

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation  
Vital Voices – Season Two, Episode One  
Interview with Toyese Oyeyemi and Candice Chen

Holly J. Humphrey, MD, MACP (HJH): Welcome to Season two of [Vital Voices](#), a podcast from the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation. I am Dr. Holly Humphrey, the President of the foundation. Our second series of Vital Voices is focusing on the remarkable careers and accomplishments of the individuals and institutions who have received the [Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation Awards for Excellence in Social Mission](#).

Social Mission in Health Professions Education includes activities or initiatives that teach, model or improve community engagement, reduce healthcare disparities, and address the social determinants of health. Social mission means making health professions education not only better, but fairer. These awards are supported by the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, and their selection is made through the [Social Mission Alliance](#). This alliance was formally known as the Beyond Flexner Alliance, and this national organization focuses on health equity and training health professionals as agents of more equitable healthcare. The alliance is based at the [Fitzhugh Mullan Institute for Health Workforce Equity in the Milken School of Public Health](#).

Today's interview is with Mr. Toyese Oyeyemi, executive director of the Social Mission Alliance, and Dr. Candice Chen, former board chair of the Beyond Flexner and now Social Mission Alliance. Toyese's research, teaching and practice have focused on equitable health workforce development and the role of the academic medical center as a critical partner in addressing community health disparities. Toyese is a public health educator and practitioner and maintains a Faculty Lecture title in Population Health and Faculty Research title in Family and Community Medicine at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Candice Chen is an associate professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at George Washington University's Milken School of Public Health. Her scholarship focuses on the examination of the roles of medical schools in addressing high priority workforce needs in primary care, underserved communities, and diversity, the role of graduate medical education in the cost practice patterns of physicians, and the status and challenges faced by medical schools in Sub-Saharan

Africa. Dr. Chen is the board chair of the Beyond Flexner and now Social Mission Alliance, and she has played a key role in the selection of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation Awards for Excellence in Social Mission. You can find all of the episodes of season two of Vital Voices on the Macy Foundation website. And now here is my conversation with Mr. Toyese Oyeyemi and Dr. Candice Chen.

HJH: Thank you so much for being here today. For those listeners who are unaware of the purpose and history of the Social Mission Alliance, can you please provide an overview of this organization, its mission, its purpose and the activities? Toyese, let's start with you.

Toyese Oyeyemi (TO): Our organization's mission is to transform health professionals education towards equity by supporting how schools advance what we call social mission. Social mission is defined plainly as the contribution of a health profession school in how it addresses inequities through its policies, its programs, its practices. So simply put, what is it that nursing schools, medical schools, dental schools, et cetera, are doing that advance student workforce diversity in healthcare? What is it that schools are doing that supports the lived experience of students once they are in the learning environment? How do they impact what they specialize in, where they go to practice, how they practice once they actually get to that place? And the reason why any of that really even matters for Social Mission Alliance is because we know that if schools transform their own processes to reflect that greatest need, if schools commit to producing diverse, well trained, well distributed, well supported health leaders, society will be better off for it.

For the Social Mission Alliance ourselves, what we do in support of that are a few things. One is we really do serve as a switchboard for students, student advocates, and administrators who are decision makers and change makers in their institutions. We do this through our Health Justice Fellowship program and through our student assembly, and by partnering with other student based organizations. We serve as a resource hub for institutional change and support of

schools by providing toolkits and practice repositories, different resources that are used to address structural racism and used to address other social mission domains. We support that work by advocating for policy change. We support and look to publicize findings on workforce inequities and mistreatment. And most importantly, I think, is we also serve as a convener for leaders. The conference that we host has always been the cornerstone of that work and is a really important way of tying in all of those other pieces into one of our major initiatives.

HJH: Thank you for that background. That was very rich. I'm glad you mentioned the fellowship program. And it occurs to me that some of our listeners may wish to find out more about that fellowship. Can you just maybe give us a little direction on that?

TO: Certainly. Our Health Justice Fellowship program is actually directed by a former Macy Award winner, Dr. Robert Rock. It is one of our organizational initiatives that brings together an interprofessional group of health leaders and health advocates from different professions and disciplines across the country -- folks who want to find out more information about that are able to find that on our website at [socialmission.org](http://socialmission.org). We are looking to open up our recruitment cycle for that program in the coming months.

HJH: I am sure that people are going to be looking into it if they didn't already know about it. Let's move on because somebody very important in my own career in medicine is Dr. Fitzhugh Mullan, the founder of the Social Mission Alliance, and he unfortunately passed away in 2019. He was an absolutely towering figure in American medicine. And Candice, I'm wondering if you are ready to share some possible lessons that you learned from the many years that you worked with him.

