counties without at PCP. That is one more barrier to minorities in these counties, especially

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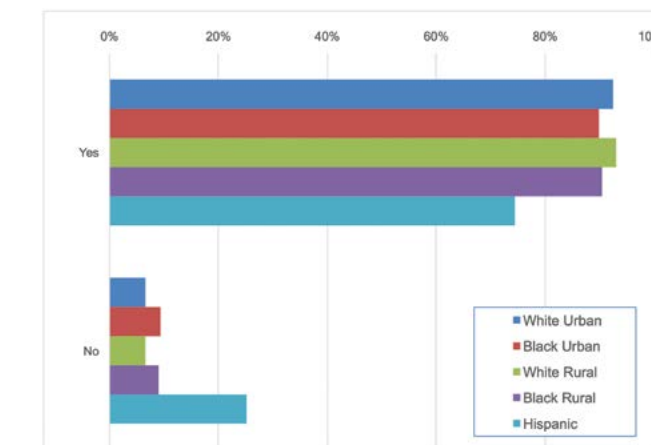


Is your regular doctor/the doctor you last saw for healthcare a male or female?



source: A survey commissioned by the Arkansas Minority Health Commission conducted by UA Little Rock Survey Research Center, 2019

Do you have any kind of health care coverage, including health insurance, pre-paid plans such as HMO's, or government plans such as Medicare?



source: A survey commissioned by the Arkansas Minority Health Commission conducted by UA Little Rock Survey Research Center, 2019



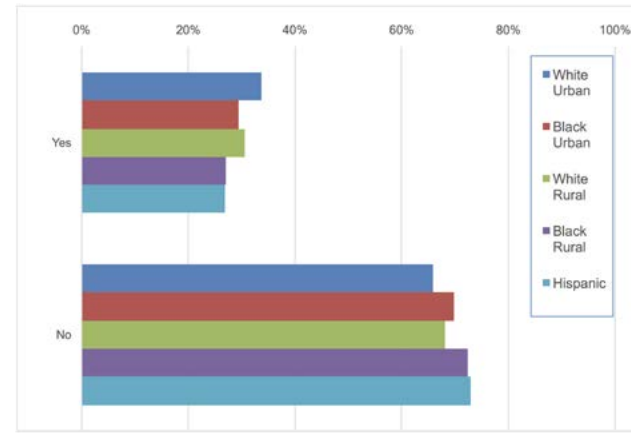
those who already have transportation and language challenges.”

The commission offers the Minority Health Workforce Diversity Scholarship to minority college students who plan to pursue careers in the field of health with a goal of helping to increase the diversity of the healthcare workforce in Arkansas. Information on the scholarship is available at aminorityhealth.com.

The recommendations from the 2019 Arkansas Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Survey are even more important after the COVID-19 Pandemic of the past two years.

