

My name is Vanessa Chambers and I am a community health worker. I work at the Rockwood CDC in Gresham OR and I am one of the founders of the program called Grandma's Hands. Our program is funded through a grant from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (USDA Specialty Crop Program). Me and my husband Willie Chambers, along with the Wallace Medical team came together to do a program for grandmothers involved with their young grandchildren. From there we started working with Mr. Chuck Smith on the idea of African American grandmothers passing down their traditions to the younger generations. Each month we come together and use specialty crops such as collard greens, beans, broccoli, asparagus, cabbage, brussel sprouts, and squash, as well as foods that are not commonly eaten by families in the area. Our group of grandmas cook for the families and have them experience different varieties of vegetables and recipes based on our family traditions.

The idea for the program was as a result of me taking care of my grandkids and teaching them how to cook. My husband would come over and see me with my grandkids; teaching them how to chop and how to cook certain things like potatoes, which is personally one of my granddaughter's favorite foods. She also really likes cabbage so that was the first meal that I created for the families for our first Grandma's Hands event. As African Americans we also wanted to make sure that our children and our grandkids know the things that we create are special to us, and we want the meals to also be special to them. When kids cook with their grandmother, they have such an enjoyable time and they will remember what their grandmother cooked for them.

Our program was designed around us purchasing food from local African American farmers and having families participate in preparing and eating a meal together at the Sunrise center. When COVID happened, we got together and we all decided that we would find a way to get meals to people like delivering the meals to the families and also having them drive by and pick up their meal. We would do that every month. This went well but it also changed the experience to a degree. It became a more joyful experience to find alternative ways of keeping the program going and also being interactive with other family members. We would have them on a Zoom call and people were very glad that we found another way to have each family participate. People would give their views about the meal and tell stories about food experiences with their families. I think that was a very exciting and joyful experience that we found another way to do something that was stagnated because of COVID.

When this program came together, we invited grandmothers to join the planning group, and each grandmother decided which particular part of their meal they would present. We began to work together in the kitchen and allow the grandmother that was featured for that particular month to take the lead and we will follow them, or we would assist them in anything that they needed. We became really close as grandmothers and we learned how to work together as African American women. We have also developed relationships not just with the grandmothers but their grandkids and other family members. That is a very special experience with these grandmothers. We were also there to help each other when things were not going right in their lives. One grandmother would step in for the other and help by preparing food or going to visit particular grandmothers see how they're doing. It has caused us to have a very close knit connection with one another.

Being affiliated with other family members that participate in the program has been great. We see the interactions between the families and within the families. We all got to see the excitement on the face of a little boy when his father pulled out a cutting board from the program materials and they started chopping vegetables together. One of our team members Marchane got her other family members in

the area involved, and now her nieces and nephews and their parents are on every Zoom call. People are excited about the program and how it builds community among African Americans to be there for one another.

Our hope is for this program to be offered in other communities in our area. We would like for people to be able to take the same kind of methods and applying them in their communities. They can make it specific for their community and different nationalities they represent. Whether it's a Hispanic family or in African Somali family or a Korean family or any other nationality we wanted them to be able to take the idea that we have done here and replicate it back within their community to help their own community. We encourage using our program or a program similar to ours that is concerned about the food and the health for their community. Actually, we would like to see the idea go nationally or possibly internationally- food, health, local farmers, and the idea of being there for their families and community.

### **A History of Grandma's Hands**

Grandma's Hands is a platform for Black grandmothers to share family recipes and food traditions with future generations. The program provides a bag of fresh produce grown by Black farmers and brings everyone together virtually to learn how to prepare the featured recipe together.

Grandma's Hands have always been there to pick us up, lift us up, and guide us to the right path.

Our Grandma's Hands story begins with Vanessa and Willie Chambers, and how Vanessa was sharing cooking traditions and experiences with their grandchildren at home. That picture was captured in Willie's mind in 2018 when he was meeting with Katrina Ratzlaff and Lisa Cline from Wallace Medical, Lynn Ketch from the Rockwood CDC, Maureen Quinn from OSU, and others working for the health of the people of Rockwood. The conversation got around to food systems how and to promote good nutrition and health. From there, the picture of grandmothers actively passing on their cultural and family food traditions to younger generations came into focus. Willie had already seen it at home; He already knew the words penned by Gil Scott Heron and sung by Bill Withers — "Grandma's Hands"

Willie reached out to Chuck Smith and the Black Food Sovereignty Coalition to help work on developing this concept. Throughout 2019 we reflected on the transformative power of Grandma's Hands and worked on how to activate Grandma's Hands in improving our health, guiding our eating habits, strengthening our connections, and building our community.

The first Grandma's Hands project was funded in 2020 through a grant submitted by the Rockwood CDC to the Oregon Department of Agriculture to serve the Rockwood community. Black Food Sovereignty Coalition (BFSC), in partnership with the Rockwood CDC did the natural and right thing- turn to the Black Grandmas in our community to have their Hands bring this project to life. Vanessa Chambers was one of those first Grandmas to guide this program.

The Grandmas who participated in launching the first project are: Vanessa Chambers, Rhonda Combs, Mildred Braxton, Martha Lewis, Laurie Palmer, Marchane Lawson, Joyce Smith-McGee, Latasha Carter, Lisa Mathis, Mary Frison, and Shantae Johnson. We also had a few men/grandfathers contribute to the effort: Arthur Shavers, Jerry Hunter, and Robert Braxton.

BFSC has respectfully accepted the honor of being caretakers of Grandma's Hands, recognizing that Grandma's Hands have always been there holding us, sustaining us, and encouraging us.

The Grandma's Hands program today is the collective gift that Black Grandmas from our community have given us. "Grandma's hands, they keep on calling to me." - Gil Scott Heron



**Grandma's Hands**  
*"Grandma's hands, they keep on calling to me"*  
Passing on Black Cultural Food  
Traditions to Future Generations

**Grandma's Hands Year 1 Summary**  
**June 2020 to January 2021**

The Grandma's Hands program is delivered in a partnership between the Black Food Sovereignty Coalition and the Rockwood CDC through an Oregon Department of Agriculture specialty crop grant. Eight monthly on-line live events were held during year 1 (June 2020 – January 2021). Each event featured a video of a grandma demonstrating how to prepare the featured dish, a full meal, sample specialty crops for participants, and a live conversation among the community members and the grandmas from the planning team. Sample specialty crops and some meal ingredients were provided by Black Futures Farm, Mudbone Grown, Wapato Island Farm, and other local Black and Indigenous farmers.

- Total Number of People Registered- 1,135      Total Number of Families Registered- 322
- Total Number Who Received Meal Kits and Materials- 874 people; Representing 258 Families
- 487 Adults and 387 Youth served
- Total Number Participating in the On-Line Live Events- 305 people; Representing 93 Families
- 98% of participants identified as Black/African American/African
- 29% of participants live in Rockwood
- 9 cooking demonstration videos produced by Grandmas Hands team members
- 22 Black, Indigenous, and POC farmers and food producers from the Portland area were promoted during the events.
- Families were introduced to 44 different vegetables and fruits.
- Over 90% of all evaluation respondents answered in the affirmative to all evaluation feedback areas.
  - Introduced to foods that I had not eaten before
  - Intent to eat more of the foods sampled today
  - Increased knowledge of foods that I could consume
  - More likely to attend events like this
  - Made connections with others in their community
  - Met new people (would be interested in connecting with them again)
  - Increased the number of people their social network

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