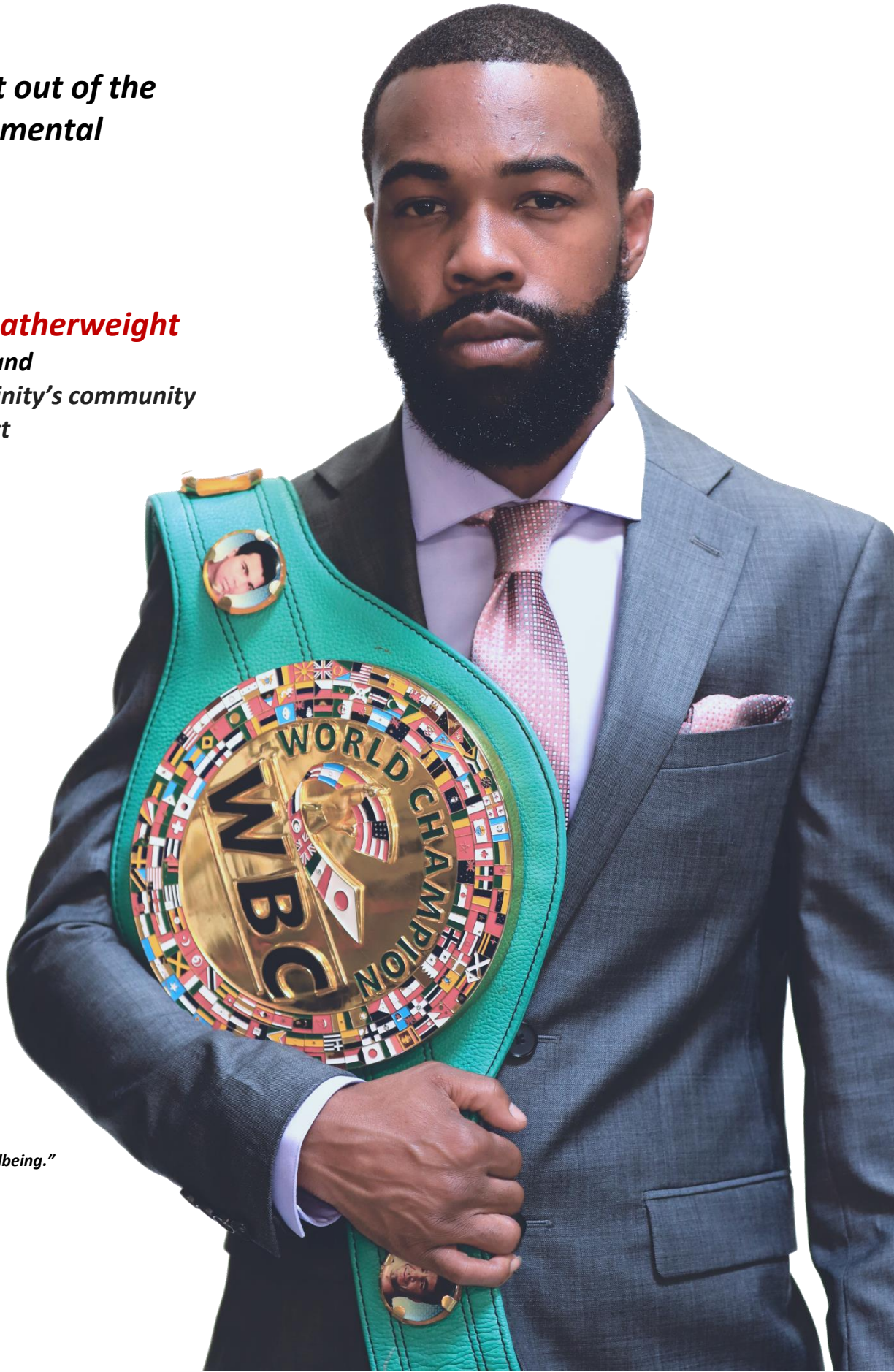


# AFFINITY

***Taking the fight out of the ring to combat mental illness!***

***Gary Russell Jr.***  
***Former WBC Featherweight***  
***Champion & Maryland***  
***native endorses Affinity's community***  
***development project***



***"To work on the frontlines of the Coronavirus pandemic is extremely mentally taxing and can cause burnout. Healthcare workers, people who always care for others, are in dire need of mental health resources to care for their own wellbeing."***

***Shalia Gregory***  
***Nurse Practitioner,***  
***MSN, FNP-C***

## Who We Are

Affinity Community Development, Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) public charity organization specializing in social services, mental health services, affordable housing, and youth development.



## Our Mission

We are currently working on a two-phase community development project that is intended to improve the quality of life of residents in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC during and after the Covid-19 pandemic; with an emphasis on addressing the needs of underserved populations.

This initiative will be accomplished by launching a free statewide teletherapy mental health clinic and a new cultural/performing arts center with a community outreach boxing gym, featuring The Gary Russell Jr. STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Mathematics) program.

