

THE BOTTOM KNOXVILLE

ANNUAL

REPORT

2020



**THE
BOTTOM**



BUILDING COMMUNITY CELEBRATING CULTURE ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY

— OUR STORY



Named after the Black neighborhood and business center in East Knoxville that was demolished by urban renewal in the 1950s, The Bottom was established in January 2020 as a multi-use community space. Dr. Enkeshi El-Amin, a local sociologist studying race and place and Black communities, was inspired to build The Bottom after her research on Black Knoxville revealed resounding themes of Black dispossession and displacement. The Bottom was conceptualized as a justice and equity project centered on space reclamation, reimagination and transformation. Given the historical obstacles for Black Knoxvilleans to claim space, a collective effort is required to hold Black space in Knoxville and to engage in place making practices. Recognizing historic and systemic injustices that have indirectly impacted Black people and places is also required to respond and heal from related trauma.

The mission of the Bottom is to build community, celebrate culture and engage the creativity of Black people through curated events, ongoing projects, shared resources and physical space. At the Bottom, community leaders, artists, university faculty and students, cultural workers, activists and more can blend culture, politics and social history in smart, strategic and engaging ways. We strive to cultivate a sense of belonging and safety for Black people who come from different class, religious, sexual orientation and gender backgrounds.

OUR MISSION —



BOOKSHOP AT THE BOTTOM

In the present moment when people all over the country are reconciling with and addressing generations of racial inequality, Black bookstores are particularly crucial. In addition to making Black history, culture and experiences accessible to the general population, Black bookshops cater to the community and provide a space to not only read, but to also discuss literature. Bookshop at The Bottom is an independent bookshop and writing space for writers, artists, activists, creatives and others. Our specially curated collection is Black affirming, empowering and authored literature for all ages.

Our bookshop is registered with American Booksellers Association, and in addition to our physical store, we have an [online shop](#) affiliated with Bookshop.org. We built a relationship with Union Ave Books, a locally established independent bookshop, and partnered together to host our first authors' discussion with Deesha Philyaw, whose writing on race, parenting, gender, and culture has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Harvard Review, ESPN's The Undeclared, Ebony magazine, and various anthologies. We look forward to continuously increasing our book inventory and expanding our platform for additional authors' talks and community dialogues.



COMMUNITY PODCAST STUDIO



We received funding this year from Highlander Center's We Shall Overcome Fund that allowed us to begin building our podcast studio. We're looking to secure additional funding in 2021 in order to fully operate and open our studio doors to the community.

Race remains a major marker of inequality and injustice in America and concurrently, the media often perpetuates the racial order. Traditionally, the media has been dominated by white voices; white experiences have been prioritized and people of color are often ignored, misrepresented or dehumanized in media portrayals. New forms of media and/or critical media platforms can serve as powerful tools for anti-racist work and work that otherwise challenges the racist social order. Podcasting is a new form of media that introduces voices that are often left out, engages new perspectives and experiences, and challenges misrepresentations of racial minorities in media. Given that the Black community in Knoxville has largely existed invisibly, with their stories often being ignored locally and nationally, The Community Podcast Studio is an initiative that seeks to provide a space for counter narratives. We are working to support local African Americans and other independent audio makers by providing a professional recording studio and offering hands-on podcast training. The project aims to create accessible and affordable entry points for new audio makers, and to activate an inclusive DIY audio community in Knoxville.

Recognizing that recording/production resources are often expensive and hard to find, yet are essential for quality sounding audio, the podcast studio would provide professional recording equipment for audio makers otherwise lacking such access. Our training would involve everything from editing and interviewing to sound design and marketing. We will coordinate regular hands-on training for makers of all levels. Additionally, the studio will foster a gathering place for podcasters, radio reporters, oral historians, sound artists, musicians and more to network and support each other.

SEW IT SELL IT

Sew It Sell It is a sewing and entrepreneurship program that provides children ages 12 to 16 with the opportunity to express their creativity, learn a vocational skill and develop a sense of self-reliance by sewing and selling a product. Through Sew It Sell It, students design a product and conceptualize a micro business around that product. No prior sewing skills are necessary and all equipment and supplies for the program are provided to students free of cost. In addition to learning the basics of sewing through a number of workshops led by business professionals, university professors, local entrepreneurs and community leaders, the students learn business and professional skills like branding, marketing, and giving a great pitch.

For many young people, this program is an introduction to careers in fashion or related business industries, and for others it is a great way to generate income while still in school or looking to pay for college. In both cases, the children are being prepared to thrive economically and professionally. This was our second year organizing this program and it is our hope to keep the program going by bringing in new cohorts of children. We are planning to expand the program beyond one summer so that students can advance their sewing skills, exposing them to other opportunities such as custom fabric design workshops and internships with sewing based businesses and organizations. We are also looking to create a Sew It Sell It curriculum that can be used for fundraising purposes in the future.

