

NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS 2023

“In community, our **potential** is truly realized. What we have to offer to each other is not merely critique, anger, commentary, ownership and false power. We have the capacity to hold each other, serve each other, heal each other, create for and with each other, forgive each other, and liberate ourselves and each other.”

—adrienne maree brown



Dear IMPACT friends,

As we embark on this reflective journey within the pages of our 2023 Network Highlights, I am filled with a profound sense of humility, gratitude, and pride. This is my first opportunity to speak directly to you as IMPACT's new Executive Director. I fully appreciate that I am standing on the shoulders of those who've poured their hearts and souls into building this remarkable organization. Thank you to each of you for believing in our mission and supporting our staff.



For the past 24 years, IMPACT Silver Spring has stood as a beacon of hope, a catalyst for change, and a testament to the power of relationship-centered, community-driven initiatives. Our core values encourage us to accomplish this in a vibrant, democratic workplace, where every voice is valued.

I believe this report vividly represents the breadth and depth of IMPACT's work during the 2023 program year while also sharing inspirational stories of network members who have helped weave a tapestry of positive transformation across the neighborhoods and families we support. Please check out the centerfold graphic in this report to see how our four core areas of work intersected this year through our programs, events, and activities.

Next year, IMPACT will celebrate its 25th anniversary! As we celebrate the achievements of the past year and chart a course together for an even greater impact in the coming years, I extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you who has lent your support, passion, and dedication to our noble cause. Together, we are proving that when a community unites through relationships of trust, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

With gratitude and anticipation of great things to come,
~Chris

Please use this QR code
to donate today.





FIGHTING RACISM

Our educational tools and programs build awareness to push back against the forces of historical and structural racism.

Spotlight on Mary Hart

MARY HART has lived in downtown Silver Spring since 1997, and became a Montgomery County Public Schools teacher in 2005. Now a Learning and Achievement Specialist supporting a cluster of schools and their school improvement and equity work, Mary's racial justice work is particularly focused on students. When she learned that IMPACT would be facilitating discussions on *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by adrienne maree brown, she saw it as an opportunity to learn strategies she could incorporate in her work. She had heard of the



book and looked forward to exploring within its pages challenges such as how to sustain social justice work when things seem hopeless, and how to engage with people from diverse backgrounds.



When it comes to the idea of centering relationships (being intentional about how we connect and how we behave once we've connected), Mary noted that the book group facilitator, Network Builder Yesenia Regalado, created conditions where participants felt psychologically safe while engaging in conversations which were sometimes uncomfortable or pushed them into their "learning brain." For Mary, this is all about relationships, and assuring that the person she is engaging with can enter the space without any shame or hesitation. An example Mary shared from the book group was that Yesenia did not judge participants who hadn't read the chapters for a particular session. Without that, Mary says, she would have entered with some level of trepidation which could have disrupted the relationships and conversation. Mary shared that she has noticed IMPACT Silver Spring asks this question throughout its work: What are the conditions we want to create as individuals that we want to see replicated in the world?

Mary and some of her colleagues have also used principles from *Emergent Strategy* as the basis of community agreements (ground rules agreed upon by a group in order to set expectations about how they will work together). Some of these include:

1. "Small is good, small is all (The large is a reflection of the small)"
2. "Change is constant (Be like water)"
3. "There is always enough time for the right work. There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it."

These and other principles from adrienne maree brown's book have made their way into Mary's work and the work of her colleagues. This real world application is a key aspect of IMPACT's racial justice programming that Mary finds unique and valuable. Mary explains, "The structure you engage with at IMPACT – all the things you do are about building that foundation of relationship and then having that 'ask' of how you are applying this in your world – is really important."

Spotlight on Lucia Vasquez

LUCIA VASQUEZ is a leader. Since coming to the U.S. 12 years ago from Sonora, Mexico, she's been working to build a better life for herself and her family. Early on, Lucia focused her attention on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at her son's Wheaton elementary school, Harmony Hills. Through an interpreter she shared, "I wanted to help strengthen the PTA and get more Latino parents involved." She became an active PTA member, attending civic education classes at the school and door knocking to engage other community members.



