



2025 Women Making History Honorees



Lana Anderson
President and Founder, Small Things Matter

Lana Anderson founded Small Things Matter (STM) as a 501(c)(3) in 2017 when she was in 8th grade and currently serves as its President while attending the University of Maryland. STM is a space where members of all ages, diverse backgrounds, neurotypical/neurodivergent, cis/transgendered, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, etc. come together to give back to their community 5 days a week. Lana has shown through her vision that small acts of kindness do have the ability to have profound effects on people's lives, both on the volunteers as well as the neighbors they serve. Lana is currently a 3rd-year student in the Integrated Life Science program at UMD and enjoys expressing herself through dance.



Rebeccah Ballo
Historic Preservation Supervisor, Montgomery Planning

Rebeccah is the Historic Preservation Supervisor at the Montgomery County Planning Department. Since joining Montgomery Planning in 2018, Rebeccah has demonstrated a commitment to racial equity and social justice. She redirected the Historic Preservation Office's work program to ensure that Montgomery Planning's documented histories are inclusive and comprehensive. Her efforts have particularly highlighted underrepresented stories in the county's history, including but

not limited to the contributions and experiences of African Americans, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, LGBTQ+ community, and women.



Taryca Baltimore
Director and Owner, Legacy Performing Arts
Arts Department Chairperson and Special Educator,
Katherine Thomas School High (KTHS) School (Rockville)

Taryca is the heart, mind, and soul of Legacy Performing Arts. Not only does she run the studio, she mentors, sign language interpreters at theater performances, and helps connect students with opportunities. She goes above and beyond everyday for every member of the Legacy Performing Arts community inspiring and empowering the girls and boys who are in her studio, raising the next generation not only of performers but of our future leaders. She ensures her studio is inclusive of all, respectful of religious and cultural traditions, and lead by values and possibilities. Taryca is also the Arts Department Chairperson and a special educator at the Katherine Thomas School High (KTHS) School in Rockville.



Dr. Santi Bhagat
Founder, Invisible Wave and PPC (Physician Parent
Caregivers)

Dr. Bhagat is the founder of Physician-Parent Caregivers (PPC), the first and only physician-parent-led nonprofit dedicated to improving the quality of health care and life for young people with chronic conditions. PPC advocates for policy changes across health care, education, employment, and government to better support these individuals. As part of PPC, Dr. Bhagat launched Invisible Wave, an initiative empowering young adults with chronic conditions and driving systemic change. She also hosts weekly podcasts, local events, and webinars to amplify their voices. Grounded in the principles of patient-centered care and family-driven advocacy, Dr. Bhagat's work ensures that young adults with chronic conditions—and their families—are seen, heard, and supported.



Emily Briton
President, MedStar Montgomery Medical Center

As the first female president of MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, Emily Briton leads the hospital's strategy and day-to-day operations, focusing on improving services, programs, and the quality of care provided. She is also a senior vice president at MedStar Health, a non-profit health system with a \$5 billion budget that serves Maryland and the Washington, D.C., area. When her daughter was diagnosed with cancer at age 5, though she had worked in healthcare

for nearly 15 years, she realized she never fully understood the patient journey she went through personally. That experience drives her every decision as a hospital president and her commitment to enhancing the experience for patients and their families.



Daria Cervantes
CEO, The Arc Montgomery County

Daria Cervantes has dedicated over 35 years to advancing the mission of The Arc Montgomery County, creating pathways to inclusion and independence for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Daria has implemented transformative changes that resonate throughout the organization and the community. Daria's vision for inclusion is exemplified by trailblazing programs like Seniors Steppin' Out, which integrated older adults with IDD into local senior centers, and the robust Employment & Meaningful Day Services,

fostering volunteerism as a gateway to employment. Her work has inspired systemic changes, not just within The Arc but across the broader community. Daria has built a legacy of innovation, inclusion, and unwavering dedication to the values of equality and belonging. She embodies the mission of connecting people of all abilities to create a more inclusive Montgomery County.



