

ThreeSixty Journalism

ThreeSixty Journalism is leading the way in developing multicultural storytellers in the media arts industry.

The program is a loudspeaker for underheard voices, where highly motivated high school students discover the power of voice and develop their own within ThreeSixty's immersive college success



ThreeSixty Journalism
College of Arts and Sciences

programming. Launched in 1971 as an Urban Journalism Workshop chapter, since 2001 the program has been part of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas. To learn more about ThreeSixty Journalism, visit threesixty.stthomas.edu.

Minnesota Humanities Center: These reports were created by ThreeSixty Journalism's summer 2021 News Reporter Academy high school students in

partnership with the Minnesota Humanities Center.

Center for Prevention: These reports on health equity were created by ThreeSixty Journalism's summer 2021 News Reporter Academy high school students. The Academy and its theme of racism as a public health crisis were supported by Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield, which connected students with story topics and sources.



Center for Prevention



Sahan Journal focuses on the immigrant experience in Minnesota

By Maneeya Leung
Eden Prairie High School

"Sahan," said Sahan Journal founder Mukhtar Ibrahim, is a "beautiful Somali word which means 'pioneer.'" He explained that when faced with a drought, the ancient nomadic villagers of East Africa would search for greener pastures by sending out the sahans: "The most trusted figures in the community doing the scouting and coming back with reliable information."

The Sahan Journal is a Minnesota news outlet focused on immigrant communities and communities of color. When Ibrahim started the Sahan Journal in 2019, he became a pioneer himself, venturing into the uncharted lands of starting a publication from scratch.

"The first six months I was like, 'What am I doing?'"

A former reporter for the Star Tribune and Minnesota Public Radio, Ibrahim would email story ideas about immigrant communities and communities of color to an editor, which weren't utilized. He would open the paper and not find stories he could relate to.

"You question being there in that newsroom that doesn't really value stories about your community," he said. "So, you either put your head down, do your work, meet the deadlines and go home disappointed, or you take the risk and do something that will address the need."

Celebrating the journal's two-year anniversary, Ibrahim now has a better idea of what he is doing and says that the risk paid off. He runs a full-time staff of 10 people.

Race quotas, insufficient staff diversity and story restrictions that hinder mainstream newsrooms are no longer a problem for Ibrahim in Sahan Journal's newsroom. "We don't say, 'We had this community yesterday. We don't have to cover it today,'" Ibrahim said. "People continue to dream big and write all the stories that they want to pursue."

The stories keep coming. Readers see stories relevant to their lives, and in return they call and email ideas for more. "They see their communities being valued," Ibrahim said.

Ibrahim said the Sahan Journal sets the agenda by showing "there are stories besides tragedies and breaking news" about people of color that can be shared.

Whether sharing successes or exposing injustices, the



Mukhtar Ibrahim

Sahan Journal is rooted in providing trusted services to its communities. In 2020, a new responsibility arose: keeping the community safe.

COVID-19 hit communities of color hard, and from the early stages of the pandemic, Ibrahim and his team went to work publishing COVID-19 guidelines in languages like Hmong and Somali.

Essentials were the minimum for Ibrahim. He wanted to take a "holistic approach" that showed the full impact of COVID-19 on communities, whether tragic or inspiring. For example, partnering with the University of Minnesota journalism program, Sahan Journal published a series of obituaries for people of color and immigrants.

"Coronavirus killed a lot of people from our communities," Ibrahim said.

Sahan Journal also published features of community members helping out in health care. As the vaccinations rolled out, Sahan Journal launched a vaccination FAQ series featuring trusted leaders of the community. Staff wanted to give "the microphone to the community and let them address issues in their own voices," Ibrahim said.

COVID-19 continues to shape the newsroom, having uncovered inequities in health systems, housing, insurance and education. Ibrahim plans to expand Sahan Journal's coverage across Minnesota to represent more communities. Ibrahim will continue to build on his vision to become a sahan for communities across Minnesota.

He also encourages others to follow his lead and break away from mainstream media.

"If you are a person of color in the newsroom you face a lot of challenges, and you cannot do anything about it because you are within the system. So as soon as you step out of the system, you can dream big and pursue things that you care about."

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Uplifting narratives help heal suffering in communities

By Marcos Odegard
Nova Classical Academy

For 47 years, Insight News has been a trailblazer for diverse media groups. Founded in 1974, the Black-owned news group has been providing its community with stories they can relate to. These are stories Batala McFarlane, the publisher of Insight News, thinks are extremely important.

