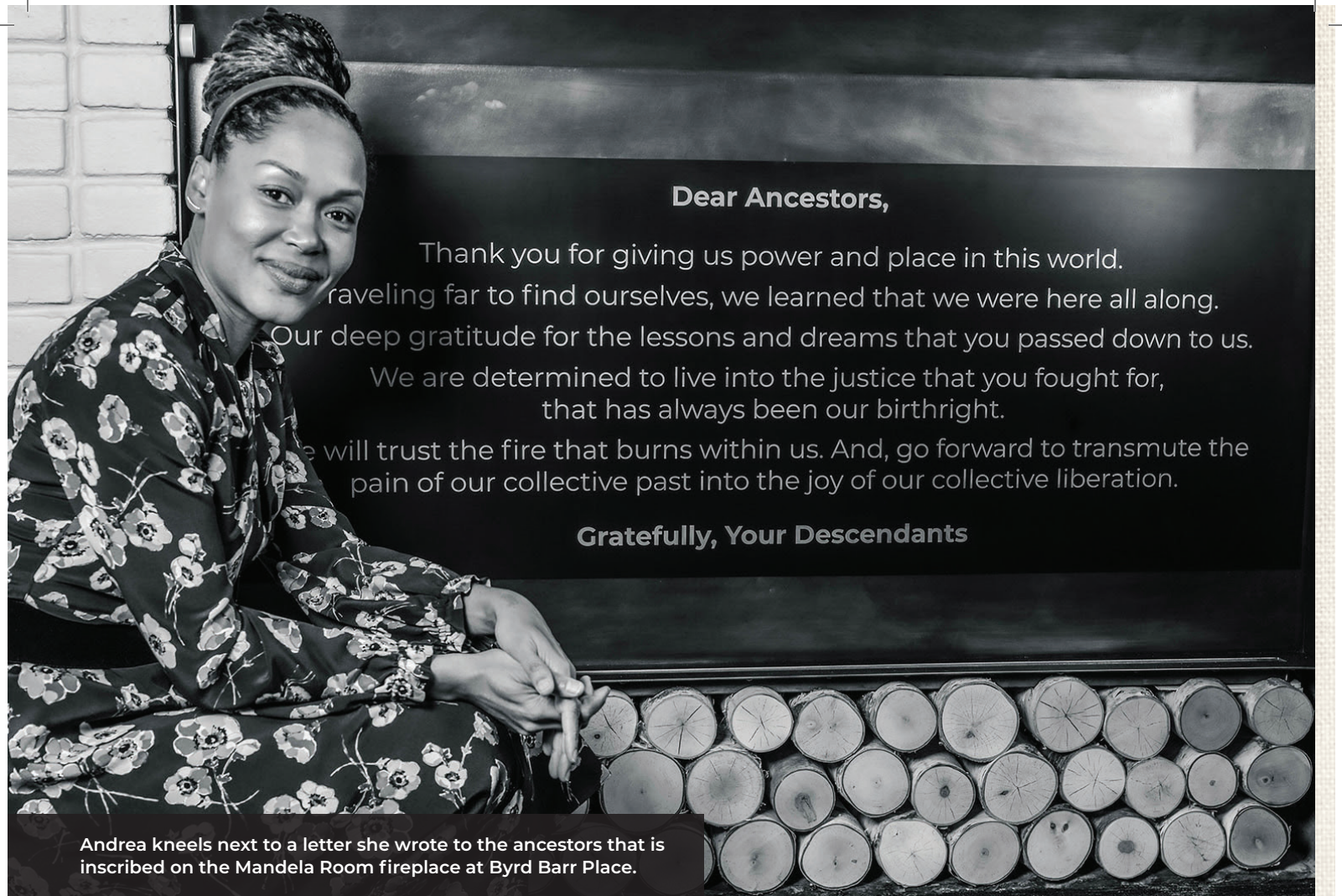


BETWEEN OUR
**ANCESTORS AND
DESCENDANTS**



Reflections on the Legacy and Leadership of
Andrea Caupain Sanderson and Byrd Barr Place





Dear Ancestors,

Thank you for giving us power and place in this world.
Traveling far to find ourselves, we learned that we were here all along.
Our deep gratitude for the lessons and dreams that you passed down to us.
We are determined to live into the justice that you fought for,
that has always been our birthright.
We will trust the fire that burns within us. And, go forward to transmute the
pain of our collective past into the joy of our collective liberation.

Gratefully, Your Descendants

Andrea kneels next to a letter she wrote to the ancestors that is inscribed on the Mandela Room fireplace at Byrd Barr Place.

“JUSTICE IS WHAT LOVE
LOOKS LIKE IN PUBLIC.”¹

— Cornel West



INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the organization known then as the Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP) was on the brink of closing its doors. Andrea Caupain Sanderson joined staff as director of operations, and several years later was asked to serve as CEO. Now, in 2023, after two decades of Andrea's leadership, she is departing, leaving in place a strong organization rooted in a culture of well-being, mutual care, compassion, and justice.

Byrd Barr Place owns its historic firehouse home free and clear, with substantial savings and no debt. It offers essential programs and services that are a mainstay—often a lifeline—for many thousands of community members. And, its advocacy for Black Washingtonians has and continues to reshape the landscape of equity and possibility in our state. Byrd Barr Place has also earned a rock-solid reputation among stakeholders that include community members, partner organizations and local leaders, city and state government representatives, and funders both public and private.

Andrea's leadership tenure began with a structure near collapse, yet she was able to steward the organization to today's robust success and health. How did that happen?

