

Contact:

Lina Page, 267.639.0464, lpage@ofn.org

DC Nonprofit Dreaming Out Loud Recognized with National Award for Food and Economic Justice Work in Nation's Capital

Washington, DC – October 22, 2019 – Opportunity Finance Network (OFN) today awarded its 2019 Justice Grant to Dreaming Out Loud, Inc. (DOL), a DC-based nonprofit with a mission to create economic opportunities in low-income communities through the development of a healthy, equitable food system. OFN, a national network of community development finance institutions (CDFI), presents the Justice Grant annually to an organization that supports economic, political, or social justice in the U.S.

In DC, more than 34,000 residents – the majority people of color living in Wards 7 and 8 – live in “food deserts,” where supermarkets are more than a mile away and access to fresh food is limited. Many also live 200 percent below the federal poverty level. At the same time in the nation’s capital, more than 50,000 residents don’t have high school diplomas, young people face unemployment rates greater than twice the national average, and the rate of unemployment among African Americans is 14 percent.

Founded in 2008, Dreaming Out Loud, Inc. (DOL) was created in response to these educational and economic disparities. It began as a child and youth development program. Early on, DOL began to see the connection between food systems and economics and evolved to tackle inequities by building community-based food systems in numerous DC communities.

Taking an integrated approach, today DOL runs a 2-acre farm and supports community gardens in Wards 6, 7, and 8. The organization’s five community farmers markets provide healthy food access to consumers, as well as marketing and distribution opportunities for local food entrepreneurs. Its DREAM (DOL’s Ready for Entrepreneurship Accelerator Model) initiative is a four month “boot camp” like program for start-up food businesses. And AyaUplift is DOL’s workforce development program, which offers intensive employment skills training, pays a fair wage to participants in the program, and helps them connect to jobs.

“Eating and growing healthy food transforms people physically, mentally, and emotionally, and it also closely ties to community well-being,” said Christopher Bradshaw, DOL founder and executive director. “The Justice Grant helps us spread the message that food justice is social justice. We are proud to have been nominated by peer organizations and honored that OFN recognizes the importance of our work in healing communities.”



DOL also advocates for public policies that promote food justice in all communities. Bradshaw sits on the District of Columbia Food Policy Council, and DOL helped pass the DC Urban Farming and Food Security Act and develop and advance the Produce Plus Program, Cottage Food Law, and Inclusive Entrepreneurship Act of 2017.

“Dreaming Out Loud is cultivating more than healthy food for our District of Columbia neighbors,” said Lisa Mensah, OFN President and CEO. “They are nurturing community and growing connectedness among people. We are excited to award them the 2019 Justice Grant and support the pride and community engagement they’re sowing in different areas of DC.”

Since 2015, DOL’s farmers markets have collectively served 40,000 customers and moved more than 300,000 pounds of produce in Wards 7 and 8. Its first DREAM program cohort in 2018 hosted 10 entrepreneurs, and its current cohort launched in August 2019 with 10 participants.

###

About OFN

Opportunity Finance Network (OFN), the national network of community development financial institutions (CDFIs), strives to ensure low-income and other under-resourced communities have access to affordable, responsible financial products and services. Members of OFN are CDFIs that deliver responsible lending to help low-income communities join the economic mainstream. Through 2017, OFN’s network originated \$65 billion in financing in rural, urban, and Native communities. This financing has helped to create or maintain more than 1,348,300 jobs, start or expand more than 321,500 businesses and microenterprises, and support the development or rehabilitation of 2 million housing units and more than 11,000 community facility projects. For more information, visit www.ofn.org.

About Dreaming Out Loud

Dreaming Out Loud’s mission is to create economic opportunities for the DC metro region’s marginalized community members through building a healthy, equitable food system. Dreaming Out Loud believes that all communities deserve equal access to fresh, healthy food choices. We envision a world in which individuals and communities are empowered to “dream out loud,” meaning they have the space to think, to imagine and to will their innermost dreams into vibrant reality. We envision resilient communities with equitable economic opportunity, family supporting wages, high quality education for all, and a healthy environment.