



Spotlight on CSNDC Board Co-Chair, LeRoy Gibson

“My big thing is youth and family advocacy and how to provide them with equitable access to opportunities in order to level the playing field,” says LeRoy Gibson, a member of CSNDC’s Board of Directors since 2019 and currently one of its co-chairs.



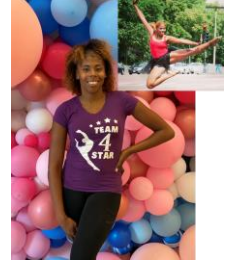
Gibson lives a few blocks away from Codman Square, along with his wife Oneka, a hair stylist in the neighborhood, and two daughters, Nakari, 22 and Ciana, 19. Their home is near the basketball court at Wainwright Park, which is where he connected with Jason Boyd, CSNDC’s former director of community organizing and resident engagement, in 2019. Boyd encouraged him to get involved with the organization and invited him to be part of the CSNDC contingent attending the annual NeighborWorks convention in New Orleans that year.

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Kaleisha Chance Soars to New Heights as First-Time Homeowner

“I’m just going to be positive about this. I just have to speak it into existence.”

That’s how Kaleisha Chance describes her refuse-to-fail attitude about becoming a first-time homeowner. And it paid off. Kaleisha is now the proud owner of one of the affordable homes developed by CSNDC on New England Avenue as part of the “New England Heritage Homes” project.



“I came here and I fell in love with the property,” she recalls. “I thought, ‘This is what I want, this is where I want to be.’”

Kaleisha’s journey to homeownership started many years before. In fact, it started when someone else became a first-time homeowner – her godmother, Licia McLean, who

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Two New Properties in the CSNDC Pipeline

CSNDC is excited about two new housing developments in our pipeline: Four Corners Plaza and Talbot Commons II. These properties will increase new affordable housing opportunities in our Dorchester neighborhood while removing existing deteriorating buildings and land that has stood vacant for many years. Since both sites are complicated by the potential presence of a hazardous substance, CSNDC was successfully awarded funding from Mass Development to remove contaminated soils.

“Both projects are part of CSNDC’s transit-oriented urban village development strategy along the Fairmount commuter rail line,” says Marcia Thornhill, CSNDC’s VP of Operations.

CSNDC has played a lead role in the Fairmount Indigo CDC Collaborative (FICC), along with Dorchester Bay EDC and Southwest Boston CDC. The Collaborative focuses on

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DON'T MISS:

Jerk Festival: June 3, 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm
at the Second Church of Dorchester

CSNDC Annual Meeting : June 22, 6:00 pm
at Codman Commons Park

Sonia Satchell Serves Up Small Business Success

“If I didn't have CSNDC helping me, I think it would have taken me much, much longer to learn the things that I've learned about how to run this business,” says Sonia Satchell, who, along with her sister, Donna, owns and operates the IRIE Jamaican Style Restaurant at 1450 Dorchester Avenue. Sonia runs the business side of things while Donna runs the kitchen.

Sonia is the youngest of 13 children. Her family came to Dorchester from Jamaica when she was five years old, and she still lives in Dorchester now with her husband and son. She remembers fondly how their family and community life in Dorchester have always revolved around the food from their homeland.

“We used to have a lot of cookouts, birthday parties and events and we did a lot of outside cooking,” she recalls. “It would attract all of our neighbors. That's where the idea of opening a restaurant came from. That's 23 years ago and here we are today.”

Sonia and Donna originally opened their restaurant on Bowdoin Street near St. Peter's Parish. The year was 1999.

“That was an era where no one really come out after six o'clock. The area was really bad,” she reflects. “We were the only restaurant that didn't put up bulletproof glass. I think that's how we gained the trust of the community. We just wanted to be accepted and feed people.”

Their approach paid off, as the restaurant thrived in that location for 17 years. That is, until their landlord sought to raise their rent in 2016. When Sonia and Donna pushed back, the landlord gave them 30 days to leave. This is an example of the business gentrification that has frequently occurred in recent years. CSNDC fights against this trend by providing support to small businesses and by offering low cost space.

“It was really depressing,” says Sonia. “This was our livelihood.”

But after about four or five months, Sonia and Donna had located a new spot for the restaurant, on Washington Street in Codman Square. They stayed in that location until November 2022, when they moved into the current location (“Our final stop,” says Sonia) on Dorchester Avenue.

“We needed a bigger space to support our growth,” she says. “We wanted to get back to hosting events and doing things to help build our community, and this new space is big enough for that kind of thing.”