Mental health and performing arts work in unison. Boston College researcher Laura Young suggests that art activities and programs can offer a safe place for community members to express or reflect on difficult emotions (Chicago Tribune). The mental health clinic and performing arts center will be a safe place where people can build a foundation to make a difference in their lives.

## Phase 1: Mental Health Services

Mental illness is not only a global pandemic, but one that impacts the most vulnerable members of our community. Covid-19 has put an undue burden and added strain on families who now must manage stress from work, homecare, grieving the loss of a loved one, parents that are homeschooling children, and those that are recovering from the virus.

I was recently exposed to Covid-19 while working at the juvenile detention center. While in quarantine, that experience gave me firsthand insight into the anxiety and fear that many people face that have been exposed to this virus. With an approximate population of 5.6 million people in the state of Maryland, close to 3.3% of adults live with serious mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression (SAMHSA.gov, 2020).



According to the State Mental Health Authority (SMHA) for Virginia, there were over 126,000 people receiving mental health therapy in 2019 while the SMHA of Maryland reported over 226,000 people received mental health treatment in the same year. Furthermore, 1 in 3 people in Maryland say the pandemic has left them feeling symptoms of anxiety and/or depression (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Over 3.2 million minorities combined in both Maryland and Virginia are reported to be living in poverty, while more than 388 thousand minorities in Washington, DC have reported to live below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2020).

We are writing to you because we need your help to win this fight against mental illness. Affinity is looking to raise approximately \$5 million to accredit, license, and run a fully functioning mental health clinic that will address the needs of our communities. The mental health clinic will offer free services to individuals from underserved communities, essential workers, first responders, teachers, front line workers, veterans, those that are unemployed, underemployed, returning citizens, and those living in poverty. In addition, we intend to reach those that are living with a mental health diagnosis including but not limited to the following: depression, anxiety, and those that have suicidal ideations. Additional intentions and attention will be placed on reducing teen and gang violence, with emphasis on reducing recidivism. Our counseling services will also provide social rehabilitation services to men and women that were previously incarcerated.

# What we are doing in the community

Through our collaboration with two mental health clinics, Healthy Lives LLC, and Life Enhancement Services, LLC we launched a program offering free virtual mental health counseling throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to help front line workers with their most important concerns. These services are available to first responders such as EMTs, front line workers, law enforcement, nurses, and veterans. We extended our services to individuals in underserved communities and those furloughed from work. This program is intended to assist front line workers and community members with their mental health concerns and adjustments to life during and after this global crisis. We are currently in the process of converting our in-person STEAM program to a virtual program.

## Phase 2: Cultural/Performing Arts Center



We further intend to raise approximately \$27 million to construct and develop a new cultural/performing arts center in Maryland, featuring The Gary Russell Jr. STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Mathematics) Program. The performing arts center will feature a 1,000-seat arena and provide a multitude of free services for moderate-to-low-income families in areas of visual arts, television, film, theater production, photography, voice and piano lessons, ballet, and gymnastics. This arts center will be accessible for children who live in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC. To support the development of this community-based project, we have assembled a team of industry experts in mental health, medicine, performing arts, higher education, science, construction and development, and engineering with more than 100 years of collective experience.

## Call to Action

We are asking for your support for this community initiative. One moment or a conversation can begin the journey to change many lives. Your donation will go towards the development of this project. Covid-19 has taken lives, jobs, relationships, and more. We are fighting to make sure it does not take our mental health too. Here at Affinity, we hold mental health near and dear to us, we can only hope it is a priority for you as well. We want to help our community members get to a better place.



Please feel free to send a check or money order for a tax-deductible donation to:

Affinity Community Development, Inc.  
2611 Antler Court  
Silver Spring, MD 20904

To make a tax-deductible donation online, click here  
<https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/AffCD>

Sincerely,

*Chanel Hicks*

Chanel W.M. Hicks, MS, LMHP-R  
Vice President of Mental Health Services  
[C.Hicks@mdartdistrict.com](mailto:C.Hicks@mdartdistrict.com)  
[www.MDArtDistrict.com](http://www.MDArtDistrict.com)

Thank you in advance for your contribution. You have no idea what it means to have your support.

## Chanel Hicks, MS LMHP-R, Vice President of Mental Health

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Chanel Hicks is a native of Detroit, MI, and has been in the Washington, DC area for a little over 5 years. Chanel has a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Michigan State University and a Master's Degree in Professional Counseling from Grand Canyon University, where she is currently obtaining her Doctoral degree in Psychology. She has experience working as an Intensive Home-Based Counselor, Mobile Crisis Counselor, Foster Care Case Manager, Wraparound Facilitator, and Outpatient Mental Health Therapist with the Fairfax County Government. As a resident mental health therapist she works with incarcerated youth in the juvenile detention system, and focuses on substance use and abuse education. Chanel also provides general behavioral health services to children, adolescents, and adults. Additionally, she works as the Director of Figure Skating at the Capital Clubhouse Recreation Center in Waldorf, MD. She has a passion for teaching figure skating, gymnastics, and cheerleading. She desires to work with the community by providing mental health services to the community.

