

# CPHE Newsletter, September, 2018

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

Dear CPHE participants and friends,

We've had lots of twists and turns this year at MEDICC, and the roller-coaster hasn't stopped yet. For CPHE, it's been a good ride, and it's all about the youth. This spring we launched our "Empowering Youth Leadership for Lasting Change" program, thanks to funding from The Christopher Reynolds Foundation. In April we sponsored leaders and youth from CPHE communities to attend two mind-expanding conferences. This summer we had the intra-site youth exchanges between inner city Milwaukee and the very rural Navajo Nation. And in January, 2019, youth and CPHE leaders will travel to Cuba and spend part of

the week immersed in activities alongside Cuban youth. These experiences can be transformative for residents of CPHE communities whose lives are directly affected by health inequities.

The lessons from Cuba, and the interactions with each other, are personal and profound for CPHE members. They reinforce the importance of each community knowing its culture and history, and they confirm that to turn things around, the focus needs to be on root causes of inequities. Institutions are guardians of the status quo. The CPHE network is about empowerment, solidarity and building capacity to change the narrative about who matters. Onward!

-Diane Appelbaum

## Milwaukee CPHE Youth in Navajo Nation

***In late August, Milwaukee CPHE leader Terron Edwards and Javon Hill, a youth in his Boys 2 Leaders group, spent three days in the Navajo Nation, followed by a day with Francisco Ronquillo, CPHE Albuquerque.***

**From Terron:** "I probably drove one thousand miles over the three days. You know you're not home when you see wild horses just walking down the side of the road! Our hosts, **Kerlissa Bitah** and **John Hosteen**, showed us a garden they planted with local youth, near the Trading Post at Teec Nos Pos, NM. They deserve a shoutout for growing corn, melons, squash, cucumbers, in barren, rocky desert land. We visited the state of the art clinic in Red Mesa, AZ, which has over 50,000 visits a year from outlying communities, and where outreach programs like John's focus on prevention, as in Cuba. The Navajo Sweat Lodge was an AMAZING experience. Javon and I were up to the challenge of this cleansing ritual, which is a test of our physical self. I hear they don't do this for everyone so I feel especially blessed. Javon and I met Stanley Nez, an elder who is a storyteller and one of the wisest men I have met. He talked about resources for families, culture and parenthood. He was impressed to hear that we had done the sweat lodge ritual earlier and said that it fit us!



**Top: Navajo Hogan**



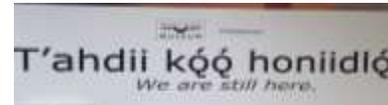
**Middle: Healthy garden**



**Bottom: Elders prepare sweat lodge (in background)**



*Left to right: Nathaniel Brown, Council Delegate, welcomes Terron Edwards and Javon Hill from Milwaukee to the Navajo Nation Council Chamber in Window Rock, AZ. Kerlissa Bitah, Eva Bennet, Carmen George, and Casey Long, Navajo community youth leader, join in the welcome.*



The CPHE network decided two years ago that the greatest investment from our learning in Cuba is in our youth, and their involvement in the Navajo Nation has gone forward and enacted in ways I couldn't imagine. I met a young woman in the Office of the President in Window Rock who has a seat in the govern-

**“This is a nation of people that know who they are, have lots of pride, and just really have a vision for themselves.”**

ment. Ms. Navajo herself represents a real beacon of hope for young girls that come behind her.

Don't get me wrong, even though it is a population outside of US culture, it is still part of the US; folks have their problems; alcoholism is big; suicide rate is high; there is a population of men, they call them *grifters*, who detach from their families and society. It is a place that has its problems, but all in all, they have owned the solutions to their problems by talking to folks, getting real, and not waiting for someone to come and save them. They understand that this is their land, these are their issues, and these are the things they need to invest in. I just love the togetherness and, as we say at home, the *attachment to the root*. Cultural identity, being able to have something that you can call your own, authentically, genuinely, and unapologetically, are pillars to move out from

even when we have trauma, even when we have things that break us up, and even with external factors get in the way. I am feeling renewed. I have a lot of unpacking to do looking at the parallels. Like the sweat lodge, back home we have *Men's Wellness* and *Boys 2 Leaders*, working to provide the true rites of passage for the young men in Milwaukee. Thanks again to the beautiful people of the Navajo Nation for showing so much love! Thanks to Davis ChestMate Filfred, Nate Brown and VP Nez's staff for giving us experiences that we would both never have received otherwise.

