

# WORLD CHANGERS

## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

December 2020



## CONTENT

Enough Is Enough - 3

The Appeal - 4

World Changers Youth - 6

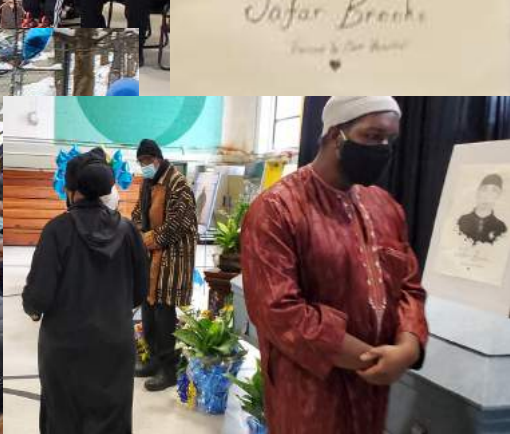
Annual Coat Drive - 9

Social Media - 10



### Community Empowerment Association

Community Empowerment Association (CEA), Inc. was organized by community activist T. Rashad Byrdsong in 1993 in an effort to reduce and prevent violence in the Homewood-Brushton area of Pittsburgh. CEA's mission is to restore, reclaim and transform distressed communities through strategic planning, collaboration, advocacy, education and mobilization. CEA seeks to develop the knowledge, skill, leadership and influence that will enable its participants, families, and the community to live healthy secure, fruitful, and productive lives. Since its inception in 1993, CEA has been tirelessly serving thousands of disadvantaged and minority families throughout the Greater Pittsburgh area and has served over 25,000 individuals, youth and families residing in 48 neighborhoods, enrolled in 74 schools and 9 school districts within Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.



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## ***Enough Is Enough***

There have been thousands of young men who have died at the hands of senseless gun violence. There will be thousands more if we do not tackle this disease from its root causes, which has become A Public Health crisis.

What will it take for the collective cries and prayers to be heard from the thousands of mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and communities to see an end to the carnage that is hemorrhaging our communities every day?

As we know too painfully well, the culture of youth and community violence has gripped this nation. Gun violence transcends race, class, social and economic status. The sad state of affairs is that we all are susceptible to the tentacles of social discord and conflict.

OUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE! These social flames have consumed the hopes, dreams and possibilities of loved ones lost; leaving families broken with grief, and communities taking on the characteristics of war-torn third world countries, grieving the loss of child soldiers and combatants. Our youth have assumed the attributes of a death march – no hope, no aspirations – no visions for the next day, let alone a future – a perceived destiny of Dead by 21, dying with their eyes wide open.

Violence has captured the minds and souls of our youth and has become a serious cancer spreading in epidemic proportions. Our communities are filled with make shift burial grounds – flowers and balloons, crosses on corners located strategically where the life was lost – Murals on buildings memorializing loved ones snatched too soon; Rest In Peace T-shirts honoring the lives of youth that are gone. Billboards acting as “Most Wanted” posters strategically placed in communities of color to exacerbate fear and terror in residents which deteriorates the social fabric of the community.

When are we going to say enough is enough? When are we going to come out of the self imposed silos of our homes, positions, degrees, churches, mosques, religious and perceived differences? How many lives must be lost before we become a united front and address this issue?

Rashad Byrdsong  
President and CEO  
Community Empowerment Association

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## ***THE APPEAL TO OUR COMMUNITY***

*This is a community appeal to re engage and assist in the lives of children and families in our communities, that have family challenges. The historical uniqueness of the black community was our ability to maintain family and community cohesiveness, despite our conditions or circumstances. We as a community have to bare some personal responsibility in addressing the interpersonal violence that's playing out in our community.*

***THE MURDER OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN BY BLACK MEN WITH EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. BLACK MEN STAND UP! THESE BOYS HAVE TO BE CONFRONTED AND STOPPED! THE APPEAL! CALLING ON BLACK MEN TO COLLECTIVELY PULL TOGETHER AND PRIORITIZE ADDRESSING VIOLENCE IMPACTING THE BLACK COMMUNITY.***

These Youth Perpetrators did not fall from space. They are ours and our neighbors children, who grew up in our communities. Their lack of human compassion and respect for life is due to multiple social factors, i.e, family, society, delayed emotional and cognitive development, and community neglect.

