



# A Year in Review



women  
of  
cincy

2021

photos by e. palm, k. nemeth, a. lipscomb, s. wegley, + n. mayes

# A letter from the Executive Director

I've put off this letter for so long, mostly because I just couldn't figure out where to begin. When thinking through how to start this off, in true '90s kid fashion, I just keep hearing Smash Mouth sing, "My world's on fire, how about yours?"

Most days I look at the world and feel... distance. It's hard to put into words, but I see ideological distance between neighbors; the massive gap between the Cincinnati we live in and a true, equitable city; and the physical distance separating friends, colleagues, and family entering our third year of a global pandemic. Sitting alone at my dining room table, I realize that I desperately miss the small talk around the coffee maker, a couch full of friends drinking wine, and the deep conversations that happen while looking at someone face-to-face. With so much distance, it's easy to see how empathy is missing from so many of our conversations.

More times than I'd like to admit, I thought 2021 was our last year of Women of Cincy. The beauty and downfall of our work is that it's hard to measure. Creating empathy: What does that look like? What kind of impact does

it make? In a world where everything has to be assigned a justifiable dollar amount, our mission – connection, storytelling, celebration – is a hard sell to grantmakers, businesses, etc.

Despite the setbacks, we're still here today because of you and the absolute joy that your stories create for so many everyday people just making life work. There are so many people who saved us, even though they didn't know it. Time and time again, we were pulled out of dark moments by a kind comment left on a story, a donation in the middle of the night, a T-shirt order from a name I didn't recognize, a story that moved us to tears, or watching our volunteers continuously go above and beyond when bringing these stories to life.

*"Well, the years start coming and they don't stop coming..."*

Looking back, I can't believe what we've accomplished since we began as an Instagram account back in 2017. My 24-year-old self had no idea how much love, loss, and life were ahead of her, and how much impact Women of Cincy would have on her and our city. Three

hundred and ninety five stories later, we're entering 2022 with big dreams, a kickass team, and stories that give us hope, insight, and gratitude.

In 2022, our words to live by are balance and sustainability. We're striving for balance: in our everyday lives; the opportunities we take and times we say no; and keeping our voice, independence, and mission alive when the world tells us it isn't enough. And sustainability: building a stable foundation we can learn and grow upon so that we can create a long-term plan for Women of Cincy in the next five, ten, twenty years.

These words to live by apply to my own life too. Finding the balance between being a new mom, running a nonprofit, and paying the bills; remembering the things I love and taking time to plan my garden; and teaching my daughter that the distance we feel is fixable when we center empathy in every decision we make.

*"All that glitters is gold, only shooting stars break the mold..."*

**"...the distance we feel is fixable when we center empathy..."**

–Chelsie Walter

To Zoey, Tia, Kristyn, Jillian, Katie, Rubina, Emily, Zaria, Cheniece, Zoe, and all of our other interviewees in 2021 – thank you for sharing your story so authentically. Your words make a difference and we are forever in your corner.

Together, we're taking a different approach to media and shifting narrative power to the people who make our city work everyday. And while all that glitters isn't always gold – with enough passion, love, and open-mindedness, there's a lot of gold left in the world.

Gratefully,

Chelsie Walter  
Executive Director  
Women of Cincy



photo by c. walter



photo by n. young



photo by a. larrison

# What is Women of Cincy?

## Mission

Women of Cincy is a nonprofit media organization dedicated to creating more connected, empathetic, and inclusive communities by centering the diverse voices that represent our city.

We shift narrative power from traditional media and influencers to the everyday people who live in our communities. We believe lived experience has power and wisdom. The community changemakers whose stories we tell are the key to creating better systems and a more just future for all.

Women of Cincy is committed to mentoring the next generation of civically engaged storytellers and sharing local stories told by local women. The diverse voices of mothers, teachers, healthcare providers, and frontline workers are the kinds of voices we amplify.

