

Environmental Community Action, Inc.

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 1, 2021- JUNE 30, 2022



Moving forward
beyond the pandemic

Message from our Executive Director

It is with great pleasure that I compose this letter for Environmental Community Action, Inc. (ECO-Action) Annual Report. It gives me a chance to shine a light on all our great accomplishments this year. Most of these would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the staff, management and board of trustees. So, with that said I will proceed.

2021 - 2022 was an extremely exciting year for our organization. It was a year that saw change in leadership, expansions in programs, and a renewed dedication.

In October 2021, I was blessed with the opportunity to join this phenomenal organization as its New Executive Director. Being tasked with the challenge of carrying out its mission and vision I found that there is no social justice without environmental justice. Over the past 30 years, ECO-Action has worked to address equality and systematic racism, environmental threats that affect the health, well-being, and quality of life of low-income communities and communities of color. ECO-Action is committed to the elimination of health disparities, dismantling of discrimination institutional practices, structures, and public policies through leadership development, organizing, and advocacy.

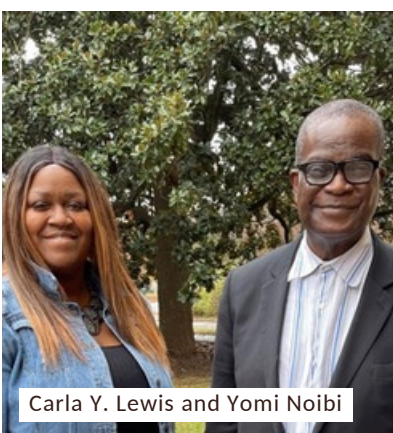


Carla Y. Lewis

As we move forward beyond the pandemic, ECO-Action has enhanced its programs and begun working face to face with partners and the communities we serve. We kicked off the EPA Environmental Justice funded climate change program “Moving from Surviving to Thriving in the face of Climate Change.” Proctor Creek and Intrenchment Creek were selected as the targeted communities and beneficiaries of this program. In addition, the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN) Adult Program invited residents from some of the area’s most impacted watersheds. This space created conditions that inspired participants to spark change by gaining the knowledge and skills they need to revitalize their watersheds and advocate for equitable development. Participants attended sessions regarding water management sustainability, urban planning and systematic racism, just to name a few. Moreover, the AWLN Youth Edition Summer Intern Program incorporated a paid workforce component that exposed youth to career opportunities in green spaces, social and environmental justice by working with community partners across the City of Atlanta. Interns also received soft skills & employability training, leadership development, and education on the prevalent pollutants within their communities and how they can be Champions in their communities. The Georgia Grassroots Environmental Network (GGEN) program efforts connected 30 community residents and liaisons to advance the environmental justice agenda through Georgia legislation. There were community conversations hosted around Unequal Protection and Unequal Response to develop realistic solutions through an equity lens. Finally, ECO-Action was able to make advancements on the Atlanta University Center Green Infrastructure project and continues to engage in the actions needed to ensure its success. As we provide organizing and technical assistance for Georgia low-income communities and communities of color, ECO-Action is committed to encourage them to empower themselves to eliminate air, land, and water pollution, energy deficiencies and climate change.

I conclude my 2021 - 2022 review by saying thank you to everyone involved with Environmental Community Action, Inc. It is an honor to serve the underserved low-income communities and communities of color across the state of Georgia. Let us never forget the importance of what we do and the Impacts we will strive to make in 2022-2023!

ECO-Action Welcomes its New Executive Director



Carla Y. Lewis and Yomi Noibi

In October 2021, the Board of Directors appointed Carla Y. Lewis, as Executive Director to lead ECO-Action into the future. Carla earned her bachelor’s degree in Political Science from Clark Atlanta University. She brings a wealth of transferable knowledge in nonprofit administration and experience in work with vulnerable communities to ECO-Action that will further its mission and vision. Ms. Lewis has dedicated over 20 years serving disadvantaged communities of color. She has served as the Managing Director for a grassroots organization committed to educating, and healing women, while creating conditions for women to empower themselves. She has also helped organize underserved communities to demand justice, dignity, and liberation for all through transforming lives, laws, and social institutions. Ms. Lewis also served as the founding executive director of an organization educating the social service community on how nonprofits could better serve youth and young adult who were homeless. We are looking forward to working with and supporting Carla Lewis in her leadership of ECO-Action’s change work in Georgia and the Southeast.

