

With and For the Community

Join us in serving our community (older adults and their families) with dignity.

Donate!



Contact Us!

Phone: (708) 613-0374

Email: info@rootedindignity.com

Website: www.rootedindignity.com

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“Thank you for your support as we honor life with dignity together.”



Rooted in Dignity

Expanding Our Reach, Deepening Our Roots: Rooted in Dignity Impact Report

2023-2025

www.rootedindignity.com

Established in February 2023, Rooted in Dignity is a non-profit organization committed to infusing the journey of end-of-life planning and care with compassion and understanding. Our central focus revolves around guiding individuals and families through this profound process. Recognizing the intricacies of life's delicate tapestry, we emphasize the significance of approaching this chapter with unwavering compassion and support.

This inaugural impact report honors our foundation—those who believed in our mission, the lives we've touched, and the powerful ways we are bringing peace, clarity, and dignity to individuals planning their care or supporting a loved one.

Decolonizing End of Life—Destigmatizing Death!

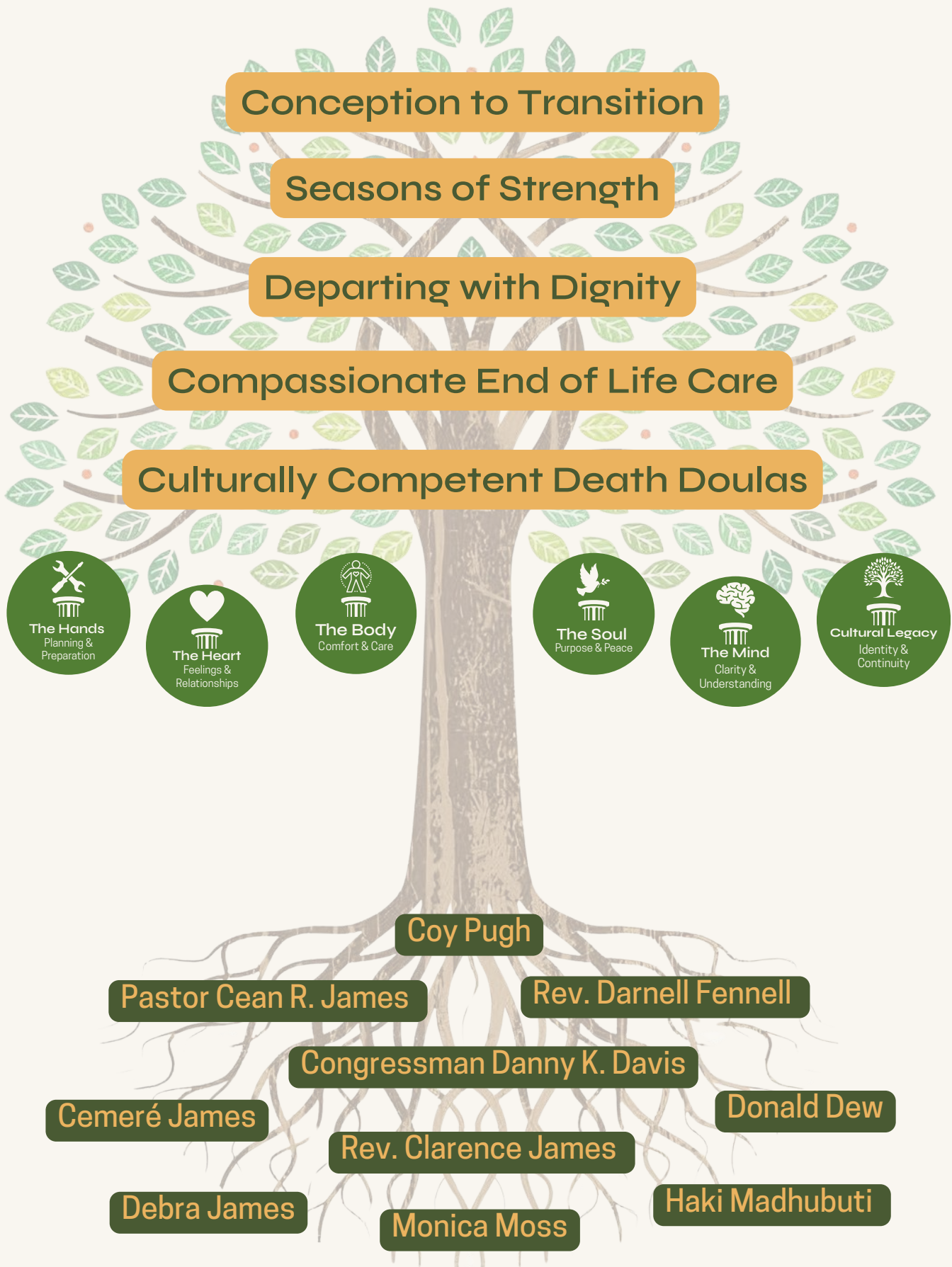
Founding Story and Gratitude

Rooted in Dignity is deeply grateful to the visionary community leaders, elected officials, nonprofit executives, funders, and faith leaders whose unwavering support brought this mission to life. We honor our Founding Funders:

- Maximus Charitable Foundation,
- National Benevolent Association (NBA),
- AMPT Chicago: Advancing Nonprofits.
- My family—including Anthony, David Young, Barbara Evans, and my grandchildren—whose support made this possible.
- My deceased brother, Rev. Clarence James, whose legacy lives on in the roots of Rooted in Dignity.

We are especially thankful for the resources, guidance and encouragement of leaders, such as:

- Coy Pugh of Pugh & Associates (Founding Donor),
- Salt & Light Pastor Cean R. James,
- Communications Executive Debra James,
- Intangible Treasures Founder Cemeré James,
- Trinity United Church of Christ First Lady Monica Moss,
- Third World Press Founder Dr. Haki Madhubuti,
- Habilitative Systems President & CEO Donald Dew,
- Illinois 7th Congressional District Congressman Danny K. Davis,
- Rev. Darnell Fennell, Director of Social Entrepreneurship of the National Benevolent Association.



Your wisdom, faith, and advocacy continue to shape our path forward. Your belief in our work has been instrumental in nurturing a movement rooted in compassion, dignity, and justice.

Our Mission

To empower individuals and their families as they navigate this transformational time with dignity, grace, and peace of mind.

Our Vision

