Judy Centers: Connecting Families With Resources for School Readiness

“We know one thing for sure—parents want the best for their children, no matter what their circumstances,” says Charlene Iannone-Campbell, director of the Judy Center at Liberty Elementary. “They may not know what that is or how they can implement it at home, and that’s where we can help.”

Her lively neighborhood Judy Center connects families to educational, health, and social services that help prepare children for school. The model is predicated on growing evidence that investing in early education results in significant gains in future well-being and academic success. The wraparound services accessed through Judy Centers have been proven to boost school readiness among five-year-olds, giving children from poor neighborhoods a strong position at the “starting line” of the long race to high school graduation.

With a goal of increasing school readiness for five-year-olds in Baltimore City to 90 percent by 2017 from 28 percent in 2002 and 76 percent in 2013, BCF set a course to open five additional Judy Centers in five years, an objective that will be exceeded this year with the opening of Baltimore’s nine new Judy Centers in three years.

SEEING THE NEED, RESHAPING THE FUTURE

The need is obvious. Each year in Baltimore City, the majority of children are born to very poor mothers. By the time children in low-income families are 18 months old, many have already fallen behind in key skills. When they start school, most know only a third of the words their more affluent peers already own. Those who lag behind by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of school. The learning achievement gap can result in a lifetime of personal pain and social dysfunction.

But walk into one of the city’s Judy Centers, and you can witness the predictions being toppled. It’s a terrific story still in the making, but these special places are working to erase some of the most pernicious and stubborn disadvantages of socioeconomic disparity.

BCF has built on Baltimore’s two successful Judy Centers by enlisting private donors and leveraging public funding to open nine new Judy Centers in the city’s neediest neighborhoods. With a network of thirteen Judy Centers, thousands of young children and their families are now connected to resources that serve as building blocks for school readiness and lifetime success.

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**Judy Centers continued from page 1**

Philanthropists George and Betsy Sherman are enthusiastic supporters of the Judy Center model, providing start-up operating funds for the first BCF Judy Center, located at Commodore John Rodgers School in East Baltimore. “We were trying to find ways to improve early childhood education in Baltimore when BCF introduced us to the Judy Center concept,” recalls George Sherman. “It was exactly what we wanted—a comprehensive public-private partnership that was sustainable.”

**WHY JUDY?**

Judy Centers, which are located in schools, connect children from birth to age five and their families with a host of educational, health and social services that help create the best environment for early learning. Services are tailored to children and families in distinct neighborhoods, and the centers thrive through the commitment and energy of the staff and partners who provide expertise in early childhood development and education, child care, health care, parenting and family support.

The idea was developed in the 1990s, when Judith P. Hoyer, early education coordinator for Prince George’s County Public Schools, brought governmental and private resources together to meet the needs of local families. After her death in 1997, her husband, Congressman Steny Hoyer, honored her memory by expanding the model of integrated services statewide.

**HOW ONE JUDY CENTER WORKS**

The Liberty Judy Center partners with the Baltimore City Health Department’s Maternal and Infant Care Program, the Family League, and the March of Dimes to present a pre-parenting course, Baby Basics, for low-income pregnant women in the neighborhood. The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, City Schools’ Early Learning Programs, First Book, and Liberty Elementary help support community baby showers where they can strengthen parenting skills, such as establishing routines that include reading a story. “You are your child’s first teacher,” Iannone-Campbell gently suggests, “and there are a lot of things you can do at home.”

**MEASURING SUCCESS, SUSTAINING THE EFFORT**

Judy Centers have been successful in improving school readiness for thousands of low-income children in Baltimore. Based on the state’s former assessment tool, the Maryland Model for School Readiness, between 85 and 93 percent of children who had been involved in a Judy Center were ready for school, compared with 76 percent citywide.

Through an innovative financial agreement with Baltimore City and the State of Maryland, private donors provide start-up funding and a decreasing share of operational support over several years, while the city and state proportionately increase funding in their education budgets to sustain the centers. A 2014 federal grant provided a match for donor commitments.