Good luck during the upcoming elections!

Thanks to Filfred Ralph for allowing us into your circle and thank you Kerlissa, Casey, Francisco

and John for being such awesome CPHE partners, and thank you Diane Appelbaum and MEDICC for supporting this experience. We will honor it in the best way and pay it forward next month.”

***Terron, Javon and Francisco enjoy fresh (New) Mexican food***



**“I am about to go back home and really do some work.”**

## Navajo Nation CPHE Youth in Milwaukee

*In early September, 2018, John Hosteen, CPHE leader from Navajo Nation, and Kenissha Joe, Navajo community youth worker, visited Milwaukee's CPHE community in Lindsay Heights.*

Ya'at'eeh Greetings, my name is **John Hosteen** from the Navajo Nation CPHE team. I had the opportunity to travel to Milwaukee, Wisconsin with a young Dine' person, **Ms. Kaye Joe** from Red Mesa. I have had the honor of working on various community health projects with Kaye for the past 4 years. Kaye and the other youth and young adults in the Red Mesa area of the Navajo Nation have seen and heard my stories of traveling to Cuba as part of MEDICC, and its program, CPHE. My experience was inspiring and enlightening in that the people of Cuba showed me how communities can work together in creative ways to increase the quality of life of their people by investing in social capital and relationships. This is similar to traditional Dine' ways of bringing families and communities together. With the support of MEDICC and the CPHE team I was able to start a youth media team in which our mission is to capture stories happening now and historically on film, photography and interviews to share with community members and reinvigorate traditional teachings of health and wellness. Kaye and a team of High School Seniors are leading and working on this project with me.

**“In Milwaukee, I felt the same spark of inspiration and motivation I felt when I returned from Cuba.”**

We were hosted by **Terron Edwards**, CPHE Milwaukee. This network of communities brought together by MEDICC and our Cuba experience was what made this particular trip to Milwaukee even more inspiring and eventful. I had met Terron before at a CPHE conference and got a glimpse of the projects he was working on, but not until I saw and met the people he was working with did I realize how impactful his work is. In particular I saw how they invest in their youth by mentoring and including them in cross generational activities, a common practice in Cuban life. The plethora of

community partnerships ranging from the *Milwaukee Bucks Feeding America Food Bank*, *Art and Music Professors* and *Youth Artist* instilled in me a sense of what our programs on Navajo can become and I was overcome by a relief that we are doing great things although on a smaller scale.



**Terron, Kaye, and John at Milwaukee Brewers game**

Our visit concluded with the annual Harvest Day Festival. This was a familiar sight because we also celebrate fall harvest in our own communities. But it was not until our last day that I got to see the infamous Walnut Way peach orchard, and I found myself sharing the story of the apricot orchards on Navajo land. Pre- 1864

apricot orchards were a staple of Dine' food source. When Kit Carson was commissioned to round up the Dine' People to march them to an imprisonment camp in eastern NM, his strategy was to cut and burn down these trees so important to Navajo life. As a result of that forced march, the US government introduced flour and beef into the Dine' diet, and the people struggled to adapt to this new food. To this day we still struggle with non-traditional foods which have led to the high rate of diabetes and heart disease across the Navajo Nation. I was intrigued that I could change that narrative by sharing this story with the Dine' youth and even starting an apricot orchard next planting season. A thought I would've never considered if I didn't see a peach orchard in the middle of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and see how people can come together and work for a positive, unselfish purpose like in the communities of Cuba.

