



# CIRCLE OF IMPACT

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# Reflections from Founder & Executive Director

As we reflect on the transformative year that was 2023, i am filled with immense gratitude and pride for the collective impact we've achieved together. The year was marked by significant milestones, inspiring events, and the unwavering commitment of our students, partners, and funders.

For me, being granted the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Livingston Fellowship has been a transformative experience, providing advanced learning opportunities that extend beyond the professional realm to deeply touch my leadership journey and personal growth. The journey, captured in a powerful video (<https://bit.ly/3OVUMoe>), narrates the profound impact this prestigious fellowship has on promising nonprofit leaders in Colorado. This Fellowship is not just about me, either; it reflects the caliber of leadership that defines CIRCLE. It speaks to the dedication and commitment of our entire community in fostering an environment where leaders can flourish and make lasting contributions.

The return of the CIRCLE Café in 2023, held under the theme "Café of Belonging," marked a joyous reunion in person. The event featured dynamic speakers, including Regina Jackson, Dr. Ramona Belrán, and Norma Johnson, exploring topics of healing, empathy, reimagining, and community action. The overwhelming response from attendees, with 98% expressing the desire to return and recommend the event, speaks volumes about the resonance of our collective efforts.

Our second ever fundraiser, "Rooting for Change," held at Raíces Brewing Company, was a night of celebration, art, and connection. Dr. Brenda J. Allen received the 2023 Award for her unwavering support as the first-ever donor and champion of CIRCLE. The evening was adorned with live entertainment, art, and the generosity of 40+ local businesses and artists who contributed auction items, ensuring the success of the fundraiser.

And the impact of our Students Taking Action & Making Progress (STAMP) programs reached new heights in 2023. STAMP Camps, a beacon for youth development, brought together young leaders to develop skills for community action and advocacy. The STAMP Conference, hosted at the brand new CSU Spur Campus, embraced the theme "Let the Youth Speak Their Truth!" With workshops spanning inclusive education, individual identity, healthcare policies, accessibility, environmental justice, and more, the conference empowered students to ignite change in their communities.

i invite you to delve into the pages of this year in review to discover the profound transformations happening through CIRCLE. Your engagement and commitment to our shared mission are integral to the ongoing success of CIRCLE, and I wish to express my deepest gratitude to each one of you—students, partners, and funders—for your unwavering support. Together, we have created a community that fosters belonging, amplifies voices, and sparks positive change. As we look forward to the future, let us continue this journey of growth, wellness and collaboration.



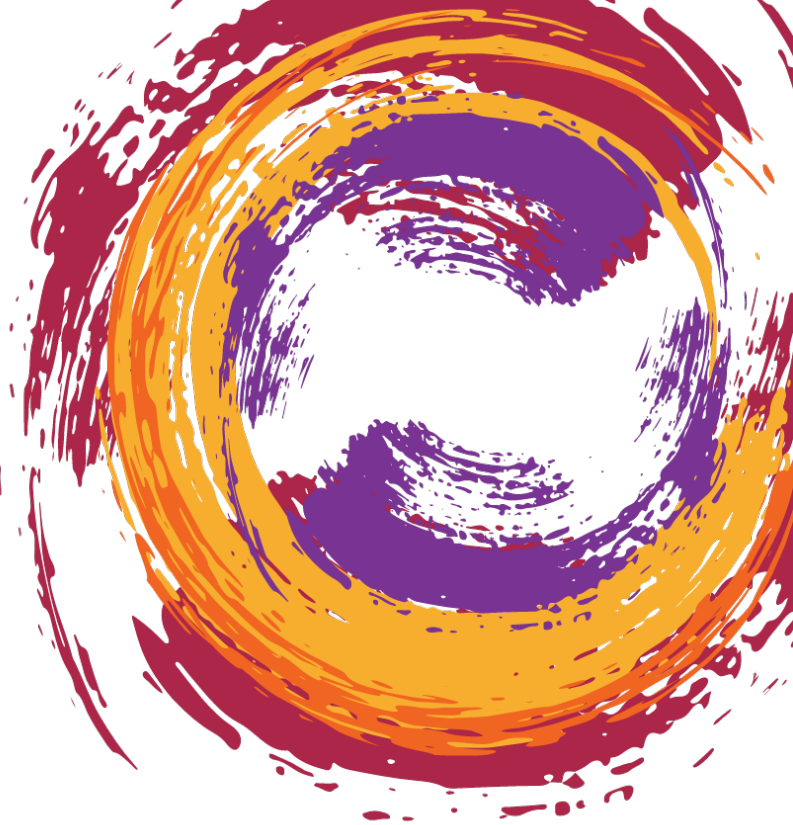
Carla M. Mestas, M.A.  
Executive Director & Founder  
CIRCLE Organization



# Who We Are

Established as a nonprofit in 2016, CIRCLE Organization, with roots deeply embedded in the community, embodies a collective vision for anti-racist, multicultural education programming. From its early days, the organization engaged local and national Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion experts, fostering a network of committed advisors, board members, friends, and volunteers.

