 changinG THE oddS

the inspiring ways our community is creating a path to economic mobility.

Profound Gentlemen, a Charlotte nonprofit organization, conducts a mentoring session as it seeks to provide young African-American men guidance from male educators of color. Supported by the Unite Charlotte fund, it is one of many organizations driving change in our community. In this special section, you can read more about Profound Gentlemen (page 10) and other organizations that are making a difference in our community, and discover ways to get involved.
Inspiring Stories: Rohan’s Road to Success

A Letter from the Publisher

We can all learn from the inspiring story of Charlotte’s Rohan Brown. Just five years ago, at 24 years old, Rohan was selling his blood plasma and taking on any yard work he could find to support himself. Raised in poverty, his chances of reaching economic stability were not good. A 2011 national study ranked Charlotte 50 out of 50 big cities in providing opportunities for people like Rohan to climb the economic ladder.

But today, Rohan is beating the odds, with the help of our community’s deepening drive to create more opportunities for people born with few advantages. Now 29, Rohan has worked his way into a good career with benefits and income that support his wife and two young children.

Rohan’s journey illustrates the circuitous nature of the path from poverty to stability. It also reflects determination, the critical role nonprofits can play, and a willingness by his employer to take risks.

The Challenge Is Clear

Lifting more families from poverty can feel overwhelming, but with perseverance—and action by each of us—it can be achieved. Over the last two years, the Charlotte WILL coalition has sought to raise awareness of the opportunity gap that undermines Charlotte’s success. This coalition of 23 public, private and nonprofit organizations – including The Charlotte Observer – has invested in a campaign to support and draw attention to nonprofit agencies making a difference throughout the Charlotte region.

Inside this special advertising section, you’ll find profiles of nonprofits such as Profound Gentlemen, which is captured on the cover and whose mission is to improve education by nurturing current and aspiring male educators of color. This is exactly the kind of grassroots, niche effort that will chip away at issues that limit economic mobility.

The issues are well documented in a recent report by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force. From that report grew a nonprofit group called Leading on Opportunity, which aspires to rally the community around a vision of a Charlotte that cares about all of our children and youth – regardless of income, race or zip code – and where all children feel they belong, have big dreams and can find opportunities to achieve their dreams.

Leading on Opportunity is focused on improving early childhood education, college and career readiness, and family stability – key factors in determining whether young people like Rohan are able to advance and share in the prosperity of our community.

Rohan’s Journey

Rohan says he would not be where he is today without the network of companies he gained access to through Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont. After graduating from high school in Bennettsville, S.C., Rohan came to Charlotte in 2009 in search of opportunity. For two years, he cobbled together income from yardwork, a factory job that he kept up, and twice-a-week sales of his blood plasma. Then, in 2011, he found Goodwill.

Company founder Steve Wilson liked what he saw. If they asked Rohan to assemble 1,000 packages in a day, he would do 2,000. When Rohan asked for more responsibility, Wilson moved him to the embroidery machine room where patterns are stitched. Then, Rohan asked to learn how to digitize designs – tapping into his affinity for art – and now is a full-time designer for the company. He has digitized thousands of patterns including one named for him: “Rohan’s Roses.”

“Some companies won’t even talk to you if you can’t check off all the boxes, but I don’t care what your background is,” said Wilson. He added, “It’s people like Rohan that make businesses grow.”

Help Impact Real Change

Like Wilson, every citizen can support the work of creating opportunities. We can contribute to or volunteer with nonprofits that advance economic mobility. We can press our elected officials for policy changes that support equality. Most importantly, we can ask ourselves “What am I doing to advance – or block – the trajectory of our children, youth and families?” And then, take action to become part of the solution.

To get started, you can visit the Charlotte WILL website, which provides links to many of the region’s nonprofits. The website also features stories of people who are changing lives through volunteer service and of those whose lives have been lifted. My hope is that each one of us will create our own story starting today.

Rohan’s progress zigzagged. First, he took Goodwill’s construction training course. That led to a 90-day construction job in Goodwill’s network that provides work experience. But when that job ended, construction companies weren’t hiring.

“I didn’t let it get me down,” said Rohan. “My choice was to give up and do nothing – or keep trying.”

