



Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

1625 K Street, NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC, 20006
Ph: (202) 518-6500; toll-free (866) 518-1CNE (1263); Fx: (202) 588-0314
web: www.cneonline.org; email: info@cneonline.org



Contact: Heather Humphries 540-882-4086
Kwame Johnson 202-518-6500

July 1, 2009

Marcus Foundation Gives Major Support to Atlanta Youth Violence Reduction Program, Cites Success

Bernie Marcus, co-founder of Home Depot and founder of the Marcus Foundation, has made a major commitment to the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Violence-Free Zone school violence reduction program based on results the VFZ initiative already has achieved. The Foundation will provide almost \$3 million to the program over the next three years.

"I am impressed with the results I am seeing from the Violence-Free Zone program. As a businessman, I want to see outcomes and a better education system. Not only is violence being reduced in the schools where the VFZ has been operated, but I can see long-term transformation in the behaviors of young people who daily face some of the most severe challenges."

"The program not only saves lives, but it is doing so at a lower cost to government. This has great potential as a national model to address the problem of youth violence and to prepare young people to receive education," Marcus added.

The Violence-Free zone program has been implemented in two Atlanta middle schools by CNE's community partner organization, Visions Unlimited. The new funding will allow Visions to extend the program to an additional four schools. The total for the 2009/2010 school year will consist of three middle and two high schools in the Atlanta Public Schools system; and one high school in Clayton County for an overall total of six schools.

The program works by marshaling the influence of young adults from the same neighborhoods or backgrounds as the students. Known as Youth Advisors, they work in the schools as hall and cafeteria monitors and mentor a caseload of high-need students identified by the schools as having behavior or other issues. Visions Unlimited hires, screens, and oversees the Youth Advisor teams in each school. The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise provides overall direction, training and technical assistance, and oversight for the program.

The Marcus Foundation first provided funding to bring the Violence-Free Zone program to Atlanta after Marcus saw it in action in a Washington, DC school. The Foundation has provided nearly \$8 million over the past seven years in the Washington, DC and Atlanta Violence-Free Zone programs.

During the 2008/2009 school year, the Violence-Free Zone program operated in 27 schools at six urban locations across the country. This included Atlanta (2); Baltimore (2); Dallas (14); Milwaukee (8); and Richmond, VA (1).

The VFZ was created by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. CNE was founded in 1981 by Robert L. Woodson, Sr., to help residents of low-income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities. In addition to the Violence-Free Zone youth violence reduction program, CNE provides training and technical assistance to community-based nonprofit service providers across the country and has a major program in adult financial literacy.

Visions Unlimited was founded and is directed by former school administrator Gwendolyn Poles Sands. Visions mounts programs in the schools and in low-income communities for young people and families.