**From Kenisha (Kaye) Joe:** “I’d like to start off by thanking the MEDICC organization for giving John and I the opportunity to visit Milwaukee, Wisconsin and experience the growth that CPHE members have established in their own community. And thank you to all the members of CPHE for being such great role models and working together to sustain better living for our community members. It has been a real honor to represent our Navajo Nation and speak amongst their people and exchange ideas and cultural values we all value within ourselves and our communities. Our trip was nothing but informative and inspiring. The night we arrived in Milwaukee, we were greeted by **Terron Edwards**, our host, and were taken straight to the Brewers vs Cubs baseball game! The next day, our neurotransmitters were in full gear, beginning with a tour of the non-profit organization called *Walnut Way*, founded in 2000 by Lindsey Heights residents Sharon and Larry Adams. Their main work is to initiate and sustain a positive economic, and neighbor impact by developing successful programs for the youth, adults and business owners. We went to their locally-owned business called the *Juice Kitchen* located literally a minute walk away from the *Walnut Way* house, which uses only organic fruits and vegetables for their recipes. I found that very inspiring because the *Juice Kitchen* is for the community and the community is all aware that without them the kitchen wouldn’t be so successful, so I noticed as we were there sampling, customers came in, but it was like a reunion because everyone



knew each other and it was just Positive vibes the entire time! We met youth of Shalom High school and exchanged very inspiring stories with one another. We met with the group of men to fatherhood group. Back home, we have a women’s wellness group, we have title x, classes for mothers and I just noticed we don’t really have anything for the men, for the fathers, for the future fathers. These fathers that came together in

Milwaukee all welcomed each other like family, no matter what anyone went through, no matter their upbringings, no matter their opinions, they listened,

**“If we could establish what they had in Milwaukee, and have that for the men and young men on the reservation, could that make an impact?”**

they supported and they understood each other. I knew we needed something like that back home on our reservation because of the high numbers of young fathers that are absent in their children’s life. Is it support they lack? Is it the lack of education of parenthood they lack? Is it the lack of guidance?

The next day we went on a private tour of the public museum from their very own lead anthropologist and director of First Nation studies! And then we attended the Indian Summer festival and got to meet Mark Powell, the director of *Our Ways* Indian community school. We were personally invited to visit the school and the students! The very last day of the trip was spent at the annual Harvest Day celebration right on the street of *Walnut Way*, with food vendors, booths, and performers. And with great honor, John and I were included as speakers! We were able to reflect on our experience of the trip and thanked the community for bringing us in as ‘one of their own.’



Navajo Nation in Milwaukee continued...

I was also infatuated when we visited *Alice's Garden*, where the entire community plants and takes care of each other's vegetation. With our high rate of diabetes on the reservation, productive gardens could really impact our communities in positive and healthy ways to sustain wellness and nutrition. The day was winding down pretty quickly and there was still sooooo much to see ... but we pretty much have many motives to return again.

**“Thank you so much for the work that you do in allowing youth as myself to become more aware of how we can be that change. I will definitely step up to get my fellow youth more involved.”**

*Terron, John, and Kaye at Harvest Day*



## **Social Medicine Consortium: Sharing Strategies for Health Equity Gallup, NM, April 2018**

MEDICC provided support for 5 members of the Navajo Nation CPHE to attend this international conference, including **McKayla Littleben**, an active youth in the Red Mesa community. McKayla joined **Kerlissa Bitah, John Hosteen, Malysa Egge** and **Darlene Begay** in a presentation on CPHE activities in Navajo Nation. **Francisco Ronquillo, Marsha McAvila** and **Fernando Ortega** from Albuquerque CPHE also attended the consortium, which focused on recognizing global interconnectedness, and supporting the next generation of health professionals.



**Darlene Begay** was reminded of Cuba, where children are encouraged to pursue a career according to what is needed in the community. **Dr. Camara Jones** was a keynote, and **Jonathan Nez**, Vice President of the Navajo Nation, closed the consortium.

Examples from Navajo Nation demonstrate the connection between historical injustice and health as well as resistance and community organizing that foster health.

