

BESTER COMMUNITY OF HOPE

FY19 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friends,

FY 19 was a year of growth and celebration. It was truly a humbling experience looking back over the last year in preparation of this report. It provided a renewed sense of purpose and direction. This journey has always been a process, one that has required great patience and grace, however the fruits of our labor are more evident than ever, and I am honored to share this annual snapshot with you.

Building on our past successes, we restructured our staffing to allow a strategic and intentional force in each of our three domains of work: Families, Schools, and Neighborhood. Through strong leadership and success in each domain, we more than doubled our workforce which included increased hiring of South End residents, strengthened mechanisms to promote resident and family driven service, as well as securing additional funding streams reinforcing sustainability.

Hope is ALIVE in the South End of Hagerstown and is made possible through strong partnerships with residents, families, community partners and donors. I would be remiss if I did not recognize the selfless and dedicated BCOH staff who make the magic happen daily. This group of amazing individuals never hesitate to jump in wherever they are needed regardless of the challenge or barriers they face. They are the DREAM TEAM! It is an honor to work alongside each of them and support their endeavors. I am immensely grateful to the South End families who allow us in their homes to share their struggles and celebrate their victories. We treasure the trust bestowed upon us by this great community and vow to continue to safeguard that trust with integrity. We are simply a catalyst for change therefore the achievements presented in this report are a collective celebration of many.

President and CEO of Casey Family Programs, Dr. William Bell eloquently describes a community of hope:

"A Community of Hope is a powerful place. It is a place where residents raise their hands and say, "I will stand with you and be the hope that you need to reach your dreams." It is a place where businesses see beyond the bottom line to the promise and potential in every young person and family that walks through their doors. It is a place where people recognize that every family, no matter the conditions they live in, wants the absolute best futures for their children. It is a place where government is a partner with the community in providing the support and services that can change a life. Hope is a place where every child wakes up knowing that they aren't invisible, that someone sees in them the potential to achieve their dreams."

With your continued support and partnership, we are committed to ensuring this remains a reality for the South End community. We ARE better together!

With gratitude,

Jen Younker, LCSW-C

Director of Bester Community of Hope

NEW OFFICE

For over a year, the BCOH team operated from two different office locations due to expansion of the Family Support team. As we began searching for a larger space to accommodate the team, it was important to remain in the heart of the Bester Elementary School catchment. After considering several locations, we were excited when a suite became available just a few doors down from our original office. This space also allowed for partnership with the Jack

E. Barr Center for Wellbeing, the latest addition to San Mar Family & Community Services. This partnership allows mental health services to be provided to individuals and families in the community. Thanks to our friends and partners at Ladders to Leaders in preparing our new space, the team moved into 356 Mill Street in January.



A ribbon cutting ceremony on May 9th celebrating this milestone was hosted by the Washington County Chamber of Commerce. Proclamations were presented from the City of Hagerstown, County Commissioners, Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Rep, David Trone, U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, Del. Paul Corderman and U.S. Sen. Andrew Serafini. Additional guests included long-term south end residents and City Administrator Scott Nicewarner and his wife, Tressa, Guinn Rogers, CEO of United Way Washington County, Kristi Bachtell, former principal of Bester Elementary School and many others.



SENATE RECOGNITION

BY TAMELA BAKER, HERALD MEDIA, MAY 22, 2019

In January, the Bester Community of Hope — a cooperative initiative to strengthen families in the neighborhood of Bester Elementary School — won national recognition from Casey Family Programs. It was recognized for bringing together public, business, nonprofit, philanthropic and community partners to improve the safety and success of children and their families. On Thursday, the Maryland Senate recognized San Mar Family and Community Services, the organizing agency for the Community of Hope, for “being awarded the national Jim Casey Building Communities of Hope Award for the Bester Community Hope Initiative and making a difference in the lives of Maryland children, families, and communities.” Sen. Andrew Serafini, R-Washington, called the Bester program a model for other communities.

San Mar CEO Keith Fanjoy, Washington County Social Services Director Mike Piercy and family support worker Teri Conrad were on hand for the citation. Bester Community of Hope is a San Mar initiative that had its beginning in 2014, as the longtime residential facility sought to provide services to families earlier — before there is any need to place children in foster care.

Partnering with Bester Elementary, Social Services, Meritus Health, Hagerstown police and several other community agencies, San Mar has endeavored to connect families with available services including health care, after-school activities and other school-

based programs. “We’re really excited today to receive this resolution,” Fanjoy told Herald-Mail Media. “It’s a validation of a lot of hard work from a lot of different people. And really, when we come down to Annapolis and Sen. Serafini’s taken the time to really share our story with the community, ultimately that’s going to help us to continue on in the future.”

The initiative has had “critical funding” from Social Services, the Fletcher Foundation and Casey Family Programs, Fanjoy added. “Essentially, it’s a place-based strategy to help children and families be stronger, with the idea that we can reduce the amount of children entering into the foster care system. The results we’re seeing is a greater investment in the families in our community,” Piercy said.

Whenever a child can be safely kept at home and parents are provided resources to help, he added, “we’re not only preventing a child from coming (into foster care) now, but we’re also reducing the trauma that child might experience in separation. So there’s an economic return on investment, but there’s also a social return on investment, which is families — their capacity being deepened and improved.” Conrad said there’s a referral process in place for bringing families into the program, but “we are there to reach out to the community. ... We try to connect with everyone in the family and let them identify what their concerns are, and help them ... reach the goals that they have as a family.”



CASEY AWARD

ARTICLE FROM CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS

2019 CASEY EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN AWARDS

Casey Family Programs is pleased to announce the recipients of its 2019 Casey Excellence for Children Awards and Jim Casey Building Communities of Hope Awards.

The awards, presented January 14-16 in Seattle, recognize outstanding individuals and communities for their distinguished work, exceptional leadership and tireless dedication to improving the lives of children and families in America.

“The winners of these awards are making the world a better place for children and families,” said David C. Mills, chair of the Board of Trustees of Casey Family Programs. “They are helping others navigate life’s challenges, serving as role models and advocating for improvements to the systems that help ensure the safety and success of children and their families. We are honored to recognize their accomplishments and the critical work they are doing.”

“Every day in communities across America, leaders from every sector and at all levels are working to build Communities of Hope for children and families,” said Dr. William C. Bell, President and CEO of Casey Family Programs. “These awards are a recognition that everyone has a role to play in safely reducing the need for



CASEY AWARD CONTINUED

foster care by strengthening families and ensuring every child has what they need in their lives to reach their fullest potential. It is an honor each year to recognize a few of the people who are making a real difference today in their communities and in the lives of children by building hope.”