Next, he joined Goodwill’s temporary work program, GoodWork Staffing, and lobbied for slots at any company that called. In 2012, Rohan landed in the packaging department of a Charlotte embroidery company called Anita Goodesign, which needed short-term help.

“Some companies won’t even talk to you if you can’t check off all the boxes, but I don’t care what your background is,” said Wilson. He added, “It’s people like Rohan that make businesses grow.”

Read on to learn about organizations dedicated to improving economic mobility in our community. See how you can get involved at CharlotteWILL.com/nonprofits and LeadingOnOpportunity.org.
CHARLOTTE WILL
IS A COALITION OF PUBLIC, PRIVATE & NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

formed to support and bring attention to various community nonprofits that are dedicated to improving economic mobility, education and literacy. Business, civic and educational organizations have partnered in this campaign to raise awareness of opportunities for the community to engage, volunteer and make an individual impact. The following pages feature initiatives that are making positive change in our community. The campaign supports the recommendations of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force, and highlights the efforts of grassroots nonprofits and individuals. To learn more, please visit CharlotteWill.com/nonprofits.

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LEADING ON OPPORTUNITY

UNITED WAY OF CHARLOTTE

CHANGE THE FUTURE.

Learn about organizations dedicated to improving economic mobility in our community. See how you can get involved at CharlotteWill.com/nonprofits and LeadingOnOpportunity.org.
United Way’s new United Neighborhoods initiative takes a multi-generational approach to creating opportunity for all, beginning in the Grier Heights [pictured] and Renaissance communities.

The long-term goal of United Neighborhoods is to improve economic mobility by addressing issues related to education, health, financial stability and basic needs in each community.

United Way’s neighborhood-level investment may focus on creating a stronger infrastructure, and build thriving communities.

Beyond Grier Heights and Renaissance, for at-risk neighborhoods that currently lack such an infrastructure, United Way is creating Block Building grants to help individual neighborhoods that want to partner with United Way once the key parameters are in place for neighborhood-level investment to succeed.

The study’s key finding was clear: children born in poverty in our city, and our region as a whole, have very little chance of climbing out of it during their lifetime — unless we as a community come together to take action for our neighbors in need.

The Task Force’s highest aspiration is that Charlotte-Mecklenburg leaders — governmental, philanthropic, business, faith, nonprofit, neighborhood and grassroots — as well as the community at large, will come together in the months and years ahead to re-evaluate our systems and structures, change policies and practices, and otherwise boldly embrace and rally around a vision of Charlotte-Mecklenburg as a community that cares about all our children and youth— regardless of income, race or ZIP code — and where all our children can be healthy, have big dreams, and the opportunities to achieve those dreams.

UNITED WAY’S NEW APPROACH Any potential for fulfilling this vision requires a willingness to do things differently — which is why United Way of Central Carolinas is changing how the organization serves the community with a new strategy that focuses on building stronger neighborhoods, improving systems that serve children and families, and providing basic needs support across our region.

As a trusted community partner for 85 years, United Way is uniquely positioned to bring together the people, resources and services to give children born in poverty in our region the chance for a better life. From their unique position at the center of the nonprofit, government, philanthropic and business communities, United Way is taking the lead in responding to the building stronger neighborhoods, improving systems that serve children and families, and providing basic needs support across our region.

To create an environment of opportunity for all, United Way’s new impact strategy is expanding beyond the traditional Impact Grants — the annual funding distributed to a broad network of partners across five counties — and bolstering those investments with two new initiatives, United Neighborhoods and Unite Charlotte.

UNITED NEIGHBORHOODS In September, United Way launched United Neighborhoods as a new community-led and community-based effort to invest in specific underserved neighborhoods. This new approach begins with a $2.6 million investment over three years in the Grier Heights and Renaissance neighborhoods in Charlotte, and will expand into other neighborhoods in the future.

United Neighborhoods is to provide the resources needed to help people stop living in a state of emergency, and then help them get to a place where they can thrive.

The first two neighborhoods were selected based on two key criteria; each United Neighborhood must be located in the five-county footprint of United Way and face clearly documented challenges, such as low resident income, education and unemployment rates, high crime rates, or a lack of safe, affordable housing options.

The neighborhood must also be engaged in active revitalization efforts led by an existing Community Quarterback agency and driven by resident engagement.

