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BLACK WOMXN ARE ESSENTIAL


A Snapshot from our Interview Series
with Black Feminist Organizations
Responding to COVID



BLACK WOMXN ARE ESSENTIAL

BACKGROUND

The devastation of COVID in Black communities; the nation's default to messages of personal responsibility rhetoric (hand-washing, mask wearing) in the absence of a robust government response; the economic realities that continue to unfold for Black communities; and the dangerous impact of stay at home orders for survivors, marginalized people, and so many others; has required us to imagine and respond to this impact on Black women, girls and other gender oppressed people. At Black Feminist Future, we have been trying to make sense of this moment, in particular, meditating on how to avoid direct action before truly understanding and assessing the devastating impact of this pandemic in Black communities. In order for BFF to move into thoughtful and impactful action, we are creating opportunities to learn about, cultivate shared understanding, and uplift the racial and gendered impacts of this pandemic. In order to best address this need, BFF conducted an interview series with representatives from local and national Black feminist organizations responding to the needs and experiences of Black women and gender expansive folk in these times. Through this interview series, we had the opportunity to speak with 15 Black feminist organizations across the country, each representing a different sector and approach within our movement spaces. This is in an effort to capture/uplift the labor and commitment put forth by these organizations, their analysis of COVID-19's impact on our communities, and the nuances and shifts to their work they have been creating in response to this moment. We are sharing highlights from this series to capture and uplift the labor and commitment put forth by these organizations, their analysis of COVID-19's impact.



WE SPOKE WITH **15 ORGANIZATIONS**

For the Gwols

**Ujima Inc.: The National Center in Violence
Against Women in the Black Community**

Feminist Women's Health Center

Priceless Insights

Sadie Nash Leadership Project

The Black Mecca Project

Philadelphia Community Bail Fund

Black Women Disrupt

A Long Walk Home

Communion Counseling & Consulting, LLC

MaMa Fund

ARC Southeast

NDWA (National Domestic Workers Alliance) -

We Dream In Black

**SOME OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS WORK NATIONALLY, BUT FOR
THOSE THAT WERE LOCAL, THESE ARE THE AREAS THEY SERVE:**



THEIR AREAS OF WORK INCLUDED:

Mutual Aid Funds

Bail out Projects

Abortion Access/Providers

Gender Based Violence Prevention

Youth Leadership Development

Gender Affirming

Social Justice Training/Facilitating

Arts Education

Black Women's Mental

Health/Counseling Services

Domestic Workers Organizing

CAPTURING THE IMPACT

We asked these organizations to identify the impacts they noticed COVID has had on the communities they serve. Each organization shared an analysis rooted in the shifts and interventions they had to make to accommodate the changing needs of their communities. Across their responses, they noticed COVID had a large impact in their communities and programming in the following areas:

Incomprehensive
Government Relief

Limitations to
Programming
for Direct
Service
Providers

Fundraising
Constraints and
Setbacks

Increased
Invisibility of
Marginal
Communities

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HERE ARE EXAMPLES OF HOW THESE IMPACTS SHOWED UP IN THEIR WORK:

Incomprehensive Government Relief

"There are a lot of Black trans folks who were left out of government responses – there is a blatant oversight of folks who need the funds the most. Black trans folks who are sex workers, who have not filed tax returns, who work outside of the formal economy, who do gig work under the radar, who live in rural areas, -- these are the folks who were left out the stimulus check."

-for the gworls

In response to the pandemic, many states used this moment to push forward abortion bans. Reproductive care organizations like ARC Southeast were of the many to provide support for folks seeking abortion access. In their response efforts, they noticed an increase of folks seeking abortion care traveling between states for abortion care. In states like Tennessee where government restrictions on interstate travel were enforced earlier in the pandemic, ARC Southeast found that many people in that service region traveled to states like Georgia or Kentucky for abortion care.

-ARC Southeast

For many of the organizers and movement folks we spoke with, they found government relief packages failed to support those in their movement communities who conduct their work as contractors or through "gigs." For these folks, the loss of security in available gigs/contracts threatened their access to income, healthcare, and other resources. This was a main area of concern for the Black Mecca Project. They shared, "the government's loan programs are not reflective of the vast gig network of Black organizers who do work under the radar of what the government considers traditional 'business.' This exposes what we already knew. People who don't fit in the traditional boxes are the people who are not supported."