JIM CASEY BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF HOPE AWARD

Named in honor of the founder of Casey Family Programs, these awards recognize communities that have brought together public, business, nonprofit, philanthropic and community partners to improve the safety and success of children and their families.

The Bester community in Hagerstown, Maryland, can be a challenging place for families to raise children safely, with a high poverty rate, health challenges and a high rate of children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. In the face of these challenges, San Mar Family & Community Services began questioning the value of their group home and foster placement services and whether there was a better approach to improving the safety of children and their families. Based on their discussions, San Mar decided to shift their focus from treatment to prevention. They formed a partnership with Casey Family Programs to launch a demonstration project for a new approach to child welfare. Hagerstown is a place where public and private organizations — nonprofits, philanthropies, government, businesses and communities — collaborate closely to build a Community of Hope. They focus on prevention with a place-based strategy for positive outcomes for children and families located in the Bester Elementary School neighborhood. The early outcomes have been promising: Bester Elementary was identified by Washington County Public Schools as having the most improved attendance in Washington County, and the Maryland Center for Character Education at Stevenson University awarded Bester Elementary the 2017-2018 School of the Year award.



WATCH THE VIDEO ONLINE AT: [YOUTU.BE/IWITKQKKIV8](https://youtu.be/iwITKQKKIV8)

COMMUNITY PARTNERS: WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER

PARTNERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR WORK. TACKLING COMMUNITY BARRIERS SUCH AS HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT BE DONE ALONE. PARTNERS HELP SHAPE OUR SERVICES AND CONNECT FAMILIES WITH THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO GROW STRONG AND BE RESILIENT.

"As an initiative to serve the homeless, The Hagerstown Revitalization Corporation, a division of the Hagerstown Housing Authority purchased four houses from the City of Hagerstown. Our goal is to provide a second chance to those in immediate need of housing who may otherwise be on our waitlist for several years. Bester Community of Hope (BCOH) has been a great partner with this endeavor, providing us with three families so far that fit our mission. BCOH not only provided us with great referrals but continues to provide supportive services to the families housed within our newly developed program."

-Dianne Rudisill, Hagerstown Housing Authority

"Over the past three years I've seen shift in our community; a positive shift. A shift to collaboration instead of silo practice. Professionals with different bias, views and opinions coming together for a common goal and that is how I am able to sleep at night. Knowing that BCOH puts in their best effort to revitalize this community. They work diligently to achieve this daily and I am proud to work beside them."

- Rob Zellner, Peer Recovery Specialist, Washington County Health Department

"Do you know why I keep coming back? I keep coming back because you guys believe in me and value my talents. I have struggled with self-worth and coming here makes me feel like I am worth something. You make me feel like I matter, heard and valued. This is my way of saying thank you."

- Community Resident

"My relationship with BCOH has benefited my professional and personal relationships. Skills and understanding I have developed while working with the professional staff have been put to good use enriching the community. - Officer Routhier, Community Resource Officer with Hagerstown Police Department



**"PARTNERSHIP IS NOT A POSTURE
BUT A PROCESS – A CONTINUOUS
PROCESS THAT GROWS STRONGER
EACH YEAR AS WE DEVOTE
OURSELVES TO COMMON TASKS"**

- JOHN F KENNEDY



Above: RBC members' support made it possible for dreams to come true for BCOH children this Christmas. Members invited San Mar staff to enjoy an evening of great food, fun, and friendship at their Christmas gift-wrapping event. A check was presented to BCOH during this pinnacle event.



RECOVERY COACH ACADEMY

In May, BCOH hosted Michelle and Darryl Lennon from the Greater Tilton Area Family Resource Center in New Hampshire who provided a weeklong training on Substance Use Disorder and its impact on family well-being. Through the support from Casey Family Programs and the Washington County Department of Social Services, BCOH was able to offer the Recovery Coach Academy for FREE to all participants. Thirty-two participants received their certification through C-CAR and are equipped to provide effective support to those impacted by the opioid epidemic.

PARTICIPANTS CONSISTED OF:

- 9 BCOH staff
- 7 Bester Community Residents
- 11 people in recovery
- And 5 additional representatives from community partners

We would like to thank the following organizational partners who participated in the trainings and are working to strengthen our community, serving as allies to those affected by Substance Use Disorder: ADAC, Brooke's House, Change Health, Community Chapels, Dad's Connection, Day Reporting Center, Ladders to Leaders, Maryland Department of Health, Mental Health Association, TruNorth, Rehoboth UMC, Washington County Department of Human Services, Washington County Free Library and Washington County Health Department.

We also would like to provide a special thank you to our colleagues, Michelle and Darryl Lennon, for their commitment in helping those affected by Substance Use Disorder and working to ensure that there is ALWAYS HOPE in Hagerstown!



Above: City Councilwoman Emily Keller, Washington County Health Department staff Vicky Sterling and Rob Zellner joined in on the last day of training to provide information on local resources and congratulate participants.



TOGETHER WITH FAMILIES CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 15-17 • CLEVELAND, OH

South End parents, Eric McDonald, Sherri McDonald, & Lakeisha Thrower and Washington County Department of Human Services staff Lashea Mills and Denise Marshall attended the 2018 Together With Families Conference in Cleveland, OH with the BCOH Team. Attendees were able to connect with agencies across the country sharing best practices in the family support field as well as participate in breakout sessions addressing critical topics such as the impact of substance use disorder, family engagement, collective impact models and resiliency-based trauma work.



This collaborative opportunity is facilitated by the National Family Support Network, Center for the Study of Social Policy and the Greater Cleveland Family Strengthening Network.

INTERNS



MITCHELL HAINES

Shepherd University, Bachelors of Social Work.

KERRY FAIR

Salisbury University, Masters of Social Work.
Currently employed as the Neighborhood Partnership Coordinator.

HANNAH WILLETTS

University of Maryland School of Social Work,
Masters of Social Work.

SAMANTHA BARRETT

West Virginia University, Masters of Social Work.
Hired as Care Coordinator in March.

HALEY GIECK

Shepherd University, Bachelors of Social Work.
Hired as a part time Program Support Staff in April.

CHARITY MITCHELL

Widener University, Masters
of Social Work.