Our summer 2020 program welcomed 10 new participants. Over the course of 4 weeks, they learned to sew, received their own machine, developed a micro-brand and sold their products to the community.





BEAUFORD DELANEY SCREENING

Black in Appalachia & East Tennessee PBS presented a short biography of the Knoxville-born artist Beauford Delaney. Beauford Delaney was born in 1901 and contributed to the canon of unique artwork during the Harlem Renaissance. Delaney became one of the world's most influential abstract expressionists. This documentary explored his life in Tennessee, Paris, and Harlem, and informed the community of how these experiences informed his artistry.

BROWN GIRLS BRUNCH

This Brown Girls Brunch provided a space to connect and opened a dialogue on radical self-care. In addition to supporting a local black-owned caterer, this was an opportunity to meet new friends, grow social networks and enjoy the company of other Black women.



JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 was not enforced country-wide until June 19, 1865 when Union General Gordon Granger led troops to Galveston, TX to announce the Civil War had ended and slaves had been freed. Our Juneteenth celebration was a parking lot expression of love and culture. We had a DJ, a food pop-up booth and a free seed give away and community gardening experience provided by local gardeners.





BLACK CREATIVES MEET UP

Our Black Creatives Meetup was presented by Harper's Naturals LLC, The Women In Jazz Jam Festival and our Sew It Sell It program. It was a time to expand creative networks, share resources, listen to stories from fellow makers and hear new music from local artists.

MAGGIE LEE'S FISH FRY

Maggie Lee's Fish Fry was an ongoing event held in partnership with Knoxville's Black Mama's Bail Out, a community-based movement working to end systems of pretrial detention and cash bail with a focus on freeing Black mothers and caregivers. Held every first Friday from July to November, these events provided an opportunity to support black-led organizations while enjoying delicious Louisiana style catfish from Get'cha Po-boy.



SEW IT SELL IT MARKET DAY

Sew It Sell It Market Day is the culmination of our Sew It Sell It summer program, a camp-style initiative where children learn to sew and acquire the skills and abilities to start home-based sewing micro businesses. On this second annual market day, ten participants set up booths in our parking lot to vend their products. Over 75 customers and community supporters came out and all ten participants sold out of their products!





BBQ & BOOKS AT THE BOTTOM

We officially opened our bookshop in the summer of this year. Although the COVID-19 pandemic added a bit of strain to our bookshop operations, our BBQ & Books events were a success. We were able to spread the word about our new bookshop, welcome many new first-time customers to our space, hold book give-aways and support a local bbq chef.

SPRUCE UP DAYS

Our Spruce Up days invited the community to help us paint, polish floors, build shelves and reorganize our space. As a thanks for giving their time, we provided volunteers with lunch and stretching and mobility activities from Yellow Optimist Fitness. We even had a volunteer that came as far from Asheville to lend a hand!



ZORA NEALE HURSTON READ-IN

As one of our very first events, this Zora Neale Hurston read-in was a celebration of the author's birthday and legacy. We gathered with the community to learn about her life, read some of her words and partake in inspired conversations.

EVENTS & PROGRAMMING



AUTHORS' TALK: DEESHA PHILYAW

Bookshop at the Bottom partnered with Union Ave Books to welcome author Deesha Philyaw, who was shortlisted for the 2020 National Book Award in Fiction, to present her debut book of stories: *The Secret Lives Of Church Ladies*. Joined in conversation with Arianna Rebolini, Books Editor at BuzzFeed News, this talk was offered to the community as a free virtual event.

UNMUTED: ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we were especially reminded of how valuable and vulnerable our elderly family members are. Whether communicating with them in person or virtually, we wanted to help our community preserve memories, stories & family oral history for generations to come. We partnered with Black In Appalachia to offer this UNMUTED project as a series of workshops and interview guides that will culminate with a capstone project in early 2021.

UNMUTED: a virtual oral history project



KWANZAA OPEN MIC NIGHT

Kwanzaa, meaning first fruits in Swahili, is an African American and Pan-African holiday created in 1966 as a way to bring African American communities together. Celebrating family, community and culture through a weeklong observance of principles, we partnered with Knoxville Kwanzaa to host a virtual open mic on the second day, Kujichagulia (self-determination). We invited the community to share how they define themselves through art and spoken words.

MILESTONES & ACHIEVEMENTS

BUSINESS INCUBATION

Throughout our first year, the Bottom has served the community in a multitude of uses. Our space continues to transform depending on community needs —we may be a makers workshop, gathering space, research lab, art gallery, party space or a meeting place. Among hosting and organizing numerous events, some of our proudest moments came from utilizing our space as a business incubator for local Black startups, including a new tutoring and literacy service for Black children, two restaurant pop-ups and a fitness program, with a place to test, launch and grow their businesses. Additionally, the Bottom has been a resource for creative groups such as a local dance troop and band in need of a place to practice during the pandemic. Having the much needed space to conduct their work has economic, social and political implications for community members who might not otherwise have this access.

