



Fall 2009

FROM THE CENTER

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ENTERPRISE



Milwaukee Violence-Free Zone staff and participants from the Latino Community Center spent the summer in service projects for the communities surrounding four Milwaukee high schools served by the organization: Left – an activities day for children; Right – entertaining Seniors.

VFZ Expands to New Schools as Results Continue to Impress

Funding Expanded, Cultural Program and Peace Initiatives Proceed

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Violence-Free Zone is in 32 public middle and high schools this fall. The schools are in Atlanta (6), Baltimore (4), Dallas (13), Milwaukee (8), and Richmond, VA (1). The VFZ program also took significant steps forward during the summer with a major funding announcement, a further expansion into the youth cultural realm, and a number of community service projects and peace initiatives carried out by CNE's community partner organizations.

Thanks to a commitment by the Marcus Foundation, the Atlanta Violence-Free Zone will be expanded from two school sites to a total of six. Bernie Marcus, co-founder of Home Depot and founder of the Marcus Foundation, said the foundation will provide almost \$3 million to the Atlanta VFZ program over the next three years because of the results the VFZ initiative already has achieved.

In Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Public Schools Board unanimously passed a resolution to fund the VFZ again in eight high schools. The vote of the Board followed a Finance Committee session at which the Superintendent of Schools, two principals, an assistant principal, two parents, a VFZ student participant, and even Milwaukee's chief municipal judge came forward to praise the program (see page 5). The Milwaukee VFZ is carried out by CNE community partners the Latino Community Center and Running Rebels

Community Organization.

The Baltimore City Board of Commissioners initially announced that it would contract with New Visions Youth Services, CNE's Baltimore community partner, to put the Violence-Free Zone in three schools, and then notified NVYS that it wanted to have the VFZ in a total of four schools.

Dallas' Vision Regeneration community organization is implementing the program on a limited basis in 13 schools under a contract from the Dallas Independent School District.

Richmond's The ROC (Richmond Outreach Center) will continue its work at George Wythe High School with funding from the community through the Richmond Police Foundation.

"The program not only saves lives, but it is doing so at a lower cost to government. This has great potential as a national model to address the problem of youth violence and to prepare young people to receive education."

– Bernie Marcus, Marcus Foundation
Co-Founder Home Depot

Atlanta — Marcus Praises:

"I am impressed with the results I am seeing from the Violence-Free Zone program," Marcus said. "As a businessman, I want to see outcomes and a better education system. Not only is violence being reduced in the schools where the VFZ has been operated, but I can see long-term transformation in the

Continued on Page 2



A Message from Bob Woodson

Recently we held a three-day training workshop for the leaders of the Violence-Free Zones from cities across the country and the more than 100 Youth Advisors that they employ. The meeting was held in Atlanta and hosted by Visions Unlimited, our Atlanta VFZ community partner organization. We also were joined by some of our principal supporters, including executives from the Marcus Foundation and the Elizabeth A. Brinn Foundation, and our CNE Board Chairman Cliff Ehrlich.

We heard some of the most amazing testimonies from the Youth Advisors who work directly with young people in schools and in the community. Many of them have faced and overcome some of the most extreme challenges in their urban neighborhoods, and their stories of transformation inspired and strengthened all of us. CNE provided training and technical assistance, and the attendees shared information on how to motivate the high-risk young people that they mentor in the schools.

The theme that ran through all the discussion was how to take the program that started more than 12 years ago and expand it into a movement that will help rescue this country from the epidemic of youth violence. The ideas that came forth were exciting.

Once again I am amazed, but not surprised, at the wisdom that comes from our grassroots leaders. This is what makes the Violence-Free Zone program successful, as evidenced by the fact that we will be in more than 30 of the nation's most violent public schools this fall. We see that same kind of wisdom in the community groups that part-

ner with us in our financial literacy program (see page 7). We are impressed also at the quality of the nonprofit organizations that we are working with in Washington, DC as we give them technical assistance through the Compassion Capital Fund program (See page 6). While many grassroots leaders are passionate "Josephs," they tend to be poor book-keepers, and we offer technical assistance to fill that gap.

