



*Sonserae Cicero speaks during the Helping Teens Thrive event.*

## **From Club Kid to Board Member, Sonserae Cicero Finds Her Passion**

When Sonserae Cicero was 5 years old her older brothers (and babysitters) made her tag along while they went to play basketball at the Southwest Boys Club. At the time, the club was only open to Boys, but Sonserae says even though she was technically “sneaking in,” she was never turned away.

“In the Club, I had to stay on the second floor while my three older brothers played basketball in the gym. The Club director would let me sit at his desk and color or watch my brothers play. Looking back, I realize he was babysitting me, but the Club director never complained. He saw this as one more way to help the community and a family in need,” Sonserae recalls.

Now, as the founder and CEO of the Society of Human Engagement & Business Alignment (SHEBA), a human resources support service for entrepreneurs and candidates seeking job placement, Sonserae is using her talents to help give back to other Club kids.

“The Club director [who helped me as a child] probably didn’t realize it at the time, but he was planting a seed in me and showing me the importance of giving back and helping my community,” she says. “Now when I coach other business owners, I always ask what they are doing to help their community. How are you giving back?”

On January 3, 2024, Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford hosted a community conversation on how the Greater Hartford community can help teens thrive. The event -which was attended by Boys & Girls Clubs of America President and CEO Jim Clark, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont, and Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam- featured a panel of community and business leaders moderated by Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford President and CEO, Sam Gray, Jr. Sonserae was a member of that panel, sharing her story and inspiring others to give back and help teenagers in our community.

“I wanted the teens in attendance to know that I was them. I was in their shoes. I know what it’s like to be surviving. But, if I can make it out, they can make it out. You just have to make a roadmap, create a plan for your dreams, and then let other people help you get there. Trust to the process, but let people, like Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford, help you achieve those dreams.”

Sonserae says it is important for the community to encourage young people to succeed. By fostering an environment where kids feel safe and supported, we can create informed, educated and effective leaders who will, in turn, give back to the community and make us all better. She says she’s proud to be a part of that as a member of the Board of Trustees and relishes the opportunity to see her contribution have an impact on other young people in real time.

“This is my purpose. I feel like I was put here in the right place, at the right time to give back and help kids feel the same safety and security I felt as a child. It’s very rewarding.”