We are going to have to approach this problem from a multidimensional prospective. Our bond and love was rooted in our belief in God, morals, values, Elders, our spiritual connection to our ancestors, and our collective journey as a people. The Black Community had a sense of belonging, security, culture, historical roots to the South (where many of our family members still are), extended family roots, and our Faith and Belief in God.

The Black Community was made up of institutions that supported family life i.e. faith-based institutions, social clubs, summer camp, social clubs, libraries, Black Doctors, lawyers, professionals, sports associations, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts and a host of social activities that are geared towards the developmental and social growth of Black children and the Black community.

Black businesses and of course, Mrs. Jones that lived next door, made sure her neighborhood was safe. This was the fabric that made up the Black Community. We had an open door policy in our community, every neighbor was responsible for watching each of our backs. ESPECIALLY the children of the community.

- BROTHER RASHAD

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## ***THE APPEAL TO BLACK MEN***

This appeal is especially a challenge for Black Men. We have to ask ourselves who's protecting the women and children in our communities? These are our wives, our aunts, girlfriends, mothers, sisters, and daughters. And what's ironic is that our boys are waging and perpetuating the carnage. The Black man's historical role has always been the protector of the village, the neighborhood, and the community, especially the women and children.

We are the ones who should be instilling, in our Black Boys, appropriate family values, morals, love and responsibility to family and community. Unfortunately, many of us are absent from this scenario. Our Black Boys have been left to fend for themselves with no leadership, support, or guidance. Consequently, these same boys have run-a-muck and are causing death, mayhem and havoc amongst their own people and communities that they live in.

Where are the Black men of the church, where are the Black men of the masjids, where are the men of the temple? Where are the black men in social organizations? Where are the professional black men? Where are the black educators? Where are the black men in the Narcotics Anonymous?

This call to action and appeal is a message for Black Men. We need the Men of our community to stand-up, man-up, and protect and serve our neighborhoods and community. Let's come out of our self imposed silos. Let's move past our individualistic subjectiveness and perceived differences of personalities, faith, ideologies, organizations, and groups. If we don't, we will continue to stiff real solidarity and unity for the greater good of our community.

Let's get serious and commit to relationship building and make it happen. If God is with us, who can be against us. Let's stand on our faith! Black Solidarity Matters!!!!

**THE TIME IS NOW FOR BLACK MEN TO TAKE THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE! OUR ANCESTORS ARE CALLING ON US. STAND UP!! STAND UP!!**

- BROTHER RASHAD

## ***World Changers Youth***

It is with deep sadness we, as a group, had to say goodbye to Jafar Brooks. World Changers works to address the very issues that contributed to the loss of one of our students. Gun violence is a public health issue. No one should have to say goodbye to their children, brothers, sisters, friends, or family members due to senseless acts of violence. We as a community need to take better care of one another and work together to provide a better world for our youth. They deserve better. Our youth wanted to share a few thoughts, memories, and messages about their friend Jafar.

### **- World Changers Youth**



## ***Messages from World Changers***

I always envied and admired Jafar. He always had this confidence about him where he could just walk in a room, join a conversation, and just get comfortable. Even when he was nervous, he always seemed to just be in his element, a skill I wish I had. He was just a smile personified and I hope to never forget it. May he rest in paradise. I'm glad I got the chance to call him a friend and brother.

- *Sani Henley, 16 years old*

I apologize for the world being the way it is. You were taken from this life too soon. Now, your suffering has ended as you have moved on. The one message I have for you is that we will all see you again someday. So wait for us.

- *Allheim, 16 years old*

On Saturday December 12, 4 days before he passed, we participated in the World Changers program at Community Empowerment Association. The last time I seen him. We ate pizza and chatted about topics around poverty. If I had known that would be the last day I would see him, I would have gave him a hug.