CNE's programs address three pillars of neighborhood restoration: reducing crime and violence; strengthening the neighborhood organizations that provide services and stabilize their communities; and equipping residents with the tools to manage their finances. All of these rest on the foundation of the inherent wisdom of the dedicated grassroots leaders who reside in almost any community, no matter how dysfunctional. But the qualities that make them effective also make them invisible – they do not protest or promote, they go quietly about their work. The Center has learned how to find them, and everything we do is geared to strengthening these operating units.

This is not just another set of programs; it is ready to become a movement.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Woodson, Sr.



Bob Woodson

Violence-Free Zone, Continued from Page 1

behaviors of young people who daily face some of the most severe challenges."

The Violence-Free Zone program has been implemented in two Atlanta middle schools by CNE's community partner organization, Visions Unlimited. For the 2009/2010 school year, the VFZ program will operate in three middle and two high schools in the Atlanta Public Schools system and one high school in Clayton County.

The Marcus Foundation first provided funding to bring the Violence-Free Zone program to Atlanta after Marcus saw it in action in a Washington, DC school. The Foundation has provided nearly \$8 million over the past seven years for the Washington, DC and Atlanta Violence-Free Zone programs.

Dallas: CBS Station Airs Show:

How do you market a different set of values to young people that will assure a positive future? Vision Regeneration, CNE's

Dallas VFZ community partner, seeks to invade the youth culture with positive messages. One way Vision will do this is through a weekly 30-minute television show broadcast by Dallas' CBS station.

"The CBS program showcases urban entertainment with a redemptive message," says Vision founder and executive director Omar Jahwar. Hosted by young people in the Violence-Free Zone program, the shows will feature performances by artists who present alternatives to the negative messages that dominate so much of the youth entertainment culture today. The weekly series started August 8 on CBS 11 (www.cbs11tv.com).

Vision's multi-faceted program, called PositiveXchange, also includes a social networking website designed to rival Facebook, YouTube and MySpace; a monthly MYJournal, and the weekly live PositiveXchange Saturday Summit entertainment venue.

Benning Terrace Revisited: Forging a New Peace



Pledging Peace



Scholarship Presentation

Almost 13 years ago, when a war between youth factions in Washington, DC's Benning Terrace public housing community culminated in the killing of a 12-year-old boy, the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise and a community organization negotiated a peaceful end to the hostilities that had resulted in multiple deaths in previous years. The 1997 peace agreement and subsequent program of life skills training and jobs marked the beginning of the CNE Violence-Free Zone program.

Fast forward to 2009. A dispute among members of a new generation of youths in DC neighborhoods resulted in a July 4 shooting in Benning Terrace, critically injuring a young man and slightly injuring two young girls who were innocent bystanders. CNE's President Robert L. Woodson, Sr. received a call from Charlie Penny, founder of the Benning Terrace Youth Opportunity (BTYO), who reports that tensions are escalating among the youth in the development.

The Benning Terrace Youth Opportunity is a group of more than 10 now adult young men, some of whom had been part of the original problem in Benning Terrace but who transformed their lives once peace was achieved. These men, who have jobs and their own families to support, have been volunteering for more than 12 years as football coaches to give the Benning youth a positive outlet for their energies and to act as role models.

"These young men, the BTYO volunteer coaches, are the ones that have all the influence and the trust of the community," Woodson says. "They have the ability to create a peace and help young people choose positive paths for their lives."

Woodson counseled the coaches on what to do next. It was a critical time. One faction of youths in the neighborhood wanted to retaliate against the other for the shooting. But through the efforts of the community, the police were able to arrest the alleged shooter. The coaches persuaded the youths to meet for talks. The first two meetings were held at Benning, the third at CNE's downtown Washington headquarters. CNE served a chicken dinner to the entire group.

"These young men, the Benning Terrace Youth Opportunity volunteer coaches, are the ones that have all the influence and the trust of the community ... they have the ability to create a peace and help young people choose positive paths for their lives."

— Bob Woodson

"I learned many years ago that young people will fight if they are drinking together, but they don't fight if they are eating together," Woodson says.