Candice Chen, MD (CC): Thank you, Holly, for that question. I think for many of us that he was really a pivotal person in a lot of our lives and in a lot of our careers. So first of all, for those of you who don't know who Fitzhugh Mullan was, he was

not only the founder of the Social Mission Alliance. Through the course of his career, he led the National Health Service Corps as well as what is now the HRSA Bureau of Health Workforce. He was an Assistant Surgeon General. He was Secretary of Health for the State of New Mexico. And he was well known for his writing, including books like *White Coat, Clenched Fist* and *Vital Signs* that talked about his own experience with cancer. He was the founder for Health Affairs' *Narrative Matters* column.

I had a chance to work with him after his government public service career, and one of the very first projects I worked on with him was the social mission ranking of medical schools, which was supported by the Macy Foundation. That study looked at the outcomes of medical schools in primary care, underserved areas and diversity, and it turned the U.S. News and World Report rankings upside down. It really brought to light the question of what should we value in our health profession's education. That question might now sound familiar to you, after hearing Toyese talk about what Social Mission Alliance does, but I think that that question just continues to be so relevant today. That study also had the benefit of recognizing schools who, despite all of the incentives, are doing the really hard work of producing the physicians that America needs.

I am going to admit that I did not quite know what I was getting into at the time when I started working on that project with Fitz, but he really taught me that research could be courageous, and it could be fierce. And another thing that I think I learned from Fitz, which I think is again very, very clear in the Social Mission Alliance, is how important community is, particularly in this space of health workforce equity. Community not only means the opportunity for shared learning, it means support for doing the hard work, and it creates the opportunity to organize, to advance change that's really needed.

HJH: Thank you for that, Candice, I know that Social Mission Alliance is a new name for this organization. Toyese, can you tell us a little bit about the reason and the background for making that change?

TO: In 2020, in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd, the organization began taking a more critical look at the name of our organization and the direction of the movement. We began to assemble a series of focus groups and interviews to ask two major questions when looking at the Beyond Flexner Alliance name. The first question was, as we distance ourselves from the legacy of Flexner, ‘is this name still appropriate?’ And the second question was, ‘is this name still relevant given the fact that we’ve transformed beyond an organization that focuses on medical education and to one that focuses on all health professions education?’ And what we found was a pretty resounding ‘no’ to both those questions.

The appropriateness of Flexner's legacy was one that we grappled with as we were looking at the name of our organization, but also it was clear that this was not resonating with dental schools and nursing schools in the same way that it did with medical schools. We were really excited to be able to unveil our new name and our new logo, which is the Social Mission Alliance. We think that it portrays clearly what our North Star is and continues to be, which is transforming health professions education towards social mission.

HJJ: That is a powerful summary. And that North Star, I hope, will continue to inspire not only us, but the next generation of health professionals. As you know, the Josiah Macy Jr. Awards for Excellence in Social Mission honor individuals and institutions for their work in advancing initiatives that teach, model, or improve community engagement, reduce healthcare disparities and address the social determinants of health. Can you share with us a little bit about you and your committee in terms of how you make these decisions, which I'm sure are impossible, but what are the factors and the data and the information that seems to be most important as you make these selections?

CC: The Macy Awards are so important and having been on the committees to review the nominations, I can tell you it's a very, very difficult decision. One of the

things I should say is that the Macy Awards always come from nominations from the field. I think what we are looking for is that sweet spot between education, innovation, and health equity and social justice, and the nominations from the field are really important because the people working in these spaces are often those who go unrecognized, and it is only the people who work with them on a regular basis who can see the unique value that they bring to their communities.

Let me give you a couple of examples from our recent awardees. An example is East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine. They received our Institutional Excellence Award. In contrast to those front-page news stories that show people camping overnight to access those one or two day dental clinics in rural communities, ECU has a mission to train for underserved, particularly rural communities in North Carolina. They do it by partnering with eight communities across the state to make sure that when their dental students are training, that they are embedded in communities and engaged with those communities. I do not mean to say that dental clinics are not important, but they are not going to be the ultimate solution. They are barely a band aid, and it is the hard work that the ECUs are doing in the world that will ultimately make the biggest difference.

Another example is Dr. Uta Landy, who was recognized for lifetime achievement for her work on reproductive health. Now, Dr. Landy has been a lifetime champion for reproductive health rights, and she founded the national Ryan Residency Training Program, which supports family planning and abortion training for OBGYN residents. Dr. Landy was nominated and recognized before the Dobbs decision, and now, post-Dobb, we think that her work is only even more critical. I won't name them all, but I think these really highlight the caliber of people and programs that the Macy Awards recognizes.