BUILDING A TEAM

During the first half of the year, The Bottom operated as a one-woman show produced by founding director Dr. Enkeshi El-Amin, who simultaneously worked as a full-time lecturer at UT Knoxville and cohost of Black In Appalachia's podcast. The Bottom then welcomed its first intern, Ty Murray (a local artist and community activist), who after dedicating her time, creativity and administrative expertise, began to volunteer as our Community Operations Manager. As Ty looks forwards to fulfilling this role as a full time employee in 2021, we are working to implement a running internship program. In addition, we have recruited an advisory board full of empowering community leaders, and are happy to welcome Brandi Augustus, Charice Starr, Ingrid Ruffin and Kelle Jolly as our 2021 members.

STATE INCORPORATION

The Bottom was initially founded in January 2020 as a community-based initiative to combat resounding feelings of displacement and loss of space in Knoxville's Black community. Over the course of this year, our multi-use space has transformed into a nonprofit organization that fosters change, provides comfort and connects with the local black community. On November 23, we were officially incorporated with the state of TN, and are currently awaiting approval of our 501(c)(3) status from the federal government.

EXPANDING OUR REACH & SOCIAL PRESENCE

When The Bottom started at the beginning of the year, we had yet to formally establish an online presence. Our first social media account, Instagram, was created in February and by July we reached 100 followers. With branding and digital communication assistance from community volunteers, we were able to launch our official logo, website and newsletter this summer. Social media platforms have transformed the way that nonprofits and businesses communicate with audiences. Through constant postings and brand consistency, we've been able to share our story virtually, increase awareness about our work, engage new supporters and kickstart fundraising efforts.

Over the course of a year, we have:

- Reached 1,000 instagram followers
- Gained 200 organic newsletter subscribers
- Acquired 1,500 unique website visitors
- Attracted event participants from as far as the United Kingdom
- Been featured in over 10 news stories

MEDIA & PRESS COVERAGE



"Knoxville sociologist to open space designed for Black creatives, makers"

"A local sociologist whose research has focused on the Black community in Appalachia has plans to open a unique space in Knoxville."

"The Bottom" will include a podcast studio, meeting rooms, a community classroom, and its flagship project; a bookstore that features Black authors. El-Amin also relocated her Sew It Sell It kids camp to the venue. At the moment, El-Amin is funding the project out of her own pocket. "We're hoping that people will support us by buying the books or using the podcast studio. We'll probably bring in some local art and other things that can help to generate income to keep the space going," El-Amin said."



"Professor creates The Bottom: a community space for Knoxville's Black community"

"A professor has created a space for Knoxville's Black community to make connections, foster their creativity, and find their place in a larger community."

As a sociologist, Enkeshi El-Amin has researched and studied the Black experience in America, and more specifically, the Black experience in Knoxville. Through her research, she says she has found that there is a common feeling of being out of place; a feeling she says she has experienced herself.

"I want people to feel like this is a hub for them to be plugged in. I want people to feel safe and to feel welcome and to feel part of a larger community here," El-Amin said.



"The Bottom: no obstacles in a former Black community"

"Right now, on Randolph Street near the site of a historic African American community, Dr. Enkeshi El-Amin is making a space. As a maker and member of the Mayor's Maker City Council, she sees firsthand the need for community. Named The Bottom, after the long-gone neighborhood, it's "intended to be space for community building, cultural expression and creativity,"

"But the reasons behind Black Knoxville's feelings of disenfranchisement, says El-Amin, are many and complex, and at their heart lies a history of displacement due to urban renewal and gentrification – a conclusion she reached in her doctoral dissertation. That's what drives her to create a maker space specific to people of color."



"40 Under 40: Enkeshi El-Amin is bringing Knoxville's Black community together at The Bottom."

"Each 40 Under 40 class is special. This 14th iteration may, indeed, be the most special of all. In a year fraught with all the challenges we could have never imagined, these 40 individuals have accomplished goals, moved mountains, and broken barriers."

"The 40 Under 40 class of 2020 is full of leaders, innovators and community servants. While perhaps not many of us will mark 2020 as our favorite ever year, these 40 individuals can mark it as a year of overcoming immense obstacles."

"Enkeshi El-Amin is a community creator. As someone who came to Knoxville not knowing where she fit in for a long time, El-Amin is committed to helping others like her find a place and a support system that will warmly welcome all Knoxville's."

