

Where are they now?

(Where are they now is a continuing column touching base with individuals who have former associations with BFNC.)



Daysi Ball

Q. What was your former association with BFNC?

A. I worked with BFNC for eight years, starting as the Administrative Assistant in Case Management and working up to Program Director of MIS. Ricardo Herrera was my immediate supervisor. When I started I didn't have a High School diploma, but through the nurturing environment at BFNC I became motivated to get my GED and attend college. Now I have an Ed.M. in higher education.

Q. What are you doing now?

A. I am the Program Manager for Vista Programs, which is a part of Americorps. In fact, we have just placed an Americorps worker with BFNC.

Q. How did your experience with BFNC help you on your journey to where you are today?

A. When I was with BFNC I interacted with all of the programs, particularly through setting up the MIS system, working with Human Resources to find the Tri-Main site, and getting that built out for the various programs that are now housed there. It gave me great experience and an understanding of all aspects of the agency's work. It was my experience at BFNC that focused me on working with nonprofits and giving back to the community. Later, that focus shifted to education, but it still includes the nonprofit aspect.

Q. What do you miss about BFNC?

A. The soul. There's a lot of great work done at BFNC. I was also amazed at

the number of people of color – I had been working in corporations and I hadn't seen that before. Culturally I felt I was understood and I haven't found that duplicated anywhere else. It's also a very talent-oriented organization. Ricardo wants to bring out the best in everyone – it's just a very nurturing environment.

Q. Did you make any lasting relationships at BFNC?

A. Oh yes. Ricardo remains a great mentor of mine. He has been there whenever I've been ready to take my next step to give his input. I am still friends with Barbara Dixon, who used to handle HR, before Letrice, and Ellen Trautman and I have collaborated on programs. I also still see Mr. Poles from time to time. They are all great people.



Unlocking Potential... Enriching Lives

BFNC Employee's Son Dives Into Competition



JaRon Williams

We all like to brag about our children, but when Tamika Boykin, Program Secretary, starts to talk about her son, JaRon Williams, she is not bragging – she is just stating the facts. And the facts are, this past spring at age 18, JaRon became the first African American to qualify for the New York State Diving Championship. Although he didn't win at the state competition, JaRon is rated number four among divers from Western New York. JaRon also is the 2013 Section VI Diving Champion and was also named the Male Athlete of the year for Niagara Falls High School.

"JaRon always loved the water – he learned to swim when he was seven. Plus, when he was smaller, he loved to do flips," Boykin said. "So diving was a natural thing for him to do."

In eighth grade JaRon joined the swimming team and when he started at Niagara Falls High School he was on the swim and diving team and joined a program at the University of Buffalo called, "Wings." It was an extensive training schedule.

"He had practice at school until 5:30 p.m. then went to UB for two to three hours more," Boykin said. "But he always kept his grades up – he graduated high school this June with a 3.65 grade average."

In addition to diving, JaRon works part-time during the school year at Mighty Taco, and in the summer adds a second part-time job to his day. He also volunteers at school as a coach to the girls diving team, and this past year was captain of the men's swim and dive team.

"There's no doubt he works very hard. He tried out for the state championship two years ago and didn't make it, so he was even more determined this year," Boykin said.

JaRon has a twin brother – who is not at all interested in swimming or diving – and a younger brother age nine. This fall he'll be studying at Niagara University, there on a full academic scholarship. Of course he will also continue his diving at college. He plans to study sports medicine or physical therapy. So his mom may seem like she's bragging when she talks about JaRon, but after all, a mom should have bragging rights to a son as hard working and successful as JaRon.

Lessons in Tearing Down Walls

by Josh Exoo

Over my desk in our office at the Tri-Main building, I have a picture of a piece by the radical British street artist, Banksy. A little girl is holding a bouquet of balloons that is lifting her up into the air, as if she is flying. The image itself might seem cutesy or trite, but what's striking is where Banksy spray-painted it: the "security wall" on the West Bank, between Palestinian and Israeli territory. Though we don't have a "security wall" in Buffalo, we have many invisible walls between neighborhoods, classes, gender, race and the mentally or physically disabled.



Recently I was giving directions to our office to some high school seniors in East Buffalo. They wanted to get information on STDs and free condoms. I was really proud to see that

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BFNC
Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
97 Lemon Street
Buffalo, NY 14204

Our Vision

The Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers plays a major role in ensuring that anyone in Western New York who needs help and has no place to turn, or who has had trouble accessing services, or who has slipped through the cracks of the human service system, has a trusted place to go for help in taking the next step toward maximum independence.

Our Mission

BFNC prepares, equips and empowers individuals to address life management issues, and to improve the quality of life in their communities.

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Ricardo Herrera

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Message from Executive Director



Ricardo Herrera,
Executive Director

We are the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Inc., and one of my goals as Executive Director is to re-establish our role as a good neighbor and a force for positive growth in the Fruit Belt. One major accomplishment has been the creation of the "Community Meeting Room" as part of the renovation of our flagship, the historic "Neighborhood House". We have been pleased that various Fruitbelt organizations and Block Clubs have found good use for the community space as intended.

At the request of community leaders who are concerned about our youth, we are in the process of bringing the Phil Jones Upstate Basketball Program (a travel league) under our umbrella to operate from Neighborhood House. The courts in front of our building are being restored so youth from middle school through high school will have a safe, supervised environment to practice. Youngsters who participate in the program will also have access to our newly renovated computer lab, tutoring and mentoring from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. each afternoon.

