

Welcome to

VOICES OF UJAMAA

A new way to stay connected!
Get the latest updates, creative tools
and stories from our Collective.

The Inaugural Issue



VOICES OF UJAMAA

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Voices of Ujamaa, a publication of the Creative Community Engagement Circle (CCEC). We're grateful to share this new offering with you and open another meaningful way for our cooperative and community to stay connected.

This collective offering is shaped by the work, ideas, and experiences of our members. It's a window into how we move as a cooperative, how we support one another, build together, and stay connected to you, the community that continues to walk with us.

Each quarter, you'll find stories, reflections, and columns rooted in:

- Cooperative education
- The creativity, leadership, and perspectives of our members
- Upcoming workshops, programs, and community events
- Wellness practices that support everyday living
- The Wisdom Corner, where members share insights from their journeys
- Dear Ujamaa Sisters, our community advice column, where you ask the questions—about cooperation, health and wellness, entrepreneurship, and more—and we respond in the next issue, offered in the spirit of conversation, care, and collective wisdom

Our intention is simple: to strengthen the connection. To celebrate the people who make Ujamaa possible. To share knowledge in ways that feel accessible, relevant, and useful. And to deepen the relationship between our cooperative and you, the broader community we serve.

Thank you for reading, sharing, and journeying with us. We look forward to growing this publication together.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Kim El: Author, Actress, Playwright, Director

Kim El is an award-winning playwright, actor, director, and educator from Pittsburgh. With a degree from Duquesne University and a passion for shifting consciousness through storytelling, Kim has penned over 20 plays and received awards for Best Play, Director, and Actress at the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre.

A proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, The Dramatist Guild, Ujamaa Collective, and Arts Renaissance Collective, Kim El is a force of cultural and artistic truth. Her creative mission? To change the world—one play at a time. Kim most recently wrote the play *Suga and Soul*, which was premiered at Point Park Playhouse.

Kim has been a member of Ujamaa Collective for over 10 years.



We are also highlighting the work of another Ujamaa sister whose entrepreneurial vision continues to grow within our collective.

EMPRESS Jenni: Artist & Advocate



Empress Jenni is the creator and curator of EMBELLISH EMPORIUM, which hosts a quarterly marketplace at The Kingsley Association in the Larimer neighborhood, offering a social selling setting for small businesses, emerging entrepreneurs, and residents. The brand also features TheeCulturedHygienist, which focuses on holistic beauty hygiene and self-care routines. The network includes 70 online exhibitors and more than 10 member and associate brands. Our featured member is building and expanding her work through Embellish Emporium while continuing to grow within this ecosystem.

The EMBELLISH EMPORIUM Exhibitors Economic Equity Market enters its second year in February 2026, with the following event in May 2026. As a member of Ujamaa Collective, Jenni is grateful to give from her capacity and grow with grace. She joined Ujamaa in October 2024 and is happy to be part of this Sintern.

SAVE THE DATES
Industry
Friends
season 2026
FEBRUARY 7TH
MAY 2ND
AUGUST 2ND
NOVEMBER TBA
3-7pm AT
*
the kingsley association

CIRCLE ROUNDUP

The Round-up provides an overview of Ujamaa Collective's interconnected projects and partnerships through our internal cooperative circles.

The purpose of our Collective's circles is to support the cultivation of creativity, collaboration, and shared leadership within our organization through cooperative skill-sharing, collective decision-making, and mutual support. Together, we work on agreements and initiatives that grow sustainable economics through products, services and community relationships in alignment with our values of meaningful work, wellness, and fair trade.

The **Body Care Circle** has created a brand named "Radiant Roots," which is now being developed into a worker-owned co-op business. The Radiant Roots Collective is currently selling two items the members have formulated: an emollient body butter called Nourishing Harmony, and a luscious hair and body oil called Fresh Glow. All Ujamaa members of the circle have the opportunity, with supportive measures, to become co-owners and operators of a professional, profitable, and trusted body care line.

One of our goals is to produce and wholesale the products so they can be made available in other industry channels, such as boutiques, salons, and hotels.



Recently, Ujamaa's **Fashion Circle** received the Rise High grant from Neighborhood Allies, allowing us to offer Eco-Essence, a Black fashion sustainability project that we presented as an educational series of creative, skill-building workshops offered free to the public. These workshops focused on slow fashion and the repurposing of fabrics into wearable works of art, with the broader goal of keeping clothing out of landfills. We have hosted over 10 workshops since October 2025 across the city neighborhoods served by Neighborhood Allies. This series has assisted the public in receiving knowledge of repair, upcycling, and responsible resourcing of clothing and the multiple material alternatives available to use and reuse in everyday ways of life.

