

# Majeedah Rashid


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## SPEAKERS


De'Wayne Drummond, Leon Robinson, Majeedah Rashid

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Leon Robinson 00:10  
Hey y'all, it's Leon Robinson here.
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De'Wayne Drummond 00:12  
and I'm De'Wayne Drummond.
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Leon Robinson 00:14  
We're so excited to bring you Iron Sharpens Iron.
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De'Wayne Drummond 00:17  
Iron Sharpens Iron is a podcast conversation for community organizing and grassroots community involvement.
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Leon Robinson 00:25  
So De'Wayne, as you know we've been doing Iron Sharpens Iron as a training workshop since 2017. And like everything else COVID messed that us, but I'm so glad that you accepted my invitation to do this podcast with you,

**D** De'Wayne Drummond 00:40  
Without a doubt, bro!

**L** Leon Robinson 00:41  
And it also gives the opportunity to teach what you know. So we'll be bringing in other community organizers from all across the city. And I can't think of a better person to first interview than Majeedah Rashid.

**D** De'Wayne Drummond 00:54  
Man, you got Majeedah for our first episode?!

**L** Leon Robinson 00:57  
Had to bro - she's a soldier in the fight for community organizers.

**D** De'Wayne Drummond 01:01  
And you know, her name precedes her.

**L** Leon Robinson 01:04  
It does, but let me tell you a little bit about Majeedah. She is the Chief Operating Officer of the Nicetown Community Development Corporation, which serves Nicetown and surrounding communities to the development and repair of affordable homes, commercial revitalization, open space management, supportive services and community outreach and engagement. Majeedah also serves as the lead for community engagement on two rebuild projects. Majeedah serves on the Philadelphia Land Bank board, La Salle University's President Community Advisory Council, and is a member of the North Philly collective and collaboration with Temple University and healthcare systems.

**D** De'Wayne Drummond 01:46  
Yeah, Majeedah has been in the game for a long, long time. So I'm really excited to hear what she has to say about community organizing.



Leon Robinson 01:54

So let's get started. Welcome to Iron Sharpens Iron a conversation in community organizing and community involvement. And today, our guest is Majeedah Rashid. And I couldn't think of a better soldier to interview with this first podcast. So I'm going to say welcome, Majeedah.



Majeedah Rashid 02:14

Thank you so much. All right.



De'Wayne Drummond 02:16

How you doing? So Majeedah, how are you doing today? And what's going on out in Nicetown.



Majeedah Rashid 02:22

I'm doing well. I'm thankful I'm doing well. Yeah, we're hanging in there in Nicetown. Even with the pandemic and everything we it's ironically, it seems like we kind of busier than ever, because we have to make a lot of adjustments to how we communicate with our, you know, communities and neighborhoods that we serve. So we're thankful we kind of busy, development wise and things like that. Supportive Services is a little tricky. You know, we have a NAC program. So some of our NAC staff is working remotely still. And then myself and Salomon, our NAC coordinator, probably see him back there. helping me out. We've been here basically, you know, all through the pandemic. We never, we never stopped. But we're doing good. We're doing good.



Leon Robinson 03:16

That's good. That's good. Majeedah, you and I go way back. We go way back. We start with you guys start building Nicetown CDC.



Majeedah Rashid 03:26

That's right.



Leon Robinson 03:27

So just for our listeners out there. Tell us about Nicetown CDC, from top to bottom, what

do you do from top to bottom?

