

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE-BALTIMORE

AUDACIOUS THINKING

AN OCCASIONAL
NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2013

15
YEARS

OF

BIG THOUGHTS
BIG DREAMS
BIG WINS



**LESSON
LEARNED**

FEWER SUSPENSIONS MEANS
MORE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

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IT'S BEEN 15 YEARS

15
YEARS
OF
BIG THOUGHTS
BIG DREAMS
BIG WINS

We opened our doors in 1998 and, with our many partners, have been generating audacious ideas ever since. This year, we celebrate our 15th anniversary in Baltimore and want not only to celebrate, but to talk about how far we've come. On each one of our issues—addressing the city's biggest challenges—we are making progress: keeping kids in school and engaged in meaningful activities after class; making drug addiction treatment accessible to all who need it; and finding alternatives to the juvenile justice system and decreasing the prison population. The needle has been moving in the right direction on all of them!

In this and issues to come, we'll share where we were in 1998 and the progress that has occurred to date. We thank all of our partners and look forward to even greater progress in the next 15 years!

SAVE THE DATE!

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE-BALTIMORE PRESENTS:

BIG CHANGE
BALTIMORE A FORUM OF IDEAS THAT ARE
RESHAPING OUR FUTURE

OCTOBER 29, 2013, 1:00-7:30 P.M.
CENTERSTAGE, 700 N CALVERT STREET,
MARYLAND 21202



OSI-BALTIMORE WELCOMES EMILY SMITH

as program associate for Community Fellowships and Initiatives. Before joining OSI-Baltimore, she was with AFS-USA Intercultural Programs reviewing applications for international high school exchange students and their prospective host families.

She received a B.A. in English and History from Boston University and an M.A. in U.S. Literature from the University of Edinburgh.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

WHERE WE STAND

SUCCEEDING IN BALTIMORE FOR FIFTEEN YEARS

Fifteen years ago, we opened our office in Baltimore. One of the first set of grants we awarded aimed to establish a network of after-school programs throughout the city and an appealing summer learning program. The programs were to be open to all children, regardless of income, and provide the extended learning time and exposure to new kinds of learning that middle class students usually enjoy. And, they would address the summer learning gap that occurs when poor children do not have access to the intellectual stimulation that their more affluent peers do when school is out of session.

Although years later evaluations would show that after-school programs increase school attendance and improve academic achievement, in those early days, we relied on common sense and experimentation. And our instincts were right: the research clearly shows the programs' value.

Fifteen years later, brain science tells us why after-school and summer learning programs are important to a child's success. Their hallmarks—informal learning using a broad range of teaching styles, student choice about what is meaningful and relevant, and emotional development and motivation (through nurturing relationships with adults and peers)—are now documented by cognitive science to support learning.

We now know from neuroscience that students' brains change continuously, from pre-school through college—and that students learn all the time, anywhere. Flexible and meaningful learning experiences actually change structures in students' brains, allowing them to develop new abilities and overcome many learning challenges. Neuroscience research also confirms that emotion and learning are integrated in the brain—teachers cannot focus narrowly on curriculum if their students are to achieve. Research also shows that students thrive

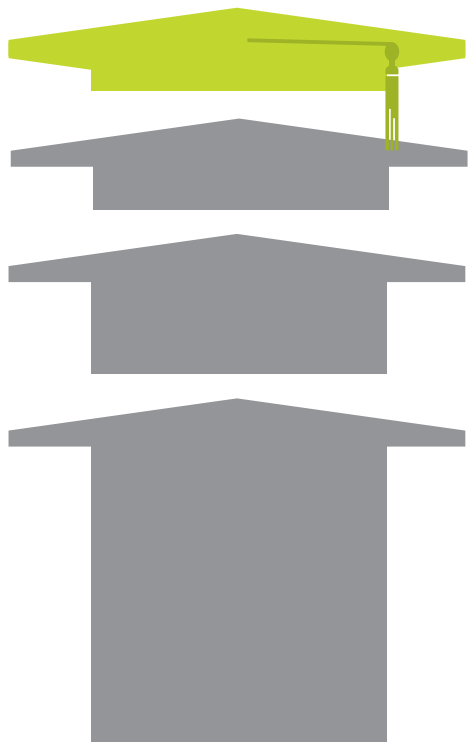
when other conditions provided by after-school and summer programs are present, especially a sense of community and protection from stress.

We are happy, of course, that current research confirms the validity of our early investment in after-school and summer learning programs. Looking back at this example, I see the value of using our funds as risk capital to support initiatives that may not yet be fully researched but which common sense and experience indicate are likely to have value. Data can refine our work, but its absence should not discourage us from making big bets.

For the last fifteen years we've helped launch programs, some that have floundered and many that have flourished. Given the urgency of the issues we address, we're very willing to take on risk and, with our partners, try new approaches. We're here to test what's possible and create new pathways to opportunity and justice. Fifteen years is a blip in time for our undertaking. We're in it for the long haul—because, sometimes, it's not until years later that the change for which we advocate is proven as the right road taken.

LESSON LEARNED:

KEY TO MORE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES



In 2004, OSI-Baltimore learned that City Schools had given out more than 25,000 suspensions during the previous academic year. Alarmed by this incredibly high number, OSI-Baltimore began its intensive campaign to reduce suspensions in Baltimore City Public Schools. Why do we pay so much attention to suspensions? First, we know from experience—and research—that using suspension as a primary discipline tool is a recipe for school failure. When children are suspended, they are not in school learning, they are not being coached to adopt new and better ways of responding to conflict, and they are not being required to make amends for their misdeeds.

Typically, they go home, watch TV, and wait.

And when they return, they are behind in their schoolwork; they still don't know how to behave appropriately or to make amends for their misdeeds.

