

Urban Hope NYC

2015 Report and Vision Plan



Building Hope in A World of Fear

In spring of this year, several brutal murders shocked our West Brighton neighborhood. Across the street from my church, a 17 year old young man shot another of the same age. This was troubling in a multitude of ways. Both these young men had grown up together, played together and unfortunately, had run in gangs together. The murder victim actually handed the murderer his gun when he left the room. When he returned, he was shot five times in the abdomen with his own gun. One of the sweetest little girls in our after-school program was in the bedroom down the hall, hearing the shots and the screams. She had to keep her little sister from running out into their bloodied living room. Death threats were soon sent on Facebook to the Junior High School sister of the murderer. Several young men were apprehended in her school as they attempted to cut or kill her.

This murder seemed to unleash a wave of similar evil and violence that we had not seen in the last 15 years. Up until this point, our church and several

Urban Hope's Existing Programs:

Six Week Summer Camp:



Provides a summer of fun and education for community children, running from 8 am - 5 pm five days per week

After-School Programs:



Includes Homework help, values training, arts, crafts, culinary, urban farming, reading, and leadership development

partnering churches have been focusing a great deal of our attention on the children of our community. Several of us reach out consistently to the NYCHA communities of Staten Island. Many of us facilitate camps, after school programs, athletic events, concerts festivals and food pantries...whatever we can do. Much of our philosophy has been to be a “fence at the edge of the cliff” for our at risk children. Personally, this trajectory was set for me in the early days of starting our church in West Brighton. Our young and small church was struggling under the overwhelming weight of those who were set in their ways towards violence and drug abuse. We were unprepared to be the “ambulance at the bottom of the cliff.”



We have devoted many years to creating a full year outreach program that serves in big and small ways hundreds of our neighborhood children. Ten to fifteen years ago, we were first getting our programs off the ground, “Larry” and “Doo-Doo” attended many of them. Tragically, we were unable to build a strong enough relationship with them, to compensate for the psychological abandonment and instability they experienced at home. Young men who experience both neighborhood and family blight are the most vulnerable to the destructive forces of our city. It was Doo-Doo that killed his lifelong friend Barry across the street from our church.

This tragedy has made it crystal clear to us that we need to be a “fence at the edge of the cliff and the ambulance at the bottom.” We and several of the churches we network with are now committed to this paradigm. We are planning to focus our efforts in 2016 on bandaging the three great wounds in our community:

1

SECOND GRADE READING

Provide platforms to assist children in becoming proficient at reading to avoid functional illiteracy, which often leads to dissociation from society and a life of crime

2

FOURTH GRADE MENTORING

Statistics show that fourth grade is when the pressures of school and “fitting in” lead to behavioral meltdowns. Guidance and mentoring will provide support systems to reduce this likelihood.

3

ENGAGING 14-20 YEAR OLD DISCONNECTED YOUTH

Provide forums to engage young people in what is clearly the most challenging age demographic of the inner city.

Making It Happen

A series of proposed new initiatives will begin to lay out a blueprint for the future of the inner city's at-risk youth:

BRINGING SECOND GRADE CHILDREN TO LITERARY PROFICIENCY

80% of federal prisoners are functionally illiterate. Illiteracy, which often leads to a life of poverty and crime, begins in 2nd grade. Reading is one of the greatest hurdles a child has. Many of our at-risk children have very challenging home lives in which homework help is virtually non-existent. We are launching a large scale elementary school literacy campaign in which we are calling on College Students, retirees, Home Schooling families and the disabled community to volunteer as a reading buddies. We will provide books, reading assistants, reading incentives and a basic reading curriculum targeted at our 2nd graders. If by the end of 2nd grade these students are still unable to read, we plan to create a special summer curriculum which we will graft into our summer camp to help them clear this hurdle in time for 3rd grade. The statistics for children who do not read at grade level by 3rd grade are daunting..."Third-grade reading levels are directly tied to high school graduation, teen pregnancy, drug use, and incarceration." This literacy initiative will be networked through local churches and facilitated during the school day at participating schools.

MENTORING FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS TO CREATE LIFE CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

Fourth grade is often when the behavioral meltdown for young boys begins. In NYC, 4th grade is an important, high pressure testing period and the time when the challenging hurdle of memorizing the multiplication tables is presented. When a child cannot read and do basic math, they have a choice: be labeled as "stupid" or be labeled as an angry rebel. Many choose the later. The scenario is obviously far more complex. Most children whose parents have not been aware that they are unable to read or finish their math homework, are also less likely to provide the basic necessities of food, security, boundaries and parental love. We are again networking with churches and caring community members to provide a higher level of mentoring as well as continued assistance academically for the most troubled children in this grade level. In our neighboring school of around 700 children, we have been told that there are about a dozen out of control boys in the 4th grade. If they can be reached, the entire climate of the school will change. If left unchecked, these boys grow into the neighborhood gang leaders. In the state of Georgia, private contractors, predict and invest in building prisons according to the school performance of 4th grade boys. This is beyond twisted. It's time invest in mentoring and rescuing these children.