M

Majeedah Rashid 03:36

Oh, wow. So basically, we were founded our organization was founded in 1999. And we had a mission to what we say we have a mission to dynamically improve the quality of life in Nicetown and surrounding neighborhoods. And so that was in 1999. When we were founded, I came along in 2002. And was actually brought on as the Chief Information Officer. And at that time, I was attending the University of Southern New Hampshire studying community development, Community Economic Development from a resident driven perspective. They throw that phrase around a lot now, but back then it was really important to me. So I was there and the NAC was my thesis. The one in Nicetown at the time had been shut down for years. But I used it as my thesis. And during that time, I worked with some people that were advising us to get it reestablished and things like that. So we started out working, you know, that was actually our first contract that we got. And basically, we learned everything just through our NAC program, about people about the conditions and neighborhoods and stuff like that. And it allowed us to fulfill our mission that way and then we got into Planning, neighborhood planning. And that started us on housing development, commercial corridor revitalization and stuff like that. We ended up with about four community plans, basically focusing on our commercial corridor, and the residential blocks that connect to it. That basically was our strategy, our neighborhood strategy. So we focused on that neighborhood revitalization, housing, land management, we have a number of land care contracts with PHS in the city, and also never getting away from arts and culture, we try to keep that as part of our mission as well. And we do that through our give back to the community festival that we plan for all year. So that's kind of it in a nutshell. Today, we're going two rebuild projects, you know, and rebuild is, you know, is the initiative that the city has to restore recreation centers, playgrounds and libraries. We're actually doing a rebuild project in our NAC service area, that's at Barrett playground in Logan. And another at the Shepherd Recreation Center in West Philly that's like very, very different. We have some of our people actually live in an area, but it's different. It is different, I can tell you some stories just about the engagement on the engagement level. So that's kind of it I mean, we you know, and and that keeps us you know, with that one stop shop, you know, kind of vibe, you know, you come to the NAC office, you can get your energy assistance, you can get a recycle bin, you can make a copy or fax, we got a key spot computer lab, just about anything, people think we do everything here. We try to do what we can here without referring people and sending them on their way somewhere. But I'm communicating with all the NACs gives us a good referral base. So if we can't do it, we got to know someone else who can.



De'Wayne Drummond 07:16

So I have a question. What does the NAC stand for? What does it stand for? I know it's an acronym, but what it does is themes for so people can know.



Majeedah Rashid 07:27

Yeah, actually NAC is Neighborhood Advisory Committee. Some NAC have a different acronym. Sometimes they say Neighborhood Action Committee, but as far as DHCD, which is the Division of Housing and Community Development, which funds all the NACs, NACs are located in neighborhoods that are at least 51% or more low to moderate income residents. So a lot of the services and resources we provide are specifically designed to address the needs of people in income bracket.



De'Wayne Drummond 08:03

Interesting, how many people is staffed through your NAC?



Majeedah Rashid 08:09

Well, we have three people on staff here now myself. Dina Butler, Dina Butler is a community organizer. She's working remotely Dina does everything. She does a lot of the billing and a lot of our grant programs and stuff like that she keeps that moving. And that's really interesting right now with a lot of the COVID products that are out there with the CARES programs and things like that. And Salomon is the NAC coordinator. He does just about everything. And Leon knows when you work in NAC, you work you got 25 hats on so. And Salomon is good at community engagement and making sure our story is out there, communicating what's going on with the NAC, especially right now because people think we're closed. So we try to do a lot of social media and things like that. And we're looking for another person, because normally we have three NAC staff and an executive director. I'm an executive director, supposedly 10% of my time is supposed to be spent as the executive director of the NAC. But as everybody knows, I'm like, you know how that goes.



Leon Robinson 09:28

Majeedah, do you have enough resources in the community? I know the answer to that, but I gotta ask you that. Do you have enough? Are you always reaching out to get more resources?

M

Majeedah Rashid 09:40

Absolutely. The answer's no. We never have enough resources. Even in normal circumstances, the search for adequate funding is ongoing and never stops. So at times like this, it kind of emphasizes the need for specific types of funding. To address basic needs, and other things that have never been appropriately funded. So you know, now we have, we've been looking at a lot of things related to mental health, and things like that, that we think have never been addressed appropriately. So basically, our partnerships and collaborations with with other providers like Temple, UnitedHealthcare, Keystone First, and others have helped us to look at health, which is a really important component, we really need to look at health and how we can bring more attention to educating our people around health disparities and things like that. And it allows us to bring up bring information and resources to the community that they wouldn't otherwise have access to. And PACDC has been really impactful in that regard with housing and health and some of the emphasis they've been putting on that recently. And also with leveraging resources on so many levels, you know, so it's great that we can, you know, look at things like housing and health supportive services, and of course, trainings, education and trainings. Big, big, big. So, you know, it's never enough resources, but through partnership and collaboration, we kind of balance things out.