McFarlane grew up with news all around her. As the daughter of Al McFarlane, Insight's founder, she often found herself at the office on 18th and Bryant Avenue North in Minneapolis. McFarlane would eventually take on a pivotal role at the family business, working as a publisher, a producer and sometimes even "cleaning behind the toilet."

"When you or your family owns a business, you do whatever it takes to keep the business operating," McFarlane said.

As well as working hard to keep her family business

afloat, McFarlane makes sure she can put out important stories for her community.

"There's (an) opportunity for us to tell our own stories," she said. "Because if you allow other people to tell your story, they'll create the narrative for you."

The free newspaper offers positive and uplifting stories – a stark contrast to how McFarlane feels her community is portrayed by the mainstream media.

"People who are not familiar with the Northside and the South Side and the East Side may just walk away thinking it's just a place you don't want to go," she said. "It's a place that's defined by a deficit, it's a place of poverty, of death, of illness."

She strongly disagrees with this perception. Rather, McFarlane wants to share real-life success stories because, according to her, "when you see yourself in that light, then you're inclined to sit a little straighter and understand



Batala McFarlane

stories with so much negative news overshadowing them.

The death of George Floyd changed a lot for Insight News.

"What has changed is that people believe us now," McFarlane said. "And what I mean by that is that those of us in these spaces have been telling the stories of the movement, of the activists, of the disparities forever."

Instead of dwelling on such a dark time for her community, McFarlane says Insight News keeps a forward mindset.

It ties back to the original vision of Insight News: positive narratives can be shared to inspire those in a misrepresented community. Its goal

is to find the solution and not to focus on the problem. McFarlane firmly believes it's all about perspective and your outlook on these problems.

"I think that's the way we should look at it. It's more than a moment, and what we do with this energy that we're in – this desire to acknowledge, to listen, to collaborate, to work together to build a greater society."

But how can this be done? How do we channel that energy? She believes the way we can do this is to share our stories.

"I think that now's the time, right?" she said. "Because, again, too often we've been told that our stories didn't matter. But they do, they really, really do."

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Housing for the Indigenous community in Duluth

By Ariana Yasmin
Spring Lake Park High School

In 1993 a small domestic violence program began responding to disparities that Indigenous people, specifically women and children, faced in Duluth. The American Indian Community Housing Organization was founded in a parking lot outside a social service agency by a group of women talking about the lack of resources and support available to the Indigenous community.

The organization eventually expanded into transitional, permanent supportive and scattered site housing.

"Our mission and vision is to honor the resiliency of Native American people, and we do that by strengthening communities and centering our Indigenous values in all of our work," said Daryl Olson, AICHO's director of programming. "Every Native American deserves to live in a nonviolent and nonthreatening environment and has the right to be treated with dignity and respect."

The key to that is ensuring they have access to a home, food, health care and support services. AICHO makes sure to properly communicate with the Indigenous community to achieve this.

"We've tried to be very strategic in the development of our programming, and we're always looking to our community to direct us on what are the needs now?"

One of the persisting issues for the Native American community in Duluth is finding housing. Olson believes that without providing adequate shelter, other needs can't be fulfilled.

"You can't look at addressing somebody's mental health or their chemical health or their spiritual well-being if you can't meet their basic needs."

AICHO currently runs a 10-bed domestic violence shelter called Dabinoo'Igan. However, it is only able to serve five households at a time due to lack of space and COVID-19.

But the housing program is not only for domestic violence victims. These shelters are available to parents who do not have custody of their children while they work on their sobriety, mental health or increasing their income. When they are ready, they safely reunite with their children.

"Seeing families that have come from a lot of trauma and have been faced with an array of barriers ... and move forward in a positive, good way in their lives, it's been life changing."

However, the housing pro-



COURTESY OF AICHO

In addition to housing resources, AICHO has a community garden, which helps teach young people garden and entrepreneurial skills.

gram cannot move forward without assured land.

"It has been frustrating. We've been trying to lease a parcel of land in their community so that we could expand our programming. We also have been in numerous conversations about purchasing land from vacant lots or collaborating with agencies that we know of but aren't utilizing the space," Olson said.

The lack of support from the city and county is also a reason for the slow progress in developing additional affordable housing.

In spite of the frustration, in five years Olson expects AICHO to expand its domestic violence shelters in hopes

of serving more victims and their children. They wish to secure either more land or an undeveloped building in order to provide affordable housing for the community.

"We are a team of dreamers," Olson said. "We're always looking into the future of what we can do."

