

Source: *Wilmington StarNews*, Feb 25, 2021; <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2021/02/25/wilmington-sokoto-house-aid-community-using-cdc-model/4393492001/>

■ FOR SUBSCRIBERS NEWS

At Sokoto House in Wilmington, community healing is led by the community

John Staton *Wilmington StarNews*

Published 6:04 a.m. ET Feb. 25, 2021 | Updated 6:44 a.m. ET Feb. 25, 2021

[View Comments](#)



On a chilly weekday afternoon in early February, [Wilmington community center Sokoto House](#) was bustling.

While Executive Director Abdul Hafeedh bin Abdullah talked with representatives from Planet Logo, Brandon Cagle helped unload donations from the Wilmington product design company, including socks for the homeless, along with journals and tote bags for area youth.

Programs coordinator Lily Nicole grabbed a cup of coffee for a visitor at what's envisioned as Sokoto House's coffee shop, while operations director Vance Williams oversaw work being done outside on an under-construction community garden.

"It might seem chaotic, but this is actually the calmest we've been," Nicole said of Sokoto House, which has been under development at 1219 Dawson St. for the past several months, and is finally ready to start showing some fruits of its many labors.



Shashamane Farm is under construction at Sokoto House in Wilmington. JOHN STATON/STARNEWS

Source: *Wilmington StarNews*, Feb 25, 2021; <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2021/02/25/wilmington-sokoto-house-aid-community-using-cdc-model/4393492001/>

Its name means "marketplace," and with so many ideas circulating and projects going on at once, it's impossible not to feel the energy of Sokoto House, which has ambitions as big as its ideas. Not for becoming "a multi-million dollar not for profit" organization, as Abdullah puts it, but for evolving into a place where members of Wilmington's African-American community can learn to do the difficult work of healing their own neighbors from the violence and poverty born of decades, if not centuries, of institutionalized racism and racist policies.



Brandon Cagle brings in donations of notebooks for area youth at Sokoto House in Wilmington. JOHN STATON/STARNEWS

"There's a lot of people being saved every day. That work needs to have more visibility," Abdullah said. "If the media concentrated more on the heroes in our community, you might have more heroes in the community."

One of those heroes is Brenda Galloway, Sokoto House's community coordinator, who, on a Saturday in early February, was cooking food as part of Sokoto House's third free community market.

Source: *Wilmington StarNews*, Feb 25, 2021; <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2021/02/25/wilmington-sokoto-house-aid-community-using-cdc-model/4393492001/>

"There's a lot of people being saved every day. That work needs to have more visibility," Abdullah said. "If the media concentrated more on the heroes in our community, you might have more heroes in the community."

One of those heroes is Brenda Galloway, Sokoto House's community coordinator, who, on a Saturday in early February, was cooking food as part of Sokoto House's third free community market.



Abdul Hafeedh Bin Abdullah, seen here in 2017, is the executive director of Sokoto House in Wilmington. STARNEWS FILE PHOTO

Source: *Wilmington StarNews*, Feb 25, 2021; <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2021/02/25/wilmington-sokoto-house-aid-community-using-cdc-model/4393492001/>

Organized by the lowercase leaders -- one of many groups coming together under the Sokoto House banner -- the market has everything from clothing and furniture to toys, books and more, given out free to community members who need it.

A retired hair stylist ("people would come in and tell me their life story," she said), for the past several years Galloway has been trying to stem the tide of youth violence by working with a number of area groups. Now, she wants to get local youth to help her lead the effort.

More: [Born of protests, Wilmington's 'lowercase leaders' help quicken pace of local change](#)



Brenda Galloway cooked food at a free community market Saturday Feb. 6, 2021 at the Sokoto House off Dawson Street. KEN BLEVINS/STARNEWS

Source: *Wilmington StarNews*, Feb 25, 2021; <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2021/02/25/wilmington-sokoto-house-aid-community-using-cdc-model/4393492001/>

"Whatever we have, the youth lead it," Galloway said, surrounded by several of the teenage girls she's working with. "We have to heal our community."

Galloway is part of the [community health worker model](#) touted by Abdullah that stems from a Centers for Disease Control program treating violence as a public health crisis.

