COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ASSOCIATION

BIO PROFILE

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS IN SERVICE
CEA BIO PROFILE

Community Empowerment Association (CEA) was founded in 1993 in order to establish an organized, structural approach to address the specific needs of at-risk youth and families in distressed, marginalized communities. CEA’s 25 year success emanated through its grassroots origins serving residents of nine predominantly low income underserved communities in Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh: Larimer, Lincoln-Lemington, Homewood, Wilkinsburg, Garfield, East Hills, McKeesport, Rankin, and Braddock.

CEA’s mission is to restore, reclaim and transform distressed communities through strategic planning, collaboration, advocacy, education, and training. Additionally, by consistently generating jobs and economic sustainability, CEA serves as an institutional foundation for the strengthening of Black communities.

CEA developed its own Afrocentric Paradigm. This model centers around African American culture and experience as a moral compass, viewing our people as subjects in our stories rather than as victims who operate on the fringes of society. In this way, we strengthen and nurture the self-esteem and ethnic identity of Black youth while simultaneously improving their abilities to reason, be attentive, and build high aspirations and resilience.

With CEA’s base operations and networks in predominantly resource-poor African American communities, CEA’s ability to reach, serve, and uplift socially disadvantaged African Americans is strengthened by its sensitivity to historical risk factors.

CEA’s successful intervention outcomes have been well documented by contemporary academic refereed journal publishers in following national and internationally ranked articles:


T. Rashad Byrdsong, Founder, President and CEO:
“The force that continues to motivate me is the tragic condition of black youth, (especially black males) and the violence that continues to saturate our communities. I have journeyed into the deepest, darkest corners where the most at-risk youth reside to offer leadership, manhood development and mentoring services as well as negotiate peace treaties amongst rival gangs exist. As a 24 year member of the National Urban Peace and Justice Council, I have traveled throughout the United States, bringing members of gangs and other street organizations together in efforts to offer mediation and conflict resolution services. I have been welcomed in these circles because they genuinely feel that I have an understanding of the conditions that they face. I have worked with countless youth and parents who have lost family members to violence. These experiences fuel my passionate desire to fight for change – to restore hope in the system and in the lives of the people affected.”

As a community-based, grassroots organization committed to the restoration, reclamation and transformation of distressed Black communities, CEA will continue to be at the forefront of developing strategies in collaboration with diverse organizations and individuals. CEA will never stop educating youth and their families, mobilizing them to reignite their resiliency, and CEA will always remain dedicated to equipping the community with the necessary tools to move towards self-determination, self-sufficiency, and sustainability.

T. Rashad Byrdsong, Founder
CORE BELIEF

The core belief of CEA is that families develop best in a community with a sense of order, positive social interaction, and opportunities supported by positive adults. It is CEA’s aim and commitment to work with individuals and families to build, foster and empower the African-American community through capitalization of indigenous support, community stakeholders, organized networks, and community education. CEA’s cultural frameworks are clearly unique to human and social service providers in the Pittsburgh region. CEA capitalizes on the powerful role that cultural influences play within African-American communities.

ACTIVATE ➔ EDUCATE ➔ MOBILIZE

OUR PROGRAMS

YOUTH INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION
- Asante Nation
- Safe Passage
- After-School
- Kamp Kuumba
- Summer Learn & Earn
- Saturday University
- African American Leadership Institute
- Caring Connections to Careers
- Construction Industry Training
- Out of School Youth Programming
- Job Fairs

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
- Licensed After-School Partial Hospitalization
- Mobile Therapy
- Outpatient Individual, Group, and Family Therapy
- Community Healing Forums

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
- Black Family Reunion
- Kwanzaa
- Ancestor’s Day
- Day of Black Male Solidarity
- Founder’s Day
- Day of Remembrance

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT
- Community Engagement Forums
- Brother to Brother, Sister to Sister Leadership Forums
- School Supply, Winter Clothing, and Emergency Relief Distributions
CEA started its Asante Nation Rites of Passage over two decades ago to address risk factors that often create cultural disengagement and educational failure among vulnerable African American students. The curriculum is Afrocentric and provides affirming cultural and academic experiences that are designed to foster positive behavior, regular school attendance, and high academic achievement. It provides timely role modeling, life skills mentoring, and in-depth knowledge of African and African American history and culture to develop positive racial identity, esteem resiliency, and self-determination.