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ThreeSixty alum centers her work on community and its power

By Allison Brodin
Mounds View High School

On April 20, 2021, cheers erupted from George Floyd Square as a guilty verdict in former police officer Derek Chauvin's trial was announced. The square was full of relief and joy. In the crowd was Feven Gerezgiher, a young reporter for Racial Reckoning.

Racial Reckoning is an independent community journalism initiative, founded in March 2021, focusing on BIPOC voices and stories. It was created to cover the trials of the former Minneapolis police officers who were involved in the murder of George Floyd. Its website includes daily updates, weekly community recaps and podcasts centered around racial justice.

Gerezgiher spent time volunteering in East Africa, where she tutored, taught English and helped with after-school programming. While in East Africa, she enjoyed learning more about her culture and her history, as well as spending time with her extended family. She was enthusiastic about absorbing her Eritrean culture.

Gerezgiher speaks fondly of her parents' home country of Eritrea, which was granted independence from Ethiopia in 1991 after many years of struggle. Gerezgiher partially attributes the success of the country's revolution to the way that "there's always been a spirit of, 'How can we make our community better?'"

That spirit of helping your community is what Gerezgiher's passion stems from. She

practices her activism in the Twin Cities by attending many protests and working to enact change on various fronts.

One of those fronts was as field director for a local city council member's campaign in 2017. She was proud to work for a grassroots candidate who was doing very progressive work. He was ecstatic that she helped get the council member elected and contributed to shifting policies for the better on the local level.

"It was a really good example of how the change that we want to see has to start at a very micro level," she said. "These are your neighbors and your community members, and it is the individual relationships that lead to systemic change."

This experience allowed her

to use her skills to enact change, especially in her position at Racial Reckoning.

Gerezgiher didn't envision going into journalism. She hadn't had any experience in the field since her involvement in the ThreeSixty Journalism program at the University of St. Thomas during her time in high school.

She was growing increasingly angry with her hometown in 2020 due to racial inequalities and police brutality when ThreeSixty Journalism reached out to her. They were looking to connect program alumni with a new project called Racial Reckoning that was going to cover the court trials for the police officers involved in the death of George Floyd.

She signed onto the project despite her lack of experience in the field. Since then, she



Feren Gerezgiher

has enjoyed having her passion for activism intertwined with her job. She mostly works on creating short daily updates

aired on AMPERS stations and other affiliated programs across the country. However, her new job has not come without its challenges.

Gerezgiher recalls the week Daunte Wright was killed during an encounter with a police officer as the most difficult week of being a reporter.

"It was challenging, just as an individual and as a reporter, to sit through. That was a hard moment for all of us. But then to deal with the very real grief of his family and to

figure out how to translate that into a very short update was something that I had to sit with," Gerezgiher said.

Wright's murder fell on the heels of Floyd's, which followed so many others. These police killings have caused irreversible pain to BIPOC communities and the country.

"The pain of the past year is being forgotten. I hope people continue to remember that people are tracking these issues and they haven't been forgotten," Gerezgiher said.

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Youth radio program amplifies diverse voices

By Han Vu-Tran
Mounds View High School



Mia Lambert

Diversity, or the lack of it in mainstream public media, has been an ongoing issue, especially in broadcast radio and journalism spaces. However, there are groups working to change that. Listen Up! Youth Radio is an organization that presents young people from underrepresented groups with the platform and the tools to get into broadcasting.

According to a 2018 survey done by the Radio Television Digital News Association, only 11.3% of radio newsroom staff are people of color. According to a 2019 report by Nielsen holdings, radio is the

predominant way that Black Americans consume media. Black and Hispanic Americans make up one-third of the radio audience in America, but only 416 commercial radio stations are minority-owned, compared to the 10,076 white-owned stations.

Even though there are many minorities who listen to radio, station leadership and staff are not representative of the people listening.

Giving young people the ability to express themselves through Listen Up!, especially

if they are from underrepresented groups, can help pave the way to diversifying radio newsrooms. Supported by the Minnesota Humanities Center, St. Paul Foundation and Youthprise, youth ages 14 to 24 have the opportunity to host a live weekly radio talk show and join the other programs Listen Up! offers. Listen Up! also works with elementary school kids.

Mia Lambert, 16, joined Listen Up! as a broadcaster three years ago, when the organization was created. Mia is now a youth board member, as well.

Initiatives such as Listen Up! allow people to hear the stories of minority youth that often are not taught in classrooms.