We believe in fostering a community where individuals can navigate this sensitive phase with dignity and grace by transforming the way marginalized communities experience aging, caregiving, end of life and grief—centering in faith, healing, and empowerment.

RID Leadership

With a career rooted in leadership and care, Darthula Young founded Rooted in Dignity to bring compassion, clarity, and community to end-of-life planning. A seasoned executive—having served as Regional Vice President at Lockheed Martin IMS and Vice President at Maximus Inc.—she blends strategy with heart to guide individuals and families through some of life’s most important decisions.

A certified end-of-life coach and doula, Darthula Young founded Rooted in Dignity after personal experiences revealed the urgent need for supportive, accessible end-of-life planning, particularly in historically disenfranchised communities. Today, she leads Rooted in Dignity with compassion and clarity, a mission that has garnered national recognition, including her selection as a 2024 National Benevolent Association (NBA) SENT Cohort member and current NBA Incubate Partner.

Letter from the President

For too long, access to the knowledge, resources, and care needed to face the end of life with dignity has been out of reach—especially for those caring for loved ones through that sacred transition. That time is over.

Since I founded Rooted in Dignity in 2023, our mission has grown into something far greater than an organization—it has become a movement equipping elders, caregivers, and faith leaders with the tools to navigate caregiving, end-of-life planning, and grief with compassion and clarity.

We've joined hands with the DuSable Museum of Black History and Education Center, Hope Christian Church (Hammond, IN), Habilitative Systems, Inc., Congressman Danny K. Davis, and many other national, state and local organizations to co-host powerful workshops and seminars. These partnerships go beyond collaboration.

Our core partnerships have expanded our reach and each of our funders has provided more than just financial support—they've offered mentorship, access to networks, and professional development that continue to strengthen our work and challenge us to grow at the pace this moment demands.

Thanks to the generous support of the National Benevolent Association (NBA), the Maximus Charitable Foundation, AMPT Chicago: Advancing Nonprofits, Habilitative Systems, Inc., and our broader community of partners, we have expanded our seminars, launched new initiatives, and helped push policy conversations forward. I've had the privilege of speaking on national stages to spotlight the deep inequities that persist in end-of-life care—and to call for a more just, compassionate way forward.

In a time when so many families feel unseen and unheard, Rooted in Dignity stands as a voice of advocacy, education, and love.

