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GLOBAL

African Link Initiative (ALI)

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Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Boys & Girls Clubs of Mercer County Partners with local non-profit to help Black teens connect with their African Ancestry and shape their own identities

Mercer County, NJ -- Shazel Muhammad-Neain was in her mid-forties when she had a life changing epiphany -- she had lived over four decades with little connection to who she was. The recent uptick in momentum behind the Movement for Black Lives has raised our collective awareness about the impacts of slavery and colonialism on diasporic Africans, but for Shazel, this reckoning came several years ago. It motivated her to find a solution that would harness the transformative power of connecting with your ancestral identity in order to help African American teens understand their present and proactively choose their future.

Her solution is the African Link Initiative (ALI). ALI is an evidence-based three-part identity development program that culminates in a birthright trip to Ghana. It's designed to help transform the way teens see their world and their possibilities by first transforming how they see themselves. A healthy sense of identity enables self-esteem, resilience, and positive life outcomes. ALI's approach is grounded in studies proving that programs for Black students that teach Black culture and instill cultural pride improve life outcomes for participants.

Teens begin their ALI experience by taking a DNA ancestry test, provided by African Ancestry. The ancestry tracing helps them answer the question, "where do I come from?" Next, teens participate in skill-building activities and Vital Smarts' custom Crucial Conversations™ workshop to determine "where am I now?" The final components are a Teen Summit Dialogue and Family Reunion event to explore "where can I grow from here?"

The birthright trip to Ghana begins with a diplomatic VIP sendoff at the Embassy of Ghana in Washington, D.C. In Ghana, participants will meet Ghanaian youth, complete a youth-led community service project and visit historical sites of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Each night, teens will spend time reflecting on and documenting their thoughts and feelings about their experiences. This homecoming also provides authentic, direct experience to help heal the divide between native born and diasporic Africans. And, help African American youth heal the divide within themselves.

Shazel Muhammad-Neain is the founder and lead consultant at Eunoia Global. ALI is a proprietary program of Eunoia Global, and will kick-off its virtual pilot program in January 2021 in collaboration with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Mercer County, AfricanAncestry.com, Vital Smarts, and Global Connections Foundation of Hopewell, NJ.

Community members can donate and learn more about ALI by visiting www.AfricanLink.org and following @AfricanLinkInitiative on Instagram and FB. All donations are tax-deductible, as allowed by law.

Why ALI Works

The challenge

We've all been there. For most of us, our teenage years bring about the first time we consider our individual identities and how that may affect our future in life -- we begin to ask who we are and why. Teens in America get bombarded with countless data points, "factoids," and "big personalities" that influence how they view their world and themselves in it, which affects their perceived value (self-worth). Their perceived value directly impacts the quality of the decisions they make about their life and future. At the same time, teens can experience an increased awareness of how others may perceive them, which may then manifest as self-consciousness, experimentation, and even rebellion.

For Black youth, questions about identity are compounded by issues related to race and ethnicity. Most descendants of enslaved people have little or no connection to their ancestral heritage before the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Why identity matters

Identity describes one's sense of self and how one defines themselves in terms of values, beliefs, and role in the world. Our self-identity in adolescence forms the basis of our self-esteem later in life. Though teenagers have some control over their identity development, their identities are also influenced by external factors including peers, family, school, ethnic identity, media, and other social environments.

Studies have shown that programs for Black students that teach Black culture and instill cultural pride yield promising outcomes. Stanford University researchers studied a special class for Black teenage boys in Oakland, California called the Manhood Development Program. They reported that Black boys were less likely to drop out of high school if the class was offered at their school. In a high school with 60 Black boys in ninth grade, on average only three students dropped out as opposed to five students in schools that did not provide the course. Between the graduating classes of 2010 and 2018, the high school graduation rate for Black boys in Oakland schools increased from 46% to 69%.

In 2010, Oakland, California schools implemented a culturally specific program for Black boys. The program helped increase the high school graduation rate for Black boys from 46% in 2010 to 69% in 2018.



Why ALI Works

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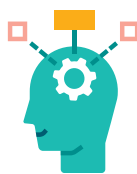
How ALI cultivates identity

ALI transforms how Black youth experience their world by first transforming how they experience themselves. ALI's evidence-based three-part program supports teen identity development by helping them explore three questions that are critical to identity formation:



Part 1:

Where do I come from?