“Being able to learn the history of a certain people allows you to understand it and maybe even connect with that,” Mia said.

The limited history of people of color has been a tool to portray minorities in a certain way in the classroom.

“I feel by not having that well-rounded history ... the stereotype and the aspects that you’ve been taught about these kinds of people and the history that you learned have all snowballed into a whole prejudice,” Mia said.

Listen Up! hopes to reach more people in Minnesota in the coming years to help unteach prejudices.

“I think that would be really great because our mission,

our goal, is to give access to young people to journalism, to radio or just to telling their story in general,” Mia said.

That access could be vital to ensure that future radio newsrooms are more reflective of their listeners.

“I think by allowing students to have access to journalism and radio—younger instead of older—it allows them to gain these kinds of skills that are needed to get into those newsrooms,” Mia said.

Coming into professional newsrooms can be challenging.

“I tell other young people, ‘Don’t lose faith in yourself,’ because sometimes it’s really hard telling your story in

journalism or radio, because there are different obstacles you face, whether it’s racism, or not being able to feel like you’re totally included in the story because of your race, your identity, your age. It’s important that you know you’ve got this. There are people out there who want to hear your story and who will support you. And even if there is not, you always have yourself,” Lambert said.

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Family Tree Clinic serves the Twin Cities LGBTQ community

By Isaac Garcia
Cretin-Derham Hall



Nathalie Crowley

A 20-year-old walked into the Family Tree Clinic in St. Paul, wanting to begin gender-affirming hormones. They were expecting to pay out of pocket, which can be anywhere from \$200 to \$400, depending on the person’s income.

After the clinic looked into their background, it concluded they were eligible for medical assistance, meaning they wouldn’t have to pay a dime.

“He broke down crying in my office, because he was so happy. It was life changing for him,” said Nathalie Crowley, the clinic’s associate executive director.

Crowley has been working with the LGBTQ+ movement for more than 25 years, including more than 10 years in health care. Crowley talks about her own experience beginning gender-affirming hormones and said that is the part of the reason she left Duluth for the Twin Cities.

In Duluth, Crowley said, there were not enough options for the LGBTQ+ community. She traveled back and forth for health and wellness care almost two years. Luckily, she had a job that allowed her to travel and pay her health-care bills.

She’s worked for Family Tree for five years and is

proud of the options they offer for transgender people. This includes everything from birth control and rapid HIV testing to trans hormone care and sex education. The clinic now sees about 22,000 people in St. Paul and expects to see about 30,000 when it moves to Minneapolis in October.

The clinic helps transgender people who are deaf, hard of hearing or blind and has clients ranging from age 6 to 80.

“The youngsters are accompanied by their guardian/parents,” Crowley said, adding sometimes puberty blockers are used to delay the process until any changes will align with a youngster’s new identity.

“Our staff are representative of the people we’re serving,” she said. “So we strive really hard to make sure we have LGBTQ+ people on our staff, that we have BIPOC books, and we have Spanish-speaking folks on our staff because these are the communities that we want.”

Those communities come from seven states, and they benefit from all of Family Tree’s programs, including education services for high schools and the medical

community.

“Most people support the programs, but there are critics,” Crowley said. “They say we’re doing awful things to people, or that we’re forcing hormones on people or that we’re part of this movement to kind of destabilize masculinity. That’s not true.”

She notes the LGBTQ+ youth have received a lot of hate and disrespect.

“These are human beings that live life differently,” she said.

Currently there are more than 100 bills restricting the rights of LGBTQ+ community members throughout the country. These bills range from limiting LGBTQ education, the banning of trans people from sports and the restriction of health care. In many parts of the country, trans youth are facing more barriers than ever before.

Despite criticism, Crowley will continue to help the LGBTQ+ community. “There’s a basic level of respect and dignity that we owe them,” Crowley said. “I like to think of the Family Tree as a refuge for people.”

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Podcast highlights Indigenous stories

By Nickel Tom
Insight Recovery School



Leah Lemm

A seedling, having been wafted along by the wind, fell to the ground. Roots dug deep into the soft, dark soil. It started to grow. The roots grew hungry for more. They grew farther down to support the growing stem. Leaves sprouted in the sunlight. Buds sprinkled the tips of the branches, promising future blooms.

Leah Lemm, a podcast host and member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, describes time within her community as a growing plant.

“We’re at the bud. You can’t ignore the stem, or the roots, or the dirt, or the planets, or the water that goes into it. These are all on a continuum,” she said.

Although she could split Native stories into past and present, she intertwines them.