D

De'Wayne Drummond 11:23

Let's talk about the year 2020. And how things started out in the year 2020. And where we are at right now? What changed? And what is the same?

M

Majeedah Rashid 11:39

Wow. Oh, 2020 the year everybody loves to hate. So 2020 has been really, across the board kind of really challenging and devastating in a lot of ways, and things like that. And for us, as the CDC, our organization, it's been really a challenge, just staying above board, anything we could do to just stay connected, and doing a lot of telephone outreach. So and and I'm gonna tell you, people love you to contact them and ask them, How are you doing? Did you need anything? Did you know we were still here, we're still here, we can do this, and that over the phone, and we can even you can sign your signature electronically, and we can process your applications and stuff. So things like that. So that a lot of these things that we're doing now, as a result of how we had to adjust, we know we're gonna keep a lot of these tools going on, even after COVID gone, we're gonna still have some of this. Some of these things available to us because they had been working well, for us the telephone calls, especially, we always got a lot of telephone calls, we get hundreds of calls a month, but I'm just paying more attention to them and really looking to help people over the phone has been really helpful.

**L** Leon Robinson 13:05  
Okay, hey, Majeedah, I know, you and I know, we go way back and a lot of discussions we had. And I know you talked about that NACs earlier, whatever. But I want to talk about the NACs as it plays in coordination with block captains? How is that essential for the work that you guys do? What's the relationship to block captains? I know me and you've had, we have guides and conversations about block captains, and how they can be, how they help us, and the work that was needed to be done in the community and how the support that they get is not what we think it should be, so can you talk a little bit about the relationship between a block captains and the NAC offices, okay.

**M** Majeedah Rashid 13:54  
I remember when I first met you, and just going back to that when we first became a NAC. I didn't know what the NAC was and what it do and everything like that. I didn't even know what a block captain was.

**L** Leon Robinson 14:06  
Get out, I didn't know that.

**M** Majeedah Rashid 14:07  
Okay, so I'm block captains are real special to us, because we look at them like, that could be our army out there. You know, they give you added capacity to share information, get the word out. They're the ones that come to the community meetings, and things like that. And one thing we - talking about lack of resources, you know, I don't want to, you know, beat a dead horse. But we know that block captains do not get the resources that they need

**L** Leon Robinson 14:17  
Say it again, say it again.

**M** Majeedah Rashid 14:23  
They do not get the resources they need, its a thankless job for the most part, so we prioritize block captains from the beginning and try to be a support base for them. So this

is actually this office is actually the headquarters for the Block Captain Committee of Nicetown, although we work with block captains in different neighborhoods, but in that regard, we're here for them when they need copies, make a flyer, have a meeting. You know, communicating just like that. And coordinating cleanups, and attending RCO meetings, just everything that block captain's do. But I will say this over the years, we know from the door, block captains, for the most part, if you get a roomful of block captain's, you're going to discover that most of them are senior citizens. So I already told you how long I've been around. Okay. So some of the black captains that we started out with are no longer here. Okay. So here we go with one of the other things that was brought to my attention by Mr. Leon, is that we need to get with these young people. Oh, my God, we got to get to these young people. Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee, which oversees the block captains have a junior block Captain component that I feel has never been tapped into appropriately. It's a built in mentoring opportunity there. And that has never occurred. Block captains need assistance with boots on the ground, helping them get around getting the word out, put fliers out, and they can learn from each other. Here's a perfect example. Right now you got all this zoom going on. So our black captain committee in Nicetown, they just got into their own zoom things. And we're here for them. You know, Salomon does a lot of hand holding and working with them on that, and they're coming along. But just think if they had some young people that would be like right under his wing or whatever, they could exchange a lot of information, and get some things done and assist each other. I mean, we got block captain's out here doing a lot right now, our black captains are heavily engaged in a partnership project with Tioga. And we're working with PHS on a greening project. So we always wondering, like, what would it be if we could get some young people involved in this? But I'll never forget one thing that Leon told me and I'm trying to get this going. Something always happens to keep us from getting it going. Bring a block captain to schools. Yeah, that right there to me is awesome. Yeah. You know what I'm saying? You could tell you can teach them, What is the block captain? Who is it you know?



