



#LetUsBreathe Collective **IMPACT REPORT 2021**

Building a Black liberatory future.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR COLLECTIVE

We all began 2021 ready to move on from one of the hardest years in our lifetime; we knew we had to step up and do whatever we could to keep moving, fighting, and creating. In 2022, we renew that commitment with hope and excitement for the days ahead.

In 2021, we experienced a lot of collective grief that will impact us moving forward. The loss of Malik Jibril Alim, a beloved father and our dear comrade, brother, co-journeyer, and friend was devastating for #LUBC. We also took time to properly mourn the thousands of lives lost to police/state violence in the continued fight for liberatory justice. **Our Collective felt the deep pain of human lives lost, and this grief thrust us into a new period of purpose and a new cycle of healing and restructuring that will support us in re-envisioning our work to provide resources needed to heal and thrive.**

While we mourned, we learned to ask for help and reaffirmed our faith in collective action and community care. Engaging in mutual aid allowed us to provide for the community without suffering burnout. Thanks to these collaborative efforts, we were able to share with each other and expand our collective reach. With the support of so many partners and volunteer stewards, we continued to breathe new life into our spaces, accomplishing huge renovation projects:

- **In the Garden**, our ArtSeed program youth and teaching artists created two new murals, and we also built a greenhouse, a pond, more accessible walkways, and a chicken run with chickens that can lay as many as seventy eggs a week.

- **in care of Black women** built a site of care that included citadel objects for the Garden, a healing wheel, a solar powered relaxing chair, and an art installation.
- **Ace Design** completely renovated our apothecary, liberation lab, and courtyard at the #BreathingRoom.

We are so grateful to those who shared space, time, and resources with us. In addition to building up our spaces, our partners built up our community. Defund CPD, TBanks, and Pull Up the City hosted Soul Service at our garden and farm to support Black and Brown folks in accessing healing practices and resources. Chicago Torture Justice Center offered meaningful healing programming in our Garden with drum circles and African dance workshops. And so many more people and organizations showed up for our community during this time. Thank you to everyone who joined us in 2021—we see you and we appreciate you. **We are honored that our spaces could serve as a sanctuary in both the hard times and the good.**

Even as we mourned, we continued to fight like hell for the living so that in the present and in the future our communities are resourced and cared for. We focused a majority of our resources this year to make sure our neighbors are fed. Our #EverybodyEats program offered space and food for both local and citywide mutual aid efforts like Love Fridge, OTIS Fresh Farm Stand, and Getting Grown Collective’s “Farm. Food. Familias.” which started as an emergency response to the pandemic and continued with the uprisings; now it is something we want to keep going as long as possible. The program grew from 100 to 400 meal delivery

and grocery drop offs per week and became self-sustaining thanks to donations from the community and supplemental grant funding.

In 2022, we are deepening our work with the launch of Liberation Landing, a collaborative partnership between Su Casa, The #LetUsBreathe Collective, Frieda’s Place, and the Chicago Torture Justice Center coming together to create affirming community work and liberatory movement building. Liberation Landing will offer a wide range of services, including Somatics and Embodiment, Political Education and Coalition Building, and Spiritual Practice—just to name a few. We are honored to be building together and look forward to sharing our progress.

We will continue to show up, help where we are able, and provide an activated space for our community to grieve, heal, and celebrate our vision of liberation.

In solidarity,
#LetUsBreathe Collective

Jennifer Pagán,
Co-Director

Kwamena Jackson,
Co-Director



IMAGE: Whole World Needs Breathing Room mural at The #BreathingRoom Space, Back of the Yards, Chicago. Photo by Torie McMillian.

TRANSFORMATION AT WORK

We organize artists to love and transform themselves, their families, their communities, and their cities through radical imagination and healing. Because this work is a labor of love and collaboration, it is important to track and share the wins we have along the way—because movements are sustained by joy and hope.

