

2023 NCF Thanksgiving offering selections

Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center (UNCC)

Urbana, IL

<https://www.urbanconnectionscenter.org/>

Founded by the late Janice Mitchell in 2010, Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center is now led by her daughter, Jeniece Mitchell, a former Champaign middle school STEM teacher and now the family liaison for the Urbana School District. Jeneice has volunteered at UNCC for a number of years and is an Ed.D. candidate in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership with a concentration in Diversity and Equity from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As an after-school and enrichment program, UNCC provides students with a meal, homework help from staff and peer mentors, enrichment activities and digital literacy education. UNCC endeavors to bridge gaps in both academic achievement and social inclusion, knowing that many of the kids come from underserved neighborhoods. The staff “engage children creatively, emotionally, intellectually and physically, empowering them to explore and discover the opportunities in their lives.” They work with 50+ students from the Urbana school district from K-12, from the end of school until 5:30 pm. Kids are exposed to models from the community and are equipped to live lives full of choices.

Sub:Culture Incorporated

Based in Mechanicsville, VA, with roots in Atlanta, Georgia, it has a national reach

<https://www.subcultureinc.org/>

“Clearing the Path for Black College Students”

One of the things we’ve learned in our attention to reparations is that Black families have a lot less wealth than white families, due to systemic injustices. So if a Black college student has a family emergency (an ill parent) or a car breakdown with costly repairs, or the need to replace a laptop, or loss of a scholarship, or an inability to pay rent due to a lost job, this often puts a college career to an end. Major or minor crises are all major because there’s typically not enough family wealth to keep them on the college path when faced with a crisis.

In 2018 Sub:Culture Inc. was formed to provide “Black students with the social and financial capital, professional guidance, and sense of belonging essential for their collegiate success.”

The organization exists to remove the barriers “impeding Black college students from holistic well-being, academic success, and social flourishing.” That includes financial barriers but also academic, social and emotional barriers, which includes a sense of belonging and affirmation. They have a fellows program and cohorts to support students’ success. They also foster student leaders’ sense of their racial identity through exploring the African countries from which so many African Americans can trace their roots. They provide mentoring, leadership and professional development, survival guides and community building. Sub:Culture Inc.’s founder is Tamice Spencer-Helms. Sub:Culture Inc. is led by a multicultural board.

New American Welcome Center (NAWC)

Located at Lincoln Square Mall, Urbana

<https://nawc.universityymca.org/>

Begun in 2017, The New American Welcome Center, part of the University YMCA, came into being as a part of the Welcome America campaign. As its name states, its goal is to make immigrants truly welcome by building bridges between the community and immigrants to make welcoming a community effort. They do this in both “big picture” and practical ways.

In 2021 they published the Champaign County Welcoming Plan, involving the work of many community players all coming together to name five key areas for growth: Economic Integration & Employment, Citizenship & Civic Engagement, Health & Well-Being, Language & Education and Public Safety. See the plan at <https://nawc.universityymca.org/welcoming-plan>.

Some of the more practical things that are happening at the NAWC are providing:

- Immigrant legal services, such as applying for citizenship
- Immigrant family services, including case management
- An online resources center
- A multilingual helpline, La Línea
- Immigrant Relief Fund, started during COVID-19, for financial emergencies for immigrant families in crisis.

NAWC is a big reason that the various other immigration service organizations in C-U are so well-connected. They also plan, coordinate and host Welcoming Week, a community-wide celebration each September. NAWC gives student interns and volunteers opportunities to develop their own skills as they catch the larger vision of the role that NAWC plays locally. Akua Forkuo-Sekyere is the new director as of this summer.