Lavontte Chatmon
Executive Director, Court Watch Montgomery

As Executive Director of Court Watch Montgomery, Lavontte leads fifty or so volunteers and two part-time staff in the organization's efforts to ensure that all victims of intimate partner violence in Montgomery County and throughout Maryland have access to responsive justice and vital services that will stop abuse quickly and permanently. Lavontte is a visionary leader and dedicated advocate for social justice with over 15 years of

experience in mental health, women's rights, and victim services. She currently serves as a valued member of the Montgomery County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, Montgomery Women, the Maryland Women of Color Network and the Tahirih Justice Center's Forced Marriage Working Group.



Melissa Cunningham
Director of Programs, Worksource Montgomery

As Director of Programs at Worksource Montgomery, Melissa oversees key initiatives including Dual Track Reentry Program, Out of School Youth Program, the WIOA Adult/Dislocated Worker Program and Instructional Services provided for Montgomery County. She has committed her career to serving under-served populations, advocating for their needs and ensuring that they have access to resources and opportunities necessary for success.

Melissa leads with heart and passion which inspires her teams every day. Melissa has volunteered with Girl Scouts for over 10 years and serves on the Board of Directors at Compass, Inc.



Rakhi De
Owner, Kiddie Academy of Silver Spring

In 2022, after being inspired to open a school focusing on preschool education and supporting culturally and linguistically diverse women in Montgomery County, Rakhi successfully opened Kiddie Academy of Silver Spring, and now serves 130 children and employs over 35 diverse women. Rakhi volunteers with the American Diversity Group, providing free vaccinations to elderly residents, and mentors youth through Future Business Leaders of America and Girls on the Move. She also sponsors job training programs, covering childcare certifications and CPR courses. Her dedication stems from a deep commitment to leadership, independence, and uplifting women and children, ensuring access to education, economic opportunities, and generational success.



Dr. Jonene Ford
Founder & CEO, Ford Wellness

Dr. Jonene Ford is a trailblazing leader and healthcare advocate dedicated to enhancing the health and wellness of her community. As the CEO and founder of Ford Wellness, she has redefined how Montgomery County residents approach integrative health, particularly in women’s wellness. Dr. Ford has devoted her career to creating inclusive, accessible, and evidence-based health solutions. She has championed community health through volunteer work, partnerships, and educational initiatives within Montgomery County. Through her advocacy and dedication, Dr. Ford continues to champion health equity and empower individuals to live their healthiest lives. With her visionary leadership, extensive expertise, and heartfelt commitment to her community, she has made a tangible difference in the lives of countless individuals. Her work serves as a model for innovation and compassion in healthcare.



LaTisha Gasaway-Paul
Co-Founder, Minds in Motion Childcare

LaTisha Gasaway-Paul is a pillar of her community, dedicating her time, resources, and expertise to initiatives that uplift and empower those she serves. As the co-founder of the largest Black-owned childcare in the county, she provides a safe, nurturing, and empowering environment for children to learn and grow. She leads the DMV’s largest Juneteenth Festival, organizes community empowerment events, and spearheads food and shoe drives for those in need. She is affectionately regarded as the matriarch of Scotland, a historic Black community in Montgomery County. Her lifelong commitment to service is unwavering, and her efforts reflect her deep commitment to fostering equity, unity, and opportunity across Montgomery County.



Luz Chavez Gonzales
Community Organizer and Activist

Luz Chavez Gonzales, a Bolivian-born community organizer raised in Gaithersburg, MD, has been a leading voice in immigrant rights since discovering her undocumented status in high school. Featured on Nickelodeon, CNN, and ABC, she has played a key role in activism, including the Clean Dream Act takeovers, DMV-wide school walkouts, securing Gaithersburg’s Freedom City resolution, establishing D.C. as a sanctuary city,

and passing Maryland's Access to Care Act for undocumented families. Luz holds dual bachelor's degrees from Trinity Washington University and a Master's in Educational Transformation from Georgetown University, focusing on transforming systems for first-generation students. A fierce advocate for racial justice and immigrant rights, Luz continues to empower and mobilize BIPOC youth in grassroots organizing across the DMV.



