BLACK GIVING: SPOTLIGHT ON CELEBRITY PHILANTHROPY

Will & Jada

Rihanna

Lupe

Alonzo & Tracy

Usher
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ABFE Magazine/January 2017 Edition
Hello to all of you in the ABFE Network –

Happy New Year!!

2017 will undoubtedly bring new challenges to those of us in the philanthropic sector concerned about the well-being of Black communities. This year, ABFE will “double-down” on efforts to increase foundation giving to support Black-led infrastructure for social change. While the majority of our work here at ABFE focuses on foundation giving, we know that philanthropy by Black donors and institutions makes up some of the largest, sustained contributions to our community. It will be important for us, now more than ever before, to organize and support Black donors to invest in our community.

One particular group of Black philanthropists we’ve reached out to at ABFE are always in the spotlight given their celebrity status. Throughout our history, sports and entertainment celebrities have played an important role in support of our community; while some are more “activist” and others are more “service”, it is an important part of our legacy as a people to celebrate. But how much do we know about their giving, concerns and interests? Much of their work falls under the radar.

In this edition of ABFE Magazine, we explore the giving of several Black celebrities and athletes as told by senior executives in their institutions. We are proud to say that most of these groups are members of our Network and we ask that the ABFE family support and leverage their work with open hearts and minds.

We hope you enjoy reading their stories!

All the best,

Sue Ann Tappin-Batten

“Black Giving: Spotlight on Celebrity Giving”
For over 45 years, ABFE has set the standard

A network leader for Black professionals in philanthropy

A direct source for connecting leaders

ABFE Career Center, shaping your organization's future

— save the date —

UNITY

New Orleans

September 18-21, 2017

ABFE will gather with equity-minded colleagues to share and create strategies for intersectionality and impact. Every couple years, ABFE partners with CHANGE Philanthropy to carry out our annual conference with the UNITY Summit. 2017 UNITY Summit details and registration information coming soon.
Donor Priorities

ABFE Magazine interviews Karen Banfield Evans, Executive Director of the Will & Jada Smith Family Foundation. Karen is also Jada’s aunt.

Karen Banfield Evans: Originally the mission was to help children and families in underserved areas with a main focus on education. They give in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Jada’s from Baltimore, Will’s from Philadelphia, and they live in Los Angeles. Over the years, they have done other projects, and they have big hearts. If something comes across that they are interested in, they will give support. The whole motivation has been on the old saying, "For of those to whom much is given, much is required." I know that in my family, my mother’s mantra was, “You are your brother’s keeper.” My parents were very active in the com-

ABFE Magazine: Share a little about the mission and purpose of Will & Jada Smith Family Foundation’s giving. What are Will and Jada’s goals and drivers for giving back?
munity and civil rights. My mother always worked with chil-
dren, with us, her grandchildren in the schools and has al-
ways created extra activities for us, our friends, and the
community. That’s how Jada became aware of philan-thro-
py. It’s similar for Will too; he was raised by hard working
parents who realized how fortunate they were and felt the
need to give back to their community. Their goal is to try
and make a difference in the communities that they are
most familiar with. Jada came to Baltimore just before the
mayoral primary elections because she felt so removed liv-
ing in Los Angeles that she wanted to be connected to the
community and felt the need to talk people in Baltimore
City. She went to church service with me, and after church
she wanted to talk with members about how they felt about
the community. She talked with members and asked how
they felt about Freddie Gray, what has changed in the com-
community so that she could get a better idea from being on the
ground and talking with people. The Will & Jada Smith
Family Foundation has been in existence since 1998.

**ABFE Magazine:** What is the focus of their giving? What
type of work does the Foundation support?

**Karen Banfield Evans:** The Foundation has shifted priori-
ties recently and cutback on many of the small grants. We
will continue to give a few small grants in education to or-
ganizations that may not be able to get money from larger
foundations. We fund *Associated Black Charities (ABC)*
every year and believe the vision of Diane Bell-Mckoy should
be supported, not only Baltimore, but for the State of Mary-
land. I think that ABC is doing phenomenal work in Balti-
more. We also fund the *Park Heights Community Health Alli-
ance* each year that focuses on health, and they have a
community garden that has expanded to other vacant lots
in the community. We were instrumental in helping this or-
ganization build a new multipurpose building. We have giv-
en directly to public schools to support their libraries and
purchased books. The public school libraries in Baltimore
are almost non-existent. Will has always been connected to
his high school. He took ten kids from Overbrook High
School on a trip to South Africa, and they met Nelson Man-
dela. It was a trip of lifetime for them, and they were so ap-
preciative. Now Will and Jada have connected with Presi-
dent Obama and will focus their giving largely to the “My
Brother’s Keeper” initiative. They will be doing much more
with this initiative because they felt the need to connect
with work that will have a much bigger impact.

**ABFE Magazine:** What are the some of the accomplish-
ments of this work that you are the most proud of?

**Karen Banfield Evans:** I’m most proud of helping small
grassroots organizations. We spend time mentoring and
providing technical assistance to smaller organizations on
governing and program support.