United Neighborhoods will accelerate each neighborhood’s own vision for revitalization, partnering with a specific Community Quarterback, an agency working inside each neighborhood to promote positive on-the-ground change.

The initiative focuses on partnerships with residents, community leaders, businesses and nonprofit partners, backed by multiyear funding and staff resources from United Way.

From helping families become financially stable and find affordable housing, to preparing children to enter school ready to learn and the needs of these communities are many and varied. United Way’s neighborhood-level investment may focus on creating early childhood education opportunities, supporting job training and creation, or helping individuals meet basic needs, but regardless of how the work is customized for each neighborhood, the end goal is to address the needs of residents, create a stronger infrastructure, and build thriving communities.

People should have the opportunity to move to change their odds of success. We need to make them aware and give them the tools to make a difference.

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UNITED CHARLOTTE In addition to its future Block Building grants, United Way began investing in smaller neighborhood organizations and grassroot nonprofits in spring of 2017 through its Unite Charlotte, a community fund established in response to Charlotte’s civic unrest in fall 2016.

Led by initial grants from Wells Fargo and Duke Energy, and facilitated by United Way and Foundation For The Carolinas, the fund supports programs and organizations focused on addressing issues related to racial equity and social justice.

Lead United Way funders include Wells Fargo, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Duke Energy, Walmart Foundation, Elevate Church, Foundation For The Carolinas, Charlotte Will, Clarion, and The Charlotte Observer; in addition to contributions from other individual and organizational donors.

The generosity of these community partners resulted in $481,577 in front-room grants to 25 local nonprofits, and neighborhood organizations, with additional Unite Charlotte grants planned for the future. The 2017 grants ranged from $1,550 to $23,000 and were invested in programs ranging from job creation and entrepreneurial training to formerly incarcerated individuals, to addressing gentrification of minority neighborhoods, to building trust between communities and the police and justice systems.

The Unite Charlotte grant applications were evaluated by a 12-member committee consisting of leaders from the faith, education and business communities, as well as community-based organizations and donors. Committee member Brandon Neal, senior counsel for Wells Fargo, said the review process was “exciting and energetic. It gave us an opening to change the dynamic and paradigms of traditional grantmaking in Charlotte.”

“We’re planting seeds in neighborhoods that may have been overlooked in the past,” he added. “We’re also encouraging grant recipients to collaborate strategically for a larger impact than they could achieve on their own.”

YOU CAN HELP CREATE OPPORTUNITY Lasting change cannot be achieved by focusing on one problem – nor can it be achieved by any one organization. Creating real opportunity requires collaboration and a commitment to Live United.

That’s where individuals can join in by drawing, envisioning, and advocating for change. And, by stepping up to be part of the action. You can learn more about easy ways to get plugged in, visit UnitedWay.org.

Learn about organizations dedicated to improving economic mobility in our community. See how you can get involved at CharlotteWill.com/nonprofits and LeadingOnOpportunity.org.

When a 2016 study by Harvard University/UC Berkeley revealed that Charlotte-Mecklenburg ranked 50th out of 50 in economic mobility among large U.S. cities, it served as a wake-up call that our community cannot rest as healthy as it outwardly appeared.

The study’s key finding was clear: children born in poverty in our city, and our region as a whole, have very little chance of climbing out of it during their lifetime — unless we as a community come together to take action for our neighbors in need.

Our community’s collective response began when the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force was formed to take a deeper look into economic mobility in the fall of 2017, the Task Force issued a report recommending bold, community-wide action, laying out a vision for our future:

“The Task Force’s highest aspiration is that Charlotte-Mecklenburg leaders — governmental, philanthropic, business, faith, nonprofit, neighborhood and grassroot — as well as the community at large, will come together in the months and years ahead to re-evaluate our systems and structures, change policies and practices, and otherwise boldly embrace and rally around a vision of Charlotte-Mecklenburg as a community that cares about all our children and youth — regardless of income, race or ZIP code — and where all our children can be healthy, have big dreams, and the opportunities to achieve those dreams.”

ACT NOW.
UNITED NEIGHBORHOODS
GRIER HEIGHTS

Faced with a median household income of just over $17,000, and only 17 percent of third-grade elementary school proficiency, economic mobility could seem challenging and out of reach for families in Grier Heights, but steady progress is being made.