Part 2:

Where am I now?



Part 3:

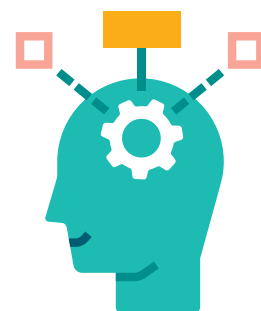
Where can I grow from here?

How ALI works

Teens begin the journey of self-discovery by taking an **African Ancestry DNA test**, learning about Africans and the continent of Africa, and hypothesizing what their ancestral DNA results will be. Depending on the status of public health, teens may also participate in an overnight educational trip to Washington, D.C.* with guided tours of Howard University, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. Teens may also participate in a unique critical thinking experience called Egypt on the Potomac. ALI includes curriculum from IKG's Cultural Imperative Program (CIP), co-founded by renowned author, publisher, cultural historian, and educational consultant, Anthony Browder.



While their African Ancestry DNA results are being analyzed, ALI Scholars will begin **Part 2 of ALI: Influencer Academy™** and participate in Vital Smarts' customized Crucial Conversations™ workshop. This world-class training course is used in 300 of the Fortune 500 companies. Teens will learn and practice the growth mindset, skill set and habit set necessary to improve self-awareness, critical thinking, decision-making, relationship skills, and accountability. ALI Scholars will experience the arts through an African Movement workshop led by Black actors and playwrights, that is by, for, and about the beauty of the Black experience.



*Specific activities will depend on the status of COVID-19 at the time

Why ALI Works

continued...

Influencer Academy is followed by **Part 3 of ALI: Teen Summit**. In this open forum of facilitated conversations, teens are encouraged to unpack and re-think individual, group, and cultural constructs like: identity, race, the juxtaposition between African American and African, popular music and its influence, colorism, Henrietta Lacks, Willie Lynch and so much more. Teens explore their ideals about how they see themselves both today and tomorrow. The goal is for teens to learn by doing – thinking critically, being curious, journaling, and challenging their own paradigms, biases, and stereotypes.



ALI culminates with a birthright trip to Ghana* to experience African culture first-hand and visit historical sites of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This 14-day experience starts in Washington, D.C. with a diplomatic VIP sendoff at the Embassy of Ghana. In Ghana, teens will meet with their Ghanaian peers, take part in a youth-led community service project, a tribal naming ceremony, and so much more.



Each night, teens will spend time reflecting and journaling about their experiences and sharing their thoughts and feelings. This homecoming trip provides authentic, direct experiences to help heal the divide between African Americans and Africans, and helping African American youth heal the divide within themselves.

Sources

- [Evidence supporting teaching Black culture to Black students](#)
- [Aspiro Adventure - Why is teen identity development so important?](#)
- [The Cultural Imperative Program](#)

*Specific activities will depend on the status of COVID-19 at the time

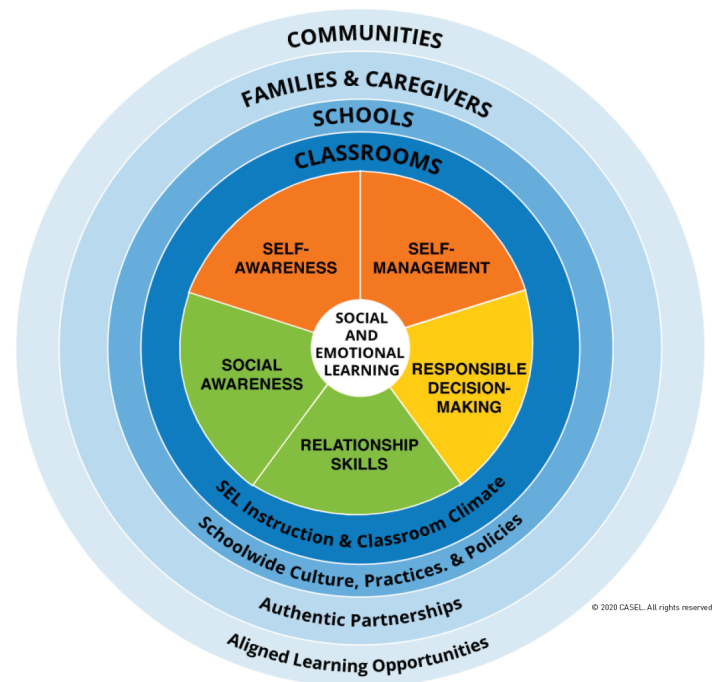
The Evidence

ALI is tackling a big issue that will impact a vulnerable and impressionable population -- Black teenagers. To ensure our program gets it right the first time, every component of our program is rooted in proven techniques that have been shown to improve outcomes among historically disadvantaged or underserved groups.