Through it all, CSNDC has been a constant support to Sonia, connecting her to people and resources to support her business goals.

“CSNDC's small business services department has been an invaluable resource to our expansion, growth and development,” Sonia says. “They've helped my business become more established and resilient. They connected me with resources to help with my business plan and my budgeting process, as well as getting access to small business grants which helped me sustain my business during the pandemic.”



Sonia (left) with Donna at the Grand Opening of their new location

CSNDC was also instrumental in connecting Sonia with a number of commercial retail locations and a team of small business support providers to help her find the current location. Most important, according to Sonia, is the fact that her affiliation with CSNDC has opened doors.

“When I tell people I'm associated with them, they know I'm a serious person trying to grow my business and trying to be more involved with the community.”

Sonia's vision for the future of the restaurant is all about community. She plans to introduce some light entertainment options, such as piano playing, poetry readings and other community-oriented activities, which the new space enables.

“I want us to be known not just as a family-oriented Jamaican restaurant, but as an outlet for our community,” she says.

CSNDC is proud to have helped Sonia achieve this vision.

Anti-Racism/Equity Army Academy Launched

A second group of recruits completed CSNDC's Anti-Racism/Equity Army Academy in April. This in-depth, interactive course was co-created by CSNDC and Cambridge College Professor, Tahia Bell-Sykes, and her partner, Abigail Francis, who teach the class. The program focused on the facts and history of racism.

This class was first offered last summer and was then repeated with a new cohort of participants in the spring. One of the members in the second group was Laurene DaRosa, CSNDC's Executive Assistant and Special Projects Manager.

"The idea is to give people the tools they need to go out, whether it be in their jobs or in their community, to be activists and civil leaders in the face of racism," says DaRosa.

The Anti-Racism/Equity Army Academy is part of CSNDC's effort to create an "Equity Army," a group of engaged grassroots constituents committed to dismantling racism by

getting informed and educating others about its root causes. The goal is to take concrete action to dismantle racism via engagement in legislation, resource allocation and other locally developed campaigns. A core idea for the Equity Army is the concept of being an "anti-racist."

"When I first heard about this program, I thought 'Why do I need to take this class as a woman of color? I know I'm not racist,'" says DaRosa. "But I learned that it's not enough just to not be racist. Being an anti-racist is about action. It's about when you see something wrong, speak up and say something or do something that can help. You have to understand the systemic racist policies that are in place and how they came to be in order to even think about dismantling them."

This is just the beginning for the Anti-Racism/Equity Army Academy. More courses are being planned for the summer/fall of 2023 and we look forward to engaging and deploying more recruits!

Ballou Farm to Come Back Better Than Ever

It has been eight years since OASIS on Ballou Farm opened and transformed a long-neglected and vacant 20,000 square foot lot in the Woodrow-Mountain neighborhood of Dorchester into a unique agriculture project that produces thousands of pounds of fresh produce each year for the local community. After all those years, despite its many successes, Ballou was ready for some improvements.

CSNDC has received \$500,000 through Community Preservation Act funding to implement some much-needed upgrades to the farm.

The key improvements will expand the farm's growing area and make it more accessible as a location for engagement with the public. Currently, the back one-third of the farm cannot be used for planting because the land slopes up too significantly. A retaining wall will be added to enable this section of the land to be flat, thus making approximately 50% more of the farm's surface area suitable for planting.

Apolo Catala, the farm's manager, believes making this additional farmable space will one day result in the farm approaching 20,000 pounds of produce per year.

Other improvements to the farm include:

- Adding a curb cut to make the site more accessible for service vehicles
- Creating a multi-purpose driveway with permeable pavers that can double as a plaza for community events and gatherings

- Building a new amphitheater and shade area
- Addressing drainage issues



"Our vision is to make the farm more of a space for community engagement and learning," says Catala. "What's special about CSNDC is that our approach to community development is comprehensive. Beyond the bricks and mortar, which are important obviously, Ballou is driven by a commitment to promoting individual, community and environmental health."

The farm closed for renovations after the 2022 growing season and will begin harvesting again in the summer of 2024.

Solar Born Brings Light to Brothers Building

“I don't live for anything other than purpose. If it doesn't align with my mission and my purpose, I probably won't even show up.”

These words succinctly capture the passion and commitment of Solar Born, a 43 year-old resident of Dorchester who, along with CSNDC's Community Organizer James Mackey, has led Brothers Building since 2017.

