



# Healthy Village Learning Institute

“BUILDING TOWARDS EXCELLENCE”

## HVLI Visitor Responses:

Hi Keith,

Being grateful to receive an invite to visit the Healthy Village Learning Institute, I was able to accept the invitation on August 10, 2022. With the assistance of Jonathan Backers, I entered a building of ‘absolutely astounding’ African and African-American history artefacts, the likes of which is not seen in many museums. The bottom floor to the very top floor (four floors), including the stairwells, spoke to the yester years of ‘African Kings & Queens’ to the years of ‘Negro and Slavery’ life to the current years of ‘Black’ life with amazing growth in between.

From the current stance of the building structure to the ‘DREAM’ of the future presentation of what is still to come, this focus on the life and culture of our beginnings and continued amazing growth stimulates the mind, body and soul as one tries to take in what really happened to a great and powerful people, what’s happening now, and what the future holds for imminent generations.

To think, this magnificent dream is occurring right here in the midst of the little City of McKeesport, Pennsylvania. What a privilege to be the host of such a powerful history making endeavor – preparing to feed the minds of millions who will visit there.

Kudos to you Keith Murphy, and others who may be involved through funding, physical support (as the building continues to receive renovation attention), and visitation from all who take advantage of touring the site – while the entry invitation is at low-cost to no-cost. (This will surely change). One day soon, the ‘DREAM’ will become reality and match the attraction of Washington, DC, Baltimore, MD, and Atlanta, Georgia. What a blessing that will be.

Keith, be strong, be healthy, be real, and continue to be blessed, as I was meeting you and experiencing your dream.

*Dr. Bev Moore*  
*Deputy Executive Director*  
*Allegheny County Housing Authority*

Thank you, Keith Murphy, for the HVLI. Thank GOD. Whatever you need from me to help keep our people coming back just ask. I can even come over and help dust or sweep. No job is too small.

**Cecelia Ware, Executive Director. Infinite Lifestyle Solutions, Inc.**

Keith Murphy has created a one-of-a-kind space that brings you face-to-face with the horrors of history and the slave movement, and at the same time, moved me from this gut-wrenching experience in the depths of the building to an elevated sense of action, purpose and possibility on the higher floors.

**Key impressions: painful, exhausting, devastating.**

Starting at the ground floor with the slavery experience, the concrete/real objects used to torture, humiliate, and control the Africans took my breath away. The brutality of man's inhumanity to man is overwhelming. While narrating the historical timeline and the stories of those swept into this history, Keith encourages his visitors to touch and hold the objects: I felt for the first time to be bearing witness by holding the shackles, feeling the weight of history, imagining the pain cutting into the skin of the neck, wrists, and ankles as they were marched miles in the burning sun. I could never have imagined how heavy the chains and shackles were but holding them in my hands brought me more in touch with what the Africans had to endure, making it even more miraculous to think of the superhuman strength of those who survived. The physical space in the basement became a sacred space to honor those whose lives were stolen/taken. The creative beauty of the African art representing the indigenous cultural beliefs helped give this spiritual sense.

Keith's personalization of the history gave more insight and meaning to what happened to the ancestors of our current black fellow citizens. The historical understanding and elaboration of the colonial conquering of Africa by multiple European nations and the creation of the slave trade and how ingrained it is in our society. The lack of adequate teaching of this history in our schools and understanding its origins plays a large role in generational discourse of this subject.

The HLVI design reinforces the narrative. As we ascended the floors of the HVLI, we travelled forward in time, towards a present that contains representations and actual stories of both continued brutality and hope in the form of resistance, strength, and youth development. The metaphor of beginning in the basement of the building reinforces the depth and painful reminder of the slave experience, the atrocities, the brutality and the immensity of this event and the exploitative nature that continues through to today. Climbing the stairs to each floor elevates our understanding and creates a new space to explore and while juxtaposing this history with current events and how they continue to impact our society. Each floor provides a safe space to connect, expand one's knowledge and challenge your understanding of these historical events as you may have been taught. These floors expose the visitor to many possibilities a truly sensory experience through art, music (drums), books with each room set-up to engage the visitor as an interactive space encouraged to ask questions, learn how to do research, understand the different levels of source materials, primary, secondary, tertiary and the impact these have on the distribution and veracity of information. Keith was incredible at giving perspective to the historical representations and experience as well as creating the link to what he is doing with this space to educate and honor the community.

Keith has created in this space a journey to manhood and womanhood that brings young adults into this space allowing for growth, conversations, connection and a sense of belonging. Giving a name and face to lives that have been lost currently and that this is a time of reckoning for all of us; to understand the responsibility lies within all of us to be respectful of each other and to help remove the "racist", "supremacist" and colonial mentality that has been built into our societal norms.

The experience of visiting the HLVI is moving and halting, it at times overwhelms the senses with the visual images of the horrors that have transpired over the past 400 years.

