"Each group of Community Associates is a pattern of the Black Belt quilt that collectively makes up the tapestry of the people and the story, the legacy, of the region as a whole.”

— Khandi Flowers, Macon Co. Community Associate & Board Member

Community Associates: The Lifeblood and The Lifelines

One of the BBCF’s goals, as it relates to collaborating with the communities it serves, is to make a difference through action-based philanthropy: an “all hands on-deck”, “all for one and one for all” mindset that led to the establishment of the Community Associates Program. As Community Engagement Officer, Erica Williams states, “The Community Associates are the eyes and ears of the Black Belt Communities, the heart and soul of the BBCF.”

The Community Associates are one of the primary leadership development resources within the Black Belt counties: with a total of 102 throughout the 12 counties BBCF serves. Community Associates are appointed for 4-year terms and many have served multiple cycles and contribute countless hours of invaluable service in their capacities. Additionally, many of the Community Associates either concurrently hold or have gone on to hold elected and appointed public offices within their communities: Bullock County Community Associate and Board Member, Robert Turner simultaneously held a local school board seat for nearly 16 years; and still others have started as Community Associates within their counties and have eventually become BBCF Board Members, such as Mr. Turner and Darlene Robinson (Greene County) — to name a few.

In the immediate aftermath of the tornado outbreaks in early January (2023), it was the Community Associates of Dallas, Greene, Hale, and Sumter Counties who in many cases were the first “boots on the ground” to help people affected with emergency housing, medical, food, debris removal and home damage repair, in addition to fundraising. And, as if answering a call to action, Community Associates from surrounding counties without storm damage responded accordingly to help their counterparts deal with the overwhelming calamity the tornadoes wrought.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Community Associates were the critical lifeline in making sure families were fed: as they organized and distributed nearly 100,000 boxes of food throughout 19 counties—including the (12) counties of the Black Belt. In rural Bullock County, one of the most sparsely-populated counties in the Black Belt, BBCF Board Member Robert Turner put the entire pandemic odyssey in perspective “…the (2) grocery stores that shutdown during the pandemic covered an area of over 24 square miles, which left a lot of people in dire-straits. It was the Community Associates who amassed nearly 18 pick-up truck loads of food and financial support gift cards and distributed it to over 20 families who were in desperate need.”

In retrospect, Board Member Turner affirmed the critical role of the Community Associates during the pandemic and throughout the history of the BBCF: that being the lifeline, if not the lifeblood, of the organization in the scope of action-based philanthropy. The integral connection of the organization’s relationship with the Community Associates as the primary needs-based resource and assistance providers, will ensure the BBCF continues to provide the resources and initiatives that will in turn improve the lives and outcomes of the communities it serves.

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