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**BIPOC  
LEADERSHIP TEAM  
NEWSLETTER  
FEBRUARY 2024**

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## Updates:

- **Black History Month:** February is Black History Month! Send Tawney book, TV, or movie, event, recipe recommendations that center black and African American stories and heritage to be added to our website and sent out.

## Shoutouts

**Jen Reyes** has been appointed to serve on the Minnesota Council of Latino Affairs. Congratulations Jen and thank you for everything you do for our community!

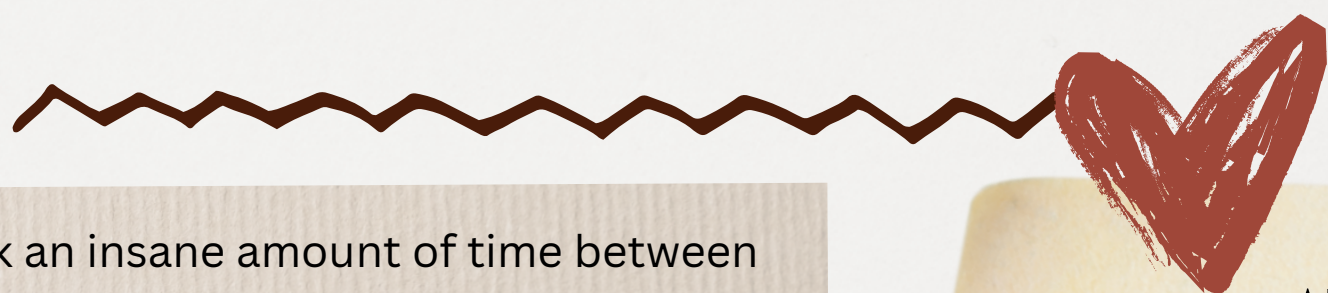


# TEAM MEMBER OF THE MONTH

## HELLO, I'M IDA WATSON- SOUTHER



Title: MnChoices Reassessor  
Time at St. Louis County: 15 Years



I work an insane amount of time between working for St. Louis County and Kohl's as my second job and an entrepreneur. I currently participate in training the Duluth Police Department as an actor in Crisis Intervention Training where we are training law enforcement, security guards, probation officers and social workers on how to use non-violence and NO weapons when interacting with individuals who may be suffering from a mental health crisis. This de-escalation training will hopefully keep our BIPOC society safe and alive; I also co-facilitate an Implicit Bias Training with my counterpart. However, Kohl's is more like going to visit my friends than going to work. I often joke with them that we are kind of like the people from the sitcom Superstore.

I do sew for myself when I get time and do crafts when I can. We love the card game Spades and when there is a family reunion, you better bring it or be leaving the table in tears 😊.

### ABOUT ME



I AM THE DECEDENT OF AN AFRICAN SLAVE FROM NIGERIA NAMED GEORGE ANDERSON, AND A CHOCTAW NATIVE AMERICAN FROM OKLAHOMA NAMED REBECCA. THEY MARRIED

AND HAD TWELVE CHILDREN AND NINE LIVED AND THREE DIED AT BIRTH. I AM THE NAME SAKE OF THE FIFTH BORN NAMED IDA. IDA AND ROBERT HAD TWO CHILDREN, WHICH INCLUDES MY GRANDMOTHER CALANTHA AND MY AUNTIE DARLENE. MY FULL NAME IS IDALENE WHICH IS A COMBINATION OF IDA AND DARLENE.

MY MOTHER, ESTHER, WAS A SINGLE PARENT WHO RAISED FIVE CHILDREN BY HERSELF. WE MOVED TO DULUTH, MN ON OCTOBER 2, 1962, WHERE I CONTINUE TO RESIDE. I REINVENTED MYSELF BETWEEN 1997 - 2004 BY GOING BACK TO SCHOOL AND GETTING MY BS AND MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK, APPLYING TO WORK AT ST. LOUIS COUNTY PHHS SHORTLY AFTER.

WHILE I HAD COMPLETED TWO INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS DURING MY UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE SCHOOL PROGRAMS WITH ST. LOUIS COUNTY, I DID NOT INTEND TO PURSUE A CAREER HERE. I CREDIT TWO PEOPLE IN GETTING ME INTO THIS AGENCY. THE FIRST PERSON IS A FORMER SOCIAL WORKER IN CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES NAMED CAROLYN PELZEL WHO ASKED ME WHY I DID NOT WANT TO WORK FOR THE COUNTY. I EXPLAINED THAT I FELT THAT AS A CHILD THAT GREW UP ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE THAT IT WAS A RACIALLY BIASED PLACE. CAROLYN SAID, "YOU CANNOT ELICIT CHANGE FROM THE OUTSIDE, YOU NEED TO BE ON THE INSIDE TO DO IT." THIS WAS SHORTLY AFTER PRESIDENT OBAMA WAS ELECTED AND I FELT THAT IF WE COULD HAVE AN AFRICAN AMERICAN PRESIDENT THAT ST. LOUIS COUNTY PHHS COULD HAVE AN AFRICAN AMERICAN SOCIAL WORKER. SO, THE NEXT PERSON THAT I GIVE CREDIT TOO IS FORMER DEPUTY DIRECTOR SHELLEY SAUKO WHO HIRED ME AS THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN "FEMALE" SOCIAL WORKER ON JUNE 8, 2009.