Additionally, we find that in our neighborhood because of the multiplicity of relationships that mothers/fathers have, the kids are often left hungry as the parents focus on step children rather than their own children. Food stamps received are spent on the new boyfriend or girlfriends children. We have a commercial kitchen and can provide a bi-weekly soup kitchen for the hungry kids in the neighborhood.

We have found that many of the angriest children are also the hungriest. We pray that we can help alleviate some of their struggle.

REDIRECTING AT-RISK 14-20 YEAR OLD MEN FROM LIFE ON "THE STREETS"

This is the most challenging crowd in any blighted neighborhood. For over a decade we have tried to love, comfort, teach and redirect our struggling children and teens. This has been very successful and many of these children are flourishing now. However many of the ones that we were unable to reach are involved in dangerous and destructive lifestyles. To address this great need. We are launching a "New Life Basketball League."

First Initiative: ENGAGEMENT AND MENTORING

We have gained the most relational traction with these disconnected youth through basketball programming. An official league for the neighborhood will mean a lot to them. We want to however, go beyond basketball. We are looking for financial support for the league but also for individual businesses or groups of friends to consider sponsoring one basketball team. For those that sponsor a team, we are asking that they commit to attending 50% of the games and to develop relationships with their team. At each game we will have dinner and during that time provide a variety of workforce and educational opportunities. We believe that their relationships with hard working men will have a positive impact on their lives, providing for them a healthy male role model. We are well aware that this is an uphill battle. This is not an initiative for the frail of heart.

Second Initiative: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Our workforce development outreach will be available for anyone, however, we are customizing it so that it synchronizes with our neighborhood basketball league. Dozens of our neighborhood youth do not have a diploma or work skills. We will leverage the relationships built through the above mentioned basketball league / academy to present the workforce training and development plan. We plan to make available: Apprenticeships, GED, job readiness and employment certification classes, entrepreneurial incubators, city job opportunities, FAFSA assistance...and much more. In addition, we will maintain an employment database and prepare our candidates for job interviews and resumes preparation.

How Can You Help?

There are several opportunities to help in big and small ways in 2015-2016:

Prayer support: Let us know if you would like to receive a prayer support newsletter.

Volunteer support: Call us if you want to help with any of the aforementioned programs and ministries.

Financial support: Our entire outreach is privately funded, financial support for Urban Hope in general helps us immensely with our full year community development outreach. Our yearly budget as of now is \$150,000. This includes all operational expenses and day-to-day costs of running our existing programs.

Below are some funding opportunities for newly planned initiatives scheduled for 2016

1. Elementary School Literacy and Mentoring Program. \$70-90K.
2. Workforce Development/Basketball League. \$45-60K.
3. For Team sponsorships we will be asking for: \$750.00 per team and a commitment of approximately 6 hours a month
4. Urban Hope Fall Classic Basketball Tournament on Oct.12, Columbus Day. Estimated cost will be \$2000.00.
5. Housing for Interns. In-kind donations of space would be helpful



In light of these new ventures, we are expediting our plans to build a gym and educational facility, adjacent to our Church facility. The total costs of this project are estimated at \$1.8 million. We have architects and contractors that are prepared to donate their services, the main costs will be in material.

Light In The Darkness....An Illustration

Our youth pastor is transitioning out this year and although I haven't been involved youth ministry for many years, I put on my sneakers and jumped in to stop gap the staffing need. I must confess, I have always loved youth work and once again, these precious children have captured my heart. I have been amazed at the hunger in their hearts for the love of God and the truth of His word.

During a time of prayer with our student leadership council, I asked them for personal prayer requests. One young person asked for prayer related to school and the 6th grader sitting next to her said, "I want to pray that the Church would be built up and strong." I was taken aback by her request and threw it back to the small group of young people. I said, "Why is it important that the Church be strong?" The 7th grade boy sitting next to me responded, "Because it makes the community a better place." Then I asked, what do you think the community would be like if the church wasn't here. As soon as I posed the question, I felt their collective fear as they imagined their neighborhood without the sanctuary of the church. One of them said, "that's scary," and they all concurred.

I nearly cried as I thought about their lives without the Lord's house in their midst. In my leadership council alone, these young people are living day to day with the all too personal, firsthand stories of parents who struggle with addiction, suicide, imprisonment and abandonment. I was scared as I imagined these beautiful, brilliant, loving children to be wandering these traumatized streets without a house of hope in their world of pain.