

A Performing Artist & Arts Educator, Sis. Raawiya M. Obike, Norma J. Thomas, embarked upon a life of service to youth and the community with SumAct, a summer theatre youth program which provided training, employed college theatre students, and brought artistic expression to the community. Out of SumAct grew the Speech Choir of Houston, a tour group of young performers, Scape Productions, and projects like Inter-Generational Theatre, which brought children and elders together in the Arts.

As a public school teacher, plagued daily by the inadequacy of the public classroom to meet the needs of the total child, she partnered with Angela F. CeZar (Sis. Mayasa) and chartered SCAPE, School of Cultural Arts & Personal Enrichment, Africentric Umbrella Home School. SCAPE opened in Houston's Acres Homes community and sixty plus students were home schooled over a four year period. While the doors of SCAPE closed, formally, in 1998, its mission continued through work with the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, in local churches, at youth and women's conferences, wherever there was need for artistic expression. Her home became a revolving door to parents seeking academic assistance for their children, high school grads seeking college guidance, young adults dropping by to say, "Do you remember me? Where is your school? I need to put my kids in your school."

With her work gaining notoriety through Theatre and Film Festivals, Raawiya, with Mayasa, founded French Creole Productions to further those efforts. Still, at the heart of every endeavor was the desire to inspire and encourage others to strive for their greatest potential as well. She created the Cooperative Fund Raising Project which, every two years, involves mounting a production for the benefit of a church, group, or organization and allowing others to sell tickets and retain a percentage of the ticket sales for their own community related mission and purpose. She was a regular Spoken Word artist on the radio show, Dialogue with Ada Edwards.

In addition to using her work in the Arts as a tool of service, Norma Thomas was instrumental in formalizing the M. C. Williams Alumni Association which creates programs, provides funding, and rallies the community in support of M. C. Williams Middle School. She works with the Coalition for School Improvement supporting all schools in the Acres Homes community. In 2010, Norma called together African American Theatre Educators throughout the city to address the dire state of Fine Arts in public schools and the bleak future of the Arts in the African American community, founding the Black Theatre Educator's Caucus. She also serves on the Board of People Outreach Ministry which has the rebuilding of Haitian schools at the core of its Mission and Purpose.

She is author and publisher of the Bibi's Girls book series, and is a contributing writer to the book, Go Tell Michelle, SUNY Press. She is an Uncrowned Queen Community Builder, Uncrowned Queens Institute for Research and Education on Women, Inc., Buffalo, NY - www.uncrownedcommunitybuilders.com.

Just as Raawiya heard the call to seek the highest expression of herself and inspire others, she heard, also, the call to follow her own spiritual truth and found herself in the pews of Shrine #10. Ultimately, she would find a way to offer her gifts in service through the PAOCC. She has converted the Chapel of the Black Messiah, the Shrine sanctuary, and even the Training Center into main stages for at least 15 productions, published the Torchlight quarterly magazine, instituted Shrine Media, produced promotional videos and the documentary, *Restoration, The Shrine 10 Impact Continues*. Most recently, this grandmother of two, Kamiliyah and Leelah, spearheaded the Training Center Restoration Project which saw its renaming to the Shrine Center for Youth Development. Sis. Raawiya is a member of the Shrine #10 Leadership Council and facilitator of the youth groups YTG2.0 and College Cadre.

She is a member of the Screen Actors' Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the Texas Educational Theatre Association, the TETA Adjudicators' Organization, Women in Film & Television – Houston Chapter, and the Texas Motion Picture Alliance.