



Urban Community Alliance, Inc. (UCA) empowers families of color to develop healthy attachments and promote physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being while creating positive connections to their communities. UCA is rooted in three central beliefs:

1. Supporting self-reliance
2. Nurturing healthy families
3. Bolstering civic engagement.

UCA authentically honors the mission through the participation of staff, interns, volunteers, and partners who are expected to be significantly involved in ensuring that the mission is carried out to the fullest extent possible. Our mission, vision, values, and central beliefs are lived out and noticed throughout Connecticut.

Urban Community Alliance, Inc. employs seven full-time and five part-time individuals to lead, manage, and implement the organization's programs, services, and operations. Presently, more than 94% of our staff identify as people of color, 15% speak languages other than English, 6% identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and our board of directors is 100% Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We remain committed to building and maintaining a representative and responsive workforce in our communities. Our employee handbook reminds staff that *"we must take full advantage of the diverse cultural backgrounds of our employees and maintain an organizational climate that promotes and is responsive to diversity."* Urban Community Alliance is increasingly dependent upon teamwork and cross-functional collaboration. Therefore, the ability of our employees and managers to achieve excellence in diverse environments is critically important.

UCA's coalition building & holistic, supportive case management intervention has proven to be highly effective and relevant in meeting the needs of many children, youth, families, fathers, and veterans served within the four signature programs:

1. Juvenile Review Board (JRB)
2. Intensive Family Preservation (IFP)
3. Male Involvement Network (MIN)
4. Veterans Empowering Teens through Support (VETTS).

UCA takes pride in providing the finest quality of service proficiently, professionally, sensitively, respectfully, and caringly.

Our History

With more than three decades of experience delivering comprehensive and transformational programs and person-centered supports, serving people in the community. In 2020, *New Haven Family Alliance* and *Veterans Empowering Teens Through Support* merged and formed the *Urban Community Alliance*. The development and formation of the Urban Community Alliance, Inc. mark an unprecedented collaboration that brings together Black and Latinx executive leaders and staff to serve communities of color, specifically in New Haven. Our mission remains to empower families of color to develop healthy attachments and promote physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being while creating a positive connection to their communities.



Urban Community Alliance, Inc. remains a child welfare reform agency employing multiple approaches to improve youth, children, and families' developmental outcomes by becoming financially self-reliant, strengthening parents' attachment to their children and connection to their communities, and as a result, increasing their capacity to guide and nurture their children to promote their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. This person-centered intervention model has proven to be highly effective in meeting the needs of very low-income urban children. In addition, to engage with and maintain trust with families, we host youth and family dinners, provide transportation assistance, offer incentives, and other strategies to support family engagement and the reduction of barriers that would otherwise keep them disengaged.

Through active engagement with the Department of Social Services, Department of Children and Families, Court Support Service Division, local police departments, and the New Haven & Hamden Public Schools, Urban Community Alliance, Inc., and its former affiliates have established long-lasting and high-impact community programs serving families state-wide. For example, in partnership with the United States Attorney's Office and Yale New Haven Hospital, we led the efforts to a successful 5K Motion production and program wherein we designed and implemented a messaging toolkit and video for females and males to curb violence across New Haven. Similarly, we worked with Providence, R. I. Non-Violence Institute, city officials in New Haven, and other grassroots non-profit organizations to successfully deploy the street outreach worker program for seven years. This successful program worked to reduce and eliminate gun violence across the hardest-to-reach zip codes. Finally, our four signature programs have worked with several government agencies for over three decades.

Program Impact

In 2020-2021, our *Juvenile Review Board* served 189 youth from New Haven and Hamden, Connecticut diverting them from the criminal justice systems, improving school attendance, in-school and community behaviors, and decision-making. In support of non-custodial fathers, our *Male Involvement Network* served 53 fathers. All fathers in this program received services to meet their basic needs, health & mental support, parent education, and healthy relationship skill-building. Our *Veterans Empowering Teens Through Support* served 31 youths and an average of over 125 hours of positive and meaningful interactions with youth that led to completing the program. Furthermore, our *Intensive Family Preservation* program served 26 families through our home-based clinical case management services that enabled parents to remain involved with their child(ren) while in the care and custody of the Department of Children and Families. Our data describe our experience engaging with persons with lived experience. To engage with and maintain trust with families, we host youth and family dinners, provide transportation assistance, offer incentives, and other strategies to support the family engagement and the reduction of barriers that would otherwise keep them disengaged.

Challenges

Even though COVID-19 and the pandemic affected Urban Community Alliance greatly, it did not stop us from delivering our signature programs; instead, we shifted our service delivery and ensured our youth and families could navigate these difficult times. We continue to believe and focus on achieving engagement, buy-in, and commitment from stakeholders, ultimately requiring everyone to remain open and transparent with their communication, building upon trust, clarity, and accountability around roles, with the ultimate goal of achieving the shared goals and objectives. Some of the challenges currently being faced are aligned with the following:



- Recruitment and hiring staff since COVID-19 has been challenging for many locally and nationally. Attracting and engaging suitable candidates for vacant positions and retaining them for more than 6 months is currently being considered a potential challenge for the organization. To address and resolve this challenge, a consulting firm is currently supporting our staffing and recruitment strategy.
- Partnership engagement for many non-profits is critical in the process aligned with special projects, new initiatives, and building capacity. Understand that often this can be taxing for organizations and a valuable investment that impacts significantly person-centered support.
- Sustaining unrestricted funding to support the changing economy and needs of those we serve in the community appears to be limited and often inaccessible to grassroots community-based organizations. More equity is required to meet this challenge.

Testimony on the importance and impact of equity: Urban Community Alliance's Vetts Mentoring Program earmarked funding being terminated in the fiscal year 2022-2023, The program received earmarked funding in the amount of \$100,000 to \$90,000 for many years, the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 the funding was terminated after communication had been received that funding had been secured at \$90,000 prior to the end of the fy2023. The notice of termination was received in July 2022 when the program continued to engage 22 active juvenile justice-involved youth referred from probation and parole. During my review and advocacy efforts, I would soon find that the funds were terminated not based on the positive results and program outcome but more related to not having a legislator advocating for continued support. Understanding the political implication of the decision to remove the program from the list, 22 justice-involved youth, and 3 veteran mentors were now at risk. Similar community-based programs on the list received double the finding whereas the results-based program Vetts Program received no funding without explanation and remains at risk for termination. The question remains, what constitutes the decision to fund some and not others serving our most vulnerable youth?

Urban Community Alliance's objectives are to provide barrier-breaking person-centered support and services to families throughout the Greater New Haven region to ensure they feel supported, become self-sufficient, and are empowered to sustain an improved quality of life.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shirley Ellis-West
Executive Director
Urban Community Alliance., Inc.