It shouldn't be a surprise, then, that children who are suspended are more likely to be retained in grade, assigned to special education classes, get suspended again, become involved with the juvenile justice system, and drop out of school. And when many children are suspended, the entire school can suffer, because it is not just a few children who have missed their lessons,



MAY BE FEWER SUSPENSIONS

but a significant portion of the student body who are now behind. Compounding the harm is the fact that some children receive an unfair share of suspensions. In Baltimore and elsewhere, boys, children of color, Special Education students and English language learners receive a disproportionately high number of suspensions. In some cases three times as many.

As is usual practice, OSI-Baltimore tackled the problem in the city by speaking out, educating and writing on the topic. Education and Youth Development staff enlisted community and advocacy partners, provided grants to seed alternatives to suspension, and pushed to get the data and research about suspension in front of City Schools' leaders. OSI-Baltimore then joined with the district to convene a school safety committee and provide support for expert facilitation and technical assistance. Under the leadership of the then newly-appointed CEO Andres Alonso, this groundwork paid off. With OSI support, City Schools overhauled its student disciplinary code and established a more preventive- and solution-oriented code of student conduct.

And the results? **The number of suspensions was cut in half, and then fell to around 10,000 per year. Still too many in our view, but clearly a dramatic improvement. And by keeping more children in school, the district lowered its dropout rate and increased its graduation rate.** Impressively, it was African-American boys that led the improvements.

The impact of fewer suspensions garnered media attention, putting Baltimore at the forefront of a growing national movement to spotlight the harmful effects of a zero-tolerance approach to school discipline.

The work is far from done, however. Despite dramatic drops in the number of suspensions, disparities in suspension, expulsion and arrest rates continue. This pattern of inequity, evident in Baltimore and across the state, caught the attention of the Maryland State Board of Education. In addition, the board saw the results of Baltimore's new policies and began to examine discipline practices statewide. And because of the courageous leadership of the state board, the commitment of OSI-Baltimore and other education advocates, real





SUNDIUS

changes are now underway across the state.

“We started working on school discipline practices in Baltimore, but we realized that the City was not the only Maryland district with high rates of suspension—some other districts were even higher than Baltimore,” says Jane Sundius, OSI-Baltimore’s director

of education and youth development. Sundius noted that Maryland schools handed out 57,209 out-of-school suspensions in the 2009-10 school year and that 40,723 were for non-violent or “soft” offenses, such as disrespect, insubordination and disruption. In addition, there was a troubling range of suspension rates from one district to another. Dorchester County, for example, had a suspension rate of 14.5%, while Montgomery County’s rate was only 2.5%.

The inequitable distribution of suspensions is as pernicious as the overuse of suspensions statewide. Indeed, every district in the state is suspending students in a way that seems biased: students of color¹ more than whites; and students with disabilities and students whose first language isn’t English at a higher rate than the general population. The differences are large and longstanding. The disparities in Anne Arundel County, for example, were so egregious that the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education launched an

investigation of the county’s policies and practices.

OSI-Baltimore and advocates had been raising these issues with the State Superintendent of Schools for more than five years. Once the State Board began its investigation, Sundius testified to the state school leaders and, along with OSI-Baltimore Program Officer Katherine Rabb, presented compelling research, offered grant support to staff, and facilitated work groups to revise policies.

Their input, and that of advocates, has prompted the Maryland State Board of Education to propose new regulations regarding school discipline that are designed to reduce disparities, increase the use of alternatives to suspension, and increase the educational

services available to students who are suspended out of school.



RABB

“Through our grant support and participation in workgroups, we’re helping Maryland become one of the first states to take on a broad-scale and progressive revision of its state-level guidance on codes of conduct,” Rabb says. “This process is the start of a concentrated effort to help local districts think about the rights and responsibilities of all members of the community and to ensure that discipline practices are equitable and graduated.”



For example, to address the board's concerns about the overuse and inequitable patterns of suspensions across the state, the discipline workgroup is considering more in-school responses to misbehavior, such as counseling, peer mediation, detention, in-school suspension, and community service. Serious student misconduct would continue to be disciplined through suspensions or expulsions, but the new guidelines will result in referrals and interventions designed to help students correct their behavior and address issues that may contribute to their behavior. These less punitive approaches are strikingly similar to the recommendations that OSI-Baltimore made to city school leaders and that were ultimately adopted in the Baltimore Code of Conduct.

Addressing disparities in discipline is one of the most contentious parts of the proposed regulations and code of conduct revision.

"Districts have never had to be accountable for differences in suspension rates among groups of students," Sundius says. "This is the first time that the state is raising the issue of bias and asking districts to take steps to address it. It is a real hot button. Like all of us, school staff consider bias to be unacceptable and morally wrong."

"What we want," Rabb adds, "is not to assign blame, but for school leaders to recognize that disproportionality exists in school discipline and to begin the difficult work to eliminate it."

Efforts to help establish a statewide "model Code of Conduct" for local districts to use as a benchmark have met with other objections, as well, Rabb says.

Some educators are justifiably concerned that state mandates will tie their hands, but most note that using alternative approaches take time and money. Our goal is to make sure classroom teachers know there are different ways to address discipline and that training will be enormously helpful in this endeavor.

"This is a multi-year process," Rabb says, "but, we expect that the new regulations and guideline will lead to fewer and more equitable suspensions. **Based on Baltimore's experience, we expect these changes to reduce the number of dropouts and increase the number of high school graduates. That's good news for all Marylanders.**"



NO NEW YOUTH JAIL FOR BALTIMORE **BUT WE MUST END THE PRACTICE OF CHARGING YOUTH AS ADULTS**

By Monique Dixon

In January, Governor O'Malley's administration announced that it will not build a \$70 million 120-bed jail for youth who are charged as adults. Instead, it proposes spending \$30 million to renovate an existing adult correctional facility that will be downsized to house up to 60 youth while they await their trials. Taking advantage of these savings, the administration also plans to build a treatment center for young people who are committed to the juvenile justice system and in need of residential treatment services. The total cost of these two ventures is estimated to be \$73 million.

