

Growing a Village

An Interview with Ashlee Hypolite, Operations Manager, Social Change Fund United

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming her current role, Ashlee Hypolite spent nearly five years at Creative Artists Agency. Hypolite earned a BA degree in politics and sociology with a minor in legal studies from Brandeis University.



Ashlee Hypolite

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Social Change Fund United (thesocialchange fund.org), founded by Carmelo Anthony, Chris Paul, and Dwyane Wade, was established to invest in and support organizations focused on empowering communities of color and advocating for the human rights of all Black lives through the lens of policy solutions, community representation and narrative change. Social Change Fund United supports critical and timely issues impacting the Black community including ending police brutality and championing criminal justice reform, economic equity, and voting and civic engagement. All donations are tax-deductible through Social Change Fund United's 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor, the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF). EIF is a Charity Navigator Four-Star Charity that meets all 20 Better Business Bureau charity standards and carries the GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency.

What was the vision for creating Social Change Fund United and how do you define its mission?

Social Change Fund United's (SCFU) mission is to create a fair and equitable society

for all through holistic, community-led initiatives focused on Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform, Civic Engagement, Economic Investment, Arts & Education, and Health Equity. Carmelo Anthony, Chris Paul, and Dwyane Wade founded Social Change Fund United in direct response to the acts of racial police violence on Black lives including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and sadly too many countless others. They felt it was important to channel their collective frustration into action, creating a space

for like-minded athletes to build a philanthropic movement utilizing their collective voices, influence, and resources in the fight for social and economic justice.

How important has it been to have Carmelo Anthony, Chris Paul, and Dwyane Wade who are such passionate and outspoken activists for social justice and equality as the creators of the organization?

Athletes in both the WNBA and NBA have pushed their leagues to use their platforms to give voice to and name those who have been victims of police violence, particularly in 2020. Our founders, in addition to our Executive Council members, Candace Parker, CJ McCollum, Khristi Middleton and Natasha Cloud, have always utilized their global platforms to speak out against social injustices. These individuals, with support from their teams, bring together their personal philanthropy, experiences, learnings, and connections to uplift, amplify, and fund

the vital work of local community leaders while collectively using their influence to speak on the realities of Black lives in America.

How has the work of Social Change Fund United evolved since its founding in July 2020?

It has been an inspiring year. We have piloted partnerships and programs through financial and in-kind investments in both national and grassroots organizations including Equal Justice Initiative, When We All Vote, The Bail Project and DonorsChoose. In just one year, we have donated \$1.1 million in-kind donations, committed to multi-year support for our grantees, as well as empowered and invested in over 5,000 young people. Through our collaboration with Bleacher Report, seven Black designers were selected to create a one-of-a-kind HBCU Homecoming collection that celebrates six Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and brings visibility to these pillars of higher education for the Black community and the students that attend them. As we embark on our second year, we plan to deepen our work with local grassroots organizations and partner with more corporations to bring the needed resources to communities across the country.

Will you highlight the issues Social Change Fund United is addressing and how it approaches its work?

Social Change Fund United was founded to challenge institutional and systemic racism that permeates all aspects of life for communities of color, specifically the Black community in America.



“We are committed to supporting organizations that directly represent and benefit the Black community with the Social Change Fund United. Our goal is to create a pathway for inclusion and success by deploying the necessary funds and resources to invest in long-term change.”

Dwyane Wade



“On behalf of my brothers, Dwyane and Melo, we are excited to partner with bold.org to offer two scholarships for Black students aspiring to be mental health professionals in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month. We need more professionals in this space that look like us in order to continue to break the stigmas around mental health in the Black community. Through the work the Social Change Fund United does, we are committed to contributing to changing the narrative.”

Chris Paul

SCFU has five pillars that guide our grant-making and strategic partnership – Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform, Civic Engagement, Economic Investment, Arts and Education, and Health Equity. We address the problem of social injustice by focusing on solutions using a holistic approach that directs support, representative change and narrative change. One example of this approach is our Social Justice grant to the Bail Project. The grant allows the Bail Project to post bail for roughly 10 clients directly, and many others as the funds are returned and are reused for additional clients. Of the more than 17,000 clients for whom The Bail Project has posted bail since January 2018, 64 percent are people of color, and 21 percent identify as women. Not only is the Bail Project providing the much-needed immediate support to their clients now, but they are also publishing reports and educating the public to understand how predatory the cash bail system is. We will continue to identify initiatives and organizations that apply this approach to their work and align with our mission and values.

What are the key characteristics that Social Change Fund United will look for when deciding to support and partner with other organizations?

We prioritize high-need cities based on guided research and recommendation. Some of those cities include Chicago, Miami, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Portland, Charleston, Milwaukee,

Atlanta, Baltimore, Winston Salem/North Carolina, and Canton, Ohio. In addition to partnering with national organizations, we prioritize creating local impact and look for nonprofit organizations with deep ties to the Black community, initiatives with diverse representation in their leadership, and a successful track record of impact.

What is the relationship between the Entertainment Industry Foundation and Social Change Fund United?

Social Change Fund United is fiscally sponsored by the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF) which has a long history of managing charity organizations. EIF mobilizes the powerful voices of the entertainment industry and partners with a robust roster of such clients as Akim Aliu, Charlize Theron, Colin Kaepernick and Jennifer Hudson. EIF has served as a great connector as we are able to share learnings with other funds and build awareness while developing and enhancing programs on the local, national and global level that facilitate positive social change.

Leading companies such as Goldman Sachs and Creative Artists Agency (CAA) have signed on to support Social Change Fund United. What opportunities exist for other leading companies to become involved and support SCFU’s work?

We are continuing to grow our Village – we refer to our partners, collaborators, supporters, and grantees, as our Village because we believe

to create real impact, we all must commit to systemic change. Overall, we look to truly collaborate with our corporate partners to identify mutual community interests and maximize our platform. We welcome opportunities to discuss partnerships that will create impact through our grant-making and programmatic endeavors. We will launch our Gamechanger Fellowship program in 2022 to equip young people in a cross section of fields with the resources and skills they need to effectively lead, support, and thrive for the betterment of their community.

How will you measure success for Social Change Fund United’s efforts and what are the keys to driving lasting, sustainable change in the fight for social justice and equality?

We understand that by supporting local organizations, Social Change Fund United is directly investing in Black lives. We are doing the work to know where our dollars are spent and to measure our impact over time. We realize that this work is long-term and ongoing, and although we can sometimes feel defeated as we react to real time events, we continue to fight on and grow our village. Our success will be measured by the number of individuals served through our grant-making, the investment in communities by equipping the next generation of changemakers through our programs, and the number of companies and corporations who join us in this work. ●



“We established the Social Change Fund United to invest in and support organizations working to advocate for the human rights of all Black lives. From championing criminal justice reform to enacting policy solutions, we strive to create change that will uplift the Black community now and for generations to come.”

Carmelo Anthony