It is worthwhile to reflect on Andrea's personal leadership journey at the helm of Byrd Barr Place, facing challenges, seeking solutions, and carving a path forward. This document is not a detailed recounting of two decades of service achievements and organizational progress. This is more an X-ray view of the process behind the progress. It's a survey of the bones inside the body of work, and it's a look at the way history is actually made—one uncertain moment at a time—rather than simply a celebration of accomplishments after the fact.

This review aims to provide context around some of the pivotal moments, actions and approaches that have shaped the evolution of Byrd Barr Place. The hope is that these reflections will be of value for staff and board members as Byrd Barr Place navigates the predictable and the unpredictable in years to come.



WHAT GOT YOU *HERE* WON'T GET YOU *THERE*

One thing these reflections are not is a specific prescription for next organizational steps. Nearing her departure, Andrea sensed that what needed to be done in her time had been done. What had moved Byrd Barr Place to this point would not be the work to move the organization to the next place. In her view, the next phase would be a time for Byrd Barr Place to process what has been achieved and what has been left behind, while listening for new possibilities and planting new seeds.

It has been a long journey to this point, from the civil rights movement of the 1960s to Black Lives Matter of today, with many twists and turns between these two pillars of the racial justice movement. When COVID-19 arrived and we saw the mortality rate for Black people more than double that of white people, along with other severely inequitable pandemic impacts, Byrd Barr Place responded by dramatically increasing its basic needs and emergency services, helping more people in 2021 than ever before.

Today, Byrd Barr Place stands strong as a leading Black organization in the city, region, and state. “We depend on the trust placed in us by our neighbors, and our neighbors know that when they reach out to us, we listen and respond,” said Andrea. “We are proof that a locally based organization led by people of color can exemplify healthy, equitable ways of working with each other and with clients across race, class, and gender. Our research and advocacy expand statewide conversations about Black well-being as we mobilize communities to dismantle poverty and racism, and work together toward a more just future.”

Just as the organization did when COVID-19 arrived, Byrd Barr Place will need to continue to develop strategic, flexible, and emergent responses to new challenges and opportunities that are not yet visible. At the core of Byrd Barr Place is and always will be love—a caring, seasoned commitment to stand with and help our neighbors and our communities across the state.

This is a brutal and uncertain time in our fractured nation. What will be needed next, and after that? To respond with care and skill, one baseline action to start with—and stay with—is deep listening.

Africatown, the Black Community Impact Alliance, Community Roots Housing, and Byrd Barr Place representatives celebrate the redevelopment of the Liberty Bank Building.





VOICES FROM THE ROOT: WHAT MIGHT THE ANCESTORS BE SAYING?

“We begin with listening to the ancestors, inviting their voices into our lives,” Andrea shared. There are many ways to do that, within or outside of any tradition, but most fundamentally we recognize that we don’t start with ourselves. With gratitude, we acknowledge the gifts and legacy of the ancestors, knowing that we live in the justice that they fought and died for.

Between the ancestors and our descendants, we carry the fire during our time on earth. Our vision reaches back to our ancestors and organizational founders, and it reaches forward toward healthy and thriving future generations. We recognize multigenerational pain and multigenerational power. We are here thanks to the vision and strength of our ancestors, and so we start by attending to those who made our lives possible.



(L to R) Andrea with Liz Peterson Word and former CAMP Executive Director Tony Orange at the organization's annual Christmas party.

We don't only thank them. We ask for their help, then listen. Whether through ritual, prayer, practice, or in our own personal way—in our hearts and minds, we can extend ourselves and open to the ancestors' guidance. Orland Bishop is a teacher and transmitter of Black Gnostic Studies, as well as author of *The Seventh Shrine: Meditations on the African Spiritual Journey*. He describes how a connection can be forged: "As we look for truth and as we call to the ancestral world to help in the fulfillment of our purposes, our eyes and the eyes of the ancestors become one, a way of seeing, a way of recognizing, a way of confirming. We become the doorways that enable the ancestral work to be done in the world."²

Sobonfu Somé, a Burkinabe teacher and writer, pointed out how the ancestors' influence can provide an important safeguard: "The spirit of an ancestor has the capacity to see not only into the invisible world but also into this world... It is this power of ancestors that will help us direct our lives and avoid falling into huge ditches."³ Asking what the ancestors might be saying, we can root our choices and actions in a perspective that runs wider and deeper than the everyday.

LEARNING FROM WISE ELDERS

As with the ancestors, we extend our listening to the elders who offered us care and wisdom during our lives. When Andrea was growing up in the Caribbean nation of Guyana, her grandmother Enid Sheila Forde worked for the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), an organization committed to empowering rural women all over the globe and amplifying their voices. ACWW states that: “Rural women are the backbone of families, communities, and nations, but they suffer the worst impacts of climate change and conflict, go unheard in legislation, and remain unprotected and unsupported.”⁴



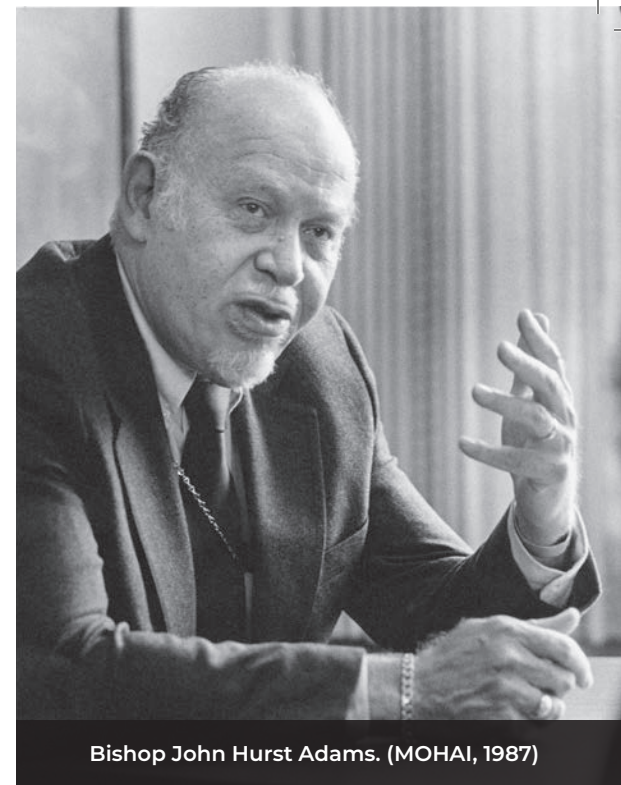
Grandmother Enid Sheila Forde.