A key centerpiece was the restoration of the old Bilinguistics School, a building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which has been transformed into the Grier Heights Community Center. While maintaining the building’s cultural significance, the restoration turned it into a gathering place where residents have access to a computer lab, job training, recreation and education programs, as well as health and wellness services.

Beyond the community center, other revitalization footholds have been established. The central gathering place, where much of the neighborhood’s crime occurred – an aging strip mall – was replaced with a new, high-quality preschool. CrossRoads has also worked to build 20 new homes, beginning to address the fact that 88 percent of neighborhood homes were not owner-occupied.

Through federal subsidies, the initial homes were restricted to buyers with incomes below 80 percent of the area median income, helping residents in once again establishing a sense of community stability and enjoyed a high quality of life. From doctors and lawyers to teachers and writers, Grier Heights connected all types of people from all walks of life. According to longtime residents, the neighborhoods look out for each other and were proud of the neighborhood they called home.

The turnaround began in 2010 when the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) received a $20.9 million HOPE VI grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. CHA envisioned the former Boulevard Homes transforming into a vibrant community centered around an innovative “Educational Campus.” Their hope was to create a neighborhood that takes on the task of leading the revitalization. The quarterback ensures that all of RWCI’s work to break the intergenerational cycle of urban poverty.

A key component of this Purpose Built Communities strategy is a Community Quarterback, or backbone organization, that serves residents with a two-generation approach to education, health and wellness services.

PROGRESS IS BEING MADE, BUT IT WILL REQUIRE A LONG-TERM, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATING, HEALTH AND FINANCIAL STABILITY.

New affordable housing was built on the site of the former Boulevard Homes public housing project, part of a large-scale revitalization of the neighborhood. Grier Heights battle the gentrification pressures that have overcome other historically African-American in-town neighborhoods. Likewise, forthcoming senior housing in the neighborhood will include 72 units for seniors earning between 30 percent and 60 percent of the area median income.

Though the Grier Heights community approach to generating long-range outcomes that have the potential to affect multiple generations. Much has already been achieved by RWCI. United Way’s intent is to expand on that success in a way that creates opportunity across the neighborhood, along with lessons that can be taken to other communities to help create an environment of opportunity for all.
ENSURING THE FUTURE HEALTH AND PROSPERITY OF OUR REGION

All of us want the best for our families, and healthcare is no exception. For more than 75 years, Carolinas HealthCare System has been dedicated to our mission of providing health, hope and healing to all, and we provide more than $5 billion a day in uncompensated care and community benefits.

For many years, the system has expanded its mission by taking bold steps to improve access to care outside of our walls and address the health and well-being of our communities, particularly in underserved areas, including opening four practices in locations that improved access for low-income patients. The need for those efforts has been reinforced over the past years, as the inequities in our communities have become more pronounced.

An area of particular importance is fostering long-term, sustainable programs to ensure all have access to needed programs and services to help end the cycles of inequity that divide many of the issues the region faces. Ranging from mental health prevention and treatment to initiatives formed to address childhood obesity, Carolinas HealthCare System’s ongoing community partnerships with nonprofits have proven vital for the promotion and protection of our children’s well-being. Recent accomplishments include:

- All Carolinas HealthCare System pediatric practices have adopted Healthy Together, a program that provides education and prescriptions for healthy behaviors to 88,000 children;
- Providing athletic trainers and medical directors for Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, Johnson C. Smith University and UNC Charlotte for more than a decade;
- Funding training and books to improve literacy for children at system practices in the area as well as training providers to incorporate reading skills in diabetic visits, as research shows that only 40 percent of Charlotte’s third graders read at age-appropriate levels;
- Establishing a classroom at Renaissance West STEAM Academy through Tutor Charlotte, a partnership with United Way and Read Charlotte that will begin in January 2018;
- Training nearly 10,000 people through the Mental Health First Aid program, including more than 25,000 community health workers;
- Screening nearly 20,000 area students over the past 10 years, identifying more than 200 students with potential heart abnormalities.