**ABFE Magazine:** Has the movement for Black Lives and the
recent election cycle impacted your work in any way?

**Karen Banfield Evans:** The inequity in our society is so de-
pressing. The unrest and Black Lives Matter is a big part of
our future and the reason why Jada came back to Baltimore
to connect. It’s a cycle and things have to happen for Black
people to get alarmed to make things happen. What’s hap-
pening today is the driver for Will and Jada’s shift in funding
priorities to support the work of “My Brother’s Keeper.” Their
children are also very philanthropic and have taken on the
issue of clean water in Africa.

This is a wakeup call for Black people, and we have to get it
together.

**ABFE Magazine:** Does the Foundation fund raise from vari-
ous sources with Will and Jada Smith being the major do-
nors? What would you say to some of the major foundations
in this country about why they should leverage your work?

**Karen Banfield Evans:** I get discouraged when I hear
about all of these different foundations that the actors and
athletes have, and everyone’s doing their own thing. I be-
lieve it would be so much more productive if we would coor-
dinate and collaborate together. Our community is in such
bad shape and the little $5,000 here or $10,000 here is
great, but it’s not making the type of impact that we can
make. The other difference with Will and Jada is the fact
that they don’t raise money or ask for sponsorships; they use
their own money to give back. They see themselves as do-
nors and don’t publicize everything that they do. 
Food Justice

ABFE Magazine interviews Ayesha Jaco, Executive Director of M.U.R.A.L.

Ayesha is also Lupe Fiasco’s sister.

M.U.R.A.L., Magnifying Urban Realities & Affecting Lives, is a uniquely interdisciplinary, grassroots-driven organization that works to inspire and unite Chicago communities and their youth by providing transformative resources and platforms that are in short supply or unavailable.

www.lupefiascofoundation.org
Facebook.com/MURALChicago
Twitter: @WeAreMURAL
ABFE Magazine: Share a little about the mission and purpose of M.U.R.A.L.’s giving. What are Lupe Fiasco’s goals and drivers for giving back?

Ayesha Jaco: When we started M.U.R.A.L., it was co-founded by Lupe Fiasco and myself, and was based on Lupe’s philanthropic spirit. He would donate to families from Chicago public schools during the holiday time to provide groceries. He would go to Wacker Drive, a place where many homeless people convene during some of the coldest months and pass out hundreds of coats. He had written a music curriculum that went into the drawer once his music career took off. So, I tapped him on the shoulder and asked him if we could provide a framework for some of the things that he was doing, so that it could be sustainable and live beyond that particular season that he was giving. Then the foundation was born. Initially, we had a coat drive, and we were doing things around food justice, and healthy and warm meals that turned into community dinners. We went from feeding 8 families to feeding 500 people and providing groceries and offering healthy food demonstrations and naturopathic doctors to talk about ways of maintaining a healthy diet and a healthy lifestyle. These programs grew. The music curriculum that he wrote we paired with a music organization in our old neighborhood, and we piloted a program for a year that we funded. Then things started to shift a bit, because we were providing direct service, as well as doing some small grantmaking. In addition to these, we had a study abroad program with a goal of pairing inner city youth with youth from international communities. We funded youth empowerment programs and joined an incubator movement called “Project Orange Tree.” Friends of Hadiya Pendleton gathered after her death to bring awareness to violence happening in Chicago. We helped them create a structural violence campaign and then they became a nonprofit. Their campaign model is now the national “Wear Orange” movement that happens each year on June 17th.

After looking at where we were, we scaled back and decided to keep our original two areas in food justice and study abroad work, and what use to be our youth empowerment work became a hip hop scholars program that is focused on education. Our mission has stayed the same. We started as a grassroots-driven organization that works to inspire and unite Chicago’s communities by providing youth with transformative resources that are in short supply or unavailable. What that looks like for us is changing the habits of communities that have high rates of diabetes, heart disease, and strokes which are rooted in diet. We believe that if we reach out to young people in those areas and teach them better eating habits by providing fresh organic produce and free cooking classes for families, we can help to achieve some of those outcomes. We still have our study abroad work and have a passport drive for the month of December. For our program Hip Hop Scholars, we partner with Howard University every year for their alternative spring break. This program brings 50-100 students to Chicago to offer college readiness clinics throughout the high schools. We served over 1,000 Chicago Public High School students. This is how the work was born through Lupe’s early philanthropic efforts since 2008 and grew to where we are today.


Ayesha Jaco: Lupe was evolving from a Grammy-award winning artist to a Henry Crown Fellow, international businessman, and visual artist. We wanted to allow him the space to do that, so we evolved the organization’s name as well. Lupe did not want the organization to bear the brunt of something controversial that he may say, a stance that he has taken on politics or social justice issues, for example. We then decided to walk a neutral path, and the decision to change the name was two-fold. We then changed the name to M.U.R.A.L., which is an acronym for Magnifying Urban Realities that Positively Affecting Lives. A lot of our work is rooted in partnerships, and we take each approach as if we are creating a mural. We have community members, peer organizations, and young people that come together to help inform our policies, outcomes, and our programs. We thought that it would be a nice touch to what we do by naming our organization M.U.R.A.L.
**ABFE Magazine:** How many young people do you reach in your program each year?

