

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH STORIES

3RD EDITION, MARCH 2014

OUR MISSION:

To inspire a new generation of storytellers by connecting youth with community stakeholders through the medium of art.

By fostering intergenerational and multicultural relationships, we will empower youth and community to share their voices in promoting awareness, learning, and cohesiveness.



The need to hear and tell stories

By Latisha Thomas

Storytelling is the oldest form of education. People around the world have always shared stories as a way of passing down their cultural beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations.

Today, we as a society still have a need to share and hear stories. Why? Stories are the core of all that makes us human.

Through stories is how we learn about ourselves, and connect with the world around us.

In many communities throughout Chicago,

there exist a culture of isolation where youth are not engaged with community stakeholders. Many community stakeholders do make significant contributions to their neighborhoods and the wider community.

However, since many communities are not engaged, both local and the greater community is not informed of all the opportunities to improve our communities. Additionally, many are not aware of all the good that is going on throughout our city,

resulting in continued disengagement and isolation. This is why we exist. To create engagement amongst youth and community stakeholders. Through the many facets of storytelling, we will give youth the tools they need to strategically interact with their community. In doing so, we will empower youth to share their voices and build intergenerational and multicultural relationships that will build engaged and cohesive communities throughout our great city.

Learning

Storytelling increases learning, social and life skills

By Latisha Thomas

Storytelling is a powerful and enduring means of communication that has wide spread appeal. It crosses cultures and communities; in fact, many of our earliest learning experiences most likely involved stories, some told to us directly, others read and, still more played out around us.

Even before we had the ability to articulate what we knew, felt and thought, we learned to make sense of our world through our stories. Storytelling is powerful. It connects people, cultures and communities and increases learning, significantly.

Storytelling has many learning benefits and is crucial for youths development. Here are four significant **learning benefits** to storytelling:

1. Development of Oral Language
2. Development of Written Language
3. Critical Thinking: Acquisition of important fact
4. Bridging of cultural and generational gaps.

“Storytelling is powerful. It connects people, cultures and communities and increases learning.”

I Am We

These four aspects of learning is crucial. As story telling engages youth in research, literacy and critical thinking skills, which are beneficial now, and will prepare them to be successful and positive contributors within their community and the wider community.

In addition to building learning competencies, storytelling can also **increase social and life skills**. By sharing and learning of stories, this creates an opportunity for youth and community to share by being able to articulate their own experiences to their peers and the greater community, and truly learn from each other. Youth who are engaged in storytelling telling are:

1. More confident
2. Can articulate more clearly
3. Can connect with other cultures.

OUR PROGRAMS

Our programs help youth find their creative voice, and connect communities through the medium of storytelling. Through these endeavors, we will empower youth and give them the necessary skills needed to be effective communicators, problem solvers and humanitarians.

- Chicago Dreamers: The Storytelling Discovery
- Chicago Voices : Youth Behind the Lens

To learn more, please contact us at:
info@iamwecommunity.org





I Am We introduces a new segment: CHICAGO. MY CITY. MY STORY.

This will be an on-line segment that highlights amazing citizens who are impacting their community. Through this segment, citizens will learn of everyday citizens who have overcome obstacles to not only better themselves, but the communities they serve.

The purpose of this segment is to promote community cohesion, engagement and inspiration.

If you would like to highlight a citizen in your community, and believe their story will inspire, please contact us at:

info@iamwecommunity.org



CHICAGO. MY CITY. MY STORY.