First Program, including more than 1,000 specifically to aid children ages 12-18 that may be developing or experiencing mental health challenges, as research shows half of all mental disorders develop before age 14;

- Developing a STEM pathway for middle school students in Union County by providing full-time specialty teachers to develop curricula, lead planning and trainings for staff and develop career-building activities for students and

The future of Charlotte and our region relies on the ability of many organizations to come together to assist and serve the day-to-day needs of the people while also ensuring equity of care and opportunities for all. As we work with Novant Health through the ONE Charlotte Alliance and all of our partners to address the needs of our region, we have never been more dedicated to our promise to provide health, hope and healing for all.

Each of you, in some way, leave the world a little better than we found it. At Novant Health, we are grateful for the opportunity to invest in the health and well-being of the communities we serve. We do it not only because it is part of our social responsibility as a healthcare system, we do it because we believe it’s the right thing to do.

Chronic diseases and conditions, such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, type 2 diabetes, obesity and arthritis, are among the most common, costly and preventable health problems. In 2016, Novant Health provided over 4,500 individuals with low income-guideline A1C tests, which measure the risk for diabetes by gauging average blood glucose levels over the past few months. In the previous year alone, Novant Health community outreach teams screened over 2,000 people at faith-based organizations, healthcare expos, blood drives and other community events.

Community wellness and access to affordable and quality healthcare are some of the most significant challenges facing our nation and our region. According to census bureau data, more than 100,000 Charlotteans do not have health insurance. Families living in underserved communities face barriers including difficulty accessing preventive and primary and mental health services and lack an integrative and comprehensive approach to healthcare. Novant Health is committed to creating access to high-quality healthcare in areas identified by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force as the most at-risk for generational poverty. When the Novant Health Community Care Cruiser arrives at a Charlotte-area community center or house of worship, it’s bringing more than immunizations for school children. It’s delivering healthcare to underserved populations.

Novant Health team members deliver preventive care and vaccines to vulnerable children via the cruiser, making a lasting impact on those students – and the health of the community.

By partnering with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Novant Health delivers vital health assessments – now required by law for any student coming to the district from out of state – to children at high-poverty schools. Through the ONE Charlotte Health Alliance, Novant Health and Carolinas HealthCare System are joining together, with the support of the Mecklenburg County Public Health Department, to also address needs of the underserved in Charlotte. The ONE Charlotte Health Alliance will build upon existing community efforts, foster partnerships, as well as create new opportunities for improving access to coordinated health services and resources in public health priority areas. In addition to these efforts, the two systems will partner under the Alliance to break down barriers and bring quality healthcare to the most underserved areas.

Recently, in a groundbreaking announcement, Michael Jordan committed $7 million to open two Novant Health Michael Jordan Family Clinics in Charlotte. These comprehensive medical clinics will serve some of the most at-risk and underserved communities in Charlotte and are expected to open in late 2020. Novant Health is committed to reducing disparities and bringing care and compassion to those who need it most. Together we can – and will – positively impact the health of our community.

**Bridging the Gaps in Healthcare throughout the Community**

The Novant Community Care Cruiser has provided services to nearly 10,000 patients and given about 15,000 immunizations in the greater Charlotte area.

The Charlotte Observer
BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH DANCE

When Allie Butler joined an African dance class at Sugaw Creek Recreation Center in Charlotte, it rekindled a passion for the movement she discovered during her childhood in Michigan.

Still, she didn’t know rediscovering that passion in a community center program would lead to her being onstage in front of a roomful of people.

But there she was, at the Midwood International Cultural Center on Central Avenue in Charlotte, performing with a close-knit group of her classmates at a holiday festival.

“It’s so liberating,” she said. “People were so moved after our performance. That sense of community, togetherness, culture – African dance really can bring people together.”

Public performances such as this or ensuing performances at area churches and schools are not the goal or purpose of the class, presented by Charlotte Ballet and supported by ASC’s Culture Blocks program, which partners with Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation to provide residents with cultural experiences close to home.

What they are is a result of the community building that has occurred ever since instructor Javonne Gbenyon-Spearman held her first class at the recreation last July.

That Wednesday night, Freddie Rivera, whose stage name is Ayinde the Drummaker, was playing the drums, a goblet drum originating from the West African country of Mali, in the middle of the unconditioned gymnasium. Gbenyon-Spearman threw open the doors to let in a breeze.

