

COMMUNITY • CULTURE • CREATIVITY



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

# BEHIND THE BOTTOM



## OUR STORY

Founded by Dr. Enkeshi El-Amin, a local sociologist studying race, place, and Black Communities, The Bottom was named after the first Black neighborhood in Knoxville that was demolished by urban renewal and institutionalized racism in the 1950s. El-Amin conducted interviews and archival research and found resounding feelings of displacement and loss of place amongst Knoxville's Black elders and youth. She wanted to do more than just conduct a study, she wanted to make an impact, and thus the idea of The Bottom began to take form.

Dr. El-Amin's efforts joined those of Brandi Augustus, Pumpkin Starr, and Ty Murray of Black Mama's Bail Out along with Jazmin Witherspoon and other Black women in Knoxville who also sought to do meaningful work. Today, The Bottom stands as a collective working to reclaim and reimagine Black space in Knoxville. What initially started with a youth sewing and entrepreneurial program in 2019, has grown into a hub of Black culture and togetherness. With the support of our community, our space has grown to include a tea room, podcast studio, expanded sewing studio, and bookstore. With the belief that Blackness is neither essentialist nor static, but relational, dynamic and changeable, The Bottom stands as a multi-use place to foster change and provide a sense of Black safety. The Bottom welcomes locals and newcomers to town.

## OUR MISSION

The Bottom is a nonprofit cultural organization serving our community through our Black-affirming bookshop and arts programming. Rooted in place justice, we stand to build **community**, celebrate **culture**, and engage the **creativity** of Black people in Knoxville. We strive to cultivate a sense of belonging, togetherness and safety for Black people in Knoxville and beyond.

# MEET THE TEAM



## ENKESHI EL-AMIN

Enkeshi El-Amin is a community sociologist in Atlanta, Georgia. She is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology & Anthropology at Agnes Scott College. Her research, exploring the link between race and place, is focused on how racial practices shape Black places and how Black people in turn are involved in practices that define, contest, and reimagine places.

**FOUNDING DIRECTOR**



## TY MURRAY

Ty Murray is a multi-faceted artist and activist. As a modern day Renaissance woman rooted in the rural south, her art reflects who she is, where she's from and what she aspires to see in the world. She chooses to create art that challenges, art that confronts, art that is loud, bold, colorful and soulful. She wears many hats, but works to elevate The Bottom as an arts and cultural center for Black creatives.

**DIRECTOR OF ART & COMMUNICATION**



## ANNASTASIA WILLIAMS

Annastasia has always enjoyed reading from an early age, and is an avid reader and lover of books. As the Bookstore Manager, Annastasia curates the inventory at the Bookshop to highlight Black authors and Black-centered stories for all ages. Outside of The Bottom, Annastasia works for a non-profit study abroad organization called CIEE, assisting college students with realizing their dreams of having an international experience.

**BOOKSHOP DIRECTOR**



## KALIL WHITE

Kalil White realized at an early age that she had a passion for nature and community development. She received her Bachelors of Science in Biology with a concentration in Environmental Sustainability from Georgia Southern University in 2018 and her Masters of Science in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications from University of Tennessee in 2021.

**DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**

# MEET THE TEAM



## GABBIE JACKSON

Gabbie studied at The University of Memphis, majoring in journalism and she is now an author with emphasis in children's literature. Working in the mental health field, Gabbie has found interest in how the psychological effects of childhood trauma determine how people navigate love, life, and relationships. She also helps those struggling with substance abuse at local recovery centers. Gabbie enjoys reading, writing, watching TV, and spending time with family and friends.

**OPERATIONS  
COORDINATOR**



## MADISON PAYNE

Being born and raised in Memphis has helped Madison recognize the importance of establishing safe spaces for Black people to build community with one another, which is why she is so grateful for the community she has found at The Bottom. In addition to creating content for social media, Madison enjoys spending her free time making Youtube videos, modeling, and acting.

**COMMUNICATIONS  
COORDINATOR**



## DASH LEE

"Do what U can, when U can, while U can"

These famous words are straight from the mouth of our resident "funchle" Dash Lee, who is a man of many talents! Among being a local chef and contractor, he has a background in youth empowerment and engagement, and also serves as the sound engineer for our Community Podcast Studio.