ASANTE NATION SAFE PASSAGE: AFTER-SCHOOL INTERVENTION & PREVENTION

Serving ages 5-18, Safe Passage provides year-round intervention and support to youth and families in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County areas. Our dedicated staff build collaborative relationships with students, families, and teachers to support academic remediation through homework assistance, advocacy in the schools, mentoring, and cultural enrichment. Utilizing an Afrocentric model of cultural centering, a portion of each day is dedicated to a workshop focused on topics relevant to students’ lives to foster a strong sense of self within the community.

KAMP KUUMBA

Kamp Kuumba is a summer program providing youth the opportunity to continue receiving empowering and culturally affirming education even when school is out. Each year the core theme differs, filling the all-day program with breakfast and lunch workshops, creative expression, educational enrichment, life skills and career exploration, health and athletics, and daily recreational outings.
**YOUTH INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION**

**SATURDAY UNIVERSITY**

We provide a safe, productive educational workspace for extracurricular opportunities otherwise unattainable to the boys and girls we serve. Programs may include STEM activities, multimedia and design, creative arts, dance, and computer programming. The success of this program relies entirely on strong, experienced community volunteers to work with our young, Black children.

**SUMMER LEARN & EARN**

This six-week summertime program engages local youth, ages 14-21 in paid work activities. Participants receive training in work readiness, interpersonal communication, and community development training, as well as a stipend and hourly wage.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE**

The African-American Leadership Institute seeks to assist at-risk, Black boys in developing dreams that transform themselves along with their communities. With the help of loving mentorship from elders, adults, and skilled professionals in the Pittsburgh community, the youth are guided to imagine themselves within three life contexts: life purpose, life mission, and life work.
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

CEA addresses the economic obstacles of our community such as employment, home financing, and wealth building. We provide access to job and career opportunities by training individuals, partnering with Pittsburgh area employers, and hosting job fairs.

CARING CONNECTIONS TO CAREERS

CEA is the first touch-point for many hard-to-reach members of the community. Our staff mentors engage teaching and learning tactics designed for low income and disadvantaged young adults with little or no prior exposure to the world of work. Participants learn the essential work readiness behavior and mindsets to significantly increase soft skills and resilience necessary to select, achieve and ascend in their careers. CEA partners with local training institutions, i.e., CCAC, for participants to earn Certification in trades as well as other areas within CCAC.

"My case manager was really helpful in the sense that she was like a guidance counselor. If I needed anything I could always talk with her because she made herself available; she assisted in keeping me organized and focused on my goals."

- Jordan T. Miles
Plumbing Industry Certificate Owner, Jordan Miles Cleaning Co.

CONSTRUCTION JOB TRAINING

This construction industry training program is for those with little or no experience in the construction trades who want to begin a career as a Construction Laborer. It is comprised of several levels of hands-on and classroom instruction which allows trainees to perform many types of work. In addition, each participant receives OSHA 10 certification. Upon completion of this program, participants should be prepared to qualify for apprentice training, enter a trade program, start their own business, or work with existing contractors.

OUT OF SCHOOL YOUTH PROGRAMMING

In response to our young community members’ desire for meaningful work at an early age, CEA now offers year-round career exploration and work-readiness education to youth out of school between 14 and 21 years old. Programming provides exposure to various professional fields of interest, including STEM, Entrepreneurship, Nursing and Health Care, Business, Cosmetology, and more. We also address personal skills like choosing proper work attire, maintaining a schedule, and professional communication to set young people up for success in the workplace.
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

CEA offers a holistic therapeutic support program to address the wellness of children, youth and families in culturally-specific, natural community settings to empower and enhance the social functioning of members of the community who are underserved and hesitant to engage in traditional mental health services.

