

Celebrating 25 Years *of* impact SILVER SPRING

2024 Network Report

From *the* Executive Directors

Dear Friends,

2024 was a transformative year for our team. Not only did we celebrate 25 years as an organization – a remarkable feat in and of itself – but we also embraced a defining shift in how we operate. Meanwhile, we continued to bolster our programs, furthered our plans for expansion throughout Montgomery County, and reached thousands of neighbors with our affirming programs and services.

First, the big news. Our board of directors – with the full support of our team – voted unanimously to transition our operations to a co-leadership approach, aligning more closely with who we are and what we value.

The shift to a co-leadership model was a natural progression for IMPACT. Over the past several years, staff have engaged in research, discussions, and workshops aimed at implementing changes that would incorporate shared decision-making and move us towards a less hierarchical structure. **Each of us is accountable for the success of our respective programs and responsibilities, yet we're just as accountable to each other. That commitment is critical to meeting our strategic goals and realizing our vision of a racially and economically equitable Montgomery County.**

Ultimately, everything we do comes down to empowerment; our work has *always* been about inspiring our participants to recognize their potential and become the leaders we know they can be. That same philosophy influenced IMPACT's decision to pivot into a co-leadership model. And though we are responsible for representing the organization as its



executive directors, we view ourselves as part of a team working toward common goals.

2024 also saw us make strides in our three key focuses: dismantling racism, economic empowerment, and creating connections in the community.

We hosted both in-person and virtual sessions exploring inner work as a component of ending racism. We launched the Collective Business Alliance (CBA), an offshoot of our popular Community Trade Academy (CTA). As always, our Network Builders were engaged and ready to meet the needs of our community and respond accordingly with services and support whenever appropriate.

A quarter of a century of operation will inevitably mean changes. We welcomed the positive and affirming changes we experienced in 2024, but also want to acknowledge what *didn't* change. **The foundation that sustains our organization will never crack, and our dedication to our community will never waver.** We are as eager as ever to stand with our network and help bring out the very best in Montgomery County.

In solidarity,

Renée Katz
Co-Executive Director

Valerie Salazar
Co-Executive Director

About Us

We are a human-centered network taking on the root causes of racial and economic disparities.

IMPACT Silver Spring was founded in 1999 as a source of empowerment and connection for our neighbors throughout Montgomery County.

You can find our team of Network Builders in East County, Gaithersburg, Long Branch, and Wheaton, areas historically impacted by inequities but also brimming with grassroots leadership. As a collective, we help create opportunities for our neighbors that embolden them to become engaged network members.

Our staff encompasses a rich spectrum of identities and lived experiences, which makes us as dynamic and multifaceted as the neighbors we work alongside. As a small yet mighty team of changemakers, we are committed to fostering deep relationship-building that leads to a transformation in Montgomery County.



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Isabel Salinas
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Lanita Whitehurst
Senior Fellow for Network Building and Strategy





Celebrating **25 Years** of Community, Momentum, and Empowerment

On May 16, we held our annual IMPACT Now event, which celebrated our 25th anniversary and introduced Valerie (Val) Salazar and Renée Katz as our new Co-Executive Directors.

Longtime members of the IMPACT community, Val and Renée expressed their excitement about stepping into their new leadership roles and reaffirmed their commitment to shared leadership as a model for democracy and liberation. Their remarks set the tone for an evening that honored the past while looking ahead to the future.

The event also welcomed local dignitaries, including Congressman Jamie Raskin's office, representative Kathleen Connor, and County Councilmembers Kate Stewart, Will Jawando, and Gabe Albornoz, who recognized IMPACT's contributions with a formal proclamation.

The night was filled with energy and celebration, thanks in part to outstanding performances from local artists. Guests were treated to the lively movements of Sabor Latino, Gaithersburg High School's award-winning Latin Dance Team, and the soulful Flamenco guitar stylings of Torcuato Zamora. Later

in the evening, the crowd was captivated by the music of Munit Mesfin, an Ethiopian-American artist blending Ethio-Soul with jazz and reggae influences. A special thanks to all the performers for adding joy, rhythm, and artistry to this memorable evening.