- *Melissa Thomas, 16 years old*

One thing I want to say is everything I do, I'm going to do it at 3 million % for you and not give up on myself. If it's in football or anything else in life, I'm doing it for you!!!

- *Darryl Perkins, 16 years old*

I'm still in shock that you're gone. Why you. I was just with you on Saturday, for the World Changers program, laughing and cracking up at the computer. I have no words to say except that I'm sick to my stomach and it has not gone away. I'll miss your hugs and you tweekin about being taller than me all the time. I'll miss our play fights. I called you family ever since I started at CEA. It will be a bond that will never be broken with me and the rest of CEA. I will love and miss you. The CEA family is hurting, but we are going to stick together no matter how hard it hits that you're gone. We know you would want us moving forward and to keep a smile on our faces.

- *Kameron Coles, 17 years old*

## ***Messages from World Changers***

Jafar Brooks was like family to me. I knew him since I first started CEA. He was so full of excitement, he always made sure to turn a light into us joking around. I can never look at Jafar with a straight face without laughing. I remember this one time when he first started wearing Jordans he would see me with a fresh pair of kicks, and ask me to buy him a pair. I remember when, he, Brannndon, Triston, Allheim, Dej, and I were at Kennywood. It started storming and after the storm stopped, out of no where, we started dancing. As much as he got on my nerves (like a little brother does, along with the rest of them) he always made sure I was okay. Jafar loved and cared for so many people. I just wish I can hug him one more time.

- *Nyah DeVan, 20 years old*

Dear Jafar, I am so sorry to see you go. I didn't get a chance to say goodbye. This is hard for me, but you're in God's hands now and you're in heaven. I will miss you very much. You were so funny and a very sweet boy. You cared about everyone, especially your grandma. Rest In Peace.

- *Mayhim Davis, 18 years old*

I remember we were always on the game ripping on each other. We would joke around talking about how I would throw him dots when we play football together. We would always make plans together. Like going out somewhere or he would come over our house and on that next day we would go somewhere like paint-balling with the fam or rollerskating.

- *Brannndon Pezzelle, 16 years old*

I remember when me and Jafar was going to teen night at Neville Island roller dome. This is one of my favorite memories because he paid for an Uber and it never showed up. So, we were outside with our friends in the cold making each other laugh and doing TikToks until we got a ride home. I also remember when went paint-balling for his birthday, his family and friends came out and we had a cookout and we paint-balled all day. I'm going to miss him coming over on the weekends, after a long week of school, and we always find something fun to do like ride bikes, play hide and seek, play video games, or to go play or take a bike ride to RiteAid to get snacks.

- *Triston Pezzelle, 13 years old*



## **Annual Winter Coat Drive**

Every year, CEA hosts an annual coat drive as a way to not only give back to the community, but to address the underlining issues that contribute to our underserved community members, youth, and families. Not only did we donate coats and distribute them to the community, but families were able to receive a free turkey for the holiday season.

No parent should have to choose between buying school supplies or a winter coat. Parents should not have to sacrifice a meal, just to keep the backs of our youth warm through the winter months. Youth, parents, and essential workers should be able to commute with a warm coat on their back.

CEA would like to thank all of the volunteers who contributed their time and helped make the event a success.



## **World Changers Anti-Violence Campaign**

### **What is it?**

World Changers is a youth driven social and interpersonal anti-violence campaign striving to empower our youth, families, and communities to awaken their consciousness and be the change our world needs.

### **November and December Highlights**

Not only did the youth volunteer their time during the annual coat drive, they also educated themselves, learning why resources like these are necessary for our communities. The youth engaged in workshops covering the topic of homelessness, poverty, and financial disparities within our communities.

### **Upcoming Workshops**

Our youth will pick back up with workshops beginning Saturday, January 2, 2021. In honor of Jafar Brooks, the youth will focus on the public health issue of gun violence.





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