FAMILIES

STATS

- 74 referrals
- 53 new families (158 children/100 adults - 258 individuals) received services with 93 families served
- 1,092 home visits provided
- Linkages and direct services provided - 14,912
- 54 successful transitions



"BCOH has been a real blessing to our lives. I think you all so much for everything you have done to help out our family. I am sad our services have ended mostly because I really need the love and support from another adult person. The encouragement and confirmation that I am doing a great job as a parent from someone who is completely sincere and not judgmental. Although I am sad, I am also happy to know that this service will be offered to others in need. 100% you all are the best!"

- Parent



PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BY MONICA JOHNSON, FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER

The Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) is a group of parents and caregivers served by the Community Triage Services program who are committed to providing input to Bester Community of Hope regarding programs and services offered. The objectives of the PAC are to cultivate positive connections and social networks, develop skills through engagement in leadership roles and increase program sustainability by provide feedback.

Over the last year, 12 parents served on the PAC and exceeded this commitment in a BIG way. Monthly meetings gave members the opportunity to provide feedback, plan service projects, reduce isolation, create positive connections, take on leadership roles and experience personal growth.

REACHING OUT: CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS AND REDUCING ISOLATION

Positive connections help reduce social isolation and strengthen communities. The PAC worked to build positive connections using place-based strategies and identified local community partners who serve families in the South End of Hagerstown. They noted agencies such as Hagerstown Police Department, Washington County Department of Social Services, the Washington County Free Library, the Community Book Warehouse, The Hub at USMH, The Crown Hotel (a local extended stay hotel) and Bester Elementary School and then embraced those agencies by planting seeds of collaboration and hope.

“We had a lot of fun planning a caramel apple bar for the teachers at Bester Elementary,” reflected a committee member. “We made apple magnets and appreciation crafts and set up the teacher lounge. It gave me a sense of accomplishment and I think it helped raise morale at the school. We just wanted the teachers to know how much we appreciate all they do.”

Another member agreed and added, “Teachers are not just about the teaching, they are people who take care of my kids, so it was about trust. I wanted them to know that I see their hard work.”

Other outreach activities by the PAC included delivering thirty 24x24 inch snowflakes to the Hagerstown Police Department, collaborating with the Community Book Warehouse at The Hub at USMH to bring the county summer reading program to BCOH families, supporting local churches in efforts to rehome toys and tools, and hosting Community Coffee at Bester Community of Hope.

After reading the list of outreach activities following a recent brainstorming session, one member commented, “When I sit and think about it, we’ve done so much. It didn’t ever feel like work. Every time we meet it feels like we have so many ideas. It’s the time we run out of - never the energy!”



REACHING IN: PERSONAL GROWTH, LEADERSHIP AND FEEDBACK

In addition to networking, the mission of the PAC encourages parent growth into leadership roles within the organization. Members are nominated by a Family Support Worker and go through an onboarding process of developing a personal vision board and growth goals. “When my Family Support Worker asked me to serve on the committee, I felt flattered and valued. She used words like ‘advocate’ and called me intelligent. I feel like this experience has been invaluable.” An example of leadership is the PAC involvement in Community Coffee. Members attended a training on active listening and group dynamics and then put those skills to use. On the first Thursday of each month members worked with the Neighborhood Partnership Coordinator to stimulate conversation and facilitate new ideas. “People had lots of good ideas,” a PAC member recalled. “My job at the Community Coffee was to write them on a huge piece of paper and ask questions that got everyone talking, making that idea super exciting; even if it was a small idea, I made it exciting. A year ago, I wouldn’t have even come out of my house, now I feel like I have a job to do.”

Feedback through leadership roles is a vital component of the PAC. After reflecting on Community Coffee, another member noted how outside agency attitudes towards families have shifted. He stated, “I’ve worked with a lot of people getting help raising my daughter. When they saw me leading a discussion, suddenly they saw the real me. As a parent receiving services, I knew that there were times when I knew what I wanted to do but just needed a little support making it to my goal. Bester Community of Hope was there for me and helped me, so this is a way I can give back.” Growth and leadership opportunities reached a national platform when two PAC members attended the Together for Families Conference in Cleveland, Ohio this spring with staff from BCOH.

“... THERE ARE DADS LIKE ME TRYING TO DO THIS DAD THING ALONE AND THEY DON’T HAVE TO. WE CAN BE STRONG, AND BE TOGETHER AT THE SAME TIME.”

- PAC MEMBER

REACHING ONWARD: CONTINUED WORK OF THE PAC

The PAC continues to grow and develop as members gain skills and group dynamics shift. The mission remains unchanged, however there are new plans on the horizon. Men on the PAC who have personal experiences combined with a passion for fatherhood formed a sub-committee called Men’s Council. With the support of the PAC and several Bester Community of Hope staff, Men’s Council plans to show this passion in an exciting way. Monthly men’s events called “Dude’s Day” will serve as a first step in gathering dads and father figures together in order to create a community of hope for this sometimes overlooked population of parents. “We want to have momentum like other communities,” said a Men’s Council member. “There are dads like me trying to do this dad thing alone, and they don’t have to. We can be strong, and be together at the same time.” To date, Men’s Council is well on their way to gaining momentum. They completed a “Father Friendly Checkup” of Bester Community of Hope and began building a relationship with the National Fatherhood Initiative. They explored several program websites and brainstormed ways to bring events to the community. Over the next year, expect excellence in fatherhood programming!

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The PAC of Bester Community Hope is a reflection of priorities and values of the organization. Without feedback from the PAC, we are potentially blind to the challenges and barriers people face. As a result, our actions and responses have the potential to be useless. With feedback from the PAC, however, we gain insight and consideration and are able to perceive our work through the lens of the families we serve. We have redefined the family driven process by encouraging families to be involved on an inclusive level. If we say we are serving families, then families need to be part of the process.

FAMILY DAY

CELEBRATING CONNECTIONS AT FAMILY DAY • APRIL 19, 2019

Pouring rain didn't stop countless families from attending Family Day on this Good Friday at the new Bester Community of Hope offices in Hagerstown, Maryland. This year's theme "Wild About Families" transformed the community office into a jungle of activities centered around family photographs and activities about thriving families. "Our goal every year is to have fun, make connections and celebrate all the things that make families strong by promoting the protective factors," explained Bester Community of Hope Director Jennifer Younker. The protective factors encompass five priorities for families: social & emotional competence of children, concrete supports in times of need, social connections, parental resilience and knowledge of parenting & child development.

