


Honoring the Charlottesville Twelve with Sundials

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Current Cultivate Charlottesville youth food justice interns collaborated on a community project that began with the design of a sundial from a previous cohort of their peers that paid homage to the Charlottesville Twelve. In 2019, for the 50th anniversary of the integration of the public schools in our city, the interns decided to recognize the courage and tenacity exhibited by their elders—the students and their parents who integrated the Charlottesville City Schools in September 1959 after a year of massive resistance.

“The conversation began because the interns were talking about ways to deal with the trauma of the Unite the Right Rally and online racist threats that had closed schools in the spring. They wanted to find a way to celebrate the positive and move towards healing,” remembers former Youth Leadership and Garden Educator Shannon Gaffey.

After production delays due to COVID-19, the sundials were completed and ready to reveal.

 But first youth ranging from pre-kindergarten to the university level had something to add. They had their hands, literally and figuratively, involved in a commemorative project displaying signed handprints from each of them as well as a heartfelt message from the youth to our elders.

The current youth food justice interns prepared and painted wooden plaques that were used as canvases for their peers in our community to leave their mark. CSG and FJN program coordinators collaborated on gathering a wide variety of youth of all ages and grade levels to exhibit the true impact the Charlottesville Twelve have at every stage in the classroom. Making the project even more poignant was the fact that some of the students were direct descendants of several Charlottesville Twelve members and expressed how special it was to feel the connectedness across generations.

The decorative plaques were not only a fun project to work on but also served as a learning tool for the city's current young people as they work alongside the each other, share stories, and raise awareness of the many persistent social justice issues that still persist in our communities today. These plaques, in a way, serve as a promise that the steps taken place more than 50 years ago by nine elementary and 3 high school students have not been forgotten and remain pertinent today as we all strive towards a more equitable and just Charlottesville.

“It took a great deal of collaboration to bring this project from concept to fruition. We are so grateful to fabricators Apex Technical Innovations and artist Mike Powers—who donated all or a portion of their work—and everyone else who helped us to complete the sundials. We are also immensely proud of the food justice interns, both the cohort who originated the design as well as the current youth leaders who are continuing to learn about the legacy of the Charlottesville Twelve,” says Richard Morris, Cultivate Co-executive Director.

We would also like to thank vocalist Mark Williams, who brought the house down with his performance of "A Change is Gonna Come," and CCS Chief Academic Officer Dr. Katrina Otey for making remarks on behalf of the Office of the Superintendent.