

NEWS RELEASES

Bull City Strong names first Say Something Strong grant awardees

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The Durham County Department of Public Health has named Antonio Alanís, Katina Parker, Cecilia Polanco, and Cornell Watson the winners of its first Say Something Strong grants to support creative projects that reflect or work to resolve health equity issues related to COVID-19. Parker has received an award of \$15,000, while Alanís, Polanco, and Watson have received \$5,000 each.

Say Something Strong is a collaborative effort between the Durham County Department of Health and Be Connected Durham to fund creative projects that reflect or work to resolve health equity issues resulting from COVID-19. The program, sponsored as part of Bull City Strong, is a community-based partnership to reduce the increased risk of contracting, being hospitalized, and dying from COVID-19 among Black, Hispanic/Latino, and other historically marginalized populations in Durham County.

“Say Something Strong provides an exciting opportunity to increase health literacy in Durham by building new partnerships with local artists,” says Bull City Strong Project Director Lindsey Bickers Bock. “Our awardees have important connections to Black and Hispanic communities in Durham and strong awareness of health equity issues that affect community members on a daily basis. Their work will communicate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in powerful new ways, highlighting the resilience of local solutions.”

About the winners

Antonio Alanís is a Mexican-American artist raised in Durham, North Carolina. He is dedicated to exploring the intersections between art, education, and social justice. He firmly believes that art is a powerful tool to educate, build, and unite people from all cultures and backgrounds. He is working on the Patecatl Illustration Project, named after the Aztec deity of healing. In this project, Alanís will create a series of illustrations and posters that address critical issues related to healthcare access, trust in healthcare and health research, the far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and mental health resources to contribute to a better, more equitable world for our Durham communities.

Katina Parker is a filmmaker, photographer, and writer living in North Carolina, who creates films for Samsung, NBC Digital, and Al Jazeera. Parker is also a Rockwood JustFilms Fellow, nominated by the Ford Foundation, and a former North Carolina Arts Council Artist Fellow. In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, Parker founded Feed Durham, a mutual aid collective that came together in response to mounting hunger in the Durham area. To date, Feed Durham has fed 155,000+ neighbors in need, through a series of sprawling no-contact cookouts where they cook tasty, nutrient-dense meals for 500 people per day and host produce giveaways, where they move hundreds of thousands of pounds of fresh produce and poultry into Durham and surrounding cities. In celebration of Feed Durham's three-year anniversary, Parker will utilize the grant funds to mount a multi-media exhibition consisting of photos, video, and prose depicting Feed Durham's joyful, inclusive, DIY organizing work.

Cecilia Polanco of Pupusas for Education (P4E) combines art and activism to enhance behavioral health outcomes for underrepresented and historically marginalized youth and their families, focusing on Hispanic/Latinx DACAmented and Undocumented youth in Durham and the Triangle Area of North Carolina. In this project called Exprésate, Cecilia will integrate art expression forms in P4E's 2023 Mental Health Youth Retreats. She will lead these retreats to empower youth to overcome the mental health challenges posed by COVID-19 and its aftermath, provide youth with an outlet to express their emotions through their art, help them manage stress and other emotions through art, connect them with like-minded peers, and promote mindfulness to alleviate the effects of isolation, stress, and anxiety.

Cornell Watson is a photographer based in Durham, North Carolina who frequently contributes photography to national publications such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and Bloomberg. His photography centers Black stories and has been featured in museums such as The Mint Museum, Nasher Museum of Art, and most recently at the National Civil Rights Museum with a solo exhibition titled "Tarred Healing." His Say Something Strong project, titled "Scrubbed Out," examines Durham's healthcare inequities in the Black community through a series of conceptual photos.

"We are excited about the selected winners for Say Something STRONG because it takes many voices and tactics to win at public health," said Aidil Ortiz, longtime public health advocate and part of the Be Connected team.

About Bull City Strong

Bull City Strong is supported through a grant to DCoDPH by the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health to improve health literacy and equity among communities of color in Durham. The program is a partnership between DCoDPH; North Carolina Central University; LATIN-19, a community coalition established to address health disparities within the Latinx community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; Project ACCESS of Durham County, a community-based organization that seeks to improve the health of uninsured and underserved Durham County residents; media partners; and other community partners who employ and support community health workers to provide services related to COVID-19.

A second application period for Say Something Strong grants will be launched in fall 2023.

For more information and updates about Say Something Strong or Bull City Strong, sign up for the Bull City Strong newsletter [here](#), or email BullCityStrong@dconc.gov.

[Return to full list >>](#)