

DREAMS  
INTO  
ACTION



A SAN MAR INITIATIVE

2016 ANNUAL REPORT



Bester Community of Hope is a community initiative facilitated by San Mar, with a mission to cultivate hope and well-being in children, families and communities. It started out as a simple concept, what if we took our expertise developed over many years of serving children and their families impacted by foster care and juvenile services, and used it to create stronger neighborhoods that ultimately prevented children from entering our program? What if the same supportive network of opportunities that existed in our facilities was available for families in their neighborhood? In order to do that San Mar would need to radically reshape our organization and go to the places the community identified as priority.

Over the course of our first full year of operations, we moved from a big idea to working with a variety of local stakeholders to develop an ambitious plan to bring about positive change at the neighborhood level. Our work is designed with an ecological approach, meaning we work concurrently with individuals, families, schools, neighborhoods and on the macro level advocating for positive change. It is within this multi-faceted process that we believe change is possible and unconditional care is realized.

This report is a compilation of the key activities and outputs in 2016, as well as the last four months of 2015 when our program first opened a new office directly across the street from Bester Elementary School on Mill Street in Hagerstown, Maryland. Looking back we are proud of the work so far but fully recognize that the journey is just beginning.

# KEY OUTPUTS

SINCE SEPTEMBER 2015

## NEW OFFICE AND NEW LOOK

370 MILL STREET AT THE PROFESSIONAL CENTER IN HAGERSTOWN

Our new office is directly across the street from Bester Elementary School. Special thanks to **St. John's Catholic Prep, Valley Storage, Lowe's, Staples** and others for helping us open and outfit this great new location.

We also created a new logo and collateral for the organization, then developed and launched a new website with supporting social media channels.

VISIT AND FOLLOW US AT - [BESTERHOPE.ORG](http://BESTERHOPE.ORG)

## WELCOME TO THE TEAM

**Kerry Fair** Program Manager, **Jerica Washington** Special Projects Coordinator, **Teri Conrad** Family Support Worker, **Jen Younker** LCSW-C transitioned from her role as Director of Residential Services at San Mar Children's Home to assume the role of Director of Community Triage Services at Bester Community of Hope.

NEW INTERNS AND OTHERS: **Krystal Holl** Masters of Social Work Intern – Salisbury University, **Carly Wade** Masters of Social Work Intern – Salisbury University, **Rafi Hoq** AmeriCorps VISTA joined in August of 2016 and will be with us through the first half of 2017. **Alexa Castle** of UMD-Baltimore finished her MSW Internship in spring of 2016.

## NEW SITE VISITS EXPAND OUR WORK

WE VISITED: Promise Heights Baltimore, Governor's Office on Community Initiatives, Patterson Park Community of Hope, Homeboy Industries and Magnolia Place Community Initiative in Los Angeles, California; SAMSHA; Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, New York; Philadelphia Access Center; National Community of Hope convening's in Philadelphia, New York, Washington D.C. and Jacksonville, Florida.

VISITORS STUDY BESTER COH: York, Pennsylvania social services site visit to Bester 10/17; Administration of Children and Families Two Gen forum in Hagerstown, 10/18; Casey Family Programs 12/23



# TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

## A COMMUNITY SUMMIT FEATURING

**DR. VINCENT FILETTI**, CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OF THE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE STUDY,  
**DR. JERRY YAGER** OF THE CHILD TRAUMA ACADEMY, AND **PATSY SELLARS** OF CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS

On March 20th at Bester Elementary, we hosted a community summit called “Trauma Informed Care” to share the foundational principles of San Mar’s Culture of Care. 450 members of the community attended, all from diverse backgrounds and professions; 118 received free admission. Keynote speaker Dr. Vincent Filetti stressed the importance of understanding social problems through a trauma informed lens. Dr. Filetti is the co-principal investigator of the Adverse Childhood Experience study. This study demonstrates definitive correlations between early childhood trauma and a host of negative social issues that manifest later in life. Expanding on this study, Dr. Jerry Yager of the Child Trauma Academy and Patsy Sellars of Casey Family Programs shared research on brain science and how this impacts the daily work of front line staff.



In the fall, we followed up at Leitersburg Cinemas having a focused conversation with specific groups from child welfare, health, religion and the public school system. We hosted two screenings of “Paper Tigers”, a film documenting trauma informed practices implemented at a high-intensity alternative high school in Washington state; 200 attended. Guest speakers included trauma advocate David Washington LCSW-C, and a team of administrators from the Woodbridge School District in Delaware who had implemented a similar model.