State officials' decision not to build a new jail is a good thing, and we applaud the efforts of hundreds of Baltimore City youth and advocates who relentlessly and persuasively argued that Baltimore does not need a new jail. We also appreciate state officials' willingness to propose an alternative to the jail and to be receptive to housing more young people accused of serious crimes at the juvenile detention center, which currently has 60 empty beds to accommodate them. After celebrating this decision, our attention must turn to the work that lies ahead.

In the months to come, Maryland policymakers must consider and answer one key question that would eliminate the need for even a renovated adult jail—whether the state of Maryland should end the practice of charging youth as adults. In our view, the answer is yes.

Under Maryland law, young people ages 14-17 who are accused of committing a crime may end up in the adult criminal justice system in one of three ways. First, a young person is automatically sent to an adult criminal court if he is charged with one of 33 specified crimes, such as robbery. Also, if a youth charged as an adult is ultimately found guilty and later accused of committing another crime, he will automatically go to the adult justice system (once an adult, always an adult). Finally, a juvenile court judge has the discretion to send a young person to the adult criminal justice system for his or her trial.

Here's the problem. Last year, about 50 youth charged as adults were held each day at the Baltimore City Detention Center, an adult jail. Research has shown that in Baltimore City almost 70% of these youth have their cases either dismissed or sent to the juvenile justice system. Yet, they spend an average of three months languishing in an adult jail. Of the 30% who remain, only about 10% are convicted and sent to prison and the remaining 20% are convicted of the crime and released to the community for a period of probation. Therefore, Baltimore City's criminal justice system confines about 50 young people in its adult jail, only five of whom are ultimately found guilty and sent to prison. This makes no sense.

More importantly, there is no evidence that charging youth as adults reduces crime. In fact, it has the opposite effect. According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control, youth who are prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system are more likely to commit future crimes than young people whose cases are handled in the juvenile justice system.

In the spirit of continuing to adopt policies in Maryland that are grounded in data and sound research, we hope that policy makers will consider the high economic and social costs of prosecuting Maryland's youth as adults, particularly African-American youth who are overrepresented in correctional facilities. Instead, all young people accused of a crime should be in the juvenile justice system, which explicitly responds to their treatment needs and capacity for rehabilitation.



IN THE MONTHS TO COME, MARYLAND POLICYMAKERS MUST CONSIDER AND ANSWER ONE KEY QUESTION THAT WOULD ELIMINATE THE NEED FOR EVEN A RENOVATED ADULT JAIL—WHETHER THE STATE OF MARYLAND SHOULD END THE PRACTICE OF CHARGING YOUTH AS ADULTS. IN OUR VIEW, THE ANSWER IS YES.

PROFILE OF AN OSI-BALTIMORE INVESTOR:

DOMINIQUE MOORE



Born and raised in West Baltimore, attorney Dominique Moore never forgets her “humble beginnings” or the power of philanthropy.

Growing up poor, educational options were somewhat limited for Moore. That is, until a local family with means sponsored her to go to McDonogh School, one of the city’s most prestigious independent schools.

“That really informed my worldview,” Moore says. “It taught me that, just by helping one person, you can really change the trajectory for that person as well as for their family.”

After graduating from McDonogh School in 1985, Moore built much of her adult life in other cities—including thousands of miles across the globe in South Africa. She started both her own law practice and her own real estate development company and was a major contributor to neighborhood changes in Washington, D.C., brought on by a recent real estate boom. Each step along the way, Moore learned lessons about community investment, transformational change and the ties that bind.

And in 2009, Moore decided to bring those lessons home to Baltimore.



TELL ME ABOUT GROWING UP IN BALTIMORE. HOW DID YOUR FAMILY LIFE AND EXPERIENCES IN BALTIMORE INFLUENCE OR INFORM THE PERSON YOU ARE TODAY?

My parents are from here and they were poor. I can't even call them working class. But I never really considered myself that way. I had no concept as a child that we were poor. My mother believed that you put opportunity in front of your children. Growing up, I had the chance to see Baltimore on the decline, which is part of the reason I never thought I'd come back. To me, Baltimore was a place with such intractable problems—and my family, honestly, was part of that—and so I thought that Baltimore was not a place that had a bright future. But because my family has suffered the highs and lows that so many others have, I have come to know that I want to be a part of the solution, not just the head-shaking. I'm trying to be who I say I am. If I say I am a person who believes that change is possible, that we have to stay invested because these are our communities, then I have to do something.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR WORK IN AFRICA. WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN THERE THAT HELP INFORM YOUR PERSPECTIVE AS AN AMERICAN, AS A BALTIMOREAN?

While on an externship in South Africa, I once drove through a desert area that had been turned into an oasis. It was really amazing how investment over time had transformed that area. And I learned that 'Whatever you focus on grows.' Baltimore to me is no different from Washington, D.C., which has experienced a revitalization, or from that desert farmland along the western region of South Africa. Just like those communities, whatever we water here can grow as well.

Also in Africa I learned the concept of "ubuntu." It's a human concept that means, roughly, 'We're in this thing together. We can't make it just by looking out for our own interests. We have to look out for each other.' That concept clicked for me in Africa. I came to understand that if I can invest my efforts, energies, time, talent and treasures in Africa, then I can do that in Baltimore.

"What I believe is that, if you really have a desire to help, then it shouldn't matter if you spend your whole life working on one issue and you only move the ball an inch. Maybe that's the inch you were meant to move. If you want to make transformative change it takes a long time; you just have to accept it."