**Ayesha Jaco:** For our food justice program, we are in partnership with Panera Bread, we work with a Charter School network to supplement their breakfast and lunch programs, and we reach about 500 young people. Our mobile market reaches 200 families, and for our food justice program, we reach about 500 families. For Hip Hop scholars, we reach about 500, and our study abroad program takes place every other year and has a smaller reach. On average, we take between 7-10 young people, and since its inception, we’ve reached about 30 young people.

**ABFE Magazine:** Does the Foundation fundraise from various sources with Lupe being the major donor. Who are some of the funders that are leveraging your philanthropy (regional, national, etc.)?

**Ayesha Jaco:** With us starting out as a grassroots organization, we were initially funded primarily by Lupe and private donors. Fast forward five years later — we still have a large private donor base that supports a lot of our food justice work. We recently partnered with Panera Bread as a corporate sponsor, and we recently received funding from the Whole Cities Foundation to support our food justice work. To date, we are primarily funded through private and individual donors and two recent corporate partnerships that we have. We are moving more towards fundraising and seeking out and soliciting foundation support. We do have a development director, Zaheerah Sultan, who is very active with CAAP (Chicago African Americans in Philanthropy) and the Association of Fundraising Professionals. We have been cultivating relationships aggressively for the last year with more foundations to expand our portfolio in that way. We have primarily been funded by our community, people who support our work, and Lupe.

In our early days, we did have the perception from many people that thought we did not need their donations because they thought we already had everything, because we had Lupe and access to all of his fans, and he has a million twitter followers. But that’s not always the case. We’ve gotten that feedback from individual donors, but that has not been our experience recently or pushback recently from corporate funders and individual donors.

To date, we have not received support or worked with any of the mainstream philanthropic foundations. We are looking to align ourselves, and we do work with Forefront in Chicago just to get better acquainted with those institutions. We have worked locally with some of the initiatives of the Chicago Community Trust, and they have been a great supporter. For the invitation-only pieces, which we find as of late there have been a lot of olive branches being extended, primarily from MacArthur, where they’re working to be more inclusive to work with foundations like us that service the populations we work with. We are starting to see a shift to some degree where rooms we may not have been privy to or invited, doors are starting to open. The shift has occurred because work is being done by people that saw there is a gap and really challenged some of the larger foundations to touch down with the people on the ground doing the work.

**ABFE Magazine:** What are the some of the accomplishments of this work that you are the most proud of?

**Ayesha Jaco:** I am very proud of how much our food justice programming has grown. We started with adopting 8 Chicago Public School families to providing programming for more than 1,000 Chicago residents each year. Building sustainable pieces within this program is very rewarding, especially seeing it grow from once a year to once a month for families. Our study abroad work that initially started as a pen pal program where we paired 10 students from a high school in South Korea and 10 students from the west side of Chicago expanded to providing young people with passports and a study abroad experience. We will host our third trip next year, and it’s great to see the growth and impact that you make on young people in our communities.

**ABFE Magazine:** Has the movement for Black Lives and the recent election cycle impacted your work in any way?

**Ayesha Jaco:** We’ve always been in the trenches in communities that have been affected by reasons on why a Black Lives Matter movement would be erected. What it has done is brought more awareness to people outside of the communities that this organization serves as a voice for. Regarding the presidential election, in a lot of the communities that we serve, the platform of the candidates and of the current president-elect did not reflect issues that these communities face. Violence, education, and lack of access to basic resources was not on the platform. It makes me think that we have to work harder and pay more attention more than ever from an advocacy viewpoint. It has created a heightened awareness and a need for more partnership and unity. As a small non-profit, we have to prepare for dealing with a new political structure coming and the reality of the barriers working with mainstream funders that we want to eventually be supported by. There is hope, because we are seeing these walls crumble in con-
that empower the community to take part in lasting change. Once the grant cycle ends, there is still empowerment through a fellowship you've helped a young person or a community member benefit and change their community, or through a committee that is established that has allowed for a seed to be planted for future generations. Dollars help, but if you don't have the knowledge on teaching people how to sustain for themselves, then it's like dropping a bag and leaving.

ABFE: EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

ABFE Magazine: What would you say to some of the major foundations in this country about why they should leverage your work?