Anne Herbster
President, Village Support Network

Anne Herbster is a dedicated leader and advocate for aging in place. In 2017, she co-founded what is now called Village Support Network (VSN) to support neighborhood Villages—volunteer-driven communities that help older adults remain independent and socially connected. As President of VSN, she has helped incubate and sustain over 20 Villages in Montgomery County by providing operational support, funding, and resources. Anne's commitment to seniors extends beyond VSN—she has served as Chair of the Rockville Senior Citizens

Commission, contributed to city policy improvements, and actively volunteers with local organizations. With a background in business strategy and marketing, she has strengthened VSN's impact, ensuring sustainable growth for aging communities. Her leadership, dedication, and community-driven spirit continue to enhance the lives of Montgomery County residents.



Samira Mohammad Hussein
Community Advocate

Samira Mohammad Hussein is a dedicated advocate and community leader who has spent over 30 years serving Montgomery County. As a Family Service Worker with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), she assisted hundreds of families, providing critical resources such as food, clothing, and referrals. Samira has been a trailblazer in cultural advocacy. She founded the nation's first Arab American Heritage Month and established the Ramadan Celebration for MCPS

educators. As Vice Chair of Gaithersburg's Multicultural Affairs Committee, a judge for the city's Labor Day Parade, and an active member of multiple MCPS committees addressing anti-hate initiatives, she continues to promote diversity and equity. Her unwavering dedication has earned her numerous awards, including the NAACP Community and Leadership Award, the Governor's Award for Lifetime Service, and induction into the Montgomery County Human Rights Hall of Fame. Her resilience, compassion, and leadership make her an extraordinary figure in Montgomery County, embodying the values of service, justice, and inclusivity.



Ke'ona Jackson
Minister & Founder, All of His Glory Ministry

Ke'ona, Minister and Founder of All His Glory Ministry, is a dedicated advocate for struggling families in the DMV area. Despite battling multiple sclerosis, she tirelessly supports her community by organizing back-to-school giveaways, clothing and food drives, holiday gift donations for underprivileged children, and free tutoring for youth. She also assists individuals facing eviction or homelessness by connecting them with resources. A former Ms. Wheelchair Maryland, Ke'ona championed accessible and affordable housing, helping many transition from nursing homes into independent living. As a caregiver to individuals with disabilities—offering her services free of charge—she embodies selfless service, funding all her efforts from her own resources. Her unwavering commitment to uplifting others makes her an invaluable force in her community.



Liliana Katz-Hollander
Co-Chair, MoCo EmpowHER

Liliana Katz-Hollander is a dedicated youth advocate and senior at Richard Montgomery High School, passionate about women's rights and amplifying youth voices. She is Co-Chair of MoCo EmpowHER, where she leads the executive board of 15 students. During her time as Co-Chair, EmpowHER has reached thousands of students through its leadership institute, events, and school outreach programs. Beyond EmpowHER, she is President of the Tri-M Music Honors Society and RM Chorus, Vice President of Compostology, and leads RM's EmpowHER club. She also works with the Young Feminist Party, SafeBae, and USYA to advance gender equality. Liliana is always driven and motivated to help the people around her. She is deeply committed to advancing women's rights, promoting community service, and advocating for students both within MCPS and beyond.



**Thea LaFond-Gadson
Olympic Champion**

Thea is the reigning Olympic Gold Medalist in the triple jump. Raised in Silver Spring, MD, after her family immigrated from Dominica when she was 7, Thea has made a lasting impact both on and off the track. She previously supported her athletic career as a special education, fitness, and health teacher at her alma mater, John F. Kennedy High School. In addition, she served as an assistant coach for cross country and track and field at Northwest High School. Beyond athletics, Thea is committed to giving back to her roots. She is working to bring field facilities to her mother's home village and hopes to provide shoes for many children on the island, after a memorable athletic day when children under 14 participated without shoes because they couldn't afford them. Above all, Thea takes pride in representing the two places that have always been a part of her: Dominica and Montgomery County, MD.