Today, CIRCLE is a prominent force in our community, expanding its impact through a robust youth leadership development program called Students Taking Action & Making Process (STAMP). Committed to its mission and vision, CIRCLE collaborates with young people, schools, and organizations to address systemic inequity and foster interpersonal inclusiveness and overall wellness, all united under the belief in creating safe and inclusive communities through a universal humanity of respect, love, and hope for the future.





# STORIES

## CARLA MESTAS, LIVINGSTON FELLOW



At the heart of 2023, we celebrated a significant milestone as our dedicated Executive Director and Founder, Carla Mestas, was chosen as the recipient of the prestigious 2023 Bonfils-Stanton Foundation Livingston Fellowship. This recognition not only honored Carla's exceptional leadership but also symbolized a testament to the organization's commitment to fostering transformative leaders within its ranks.

The Livingston Fellowship Program, known for providing advanced learning opportunities to promising nonprofit leaders in Colorado, bestowed upon Carla a unique chance to delve into unparalleled growth both professionally and personally. This immersive experience allows her to expand her horizons, gaining insights and skills that will prove invaluable in steering CIRCLE towards even greater impact and relevance.

Carla's journey as the Livingston Fellow became a poignant chapter in our organization's narrative. Through a compelling video (<https://bit.ly/3OVUMoe>) that captured her experiences and the symbiotic relationship between her personal development and CIRCLE's evolution, the broader community gained a glimpse into the profound impact of the Livingston Fellowship on both individuals and the organizations they lead.

Carla's story, interwoven with the values of CIRCLE, serves as a beacon of inspiration for aspiring leaders within the nonprofit sector. As she shared her insights, the ripple effect of the Livingston Fellowship echoed not just in Carla's journey but also in the enhanced vision and capabilities she continues to bring back to CIRCLE.



# CIRCLE CAFÉ RETURNS



In 2023, the CIRCLE Café made a return to in-person gatherings with the theme “Café of Belonging.” Attendees heard from three dynamic speakers—Dr. Ramona Belrán, Norma Johnson, and Regina Jackson—covering topics such as healing, deeper empathy, reimagining, and community action. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with 98% expressing a desire to return the next year and recommending the event to others. Additionally, 94% reported gaining practical tools and strategies for their current roles. The Café fostered meaningful conversations, with many attendees wanting to prolong discussions and connect further with fellow community members.



# Fundraiser at Raíces Brewing a Great Success



In 2023, CIRCLE Organization marked its second-ever fundraiser at Raíces Brewing Company with Jesse Ogas from 9News as the emcee, themed “Rooting for Change.” This celebratory evening focused on art, giving, and connection, raising essential funds to empower young people in channeling their creative spirits towards impactful action.

A highlight of the evening was the recognition of Dr. Brenda J. Allen, who received CIRCLE’s 2023 Award for her exceptional role as the first-ever donor and champion of CIRCLE from its inception. This acknowledgment underscored the pivotal support that individuals like Dr. Allen provide in laying the foundation for the organization’s success.

In preparation for the event, Executive Director Carla Mestas, alongside STAMPers Alajiah and Danny, took to 9News to promote and share CIRCLE’s story. The night came alive with captivating performances, including a folkloric dance by ArtistiCO, live art by Julio Mendoza, and musical vibes by Miguel Camacho. The community’s generosity shone through as over 40 local businesses and artists contributed to a vibrant auction, enhancing the evening’s spirited atmosphere of giving.



# 2023 STAMP Programs Highlights

## STAMP Camp

CIRCLE's Summer Youth Leadership STAMP Camps go beyond the typical summer camp experience, providing a platform for youth to hone their skills for community action and advocacy. In 2023, campers engaged with community leaders from Cultivando, Green Spaces, CSU Spur, RiNo Arts District, Spirit of the Sun, CAPU (Colorado Asian Pacific United), Denver Museum of Nature & Science, fostering connections with each other and the CIRCLE team.

## STAMP Conference

The 2023 STAMP Conference marked a significant evolution as CIRCLE "glowed up" and moved to the new CSU Spur Campus. Themed "Let the Youth Speak Their Truth!," the conference brought together 45 high school student leaders, 18 faculty adult volunteers, and 200 middle school student attendees from 22 schools across Denver. This CIRCLE program, designed by and for students, serves

as an entry point for discussing social justice-related issues, providing a space for self-discovery and the development of tools to build inclusive, responsive communities. Workshops at the conference covered topics such as inclusive education, individual identities, health care policies, accessibility, water rights, environmental justice, and using one's voice to spark change. A poignant reflection from a STAMP Middle School Attendee emphasized the importance of empathy, kindness, and respect in recognizing and addressing diverse experiences and problems.

## YLC 2023/2024 School Year

The Youth Leadership Council (YLC), initiated by STAMP high school leaders, serves as a year-round engagement platform within CIRCLE. Committed to deepening their understanding of self, community, and advancing inclusive, responsive education, the YLC provides a student voice and perspective. The council actively contributes to recruiting STAMP students, participates in local community events, and coordinates learning events for all STAMPers. The YLC embodies positive representation in all spaces. A special acknowledgment goes to our exceptional leaders (listed below) for the 2023/24 school year, whose dedication and leadership drive these impactful initiatives forward.