“I don’t see us being separate from our past. We are looking toward our next generations,” she said.

Lemm is sharing stories using modern technology, but the tradition of storytelling stays true. Telling stories of the past, and the present, honors her ancestors. She acknowledges her tribe’s past and has her eyes on the future.

“Native Lights: Where Indigenous Voices Shine” is one of Lemm’s multiple podcast projects. She created it for Native people, wanting a space where they could share their stories, humor and

hope. “I feel like there was definitely a time when I would have needed this podcast. ... There are times when we can feel driftless,” she said. “But it is a way to share how we’ve worked through challenges and have found purpose or have worked towards finding purpose.”

Being driftless is a familiar topic for Native people, especially the young. Lemm wants them to find others who are working through that feeling of being driftless and persevering until they find their purpose.

“Native Lights” “focuses on how Native people around Minnesota use their gifts to share with their communities. ... We’re given these gifts by the Creator, so we need to use them to help our communities.”

Featuring Native people who are actively working toward their goals and creating a path for those who come after them is a stark contrast from the types of stories mainstream media tends to report. If topics of addiction, violence and erasure of Native American culture do come up, Lemm ensures they do not overshadow the positive work being done. Lemm said as important as these topics are, she does not want to dwell on them.

She quotes her father: “If you can do something about

it, you can’t complain about it.”

“When I was asked to work with Minnesota Native News, I was like ‘No, I don’t know what I’m doing.’ ... But I knew it was a step in the right direction. So, if I could do it, then that’s what I needed to do,” Lemm said.

Lemm described them as marching orders; looking at it as “work to do” rather than an insurmountable wall is essential to being a story sharer, a term Lemm uses to describe herself.

Culture, connection and community are the words to describe Lemm. She embraces her culture, despite the erasure it has faced through imperialism. Her connection and community outreach are inspiring. She has created an experience using modern technology with contemporary issues, but the story sharing tradition stays the same. It is also vital to keep the Native way of life around.

The flowers have bloomed and their pollen has spread throughout the land. Lemm has come to a crucial understanding of time and her culture.

Interested in Lemm’s work? Visit leahklemm.wordpress.com.

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Veteran radio journalist Marianne Combs continues sharing stories

By Ariana Yasmin
Spring Lake Park High School



Marianne Combs

Veteran radio journalist Marianne Combs noticed a lack of inclusivity for people of color in newsrooms. And the data backs her observations: According to a 2020 study by The Radio Television Digital News Foundation, 15.4% of those employed in local radio newsrooms are people of color.

Combs, who worked at Minnesota Public Radio for 23 years before resigning in September 2020, believes the solution starts with newsrooms doing more training and supporting young reporters. She wants to be part of that.

And that’s exactly what she’s doing working with Ampers, KMOJ and the Min-

nesota Humanities Center. Combs is a leader in the groundbreaking project Racial Reckoning: The Arc of Justice, which is centered around supporting and training young reporters.

When Combs was approached about being part of project, an independent community journalism initiative, she was told they “wanted to create this space for young women of color to learn how to do journalism.”

Racial Reckoning started as a short-term project, created for the purpose of covering the court trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek

Chauvin, who was eventually convicted of murdering George Floyd, as well as the trials of the three other officers involved in Floyd’s death. Combs did her part in helping.

“I started training these young women, or women of color, to do their own radio stories and produce their own stories,” she said.

However, incidents of other injustices against people of color continued to transpire, such as the case of Daunte Wright, who was shot by a Brooklyn Center police officer during a traffic stop. What was intended to be an eight-month project just keeps growing.

While working with the project, Combs wanted to use the skills she learned in mainstream media to mentor peo-

ple of color.

Although she’s their managing news editor, she doesn’t assign stories. She says she trusts their expertise about what needs to be covered. She gives them the knowledge and resources to tell their own narratives but never tells them what stories to cover.

“It’s about recognizing that, because of their lived experience and their cultural background, they have expertise that I will never have. I can help them to become a better reporter, but I’m trusting their editorial judgment from the start,” she said.

Her confidence in the journalists brings out the best in them. She said she had been amazed by the stories her reporters have come up with and doesn’t think those sto-

ries would necessarily have been covered in a mainstream newsroom.

But Combs wants more than to simply assist BIPOC youth in writing great stories. “Their experience to me is more important than the finished product of what we put on the air,” she said. “It’s more important to me that they feel supported and valued. ... Their gut instinct is strong, and they are worthy of working in great big newsrooms across the country.”