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH PHILANTHROPY?

Call it my selfish desires to want to be helpful. When I moved back here from D.C., I wanted to do something to help here in Baltimore. I just thought I'd help in one way, and I quickly learned if you show up and do what you can the best way that you can, it's appreciated. And the penalty is that they ask you to do more. (Laughs). So one thing led to the next thing. I went from Associated Black Charities' board to the United Way's board. In October 2011, during an Aspen Institute seminar about racial equality, I was asked if I would be interested in being a part of OSI's Leadership Council. And I've been involved with OSI in some way ever since.



WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING PHILANTHROPY, ESPECIALLY HERE IN BALTIMORE?

Frustration, a sense that we're not seeing improvement quickly enough. Decade after decade, we find ourselves dealing with the same exact issues, and people who have been donating money forever think, 'I've been giving to these same issues for 10 years—and there's no hope.' **What I believe is that, if you really have a desire to help, then it shouldn't matter if you spend your whole life working on one issue and you only move the ball an inch. Maybe that's the inch you were meant to move. If you want to make transformative change it takes a long time; you just have to accept it.**

WHY OSI-BALTIMORE? WHAT IS IT ABOUT OSI-BALTIMORE'S APPROACH THAT YOU FIND COMPELLING?

What I prefer about OSI is their whole strategy. It's a slower strategy that is geared toward transformational change and the building-up of a groundswell of knowledge and interest and action from the very people in the community that you seek to help.

WHAT ARE BALTIMORE'S CHIEF STRENGTHS? BIGGEST CHALLENGES?

Our chief strength is something that Joe Flacco said after the Super Bowl: 'We don't make it easy, but we get it done.' (Laughs). He's talking about resilience. That's one of Baltimore's greatest assets. Despite the challenges that have been before us, and there are many, we keep putting one foot in front of the other. We keep fighting.

WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT THE PAST 15 YEARS, HOW HAS BALTIMORE CHANGED? HAVE YOU SEEN PROGRESS?

I see tremendous progress. I think that Baltimore City is extremely blessed to have the only U.S. field office (of the Open Society Foundations) where we're getting to try out new ideas. In Baltimore, OSI gets to try the theory and show the results, so that our next steps are data-driven approaches that we know will work.

“Our chief strength is something that Joe Flacco said after the Super Bowl: ‘We don’t make it easy, but we get it done’.”

WHAT DIFFERENCE DO YOU THINK OSI-BALTIMORE HAS MADE TO THE CITY OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS?

With the Community Fellows, OSI-Baltimore is investing in people. It's no different from my scholarship to McDonogh, which helped to propel me on my path through life. They're investing in individuals who are making strides in our community. OSI also does tremendous work on changing the over-reliance on our penal system in our communities. They were instrumental in ensuring that the new juvenile jail wasn't funded. They are helping us to look at other ways of transforming our society other than locking everybody up.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?

I see transformation happening here. And I want to continue to look for ways to participate in transforming our society. Working with OSI-Baltimore, I know that change will take time, but I believe it can happen. Because that's the only strategy for transformative change. We can feed the hungry. We can get beds for the homeless. We can do a zillion small and big things for families that are affected but, in the end, that's just handing out fish. If you really want to make change, you have to teach people how to fish. We're doing that at OSI-Baltimore. We're teaching communities how to fish.



DEATH PENALTY IN MARYLAND

BONNITA SPIKES

For the better part of a decade, **Bonnita Spikes** worked quietly and out of the spotlight, meeting one-one-one with the victims of crime or their families, sometimes venturing into maximum-security prisons to talk to inmates.

ON MARCH 15, 2013 THE MARYLAND'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY VOTED TO END THE DEATH PENALTY IN MARYLAND. HERE'S PART OF THE BACK STORY.

The work began in 2005 as an OSI-Baltimore Community Fellow, when she reached out

to families of murder victims and prisoners convicted of murder to cultivate new advocacy leaders to talk about abolishing Maryland's death penalty.

Today, Spikes' profile has never been higher, as the movement to repeal the death penalty in the state has gained strong support. This spring, the legislature voted to end capital punishment in the state, and Spikes' work in the movement to achieve this result has captured significant media attention.

"I do a happy dance every day," Spikes says with a smile. "I don't know how long it's been since I was this happy."

Spikes has played a key role in the death penalty repeal movement in the state as a victim family coordinator and lobbyist for Maryland Citizens Against State Executions. She has made countless visits to crime victims' families, church groups and other gatherings to talk about problems with the death penalty.

Spikes delivers a possibly counter-intuitive message that the death penalty poorly serves the family members of murder victims. As in other states, death penalty cases in Maryland drag on for many years, even decades, subjecting family members of victims to seemingly endless appeals and hearings.

Spikes, who is 59 and lives in Upper Marlboro, has no trouble relating to crime victims and their families. Her husband, Michael, was murdered in 1994 in New York City. Although desperately angry with the killers, Spikes remained opposed to the death penalty, in part because her husband had opposed it.