## The Big Three

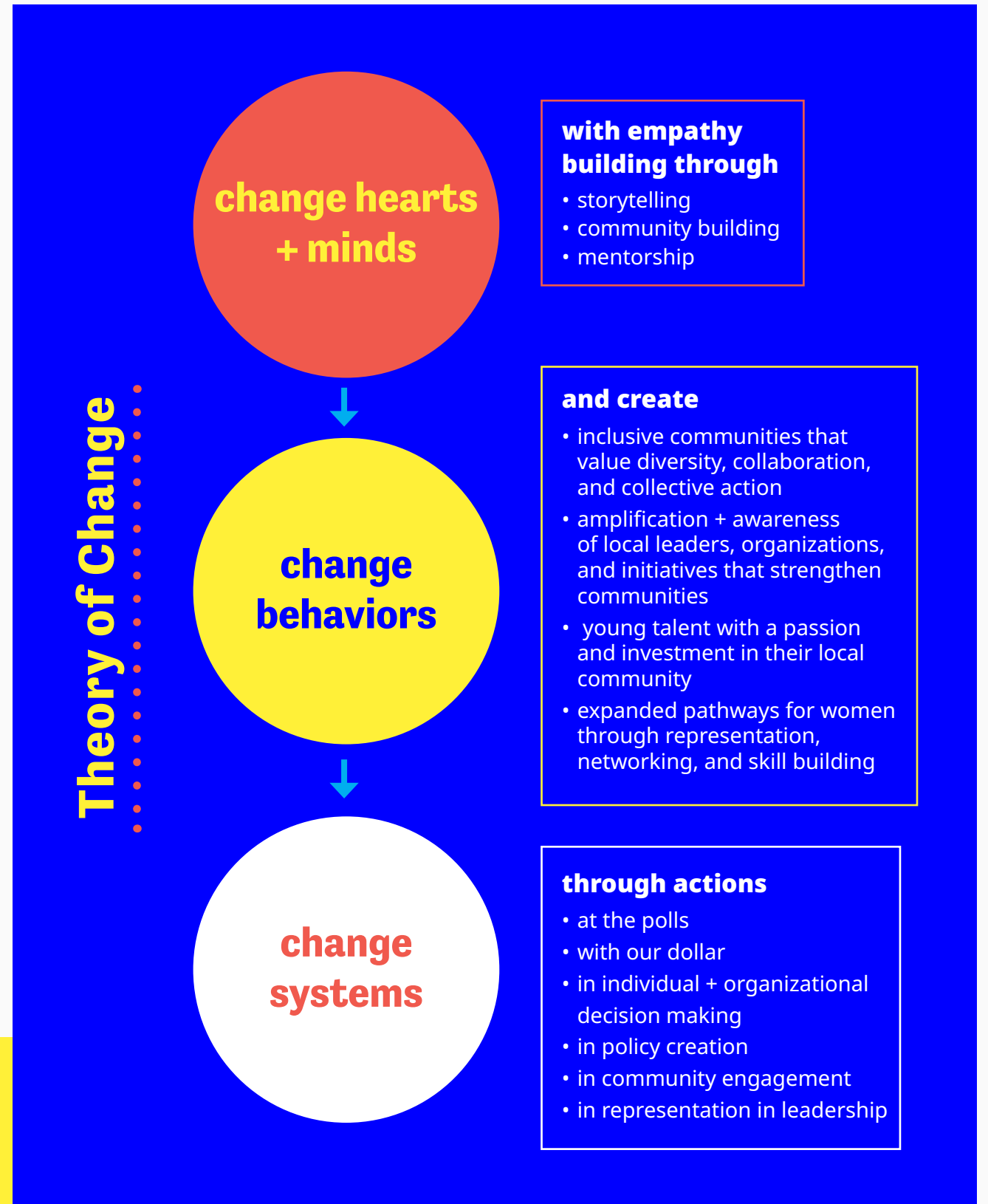
We enact our mission through three pillars: storytelling, community building, and mentorship.

**Storytelling:** Our stories consist of long-form Q&As, Community Mix pieces, and in-depth special series on topics including entrepreneurship, Black women's economic mobility, housing insecurity, and more. All of our stories are centered around the Cincinnati region.

**Community building:** We amplify local leaders, organizations, and initiatives that strengthen communities, and we connect like-minded people who can leverage one another's strengths to work toward a common goal. We also build community within our team, with more than 40 volunteers and residents who are more like family than acquaintances.

**Mentorship:** Our residency program is aimed toward college students with interests in journalism, communications, and multimedia. We believe in investing in young people by giving them an active role in creating work that exemplifies integrity, quality, and social good.

We are creators, storytellers, and community activators.



**“Craft your own story and craft your own path. It won’t always be easy, but it will always be worth it.”**

– Jillian Harrison-Jones



photo by s. wegley

# A look back at 2021

Thinking back through 2021 feels a bit like déjà vu. Still in the throes of COVID, we worked hard to make the best of Zoom meetings, limited outdoor events and get-togethers, and reminisced about the days when we laughed and sipped coffee with our interviewees without masks or worry. And while the year threw challenge after challenge our way, we also discovered more about ourselves and found ways we could bring empathy to our community in an attempt to close that ever-present distance we all felt.