Leon Robinson 17:36

On your block, who is the block captain on your block?



Majeedah Rashid 17:39

Absolutely. And respect them and love them. And you know, because they're so valuable. Block captains are very, very valuable. We love block captain's around here. They're our community partners. And we try to keep keep our relationships nurtured they are our first point of contact, everything.



**L** Leon Robinson 17:58  
Well, that's, you know, what, that's to me. That is a whole topic for this podcast, block captains. Getting them support and getting younger block captains. Yeah, innovators, you know, getting that thing jumping starting.

**M** Majeedah Rashid 18:12  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, we looking forward to doing some things like that.


**D** De'Wayne Drummond 18:17  
So Majeedah, as I know, and everybody else know, you've been in the game for a while. And it's much respect to you and the things that you have done for just not Nicetown, but Philadelphia at large. Like you're really, really a true true role model. And as you know, community organizing is not for the faint hearted.


**M** Majeedah Rashid 18:42  
Absolutely not. Oh, wow.

**D** De'Wayne Drummond 18:44  
So what keeps you in this fight?


**M** Majeedah Rashid 18:50  
Well, it's amazing. And thank you so much for saying that, you know, that kind of that kind of stuff, right? That gives me the fuel, that's my fuel right there, make me stay on my toes, I got work to do. But what keeps me here is just just the desire to serve our people, and try to find ways to better serve them every day, just knowing the needs that are there. And, you know, I think I was put in this world to do what I do. You know, I don't know if you want to call it a higher calling or whatever. But that's what I believe about myself. And most of the people that we work with, here at the Nicetown CDC are special people. You know, it takes special people to do this, like you said. You definitely don't do it for the money. You got to have a passion for it. And a strong desire to really assist and help our people and empower them which in every way that you can. Um, and that kind of keeps us going like when we see that what we're providing in our assistance is actually helping them and helping them to be more self sufficient. We do a lot of programs, but around here we like to present those programs and provide those programs in a way that doesn't encourage

dependency. Because sometimes these programs can become a crutch, or it can be generational dependency. So we like to most of the programs that we do, they got to sit down, we got to talk to them, we got to do budget counseling. That's what I love about NACs, you know, NACS are the sit down hand holding people, you know. You'll find people working the NAC, you might find them in a seven, eight o'clock at night still in there talking to miss so and so because somebody stole her Recycle Bin or whatever. So, you know, just this is the kind of thing you do, and you really gotta love it. And you really got to care about your people in order to do this. Our people will take you there sometimes, sometimes it's you know, you get a little beat up, sometimes you can't do enough. You know, and I'll give you an example. I shouldn't even be sharing this. I rushed out. Our door was left open one night. So this guy in the neighborhood he's kind of notorious. He saw the door was open, did a great deed. He did a good deed. And he said what actually happened was he knows that one of our volunteers, our food covered supervisor, Leon, you know her, Miss Minnie.

 Leon Robinson 21:27  
Okay, yeah,

 Majeedah Rashid 21:28  
Yeah, she lives around the corner. She asked me about you today. Okay. She lives around the corner. She got the keys to the place. Everybody knows she run the joint. She's our best community volunteer.

 Leon Robinson 21:39  
Yes, she is. Hands down for Miss Minnie.

 Majeedah Rashid 21:45  
He knows - the guy knew this. So he went around a corner to her house to say, Hey, I saw the door was open. I don't think that's cool. So she said what? And she went on. Came around and locked the place up. You know, said I'm gonna give it to that Majeedah. So anyway, to make a long story short. The guy comes around. And he says, Oh, yeah, you know, I came in here. The door was open. I closed the door and everything. And I want a reward. I said, Oh, wow. But he was dead serious. He was dead serious. So I wasn't sure about doing something like that, like giving somebody cash money for stuff. You know, we can't do certain things. I say, Well, let me think about it. And it was nice. I was like, well, didn't you did that out of the kindness of your heart? Yeah, yeah, but I won't know what it's

worth to you. So anyway, the end of the story was the day he went down the street and told my boss, yeah, I did this and you need-



Leon Robinson 22:23

I know he was, I know he was. - give me some money. Give me some money.