How can one prepare to move through this space? It can be expected to be emotional and heart wrenching while at the same time creating a space to explore and better understand where each person is in understanding this history. This is an important story to tell, exposing the horrors that our society has extracted on those blacks that arrived here not of their own free will and what is our responsibility to correct these wrongs and how do we create a better place here in our community and our country that will begin to treat all humans as equal.

That Keith could take this horrific history and turn it into an experience for growth and conversation is testament to his unique genius and a gift to us all.

***Dr. Keith Somers***

Good morning Keith,

I want to tell you that this summer has been an emotional one for me since my cousin was murdered in May. I just couldn't make sense of it. It has made me wonder why am I doing this work if young people are still killing each other. I was really considering walking away from this because I had lost my desire until I visited the HVLI. Seeing our campers and staff faces as they moved through your African exhibit was speechless. Then I was moved by the drumming, the rhythm and beats spoke music to my soul and spirit. I could not believe how our campers were so in tune with you. Lastly, when we were having lunch on the steps outside, one kid from the neighborhood was looking at us and I offered him some food. But he said he only wanted something to drink, I asked him to take the whole bag. Then 4 more kids came. I gave them all the extra lunches that I had packed. That's when I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be and doing exactly what GOD wants me to do. I woke up dancing the next morning and singing praises.

The Healthy Village Learning Institute is something out of a dream. I have never seen a place so African-centered and student-focused in person. I'm honestly jealous that nothing like this was around when I was a child. The most impactful part was Mr. Keith Murphy. It is essential he leads all the tours when possible because his story makes the experience even more impactful. The only thing missing for me was the children. I can't wait to go back and visit when they are there.

***Alisha Tarver, Penn State Univ.-GA, BSU***

**Keith, and Forbes Fund Staff**, thank you so very much for the opportunity to tour your amazing facility! I've experienced the National Underground Railroad Museum, which is wonderful; however, you allow us to physically touch history. I've seen human shackles before, but to hold those 20 pounds in my hands felt like 20 tons on my soul, and that's important for each of us to experience. There is still bondage in this world, in many ways, and we need to accept and continue to battle this heinous act

***Richard Carrington***

**The HVLI** is a must see for all in the Pittsburgh Community. Thank you Keith for all the work you are doing

***Keith Somers***

**My** visit to "The Healthy Village Institute" was one of the most inspiring experiences that I have had in my lifetime. The Institute is the most courageous effort, that I've witnessed, designed to restore our Children, Families and Communities back to optimal health!

***Kwesi Andre McCray M.A., MFT***

- 1. Most impactful part** of your Village experience? The most impactful part of BSU's tour of the Village Experience was the pictures of all of the Black Men who graduated Mr. Murphy's program and were able to go back to our homeland to receive their rites of passage into manhood in Ghana.
- 2. Least impactful part** of your Village experience? There wasn't anything that I can say that was least impactful. Everything to me had a meaning behind it, symbolism behind the tour, the artifacts, the way the rooms were colored and adorned with specific images, were all the most impactful and I can honestly say that nothing stood out to me as least impactful.
- 3. What's missing?** What do you feel or think could be added? I truly believe that when the library becomes fully functional, the only thing it's missing are the children. There were so many things that even I, could not fully rap my mind around. The amount of knowledge and history that was stored in that building was mind blowing. I feel that Mr. Murphy has done a fantastic job of incorporating countless amounts of activities, and routines for the children in this community, that it would be nearly impossible for them to become bored. He has made this into an interactive studies institution where you not only can learn, you can also see, feel, and hear the sounds of our history and culture in that building. I wouldn't change a thing!

***Armani Isaac, Penn State Univ.-GA, President of the BSU***

**“Going** into this endeavor, not fully prepared, allowed me to keep an open mind and embrace the raw emotions that enveloped me. Learned concepts through typical education were utterly shattered by the visuals of slavery and lynching leaving me speechless, ashamed of our past, and determined to align myself further towards social justice.”

**Bobby Ryan, LPC NCC**

**I was thinking** about my experience as I was driving back to school. There was so much stuff involving history and visuals that we actually got to hold, which impacted my experience at the “Village”. I mentioned to my mother, brother, and his fiancé that this was an experience that couldn’t be experienced anywhere else! I said it yesterday and will say it again, I was very blessed to be there!

The most impactful part for me was the shackles and feeling the weight of them. Also, walking through the halls and up the steps seeing all of the artwork and quotes. Honestly, I cannot name anything that was “least” impactful because everything was 100/10. More because most of the things I learned today was not taught anywhere else.

Lastly, I liked and felt the importance of the past and recent experiences that Blacks went through. Showing that things have not changed, the acts of racism are just in a different form.

Great experience, highly recommended!! Thank you,

**Ke’ira Williams, Penn State Univ.-GA, BSU**

**Had to join virtually**, but still felt strong sadness and punches in the gut. Looking forward to visit in person next month when I come to Pittsburgh. This is an over the top experience. Deep thanks.