The highlight of the night was the *Momentum Awards*, which honored six community members and groups making a significant impact in Montgomery County. These awards recognize outstanding volunteerism, advocacy, and grassroots leadership in the areas where IMPACT works—East County, Gaithersburg, Long Branch, and Wheaton—as well as in the fields of economic empowerment and racial justice. As each awardee took the stage, their stories of resilience and action underscored the power of network building and collective momentum.

IMPACT Now 2024 was not just a celebration of IMPACT's history but a reaffirmation of its vision of strong, interconnected communities where everyone can thrive.

2024 Momentum Award Recipients

Community Builders at Spring Parc

A group of Spring Parc Apartments tenants and their supporters working to improve conditions and build relationships.

Luz Chavez Gonzalez

A community organizer empowering undocumented youth.

Montgomery Community Investment Cooperative

An immigrant-led cooperative providing the capital and support needed to create and grow small businesses.

Park Montgomery Residents Council Executive Committee

Grassroots organizers of a newly launched tenants association in Long Branch.

Dr. Tasnuva Khan

Founder of Faith Alliance for Community Equity & Sustainability (FACES).

Víctor Henriquez

An extraordinary volunteer supporting community gardening and youth sports in Wheaton.

Economic Empowerment



The majority of our economic programs are led by Co-Executive Director **Valerie Salazar** (left) and Senior Network Builder **Carmen Hernandez** (right).

At IMPACT, we believe boosting economic power for those in historically marginalized communities can be a potent way to promote equity and justice. We've witnessed increased economic power leading to greater access to resources, opportunities, influence, and the space to simply exhale.

For 2024, our key vehicles for boosting economic power have continued to be our Community Trade Academy (CTA) and the technical assistance and incubation we provide to worker cooperatives.

Our CTA, a grassroots program operating in Wheaton, is designed to provide immigrant adults

with the know-how to strengthen existing and launch new microenterprises. Beyond teaching handcrafts like piñata- and jewelry-making, both rooted in cultural traditions, students also gain crucial business knowledge and computer skills.

IMPACT Senior Network Builder Carmen Hernandez, who stewards the CTA, is also intentional about teaching residents the value of social capital, building networks of support and exchange, and leveraging relationships with trusted partners. We believe the addition of relational soft skills is one of the things that sets the CTA apart from other economic education initiatives.

Our work this past year also included supporting cooperatives like the Montgomery Community Investment Cooperative (MCIC). MCIC is an immigrant-led cooperative that uses collective savings to provide capital and support for emerging and more established small businesses in Montgomery County. 2024 saw us seeding the Collective Business Alliance (CBA), an offshoot of the CTA. Carmen worked tirelessly throughout the year to support the group of immigrant women graduates of the CTA who decided to come together to form the CBA and work cooperatively in support of each other's small businesses.

Highlights



CTA graduate Susana Vega was featured on Fox 5 Morning Show in October. Susana, now the owner of a thriving online piñata business, gave a lively piñata-making demonstration on air that included a shout-out to IMPACT Silver Spring. It's also worth noting that Susana has gone from student to teacher as she is now a CTA instructor!

We created marketplaces for microentrepreneurs to showcase their creations and services. Thanks to Carmen's efforts, we hosted a Valentine's Day Market in February and Mother's Day Market in May, both in Wheaton. These markets provided valuable opportunities for microbusiness owners to connect with customers—while charging them absolutely zero in vendor fees. While some vendors were able to earn up to \$700 per day at these markets, all of the participants benefited by gaining real-world experience and boosting visibility for their businesses. We want to thank our partners at Hughes United Methodist Church, Montgomery

County Department of Environmental Protection, and the Mid-County Regional Services Center for helping us make these markets happen.

Members of the CBA designed and ran the Barrios Mágicos (Magical Neighborhoods) exhibit at the County's Hispanic Heritage Month Festival in October. Invited by Montgomery County Government to lead the family-centered exhibition, the fifteen women of the CBA offered up cultural activities and interactive stations showcasing Latin American traditions including piñata-making, music, face-painting, and traditional games. They had a high-visibility role at a beloved community event (more than 2,500 people attended the festival), which allowed them to demonstrate the strength of cooperative business efforts and spotlight their unique talents and small enterprises.

The MCIC raised over \$22,000 in collective savings in 2024. The cooperative's ten members used those funds to support an ongoing real estate investment in Baltimore and to launch three construction projects under the MCIC name yielding a return on investment that went back into the shared savings.