As we look ahead, I remain deeply moved by the trust you place in us. Together, we are building a future where every individual can make empowered, informed, and compassionate choices.

Thank you for walking this journey with us.

With enduring gratitude,



Darthula Young

Founder and President

RID Board Members



Pastor LaVonne Carson

Pastor LaVonne Carson of Hope Christian Church (Disciples of Christ | Hammond, IN) brings spiritual depth and compassionate presence to end-of-life care.



Cemeré James

A seasoned nonprofit executive and entrepreneur, Cemeré James brings expertise in fundraising, nonprofit management, and leadership development. As founder of Intangible Treasures, Cemeré also brings expertise and passion for preserving legacy.



Patricia Knazze

Patricia Knazze, of the DuSable Museum of African American History and Education Center, brings a deep knowledge of governance, inclusion, and financial oversight from nearly a decade of experience overseeing the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund, including terms as President and Vice President



Tonya Cody-Robinson

Tonya Cody-Robinson of Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership serves on the leadership team at Rooted in Dignity, helping uphold the organization's mission of fostering dignity, clarity and compassionate support for end-of-life planning.

Programs and Services: Turning Mission into Momentum

Leadership in End of Life Planning and Systems

Rooted in Dignity continues to lead in compassionate end-of-life care. In 2023, Founder Darthula Young contributed to the 7th Congressional Think Tank's Grief and Grieving Committee, shaping national conversations on loss. She also helped develop an advanced directive training for Community Health Workers, ensuring it reflects real community needs. Additionally, Rooted in Dignity supports the Illinois Hospice and Palliative Organization through active participation in the POLST Committee, advocating for accessible, person-centered care legislation.

Program Highlights

Seasons of Strength (SOS)

Seasons of Strength is Rooted in Dignity's flagship seminar series for older adults, caregivers, and families, especially in underserved and BIPOC communities. Launched with partners across Illinois and Indiana, SOS provides holistic education on topics like grief, dementia, caregiving, legal tools, and end-of-life planning. Through group sessions and one-on-one consultations, participants use the Six Pillars of Dignified Living and Dying framework to navigate aging with confidence.



Conception to Transition (CTT)

In partnership with the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center, Rooted in Dignity launched Conception to Transition, a groundbreaking life-stage education event focused on culturally grounded care. Featuring leaders like Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III and Congressmen Danny K. Davis and Jonathan Jackson, the symposium brought together faith leaders, scholars, and healers to discuss care across the lifespan. Supported by community partners, CTT emphasized trust, healing, and equitable access to hospice and mental wellness services.



A Gathering of Voices

Faith leaders, policymakers, scholars, and community healers came together for a day of reflection, education, and empowerment.



Highlights

- Powerful dialogue & intergenerational wisdom
- Healing practices for mind, body, and spirit
- Community-rooted strategies for dignity across life's stages



Featured Speakers

- Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III
- Congressman Danny K. Davis
- Congressman Jonathan Jackson
- Third World Press Founder Dr. Haki Madhubuti,
- Urban Prescriptives President and CEO Dr. Carol Adams
- Director of Education and Program at DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center Dr. Kim Dulaney

Trusted Experts in Care, Grief, and Transition



Rooted in Dignity provides personalized support and end-of-life doula services to assist individuals and families with caregiving, grief, and transition. Their trained doulas and grief coaches offer compassionate, culturally responsive care that respects each person's values and legacy. Services include helping with advance directives, navigating medical decisions, and providing presence during significant life moments. They ensure families are supported before, during, and after loss, emphasizing dignity, empathy, and deep listening.

Care Team and Consultants

Rooted in Dignity is guided by a diverse team of experts in mental health, policy, spiritual care, and end-of-life planning. Together, they offer culturally grounded, compassionate support to individuals and families facing life's final transitions.

Board members Cemeré James and Pastor LaVonne Carson additionally serve as members of the Care Team.

Cheryl M. Francis

Sacred Passage Coach, End-of-Life Doula, and grief recovery specialist. She is also a nonprofit strategist with over 30 years of experience and supports BIPOC leadership through board training and equity-centered planning.

Monica Faith Stewart,

former Illinois legislator and policy expert, leads efforts in civic education, legacy planning, and community engagement.

Mary Scott-Boria

draws from decades in anti-racism and trauma-informed care to lead healing-centered conversations on grief and caregiving.