As a girl, Andrea traveled to Kenya and other countries with her grandmother, who taught women in many developing countries to empower themselves and develop self-sufficiency. Andrea witnessed her grandmother working on behalf of others, dealing with conflict as a necessary part of the work, and embodying the spirit of the quintessential public servant. This youthful learning and witnessing of her grandmother’s skill and commitment to public service fed into Andrea’s sense of possibility, as she went on years later to earn an MPA in political economy and work in Olympia with the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs, prior to working with CAMP.

When she arrived at CAMP, what the organization needed at the time fit Andrea's strengths— including a combination of organizational skills, a realistic and compassionate worldview, strong ethics, the courage to speak with candor, and the willingness to tackle hard situations. She had no idea when she began her work with CAMP what specific *organizational* blueprint was needed. But she did arrive carrying an *internal* blueprint of what service and leadership can be, created in part during the years of absorbing her grandmother's example.

At one key phase early in her tenure steering the organization, Andrea reached out to as many CAMP founders as she could, including national civil rights leader and CAMP co-founder Bishop John Hurst Adams, whom she flew from Georgia to Seattle to discuss the genesis and vision of the organization. Adams shared with her that the name Central Area Motivation Program was created because he and his colleagues wanted to get people civically engaged. But when they knocked on community members' doors, they saw that what was most needed was basic services like food. And though Adams and his colleagues wanted to go back and change the name to reflect this pivot, they never did. This detail highlights a throughline connecting Byrd Barr Place's current advocacy work with the original vision for CAMP.

Andrea's effort to connect in person with Bishop Adams and other founders, in order to learn and integrate a direct transmission of the original vision, helped to create a strength and clarity for the organization. Learning from elders is always part of the work.



Bishop John Hurst Adams. (MOHAI, 1987)



(L to R) Co-founders of the Black Future Co-op Fund: T'wina Nobles, Michelle Merriweather, Angela Jones, and Andrea Caupain Sanderson.

HONORING THE FEMININE: LIFTING UP BLACK WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

"When I liberate myself, I liberate others."⁵ –Fannie Lou Hamer

Looking back at the civil rights movement of the 1960s and forward to today, we don't hear enough about the women who led, often beside more-famous male leaders. Women who fundamentally drove the daily work of changemaking may have also stood a few steps behind the podium with a man at the microphone. There are so many women's names we don't know. Angela Davis reflected:

“As many times as I’ve spoken during Black History Month, I never tire of urging people to remember that it wasn’t a single individual or two who created that movement. That as a matter of fact, it was largely women within collective contexts, Black women, poor Black women who were maids, washerwomen, and cooks. These were the people who collectively refused to ride the bus. These are the people whom we have to thank for imagining a different universe and making it possible for us to inhabit this present.”⁶

When the time came to rename the organization as part of a renewal and rebranding process (after the intermediate name of Centerstone that succeeded CAMP), the board and staff chose to commemorate Seattle civil rights leader, educator, and journalist Ms. Roberta Byrd Barr, who also contributed writing to our CAMP community newsletter.

“It expresses a core organizational value that every time our name is mentioned, it lifts up the name of a Black woman leader from our region,” Andrea said. “We intentionally create and hold space—daily and structurally, short-term and long-term—for women’s voices, perspectives and leadership. Like most organizations, CAMP had been historically male-led, yet we know that our communities need both women’s and men’s creative leadership and visions of a healthy future. We know how destructively gender inequity feeds into poverty, risk and harm for women and children.” Byrd Barr Place stands with women stepping into their power.

“When we consciously honor ancestors, elders, and women, it grounds us in the wisdom and undefeated love of our people. We are more able to move in ways that are far-seeing and deep-rooted. When we honor ancestors, elders, and women, we feel witnessed. We are witnessed. This increases our motivation and capacity to align our actions with our heartfelt intentions, helping us to stand upright even when strong winds blow. Living in our integrity is a source of strength and protection.”

But none of that guarantees quick success or a comfortable path. The organization still had to do the work. And Andrea’s work began with a messy situation—with lack of clarity, lack of open communication, and with pain and struggle.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

“The reason you want to leave is the reason we need you here.”

Andrea arrived at CAMP in October 2003, as director of operations, a role she held for five years before becoming CEO in 2008. In fall 2006, she joined other CAMP leaders in meeting with private funders of that time, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle Foundation, and United Way. It was a difficult meeting, and the feedback from funders was harsh. Looking at CAMP’s work, the funders saw sub-standard program delivery and a lack of strategy. They didn’t see CAMP providing value to the community in a way that justified their funding. They said that CAMP needed to evolve and employ better strategies.

Then as now, the board was primarily Black. Board members challenged these white funders in the meeting, asking: “Who are you to tell a Black organization what to do?” After the meeting, these funders went away and made a choice that they had the institutional power to make. They pulled their funding, abruptly, decisively, entirely. CAMP went from 52 to 26 staff and from seven centers to two. There were shockwaves in the community.