Ayesha Jaco: We echo a lot of the initiatives that are launched, and we're on the ground. We would help to enhance some the work that they set out to do, because we're on the ground and in these communities. Major foundations should look at other models. For example, Whole Foods, whole cities grant reached out to the community for a community vote. We submitted a proposal that was selected and the community voted on who they wanted to serve their community. It would be nice to see more of this model where the people who benefit from the funding are part of the process, on a screening committee or evaluation committee to bring true community voice. They work better with organizations like M.U.R.A.L. just to make sure they're in alignment with what is happening on the ground and what the people who receive the services want. We are a catalyst, we stand the middle ground, and it would be nice for others to penetrate this model more by reaching out, having more dialogue, having more opportunities where we can benefit from funding, partnerships, and fellowship...
Youth Development

ABFE Magazine interviews Yvette Cook, President of Usher’s New Look

Usher’s New Look is a non-profit organization that transforms the lives of underserved youth through a 10-year comprehensive program that develops passion-driven, global leaders.

www.ushersnewlook.org
facebook.com/ushersnewlookfoundation
Twitter: @ushersnewlook
ABFE Magazine: Share a little about the mission and purpose of Usher's New Look giving?

Yvette Cook: Usher’s New Look is a 501c non-profit organization that’s been around for 17 years. We are really point-ed to transforming lives for underserved youth, and we do that through a 10-year comprehensive program that works with youth to develop them as passion-driven global leaders. And along the pathway to becoming these global leaders, we help them with their life skills so that they can overcome a lot of the challenges that underserved youth often deal with simply because of their zip codes.

Some of the skills that we equip our students with are skills that we think are required for their future. For example, finishing high school and going on to trade school or college. We express the importance of education. Then, we empow-er them with tools and teach them how to solve for challenges that they face every single day in their commu-nity and in their lives. We also have a service component which is all about helping our students build stronger communities. This is our mission in a longer statement.

ABFE Magazine: What are Usher’s goals and drivers for giving back?

Yvette Cook: I’ll give you a little background about our Founder’s story. In 1999, when Usher was 20 years old, he wanted to do something to give back to the community. He talks about how the Boys and Girls Clubs really helped him when he was a young person. He and his mother sat at the back of a juvenile court and listened to these court cases, and that year in 1999, they made a commitment to help ten youth. We started off as a summer camp program, and it grew. In 2010, we became this fully programmatic organiza-tion that offers a leadership academy on Saturdays and after school that works with our students starting in Sep-tember and all the way through May. Usher often talks about his being his “heart work,” the work of his heart. He says that he was purely driven by his passion to help under-served youth and so he created New Look as a catalyst to empower and to instill confidence in young people all over the world. And that truly is what we have been doing and will continue to do on his behalf.

ABFE Magazine: Please share more about the lifecycle of the program? Do you work with the same youth for the entire cycle of the program?

Yvette Cook: The four key pillars to Usher’s New Look’s success are talent, education, career, and service; each one corresponds to a grade level. Our program has three phases, and you matriculate from one to the second, then the third. The introductory program is called “Powered by Service,” which is generally for eighth graders. We bring 250 students into the auditorium at the school, and most of the time they have no idea of what they are coming in there for. It’s an engaging and interactive peer-to-peer training session designed to give the students an introduction into whom and what we are at the leadership academy. In that four to six-hour session on that one day, we help our stu-dents identify their passion, their talent, and their spark as we call it, if they don’t already know it. We introduce them to basic principles of leadership and the importance of civic engagement.

The one thing that’s really cool and very unique about us is that all of our programs and all of our trainings are peer-to-peer lead. So that means every person teaching a class is a youth who has matriculated through this program and taken some extra classes. All of our trainers are people who have been in our program and graduated.

The second phase is the Leadership Academy that runs from ninth through twelfth grade. It’s a four-year experi-ence, and each year we focus on a different pillar. Ninth grade is all about talent, passion, and helping students (if they don’t know already) identify their passion, talent, and what they are really excited about. What we’ve found is if you discover what a student is excited about, you can make a connection between the relevancy of school and educa-tion, versus a student who is thinking about dropping out because they don’t find any relevancy in going to school.

The sophomore year is about the importance of education and how it will help you get closer to obtaining your goals. The third year is about careers. What happens with under-served students often times is they don’t have the exposure that you and I might have. So, we do career day shadowing where we allow our students to spend a day with someone who works in a career that they may be interested in. The cool thing is either they come back really enthused and ex-cited or they decide that this career is not for them. The fourth year is about service and helping to produce socially conscious leaders, encouraging our students to be involved in their community. We have students who work alongside other non-profits and some that have started their own non-profits. We have students who have a program called “Books IV Bonding,” and they provide books to students in Kenya and inner city Detroit. Their program is about early childhood literacy.

At the completion of each academic year in the Leadership Academy, the students receive a certificate that says they have completed at least 100 hours in that area of discipline. The certificate is stamped by New Look and by Emory Busi-ness School that has certified our curriculum. It’s a very val-
valuable tool for college entrances, employment, and great for building self-esteem and shows commitment for the students.

The third phase is called “Moguls in Training (MIT).” This program is a personal and professional development platform for college students. It helps with essential life and business skills, practicing leadership through mentoring youth. These students train our younger academy students. We have to make sure that they are on track, because we know getting students to college is one thing now days, but seeing them through graduation is challenging for various reasons, many times due to financial reasons and lack of encouragement.

