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THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

Philly woman receives worldwide recognition for her work with girls of color. 8

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Philly's own *Woman of Worth*

Cheryl Ann Wadlington is getting worldwide recognition for her exceptional work in Philadelphia.



MOLLY GIVEN
Molly.Given@metro.us

One local woman is getting worldwide recognition for the work she's doing right here in the City of Brotherly Love, and for Cheryl Ann Wadlington this has been something she has been working towards her whole life.

Wadlington is the Founder and Executive Director of The Evoluer House here in Philly, and this year she was nominated for the L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth in the U.S. for 2020. The program honors extraordinary women around the world who selflessly volunteer their time to serve their communities for their Women of Worth Honoree recognition, and Wadlington is one of 10 women who were selected. But her knack for helping others came early on from her family.

"I saw how people didn't sit around and wait for things to happen when they saw is-



Cheryl Ann Wadlington.

ALL IMAGES: PROVIDED

sues in the community," says Wadlington. "I saw my family, then I said I could do it."

The Philly native's family was always religious and keen on helping the community around them. Her mother was heavily in-

volved with the Civil Rights movement and one of her brothers started an organization from the ground-up during the HIV pandemic in the '80s. It was after seeing a need for girls of color in the community that Wadlington found what she had been looking for as a way to give back.

"I saw a lot of issues that related to girls of color in our community that nobody was talking about and nobody knew how girls of color were suffering," explains Wadlington. "For example, the school to prison pipeline and just how prevalent that was, how girls of color were unsafe at school and how they are six times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts. They were being suspended if they had darker skin, and for the way they dressed, and their hairstyles to the point where the National Women's Law Project had to step in.

Young girls of color just couldn't be themselves, there was just so much stripped away from their whole existence, their self-esteem, and not to mention they were absolutely traumatized. This would pertain to girls whether they were from low-income or privileged backgrounds."

Before starting The Evoluer House in 2004, Wadlington was heavily involved with overseeing different community centers and housing authorities for girls, and not just in Philadelphia. She says that most of the programs had to be shut down due to funds—something that happens regularly in cities around the country when it comes to girls' programs in particular. Once she decided to stick to the City of Brotherly Love to make a difference, Wadlington worked on overseeing 50 more programs for girls mainly from the inner city, and 16 recreation centers all over Philly. However, af-



ored to be a Woman of Worth because it gives Evoluer House the opportunity to elevate the story to the voices of girls of color around the world and it also gives us an opportunity to win money that can help us expand our programming and build capacity which is something we greatly need right now with the issues of COVID."

Voting is open on for the L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth on their website until Nov. 27, and if Wadlington wins she has big hopes for The Evoluer House if they receive more money.

ter seeing the conditions of these centers, a decision had to be made to create a space that was functional and also safe.

For 16 years, Wadlington's organization worked with girls of color in Philadelphia aged 13 to 18, who are experiencing a unique set of social and emotional challenges and barriers to success. According to their website, The Evoluer House's research-based curriculums are designed to promote emotional, mental, and social well-being, to equip girls with the tools they need to become college-bound and career-ready, and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Evoluer House provides a safe community for girls to share experiences and learn both from and alongside one another.

"1.1 billion girls in the world right now, and all of the research is saying that they're going to be the ones to change the world. So we have to make sure that all girls are ready to not just take up an opportunity, but do what we can to make the world a better place," says Wadlington.

Wadlington received a call that she was a finalist for the L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth in the U.S. award. The accolade landed The Evoluer House a \$10,000 donation from L'Oréal Paris, and on top of that, one of the international beauty brand's 10 honorees, chosen by three weeks of online voting, will receive an additional \$25,000 towards her cause.

"I screamed," says Wadlington. "They say I'm a finalist, but no—I'm an honoree because I earned this. I am so hon-

"Ninety percent of the girls that we deal with are from low-income households, so a lot of the parents for the girls that we mentor are essential workers," explains Wadlington. "We are watching our girl's parents get sick and our girls get sick—they are very vulnerable to getting infected. We know that we're seeing our girls go through more grief on top of what they are already experiencing as girls of color."

"If we get the \$25,000, this will help us to build capacity and help us take more girls because for every two girls there are always at least ten more that want to get in," she continues. "We're also going to have to figure out some other health components for what we are seeing with mental health, our girls have really been impacted by COVID and by the racial injustice that they've been witnessing. What we're seeing is the young girls are actually the ones out on the street protesting on the front lines."

Philadelphians can vote for Cheryl Ann Wadlington by visiting lorealparisusa.com.

"Not only did [L'Oréal] give us money, they also gave us support. We've had all kinds of seminars and sessions to help our organization. Anything you could name, they were so willing to support us as women," says Wadlington. "So, I'm thrilled and I'm amazed."

To learn more about Cheryl Ann Wadlington and The Evoluer House, visit evoluerhouse.org.