In 2021 we produced **41 stories**, reached over **34,000 people**, **graduated seven students** from our residency program, and launched UPLIFT: a directory of women-led products and services.

We kicked off the year featuring a local fiber artist, followed by: a pediatrician, entrepreneur, floral farmer, and a nonprofit founder focused on helping formerly incarcerated women. The stories we tell are diverse in so many ways because of you. Our Feature stories are selected by the community and as of today, there are **357 nominations** and growing. In 2021, our Feature

interviewees were **72% women of color** with a majority of those features centering Black women. In 2022, our goal is to hit 75%.

We launched Feature after Feature week after week from January to November highlighting awesome Cincinnatians in their own words. Women of Cincy also produced nine editions of Community Mix on the first Saturday of each month. Community Mix is a place for us to explore the people, places, and events that make Cincinnati sing. In Community Mix, we published: local gift guides, a collection of books about Cincinnati history authored by Black Cincinnatians, chatted sex with our favorite local librarian, interviewed some of our badass team members, explored gender identity and music, and so much more.

In April, Women of Cincy launched UPLIFT: a directory of women-led products and services to help our community access local business and nonprofits led by women-identifying individuals. Since the directory launch in April, it has been viewed **over 1,000 times**. Thirty local businesses and nonprofits have signed up and we continue to explore ways to

Together, let's put empathy to work!

grow this cohort, encourage our city to shop local, and share stories of the women who drive our local economy.

We also moved outside of our typical content to help readers get to know candidates for the Cincinnati City Council and Mayoral races, explored Ohio's current issues with gerrymandering, and reminded our readers of important voting dates.

When the weather warmed up, we got outside and shared a few moments in the sun with our community. We threw our first-ever silent auction fundraiser and **raised close to \$3,000**, chatted with folks at Second Sunday on Main, and shared a charitable brew at Rhinegeist and Brink Brewing.

As a team, we welcomed SO many new babies (Nora, Izzy, Griffin, and Clay) and our spirits were lifted. We also worked together to bring stories to life and sharpen our craft, poured as much wisdom as we could into our residents, and created long-lasting friendships.

And finally, YOU. You were such a huge part of our success this year. From sharing our content, to donating to

support these stories, to flooding us with nominations, to buying merch, and thoughtful conversations - we can't thank you enough. Incredible things happen when people support each other. And together in 2022, we're going to make huge, positive ripples throughout our city. Let's go!!!



# Measuring impact by the numbers

COVID threw quite a few curveballs into our editorial calendar, but our team and interviewees made it work. In addition to our typical stories, we also launched a women-led business directory, covered the mayoral and city council races, and produced a social media series on gerrymandering.



# Measuring impact through experience



**“We [Women of Cincy] don’t just honor CEOs; we celebrate everyday people who are doing incredible things in our region.”**  
– Sandra Okot-Kotber, Women of Cincy Communications Director



**“When I interview women, I learn about their lives, their experiences, and their passions. Their stories and their voices build empathy in new and wonderful ways every time.”**  
– Suzanne Wilder, Women of Cincy writer



**“Women of Cincy has highlighted the stories of people who are dedicated to making Cincinnati a better city. Even as a Cincinnati native, I learn so much from these interviews, and they have inspired me to tune in more to my city, and to do what I can to improve my part of the world.”**  
–Ayana Rowe, Women of Cincy editor



photo by h. colley

photo s. barton

photo provided

# Residency program

## The next generation

There's no path toward a bright, more connected and equitable future that doesn't involve the next generation of storytellers. When we talk about progress, we're talking about generational work that centers empathy and a deep respect for our neighbors. Investing in the talents, passions, and experiences of young people ensures that our city is able to become a city that all citizens are proud to call home.

Women of Cincy is mentoring the next generation of civically engaged storytellers and sharing local stories told by local women. In 2021, **seven students** participated in Women of Cincy's Residency program and built their skills through storytelling and media creation.

Throughout two college semesters, our residents build their skills in writing, communication, problem-solving, and empathy building to create social media posts, stories, research projects, and more. In 2021, our residents surpassed the stereotypical "intern" role to produce high-quality work and directly advance Women of Cincy as an organization.

