



## Celebrating Excellence Through Community Engagement

By Tabia Akintobi, PhD, MPH



As we dive into 2022 and navigate the continued reality of COVID-19 pandemic, we are careful to continue amplify and celebrate the

people and community partnerships that reflect our Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center (MSM PRC) vision: To lead the creation and advancement of health equity through community-led prevention research, programs, policy, systems, and environmental change. To accomplish we: (1) conduct interdisciplinary community-based applied public health prevention research with minority and health disparity populations; 2) train underrepresented community-based researchers and public health practitioners; and 3) demonstrate the value of community coalitions in conducting research. We are pleased to feature the important leadership and service of Community Coalition Board members Thomas Cotton (Vice Chair) and newest member Erin Vinoski Thomas, PhD.

In this issue you will also find an update on Project Take Charge, the HIV/AIDS prevention and implementation science study with and by young adults 18-25 years old in urban and rural Georgia. You will also learn of the newly established National African American Child and Family Research Center. We must continue to share the community-centered facts through a focus on COVID-19 vaccinations for children and the statewide work we are honored to serve and lead through the Georgia Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities (Aim 1).

You will also learn of the experiences of students engaging with the Center and how they demonstrate positions as both learners and future leaders. We look forward to continuing to serve, partner with and respond to the community through research and response strategies that make a difference! To learn about the MSM PRC, please visit [https://www.msm.edu/Research/research\\_centersandinstitutes/PRC/index.php](https://www.msm.edu/Research/research_centersandinstitutes/PRC/index.php). You can also follow us on social media sites.



<https://www.facebook.com/msm.prc/?fref=nf>



[https://www.instagram.com/msm\\_prc/](https://www.instagram.com/msm_prc/)



[https://twitter.com/msm\\_prc](https://twitter.com/msm_prc)



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6kP8h2CZZDLPID0InZo0Ag>



# New Community Coalition Board Member

By Erin Vinoski Thomas, PhD, MPH, MCHES®

Erin Vinoski Thomas, PhD, MPH, MCHES® is a Research Assistant Professor in the School of Public Health at Georgia State University (GSU) and the Associate Director of the Center for Leadership in Disability (CLD) at GSU.

Dr. Vinoski Thomas's work focuses on promoting health equity for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). She is PI of the CDC-funded Georgia Statewide Disability and Health Program, which seeks to improve access to preventive health care among adults with disabilities.

She also leads CLD's collaborative work with the Southeast ADA Center, which provides training and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act. She is interested in systems-level equity issues that occur at the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability, and brings this lens into all of her research and teaching.



Dr. Vinoski Thomas has worked with PRC's Community Engagement Course and Action Network (CECAN) since May 2020 and has received a CECAN mini-grant. As a member of the Community Coalition Board, she looks forward to strengthening CLD's and GSU's connections with other academic institutions, community organizations, and state agencies; learning from the vast expertise of other Board members; and ensuring disability community values and needs are considered within the PRC's initiatives.

# Project Take Charge

By Rhonda Holliday, PhD and Samantha Martin, MA



Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM), Prevention Research Center (PRC), has partnered with Albany State University (ASU), Atlanta Metropolitan State College (ATLM) and Morehouse College (MC) to implement and evaluate an HIV testing and educational strategy to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority serving institutions. First, an assessment was conducted at each institution to identify barriers to HIV testing, HIV and substance use education, and condom use, as well as to inform activities on each campus.



Following the assessment, a series of social media campaigns to promote HIV testing and awareness, and becoming effective peer educators on their campuses. At the conclusion of these trainings, students felt prepared and empowered to support the needs of their communities, reduce barriers to HIV testing, and promote change at their schools.

To learn more about Project Take Charge, please visit: <https://www.projecttakecharge.org/>





# GEORGIA CEAL

Community Engagement Alliance Against COVID-19 Disparities

## Garnering Effective Outreach and Research in Georgia for Impact Alliance

### Community Engagement Alliance Against COVID-19 Disparities

By Brittany Taylor, MPH, CDF  
Project Director



In 2020, the National Institutes of Health created the Community Engagement Alliance (CEAL) Against COVID-19 Disparities to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Georgia CEAL along with 10 other states/territories formed the CEAL Network. The Georgia CEAL team is led by Tabia Henry Akintobi, PhD, MPH (PI), with community principal investigators: Sedessie Spivey, DBA, MS, David Williams, MD, MPH and Robert Bednarczyk, PhD, MPH.