**SOUND ENGINEER &  
SPACE MAINTENANCE**



## DANIEL CRAFT

Knoxville-based artist, Daniel Craft, has been honing his skills in the art world through mixed media. His inspiration is themed in comic book illustrations and paintings that bleed into a political/social sense of awareness. He's been drawing since he was able to pick up a pencil and attended Nossi College of Arts.

**ART DEPARTMENT & FACILITIES**

# TRANSITIONS & GROWTH

**This year was filled with growth and transitions. Our organizational leadership moved to a three-prong directorship and we welcomed two full time coordinators, along with a part time facilities and art assistant. You can read more about their experiences joining our team below.**

"I'm Daniel Craft and I work in the art section of the Bottom. I do art for various people in Knoxville, but I love doing art for the bottom cause they push me forward in developing my art skills. I love to see the community come together to enjoy things around my town. I hope in the future this will continue to grow into a beautiful thing for my children to grow up in as well." - Daniel Craft,

"I began my journey at The Bottom in February as an intern, and transitioned into a full-time staff member in August. Since starting full time, The Bottom staff has encouraged, challenged, and inspired me in more ways than one. I appreciate how I am granted a lot of creative freedom and it makes me feel trusted and respected as a staff member." - Madison Payne

"As I came on board at The Bottom, it was everything I had expected it to be. A space full of love, courage, and peace. The Bottom became my home away from home. Allowing me to share my ideas and authenticity without judgment. I often say, "The Bottom saved me." Those words hold true because The Bottom gave me the strength to create a vision for my personal and professional desires and a sense of bravery to relish in the belief that I deserve to embark on my endeavors. Looking forward, I plan to absorb an abundance of knowledge to contribute to my professional development for the betterment of The Bottom." - Gabbie Jackson



# DIRECTOR STATEMENTS

## **Read statements from our directors as they reflect on their past year with our organization:**

It has brought me so much joy to be a part of an organization and team of black women committed to amplifying the power and creativity of our people through literature and art. We have grown so much within the past year in our team and the programs we offer. One of the biggest programming highlights The Bottom has nurtured my inner child in so many ways, by just providing a welcoming black affirming space that I could have only dreamed about as a kid. I am excited to see the growth of The Bottom 5 years, 10 years, and beyond! - **Kalil White**

There is something so healing and joyful about walking into The Bottom and seeing shelves filled with works by Black authors. Literature is the great connector – it helps us better know and love ourselves, the people around us, and become familiar with other ways of life near and far. Literature is essential to our mission within the Knoxville community and essential to the liberation of Black folks. We are grateful to our community for continuing to support our Bookshop by attending events, buying books, and reading our monthly newsletter. This year, our beloved Bookshop has grown and thrived in new ways. With the addition of new staff members at The Bottom, we've been able to make our Bookshop more mobile and pop up more frequently around Knoxville and beyond, while expanding our selections in the Bookshop. We've had amazing new events and initiatives such as our Lit Kidz program, Rest is Resistance cohort, seasonal book swaps, book fairs, and informative panel discussions on banned books that have extended our reach in the community. We even got to host multi-award winning author and artist Jerry Craft to the space for an author talk and illustration demonstration! My work at The Bottom is fulfilling in so many ways – primarily it has allowed me to marry my love and passion for books and reading with activism. I'm so grateful for the roots The Bottom has allowed me to plant in East Tennessee. Looking ahead, we hope to add a staff member to assist me in managing the Bookshop so we can continue to keep pace with our growth. Happy reading! - **Annastasia Williams**

The Bottom was built by a small team who dreamed of making many big moments happen for our community. It's been beautiful to witness how the organization has blossomed, and an amazing journey of holding space for blooming artists, leaders and start ups. This year we welcomed two coordinators who have tremendously amplified The Bottom's ability to do transformative work in our community. This has been a year filled with mindful music and movement – creating and kicking off initiatives like Sadie Pearl Records, and producing the Tiny Bookshop Concert series, which showcases local talent in an intimately empowering environment. I look forward to seeing how our space continues to blossom! - **Ty Murray**

# OUR IMPACT

150

Copies of our first  
publication, Bottom  
Line, distributed

130

Youth engaged  
through  
programming

458

Volunteer hours  
logged

51

Artists leading workshops,  
performing, or exhibiting with  
The Bottom

63

Monthly Book It  
Subscribers

\$415,348.01

Raised through  
individual giving,  
in-kind donations,  
grants & awards,  
bookshop  
purchases and  
space rentals

76

Events Held

7

New partnerships  
cultivated

# IMPACT STATEMENTS

**Maggie Connolly**  
Ceramics at The Bottom Instructor

"The Bottom has allowed me to more fully explore how art can be utilized first as a catalyst for interpersonal interaction, that then ripples outwards as a community builder. Working with the Bottom has given me the opportunity to work with people similarly interested in creative self-expression, coming together and creating a more unique and expressive Knoxville. I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with this community on ideas of creative placemaking and excited to discover where it goes."