86% of our kids are first generation college students. The number that we are most proud of is we have maintained a 100% graduation rate for every student coming through our high school leadership academy. Last year, our program trained and served 4,300 students. To date, we have trained over 43,000 students. We also have an international training program. We select seven of our college students every year and take them on an international excursion, and we train students in another country. We’ve trained in the Philippines, Kenya, South Africa, Hong Kong, Amsterdam, and London. This year, we trained in Dominican Republic and Haiti. Our goal was to get the young people talking to build bridges internationally and specifically between these countries.

We currently offer our programs in Detroit, Milwaukee, Brooklyn, and Atlanta.

**ABFE Magazine:** Are the youth that you serve from the Black community?

**Yvette Cook:** Our program is open to any youth that is in need. By design, we work in the most underserved schools in these communities. We work in schools that some people like to label “dropout factories.” I don’t like that phrase. Many of our students are on free and reduced lunch programs, live in a one-parent household, may have one parent incarcerated. These are the kids that have the highest probability to fall through the cracks.

**ABFE Magazine:** Does the Foundation fund raise from various sources with Usher being the major donor? Who are some of the funders that are leveraging your philanthropy (regional, national, etc.)?

**Yvette Cook:** Usher is the largest individual donor. Our funding list is pretty extensive. We have corporate and individual funders, and now we are starting to do more grant writing. Our website will show the complete list. Some of our biggest funders are Ford, GE, Georgia Power, MGM Grand, Microsoft, Comcast, Home Depot, Sun Trust Bank, Southwest Airlines, Travelers Insurance, Georgia Pacific, and Wells Fargo. We have a diverse list of major funders from corporate foundations and individual donors. To run a multi-million dollar foundation, it takes a village. These donors become partners, and funding from Travelers Insurance will bring our program into Baltimore.

**ABFE Magazine:** What are some of the accomplishments of this work that you are the most proud of?

**Yvette Cook:** I’m proud of our students. I have been here two years and four months. I have personally witnessed students’ lives completely transform through being in our program for one year. We had a student who had been bullied mercilessly through all of her school years because she was different; she is artistically inclined. Through New Look, in one year, she participated in career day shadowing as a ninth grader for the Office of Film and Entertainment. As a consequence of this experience, she has worked on two paid motion picture jobs and she is only a junior this year. She has come out of her shell. I have one young man who is now interested in robotics.

We just graduated our first female valedictorian who graduated from high school with two associate degrees. Now, she is a freshman at Georgia Tech with enough credits to be a junior and is studying Industrial Engineering. The stories go on and on. But what I am most proud of is how our students support one another and want to pull up their peers. We get to see kids doing good things. By the way, we don’t care about their GPA and we don’t pick the brightest of the best. In fact, most of our kids coming in are in and out of trouble. Once they get into our family as we call it, they all change. We give them what they’re not getting at home and what they’re not getting at school, and we give them a choice to either join New Look or join a
There is real power in regional and placed-based strategies that allow cohorts of funders to work together to shift the culture of philanthropy from supporting societal reform to radical change.

- Susan Taylor Batten
Celebrating ABFE Members

ARE YOU A MEMBER?

Join or Renew Today at ABFE.org
ABFE Magazine interviews Bill Diggs, President of Mourning Family Foundation

The Mourning Family Foundation, is a nonprofit organization founded by Tracy and Alonzo Mourning that focuses on youth development through advocacy, education and enrichment. Since 1997, the Mourning Family Foundation has served thousands of children and their families by raising over $25 million to support various youth development programs, including the Overtown Youth Center and Honey Shine programs. By providing educational and extracurricular activities, MFF has helped to change the trajectory for hundreds of young people from South Florida’s disenfranchised communities.

www.mourningfamilyfoundation.org
facebook.com/morningfamilyfoundation
Twitter: @mourningfamily
**ABFE Magazine:** Share a little about the mission and purpose of Mourning Family Foundation’s giving. What are Alonzo and Tracy’s goals and drivers for giving back?

**Bill Diggs:** Our mission is to empower youth through advocacy, education, and enrichment. Our goal is to support youth development programs that aim to produce positive contributing citizens. In our community, specifically, we hope our youth will grow and move throughout the world and have as a basis for who they become their interface in past years with the Mourning Family Foundation and our programs. Our programs focus on diverse youth that come from Miami’s most underserved, non-gentrified communities that are mostly Black or Hispanic, and kids that come from underprivileged backgrounds.