*Above: CPHE Navajo Nation and other CPHE attendees*

*Left: Kerlissa Bitah, John Hosteen and McKayla Littleben present at the Consortium*



## Keeping it Real: Policy Link Equity Summit: Our Power, Our Future, Our Nation, Chicago, April, 2018

*Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore.* This was a conference like no other. The language was bolder, no longer about "cultural competence," but about power, racism, colonization. Music and dancing were not add-ons, but incorporated into the meetings. In a funders' panel entitled "Race, Power and the Role of Philanthropy in Driving Change" there was a clear acknowledgment that the solutions to inequity are rooted in communities, and that there needs to be a redistribution of power through a racial justice lens. As one foundation program officer stated, "With centuries of having the decks stacked against people of color, foundations have to roll the tape back and move the money to where the hurt is the worst."



**"By making connections with people you can relate to, it helps both parties see their problems from a different point of view."**

-Teikani Richardson

As part of CPHE's youth program, MEDICC provided support for 2 young Milwaukee participants to attend the conference: **Teikani Richardson** and **Quanaja Williams**, as well as **Terron Edwards** – all from the CPHE Lindsey Heights community of Milwaukee. They noted that a strong focus of the conference was to address past harms, embrace inclusion, build an equitable economy, and model true democracy in solidarity with the emerging people of color majority. **Teikani** participated in a workshop which encouraged intergenerational collaboration, fitting to CPHE's collective goal to include youth in community initiatives,

as inspired by Cuba. Participants discussed the benefit of young men of color having adult men of color in their lives to propel the work of racial justice for young men of color, their families, and their communities. Back in Milwaukee, Teikani presented what he learned at this session to *Walnut Way's Boys 2 Leaders* program and *Men's Wellness* groups.

MEDICC Board member **Arnold Perkins** and CPHE Director, **Diane Appelbaum** attended the conference, as did **Danielle Burrell**, CPHE New Orleans and **Sonya Vasquez**, CPHE South LA. Danielle was a New Orleans representative of *Family Independence Initiative*, and explained that "FII works to change the narrative about low-income families in the US, by trusting and investing directly in families so that they can work to achieve prosperity. The Summit was an encouraging renewal of energy and commitment to do the work of community uplift - which inspires my ongoing commitment to my New Orleans CPHE team, working to realize positive change in Central City."

**"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."**

Audre Lourde



**Diane, Teikani, Terron, Quanaja (MKE), and Danielle (NOLA)**

## Cuba Salud 2018 International Convention, April, 2018

This convention in Havana provided a space for the exchange of ideas on current and future challenges to global public health including efficient and sustainable health systems, international cooperation in health, medical education, and universal access and universal health coverage. **Bill Wagner**, Albuquerque CPHE, was invited as part of a MEDICC panel to share information and outcomes on CPHE programs in the US. CPHE was also represented by **Claudia Benavidez** and **Alma Olivas** from Albuquerque and **Adam Bradley** from CPHE New Orleans. Bill shared that “It was a momentous time, right after the election of Cuban President Díaz-Canel, to talk about the successes of the Cuban healthcare system, and how Cuba can be a model for world leaders in healthcare, including the World Health Organization. I was able to establish lasting connections with public health leaders from the US and Cuba, including members of PAHO and Zoe Díaz Bernal, PhD, an



anthropologist at The Cuban National School of Public Health.”

**From Adam Bradley**, CPHE New Orleans, ED of *Luke’s House*: “The Cuba Salud conference was the most significant conference I have ever attended. There is something to be said being in a room with 400 of the world’s leading health authorities from around the globe, but mostly from the Global South which has been ransacked over the last 500+ years. We were in the room with people who had spent their entire lives fighting fascism, racism, and capitalism, working to provide access to healthcare to the poorest people on the planet, and throughout it all had high spirits and continued to believe in their convictions. We saw Cuba’s public health model, rooted in best practices, first-hand and learned about their tremendous pharmaceutical and technological advancements.

We attended sessions that highlighted the difficulties the new sanctions against Cuba cause in our ability to effectively collaborate with Cuban scientists. There are a lot of opportunities to develop novel cancer treatments and pharmaceuticals that have been put on the shelf due to the blockade that hurts people from both countries by putting politics before science.

