

CHALDEAN NEWS

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It Takes a Village

A Chaldean journey to Kintsugi

By Sarah Kittle

Nestled in Detroit's historic Corktown neighborhood, Kintsugi Village is more than just a school—it's a living, breathing ecosystem built on the idea that education should nourish the whole child. Set to open in October, the nonprofit early childhood center blends learning with art, food, nature, and community connection. But perhaps most powerful is the concept behind its name: Kintsugi—the Japanese art of mending broken pottery with gold, transforming cracks into something beautiful and strong. Founders Hamsa Yaqo and Paul Spiegelman are doing just that with a bold, healing vision for families and the city itself.

"Our goal isn't to open a traditional preschool," says Hamsa. "We're building an ecosystem that nourishes children and families—emotionally, creatively, and physically."

Kintsugi Village draws inspiration from the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education—a child-led philosophy rooted in exploration, creativity, and real-life experiences. That means children will plant and harvest vegetables, cook meals in a teaching kitchen, create art alongside local artists, and spend time in a "pocket forest" designed to spark curiosity and reflection. Classrooms are fluid, natural spaces guided by kids' own questions. "We see children as curious and capable," says Hamsa. "Our job is to follow them on their journey."

From brokenness comes beauty

The theme of Kintsugi runs through every part of the Village—not only in its emphasis on growth through imperfection, but also in the founders' own stories. For Hamsa, Kintsugi Village emerged from a deeply personal place—grappling with infertility led her to envision a space filled with children, creativity, and healing. "This project began with my desire to be around kids," she shares. "Then we found Reggio Emilia, and it all clicked—this was about life skills, family, community, and joy."

Her sense of family is deeply shaped by her own Chaldean upbringing. "I was born and raised in Baghdad and moved to the States in 1991 when I was 12 years old," she recalls. "My earliest memories of being Chaldean were when we'd take trips up north to Alqosh, where my dad is from, and visit with the family in the village. My uncle had twin girls who were my age—we'd run around, build forts, laugh all day, and then sleep on the roof under the stars. Being in the village was very different from being in the city—and it was truly magical."



Paul Spiegelman and Hamsa Yaqo, founders of Kintsugi Village.



Inside the circled area is Kintsugi Village, close to Michigan Central.

Traditions, especially food, remain a thread of connection. “My favorite is making kletcha with my mom and dad,” she says. “We prep an assembly line and use a recipe my mom has followed for years. She mixes dates and walnuts together, while many people make them separately. As a perfectionist, she never let me in the kitchen when I was younger—but now as an adult, I get to be part of it. It’s one of my favorite ways to spend time together.”

Those values of family, hospitality, and resilience carry into her work today. “Both of my parents are incredibly hardworking and taught me and my brothers the importance of kindness and perseverance. For as long as I can remember, they hosted people for dinner—family, relatives, friends, and even friends of friends. Everyone left with full bellies and full hearts.”

That sense of warmth mirrors the heart of Kintsugi. “Kintsugi celebrates imperfections,” Hamsa reflects. “As Chaldeans, many of us have experienced war, hardship, the immigration journey, grief, struggles of starting a new life while balancing two cultures, and pressures that still exist today. But those experiences give us perspective and allow us to appreciate what we have and what we’ve overcome. Kintsugi is also about joining and mending—and that’s what family and community do when times are tough.”

Food, art, and heart



Food plays a powerful role in the Kintsugi model. Children and families will grow vegetables and herbs in a community garden, then use them to prepare nutritious meals in an on-site culinary kitchen. “Food is love. It’s culture. It’s health,” says Hamsa. “Especially in underserved areas, food education is crucial.”

The campus will also include an artist residency program and wellness retreat center, bringing in creatives from across Detroit to teach, collaborate, and support the wider community. Artists will not only create their own work but teach in the school, host community classes, and lead field trips to places like Eastern Market murals and Pewabic Pottery.



Renderings include an outdoor garden space, classrooms, and artist workshops.

Kintsugi Village is committed to accessibility. Discounts are available for families living in surrounding zip codes, and financial aid will be offered through partners like the CDC. The school’s nonprofit model blends tuition, grants, and program fees with private donations to ensure long-term affordability.

“Our goal is to be sustainable while staying mission-driven,” says Paul. “We’ve built multiple revenue streams—from art classes to event rentals—so we can grow thoughtfully without losing sight of our core values.”

At the heart of Kintsugi Village beats a rhythm of compassion, unity, and purpose—captured in the acronym HEART, which defines the five core initiatives guiding the Village: Hospitality, Education, Arts, Retreat, and Training. More than just a framework, HEART is a living expression of Kintsugi’s values.

It begins with Hospitality—welcoming families, neighbors, and visitors into a space where they feel truly seen and cared for. It extends through Education that honors each child’s curiosity, Arts that give voice to creativity, Retreat that invites rest and reflection, and Training that empowers parents, educators, and community leaders to carry the mission forward.

A modern-day village

For Hamsa, the idea of “village” has roots that run deep. “My grandparents always said it takes a village,” she reflects. “And it still does, even though we’ve gotten away from traditional villages. I think they’d be proud because we’re bringing the best parts of that back—focusing on kids, making sure family and community are strong pillars in their upbringing, introducing them to food and nature so they understand where it all comes from, and creating an ecosystem where everyone can co-exist, learn together, and support each other. I hope they’d be proud.”

As construction continues and programming takes shape, the team sees this first year as just the beginning. “Success won’t be measured by test scores,” says Paul. “It will be in the feedback we get—the stories from families who say they feel seen, heard, and supported. That’s when we’ll know we’re making an impact.”

In a city that knows both hardship and hope, Kintsugi Village offers something rare: a place where brokenness isn’t hidden but celebrated—and where children grow not only to learn, but to thrive.

For more information or to get involved, visit kintsugivillage.org.