Alonzo and Tracy are both individuals that grew up in interesting situations. Alonzo grew up as a foster child and has many brothers and sisters in the foster care program that were raised by this wonderful lady, Ms. Fannie Threet. She passed away a few years back. In the neighborhood he grew up in, she was a giver and opened her home to all these children that were strangers and created a family. Tracy grew up as a bi-racial child of a German mother. She was in the same tough situation where her mother cleaned hotel rooms, and they moved from south Florida to Las Vegas, where she attended public school. She went to Howard University with a scholarship given by Bill and Camille Cosby. Because of this philanthropic gift that helped her to develop into the wonderful woman that she is, they’ve grown up through giving and philanthropy, and that’s the driver for them. Their goals are really simple; they want children to be exposed to the best and to have an opportunity coming from these underprivileged and impoverished communities to realize their full potential because of their interactions with the Mourning Family Foundation.

The Mourning Family Foundation has been around for almost 16 years now. In the beginning though, there was not really an official Mourning Family Foundation but the individual philanthropic efforts of Tracy and Alonzo. Tracy and Alonzo Mourning came to Florida almost 20 years ago from Charlotte, North Carolina. They built an event, “Zo’s Summer Groove,” which is annual event to give back to the community of south Florida, and it helped to build their philanthropic efforts. A few years after that, Tracy founded another organization, “Honey Shine,” an empowerment enrichment program for young girls of color throughout south Florida. Over the years as Zo Summer Groove and Honey Shine grew, we built the “Overtown Youth Center” almost 12 years ago, and the Alonzo Mourning Charities was the fundraising arm for these two organizations. The Alonzo Mourning Charities grew out of a basketball weekend that was sponsored by Nike, the Miami Heat, and Publix. Alonzo and Tracy have three children. As the children were getting older, Alonzo began to move away from being an active professional basketball player, and they made a decision to change the foundation name from Alonzo Mourning Charities to the Mourning Family Foundation. It’s because of growth, intellect, and understanding about philanthropy that moved them to rename the organization. The foundation manages and operates the Overtown Youth Center and Honey Shine programs under this umbrella.

**ABFE Magazine:** Where is the focus of the giving? Does the Foundation fundraise from different sources with Tracy and Alonzo as the major donors?

**Bill Diggs:** Currently, we do not fund nationally as of yet. We fund two programs, “Honey Shine” and “Overtown Youth Center.” Our Honey Shine program is beginning to push across the country nationally. We have programs that now exist in Los Angeles, California, and Dallas, Texas. In the coming spring, we will have a third program outside of Miami area and Washington D.C., and we’re beginning to fund these programs nationally. We have over $5 million dollars in total programs that we run, and we raise this amount of money with Alonzo and Tracy as big donors. My job as the President of the foundation is to go out and solicit dollars from other more well-heeled foundations to assist us with giving to these two programs. For us to survive as a foundation, we have to build an endowment. As a young man who grew up with nothing, who’s an NBA basketball player, of course it’s not a fully-funded foundation. The foundation being around for 16 years, I hope when Alonzo and Tracy are both gone, we would have enough money to sustain the Foundation and continue to do real deep philanthropic giving to help communities use what we have done to do more.

Our goal is to work more with philanthropic and corporate foundations. Right now, we steer our two programs to these funders to show justification for why they should support our causes. From a development perspective, we find resources and try to push them towards our two programs. On the other side, we deal with major corporations and their foundations, and those that are partners of ours in Miami and in Florida understand how the Mourning Family Foundation operates. They will essentially work directly with us to create funding opportunities to support our two programs.
ABFE Magazine: What are some of the accomplishments of this work that you are most proud of?

Bill Diggs: That’s easy. Our Overtown Youth Center is our community-based, 25,000 square feet youth center in the heart of one of the toughest neighborhoods called “Overtown.” Over the 11 years, less than 50% of the kids in that community will graduate from high school. 100% of the kids that are in our program, over 500 that come to us on a daily basis, graduate from high school, and 95% of them will go on to college. We’ve successfully had kids matriculate from high school through college that come from these underprivileged backgrounds and are now back in our organization working for us. We’ve seen the success because we’ve taken the long view. Everything that we do is based on a relationship model and none of it is a transaction. Our kids are with us 7 days a week, and we build programming in school, after school, and during the summer time, and we assist them with jobs as well. The best thing we can do is to have a child come to us in the second grade and after 11 years they graduate from high school and go to college, and we help to fund portions of their college education. Our goal is for a youth to stay with us until they are 25 years old, not just until they’re 18.

The Overtown community has over 75% of its residents that are second and third generation Miami “towners.” We don’t have a lot of attrition based on the fact that kids are leaving. They are part of this community, and we consider our center for the last 11 years to be the same. It is not just a youth center, it is a community center, because we utilize it during the day for their parents and to assist their families.

ABFE Magazine: Has the movement of Black Lives and the recent election cycle impacted your work in any way?

Bill Diggs: Not really. Steady is our course. We are a community-based program regardless of politics; our work stays the same. We have not seen a jump or a decline in crime and poverty at all. Our everyday focus is not to be politically motivated, but to be motivated based on good stewardship for the programs that we do have. While we might have relevant topics on a day-to-day basis to allow our kids to express themselves, we educate them on these political cycles. We have a tremendously strong relationship with President Obama because of Alonzo’s work as one of the 14 members of the My Brother’s Keeper board of directors. It still has not changed what our focus is, we know exactly what our 2, 5, and 10-year plan is, and we are not moving away from that.

