

Project Butterfly New Orleans presents:

HAVING OUR SAY



New Orleans, Louisiana
November 5, 2018
www.projectbutterflynola.org

“If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”- Shirley Chisholm

HAVING OUR SAY

Project Butterfly New Orleans is an African-centered, rites of passage program that prepares girls of African descent for their transition from adolescence to adulthood. The program does this through weekly “Chrysalis Circles” where its evidence-based, culturally-grounded curriculum is implemented to help facilitate girls’ personal development, prepare them with a critical social analysis, build their self-esteem, and address topics including the influence of media on girls and women, body image, girls’ health, effective decision-making, spirituality, and many other topics relevant to adolescent girls.

Project Butterfly New Orleans also hosts monthly programming including our signature Period Party, a program that teaches our butterflies-in-training about their reproductive health and addresses the stigma associated with girls’ menstrual cycles by teaching about its divinity and cultural significance. The Mama Monologues, another signature program, examines challenging issues facing girls of African descent through monologues written and performed by our mentors about their experiences as teenagers.

Having Our Say, is the newest addition to Project Butterfly’s signature programming. The title of the program is a nod to the book about the Delany Sisters, centenarians whose story captured the unique experiences of African American girls and women in the United States. This program seeks to lift up the voices of African American girls and women by helping them examine sociopolitical issues that impact them, and helps them establish a policy platform they can use to advocate for the improvement of their lives. **This is our platform.**



“It is our duty to fight for freedom. It is our duty to win.”- Assata Shakur

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

African American women ages 18 and 19 are **four times more likely to be incarcerated than their White counterparts** (DeMonthier, Childers & Milli, 2017). In addition, African American girls and women have an incarceration rate twice that of White girls and women and African American girls represent 45% of girls suspended in grades K-12 (DeMonthier, Childers & Milli, 2017). African American women also experience racial profiling and higher rates of police brutality than women from all other racial/ethnic groups. Although **African American women only represent about 13% of women in the U.S., they represent 53.4% of women stopped by police** as compared to 13.4% of White women. Additionally, **more than 22% of women killed by police in 2015 were African American women** (DeMonthier, Childers & Milli, 2017). To combat these issues facing African American girls and women, our butterflies-in-training propose the following:

- Establish a commission to examine criminal justice issues impacting African American girls and women.
- Replace school suspensions with support groups, mental health services and leadership opportunities for African American girls and other students.
- Provide educators with professional development to stop the school-to-prison pipeline for African American girls and other students of color (e.g., implicit bias training and training on restorative justice practices).

“No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women.” Michele Obama



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

African American girls and women face an uphill battle in achieving economic stability and well-being. In Louisiana, **African American women are paid 47 cents for every \$1 earned by White men** (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2018). This wage inequity impacts African American families significantly since **52% of African American families in New Orleans are headed by single mothers** (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The impact of this wage inequity is reflected in the fact that **60% of African Americans households in New Orleans are poor or working poor** (Hoopes, Abrahamson, Hills, Mao & Thall, 2015). To address these issues, our butterflies-in-training propose the following:

- Establish wage equity laws to protect women from being underpaid.
- Raise the minimum wage to a liveable wage.
- Provide entrepreneurship education, support and mentorship for African American girls and women who are emerging entrepreneurs.

A **living wage** is an income high enough to meet your **basic needs**.

“Education is the seed of empowerment.”- Rashida H. Govan, Ph.D.



EDUCATION

Educational attainment is linked to lower unemployment rates, higher salaries, longer life expectancy and greater likelihood of voting. Thus, the higher you climb in education, the better your quality of life. Unfortunately, **students at predominantly African American and low-income, public high schools** in New Orleans are **less likely to have access to courses linked to college readiness** than their peers at selective admissions high schools in the city (Govan, 2017). African American students in New Orleans public high schools are also **three times more likely than their peers of other races/ethnicities to be suspended from school** (Govan, 2017). African American and low-income students are also significantly **more likely to be taught by inexperienced and uncertified teachers** than their White and more affluent counterparts (Govan, 2017). To address these issues, our butterflies-in-training recommend the following:

- Recruit, train and retain experienced teachers for schools serving low-income students and students of color.
- Require teachers and school staff to be trained in trauma-informed practices.
- Require that all schools serving low-income students and students of color offer high-level college and career readiness courses.



“We need to stop acting like needing help from professionals is bad. Instead we need to promote getting help and talk about things.”- Butterfly-in-Training

HEALTH CARE

African American girls and women experience significant disparities in their health outcomes. Of girls ages 10-16 surveyed between 2012-2015 (87.3% of respondents were African American), approximately **17% endorsed symptoms of depression (Institute of Women & Ethnic studies, 2015)**. Approximately **17% of girls also endorsed symptoms of current PTSD and almost 19% of girls endorsed symptoms of suicidality**. In addition, the reported cases of **chlamydia among African American girls aged 15-19 year olds were 4.7 times the rate for White girls (CDC, 2015)**. In 2016, **4,560 African American women and girls received an HIV diagnosis**, compared with 1,450 White and 1,168 Hispanic girls and women (CDC, 2018). In order to address these issues, our butterflies-in-training recommend the following:

- Mandate comprehensive sex education in schools with open dialogue and no scare tactics.
- Increase availability and affordability of health care services.
- Establish standards of care guidelines for health care providers to routinely screen for mental health issues during physical health examinations of African American girls and women.



“I know the streets, I know the system, I know poverty, and I know how it feels to be 15 and not have a safe place to go.”

– Lateefah Sampson

HOUSING

Home loan denial rates for African Americans are more than twice that of Whites (Dietrich, Liu, Parrish, Roell, & Skhirtladze, 2018). **African Americans are also 105% more likely than Whites to be given a high-cost mortgage** (Bayer, Ferreira & Ross, 2016). In New Orleans, **61.3% of renters pay 30% or more of their income on housing**, an indicator of unaffordable housing (Owens, 2015). Similarly, **43.9% of homeowners pay 30% or more on home ownership costs** (Owens, 2015). In addition, thousands of blighted properties remain in New Orleans, while thousands of families go without affordable housing. New Orleans has reached a crisis level with unaffordable housing. To address these issues, the butterflies-in-training propose the following:

- Eliminate barriers to financial assistance for housing.
- Turn blighted properties into affordable housing.
- Eliminate policies preventing returning citizens from living in public housing if they do not pose an immediate threat to others.

“I grew up always thinking that fighting for justice was our obligation...- Angela Rye

AFTERWORD

Ujima, the second principle of the Nguzo Saba (seven principles of Kwanzaa) teaches us “to build and maintain our community together, to make our sisters’ and brothers’ problems our problems, and to solve them together.” Our butterflies-in-training are problem-solvers and **Having Our Say** is our effort to lift up the issues that matter to African American girls and women and their families. This platform is a roadmap for policy makers and advocates to address our issues and concerns in order to make our schools, communities, cities and nation better for *all* of us. The voices of African American girls and women matter and we will continue to use our collective voices to push for positive change.

Please sign on to endorse our platform and let our butterflies-in-training (mentees) know that their voices matter. To sign on in support of our platform, visit <https://tinyurl.com/HOSPolicy>.



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