An extension of CSNDC's programming for men of color which began around 2013, Brothers Building is a bi-monthly forum focused on the health and well-being of Black men in the community. Its mission is to co-create a movement for Black men to come together, receive and give support, learn and teach, heal and be healed, and proactively address each participant's quality of life with the goal of improving health outcomes.

Solar remembers well the day that James approached him with the idea. They had known each other through their independent community activism work, and when James joined CSNDC they began talking about creating this program.

“I told him, of course, let's get it together,” Solar recalls. “That was basically the founding of it. We brought in a couple of other brothers who we knew shared the same sentiment and passion, and vision/mission statement for their own life, and the rest is history.”

Each session is different, according to Solar. Sometimes they exercise together, sometimes they go on outings, sometimes they coach each other on healthy lifestyle. But no matter the specific activity, the true impact is in the group's experience of being together.

“My main drive and passion is to help change the lives of others that I don't want to go through the same thing I went through,” he says.

That piece of Solar's story began when, at age nineteen, he was sentenced to 8 ½ to 15 years in prison for armed assault.

“I was already on the path to righteousness prior to that,” he reflects. “But I didn't have alternatives to violence in my toolkit yet.”

From the moment he got to prison, Solar began searching for programs where he could teach and lead individuals that were in similar situations to his, so that he could help them not befall the same fate.

“It was pretty smooth for me because I knew myself already. So, it wasn't too hard for me to stay in my own lane, study myself, and pay attention to what I was supposed to be doing,” he says.



Soon enough, he found what he was looking for in a program called Project Youth.

“I spent a lot of time with youth as they came to visit the prison,” he says. “I was able to share my story and give them the opportunity to realize where the choices and decisions are being made in their own life, to not get off path and stay focused.”

Solar also ran programs called the African Heritage Coalition (AHC) and African American Coalition Committee (AACC), which he credits with giving him the experience he ultimately needed to be a leader in Brothers Building.

A year ago, when the group finally resumed meeting in person in the wake of the pandemic, Solar's brothers came together to celebrate his leadership.

“It was just a regular outing,” he recalls, fighting back tears. “The fellas just begin clapping and clapping. I'm thinking I don't know what we're celebrating, but I'm just happy to celebrate somebody else, so I started clapping. Then I noticed everybody's looking at me and brother James is bringing me a beautiful gold plaque with my picture on it. It was the biggest surprise ever, and everybody was genuinely happy for me.”

“The camaraderie that has grown among the individuals in this space, it's been very, very impactful on us all as individuals,” he says. “Each of us in different ways. However, one thing that's been indelible is the bond we've formed. We are truly brothers.”

No doubt, his brothers have come to understand the meaning of his name.

“Solar represents the sunlight and Born is to bring into existence,” he says. “My duty is to bring the light into existence. And, like the sun, I rise before anybody needs to tell me what to do.”

Two New Properties in the CSNDC Pipeline

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mixed-use affordable development, green space development, transit equity and climate justice in the low/moderate-income, predominantly minority Boston neighborhoods of Dorchester, Hyde Park, Roslindale, Roxbury and Mattapan that abut the Fairmount line. More than 93,000 people live in these neighborhoods within a half mile of the MBTA Fairmount/Indigo Line stops. These communities represent 15% of Boston's total population, making this the most densely populated region in the City of Boston. Most of Boston's Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, and Spanish speakers of numerous dialects make their homes along the Fairmount/Indigo Line.

CSNDC looks forward to welcoming these new properties to Dorchester:

Four Corners Plaza (FCP) – Located at the intersection of Washington and Bowdoin Streets in the Four Corners neighborhood of Dorchester, this project has seen many evolutions of development planning and visioning with CSNDC and the community for over 20 years. What began as a commercial development project has shifted over the years into a \$25.4M mixed-use development. After many starts and stops, this new construction project finally gained traction about five years ago. We broke ground in October 2022 and expect to be done with construction in May 2024. When completed, this rental housing development will become home to 35 families of low and moderate income means. Additionally, the project includes approximately 3,900 square feet of commercial space that will be available to local entrepreneurs or existing businesses looking to expand. We envision FCP as a catalyst for further development opportunities to help revitalize this corridor.



Talbot Commons II - TCII is a continuation of many projects developed by CSNDC over the years that include both multi family and senior housing developments along the Talbot Avenue corridor. This \$28.1M new construction project will consist of two sites that will house 19 affordable rental units and 23 multi-family units. Having already been awarded City funds, we are now awaiting funding from the State, which will be the last remaining major funding needed for the project. If successful in receiving the State funds this year, we will begin construction in the spring of 2024 with an anticipated completion date in the fall of 2025.

