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From homelessness to hope: Ithaca leader comes full circle



The third speaker in the 2017 Soup and Hope series now leads the organization that helped her when she found herself briefly homeless in Ithaca 26 years ago.

During her talk Feb. 16 in Sage Chapel, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, director of the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC) and a member of the Tompkins County legislature, shared her life's struggles and paid tribute to those who helped her through them. The talk was preceded by introductions by Mayor of Ithaca Svante Myrick '09 and McBean-Clairborne's husband and former Common Council member, J.R. Clairborne, current advocacy coordinator of Loaves and Fishes of Tompkins County.

Originally from Guyana, McBean-Clairborne grew up in the Caribbean but moved to New York in 1989 to live with her mother. In 1990 she landed an elementary school teaching job in Syracuse, which she held for one year before leaving to work at Ithaca High School.

Shortly after moving to Ithaca, McBean-Clairborne was displaced from her home. For about two weeks she lived in an old Monte Carlo car her brother had given her, washing up at GIAC some mornings before going to work. By happenstance, she heard that a woman, Diann Sams, was looking for someone to live in her house and help care for her. McBean-Clairborne met Sams and her two sons and was offered a room in Sam's home. "She took me in and became my mother and I became her daughter ... and my life turned around." McBean-Clairborne said. Sams and her sons gave her "hope that there are good people and good opportunities in this world."

Sams was well-known in Ithaca. She helped develop GIAC, was the first African-American woman to serve on Ithaca's Common Council and the first African American to lead Ithaca when she served as the city's acting mayor. Years later, the

Diann Sams Annual African American History Month Recognition Award, which “honors outstanding persons who possess leadership, courage against unspeakable odds and vision,” was created in Sams’ honor. Sams encouraged McBean-Clairborne to be a foster mother and become involved in the city’s politics.

Years later, after budget cutbacks eliminated her job, McBean-Clairborne was again unemployed and again a friend gave her hope. Four months pregnant and single, she went to the Department of Social Services to apply for food stamps. Her interview left her feeling she was of no value, but she went home, gathered all her degree certificates and transcripts, took them back to the social worker’s office, and showed them to her, saying, “I am not a lowlife I just happened to fall into this place at this time.”

Though she did not get any help from that worker at the time, her best friend Gale “Trim” Trimble – who worked at GIAC – made sure McBean-Clairborne always had food to eat. McBean-Clairborne was seven months pregnant before she finally received social services’ assistance.

In the years following, McBean-Clairborne met her husband and worked in a variety of activist, political and mediator roles. She became Tompkins County legislator, GIAC deputy director and acting director before assuming her current director role.

“Even with all the obstacles, I am standing before you as an accomplished woman ... as a mother of three beautiful children ... as a wife.... I stand here proud to head an organization that gives back to this community, who is proud to head an organization that gave me hope, that gave me soup,” she said. “Think of all the ways that you bring hope or can bring hope to someone, that you can help change somebody’s life for good.”

Empathy, Assistance and Referral Service celebrates 45 years

Editor’s note: EARS services are available for undergraduate and graduate students; we are highlighting this article so that staff are aware of these services for students. Staff and faculty members and their partners are encouraged to contact the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (<http://fsap.cornell.edu/>) to address issues that may be affecting their own personal lives and/or job satisfaction or performance. Also see <https://hr.cornell.edu/wellbeing-perks/self-care>.

This month, Cornell’s Empathy, Assistance and Referral Service (EARS) celebrates its 45-year anniversary, making it one of the nation’s oldest peer-counseling programs in higher education. A [new website](#), targeted to undergraduate and graduate students and funded by an anonymous alum of EARS, has been launched in recognition of this milestone.

“The EARS program has offered support to students on this campus for decades, some of whom might be going through a difficult time and others who just need a listening ear,” said Gregory Eells, director of Counseling and Psychological Services at Gannett Health Services/Cornell Health. “We have been fortunate to have outstanding undergraduate and graduate student peer counselors who have been willing to share their time, empathy and knowledge of local and campus resources with others. In recent years EARS has more intentionally expanded training and support for graduate students and graduate student volunteers.”

EARS was started in 1972 by Florence Berger, professor emerita in the School of Hotel Administration, and a group of faculty wives to respond to requests for informal counseling. The program was inspired in part by psychologist Robert C. Carkhuff’s belief that peer counselors can effectively deal with student problems because they are in similar circumstances and have had similar experiences.