MEDIA & PRESS COVERAGE

Torchbearer

The Magazine of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

"While preparing for her first year as a faculty member, El-Amin launched Sew It Sell It, a sewing camp that teaches crafts and entrepreneurship skills to children eight to 15 years old. This year she also founded The Bottom, a community space for Black creatives named for the historically Black Knoxville neighborhood lost to urban renewal in the 1950s. Like other trailblazers who came before her—the ones who took the Volunteer Creed to heart and got to work—El-Amin saw the need for a bridge between academia and the community, and she built it, recruiting others to help her along the way."

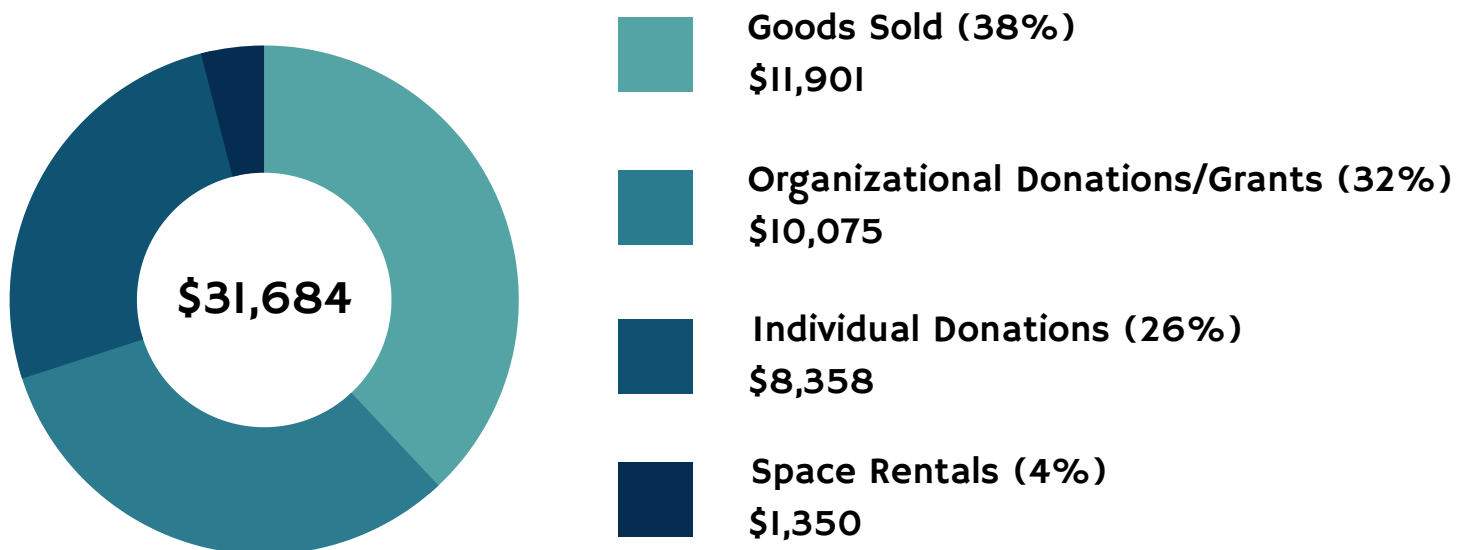
"Black people who were born here or have been in the city a while have had to burrow their own paths," says Charles Lomax, a second-generation Knoxvillean and director of community empowerment for the City of Knoxville. "When you're relocating to Knoxville for college or a job, you're going to seek out that space where you can gather and find like-minded, passionate people. This is really a game changer for the city." Lomax believes The Bottom will play a crucial role in the retention of Black professionals in the area."

"It took a long time to find my path," says El-Amin. "Now that I'm here, I want to bring people together and show them what's possible. I want them to feel welcome and seen—to feel like their voices and stories do matter."



Annual Income Statement

A summary of our sources of income in 2020



The Bottom operates as a community space in more ways than one. We feel honored to know that our community values our efforts and the work that we have set out to do. So many individuals and organizations have supported The Bottom through in kind donations, as well as through financial support and purchases.

The work that we were able to do this year, as we began to build The Bottom, is a complete product and expression of our community's investment in this space. We look forward to tripling our impact as well as our financial income in 2021.

Financial Supporters



United Way
of Greater Knoxville



**Randy Boyd
Foundation**



Office of Community Engagement and Outreach
Office of Equity & Diversity

Community Partners



BLACK BUSINESS
DIRECTORY





The Bottom proclaims space for Black people to build community, celebrate culture, encourage creativity and share our history -- together! We host events and lead programming through community initiation and need. Furthermore, what we do reflects who we are and what we need to thrive in Knoxville, which is more Black determined spaces.

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Dr. Enkeshi El-Amin, Founding Director
Ty Murray, Community Operations Manager
Brandi Augustus, Advisory Board
Charice Starr, Advisory Board
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