More newsrooms are looking to hire BIPOC journalists, but experience is essential. It’s leading to crisis in mainstream news right now.

According to Combs, the concept of unbiased is controlled by white male perspectives, and “to anybody outside of

that community ... it’s pretty obvious that there is a bias in the reporting.” She added, “It’s no longer about saying I’m unbiased, but being transparent about what you stand for.”

As Combs continues to work with Racial Reckoning on bringing forth the voices of young journalists of color, she finds hope in doing journalism a different way.

“We’ve decided just to keep telling stories, as long as there are stories to tell and there’s an appetite for them.”

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Twin Cities nonprofit, Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio, helps Latinos thrive

By Anna Brodin
Mounds View High School

On a late July weekend, the area outside Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (Latino Communities United In Service) is bustling with activity, including food distribution and a vaccine clinic.

“It’s like a little health and wellness fair,” said Janelle Calvo, food access coordinator for CLUES. “We are expecting 200 people to show up. We’re going to have fresh produce, fruits and meat, as well.”

CLUES is on East Seventh Street in St. Paul. The nonprofit social services organi-

zation was founded in 1981 by and for Latinos to provide culturally and linguistically relevant services. Over the years, it has helped many Latino families in the Twin Cities by striving to build community connections and targeting resources to Latinos in need.

In Minnesota, 5.5% of the population is Latino, for a total population of 309,283 Latinos, according to CLUES. Of those Latinos living in Minnesota, 21% are living under the poverty level.

One of CLUES’ latest projects is a community garden that aims to give Latino families fresh produce. CLUES has

many services available to Latinos in the area. As well as those services, it also has many activities and events planned for community members.

Patricia Morales, a volunteer and community member, said through a translator, “CLUES has helped me in many ways, especially economic ways. Like how food prices are going up, especially fresh produce.” Morales has also participated in computer classes through CLUES.

Reyna Lopez, a community member, started volunteering at CLUES in January.

“I met a lot of Latinos there,

people from my country I have never met before and that is amazing,” she said.

Many people have had similar experiences through CLUES.

Jennifer Peña, an intern at CLUES, said that filling community needs is activism. “This fake activism that goes around in the Twin Cities, a lot of the time people will be like, ‘Oh yeah, let’s go protest,’ and they use the protests as an excuse to think that’s what actual change is when actual change is laws and actually doing things that will better the community.”

Lopez said when she’s not in

the Twin Cities she faces racism and microaggressions, which is why the community that CLUES is building is so important to Latino people. She recalled once ordering a Coke at a bar outside of the Twin Cities; the server asked her what she was doing there and if she spoke English.

“It’s not happening in the Twin Cities area but outside it’s happening all the time,” Lopez said. At CLUES, she said she can connect with open-minded people and share experiences and culture.

The name of CLUES’ community garden, Jardín de Armonía y Acción, reflects

that type of healthy, positive and accepting environment. The name, which translates to The Garden of Harmony and Action, is a new symbol, Morales said, of a harmonious community.

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U center focuses on anti-racism

By **Evyan Blyden**
St. Francis High School (Calif.)

The new University of Minnesota Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity, funded by a \$5 million donation from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, focuses on research and education. It also serves as a resource on anti-racism to address long-standing health inequities.

"We want to bring a focus to the systemic issues and institutional issues that continue to have Black and brown people die at higher rates than non-Black people," said Miamon Queegly, manager of community-engaged research at the center.

Anti-racism research combats all forms of racism. Whether somebody makes a

clearly racist comment or a system is discreetly racist, anti-racism combats all of that without discretion.

The work of the center is vital, as health data paints a stark picture of inequities across the nation. For example, Black women in the United States are 3 to 4 times more likely to die during or after childbirth than white women, regardless of income and education levels, according to the center. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the persistence of deep racial disparities in infection, in health equity and in outcome, according to Brookings, with Black people having a higher rate of contraction and death.

Institutionalized racism also contributes to higher rates in Black and brown peo-

ple of the most common chronic conditions suffered by Americans, including diabetes, heart disease and cardiovascular disease. Queegly emphasized that by focusing on this, the center can help reduce such widespread health inequities, providing solutions to reverse such worrying trends.

"How is the system causing these disparities to happen?" Queegly asked.

The center will address this question through education and training on structural racism and health inequities. It fosters authentic community engagement to address the root causes of racial health inequities and drive action; helps change the narrative about race and racism to one that does not hold up "whiteness" as the ideal standard

for human beings; and serves as a trusted resource on issues related to racism and health equity.