The **Creative Community Engagement Circle** specializes in creating open-air and maker marketplaces, plus other opportunities that bring partnership and community connections for our organization and the community at large. This circle assists members in growing relationships with each other as well as others who align in our journey of growth and impact. Curating many of the Ujamaa events, the circle helps set the stage up front and behind the curtain.



These three circles give dimension, color and texture to the threads that we weave as one.

CULTURE & WELLNESS

Member Mama Toni and Her Trip to India

Culture and Play in India:

For my 77th birthday, I embarked on a journey to Udaipur, Rajasthan, India, traveling via Istanbul and Delhi for an InterPlay cultural immersion. As an InterPlay Certified Leader and Life Practice Teacher, I joined a diverse group of InterPlayers from the US, Australia, and India, all united by a passion for InterPlay—a 35-year-old global movement that uses guided activities, or “forms,” to unlock the wisdom of the body through movement, voice, story, stillness, and reflection. These universal forms are rooted in age-old practices, making InterPlay accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Our hosts in India helped us foster creative, playful, and transformative spaces through the arts, movement, and community engagement over seven days.



While the trip was sponsored by InterPlay, I also represented the Ujamaa Collective as an Ambassador Member, eager to explore India’s vibrant entrepreneurial and community collective culture. Udaipur itself was a sensory feast—colorful, noisy, crowded, and bustling with life. The city’s narrow streets teemed with cars, scooters, motorcycles, and tuk-tuks, their horns creating a chaotic symphony. Sacred cows, goats, and dogs wandered freely, blending seamlessly into the urban landscape.

Our group of 17 participated in daily InterPlay sessions and immersed ourselves in Udaipur’s rich traditions. We learned marionette puppet-making from Raju, a master craftsman whose family has practiced the art of Kathputli puppetry for generations. We also studied the traditional Rajasthani folk dance, Ghoomer, under Master Dancer Vijay Laxmi Amenta, culminating in a performance at the renowned Rajasthani Virasat Folk Dance and Puppet Show.

Our cultural exploration continued with a visit to Shikshantar, an unconventional community education center, where we learned the ancient art of tie-dyeing with natural materials. At the center’s Friday night Meet-Up, I had the honor of being a guest storyteller, mingling with local attendees. We also toured the Old City’s narrow lanes, guided by a local organizer whose family’s apartment complex was built by his great-grandfather, a descendant of Turkish noblemen.



(Interplay BIPOC Leaders)

A memorable highlight was witnessing a collective of elderly women crafting traditional plates and bowls from Palash tree leaves, a cottage industry dating back over 2,000 years and typically reserved for women. We also enjoyed an evening cruise on Lake Pichola, circling the City Palace—a grand structure built on land once inhabited by tribal people.

Each day’s InterPlay practice culminated in a joyful Community Play session, where locals and visitors moved and played together, deepening cross-cultural connections. Throughout my time in this 400-year-old city, I was greeted warmly with smiles and the traditional Namaste. I saw reflections of my own family in the faces around me, reminding me that, despite differences in language or cuisine, we share a universal language of heart and spirit. My experience in Udaipur reaffirmed that, when we open our hearts, people everywhere are fundamentally the same—a lesson I will always cherish.



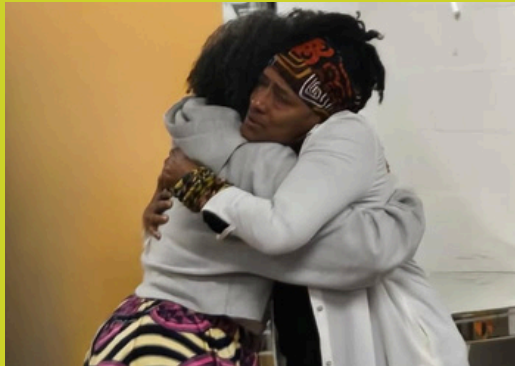
DEAR UJAMAA SISTERS

A Letter From the Heart of Our Collective

Did you know some of the most powerful conversations in our community begin with a question whispered from one sister to another? We've heard them over tea in the boutique, while choosing fabrics that remind us of home, or in quiet moments when life feels heavier than our smiles reveal. Questions about love and leadership, about balancing dreams with duty, about growing a business without losing ourselves in the process, or about resting when we were taught to survive by never slowing down. Questions like this stay with us. And, like seeds planted in nurturing soil, they begin to grow. What if there was a space where wisdom wasn't just shared, but collectively nurtured? Where solutions weren't borrowed from the outside, but rooted in who we are — our culture, our ancestors, our values, our cooperative way of being? Such seeds have grown into a space we now call Dear Ujamaa Sisters.

