

Embracing Authenticity: Gaining Insight into Self Through Community for True Impact
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Introduction

During my fellowship with Martha's Table (MT), I immersed myself in projects aimed at fostering inclusive and equitable community and economic development across Ward 8. This experience not only enriched my professional skills but also profoundly shaped my personal growth and career aspirations.

My primary focus during my fellowship at Martha's Table encompassed three key areas: first, developing an evaluation plan for the [Training and Technical Assistance Program \(TTAP\)](#); second, supporting the [Community Impact Fund \(CIF\)](#), which aims to empower grassroots organizations in Ward 8; and third, assisting with the summer [Joyful Food Markets](#) across Wards 7 and 8, a cherished initiative synonymous with Martha's Table's community impact efforts.

Training and Technical Assistance Program (TTAP)

My role in developing an evaluation plan for the Training and Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) centered on maximizing program impact through expanded capacity. The TTAP aimed to refine strategies for assessing program effectiveness and proposing improvements. Concurrently, the Community Impact Fund (CIF) focused on providing direct investments for community-driven solutions to local challenges. Through my active participation in both initiatives, I gained insights into the transformative potential of targeted investments in community development. These experiences deepened my commitment to inclusive community action and shaped my approach to fostering equitable and thriving communities.

Community Impact Fund (CIF)

Working with Martha's Table and CIF partners, including the Center for Nonprofit Advancement and the Greater Washington Community Foundation, enhanced my understanding of effective philanthropic strategies and community engagement. I developed a draft rubric for evaluating grant applications, ensuring fairness and transparency. Serving as a grant reviewer for six grantees who received \$25,000 in additional funding allowed me to directly impact community organizations. I also solicited diverse grant reviewers and researched BIPOC-led organizations to enhance inclusivity. Participation in check-in meetings with The Center for Nonprofit Advancement, GWCF, and Spur Local provided opportunities to contribute ideas and advance community development efforts. These experiences reinforced my commitment to inclusive community action and shaped my approach to creating equitable communities.

Joyful Food Markets (Health and Wellness)

A standout project was supporting the setup and operations of daily summer Joyful Food Markets in Deanwood, Benning Stoddert, Martha's Table's Outfitters, and Fort Stanton, particularly in Barry Farm. I led the registration and check-in process, ensuring smooth operations and a welcoming environment. Collaborating with at least three community-based organizations, I connected DC families to essential social support services. Additionally, I created and implemented an assessment strategy, including feedback surveys and testimonials, to measure partner satisfaction and gather insights into the impact of tabling at these markets. These markets provided essential nutrition and served as vibrant community hubs, highlighting the role of grassroots efforts in fostering community well-being and reinforcing my dedication to equitable development.

Community Engagement and Development

A poignant moment in my journey occurred during a conversation with a local community member at one of the Joyful Food Markets. Their appreciation of their community highlighted the interconnectedness of economic development and community well-being. I learned that while people cherish their community's intrinsic beauty, they often seek to enhance these qualities through thoughtful additions. This foundation, I realized, is strong and enduring. This insight was reinforced through interactions with community members, who emphasized that sustainable development depends on collaborative efforts shaped by local insights and aspirations.

My fellowship imparted valuable lessons in neighborhood-specific development and community engagement. Martha's Table's relocation to Barry Farm in May 2018 exemplifies community reinvestment. Prior to this move, the area had seen limited development. Martha's Table's co-location with Community of Hope (COH), a federally qualified health center (FQHC), in a 13,000 square foot space funded through LISC's Healthy Futures Fund, underscores their commitment to comprehensive support. This initiative enhances accessibility to vital services in one of D.C.'s most under-resourced neighborhoods, where over 30% of residents live in poverty.

Concluding Points

This fellowship has directed my career towards fields that prioritize community safety, such as public health and small business. It has prompted me to question how an environment can be truly "healthy" without community safety at its core and to explore what grassroots mobilization truly means. Consistently, I learned that it's not just about moving people towards something new but about supporting what they are already mobilizing around.

On a personal level, this fellowship has deepened my understanding of community. As a small business owner focused on health justice, engaging with communities that view health comprehensively was affirming. Embracing my authentic self has allowed me to forge deeper connections and foster impactful collaborations.

My time with Martha's Table has been transformative, shaping my professional trajectory and deepening my commitment to inclusive community action. As I move forward, I carry with me lessons of empathy, collaboration, and the profound impact of community-centered initiatives, guiding my future efforts to create equitable and thriving communities through health equity initiatives and public policy.



(Pictured = Chelsea at a Joyful Food Market in Deanwood)



(Pictured = Chelsea outside of the Anacostia Community Museum)