Gains are already being made. This year, the Minnesota House of Representatives passed a bill driven by the center's work. The bill will help pregnant women by giving them access to affordable and quality care before and after the pregnancy. The people who work at the center strive to be leaders in anti-racist health research, but anti-racism research and disrupting the institutional and systemic causes of racial health inequities both in Minnesota and across the country are complex, Queegly said.

Ultimately, through its tools and research, the Center will expand awareness about



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Miamon Queegly

health disparities within Black and brown communities and build a curriculum for professors and physicians that will help them better understand marginalized groups and how to better care for them.

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ty were created by ThreeSixty Journalism's summer 2021 News Reporter Academy high school students. The Academy and its theme of racism as a public health crisis were supported by Center for Prevention at Blue Cross Blue Shield, which connected students with story topics and sources.

County takes new approach to juvenile justice system

By **Nickel Tom**
Insight Recovery School

Whirlwinds of emotions, impulsivity and the teenage brain. How does all of this play into the juvenile justice system?

Adolescence is a time of change - going through puberty, making new friends and building neural pathways. Sometimes, all of these changing factors lead to young people making poor decisions and ending up in the juvenile justice system.

Lexi Prah Martin, a Transition Age Youth coordinator for Hennepin County, is working to change the juvenile justice system. The county is pioneering an approach that includes making expungement easier, creating a transition-age probation unit and closing the County Home School, a long-term confinement center.

"We don't need young people to be detained. Because of that we are closing that facility. It's life changing for the young person and for the community members that are around them," Prah Martin said about incarcerating young people.

Prah Martin and other Transition Age Youth coordinators focus on the well-being of youth in the county. They work to keep young people in their homes, and if the conditions do not meet the young person's needs, they try to network in the family to find a suitable home.

"We're hoping to keep young people closer to home and in situations that are more appropriate," Prah Martin said.

According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, adolescent brains are still developing, thus adolescents should be treated accordingly.

One of the plans the Transition Age team is working toward is a developmentally appropriate justice system, with "increased family engagement and greater attention to procedural fairness, including interactions with police, legal representation for youth, and reduced use of juvenile fines and fees."

Hennepin County is following some of NASEM's recommendations. Part of Prah Martin's focus in this area is the county's Transition Age probation unit, which works to create an environment where young people can thrive and learn from their mistakes. Currently, Hennepin County District Court is working to make expungement, or the removal of one's criminal records, easier.

"Hennepin County has been taking steps in certain sentencing cases and in certain diversion efforts to make sure that the record is gone," she said.

Prah Martin notes that the benefits of expungement have opened doors for hous-



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Lexi Prah Martin

ing, education and employment.

While dealing with the consequences of one's actions is extremely important, Hennepin County has been and continues working on initiatives to help prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system. Partnering with Allina Health, Hennepin County has implemented a program called Change to Chill in public schools.

The program focuses on creating a safe environment where young people can get the help they need. From providing rooms where young people can hang out to providing counselling, Change to Chill is providing underrepresented communities the help they often do not receive.

Godwin Kasongoma, a senior at Columbia Heights School, said, "I didn't really see this much devotion to mental health (at her school). I'm disappointed that they did not have this program earlier on." Godwin is an intern with the Transition Age Youth coordinators.

Godwin noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have had a significant impact on students' mental health, and life in general. Because of her passion in the area, Godwin joined the Student Wellness Committee at her high school, focusing on student well-being.

Prah Martin, Godwin, and other interns and Transition Age Youth coordinators work to create a better community for young people by helping them correct their mistakes, work through their traumas and then change the course of their life. They are the future of our community.

"Young people are the heart of our community," Prah Martin said. "And we want to make sure our heart's going strong."

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The future of low-income housing

By **Claire Van De Weghe**
South High School

Minneapolis may have the biggest racial home-ownership gap in the U.S., according to those doing housing equity work. But, two non-profits are working toward bridging this divide and changing the way they deal with low-income people by asking them what they need.

Representatives from Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity and Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Cathy Lawrence and Ben Waltz, met with students on the University of St. Thomas campus to talk about their plans for the future of low-income housing. Lawrence is the leader of resource development at Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity. She said that her organization has historically worked with mostly East-African immigrant families.

"Who we've left behind are what we refer to as foundational Black families," Lawrence said. Foundational Black families are often people descended from African slaves. That group has been most heavily impacted by home ownership disparity. This not only affects day-to-day need for shelter, but health, rates of employment and much more.