*"As a resident in my second semester, something that makes Women of Cincy special to me is their trust and confidence in their residents. I became a resident in May of 2021 and I knew at my first meeting that this was not only a place, but a family, that made me feel heard, respected, and appreciated. I'm not just an intern grabbing coffee for my supervisors. I am constantly given tasks like editing features, writing social media posts, and building our website. Women of Cincy even gives their residents an opportunity to be a part of the hiring process, which is one thing that truly made me realize how valued I am as a resident."* -Sally Bishop

*"As a resident, I've had the opportunity to have a peek into how these stories are put together, and the care and attention that goes into each and every one of them is an amazing thing to see every time. I feel so lucky to be a part of the Women of Cincy team."* -Hailey Semchee

Last year, all seven of our Residents received academic or internship credit by working with Women of Cincy. Our Residents also wrote and produced their own stories about rape culture at their universities, public art, farmer's markets,

profiles on Women of Cincy volunteers, and gerrymandering. The students also produced a whopping **238 social media posts** and **26 newsletters** for the organization.

We strongly believe we must include young people in hard conversations. We know we must engage and uplift growing storytellers. We see first-hand the importance of nourishing their pas-

sion, skills, and potential. Bolstered by their experiences at Women of Cincy, our students finish the residency program and move into careers in journalism, communications, community advocacy, and more.

Our students are the next generation to promote sustainable and equitable change and enrich our community through telling stories.

**"We strongly believe we must include young people in hard conversations."**



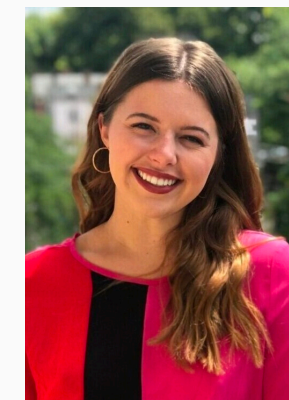
**Olivia Taylor**  
Residency Director  
Former Resident



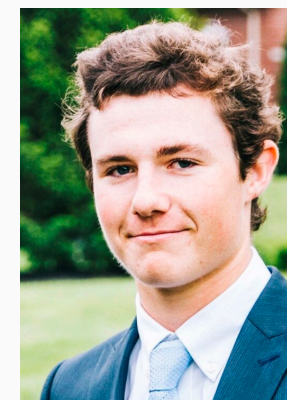
**Hailey Semchee**  
Summer/Fall 2021



**Karley Cappel**  
Spring/Summer 2021



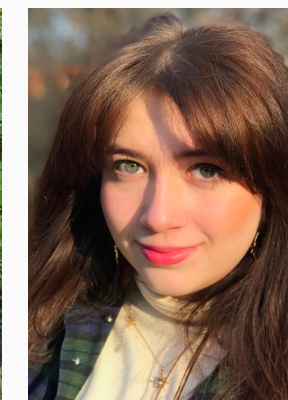
**Sally Bishop**  
Summer/Fall 2021



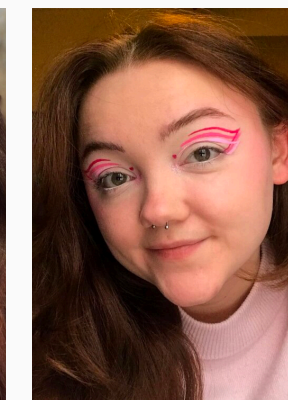
**Aaron Sary**  
Spring/Summer 2021



**Natalie Galle**  
Fall 2020/Spring 2021



**Emma Segrest**  
Fall 2020/Spring 2021



**Dani Delaney**  
Spring/Summer 2021



photo by c. walter



photo by h. colley

# Looking ahead to 2022

*In 2022, we're shooting for the stars – but with hearts grounded in empathy and community.*

## With your help...

- We can fund a part-time executive director and hire a part-time editor and content manager – capacity building is crucial to maintain our current workload and future growth
- Continue to raise funds to support our Residency program with the goal of moving the residency to a paid position and funding a residency director
- Launch new revenue streams to support our growth as an organization
- Increase the number of stories published
- Expand our business directory, UPLIFT, and continue to find new ways to connect Cincinnatians to their local business community
- Reach 65,000 readers
- Produce another in-depth sponsored series
- Continue to build strong ties with our community and train the next generation of civically minded storytellers



**“We are documenting the lives of unsung heroes and celebrating their voice, lived experience, and hopes for the future.”**