**Barry Kerzin**

**As we visited** your Village yesterday, I was literally amazed at the information I learned about our history from the beginning to the present and all in between! The sacrifices our people have made were identified in a most reverent Way! As we proceeded through each floor with all state of the art materials at each one’s disposal! Truly a Blessing from God! You as a visionary are truly Blessed with your knowledge and application of how to make a Healthy Village! I would like all persons to be exposed to your revelation and knowledge of our true history!

I was also amazed at the TRUTH-BRARY vs. Library 😊 Truly we as a people have a lot to learn ? The few books I leafed through really I could have spent a day just reading books about our culture! We as a a nation have endured so very much, and we are still standing ! Only GOD 🙏 Once again Thank you for allowing me to experience such a Peaceful and Joyful day! I know I missed so much you had to present! I Pray our younger and all generations will have the Positive experience I shared! I definitely plan to revisit the experience! The Healthy Village is truly a learning Process! Thank You Again for the opportunity 🙏

**Elaine B.Jenkins R.N**

**Our** Community-School Based Behavioral Health Team at Edgewood Primary found our tour experience at the Health Village Learning Institute to be emotionally impactful, awestrucking and culturally enlightening. Our team found the following to be the most moving:

"I enjoyed the start of the tour. Witnessing the chains used to enslave my ancestors was a powerful moment for me. I felt a sense of renewed strength in understand how they spiritually and emotional prevailed through an indescribably horrific experience."

**Brittney Singletary, LSW**

**The** experience was truly moving. I especially enjoyed the comprehensive scope of the HVLI – making unique resources accessible to those entering the doors! I enjoyed learning about the deep historical and cultural influences within the HVLI; whether it's subtle or obvious – a connection within the various rooms/exhibits/classrooms was always present and meaningful. I may be speaking for a small population, but I think responding to narrow and specific feedback questions is easier for the respondent and it typically increases the rate of response. I hate to say people – including myself – are guilty of being lazy. Just thoughts for consideration.

**C. Romerd, Matilda Theiss Early Childhood Behavioral Health**

Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC, WPIC Early Childhood Trauma Treatment Center

**My** experience at the HVLI was very powerful and moving. Seeing the photos and artwork, on top of the actual chains the slaves wore made it truly real. Never learned these things in books throughout my years of schooling is very shameful. I was also moved by amount of support that is offered there. Giving these kids and families a safe place to be and learn and grow, having that support that might not be given elsewhere. Obviously there is nothing negative to say about such an amazing place, I wish I would have known about HVLI sooner to help pervious families I have worked with.

**Colleen Johnston, BHW**

*Behavioral Health Worker*

**Because** of the name, “Healthy Learning Village Institute”, I was unsure of what to expect when I arrived for the tour. Shortly upon arriving, Keith made the name, “Healthy Learning Village Institute” make a lot more sense to me. Keith greeted us warmly and spoke passionately about the importance of the health of a village as a whole and how necessary that is to raise healthy individuals. He then tied that back to the African cultural emphasis of healthy villages. Keith was very knowledgeable and used the artifacts in the first level of the HLVI to tell a story. The story Keith told was of the evils and brutality that African American people faced when they were sold as slaves and arrived in this country to be treated as less than human. This is a story that I believe most Americans know well, but Keith brought a new reality to the story through the interaction with artifacts, photographs, and artwork he had collected.

As I followed the tour from floor to floor, I felt that I was watching Keith's dreams for his “village” unfold before my eyes. He had rooms filled with Macs and iPads, art supplies, drums, and places for women to gather together and men to gather together. The Healthy Learning Village Institute has truly been thought out to be a place that promotes healthy living – mind, body, and soul – and a place for the community to gather together. Truly, the most moving part of my whole experience at the HLVI was Keith himself. Keith is one inspiring individual, who has put his dreams for lifting others up into motion, and in a unique and meaningful way. But if you had to ask me of one THING that moved me the most, I would absolutely say the slave chains. To hold something that someone actually wore as shackles was one of the most powerful things I have ever experienced. I still can't believe the weight. I definitely walked out feeling far more connected to the history than I did before I walked in.

The only thing I can think of as an addition to the Healthy Learning Village Institute, which could be in place already without me knowing, would be community meals. Maybe cooking classes or potlucks? In my experience, nothing brings people together like food!

**Kaitlyn Scott, BHW Twin Rivers**

**The** thing about the Healthy Village Learning Institute that amazes me is not just the fact that it targets to support and guide the youth of McKeesport, but how the organization creates that possibility. HVLI targets the areas of individual, family, school, peer, community, and technology all while including the significance of African culture, providing a well-rounded experience. I was amazed to see the different rooms, each one offering unique and educational experiences - from literature to coding to music. I especially enjoyed the beautiful artwork and the

historical meaning behind each piece! Keith, a McKeesport native, offers a connecting link between HVLI and the community because he knows the neighborhood, he is able to relate with the kids on a deeper level, and he is an advocate for self-success. Most importantly, Keith has a vision and he is able to link students with their African Culture, the global world, and themselves. It takes a village!