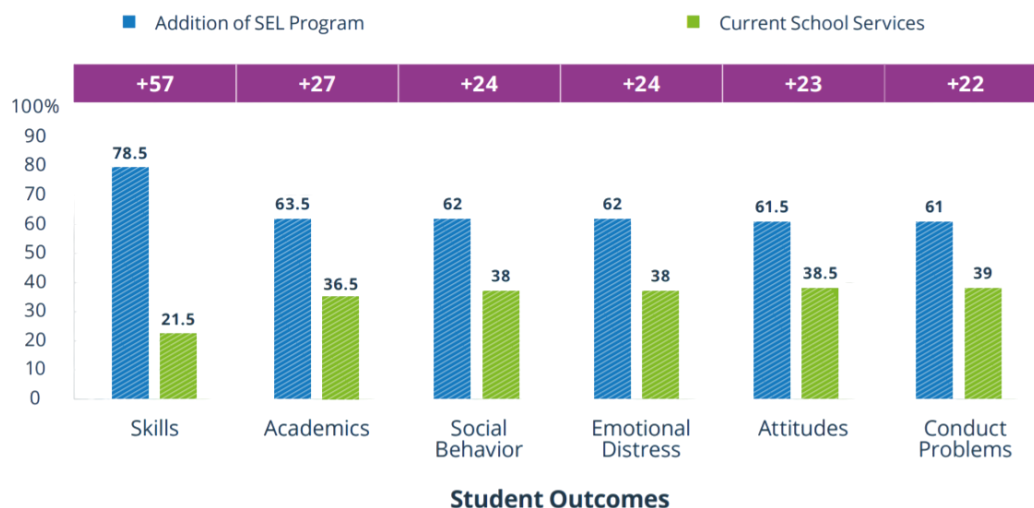
Social and emotional learning (SEL)

At the core of our approach is social emotional learning (SEL), a framework through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. Source: [CASEL](#)



Percentage of Students Who Improve with the Addition of an SEL Program



The Evidence

continued...

ALI operationalizes proven and promising links between social and emotional learning (SEL), culturally responsive education, identity development, and improved life outcomes for Black youth.

A Stanford University study found, this program, which focused on cultural pride for Black youth, yielded a

**50%
increase**

in the Black male
graduation rate

**300+
Fortune 500
Companies**

use Crucial Conversations™, a core component of the ALI curriculum

In October 2020, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) updated its definition of SEL to include identity development, which is the heart and soul of ALI.

**Cultural pride improves
outcomes, including GPA,
for Black students**

Source: Hechinger Report 2019 & Cultural Imperative Program

Programs that offer social and emotional learning strategies yield an

**11:1
Return on
Investment**

Source: Columbia University 2015

Founder Biography

Shazel Muhammad-Neain

Founder, Eunoia Global

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Shazel Muhammad is the founder and lead consultant at Eunoia Global, a leadership training and coaching firm. She specializes in helping individuals and organizations get from where they are now, to where they want to be. Through Eunoia, she also develops and executes programs that empower youth around the globe. Shazel's life mission is to connect with the people that God puts on her path and with them, cultivate the best in humanity by first cultivating the best in themselves. Shazel believes that self-cultivated individuals nurture stronger families and more resilient communities that collaborate, innovate, and resolve conflict. These communities become and shape the excellence that is our humanity.

Shazel's passion for helping others achieve their fullest potential began as a motivational speaker and professional facilitator as a teenager. She spent over 25 years as a "corporate-America insider," spending a decade at Wyndham Worldwide, Inc. building organizational capacity and capability in communication, leadership and influence, personal effectiveness, and team performance.