## MEDIA COVERAGE

### BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR THE NEW VISION

Kick off meeting 10/26/15; Comfy Cozy Night December 2015; Trauma conference 3/20/16; “Seeds of Hope” Locust Street revitalization August 2016; Southside Community Block Party 8/20/16, Full write-up on program in Herald Mail in October 2016; Governors visit 10/13/16, and other smaller write-ups and coverage via partners



## LOGIC MODEL PLANNING SUMMIT

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER OF 2015 - FACILITATED BY **ANNIE BLACKLEDGE** OF CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS

- **Service Integration and Care Coordination for Well-Being:** Robin and Adam Roberson (CFC); Jenny Fleming (HEAL); Matt Semler (WCPS), Allen Twigg (Meritus)
- **Enhancing Educational Opportunities:** Kristi Bachtell (WCPS), Sherri Lantz (Judy Center), Jack Carpenter (WCCMC), Kathleen O’Connell (Library), Carol Costello (Director of Student Services – WCPS)
- **Recipes for Stronger Neighborhoods:** Karen Cook (RWJCC); Gerry Kendle (HPD); Kathy Powderly (HARC); Sarah Nelson (City of Hagerstown); Ligia Teodorovici (WCDSS)
- **Data Integration:** Brad Sell (CFWC), William Young (Fletcher Foundation); Melissa Reabold (UW); Stephanie LaPole (OCGM); Bud Gudmundson (WCGIS); Melissa Minotti (JHU Comstock Center); Kim Halsey (USMH)

In addition, a large volume of other community providers and partners were consulted following the development of our logic model draft to refine and prioritize the initial strategy and road map for Bester Community of Hope.

“The Bester Community of Hope is an aspirational endeavor that marshals community resources in a timely, constructive manner on behalf of families confronting economic, social, and emotional challenges. Access to resources, combined with support from neighbors and community leaders, can replace the debilitating effects of poverty with strength, education and connection.”

*-Michael Piercy, Director, Washington County Department of Social Services*

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# NEIGHBORHOOD

## COMMUNITY TRIAGE SERVICES

### STRENGTHENING TIES AND EMPOWERING PARENTS

Collaborating with the Maryland Department of Human Resources and the Washington County Department of Social Services, we are implementing a family support service model intended to prevent children and families from penetrating the child welfare system. We adapted a public model studied in Jacksonville, Florida called Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (STEPS) with the goal of creating a neighborhood safety net and linkages to local supports for families in need. Key operations of STEPS include in-home supportive visitation, service coordination with community partners and direct services including education, clinical consult, parenting, case management and family support.

- Families Blossom Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Program in partnership with Washington County DSS – Awarded \$304,000 for FY 17 to underwrite the hiring of STEPS program staff and subsidize the Bester Community of Hope umbrella as a collective impact entity.
- After hiring Jen Younker, LCSW-C, as program director for Community Triage Services, we also hired Teri Conrad as our family support worker to assist in the delivery of supportive, in-home services and we partnered with Salisbury University to place a MSW student to assist with lower intensity cases.
- National Wraparound Initiative Conference in Washington D.C. – STEPS staff members attended to understand best practices and collaborate with diverse programming efforts in other parts of the country to support our team approach to a holistic, community based care model.
- Developed protocols and an operations plan and all relevant documentation as well as began the development of a new case management system from Salesforce, customized by Candoris.
- In October, STEPS officially opened for referrals in the Bester catchment with the ability to receive referrals from Bester Elementary, Washington County Child Protective Services

## BESTER COMMUNITY OF HOPE

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and their Family Center program, as well a coalition of 16 houses of faith located within the boundary of Bester.

- After extensive marketing we reached capacity in the STEPS program early after only about 8 weeks as we were serving 75 individuals and 17 unique families and began a waiting list, clearly displayed the high level of need for this comprehensive service
- We began to identify levels of intensity to best move through the waiting list for family support services based on need.
- We identified the Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST) to track client outcomes and the Parents Assessment of Protective Factors (PAPF) to gauge perceptions of families to meet them at their identified place of need.
- We worked with San Mar to facilitate a Christmas gift program to support families on the STEPS caseload, a significant amount of resources

We have been able to advocate for families in distress that otherwise would have had barriers limiting their potential for success. Out of the 25 families served during the initial three months of the STEPS program, only one family required an elevated child protective services intervention leading to removal, and BCOH played an important role in clarifying and supporting that particular investigative process. The others received over 100 home visits and 565 linkages to community supports.

