



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Center for Research & Fellowships



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Leadership in Action - Summer 2 Final Deliverable

**DC Drug Take-Back Initiative:
A Community-Centered Approach to a safer DC**

The Drug Take-Back Initiative

This summer, I had the privilege of leading my Leadership in Action project with the Office of Representative Oye Owolewa in Washington, D.C. My project, the DC Drug Take-Back Initiative, was born from a simple but urgent question: what happens to the unused prescription drugs sitting in people's medicine cabinets?

In Wards 7 and 8, neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by opioid misuse and fentanyl overdoses. Families have very few safe and trusted places to dispose of medications. Many residents feel unsafe going into police stations, where most disposal bins are located, and others are unaware of their existence due to their limited availability. This lack of access puts entire households at risk of misuse and overdose.


My goal this summer was to lay the groundwork for a community-driven solution that listens to residents, builds trust, and creates sustainable pathways for safe disposal through two solutions: mail-back programs and installation of drug safety bins.

DC DRUG TAKE-BACK INITIATIVE
Reducing harm. Raising awareness. Reclaiming community voices.

The DC Drug Take-Back Initiative is a community-centered project focused on raising awareness around the dangers of unused prescription medications in Wards 7 and 8 by creating safe and stigma-free ways to dispose of them.

We are collecting community stories, partnering with local organizations, and advocating for long-term solutions like year-round disposal bins in accessible locations.

Contact Information:
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In partnership with the Office of Rep. Oye Owolewa.

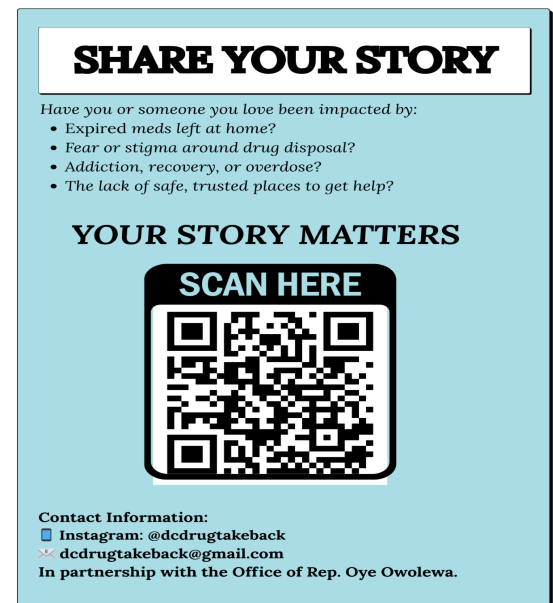


From Vision to Action

I started with the basics by building the first public materials for the initiative. I created a one-page overview of the project, flyers, a “Share Your Story” form, and a partnership interest form. I launched the official email and Instagram account (@dcdrugtakeback) and set up a Notion workspace to track every outreach effort.

But the real work happened on the ground. I attended community events like the Juneteenth Celebration at ONE DC’s Black Workers Wellness Center and the Annual Peace Jam hosted by an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner. At these gatherings, I was able to introduce the initiative, listen to residents’ stories, and have honest conversations about safety and stigma.

I had meetings with several key organizations, including the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), the DC Ward 7 and 8 Prevention Center, the Health Alliance Network, Islamic Relief Group, the Behavioral Health Group (BHG DC), the District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation, Inmar Intelligence, and an ANC Commissioner. They all provided valuable insights on overdose prevention and opportunities for collaboration. These conversations helped me understand the varying needs across




SHARE YOUR STORY

Have you or someone you love been impacted by:

- Expired meds left at home?
- Fear or stigma around drug disposal?
- Addiction, recovery, or overdose?
- The lack of safe, trusted places to get help?

YOUR STORY MATTERS

SCAN HERE



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different neighborhoods and highlighted the importance of community trust in developing effective solutions.

A highlight of my summer was hosting my very first event for the DC Drug Take-Back Initiative at the Benning/Dorothy Height Library in Ward 7. At this gathering, I was able to share the project directly with community members, answer questions, and invite them into the vision of creating safer neighborhoods. This event marked a turning point as it transformed the project from an idea into something tangible in the eyes of the community.

By the end of the six weeks, these combined efforts led to four confirmed community sites agreeing to host mail-back programs. I also began developing funding materials, researching grants, and building a database of potential donors to support long-term growth.



Challenges Along the Way

Not everything went as planned. Many outreach emails went unanswered, especially from youth organizations during the summer. I underestimated how challenging it would be to maintain communication while schools and programs were on summer break. Additionally, I faced some pushback from community sites concerned about safety if a bin was installed at their location. I also discovered that the project did not qualify to be a naloxone distribution site, which was something I had hoped for early on.

These setbacks were frustrating, but they also taught me how to adapt. I began focusing more on in-person visits to build trust face-to-face rather than relying on emails. I also learned to take the feedback given to me and incorporate it into my work so that it continues to center community voices.



Leadership Lessons

This project pushed me to grow as a leader in ways I didn't expect.

- I learned that clarity matters. Before I could ask others to support the initiative, I had to be able to explain it simply myself.
- I realized that leadership often means persistence by showing up again and again, even when responses are slow or discouraging.
- I discovered that trust is built step by step by listening deeply, being present, and respecting people's experiences.

The Laidlaw values guided me throughout:

- Integrity & Responsibility when collecting community stories.
- Community-Mindedness in placing residents' voices at the center.
- Entrepreneurial Spirit when creating funding materials and researching grants.
- Courageous Leadership in addressing a stigmatized issue openly.

What Is Next?

What began as a solo effort is now evolving into a team under Representative Owolewa's office. I am developing an application to recruit members for media and outreach, fundraising, youth engagement, research, and policy initiatives. The next phase will focus not just on four sites, but hopefully on a citywide movement. This summer was only the beginning; the foundation has been laid, and now it is time to continue the work.



Acknowledgments

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