**Brittany Love-Campbell
Principal, Gaithersburg High School**

As Principal of Gaithersburg High School, Mrs. Love-Campbell is deeply committed to her students and staff. Mrs. Love-Campbell fosters a culture of collaboration by actively engaging students, staff, and parents in decision-making, ensuring that the best possible solutions are put into practice. Her commitment to the school is evident in her long hours and tireless work ethic. She regularly participates in student events and activities to show her unwavering support and build a strong sense of community. Beyond her leadership at the school, Mrs. Love-Campbell is also deeply involved in her church, reflecting her dedication to service and community both within and outside the school. With a compassionate heart and an unwavering desire to help, she consistently goes above and beyond for those in need.



Jessica Markham
Managing Principal, Markham Law Firm

In 2015, Jessica founded Markham Law Firm, which has since become the top divorce firm in the area, winning numerous awards for both her personal achievements and the firm's success. In addition to her legal practice, she teaches various courses, is frequently published, and often quoted in the media. She also dedicates time to mentoring young attorneys, helping shape the next generation of legal professionals. In 2023, she expanded her entrepreneurial endeavors by opening

Jurisdiction Clothing, a boutique offering woman-owned, local, and handmade items, while hosting community and charitable events. Her extensive service to the legal community includes roles on the Montgomery County Bar Executive Committee, Bar Foundation Board, and Bar Endowment Committee, and the Maryland State Bar Association. She is also an active member of the Hispanic National Bar Association, the County Racial Justice Council, and the Women's Bar. Beyond her professional commitments, she regularly volunteers at community events to feed the underprivileged.



Dana Marlowe
Founder & Executive Director, I Support The Girls

Dana is the founder and driving force behind I Support The Girls (ISTG), a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring dignity to girls and women experiencing homelessness by providing access to essential items they often lack, such as bras and feminine hygiene products. Inspired by a viral Facebook post requesting donations for these items, Dana packed over 7,000 products to donate to homeless shelters in Washington, D.C. Since then, she has expanded ISTG into a

global initiative, with affiliates in major cities around the world, helping women and girls find dignity and support through her outreach. In addition to her work with ISTG, Dana is the president of Accessibility Partners, a company that hires people with disabilities to help make technology, such as websites and mobile apps, more accessible and user-friendly for everyone. Her work continues to inspire and empower others to join the mission of making the world a better, more inclusive place for all.



Bibi Mohamed
Program Director, Islamic Society of the Washington Area

Ms. Mohamed is the Program Director for the ESOL program at the Islamic Society of the Washington Area, where she has expanded the program, increased enrollment, and created culturally responsive, accessible classrooms. She initiated weekly food drives and raised funds to prevent eviction for refugee families, demonstrating her commitment to removing barriers to education and providing essential support. In addition to her work at the Islamic Society, she serves as the

Program Director at Ansaar-ul-Birr Community Services, offering assistance to anyone in need, particularly in Montgomery County. Her quiet, behind-the-scenes efforts, such as organizing meals during the Arrive Silver Spring fire crisis, highlight her selflessness, humility, and unwavering dedication to uplifting her community. Ms. Mohamed is more than an ESOL Director—she’s a lifeline for the community. From food and medical care to clothing and education, her tireless efforts reflect a deep sense of compassion and leadership, making a meaningful difference in the lives of countless families.



Rev. Dr. Ruby Reese Moone
Founder, The Sweet Hour of Prayer Ministry

Rev. Dr. Ruby Reese Moone dedicated 40 years to education as a high school guidance counselor, where she pioneered Montgomery County Public Schools’ first Career Center, leading to its expansion across all county high schools. Beyond education, she founded The Sweet Hour of Prayer Ministry in 1976, which now has over 300 members nationwide. A sought-after speaker, she recently delivered the keynote address at the Marker Dedication Ceremony for John Diggs-Dorsey and Sidney

Randolph. She was also present in the Oval Office when President George Bush signed the No Fear Act and was awarded the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award by President Joe Biden. A lifelong advocate for civil rights, Dr. Moone marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., participated in the 1963 March on Washington, and stood on the Edmund Pettus Bridge during Bloody Sunday. Her enduring legacy of service, faith, and leadership continues to uplift and inspire communities.