Message from our Board of Directors

As ECO-Action celebrates its 33rd year, we are determined to build on our efforts to promote environmental justice, citizen science, sustainability, resilience, and clean, affordable energy in vulnerable communities throughout Georgia. Our work “connects the dots”, linking global and local environmental impacts, and provides a training and research support system that empowers communities to organize and mobilize to address environmental health hazards. Our work is centered on the belief that all communities have a right to clear air, land and water, and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

Promoting resilient communities requires training the next generation. Over the last year, ECO-Action expanded its programs involving students interested in environmental, energy and sustainability issues. Our programs for youth education provide a two-way exchange where students learn from the community while the community engages with the students. Over the next year, ECO-Action will broaden its collaborations with Georgia schools, colleges and universities to establish additional training programs that benefit students, their academic communities, and their home communities.

Over the last year, ECO-Action has moved forward in meeting its strategic goals and objectives, including expanding its board of directors, diversifying our funding sources, building our volunteer base, recruiting interns, expanding our partnerships with academic institutions, and increasing staff capacity. Last year we hired a new executive director, Carla Lewis who has played a key role in identifying new funding sources. This year we will hire a Program Manager and a Director of Development. Dr. Yomi Noibi continues to lead our program work both in the Atlanta area and throughout Georgia, connecting vulnerable communities with resources to strengthen their capacity to resolve environmental health threats.

I am enthusiastic about ECO-Action’s prospects this year and am looking forward to its future growth. With expanded staff and board, ECO-Action is poised to become an anchor organization in Georgia to research, educate, organize, and successfully advocate for a safe, and sustainable, environment and for social justice. Please join us in support of our work!



Dr. Frank Bove, Board Chairperson

ECO-Action’s Board of Directors



Christina Hemphill Fuller



Cosco Jones



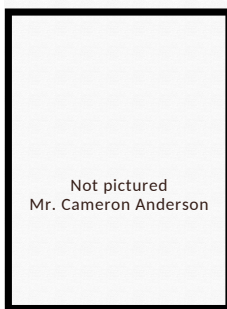
Jewell Harper



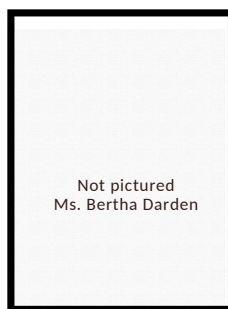
Lyndell Robinson



Chris Lemmons



Not pictured
Mr. Cameron Anderson



Not pictured
Ms. Bertha Darden

About ECO- Action



ECO-Action won a grant from Spitfire Strategies, a woman-owned, strategic communication firm based in Washington D.C. providing support to nonprofits looking to spark change. The five-person Spitfire team worked with staff to create a Communications Plan, Message Platform, Press Advisory, and website and social media recommendations. Staff are currently using these tools in its communications (including the preparation of this Annual Report)



Between July and December of 2021, ECO-Action hosted a series of Community Conversations. The series, Realities of Social Change: Conversations with Community Activists, Young and Old, underscored strategies for organizing for justice and equity. Moderated by Dr. Yomi, the guests included community activists and community organization leaders fighting to prevent toxic chemical exposure: Over 150 people joined us on Zoom for these engaging conversations.



ECO-Action provides organizing and technical assistance so that Georgia low income communities and communities of color can empower themselves to eliminate air, land and water pollution.



ECO-Action's summer community cleanup of the Peopletown neighborhood brought 20 of its interns from the AWLN Youth Internships program together with parents, community members, NPU-V community leaders, nonprofit organizations and AWLN staff to help beautify the neighborhood. Over 20 bags of trash were collected from four areas in the neighborhood and hauled off by Keep Atlanta Beautiful.



In September 2021, ECO-Action was invited to participate in the AGREC Community Science Collaboratory. Since that time, ECO-Action has worked with other collaboratory partners including Emory University, Georgia State University, Kennesaw State University, Morehouse College and Spelman College, along with Network—Regional Centers of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development, Atlanta to design and implement a sustainable model for long-term university-community science initiatives in Metropolitan Atlanta.

ECO-Action Programs

Work in the Atlanta Metro Area

Atlanta Watershed Learning Network

Increasing amounts of rainfall (due in part to climate change) combined with aging undersized infrastructure have exacerbated public health issues related to flooding and stormwater overflows in many Atlanta neighborhoods. To address these issues, particularly in low-income communities, ECO-Action is equipping neighborhood residents with the knowledge to advocate for improved stormwater infrastructure and integrated stormwater management including green infrastructure.

