

January



Dear Honorable Chairperson, Committee Members and Community Investors,

My name is Marjorie Young-Grays. I am the Executive Director of Family Matters Empowerment Center (FMEC). We are a faith-based nonprofit organization that has worked for the past 10 years with social service agencies and urban communities throughout the DC Metropolitan.

Our mission is to strengthen families and guide our young people toward making positive life decisions by giving them training to create healthy life choices. We are pleased to share with you this testimonial regarding our work with youth and families at the Brookland Manor Community Center.

I am a native of Washington DC and grew up just a few miles from Brookland Manor. I was a special educator for the Prince Georges County Schools, a building administrator and have taught teacher preparation courses at Trinity University and the Catholic University of America.

I was trained to conduct peer mediation, conflict resolution and peace education programs for youth in the early 1990's. These successful programs were carried out on the elementary and middle school levels for more than 12 years.

FMEC also offers classes in health and nutrition, financial literacy as well as character education for youth, and parent education and couples training for Adults.

As a teacher I knew that most of the problems faced by our young people and our society stemmed from problems they encountered at home and in their communities. As you approach the Brookland Manor property you see neat well-cared for apartments nestled in a notoriously high-crime area where children

have to run a gauntlet past drug dealers, junkies, unemployed folks who have given up hope of having meaningful work, and who hang out behind the local liquor store across from the property from, early morning to way past midnight on any given day. Our little ones hurry along with their young parents, their aunties, older siblings or grandparents to get to the safety and security of the Brookland Manor Community Center.

It is here that concerned service providers, including FMEC work to find innovative ways to teach the life skills that will allow these children to make solid, proactive decisions that are literally life or death choices for them.

One of the unique aspects of the FMEC conflict resolution program is that we conduct classes with a male and female facilitators. The fact that the facilitators' way of handling gives credibility to some of what we teach in a number of different ways. For the boys, seeing a mature married black man working with his wife and valuing good manners and respectful behavior is a plus. The girls are often startled to discover that the facilitators are married, to each other. For many have not seen marriage or healthy two parent relationships up close.

Our students ranged in age from 5-14 years of age. In 2012 we worked with students on financial literacy using the Junior Achievement curriculum.

We talked about what community means and how each of us has a part to play in making our communities safe and a good place to live, work, and play.

We talked about the roles that workers and community helpers play in serving the needs of the people in a particular community.

We identified types of communities such as urban, commercial and rural zones, how the needs of each area vary.

We talked about money and how to make smart money choices. To reinforce the concepts taught we set up scenarios where the children assumed the roles of store owners, bank employees and community workers with pay checks to cash and bills to pay. The children enjoyed this learning experience and took real ownership of the roles. They enjoyed helping each other as the older children guided their younger peers in writing checks for purchases, making out savings and deposit forms and counting money and making change.

In partnership with a local bank students set up actual savings accounts and were encouraged to save money on a regular basis.

From 2013 to 2015 FMEC worked with the students and staff of the Brookland Community Center on a Conflict Resolution curriculum based on the 6 Pillars of Character.

The work of children is play. We discovered that teaching the of Honesty, fairness, respect, responsibility, caring and citizenship through sports and play activities helped students to learn the language of peaceful negotiation as well as respectful communication. The site director at Brookland Manor was very helpful in incorporating the themes that we were teaching into her morning meetings with the children in the summer sessions and using bulletin boards and words of praise as the children demonstrated peaceful ways of handling daily problems.

Many times we noted that the student interns and aides assigned to help with the younger children needed to learn these same peace principles. When they first entered the program they yelled at the children and made negative comments to them to get them to do what they wanted.

Over time we saw a definite shift in their positive behavior and interaction with the younger children as we discussed and demonstrated how they could get what they needed and wanted without violence and without getting upset.

It is essential that our youth learn peaceful ways of surviving and thriving
In our troubled city.

We increase their chances of making a positive impact on the future
by believing in their potential and fostering their brilliance through innovative
programming and caring relationships.

We at FMEC would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Edgewood Management Company, Mid City Development, and the Community Service Foundation, for their intentional intervention in the lives of children and families.

We are proud to have been a partner and resource for life skills and positive youth development in this endeavor.

It has been my pleasure to share this testimonial on behalf of the children of Brookland Manor and these excellent organizations

Marjorie Young Grays

Marjorie Young-Grays
Executive Director,
Family Matters Empowerment Centre
4906 Nicholson Street
Riverdale, MD 20737
301 233-3811