I HAVE NOT TALKED ABOUT THIS FOR YEARS, BUT IT WAS DR. TIM MILES THAT ENCOURAGED ME TO TAKE OWNERSHIP IN THE FACT THAT I WAS THE FIRST BLACK FEMALE SOCIAL WORKER, SO I SAY IT BOLDLY AND LOUDLY NOW.



FEBRUARY 2024

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

*In honor of Black History Month, the BIPOC ERG co-chairs, Dr. Tim Myles and Tawney Carlson, have shared cultural perspectives about what Black History Month means to them and elements of their community that are important to them.*



## DR. TIM MYLES: THE INFLUENCE OF THE BLACK CHURCH ON MY COMMUNITY.

The Black Church has a rich history of being the staple of the communities they represent. For communities of people who have historically been undervalued, underestimated, and marginalized, the Black Church has been the institutional backbone.

They provide hope, spiritual guidance, mental health care, and social support for African Americans. The Church has represented the central hub for political, social justice, and advocacy for its congregants.

The Church long stood as a place for the oppressed and marginalized to find refuge and healing, remaining a gateway to reach and mobilize African Americans for meaningful change and reform.

The Church creates a strong sense of kinship and social connectedness through resilience while engaging in capacity building and surviving in the face of adversity. The parishioners have persevered despite the scarcity of resources and historical threats.

The Church facilitates community engagements with programming around education, health initiatives, healthy eating, and physical activity by disseminating faith-based interventions while enhancing spiritual knowledge and building a culture of health through community-driven policy and system and environmental change. Seeing the Black Church as a place of worship and a source of community wellness is essential.





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## TAWNEY CARLSON: TAKING TIME DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH TO REMEMBER THE HARDSHIPS AND THE JOY



I grew up seeing Black History month as a time to educate us all on the trauma Black and African American people have endured to make their place in the United States. I have learned to view these stories through the lens of awe for the strength, resilience and joy our ancestors had to not only fight for the future that I get to enjoy and continue their fight in, but that they passed down to us. From slavery to the Civil Rights Movement, to inequality in all systems, the fight has been and still is an uphill battle. While learning this history is integral to understand culture and how to continue dismantling our current systems of oppression that have been built over the course of generations, I invite myself others to also rope in stories of Black and African American joy as well. Black and African American culture is creative, tenacious, and vibrant. Learning about black and African American hairstyles, trying an African recipe, watching an inspirational black speaker on YouTube, listening to African drum and dance and learning about cultural complexities are all great ways to celebrate Black History Month. Speaking of cultural complexities, did you know that there are 250 ethnic groups speaking 500 distinct languages in Nigeria alone?

The heaviness of the history and current fights for equality makes African American joy only possible through the strength and wisdom of our ancestors and those who are currently living. Black history month, to me, is a time to celebrate my grandmother, a world traveler who spoke 9 languages. Black history month is a time to celebrate soul food and a time to re-read or re-listen to anything by Maya Angelou. My daughter and I learn about our culture by learning about the struggle and the beauty, the pain and sorrow and the joy and resilience. My hope for everyone during Black History Month is that our community learns something new, tries something new to connect to a deepened understanding of Black history and culture.



# FEBRUARY EVENTS

**SEE YOU AT THE NEXT MEETING!**

**FEB  
21**

**NEXT BIPOC  
MEETING**

**10AM-11AM**



## **Recent Accomplishments/Activities:**

INTERVIEWS WERE HELD FOR THE EQUITY AND INCLUSION SPECIALIST ON 1/24 AND 1/25! HURRAY! THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO SERVED ON THE INTERVIEW PANEL OR OTHERWISE PARTICIPATED! SECOND/FINAL INTERVIEWS HAVE BEEN SCHEDULED FOR NEXT WEEK. THIS IS A HUGE MILESTONE WORTH CELEBRATING! WE HAVE ALL CONTRIBUTED TIME, WORK, VULNERABILITY, THOUGHTFULNESS, STRATEGIC ORGANIZATION AND MORE TO GET US AND THE COUNTY TO THIS PLACE. SO EXCITED TO SEE WHAT 2024 BRINGS AND WHAT WE CONTINUE TO BUILD TOGETHER! THANK YOU FOR ALL THE WORK YOU DO COLLECTIVELY TO MAKE ST. LOUIS COUNTY A BETTER PLACE FOR EVERYONE NOW AND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.



# WHAT'S UP?

- DO YOU WANT TO BE ON A WORKGROUP TO HELP ORGANIZE THE WEBSITE TO BETTER REPRESENT DAT, DEI AND ERGS? LET TAWNEY KNOW!
- DISCUSSIONS ARE CURRENTLY HAPPENING ABOUT HOW TO WELCOME THE EQUITY SPECIALIST WHEN THEY START. IF YOU WANT TO HELP/BE INVOLVED OR HAVE IDEAS ON WHAT TO DO, LET TAWNEY KNOW! OTHERWISE, THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIGN A CARD OR BANNER AND/OR ATTEND A MEET AND GREET (DEPENDING ON WHAT EVERYONE DECIDES TO DO) WILL BE SENT OUT WHEN THE TIME COMES.
- WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE BIPOC NEWSLETTER AND COMMUNICATIONS? ANY SHOUT OUTS OR THINGS YOU WANT TO INCLUDE FOR MARCH?