## FOSTERING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

### POSITIVE CHANGE DRIVEN BY LOCAL CITIZENS

- **Community Advisory Board** – A diverse group of local residents, businesses and service providers located within the Bester catchment was assembled and began meeting in early 2016 on a quarterly basis to drive neighborhood activities. Meetings occurred on 3/11, 5/20, 8/5, 12/2/16, eventually moving from our Mill Street office to a larger meeting space at the Fletcher library. A quiet immigrant came to the meeting after hearing from another Bester parent, but after the meeting we weren't able to connect. We asked our contact how he felt about the meeting and she said, "He was recently talking about moving out of the street he lives on because of the crime and problems, but after the meeting he said, if they are going to commit to this I want to stay."
- **Faith Coalition** – There are currently 16 houses of faith located in the Bester district. We worked with the Hagerstown Area Religious Council (HARC) to bring these groups together to ensure there was a shared vision of collaboration for neighborhood success. We have two primary missions with this steering group: to share efforts and activities occurring amongst institutions to ensure mutual support and prevent duplication of efforts; second, we hope to be a trusted social service provider to offer not only crisis response with our STEPS program,



but a variety of other resources such as parent support groups and education at their respective sites. We held three large steering events this past year, starting with our kick-off at Emmanuel United Methodist Church, Life House Church (June) and B’Nai Abraham Synagogue (September). Since that time we have focused on managing an activity and outreach calendar via e-mail to these groups, leading to our next meeting in the spring of 2017. We also helped market activities such as the April kid’s carnival at the synagogue to all Bester kids. A church representative explained, “I am so excited right now, because I have been wanting my church to get connected with the synagogue for 18 years, and this process has finally allowed that to happen.”

- **Partnering with Neighborhoods 1st and other groups** – Listening and participating in each of the five Neighborhoods 1st groups located in the catchment as well as catalyzing the creation of Bester Communities First, a new group focused on the underrepresented area on Locust Street. Initially they met at our Mill Street location and now they are housed at the synagogue. We also joined a variety of other coalitions such as the Bester PTA Executive committee and Early Childhood Advisory Council.



## RESIDENT DRIVEN NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES

GENERATED FROM LISTENING SESSIONS WITH OUR NEIGHBORS

- **“Seeds of Hope” Locust Street Revitalization** – We partnered with Lowe’s and Bester Communities First residents to clean and refurbish spaces on the locust street corridor. We worked with the City of Hagerstown to close the busy street on August 13th when temperatures soared over 100 degrees to paint crosswalks with Bester bear prints. Every home on the street received a large flower planter filled with soil and flowers, and we did a variety of projects such as fixing broken fences, painting over vandalism and even putting in a hopscotch on the sidewalk.



- **Southside Community Block Party** – Over 1,000 people attended this major community event organized to bring together entertainment, community resources and neighborhood connections in a centralized and free event. Brothers O’Shea Lewis (15) and Raykwan Lewis (16) volunteered from the beginning to the end of the event and worked pretty hard in the heat and when we were driving them home after the long day they said “Volunteering is fun! I’m going to do all my hours with you guys.”
- **VOTE!** – On Sunday October 9th, the week before the national voter registration deadline, we partnered with the NAACP and B’Nai Abraham Synagogue in a bi-partisan effort to ensure citizens were registered to vote and knew of their polling location. In addition to neighborhood canvassing and giving documentation we were able to register an additional fifty voters in the catchment.
- **Walking School Bus** – We worked with local parent Kay Papeskov who expressed concern about school attendance and elementary age children traveling to school with little supervision. Starting on 11/28 we brought together the outgoing and incoming Mayors of Hagerstown and the Fire Department to escort children to school. On December 22nd, we held another event this time supported by four separate houses of faith providing hot chocolate and singing carols on the way to school. We hope that this continues monthly and slowly transitions to a resident managed activity.
- **Field of Dreams** – Held planning meetings with a group of community stakeholders to discuss a community development project at the old Bester Elementary School site, currently an expansive field. Frederick Siebert & Associates has rendered a drawing and Callas Construction has estimated expenses. 2017 priorities for the project will be a public private agreement with WCPS and fundraising.

“The Community Free Clinic is proud to provide acute healthcare to Bester Elementary School students, who may otherwise have no access to medical intervention. Our vision is to improve the health and well-being of these students, so they can stay in the classroom, achieving better grades and more success.”