Upstairs in the social connections station, families took a quote about belonging from author Jane Howard and created unique posters with hand prints comprising of all members of the family. Neighborhood Partnership Coordinator Kerry Fair explained, "Social connections matter because we are all part of the same community and when we know each other we can help each other." As one parent completed her poster she shared, "Before I got involved here, I wasn't very social because I have social anxiety. But now it's easy because I know people."

At the social and emotional competence of children station, children built mindfulness kits and took home the book "Greedy Steve" to learn all about making healthy choices. Local Community Resource Officer Alex Routhier was at the event helping at the concrete resources in times of need station, and noted, "It's great to see how families worked through all of the activities together. Kids are really honest, they know what they need and what they don't need." Routhier wasn't able to finish his thought as a child, Kimaya, ran into him for a bear hug from their past positive connections in the neighborhood. Knowledge of parenting & child development was demonstrated through a variety of games families attempted that highlighted exploration, discovery and strategy. Lead Family Support Worker Teri Conrad explained, "Kids learn through play and it can help build the relationships between parent and child."



BESTER COMMUNITY OF HOPE

FAMILY DAY CONTINUED

Parental resilience was showcased in two different stations, parents identified the strengths in their family system, and then took a moment to receive a massage from licensed massage therapist Ola Jones. San Mar volunteer Tim Harrison noted, "I'm seeing a lot of smiling faces and happy people. I also see that a lot of love went into preparing for this day." As one family was leaving for the day, a mother noted, "We were in a rush, so I didn't get a chance to get a massage." Her daughter interrupted, "Don't worry mom, I'll give you one when we get home, that's why I'm here. I'm here to help!"

Bester Community of Hope and activities like Family Day are made possible by the generosity of our core partners: the Washington County Department of Social Services, the Alice Virginia & David W. Fletcher Foundation and Casey Family Programs.



PARENT CAFÉ

We continue to provide monthly cafés that offer a safe space for parents to have conversations that strengthen their Protective Factors. Participants share ideas that can assist them in taking care of themselves and their families and raise strong, happy children. Parent Cafés occur in collaboration with several community partners such as The Judy Center, Early Childhood Advisory Council, The Hub at USMH and the Birth to Kindergarten Program. Cafés are held at different community sites as well as different times of the day to increase accessibility. During this year, we had the opportunity to participate in the 1st Annual Parent Café Conference during which we presented on the topics of Parent Cafés to dual language populations and “Mix It Up! New Ways to Present the Protective Factors.”

- **# of sessions: 11**
- **Average # of participants: 19 participants per session**

H.O.P.E.

Helpful Opportunities for Parental Enrichment (H.O.P.E.) continues to offer a space for Hispanic families to increase their English language skills, get connected to community resources and identify possible solutions to daily struggles. We embarked on our second phase by offering summer sessions as well as



increasing the frequency so that sessions occurred weekly. Our partners at The Hub at USMH continued to offer support by hosting us during the summer and providing school readiness and enrichment to the littlest members of the family.

- **# of sessions: 32**
- **Average # of participants: 8 participants per session**

THAT FAMILY THING

Parents of children of all ages benefit from a supportive environment and opportunities to talk about challenges and successes in parenting. In response to the absence of these opportunities for parents with adolescents and teens, That Family Thing offered a monthly gathering (January-June) for parents to benefit from peer connections. In partnership with Discovery Station and the Beacon House, parents were able to participate while their children were engaged in active learning and social experiences.

- **# of sessions: 5**
- **Average # of participants: 7 per session**

LEARNING PARTIES

We continue the collaboration with The Hub at USMH, Hagerstown Area Religious Council, Early Childhood Advisory Council and The Judy Center to offer Learning Parties. During these four-week sessions, parents increase their basic knowledge in areas of child development as well as gain tools and skills to promote raising healthy and happy children. This year we hosted a Learning Party specifically for Hispanic families that explored Social Foundations

- **# of sessions: 1 session: 4 weeks**
- **Average # of participants: 8 per session**

SENS CARE TEAM

BCOH collaborates with the Washington County Department of Human Services and other local stakeholders in the development and implementation of the Substance Exposed Newborn Care Team. The SENS Care Team values statement, "In all of our interactions with Washington County newborns and families, we will be guided by the following values: self-determination, human dignity, respect, advocacy, respect, advocacy, and the non-judgmental provision of services," sets the tone for all outputs of the team. During this reporting year the team has:

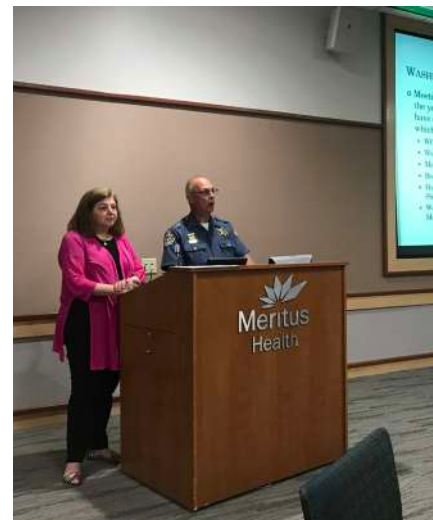
- Completed a strategic planning session and team development opportunity where members identified the values and mission of the team
- Explored implications of new state law regarding reporting & responding to babies born exposed to substances. Continued discussions on current protocols (hospital and DSS) and how private providers can provide voluntary family support services
- Conducted a survey to women whom had a live birth within the last 10 years or pregnant to determine the experiences receiving care and availability of services specific to Washington County. Survey was administered at Babypalooza and additional safety education was provided. Two additional surveys were created to target local OBGYNs & Pediatricians
- Public/community education
- BCOH provided in-home family support services to multiple families referred by local agencies during pregnancy and post-delivery.
- Through the generosity of Casey Family Programs, BCOH was able to purchase 60 pack-n-plays and 30 mama-roos to families in Washington County. Additionally, onesies promoting safe sleep and positive parenting practices was designed and dispersed to our newest community residents.