It was through door knocking at her apartment complex, Westchester West on Hewitt Avenue in the Aspen Hill area of Silver Spring, that the idea for forming a community group blossomed. "As I was talking to people, I realized many of them shared the same concerns—health care, especially dental; safety; opportunities for their kids; and wanting to understand local laws and regulations." With a small group of women she met through door knocking, Lucia invited IMPACT Senior Network Builder Carmen Hernandez to come and teach a series of civic education classes at Westchester West. Through that collective action, the Hewitt Avenue circle was born. In addition to Lucia, other core members of the circle are Edith Villelas, Maria Morales, Isabel Velásquez, Olimpia Alvarez, Claudia Rivera, and Dubiney Henao.

Aided by Carmen's leadership training around communications, organizing, and outreach, circle members launched a variety of community actions. Applying what they learned in their civic education classes, they submitted testimonies to the September 2021 County Council Town Hall, bringing attention to resident concerns identified through door knocking. At the height of the pandemic, they started a WhatsApp mutual aid group called Union Comunidad to disseminate information quickly and easily about resources, jobs, carpooling, etc. Through the WhatsApp group, they raised money to support a neighbor whose young daughter died suddenly. To date, the group has about 90 members. Also during the pandemic, they hosted an outdoor block party at Westchester West with music and games, connections to vital county resources and services, and COVID testing and vaccinations. More than 100 neighbors attended.

Perhaps their most widely publicized action was advocating for Montgomery County leaders to use the Right of First Refusal law in June 2023 to maintain affordable housing at Westchester West when the property owners announced they were selling. Their advocacy led to the complex ultimately being purchased by a nonprofit and ensuring that rents would remain affordable.

"Through all of our working together, the members of the circle have gotten to really know each other and build strong bonds," Lucia shares. She's even partnered with Edith and Dubiney to start a small food stand business called Latino Fusion Food. It's worth mentioning that Lucia, Edith, and Dubiney are all graduates of IMPACT's cooking classes!



So, what's next for this circle of women community leaders? Thanks to their advocacy, a dental clinic is opening in their neighborhood soon and they hope to form a neighborhood association. Lucia says it's important to keep identifying and working with the grassroots leaders she knows are out there in her neighborhood. "My dream is to make sure people understand the power of working together."



GROWING LEADERS

Our empowerment programs spark people's innate power to become leaders, and to take actions towards creating more equitable neighborhoods and communities.

Resilient, Relational, Evolving: WE CENTER RELATIONSHIPS

IMPACT is proud to offer workshops, training, initiatives, events, and technical assistance all in pursuit of our mission of creating a more equitable and just Montgomery County. Our work is deeply rooted in a belief that **strong relationships are key** to sparking the resilience and evolution needed for positive change.

In the graphic below (which covers the period July 1, 2022–July 30, 2023) we illustrate the **relationships among our different programs** within our four core areas of work. At IMPACT, interconnectedness is part of everything we do!