***Molly Michael***

*Hello Mr. Murphy,* I want to thank you for allowing me to enroll my 7, 8, and 10 year old children into your Summer Camp. As a single Mother working 2 and sometimes 3 jobs and still struggling to make ends meet I was at a loss in figuring out what my children could do and what I could afford. The Healthy Village is the blessing not just for me but my children but to offer all those things inside that incredible place, free-of-charge, still has me at a loss of words. All my children talk about when I see them is what exciting things that they did that day. They are happy and as you would say "A happy child is a healthy child". If there's anything that I can do, volunteer, bake cookies, or help inside the place just let me know.

***Sheryl Boatwright***

***Upon*** entering the Healthy Learning Village, I was in awe at the afro centric ambiance. The artifacts and all the literature that filled the first floor brought me a sense of peace and belonging. I was surprised to see all the detail and thoughtfulness Keith put into the design and choosing of every piece that he decided to use. As we ascended to each floor, again I admired Keith's thought to detail. The knowledge and wisdom that Keith possessed illuminated in the HVLI mission and purpose. There were several activities offered in the HVLI, STEAM activities such as, math, coding, and art with an emphasis on African culture. I felt proud knowing that there was a place in the McKeesport community where I or others could go to learn about the proper history of our people. I loved how he incorporated McKeesport and surrounding communities to include the Mon Valley with specific color rooms. As we ascended further my favorite room on the top floor which was painted gold and had a gorgeous view of the Mon Valley brought on a feeling of completeness and empowerment of the vision of the HLVI. I am hopeful that HLVI will expand into many surroundings communities and be that place of hope, education and refuge for many community residents.

***Tierra Thorne B.A***

*Behavioral Health Worker*

Community and School-Based Behavioral Health Team at Twin Rivers Primary and Intermediate School

**Matilda Theiss Early Childhood Behavioral Health**, Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC

**A wonderful experience** and even more so to have the privilege to spend time talking to Keith about his experiences and vision for the space and the Community. Many thanks for all your work and for sharing your wisdom, Keith.

***Adriana Sanchez-Solius***

**Bro Keith**, Thank you so very much for inviting me to the Healthy Village Learning Institute. "I finally Made it!". LOL I could not have visited the HVLI on a better day. What a rare opportunity and especially when the pioneer found himself within your collage. Wow, wow, wow is what I have been saying to myself.

As you continue with the shaping and molding of each room and hallway. I am certain all who visit will find pride in claiming the HVLI as Sacred space and will link up with intent of rising up and living up to the expectations of those whose shoulders we stand upon. I say , "Go forth Joshua!"

I am impressed with the personalities each room possess and the intent of their individual theme supporting the overall context. Will a plaque adorn each entry? Will the principles of each room be visible or scribed?

***Teri L Gilmore Life Coach***

*Pedology AS, Child Development & Family Relations BS*

*Applied Developmental Psychology MS'18*



**Had** the pleasure of experiencing this gem of a space. The outside does not prepare you for the weight of what lies inside. The artwork and history featured throughout the building was beautiful and impactful. The students were engaged and moved by the weight of the chains that had shackled African ancestors. It made the bondage and hardship they endured real.

The students were impressed by the history, library, art room and the women's meeting space. Access to current technology was visible throughout the building. The students seemed to enjoy and be engaged throughout the tour. We were all very impressed by the treasures, knowledge and potential the Institute presents. I highly recommend it to anyone who want to learn and get a tangible sense of African history in America.

**Tracy Thorpe Scott**

*TTS Coaching & Development, LLC*

**I did not know** what to expect before arriving at HLVI. Upon entering, I could tell this was a special place. I could not be prepared for the relics that I saw. The emotional weight that these relics carried was overwhelming and inspiring at the same time. Narrowing down the most impactful thing I saw is very difficult. The imagery on the walls, the rooms and the programming that is happening was all incredible. If I had to pick one thing, I would say it was holding the slave chains in my hands. I have been to museums and have seen these things before but to be able to physically touch them was something else entirely. The ability to touch the whips. I think the least impactful was the outside of the building, It did not give any indication to what was going on inside. As far as missing components, I would love to have been able to see some videos of the kids in action.

**Juan Perez**

Senior Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania

## ***PENN STATE-GREATER ALLEGHENY STUDENT RESPONSES***

**Emily Donato**

The experience at HVLI is for people of any background, race, and ethnicity, to gather together to honor and engage with the experiences of peoples of African descent. As a white person, HVLI is a place for me to feel challenged in my assumptions, my blind spots, and my willingness to access my humanity for both others, as well as myself. Through our experience of holding the artifacts and investigating our biases I came into a more thorough understanding of the depth of the experience of enslaved peoples.

My personal experience took me through sorrow, guilt, and pain. I had to remind myself not to center my own experience, but to work through it, and continue to be present with my colleagues and with the spirit of those we honor through our learning. Mr. Keith's guidance supported that experience and called me back to the present. Moving through the exhibits, Mr. Keith instructed us on drums and showcased many of the resources including arts, which released the negative emotions and moved the experience into one of hope for community healing.