“The drums were echoing all throughout the parks, the baseball field, the soccer field, the little playground and people just started coming from throughout the neighborhood,” she said. “That’s how it started.”

Since then, the weekly class – which draws anywhere from six to more than 20 participants – has allowed newcomers and regulars to do something for themselves.

“I tell them to take your arms, wrap your arms around you and think yourself as Gbenyon-Spearman said, “We do it for others on a daily basis. But here you are today. You took this hour for yourself.”

You get whatever toxins and negativity out of your system and reinforce it with positivity.”

Every movement the participants learn in class has a name or a meaning behind it. Scooping down with an arm becomes more than just a dance step – it’s symbolic of the history of women and girls in Africa gathering water in buckets for their families.

“You’re really learning about the background of the African culture which makes it more special,” Butler said. “You realize that something as small as dance can mean so much to our culture and that’s why I like being a part of it.”

Gbenyon-Spearman, who is originally from Liberia and graduated from North Carolina A&T University with a degree in dance and performing arts, said the class enables her to share a part of herself with her students.

“They may not necessarily have that passport to escape, to go travel and see the world,” Gbenyon-Spearman said, “I look at it as they get that little piece of authenticity from me.”
HELPING STUDENTS REALIZE DREAMS

It was a moment of quiet anticipation at the 2017 Blumey Awards right before Justin Rivers was named Best Actor. The night had begun with students from 44 Charlotte-region high schools performing quite fittings, Man of La Mancha’s “The Impossible Dream,” following medleys and show-stopping solos, Rivers and his peers awaited the announcement. In that moment and those that followed — amid cheers of joy, excitement and, from Rivers, disdain — the theater was a place of utmost possibility.

“I said I wouldn’t cry, and I cried,” Rivers says of his award. “It was a moment of quiet anticipation. The point is that programs like this can engage kids who aren’t otherwise connected to school. Some of them tell us participating in The Blumeys is why they stayed in school, why their grades ticked up, why they began to believe they could dream big and make those dreams happen.”

While Rivers’ dream to act professionally led him to the musical theater program at Point Park University in Pittsburgh, opportunities in the arts are not limited solely to careers on the stage. Students can serve as Blumenthal critics, Blumenthal junior ambassadors, and interns in various departments at the performing arts center. Scholarship programs additionally recognize student achievement in areas outside of performance.

Dequarius Jackson, a graduate of Hough High School in Charlotte, received both the Gordon Hey Scholarship, awarded to non-performance majors, and the Mary Doctor Performing Arts Scholarship in 2017. According to Jackson, the scholarships have made entering North Carolina Central University “smooth sailing” and affirmed his decision to major in arts education.

“Junior year, I was a (dance) student teacher. These were people who’d never danced before,” he says of his arts involvement in high school. “Being able to teach them different styles — that was the point. I was like, ‘You're changing people’s lives.”

Jackson says that while his family did not always support his pursuit of an artistic career, he has seen firsthand how transformative the performing arts can be.

“[Theater] brought happiness. Watching plays and musicals, you see people struggle and stuff, but it’s something you can relate to,” Jackson says. “It’s just like anything is possible.”

PROVIDING ACCESS AND BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Through partnerships with programs like Freedom Schools and Big Brothers Big Sisters, Arts for All enables thousands of children to see Broadway touring productions at Belk Theater. Blumenthal’s Junior Ambassadors work as volunteers, develop leadership skills and discover arts-related career paths through special seminars. Ambassadors also build new networks, engaging with people of all different ages and backgrounds, including community leaders.

ELEVATING ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH THE PERFORMING ARTS

Theater fans know Blumenthal Performing Arts as the home of touring Broadway’s best shows, located a few blocks uptown to the Queen City, but Blumenthal believes the arts can do much more than entertain. The arts can be a significant contributor to closing the opportunity gap, and Blumenthal has developed many programs around this goal.

SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Research by the National Endowment for the Arts has shown a correlation between high participation in the arts and better grades, higher rates of college enrollment/attainment, as well as increased civic engagement.

But with shrinking budgets, many schools have cut back funding for arts programs. Blumenthal tries to fill this gap by providing quality arts education experiences at low or no cost to schools.

Arts participation keeps many kids engaged, and motivates them to stay in school and try their best.