Just as an older generation did almost 13 years ago, the youths pledged peace. After they demonstrated their commitment for several weeks and resisted provocation from rival area groups, it was clear that the peace effort was successful. It even garnered praise from the police. To honor the young people, CNE and BTYO then treated more than two dozen to a seafood dinner at a local restaurant, an event attended by high-ranking police official, Commander Melvin Scott.

At the dinner, Woodson made a presentation. A Benning Terrace high school graduate had won a full scholarship to college, but she did not have the funds to buy a laptop, printer and books. Thanks to a gift from CNE Board Chair Cliff Ehrlich and his wife Patricia, she is now able to have these essential aids to her education.

For the future, Woodson wants to raise funds so that the BTYO can have a full-time presence in the community. Despite all that the BTYO volunteer coaches have done for more than 12 years – the time they have spent, the sacrifices they have made – going into their own pockets to provide treats and outings for the youth, the organization has had almost no financial support except for modest grants from the D.C. Housing Authority and CNE.

Woodson also would like to see a job program created for the youths who are keeping peace, just as one was created 12 years ago. Also needed is a permanent building for the Benning Terrace Youth Opportunity where coaches can mentor and hold life skills classes and volunteers can provide tutoring to neighborhood children.

In an interview with the Washington Times, Commander Scott said about CNE, "We're supporting their efforts to reduce violence in that community. They have been successful with these efforts in the past, and we're very optimistic that it will work again."



Rewarding Good Behavior, Grades – From Left: Participants in the Violence-Free Zone program operated by The ROC in Richmond’s George Wythe High School on a trip to Washington, DC. Center: Celebrating achievement with a feast at the Golden Corral. Right: VFZ participant Porscha Wright received an award for improving her grades.

Richmond VFZ School Posts Dramatic Results

In just one year at George Wythe high school in Richmond, VA, the Violence-free Zone program implemented by the Richmond Outreach Center (The ROC) indicates significant impacts. The school reports that incidents, which include all categories from disruptions to violent incidents, were down 16% for the year from the previous year. Major reductions were also logged in unexcused absences and trancies.

Individual students enrolled in the VFZ mentoring program also showed major improvements in behavior and academic progress. The 84 students who were in the VFZ program for at least one school marking period (nine weeks), reduced the number of negative incidents in which they were involved by an impressive 45%. They also decreased the number of their suspensions by 55% and cut in half the number of days they were suspended. They reduced absences by 20%.

The Richmond VFZ participants increased their grade point averages (GPAs) by 8%. Although the Violence-Free Zone is not an academic program, its goal is to motivate students to learning and tutoring is provided wherever possible.

The ROC treated about 30 young people who showed the most improvement in their school attendance to a sightseeing trip to Washington, DC, where they toured the Smithsonian, saw the Capitol and other monuments, and went to the International Spy Museum. The ROC also rewarded students who showed improvements in their behavior, attendance, and GPAs with a meal at Golden Corral.

Data reported by the Richmond Police Department also shows that arrests and incidents in the schools reported by School Resource Officers have dramatically decreased (see chart below right). Richmond Police also report that the Violence-Free Zone has had a substantial impact on crime in the surrounding area. According to Third Precinct officials, the youth intervention aspects of the Violence-Free Zone at GWHS have impacted Motor Vehicle Theft in Sector 312. In 2007, the largest incident producer in 2007 in Motor Vehicle Theft was the Northrop Neighborhood, the area immediately adjacent to GWHS. This year, the Richmond Police Department reports, with the VFZ encouraging young people to stay in school and be involved, vehicle thefts were dramatically reduced.

Measure	Pre-VFZ (07/08)	Post-VFZ (08/09)	Percent Change
Enrollment	1,326	1,114	–
Incidents	1,326	1,114	Down 16%
# of days Out-of-School	4,438	3,978	Down 10%
Unexcused Absences	14,177	9,161	Down 35%
Absences	22,972	20,949	Down 9%
Truancy Rate	34%	20%	Down 14%
Drop Outs	68	65	Down 4%

*Source: Richmond Public Schools data.