**Demario Andrews**

What Keith has put together at the Healthy Village Learning Institute is amazing. Not only does it raise awareness and generate deep emotional discussions but, it also gives young people a place to go and learn in an old world sort of way. I say that because of the "it takes a village" theme that emanates literally from the walls of the HVLI. The things I saw as I walked up the stairs made me feel as though young people could look back as a way of looking forward. This was really inspiring. The things I saw on the bottom floor horrified me and gave me a deeper appreciation for what my ancestors went through. I think Keith delivers a message in such a way that folks of all races and cultures can feel a similar emotion upon hearing it.

**Peter Jenkins**

Visiting the Healthy Village Learning Institute is an experience unique in its ability to transport you through time and facilitate a journey through the African diaspora, lessons on African culture, and the history of Africans in the Americas. The institute is filled with artifacts that you can touch, hold, hear, feel and connect with. I challenge you to leave without feeling the playing of the djembe drums in your soul, seeing yourself in the exhibits, or being emotionally affected by thinking about your ancestors and how their story of their lives is being echoed in what you are experiencing.

Some moments were tragically and painfully truthful in the discussion of the journey of our African ancestors and the ongoing challenges and triumphs for Americans of African descent, as well as our brothers and sisters abroad; other portions of the institute were inspirational in their design to create solutions and be active participants in making substantive positive changes in the world around us. The Healthy Village Learning Institute is a treasure that should be recognized nationally and it is clear Brother Keith Murphy has poured his life into telling the story of "us". Come ready to be both challenged and changed.

### ***Phil Light***

The Healthy Village Learning Institute is not only a place to visit and learn, it is a call to immediate action. Facing our past and present as directly as it's presented there *compels* us to build a better future for our community. And Keith has created a space where those futures can be built and shaped through honest discussions and access to artifacts, books, traditional and modern technology, and mentors. No matter who you are when you walk in the door, you will be a little different person on the way back out.

On my first visit to the Healthy Village Learning Institute (HVLI), I was offered a job opportunity to work as a counselor for Keith Murphy over the summer. The mission of his summer program is to ensure that black and brown children from low-income neighborhoods have counselors that reflect them, respect them, and encourage them to succeed beyond the expected expectations of a child living in the hood. Additionally, the HVLI is a safe place for children to learn about African history and to make sure that these kids can read and know the foundation of math. Although my first experience at HVLI was gratifying and admirable, I felt upset and indignant, and I learned that it is vital to understand what you don't know.

As a black woman who lives in an elitism society and knowing that American will never be an egalitarian country, it is gratifying to see and be a part of a foundation that wants to teach black youth about their history within my city. I grew up in a country that stripped me away from my African history, and throughout my history classes, my learning experience about American enslavement was depressing and offensive. Additionally, I interpreted history regarding my culture that Africans were nothing but slaves, and nothing significant will come from being black. I commend Mr. Murphy for being conscientious and dedicated to the purpose of educating black youth. I admired the African artwork and sculptures; they are unique. Art has a story; you must be willing to see the purpose behind the art. African culture, in general, is special; it is a part of me. It inspires me to know that I come from a history of kings and queens and never to think less of my identity and regions.

When I type this paper, I find myself tearing up. I hate having racial conversations; they are weathering and irritating. I know that it is essential to have racial discussions but having them with your family, friends and now having to converse in the class is frustrating; it never ends! It is upsetting to know the history of Africans who were forced to be Americans through enslavement. At HVLI, that was my first-time seeing slave chains, slave collar and whips. To feel what my assertors were forced to wear and to hold a leather whip that caused anguish saddens me. Generational trauma runs deep within the black community, and no matter how far we have preserved, we seem never to be free from those traumatic 400 plus years. I went from being sad to now being angry emotions that cause pain. It is not fair that I must feel this way, but that's one of the struggles of being black in America. It makes me hate white people all over again. I know that is wrong for me to say, but that is how I feel. Some anti-racist white people are here to fight alongside the black community, but it is hard to forgive.



"It is not what you know but what you do not know," wise words from Mr. Murphy. Learn what you do not know. I was embarrassed to see that I did not know anything about African history. I blame America and myself. The American education system has failed the black community when educating black children about their traditions from Africa and black culture on American soil. I am at the age where I can no longer use excuses not to know where I originate. I know that American history will never teach me about myself; I have to find those answers. It isn't very comfortable when I converse with people from other countries about ethnicity. When they ask, "where does your family originate from" and I cannot answer the question, they look quizzically. I felt like I was being judged (as a stupid person) for not knowing. When I tell them the history of American enslavement, they understand, but I can still feel that that's not an excuse to live in the 21st century and not know your regions. I envy those who have a sense of belonging; "if you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going," Maya Angelou. It is not my fault that Africans were enslaved and stripped away from their identity, but I am responsible for educating myself about my customs.