The board began scrambling and, in an effort to show progress, pushed out the CEO and onboarded an interim CEO in 2007. This interim CEO was not made aware of the challenge he was entering, and there was considerable conflict. Andrea did not see a healthy organizational culture or a place for herself within the existing dysfunction, and she made plans to leave for another nonprofit. She informed the interim CEO of that, but he did not, in turn, notify the board. The board then contacted Andrea with the news that they had decided to appoint her as CEO, not knowing that she had already given her 30-day notice. Andrea was thrown into

uncertainty about her next steps. She recognized how hard the work would be if she accepted the CEO role.

As she weighed the decision, other staff told her that the very reason she wanted to go to the other nonprofit was the reason they needed her here. These staff recognized that Andrea saw the situation clearly and possessed the ability to face hard truths. She had the capacity to make bold and necessary structural changes, and these staff members strongly encouraged her to consider taking on the role.

Such times of painful struggle and uncertainty are to be expected in the life of a long-enduring nonprofit. Organizations have peaks and pits. And, at some crucial junctures, there is an opportunity to either grow stronger or crumble. “We go forward one moment at a time, discerning when it’s time for ‘yes’ and when it’s time for ‘no.’ There is no universal formula.”



Andrea stepping into the CEO role.



SETTING A COURSE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL HEALING

Andrea determined that she was potentially open to stepping into the CEO role, and identified what actions were needed next. She felt the organization must be retooled and rebranded, with the first step to repopulate the board. She told board members that for her to accept this position, they would need to leave their roles (except for a few), because they were inextricably implicated in the dysfunction of the organization. After difficult conversations, a compromise was agreed to, with executive board members stepping down and new board leadership stepping in.

The organizational rebranding aimed to carve out a fresh identity that stood apart from ineffective and harmful activities which had taken place in the past. This process took many years and, ultimately, included the organizational renaming in 2018 that both honored Roberta Byrd Barr and seeded long-term organizational renewal. The renaming was a beautiful—and true—story, wrapped around an organizational imperative: to leave old patterns behind and advance into new territory and new ways of being.

In his powerful book, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Resmaa Menakem writes:

“In today’s America, we tend to think of healing as something binary: either we’re broken, or we’re healed from that brokenness. But that’s not how healing operates, and it’s almost never how human growth works. More often, healing and growth take place on a continuum, with innumerable points between utter brokenness and total health.”⁷

This is true for organizational healing and health too. Many moments are not photo-ready, but that doesn’t mean they signal permanent failure. Ups and downs simply show that we are in a process, on a continuum of growth. The reality of how organizations adapt and build strength includes plenty of uncomfortable challenges.



SEEING THROUGH AN OUTSIDER'S EYES

"The need for unity is often misnamed as a need for homogeneity."⁸

–Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

Andrea was Byrd Barr Place's youngest CEO and first foreign-born Black CEO. Entering the role, she found herself being "othered" by a cultural view that the organization should be led by a US-born Black leader. She was critiqued by some as "that girl over there," an outsider who wanted to lead the way and set new limits but didn't herself fully belong. Certainly not everyone in the community held that perspective, but in the early days of her leadership, at times there was a chill in the air.

Yet, her relative "outsider status" was an asset in setting necessary boundaries. Andrea was not so indebted to and enmeshed in the community. This created a platform for changemaking. There were Black male leaders in the organization who needed to save face and couldn't find a way to tell friends on the board that the organization was in trouble. There were directors serving on the board for 20 to 30 years when the bylaws set 10 years as a maximum for board service. There were resources intended for community members that didn't always reach community members.

Andrea understood how difficult it was for past organizational leaders to stand and deliver in front of their friends. But she had fewer hooks in her from that community. Grounded in her own West Indian Black community, she was more readily able to step in and say, "We're messing up. Here's what's at stake." If a board member backed up a car to fill with food, Andrea could draw a firm line, yet sweeten the medicine with a dollop of humor, saying "This ain't Big Momma's house." Fair for all can't be a free-for-all.

Andrea stayed rooted in her identity and vision, while expanding the organization's collective sense of "who we are and who can lead us." She was able to keep her eyes on the prize of sustainable organizational health, although it was initially a very real question whether that would even be the goal.



THE TURNAROUND: LEADING WITH LISTENING

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”⁹ –James Baldwin

In the fall of 2007, Andrea was asked to field a call with government partners which, unlike the group of private funders noted above, had not yet terminated their funding. A representative from the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (now the Department of Commerce) said they were not ready to pull their funds. They were reluctant to shut down a Black organization, but they believed that remedial organizational actions needed to be taken quickly. Andrea led with listening and asked these government funders, as well as other private funders for their ideas around how to build a road map to move the organization back to stability. She asked them what, in their eyes, “getting it together” looked like.

She then used their feedback in the development of a three-year turnaround plan. The initial idea was not to definitively save the organization, but to stabilize the organization sufficiently, then determine whether to stay open or close the doors. The aim was to put out fires first, then take stock. Even if the fires were put out, the organization still might not survive. But there would at least be space to think about surviving.

Part of the feedback from government funders was that Byrd Barr Place had a responsibility to systematically seek input from community around whether to remain open or close down the organization. These funders asked if Byrd Barr Place understood what our community thinks and wants. The organization launched a structured listening campaign, including surveys, over a nine-month period, asking community members: “Is this organization of value to you? Should we still be around? Could other nonprofits do it better than we can?”



The community response was an overwhelming “Yes! The organization should do everything you can to survive.” It was clear that, to the community, Byrd Barr Place was not a faceless provider of support around food, utilities, education, and other essential services. This was an organization that was a vital home to Black people and a central place where people could step into their power, grounded in Black traditions, culture, and community.