In this column, business questions sit beside heart questions. Healing walks with creativity. Self-care stands next to community engagement.

You might ask about friendship, finances, conflict, collaborations, or courage. You might write to us about decisions you're struggling to make, or dreams that feel too heavy to carry alone. We will respond — not as experts looking down, but as sisters lifting up.



This is wisdom rooted, not rented, love-filled, not judgmental, community-grounded, not individualistic: because at Ujamaa, answers aren't handed down from one person's pedestal. They are shaped together in a circle.

So, write to Dear Ujamaa Sisters with your questions, your stories, your reflections, or the dilemmas that keep tugging at your spirit. Your letter just might be the one that another sister needs to read. Your vulnerability just might inspire someone else's breakthrough. Your experience just might unlock another woman's resilience. And in return, we will offer guidance shaped by our collective wisdom, cooperative principles, ancestral insight, and the belief that sisterhood itself is a life-giving resource.

**Welcome to a space for truth, tenderness, and transformation.
Where we grow in community, one question at a time.**

We would love to hear
your feedback and
questions.

Please email us at:
dearujamaasisters
@ujamaacollective.org



2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

A year of movement, meaning, and deepening our cooperative heartbeat.

The "2025 Year in Review" for the Creative Community Engagement Circle (CCEC) of Ujamaa Collective details a year of "movement, meaning, and deepening our cooperative heartbeat."



KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR YEAR

- **Community and Membership:** Welcoming seven new members, gathering for the Annual Membership Dinner, and holding a Kwanzaa Celebration focused on collective principles.
- **Space and Growth:** Launching a capital campaign ("Building our Shared Future"), securing a new interim home on Wylie Avenue, and completing the transition out of the former One Hope Square location.
- **Workshops and Training:** Hosting a Tax Time Workshop, a Signs, Symbols & Synchronicities Workshop, Ujamaa Member Vendor Training, the launch of Eco-Essence Fashion Sustainability Workshops, and the transformative Woman's Orgasmystical Workshop.
- **Partnerships and Recognition:** Deepening the partnership with Legacy Arts Project for Dance Africa Marketplace planning and the Africana Wellness Conference. The collective also received a city council proclamation recognizing Ujamaa Collective as part of the local cooperative ecosystem in celebration of the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives 2025. Continuing our neighborhood work around building cooperation with the Hill District Consensus Group's Community Learning Justice Series and a new partnership with Bethel AME Church.
- **New Initiatives:** In honor of our 14th Anniversary, the Fashion Circle launched the Legacy Edition T-shirt to support our Capital Campaign, the Body Care Circle soft launched the Radiant Roots Collective, Ujamaa Members facilitated the "Aya Duafe Sister Stories: Black Girl Pushout" 12-week teen cohort, and the Creative Community Engagement Circle prepared for the January launch of this quarterly publication, Voices of Ujamaa.

Closing Reflection: *2025 has been a year of movement, creativity, spiritual expansion, and collective growth.*

We deepened our relationships.

We welcomed new sisters into the family.

We built, learned, created, healed, celebrated, and envisioned the future together.

And we are just getting started!



COLLECTIVE WISDOM

**TAKE A MOMENT TO RESPOND TO THIS QUARTER'S
QUESTION AND ADD YOUR VOICE TO THE WISDOM
WE ARE GROWING TOGETHER.**

**If social media came to an end TODAY,
how would you stay in contact
with the community,
your friends and loved ones?**

Email us at: dearujamaasisters@ujamaacollective.org

Reach us at: www.ujamaacollective.org
2512 Wylie Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Tues-Fri: 11am-5pm and Sat: 11am-4pm

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Special thanks to our Creative Community Engagement Circle (CCEC) members:
Tia Baker, Bekezela Mguni, Alana Griffin, EMPRESS Jenni, Lois Toni McClendon,
Anita Russell, Nisha Blackwell, Kat Carter, Charlotte Ka

Join Our Capital Campaign: Help Us Find a Permanent Home

We are committed to establishing a permanent home where Black women artists and cultural workers can thrive and collaborate with the community. Your donation to our Capital Campaign will help us secure a physical home that reflects the power and beauty of Black artistry, culture, and community. This space will allow us to expand our retail presence and programs, develop the cooperative production skillsets of our membership, and deepen our community impact. [**CLICK HERE**](#)