**“Cuba Salud will become a long-term professional development piece at our organization.”**

Cuba Salud offered great networking possibilities, opportunities to learn and collaborate on projects with people from across the globe, and guidance for professionals looking to make their organizations, communities, and world more equitable for everyone.”



Register at the [MEDICC website](#) now for this exciting conference. There is no better place to experience Cuba than spectacular Santiago de Cuba, the birthplace of Cuban independence.

# South LA CPHE: In The Mean Time Men’s Group – Making a Difference in the Lives of African American Young Gay Men

*Cynthia Davis, MPH, is an Assistant Professor, College of Medicine and College of Science and Health at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science. She is also a pioneer member of the South Los Angeles CPHE, which traveled to Cuba in 2005-2007. With support from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, MEDICC was able to further Professor Davis’ important work with young African American gay men.*

*In the Mean Time Men’s Group* (ITMTMG) is a 501 c3 non-profit organization based in Los Angeles, California which was established over 21 years ago to address the physical, spiritual and mental health well-being of African American young gay men aged 18 to 25. Currently, the CDC estimates that 50% of African American gay men will become HIV infected in their lifetime. A staggering statistic. But it is real. I have been working with ITMTMG for close to 15 years. I started out providing free HIV rapid testing to the organization and then was asked to join the South Los Angeles Crystal Meth Task Force, founded by Jeffrey King, the Executive Director of ITMTMG. With funding from the LA County Office of AIDS Programs and Policy, the Task Force developed culturally appropriate programming over 5 years to address the Crystal Meth epidemic ravaging the gay community in Los Angeles County. They developed a website and educational brochures as well as a series of workshops which presented factual information highlighting the negative outcomes of Crystal Meth addiction. The Task Force was so successful that the LA County Health Department made more funding available so that other Crystal Meth Task Forces could be developed throughout LA County. With a mini-grant from MEDICC’s CPHE, I collaborated with King on the



*Professor Davis with members of In the Mean Time Men’s Group*

development of a series of “primary prevention” workshops targeting the clientele of ITMTMG. Over the course of a six month period, workshops were implemented on STIs and HIV, PrEP and Mental Health. Analysis of pretest and posttest evaluation forms from all of these workshops, established that the young gay men did benefit from this life saving information; some had misinformation regarding the transmission of HIV and other STIs and some had minimal knowledge of the new bio-medical regimen called PrEP. PrEP targets HIV negative at risk individuals, who are encouraged to take a once a day pill called Truvada to protect themselves from infection with HIV. PrEP when used correctly and taken consistently, has proven to be over 90% effective

**“Hundreds of young African American gay men in South Los Angeles have been able to take back their lives and live openly in a society which, in many instances, has stigmatized them and counted them out.”**

in reducing sero conversion from HIV negative to HIV positive. PrEP does have its drawbacks though, including the price of the medication as well as adherence issues and several serious side effects.

*ITMTMG continued...*

Hundreds of young African American gay men in South Los Angeles have benefited by the hard work of the dedicated staff of ITMTMG. They have learned how to protect themselves against HIV acquisition and these ongoing health education and disease prevention interventions have enhanced their self-esteem. ITMTMG is a model for effective community mobilization, and was recently involved in a five-year CDC funded study which proved to be very effective in increasing knowledge of HIV risk among young gay men of color. The ITMTMG curriculum has been cited by the CDC as “an evidenced-based” curriculum to use when targeting African American young gay men for HIV/AIDS-related health education and risk reduction. My hat is off to Jeffrey King and all of his staff who have dedicated their lives to saving the lives of a generation of Black young gay men who are worthy of their time and attention. Kudos to In the Mean Time Men’s Group and to all of the staff and volunteers. I say, keep Up the Exemplary Work.”