*-Robin Roberson, Director of Finance & Compliance,  
Community Free Clinic of Washington County*

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# HEALTH

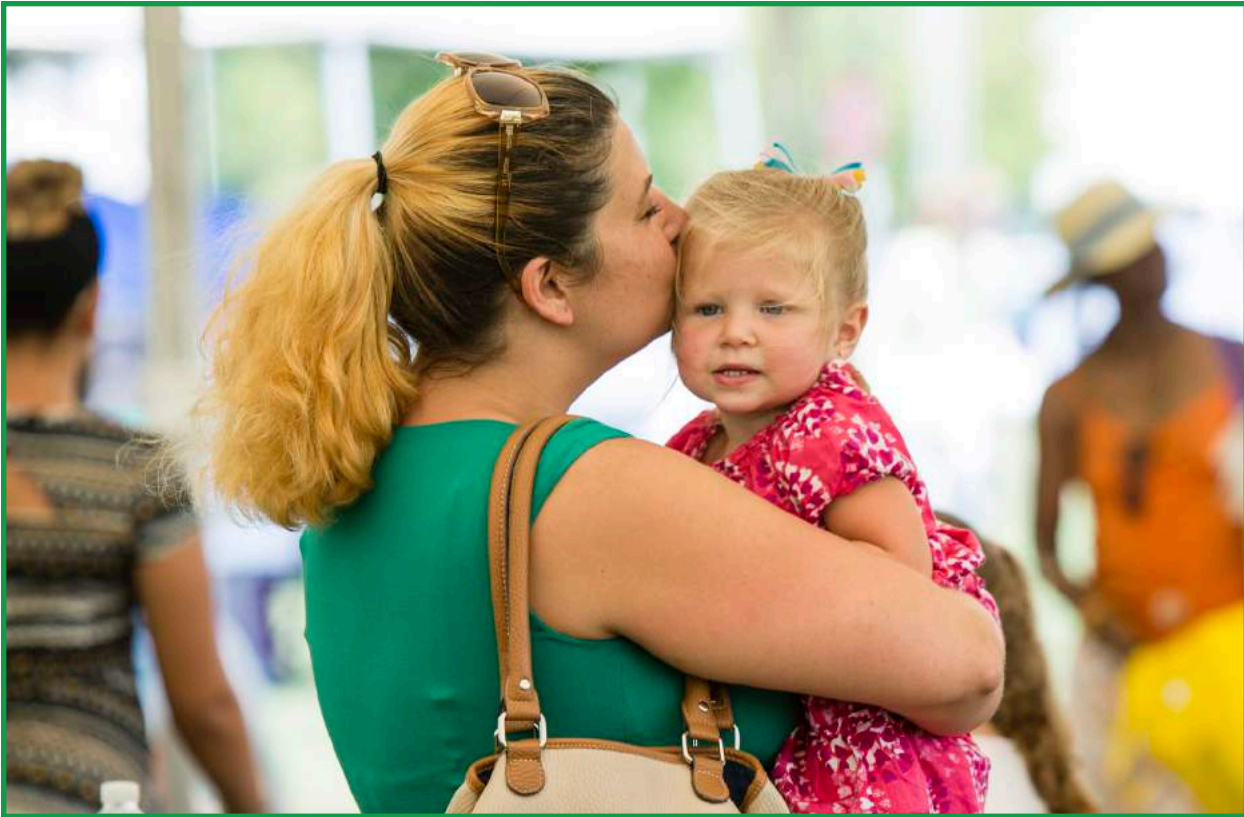
## BESTER HEALTH CENTER

### FREE ONSITE URGENT CARE SERVICES FOR BESTER ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

The Community Free Clinic at Bester Elementary reduce barriers and improve convenience.

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) completed between Meritus Health, Washington County Public Schools, Community Free Clinic and San Mar for the creation of the Bester Health Center at Bester Elementary. This was an extensive process and a tribute to the support and time of Anthony Trotta, Chief Legal Counsel of Washington County Public Schools
- M&T Bank, located in Boonsboro, Maryland, gave \$5,000 to support the expenses associated with the yearlong placement of an AmeriCorps VISTA at our site
- Strong City Baltimore placed our AmeriCorps Healthy Futures VISTA Rafi Hoq and he began service in August 2016, initially working to organize space and set up new health center office and purchased equipment such as a laptop for CFC staff
- Almost 200 youth registered in the first three months of the 2016-2017 academic year
- **Services began on September 6, 2016**, with the Community Free Clinic (CFC) providing a pediatric registered nurse practitioner and an aide Monday-Thursday for about 2.5 hours daily. Students received urgent care at no cost and with no insurance needed.
- Developed a record system and protocols for ongoing management of client services and communication between vendors
- Special Projects Coordinator Jerica Washington, LCSW-C led our application for a five year, \$250,000 grant to underwrite the Bester Health Center effort through the American Academy Healthy Tomorrows Partnership for Children Program. We received word in December of 2016 that our application would be awarded during the second cycle, with funding beginning in March of 2018.





