



Celebration Kicks Off Patterson Park's 'Community of Hope'

BALTIMORE, Feb. 18, 2016 – A celebration in Baltimore's Patterson Park neighborhood kicked off the "Community of Hope," a collaborative effort to provide a safe place for parents to raise their children. The effort is modeled after others that Casey Family Programs has sponsored across the nation within their '2020: Decade of Hope' initiative.

The party drew about 200 people and followed a year of preparation. Building Families for Children, Inc. (BFC) is leading a collaborative effort with fellow nonprofits, the City, and, most importantly, local residents. A chief objective is to develop a "resource hub," which is not only a place-based hub but also a commitment to ensuring that residents have access to a comprehensive network of integrated services that are consumer-driven and friendly.

Those who attended the December 18 party at the Virginia Baker Recreation Center in Baltimore were asked what they wanted in their community. Their written responses, which quickly filled a massive poster board, included:

- "Stop all the killing"
- "Feed homeless people"
- "Give kids stuff to do"
- "We need to clean up our block"
- "Get more parents involved"

These and other wishes helped shape an "action plan" developed on February 1. A primary action step is forming a community advisory board. This will allow for continued discussions with residents and city leaders about the early spoken goals, including: curbing crime, reducing teen pregnancy, cleaning up the streets and helping all have opportunities for work and play.

Fatima Wilkerson, a working mother of two boys and a long-time resident of the neighborhood, said she would like to serve on the advisory council and help the proposed "resource hub" become a reality.

"I believe in the mission, I believe in the idea. I believe it is going to make a difference," Ms. Wilkerson said. "A community-driven services hub is needed. It will allow us to help each other."

The "Community of Hope" has earned the interest of several key city agencies, including the departments of Social Services, Human Resources, and Health, Behavioral Health System Baltimore, as well as the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice. The Zanvyl and Isabelle Krieger Fund has also recently awarded a grant in support of the efforts.

In addition to Casey Family Programs, BFC's other partners include: Martin Pollak Project, which is a leading child-service agency; Echo Resource Development, which helps communities meet their needs; Helping Hands Training and Consulting; and the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY).

Several local nonprofits are also involved, including Living Classrooms, the Baltimore chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the area library and neighborhood association, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and churches.

BFC Director Debbie Marini, who chairs MARFY, said: "We intend to make a real difference by working with the community to develop a strategy around the protective factors designed specifically to eliminate risk and increase health and well-being in children and families."

Lizette Ubides, BFC Director of Clinical Program Development, took the lead in efforts to organize the event. She said, "We delivered our message, which is: we intend to impact change by tapping into the inherent strengths of the community. This message is key to the success of the collaborative."

Patterson Park Community of Hope: Building Families has taken the lead agency role in a collaborative, community mobilizing initiative in Patterson Park, called the Community of Hope. We are engaged in a process that builds on family strengths preventatively—creating networks within communities that focus on resiliency and providing hope. An important value of this work is that the consumer informs the final practice model. So, we are allowing the community mobilization process to guide us by actively engaging resident leaders, seeking resources from those with common goals, collecting data on the well-being of the neighborhoods and engaging neighbors in conversations about their community. Patterson Park is a unique neighborhood with many positive qualities; we look forward to supporting the community in offering its strengths to all who live there.

We are actively interviewing for a Local Organizer. If you know of a strong candidate, please refer them to the following link: www.buildingfamiliesforchildren.org/employment. A job description and an application will be available after February 19, 2016.

CONTACT:

Debbie Marini

[Building Families for Children](http://BuildingFamiliesforChildren.org)
pattersonparkcoh@gmail.com

(410) 872-1050 Ext. 1240

###