### ***Madason***

My experience going on that field trip was enlightening, to say the least. Enlightening is only one of the many words I could use to describe that experience. From learning about the exact tools that were used to restrain my ancestors, to taking a deeper dive into the root of the N-word, I've managed to gain a whole new perspective on what being black in America is and means.

For starters, I loved when we dove into who or what we identify as currently. Before going on this trip I would've told anybody that I am an African American male. But we dug deep and got to the root of what and who we really are. I am an African male. Not African American. My ancestors are from Africa, not from this place we call America. I loved it when the speaker asked us "What do they call a Polish man who is born in Germany?" That alone gave me so much insight and just opened my eyes even more to how America treats our brothers as a whole. But it made me realize that it's not even just America and that this is worldwide.

Something else I picked up while being on this trip was that the images that are shown in textbooks or on the internet are so much deeper than what they try to give off. There's always more to every picture almost every time you look at it. The speaker asked us to look at a few images and look carefully. At first, we just pointed out the obvious and said something like "The man is being hung." But once he said look again, we took the time to unravel all of the details of the picture. We noticed that not only was the man being hung but there were white people in trees trying to get a better view of everything that was going on, and some of them in the picture were laughing.

This trip really made me think. I always knew that slavery was terrible but going to the Health Village Learning Institute helped me realize how egregious it was. It also made me realize that I have to be great and there isn't a choice. I say that there isn't a choice because my ancestors went through all of that pain for my freedom. From pregnant mothers being shackled and having to carry heavy buckets, to being whipped and having to walk miles without rest, to being thrown in a dungeon to watch each other's death... The entirety of this trip just opened my eyes to a world I didn't know existed. I had many emotions while being at the learning institute. Anger and sadness are two of the main emotions I felt, but more than that I felt driven. Driven to be my best because that sacrifice couldn't have been for nothing. I won't allow that to be the case.

### ***Reuben***

The Healthy Village Learning Institute was an impeccable experience for me or anyone else that got to learn more behind our African history. Not only heard about what happened but also got the opportunity to go in depth about what enslaved had to physically go through being chained on our ankles and necks and having to be forced to walk 20 to 30 miles without much water or food, the most important things you need to survive.

When being able to hold those heavy chains, the whips that can potentially open a person's flesh if being hit with it. Seeing those pictures of us being hung from a tree while white people got to watch us hang and saw it as comedy. Being able to laugh and not have any care for a human being they looked at us as dogs “niggers” as the whites would call us Africans.

I learned a valuable thing after I left the Healthy Village Learning Institute. It's how to value yourself as a person and don't let anyone put the wrong information into your head. Not only value yourself but start to put a different perspective on life itself, certain things you hear people say to you and how they say it. Another thing I won't forget that brother tony said was figure out what you don't know, always verify for yourself to be sure. “It's not about what you do know, it's about what you don't know”. The way I felt while listening and being able to capture so much information in a matter of little time being able to know it's so much more that i have to learn because I still don't have all of my background history that i need to know as a young African woman. *Tomisha*

Ever since I was a young child and my cousin got married into an African family I have always been interested in our true culture. All I remember was everyone was dressed in traditional clothing and listening to traditional music, but I was so young I didn't really get the full experience. So, The Healthy Village Learning Institute was like an experience to connect everything. I truly feel that was the closest I have ever been to my ancestors. When I walked in, I felt like welcomed like I was home. He had me interested from the introduction when he was talking about his traveling experiences to Ghana and other parts of Africa. As he was saying people have much respect for him there because he has helped in many ways and showed them respect. I took that deeply because a motto I live by is “respect who respects you.” I have always wanted to help and provide for others especially youth so when I stepped into the Institute, I saw this as an opportunity. An opportunity to learn about my culture but also learn different ways to be successful helping and inspiring the youth. After this he took us in the slave dungeon, we were standing so long, and it was hot I can't imagine what our ancestors really went thru in a real dungeon. We even had snacks they weren't allowed any food or water they literally watched each other die. He handed us the actual handcuff and guns created by the white men used to torture us.

This experience for me I was amazed of the obstacles we went through and survived, that should make us superior right there. Also, one thing that stuck with me is how much power the N word holds. He told us that the white men used the n word as a derogatory reference towards us, but now we are using it within us now they don't even have to use it anymore. That's shows who holds the power. The white men also caused us to be African Americans, we are just Africans. They took us from our home worked us, relocated us, and renamed us. Also, we are being called minorities, but there are way more people of color than caucasians in America. We must come together forget the slight differences and remember we come from the same people. This is the only way we will be able to get our power back and get in control. Racism and discrimination have been alive too long and we're the ones that must diminish it.