-Black Mecca Project

Fundraising Constraints and Setbacks

Like many other in-person youth programs, the **Sadie Nash Leadership Project** canceled in-person programs to ensure the safety of their participants. They are also applying to COVID emergency response grants to get funding to continue their programming while also providing mini grants and other forms of cash assistance to their youth participants. The changes in the availability of programming funds have left them in "an area of consistent fundraising."

-Sadie Nash Leadership Project

Limitations to Programming for Direct Service Providers

The **Philadelphia Community Bail Fund** works across 5 to 10 jails for women and men in the Philadelphia area. Since the start of COVID, they have been unable to perform their in-person interviews with incarcerated folks to assess their need for bail out services. This pause in interviews is a result of jail visitation closures and the Bail Fund's decision to stop in-person visits to avoid the spread of COVID. This challenge to their work is also a result of many Philadelphia jails' decision to close courts and jury trials, leaving many folk's cases on pause until further notice.

-Philadelphia Community Bail Fund

Increased Invisibility of Marginal Communities

"Based on the ways the intersections of gender oppression operate, Black trans folks are experiencing a particular form of violence as a result of COVID-19. Black trans folks are first to be hired and first to be fired, and have been experiencing discrimination around the work place prior to COVID. But in the wake of COVID, we have noticed that many Black trans folks have been laid off or fired without proper compensation.

-for the gworls

In response to how the pandemic has impacted housing access, Ujima Inc. noticed how stay at home orders led to an increase of violence against the Black women they serve. Examples of how this violence manifests in the experiences of the women they serve included:

- Landlords soliciting sex from tenants to substitute missed or late rent
- An increase in food insecurity
- Rises in cases of domestic violence for women quarantined with their abusers
- Threats of eviction which disproportionately impacts Black women

-Ujima Inc

Organizers with **We Dream in Black**, a national alliance centering the experiences of Black domestic workers, realized how the stress the pandemic placed on employment enhanced the already precarious working conditions for Black domestic workers. From surveying the Black domestic workers in their alliance, they learned of these new challenges to their work:

- Women who work as nannies were taken out of state by families who were leaving city hot spots to avoid COVID in the city without full consent, and were forced to leave behind their homes and families.
- Employers of these women used social distancing to both coerce and police the movement of domestic workers who were working with their families.
- Many domestic workers are misclassified as independent contractors within domestic work, which makes it difficult for folks to apply to unemployment or receive government relief.

-We Dream in Black

A common theme across the youth organizations we spoke with was a push to acknowledge the intersections between age and racial/gendered impacts of COVID. Some of these youth led organizations noticed increases in youth expressing concerns around their safety while being contained with people they don't feel safe with. They also identified that many young people who were either alum of their programs, or current participants, are now frontline workers or the main sources of income in their households.

On the latter end of this spectrum, organizations we spoke with who serve elder communities also spoke to this intersection. They found that as a result of COVID elder communities have experienced a lack of access to cash assistance, internet services, healthcare access, transportation, and limited mobility due to the risk of contagion.

IDENTIFYING OUR STRATEGIES

To best respond to the shifting needs of their communities, these organizations used the information they gathered from the experiences of the folks they serve to create alternative spaces of support. Here are the strategies and tools they utilized to adapt their work:

**Mutual Aid
& Rapid
Relief**

**Virtual
Spaceholding**

Surveying

Policy

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IDENTIFYING OUR STRATEGIES

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Mutual Aid & Rapid Relief

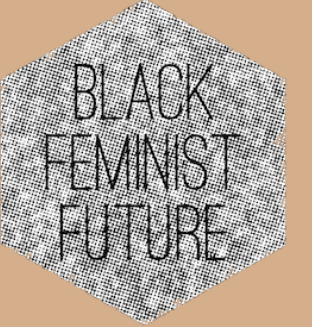
For **MaMa Fund, for the gworls, Priceless Insights, Sadie Nash, and A Long Walk Home**, creating mutual aid funds and other forms of rapid relief was pivotal in the ways they were able to support their communities. **These forms of cash assistance were used to provide folks with additional income to respond to emergent needs that included:**

- A loss of income due to COVID job closures
- Medical funds for folks impacted by COVID
- Food, other grocery supplies, and Internet/phone service support
- Rent or housing security needs
- Other support needs that arose due to the pandemic

Virtual Spaceholding

Leaning into virtual platforms as an alternative to in-person space-holding has been a resource that provided these organizations with opportunities to reimagine ways to be in community. For the youth leadership organizations we spoke with, online programming allowed them to continue to creatively process this moment with their young people while also pushing for new dynamics of mentorship. For **Communion Counseling & Consulting**, they found this movement to virtual spaces expanded their capacity to share mental health services for the Black women they serve. The availability of tele-therapy now provides people with access to a diverse range of mental health services which in the past may have been inaccessible to access in person.

