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Community Conversations: Sister to Sister awarded \$100,000 Cummings grant

Cambridge-based nonprofit receives three years of funding from Cummings Foundation

Cambridge, June 10, 2021 - Community Conversations: Sister to Sister is one of 140 local nonprofits to receive a grant from the Cummings Foundation's \$25 Million Grant Program. The Cambridge-based organization was chosen from a total of 590 applicants during a competitive review process, and will receive \$100,000 over three years.

Widespread structural barriers to healthcare access are well-documented, and disproportionately impact Black communities in the United States. These barriers have a direct negative impact on health outcomes. . Focusing on the role that Black women often play as the stewards of family and community health, Community Conversations has worked tirelessly for over 12 years to empower our participants as they navigate the healthcare system for themselves and for their families.

Community Conversations is a grassroots public health initiative, building a tight-knit health community of Black women, providing health literacy exposure and training, giving participants access to a referral network of advanced care providers who look like them, and creating a much needed space to support established and aspiring Black healthcare professionals to combat the high turnover of Black academic physicians.

The cornerstone of Community Conversations' programming is monthly discussions in Simply Erinn's Unisex Hair Salon, during which community members engage in dialogue with a rotating interdisciplinary team of Black women health professionals. Participants in this programming come from a diverse, intergenerational network of 850+ Black women from across Massachusetts, all

interested in relaxed and candid conversation about health issues relevant to Black women and Black families. This work only became more urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when ongoing health concerns (e.g. stress and anxiety) became exacerbated and new concerns (e.g. poor COVID outcomes, vaccine safety) came to the forefront.

“It is an honor to receive the Cummings Grant, and with this grant we will be able to expand our footprint and address the needs of women of color in Cambridge and beyond. We welcome the sistas from greater Boston to the community,” says T. Salewa Oseni, MD, a breast oncology surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital and a member of the Community Conversations Strategic Planning Committee.

The Cummings Grant supports the development, delivery, and evaluation of monthly health programming. These funds will help lay the foundation for CC’s long-term growth and sustainability. CC’s role advocating for and empowering Black women secures their place in the national conversation. Opportunities for Black women’s voices to be heard at the decision-making table are a critical first step towards building a more inclusive, equitable, and just healthcare system.

The Cummings \$25 Million Grant Program supports Massachusetts nonprofits that are based in and primarily serve Middlesex, Essex, and Suffolk counties.

Through this place-based initiative, Cummings Foundation aims to give back in the area where it owns commercial buildings, all of which are managed, at no cost to the Foundation, by its affiliate, Cummings Properties. This Woburn-based commercial real estate firm leases and manages 10 million square feet of debt-free space, the majority of which exclusively benefits the Foundation.

“We aim to help meet the needs of people in all segments of our local community,” said Cummings Foundation executive director Joel Swets. “It is the incredible organizations we fund, however, that do the actual daily work to empower our neighbors, educate our children, fight for equity, and so much more.”

With the help of about 80 volunteers, the Foundation first identified 140 organizations to receive grants of at least \$100,000 each. Among the winners were first-time recipients as well as nonprofits that had previously received Cummings Foundation grants. Forty of this latter group of repeat recipients were then selected to have their grants elevated to 10-year awards ranging from \$200,000 to \$500,000 each.

"We have adopted a democratic approach to philanthropy, which empowers an impressive roster of dedicated volunteers to decide more than half of all our grant winners each year," said Swets. "We benefit from their diverse backgrounds and perspectives; they benefit from a meaningful and fulfilling experience; and the nonprofits often benefit from increased exposure and new advocates."

This year's grant recipients represent a wide variety of causes, including social justice, homelessness prevention, affordable housing, education, violence prevention, and food insecurity. The nonprofits are spread across 43 different cities and towns.

The complete list of 140 grant winners, plus more than 800 previous recipients, is available at www.CummingsFoundation.org.

Cummings Foundation has now awarded more than \$300 million to greater Boston nonprofits.

About Community Conversations: Sister to Sister

Community Conversations: Sister to Sister is an ongoing, open forum to explore health issues relevant to Black women and their families. Founded in a hair salon in 2009, Community Conversations aims to address barriers to improved health outcomes in the Black community, and to empower community members as they navigate the healthcare system in search of the highest quality care for themselves and their families. Additional information is available at <https://www.ccsister2sister.org/>.

About Cummings Foundation

Woburn-based Cummings Foundation, Inc. was established in 1986 by Joyce and Bill Cummings and has grown to be one of the three largest private foundations in New England. The Foundation directly operates its own charitable subsidiaries, including New Horizons retirement communities in Marlborough and Woburn, and Veterinary School at Tufts, LLC in North Grafton. Additional information is available at www.CummingsFoundation.org.



Members of the leadership team celebrate receiving a \$100,000 grant from the Cummings Foundation. *From the left:* Dita Obler, Harriette Crawford, Shelley Flaherty, Erinn Pearson



Community members discuss kidney, liver, and spleen function at a monthly health forum in April 2019. Urologist Dr. Elodie Joy Dielubanza (left), from Brigham and Women's Hospital, gastroenterologist Dr. Nneka Ufere (center) and nephrologist Dr. Merranda Logan (right), both from Massachusetts General Hospital, sit facing community members. More information about previous topics can be found at <https://www.ccsister2sister.org/what-we-do>.



A four-generation family attends a Community Conversations discussion at Simply Erinn's Unisex Salon in Cambridge, MA. *From the left:* Amari Flaherty, Nancy Beckford, Roberta Goodman, Shelley Flaherty.