

### Director's Message

## Past is Prologue

In William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, Antonio famously states "what is past is prologue" to justify choices that he feels fate has brought him to. While I won't give away the plot for all of you who might have some extra time to read some Shakespeare, I must say that I do agree with the underlying premise that **history sets the stage for understanding the present.**

History was always my favorite subject throughout school. There seems to be no other time of year that I am more immersed in reflecting on history than during Black History Month. The roots of Black History Month can be traced to 1926 in the United States, when historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History announced the second week of February to be "Negro History Week". While initially the emphasis was placed on encouraging the teaching of the history of Black Americans in public schools, eventually by 1970 the commemoration evolved into a full month within the United States. The observance of Black History Month now celebrates the contributions that African Americans have made to American history as well as the struggles for freedom and equality throughout history.

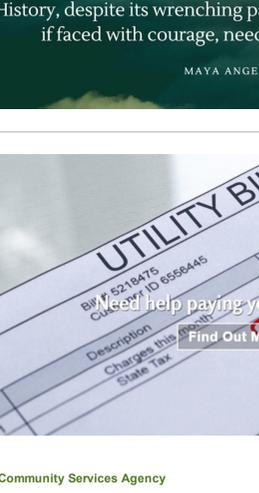
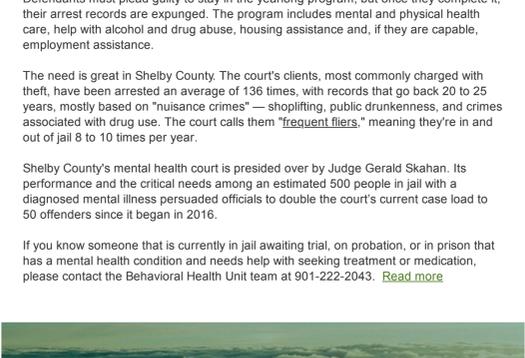
Regardless of your heritage, a better understanding of Black History is important to everyone's understanding of the full history of this nation and the world. While Black History Month may be designated as such, the truth is that **Black History is integral to the fabric of our collective history.**

History is vitally important. Just as science helps us to understand the physical laws that govern our world, history helps us to better understand the people in the world. It gives us an opportunity to critically reflect on our past mistakes, but also **helps to inspire us to do better** in the future. It helps us to understand our society and ourselves. It provides us with a sense of identity. It preserves our stories. It inspires us. It gives us warning signs. It can help us to be better people individually and collectively.

History is not just important in this global way, but it plays a very essential role in how we serve the community. We must dedicate time to exploring the history of economics, politics, and traditions of Shelby County to be best equipped to tackle the issue of poverty. We must also be intentional in listening to the histories and dreams of our clients. The better we understand a person's story, the more likely we are to **identify ways to best support them to success.** I am hopeful that we will all leverage this month's focus on Black History, our collective history, year-round, to inspire us to continue to be our best in service.

**Dorcas Young Griffin**  
Director of the Division of Community Services  
Shelby County Government

[Read More.](#)



### Office of Justice Initiatives, Behavioral Health Unit

## Mental Health Challenges in the Criminal Justice System: The Need for Shelby County's Behavioral Health Unit

According to a [Mental Health America 2015 report](#), 1.2 million people with mental illnesses sit in jail and prison every year. That is more than half of all Americans in jail or prison.

**Let that sink in. Half of all Americans in prison have a mental illness.**

Tennessee unfortunately ranks within the top ten states with the least access to mental health care. Shelby County took action in January 2016 to ensure that defendants in the criminal justice system, that have been identified as having a mental illness, have options for care and treatment that will ultimately reduce their risk of future incarceration.

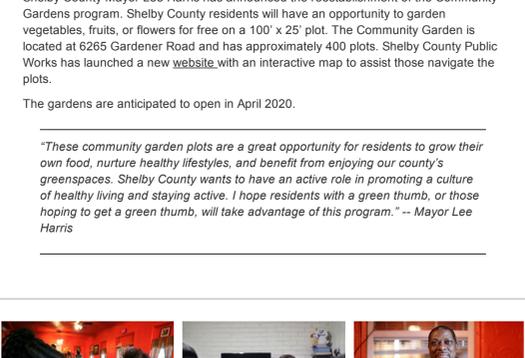
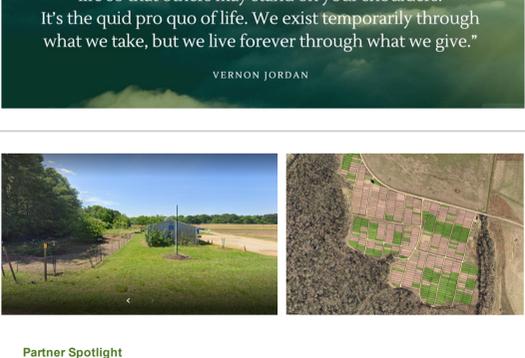
Qualifying defendants suffering from mental illness can go on probation, in lieu of incarceration, and have the option to have their charges dropped in exchange for completing a year-long mental health treatment plan determined by Shelby County's Mental Health Court.