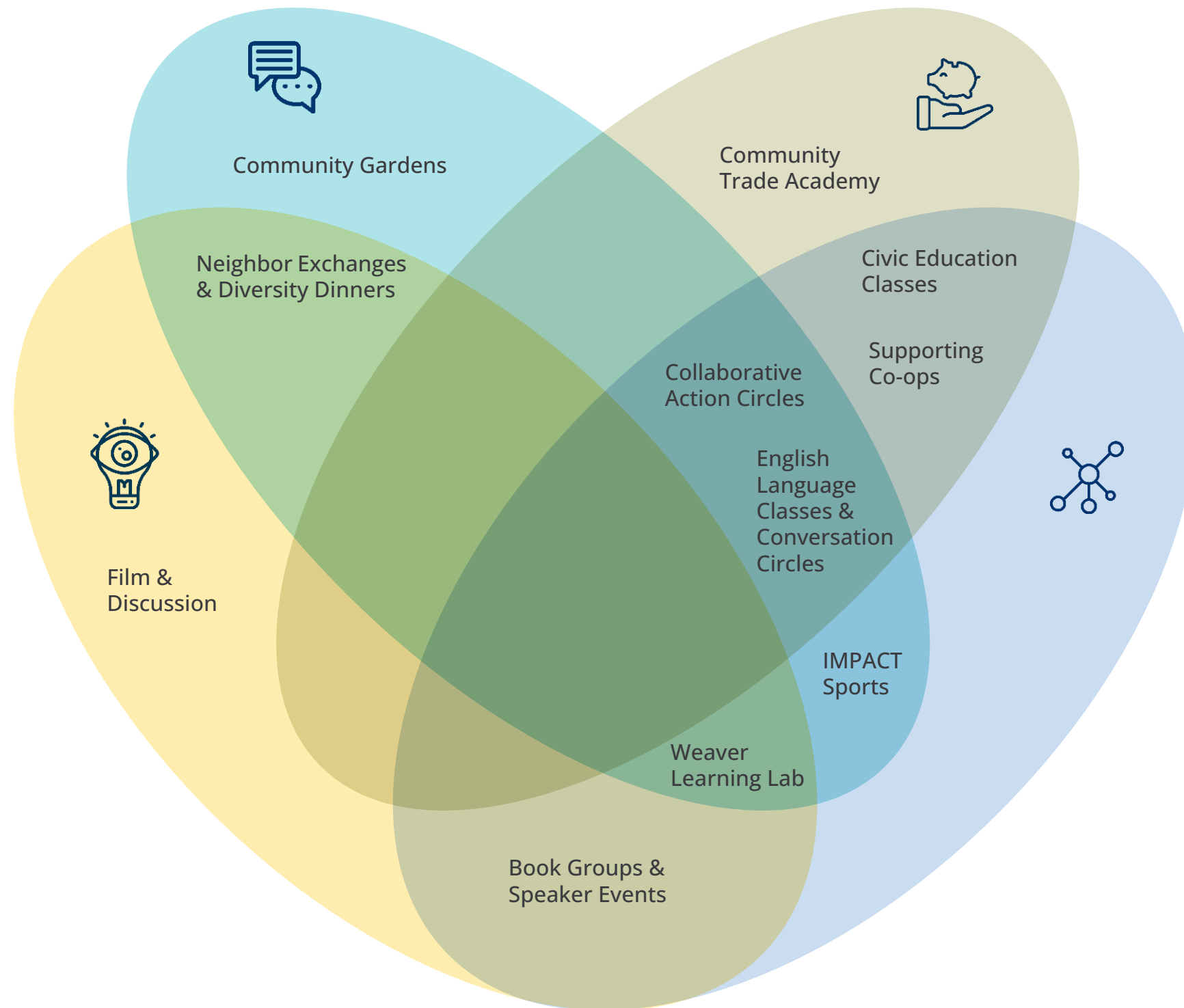
CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

- » In March, IMPACT hosted a “Community Connect” Neighbors Exchange, our first large, in-person community meeting in Long Branch since the beginning of the pandemic.
- » 225 students participated in IMPACT’s English Language Classes at the beginner, intermediate and advanced levels throughout the year.
- » In February, IMPACT launched a community garden project in the Glenmont Forest neighborhood of Wheaton in partnership with the neighborhood civic association.



FIGHTING RACISM

- » Participants in this year’s Weaver Learning Lab met for four two-hour sessions to explore the concept of generative conflict.
- » 2022-2023 Film & Discussion events featured “Decolonizing Mental Health,” “American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs,” and a viewing and discussion of two short films on Afrofuturism.
- » In the fall of 2022, IMPACT facilitated five bi-weekly discussions on the book *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown. A special event in October 2022 featured Professor Dean Spade on the topic of mutual aid, and in June 2023, Deepa Iyer led a webinar on the Social Change Ecosystem she developed and featured in her book *Social Change Now: A Guide for Reflection and Connection*.



BOOSTING ECONOMIC POWER

- » Several IMPACT programs coalesced this past year and are now all part of our Community Trade Academy (CTA). These community-based classes focus on skills residents have asked for such as: cooking for the food service industry, jewelry making, sewing, piñata making, and basic entrepreneurship skills.
- » Throughout FY23, IMPACT provided technical assistance to Anytime Union Taxi Cooperative, a worker-owned taxi company composed of predominantly immigrant drivers.



GROWING LEADERS

- » Hewitt Avenue Circle, a group of residents formed in 2021 with the aid of IMPACT to take on collaborative action in their neighborhood, successfully organized this year and partnered to stop a sale that would have resulted in significant rent increases. The county intervened, purchased the property, and sold it to a nonprofit that would keep rents affordable.
- » In the 2022-2023 program year, IMPACT offered a series of Civic Education Classes at both Westchester West apartments and Highland Elementary School.
- » In FY23, IMPACT Sports continued to provide free, high-quality recreational soccer to youth in the Long Branch, Wheaton, Aspen Hill and East County areas of Montgomery County.