George Wythe	2007-2008 Pre-VFZ	2008-2009 Post-VFZ	Percent Change
Calls for Service	120	98	Down 18%
Arrests	107	91	Down 15%
SRO Reported Incidents	100	66	Down 34%
Motor Vehicle Thefts (Northrup Area)	132	51	Down 61%

*Source: Richmond Police Department Group PREC3.

What They Said...

The Chief Municipal Judge, the Superintendent of Schools, three principals, parents, and a VFZ student participant all came forward August 20 to testify before the Board of School Directors Finance and Personnel Committee, Milwaukee Public Schools, on a resolution to contract for the Violence-Free Zone in eight Milwaukee public high schools.

Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent William Andrekopoulos: *"We think this is a very successful program. If you look at the data...in the six Milwaukee high schools using this program, three schools had a 32% reduction in violent incidents, a 20% reduction in nonviolent incidents, and a 36% reduction in suspensions. There's been a great increase in GPA. Also in the multiplexes we also have seen reductions. Clearly the program has added value to the city."*



Sylvester Stewart, Jr.

City of Milwaukee Municipal Court Chief Judge Derek Moseley: *"Any given day I have from 100 to 300 juvenile cases on my calendar from incidents inside the schools, the parks, and the community. We realize we can't continue to prosecute our way out of some of these problems. We need to collaborate with other organizations. As a judge, I hope that you will support this program and I hope that you will expand it to other schools. It makes my job easier – believe me, it helps make my job easier ... "*

Bay View High School Principal Robin Kitzrow: *"I watched something I've never seen in schools before. I watched the Violence-Free Zone Advisors become the safety nets for students that had basically given up on themselves. They took these students, they gave them hopes, they gave them dreams, and then they followed through with this. They kept up with the students, they went to their homes, they were out in the community, they communicated with all of us. I watched students that never, ever thought they would graduate, never thought they would go to college, walk across the stage in June, that really is the proof. So please, support Violence-Free Zone."*

James Madison Academic High School Principal Zanetta Systrunk: *"One of my students, whose attendance the prior year was extremely horrible – beyond compare – we did home calls to the student and no results. This year with the help of the Violence-Free Zone, not only did his attendance improve, he is now on the honor roll as well as one of our scholar athletes. This program not only should continue but it should even expand to the rest of the high schools in MPS."*

Bradley Tech High School Assistant Principal Jody Bloyer: *"I see them as proactive means of keeping our school safe and our climate positive so that we can be about the business of learning, where safety sometimes has to be reactive. So that when you join those two things together, the proactive and the reactive, we've really seen some improvements not just with lowering fights but with all of the students feeling safer, therefore they have the ability to learn."*

Parent Latifa Thompson: *"... I have a 16-year-old daughter who was getting off track in life, disrespecting her elders and disrespecting herself. [Youth Advisor Lamont Shelton] helped my daughter get on track. Some of these people are more than mentors – they are our school angels."*

Parent Sylvester Stewart, Sr.: *"I can say that they really, really, helped my child. I have seen a big change in his life. My son is on his way to the University of Oshkosh and a lot of that goes back to the Running Rebels. I say please give them this contract because it is really and truly worth it."*

Student Sylvester Stewart, Jr.: *"When they first came to Custer, there were a lot of fights at Custer. I was a popular person but I never had a voice to come and tell me that's not right to do, or don't get into fights and let's sit down and talk about it. They just made me want to stop my friends from fighting and stop everyone from Custer from fighting. When they first came I wasn't excited about going to college, but they got my mind set on going to college and helped me with all the forms and such."*

CNE Helps Step Afrika! Soar Even Higher

It starts with a subdued rhythmic tapping, a single spotlight illuminates a lone figure on stage. A voice sings off to the side. Other singers and dancers join in, building to an explosion of hands and feet pounding, clapping, spinning, their bodies instruments telling a story of hope and transformation. It's just one of the many powerful and exhilarating presentations by Step Afrika!, a unique organization working to help at-risk children, and part of CNE's network of grassroots organizations doing important work in the Washington, DC area and beyond.