From my perspective, President Obama has done a great job as a president. There was a growing divide long time ago between the haves and have nots in Miami. In Miami, they are circumspecting this in a very strong way; there is almost no middle class in Miami, your either poor or your upper class. Our goal has always been to allow our children to have a voice to express their concerns through our high school and post-high school programs. It is not because of these recent issues. Now, I will tell you, our kids have gone out and have protested because of the police shootings that have been taking place in our community. We built a vehicle for them years ago to be able to do that, and it’s always been there. Black folks being shot and killed by the police is not a new phenomenon. It is something that has always been a major issue in our community. We have not been reactive, because we have been tempted to be proactive and giving them that voice. As part of the leadership development that goes within our organization, that is our message, because Alonzo is a Black man that has Black children and that is always central to how we build our programs.

The community where our center is located is called Overtown. The reason it is called Overtown is that when the interstate highway system was developed, it came through the heart of Miami’s most populist Black middle class community called Overtown and destroyed it. Over 30 years ago, the people that had money and businesses left and it left a chasm of Black folk who are absolutely poor. That is where we are. We are there providing assistance, every day for us Black Lives have mattered for quite some time. It is tough because the police department is two blocks away, and these Black boys in Miami have been getting shot and killed for a long time. We said a long time ago, of course
Black Lives Matter. We believe in it and we advocate for them the ability to continue to do their job. We are glad that they are coming to the fight, because we have been here.

ABFE Magazine: What would you say to some of the major foundations in this country about why they should leverage your work?

Bill Diggs: There are two things from our perspective. One, if you come to see our program you will fund this, it’s that simple. What we do is revolutionary. We are a program that is trying to meet the unmet need of a child and make them a better citizen. Alonzo is very fond of saying we put our last name on every child that walks through the doors, and we do. I think the problem with mainstream philanthropy, if there is a problem, is it is hard for them to get out of those large castles and come down and see individual programs. It is not how they operate, because so many people are after them on a daily basis. The face of philanthropy from that perspective needs to change and needs to become more proactive. What we say is, when we do interface with major foundations that will come and take a look at our programs, they will find the work that we’re doing not just respectful, but really high above the watermark, regardless of what they may have seen before. We built it that way. We are sophisticated enough where we built the correct matrix and all the other things to help them to understand why and what their return on investment will be, but we need to see more of that. For some of them, it is so hard for them to move these big ships into the middle of the ocean. What we are asking for is for them to make the effort to do that. Once you do, you will find your way to funding us in a major way. We just received a major grant from Bank of America to assist us with our work that will include training our executive staff on how to run a better non-profit organization, and serves as an invaluable source of opportunity for us.

Major foundations do support our two main programs. We have other foundations that fund the Mourning Family Foundation that includes the Carnival Foundation, Miami HEAT Charitable Fund, Lennar Foundation, The Michael Fux Foundation, and Miguel B. Fernandez Family Foundation. They understand where we are going, because we are a developmental organization. We are going to build our
second youth center in Miami, and this work cannot be done by the actual non-profit itself, so the foundation will launch a capital campaign and these funders (listed above) will partner with us. We have these types of helpmates along the way that believe in our overall mission.

I think it is important from a philanthropic viewpoint for major foundations to understand that some of the largest employers of people of color in many major cities happen to be non-profits. Major Foundations should look at non-profits as a business model to invest their money looking for a return and not so much for a non-profit to do well with a transaction. What we really want is to build relationships. A lot of them are not built to help build capacity, and we realize what the Mourning Family Foundation is attempting to do is to build capacity. We want to come in and be a good community partner so the communities themselves will not become a victim of gentrification. Many of the urban areas are beginning to disappear through gentrification, and we are saying that they should be able to stay. Major foundations in philanthropy have a good value set in regards to what it takes in order to lift people up out of poverty. You do not want to lift them up and replace them; you want to lift them up so they can sustain their own homes, communities, and households. Philanthropy somehow has to play a part in that and it needs to begin by having a discussion around the denigrating values of too much gentrification. ♦
ABFE Magazine interviews Towalame Austin, Executive in Philanthropy at Roc Nation

The Clara Lionel Foundation (CLF) was founded in 2012 by Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty in honor of her grandparents, Clara and Lionel Braithwaite. Grants funded by CLF are used to promote global programs in the areas that Rihanna is most passionate about including health, education, arts and culture. Current programs include the Clara Braithwaite Center for Oncology and Nuclear Medicine at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Barbados, the Clara Lionel Foundation Global Scholarship Program and the Barbados Micro Grants for Schools Program. Having raised tens of millions of dollars for charitable causes over the years, Rihanna’s remarkable and inspiring legacy of service to others continues in CLF’s mission, programs and partnerships.

www.claralionelfoundation.org
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**ABFE Magazine:** Share a little about the mission and purpose of Clara Lionel Foundation’s giving. What are Rihanna’s goals and drivers for giving back?

