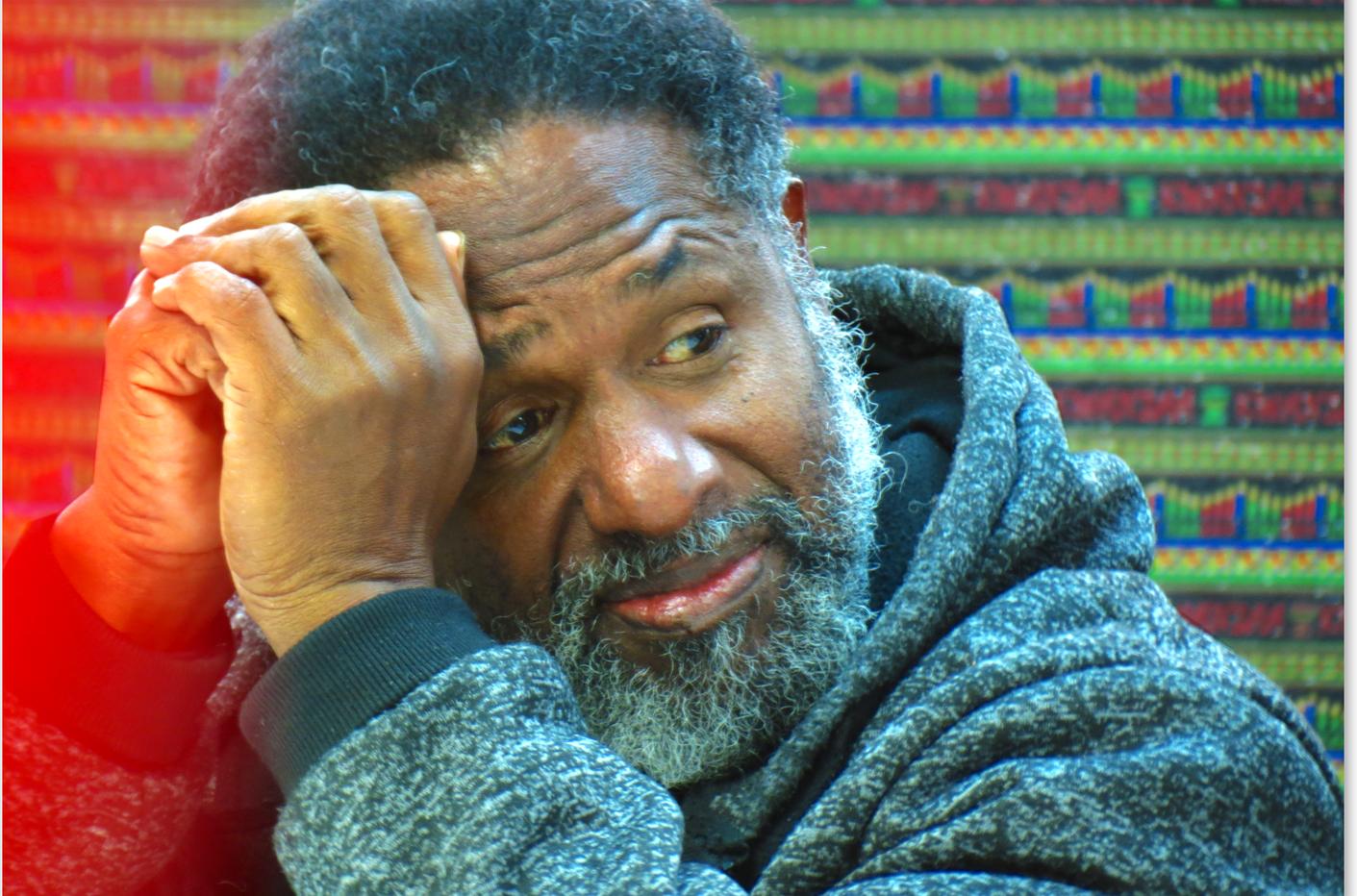


T H E V I L L A G E



Happy New Year!

The Village Voice welcomes you to the new year, and the new decade. In this volume, we give tips about mental health and the *Nguzo Saba*, questions to bond with family, and interviews with some of the extraordinary women of VC (Village-Connect).