LICENSED AFTER-SCHOOL PARTIAL HOSPITALIZATION PROGRAM

Our program is designed to provide assessment and treatment to children and youth 5-18 years of age who are challenged with severe emotional and behavioral issues. CEA’s program staff and psychiatrist provide services in a highly structured, safe environment and partner with parents and other professionals in order to stabilize behavior.

YOUTH MOBILE THERAPY

On-site therapy is available for children who are challenged with social, emotional, or behavioral issues that result in impairments that substantially interfere with or limits the child’s role or functioning in family, school, or community settings. Services are face-to-face, child-centered, and family-focused as identified in a treatment plan. The expected outcomes include the reduction or elimination of problematic behaviors, learning new skills and positive behaviors, and obtaining competency skills to address future behavioral issues, ultimately improving or stabilizing behavioral health symptoms in the places in which they are occurring.

INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, AND FAMILY OUTPATIENT SERVICES

Both CEA’s Homewood and McKeесport locations offer outpatient services by a licensed therapist for youth and adult individuals, groups and families. The goals of the program are to assess therapeutic needs, identify and reinforce strengths that already exist, examine and change negative challenges, increase knowledge of positive choices and behaviors, and provide a space for participants to feel comfortable as they work towards successful completion of their goals while in treatment.

COMMUNITY HEALING FORUMS

In its on-going commitment to educate and empower African American families, CEA sponsors community educational forums on topics identified through surveys received from community members, CEA participants, and their families and/or topics related to specific community issues and challenges. These forums are interactive and in many cases structured to have panels that include professionals on the topic as well as community residents with knowledge or experience related to the theme.

Referrals Accepted From

- Individuals and Caregivers
- Schools
- Children, Youth & Families
- Family Support Programs
- Other Service Agencies

CEA is one of the only community based organizations in Pittsburgh licensed to operate an after-school partial hospitalization program.

We currently accept Health Choices coverage, including UPMC for You, Gateway Health Plan, Unison, etc. We also accept UPMC Commercial and Health Choices for outpatient services.
CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

For over 25 years, CEA has hosted annual cultural events to engage community residents in safe spaces for education, cultural history, and recreation.

BLACK FAMILY REUNION

The Black Family Reunion is a cultural celebration where thousands of Allegheny County residents, vendors, artists, and activists come together to celebrate the Black family and the Black community. What started out as an intimate block party in 2003 has grown into an iconic, multi-day event with thousands of attendees and over 40 vendors. A main performance stage features entertainment by local and national artists. Participants enjoy recreational activities, free health screenings, information booths, and arts and crafts for kids. The Reunion also includes summits and networking opportunities with local leaders to address issues specific to the Black community. This highly anticipated local healing space truly epitomizes the word “family.”

“Every event I attend I meet wonderful people and more importantly I learn more about our history.

-Lisa Lebabe, 2018

KWANZAA

Every December, Community Empowerment Association celebrates Kwanzaa in the spirit of the seven principles. An annual attendance of over 500 people gather to share in the festivities, including West African dance and drumming performances, children’s arts and cultural activities, and even community building awards. Those who can are encouraged to bring a dish of food to share with the community.
CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

ANCESTOR’S DAY
This gathering is a celebration to honor the trailblazers that came before us through cultural performances by the children of the CEA family.

DAY OF BLACK MALE SOLIDARITY
Over 600 black men and youth gather each year to renew their vow to unite against violence and address community needs at this annual event which was established in 2007.

FOUNDER’S DAY
Founder’s Day is a networking event where community residents, members of the CEA family, and supporters of CEA’s endeavors are invited to commemorate the work of Community Empowerment Association and celebrate our founder, T. Rashad Byrdsong.

DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
To commemorate young lives lost to senseless violence, CEA hosts a memorial event inviting community members to plant flowers in a garden open to the Homewood community. This gathering allows for healing as well as promoting personal pride by enhancing our neighborhood together.
COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

What sets CEA apart from many other community service organizations is our commitment to actively empowering individuals to speak their voice in pursuit of justice and equality. A combination of education and access to key stakeholders is necessary to impact our circumstances in a meaningful way, which is why we focus on structured forums and less formal mentoring interactions to build community confidence as a call to action.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FORUMS

We understand the need for individuals to have public spaces to dialogue and engage around the critical needs of the community. This historical basis of community activism has spawned all CEA activities and programs. Topics are influenced by the needs of our families as well as current events at the local, national, and global scale. Content has covered issues ranging from public policy to employment and business development strategies, and more.

BROTHER TO BROTHER/SISTER TO SISTER: LEADERSHIP FORUMS

Parallel Black male and Black female leadership forums enhance community and neighborhood safety, improve quality education in our communities, develop political and legal expertise, improve community wellness including mental, physical, and behavioral wellness, and economic development and economic self-sufficiency. This project offers an opportunity for adults and youth to talk and plan activities that provide mentoring opportunities for the youth.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES, WINTER CLOTHING, AND EMERGENCY RELIEF DISTRIBUTIONS

Networking and distribution events make sure that youth have the supplies needed for the start of the school year and the apparel that they need to stay warm during the winter months. Additional distributions occur as needed for emergency relief needs from government shutdowns or natural disasters. Our tight-knit relationship with the community allows us to help those most in need through the generous support of individual and businesses who donate to our events.

GET INVOLVED!

Visit our website to see our full event schedule

www.ceapittsburgh.org
OUR PARTNERS

We appreciate all of our past, present, and future partners who support our programs!

- KEYBANK
- UPMC FOR YOU
- COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY
- MISTICK CONSTRUCTION GROUP
- KBK ENTERPRISE
- DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, OFFICE OF CHILDREN YOUTH AND FAMILIES SERVICES
- EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH
- PNC FOUNDATION (WFDT)
- PNC TRUST (SP)
- PITTSBURGH FOUNDATION
- DR. MARCIA STUDEVANT
- UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
- HOMEWOOD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIVE
- STAUNTON FARM
- HEINZ ENDOWMENT
- RICHARD K. MELLON FOUNDATION
- PARTNER 4 WORK
- STARBUCKS
- CCBHO
- URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
- HOUSING AUTHORITY, CITY OF PITTSBURGH
- DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA
- STATE SENATOR JAY COSTA
- CITY OF PITTSBURGH, MAYOR’S OFFICE
- ALLEGHENY COUNTY EXEC, RICH FITZGERALD
- CONGRESSMAN MIKE DOYLE
- STATE REPRESENTATIVE ED GAINNEY
- COUNCILMAN RICKY BURGESS

INTERESTED IN HELPING TO SUPPORT OUR PROGRAMS?

Send an e-mail to contact@ceapittsburgh.org so we can reach out personally!
OUR STAFF - OUR FAMILY

CEA Staff is unique because it has the capacity to engage with the most difficult-to-reach residents and provide them with interventions that get to the core of their suffering. We identify with the people in need and view ourselves as being equal to one another, as there is virtually no class difference. Staff members are continually exposed to in-house training programs, which occur routinely and as part of monthly staff development meetings.

“I am so comfortable with CEA. Staff work hard with the youth to inspire them. I do not know what the community would do without CEA. There is nowhere else I'd send my kids.” - Ranee Seymore

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- T. Rashad Byrdsong - President and CEO
- Ms. Fran Carter - Department of Human Services
- Mr. Franklin Robinson, Esquire; Chairman
- Dr. Robert Marin - Associate Professor of Psychiatry WPIC
- Ms. Lavern Jackson - Retired Registered Nurse, Washington, D.C.
- Mr. Christopher Carter - Sports Analyst

EXECUTIVE TEAM

- T. Rashad Byrdsong - President and CEO
- Ms. Amargie Davis - Co-Founder of CEA and Director of Youth and Family Services
- Ms. Angela DeVan - Manager, Therapeutic Support
- Ms. Genie Beckom - Assistant to the President and CEO