Connecting communities through stories

By Latisha Thomas

I Am We is a young non-profit organization. Before launching programs or being funded in any type of capacity, we first wanted to understand communities. We wanted to understand, what was it that under resourced neighborhoods and the wider community truly needed and wanted. What we discovered was, in all communities, most people want the same thing. To give, be heard, and make an impact in some type of way. This narrative was consistent with youth, our elders, and all people from all backgrounds and economic levels. However, many communities are isolated, due to negative one sided narratives. In spending a great amount of time in communities and developing case studies to truly define need. What we have learned is that communities throughout Chicago need to hear stories that resonates with them. Stories that not only inspire, but highlight solutions. Stories that are innovative, and stories that highlights the victory in overcoming obstacles. And most importantly, stories that touch the pulse of all humanity. One

of our goals as an organization is to break barriers through stories. This is why we are excited about this segment: Chicago. My City. My Story. There are some amazing citizens here in Chicago. Their stories need to be told. In doing so, we will begin to break barriers, by sharing unfamiliar narratives that inspire us all. Additionally, the aspiration for this segment is our youth. We believe youth need to be exposed to engaged citizens who are making a difference. Therefore, one of our initiatives is to give youth the tools needed to interview, write, photograph and tell the stories of our amazing citizens. This is valuable for many reasons including, exposing youth to people and opportunities that they didn't know exist, and to allow them to use their skills to engage, and prepare them for real life work experiences. We are excited about this endeavor. To learn how you can get involved, please visit our website at: www.iamwecommunity.org

CHICAGO. MY CITY. MY STORY

Christian Fields

Owner, Christian Fields Style Bar and Academy

By Amanda Lonick

The Christian Style Bar and Academy is located in the Woodlawn Community at 6550 S. Cottage Grove, Chicago, IL. When you walk into the style bar, you are immediately greeted by kind and professional staff. The decor has a loft feel, open space, distinctive furniture and exposed brick and bamboo walls. The environment is welcoming and has an inspirational element to it. The hair stylist, barbers and students are inviting and very interesting to watch, as each stylist truly treats the treatment of their clients hair as art. The style bar and academy also has an eatery inside, specializing in various healthy and delicious refreshments and meals such as salads, soups, sandwiches and entrees. However, the signature of this fine establishment is, Christian. Christian is warm, dedicated to excellence and most importantly always serving - with grace and laughter. His establishment brings such positivity to the Woodlawn and Chicago community. What makes the Christian Style Bar so inspirational is its commitment to innovation and philanthropy. Through these efforts Christian is strategically growing his business, fostering positive relationships and transforming lives.

THE INTERVIEW: Christian Fields

I Am We: What does Chicago Mean to you?

Christian: Chicago means opportunity, which is one of my



motivations in moving here from Baltimore, D.C. My mom inspired me to move to Chicago ten years ago to attend Pivot Point, which is one of the leading hair schools in the country. I was apprehensive at first, as I currently had a salon back home. However, when I visited Chicago, I fell in love with the beauty of the city. Meaning its architecture, diversity, culture, and the people. From my one visit, I immediately realized that this was my new home. Therefore I closed my salon in Baltimore and moved to Chicago and experienced struggling, being broke and a student.

I Am We: Can you define your struggle?

Christian: Yes. I experienced a pivot point in my life, meaning, I had to start over. In Baltimore, I was an accomplished hair stylist. I had a steady clientele. Before I moved to Chicago, I had locs.

I Am We is pleased to introduce Christian Fields, owner of Christian Fields Style Bar, in our first installment of: CHICAGO. MY CITY. MY STORY.

We are delighted Christian shared his story with us, and we are equally excited to introduce you to Christian.

~Be inspired.

I Am We

People loved my locs. They would always stop me and inquire about my hair, and from that simple inquiry, it was very easy to build clientele. However, when I moved to Chicago I cut off all of my locks. Since I no longer had locks, it was difficult gaining clients. So I had to struggle. I had to start over.

I Am We: What did starting over look like for you?

Christian: Some trials and tribulations, but eventually I began building clientele. I worked at a salon after I graduated from Pivot Point. One of my clients had an apartment on the west side that he rented to me. While residing there, the house burned down. I remember driving home to a total loss. I couldn't believe it, everything I had was lost in that fire. To make matters worse, I also lost my job on that day.

CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE 5.

CHICAGO. MY CITY. MY STORY.

3RD EDITION, MARCH 2014

CHICAGO. MY CITY. MY STORY. Christian Fields

(CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 4)

Christian: In to think, I just purchased a truck, two weeks prior. This all happened in May, 2004. From May to October, 2004, I lived in my truck. I would wash up at the local YMCA, then go to my job in Bronzville and do hair. In November, I got a new apartment where I resided for three years.

I Am We: What brought you to the Woodlawn community?

Christian: I was introduced to several opportunities throughout Chicago, including the south loop. However, I wanted to take my services to a community that had some challenges; primarily as it relates to gangs and violence. I knew if I could take root within such a community, I could spread seeds of love and create transformation. After doing my due diligence, I decided to open my business in the Woodlawn community. Its been a labor of love, with countless of blessings. In 2014 we will be celebrating our seventh year anniversary. I love this space, and the community that we get to serve. I mostly enjoy the joy that our clients receive after they have experienced us. Just as importantly, the relationships we have developed within the community due to our philanthropic efforts.

I Am We: What do your customers experience?

Christian: Love. Love is the core value within our establishment.

We are a business that its dedicated to service and excellence. We take our time with our clients. We bask in our clients joy. When they come in wanting a service, or a particular style, we give it to them. And we radiate just as well as they do when they are pleased. We love on our clients and they can feel that.

I Am We: Tell me about the Christian Field Hair School Academy.

Christian: It is a training program that not only teaches students how to be stylist but prepares them to be effective and engaged leaders, contributors and owners of their own salon. The program instills life and soft skills, in addition to giving students the fundamental tools needed to be professional and desirable stylist in natural hair such as but not limited to, braids, locs, twist, sew-ins, and a various amount of hair styles (both natural and processed). Once students master these skills, they can graduate from the program and apply for their license to be a professional hair stylist.

I Am We: Are former students hired by you?

Christian: All of our employees are graduates of the program.

I Am We: People in the community consider you a humanitarian. Where did you learn to give back?

Christian: My mother had me volunteering every since I was 16 years of age. I did volunteer work

“I knew if I could take root in such a community, I could spread seeds of love and create transformation.”
-Christian Field

throughout high-school. So giving back was taught to me very young. However, being the only child, I experience an abundance of love from my mother. Not only did she love on me, she taught me how to love. Through the love I experienced from my mother, I knew what true love felt like. Therefore, as early as five years old, I could sense when my peers acted out, due to their absence of love. So I became very sensitive of this early on. I knew people who didn't have love wanted it. So, its just a part of me to give, and share through love. Its just who I am.

I Am We: What's next for the Christian Fields Style bar and Academy

Christian: To receive accreditation. Currently we have trained over 44 professionals. We want to give more students this opportunity by cultivating relationships and offering an enrich curriculum that will prepare students to be cutting edge in the hair industry as well as invested and engaged citizens within their local and wider communities. Additionally, we will continue with our outreach component, as we are dedicated to touching and inspiring lives with love.

For more information, please visit: www.christianfields.net



**CHICAGO.
MY CITY. MY STORY.
Christian Field**

(CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 5)

Christian has made significant contributions within his community. He has supported youth programming and partnered with organizations to help women transition back to the work by offering complimentary hairstyles and makeovers. When asked what story stand out about giving back to the community, he smiled. He referred to a woman who was in the transition to work program and received a complimentary hair style and make over at his salon. He said she came to his salon in tears,

thanking him for giving her confidence. The woman mentioned how she has been rejected in her job search due to her appearance. Each time she would fill out a job application, she would never receive a call back. In fact, often, she would witness management throwing her application away. However, she mentioned that, just by the salon showing her love, and building her confidence. She continued her job search, and finally received an interview - her first interview in years. The style bar does not receive any type of funding for its outreach. Its reward are in the lives of the people they touch. To learn more, please visit: www.christianfields.net

