

CHICAGO BEYOND

Chicago Beyond Launches New ‘Leadership Venture’ and Taps Mental Health Leader To Drive Change

Names Dr. Nneka Tapia as Inaugural ‘Leader in Residence’

CHICAGO – Chicago Beyond today announced its newest initiative, the Leadership Venture, a fellowship for high-potential community leaders, focused on tackling significant challenges facing Chicago’s youth. The inaugural Leader in Residence is Dr. Nneka Tapia, a psychologist and the former Executive Director of the Cook County Department of Corrections. Throughout her career, Dr. Tapia has been driven by her own life experiences and passion for increasing mental health wellness for all people, especially those whose lives have been impacted by incarceration.

Over the next 18 months, in partnership with Chicago Beyond and the communities it serves, Dr. Tapia’s primary focus will be on young people whose parents have been incarcerated and what can be done to reduce the intergenerational cycle of incarceration, among other efforts. The venture will give Dr. Tapia the freedom and opportunity to leverage her expertise to create an impact for Chicago’s youth.

“There is power behind a woman who has left an indelible impact on the lives of those she serves – especially when she has walked in their shoes,” said Liz Dozier, Founder and CEO of Chicago Beyond. “Throughout her career, Nneka has applied creative and original thinking around solving complex challenges, and that is exactly the kind of ambition Chicago Beyond seeks to lift up in order to improve the life outcomes of our youth. Chicago Beyond is proud to invest in Nneka, an empathic and driven leader, to help build upon the important work of our community partners and improve mental wellness for young Chicagoans.”

Dr. Tapia is an experienced psychologist who is passionate about mental wellness, criminal justice reform, and supporting young people who have experienced trauma. Prior to joining Chicago Beyond, she served as a Senior Fellow with the University of Chicago Institute of Politics and as the Executive Director of the Cook County Department of Corrections. As the leader of the jail – an institution that has been called “the largest mental hospital in the country” with more than 2,000 inmates diagnosed with mental illness on a given day – Dr. Tapia spearheaded several bold strategies to promote wellness and reduce recidivism. One of her legacies is the Cook County Mental Health Transition Center, a program Dr. Tapia developed in 2014 in partnership with Sheriff Tom Dart that has helped hundreds of detainees successfully re-enter their families and communities and has become a model for correctional institutions nationally.

Dr. Tapia’s personal experiences have significantly influenced her life’s work. She has seen loved ones struggle deeply with mental illness and as a young child was separated from her father when he was incarcerated. Dr. Tapia credits her family support network that helped her build resilience during difficult times, and she has dedicated her career to ensuring others have similar opportunities to fulfill their potential.

“There is incredible work happening around mental wellness in our city, yet there is still so much we don’t know about the far-reaching impacts of trauma and family separation,” said Dr. Tapia. “As Chicago Beyond’s inaugural Leader in Residence, I am humbled and thrilled to have an opportunity like this – to step back, connect with the community, and think creatively and proactively about how to support our young people. Chicago Beyond is putting a stake in the ground on supporting the mental wellness of our youth, and I look forward to building on that momentum with their thought partnership and support.”

Chicago Beyond believes that in order for all young people to have equitable access and opportunity to fulfill their human potential, a greater emphasis must be placed on promoting mental wellness in Chicago.

“As a country we’re starting to appreciate that mental illness can affect absolutely anyone, and it has hidden yet deep impacts on families and loved ones,” said Alexa James, the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Chicago. “For our city to thrive, we must continue to innovate around how to tackle this issue. Nneka has such intimate experience and expertise around mental health, especially with those affected by separation, and I am grateful that she and Chicago Beyond will be focused on promoting wellness in our Chicago communities.”

Chicago Beyond is a youth equity platform that fights to give young people the opportunity to achieve their fullest human potential. Since launching in 2016, Chicago Beyond has invested \$30 million in local organizations working to improve life outcomes for young Chicagoans. Beyond funding, Chicago Beyond works hand-in-hand with its partners to help them ultimately reach their goals. From strategic planning, to development, branding and communications supports – Chicago Beyond designs unique investment plans to help its partners grow their impact. The new Leadership Venture goes beyond investing in organizations, and gives extraordinary individuals the opportunity to leverage their background to explore and address challenges facing young Chicagoans.

Learn more at ChicagoBeyond.org.

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