Dr. Nkem Okeke
CEO & President, Medicalincs

Dr. Nkem is a visionary leader in value-based care, driving over \$150 million in healthcare savings while improving outcomes and equity in Maryland. She mentors emerging leaders, supports entrepreneurs, and has earned accolades like Most Admired CEO and the Healthcare Heroes Lifetime Achievement Award. Her company, Medicalincs, is a Top 100 Minority Business Enterprise and a Top 5 Minority Supplier Finalist. Committed to community impact, she funds medical

assistance, advocates for African American students, supports health education, and creates scholarship opportunities. Serving on key advisory councils, she continues to break down healthcare barriers, enhance student mental health, and strengthen trade with Africa—proving that even the biggest goals can lead to lasting change. Through her expertise and efforts, Dr. Nkem continues to shape the future of healthcare delivery, and community growth and development.



Mitra Pedoeem
Commissioner, Montgomery Planning Board

Mitra is the Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Planning Board, bringing over 40 years of expertise in permitting, parks, engineering, and government work. She has played a key role in shaping land use, advising on master plans, and influencing policies like the Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative and Growth and Infrastructure Policy. Mitra is deeply involved in the community, serving as president of the Westleigh HOA, mentoring young women in engineering at the University of Maryland, and volunteering with HIAS to support asylees. As an immigrant and former refugee, she understands the power of

perseverance. Her journey from being the only female in her engineering cohort at Tehran University to rebuilding her life in the U.S. reflects her resilience. Despite facing discrimination and starting over in a new country, she earned degrees in civil and structural engineering from the University of Maryland and became a bridge designer. Mitra's story is a testament to determination, passion, and the unwavering pursuit of one's dreams.



Dr. Briana Pobiner
Research Scientist & Museum Educator, Smithsonian Institution

Dr. Briana Pobiner is an accomplished archaeologist and anthropologist with over 100 professional presentations and 46 peer-reviewed publications. Her research has been widely covered in major media outlets, but her true impact lies in her education and outreach efforts on human origins and evolution. As a key contributor to the Hall of Human Origins at the National Museum of Natural History, Briana fosters

dialogue on evolution, engaging diverse audiences through public programming, teacher workshops, and national outreach. She co-leads major projects, such as a traveling Smithsonian exhibit and the NSF-funded LUDA project in Alabama, supporting teachers in navigating socially sensitive science topics. Recognized by prestigious scientific and education groups, she frequently speaks at conferences, media events, and public forums. Her dedication to science communication and inclusivity makes her a leader in bridging the gap between science and society.



Carol Randolph
Founder & Executive Director, New Beginnings Inc.

Carol Randolph founded New Beginnings in 1979 to support separated and divorced individuals in the DC metro area. Starting as a small gathering, it grew into a nonprofit with 501(c)(3) status, offering facilitated discussion groups, expert-led seminars, and social events to help members heal, build relationships, and make informed decisions. As Executive Director, Carol oversees programming, finances, and outreach, ensuring the organization's longevity. She established Divorce 101, a six-week public education series featuring top legal professionals, and remains active in Montgomery County's Divorce & Family Law Roundtable. During the pandemic, she swiftly transitioned meetings online, ensuring continued support. She is also regularly involved with Oleny Helps. Her dedication has sustained New Beginnings for 45 years, a testament to her compassion, leadership, and belief in the power of community.