“Love. Love is the core value within our establishment.”
~ Christian Field

CHICAGO’S UNSUNG HEROES: THE TRAVELING PHOTOGRAPHY AND AUDIO EXHIBITION

In an effort to engage, unite and inspire positive engagement amongst local neighborhoods and the wider community, I Am We has launched Chicago’s Unsung Heroes as our first citywide initiative. Through this endeavor we are seeking to highlight 20 citizens who have addressed and created solutions for many of Chicago's needs in the specific areas of education, health, violence prevention and economic growth. Through this endeavor, citizens will learn the motivation in why our heroes took action; learn of their solutions, their obstacles and why they didn't give up. Finally, visitors will witness the measurable impact that our unsung heroes has made on our city. This will be done via story, photography and sound. In building relationships amongst communities, and listening to their needs, we have discovered that our youth need to be inspired the most. We know when youth are given the proper resources and are nurtured in an engaged community, they prosper. Therefore, as an organization, we have decided to include youth in the predevelopment, production and post-production of this project. Through this endeavor, youth will be exposed to citizens who are making a difference. Additionally, they will have the opportunity to interview nominees for our unsung heroes, and help capture their story via photography, film and sound. We are excited about this initiative, as we know it will change lives and inspire positive action throughout our city and beyond. To learn how to get involved, contact us at www.iamwecommunity.org



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~I Am We



THE STORY OF OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS

Engaged Partners

Latisha Thomas

In the summer of 2013, we launched a volunteer campaign to help us identify like minded engaged citizens who was dedicated to community, and also would be committed to our cause as volunteers. We were amazed by the positive responses we received. Most of our volunteers and interns were recent college and MA/MPA/MBA graduates, and others were active members within their communities who were passionate about building community from a grassroots perspective. Our volunteers are true representation of diversity. Many come from various cultures, and communities. To make our volunteer experience even more spectacular is that, three of our volunteers don't even live in Chicago: Nina Makalinaw lives in California, Vidushi Raval lives in Massachusetts and Fang Fan lives in Washington.

These three individuals were instrumental in developing and relaunching our website. In addition, to our out of state volunteers, our volunteers in Chicago were key contributors in helping us build our social media networks, develop policies and serving as subject matter experts for the organization. We recognize all of our accomplishments thus far, and we know that none of this work would have been possible without our committed volunteers. The commonality of all our volunteers is that each share a love for humanity and are dedicated to building more united and cohesive communities. We are thankful for our volunteers, as we realize that that there generosity and commitment is invaluable to us and the communities we serve. For more information on volunteering, please visit our website.

HOW STORYTELLING CHANGED MY LIFE

Latisha Thomas

I Am We

Founder, CEO

By Latisha Thomas

As a wife, mother and humanitarian, I am delighted to lead an organization that brings communities together through stories. The sharing of stories changed my life. Although I grew up in an under resourced community on Chicago's south side, I learned that not having "things" did not necessarily mean "being impoverished." There is intrinsic value in humanity and our connection through communication.

My neighbors nourished my younger life with love and inspiration and set its trajectory for my present life. It truly takes the people in a neighborhood to nurture a community.

As a child I met Ms. Harris, known as the "candy lady" by the children in the neighborhood, who freely shared meaningful stories with me. I recall how much I looked forward to listening to her stories; and it was through those stories that she instilled in me a desire to go to college and graduate school. Although, Ms. Harris made her transition years ago, I will always cherish her generous gift of sharing stories, which changed my life. I regret not having had a chance to thank her for encouragement and inspiration. I think she would be proud that I am paying her gift forward by advocating that others share their life stories with one another. I am a living witness, as are many, that the sharing of stories has the power to change lives.

So please support our organization today. In doing so, you may be changing the trajectory of a young life.

Thank you,



Latisha Thomas

I AM WE

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WAYS TO GIVE