

AFP Chicago Fellows Spotlight Michelle Rashad, Imagine Englewood if



Michelle “Chellee” Rashad is raised and rooted in the Greater Englewood community. She is a compassionate leader on a mission to revitalize her neighborhood by investing in youth development and strengthening the support systems of families to build a more prosperous community.

As the fearless leader of *Imagine Englewood if* (IEi), Michelle has redesigned and developed youth programs to provide trauma-informed care, leveraged strategic partnerships to expand supportive services and activated vacant lots in the community to promote healthy living. Under her leadership, IEi has successfully engaged over 2,500 children and over 5,000 families total, with more to come. Michelle’s story is truly a full circle journey as she is not only a proponent of IEi as Executive Director, she developed her love for service as a teenage graduate of IEi’s Growing Citizen Leaders program (2009).

Michelle is passionate about giving back in a meaningful way, by devoting time to serving in volunteer leadership roles. She helped build the award winning, and nationally recognized, Greater Englewood Toastmasters Club, enhancing communication and facilitation skills of residents and local leaders. She has developed valuable connections between students and community partners as the Appointed Local School Council’s community representative for Lindblom Math & Science Academy (her alma mater). Her community organizing superpower helped resurrect her block club after over 20 years of inactivity. As president of The Great 68th block club, she fosters community among her neighbors, curates safe activities for youth, and addresses public safety concerns in collaboration with law enforcement and the 17th ward Alderman.

At the end of each day, Michelle is most fulfilled by spending time with her family and being fun Auntie Chelle. She graduated from Howard University with a bachelor of arts in Telecommunication Management and Business Administration and is currently completing her certificate of nonprofit management at the University of Chicago.

Can you tell us a little bit about your work at Imagine Englewood if?

As Executive Director, I am the chief fundraising officer for Imagine Englewood If (IEi). My responsibilities include formulating and working on plans to raise funds that support our youth and family programs. I work with IEi’s board of directors to secure funding to keep the organization’s capacity and team growing. Over the past three years with IEi, I have strengthened relationships with funders, added sponsorship opportunities to our annual events, and have exponentially increased the number of individuals who contribute to the organization on a monthly basis. When youth and families we serve are faced with financial challenges, as they have been in 2020, I have launched crowdfunding campaigns to provide holistic support to those in need. As I continue to grow the organization’s capacity and visibility, I currently spend 75% of my time on development activities with the goal of bringing a much needed youth development center to the Greater Englewood community.