The EARS model was also influenced by the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers, who believed all individuals are inherently able – with support – to find clarity within themselves and resolve their own problems. The model was refined by Tanni Hall, associate dean of students and EARS adviser from 1986 to 2003, who drew from other counseling experts to provide student counselors with a formalized counseling approach.

“For 45 years, every week of the semester, seven days a week, support has been available for students, by students,” said Janet Shortall, EARS director. “I encourage all students to check out the new [EARS website](#) – you never know when you or

someone you know could benefit from contacting a counselor.”

In addition to providing peer counseling and information to students about on- and off-campus counseling and support resources, EARS training is a resource for those wanting to strengthen their interpersonal communication skills. Many students take EARS training to develop their listening skills, without necessarily planning to become counselors.

For several years, EARS has also served as a hub for an online chat service sponsored by the [Suicide Prevention and Crisis Service](#) in Ithaca.

Today’s undergraduate and graduate counselors reflect a variety of backgrounds and nationalities. EARS currently has 56 counselors and offers hours every day (Sunday through Thursday, 3-10:30 p.m.; Friday 3-10 p.m.; and Saturday 6-10 p.m.), by phone and in person at its Willard Straight offices (Room 213).

As one student who came to EARS this past semester said: “It can be hard at Cornell to have conversations even with close friends – we’re all so busy. EARS taught me that we don’t have to pretend to be OK at all times. Sometimes it just helps to talk things out instead of bottling everything up inside.”

Apply now for youth summer camps

Cornell offers a number of summer camp programs for children and high school students. Below is a sampling:

International Summer Debate Camp

This camp, geared for students ages 13-18, attracts students from all over the world who are interested in learning and advancing their argumentative, debating and public speaking skills, combined with an experience of the Ithaca campus. Now in its sixth year, the debate camp is led by the Cornell Speech and Debate Program, providing students with debate and public speaking instruction.

The 2017 camp will be held July 30-Aug. 6, offering a choice of day camp or overnight experiences. Many students – from other countries and across the U.S. – tend to stay overnight for the week, while local students or students whose parents are vacationing in the local area often come for the camp’s debate instruction and practice during the day.

For more information, see the [web page](#), email debate@cornell.edu or call 607-255-2136.

Summer youth programs through Cornell's Adult University

In addition to its residential programs for adults and kids, Cornell's Adult University (CAU) offers commuter camp for area youth weekly from July 10 to Aug. 4. Youngsters get a taste of college life at Cornell while experiencing the fun and friendships of camp, with well-organized activities, field trips, kid-friendly meals, and a chance to explore Cornell’s Ithaca campus.

Supervised by well-trained, caring counselors, younger commuter campers (ages 3-12) participate in programs Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., while teens (ages 13-15) enjoy programs and activities from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Children of Cornell employees receive a 20 percent discount off the regular program charge.

For more information on CAU youth programs, see https://www.sce.cornell.edu/cau/on_campus/youth_program.php

Summer College programs for high school students

Cornell's Summer College offers precollege programs for motivated high school sophomores, juniors and seniors, who earn up to six college credits in courses taught by Cornell faculty. Students choose from more than 30 two-, three-, or six-week programs, more than 50 Cornell courses, or the non-credit robots program, all offered between June 24 and August 8.

Courses, grades and credits earned are recorded on an official Cornell University transcript and can generally be applied toward an undergraduate degree at Cornell or another school. Summer College students also can take advantage of college admissions counseling and a college fair.

For information, visit summercollege.cornell.edu.

Cornell Athletics camps and clinics

Cornell Athletics runs sports camps and clinics for boys and girls, ages 6-19. All camps are held on the Cornell campus at Cornell's Division I athletic facilities.

CUBS Camp is a week-long all-sports camps for boys and girls, ages 6-12. Campers will be introduced to several different sports; this full-day camp is packed with fun and creative sport-specific games as well as team-building activities. The camp includes swimming daily at Cornell's pool and lunch daily in the dining hall. There are seven weeks of CUBS Camp, starting June 26 and running through August 11.

Cornell Camps & Clinics also offers several sport-specific camps, including such sports as soccer, lacrosse, football, tennis, rock climbing, volleyball and basketball.