These teams are guided by a Community Coalition Board, comprised of 35+ organizations, designed to ensure that

research, outreach processes and findings are translated with, co-created by, and relevant to communities. Georgia (GA) CEAL's goal is to conduct community responsive, innovative research and outreach to understand and address vaccine hesitancy, misinformation and mistrust towards acceptance, confidence in and uptake of COVID-19 vaccination in Black and LatinX communities.

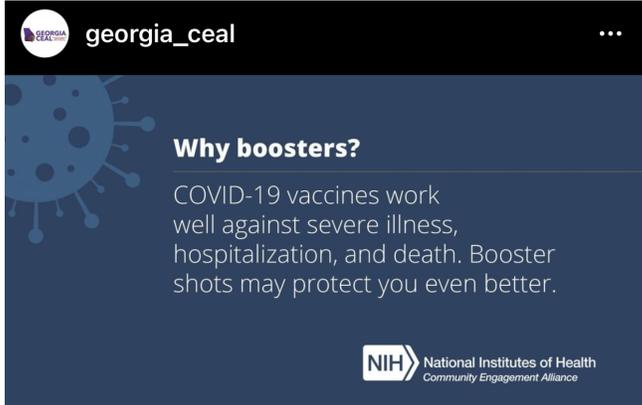
GA CEAL works to understand factors that contribute to the disproportionate burden of COVID-19 in underserved communities and establish effective, community-engaged research and outreach.

Year 2, incorporated increasing COVID-19 testing in populations at risk of or living with diabetes, and improving vaccine education among critical workers, and migrant populations in rural Georgia. Collectively, Georgia CEAL has created a Health Equity Dashboard, hosted COVID-19 townhalls, and media campaigns, participated in national educational forums, offered COVID-19 testing, provided COVID-19 vaccination clinics, rallies, provision of health care services, conducted clinical trials, distributed PPE and resources, and administered over 70,000 COVID-19 vaccinations.

In Year 3, we will continue efforts towards increasing vaccine trust, education and uptake. This will entail enhancing the Health Equity Dashboard, mapping the prevalence of school mask mandates, and implementing strategies to reach children. Georgia CEAL hopes with continued education and mitigation strategies, COVID-19 will become an endemic.



**We got a COVID-19 vaccine so we can make more memories.**

**Why boosters?**

COVID-19 vaccines work well against severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Booster shots may protect you even better.



# LET'S GET OUR KIDS

# VACCINATED

**BRING BACK SAFETY TO OUR SCHOOLS  
AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Vaccinating children ages 5 and above can keep them in school and safely participating in sports, playdates, and other group activities



**IN GEORGIA, MOST CHILDREN K-12 CAN  
GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE**

Scientists have determined that the Pfizer vaccine is safe for children ages 5 and above

**HELP PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN, FAMILY,  
AND OTHERS**

Vaccinating children ages 5 and above can protect others who are not eligible for the vaccine and those who are vulnerable to COVID-19



**BE A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUR CHILD**

Children are more likely to get vaccinated if their trusted elders are also fully vaccinated



For more information on COVID-19 vaccines:

[HTTPS://WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2019-NCOV/VACCINES/RECOMMENDATIONS/SPECIFIC-GROUPS.HTML](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/specific-groups.html)



SCAN ME

# The National African American Child and Family Research Center

By Latrice Rollins, PhD, MSW  
Center Director and Principal Investigator



The National African American Child and Family Research Center (The Center), the first of its kind in the United States and offered exclusively at Morehouse School of Medicine, is designed to provide national leadership and excellence in community-engaged research to better serve African American children and families. The Center will lead and support research on the needs of African American populations served by the Administration for Children and Families and promising approaches to promote social and economic well-being among low-income African American populations. The Center's work will broadly focus on early education, childcare assistance, TANF and economic mobility, and healthy

relationships, including fatherhood and supportive family relationships. The Center will also support and advance the practice, research, and policy communities by providing tools and resources, supporting emerging African American male scholars, and disseminating relevant research to help programs and policies better serve African American children and families.