Kaleisha Chance Soars to New Heights as First-Time Homeowner

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Kaleisha refers to as her aunt. Licia won the affordable housing lottery through the City of Boston in 2000 and has been living in her home on Marden Avenue ever since.

“She knew the process, so she was able to help me through it,” says Kaleisha. “When she saw there were houses being built, she said, ‘You need to try this.’”

Hesitant at First

Only 26 years old at the time, Kaleisha was hesitant. She had completed the First-Time Homebuyer Program through the city, but still didn’t feel ready.

“At first, I was nervous about submitting an application because I just didn’t have the money at the time,” she remembers. “My aunt told me I just need to have a little bit saved up and she helped me learn how to begin saving. I started getting more disciplined with how I spend my money because I knew there was a goal in the future.”

“When we saw a flyer about these homes being built, she encouraged me to sign up,” says Kaleisha. “She said, ‘Just do it. You never know unless you try.’ So I did.”

She met with the realtor and the bank and, despite concerns about her credit score, she was pre-approved for the loan and she submitted her application to the Boston Home Center. Unfortunately, the first year her lottery number was too high.

“I kind of got discouraged,” she remembers.

But she kept focused on her goal. The next year, she applied again, and this time got a number high enough that it gave her hope. By this time, she had given birth to her beautiful daughter, Kennedy. That’s when she decided to “speak it into existence” through a “positive attitude.” After several months of paperwork, she was able to purchase her new home in July of 2021.

“They gave me the keys and I came in here with an air mattress and made it work,” she says proudly. “It feels really good. I was nervous about how my neighbors would welcome me. But they were super supportive and very friendly. They were especially pleased to see a black face in the neighborhood owning a home, still here in the community and not getting pushed out.”

Dance Moms

Kaleisha credits her godmother and another mentor for

giving her another important gift in her life — dance. She says her first “Dance Mom” was Andrea Herbert Major, the Artistic Director at the Roxbury Center for the Performing Arts.

“Ms. Andrea gave me the passion and drive, and that opened my eyes to the fact that the world is bigger than Dorchester,” she says. “She took me to New York for classes. She pushed me in my dance career.”

But it was Licia who helped pave the way for her to build her life around dance, having owned and operated Four Star Dance Studio in Codman Square for twenty years. Kaleisha teaches there under her mentorship — that is, when she’s not serving in her role as Director of Arts for Codman Academy Charter School in Dorchester or taking care of her daughter and her foster child, or when she’s not pursuing her master’s degree in arts and teaching at Mount Holyoke College.

“Growing up, I struggled with academics and dance was the way I could show I was also good at something,” she reflects. “My godmother was my voice of reason. She said, ‘Let her dance if she wants to dance.’”

“Dance saved my life,” she says.

Giving Back

Now, Kaleisha is determined to mentor and support young kids who, like herself, want to dance and just need someone to believe in them.

“Having a studio in the heart of Dorchester is my way of giving back to my community,” she says. “Sometimes you just need that safe haven or that teacher that’s not your parent who can see you in a light that you might not see yourself in.”

“We all don’t learn the same,” she says. “I can use my own personal experience to find a way to meet the needs of all learners, and make sure they have a safe space in my classroom to create and express and feel successful.”

In fact, Kaleisha now considers herself a “Dance Mom” to many of her students. One of her students, who has been under her tutelage since she was eight years old, recently performed with Lizzo at the Grammys!

“She called me and said, Kiki, I made it,” she beams. “The fact that she came back to share that with me was amazing. My goal is to be a mentor for the youth of Boston – because I made it and I want them to know they can do it as well. I want to give them that opportunity to shine.”

Darlene Harrison Builds Community at Talbot Bernard Homes

"I'm a people person. Everywhere I go, I meet people," says Darlene Harrison. "My kids always say, 'Mom, you're always talking to people. Do you know them?' I say, 'No, I just met them.' That's just how I am. I'm a really friendly person."

That's one reason why Darlene was chosen to be the designated "Resident Leader" at Talbot Bernard Homes, a 44-unit affordable housing project built in 2003 by CSNDC.

"I guess they saw something in me," Darlene recalls. "I was already doing leadership stuff — like when the residents had an issue with management, I would offer to go with them to support them. And I help management, too."