In November, IMPACT hosted a celebration recognizing the 44 graduates of the CTA's fall session. Students from the piñata- and jewelry-making classes and business classes were joined by family and friends for the ceremony at the Wheaton Recreation Center. To date, over 200 community members have graduated from the CTA, with approximately 80% going on to launch their own small businesses.

Dismantling Racism



Our antiracism initiatives are planned and managed by Senior Fellow for Network Building and Strategy, **Lanita Whitehurst**.

This year, as we continued to navigate the backlash to 2020's racial reckoning, the sluggish recovery from the pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities, and the dizzying highs and lows of an election year like none other, IMPACT's racial equity and justice work was rooted in centering—both in looking inward and refocusing on the very core of racial justice: the work of ending racism.

Our commitment to inner work was shaped by what we observed, learned, and felt throughout the year. Rhonda Magee's *The Inner Work of Racial Justice* served as a guiding force, particularly her

insight that without deep self-reflection to confront unconscious conditioning, we risk perpetuating the very harm we seek to heal. This idea resonated deeply and felt deserving of our attention.

We were also drawn to a more expansive vision for IMPACT's racial equity and justice work—one that felt more aspirational than reactive. **What if, instead of looking for ways to lessen racism, we committed to ending it?** This shift in perspective felt energizing—an invitation to move from responding to challenges and into exploring possibilities.

How We Ended Racism Book Discussions

In January, we launched a three-part, in-person book discussion of *How We Ended Racism* by Justin Michael Williams and Shelly Tygielski.

The authors propose eight pillars as essential to dismantling racism within a generation. Facilitated by Lanita, the discussions encouraged participants to engage critically with the book's ideas. Across the three sessions, there was lots of thoughtful exploration, marked by good-natured disagreements and healthy skepticism.

Despite differing perspectives, the 11 participants reported finding the space valuable. After the discussions concluded in March, participant Ken Maton reflected in an email that a key takeaway for him was the *“need to co-develop empowering community spaces where deep personal work is supported and our capacity is enhanced to fully and effectively participate in the work of dismantling racism.”*

Somatic Retreats: Centering in a Time of Chaos

In July and August, IMPACT partnered with therapeutic healer and artist Hiba Haroon to offer three online mini-somatic retreats. Somatic work focuses on the body—particularly the nervous system—through practices like breathwork, yoga, poetry, and free writing. **These sessions were designed to help activists and allies stay grounded and open while navigating personal, communal, and systemic challenges.**

Hiba led sessions on *Resting to Remain Awake*, *Resourcing Ourselves*, and *Holding Our Anger*, with 43 participants attending across the three retreats. Feedback was positive, with many participants expressing appreciation for the space. One attendee shared: *“I’m grateful for these offerings and sent them to a few friends and family. Hiba is a great facilitator, and these retreats feel very relevant.”*

A New Vision Workshop: Exploring Key Inner Work Practices for Ending Racism

In September, IMPACT launched *A New Vision Workshop: Exploring Key Inner Work Practices for Ending Racism*, a five-session series designed to deepen the internal work necessary for racial justice.

Grounded in the principles of intraconnection, shadow work, and forgiveness, the workshop blended in-person and online sessions, drawing on insights from racial justice thought leaders such as Rhonda Magee, adrienne maree brown, Mpho Andrea Tutu, and John A. Powell. **At its core, the workshop emphasized that without first looking inward—examining the unhelpful beliefs we hold about ourselves and others—we remain ill-equipped to break the cycles of conditioning that perpetuate harm.**

Utilizing a variety of modalities—including presentations, homework readings, large and small group discussions, guided meditations, journaling, ceremonies, and rituals—the workshop provided a multi-dimensional learning experience. Workshop sessions were facilitated by Lanita alongside consultants Oswaldo Montoya, Molly Jackman, and Keren Cabral.