Majeedah Rashid 22:54

So that kind of stuff, or when they fight over the turkeys and the coat drives and all that.



Leon Robinson 23:03

You know, there's no training for that. No, there is no, pull you aside and say, Hey, listen, when this happens, do this or do that? There's no, but it's there. It's gonna come. When you're helping people there are some people who don't appreciate the help. Yeah, but they but you cannot turn to help away from because they don't appreciate it.



Majeedah Rashid 23:25

Right. Right. Right. Yeah.



Leon Robinson 23:28

That comes with experience, that comes with experience.



Majeedah Rashid 23:32

We have seen progress with some people that might have started off kind of, you know. And then over time, because most of the time people do not one and done, you know.



Leon Robinson 23:43

And they just wanted some attention too you know, they want attention. And you know what, and this brings me to, you know, where we as community organizers share information with one another, because nobody can tell you how to react to those kind of situations, but somebody who's been through it, see what I'm saying. And so that's why it's so important that our programs like these Iron Sharpens Iron, where we can hear somebody else who's a community organizer, who's been through the, the rough patches or whatever, who can come back and say, Hey, listen, when this happens, this is what you

should do. Don't react, you know, don't react to that. You know

M

Majeedah Rashid 24:23

It's hard. It might be hard sometimes.

L

Leon Robinson 24:25

Yeah, it really is. It really is. And so my next question to you, my question to you is, um, so what's your relationship like with other community organizers? Do you guys share information? I know there was a time when we did do that. We had a city wide NAC Alliance. And then you know, time goes on things changes. And you have to you have to be in touch with colleagues like yours.

M

Majeedah Rashid 24:52

Yeah and we have over the years and we've learned from each other tremendously. It's good to have that support system. And that's why I miss the city wide NAC alliance so much because we can share best practices, but also share experiences like something like just sharing somebody knowing that somebody else goes through similar things. It's kind of help us support network. But over time, I'm telling you, I mean, just people that we've worked with over the years, have grown in the position, and I'm telling you, the experience with the NAC is really what strengthens them, educates them. Sometimes people look at NACs, like, that's a little tough. That's how we almost like the block captains of community development, almost, you know, but without without what we do the impact because it's all about the community, the community is where the power is, okay? And that's one thing. I learned from development, the community if they either like it, or they don't, and if they don't they shut it down, okay. Knowing that, and that kind of respect has to be given to them.

L

Leon Robinson 26:02


And experience with the NACS is also sharing that information among colleagues who are doing community organizing and are doing community engagement. And one thing leads to another, you know, when somebody knows the work you do, and they say, I know somebody, then you can get that referral.

M


Majeedah Rashid 26:20

And it's good, a great benefit. These people like this are advocates for the community, you


know, activists. So it's, they're essential to communities in how they operate. So people like everything we shared with other NACs over the years, and the people that work in NACs, it's been extremely valuable to all of us,

 Leon Robinson 26:41


You know, I always said the best community organizer is the one who comes out of need.

 Majeedah Rashid 26:48

Oh, wow.

 Leon Robinson 26:48

When I when I say that, I think of the story of Leanna Washington. state rep. And how she got started. She was a mother on welfare and something wasn't right. Yeah, she just came out and said, Hey, listen, this is not right. And while she was out there fighting, she said, Well, listen, nobody's saying nothing but me. Well, I'll need to speak up for the people on my block, you know, and that's how she became state representative. So this, this grassroots community organizing thing it don't start at no college, you know, it's no college course on that. It starts at the street level, it starts at the grassroots level, it starts from a need. And then I've had run across some of the best community organizers who came out who needed something. And they found out that it wasn't available to them. And he started fighting, getting those state reps and the city reps and all those other people to be responsible for the things that you said that you were going to do.

 Majeedah Rashid 27:42

I love I love being called a community organizer, I never want that to go away. I believe it's an honor to be a community organizer, especially when you get the top. A community organizer was our former president. And we still doing it, see what just happened the election.

 Leon Robinson 28:04

Exactly. Let me tell you wouldn't have got those people out there to vote like that if it wasn't for grassroots community organizing.