Abdullah, who moved to Wilmington in 2016, worked on the CDC program in Portland, Oregon, and he calls it an "evidence-based approach" in which they "mobilize community leaders."

"It's already worked," he said. "We're trying to get the community behind it."

Helping to do just that is Williams, who for years in Wilmington has been trying to provide better options to area young people as part of his Advance Youth Outreach program, which focuses on deterring instances of life-altering violence.



Vance Williams talks about the free community market held Saturday Feb. 6, 2021 at the Sokoto House off Dawson Street.
KEN BLEVINS/STARNEWS

"Sokoto House is doing something not a lot of groups are doing," Williams said.

By bringing together these "spark plug personalities," as Williams calls them -- Abdullah, Nicole, Cagle, Galloway, himself and others -- the hope is that they can build a sense of energy and momentum that will make community healing inevitable.

"Those spark plugs join together to push the vehicle forward," Cagle said.

Source: *Wilmington StarNews*, Feb 25, 2021; <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2021/02/25/wilmington-sokoto-house-aid-community-using-cdc-model/4393492001/>

Cagle added that while "the pandemic killed collaboration," at least temporarily, he sees Sokoto House as trying to bring back the vibe of collective inspiration.

"Let's look at the mission. Every one of us brings something to the table," Williams said. The goal, he added, is to "interrupt the cycle. We don't have THE solution. There are multiple solutions."

Among the projects the group is working on is the Cape Fear's Comprehensive Community Violence Prevention Strategy, which was featured during a lengthy chat with Abdullah, Williams and Nicole -- an activist who helped lead some of last summer's local George Floyd protests as part of the lowercase leaders -- on Sokoto House's YouTube page recently.



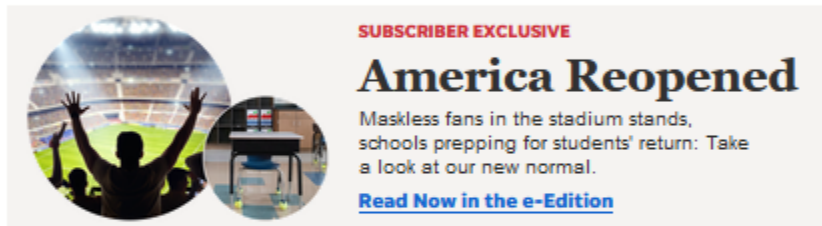
Headquartered in part of a huge building on Dawson Street that's mostly an HVAC warehouse, Sokoto House is neighbored by a large, open field that used to have a wooded area that attracted crime. The underbrush has since been swept away, and the field is home to a community solar station for charging phones and laptops, as well as Shashamane Farm, which will have a greenhouse, grow numerous crops and serve to educate the community on everything from healthy eating to ecology.



Source: *Wilmington StarNews*, Feb 25, 2021; <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2021/02/25/wilmington-sokoto-house-aid-community-using-cdc-model/4393492001/>

Nicole said the idea is to show people that "there are better options than there are at the corner store or even the grocery. Plus, getting your hands and feet into to the dirt is literally healing."

The next step for Sokoto House is "getting (its) programs fully activated," Abdullah said. "We're not trying to get everyone to rally behind us," he added, but rather trying to push ideas like youth leadership development and community professional development, in which community programs lead to jobs for area people. He calls it "activating a dormant asset," and the hope is that their example will inspire Sokoto House-like projects to take root in other Wilmington neighborhoods.



SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE

America Reopened

Maskless fans in the stadium stands, schools prepping for students' return: Take a look at our new normal.

[Read Now in the e-Edition](#)

And while Abdullah said that focusing on at-risk youth or stopping violence is nothing new, "What's new," he said, "is community leaders leading it."

"You know that doing the same thing and expecting a different result is the definition of insanity," Nicole said. "We've been doing the same thing for 30 years and it's not working."

Contact John Staton at 910-343-2343 or John.Staton@StarNewsOnline.com.

LEARN MORE

Sokoto House, 1219 Dawson St., Wilmington

910-228-5040 or info@sokotohouse.org

SokotoHouse.org