Stepping is an exciting dance form in which the body is used as an instrument to create intricate rhythms and sounds through a combination of footsteps, claps, and spoken word. Primal and dynamic, it speaks to people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds and has a special appeal to young people. Step Afrika brings the art and energy of stepping to young people of all ethnic backgrounds from kindergarten through college.

When the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise first learned of Step Afrika, the organization was run from the home of its founder. Over the past five years, CNE's technical assistance team led by Virginia "Geanie" Kase has provided substantial assistance in human resources, program development, financial management, and organizational management. Step Afrika is now a well-managed organization with administrative offices, rehearsal space, and performance space housed in the beautiful Atlas Performing Arts Center in Southeast Washington, DC.

Step Afrika was founded by C. Brian Williams, who as a young Howard University graduate traveled to South Africa in the early 1990s. There he saw a resemblance between the stepping he had learned as a member of his college fraternity and the South African gumboot dance, a dance form created by South African mineworkers. In partnership with the Soweto Dance Theatre of Johannesburg, he created the Step Afrika International Cultural Festival, linking the two dance traditions. In 1996, he launched Step Afrika in the United States to bring performances,



Step Afrika! is the most-requested group by schools in the Washington, DC Greater Metropolitan area.

and step clinics and residencies to elementary, middle, and high schools in the District of Columbia. The organization has introduced students to stepping at more than 150 DC, Maryland, and Virginia schools.

From presentations lasting one hour to year-long residencies, Step Afrika uses the basic tool of stepping to promote life lessons and education, and to promote connections between people by highlighting the similarities in dance forms.

"If we can dance together, then we can work together," is the group's motto.

For the younger children, the organization uses stepping as a tool to demonstrate teamwork, discipline, and commitment, integrating it with English language and social studies content. For older students, the classes delve into the history of stepping and its ties to Africa's percussive dance traditions. This summer, thanks to support from the Washington Performing Arts Society, Step Afrika is hosting a camp for more than 150 young people

continued on page 7

"Thanks to the two-tier approach of technical assistance and capacity building grants provided by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE), Step Afrika! is a dramatically different organization than it was in 2004. We have grown from a founder led organization with a home office to a three-person management team housed in the beautiful Atlas Performing Arts Center ... Since 2004 Step Afrika has benefited from the TA expertise of Virginia Kase and her staff in human resources, program development, financial management, and organizational development. Additionally small grants have enabled Step Afrika! to complete an IT assessment, procure the recommended hardware, obtain our first audit as well as to implement a comprehensive development plan."

– C. Brian Williams
Founder and Executive Director, Step Afrika!



Step Afrika! founder Williams explains the program on an international tour.

Step Afrika!, continued from page 6

staffed by eight professional artists plus other volunteers and staff. The session culminates in a field trip to Howard University where the students view college stepping but are also exposed to the excitement of higher education.

"The qualities required to be good steppers are the same as those for academic achievement," Williams says. "Good steppers should be great students."

Though wildly successful in its artistic pursuits, Step Afrika needed help in managing its rapidly growing organization.

"CNE walked with us through this process of having been a small, house-based organization with a dedicated leader to having a full-time staff of four, a team of consultants, and a full time company of 10 teaching and performing artists," recounted Williams. "CNE helped develop the systems to manage the human resources functions."

The subawards provided by CNE under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Compassion Capital Fund also enabled the group to complete an IT assessment and procure needed computers, obtain its first audit, and to implement a comprehensive development plan.



Steppers on stage at a Step Afrika! performance.

"Step Afrika is a dramatically different organization than it was in 2004," Williams concludes.

The organization is one of approximately 40 Washington, DC community and faith-based groups that belong to CNE's Hands-Across Network and that the Center has helped through technical assistance over the years. CNE presently is providing technical assistance and sub-awards to 20 DC groups thanks to the support of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Compassion Capital Fund.

Financial Literacy Training Benefits El Paso Community

The El Paso Collaborative for Community & Economic Development, a non-profit organization serving El Paso and contiguous counties in Texas and New Mexico, is one of CNE's earliest community partners and has held among the largest number – 58 – of workshops. According to the organization's Project Coordinator and Office Manager Lorraine Frias, not only have the 1,643 participants benefitted from the program, but it has created an opportunity for staff to learn and keep up with economic changes as well.