People especially needed Byrd Barr Place to survive as a refuge for Blackness at a time when the historic identity of the Central District was being increasingly eroded by gentrification. Giant construction cranes loomed overhead, throwing their shadows on the street, harbingers of new waves of Black displacement. The Black community said to Byrd Barr Place, “We can’t have you going away too.”

The charge from the community was clear: Survive. With this affirmation in hand, the organization began a three-year turnaround plan.



Andrea talking with Angelique Kitchen and Robin Byrd about renaming the organization in honor of their grandmother Roberta Byrd Barr.



THREE-YEAR PLAN: “EVERY WHICH WAY ‘TIL SUNDAY”

Year one (2008 – 09) of the three-year plan focused on putting out fires, addressing challenges in areas of financial management, program structure, and personnel. There had been mismanagement of funds and misuse of organizational resources, including, for example, a staff member selling individual services out of the organization. Programs had lacked follow-through and recordkeeping, with case managers not tracking appointments or completing needed paperwork for clients. In response to these harmful patterns, the organization tightened its financial controls and opened its books to auditors—and those auditors had auditors. Program recordkeeping was monitored. Staff oversight was increased.

On a personal level for Andrea, the willingness to tackle the many challenges came from a fundamental sense of conviction and determination that “This is wrong, and I’m going to find every which way ‘til Sunday to fix it.” Andrea approached leadership as someone who would not seek out conflict, but equally would not run from it.

During this time, the City of Seattle determined that it needed to relocate Fire Station No. 6, and it had identified Byrd Barr Place’s satellite office at the intersection of South Jackson St. and Martin L. King Jr. Way South as a desirable spot. Byrd Barr Place did not want to sell, but the City said it would exercise eminent domain and take the land regardless. In response, the organization set a price of \$1.81 million, which the City paid. This was a windfall at a time when the organization was struggling financially, because private funders had not yet come back. The organization was able to pay off all debt and deposit \$1 million in savings. As a sign of long-term financial prudence, it’s notable that 15 years later, in 2023, Byrd Barr Place retains \$600,000 from that initial savings.

Year two of the three-year plan (2009 – 10) emphasized introspection, documenting all activities and drawing insights from that analysis. Year three (2010 – 11) centered on reflecting on learning from putting out the fires in year one and from introspection and documentation in year two. Year three was the year that Byrd Barr Place fully resolved to take every right step in order to survive long-term, digging into the challenge of identifying what every right step was.

This included changing auditing firms; instituting organization-wide best practices; educating the board about stewardship roles and responsibilities; and continuing to strengthen organizational policies, practices, and culture—all with the intent of building for the future. It was during this process that Andrea reached out to as many of the organizational founders as she could, including Bishop John Hurst Adams described previously, to more fully understand the initial impetus and vision of the organization. This commitment to listening was followed through with staff as well.

From ancestors and elders to staff and volunteers to funders and community partners, Andrea's leadership approach consistently has been anchored in this 360-degree listening—sustained listening to stakeholders on all sides and in all directions—asking questions and being guided by what she heard.



Andrea with Boardmember Sharon McGary.



Andrea recognized with Puget Sound Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Leadership Award.



PROGRAM CUTS: PRUNING BRANCHES TO STRENGTHEN THE TREE

The care that powers the work of Byrd Barr Place sometimes entails hard choices. Andrea recognized that organizational health would require letting go of some programs and related funding in order to focus on what the organization does best and what generates the most useful impact.

Byrd Barr Place thoughtfully explored: “Which programs best align with our mission and are essential to continue? Which are effectively serving community needs? How many programs can we manage given our capacity? Which are not working and we should consider letting go?”

Through a process of assessment and reflection, the organization determined that it would discontinue the Reentry Program that served Black men and women coming out of incarceration. The organization had seen a high recidivism rate among program participants and, at the end of one contract, Andrea informed the Department of Corrections that Byrd Barr Place would not renew it. Byrd Barr Place’s stance was that this work should be held instead by an organization with deeper expertise and already doing it exceptionally well.

Byrd Barr Place also shuttered an employment training program, judging that while it was a well-intentioned, the program provided training for the 10 lowest-paid jobs in Washington state. It was not a pipeline to technology jobs or other compelling career opportunities. Even though this program closure also led to lost funding, Andrea was clear that this was another needed step in the larger strategic honing of organizational focus. Through this assessment process, Byrd Barr Place reaffirmed and sustained its commitment to the food bank and core services focused on rental assistance, home repair, financial tools, and utility assistance.

RESHAPING STAFF CULTURE

As part of the turnaround, Andrea also needed to reach a new shared understanding with staff. Poor and inconsistent work performance was evident in staff not showing up for all of their hours, being routinely late, or in other ways not fulfilling their responsibilities. In those years, the staff was unionized, but there were troubling ways that the union was not supporting staff. For example, at one point, the union was willing to let go of medical benefits in order to raise union fees, although two employees were facing breast cancer at the time.

In the process of reshaping organizational culture, Andrea asked staff “What do you need to see?” and, among other priorities, employees identified generous time off and quality medical benefits as key. “The collective effort was to reach a common understanding around what we needed as an organization to operate and to care for our employees so that the work could get done and our people could thrive,” Andrea said. There was a substantial organizational changes during these turnaround years, including board and staff reorganization, as well as the staff decertifying the union.

Still, there remained a difficult road ahead to regain the confidence of funders, clients, and community members. For a time, the organization was not seen as a credible partner and perceived as lacking strategy. The organization had to rebuild public esteem by devising and modeling strong strategy, as well as by demonstrating strong financial management, program delivery, and staff and board practices. With Andrea’s guidance, this happened over time. An important part of the work to strengthen the organization’s position and identity included growing its relationship with other Black organizations.