*Bryce*

The trip to the Health Village Learning Institute was an unforgettable experience that I learned a lot from and will carry on with me and those around me throughout my life. The experience wasn't what I expected it to be at all, in fact, it was the complete opposite. I thought the experience would be like a normal museum where there would be artifacts and other materials from the time period behind a rope or glass with captions on podiums describing its importance. Instead, the Health Village Learning Institute was more up close and personal and really engaged not only myself but my other classmates as well. I felt very intrigued listening, learning, and processing the knowledge that Brother Murphy spoke to us. I felt like I could relate, which I could because these were experiences and events that our ancestors had gone through over the centuries. I learned a lot about the types of whips and chains used to “control” our native people as well as how we've come so far from that time as far as technology and our minds. I also learned and enjoyed Brother Murphy's story that he shared with us about his schooldays and the issues he had gone through, especially when half of his team was ineligible to play. Stories like those connect well with me, and I feel that I was able to get a good sense of the type of individual he was and what he wanted. Brother Murphy gave a

lot of great advice that I could take away from the experience, for example, how he mentioned he owns his school and that he doesn't pay rent or have a lease because it's his, or in his words our building. What I found most shocking was when we were in the circle, and we were passing around the whips and chains and just feeling how strong and sturdy they were and just trying to imagine the strength our ancestors had inside them to deal with such torture. Another thing that was surprise were some of the images around the institute such as the Africans hung and the people circled around smiling like they're at a sporting event and image that explained the 5 dogs with no teeth and the 1 with teeth, it was as if they treated us like toys, wasteful and good for the moment.

### ***Stalin***

As an African Descent who moved to the diaspora or the western world at the age of 9 years old. I have appreciated healthy learning institute. Not only is that place a great learning place, but it can bring people together specially Africans and African Americans. This place will inform people and younger generation of black kids to learn their history not the history told from the white man in their books. Healthy village is that place for everything. As we began school at a younger age history class start from slavery and where the slaves came from and that's how most history books are made. Therefore, as we get older places like healthy village and many more becomes a special place for us to learn and go deeper. Not only is this place welcoming but you will version yourself in Africa. Healthy village is totally different from what version it to be. As he starts back years from the slavery and you learn a lot of things specifically as a black kid. Everything from the culture, arts to the hands-on things at healthy village learning institute are heartwarming. What I experience versus what I thought about the healthy learning was totally different experience and outcome. When you think of the name healthy village institute it just feels like another place to learn a few things but as I step there, everything changed. I felt like I was home as I walked down the steps to the village, and I heard the words "welcome home".

What I like about this place was the hands part of the place. when he took us to the beginning of the start of the enslave Africans in North America, west Indians etc. As the whole class walked down to the start, I started to feel emotions of sadness. For myself and of those stolen Africans. I became sadder with anger as I felt the chains the white man used to restrain those Africans. What surprised me was little children had their little baby chains. That part was so scary and you felt sadness once again. You can see the guns they use and carried. The beginning part was one of my highlights of the trip. Not only did we talked about the African history before slavery, but my peers add some of their thought in as they thought many Africans don't include them in as they too can call themselves African. He said everything where they from, most said American, and most of the African America and he made the point. American is the only place in the world who call black people different names but in other counties u just from African, white or Asia etc. but somehow the blacks in American have different names from the slavery until now. Finally, I don't think I didn't like anything, everything was a learning tool and I will soon will take my siblings who are African born American to health village Learning.

### ***Daruka***

The field trip to the Health Village Learning Institute we a great learning experience. Seeing all the equipment and the art based during slavery was very humbling in my eyes, and the building itself was very enthusiastic. Just watching the African history, my history flashed before my eyes in the 3 hours I was in the building. Though it was a broad experience, there were certain paintings, pictures etc., in which I seen that was very unpleasant. The weapons that were used on slaves, like the whips for example, were very unpleasant to touch. The feeling of the whips was so rough, and I can imagine the pain slaves went through being brutally whipped by those weapons. Also, holding those weighted chains and cuffs, and imagining how slaves had to walk around with all that on every day is disturbing and ridiculous. Seeing how wearing those chains, shackles, or cuffs for many hours and days, I can see how it also damages their posture too. Seeing those scars from the whips on the slaves' back is something I cannot unsee.

This is what really shocked me, seeing how slaves went through all that pain and suffering, and still manage to survive and stay alive. White folks had dogs whose purpose was to catch any slaves who try to run away, so that the slaves will not get hurt, the white folks remove the teeth to only bite the slaves with their gums, but if it is repetitively there will be a one dog with teeth who will catch the slave potentially killing them. One of the things I learned is the true meaning of the N word and its background, which helped me learned that word like that should not

be used in conversation between each other. Not only was the word addressed toward us by white people, but in a way, it is giving them authority or power over us, which should not happen. Also, learning about the words that identify us, for example, white people created the term Black-African American back in the 1900's. Overall it was a great life learning experience, and this is a trip that many other people need to experience because of the lack of knowledge people may have on the African history. I recommend going back again, because you never know, you may learn something new again.