Many Judy Center results are measurable, but what can’t be statistically captured is the joy of children who are encouraged to learn. “Through First Book and the Book Bank, we give away beautiful books,” says Iannone-Campbell. “The children come in and say, ‘Can I have this book? It looks good.’ And we say, ‘Yes!’—and take the book next to it and the one behind it!’ And they do.”

After birth, a program for toddlers and parents, Mommy, Daddy & Me, helps develop oral language and vocabulary as well as social skills. Educational consultant Anana Kambon guides the curriculum and helps fill knowledge gaps for child care providers. Born to Move, a partnership with Brick Bodies and the Weinberg Foundation, helps children 15 to 36 months with eye-hand coordination, balance, and body awareness.

Judy Center leaders connect families to a wide range of services, such as Early Head Start, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten and invite caregivers to classes where they can strengthen parenting skills, such as establishing routines that include reading a story. “You are your child’s first teacher,” Iannone-Campbell gently suggests, “and there are a lot of things you can do at home.”

**JUDY CENTER DONORS**

These donors’ generous gifts leveraged public funding from the city, state and federal government to open and sustain a strong network of Judy Centers in Baltimore City. Their generosity will ensure that thousands of children will get a fair start in life by achieving school readiness by age five.

- The Baltimore Ravens
- The Steve and Renee Bisciotti Foundation
- The Blaustein Family Funds at BCF
- Eddie and Sylvia Brown
- The Mary Ellen Ruff Brush Endowment for Education at BCF
- Ben & Zelda Cohen Foundation
- Tom and Jeanne Gildsee
- M&T Bank
- Robert Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker
- Arnie and Allison Richman
- Rosenberg Family Fund at BCF
- The Philip and Beryl Sachs Family Foundation
- Harriet Stulman
- T. Rowe Price Foundation
- Thalheimer Family Fund at BCF
- Under Armour and Fight for Children
- The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation
- Wells Fargo Foundation
- Susan A. Wolman

**THE BCF BEAT Reporting on all things BCF**

- **APRIL 28, 2015**
  - **THE FUND FOR REBUILDING BALTIMORE**
    - The morning after outbreaks of violence following the death of Freddie Gray, BCF established The Fund for Rebuilding Baltimore to help repair the physical and emotional damage that had been done, and to address the underlying causes of the uprisings. What followed was an outpouring of donations and love from around the world, which we have faithfully put to work right here in our communities. Information and updates are at www.bcf.org/rebuild.

- **OCTOBER 14, 2015**
  - **FALL DONOR RECEPTION**
    - We invited all BCF fundholders to join us at摈berly Elementary School, a brand new facility that inspires everyone who steps inside. We heard from deeply committed teachers and principals about their daily challenges and triumphs, demonstrating what great school leaders look like.

- **NOVEMBER 9, 2015**
  - **TRANSPORTATION REPORT CARD**
    - The Transportation Alliance released a report card giving Central Maryland’s transportation system an overall grade of D. Find out how the region scored on each of 12 critical areas and discover what transportation looks like in cities with higher grades.
Central Maryland Transportation Alliance

Connecting people to where they need to go: connecting residential neighborhoods with job centers, retail main streets and entertainment hubs, is a fundamental marker of a great urban center. BCF created the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance in 2007, uniting the business, philanthropic and institutional sectors around a common agenda: improving and expanding transportation options for the people of Central Maryland.

The Transportation Alliance’s work to advocate for a more comprehensive transportation landscape in Central Maryland is a natural fit with BCF’s goals in neighborhoods. Without adequate transportation, neighborhoods cannot become and remain safe, clean, green and vibrant.

In recent months, Baltimore’s economic future was dealt a heavy blow when Governor Larry Hogan canceled the planned Red Line, which would have been the first east–west light rail line in the city. While many regional business leaders, elected officials and transportation advocates (including the Transportation Alliance), have decried the governor’s decision, there is still a need for a comprehensive transportation plan that can give Marylanders viable transportation options throughout the region.

