

Auntie Na's Summer Youth Program
Country Where Project Took Place: United States
Sponsoring College: Oberlin College
Student: Darrell Davis, United States, Oberlin College
<https://auntienashouse.wordpress.com>

SECTION I:

The 2016 Oberlin College Projects for Peace aimed to create a summer youth program located in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan under the guidance of Sonia Brown, colloquially known as Auntie Na. The program, funded by the Davis Projects for Peace Prize, included a summer play and learning club for children and a youth development and employment program for young adults called the *Peewee Planters Program*.

The parent program entitled *Auntie Na's House* is a grassroots community outreach center located on the west side of Detroit. Auntie Na and her contemporaries are the direct descendants of black agricultural laborers who moved to the northern U.S. because of the industrial boom. One of the millions of black people who embarked on this journey was "Peewee" - Auntie Na's grandfather. He brought his agricultural prowess and solidarity-focused and social welfare-centered ways to where Auntie Na's House is located.

This first summer of the Peewee Planters Program, made possible by the Peace Prize grant, employed four local youths as support staff for eight weeks of the summer and served between fifteen and twenty Campers each day. Thirty youth benefitted from the programming more than once, plus an additional sixty youth benefitted from the end-of-summer backpack giveaway. The Peewee Planters were between 15 and 22 years of age, while the Campers were as young as 2 and as old as 14. Almost all of these youth are black and all are residents of the surrounding neighborhood with families living below or near the poverty line. The Peewee Planters worked in morning and afternoon shifts Mondays through Wednesdays with the overlap of these shifts reserved for group learning and check-in meetings. On Thursdays all of the Peewee Planters travelled to local organizations and assisted in tasks such as creating a garden or building a fence. Two of the Peewee Planters chaperoned Friday field trips and the other two assisted with our Saturday food runs and other activities. The Campers were present all of the time and when they were not engaged in some activity, they assisted in the daily operations of Auntie Na's House. These tasks included garden planting and harvesting, cooking, and moving free food and clothes to and from the corner lot for the community to enjoy. While the Peewee Planters' term of employment began June 20 and ended August 12, we served Campers full-time from the moment school ended in mid-June to the moment it started after Labor Day. Grant funding was utilized until the end of August to cover the expenses of full-time summer programming even without the Peewee Planters.

A recent graduate of Oberlin College, Aaron Appel, managed the budget and additional funding for the project. There were budget constraints and barriers that Auntie Na's organization had to traverse, including two of the Peewee Planters having to depart before the end of the summer, all of which led to numerous budget changes throughout the summer. These modifications allowed the project to end successfully and with all Davis money spent. Outside of the Peace Prize grant, \$2,057.25 was raised from a few private donors for other programmatic expenses, such as food for our monthly Bazaars, the bounce house at our monthly Bazaars, and the t-shirts for our summer camp.

At Auntie Na's there were many hurdles to overcome in terms of organization, time, and ability. These hurdles included crisis control and alleviation, which are often required when working with an evolving program that serves youth from inner city populations. Throughout the summer, there was a search for the balance between sacrifice and over-exertion and sometimes exhaustion of the staff, and overcoming those contradictions was a challenge.

The cultural barriers that one would think would be ever-present at Auntie Na's House in actuality were not very noticeable. Darrell Davis, the Projects for Peace award recipient, is black and felt like some people in Na's community had a harder time relating to him than to some of the non-black individuals involved in the program. The ultimate goals of the program were to better educate the kids, give them a space to just be kids, and provide them with a happy life experience while creating a foundation for further positive development. We accomplished all of those things, but the methods and systems in place will continue to evolve. There were a series of direct benefits for the program participants including the satisfaction of completing community oriented projects at Auntie Na's House and for other organizations and community leaders. Ultimately, we brought people together from the Detroit community to work toward a common cause of supporting children and transitional youth from the inner city while supporting their community. The long-term impact of this program is that Auntie Na has an established foundation through which she can impact the lives of these youth in a positive way. In December, Darrell will return to Detroit to work with a group of middle school students on issues of education justice.

SECTION II

Peace is a multi-sectored condition that intersects with political economy, culture, history, and spatial-temporal material conditions. Throughout the globe, there are structures and superstructures interacting with one another, as the structure of individual relationships and dynamics, such as those at Auntie Na's House, are a reflection of the dynamics of the superstructure. Addressing these factors allows individual relations and work such as at Auntie Na's House to be truly peaceful.

The best way to ensure peace is to make sure everybody's needs are met. Auntie Na's House is a social organization trying to reach that goal, but she is limited in her abilities for structural and practical reasons. Education justice will be an important focus moving forward, for if individuals in this environment are educated in regards to ways in which they can support their community, they might be less likely to start selling drugs, prostituting, or robbing to survive. This is especially true for young children and adolescents.

"This project has given us a great deal of energy on our journey of becoming change agents, peace agents, and social advocates." - Darrell Davis

Peewee Planter Program Under the Microscope



This photograph was taken at our 2nd monthly Bazaar in June, five days after the start of the Peewee Planter Program. This captures some of the multitude of activities that would take place at these monthly events.

Some kids are getting their faces painted while others are hearing their own heartbeat. Off camera to the left, a community workshop on recycling is about to begin.



This picture was taken at the second of our weekly Harvesting Unity days, where we took the four Peewee Planters to apply their hands to other community initiatives. Here, Darrell is collaborating with Deanta, Kenny, and TJ (3 of the Planters) to build a double compost bin at the home of a community member. We also constructed and filled a garden.



Every week we took our most engaged Campers on Field Trip Fridays. Generally we partnered with Summer in the City - a local nonprofit. Field trips included Belle Isle park, the African American History Museum, and The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. This picture was taken in front of the Detroit Institute of Arts.