



# Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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## **CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ENTERPRISE MARKS 25 YEARS OF ADDRESSING PROBLEMS AND REDUCING VIOLENCE IN LOW INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS** *Successful initiatives based on identifying and empowering community "Josephs" to be agents of positive change in each community*

**WASHINGTON, DC** – The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) announced today that October 2006 will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding by Robert L. Woodson, Sr. Over the past 25 years, CNE has helped more than 6,000 individuals and organizations change their schools, neighborhoods and communities through innovative problem solving by those who know the problem best – community leaders in low income neighborhoods, many of whom have overcome problems such as substance abuse, criminal behavior, and gang activity, but have transformed their lives and want to help others. CNE is based on the principle that those suffering the problem must be involved in the solution.

The concept for the organization was developed when Woodson, a native of Philadelphia, once known as the "youth gang capital of America" noticed the success of community activist Falaka Fattah when she invited her son, and members of the gang he had joined, to live with the family. The Fattah family started a "No Gang Wars" campaign that worked from the inside out – utilizing current and former gang members to spread the message of reconciliation and non-violence across Philadelphia's neighborhoods and communities.

According to CNE President and Founder Robert Woodson, the true experts of social revitalization are more likely to be found among the inner-cities than among academic institutions. He notes: "Just as in book of Genesis in the Bible, the slave Joseph was able to find the solution to the famines that struck Egypt, the answers to many of the most pressing problems that America now faces can be found in the men and women who have come out of prison, who live in drug-infested, crime-ridden neighborhoods, some of them whom, themselves, have fallen but have been able to recover through their faith in God. There are countless examples of these Josephs who have been called to responsibility from jails, from drugs, from crime, from prostitution. Their authority is attested to, not by their position and prestige in society, but by the thousands of lives they have been able to reach and change."

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise works to empower the neighborhood "Josephs" to be agents of change within their communities. CNE provides training, technical assistance and linkages to outside resources to help these individuals and organizations address the crime, violence and gang participation that plague their schools, neighborhoods and communities. Some of their success stories over the past 25 years include:

- The **Violence-Free Zone** initiative began in 1997 in the Benning Terrace neighborhood of Washington, DC, when a 12-year-old youth was shot and killed in violence between rival youth factions. CNE and a local grassroots organization negotiated a truce between the gangs and created a program that offered life skills,

employment, and other alternatives to the street life. The result: there were zero gang-related deaths in the area of a period of nearly 10 years after the truce was declared. The model has been adapted across the country, with VFZ programs now underway in nearly 30 schools in Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Milwaukee, Washington, DC, and Prince George's County, Maryland. The results in these other areas are equally measurable: In Dallas, gang violence at Lincoln High dropped from 34 incidents to 1 and at Madison High from 113 to zero after the schools adopted the program.

- The **Weed and Seed Program** was launched when CNE was selected by the Justice Department to build the capacities of grassroots organizations and to create a youth leadership development initiative to prevent, reduce and control violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related activity in high crime neighborhoods. With law enforcement providing the "weed," community organizations provide the "seed" of intervention and prevention programs in the community. Activities include technical assistance workshops for community organizations and youth leadership camps to help train and empower youth leaders.
- CNE and HSBC-North America, (formerly Household International) launched a **Financial Literacy Program** in 2003 to help individuals and families do a better job of planning and managing their money. First piloted in Lowndes County, Alabama, the project includes hands-on workshops for community organizations convened in low-income neighborhoods around the country. To date, more than 250 workshops have been conducted bringing financial literacy education to more than 6,000 low and middle-income adults.
- **Capacity Building** – CNE builds capacity among grassroots organizations by identifying those that demonstrate the ability to address problems in their low-income communities and giving them the tools they need to strengthen their operations. To date, CNE has provided training to more than 2,000 leaders of faith-based and community organizations in 39 states, and leveraged approximately \$300 million in resources to these organizations at a cost of only \$30 million. With grant support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Compassion Capital Fund Demonstration Program, CNE has provided intensive, hands-on technical assistance to more than 30 organizations in Washington, DC and brought them together in its Hands-Across DC network to share best practices and exchange assistance. Issues the groups address include reentry of ex-offenders, victims' assistance, adult literacy and education, youth gang intervention, faith-based substance abuse and homelessness services and youth development and motivation through the production and performing arts.

### **About the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise**

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise was founded by Robert L. Woodson, Sr. in 1981 to help residents of low-income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities. CNE's model includes provides training and technical assistance to community-based and faith-based programs and empowering individuals who were once a part of the problem to become a part of the solution. Believing that civil order is a fundamental prerequisite to community revitalization, CNE has a strong focus on reducing youth violence and gang activity in communities and in the schools.

**Media Notes:** *There are a number of individuals available to be interviewed about this program, including founder Bob Woodson, community-based organizational leaders, city mayors, school principals, other civic leaders, and young people, including former gang members who have turned their lives around. Please contact Jennifer Devlin at 703-876-1714 or [Jennifer.devlin@cox.net](mailto:Jennifer.devlin@cox.net) to speak to one of these individuals or to identify someone in your area who has been involved with CNE.*