CHILD FATALITY PREVENTION EFFORTS

As part of our global efforts to reduce child abuse and fatality as well as promote family permanence and as core members of our local Child Fatality Prevention Committee, the following were accomplished in the last year:

- Secured funding for numerous projects identified by the Child Fatality Prevention Committee strategically designed to address fatality trends in Washington County
- Held the second annual Child Fatality Prevention conference on June 22, 2018. The event was sponsored by Washington County Department of Human Services, Casey Family Programs, and Bester Community of Hope. Guest speaker Teri Covington, MPH Director of Within Our Reach associated with the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities presented on the recommendations of the National Strategy to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities which included primary prevention opportunities and non-formal mechanisms designed to promote protective factors within families and communities. She explored the 21st Century Approach as a Public Health initiative based on physical and societal implications with prevention at the core. Claudia Remington, from the Maryland State Council on Child Abuse & Neglect, presented the state of Maryland's perspective of prevention by reviewing current statistics as well as prevention and intervention provide in the Baltimore region.



Local presenters included Rachel Mazloun (WCDHS), Officer McCauley (Washington County Sheriff's Office), Lori Sprecher (Meritus Medical Center), Robin Handler (Washington County Public Schools), Sheriff Mullendore (Washington County Sheriff's Office), Mary McPherson (Washington County Health Department), and Jennifer Younker (BCOH).

- In collaboration with the Washington County Health Department, BCOH posted over 30 "Safe Sleep Floor Talkers" all throughout the catchment area. Thanks to the support of local businesses and agencies, the Floor Talkers can be seen in the local market (Locust Point Market), Community Free Clinic, Washington County Free Library, liquor store, local pool, Headstart, WCDHS, etc.



SCHOOLS

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

We entered the first year of full implementation of the Caring School Community curriculum. CSC provides school personnel with supplemental curriculum geared towards age appropriate social and emotional development with 32 classrooms from kindergarten to 5th grade participating. A strategic implementation plan was developed and monitored throughout the year. In addition, BCOH conducted surveys with staff, students and caregivers at the beginning and end of the year to determine the impact of the implementation of the curriculum and school climate. BCOH provided training opportunities, technical assistance, and monitoring during the academic year. School teachers provided daily morning and closing circles with students as an enhancement to academic curriculum focused on student social and emotional development. At the beginning of the school year, Josh Cole, a consultant for The Center for Collaborative Classrooms, provided professional development to teachers, provided as well as consultation with administration.

■ **Total # of circles provided: 5,084**

This academic year, Bester Elementary also prioritized space within the building to develop their “Caring Cave.” The Caring Cave was utilized as the mindfulness room where students could visit to explore preventative opportunities or in moments of dysregulation. Ali, Atman and Jamar from the Holistic Life Foundation taught teachers effective use of mindfulness techniques and later returned to provide that same opportunity to students. One student stated, “I didn’t know my tummy did not have to hurt everyday,” as he learned about the mind body connection and techniques used to mitigate stomach aches associated with anxiety.

THERAPEUTIC MENTORING

Student interns provided individual therapeutic mentoring sessions to students to build upon social and emotional skill development.

■ **# of sessions: 46 individual sessions**

SOCIAL SKILLS GROUP

Social skills groups were provided by BCOH interns to select students in grades 3rd-5th. Topics included self-regulation, peer relationships and communication.

■ **# of sessions: 20 group sessions**

BESTER HEALTH CENTER

BCOH, through a grant received by HRSA, manages the Bester Health Center, a service collaborative with Washington County Public Schools, The Community Free Clinic and Meritus Health. Registered students have access to an on-site Nurse Practitioner for medical needs without ever needing to leave the school grounds. Students who need to leave school due to an illness receive a “wellness bag” with necessary get well supplies including clorox wipes, soup, ginger ale, tissues, wellness information, lice shampoo and more. During the majority of the FY19 school year we successfully worked with MSDE to become a certified school based health center while our acute care services were closed.



BOOST

Fall of 2018 was the closing season of BOOST programming as we worked to launch the South End 21 after-school program. Eight clubs provided 75 students with enriching activities.

CLUBS

I2 WITH MS. ANN MARIE LUCAS

Students explored the seven emotional intelligences through hands on experiments and firsthand experiences.



■ 12 students

GIRLS ON THE RUN WITH OFFICER ROUTHIER AND ASHLEY ROUSH

Girls were empowered to explore their inner selves while training physically for a 5k.

■ 12 students



BROADWAY BEARS WITH MS. BLAIR BOSCOLO

Students honed in on their vocal performance skills and learned several songs to perform for the holidays.

■ 16 students

KIDS COUNCIL WITH MS. LINDA SILVER

Students developed leadership and advocacy skills as representatives for their grades.

■ 10 students

PAGE TURNERS WITH MS. KRISTY RUBECK

Students began a Gordon Korman trilogy and explored the nuances of text.

■ 15 students

LIVERPOOL FC WITH ALAN LYDIATE

Always a favorite, students improved their soccer skills on the field and social skills, too.

■ 23 students



SOUTH END 21/ MSDE GRANT

In fall of 2018, BCOH received notification of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant award from the Maryland State Department of Education. The first day of programming occurred on March 25th and occurred daily from 3:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. This grant allows BCOH to provide free after school programming to students at Bester Elementary and E. Russell Hicks Middle School. Students receive an hour of fun academic instruction followed by an hour of creative enrichment provided by community partners. Meal and transportation are provided in partnership with Washington County Public Schools. In preparation of next year, modified programming was provided at Bester Elementary (grades 3-5th) in FY19, with full expansion to include K-5th grade and students at E. Russell Hicks in FY20.



SOUTH END 21 CLUBS SPRING 2019

PEACEMAKERS

Led by the Community Action Council, students practiced skills for problem solving, teamwork, and character building.

■ **Total Enrollment: 17**

SUPER STARS

Led by Kimberly Hadley, a paraprofessional with WCPS, this club focused on building confidence, teamwork and self-esteem through various activities and lessons.

■ **Total Enrollment: 19**

BADGES FOR BASEBALL

Led by Hagerstown Police Department, Officer Routhier and Ashley Roush, students enjoyed hands on structured games focused on healthy habits that build character and skills in leadership & cooperative team engagement.

■ **Total Enrollment: 22**

UPCYCLED ART

Led by Kanika Pinto, a paraprofessional within WCPS, this club focused on recycling and repurposing computer pieces and other related materials to create one of a kind masterpieces.

■ **Total Enrollment: 12**



HOT SHOTS

Led by a local neighborhood resident and coach, Thomas Rawlings, students developed skills on the court as well as in leadership and teamwork.