**Members:** Maria Storch, Olive Link, Vivian Bates, Kenna'D Darnell, Sophia Armstrong, Zareen Bissinger, Audrey Shia, Kat Walsh, Parisa Kian





135

responsive and  
inclusive programs  
and services provided

1388

people engaged with  
CIRCLE's services such as  
STAMP, Circle Café, and  
consulting

125

organizations we  
worked with

36

community partners  
and sponsors

139

individual donors

# IMPACT & OUTCOMES



## Sophia, STAMPPer



// For almost a year and a half, I've had the privilege of being deeply involved with CIRCLE across various programs like STAMP and YLC. My journey began as a workshop leader at STAMP, where I later advanced to a senior leadership role, orchestrating the STAMP conference and guiding workshop leaders and their groups. Through these experiences, I've not only honed my leadership skills but also cultivated personal growth and found a supportive community. CIRCLE has been instrumental in enhancing my confidence, communication abilities, and advocacy skills, preparing me for future academic and professional endeavors. One particular memory that stands out is the sense of peace and belonging I felt every Monday at our meetings, surrounded by a community dedicated to creating positive change. As I move forward, I carry with me the invaluable lessons and connections forged at CIRCLE, eager to apply them in all aspects of my life.





## Gabby, Faculty Member

// As a faculty advisor with CIRCLE, I've had an extraordinary journey. Working alongside the organization and leaders like Caite, Carla, and Jaydn has been eye-opening. Their approach to engaging young people in discussions about equity and justice is unparalleled. They not only initiate these conversations thoughtfully but also empower students to shape them. Through this experience, I've gained invaluable insights into fostering meaningful dialogues in both academic and personal settings. CIRCLE has taught me the importance of strategic planning and intentional organization in creating environments conducive to courageous conversations. One particular moment that stands out is when Carla reached out to me personally during the Hamas-Israel War, demonstrating genuine empathy and understanding of my perspective as a liberal Jew. This level of support made me feel truly valued and appreciated.



## Shreka, STAMPer Parent, Faculty & Board Member



// I became a board member for CIRCLE in January 2020. Since then, I have enjoyed learning from extraordinary colleagues who are leaders and change makers in their communities. I am humbly grateful for the support and warmth I experience during our board meetings, which is unheard of in typical board settings. Carla Mestas, our executive director, leads with head and heart and that makes all of the difference in working with CIRCLE. As an African American woman living in a society that prioritizes white culture, it is a relief to have educated, wise, effective leaders of our society see me for my whole self, accept me for who I am and choose to uplift me. I feel privileged to be included in the work that Carla does so relentlessly with full passion. Hearing about the consultant work, STAMP conferences, YLC and other activities brings me confidence that young people and adults are gaining knowledge and experiences needed to help build equity for marginalized groups.



# **CIRCLE Staff**



**Left to right back: Jacob Mestas Duey, Carla Mestas and Connor Duey. Left to right front: Miriah Royal, Jadyn Mill and Caite Plunkett**

**A**s an organization CIRCLE intentionally brings people together to work towards expanding and deepening efforts of equity and inclusiveness. CIRCLE's overarching goals are centered on advancing both racial and economic equity through community led work.



# Board Members

**Ms. Carla Mestas, MA**

She/her/ella, Executive Director

**Dr. Nicki Gonzales, PhD**

She/her/ella, Board Chair

**Dr. Nicole Sager, PhD**

She/her, Board Scribe

**Ms. Shreka Thomas, BSN, RN**

She/her/hers, Board Treasurer

**Ms. Jennifer Collins, JD**

She/her/hers

**Dra. Tania Hogan, EdD**

She/hers/ella

**Ms. Katie Borden**

She/hers/ella





# GRATITUDE & GENEROSITY

## Individual Donors & Organizational Partners

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Ana Arias  
Maya Armstrong  
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Megan Ives  
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Kaela Martin  
Kaela McLain  
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Jason Mundy  
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Laurie Chandler  
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Citlaly Fierro  
Leneta Jones  
Amy Larson  
Pamela Mendoza  
Zoie Noone  
Jesse Ogas  
Urban Land Conservancy



Tracy Weil

WunderWerkz

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Colorado Gives Community

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YellowDog Design

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Zak Bissinger

Sean Kenney

Daniel O. & Mary Jane Mestas

Kathleen Nalty

Yukiko Okuma

Caite Plunkett

Cami Schan

Denver Museum of Nature  
& Science

Wiley Y Daniel Family Fund

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Dr. Juliet Collingwood

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## \$2501-5000

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Anonymous

Graland Country Day School

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Kent Denver School

St. Annes Episcopal School

Stanley British Primary School

Daisy Gonzalez

Dr. Nicole Sager

## \$5001-9999

Colorado Academy

Mestas Duey Family Fund

## \$10000+

Bonfils Stanton Foundation

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Delta Dental Foundation

RiNo Arts District





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You are only free when you realize  
you belong no place—you belong  
every place—no place at all. The  
price is high. The reward is great.

– **Maya Angelou**







# CIRCLE

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