"We apply the lessons to our own lives," says Lorraine Frias. "It has been an eye opener and good experience."

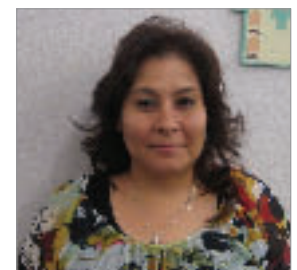
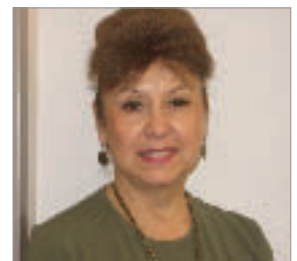
CNE's relationship with the El Paso Collaborative started in 2004. At that time, HSBC and CNE representatives traveled to El Paso to provide the training. Then Charles Perry, CNE's Financial Literacy Program Director, provided training to three El Paso Collaborative staff members. Upon completion of the training, trained staff immediately proceeded to conduct classes. Their commitment to this program led them to begin training new El Paso Collaborative staff. In total, El Paso Collaborative has had 5 trainees and 6 AmeriCorp Volunteers that assist with recruitment.

Financial literacy training is a natural fit with El Paso Collaborative's mission, which is to facilitate affordable housing, small business, and economic development. To implement this mission, the organization offers a number of loan products and development services. Loan products consist of: new construction, home improvement, Energy Star appliance, small business lending, and credit building loans. Other services consist of Individual Development Accounts savings and first-time home-buyer assistance programs.

El Paso Collaborative's Executive Director, Delia Chavez, along with the Board of Directors agrees that Financial Literacy Education Workshops /Homeownership counseling is a required component for every customer that is a recipient of a loan.

"Due to our geographic location, the number of un-banked individuals and the overall number of low income families, the workshops are very much needed. The workshops empower the community and give them a sense of ownership. We are very happy with CNE services and look forward to a continued partnership in the future," Chavez says.

The El Paso Collaborative will conduct eight workshops this year (2009), a number of them in Spanish. In many cases, the workshops are held in different places throughout the area, making the workshops a true community program.



El Paso Collaborative staff members Delia Chavez (center photo) and Lorraine Frias (above) are just two of a staff of five who provide financial literacy training. The organization will hold eight workshops this year.

From The Center is published by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise,* a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1981 by Robert L. Woodson, Sr., to assist low-income Americans in solving the problems of their communities.

CNE identifies effective grassroots organizations and strengthens them by providing training and technical assistance, and links them to outside resources. It also measures their impact and recommends public policies to facilitate their efforts. CNE has trained more than 2600 leaders of grassroots organizations across the country. Since its founding in 1981, it has leveraged resources for grassroots organizations at a rate of more than 10 times what it has expended. Subject areas addressed by CNE's grassroots affiliates include substance abuse, teen pregnancy, homelessness, joblessness, poor education, and deteriorating neighborhoods. The Center has a major focus on programs addressing youth violence.

Editor: Heather Humphries

Graphics & Layout: Andrea Gaines

Please visit CNE's website at www.cneonline.org for more information and the latest updates on our activities.

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise is a nonprofit organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All contributions made to CNE are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law.

*Formerly known as the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

Robert L. Woodson, Sr., President

1625 K St., NW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: (202) 518-6500
Fax: (202) 588-0314
Toll-Free: (866) 518-1263

E-mail: info@cneonline.org
Web site: www.cneonline.org

CNE Financial Literacy Program Scorecard — Year 2009 Halfway Mark



92 Workshops held
– 53% of 175 goal

3,359 Adults received Financial Literacy Training
– 60.3% of 5,000 adult goal

Workshop average size:
35 adult participants

94% of participants said that
the workshops were successful and most said
they applied to their own situations



Scenes from the Financial Literacy workshop at East of the River Family Strengthening Collaborative.



Center for Neighborhood Enterprise
1625 K St., NW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20006

*Serving
Since 1981*