Karen Crawford,

Certified Public Accountant and a Professional Project Manager with over 35 years of experience in financial leadership across diverse sectors both private and public.

Dr. Arlene Paden

brings more than 35 years of psychiatric experience to help individuals navigate grief and caregiving with clinical and cultural sensitivity.

Jalyn Smith

is a seasoned caregiver with over a decade of expertise. Specializing in providing dedicated end-of-life care to those in need

RID also partners with consultants specializing in wellness, health equity, coalition building, estate planning, probate, insurance, and nonprofit governance.

Milestones and Accomplishments

Expansion and Sustainability

Rooted in Dignity's funding milestones have been significant. This rapid expansion launched from our early engagement with and support from the National Benevolent Association. Ms. Young was selected as a member of the National Benevolent Association's Social Entrepreneurship Training (NBA SENT) Cohort of 2024, a program that equips faith-based leaders with the tools to grow sustainable, justice-centered initiatives.

Funding Awarded in 2023



- \$550 from NBA Next Step Grant
- \$1,000 from Wenda and Wale Clinard Fund
- \$5,000 from Coy Pugh and Associates Gift

Funding Awarded in 2024



- \$1,984 NBA SENT Support Grant
- \$5,000 from AMPT Chicago: Advancing Nonprofits
- \$8,000 from National Benevolent Association Older Adult Ministry
- \$10,000 from Maximus Charitable Foundation

Funding Awarded in 2025



- \$10,000 from AMPT Chicago: Advancing Nonprofits
- \$52,000 From National Benevolent Association (Incubate Program Grant)

Educating, Informing, Leading 2023: Foundation and Early Activities



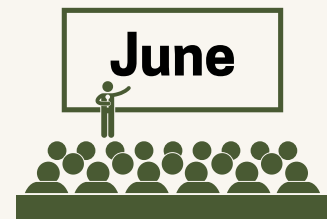
February

Rooted in Dignity established as a nonprofit organization.



April

First seminar held in partnership with **Salt and Light Church** (Philadelphia, PA).



June

Seminar for **Keep Every Citizen Safe (KECS) Block Clubs**.



July

Seminar for **S.B. Health Group** with consulting to families on end-of-life planning.



October

"*Departing with Dignity*" town halls with **Congressman Danny K. Davis** (7th Congressional District)



November

Seminar for **Habilitative Systems, Inc.** to care providers of adults with developmental disabilities.

2024: Growth, Recognition, and Partnerships



January–March

Planning & outreach for **Seasons of Strength (SOS)** seminars with **Hope Christian Church (Disciples of Christ | Hammond, IN)** under a partnership agreement.



April

IL-HPCO Spring Conference — **Presentation** on African Americans' reluctance to use hospice and mistrust of the medical profession.



May

“*Release the Silence*” Conference hosted by the **Alzheimer’s Association Illinois Chapter** featuring the *Visions for Change* Webinar with **Dr. Korey Grice** and hospice expert **Meleine Brown-Moor**.



July

NBA Convocation Conference — Overview of Rooted in Dignity’s end-of-life care model.



August

Panelist at the **Black Women’s Expo**, discussing Black women and self-care.



September

Seminar for **Alpha Kappa Alpha Lambda Tau Omega Chapter** focused on caring for loved ones and self-care.



October

- iHeart Radio and Intellectual Radio appearances
- Ohio Council for Home Care & Hospice Presentation



November

- First **Seasons of Strength (SOS) Seminar** at **Hope Christian Church (Disciples of Christ | Hammond, IN)** addressing caregiving, grief, and wellness.
- Initial presentation and collaboration event with the **DuSable Museum of Black History and Education Center** under the *Conception to Transition* project.
- Presentation “Caring for a Loved One & Self Care” Workshop at **Rainbow PUSH**.
- **Senior Zone** media appearance to raise awareness about end-of-life planning.

2025: Expansion and Deepening Community Integration



January

The **Seasons of Strength(SOS)** seminar launched with **Bethel New Life in Chicago, IL**, and officially began its series with **Hope Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)** in Hammond, IN.



February

Conception to Transition Symposium, featuring **Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III**, **Congressman Jonathan Jackson**, **Congressman Danny K. Davis**, **Third World Press Founder Dr. Haki Madhubuti**, **Urban Prescriptives President and CEO Dr. Carol Adams**, and **DuSable Museum Director of Education and Programs Dr. Kim Dulaney**.