2021 By the Numbers

9
volunteers
per week for
garden and
LUBC programs

12
community partners
collaborating
for healing

50+
mouths fed per
week through
Everybody Eats

1
acre of land
transformed
in the Garden

16
restorative
events held

THE COLLECTIVE STORY

The #LetUsBreathe Collective started in 2014 as an initiative to support protesters and activists following the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson. Most of us were artists and educators, and suddenly found ourselves to be organizers. Some were already activists, but we as a community wanted to participate in this new iteration of liberation tradition. **We found ourselves responding to an initial moment that soon engulfed us in a movement.**

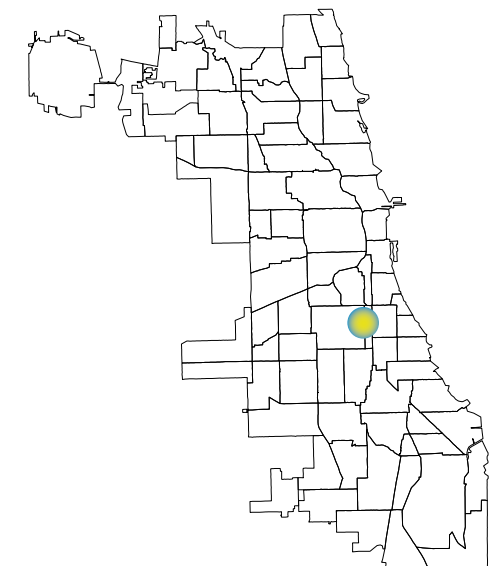


Through an abolitionists lens we look to create a world that does not need and no longer has carceral institutions, namely police and prisons. We believe them to be violent and destructive, particularly against Black communities. We work to build power and creativity and amplify voices within our community through cultural production, popular education, and resource distribution. We've sheltered families in need, redistributed clothes and household goods and served as many free meals as we possibly could.



In October 2016, the Collective signed the lease on the Breathing Room space, an arts, healing, and organizing hub. It is a Black-led liberatory space that produces cultural events, builds coalition with the Chicago resistance community, and incubates programs that aim to force prisons and policing into obsolescence. Breathing Room features activists, poets, rappers, political scholars, community organizers, comedians, musicians, burlesque artists, and many other performance genres.

The Breathing Room space is located at 1434 West 51st Street.



THE PEOPLE'S FARM AND LIBERATION OASIS



Before it had a name, #EverybodyEats aimed to provide free food and community meals for programming like The #BreathingRoom Series, Tribe Day, and #FreeDay. During the Freedom Square occupation in 2016, we recognized how important food was in connecting and building with those most impacted by mass incarceration—and our community food access programming was born.

We expanded #EverybodyEats through our work with Envisioning Justice in 2018 and opened our People's Farm and Liberation Oasis to the public. The Gardens and Farm is a community garden operated by #LetUsBreathe Collective and our neighboring organization, Su Casa Catholic Worker.

Since its launch, #EverybodyEats has been a critical part of food distribution and food justice efforts across the city. Led by #EverybodyEats director and garden sensei Kwamena Jackson, we have built a team of farmers, culinary artists, and gardeners who have cooked countless meals to support local community events and larger food distribution efforts across the city. Jackson and her team have cultivated the land for several years, growing and maintaining the Gardens.

Among the rich soil and blossoming life, the Gardens are home to workshops and pop-up art shows. Volunteers and visitors alike bring love and joy, activating the space as a healing incubator for everyone, Black and indigenous people on the South Side and beyond.

A SPACE TO REIMAGINE



Juneteenth Block Party hosted by Defund CPD, #LUBC, and other partner organizations



Volunteer students from Ace Design support the redesign of the #LUBC courtyard



Land stewards support greenhouse creation



Defund CPD resistance summer training



#LUBC members participate in press conference to defund CPD



Juneteenth Block Party hosted by Defund CPD, #LUBC, and other partner organizations

DONORS DISRUPTING THE STATUS QUO

The #LetUsBreathe Collective serves as an incubator for innovative activism and liberatory and cultural work in Chicago. Donations of any size help us create alternatives to prisons and policing, produce cultural events, and build power in communities. All donations benefit our #BreathingRoom space—an arts, organizing, and healing hub on the South Side of Chicago.

Through both cultural events and direct actions, we disrupt oppressive systems, amplify marginalized voices, and serve those most

directly harmed by mass incarceration, police violence, and systemic injustice. Your gift now and in the year-ahead will boost these efforts by helping us to increase our reach and grow our programming.

The power to reimagine a better, more free world belongs to all of us. Your support amplifies the voices calling for change and liberation through art and activism. Thank you to all who supported #LUBC this year.

10,000+
donations

\$51,000
largest grant
received (from
Chicago Beyond)

\$50–200
Average one-time
gift amount



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