**Cynthia Davis and Jeffrey King,  
ED of ITMTMG**

## Bronx CPHE

**Roberto Claudio**, CPHE-Bronx, credits his experience in Cuba as important to his personal and professional life at *Bronx-Lebanon Hospital* and *Claremont Neighborhood Center*. Cuba provides an example of what can be accomplished when a transparent and inclusive environment is established with residents and leaders working together. Shortly after returning from Cuba in 2016, Roberto was encouraged by **Dr. Douglas Reich**, Chair of Family Medicine at *Bronx-Lebanon* and part of CPHE, to become a Community Health Worker (CHW). The CHWs are now involved in community outreach, including activities within tenement buildings and Bronx housing developments. **Linda Kemp** and *Bringing the Peace* held several breast cancer events recently to gain support of her petition to expand insurance coverage for early detection and prevention and to stop denying screenings on the basis of age, family history, or gender. Linda has gained the support of Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson and a Brooklyn oncologist. Her petition has received over 1,000 written signatures and 400 more on change.org. With 5,000 signatures, the proposal will be taken to Congress. The hope is that *Bringing the Peace* will be a 501c3 by the beginning of 2019. The organization dissolves silos.

**“I would not be as involved as I am had I not gone to Cuba.”**



**Linda Kemp (center, big smile) with supporters**

## Albuquerque CPHE

**Bill Wagner** reports, “Albuquerque team is really benefiting from being part of CPHE. We are starting to be more involved in policy making. New Mexico is going to be proposing the possibility of Medicaid buy in, which would allow a lot of local residents who don’t meet local qualifications or are undocumented the option of lower cost healthcare. Centro Sávila is expanding community engagement and community partners. In October, we are having a workshop with our colleagues and community to move toward policy change that is preventative and upstream. Examples include putting money into education and healthcare instead of juvenile detention centers. We have a lot of leaders that are developing systems of change comparable to what we see in Cuba -- a preventative, inter-sectoral, lower cost, higher yield system.”

# Milwaukee, Navajo Nation and New Orleans CPHEs

*As part of our Empowering Youth Leadership for Lasting Change program, MEDICC was able to provide start-up funds to our partners in these three newer CPHEs:*

## CPHE Milwaukee



*Walnut Way's Growing Youth Leadership* is an internship program for teens to maintain urban gardens, harvest produce and sell produce at a local farmer's market. The program has completed three 10-week cycles of this training. The *Boys 2 Leaders* program provides workshops for youth ages 10-21 on subjects such as conflict resolution, pain and grieving, trauma, leadership and career path skills. Over the summer, youth attended the workshops, and 7 were connected to employment or academic resources.

## CPHE Navajo Nation

CPHE Navajo Nation follows the team motto "Growing Our Own" as they work on their many community- and youth-inspired projects, including community gardens, the *Red Mesa High School Media Team*, and the *Trash to Art/Community Clean Up* program. CPHE Navajo Nation member and teacher and coordinator at *T'iis Nazbas FACE* Program, **Kerlissa Bitah**, was select-

ed as the 2018 Navajo Nation First Things First Champion for Young Children for her awareness-raising efforts, including traveling to Cuba with CPHE to gain ideas for service and program implementation. Current Navajo Nation Vice President **Jonathan Nez**, who traveled to Cuba with CPHE, is running for the presidency in November.



**Top: Community garden team  
Bottom: Red Mesa High School Media Team**

## CPHE New Orleans

The *Youth Mental Wellness* program is in the beginning stages of recruiting participants, spearhead-

ed by CPHE member **Mama Jamilah** at the *Ashé Cultural Arts Center*. In the meantime, **Adam Bradley**, ED of *Luke's House* clinic, reports, "Luke's House has tripled our clinical capacity through a partnership with the City of New Orleans and its Federally Qualified Health Center, Healthcare for the Homeless (HCH). We moved from a 1,400 square-foot shotgun house to a 7,500 square foot facility. We also know that the social determinants of health drive the health outcomes of community members much more forcefully than access to care alone. Cuba's focus on primary care and prevention means they spend far less on healthcare than the US and see almost identical health outcomes. Luke's House is taking this Cuban/socialist model and promoting prevention first. We provide day laborers education regarding how to be safe at work, nutrition classes to families looking to save money and lower their risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. We offer community gardening, cooking, and fitness classes that highlight how to eat healthier on a budget, how to exercise without needing a gym membership, how to de-stress and cope with the challenges of systemic oppression. We are excited to see how our focus on prevention will impact the future health of our community members and their children."