**George Habeib**  
Black Creatives Meetup Leader

"The Bottom, to me, is a sanctuary. A place where I can go and I know someone I care about, who cares about me, will be there. The Bottom was a major driving force in me moving back to Knoxville. It has helped me grow closer to my community here and has empowered me as an artist. By developing skills, experience and educating at the Bottom it has empowered me to serve my community as well."

**Jorden Albright**  
Tiny Bookshop Concert Performer

"Last night at The Bottom Knox fed my soul. Thank you for giving black artists such a cool space to share their stories!!! Thank you to everyone who has shown me and my music such love, I'm bussin at the seams!"

**Karena "Kidd" Graves**  
December 2023 Exhibiting Artist

"Omens is an exhibition that tells the shared stories about Fish Dreams and Bird symbolism within Black Folklore. The aim for this research and creative activity is to document orally shared stories in Black communities."

Thank you so much to The Bottom Knox for hosting me and my artwork this month. The reception was great and a beautiful time. Thank you so much to everyone who came out and celebrated Omens with me."



# IMPACT STATEMENTS

**Trinity Todd,**  
3rd year Sew It Sell It student

"Sew It, Sell It has allowed me to explore my creativity. I've been able to learn more about myself and what I would like to do in the community. I've learned a lot about entrepreneurship, and I've picked up a skill that no one can take away from me. This has allowed me to embrace my power as an artist. Each year I have been able to expand my sewing skills and challenge myself with a new product each year for the past three years. Last year I created bonnets and I felt the need to challenge myself this year so I created bags. The team at the bottom allowed me to expand my creativity and test my limits as a seamstress and business owner."

**Kertesha Riley,**  
Rest is Resistance Participant

"I would jokingly talk about how The Nap Ministry was haunting me because folks in my life recommended it numerous times before I saw the 'Rest is Resistance' cohort at The Bottom! But it ended up being the right time; I was finally at a point where I could begin embodying what I was learning about systemic exhaustion and how rest was integral to my wellbeing. It was so nice to be in community with other women who felt similarly - who were also learning the importance of rest. It will be a lifelong journey, but I'm grateful to the cohort for being there as I began, and to The Bottom for cultivating that space."

**Black Outside, Program Leader**

"Some of our kids were hesitant to participate in our kayaking excursions, however we quickly learned that they are naturals. My favorite memory is when one of our leaders fell off of their paddle board into the lake and could not get back on. I was too far away to quickly help her get back on. She was freaking out because this was a learning experience for us all. The participants with us that day were so courageous and remained calm and were able to escort her back on her paddleboard. I was beyond impressed that these middle school boys took initiative and helped fix a scary situation."

**LitKidz, Participant Parent**

"The Bottom is the only place in Knoxville that we can go to find an entire library of books that represent our culture, history, and imagination for our Black/Haitian toddler."

# NEW PARTNERSHIPS

**ARROWMONT**  
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND CRAFTS



 Sundress  
Publications



**WE'RE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL  
FOR EACH AND EVERY  
ORGANIZATION AND INDIVIDUAL  
WHO SUPPORTS OUR SPACE !**

# 76

**Events this year!**

Our space was created as a place for the community to gather, create, fundraise, and launch their own passions.

This year we held over 70 events! While most of these were hosted by our team, we were also excited to collaborate with outstanding organizations and individuals to make them happen.





# PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

Click Below for More!