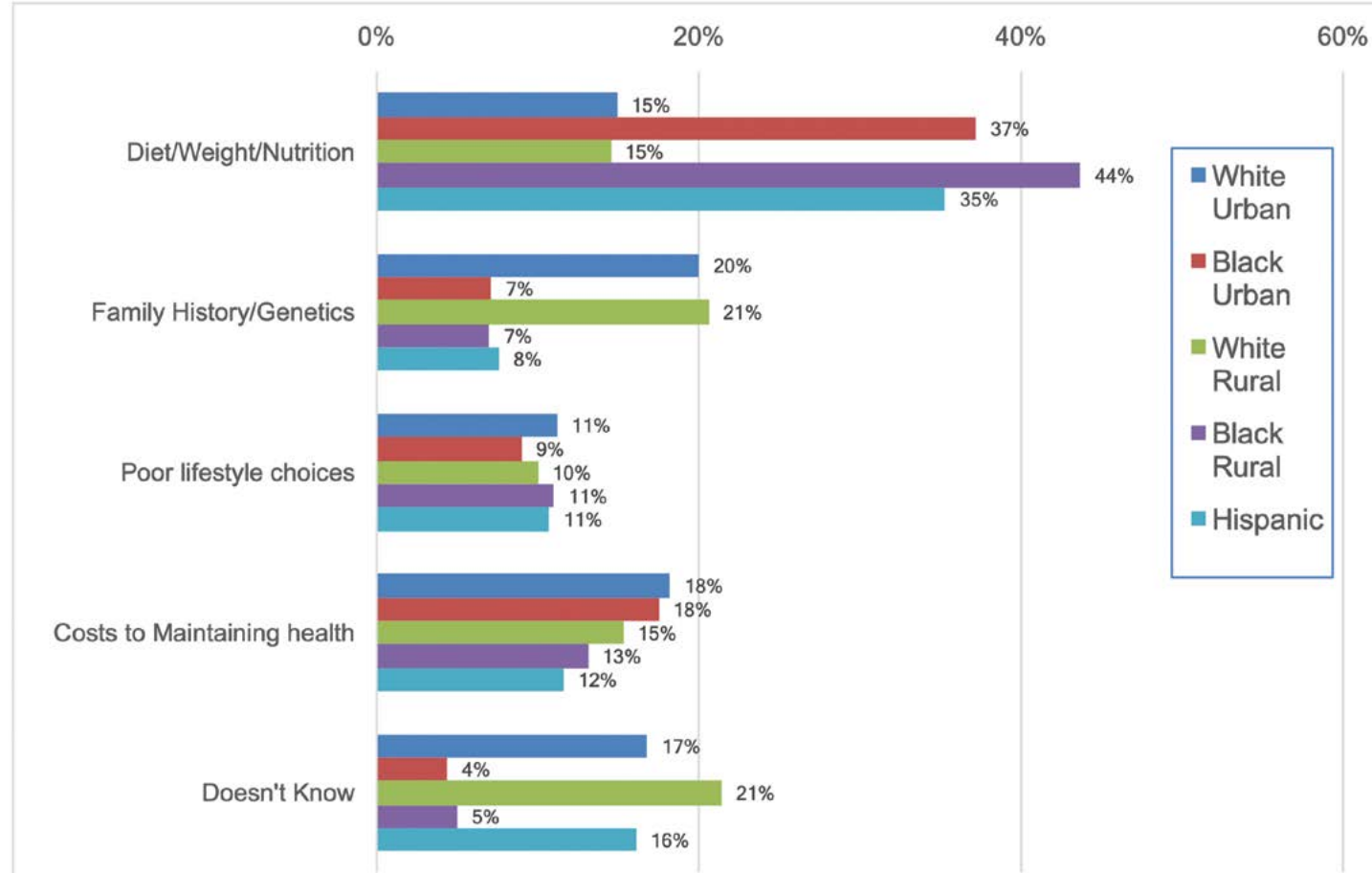
“The pandemic raised a big red flag. It is frustrating to have things documented, but not learn from them,” said Mondragon. “We saw minority workers who did not have benefits or resources that allowed them to take off 10 days when exposed to COVID-19. We saw groups of people afraid to seek help for essential healthcare issues because of huge bills they knew they couldn’t pay.”

In the past 2 years, has a doctor talked to you about any emotional concerns that may be affecting your health, for example, depression or stress?



source: A survey commissioned by the Arkansas Minority Health Commission conducted by UA Little Rock Survey Research Center, 2019

What do you think is the main reason that Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to have more health problems than Whites?



source: A survey commissioned by the Arkansas Minority Health Commission conducted by UA Little Rock Survey Research Center, 2019

Building a Table to Serve Black Communities in Arkansas

By Derek Lewis II
Chair, Arkansas Black Philanthropy Collaborative
Executive Director, Derek Lewis Foundation



Derek Lewis II

In 2018, I joined a group of other Black philanthropic leaders over dinner to discuss how we could work together to build a network for Black philanthropy in Arkansas. As we sat around the table imagining a better future for our state, we decided to meet regularly to establish a plan on how to organize Black people and Black philanthropic dollars.