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

To overcome the mistrust and fear that lead to fractured and divided communities, we create human-centered spaces to help diverse people connect and build relationships of trust and respect across lines of difference.

Spotlight on Kassaye Abaydres

Seed pods, nutrients, water, light, and a tabletop hydroponics unit make it possible for **KASSAYE ABAYDRES** and her family to grow fresh herbs and vegetables year-round in their Takoma Park apartment. Since joining IMPACT's hydroponics project in the spring of 2022, Kassaye has been part of a small group of residents supporting each other in learning and mastering this sustainable way of growing food.



So, what is hydroponic gardening? It is a soil-free method of gardening that uses a water-based, nutrient-rich solution to nourish plants. IMPACT Network Builders Sara Mussie and Oneyda Hernandez recognized the promise of soil-free gardening as helpers in an urban gardening project led by our partners at Clifton Park Baptist Church (CPBC). While CPBC's project used tall vertical towers for growing, Sara and Oneyda knew that if they wanted to start a similar project with apartment-dwellers, they would need something more compact.

"We saw using these small tabletop hydroponic units as a way of promoting a culture of home gardening for people without much outdoor space," Oneyda explained. Another goal of the project was to bring diverse residents together through a new learning experience. In addition to Kassaye, Zoila Vasquez, Nuvia Avila, and Tori Bell joined the project. As participants, they were supplied with tabletop hydroponic units, nutrient solution, water filtration systems (to provide clean water as a base for the liquid nutrients), and seeds of their choosing.

Since the project was launched during the pandemic and the tabletop units, while small, aren't easily portable, Oneyda decided to meet with the women bi-monthly via Zoom. These virtual gatherings, which are still ongoing, are a time for exchanging ideas, offering encouragement, and providing technical assistance. Additionally,

Kassaye, Zoila, Nuvia and Tori created and have maintained a WhatsApp group to stay in touch and share successes and challenges. Because Kassaye speaks Amharic, Zoila and Nuvia speak Spanish, and Tori speaks English, they use Google Translate to overcome language barriers on the app.



"It was really helpful being part of a group," Kassaye explained via interpreter. "We share pictures and talk about how well our plants are doing," she added. A quick scan of their WhatsApp thread shows they also share lots of advice and recipes! Kassaye and the other women have been growing a variety of vegetables and herbs including basil, cilantro, tomatoes, lettuce, and kale. When asked why she wanted to participate in this project Kassaye said, "I love gardening and this is a low-cost way to give my family organic vegetables." It's worth noting that Kassaye hopes that in the future she can grow enough vegetables to be able to share with her neighbors.

Spotlight on Susana Vega

To say **SUSANA VEGA** makes piñatas is an understatement. Her creations are more like cardboard pieces of art. She sells her piñatas on Facebook Marketplace at Dale-daleSuxpiñatas. It's hard to believe she completed IMPACT's piñata making class just last May!

Susana is originally from Mexico City, Mexico where piñatas are a traditional part of the culture. "When I was a child, I learned to make piñatas using a paste made from water and flour," she explained. Susana once again tried her hand at making pinatas after moving to the U.S. and settling in the Glenmont area of Wheaton with her husband and two children. However, in her new home, she couldn't successfully replicate the process she learned as a child. So, when she heard about IMPACT's piñata making classes via Whatsapp, she signed up.



IMPACT's classes are part of our Community Trade Academy (CTA), community-based training that helps residents build supportive networks while gaining skills for employment and/or starting small businesses. An important element of the CTA is that students learn skills that can quickly and easily be turned into small businesses or employment opportunities. Susana's 10-week piñata class was taught by fellow Wheaton resident Silvia Argueta at a space generously offered by Hughes United Methodist Church.



Susana described her classes as fun and inspirational, noting the supportive vibe of the classroom. "I made a lot of friends through the class. When I was with the other mothers, we talked about our families and any issues we were having. Sometimes we gave each other helpful advice," she explained.

Once Susana completed the class, she launched her small business on social media. In addition to selling on Facebook, she is also on Instagram at Daledale_Suxpiñatas. Susana sells six to seven piñatas weekly. "Normally, people send me a picture of what they want and I'm able to just make it," she shares with a humility that belies her talent. She explains that it usually takes about two days to make each creation. Most orders are for birthdays, but Susana shared that she once received an order from a church that wanted piñatas of the saints.