**Towalame Austin:** Rihanna has another side to her that people don’t see. She is very passionate, loving, giving, and generous with her money and time when it comes to philanthropy. She loves and cares about people. She has traveled the world often and she sees things that shouldn’t be. For example, she’ll see children running around on the streets in Africa with no shoes or food to eat, with minimal access, who lack the simple things, the basics to survive like water, shelter, or food. She immediately reacts to what she sees in that moment and will want to offer a solution or determine how she can help. There have been many instances during my time working with her when she would call or email me about things she’s seen on social media or read in an article or heard about. One time in particular she called me about a little girl in Jamaica who she saw on Facebook pleading for books so that she could go to school. Or someone sends her a direct message in her Twitter box from Alabama and says she is about to get evicted and pleading for Rihanna’s help. If she’s moved by this person, she jumps into action immediately. We call these her random acts of kindness. That is her spirit, the essence of who she is, her thought process, and how she approaches things.

Rihanna started her foundation after her grandmother passed away of pancreatic cancer in 2012. Her grandmother was living in New York at the time, and she was fortunate enough to give her the access to care and treatment in an effort to preserve her life as long as she could. All of her family is still in Barbados where healthcare is free and they have one public hospital on the island, Queen Elizabeth Hospital. During that time, they had one piece of cancer treatment equipment in the oncology center that was at least 15 or 20 years old, and she said that it was unacceptable. She made a commitment to work with the hospital to modernize their oncology center and pledged to purchase three pieces of equipment. The center has been named in honor of her grandmother and is now the Clara Brathwaite Center for Oncology and Nuclear Medicine. This triggered the official launch of her personal philanthropy and the beginning of the Clara Lionel Foundation.

I worked with Rihanna to design the mission, programs, and objectives of the foundation. A major part of our initial work was fulfilling her commitment to Queen Elizabeth hospital. I worked to finalize grants and secure the purchase of the medical equipment. We later started to raise funds for the charity and created the inaugural Diamond Ball in 2014, which officially launched the Clara Lionel Foundation. The last piece of medical equipment was installed this past summer from the funds raised, and now the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is recognized as the most modern oncology center in the Caribbean. “Clara” is her grandmother and “Lionel” is her grandfather.

As a result of the growth of her philanthropy, the Clara Lionel Foundation has recently hired a new full-time Executive Director to expand her philanthropy globally.

**ABFE Magazine:** Does the Foundation fund raise from various sources with Rihanna being the major donor? Where is the focus of the giving?

**Towalame Austin:** The Clara Lionel Foundation was funded personally by Rihanna initially and now
receives national and international support from corporate and private donations. The foundation currently offers a mix of grantmaking, donations, and some programming. In addition to the grants extended to the hospital, I launched the Clara Lionel Foundation Global Scholarship program in June 2016. We work with a scholarship management company to assist with operations and management to offer full scholarship tuitions for students in need from 7 countries from around the world.

ABFE Magazine: What are some of the accomplishments of this work that you are the most proud of?

Towalume Austin: I am most proud of the work that we are doing to help people through the programs at the hospital in Barbados and scholarship program, because this work is directly impacting people. I’m also proud of launching a charity for this global pop star. I work with a lot of high profile names, and the work of those organizations are on a national and regional scale, and having the opportunity to work with someone on a global scale has helped me grow in this space from an experience perspective. Not only launching her charity, we also launched a premier fundraiser for the last two years successfully and raised a significant amount of money under my leadership, that is something to be proud of. Although, I did not pound the pavement alone soliciting and securing donors, it was definitely a team effort within Roc Nation. Keeping the donors engaged and informed about the foundation is something that I am also proud of.

ABFE Magazine: Has the movement for Black Lives and the recent election cycle impacted your work in any way?

Towalume Austin: Rihanna participated in the Alicia Keys’ 23 Ways you Could Be Killed If You Are Black In America campaign which supported the We Are Here Movement. She has been very vocal on social media where she has expressed how saddened she was over the unnecessary killings.

ABFE Magazine: What would you say to some of the major foundations in this country about why they should leverage your work?

Towalume Austin: Bringing awareness and opening our eyes to the public health systems and medical conditions in the Caribbean is important because resources are very limited. The global scholarship fund supports youth in need from the poorest communities around the world to offer opportunity to youth to get an education here in the US. Donors can support this work by continuing to fund education and health globally.
ABFE is a membership organization that advocates for responsive and transformative investments in Black communities. Partnering with foundations, nonprofits and individuals, ABFE provides its members with professional development, technical assistance and networking opportunities to increase the impact of their work. Established in 1971 as the Association of Black Foundation Executives, the organization was credited with many of philanthropy’s early gains in diversity. It since has evolved into an influential network. In 2013, the organization shed its descriptor and adopted the simpler ABFE (ab-fee) to better reflect its broadening membership. For more information, visit www.abfe.org.

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