BLACK ORGANIZATIONS FULFILLING EACH OTHER: “ALL FLOURISHING IS MUTUAL”

“The windfall property purchase and the other steps of solidifying the organization gave breathing room to contemplate what we actually might want to do beyond what we had already been doing,” said Andrea. “We took stock of other Black organizations, such as Seattle King County NAACP, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle, and Black churches, and contemplate the possibilities of collective engagement.”

Byrd Barr Place approached this inquiry with an abundance mindset and in the spirit of the proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” The organization looked for connections between these potential partners, asking questions of funders, community members, and clients related to what each did well and what it did less well. Andrea didn’t know if this connection-building would lead to funding, but she felt that the organization fundamentally needed to show a different model of being in community.

In 2016, with grant funding from Northwest Area Foundation, she initiated a Seattle Community of Practice as a container for Black-led organizations to connect and grow together. In this Community of Practice, Byrd Barr Place invited Africatown, Seattle King County NAACP, Skyway Solutions, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle, and the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs to explore strengths, needs, areas for development, mutually supportive partnerships, collective capacity-building, shared policy priorities, and advocacy.

One key element of this outreach and exploration was that Byrd Barr Place did not want to step on anyone’s toes as part of its expansion into new directions. “We wanted to find ways to fulfill and complement each other as Black organizations



rather than compete with each other,” Andrea said. “We sought to locate our voice within the choir, developing our organizational identity and contribution to the greater good in ways that would align with and support other Black organizations.”

Some of the participating organizations did not have harmonious relationships at the time, but they were willing to come to the table, and they are still working well together today. “Animating these burgeoning partnerships was a spirit of non-greed and creative generosity. It came from the understanding that we need to work and thrive together, and this has led to good results over time,” Andrea shared.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment and author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, draws a compelling lesson for collaborators from the lives of pecan trees:

“If one tree fruits, they all fruit—there are no soloists. Not one tree in a grove, but the whole grove; not one grove in the forest, but every grove; all across the county and all across the state. The trees act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective. Exactly how they do this, we don’t yet know. But what we see is the power of unity. What happens to one happens to us all. We can starve together or feast together. All flourishing is mutual.”¹⁰

Byrd Barr Place acted from a vision of abundance, believing that open-handed community connections lead to the best outcomes, and invited others to join in this vision. Over the years, Byrd Barr Place and leadership staff have continued to act as a convener of Black-led organizations, “as we all work to advance racial equity in health care, housing, human services, and economic mobility.” Byrd Barr Place has also partnered with other Black-led nonprofits in community development, capacity-building work, as well as policy and systems change.




DATA OPENS DOORS: THE POWER OF NUMBERS

One of the many uncomfortable pieces of feedback from funders was their saying, “You all are good at anecdotal stories, but where’s your data?” Andrea quickly resolved that she never wanted to be in those rooms and conversations, unprepared to respond with both stories and quantitative data. At that time, no one in the area was gathering data in the Black community for the Black community.

Numerical evidence—whether evidence of need, inequity, or accomplishment—testifies to planful data-gathering and a systematic approach to understanding communities. It offers precision and a defensible objectivity that funders and legislators are keen to rely on when justifying priorities and allocation decisions. Andrea recognized that reliable, illuminating quantitative data is one necessary tool in the toolbox. As business professor and author Aswath Damodaran puts it, “Stories create connections and get remembered, but numbers convince people.” In his view, “You need to bring both stories and numbers into play...”¹¹

“So Byrd Barr Place went into the research and data business in 2015, beginning our work assembling data about Black well-being, and releasing our first report, *Creating an Equitable Future in Washington State: Black Well-being and Beyond*.” The report assessed barriers to success for Black Washingtonians—examining areas such as education, housing, jobs, and health care. Byrd Barr Place’s research and data opened up opportunities for meaningful contribution. It also enabled the organization to serve the community in new ways that did not compete with other Black organizations.

Seven years later in 2022, Byrd Barr Place partnered with the Black Future Co-op Fund to produce *Black Well-Being: Moving Towards Solutions Together*, an update of the influential 2015 report. Through all these years, we continued to gather data,



hold focus groups, and conduct online surveys, working to establish and share an actionable framework for understanding the current state of Black health in our region.

Byrd Barr Place's data work has helped inform how it creates and shapes services, as well as inform advocacy aimed at policy change. It has also been an important part of the organization's funding journey. In the germination of data-gathering and reporting work, and in the convening of Black organizations described previously, one funder played a particularly essential role.


A case study in relationship-building with a funding partner

The **Northwest Area Foundation**, based in Minnesota, presents a strong example of the way that Andrea went about weaving new strategic dimensions of Byrd Barr Place's work into fruitful relationship-building with a funding partner, which could then be further leveraged for expanded support.

The Northwest Area Foundation had funded earlier work in the Seattle Black community, work that Byrd Barr Place had partnered on, but that had not been particularly successful. A Black grants officer from the Northwest Area Foundation traveled from Minnesota to Seattle to say that, as things stood, the Foundation would not provide more funding and that Seattle's Black nonprofit community needed to "get it together."

Andrea asked for one more chance to do something differently, and the grants officer asked what Byrd Barr Place would do with \$50,000. Andrea proposed to carry out a study on the state of Black Washingtonians, and the Northwest Area

Continued on the next page



A case study in relationship-building with a funding partner

Foundation committed a \$50,000 grant. That first study ended up costing \$92,000, straining financial resources, yet it was a hugely valuable piece of work that led to so much more. The dedication on the first page of that 2015 report is made to that grants officer “for his devotion and endless support to seeing this through.” We could not have done this if he had not taken another chance on Seattle’s Black nonprofits.

The next year, Northwest Area Foundation returned and asked what Byrd Barr Place would do with \$300,000. Andrea replied that she would build a Black Community of Practice in Seattle and, with the support of both the Northwest Area Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, this was successfully implemented.