This summer we have also provided office space to VISTA volunteer, Breona Jones, who is working through The Service Collaborative of WNY on a project to help Veterans in the Fruitbelt neighborhood with small repair jobs on their homes. We have provided small business incubation services to the "Pearls of Wisdom", a group of nursing professionals interested in starting their own health care agency. We will be welcoming the "One of a Kind Dance" Studio to our Moot site as we attempt to expand programming and support community business development. We have continued our partnership with the Greater Buffalo United Accountable Health Network (GB UAHN) as we begin our move into community primary health care. We will soon be doing an in-depth community health needs assessment for the Fruit Belt area that will allow us to focus our services and develop a methodology that can be replicated in other communities in Buffalo.

We have a number of people and organizations to thank for their support and assistance helping us make the necessary changes to offer these new services. Framing Hope Warehouse has done a great job providing us with the materials and labor for our renovations and I sincerely appreciate their efforts.

I feel we are only at the beginning of a great journey which will result in BFNC becoming known as a catalyst for change and cooperation within the Fruit Belt – but the steps we have taken so far are definitely in the right direction.

BFNC opens doors to youth through basketball program

The BFNC umbrella is expanding to bring a traveling youth basketball program (the Phil Jones Upstate Basketball Program) and mentoring for junior high students to Neighborhood House. Chris Lewis, who has been coaching in the program for several years, and Erik Daniels of Residential Services, will be in charge of combining basketball with a mentoring program and tutoring provided through First

Hand Learning.

"The goal is to create a safe haven for youth here at Neighborhood House," Daniels said. "First Hand learning will focus on science, we will have a computer lab open, plus we'll provide nutritional snacks. We hope to have about 20 kids participate."

The program will run from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays, starting July 1, and will transition to after-school in the fall. Additional mentors will be provided through SYE (Summer Youth Employment program).

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Basketball Program continued from page 2



Travel team, Upstate Basketball League

"Our initial funding is coming from a grant from the Children's Foundation," Lewis said.

The program will run from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays, starting July 1, and will transition to after-school in the fall. Additional mentors will be provided through CAPP (Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention program) and SYE (Summer Youth Employment program).

BFNC hosting Veterans and Military Families Project 2013 to do small repairs on Fruit Belt Veteran housing

Veterans living in the Fruit Belt neighborhood who need assistance with small maintenance projects around their homes can contact the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers (BFNC) to receive help this July and August. The Veterans and Military Families Project 2013 aims to lead and implement community service activities and volunteer based programming befitting veterans and military families. Breona Jones, a Summer VISTA Member, through The Service Collaborative of WNY, is coordinating the project out of the Neighborhood House at 97 Lemon Street in Buffalo.

"We will be working with Neighbors Connecting at City Hall and with the various coalitions throughout the Fruit Belt to identify Veterans who need help," she said. "We are also looking for carpenters, electricians, painters, plumbers and handymen who want to volunteer to assist with these projects."

The VISTA Summer Program will coordinate volunteer recruitment to help homeowners with small, one- to two-day projects such as flooring, painting, and small plumbing repairs. The goal is to set up the jobs during the weeks of July 21st - 26th and August 5th - 9th.

"We will also be reaching out to retailers such as Walmart, Lowe's and Home Depot, asking for their support and for donations to complete these projects," Jones said. "But our first steps are to identify veteran and military families who need help, and put together a volunteer labor force to do the work."

Please contact Breona Jones at 716-856-0363 or breelashaay@gmail.com if you are a Veteran who owns a home in need of repairs in the Fruit Belt neighborhood, or if you would be willing to volunteer your labor.

BFNC is really stepping up to the plate to draw youth in and provide them with healthy activities."

The program held a Fish Fry Fundraiser on June 28 to support the league's annual trip to Las Vegas July 22 to 28. The purpose of the trip is to get seniors in front of college coaches who are recruiting players.

"Giving teens productive activities that are supervised by responsible, attentive adults is the best way to engage them and keep them away from harmful influences such as gangs," said Ricardo Herrera, executive director, BFNC. "So that's where we are at BFNC, we're working to provide the setting for those kinds of beneficial activities."

Lessons in Tearing Down Walls continued from cover

through CAPP, they had become motivated to take care of themselves, their partners, and their community. As I was telling them the quickest route to our building, however, they let me know it would not be safe for them to walk through that neighborhood, which is a few blocks away from their own. If they did choose to walk those streets, they risked being assaulted or possibly worse, because they would be crossing into gang territory. It would never have occurred to me that coming to my office would be so dangerous for a certain segment of Buffalo's youth.

I learned a similar lesson last year when I was running a boys' group at a Buffalo public school. This class of special needs students was not on track to graduate; they had all been slotted in general education classes, which they were uniformly failing. Though they were in trouble academically, they were some of the nicest students I've had the pleasure to teach. We started talking about the prison system in group one week, and I learned that all but one of them had already been to jail.

The walls of race, class, gender, sexuality, mental illness, physical disability and gang territories are omnipresent facts of our society, but they are not impenetrable. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, "Compassion is the radicalism of our time."

Recently at CAPP we handed out gift baskets with basic toiletries to a group of at-risk girls at a shelter. Their gratitude for such basic necessities was overwhelming. It was not because of the soap or the dollar wash cloths, but because it showed that people care about them as human beings. That radical idea, to show care for others, is what will eventually tear down all of these walls our society has built.