Working in partnership with organizations including the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA) and American Rivers, the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN) brings together residents from some of Metro-Atlanta area's most impacted watersheds. Its goal is to create the conditions that inspire participants to spark change by gaining the knowledge and skills they need to revitalize their watersheds and advocate for equitable development in their communities. Metro Atlanta sits atop three river basins, the Chattahoochee, the Flint, and the South River /Ocmulgee. These river systems have been highly influenced by urbanization, with concrete sidewalks, roads, buildings, and parking lots preventing water from being absorbed into the ground, resulting in serious flooding in many communities. Green infrastructure uses soils and plants to absorb and clean the water while reducing flooding. Parks and greenspaces can act as sponges for stormwater and provide places for kids to play and neighbors to gather.

AWLN seeks to expand community knowledge related to green infrastructure, equity, and sustainable design practices. The program prepares residents to take part in the planning of new parks and greenspaces that might benefit their neighborhoods. This way, residents can support projects that provide the greatest environmental, economic, and social justice outcomes for their communities. This year, nine residents of the Proctor, Intrenchment Creek, and Utoy Creek watersheds participated in AWLN's first face-to-face training in two years. These meetings allowed residents to have conversations about the watershed issues in their communities and share the realities they are facing because of it.



Green Infrastructure at the AUC

ECO-Action started its program Green Infrastructure at the Atlanta University Center (AUC) as it recognized a gap in city efforts to reduce flooding in the Proctor Creek watershed neighborhoods in Atlanta's Westside. Since the conceptual work was completed in 2018, ECO-Action has been working with college and university representatives to complete the final design work associated with each of the conceptual plans and to begin the construction of new green infrastructure. Current activities have centered on work at Spelman College, where ECO-Action has identified a green infrastructure project for early development in partnership with the college. Along with the work at Spelman, ECO-Action is continuing to advance the remaining design concepts identified in the student-generated conceptual plans at the other AUC Colleges (Clark Atlanta University, ITC, Morris Brown College) and stakeholder (Russell Construction and Friendship Baptist Church) sites.

This year ECO-Action also engaged Earth Economics to place dollar values on the many co-benefits of green infrastructure. Staff soon documented that tree planting options were severely limited by the large number of power poles lining area streets. This led to a partnership with Georgia Power to identify locations to remove overhead power poles and move power lines underground. In total, the team has identified 403 power poles for removal between Northside Drive and east of Lowery Boulevard. These activities will support future AUC activities in support of green infrastructure. Additionally, ECO-Action and other community partners plan to accelerate tree planting at the AUC to both reduce flooding and combat urban heat island effects. The left side of the photo shows the power poles at the existing intersection of Atlanta Student Movement Boulevard and Vine Street while the right shows the same location with the power poles removed and replanted intersection.



ECO-Action Programs

Work in the Atlanta Metro Area

AWLN Youth Internships

ECO-Action's six-week summer program, AWLN Youth Internships, was an opportunity for underserved south and west Atlanta youth to get a hands-on work experience at community, social justice and green nonprofits. ECO-Action has convened the last few years of the program online, which was far less attractive to the youth participants. This was the first year the entire program operated face to face post-pandemic. This was also the first year the program included a paid work experience. Staff assigned youth to a project site four days each week and on Fridays, youth learned about soft skills for their work assignment, environmentalism and environmental justice, sustainability, leadership, finances, and nutrition at the Georgia Hill Center. We were pleased that many of ECO-Action's long time partners hosted the interns on their worksites. These included the Georgia WAND, Groundwork Atlanta, Emmaus House, Historic Westside Gardens New Georgia Project, the Proctor Creek Green Team, Rick McDevitt Center, Truly Living Well and West Atlanta Watershed Alliance. All of these nonprofits helped youth to see the importance of restoring the damages of social and environmental injustices as a part of the work on their job. At the close of the program, youth participated in a community cleanup and closing graduation, where they each presented a PowerPoint presentation on the work they had done at each of their sites. Thirty-four students graduated from the program.

A special thank you to the Program Manager, Gerald McClain and Program Coordinators Tiara Calahan and Liz Guyette who worked with us during the summer.



Building Climate Resilience



ECO-Action kicked off its newest program Moving from Surviving to Thriving in the Face of Climate Change in April with a kickoff dinner at Southside Medical Center that invited local politicians, community and nonprofit leaders, and local community residents to think about the impacts of climate change on low-income communities. ECO-Action's yearlong program, funded by the EPA, is helping low-income residents of Atlanta, Southside and Westside better understand what climate change is, how it can affect their family, how to prepare themselves for its impacts and what policy changes they can work for collectively to reduce the impacts of climate change on their and other low-income communities. While we are only about one third of the way through the program, participants are noticing more of the climate impacts that are in the news and making climate change part of their regular conversation. As this project continues, ECO-Action will continue to help communities gain resilience in the face of this growing environmental threat and be better able to both understand and adapt to coming climate change impacts.