THE TRANSPORTATION REPORT CARD

This fall, the Transportation Alliance released the 2015 Transportation Report Card for Central Maryland, which provides a detailed review of transportation projects and policies in the region. It also examines how the region might improve if the transportation system were designed to better meet the needs of residents in the region.

The Transportation Alliance graded 12 specific elements of the region’s transportation system, and gave the region an overall score of D, with particularly low grades in commute time, congestion, reliable transit and neighborhood isolation.

The report digs deep into why each element matters, how the Transportation Alliance arrived at the grade for each, and gives examples of cities and regions that are setting standards for good transportation planning throughout the nation.

“What we took away from this is that central Maryland is not delivering on the things that make an excellent system,” says Transportation Alliance president Brian O’Malley. “Our system is not providing good access to jobs through any mode of transport, be it by car, transit or otherwise.”

The goal of the report card, says O’Malley, was not to indict the region’s transportation system, but to assess the quality and condition of the system as a whole, not as separate modes of transport that do not interact with each other. The report card is one portion of a campaign to better educate the public, elected officials and candidates for political office on the realities of the region’s transportation system. The Transportation Alliance will be hosting a number of candidate forums, and creating awareness videos featuring residents talking about how they use the region’s transportation system.

“What we want is a system that utilizes multiple modes of transportation through a comprehensive plan which can best serve all users,” says O’Malley. “Each piece of the region’s transportation plan affects the other, and together they all have a significant impact on the region’s economy.”

WHAT’S WORKING

We asked professional advisors who have referred clients to BCF why they make those referrals. Here’s what they said:

NANCY BRYANT, Bryant Financial Advisory, Inc.
I refer clients to BCF because they’re here in Baltimore, they’re in touch with all the needs in and around Baltimore, and a lot of my clients are interested in giving back to Baltimore. I do believe there’s no better place to send my clients, and the ease with which my clients can set up funds makes it easier for me to do my job.

JON ACKERMAN, Law Offices of Jonathan D. Ackerman
BCF provides a unique benefit to the community. What BCF does that no other charity can do is serve the needs of Baltimore.

EMIL KALLINA, Kallina & Associates, LLC
They’re good people to work with, they understand their profession, they’re sophisticated, they can work through issues and problems, and as a professional, that’s what I most enjoy about working with them. There’s a lot of camaraderie and easy ability to get things accomplished and done.

CHRIS OWENS, Chris A. Owens Attorney at Law
The main reason I refer clients is because BCF is a good steward of their donation dollars. I give the clients a little bit of information about how BCF works, but then I let the good folks at BCF explain to them more fully what services can be provided—and sometimes other things click with the clients that I didn’t think as mention.

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Say Yes to Education: Baltimore's Candidacy

Say Yes to Education is a national non-profit organization that utilizes a public/private partnership in a coherent collaborative process. The goal of this partnership is to help students and families achieve high school graduation, and then ensure that students succeed in affording, attaining and completing an educational experience beyond high school.

This goal reflects the belief that every child, regardless of economic circumstance or social standing, can achieve a post-secondary education and go on to be an actively contributing member of his or her community—if given the proper opportunities and support.

The opportunity for Baltimore is to become the fourth Say Yes community-wide chapter. We would do so by successfully meeting the standards of sustainable citywide commitment developed by Say Yes, based on more than 28 years of experience in overcoming the barriers specific to urban education. Current citywide chapters are in the upstate New York cities of Syracuse and Buffalo, and Guilford County (Greensboro—High Point), North Carolina.

A successful candidacy depends on Baltimore's ability to demonstrate to Say Yes a citywide commitment to sustainable change and the demonstrated willingness of all partners to collaborate in the development of a coherent strategy to achieve and sustain a unified vision for the students and families of Baltimore.

Baltimore stands at the beginning of a long road on behalf of our children and families. After more than a year of discussions and meetings with the Say Yes National organization, Baltimore received a request for proposal (RFP) to be the fourth community in the Say Yes program, and in late fall, Baltimore submitted its completing proposal.