Today, Susana sells piñatas full-time, allowing her to provide important supplemental income to her family. She especially appreciates the convenience of her small business. "Making pinatas is a way I can make money while working from home," she says. Susana has big aspirations for her business. "My dream is to one day create a party store where I can sell my piñatas and other party supplies." In the meantime, in addition to her thriving virtual business, Susana is the new teacher for IMPACT's piñata class!



BOOSTING ECONOMIC POWER

Our neighborhood programs in marginalized communities help build stronger economic growth and stability, including providing incubator support for new and emerging worker cooperatives in communities of color. Worker-ownership in particular is a proven way to close the wealth divide, build assets for worker-owners, and help create a more thriving local economy.

IMPACT is grateful for the generous support of all of our funders and the collaborative relationships that have developed through these partnerships:

Adventist HealthCare

Aldi Cares

Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Christ Congregational Church

Eat the Change

Greater Washington Community Foundation

Hughes United Methodist Church

if, A Foundation for Radical Possibility

Leveling the Playing Field

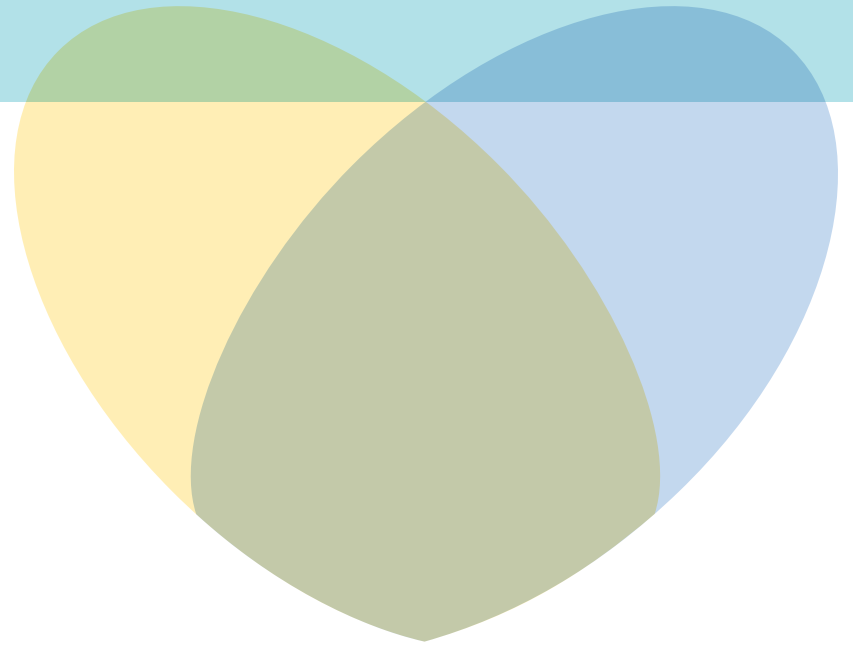
Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation

Meltzer Employee Giving Fund

Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy

Montgomery County Government

Westmoreland Congregational UCC



Thank you to the **over 200** network members who made donations to IMPACT Silver Spring in FY23. We consider you partners in our work towards a more equitable and just Montgomery County.

Recurring donations help us plan and budget our program year. Thank you to our recurring donors for your continued support.

Thank you to the members of our staff and board of directors for your care, enthusiasm, and hard work this program year!

**IMPACT Staff
(program year 2023)**

Fekadu Adbeb
*Christopher Beard
Keren Cabral
Daniel Centeno
Javier Chavez
Kyree Clark
Carmen Hernandez
Oneyda Hernandez
Harold Hill
Renée Katz
Wilfredo Medrano
Eneshal Miller
Sara Mussie
Yesenia Regalado
Michael Rubin
Valerie Salazar
Lanita Whitehurst

*Joined the staff in September 2023.

**IMPACT Board
of Directors**

Nanette Alvey
Daniel Gebrie
Jenny Hoffpauir
Paul Purnell
Izola Shaw
Tia Taylor



25 YEARS IN 2024!

Mark your calendar for
IMPACT's 25th anniversary celebration
happening on May 16, 2024.
Look for more details coming soon!



8807 Colesville Road, LL
Silver Spring, MD 20910

www.impactsilverspring.org
(301) 298-5117 / info@impactsilverspring.org