ECO-Action Programs

GGEN and Work Across the State of Georgia

Georgia Grassroots Environmental Network

The Georgia Grassroots Environmental Network (GGEN) program seeks to bring community liaisons and residents together to discuss issues and agree on Georgia environmental justice priorities, including the demand for a Georgia environmental justice policy. One of GGEN's key focus area is the advancement of environmental justice legislation in the state of Georgia and at the local level. The 30 communities that currently participate in GGEN come together quarterly through an online community forum.

ECO-Action staff also provides one-on-one support to leaders and organizers in rural communities that participate in GGEN. Two of our GGEN partners who made significant progress this year were the community groups, Rebuilding Together and Environmental Justice Advisory Board, based in Brunswick and Glynn County, Georgia. Glynn County is home to 4 of Georgia's 16 nationally designated hazardous waste sites (Superfund Sites) and 12 state-designated hazardous waste sites. Residents are concerned about the potential health from exposure to toxic chemicals at the sites. ECO-Action introduced them to our partners at Emory University who are now working with residents to conduct an environmental health study. When completed, the study findings will identify actionable strategies to reduce residents' exposures to toxic chemicals.



Unequal Response leads to Unequal Protection

A Tomato Gets More Attention from Public Health Authorities Than Communities Poisoned by Toxic Chemicals



Only two people need to get a foodborne illness to trigger an entire team at the FDA to track down and recall the food



For the Unequal Response, Unequal Protection (URUP) initiative, ECO-Action convened face to face and online outreach meetings that involved GGEN and other members of low-income Metro- Atlanta community organizations trying to reduce local toxic chemical exposures. ECO-Action adapted draft URUP campaign materials and shared them with Georgia grassroots community organizations. After asking participants to share experiences they had had with federal, state and local exposure responses, the participants were asked to comment on effectiveness of a new approach that the URUP campaign is developing to address the concerns of communities like theirs.

When ECO-Action staff met with the 555 Community Group and young people in Peoplestown, they used an inter-generational approach to facilitate knowledge transfer between the participating adults and the youth.

Dr. Yomi Noibi shared ECO-Action's experiences at a panel discussion in August that discussed national perspectives on the URUP campaign. The feedback shared with the organizations creating the national campaign will be used to optimize the campaign's final approach.

Impact Stories



AWLN Youth Success Stories

While the specific goals of the AWLN Youth Internship program were to increase young adult awareness of green career opportunities, increase young adult knowledge about how to address the environmental issues in their community and provide soft skill training and employment, the program has also changed the lives of some of its young participants. Here are three brief stories about the program's impact on the young people who were part of it:



Jada is a 15-year-old living in the Peoplestown neighborhood of Atlanta. During her AWLN internship, she was assigned to work with the Proctor Creek Green Team where she picked up trash, weeded the green infrastructure features, and painted a mural at Lindsay Street Park. The AWLN staff members have seen the many ways Jada has changed as she served in the program. When she first started the AWLN Youth Internship, she would join her friends in activities that did not make her a leader. After being separated to work in a different work environment, she began to tap into her own internal influence. This led her to encourage and motivate the people surrounding her to participate and do the right thing, making them leaders as well.

Esra is a high school senior from the College Park area who recently graduated from Westlake High School. He was assigned to the Historic Westside Gardens, where he harvested fresh fruits and vegetables; helped at local farmer's markets and completed home visits to bring produce to homes with limited food access. During the program, Esra's assigned mentor encouraged him to write a proposal to help get support for his graphic design studies which he will start this fall at SCAD. ECO-Action recognized the creativity and professionalism of his proposal and awarded him a \$500 scholarship to support his studies.



Delance and Devontae from the Peoplestown and Mechanicsville neighborhoods, respectively, are two 16-year-olds who performed with an impressive work ethic throughout their entire summer with the AWLN Youth Internship. They were assigned to work with the Georgia Project where they learned administrative work, assisted with voter registration and got acclimated to computer software. As a result, their site supervisor offered both of them full time positions with the nonprofit, once they turn 18.