Through this initiative, Byrd Barr Place made subgrants to the participating organizations (e.g., Africatown, Urban League), as these Community of Practice (COP) convenings unfolded over three phases during 2016 to 2018. In addition to building collective strategic leadership skills and relationships and identifying shared policy priorities, the COP worked to design and implement a pilot breakthrough service model to strengthen the relevance and impact of programs serving Black people.

The momentum growing between Byrd Barr Place and the Northwest Area Foundation in this time affirms the value of an abundance framework, which recognizes that sharing wealth can increase wealth and that what costs more now might bring lasting benefit. This approach does not disregard financial prudence but sits it within a larger strategic frame. The important sometimes stretches beyond the immediate.

In response to these multiple years of successful implementation, the Northwest Area Foundation next returned with a \$1 million grant for Byrd Barr Place’s general operating support. They had seen under Andrea’s leadership, Byrd Barr Place had followed through and delivered, “doing what we said we would, every time.”



EARNED TRUST: RENEWING THE FLOW OF FUNDING

Byrd Barr Place was able to leverage the Northwest Area Foundation's substantial and sustained support as proof of performance. This was part of the process of renewing the flow of grants from private philanthropic partners, like the Gates Foundation and Seattle Foundation. Years earlier, those private funders had walked away from the table and withdrawn their funding. "Today, we are thought partners with them, Andrea said. "Today, they *come to us* when they want to understand how to better act for equity in philanthropy."

This is the earned trust that sustains the work of Byrd Barr Place. "We consistently do what we say, and our structural shifts over time demonstrated our holistic approach to organizational health," Andrea continued. Funders assessing nonprofits generally form a picture of organizational functioning by looking at such things as financial management, planning and evaluation, programs and services, human resources, community relations, board of directors, and results. Each area matters and they are all connected.

Where an at-risk organization lacks basic financial monitoring and operates in isolation, a thriving organization maintains fiscal best practices, makes data-driven decisions, and engages in deep collaboration with community partners. A thriving board conducts periodic self-assessments. During Andrea's leadership journey, Byrd Barr Place rose to the challenge of becoming a thriving organization. The organization demonstrated its capacity to funders, using a holistic strategic lens, transformed systems, and developed sustainable best practices across organizational domains.

Integrity, follow-through, a collaborative abundance mindset, and taking initiative in gathering data about Black Washingtonians were central elements that helped steer Byrd Barr Place's course. "Operating in this way, we have grown our connections with funders, with other Black organizations, and in the widest community circles of our work," Andrea said.

SECURING OUR HOME

In 2010, after being obliged to sell the property at South Jackson St. and Martin L. King Jr. Way South, the organization had again become fully renters and not property owners. The organization was based entirely at Fire Station No. 23, its historic headquarters, which had been rented from the City of Seattle for more than 50 years. “Although we were now renters with \$1 million in the bank, we held an unreliable month-to-month lease that any new mayor could yank from under our feet,” shared Andrea. “We needed more predictability and, beginning in 2010, we decided to go after ownership of the building.”

Andrea met with Mayor Greg Nickels and every mayor since, seeking to forge an agreement and map a pathway toward ownership. It didn’t go well. The City’s process was start-and-stop. Although Byrd Barr Place met all of the criteria the City presented, for many years, it appeared impossible to acquire the building. Then, abruptly, in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, the City wanted a quick win with Black people, and it gave Byrd Barr Place the building.

People praised the overnight win, but it had come after 10 years of seemingly fruitless advocacy, gritty persistence, and tiresome hoop-jumping. And still, it was a gift with strings attached, because the City demanded that Byrd Barr Place now make the building ADA-compliant. Building on years of goodwill established through proven follow-through, Andrea led the successful raising of \$12.8 million in 2021 in order to fully renovate the site. “We expanded and rehabilitated the building, preserved the historic structure, tackled the building’s structural instability, improved accessibility for people with disabilities, and increased space to meet the growing need for our services,” Andrea explained. “In August 2022, we reopened our firehouse home to the community with a renewed sense of place.”



Symbolic groundbreaking party before the renovation.




Touring the construction with UW Professor Joe Lott Jr.

Andrea views this piece of work as her capstone. She needed Byrd Barr Place to have a home that “we fully own and control,” and she was able to complete the work with no debt. This accomplishment was made possible by having positioned the organization through long cultivation. Creating the conditions for success over time enables a leader to move decisively when opportunity arises. As the adage goes, “We might tend the orchard for many seasons before the fruit suddenly appears.”

“The acquisition of our firehouse home was an especially sweet and important victory in the historical and present-day context of Black property ownership in the U.S.,” Andrea shared. “We know it to be a history filled with systemic obstruction, dispossession, discrimination, and exploitation—from the unkept promise of 40 acres and a mule to racially restrictive covenants, redlining, and contemporary inequity of many kinds.”

As just one current example, the systemic undervaluation of Black people’s homes is present today. In a 2021 Brookings Institution report, “Biased appraisals and the devaluation of housing in Black neighborhoods,” the authors describe how economists and data scientists at Freddie Mac analyzed over 12 million appraisals, producing “strong evidence that appraisers discriminate against majority Black and



majority Latino or Hispanic neighborhoods.”¹² A *Washington Post* article describes how one Black couple in California, dismayed at the low valuation an appraiser gave their home, invited a white friend to pretend to be the homeowner—complete with staged photos of white family members—and obtain a second appraisal, which came in almost 50% higher.¹³

The racist barriers imposed over generations to restrict Black property ownership play a central role in today’s persistent wealth gap, even when those barriers change shape. African American Studies professor Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor describes the concept of “predatory inclusion” in her book, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*.¹⁴ In a 2019 interview with *The Nation*, she noted that:

“Predatory inclusion explains how, even when Black people are no longer legally excluded, the consequences of their decades-long exclusion shaped the terms upon which they were included. The Federal Housing Administration goes from exclusion to exposing African Americans to new forms of real estate exploitation. Black people had to pay higher interest rates, they had to pay more fees, they were relegated to isolated and neglected housing.”¹⁵

Many Black nonprofit organizations face the same obstacles and suffer the same injustice as individual Black people, and this reality underscores the importance of Byrd Barr Place’s building acquisition. After many decades of systemic obstruction, Black property ownership today remains precious, hard-won, and transformative. It is a tangible slice of liberation to know that “we own this place.”