## PROMOTING A CULTURE OF WELLNESS

### TARGETING HEALTH CONCERNS AND IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC WELL-BEING INITIATIVE

- **Bester Wellness Committee** – We began our work through the school based team already in place, as they had done much work to construct a plan to bring about positive health outcomes. Our role in their effort was to add capacity and linkages to resources upon request
- **Special Events We Supported:** Cray Cray 3k (Nov 2015) –Students ran a 3k, and in the end were able to duct tape their Principal Kristi Bachtell to the wall to raise funds for the Boys and Girls Club of Frederick Manor; The Students vs. Teachers basketball game (Feb 2016) was a fun event but also included important messages about physical activity; Family Fitness Night (May 2016) was led by the Wellness Committee, but we brought along Holly Luther from the Health Department to teach kids about the dangers of smoking, and had dental hygiene bags for all students provided by Robinwood Dental and Kool Smiles
- **Pedometer Challenge (Mar- April 2016)** – Purchased high quality pedometers with a grant from the Washington County Health Department for all 600 students to participate and gain awareness of how much or little they are moving to promote more physical activity. Classes kept score and students challenged each other to increase their activity. One student was running in place while waiting in line. The teacher asked what she was doing. The student said, “I’m trying to get my steps in!”

- **Skechers** – Talking to physical education instructors we learned that many students did not arrive prepared to participate in P.E. They didn't have proper shoes. Working with Sketchers at the Hagerstown Prime Outlets, we created a shoe loaner program.
- **Movement Lab** – Supported the school in their application and installation of a pilot program that would allow youth to work with elliptical, yoga mats and exercise balls. The lab began operation in the fall of 2016.
- **Insurance Registration** – We created a navigation binder to help the population access insurance, and focused on ways to target transient populations and those currently enrolled in services who lose their insurance during the year.



- **Babypalooza (Pictured Above)** – In the fall of 2016 the Judy Center left Bester for Ruth Anne Monroe Primary School, a major loss, leaving a void for early childhood resources. We responded by bringing together the Early Childhood Advisory Council, Washington County Health Department, Safe Kids, and Towson University for a major community event. This event linked resources and service providers to local families with young children. Casey Family Programs provided some funding and technical assistance to the Mayor's Office for Children in New York City who had supported similar events. 400 attended the event. 50 partners donated prizes and shared information on Saturday, October 22nd.
- **Linkages to Local Doctors** – It also appeared the vast majority of youth had an identified primary care physician, this goal shifted to ensuring the consistency of utilization and collaboration.
- **The Jack E. Barr Center for Well-Being** – San Mar Children's Home significantly modified their programming to continue to focus on more proactive solutions for families, closing their renowned residential programs for adolescent girls and repurposing one of those buildings for a new outpatient mental health clinic. Long-term we hope to increase access to quality mental health resources and make them available to communities in need.





# CENTRALIZED DATA

## PROGRAMMATIC MEASUREMENTS

We evaluated a variety of tools to consider how to manage and track all of our program level activities. We utilized brief consult with national experts such as Peter Pecora (Casey Family Programs, Seattle), Detria Russell (MLK Sr. Community Resource Collaborative, Atlanta), and evaluated a variety of tools before determining that Salesforce provided the best non-profit platform for us to be able track and measure our ongoing work.

We received a grant from Salesforce for 10 free licenses and entered into a relationship with Candoris Technologies to customize a database solution for us to be able to track all of our activities. This was and continues to be a heavy workload to design a database. While we have been entering information since September, the work continues to develop meaningful outcome reports for internal and external stakeholders. Our direct service work through STEPS does have two separate pre and post test tools that bring potential to track family success, and they will be embedded into the Salesforce platform.

As a part of the Salesforce solution, AmeriCorps VISTA Rafi Hoq supported the office by completing thorough research and collaborating with office staff to determine priority measurements. Early successes were the development of a community resource guide for concrete resources for families, a great asset to our direct services team. Our hope long-term will be to share this as an open source document that can continually be updated by front line practitioners.