### ***Michrist***

The experience of the field trip was life changing in my eyes. I learned a lot of new information and a lot of things opened my eyes. When I first walked through the door, I did not know what to expect. When I got the paper about things we know about United States culture, I felt confident. I did not know what the purpose of the paper was until I received the next paper. The next paper was about African history. Knowing that I knew nothing about the place that my ancestors came from was embarrassing. It was worse when I realized none of my peers around me knew the answers either. It showed me how in America, they do not teach us about black history, unless it is after slavery. I realized during the trip I do not know anything about where black people were before slavery. The first thought that came to my head when I thought about where black history started was slavery.

The trip made me feel like a new man. Learning about the details of how slaves were treated. Knowing that there are people out there that still care about slavery and studying what happened changed my views. I was shocked during the trip by all the equipment that slave masters had used on slaves. Seeing up close and personal some of things they had to deal with. I found myself complaining about how long we were standing during the trip but came to the realization that my ancestors have endured way more pain than I have while I have been standing for only an hour. Another thing that shocked me was how different the school was in an effective way. Going in the door I did not know we were at a school. I did not realize we were at a school until it was said. Then I saw it all came together when we went upstairs and looked at the classrooms. The classrooms did not look like normal classrooms in normal schools. The classrooms had a lot of technology, and the decorations were touching. As we walked through the "men's room" and "women's room" I got chills seeing the room decorated as young black women and young black men who all were murdered by the police. It made me want to do research on their stories. The entire world knows about the popular stories, but no one knows the stories about African Americans who are killed by the police and their story is not publicized. My takeaway is I personally must do better as a black man in America and I need to encourage my peers to do their research with me, so therefore they can do better. I would love to go back there again.

### ***Maurtice***

What I Learned at the Health Village Learning Institute is that thing we didn't learned in high school which is very weird to me I think that people should be teaching this stuff in high school just in case some people don't go to college. And the other thing is I liked how we was able to touch the artifacts as if we was to go to the museum and we couldn't touch anything, I felt a little weird at some points but at the same time I felt weird because I never knew so little about my people that made me want to learn more. As for me I would like to change my act and the words I use or phrases I use and start to clean up my grammar. I loved every moment of it and would really love to go to Africa and see the place the professor was talking about.

### ***Jacob***

Visiting the Health Village Learning Institute was a great experience for me. I did a lot of research about the things we learned, and I just found more sources. First stepping into the building, I felt comfortable seeing all different artifacts and learning a little more about how our ancestors suffered. I finally got to hold some things they went through, and I never knew they had dollar bills for slaves. That's something high school didn't teach me, so that was a new thing I learned. I like how the whole school building is filled with full of cultures stuff my favorite things were the Egyptian sculptures and the rooms we were in upstairs, the room with all the females that were murdered that

room shocking because I never knew so many were murdered their murders don't really get talked about around me or less it went worldwide its crazy how many were.

### ***Chero***

As soon as I stepped into the building, I felt like I was at home and like my soul connected to something, I just didn't know what, but I soon found out. Everything in the establishment was African oriented and behind every item was strong lineage and history. As soon as you walk in to left of you is a room filled with harmful tools used to enslave blacks and sometimes even kill. There were shackles, neck harnesses, nooses, advertisements to find run-away slaves, and symbolic statues. As these items were passed around, all I could think about is why would any sane human being want to torture someone this badly. I also felt the history, pain, blood, sweat, and tears behind these diabolical man-made objects.

Coming out of the room to the right we're tables filled with degrading things made by whites to remind them of how much they hate us. Church fans with shameful words on the back, posters made for selling little black boys and girls using mortifying words to describe them. Then right next to these horrific objects were things black people created and invented. It really put into perspective how powerful black people really are. Throughout all the beatings, killings, torture, and pain we were still able to outsmart and invent great items and gadgets for everyday use. What had me taken aback was the fact that whites couldn't even come up with ideas to start the invention but could call us ignorant and use our inventions. Taking all of this in, I felt myself getting a bittersweet feel. I was proud and upset at the same time.

Over to the left, was a table full of whipping tools used to beat us whenever we didn't follow the rules. Leather whips, bamboo whips, and whips for women. Out of all the whips the bamboo whip was the harshest because when you wet it, it becomes even more painful to endure because it digs deep into your flesh to tear it out. The women whip was short and hard for close range hits. Going upstairs was the most sentimental part for me. It worshiped black women and black men and celebrated their legacy. Each gender had their prospective sides and was filled with history. The black women side had room filled with pictures of black women killed for no apparent reason. It also had pictures and artwork of women of all colors, light skin, dark skin, albino, or brown skin. They are painting showed that all colors of black women are beautiful, and we all should appreciate ourselves to the highest degree. In conclusion, my experience was entertaining and informative. Learning all of this encourages me to continue to learn and be the best black woman I can be for my ancestors have died for me to get the very opportunity. I know they would be proud of me if I accomplished my dream and lived my life to fullest because that was something they couldn't do, but they paved the way.

### ***Jada***

*If you wish to share your experience, please send it to: [kmurphy@hvlweb](mailto:kmurphy@hvlweb).*