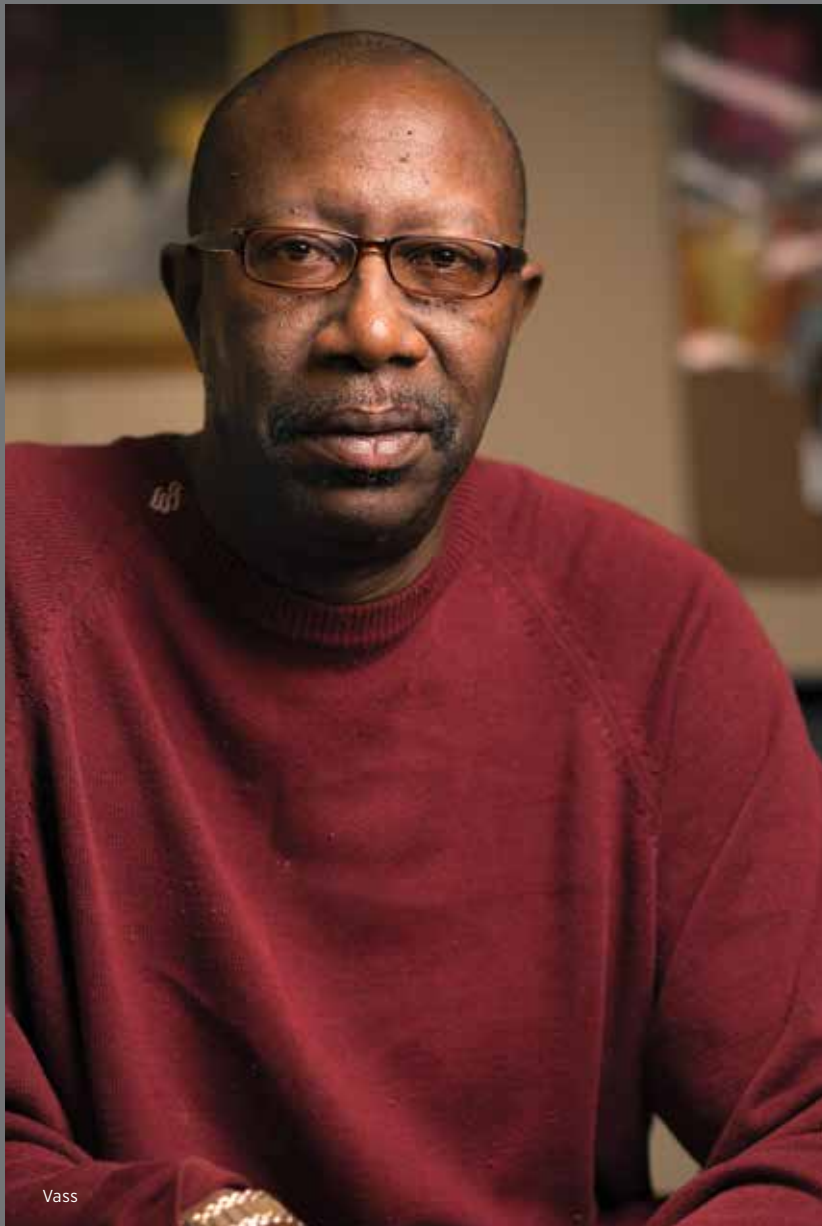
But she sometimes meets crime victims' families who support the death penalty. "I always tell them, 'It's ok, I still love you.'"

Spikes marvels at the growth in support for death penalty repeal over the past eight years. "It's just an honor to be a part of the team that made this happen," she says. "What an amazing journey it's been for me."

READ A RECENT BALTIMORE SUN ARTICLE ABOUT SPIKES' FIGHT TO END THE DEATH PENALTY IN MARYLAND.

http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2013-02-09/news/bs-md-death-penalty-victims-20130209_1_death-penalty-bonnita-spikes-families-share-grief

OBSTACLES TO JUSTICE



Vass

LESLIE VASS SPENT 10 YEARS IN PRISON FOR A CRIME HE DIDN'T COMMIT.

The story he tells about how the police, the courts and entire criminal justice system failed him is alarming.

But what has happened to Vass after he was finally released and pardoned by Maryland's governor for the state's gross mistakes may be worse. He carries that letter, signed in 1986 by then Governor Harry Hughes. "I would like to express my sincere regret for the terrible injustice you have suffered," the Governor wrote. "It must have been devastating to spend 10 precious years in jail for a crime which you did not commit."

Ever since he was freed in 1986, Vass—an innocent man—has been haunted by the erroneous charges that still exist on his record, even today.

For more than 25 years, Vass has fought to have his record expunged, wiped clean, so that no trace of the arrest or wrongful conviction remains. He has gone to great lengths, even suing the state and winning a small sum.

THE STORY

He has written letters, won multiple court orders and enlisted the help of top legal minds, advocates and elected officials. But his record has never been expunged.

As a result, Vass has been unable to find and keep steady employment. It doesn't matter that he is innocent of the armed robbery he was accused of committing when he was 17 and charged as an adult. Employers dig up the decades-old charges—all of which have been proven false—during background checks and label him as a criminal, refusing to hire him. In 2004, the charges came back to destroy what semblance of a life Vass had managed to piece together. He was falsely accused of involvement in a stabbing and ultimately acquitted of all the charges. **But his trial didn't come until after Vass had served a year in jail, awaiting trial. His prior conviction—despite his innocence of that crime—was used as the basis to hold him without bail.**

"The same criminal record that the state paid me the compensation for, the same criminal record that Jet magazine did a story on, that same record kept coming up," Vass says today. "So they could hold me for a year without bail, because they said I had a prior criminal record."

It didn't take long for a jury to find Vass not guilty of all charges. But the damage was irrevocable.

"The next morning I was released, but the job I had held in the state was gone, my house was gone, and my children were still in foster care," Vass says. "I had to start all over again."

Monique Dixon, director of OSI-Baltimore's Criminal and Juvenile Justice program, says Vass's story touches on many aspects of the work OSI-Baltimore and its grantees are so invested in.

"Leslie's case is an example of the failure of the criminal justice system at each and every stage," Dixon says. "As a 17-year-old boy, he was charged and convicted as an adult for a crime he did not commit, was found innocent a decade later, completely exonerated, compensated by the state, petitioned the state to expunge the wrongful conviction, and was ready to move on with his life, but now at age 55, he can't because his conviction was improperly expunged. It shows that, even if you're innocent, once you're in the system, it's hard to get out of it. That's one reason why it's so important to us that young people don't get caught up in the system in the first place."