“For some kids, it’s really the only thing that floats their boat,” said Tom Gabbard, Blumenthal’s president and CEO. That’s why programs like the Broadway Junior Celebration are vital. Last April, nearly 2,200 kids and their teachers converged uptown to present a segment of their school musical and receive feedback from theater professionals.

Through programs like these, students learn arts-related skills — but that’s not all. “This is the secret part of Broadway Junior,” said Freddie Gershon, the Tony Award-winning founder of Music Theater International’s Broadway Junior Collection. “It’s not about singing and dancing only. It’s about theater craft; it’s about theater business, it’s about learning how they’re all a team.”

While promoting healthy competition, The Blumeys also inspire students to explore the larger arts community.

“They are constantly going to see what other schools are doing,” said Robinson. “That only serves to better their theatrical process. It spurs their creativity even more.”

Blumenthal’s The Broadway Experience annually gives 12 area teens with interest and ability in the performing arts an all-expenses-paid, three-day trip to New York, funded by the Doctor Foundation Family. “The kids get a tremendous overview of what New York is like and get a chance for talkbacks with Broadway actors,” said Robinson.

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SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

Sunday, November 12, 2017

The Charlotte Observer

8P

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Sweeney Todd

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“They are constantly going to see what other schools are doing,” said Robinson. “That only serves to better their theatrical process. It spurs their creativity even more.”

Blumenthal’s The Broadway Experience annually gives 12 area teens with interest and ability in the performing arts an all-expenses-paid, three-day trip to New York, funded by the Doctor Foundation Family. “The kids get a tremendous overview of what New York is like and get a chance for talkbacks with Broadway actors,” said Robinson.
CREATING OPPORTUNITY AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

This spring, United Way of Central Carolinas invested $481,517 in Unite Charlotte grants into 20 local nonprofits and neighborhood organizations. Here are a few ways that seed funding is being deployed at the neighborhood level.

YOUNG BLACK LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

Young Black Leadership Alliance (YBLA) is committed to developing the next generation of leaders by educating and empowering young black men and women to have a positive impact in their communities and beyond. YBLA focuses on helping young people become leaders who are college and career ready. As the YBLA leaders strive to succeed, they are trained to make an impact within their circle of influence. The young leaders of YBLA reach back and mentor elementary, middle and high school students.

YBLA offers two distinct programs. YBM Leadership Alliance and YBW Leadership Alliance offer high achieving young black men and women hands-on leadership training, real-world local, national and international service work, and college preparation.

The Unite Charlotte funding was dedicated to their Common Ground program, which brings together young black men and women, CMPD officers and community leaders with the objective to develop relationships, increase cultural understanding, and build bonds of mutual respect.

CAMINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Charlotte-based Camino Community Development Corporation was originally started in 1995 as World Reach Inc., to relieve a humanitarian crisis in Cuba by providing medical supplies to hospitals and clinics. In 2002, the organization expanded to Guatemala. But in 2004, after the preventable death of a friend of the organization here in Charlotte, the group realized Charlotte’s Latino community also needed access to better health care.

Their work on the ground in Charlotte began with a free medical clinic for the local uninsured Latino population, followed by a food pantry, homeless outreach and a thrift store for low-income families. Those multiple services were ultimately brought together into what is now the Camino Community Center, an integrated model that serves over 20,000 people a year. This work includes focusing on creating upward mobility by empowering the Latino community through financial literacy programs, workforce training, and the creation of small businesses.

Beyond providing for basic needs, the Camino Community Center helps neighbors get actively engaged in the community, which is where the Unite Charlotte grants were deployed. The Latino Civic Engagement Project enabled training and workshops for 40 Latino community members.

SOUTHSIDE RIDES FOUNDATION

Southside Rides founder Dave Moore knows firsthand that young men getting out of jail very often won’t be able to secure a job quickly—few people will take a chance on a just-released felon. Yet ex-offenders are typically required to pay probation fees, restitution fees, and in many cases child support. If they can’t, they’ll end up right back in jail.

Dave understands their situation because he’s an ex-felon himself. The idea for Southside Rides came to him while serving a sentence for dealing drugs. Rumbled by the experience, he resolved to make a difference by using his automotive expertise to put young men back to work.