*–Chelsie Walter, Executive Director*

# How can you help?

## This belongs to you.

- We need funds! This work takes time and resources – no ifs, ands, or buts about it. To give, head to [womenofcincy.org/give](https://womenofcincy.org/give). Women of Cincy also offers a variety of sponsorships to local businesses who align with our mission. Email [chelsie@womenofcincy.org](mailto:chelsie@womenofcincy.org) for more information.
- Know a business that might be interested in participating in our business directory? Send them our way! Businesses can sign up at [womenofcincy.org/uplift](https://womenofcincy.org/uplift).
- Tell your friends and family about Women of Cincy and share our stories each week.
- Nominate awesome folks in your community for us to interview. Head to [womenofcincy.org/nominate](https://womenofcincy.org/nominate).
- Volunteer your time. Are you a writer, photographer, or editor? Consider joining our team. Learn more at [womenofcincy.org/join](https://womenofcincy.org/join).



**Thank  
you!**

**When people support  
each other, incredible  
things happen.**

**To our Team:**

*Without you, none of this would be possible. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!*

**To our Donors:**

*Your financial support keeps this publication running. Every story, photograph, and connection made is possible because of you.*

Dawn Adams	Melissa Currence	Elise Hutter	Michelle Meitzner	Sara Skaggs
Kristina Anderson	Kelly Dailey	Dani Isaacsohn	Aimee Mercer	Jennifer Skaggs
Maria Arce	Patricia Davis	Kagoro Ivan	Jenni Moody	Sharon Skaggs
Katie Bachmeyer	Sarah Day	Richard James	Katie Moreno	Ashley Skaggs
Mary Baldino	Amelia Dewey	Christine Jankowski	Rachel Murphy	Ashley Solomon
Blaire Bartish	Rita DiBello	Michelle Jeanty	Liz Neidich	Chris Stahler
Kenneth Bean	Les Donahue	Whitney Jenkins	Margie Newcomb Ventre	Ciara Staunton
Beth Benson	Jake Elich	Key Jenkins	Hope Novak	Nicole Stubbs
Peri Bo	Chrissy Fidelus	Dale Jenkins	Sandra O	Joe Tacinelli
Betty Bollas	Rachel Fisher	Leslie Jenkins Reed	Andy O	Laura Taylor
Jackie Bonfield	Brandy Foster	Kelsey Johnson	Rosemary D. Oglesby-Henry	Katie Taylor
Jessie Boone	William Foster	Courtne Judy	Cynthia Oh	Annette Teel
Alex Bowden	Patience Gatima	Kathleen Kern	Dani Ondreka	Diane Tefertiller
Katherine Brennan	Kery Gray	John Kilbourne	Nathan Overmann	Joanne Urmston
Jerry Bressler	Brittany Guthrie	Michael Knot	Emily Paige	Devan Vaughn
Brice Brice	Maria Hall	Justyna Kukułka	Francesca Peace	Chelsie Walter
Monica Burden	Karen Harshaw	Mary Laymon	Stephanie Peacock	LaTosha Ward
Mary Burke Rivers	Max Heckel	Tonya Laytart	Tracy Pyles	Julia Warner
Sarah Busch	Jim Hickey	Maurice LeCroy	Sheryl Rajbhandari	Jenny Watts
Jacqueline Busingye	Brooke Hickey	Lindsay Lee	Michaela Rawsthorn	Eddie Weaver
Chuck Campbell	Dianne Hickey	LA Littleford	Gina Regan	Stacy Wegley
Ashley Center	Shan Hennigan	Meredith Macdonald	Tricia Reynolds	Heather Wells
Sarah Christ	Kelley Hill	Nazly Mamedova	Kelly Rivard Ives	Jennifer Wells
Cohen	Vada Hill	Casey Marie	Tia Rochelle	Sarah Wheatley
Rick Cooper	Janet Hill	Deana Marie	Kali Rothwell	Suzanne Wilder
Megan Cooper	Rachel Hodesh	Ayana Marie	Ruby Roulette	Sarah Wilder
Amy Cottrell	Bryce Hodge	Karlee Mason	Emma Schmidt	Denise Williams
Amy Cottrell	Andy House	Candice Matthews Brackeen	Katie Schneider	Ben Wilson
Zac Courter	Jenell Hubbard	Kay McAdow	Jenny Schoeppner	Emily Wolff
Calcagno Cullen	Ellen Huggins	Kate McCracken	Lauren Sebastian	Cathy Wolff
John Cummings	Dina Hurley	Sarah Mcginley	Brian Shaw	Christina Yearout
Simon Curran	Alexis Hutchison	Alex McMahan	HW Shows	Michelle Ziegler