

Phyllis "Yafah" Duncan
Founder of Mothers of Murdered Sons, and Women's Community Leadership Council of Illinois
Class of 2007

How has Triton College impacted my life:

Triton College impacted my life by welcoming a nontraditional, full-time working woman into their halls of higher learning. My counselors, professors and 'Student Life' helped me to realize my potential and move forward. As I continue my work as an activist, community organizer and caregiver, I owe Triton College for being there and supporting my endeavors.

Biography:

Phyllis Duncan, known by family and friends as 'Yafah,' is a Hebrew Israelite and a mother of five (one deceased son), 14 grandchildren (one deceased grandson) and seven great-grandchildren. She was born and raised on the South Side of Chicago. In 1992, she moved to Kalamazoo, Mich., where she received her GED and started her journey as a college student. While in Michigan, she worked for several social service agencies. In 1997, she became a volunteer for AmeriCorps and received a scholarship for school along with a scholarship from a private donor.

Duncan moved back to Illinois in 2002 started working at Free Your Mind bookstore in Maywood and Aspire of Illinois, furthering her work in human services. She enrolled at Triton College in 2003. While a student, her son Dodavah, was murdered in 2005. The tragedy occurred right before Ms. Duncan's final exams, but she wanted to complete her finals and she convinced her English professor to allow her to do so. On the day of her exam, she read *Mother to Sons* by Langston Hughes and received an A along with the support from her fellow students, many who were close in age to her son. The tragedy of her son's death kept her out for a semester but she returned and graduated in 2007.

In 2006, Mother of Murdered Sons was born, a not-for-profit advocacy organization for mothers and family members that had lost a loved one to gun violence. The group started at the Bellwood Library, not far from where she had lived.

In 2008, land was donated on the Prairie Path between Madison and Washington Boulevard in Bellwood, Ill., for the creation of the Proviso Township Memorial Garden. The memorial contains the names of many of the young men and women who have been killed in the Proviso Township area. In 2009, she changed the name of her organization to Women's Community Leadership Council, which provides human services throughout the area.

Phyllis received the Percy L. Julian Community Service Award from Operation Uplift in 2009 as well as a Humanitarian Award from Proviso Township Master Minds. In 2016, she received the Women of Excellence Award from the *Chicago Defender* newspaper honoring 50 women who showed excellence in their work in the community.

From 2011 until 2015 she hosted the *Maywood Show*, a community access public program on cable. As a community activist and organizer she has facilitated many town hall meetings and community outreach

programs addressing gun violence. In 2015, she started Drive by for Peace a community outreach program that promotes safety during summer and the beginning of the school year. Duncan also organizes an annual cookout for families of murdered children in Bellwood Memorial Park.

Duncan currently lives in Maywood, working as a caregiver to seniors and veterans, a job she says she loves. She enjoys writing poetry, sewing, and being of service to others through her many programs and outreach.