It is also notable the City of Seattle required Byrd Barr Place as the owner to renovate the building to ADA-compliant standards, when the City as the owner did not do that over the course of many years with Byrd Barr Place as a renter. This is an example of an onerous property-related burden imposed upon a Black organization, a burden that obliged Byrd Barr Place’s massive fundraising campaign. The City gained a public relations win in a hot moment of racial reckoning, while offloading the cost of

a long-overdue renovation that it had side-stepped for years—years in which Byrd Barr Place paid rent and delivered services that bolstered Seattle’s social safety net and backstopped the City’s publicly-claimed successes.

Ultimately, it is a huge victory for Byrd Barr Place to own the property outright, after a long decade of navigating logistical, systemic, and fundraising challenges. It marks a culmination of Andrea’s organizational stewardship and testifies to her years of tending to Byrd Barr Place’s relationships, reputation, financial strength, and organizational health.

By securing this property, Byrd Barr Place has sunk deep roots in the Central District, its original home. “In doing so, we are protecting our legacy as a people.”



The new reception area with a display about the organization’s namesake Roberta Byrd Barr.



SUPPORTING BLACK PEOPLE IS THE TIDE THAT WILL RAISE ALL BOATS

Over the past two decades, Byrd Barr Place has steadily strengthened its presence as a resource for Black people. Looking back to the early days of Andrea's organizational tenure, new ways of working together had to be forged in struggle. As healthier systems and practices were established over the years, organizational stability increased and services and advocacy expanded, while the organization has come to be widely respected by peers, funders, and community members.

Knowing that only 1.8% of national philanthropic dollars go to Black organizations serving Black people, it is monumental that in the 1960s a group of Black neighbors came together, envisioned this organization, brought it into existence, and it continues today. Through its ebbs and flows, Byrd Barr Place has been able to create tradition and sustain legacy for Black people, advancing from struggle to survival, then onward to genuinely thriving today.

As the orbit of Martin Luther King Jr.'s work grew, his commitment to freedom and justice for Black people expanded to include all poor people in the U.S. and all those struggling around the world. He saw the common ground of our collective humanity.



(L to R) Co-founders of the BIPOC Executive Directors Coalition: Ananda Valenzuela, Victoria Santos, Andrea Caupain Sanderson, and Jodi Nishioka.

Mirroring that expansion, CAMP began with a vision of “we need to help ourselves.” As the organization grew, this vision expanded to embrace knowing that “when we all do better, we all do better.” This understanding remains rooted in the knowledge that supporting Black people is the tide that will raise all boats. Andrea leaves the organization confident that Byrd Barr Place embodies this knowledge and commitment.

Choosing the time and manner to constructively depart a leadership role is a nuanced move. It calls for keen and careful listening, both inwardly and outwardly, to the many elements involved in making a skillful transition. Andrea’s departure process has been guided by the same generous listening into *what is needed* that she has offered to so many during her two-decade leadership journey.



Byrd Barr Place staff having fun in The Market.

PASSING THE BATON: THE RELEASE

"We live this life between our ancestors and our descendants, working to advance the good in a particular place and time. And then we pass the baton forward."

Andrea is an avid runner and former track athlete who ran relay events like the 4x400. She knows that passing the baton is not a single moment. It is a series of highly coordinated body-mind actions that weave together sight and touch and sensing the body in space. Two runners connect in dynamic teamwork, during crucial moments, under high pressure.

It requires both the determination to hold on and the willingness to let go. These might sound like opposites, but it's about shifting from holding on to letting go in the right way, at the right time.

Imagine a relay runner speeding toward the next-leg runner who waits, focused, ready. The incoming runner powers forward, heart pounding, giving her all to this team, this race.

She decelerates as she nears the exchange zone, while the receiving runner eases into movement. It's a precise dance aimed at sustaining momentum while ensuring coordination. Too fast won't work. Too slow won't win.

The receiving runner reaches their hand backward. The incoming runner stretches the baton forward, muscles burning, minding her steps.

They align speeds. In a series of micro-moments, the baton is first extended, then touched by both runners at the same time. In a simultaneous energy transfer, the receiving runner secures their grip around the baton while the incoming runner releases her hold.

When it flows just right, it is joyful grace.

And that's it. The next runner takes off down the track. The runner who passed the baton might yell: "Go!" This is our team, she thinks. "We can do this!"

Her open hand still feels the shape of the just-relinquished baton. But right now, in this moment, there is nothing to do. She lets go a deep breath, a Black woman at her ease under the vast blue sky.



Andrea at a racial reparations sisterhood meeting.



Andrea and Megan Brown traveling to a Community Action Network conference.



Andrea with Carmen Best at the United Negro College Fund gala.



Celebrating one of Central District's local businesses.



Uncle John and Andrea at the organization's annual gala.

"Maybe the purpose of being here, wherever we are, is to increase the durability and the occasions of love among and between peoples. Love, as the concentration of tender caring and tender excitement, or love as the reason for joy. Love is the single, true prosperity of any moment."

—June Jordan



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