He begins by taking them through an eight-week class inside the Mecklenburg County jail. Students must earn the right to a job in Dave’s body shop once they are released. These jobs are supported by stipends from Unite Charlotte.

The young men look up to Dave and see someone who has overcome his mistakes. He doesn’t just teach them about cars, he instills a sense of purpose and self-respect, providing life skills to go along with job skills. After they’ve proven themselves, he helps them land a permanent job elsewhere in the auto industry.

More stories on next page

CHANGE THE FUTURE.

Learn about organizations dedicated to improving economic mobility in our community. See how you can get involved at CharlotteWill.com/nonprofits and LeadingOnOpportunity.org.
REFUGEE SUPPORT SERVICES

Over the last two decades, approximately 17,000 refugees have been resettled in Charlotte – legal, permanent residents. These are individuals who are unable to return to their home country because of persecution due to race, religion, political opinion, membership in a particular social group, or national origin. The greatest population of refugees in Charlotte come from Bhutan, Burma, Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with about a third of all refugees coming from countries outside these four.

Refugee Support Services (RSS) was created to help newly arrived refugees successfully adapt to Charlotte as their new home – teaching self-sufficiency skills to refugees in a manner that empowers them to thrive in American society.

PROFOUND GENTLEMEN

Studies show that when boys of color have male educators of color, they are more likely to graduate from high school, experience increased self-esteem, and have a greater likelihood of pursuing a college degree. Currently only two states across the nation have a high school graduation rate as high as 80 percent for boys of color. Compounding this already challenging situation, only two percent of teachers in public schools are men of color – and, for a variety of reasons, men of color leave the education profession at a faster rate than any other demographic.

Profound Gentlemen was founded to combat this challenge by creating small groups allowing male students of color to build relationships with other male educators of color. Additionally, Impact Leaders facilitate bimonthly gatherings, design individual support plans, and recommend programs to develop participants in character development, professional growth, creating mentoring groups, and civic engagement. As a result, more than 95 percent of Profound Gentlemen’s educators remained in the field last year, a rate much higher than the national average.

Unite Charlotte funded a project to build, train and support 3rd through 12th grade teachers to lead their students in civic and community engagement projects, positively impacting both the teachers and the students they lead.

RACE MATTERS FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE

Race Matters for Juvenile Justice is a collaborative leadership group formed by the juvenile court judges of North Carolina’s 26th Judicial District. It brings together judicial officers, systems experts, service providers and community partners who are working together to reduce the disproportionate and disparate outcomes for children and families of color in the juvenile justice system.

United Way’s investment into RMJJ funded a “Racial Equity” workshop for 630 participants, a racial equity impact analysis, and allowed RMJJ area high school and college student leaders to participate in a two-day “Racial Racism” workshop at no cost.

Racial Equity is a two-day, intensive workshop designed to build the capacity of educators, health practitioners, child welfare advocates, judicial officers, elected officials, law enforcement officers and other community leaders who are interested in understanding and eliminating racial inequities across Mecklenburg County.

This workshop connects the dots between the origins of race in the early construction of America to today’s current systemic racial inequities across our nation, helping local leaders better understand how deeply entrenched our systematic challenges are. The Unite Charlotte grants enabled leaders from Leadership Charlotte, the Law Institute, Mint Museum, Safe Alliance, the Children and Family Services Center, the YWCA of Central Carolinas and other nonprofit organizations to participate.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

Central Piedmont Community College’s Opportunity Scholarship initiative extends educational and career-training opportunities to low-income, minority students at CMS high schools. Students receive the financial resources and support services needed to attend CPCC and earn a two-year, career-focused degree, which will lead to meaningful, family-supporting employment.

During an August reception, the first group of Opportunity Scholarship recipients and their donors connected. The students met the individuals whose gifts are impacting students’ lives. Opportunity Scholarships have been awarded to 43 students who began classes at CPCC on August 16.

The scholarships cover the complete cost of attendance and provide each student with a notebook computer to meet their digital needs. Students participate in CPCC’s Summer Bridge program prior to their first semester to help prepare them for college. Scholarship recipients also receive the support and guidance of an academic counselor/career coach to help with course and career path selection, secure workplace learning opportunities and assist with job placement.

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