

Dear Friends:

This month's update re: 'Understanding and Combating Racism' is primarily in the form of an abridged email I received recently from a friend of mine regarding Alvin Mitchell and his amazing story and journey.

I just met Alvin last week at his Cobbs Hill Park "office". This was especially meaningful to me on many levels including that Cobbs Hill (as I've written about before), was literally a playground of mine in my youth. So here's the background about his "work" per the email:

*"I started working with Alvin Mitchell earlier this year at Cobbs Hill Park to support his outreach efforts through being a basketball presence who also feeds people [ basketball players, little kids and their parents]. He has been doing this for five years.*

*I met Alvin at the art opening for 'Lake Effect' magazine Volume 60, Winter/Spring, 2022. We subsequently started getting acquainted when he reached out for help as the pandemic support for renters disappeared [but he solved his own problem around that with his landlord]. He has a goal of creating a 501 C3 organization to support the work he is doing in the park, but does not know how to create one. He was hard pressed to figure out how he was going to manage what he did at the park for the coming 2023 season.*

*After hearing his story, I committed myself to helping him get through this summer season. I took him to lunch and introduced him to some other people I know through the 'Alternatives to Violence' initiative and the Gandhi Institute. I have personally contributed monetary support in addition to doing some food shopping as an in-kind donation this summer. My little Buddhist meditation Sangha has been generous and amongst us, including Alvin and his fiancé (Malika), we have met the need so far [which has been about \$150 per cooking event].*

*I took my daughter, who used to direct the 'Investing in Youth' program for Hillside and a friend of hers, with Alvin and me to the Teen*

Empowerment luncheon. I told him, "you are a part of this community and don't even know it!" My daughter and her friend introduced Alvin to people they knew working on non-violence efforts in the City, including Victor Saunders and Anthony Hall.

Since then the City has reached out to Alvin and integrated him into its 'Choose Wisdom' non-violence campaign (see picture below). I continue to do outreach to share his story. As a way of further introduction, here are some links in which Alvin appears. He is the guy in the blue T-Shirt talking about spreading love. [Alvin grew up in a household where he was not told he was loved. He says he used to be a member of the G-Boys gang on Genesee St and served some time in jail, but that he has learned to love himself, has developed a strong faith, and says what kids who show up to play basketball need to hear is that they are loved! ]

The mayor's introduction to the 'Choose Wisdom' campaign and the showing of the 3 minute video that includes Alvin...

<https://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=21474852520>

The piece in the Minority Reporter that describes the program and has a 30 sec section of the 3 min video ...

<https://www.minorityreporter.net/post/new-violence-prevention-campaign-to-increase-awareness-of-resources>

The City is in the process of making a film about Alvin and his story. The videographers have interviewed folks playing basketball at Cobbs Hill, Alvin cooking there, and they came to a recent family reunion of Alvin's .... <https://rocovp.com/>

I plan to reach out to Sister Beth LeValley, have offered to share the story with Greater Rochester Council of Churches, and would welcome any thoughts you have about others who might be interested in helping this kind of grassroots effort. My personal plan going forward is:

- 1. Support Alvin and his fiance to participate in the 'Alternatives to Violence' community workshop series starting in the Fall [after the Cobbs Hill Park basketball season].*
- 2. Alvin is scheduled to talk to folks at St John's Brickstone Community in early January.*

*He has told me he is willing to talk with anyone to share his story 'Anything for the Kidz'". (end of email)*

Last Friday, I (Bill) took Alvin and Malika to a RocGrowth event Downtown and he introduced himself to about two dozen people. He has a current initiative to provide back-to-school backpacks for the "kidz" and is in need of more. If you are interested in learning more about Alvin and his amazing work, the best way to do that is to visit him at the Park near the basketball courts, especially on Sundays at the barbeque he puts on starting around 10:00 AM through the rest of the day.