Defendants must plead guilty to stay in the yearlong program, but once they complete it, their arrest records are expunged. The program includes mental and physical health care, help with alcohol and drug abuse, housing assistance and, if they are capable, employment assistance.

The need is great in Shelby County. The court's clients, most commonly charged with theft, have been arrested an average of 136 times, with records that go back 20 to 25 years, mostly based on "nuisance crimes" — shoplifting, public drunkenness, and crimes associated with drug use. The court calls them "frequent fliers," meaning they're in and out of jail 8 to 10 times per year.

Shelby County's mental health court is presided over by Judge Gerald Skahan. Its performance and the critical needs among an estimated 500 people in jail with a diagnosed mental illness persuaded officials to double the court's current case load to 50 offenders since it began in 2016.

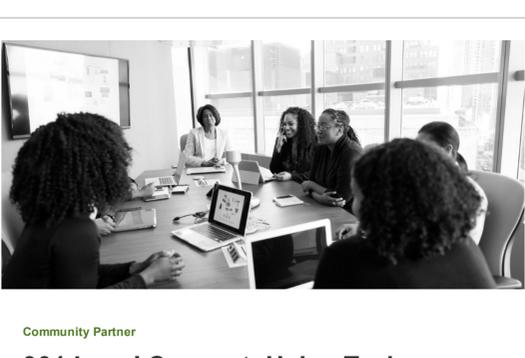
If you know someone that is currently in jail awaiting trial, on probation, or in prison that has a mental health condition and needs help with seeking treatment or medication, please contact the Behavioral Health Unit team at 901-222-2043. [Read more](#)



### Community Services Agency

## Rising Utility Costs Met with More Assistance

Winter months show significant increases in household utility usage which results in higher utility bills. These higher utility bills often put a strain on low income residents. Shelby County Community Services Agency (CSA) wants to help residents of Shelby county meet the rising cost of utility bills by paying up to \$650 towards your MLGW account. You don't need to wait until you receive a cut-off notice to benefit from our Utility Assistance Program. For eligibility information, visit [www.shelbycountyttn.gov/utility](http://www.shelbycountyttn.gov/utility) or be proactive and get an appointment NOW! We take appointments every Monday morning starting at 8:00 a.m. on our appointment line (901) 222-4299. We also take appointments in person every Monday morning from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Memphis Housing Authority office located at 700 Adams Ave, Memphis, TN 38105. We also accepted mailed in applications. For more information about utility or other types of assistance, visit us online at [www.shelbycountycsa.org](http://www.shelbycountycsa.org) or call us at (901) 222-4270.



### Division of Community Services

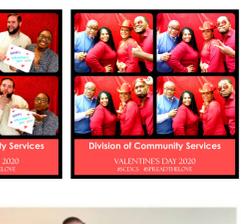
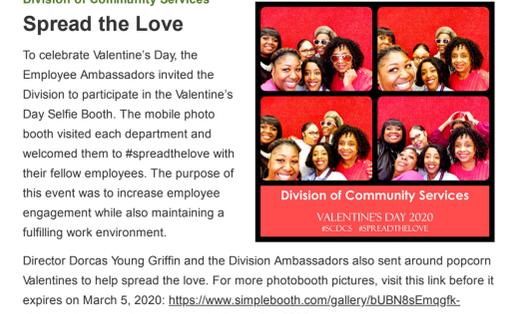
## Thank you ITS for Serving the Community

When approached by Shelby County Schools' Division of College, Career, and Technical Education (CCTE) to request we participate as a 'work-based learning site' for their '2020 CCTE IT Day' on January 30th, we knew that Shelby County's Information Technology Services (ITS) team would be willing and ready to give back.

Touring over 320 students city-wide, CCTE IT Day's goal was to expose students to careers and strengthen SCS' relationship with Memphis' IT industry employers. After providing a brief overview of County government by Deputy Director Raushanah Morgan, Chief Information Officer John Halbert, Administrator Sandra Perry and the ITS team hosted, educated, and entertained eleven Central High School students about the comprehensive work that ITS does for the County. The ITS team, led by Troy White, enlightened them with career path advice about what they did, why they did it and how they arrived at County government. The students then toured the careers in action, led by Central High alumni through IT departments to experience 'live demo' sessions.

Many students were surprised by what they learned and also the team's diversity; to continue learning, we encouraged them to apply for the Mayor's Summer Youth program for an IT internship.

As we work to introduce the next generation to County careers, we appreciate the unsung superheroes among County government within the ITS Division for giving their time and knowledge to these students. [Read more](#)



### Partner Spotlight

## Community Gardens Come Back

Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris has announced the reestablishment of the Community Gardens program. Shelby County residents will have an opportunity to garden vegetables, fruits, or flowers for free on a 100 x 25 plot. The Community Garden is located at 6265 Gardener Road and has approximately 400 plots. Shelby County Public Works has launched a new [website](#) with an interactive map to assist those navigate the plots.