Shazel's experience is not limited to adult learning in corporate settings, though. She works with Pass it Along, Inc. to facilitate three-day workshops for high school freshmen called Discover your Passion and Purpose. The curriculum helps students practice self-awareness, gratitude, and service to explore their life's possibilities. Shazel worked with over 1,000 students in New Jersey through this program.

Shazel has also made significant impact through her international non-profit programs. Under her leadership, Eunoia Global partnered with the Global Connections Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to linking domestic and international communities through education diplomacy - connecting American students with students in Kenya through unique travel experiences. The program fosters global citizenship through self-awareness, reflection, and ethical action in local, national, and international affairs. This unique program equips students with skills and confidence to lead and influence change within their communities. Shazel recently keynoted at the [Kenya Diaspora Alliance Homecoming Convention](#). She was also interviewed on BBC News, where she highlighted how to best connect Africans in the Diaspora to contribute to Africa's development.

Founder Biography

continued...

Shazel also worked with the Global Peace Foundation, an international peace building organization, to conduct workshops on community resilience and anti-radicalization. Her work focused on empowering communities to build an internal network of trusted resources to help recognize individuals who may need help and support.

Now, Eunoia Global is piloting the African Link Initiative (ALI), a program for Black teenagers designed to nurture a healthy and supportive sense of self-identity. ALI seeks to become a catalyst for a paradigm shift in identity that transforms how youth of African descent see their world and their possibilities by first transforming how they see themselves.

Shazel's gift is her ability to help people see old problems in new ways, empowering them to write new scripts for their lives with a better understanding of themselves and others. She has coached and trained individuals at all levels of corporate, private, and nonprofit hierarchies. Her whole-person approach to training supports her reputation as an effective and respected leader in learning and development and human resources.



ALI Founder, Shazel Muhammad-Neain delivering a training on building community resilience

Meet our Partners

Curriculum Partners

Anthony Browder (IKG Cultural Resource Center)

Anthony Browder is a renowned author, publisher, cultural historian, artist and educational consultant and has lectured extensively throughout the USA, Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico, Japan and Europe, on issues related to African and African American history and culture.

Mr. Browder is the founder and director of IKG Cultural Resource Center. He has traveled to Egypt 54 times since 1980 and is currently director of the ASA Restoration Project, which is funding the excavation and restoration of the 25th dynasty tomb of Karakhamun in Luxor, Egypt. Browder is the first African American to fund and coordinate an archeological dig in Egypt and has conducted 23 archeological missions to Egypt since 2009. All of his publications are currently being used in classrooms around the world.



Vital Smarts

Vital Smarts is an award winning learning and development organization whose training programs have been used by more than two million people and over 300 of the Fortune 500 companies to improve productivity, relationships, and overall performance. The behaviors that are taught help people to engage in healthy and beneficial dialogue around risky topics that often lead to unhealthy and/or damaged relationships, poor and non-productive outcomes, or even worse, violent outcomes.

When Crucial Conversations skills are learned and implemented, dialogue becomes compassionate yet honest; wherein mutual purpose and mutual respect are found and created, and outcomes are healthy and productive.

VitalSmarts®

**crucial
conversations®**



Meet our Partners

continued...

Programmatic Partners

African Ancestry, Inc.

African Ancestry, Inc. (AfricanAncestry.com) is the pioneer of genetic ancestry tracing for Black people around the world. They utilize the largest database of African lineages in the world to accurately assess present-day African countries of origin and tribes for people of African descent.

African Ancestry is a Black owned company and employs Black scientists, geneticists, and staff. Their work has impacted the lives of more than 1,000,000 people including consumers, communities, and renown notables to help them connect with the roots of their family tree. African Ancestry does not research, sell, or share DNA results or any customer information, period. All samples are destroyed at the lab following analysis. African Ancestry has the largest and most comprehensive database of over 30,000 indigenous African DNA samples and determines specific countries and specific ethnic groups (tribes) of your origin.



"Partnering with ALI is fundamental to our mission of transforming the way that Black people view themselves by understanding the roots of their family trees. We look forward to contributing to the transformative effect that the ALI program will have on the young people who participate." - Dr. Gina Paige, President and Cofounder

Boys & Girls Club of Mercer County, NJ

Boys & Girls Club of Mercer County has been making a positive impact on Mercer County youth for more than 80 years. Their programs focus on overall youth development in building youth's "40 developmental assets" to help them make the successful transition into adulthood. The Club utilizes evidence-based and best practice programs to reach these outcomes.