■ **Total Enrollment: 16**

SPECIAL EDUCATION CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

As a committed and active member of SECAC, BCOH assisted with the first annual Special Education Resource Fair hosted at Bester Elementary School on April 13th. Event aimed to connect families to local organizations that provide services to children with mental health concerns, students with 504 plans and special education IFSP & IEP birth through 21.

■ **BCOH participated in 13 advisory meetings.**

NEIGHBORHOOD

BETTER TOGETHER

In the country of Rwanda, once a month all citizens come together for “Umuganda”. This translates as “coming together in common purpose to achieve an outcome for the benefit of the person, society or nation”. This concept led to the development of our Better Together initiative, a monthly opportunity for community members to come together in acts of service in the South End neighborhoods.

The first event was held on March 22 and welcomed 35 students and 4 teachers from Highland View Academy to the western portion of the catchment for a community clean up. Joined by Officer Mark Morris, from the Hagerstown Police Department, students filled 25 large bags with trash from the streets around Elgin Station. BCOH maintains an ongoing dialogue with local houses of faith to continue meaningful projects throughout the year.



WALKING SCHOOL BUS

The Walking School Bus meets elementary students each Wednesday morning before school in their neighborhood. Students come to the stop, enjoy light morning refreshments and activities with each other before walking as a group to school. Students not only learn safe pedestrian behavior, but are often joined by special guests who help deepen their connection to the community, experience new activities, learn more about health and fitness. Each stop benefits from Walking School Bus Ambassadors - residents who live in the neighborhood, have a student at the school, and who take leadership to organize the walk to school.





AMERICA'S FAVORITE CROSSING GUARD

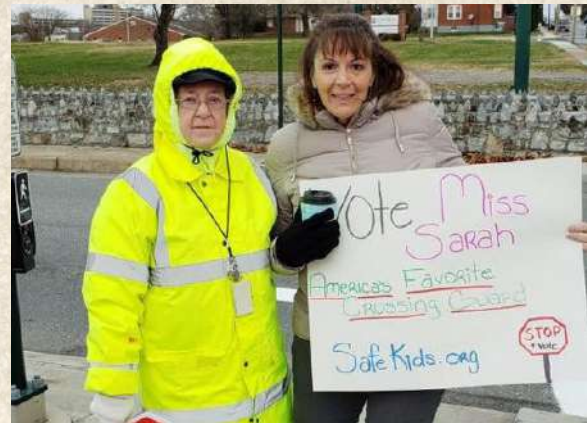
By Kerry Fair, Neighborhood Partnership Coordinator

Every morning on my way to the office during the school year, I saw her. Sarah Mason stood on the same corner regardless of the weather. Through the Walking School Bus, I had the opportunity to get to know her a little and knew she had been on that same corner for about fifty years. Miss Sarah was now crossing the grandchildren of children she crossed many years before. When Kelly Llewelyn, trauma nurse at Meritus and Safe Kids of Washington County coordinator, called to ask if we knew of a crossing guard to nominate for the America's Favorite Crossing Guard contest, it seemed natural to recognize Miss Sarah.

It was an exciting but chilly November morning when we first told Miss Sarah she had been nominated. Surrounded by the families in the neighborhood she works, she was surprised with flowers and many hugs from the elementary students on their way in to school. "Well, ain't this something! I've been on this corner for oh, just about fifty years or more and I couldn't imagine doing anything else."

Sarah Mason began as a crossing guard in Washington County, MD, during the mid 1960's. "Back then, we worked for the police department and had to wear a uniform that included a skirt and official hat." Miss Sarah explained she stayed on the job because "these are my kids, too, you know? Some of them don't have but nothing, really, and no one walks them to school. I'm glad to see them each morning. I try to remember their birthdays, too."





AMERICA'S FAVORITE CROSSING GUARD CONTINUED

Crossing guards and bus drivers are often the first school personnel to greet students each morning and the last to see them each day. "She truly cares about our kids and looks out for them," relayed one mother. "My kids miss her when she isn't there for some reason. It changes their whole day."

Miss Sarah was one of 170 crossing guards across the nation who had been nominated for their work. A voting process began to narrow it down from 170 to just five finalists! Word spread quickly throughout the community and we learned just how many people knew Miss Sarah. People were reaching out from all over the city to wish her well and share that they had voted. As it came down to the wire, businesses, organizations, and community members were spreading the word through email, social media and every way they could think of to remind everyone to vote every day. On February 26, 2019, Safe Kids of Washington County released the official results. Miss Sarah had secured third place out of 170 entries! Now, we waited while the Safe Kids Committee chose the top three.

Soon, not only all of Washington County, but people across the country were voting and rooting for Miss Sarah. On February 7, 2019, a reception was held at Bester Elementary School in honor of all crossing guards in Washington County. We had learned there were at least four other crossing guards who had been on the job for at least fifty years! The room was full of local and state dignitaries, families and students who had come to say thank you for keeping children safe as they walked to school and learn the results of America's Favorite Crossing Guard. After proclamations and special thank you's, it was revealed that Miss Sarah Mason had placed second in the nation bringing in \$7500 to the community for safety improvements.

How did a crossing guard from Hagerstown, Md, place second out of 170 nominees in the nation? It was her dedication to keeping children safe and her willingness to connect with students and their families for over fifty years.

THIRD ANNUAL SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY BLOCK PARTY

SEPTEMBER 2018

AT THE THIRD ANNUAL SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY BLOCK PARTY, THE SAN MAR INITIATIVE BESTER COMMUNITY OF HOPE BROUGHT TOGETHER A MASSIVE CELEBRATION FOCUSED ON FAMILIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS AT BEAUTIFUL CITY PARK.

Fall temperatures and the first dry Saturday in weeks brought a constant stream of close to 2,000 children, families and members of the general public. The event offered something for everyone, but the primary goal for organizers was to create social connections in the neighborhood. Bester Community of Hope Director Jennifer Younker explained, "Life is stressful and raising a family is tough. This event is about coming together as a community and having fun! Having our community providers present allows us to build a network of support that is important for every family."

Headlined by musical act The Soul Rebels from New Orleans, and The Chuck Brown Band from Washington D.C. performing at the Peter Buys Band Shell, there was a constant stream of eclectic music for audiences to enjoy "I think of one of the great things about this event was the diversity and the togetherness was truly beautiful," explained Soul Rebels touring manager Anderson Ireland.