M

Majeedah Rashid 28:11

That's right. It's all about the organizing. Yeah, cause you educate through organizing. So that's how you mobilize people.

D

De'Wayne Drummond 28:20

So Majeedah, through this pandemic, we was talking about the grassroots organizers. Through this pandemic, have you been in touch with these grassroots organizers? And where have they been doing and what type of collaboration have you been doing?

M

Majeedah Rashid 28:36

Well, right, like I just mentioned the election. So I will say that the whole voting thing, getting people out to vote has been a major part of what we've been doing for months. And we were working with an organization like Black Voters Matter who the Pennsylvania coordinator for Black Voters Matter is Brittany Smalls, who used to be a NAC coordinator, okay? I rest my case. She's out there rocking and rolling with Stacey Abrams, and people like that doing big, major, major thing. So we've been really doing motorcades, going door to door and giving out information and things like that. And it just let you see this was one time I really saw voter education really inspired people because they actually believed. Now they say, Oh, we did that we voted and we made this right here happen. Whereas before, you might not have actually seen that much of an impact. But this year, you saw the activity and how everybody was getting involved and everything like that. So that's crazy how I was talking about that and it's go right back to a NAC coordinator.

L

Leon Robinson 29:50

Okay, there's go the best kept secret. Remember, we used to always say the NACS were the best kept secret in our communities. Okay.

M

Majeedah Rashid 30:00

My board members always looking at me like here she comes with this NAC again, you know.

L

Leon Robinson 30:07

But Majeedah, you know what we can go on and on and on, ya know, we but we only have a half hour on this podcast. So I'm going to De'Wayne if you want to ask any more

questions or whatever I'm going to say thanks for being a guest. And you will be back. Hopefully, you will be back and De'Wayne you want to close this out?

**D** De'Wayne Drummond 30:32

Yeah, I would like to close out and I just have I have a personal question. And I like to ask people to define stuff. And I need you to define this one phrase for us. What does 'iron sharpens iron' mean to you?

**M** Majeedah Rashid 30:49

Oh, wow. Um, if I'm not mistaken, I sharpens iron. Is that like a proverb?

**L** Leon Robinson 30:56

Yes, proverb. From the Book of Proverbs.

**M** Majeedah Rashid 30:59

Right. So when I hear people say it, and I'm always like, you don't know about iron sharpens iron for real, you know, but, um, it means is extremely important, just based on what we were just talking about, just like, you know, working with block captains and working with other NACs and other things like that. This is how you get sharp, you know, so everybody, all of us are iron and we sharpen each other. It means that's what it means to me. Like, you know, everybody has something to offer, something they bring to the table. We may not realize that, but one thing about doing this kind of work is you find out you know, it's jewels everywhere. So that's what 'iron sharpens iron' means to really means to me that we sharpen each other. And the things we do, it keeps us sharp, you know, and working, working well operating well.

**D** De'Wayne Drummond 31:53

And before we let you go, can you tell our listeners how to stay in touch with Nicetown CDC? And how can they help support your work?

**M** Majeedah Rashid 32:04

Oh, wow, well, they want to stay in touch with the nicetown. CDC, they can go to our website, which is [www.nicetowncdc.org](http://www.nicetowncdc.org). And it has information about our organization there and the different programs and projects we're engaged in. Also, we have surveys on

our website that you can complete if you want to stay connected with us. And you can also get in touch with us by email on [info@nicetowncdc.org](mailto:info@nicetowncdc.org) by email, or you can call us at 215-329-1824. So you can go to our website, you can go to our email address, and you definitely can catch us up on social media. We're on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We are working hard trying to get that Twitter but Salomon got it taken care of. So we're on social media, we're trying to make sure we have all options for people to get in touch with us. And we do a lot of zoom, we putting together this zoom but we generally do two zooms a month for the community just to stay connected. So look out for us on our what we call our zoom experience. And we have our website all hooked up now where we're going to be doing that live stream and on the YouTube and everything. So see we start off with the basic zoom stuff, now we got to get real. So now you guys gonna teach me how to do podcasts.



Leon Robinson 33:47

Majeedah, we thank you again.