## NEIGHBORHOOD METRICS

One of the hardest things for us to measure is how the day to day activities on the ground are going to make a difference in the long-run across the community at-large in real time. We need mile markers of success that give us an impression that we are on the right track so we can continue to move in the right direction. For our health work and school based work, data is not organized in a way that is easily accessible, but we can isolate key measurements such as: attendance, behavioral and disciplinary infractions, chronic health issues and physical education testing scores. We

wanted to establish a baseline for where the neighborhood was today based on the perception of its members, so later on we could evaluate whether our broader efforts had moved the needle.

Over the course of 2016, following smaller surveys including Bester Elementary families and participants at the Southside Community Block Party, we undertook the massive task of a neighborhood survey of the entire district, with a representative sample of 320 households. We worked with the Hagerstown Police Department, David Chavis and Ryan Schooley of Community Science and others to achieve a legitimate process. We used a 26 question instrument from Community Science called the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2) administered door to door using electronic tablets. In total the process took about two months of heavy workload for our small office, but the knowledge and relationships developed were invaluable. We are currently analyzing the findings and doing additional research and hope to share a comprehensive report with the community in early 2017.

**Technical Assistance on Community Measures** – As a part of the IV-E Waiver work with the Department of Human Resources, we are accessing technical assistance from Chapin Hall regarding best measurements programmatically and at the neighborhood level for ongoing evaluation of our effort.



In order to evaluate longitudinally the impact of smaller efforts such as Bester Community of Hope on the broader community, we need the ability to have access to a great deal of information from county and state run institutions. Fortunately, we live in a time in the United States where human services and the governmental sector are having greater access and transparency of institutional data. Our objective is to catalyze a process to bring together the most relevant social institutions, such as health, law enforcement, government, education and child welfare and begin to share mutually beneficial data that will support the whole community.

**Community Stakeholder Meeting - 11/17/16** – Proposed partnership with Johns Hopkins, Policy Map and State of Maryland using some allocated funding to push a centralized data platform to reduce the barriers accessing data from other institutions. Special speakers included Uma Ahluwalia, Director of Montgomery County DHHS, Tyler Corwin of Casey Family Programs, Maya McDoom Echebiri of Johns Hopkins and Trudie Thomas of Policy Map. Next steps include identifying key partners and institutions that are most ready to implement this practice at their institution and expanding from that initial group.

“This is an exciting time for Bester, our children, and our community. We are already beginning to see how eliminating our ‘silo’s’ helps agencies and community resources work together in a smarter way.”

*-Kristi Bachtell, Principal, Bester Elementary School*

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# EDUCATION

## COMMUNITY SCHOOL STRATEGY

**Speakers at Bester** – Gold medalist Vicky Bullett, “A dream, without a plan, is just a wish” The Holistic Life Foundation, teaching youth coping skills and breathing strategies to reduce anxiety and conflict; Victor Woods, discussing his experiences leading to incarceration

**Bester Out Of School Time (BOOST) Clubs** introduced in the fall of 2016 to students at Bester Elementary to provide enhanced academic experiences, community connections, and healthy development. Five opportunities were offered to students. Two of the clubs strengthened the existing YMCA Afterschool Program. The other three opened schoolwide.

**Open Minds** conducted one hour long activities focused on self-awareness, personal power, impulse control, and emotional regulation once per week for six weeks. On average, 25-30 YMCA students participated weekly and gained skills to thoughtfully react to situations by being aware of their mind, body and emotions and by using self-regulation for improved focus and stability.

**Girls On The Run** met twice weekly with a focus on empowering young girls and helping them work towards physical fitness goals. At the end of the fall, 7 of the 15 registrants successfully completed a 5k at a community event in December.



**The Washington County Community Mediation Center** began working with YMCA students on a weekly basis to develop group cohesion and conflict management skills. Together with the students, they have developed a list of behavior expectations and consequences for actions as well as worked in small groups to identify problematic areas and produce community based solutions. This opportunity will continue through the winter for YMCA students.



**Garden Club** began meeting early in the fall on Monday afternoons and Thursday mornings and is led by Bester teacher Jen Buhrman and supported by Bester Community of Hope's AmeriCorps VISTA Rafi Hoq. A total of 60 students registered for this activity which utilized the "Growing Healthy Habits" curriculum developed by UMD Extension to introduce students to concepts in growing and harvesting edible crops, the lifecycle of a plant, composting, and more. BCOH built a greenhouse in the school courtyard in 2016, and we hope to improve that structure to be able to produce plant life.