To this end, Club members are more likely to graduate from high school and enter into college, volunteer for community service, and perform better in school. Club members refer to the Club as their second home, and count Club staff as key influencers in their lives.

Today, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Mercer County serves more than 2,600 youth each year.



Meet our Partners

continued...

Programmatic Partners

Global Connections Foundation

Global Connections Foundation (GCF) NJ Corp's mission is to foster global citizenship by advancing educational diplomacy through reflection and ethical action in local, national, and international communities. Since 2007 GCF's sister organization, Global Connections Kenya has been linking teens across the globe with enrichment and community service trips between the U.S. and Kenya.

Global Connections Foundation earned GuideStar's 2020 Platinum Seal of Transparency, the highest level of recognition offered by GuideStar, the world's largest source of nonprofit information.



Brand Imagery

Sankofa



The concept of "Sankofa" is derived from King Adinkera of the Akan people of West Africa. "Sankofa" is expressed in the Akan language as "se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenki." This translates to "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot."

Sankofa dictates that we must revisit and understand our roots in order to move forward powerfully. This aligns with Eunoia Global's vision for ALI. By revisiting and exploring our collective and individual histories, we can grow together and shape the future.

Shazel Muhammad-Neain, Founder



ALI Founder, Shazel Muhammad-Neain



ALI Founder, Shazel Muhammad-Neain with Kenyan Ambassador to the U.S. Robinson Njeru Githae

Brand Imagery

continued...



ALI Founder, Shazel Muhammad-Neain after BBC interview with Hudheifa Aden of BBC Africa



ALI Founder, Shazel Muhammad-Neain, delivering remarks in Kenya at the 6th Annual Kenya Diaspora Alliance Homecoming Convention

Partnership Packages

Why you should become an ALI partner

The primary benefit of an ALI partnership package is the satisfaction you'll gain from being a driver in the global shift towards ensuring equity through education. Your contribution to ALI is tax deductible through our partnership with the Global Connections Foundation NJ (GCF). GCF is a federally approved 501(c)3 non-profit organization registered in the State of NJ. By supporting ALI, you will:

- Help operationalize the link between cultural pride and improved life outcomes for Black youth,
- Be part of an innovative initiative that enables change from the inside out, and
- Make a profound impact in the Black community.

Game changer
\$25,000 per year

Platinum
\$12,000 per year

Gold
\$6,000 per year


Silver
\$3,000 per year

Bronze
\$1,000 per year

Honorable Mention
\$500 per year

How to become an ALI partner

The ALI team is thrilled to partner with you and grateful for your support. Contact our founder, Shazel Muhammad-Neain, to discuss partnership packages and next steps.


































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Partnership Packages

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Partnership incentives

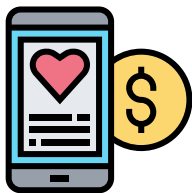
	Game changer	Platinum	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Honorable mention
Invitations to member only events						
Subscription to ALI's quarterly newsletter						
Listing on ALI's digital recognition wall						
Name or brand featured on the ALI website						
Name or brand featured on ALI social media						
ALI scholars volunteer with your organization						
Opportunity to network with other partners						
Logo featured on ALI merchandise						
Interview feature						

Support ALI Today



Become an ALI Partner

Email Shazel@AfricanLink.org to become an official ALI partner. Partnership packages range from \$500 - \$25,000 and offer excellent incentives.



Donate

Visit www.AfricanLink.org/Donate to make your tax-deductible* donation. It takes less than five minutes to complete.



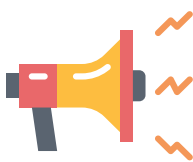
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Subscribe to our email list

Visit www.AfricanLink.org and enter your email address when prompted.



Tell five friends about ALI

Tell five people about ALI and encourage them to support. Consider starting with these: (1) a childhood friend; (2) a close coworker or colleague; (3) a family member; (4) a friend from college; (5) a member of your religious community.

*Tax-deductible as allowed by law

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