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Matunda ya Kwanzaa: The Solstice & Mental Health

The Winter solstice is for most, a time to reflect on our blessings among family and friends. However, between those who have had family tragedies during the solstice, holiday loneliness, what young people call “Cuffing Season” and SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), the Winter is for many people, a time of negative rumination, loneliness and anxiety.



In December, The Village Voice sought to find habits for good mental health in yearly tradition. On the eve of the first night of Kwanzaa—the seven day long observance of traditional Afrikan culture, philosophy, and spirit—The Village Voice visited the VC office to connect with Village members and find well-being among the *Nguzo Saba* (the seven principles of Kwanzaa)

Umoja (Unity): To strive for and to maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.

The collective good is overshadowed by individualism and the myth of independence in America. The consequences of this philosophy run visibly deep, from social isolation, to pridefulness and oppositional attitudes between our mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and our public figures. *Umoja* is the recognition that we are truly stronger together, and isolation is an unhealthy tendency with often catastrophic results.

Kujichagulia (Self-Determination): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.

The late Dr. Huey P. Newton characterized power as “the ability to define phenomena...and to make these phenomena act in a desired manner.” Defining our own destiny is essential to our proper mental health and the health of our generations to come. The principle of *Kujichagulia* leads us to resist accepting what others tell us we are, and produce our culture day-by-day.



Jhalil Logan blows out candles on the Kinara at the 2019 VC Kwanzaa celebration.

***Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility): To build and maintain our community together, making our brothers' and sisters' problems our own, to solve them together.**

In the spirit of *Umoja*, *Ujima* states a guideline to solidarity and problem-solving. Consider it your duty to reach out to your family and loved ones in your times of need, and make time to listen to those in your community who need you.

***Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics): To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and profit from them together.**

Consumer culture places a huge weight on us to buy big, buy often, and buy outside of our community. This unnatural pressure to consume keeps our pockets empty and our community dependent on outside production and influence. *Ujamaa* encourages us to recognize the wealth we already have, and reinvest it in the development of our own people; we have all that we need already.

***Nia* (Purpose): To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.**

It's not uncommon that we lose track of the "why" in our daily lives. The rich history and cultural traditions we descend from, our proverbs, religious practices and fables imbue us with the motivations and values we need to move through the world with intention. Where *Nia* is practiced and upheld, there can be no aimlessness, or sense of lost direction among our community.

***Kuumba* (Creativity): To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.**

Entrepreneurship, environmentalism, cultural and political advocacy are all leveraged through continual thought and development. The principle *Kuumba* incentivizes us to look at ourselves through newer eyes all the time, and push the boundaries of ideas we may not have fully realized yet.

***Imani* (Faith): To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.**

The concept of *Imani* signifies that great immaterial goal that we strive for collectively and individually. The greatest responsibility we have is to the next generation who will inherit our history, customs, and collective spirit to embody and take further than we ever could. For them, we uphold *Imani*.

When practiced continually, and in concert with one another, the *Nguzo Saba* comprise a lifestyle of refinement and pride in one's self. Mental health struggles during the holiday season can certainly be coped with, and may even make some of us stronger, when we see clearly who, what, and why we are.

In the new year, plant the seed of faith. Your people will thank you at the harvest.

SES - Student Spotlight: Anyla Blodger

Over the holiday break, The Village Voice had the rare privilege of sitting with Anyla Blodger. Anyla is a 13 year-old student activist, future structural engineer, big sister, and one of VC's youngest members. We asked her to weigh in on social responsibility, leadership, and gender representation in VC through her experience with the SES program at Bohannon Middle School in San Lorenzo.

TVV: How long have you been with VC?

ANYLA: One year, or almost a year. When I first got into it, it was because they came to my school, and then my dad was like "Hey you should go do it", so I tried it out, and it was pretty cool being at the same community. I just kept going, then my dad started working with Gaylon, and he came here. We met in a group, and talked. Basically did VC prep; talked about things that



Anyla's favorite animal is the Bengalese white tiger, and her favorite film is *The Hate U Give*.

we could change within the school, and within in the community, as well as ways that we could better help people act; like, the ways that we talk to each other.

TVV: Do you have any favorite parts of VC?

ANYLA: Meeting all the people, and seeing how they all stick together and help out. How we all have a different part in VC.

TVV: What do you think your part is?

