



Rebuilding community through Cultural Reconnection

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By Amanda Mancenido, Communities of Opportunity

When Dr. Marcia Arunga first moved back to Seattle after living in Kenya for over a decade, many members of her community asked her questions about her experience. What is it like to live there? What were the people like? Could you relate to them?

Inspired by their curiosity and her own rekindled connection to Africa, Dr. Arunga made it her mission to share her cultural pride and help other people in the community reconnect with their culture. Through Cultural Reconnection, an organization part of the Replanting Roots, Rebuilding Community (RRRC) partnership supported by Communities of Opportunity, she is helping strengthen cultural ties for African Americans in King County.

Reclaiming heritage

As the African American community faces the impacts of gentrification and displacement, the RRRC partnership is focusing on rebuilding a sense of place for the community in the Central District. Educating and creating a supportive system for young people is vital to this work.

Cultural Reconnection uses shared learning and storytelling to help youth understand and reacquaint themselves with their cultural roots. Recently, Dr. Arunga spent an afternoon at Washington Middle School to share her story with young women in My Sisters Keeper a program dedicated to fostering sisterhood for black female students of African descent. To know where we were going, she says, we have to know where we came from.

To help students connect with their ancestry, she shared the story behind her book, *The Stolen Ones and How They Were Missed*. As she weaved together personal anecdotes with tidbits of history, she challenged students to think beyond the common narrative of the slave experience. I had always heard that we were stolen, but I had never heard that we were missed, she said. Do you see the difference?

The second narrative, she explained, shows that whether they left Africa two years ago, or two hundred years ago, they are still linked to that culture. Connected and culturally rooted communities are stronger and better able to fight injustice, so she encouraged students to embrace their heritage as a way to better connect with

themselves and with others.

Understanding the past to build a path to a better future

The knowledge, insight, and advice Dr. Arunga offered sparked an excitement in students. Throughout her story, students listened intently and even piped in eagerly with their own stories.

By initiating dialogue about cultural pride and reclaiming heritage among young African American women, Cultural Reconnection is helping strengthen community ties not only to culture, but also to one another. With this work, Dr. Arunga is helping the RRRC partnership rebuild a community rooted in culture and connection.

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