Vass is now working with a new attorney to try to expunge his records, once and for all. And he is working with OSI-Baltimore grantees to end the prosecution of youth as adults.

He is hopeful that, by telling his story repeatedly, what happened to him won't happen to anyone else.

"I had high expectations of trying to move forth with my life," Vass says. "But now I'm 55 years old. I'm living in public housing, and I'm still trying to pick up the pieces. But you know what? I'm not bitter. What I would like is for my case to be a stepping stone to help others."



Perkins-Cohen

FOR MANY OF BALTIMORE'S FORMERLY INCARCERATED RESIDENTS, SHAKING THE STIGMA OF TIME SPENT IN PRISON IS A MAJOR UNDERTAKING. One of the hardest aspects is finding stable, meaningful employment.

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF)—a long-time OSI-Baltimore grantee—is working to change that.

JOTF is a nonprofit that works to develop and advocate policies and programs to increase the skills, opportunities and incomes of low-skill, low-income workers and job seekers. With help from OSI-Baltimore and others, JOTF has worked hard to improve employment opportunities in the region, in particular for those with criminal records.

“Seventy-five percent of the population we deal with has a criminal background,” says Jason Perkins-Cohen, JOTF’s executive director. “Having a record is a huge barrier to getting a job. That record stays with you forever. To help, JOTF has spent considerable time and effort working to improve the state’s expungement policies.

Expungement is the removal of court and police records from public inspection. When records are expunged—a process that usually happens at the request of a petitioner—those records should become inaccessible and not available to use against a person. But the process is flawed.

It’s expensive to petition for expungement and time-consuming, sometimes requiring a lawyer’s help. Yet, even with the legal assistance, sometimes records are often only partially removed, or sometimes not at all. (See the story about Leslie Vass, page 12)

THE SOLUTION

“It used to be that you could be arrested and released—not even charged—and that would stay on your record,” Perkins-Cohen says. “So we got a law passed that all arrests without charges are automatically expunged.” Passed in 2007, the law ensures that, when someone is not charged with a crime, the arrest does not negatively affect his or her employment prospects. And since the process is automatic, there is no cost or paperwork required.

Since then, however, advocates at JOTF have been working to protect the employment prospects of people who have been convicted of a crime by gathering the stories of dozens of individuals whose criminal records have prevented them from finding employment. It is JOTF’s hope that these stories will persuade policy makers to permit the expungement of felonies and misdemeanors that occurred many years before.

“One person we were working with was convicted of trespassing when he was in his 20s. He was trying to get a construction job and the employer’s view was that it didn’t matter how old the conviction was, he would not hire him,” Perkins-Cohen says. “Never mind that he was in his 20s, just goofing around with friends, and now he’s in his 30s, trained and ready to go to work.”

But expanding the expungement law has been met with much opposition, especially from employer groups that are concerned about not initially seeing full documentation. And many in the criminal justice community have fought the idea, arguing that they should have access to individuals’ past charges in order to properly do their jobs. JOTF is urging policy makers to support a “shielding” practice, which would hide old records from the general public but allow lawyers, police officers and judges to see them.

“Criminal records were made for the criminal justice system,” Perkins-Cohen says. “But ordinary people request background checks and use the information in really inappropriate ways. Landlords, for instance, deny people housing because of a past charge. So this law would “shield” nonviolent misdemeanors from the view of the public. Three years after a conviction, employers, landlords and people on the Internet would not have access to it.”

The shielding bill put before the legislature in the 2013 session failed, but JOTF will continue to work on this important issue in 2014.

Expungement and shielding are important ways to help formerly incarcerated people secure and keep steady, well-paying jobs, which can keep them from becoming repeat offenders, Perkins-Cohen says.

“Many people who have been in prison are doing their best to keep their heads above water, and being held up by something in their past is just devastating to them,” he says. “It is discouraging to think you might never get a job if this [conviction] is just going to follow me around.”

OSI-BALTIMORE ALSO FUNDS:

JUMPSTART, a program that works with low-income Baltimore City residents to become licensed construction craft workers and obtain family-sustaining incomes—while improving the area’s construction workforce. JOTF oversees the program while partners provide training, placement, and connections to employers. The program has an 84 percent completion rate, with 73 percent of those who complete the program obtaining jobs.



WHY WE FUND IT

“At OSI-Baltimore, we believe that people who have been convicted of a crime and served their time deserve a second chance. Often people with criminal records are not considered for employment even if the conviction happened decades before and is unrelated to their job responsibilities. This should not happen. That’s why we work with organizations like the Job Opportunities Task Force—to remove barriers and change policies so that more people with criminal records are able to find employment and contribute to their communities.”

MONIQUE DIXON, Director of the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program

CONVERSATION WITH OSI-BALTIMORE BOARD AND LEADERSHIP COUNCIL MEMBER

EDDIE AND SYLVIA BROWN

Known throughout the region for their generosity and approachability, Eddie and Sylvia Brown are a powerhouse couple. Eddie is the founder and president of Brown Capital Management, one of the country's oldest African-American-owned investment management firms. He and his college sweetheart and wife, Sylvia, run the Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Family Foundation, an organization that helps support improvements in education, health and the arts, particularly among Baltimore's most disadvantaged groups.

In 2011, the Maryland Historical Society named Eddie and Sylvia its "Marylanders of the Year," honoring the couple for

contributing more than \$22 million to charitable causes over a 15 year time period.

Eddie Brown is also a recipient of Maryland Life Magazine's Marylander of Distinction award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Arthritis Foundation. The daughter of public school educators, Sylvia volunteers her time on behalf of the city's schoolchildren, including mentoring and tutoring in one of the city's elementary schools.

Though busy working in separate arenas, the Browns came together recently to talk about their long history with Baltimore and their shared, optimistic vision of this city's future.



