

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Q&A with O’Nesha Cochran-Dumas, Recovery Leader and Community Advocate

By **Saundra Sorenson**
Of *The Skanner News*

O’Nesha Cochran-Dumas has fought hard in both recovery, and in her career as a recovery professional.

In late 2018, Cochran-Dumas was named program manager of Diane Wade House, an Afro-centric women’s transition home in Gresham. Widely praised for her leadership skills, Cochran-Dumas was often the public face of the ambitious, culturally responsive program. Her sudden dismissal only a month after the house opened shocked her and many in the recovery community. The abrupt termination prompted Cochran-Dumas to sue the nonprofit running the program, Bridges to Change, which settled with Cochran-Dumas and two other employees in 2021 for an undisclosed amount.

Cochran-Dumas told *The Skanner* that after leaving Diane Wade House, she was hired as a mutual aid coordinator for the nonprofit Brown Hope. A year later she moved into the position of community liaison for the Miracles Club (<https://www.theskanner.com/news/northwest/35316-bipoc-providers-push-back-against-initiative-to-fix-measure-110>), a Black peer-led recovery center specifically serving BI-

POC individuals struggling with addiction. Now nearing its 30th year of operation, the nonprofit provides harm reduction and addiction recovery services, and has expanded its offerings since receiving \$2.6 million of an allotted \$3.2 million of Measure 110 funding. Cochran-Dumas now serves as senior director of program development and outreach, supporting the organization as it became certified through the Oregon Health Authority to provide certified recovery mentor (CRM) training, and as Miracles extended its hours to 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week.

The Skanner sat down to speak with Cochran-Dumas about her work and how Measure 110 has changed addiction services in Oregon for the better. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The Skanner: What was your experience with the Miracles Club when you accepted the position of community liaison?

Cochran-Dumas: In 2011, when I first got clean, I came to Miracles broken, with nothing. Everything I owned was in a black garbage bag at my now- mother-in-law’s house, and when she got up at 7 a.m. to go to work, I had to leave her house and I had to catch the bus all the way out to 162nd to my wife’s friend, who

had an apartment where she didn’t have to pay a water bill, take a shower there, catch the bus all the way back up to Northeast Portland to the Miracles Club, and I would sit up here all day and I would let these people tell me what I needed to do to get off of drugs, get a job, pay a bill, get a house, and walk me through my

“They showed me, they talked to me in a language I could understand, they held my hand.

whole process of lived skills that I needed, life skills. I was a street kid at 13, I lived my whole life bouncing from homelessness, couch-surfing, and then when I wasn’t couch-surfing I was in prison. I went to prison

three different times. From the age of 13 to 35, I was in prison or I was houseless on the street. So I had no life skills.

But the people at the Miracles Club had experienced those things, and they made it to other levels in life. And they showed me, they talked to me in a language I could understand, they

held my hand. And today I hold two degrees of my own – I got my associates in alcohol and drug addiction at PCC and my BSW from Portland State University as a licensed social worker. I was the first peer mentor at

OHSU. There was no way I could’ve achieved these types of things without these women in recovery who have been there, done that, and shown me how to.

Couldn’t no doctor show me; couldn’t no lawyer. Couldn’t no politician. Couldn’t no policy, and all the people that want to repeal and change Measure 110 – they couldn’t have taught me how to get clean and sober and get my life together.

The Skanner: How has Measure 110 funding and implementation changed the work you do?

Cochran-Dumas: It definitely has changed the work that collectively a lot of community-based organizations are able to operate. I’m also the tri

chair on the Measure 110 Oversight and Accountability Council (OAC), and I’ve been a part of that council for about two years. So we got to read the grants and make the decision on who would receive the money.

About a year later I ended up working at Miracles, and Miracles was one of the recipients, and I got to see how their funding has immensely grown the services that they’re already offering. They were already doing culturally specific peer support and groundbreaking work in the community, so what the Measure 110 dollars did was start to multiply those services. There was one peer mentor that was here, an execu-

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DIANA WALKER/GETTY IMAGES

A ‘Sanitized’ MLK

This photo shows U.S. President Ronald Reagan signing Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday proclamation with, from right, King’s widow Coretta Scott King, son Dexter and sister Christine Farris on Jan. 12, 1983.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a sanitized version of Martin Luther King, Jr. was part of a conservative political strategy for swaying white moderates to support President Ronald Reagan’s reelection by making King’s birthday a national holiday.

Even after Reagan finally signed the King holiday into law in 1983, he would write letters of assurance to angry political allies that only a selective version of King would be commemorated.

That version was free of not only the racial politics that shaped the civil rights movement but also of the vision of systemic change that King envisioned. In addition, Reagan’s version left out the views that King held against the Vietnam War.

—Hajar Yazdiha, Assistant Professor of Sociology, USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Seattle Griot Project Checks In: Here’s How to Expand Local History Preservation

The new Washington State Black Legacy Institute will house the organization’s work and provide resources for community historians.

By **Saundra Sorenson**
Of *The Skanner News*

A year ago, the folks at the Seattle Griot Project introduced us to a developing blueprint for cities looking to preserve local Black history, neighborhood by neighborhood.

Curator Roger Evans told *The Skanner* that the organization has “been in turbo mode this year,” acquiring an impressive permanent space that used to

house a Christian Science church, and fundraising to purchase it outright.

The group continues to combine analog resources with digital technology – including AI – to best exhibit Black history in the Pacific Northwest. The growing interactive museum and community space has resources for new archivists and interviewers who might be looking to explore their own families’ pasts.

Evans sat down with *The Skanner* to talk about Black history in the Pacific Northwest, the unexpected treasures that can be found among elder’s personal archives and how digital literacy is the key to preservation.

The Skanner: How has the Seattle Griot Project grown since we last spoke?

Roger Evans: This year, on top of interviews, we’ve added to our profile. We bought a 9,000-square-foot building up in West Seattle, which we have

formally titled the Washington State Black Legacy Institute.

The environment is going to be the display case, so to speak, of what the Griot project is collecting, what they’re amassing, what they’re getting ready to tell the story of the Pacific Northwest and I hate to say it, it includes Oregon too, because we’re talking about the Oregon territories, when Blacks made migration over here in 1844. So it covers all of Oregon, all of Washington, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho – we’re talking about six states. We have been collecting and putting together that story to be spoken in this environment.

We have a mobile exhibition, the roving museum. We have created 11 banners that represent eight pioneers, a timeline and a preface that outlines what we do. The banners have primary Black pioneers from Spokane to Bremerton. There’s a timeline that

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The Seattle Griot Project’s new Washington State Black Legacy Institute is housed in the former Sanctuary at Admiral building in West Seattle.