IDENTIFYING OUR STRATEGIES



Surveying

Many of the organizations we spoke with, including **We Dream in Black**, **A Long Walk Home**, **Sadie Nash**, and others, utilized surveys as a tool to assess the impact of COVID in their communities and inform how they wanted to pivot. For **A Long Walk Home**, the assessment they conducted provided them with the insight to understand how the youth they serve coped with the closing of the classroom and social spaces that provided them with support and refuge. **They learned:**

- Their youth are caregivers who now hold more responsibilities at home. They are the folks making meals and supporting their parents.
- Their youth are essential workers and were often the main sources of income in their household when their parents become unemployed due to COVID.
- A large number of their youth's parents work in the healthcare industry.

–**A Long Walk Home**

Policy

For some of the organizations we spoke with, the push for policy changes was an avenue to offer solutions to the challenges in their communities beyond rapid relief. For **Ujima Inc.: The National Center in Violence Against Women**, their strategy was to use the lived experiences of the Black women they serve to inform their collaboration with policy makers creating relief bills. Initiatives they have focused on include pushing for additional funding for shelters and hazard pay for folks who operate them. Similarly, the **National Domestic Workers Alliance** are fighting for a federal Domestic Workers Bill of Rights to expand the labor laws to include the rights of farm workers and domestic workers who are excluded from many federal labor laws.

Across these organizations, they all identified that to pivot their work, they needed to invest resources and energy into their staff. Here are some shifts and policies they created to hold space for their teams:



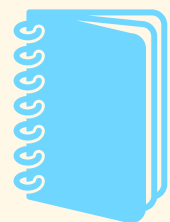
Creating a “Quarterly Wellness Stipend” for staff members to get access to funds to support their medical or personal needs in these times



Holding conversations to help folks understand the need to pause



Encouraging self-care while carrying out projects to ensure “we’re not working ourselves into the ground while trying to get more resources out to our communities” -ARC Southeast



Updating staff handbooks to include a hazard pay policy to have additional pay for staff working in this time



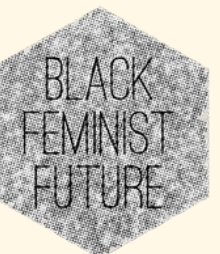
Re-writing leave policies to include a special COVID response policy and pandemic protocol



Practicing boundaries around their work hours to preserve time for their healing and mental health



Hosting healing and grieving circles with folks rooted in Black liberation work to hold space for their organizers in this moment



REFLECTIONS & QUOTES

“There’s not gonna be a ‘post-pandemic,’ just other waves that are going to look different. So, we need to think about how people are going to be impacted by this tremendous loss”

-Sadie Nash Leadership Project

“This moment has re-focused us on why we focus on black women and girls as leaders and change makers. We have to ask ourselves, what happens when they are not seen again? Especially in a moment when they are the main folks supporting their families at home?”

-A Long Walk Home

“Black women are spearheading the creation of solutions and movements that matter in these times. These are the efforts that support the community, that bring us together, and that are for the future.”

- MaMa Fund

“We have what we need to make the futures we want.”

-Philadelphia Community Bail Fund

“Many people are in a panic mode now, but people need to realize that our communities have been in panic mode before this pandemic existed.”

-for the gworks

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THANK YOU + STAY CONNECTED



We would like to thank all of the organizations who contributed their time, insights, and care to this interview series. In times of crisis when our governments fail to support us, it is our movements who step to fill these gaps.

Learn more ways to plug into these organizations by visiting their websites!

- [For the Gworls](#)
- [Ujima Inc.: The National Center in Violence Against Women in the Black Community](#)
- [Feminist Women's Health Center](#)
- [Priceless Insights](#)
- [Sadie Nash Leadership Project](#)
- [The Black Mecca Project](#)
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- [Black Women Disrupt](#)
- [A Long Walk Home](#)
- [Communion Counseling & Consulting, LLC](#)
- [MaMa Fund](#)
- [ARC Southeast](#)
- [NDWA \(National Domestic Workers Alliance\)](#)
[- We Dream In Black](#)