March

Film discussion and community engagement event with the **DuSable Museum of Black History and Education Center**.



April

Seasons of Strength seminar series with Habilitative Systems, Inc.



May

Presentation at **Alzheimer’s Association African American Conference**, Departing with Dignity and Caring for a Loved One.

Our Theory of Change



Assumptions Driving Our Approach



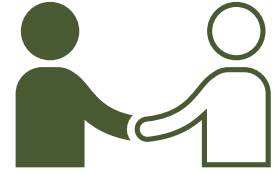
Healing happens in culturally relevant connections.



End-of-life planning is a public health and justice issue.



Proactive education prevents crisis care and trauma.



Integrated partnerships build sustainable change.



How We Drive Change



We operate through three interconnected pillars that support the full end-of-life journey:



Community Outreach & Engagement

Host seminars, town halls, and forums in trusted spaces like churches and community organizations.



Health Equity Education & Training

Deliver Advance Care Planning (ACP), legal literacy (Power of Attorney - POA, Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment - POLST), caregiver wellness, and cultural competence for providers.



Direct Support & System Navigation

Offer grief coaching, assistance with advance directives, policy and advocacy, and connection to essential resources like hospice, housing, and funeral planning.



Outcomes: Our Cultural Vision for Change



BIPOC communities are informed, empowered, and equipped to navigate end-of-life with confidence.



Death is recognized as a sacred, shared stage of life —not a crisis.



Families are supported with tools and guidance, not left to struggle alone.



Cultural traditions and storytelling are reclaimed to strengthen cultural identity and collective healing.

Impacting Lives with Dignity

Map of Locations



Chicago, IL



Hammond, IN



Indianapolis, IN



Columbus, OH



Philadelphia, PA



Washington, DC



Detroit, MI



National (Virtual)

Communities Served: Rooted in Dignity serves BIPOC older adults (age 50+), their families, caregivers, and a diverse range of seminar attendees across ages, cultures, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Each year, the organization reaches an estimated **500 to 720 individuals** through its programs and events.¹

Testimonials

“Rooted in Dignity has shown the importance of engaging, encouraging, and supporting all the members of their communities... Their work around inclusion reminds us that, together, we can empower individuals and families.”

-- Dr. Arvenita Washington Cherry, Maximus Charitable Foundation President and Chairperson

Seminar Participant

“I received more than I could have imagined from this seminar.”

My father is 87 years old and I'm his caregiver. There was a lot of information that I needed to know and I heard today.”

Very informative. So much about end of life, planning, preparation and care that I knew nothing about.”

“I learned more of an understanding of the brain's vulnerability...I learned health habits for the brain and positive coping skills when dealing with life as a caregiver.”

“I learned so much about the inequities of the health care system and how cultural differences should be considered in the health care service.

¹ This estimate reflects unique individuals reached annually through RID's core programs, seminars, training sessions, and events, and the wider virtual/in-person footprint.//

Estimated Impact Data

Audience	Estimated Number Reached	Details and Source
BIPOC Older Adults (Age 50+)	200–375 annually	Through the <i>Seasons of Strength (SOS)</i> seminars and events hosted in predominantly Black and Latino communities (e.g., Hope Christian Church (Hammond, IN), Bethel New Life (Chicago, IL), DuSable Museum of African American History and Education Center, Habilitative Systems, Inc.)
Caregivers (spouses, adult children, family members)	100–200+ annually	Participated in targeted caregiver seminars focused on dementia, Alzheimer's, self-care, and end-of-life preparation.
General Seminar Attendees	400–500+ (since 2023, across 30+ events)	Participants at community workshops, town halls, conferences, and webinars. Includes attendees at: Chicago Park District - Fosco Park, Salt & Light Church, Caring for a Loved One and Self Care, Rainbow PUSH, IL. Presentation at the Alzheimer's Association African American Conference: <i>Departing with Dignity</i> and <i>Caring for a Loved One</i> .