ALTHOUGH BALTIMORE WASN'T THE PLACE IN WHICH YOU GREW UP, YOU APPEAR TO BE ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST GENEROUS CITIZENS, IN MANY WAYS. WHY IS THAT?

Eddie: We came to Baltimore in 1973, so we've been here a long time. Our business is in the city. Some of our employees live in the city. We are very interested in making Baltimore a very vibrant city that would stack up against any other city in the world.

AFTER GROWING UP WITHOUT WEALTH IN MONETARY TERMS, WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GIVE BACK?

Eddie: When I was in high school in Allentown, Penn., a woman I never met—and still don't know—approached a community organizer and said, "I would like to help a black child go to college." The organizer suggested she help me because I was poor, and I also had good grades. Every year that I attended Howard University, I received a check for \$1,000. That \$1,000 paid my tuition, room and board and books. That left an impression on me. I said to myself that, one day, if I ever had sufficient resources, I would help someone less fortunate achieve their goals. And also, a former minister once said that those who are blessed should be a blessing to someone. And that is something we both believe.

YOU ARE KNOWN TO PICK JUST ONE BOARD TO SERVE ON IN THE CITY. HOW DID YOU ARRIVE AT THIS DECISION?

Eddie: We very much believe in being involved with charitable institutions. One way to do that is to serve on boards, especially organizations making a difference. But over time, I got over-extended and I said to myself, if I were to just choose one organization to work with, which one would it be? With limited time, how can I devote myself in a way that has significant impact? As I looked around, OSI-Baltimore was, by far, that organization.

Enlightened business leaders who really care about the city's challenges understand that OSI-Baltimore is very much in line with their goals. OSI has a history of 15 years of making a difference.

SYLVIA, TELL ME ABOUT WHY YOU ARE PART OF THE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL AND WHAT YOU GAIN FROM BEING A MEMBER?

Sylvia: It's been a very worthwhile experience for me because it has a pulse on what's going on in the city. Guest speakers talk about some of the city's most pressing problems, whether it's the idea of building a new youth jail or challenges in the school system. I come away better informed about what needs to be done to make positive changes.

AS ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST PROMINENT BUSINESSMAN, HOW ARE OSI-BALTIMORE'S GOALS AND VISION IN LINE WITH THOSE OF BALTIMORE'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

Eddie: Enlightened business leaders who really care about the city's challenges understand that OSI-Baltimore is very much in line with their goals. OSI has a history of 15 years of making a difference. As more business leaders hear the OSI-Baltimore story and are informed of the results, I think they will be inclined to step up to the plate and add their voices as well as their dollars. I currently sit on the development committee, and I am personally reaching out to them, encouraging them to get involved.





WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT THE PAST 15 YEARS, HOW HAS BALTIMORE CHANGED? HAVE YOU SEEN PROGRESS?

Sylvia: The physical changes in and around the Harbor. When we first came here, we were told not to go to the Harbor, that it wasn't safe. And now there's Harborplace, Harbor East, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, the Visionary Arts Museum and other museums in other areas, such as the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum. So culturally, there's been much improvement.

Eddie: That's a huge positive transformation. I think it has made Baltimore a more attractive place for people to live, especially to live downtown. But with all of that transformation, there are still pockets on the East and West sides that have actually gotten worse. You have these gaps, a lot of pockets that have actually gone backwards.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DO YOU THINK OSI-BALTIMORE HAS MADE TO THE CITY OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS— AND WHAT CHANGES DO YOU HOPE WILL OCCUR OVER THE NEXT 15?

Eddie: There is documented evidence of real change in the school system—decreases in absenteeism...

Sylvia: And the decreases in suspensions have had very real, positive ramifications for the city's children.

Eddie: Yes, that's an important one. There's also progress being made in terms of juvenile justice. The most recent example is the work OSI has contributed to stopping the youth jail. And OSI has helped to reduce recidivism for those who have been incarcerated by helping to get people who have criminal records employed. Then there are the efforts to increase access to drug treatment programs. There's a whole gamut of contributions and, in almost every one, there have been measurable outcomes and results. That will continue the longer OSI works on these important issues.

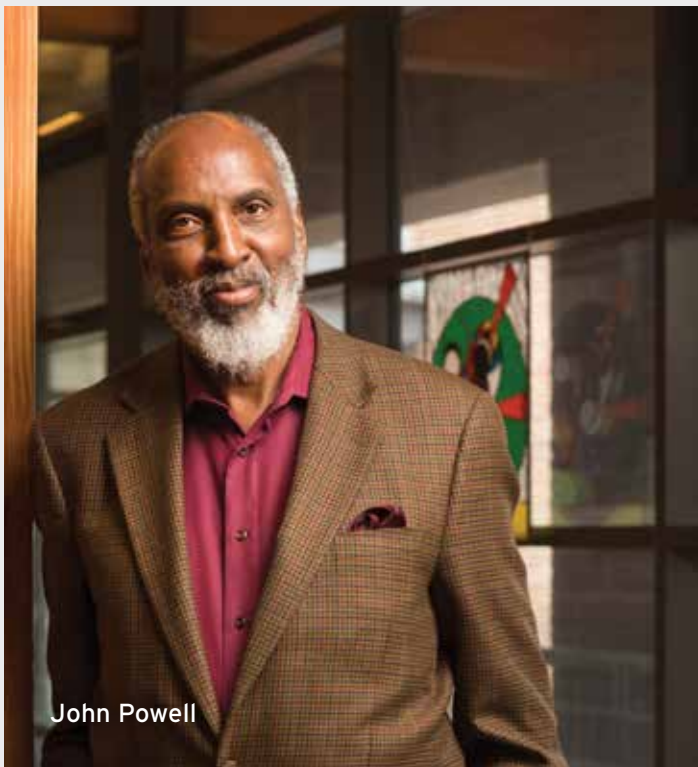
“As more business leaders hear the OSI-Baltimore story and are informed of the results, I think they will be inclined to step up to the plate and add their voices as well as their dollars.”