Cynthia Rosselle
Owner, One Ocean Scuba

Cynthia Rosselle is a pioneer in marine conservation and scuba education as the owner of One Ocean Scuba. With over 30 years of teaching experience, she integrates conservation into her dive training, inspiring students to become stewards of the ocean. Under her leadership, One Ocean Scuba became one of the first PADI Eco Centers, setting a global standard for environmental responsibility. Cindy is committed to breaking barriers for women in STEM; she partners with the MCPS

Summer Rise program, hosting 22 interns to date. Cindy leads community initiatives such as Toys for Tots drives, food collections, and support for youth in foster care. Her lifelong connection to Montgomery County and dedication to environmental stewardship have earned her recognition, including a feature by PADI. Through education, advocacy, and action, Cindy is making history while securing the future of our oceans.



Jeanette Jones Simmons
Montgomery County Public School, Substitute Teacher and Retired Educator

Jeanette Jones Simmons is a dedicated educator with 45+ years of experience, continuing to support under-resourced students in Maryland even after retiring from MCPS. She serves as Parent Advocacy Committee Chair for the Maryland Coalition of Gifted and Talented Education, empowering parents and advancing educational equity. A strong advocate for STEM education, she mentors K-2 students in Destination Imagination. Mrs. Simmons has

helped hundreds of students get into college, raised over \$100,000 in scholarships, and increased SAT scores through free SAT prep workshops. She continues to substitute teach, addressing staff shortages while maintaining educational excellence. A Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. member, she leads STEM programs, organizes community events, and helps award over \$50,000 in scholarships to Montgomery County students. She is also active in theater ministry and even appeared as a background actress in the 2023 Color Purple musical movie. With unwavering dedication, leadership, and a passion for service, Mrs. Simmons continues to make a profound impact on education and the community.



Nancy Stoner
President, Potomac Riverkeeper Network

Nancy has dedicated over six years as President of the Potomac Riverkeeper Network (PRKN), a nonprofit protecting clean water in the Potomac and Shenandoah watersheds. Under her leadership, PRKN has stopped pollution, safeguarded drinking water, and enhanced recreation and habitats, benefiting Montgomery County and beyond. A key achievement includes advocating for Maryland's Clean Water Justice Protection Act, the first-in-the-nation law allowing communities to enforce clean water protections. Nancy has mobilized community activists and volunteers to advocate for policy changes, sue polluters, investigate pollution, conduct river cleanups, and address PFAS contamination in drinking water. A leading expert on stormwater pollution and Chesapeake Bay conservation, she has driven impactful solutions at local, state, and national levels. Beyond her advocacy, Nancy is a mentor and connector, fostering an ever-growing network of clean water advocates in the DMV region. Her unwavering dedication, leadership, and mentorship make her a trailblazer in environmental protection.



Jessica Wilson
Chief Strategy Officer, CCI Health Services

As Chief Strategy Officer at CCI Health Services, Jessica Wilson has secured millions in grant funding, empowering the organization to expand its services for underserved communities. Under her leadership, CCI is set to launch CenteringPregnancy services, broaden its Substance Use Disorder programs, and open Montgomery County's first Center for Sexual and Gender Minority Health Care. Jessica actively collaborates with organizations and elected officials to tackle critical health issues. She serves on the boards of the Primary Care Coalition, the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, and the Young People's Symphony Orchestra, while also dedicating time to community outreach to ensure residents have access to vital healthcare resources. Jessica is well-known for donning an inflatable turkey costume at the annual MoCo Thanksgiving Parade! Her adaptability and visionary approach have established her as a leading expert in healthcare administration.



Mariam Yaldram
Special Education Teacher, Ingenuity Prep

Mariam is an 8th-grade special education teacher dedicated to fostering academic growth, inclusivity, and social-emotional well-being. With experiences as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Teach For America corps member, and disability/social justice advocate, she creates an equitable classroom environment that integrates PRIDE values— Positivity, Resilience, Integrity, Determination, and Empathy. Mariam actively advocates for underrepresented communities, particularly immigrants and individuals with disabilities. As a first-generation, low-income student with disabilities, she demonstrates resilience and dedication to creating change, balancing caregiving with advocacy. Mariam’s commitment to social justice, equity, and community service continues to make a lasting impact.