Almost forty community resource vendors were present sharing various information on resources available to the public that ranged from social services, health and neighborhood coalitions of community residents. Anthony Bostic is an active resident in his neighborhood through a variety of personal and professional affiliations, and he was onsite providing resident's information regarding the program Dad's Connection as a part of the Washington County Department of Social Services Family Center. "This is the best one yet. It's the right place, the right lay out. You guys took over City Park!" Community organization "It's a Blessing to be a Blessing" prepared and served a free meal to close to 1000 people. Director Dierdre Norris, Hagerstown's own version of Bea Gaddy, brought her mission of love and support to the event for the





BLOCK PARTY CONTINUED

second straight year to the delight of those eating her prepared tasting plates.

Bester Community of Hope staff and South Hagerstown High School volunteers manned a variety of carnival games including a dunk tank, sledgehammer, speed pitch and a very popular laser tag course. "I liked playing the games," Jaydin explained, while his mother Amber continued by saying the best part was, "Spending time with my family." Nearby, members of Old Line Garrison 501st Legion volunteered two Star Wars Stormtroopers, and combined with a meet and greet with members of the Paw Patrol, kids and adults alike were star struck! Hagerstown Police Department community resource officer Mark Morris explained, "This is a nice event because there was a lot of opportunity for people to come out and see what is available to them. And I got to take pictures with Storm Troopers! Doesn't get much better than that!" The event covered a large area of City Park, including

allowing free access to the City Park Train museum with barrel rides, as well as free paddleboat rides on the City Park Lake facilitated by River & Trail Outfitters.

Mr. Anthony of the Boy Scouts was onsite as a community vendor and is known for his booming voice, the kind you need to wrangle lots of high

**" ... YOU GUYS TAKE AN
AMAZING COMMUNITY DAY
AND GIVE IT PURPOSE AND
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IN THIS TOWN."**

MR. ANTHONY OF THE BOY SCOUTS

energy kids. "This right here is my favorite table at this event (bike helmet giveaway)! You guys take an amazing community day and give it purpose and that's why you matter in this town." San Mar CEO Keith Fanjoy explained, "We've been involved in a formal partnership with families of this neighborhood dating back to 2014, and

we're so excited to see the continued growth and revitalization of this corner of Hagerstown. When you take the time to listen and genuinely respond to what the community desires you see the success of activities like today. There is no question that the South Side is on the rise."

BABYPALOOZA 2018

SEPTEMBER 2018

Babypalooza 2018 was the place to be for young families in Washington County on Saturday, with close to 800 individuals entering Bester Elementary School on a cool autumn day, close to four times more attendees than the same event in 2017. Now in its third year, Babypalooza was created as a community baby shower to support expectant parents as well as young families with children from newborn to five, helping to develop community connections and obtain supportive resources.

"I think it's an awesome experience for the community," explained Amy Palfrey, CPNP of the Children's Doctor. Her co-worker Miranda Turnblacer, CPNP agreed, explaining, "We want to show families that there is good pediatric care here and available in their community." The school was packed with families taking advantage of all the opportunities, including local parent Leticia Diaz. "I'm here for support and resources. Maryland Excels was here so I'm thinking about daycare options for my kids which will help me work and support my family without stressing because I'll know they'll be taken care of."

Towson University nursing students from the Hagerstown campus were present in big numbers to provide resources on birth control, postpartum depression, as well as providing safe sleep demonstrations and teaching swaddling techniques. "The turnout was a lot bigger than I expected," explained Towson Nursing student Madison Null. "There were a lot of pregnant moms, or those with

young kids who were asking about our information. I think it was very helpful and useful because we were being asked lots of good questions."

The Family Center of Washington County joined to provide opportunities for families including educational supportive services, with their staff members Anthony Bostic and Jamie Matthewson onsite.

"I think it's an awesome opportunity to get connected to community resources and for agencies to get the word out about what they do," Matthewson explained. The Community Free Clinic of Washington County was also present and able to offer a variety of resources, and commented on the positive engagement with so many thankful participants. CFCWC Board President Major Warren explained, "We identified a lot of parents and mothers who were lactose intolerant, so we were able to respond by bringing 28 cases of formula specific to the need, and we were able to give it all away to very appreciative parents."



Aside from a variety of great information and resources, there were also activities such as face painting, a clothing exchange, a diaper giveaway, family photographs and a meet & greet with Minnie & Mickey Mouse to go along with lots of door prizes. Valued partner It's a Blessing to Be a Blessing was onsite feeding the community at no cost. On the way out of the event, grandparent Theresa Marshall was pushing a stroller and explained, "I've never been to this before, so I came with my daughter and grandchildren. Although we didn't win any of the prizes there was still lots of great information here."



BABYPALOOZA CONTINUED

Local parent Kayla Shetler celebrated with her friends and family after winning one of the five grand prizes, a basket with pillows, blankets and camping gear. "Oh, she's [my daughter] gonna love my prize!"

Jessica Burton, a parent who took the opportunity to get a photograph of her children with Mickey and Minnie Mouse (above) explained why she took the time to participate, "It's a great opportunity to bring the community together and support each other as families. It's important."

"I THINK IT'S AN AWESOME OPPORTUNITY TO GET CONNECTED TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND FOR AGENCIES TO GET THE WORD OUT ABOUT WHAT THEY DO"

- AMY PALFREY, CPNP OF THE CHILDREN'S DOCTOR



ANNUAL TRAINING

APRIL 2019

Close to 450 community stakeholders came together today to learn from national speakers at “Unconditional Care” on the campus of Hagerstown Community College at the Kepler Theater. Hosted by Bester Community of Hope, a San Mar Initiative, this event was the sixth installment in a series of trainings focused on beliefs and strategies for social progress, and this event placed a particular emphasis on self-care and understanding the impact of caring for others. Bester Community of Hope Director Jen Younker, LCSW-C explained, “Those who work taking care of others often disregard the need for self-care until signs of distress arise. Even then, we still may not recognize the signs as maladaptive or troublesome. If we take a preventative approach by taking care of our nervous system, we can mitigate the effects and keep our A game strong.”

Tonier Cain, founder and CEO of Healing Neen Inc. in Annapolis, Maryland, brought to the audience her amazing personal story of resilience. Overcoming profound trauma and devastating challenges, including drug addiction and living life on the streets, Cain was eventually able to address the root causes of her behavior and use it as a launching pad for her worldwide success. “When my belief system changed, is when my thoughts changed.” She revealed deeply personal moments, and reflected on her journey to recovery, “I remember the moment that I thought things may have changed. I was in a program and someone snapped a photo of me playing with my daughter. And I saw her smile.” As a living success story, Cain urged the audience to consider her when thinking of others they support, “If you don’t believe in the people we serve, how can they have hope for themselves!”