The gardens are anticipated to open in April 2020.

*"These community garden plots are a great opportunity for residents to grow their own food, nurture healthy lifestyles, and benefit from enjoying our county's greenspaces. Shelby County wants to have an active role in promoting a culture of healthy living and staying active. I hope residents with a green thumb, or those hoping to get a green thumb, will take advantage of this program." -- Mayor Lee Harris*



### Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center

## Grief Group Helps Teens, Parents Who Had to "Face Death Too Soon"

The [Daily Memphian](#) was there when a homicide response counselor and a community engagement specialist from the Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center met at Orange Mound Outreach Ministries to discuss using the ministry as home for the teen grief pilot program. The grief group will be for teens and their parents impacted by homicides. The [Daily Memphian](#) reports:

*"You don't understand how much we need this," Rev. Reginald Tucker said. "It is a real serious necessity because I've had several kids who have had to face death too soon and the grief process is not resolved. I had one kid's brother to be taken, and it has been like four years and she is still acting out."*

For more than two decades, the Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center has offered help and free counseling to those in need. This year, the center is expanding its outreach in an effort to let the public know who the center is and what the center offers. Among the offerings is the new program to help teens affected by homicides in Memphis and Shelby County.

Photos by Patrick Lantrip of the Daily Memphian



### Community Partner

## 901 Legal Connect: Using Tech Innovation to Increase Free Legal Help

On February 6, the Memphis Bar Foundation launched [901LegalConnect.org](http://901LegalConnect.org) as the legal community's latest initiative to improve the way that underserved populations access vital legal services. 901 Legal Connect is a mobile responsive web-application that connects underserved residents in the City of Memphis, Shelby County, and the surrounding counties to free or low-cost legal service providers. The Memphis Bar Foundation is a part of a growing number of organizations that has employed tech-innovation to build sustainable programs that minimize some of the barriers to justice. Also, the Foundation is the first bar organization in the state of Tennessee to develop a web-based, applicant intake portal.

As a one-stop portal, 901 Legal Connect serves as a pre-screening tool that connects appropriate applicants with the correct legal service provider on the first try. 901 Legal Connect informs applicants in as little as 20 minutes if they meet the minimum qualifications for legal assistance. Then, they will be connected with the appropriate legal service provider who will complete the intake process to determine final eligibility.

This new one-stop approach creates a win-win for both applicants and legal service providers. Now, applicants will only complete one initial screening regarding their eligibility for legal assistance instead of contacting multiple organizations to find out if they qualify for help. As a result, CLC and MALS will receive only qualified applications, which increases their capacity to serve more underserved residents who would not otherwise have access to legal services. To learn more about 901 Legal Connect, visit [www.901LegalConnect.org](http://www.901LegalConnect.org). [Read More.](#)

### Where Human Needs and Government intersect

The Division of Community Services promotes ongoing economic security and independence for the people of Shelby County. We do this by promoting, coordinating and delivering services that address the underlying conditions for well-being and justice. We strive to be a highly organized team and partner, dedicated to promoting a strong community where all people are able to reach their full potential.



### Division of Community Services

## Spread the Love

To celebrate Valentine's Day, the Employee Ambassadors invited the Division to participate in the Valentine's Day Selfie Booth. The mobile photo booth visited each department and welcomed them to #spreadthelove with their fellow employees. The purpose of this event was to increase employee engagement while also maintaining a fulfilling work environment.



Director Dorcas Young Griffin and the Division Ambassadors also sent around popcorn Valentines to help spread the love. To have a photo booth pictures, visit this link before it expires on March 5, 2020: <https://www.simplephoto.com/gallery/bURNsEmag?location=division-of-community-services-valentine-s-day-2020>



**Division of Community Services GOES RED!**  
National Wear Red Day  
Friday, February 7th, 2020  
To raise awareness about the #1 health problem that affects American women - Heart Disease



## Wishing you a very HAPPY BIRTHDAY

- ANDREA ABANTO - Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center
- TAWANDA BATTIS - Aging Commission
- ESTHER BROADNAX - Community Services Agency
- CHRISTINA CATHEY - Pretrial Services
- CARLA COLEMAN - Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center
- TORI DENTON - Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center
- STEPHANIE DUCKETT - Community Services Agency
- HAZEL FANT - Community Services Agency
- IVAN FLORES - Community Engagement & Outreach
- CLARION HARRIS - Pretrial Services
- SHARON HOLLOWAY - Community Services Agency
- AUDRENA JAMES - Aging Commission
- SANDRA JOHNSON - Pretrial Services
- JANET LO - Community Engagement & Outreach
- CYNTHIA MORRIS - Pretrial Services
- LARRY ORANGE - Office of Justice Initiatives
- LASHAWN ROBINSON - Aging Commission
- JOYCE SMITH - Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center
- SANDRA TURNER - Pretrial Services
- LAUREL WILLIAMSON - Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center

[Read All Staff News](#)