Darlene has lived at Talbot Bernard for 20 years, since the buildings were first constructed. She lived in a three-bedroom apartment and then a four-bedroom apartment to accommodate the various housing needs of her family of seven daughters over the years. Now that her daughters are all grown, she's downsizing to a one bedroom.

"Less to clean," she says with a smile.

It's also all on one level, which is critical to Darlene since she suffers from rheumatoid arthritis. It was this condition that caused Darlene to leave her job in the Sterile Processing Department at the VA Hospital and focus her energies on her family and her community.

"I've been doing a lot of volunteering," she says. "If people need help in the community, I just jump right in."

And she's passing that attitude down to her children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

"When I have my grandchildren with me, we go out in the community and see what we can do," she says. "Sometimes I don't even need to ask them to volunteer. They see somebody's having a yard sale and say, 'Can we help?'"

When she's not engaged with the next generation, Darlene is focused on helping another group in particular.

"I always wanted to be an advocate for seniors," she reflects. "Seniors have a voice, but sometimes their voice is not heard. It's not that they don't want it to be heard. They just don't know how to ask for help when they need help, because they're set in their own ways."

Darlene recalls the time when she helped her elderly uncle set up a virtual medical appointment during the pandemic.

"He didn't know anything about how to connect virtually," she says. "I called the clinic and said, 'You're asking these seniors to do virtual, but no one has taught them how to get on Zoom.' If it wasn't for me advocating for him and sitting with him, he wouldn't have been able to do it. He would have missed the appointment."



Darlene with her daughters at her 60th birthday celebration

Like all of CSNDC's resident leaders, Darlene is a graduate of CSNDC's Resident Leadership Institute (RLI), a comprehensive training designed to ground resident leaders in the fundamentals of community organizing, policy advocacy, asset mapping, and facilitation of community-building initiatives.

"I got to meet a lot of people from different states and different nationalities," she recalls. "It was a beautiful thing because they put you in groups, so you really get to know each other and learn different strategies about what worked for them and what can work for us. And even if it doesn't work, you don't give up."

Darlene has taken that knowledge and attitude to heart in her role as Resident Leader.

"I love it because it's helping the community make changes in the community," she says. "Not only that, it's working with the management, and helping tenants know their rights and understand the best way to approach things to get the changes they want."

Although she believes she was a leader long before being asked to play this role, Darlene credits the training from CSNDC for making her a better leader.

"I've learned how to get to know the different dynamics in a group, like when you're trying to set goals everyone's not going to be on the same page," she says. "But you have to listen and accept it and try to get everyone to get involved."

"We're just looking out for our neighbors. I think a lot of communities have lost those values. If more people do this, it'll be a better place."

Spotlight on CSNDC Board Co-Chair, LeRoy Gibson

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It was there that Gibson met and impressed CSNDC's Executive Director, Gail Latimore, who asked him to consider serving on the CSNDC board.

Besides being the board's Co-Chair, Gibson also serves as the director of board development, in which he works to strengthen and diversify the board and find other ways to make it better.

"I enjoy the work that I do with the board, and I love the work that the organization does," Gibson says.

Giving back to his community seems to come naturally to Gibson. A resident of Dorchester for 17 years and a former basketball coach, he has the unique position of Student Success Coach at the High School Extension Program (HSEP) in the Cambridge Public School District. This alternative high school setting caters to students who require individualized attention, and it is Gibson's responsibility to provide whatever support these students need to be successful – from resources for behavioral and academic support, to working with them to plan their future after high school, to engaging with their families to address areas of concern.

"We often find that when you get deeper into the why of what they're doing, you realize it's factors outside of the school that are controlling their actions, so we try to tap into resources to help out their families and give them the tools in their toolbox they may need," he says.

Now, Gibson is bringing this important educational perspective to CSNDC.

"I really appreciate CSNDC's commitment to educate the residents of the community, whether it's financial literacy or understanding policy or building equity armies," he says.

Gibson's highest priorities, however, are addressing basic necessities and engaging the youth in the community.

"My biggest pet peeve for our community is the lack of healthy food choices," he says. "If you're not eating right and taking care of your physical and mental health, you're not going to be able to push the needle on other things."

And, of course, everything comes full circle with his background in youth engagement.

"We've got to always think about the work that we're doing as it pertains to the future generation," he says. "What is this going to look like 10 or 15 years from now? Because the youth are our future and we have to make sure things are sustainable."



587 Washington Street, Dorchester, MA 02124

617-825-4224

www.CSNDC.com



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