**The Learning Lab** was supported by two South High juniors and Bester Community of Hope to provide academic activities aimed at supporting student comprehension at their grade level. This opportunity was available for students in grades 2 through 5. For the first half of the afternoon, students were able to work independently or with a South High student to access online learning programs such as Stride Academy, Storia, Epic and others on iPads provided by Bester Community of Hope. During the second half of the afternoon, students and volunteers/staff played a variety of games that encouraged social skills, critical thinking, cooperation and strategizing. This opportunity was available twice per week for one hour each day. A total of 8 students regularly participated on one or both days.

**BLAST** took place on Wednesday afternoons with 5th grade teacher Ryan Rau and any student in grades 1 through 5 had the opportunity to participate. BLAST aimed at developing leadership skills and teamwork through group activity, sports, and conversation. A total of 13 students regularly participated in this club on a weekly basis.



**Spring 2017 BOOST Schedule** – We are planning several opportunities that support the development of 21st century skills, leadership, health and wellness, enhanced academics, STEAM concepts, service learning and family engagement. We hope to expand clubs, increase attendance and in the long-term use these activities as a demonstration for funding from the State of Maryland for 21st Century Learning Centers.

**Caring School Community** – Increasing emotional intelligence and social skills was a priority. Kids have the ability to be leaders and help each other as well as have stronger relationships with their teachers. We received consult from the Center for Collaborative Classrooms and Robin Handler of WCPS to purchase classroom toolkits for every teacher for school wide implementation of a weekly classroom meeting process called Caring School Community. We brought a master trainer onsite on September 20th for a full day of work with teachers and following a demonstration period we will bring them back for deeper training in the spring of 2017.

**Summer Opportunities** – We increased YMCA summer staffing from 4 to 10 which allowed for smaller groups throughout the facility at Bester and more personalized interactions. Provided weekly programming and fieldtrip opportunities to exciting local resources. Increased daily census by close to 25 students (50%) from previous summer. On April 20th, we brought Liz Kelley, Director of the Office of Child Care, onsite and we redesigned a form for parents to navigate complicated new funding process.

- Emma Roberts and Jordan Rawlings worked the YMCA summer camp through the Western Maryland Consortium. Emma had limits on the hours she could work a paid position, but enjoyed her job so much she volunteered the rest of her time. Jordan was a gentle giant, who the kids loved. He was so heavily utilized the YMCA hired him as one of their afterschool program staff at Bester.
- Our three South Hagerstown High Scholars: Grace Heinrich, Cameron Dorsey and Chelsea Klein. Grace, a former Bester student, ran weekly groups for girls through curriculum from the Soroptomist club. We hope to continue to build a ladder of leadership with SHHS in a variety of ways that continues to strengthen the connection between those schools. Grace is still engaged with the Bester YMCA Afterschool Program as a part-time employee.
- Saint James provided two students, Ryan Brown and Joseph George to help cover the duration of summer camp as full-time volunteers as a service component of their scholarship award from the Fletcher Foundation.
- Partnered with Hagerstown Community College and their supportive funders to provide scholarships for ten Bester youth to attend College for Kids, a variety of week long summer programs located at the HCC campus to engage them in exciting learning opportunities and become immersed in the college experience.
- Funded Bester student Lyrah to attend swim camp with Coach Neil Parrot at Potterfield Pool: Her mom Cassandra said, “At the beginning, Lyrah didn’t know how to swim. She finished the summer program knowing how to swim with confidence. She didn’t make it to district competitions, but she made it through without disqualifications. We couldn’t have put her through the program and we are so thankful she was able to go!” What did Lyra think? “I love swimming!!!”



**Food Resources** – Supported BJ Lushbaugh and the Bester Elementary Food Pantry in collaboration with the Maryland Food Bank by providing manpower and organizing capacity. Visited Eastern Elementary to study their food pantry process to understand best practices. In addition, managed two community food drops, where close to 10,000 pounds was distributed to families in need during the financially challenging holiday season. Additional large food distribution events are planned for Spring 2017.

