

NEWS RELEASES

Bull City Strong names winners of 2024 Say Something Strong awards

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The Durham County Department of Public Health (DCoDPH) and Be Connected Durham have named Ivan Almonte; Tauheedah Caldwell; Oscar Garcia Cervantes, Rodrigo Dorfman, and Dorian Gomez; Marla Dobbs Hawkins; Constance Walker; Antonio Alanis; and Mariah M. and Honora Ankong the winners of its 2024 Say Something Strong grants, a Bull City Strong initiative to support creative projects that reflect or work to resolve health equity issues related to COVID-19. Almonte and Caldwell have received awards of \$15,000, while Garcia Cervantes, Dorfman, and Gomez; Hawkins; Walker; Alanis; and M. and Ankong have received awards of \$5,000 each.

"We are excited to partner with local community members once again for new creative projects in this round of Say Something Strong," said Bull City Strong Project Director Lindsey Bickers Bock. "Our awardees are embedded in their communities and understand the issues these communities face in a way that has allowed them to develop projects that will truly communicate and respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in powerful new ways."

Awardees will use the grant to develop their community projects from now through the end of May 2024. Learn more about each project and award recipient below:

About the winners - \$15,000 winners

Ivan Almonte, "The Chronicles of the Pandemic" – Ivan Almonte has been living in Durham for more than two decades. On a daily basis, he provides information about issues related to social justice and access to medical care and plans and organizes fundraising events for individuals who don't have necessary resources. The Chronicles of the Pandemic is a project to raise awareness of the changes in the health system that must be made based on the experiences of the barriers and challenges the Latino immigrant community faced throughout pandemic. This project will create a space where health professionals, COVID-19 survivors, and community leaders will be able to share their experiences through interviews about the challenges they faced, cultural survival measures they implemented, and what they would like to see different in the healthcare system.

Tauheedah (Tai) Caldwell, "Hike 2 Connect™" – Tai Caldwell is the CEO of Tai Connects, LLC, a resilience coaching organization, and the founder of Hike 2 Connect™. She has been recently featured at Marbles Kids Museum as a local trailblazer and a community partner. Tai knows just how essential it is to focus on mental health and wellness as a catalyst to living a fulfilled life. As a Resilience Coach who has her NC Certified Peer Support Specialist certification, she uses her training and lived experience as a survivor of childhood trauma to walk alongside individuals on their wellness journeys. Amidst the pandemic, she partnered with StandUp SpeakOut of NC to offer immersive hiking experiences via Hike 2 Connect™ to Durham County residents. These

outings combat isolation, anxiety, and depression. The Bull City Strong Award will amplify Hike 2 Connect's impact within historically marginalized communities, promoting resilience, family engagement, and training community coaches.

About the winners - \$5,000 winners

Antonio Alanís, “The Antonio Alanís Art Podcast” – Antonio Alanís, a Mexican-American multidisciplinary visual artist from Durham, NC, is launching the Antonio Alanís Art Podcast, a branch of the Me Vacuno Porque Podcast Project. In five episodes, he'll interview five artists working or living in Durham, delving into the intersection of their work, activism, and health equity for Black and Brown Communities. Each artist will offer insights and recommendations for fostering a more equitable world, focusing on how they merge the arts and health.

Honora Ankong and Mariah M., “Festival of Care & Community + Estuary Zine” – Mariah M. and Honora Ankong are creatives of Saltwater Sojourn, a Blackqueer-autonomous collective of artists and culture workers that believe in the transformative impact that art can have on the individual and collective. The project Festival of Care & Community + Estuary Zine will consist of a community listening session and zine release as well as a day-long festival for the Durham community at large. The listening session would be conducted by members of SaltWater Sojourn with people within the local SaltWater network, individuals organizations and micro-communities they have been in connection with via their COVID-conscious programming. These listening interviews will be available via podcast and within an abbreviated interview to be published in a zine that will be released the day of the festival. The zine titled “Estuary: a SaltWater Sojourn zine on community care + COVID-19,” will also hold a submission period for art and stories of the Durham community about their relationship to COVID-19 and the pandemic’s impact on their mental, physical and social health.

Oscar Garcia Cervantes, Rodrigo Dorfman, and Dorian Gomez, “Behind the Mask of COVID” – The Center for the Nuevo South’s public awareness program Behind the Mask of Covid (Tras la Máscara de COVID) brings a Latino lens and holistic approach to expressing and communicating the impact of COVID-19 on Latino communities. The program uses Zumba and well-being practices, talking circle workshops, community-created public art and public awareness materials. The idea behind “Behind the Mask of COVID” is to explore not only the psychological impact of putting on masks but also the different “masks” the community had to wear when we took off our physical masks and were faced (or did not face) what was necessary to do in order to survive the pandemic. Their creative team of community activists consists of Oscar Garcia Cervantes (Zumba Activist and Spanish interpreter for the Durham County Department of Public Health, Dorian Gomez (multimedia storyteller) and Rodrigo Dorfman (visual storyteller).

Marla Dobbs Hawkins, “The Creative, Connected, Community Story Quilt Project” – Marla Dobbs Hawkins is a visual artist focused on mixed-media textile based work, a current Durham Public Schools high school arts educator, and a local business owner and operator of Cultivate Creative Cafe on Guess Road in Durham. The business’s mission is to support the connection between mental/emotional health, creativity, and connection to others through providing space and affordable workshops and events centered around the arts and

wellness. The Creative, Connected, Community Story Quilt Project will be a mixed-media textile piece comprised of miniature quilt-like blocks connected into one larger piece that documents the impact of social isolation affecting community members of all ages during the pandemic as well as their positive experiences of using creativity and community to express themselves and support their mental and emotional health. This project will be collaborative through local artists and community members contributing to its completion.

Constance Walker, “One Day at a Time’: Family Health Survival Stories of the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic – “One Day at a Time” is a program of the West End/Lyon Park Legacy Project. The program will provide an opportunity for Durham families to tell their survival stories about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The stories from the families will be a document for the Durham community and for further study by the mental health community. A discussion, open to Durham families, will present health professionals, who will address solutions to the effects of the pandemic. The mission of the West End/Lyon Park Legacy Project is to promote the history and preservation of the community. Dr. Constance Sartor Walker, a Durham native, is the Founder and Director of the West End/Lyon Park Legacy Project. She received her undergraduate and graduate education at North Carolina College (NCC), now North Carolina Central University (NCCU) and received a Juris Doctor degree from North Carolina Central University School of Law. She is a retired college educator, a community/youth leader, a West End Elder and the West End storyteller.

About Bull City Strong

Say Something Strong is presented as part of the Bull City Strong program 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; Pillar Consulting, a global program evaluation research firm that helps organizations assess the impact of their initiatives; media partners; and other community partners who employ and support community health workers to provide services related to COVID-19. Say Something Strong is also led in partnership with The Art Chose Me, an organization that works to dismantle the obstacles that limit access to and appreciation of the visual arts – paying special attention to engaging historically marginalized artists and communities; and Aidilisms, a community connector for local government re-imagination with culture as the superior strategy.

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