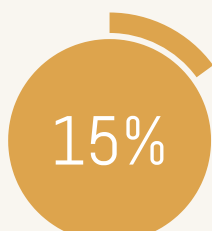
Participant Distribution by Program (Estimated Annual Reach)



General Seminar Attendees



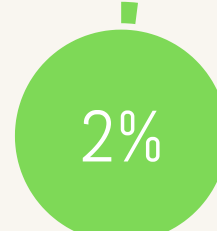
Seasons of Strength (SOS)



Conception to Transition



Caregivers (overlapped with SOS)



Community Health Workers (trained)

Outcomes

Preparedness



75%

completed legal or spiritual end-of-life documents

Caregiver Health



60%

reported reduced stress and improved self-care

Financial Security



Participants demonstrated improved understanding of long-term financial planning

Healing and Connection



90%

found grief support and trauma-informed services meaningful

United in Purpose: Partners and Funders



Wenda and
Wale Clinard
Fund



Nonprofit Utopia



POLST
ILLINOIS
Practitioner Orders for
Life-Sustaining Treatment

The DuSable
BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM
and EDUCATION CENTER
A Smithsonian Affiliate



AMPT
ADVANCING NONPROFITS



Community Engagement

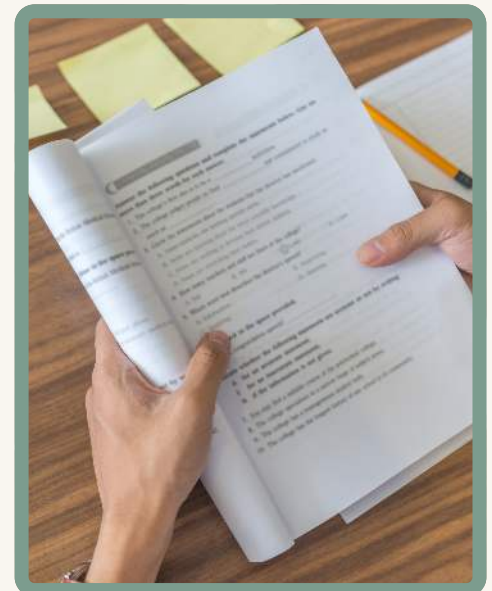
Partnerships mutually expand our ability to:



Curriculum development to provide training on end-of-life planning, preparation, care giving, and self care.



Training for caregivers and navigators



Development of end-of-life planning workbook and document repository

Strategic Vision: A Future Grounded in Purpose

At Rooted in Dignity, we aim to enhance our impact and support individuals, particularly in BIPOC and underserved communities, in approaching end-of-life with dignity and peace. We are expanding our initiatives in the Midwest, training faith communities to provide culturally relevant grief and end-of-life planning support. With backing from the National Benevolent Association, AMPT Chicago, and Maximus Charitable Foundation, we're focused on outreach, facilitator training, and education. Our goal is a sustainable, community-led model of end-of-life care emphasizing compassion, culture, and justice.

Establish Strategic Partnerships to Expand Reach

Formal collaborations with churches, clinics, nonprofits, and civic leaders expand the ecosystem of support for end-of-life care, ensuring families have access to trusted guidance, referrals, and community-based healing

Measure Outcomes to Drive Continuous Improvement

Using surveys, attendance tracking, referral data, and satisfaction metrics, RID monitors the impact of its programming, adapts its methods, and ensures alignment with community needs and values.

Build Sustainable Infrastructure Rooted in Justice and Dignity

Through diversified funding, earned income strategies, and donor engagement, RID strengthens its organizational resilience—ensuring that dignity-centered care remains accessible to future generations

Scale Faith and Community Partnerships

Deepen collaboration with faith communities, clinics, and civic organizations across the Midwest to expand culturally rooted grief and end-of-life care programming.

Expand Programming (Seasons of Strength and Conception to Transition)

Formal collaborations with churches, clinics, nonprofits, and civic leaders expand the ecosystem of support for end-of-life care, ensuring families have access to trusted guidance, referrals, and community-based healing

The funding from the National Benevolent Association has enabled RID to:

- Build new partnerships with churches, senior centers, and cultural institutions.
- Deliver more frequent and geographically expanded seminars through our Seasons of Strength and Conception to Transition initiatives.
- Train new volunteers and community leaders using RID's Advance Care Planning and Six Pillars curriculum.
- Support staff participation in leadership development and strategy workshops through NBA's cohort resources.
- Increase visibility through community events, town halls, and media engagement.
- Launch and roll out of Seasons of Strength initiative funded by the NBA Older Adult Ministry Grant.