Impact Stories



Connecting Communities to Resources Columbia Elementary School

One way that ECO-Action works with underserved communities is by connecting them to the resources and opportunities with which they can implement their own projects. Gabriela Atsepoyi was one of the Spelman College students ECO-Action trained during the Green Infrastructure at the Atlanta University Center Initiative. After graduation, as she volunteered at a school near her Atlanta home, Columbia Elementary, she thought the green infrastructure techniques she first learned with ECO-Action could address some of the flooding issues she saw on site. She envisioned a Greening Columbia Elementary School project which she first shared with ECO-Action at its Community Forum on Green Infrastructure in December 2020.

ECO-Action staff later met with Gabbie and Columbia's principal, Raymond Stanley, to discuss their flooding concerns and the opportunities to use green infrastructure solutions. As Gabriela convened a working group of parents and school supporters, ECO-Action connected them with Park Pride. They led a visioning workshop for the school project that would both address flooding and develop a nature preserve and trails next to the school. In April 2021, ECO-Action worked with Gabbie and members of her group to complete a partnership assessment under DeKalb County's Green Schoolyards program. The project has continued to receive support with an initial grant from the Turner Foundation to advance green infrastructure and develop the green schoolyard, nature preserve and trails.

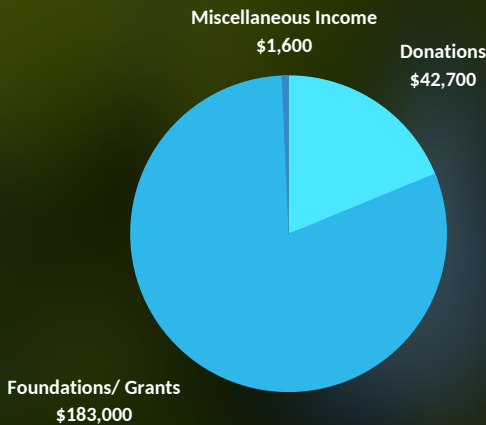
Financial Information

January 1, 2021 to December 30, 2021

Income

Donations	\$42,700
Foundations/ Grants	\$183,000
Miscellaneous Income	\$1,600
Total Income	\$227,300

Income

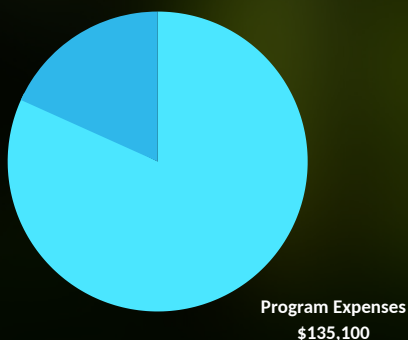


Expenses

Program Expenses	\$135,100
Administrative and fundraising expenses	\$30,200
Total Expenses	\$165,300

Expenses

Administrative and fundraising expenses
\$30,200



Thanks to our funders.

We couldn't do it without you.

American Rivers
BEA Fund - Grassroots International
Bonneville Environmental Foundation (GA Power)
Center for Health Environment and Justice (CHEJ)
Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta
The Conservation Fund
Kresge Foundation
Partnership for Southern Equity
The Turner Foundation
US Environmental Protection Agency
United Way - Racial Equity Fund
Waterfall Foundation

We received over \$25,000 in donations from roughly 30 individuals this fiscal year. Thank you for your support!!!

THANK YOU:

Our Community Partners

Community Organizations
Citizens for a Healthy and Safe Environment (CHASE)
Chapel Hill Organization
Community Improvement Association
iSpeak Therapy Service
Peopletown Revitalization Corp
Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association
Proctor Creek Green Team
Rick McDevitt Center
Summerhill - SNDC

Government Partners

City of Atlanta, Office of Planning
City of Atlanta, Department of Watershed Management
United States EPA (Region 4)

Environmental, Environmental Health and Justice Non Profit Partners

American Rivers
The Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
The Conservation Fund
Emmaus House
Georgia Rivers Network
Georgia Women's Action for New Directions (Georgia WAND)
Glynn Environmental Coalition
Groundwork Atlanta
Historic Westside Gardens
Metropolitan Atlanta Urban Watershed Institute (MAUWI)
New Georgia Project
Project South: Institution for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide
Park Pride
Partnership for Southern Equity
Peopletown Revitalization Corporation
Truly Living Well
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance

College and University Partners

Emory University, Department of Environmental Studies
Emory University, Office of University - Community Partnerships
Emory University Rollins School of Public Health
Georgia State University, Institute of Public Health
Georgia State University, Department of Geosciences
Spelman College

DONATE

You can help ECO-Action as it works to fight for a toxics free Georgia. There are many ways to give.

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Use this QR code to go directly to ECO-Action's online donation page.