Organizations like Habitat for Humanity and its partner Blue Cross Blue Shield have been working to supply housing for the families who need it. After the murder of George Floyd last summer, they changed their strategy.

"We've got to stop going into communities and saying to you, 'I can solve your prob-



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Cathy Lawrence and Ben Waltz

lem.' We need to go in and listen and say, 'How can we partner with you, what would you like to see in your community, what kind of housing do you want,'" Lawrence said.

Habitat for Humanity and Blue Cross and Blue Shield want to make sure that low-income residents have all they need to be healthy, and homeownership is an important piece of that puzzle. According to recent health studies, nearly 80% of health should be cared for outside the clinic, including diet, exercise and general well-being.

Lawrence told a story about a single mother and her sons' experiences with their housing: "All of them were on the inhalers because they suffered from asthma. ... She would tell stories about how she would have to take her sons from the apartment and

go into urgent care or to the emergency room and get help."

With dust and spores posing a huge risk to her family because of their asthma, being in a clean and stable home was vital to staying well. This family found relief in low-income housing units supplied to them by Habitat for Humanity.

"They were not in that home for long before their symptoms disappeared," Lawrence said.

Through listening to perspectives of the communities living in the low-income housing units, Habitat for Humanity is slowly growing stronger bonds with community leaders and helping trust grow.

Though Waltz, Lawrence and their respective organizations face an uphill battle, this new way of considering

low-income housing work promises to yield much more connection and communication that could be previously established.

"Good news is we have a high level of ownership here and that we just use it a little bit, but it's mostly if you're white, so if you're white you own your home," Waltz said. "And if you're a person of color, you don't. So, I would love to see our organization really lead from within."

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BCBS official takes on racial inequity

By **Gloria Ngwa**
Washington Technology Magnet Secondary School

Civic engagement and public health have always been driving forces for Vayong Moua.

"My mom worked for 25 years at the Eau Claire public health department, and my dad worked at City Hall. I was forged out of civic engagement and public health," he said.

Moua was born in Laos but his family fled to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, as refugees when he was an infant because people were facing genocide in their home country. They became one of the first Hmong families in Wisconsin.

Moua is now the director of racial and health equity advocacy at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, one of the few people of color in the advocacy department. The basis of his work is "changing the way policy is designed, the way they're decided upon, to make sure that racial and health equity is built into how we even assess policies," he said.

His work includes "leading campaigns and coalitions to advance racial and health equity and to change govern-



Vayong Moua

ance, not only issues," he said. His work also involves commercial tobacco control and food systems issues, increasing physical activity, racial equity, and establishing diversity in education and public places — approaches he "hopes will impact in a durable way."

Moua said white supremacy is the biggest obstacle in his work.

"A lot of it is rooted in white fragility, this sense of if we acknowledge this, that then implicates us as a society," he said.

But he doesn't let that affect his game plan.

His team members remind each other of a saying: "If you're not on the table, you're going to be the menu."

Together they have to tackle racial inequity, something Hennepin County declared a public health crisis last summer following the events of racial unrest.

Moua's team remains on high alert for issues impacting communities of color.

"How things are fought for are shown in lots of things,"

Moua said. And solutions start with getting the right people involved in the action.

"We advocate together," Moua said. "So you're seeing more people of color at the table and creating their own tables. We're not trying to fill vacancies. We're trying to redesign entire tables and say, 'I don't like your rules, and ... I'm not here to fulfill something for you. We are here to decide upon things together.'"

Another term for this is cross-cultural power, which Moua describes as getting together with people of different backgrounds to take an action that will affect the community positively and equitably. In turn, it helps to prevent racism as a public health crisis.

Moua's work involves diversity across the board.

For example, he works closely with underrepresented communities in Minnesota, including Karen refugees. According to the Karen Community of Minnesota, 2017 statistics show there were over 17,000 Karen in Minnesota, many living in St. Paul and Maplewood.

He works with decision-makers across Minnesota, such as Gov. Tim Walz's office and far-reaching orga-

nizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and World Health Organization.

All are defining health disparities as differences in health that are preventable. What this means is the priority of racial and health equity is embedded in science, as well as social science. And Moua's team adds the missing voices to the table.

Moua knows firsthand how different perspectives change the conversation. He witnessed his parents as "view-changers" in the Asian community as they too stood up against racism.

He's proud of being Hmong and knows how important his work is in his community.

"There's something that makes me feel accepted," he said. And so, he continues to advocate for refugees and people of color like him.

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