## REDEMPTION & ADVANCEMENT ALLIANCE

By Thomas Cotton  
Founder and CEO



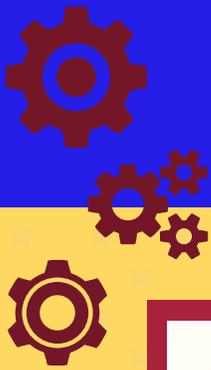
Reentry after a stay in prison can be a complex puzzle especially for someone who has never put a puzzle together. Approximately 95% of all people involved with the justice system will return to communities. Although returning to the community may be inevitable, successful reentry and reintegration are not.

We are raising \$25,000 to expand in 2022 to scholarship multiple formerly incarcerated people to go through technology training. We will also be placing them with a company to begin to build their career and life.

Follow us on our journey by going to our website [www.redeem-advance.org](http://www.redeem-advance.org) and click on the social media links to like, follow, and share. Also, partner with us by donating, or finding ways to volunteer. One minute is all it takes to make a difference in the lives of those who need transformation.



# Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center Student Spotlights



**Name:** Kaleb Whitfield

**Title:** MSM PRC Graduate Research Assistant  
2nd Year MPH Student at Morehouse School of Medicine

**Project:** GEORGIA CEAL

When starting with the Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center, my plan was to prepare and plan for applying to Ph.D. Health Policy programs focusing in the area of Maternal and Child Health. While working at the PRC my interests in public health have broadened a bit.

One thing that I love about the work I do here is the flexibility, collaboration, and room for professional growth. I have the opportunity to contribute and make an impact any and everywhere, ranging from participating in community events to data collection of surveys.

The most challenging aspect of my work is learning how to limit my emotional attachment to the people we serve. I am most rewarded by knowing that the work I do is not for gratification or glorification, but rather for building healthier communities and reducing health disparities. Working at the PRC has helped me to embrace and understand the concept of valuing humanitarianism. I may not be able to change the world but by doing my part I can change the narrative.



**Name:** Shawn Trimble

**Title:** MSM PRC Graduate Research Assistant  
2nd Year MPH Student at Emory University

**Project:** Prevention Research Center Evaluation Projects

As a graduate research assistant for the MSM PRC, I am tasked with supporting the evaluation of our prevention research programs. I work with researchers and community members to identify the health needs and issues within the city of Atlanta and the greater community. My work is to include the very people we strive to serve and develop community-driven solutions.

My time at the PRC has been rewarding in that I have been able to work towards ensuring that everyone has more equitable access to healthcare. The nature of evaluation does not always allow for me to be as hands on as I'd like with the community, but it's a necessity to ensure our programs are impactful. I aspire to become a research physician, and I believe the PRC has provided me with the tools to ensure that my work will stand to benefit those who are failed by our current healthcare system.





**Name:** Sanyu Kigudde  
**Title:** MSM PRC Research Intern  
High School Senior at Woodward Academy  
**Project:** GEORGIA CEAL and RADxUP

When I began working with the PRC, I understood that I wanted to pursue a career within the medical field; however, I did not specifically know what career I wanted to pursue. As an intern for the MSM PRC, I gained experience aiding in coordinating community events and ensuring that all participants received the proper incentives.

The most challenging aspect of my work has been balancing the responsibilities of high school with the tasks assigned to me at the PRC. On the other hand, the most rewarding aspect of my work is understanding that my contributions directly impact the lives of members of my community by ensuring that minorities have a voice when it comes to COVID-19. The PRC has provided me with an invaluable experience where I get the opportunity to work with community members and see how data collection can be used to improve the lives of people in minority communities.

## Project PEACH Student Researcher Receives an Award for Research on Diabetes Care Management during the Pandemic.



**Name:** Nyla Blagrove  
**Title:** RISE Research Intern  
Senior at Spelman College  
**Project:** Project PEACH

Nyla Blagrove is currently a sophomore biology major at Spelman College, participating in the Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE) Program. This program allows her to be a student researcher for Project PEACH (Promoting Engagement and COVID-19 Testing for Health) at Morehouse School of Medicine under the mentorship of Dr. Tabia Akintobi. This project studies how COVID-19 affects diabetes care management and how underrepresented groups can receive increased COVID-19 testing around Georgia. While completing tasks and attending meetings, she works on a sub-study project called COVID-19 and Diabetes Care Management among African Americans. She researches how the pandemic has affected access to care for African Americans living with diabetes and their challenges regarding care management. Furthermore, Nyla had the opportunity to present this research at the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS), where she won a Social and Behavioral Sciences and Public Health award for her outstanding presentation.