HJH: Thank you for sharing a few examples. Those are real teasers for the rest of the podcast series. Toyese, over the years, you have had the opportunity to learn about the remarkable work being done all over the country to advance the social mission. In the upcoming episodes of this season of Vital Voices, we are going to

be featuring some of the individuals doing this work and the stories of the work that they do every day. Why do you think it's important for us to highlight this work?

TO: I will tell you why it's important. What is clear is that spotlighting what works is an opportunity for us to create additional change. I think that it can really galvanize other efforts when we place a bit of a magnifying glass on the work that people are doing to advance health equity in a lot of different ways. And I think that the Macy Awards are examples in which we are able to shine that light. But I think an example of how spotlighting works from an institutional level is the work of social mission and the Social Mission Alliance is actually shifting the way that schools and students within schools view their ability to hold themselves accountable. I will give two examples. One is Vanderbilt and the medical students at Vanderbilt who when they had seen how their school had performed in looking at social mission, they used that as an opportunity to say, "Hey, this is where we currently sit. How do we make this an opportunity to actually improve?" Spotlighting in that way served the purpose because it created a new mechanism for accountability, which is an important piece for this type of change work. Another example is what we saw with the Penn School of Nursing, which looking across social mission and assessing their social mission, they performed well and they used that as an opportunity to spotlight their work. There are different ways of being able to identify performance in supporting social mission, and being able to spotlight those performers from an institutional standpoint or from an individual standpoint or in terms of community coalitions for change is a key lever for ensuring that change can continue and that those who are actually supporting that change feel as though they're part of a community nationally of leaders and change makers.

HJH: Thank you. Those are really wonderful examples. As you know the Social Mission Alliance and the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation have a very long history of collaboration. That collaboration actually predates all of us and was being done by our predecessors. Can you share with our listeners a little bit about the project to

assess and encourage medical school's participation in advancing their social mission?

TO: Yes, of course. First of all, I think we are really proud of the legacy of partnership that we have long had with the Macy Foundation. As far as the assessment of medical schools and other health professions schools, the Social Mission Alliance looks at this from the standpoint of we need to be able to measure what matters. That is a central point. And what we've often seen is that there are incongruent structures between the metrics that are often in place and what actually does support social value and the social good, and these different factors that actually advance equity. The Social Mission Metrics Initiative is one way in which we lead that type of work because it does give us a platform not just to provide schools with baseline information, but then also how do you tangibly use that baseline data to change, and then also to track progress? And then hopefully also to inspire and encourage other organizations and other systems to also change in the same direction?

A lot of the solutions are hiding in plain sight when it comes to these different institutions. Some of these different domains that we see around what the mission of a school is constructed to look like in and of itself – their admissions practices and how that impacts diversity, their faculty diversity as well, the community partnerships and collaborations that they have. All of these pieces are really important to be able to take a critical look in order for there to be any type of tangible change that happens. The assessment itself is insufficient. There needs to also be some type of series of collective impact that is being driven from within an organization, from within an institution, but also from an outside institution as well. There needs to be external pressure and also external guidance on saying, “this is where we're collectively trying to move to. How can we be of support?” And I think that is where our Social Mission Metrics Initiative and the alliance more broadly does support that type of work.



HJH: Excellent summary. And obviously a lot of important work to do. Candice, as you know, we are going to be featuring some of the winners of the awards, and I want our listeners to understand how they can learn more about the awards and potentially nominate individuals and/or institutions for this recognition. Could you say a word about that?

CC: First of all, we recognize all of our Macy awardees at the conference, and we are particularly excited to share today that our next partner for the Social Mission Alliance conference is the Duke University School of Nursing. So something really special I think about the conference is that we always host in partnership with the local institution. And we are particularly excited about the partnership with Duke because it's the first time that our lead partner is a school of nursing. We are looking at spring of 2024 for the conference. That means that we will likely be seeking nominations for the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation Awards for Excellence in Social Mission later this year, probably summer, early fall. And as Toyese mentioned earlier, you can find more information on Social Mission Alliance, on the awards on our website, which is [socialmission.org](https://socialmission.org), including links to all of our social media accounts that will announce the call for nominations. So be looking forward, I would say, later this summer, early fall.

HJH: Wonderful. Thank you very much. And I want to thank both of you, Candice and Toyese for being with us today. I know that you have whetted the appetite of our audience. There is a lot more to come and a lot more to learn, and most of all to be inspired by. We really look forward to meeting the group of very impressive people who have been honored in the recent past, and then the next group who will receive the awards as you've just outlined in 2024. So again, thank you very much.

CC: Thank you.

HJH: Thank you for listening, and we hope you will share this conversation with others. Be sure to subscribe wherever you get your podcasts so that you will be

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