One participant reflected on the impact of the experience, sharing anonymously in a post-workshop survey: *“Post-election it feels much harder to hold on to the hope, peace, and joy we experienced in the class. But there are certainly messages of light and connection that I want to hold on to and hope for more workshops like this.”*

Connecting Communities



Network Builders **Harold Hill, Javier Chavez, Sara Mussie, Eric Moreno,** and Network Guide **Rubidia Machado.**

IMPACT has always been in the business of building connections, and our partnership with Montgomery County's Service Consolidation Hubs has provided a powerful avenue to expand that work. **While the Hubs' primary role is to provide weekly free food distributions, they have also become vibrant spaces for community-building, advocacy, and mutual support.**

IMPACT's Network Builders—embedded in the Silver Spring, East County, and Gaithersburg Hubs—go beyond helping with weekly distributions; they cultivate relationships. Our network-building approach includes linking people to resources and

services, but it's also about connecting them to opportunities, information, and, most importantly, to each other.

At the Hubs, this takes shape in multiple ways. When possible, we connect residents to helpful services through warm referrals, ensuring a smooth and supportive transition to the resources they need. We facilitate listening spaces where Hub clients share the issues that matter to them and the challenges they face. We also strengthen social ties by helping residents with shared interests, concerns, or proximity come together in circles—self-organized groups that practice mutual support and often take

collaborative action. Additionally, we serve as bridges between community members and decision-makers, creating pathways for grassroots voices to be heard by agency leaders and elected officials, and ensuring those in power stay connected to the realities of the people they serve.

All of this dynamic work—both within the Hubs and beyond—strengthens communities, deepens trust, and fosters collective action. It is made possible by the dedication and skill of our Network Builders: Harold Hill, Rubidia Machado, Sara Mussie, Javier Chavez, and Eric Moreno who carry out this work with care and commitment.

Listening Spaces

- Harold hosted listening spaces in the parking lot at The Centre at Silver Spring Apartments in East County (a Hub site), engaging with 72 residents. He shared their concerns and issues directly with their Councilmember.
- Javier hosted a listening space at the Gaithersburg Hub for immigrant parents of children with special needs. One mother with a special needs teenager was able to secure much-needed adult diapers for her child as a direct result of the session.
- Sara hosted a listening space at the Silver Spring Hub for community members concerned about the threat of mass deportations. Seventeen people attended, and in response to their concerns, IMPACT and the Hub partnered to launch a series of *Know Your Rights* trainings.

Circles

Bolivian Circle

Supported by Javier, this group of 18 Bolivian immigrants and counting stays connected through a WhatsApp group and in-person gatherings. They provide mutual support by sharing information, strengthening social ties, and assisting each other with practical needs like car rides and help with home repairs.

Park Montgomery Residents Council

Coached by Sara, nine residents of Park Montgomery Apartments in Long Branch formed a committee with the goal of establishing a tenants association at their complex. Now with over 60 members, the association has already successfully advocated for key improvements, including repaired walkways, better lighting, and increased security.

Electricians Circle

After helping bring a free electrician training program for newcomers (those who've been in the country less than two years) to Gaithersburg, Javier supported the 12 graduates in forming a mutual support circle. Three members have already secured jobs with a subcontractor, with one graduate helping the other two get hired.

Pathways to Access

In 2024, we expanded access to vital opportunities at the Hubs, helping bring free English language classes, job readiness training, food and nutrition workshops, and electrician training to the community—positively impacting 235 individuals. Additionally, in partnership with the Silver Spring Hub, we co-sponsored two Health Fairs, providing more than 600 community members with equitable access to essential health and wellness resources.

In 2024, IMPACT continued to provide a financially, geographically, and linguistically accessible soccer program serving elementary and middle school youth in the Long Branch and Wheaton areas of Montgomery County. IMPACT Soccer is a much-needed activity in Montgomery County where children can enjoy character-building and positive competition in a safe environment. At the same time, it provides parents with opportunities to connect with additional IMPACT programs and resources.

Our Supporters *and* Funders

In 2024, 104 individuals donated to our work. We thank them for helping us sustain our established programs while providing us with the freedom to expand.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the organizations and companies that continue to fund our work:



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Community Feedback



“IMPACT Silver Spring helped my community by empowering our women, teaching our young ones about education and career opportunities, and showing us how to voice our concerns to our apartment management.”

— Park Montgomery Apartments Resident

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to take the workshops. Thank you for your great work.”

— Community Trade Academy Participant



“I feel more aware of myself and educated on a different level working with the MCIC. ”

— Montgomery Community Investment Cooperative (MCIC) Participant



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