Brothers Ali and Atman Smith along with Andres Gonzalez came together to share their work from the Holistic Life Foundation in Baltimore City, a comprehensive program focused on teaching mindfulness practices to communities as a tool for both self-regulation and helping others. The trio took the time during the presentation to show the work in action, by leading audience members through a variety of breathing and mindfulness practices. On different occasions the audience fell silent as they were



- 422 tickets sold: 41% education, 13% child welfare, 14% local and state government. 7% health, 2% housing, 1% faith based, 13% more than 1 profession, 24% some other profession
- 88% have a deeper understanding of how clients experience of trauma is affected by my personal and professional reactions
- 93% are better able to recognize their own trauma response and the impact it has on their work with clients
- 92% have a better understanding of the importance of self-care
- 97% will give greater consideration on how witnessing a client’s experience of trauma impacts their thoughts, beliefs, and values about the population they serve

ANNUAL TRAINING CONTINUED

lead through different approaches, with the hope that this first hand practice experience would be useful tools for both professionals and those served.

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, Founder and Director of the Trauma Stewardship Institute, brought humor and research to lead a focused dialogue on developing insight on the personal toll of working to care for the needs of others. She blended that dialogue with some commonsense responses, including focusing on your purpose, to ensure helpers weren't headed towards a destination of burnout. "Why am I doing what I am doing everyday? As long as you're honest, you can remind yourself of your why! Our lives are not being done to us; we are co-creators."

Noteworthy contributors also included longtime San Mar psychiatrist Dr. Ira Lourie, a thought leader in developing effective systems of care. San Mar Family & Community Services CEO Keith Fanjoy also used the occasion to deliver the 2019 Jim Casey Building Communities of Hope award to the Community Free Clinic of Washington County, as well as recognize long-time San Mar board member Susan Peterson for her dedicated service.



SPECIAL EVENTS & PROGRAMS

CUPCAKES AND CONVERSATION

Rokia Ballard, local home baker, provided the cupcakes while the neighborhood residents provided the conversation. These community building sessions empowered residents to identify solutions to common challenges and barriers in their neighborhood. As a result, the Frederick Manor community was able to work with the City Engineer, Rodney Tissue, and the Hagerstown Housing Authority to tackle concerns related to pedestrian safety and speeding in the housing development.



COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

The Community Advisory Board is a quarterly opportunity for residents, business owners, and stakeholders to come together with BCOH staff and each other to inform us on our work. Just as our work with families must reflect their individual and collective needs, so must our work with the Bester community. By reporting on our current programs, sharing information on funding, initiatives and resources and listening to the community as a whole, we are able to ensure the work we are doing is the work that is needed.

COMMUNITY COFFEE

Great conversations are often had while relaxing with a hot cup of coffee and good company. The first Thursday of the month is set aside for residents, business owners and stakeholders to connect with BCOH and share their ideas, concerns and stories about life in the south end.

TOMORROW'S LEADERS

Bester Community of Hope partnered with the Boys & Girls Club of Washington County to support the Tomorrow's Leaders program. Local teen-aged youth gained valuable employment and career skills by completing an application, participating in an interview and working directly with club participants while exploring their own skills and knowledge. Three 10 week sessions benefited from the participation of 10 youth who gave 364 total hours of support to the Boys & Girls Club.

LUNCH BUNCH AT POTOMAC TOWERS

On the second and third Thursday of the month, BCOH staff and volunteers joined New Life World Ministries and Bridge of Life Church to serve lunch to the residents at Potomac Towers. These houses of faith, along with several others, work to fill the gap and ensure seniors and disabled individuals have access to a healthy lunch.



MURAL

Hagerstown Artist Group donates time and talent in the revitalization of the Memorial Blvd overpass. Each aspect of the design was intentional and included input from the South End Neighborhood 1st Groups. The tree signifies “growth” and presents a “welcome” feeling. Water was included because that area of the street often floods during heavy rains. Inspirational words were included to remind students on their way to school and those passing through that “hope” is possible and “love” flourishes. Words were captured in English, German and Spanish to reflect the multitude of cultures present in this area.



NEIGHBORHOODS 1ST GROUPS

Neighborhoods First, an initiative of the City of Hagerstown, provides support and limited funding to resident groups for neighborhood projects. Bester Community of Hope partners with the four Neighborhoods First groups in the Bester Elementary School catchment to provide additional funding for activities that promote the overall wellbeing of families and highlight the 5 Protective Factors for Strong Families.

Bester Communities First, led by Samantha Barrick and her father, Ed Barrick, utilized these funds to host “Family Fun Days” monthly during the summer.

BESTER COMMUNITY OF HOPE

COMMUNITY DATA PORTAL

Bester Community of Hope functions as a catalyst for ongoing efforts to improve data accessibility in Washington County. Following a series of broader meetings over several years, a small group of community stakeholders are working to finalize discussions of how to make incremental progress in this area. Bester Community of Hope, along with the United Way of Washington County and Meritus Health are exploring vendors to help launch a stand alone website for the purpose of tracking local data to use to identify community needs and strengths and use it as a tool for decision making. FY20 is shaping up as a big year for data!



COMMUNITY DIALOGUE CIRCLES

In collaboration with the Hagerstown Police Department, BCOH staff joined other stakeholders in the community to engage in a collaborative process focused on policies for policing youth in the city of Hagerstown. Sessions were facilitated by Community Mediation Maryland and incorporated youth and residents dialogue circles geared towards exploring personal experiences, bias, societal intricacies and local politics. These circles led to a deeper understanding of resident and stakeholder perspectives and the complexities pertaining to police involvement.

COMMUNITY MESSAGE BOARDS

Four community message boards were installed in the South End to provide a place where residents where can gain information on upcoming events and local resources. Additionally, a walking loop was created to connect the four boards, promote physical activity and create a walking tour of the South End. Community boards are located 1) near Thomas Kennedy park on E. Baltimore Street, 2) near Park Circle on Virginia Avenue, 3) at the intersection of Maryland Avenue and W. First Street by Krumpke's Donuts, & 4) the main entrance of Rose Hill Cemetery.







Washington County
Department of
Social Services

THE ALICE VIRGINIA AND
DAVID W. FLETCHER FOUNDATION