A full listing of all sports offered, as well as more information and the complete camp calendar, can be found at <http://cornellcamps.com/>.

New York state 4-H camps

Nine 4-H camps throughout New York state are open to all young people, whether or not they are enrolled as 4-H members.

All of these camps offer traditional resident camp programs and some also offer day camps and shortened overnight programs for younger campers.

In addition, several camps are offering such specialty camps as 4-H science camps, or programs for unique audiences (for instance, for children with autism or for at-risk youth).

4-H is part of Cornell Cooperative Extension. For more information, see <http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/getinvolved/pages/camps.aspx>.

Focus on savings during America Saves Week

Started in 2007 and coordinated by America Saves and the American Savings Education Council, America Saves Week is an annual opportunity for organizations to promote good savings behavior and for individuals to assess their own saving status.

This year, America Saves Week is Feb. 27-March 4. During this week, Fidelity will offer a complimentary curriculum of webinars on a range of topics, from managing finances to college planning strategies, to learning to invest with confidence. Attend one or sign up for several – but register early as space is limited. Log on to netbenefits.fidelity.com/livewebmeetings.

Feb. 27 (Times are all Eastern Standard Time)

- Identify and Prioritize Your Savings Goals: 10 a.m.
- Take the First Step to Investing: noon
- Turn Your Savings into Retirement Income: 2 p.m.

Feb. 28

- Your College Planning Choices: 2 p.m.
- Wise Choices for Your Old Workplace Savings Plan: 4 p.m.
- Create a Budget, Ditch Your Debt and Start Building for the Future: 6 p.m.

March 1

- Get Started and Save for the Future You: 8 a.m.
- Identify and Prioritize Your Savings Goals: noon
- Make the Most of Your Retirement Savings: 2 p.m.

March 2

- Preserving Your Savings for Future Generations: noon
- Invest Confidently for Your Future: 4 p.m.
- Take the First Step to Investing: 8 p.m.

March 2

- THRIVE: Helping Women Make Financial Progress: 10 a.m.
- Turn Your Savings into Retirement Income: noon
- Create a Budget, Ditch Your Debt and Start Building for the Future: 2 p.m.

To register, log on to netbenefits.fidelity.com/livewebmeetings.

For more videos, checklists, savings tools and resources, go to America Saves “For Savers” webpage: <https://americasaves.org/for-savers>.

Also related: “Managing Income and Debt: It’s Your Budget – Take Control”

This in-person workshop by TIAA, to be held March 8, from 12:30 p.m.-1:30 p.m., in Room G01 (Racker Room) in the Biotechnology Building, will explain the big picture of budgeting:

- Learn the importance of cash flow – and how to use it
- Change how you look at saving and spending
- Understand debt and how to manage it.

Click [here](#) to register or use this link: <http://www.cvent.com/d/4vq685/4W>.

Tropical Day brightens winter workdays



When Joe Remillard, manager for customer service and communications, suggested that the staff in Infrastructure, Properties and Planning hold a Tropical Day to draw attention away from recent dreary winter days, he did not expect the impromptu event would be an instant success.

But the committee that coordinates the IPP department’s newsletter for staff, “The Steward,” took on the challenge of organizing the event, announcing it a couple of weeks ago.

By coincidence, the outdoor temperatures on Tropical Day – Feb. 23 – were in the 70s. So Tropical Day became a celebration of the return of good weather: staff dressed in costumes, decorated their offices and workspaces, and brought in food and games. They visited each other’s workplaces and voted on the best-decorated office – and shared in a temporary, tropical reprieve from the grey days that have dominated the past few weeks.

Tatkon Center boasts Agave blooms

Margherita Fabrizio, director of the Carol Tatkon Center, is known for her large garden and many “tender” plants in large pots that are moved in and out of her house each year. But because the flower stem of her approximately 15-year-old Agave Americana (commonly known as Century Plant), grew higher than her ceilings allowed, Fabrizio brought her plant to the center. The flower stem is now about 90 inches high and the plant is starting to bloom.

Native to Mexico and the southwestern United States, Agaves bloom in nature when they reach 10-25 years old. Some have even been known not to bloom until their 80th year. The tall stalk of spectacular flowers signals the end of the plant’s life cycle. The plant blooms only once and then dies.

However, the species also produces numerous small “pups,” or baby plants. These new offshoots of the original plant will be cultivated for future plantings.