**Sew It**  
**Sell It**

**Ceramics at the**  
**Bottom**

**Black Creatives**  
**Meetup**

**Bottom**  
**Line**

**Community**  
**Podcast**  
**Studio**

**Elandria Williams**  
**Reading &**  
**Research Room**

**Community**  
**Fellowship**

**Tiny Bookshop**  
**Concert Series**

# NEW PARTNERSHIPS

**ARROWMONT**  
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND CRAFTS



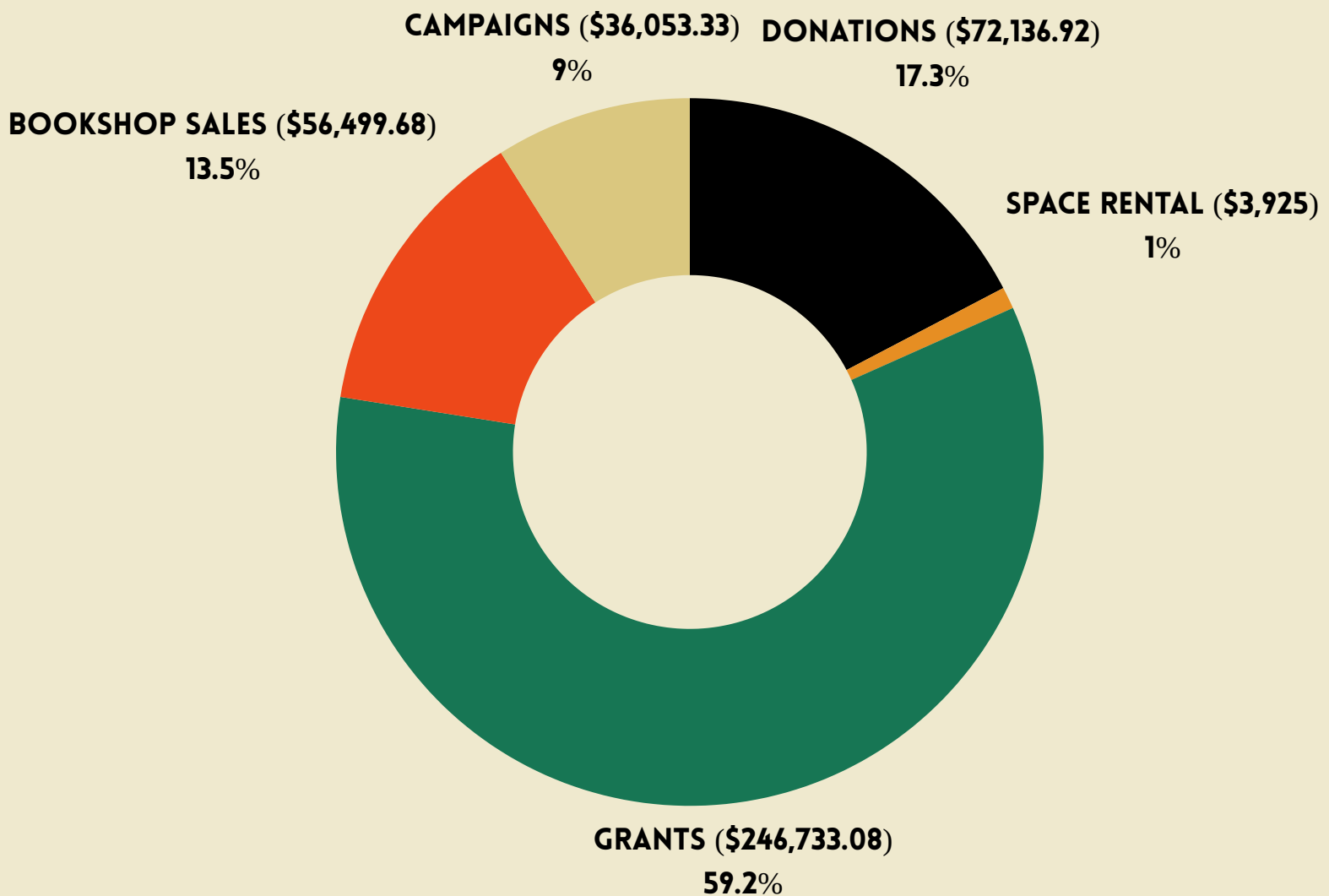
 Sundress  
Publications



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FOR EACH AND EVERY  
ORGANIZATION AND INDIVIDUAL  
WHO SUPPORTS OUR SPACE !**

# ANNUAL INCOME STATEMENT

A summary of our sources of income in 2023



This year at The Bottom was filled with growth and expansion. We are so grateful for the advocatess and funders who support our mission and help make our work possible!