The RFP asks that cities demonstrate a broad-based commitment to, and readiness for, successfully implementing a citywide turnaround strategy, which has multiple steps including a citywide review of academic and non-academic services. The extensive process required for a successful Say Yes candidacy is reflective of the complexity, strategic planning, and commitment of every segment of the community necessary to effect a sustainable citywide turnaround.

Offering the promise of access to scholarships for all public high school graduates, the Say Yes model provides financial assistance for college and other post-secondary programs, as well as the academic, health, social, and legal supports students need to graduate from high school and succeed in further learning. The strategy also coordinates the efforts of a broad range of government agencies, the school system, and community organizations to provide comprehensive services and revamp academic programs to better serve students, families, and taxpayers. It's a comprehensive solution that helps improve educational attainment, reduce social services costs, and build a stronger tax base by giving people reason to stay in cities – and incentive for others to move into them.

Over the past 28 years, Say Yes has learned significant lessons about local policies and practices that work to make citywide change possible.

- Sustainable improvements cannot be imposed. They must build on and strengthen local capacity.
- Addressing social, emotional, and health needs of children through collaborative delivery – in cooperation with public agencies and service providers – is critical.
- Extended-day/year and summer programs for all students provide important opportunities to remove academic, social, emotional, and health barriers.
- Scholarships help students and their families believe they can go to college, and that quality of instruction and the learning program is the critical factor in determining whether they will be successful.
- Collaboration, transparency, and communication among all major partners must be continuous, inclusive, and central to decision-making.
- Sustainability of the program requires a commitment to fiscal transparency, committed leadership, and accountability to strong community-wide governance.
- Change takes time. The problems affecting schools and low-income neighborhoods won’t immediately disappear after early interventions are introduced.
- Citywide change requires sophisticated use of data, assessment, and planning. Curriculum, instruction, and support for students must be part of an integrated data-driven strategy.

The campaign to bring Say Yes to Baltimore is led by the City of Baltimore, Baltimore City Public Schools, and the Baltimore Community Foundation, along with many other stakeholders.

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Empowering Youth Leaders and Supporting Social Justice

By Dion Cartwright

Following the Baltimore uprising in April, BCF participated in a youth leadership and philanthropy meeting hosted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. During that meeting, we heard from many of Baltimore's youth that they were interested in building youth leadership, empowering the youth voice for social justice and increasing youth engagement opportunities.

For over twenty-five years, BCF has focused on ways to engage residents of all ages in communities in Baltimore City and County through our Neighborhood Grants Program, but one area that continues to be a challenge is getting older adult residents to engage youth residents, get their perspectives and provide opportunities for the youth to take a leadership role in things that impact not only the community but their individual lives.

The Baltimore Community Foundation aims to increase the livability of Baltimore neighborhoods and develop and support community leaders to be advocates for issues that are important to them. The Annie E. Casey Foundation aims to build the capacity of leaders to achieve better results, transform disinvested neighborhoods, and raise awareness of critical issues impacting communities. It's a natural fit for the two foundations to work together to build leadership and engagement opportunities for Baltimore's young people.

With financial support from the Casey Foundation, BCF has created the Youth Leadership for Change grant program that will provide not only funding, but networking, training and technical assistance opportunities to youth-led and driven nonprofit organizations in Baltimore. Grants of up to $10,000 each will support projects and/or programs targeted at addressing issues in the community, projects that foster new youth leaders or improve existing leadership in the community, and that build the confidence, knowledge, skills, and collective leadership of youth while addressing the root causes of injustice and inequity in their lives.

But these grants go beyond the dollars. In addition to providing funding, BCF will provide the grant recipients the opportunity to build their organizational and individual skills. Through trainings and workshops, technical assistance, networking and the convening of Baltimore's youth and adult leaders, BCF will help to build a youth leadership pipeline that empowers our youth leaders and helps prepare them to be a voice for our city.

There's an old quote that says, "keep true to the dreams of our youth." If we want to know the dreams of our youth, we must ask them. If we want to help our youth fulfill their dreams, we must empower them. If we want Baltimore to thrive, it must be a place where youth opportunities and backgrounds have an opportunity to be heard and where resources are offered that translate ideas into action.
Investing in Education
We focus on getting children ready for school and the schools ready for students, organizing our efforts around school readiness, school leadership and school effectiveness.