IN GOOD COMPANY

WINTER EVENTS WITH OSI-BALTIMORE BOARD, DONORS, AND FRIENDS

BOARD RETREAT

In January at their annual retreat, OSI-Baltimore's board was joined by Ken Zimmerman, newly appointed director of U.S. Programs for the Open Society Foundations to learn more directly about the work being done and to discuss new initiatives. Also joining the board was John Powell, Director of the University of California at Berkeley Haas Diversity Research Center and Robert D. Haas Chancellor's Chair in Equity and Inclusion. He shared his expertise about the implications of brain research findings for addressing racial discrimination, bias, and anxiety—all of which are deeply connected to our work.



A CONVERSATION WITH SOLEDAD O'BRIEN

OSI-Baltimore's first event of the year for our donors was a candid conversation at the Center Club with Soledad O'Brien, former anchor and host of CNN's Starting Point. Just days after the inauguration, Soledad O'Brien discussed the implications of the 2012 election, what action we can expect at the federal level on the issues we address to increase justice, equality and opportunity, and the important work left to be done by advocates, policy makers, and community members.



Guests listen to Soledad O'Brien and Renée Hutchins



Soledad O'Brien and Renée Hutchins



Susan Leviton, Emile Bendit, and Robert Embry



Diana Morris, Soledad O'Brien, and Veronica Cool



Lionel Moore and Jimmy Wood



Rachel Bloom, Chip Wendler, and Laura Tucker

TALKING ABOUT RACE WITH TAYLOR BRANCH

Together with The Enoch Pratt Free Library, OSI-Baltimore held a small reception before the Talking About Race event with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Taylor Branch. Taylor Branch spoke about his book, *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement*. In his new book, he has selected eighteen essential moments from the Civil Rights Movement as presented in his *America in the King Years* trilogy, and has written new introductions to set each passage in historical context.



Taylor Branch, Lois Feinblatt, and Liz Moser



Michael Bronfein, Allison Hillman, and Robert Hillman



Taylor Branch and Vernon Reid



Elizabeth Carey, Maurice Haywood, and Diana Morris



Rheda Becker, Robert Meyerhoff, and Fred Lazarus



Carla Hayden and Taylor Branch



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AUDACIOUS THINKING FOR LASTING CHANGE

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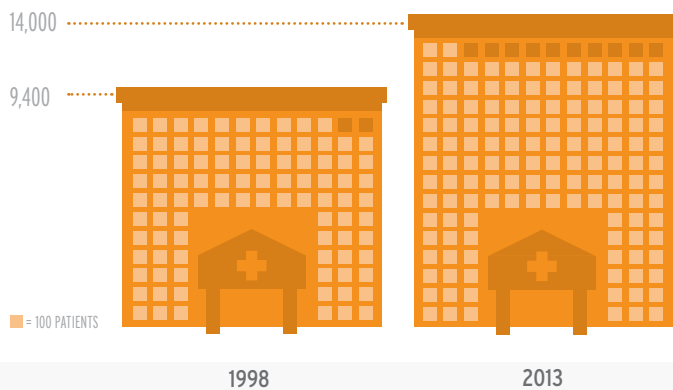
THEN & NOW

One of the Open Society Institute-Baltimore's first priorities when we opened our doors in 1998 was to make certain that anyone who needed drug addiction treatment was able to get it—whether or not they had health insurance.

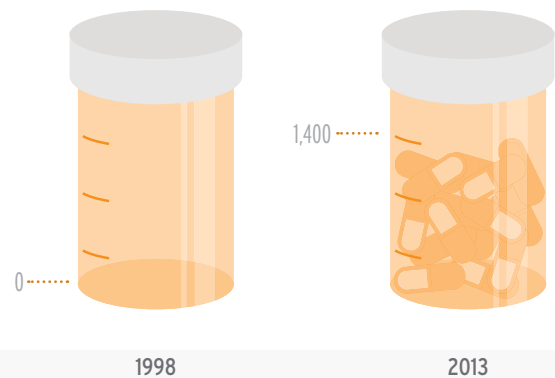
Over the past 15 years, there was an increase of \$20 million per year for addiction treatment in Baltimore. This translates into about 14,000 patients being admitted annually for drug addiction treatment in Baltimore, and it is now rare for a treatment program to have a waiting list. Today, five times more patients receive Medicaid to cover addiction treatment, and almost twice as many have health coverage.

In 1998, buprenorphine was not allowed to be prescribed for heroin addiction. However because of the funding OSI-Baltimore provided for the last 10 years, Baltimore is now a model for how buprenorphine can be incorporated into addiction treatment. OSI-Baltimore brought in doctors from around the world who had successfully used buprenorphine to train physicians in Baltimore. Now, 1,400 patients are prescribed buprenorphine annually.

ADMISSIONS FOR TREATMENT



PATIENTS ON BUPRENORPHINE



And that's just the beginning. With the advent of health care reform, addiction treatment will not only be a benefit, but addiction will be treated as a long-term disease.

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE-BALTIMORE focuses on the root causes of three intertwined problems in our city and state: drug addiction, an over-reliance on incarceration, and obstacles that impede youth in succeeding inside and out of the classroom. We also support a growing corps of social entrepreneurs committed to underserved populations in Baltimore. Before we make a single grant, we analyze the root causes of a problem, cull research and examine current practices. Because we aim for lasting sustainable solutions, we engage public and private partners from the start. It is only then, with a clear picture of the problem, that we begin to focus our approach and diligently craft a roadmap for change.