ANYLA: I think there's not really a lot of girls, so that's my part, that's where I come in and help to bring in more people. I also help with when they bring new people in, I'm there for that. I help to pass out materials, and I talk, so I feel like when we do that, it helps me feel like I'm a part of something.

TVV: How do you feel about being one of the only girls at VC?

ANYLA: It doesn't really bother me much, but I do think it's something that we could work on, to make us less of a minority, and balance it out.

TVV: Is there something special that you've taken away from your experience at VC?

ANYLA: I feel that what I take away from it, is that if I push to do something, and I ask people, "do you need help", then I could be a part of something. Just like, try for what I want.

TVV: Is that going to help you to be a structural engineer?

ANYLA: I feel like it will. Because I need to know how to be able to reach out to people, and if I need certain materials, I'll need to talk to them to see I can get those. Also, dealing with the public. I'm going to need to have better interaction and communication skills, VC is always helping with that.

TVV: Would you describe yourself as a leader? (she smiles)

ANYLA: Yes. In my school, I've been in student government within my school ever since I was in fourth grade; I'm in eighth grade now so that's been four years. You know, when I wasn't able to be in the government, I would help with PeaceMakers, and I would always try to help bring the school together. At my school I'm in leadership as well. Instead of the staff working, we put together all the dances, we gather money, fundraisers, we put together field trips. It's a lot of work. My little brother is in student government too, so I guess he kind of follows what I do. I do scorekeeping, so that can influence the whole game if I mess up, so I really have to stay on top of the task at hand

TVV: If you could change the world, what would you do?

ANYLA: I would make it to where everybody feels like—not so much equal, because being different is good, but—I'd make it so that everybody has the same rights, and everybody is less discriminatory towards other groups of people for emotional reasons. That's what I'd do.

TVV: Do you ever feel like you just wanna sit out on all your responsibilities?

ANYLA: Not necessarily—because I put those responsibilities on myself—but there are times that we do work a dance, and then we have to do TA or something, and stuff keeps coming up, so there are a few times I'm tired, I just wanna sit down and take a break. I feel like—this is my last year at that school so—if I don't do something *now*, then what's the future of that school gonna look like? If I don't make a difference, I'm gonna feel like “Oh, I could have changed that, or I really could have fixed that but I just sat there and did nothing”

TVV: The floor is yours. Is there anything else you want our readers to know?

“If I don't make a difference, I'm gonna feel like ‘Oh I could have changed that or I really could have fixed that but I just sat there and did nothing.’”

ANYLA: If there's something that you can do, then do it, rather than letting an opportunity just pass by you.

CBTC - Human Check-In Exercise

VC's signature ritual preparatory sequence, known simply as "VC Prep" is a unique 3-step process of quick and simple group exercises designed to promote the being-ness of the members.

The third and final phase of VC Prep is known as Human Check-In. Human Check-In is designed to *"create safe space to share/receive human experience"* Members of the group are heard and appreciated for sharing candidly highlights (positive experiences and thoughts) as well as reflecting openly on challenges (upsetting or unsettling difficulties) lived within the past 72 hours. This sequence gives the group initiatives to connect and identify with one another.

This month, connect with your family and community members through this Human Check-In:

1. Share a highlight lived within the past 72 hours.
2. Share a challenge lived within the past 72 hours.
3. Share three things you love most about yourself.

To learn more about CBTC, [visit us on Facebook](#).

PFAP - Lead Family Advocate: Celeste Johnson

The future is bright for the VC PFAP (Parent and Family Advocacy Program) initiative. At the turn of the new decade, The Village Voice interviewed with VC's new Lead Family Advocate, Sister Celeste Johnson. In addition to her work as Lead Family Advocate for VC, the wife, and mother of four is a co-facilitator under the AAEP (African American Empower Project) program at Hillside elementary school. Ms. Johnson covered in detail her history of family advocacy, and her vision for PFAP in 2020.

TVV: How did you get involved with VC?

CELESTE: I saw VC almost about a year ago at Edendale middle school. I saw all these African American kids in there, and I asked somebody about it. It was the first time I'd ever heard of VC. My child was too busy to come to VC at that time because



Celeste Johnson is the lead family advocate at VC, as well as girls group facilitator at Hillside Elementary School.

they were having it after school, but then this year I was referred to VC by the director of the youth center. I said 'you know what, let me go ahead and connect with the Village' because I believe Black people need to support each other, we need to help each other.