RECENT INVESTMENT:
BALTIMORE EDUCATION COALITION

“When it’s crunch time in Annapolis, we have to work hard to get people together,” says Frank Patinella, Baltimore Education Coalition co-chair. “We want to bring more people up to the leadership level, get more community members to do more in Annapolis, and more in the city.”

Great schools are a crucial ingredient to a strong Baltimore, and BCF has made investing in school leadership and school readiness touchstones of its education work. BCF’s advocacy in Annapolis has focused on ensuring Baltimore schools have the resources they need to create great learning environments for all students.

That advocacy is made stronger when all community members – including students and community leaders – can engage at the grassroots level. That’s why BCF recently granted $20,000 to the Baltimore Education Coalition (BEC), which is at the forefront of equipping community leaders, parents, students and residents to advocate for education reform.

As a coalition of 22 organizations throughout the city, BEC has been united in a mission to ensure all children in Baltimore receive an excellent education. To that end, the group trains people from all parts of the community – including students, parents, teachers, residents and organizations – so that they can deliver their messages to policy makers in both City Hall and Annapolis.

“We represent nonprofits, community associations, churches – there are a lot of organizations coming to the table to work together,” said Roxanne Allen, BEC co-chair. “Many in the community now come to us as a lead coalition in the city to ask for advice on issues.”

The grant from BCF will help the Coalition to train more community leaders, and partially fund their strategic planning process.

Investing in Neighborhoods
We invest in strengthening resident leadership and community organizations, helping neighborhoods to become and remain safe, clean, green and vibrant.

RECENT INVESTMENT:
PATTERSON PARK NEIGHBORHOOD GREENING PARTNERSHIP

Who wants to live with trash and rats?

“The obvious answer is ‘no one.’ But street litter, alleys used as dumps, and the persistent problem of rat infestation are perennial challenges in urban areas. Fighting back takes determination and organization, but the payoff can be huge: a neighborhood where people want to invest their time and money, a neighborhood they can be proud of.”

“The Patterson Park Neighborhood Association has dubbed the neighborhood “Baltimore’s greenest.” Seeing parts of their neighborhood suffering from dumping problems, general lack of upkeep and rat infestations did not fit with residents’ image of their community. They formed the Patterson Park Neighborhood Greening Partnership, and with a $5,000 grant from BCF’s Neighborhood Grants Program they launched a broad effort to address these health and quality of life issues.

The group produced the “Patterson Park Clean City Guide,” a comprehensive booklet that offers tips and ideas on how to keep streets, alleys and yards clean. They also purchased trash and recycling bins for neighbors, developed and printed neighborhood-specific bilingual educational materials, provided neighborhood incentives for greening and held celebrations to mark progress on the work. They also hosted massive alley cleanups and helped neighbors who needed assistance in cleaning their properties to reduce trash buildup and rat infestations.

The program led to the clean-up of five problem alleys—decreasing the rat population—distribution of numerous recycling and trash cans to residents who needed them, and participation by more than 800 neighbors in the effort.

It was BCF’s initial investment that helped the group get their effort moving. Using BCF’s grant as leverage, the partnership attracted more groups to its ranks, which led to more investments from new funders.

“With the support of BCF we were able to drum up support surrounding the guide,” said Tressa Carter Wotring, who led the effort. “If we had not received funding, we would not have been able to start making moves that led to the attention and help from our eventual partners.”
Every family in Baltimore, regardless of economic status, should have access to a quality education for their children. Give a child a quality education and all of his or her future generations will not experience the hopelessness and struggles of living in poverty. The cycle will be broken. It is not only morally unacceptable to deny our poorest children the chance for a meaningful and successful life: We cannot afford the loss of so many productive, creative people if we hope to maintain and improve the quality of life here in Baltimore and our nation.

That is why our legacy fund at BCF will support education from pre-k through college, impacting thousands of future Baltimore children and families.