Fast forward to 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic was having a disproportionate effect on Black Americans, and the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor led to increasingly urgent calls for racial justice across the nation and around the world. As a result, corporations began redirecting dollars to Black-led organizations and Black communities to combat systemic racism.

Arkansas was a beneficiary of these efforts. In December, Facebook announced that Arkansas Community Foundation would be among 20 community foundations to receive \$1 million for grants to distribute to local nonprofits serving Black people and communities and being Black-led. Around that same time, the Arkansas Black Philanthropy Collaborative was formalized through the Derek Lewis Foundation with seed funding provided by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

Arkansas Community Foundation engaged the ABPC to spearhead what would become the Building Black Communities Fund. The ABPC got to work, and more than 40 Black-led and Black-serving nonprofits in central Arkansas received funds up to \$25,000 this past summer.

From the initial brainstorming meeting over dinner to the partnerships that formed between three Arkansas-based foundations, the Arkansas Black Philanthropy Collaborative has been larger than one person or one organization from the start. It is the result of people coming together to solve some of our state’s biggest challenges.

We don’t have the solutions today. This will take time. But what we do have is a coalition of dedicated, Black philanthropic professionals willing to roll up their sleeves and work together to create positive change and equitable outcomes for Black communities across the state.

As we enter our second year, the Arkansas Black Philanthropy Collaborative will continue to provide strategic capacity building and technical assistance for Black-led or Black-serving organizations across Arkansas. We also are launching a speaker series designed to examine internal biases and structures within philanthropy that hinder equitable access for minority organizations seeking grants. Most importantly, ABPC aims to explore the history of Black philanthropy in our state and begin to shift the narrative surrounding philanthropy in Black communities.

We invite you to join us on this learning journey and pull up a seat at our table. Email me at dlewis2@dereklewisfoundation.com or visit <https://www.linkedin.com/company/weareabpc> to find out how you can get plugged in.



ARKANSAS BLACK PHILANTHROPY COLLABORATIVE

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

—James Baldwin



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Pay it Forward: A Legacy

Arnell Willis, Sr. grew up in the 50s in the small, segregated town we know as West Helena. Living in the Delta during the civil rights era presented hardships for the Willis family, but through the lessons taught by his mother, Laura Nelson, and his aunt, Lillie May Stevenson, Willis was able to overcome incredible odds.

“My mother was a homemaker, custodian and private duty attendant. She taught me the importance of faith, education, hard work and discipline,” Willis said. “Most importantly, she instilled in me the belief that education is the single greatest lifting mechanism in our society – and through achieving an education, I could realize my full potential.”

Willis was also inspired by his aunt, an entrepreneur, civil-rights worker, politician and labor union representative. “She taught me the importance of giving back to the community. She lived a life committed to civic involvement,” Willis said. “That probably had the most influence on my political involvement.”

During the last semester of his senior year at Philander Smith College, Willis didn’t have the money he needed for tuition. After discussing his situation with the president of Philander Smith College at the time, Dr. Walt Hazzard, his tuition was waived. Instead of having Willis pay back the money he owed, Dr. Hazzard asked Arnell to help others in a similar way — by paying it forward.

Now Willis and his family have three scholarships at the Community Foundation. Two scholarships help students from Phillips County and students attending Philander Smith College. Most recently, they opened the Arnell Willis, Sr. Endowed Scholarship for the Entrepreneurial Studies Program at Shorter College.

“I want to help others reach their full potential. I hope that students will know the story of why I have established these scholarships and pay it forward too,” said Willis. “I had extraordinary examples in my life who taught me such valuable lessons, from my mother and aunt to Dr. Hazzard. I hope that these lessons can be passed on.”



Arnell Willis, Sr. and his family at Phillips Community College in Helena

