



# One Woman's Mission

To Empower other Women in her Community.

by Martha Joseph Watts

Delay should aim to sharpen skills, hone talent, and build relationships that lead to success.

## Why Wait?

Often, we encounter people who yearn to make an impact but allow the restraints of their geographical location to hinder their desire to start. Why avoid delay because we fear acceptance, or failure? Instead, delay to sharpen skills, hone talent, and build relationships that lead to success.

Ms. Muriel Baptiste, a native of the Caribbean Island of Dominica, can be characterized as an individual who delayed action to develop the skills required to positively impact a community she adopted as an adult. Muriel serves as executive director of Utopia Connect Foundation (UCF), a nonprofit organization on the West Side of Chicago. The Foundation aims to improve the quality of living standards by investing in women and girls through projects, mentorship programs, and community engagements.



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## Preparation

I asked Muriel why she chose a foundation for women and girls. With confidence, she shared her journey. Muriel obtained a bird’s eye view of the problems that permeated her community while working at an educational nonprofit organization, and serving on a variety of committees in Austin, one of 77 communities in Chicago, Illinois. These experiences sharpened her skills, and talent, and she fostered relationships that propelled her desire to help marginalized women and girls. According to her, those moments of relationship building moved her to act, and in 2014, she started Utopia Connect Foundation with the sole purpose of adding value to her community.

## Bloom where you are planted

Passion saturated Muriel’s response as she expressed her reason for choosing to impact rather than watching from the sideline.

She said, “until you walk the streets and build relations with real people with names, hear their stories, feel their pain, and see their potential, they are just a number or another sad story. After experiencing, first-hand, the struggles of women and children in Austin, I knew I had to act.”

UCF believes that if marginalized women recognize that they have potential, and they can develop skills that lead to independent and sustainable lifestyles, then they will develop a confidence that will lead to more accomplished lives and this transformation will, in turn, strengthen their community.

## Building Community

In addition to skill development, *UCF* organizes projects that give back. *UCF* noticed that when community members engaged in projects that build or uplift their environment, they developed a sense of pride. Therefore, they plant trees, release butterflies, feed, and clothe those in need.





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## Don't Wait to Impact

Muriel encourages readers to bloom where they are planted. She said, "If you can't organize programs, support those who do. Teach a skill, volunteer your time, or donate your money."

## Greatest Need

According to Muriel, the foundation's greatest need is to own a facility in a strategic location in the community of Austin. It would provide a place for volunteers to teach skills such as baking, coding, sewing, and any educational program that contributes to the advancement of individuals and the community.

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