TVV: In your own words, what does PFAP mean to you?

CELESTE: So, PFAP stands for Parent & Family Advocacy Program, but what that means to me is that this is a program where we can help and support each other; advocate for each other, for our kids, for our students. Advocate by giving, and getting

resources and information regarding our education and our culture, so that we can educate families on those topics. It's not just that, but it's the whole coalition between families and schools, providing education and resources, so that's basically what it means to me.

TVV: How do you describe your work as new lead family advocate?

CELESTE: Well, like you say, I'm the *new* lead family advocate, so I'm new in this role, but advocating is something that I've done naturally for years anyway, so advocating is not new to me. So describing my work: that's connecting with the families, bonding with them, advocating for them, for the parents and the kids. I'm also always being a listening ear, identifying when there is an issue that needs to be resolved, or some advice that needs to be given, or maybe a shoulder to cry on, or to provide resources. It doesn't matter who the family is, it could be the grandparents, uncles, aunts, kids, parents, cousins, just the family in general, but *especially* those children.



Sister Celeste at the 2019 VC Kwanzaa celebration, pictured with her daughter Trelicia.

TVV: As a mother, has VC helped you to relate to your family?

CELESTE: As a mother, VC helps me relate to them through awareness, and providing them with information. I think they look forward to finding out a little bit more about what VC has to offer, and how we can all benefit from VC and their resources, information and teaching.

TVV: Do you have some goals that you hope to reach with families at VC?

CELESTE: My main goal that I hope to reach with the Village family, is that they would become strong people. That's a goal of mine, that I would see change in the people. They would become stronger, more positive, and involved. Not just for themselves, but for their families and for the children. That's my goal. I should be able to see that change.

TVV: What is your best family advice?

CELESTE: Don't let anybody tear down your dreams, no matter how big your dream is, or how small your dream is, just don't let anybody tear it down. Go for it. If you can dream it you can achieve it.

TVV: What would you say to people interested in enrolling into the PFAP programs?

CELESTE: I would say to those interested in enrolling in the PFAP programs, get ready because you're about to experience something you probably never have before so keep an open mind. That's partly because talking to the families and telling them what their children are learning, and how we at VC work with their children, they're surprised at what I'm telling them, you know. They're like 'Oh, really? We don't have enough of that' and even getting feedback from my son, my husband, and my friends' boys today after coming back from Real Talk Wednesday* last night, they were all surprised and enjoyed it, every last one of them. That's why I say get ready.

*Real Talk Wednesday is an intergenerational, gender-focused process group promoting community healing. For more info on the Real Talk Wednesdays community forum or youth mentorship, [visit us on Facebook](#).

Upcoming VC Projects & Events

Project / Event	Date	Time	Location	Cost
Think Outside the Boss Cooperative Economics Workshop	Saturday Jan 25, 2020	9:00am - 3:00pm	AACSA <u>304 N. 6th Street San Jose, CA 95112</u>	Sliding Scale
The Brothas Fathers & Men Support Group	Wednesday Jan 29, 2020	7:00pm - 9:00pm	Roots Community Health Center <u>9925 International Blvd, Oakland, CA 94603</u>	None
The Brothas Fathers & Men Support Group	Wednesday Feb 5, 2020	7:00pm - 9:00pm	Roots Community Health Center <u>9925 International Blvd, Oakland, CA 94603</u>	None
Agency Orientation	Monday Feb 10, 2020	6:00pm - 7:30pm	Village-Connect <u>1572 150th Avenue San Leandro, CA 94578</u>	None
Real Talk Wednesday Boys & Men	Wednesday Feb 12, 2020	6:00pm - 9:00pm	Village-Connect <u>1572 150th Avenue San Leandro, CA 94578</u>	None
The Brothas Fathers & Men Support Group	Wednesday Feb 19, 2020	7:00pm - 9:00pm	Roots Community Health Center <u>9925 International Blvd, Oakland, CA 94603</u>	None
Real Talk Wednesday Women & Girls	Wednesday Feb 19, 2020	6:00pm - 9:00pm	Village-Connect <u>1572 150th Avenue San Leandro, CA 94578</u>	None
Cooperative Mastermind Cyber Session The Cooperative Way	Tuesday Feb 25, 2020	5:30pm - 7:30pm	Zoom Video Conference	Sliding Scale

Support the Village!