**An MOU for Therapeutic Services** – received through Washington County Public Schools allowing graduate social work students as well as licensed staff to enter Bester Elementary School and provide support to their administrative team and to identified students who have received a signed release of the parent. Examples of this include:

- Alexa Castle - Completed a yearlong MSW internship via University of Maryland at Baltimore from October 2015-May 2016 providing individual mentoring and group work for a select group of young women in the 4th and 5th grade.
- Krystal Holl – Joined BCOH in August of 2016 as an MSW intern from Salisbury University building on the work Alexa started the previous year, offering individual mentoring, groups, and general support to the human service team at Bester with a variety of tasks. Krystal also has many other opportunities she is currently engaged with including classroom support, parent training, meeting neighborhood groups and special event support.
- Keith Fanjoy, LCSW-C, provided weekly groups to select groups of 4th and 5th grade boys focused on social skills, leadership and friendship. In the fall of 2016, the focus of this group shifted towards service to others, with each group taking on a focus of how to give back to their community in meaningful ways.

## SPECIAL EVENTS

### ENCOURAGING POSITIVE BEHAVIORS IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING

Collaborating with the existing Bester Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Team we supported a variety of events.

- **Ice Cream Social** for all students with special speaker Frisbee Guy (9/30)
- **Fall Fest** – Volunteers worked with Cronise farm to leverage school dollars (10/25)
- **Harlem Ambassadors Touring Basketball Team** – A team of school teachers and community members played the pro team at South Hagerstown High for Bester families, 225 attended!
- **Bester Family night with USMH at Hager Park** – Included dinner and a free game next door for the entire family afterwards at Municipal Stadium to watch the Hagerstown Suns – Even with poor weather, 351 kids and family members attended, while community partners such as the Soroptomist club and others volunteered their time to ensure the event ran smoothly



- **Governor's Visit (Pictured Above)** – Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan accepted our invitation and visited Bester Elementary on Thursday October 13th. He joined a second grade class in session and also talked to about 90 fourth-graders about working hard and persevering — including how he did that to both become governor and beat cancer. Hogan told Bester Elementary students that they will encounter hard times in life and unplanned things will happen, but if they work and study hard, they can make just about anything happen. He told them, “I know you’re all going to grow up to succeed and do great things.”
- **Family STEM Career Night** – We partnered Bester Elementary with USM Hagerstown, Hagerstown CC, Western Maryland Consortium, One Stop Job Center and staffing agencies to bring career and education opportunities to a fun non-stigmatizing family career event where parents could explore resources while their children explored next to them with fun career activities. 380 people attended and one parent commented, “I have to congratulate you and your staff on the most exciting STEM night I have ever seen. I am so happy that I had the opportunity to be part of it. This is the type of Bester that I have been hoping to see. Bravo! I am sure that the kids will be talking about it for days to come.”
- **SHHS Grad walk** – This past June, a new tradition was developed where seniors came back to Bester to march through the halls in their full graduation attire and give words of wisdom to the select students at a special assembly.

## GRADUATES RETURN TO SPEAK WITH STUDENTS

### A SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR CURRENT STUDENTS

“Life is hard. It’s hectic. Don’t let anyone stop you. Put on those Jordans and dribble down that court.”

“Take more chances. I used to have bad anxiety and stay in the house. Life is short. I learned that when my grandma passed away. You have to keep going and take risks. Don’t be scared to take risks.”

“My father passed away. People judged me on my grades or how I looked. Bands and clubs helped. They made you feel understood. If you want to feel welcome, join the band or join a club. You’ll have someone to look up to, whether it’s a teacher or a friend. No matter what you go through, you can overcome, if you put yourself in the right place.”



“Set the bar high. Dream the impossible. It’s good that it scares you. That means you are challenging yourself. My parents were Ethiopian immigrants with little opportunity. They told me that with education you can do anything.

I remembered that when I got to high school. I took every shot I could. This Fall, I will attend Princeton University. This isn’t unique to me. **Stick with your dreams. Work hard and stay true to them.**”

- Valedictorian, Pictured Above



## THE ALICE VIRGINIA AND DAVID W. FLETCHER FOUNDATION

The foundation continues to play a critical role in the development of the initiative, as highlighted in their recent feature in Exponent Philanthropy's 2016 annual report. They have built on their initial fiscal commitment of \$222,000 from September of 2015 through August of 2016, with another investment of \$272,000 to sustain the work through December of 2017. With the partnership of the Washington County Department of Social Services and Washington County Public Schools, long-term sustainability is our top priority moving forward; consolidated financial information on Bester Community of Hope is available via San Mar. We know from studying other sites across the country that this work is an investment in families and communities that requires decades of effort. We are humbled to play a role in moving towards that vision.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT







# SAN MAR



Washington County  
Department of  
Social Services

**The Alice Virginia and  
David W. Fletcher Foundation**



casey family programs  
fostering families. fostering change.™

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**2016 ANNUAL REPORT | DREAMS INTO ACTION**