Seigle Avenue

Freedom School Partners

Annual Report
2009 - 2010

Celebrating Ten Years of Growing Together
A Letter from Mary Nell McPherson
Executive Director, Freedom School Partners

Dear Friends,

This year we celebrated our tenth anniversary. It is hard to believe that in the course of a decade we have grown our after-school program to serve almost eighty students who live in the area once known as Piedmont Courts. We have witnessed the transformation of this public housing project into the new Seigle Point community.

Invited by the Charlotte Housing Authority to be the onsite provider of after-school and summer programs in this new community, we now reside in a beautiful, state-of-the-art facility. We also rejoice that our CDF Freedom Schools® have grown to serve 500 children throughout the city. But our work is far from done. The need in Charlotte is much greater.

Research shows that summer learning loss is the largest factor in the achievement gap for low-income children. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools recently reported that the poverty rate in our school system has exceeded 50%, which means that more than 50,000 elementary and middle school children need quality summer learning opportunities.

This fact brought us to an exciting new phase of our mission. Freedom Schools really make a difference in summer learning. We know in our hearts that reading good books every day and being inspired by college student role models would make a positive impact on elementary and middle school students. Now we have exciting preliminary research to support just that. Please read the article about our promising findings later in this report.

On this tenth anniversary we have much to celebrate. We are no longer just “Seigle Avenue,” although we are thankful for our history in that community. We have preserved that history in our new name “Freedom School Partners” and have expanded our vision to serve more than forty CMS high-poverty schools. This mission will require many partners: colleges and universities, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, houses of worship, foundations, corporations, and many, many volunteers.

We are thrilled that the Leon Levine Foundation has graciously bestowed a $300,000 gift over three years to help create a sustainable model for the expanded CDF Freedom Schools® program.

Now more than ever, we need your support of resources, gifts, time, and talents to move our mission forward. We value your partnership as we work to close the achievement gap and create a more hopeful future for many of Charlotte’s children.

In Partnership,

Mary Nell McPherson
McPherson honored as Community Leader by Mecklenburg Ministries

Mecklenburg Ministries honored Mary Nell McPherson with their 2009 Community Leader Award at a well-attended breakfast at Park Road Baptist Church. Mecklenburg Ministries is a non-profit organization of 88 member congregations that work to foster interfaith cooperation, promote racial and ethnic understanding, and address social needs in Mecklenburg County.

In her introduction, 2008 Award-recipient Rabbi Judy Schindler spoke to Mary Nell’s faith, service, leadership, and advocacy on behalf of Charlotte’s children. “[Mary Nell] has given all of us the direction we need so that more and more of us can open our doors during the slow days of summer, to inspire those most in need to learn - as we dance with them, sing with them, read with them, creatively study with them, engage in social action projects together and help our most fragile youth understand that, with the paddles of education and learning in their hands, they have an abundance of professional or personal destinations before them.”

Johnson C. Smith University hosts Fourth Annual CDF Freedom Schools® Summer Jubilee

Over nine hundred scholars; Thirteen sites; Largest event to date


With 958 scholars in attendance, Dr. Ronald L. Carter, President of Johnson C. Smith, spoke on the importance of literacy and social action. He encouraged the scholars never to be afraid to dream. Dr. Carter emphasized that they should embrace reading so that they too could make a difference - even at a young age.

The event kicked off with Harambee, which means “all for one” in Swahili, and included social action chants, dancing, cheering and singing from the 13 sites represented, which included all 9 Charlotte-area sites, plus 4 other sites from North and South Carolina. Tonia Bendickson, WBTV news anchor, and Allen Davis, intern at Billingsville Elementary, hosted the second part of the program.

The celebration concluded with an advocacy demonstration. Scholars marched with school banners on the track of JCSU’s Irwin Belk Complex to represent and raise awareness of the nearly nine million uninsured children and pregnant women in America. Bank of America and Duke Energy also co-sponsored this annual event.

Pilot Study Results Surprising, Promising

Freedom School Students Make Gains in Summer Reading

Last summer, the Institute for Social Capital at UNC-Charlotte conducted a pilot research project on the reading ability of students before and after Freedom School. The results of this pilot project are very promising - certainly worth expanding the study and worth sharing the news.

The Institute’s research shows that nearly 60% of children increased their reading scores, and another 29% maintained their reading levels. This means that more than 85% of the children in Freedom Schools do better - significantly better - than those children who do not participate in quality summer learning programs.

These excerpts from the Conclusions section of the UNC-Charlotte-Institute for Social Capital Pilot Evaluation, illustrate promise and the need for further study:

- “The data obtained through reading assessments of children in grades 2-5 clearly demonstrate that Freedom School had a positive impact with regard to reading. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assign a cause for these results; we cannot know with certainty why the program helped approximately 60% of students grow in their ability to read.
- “...clearly there is a pattern that emerges from this data showing that Freedom School is a place where many students improve their ability to read.
- The vast majority of students not only reported a positive experience with Freedom Schools, but students also believed that their reading had improved.
- In conclusion, the results from this first pilot evaluation of Seigle Avenue Partners Freedom School are extremely promising, particularly in regard to the ability of the program to enhance reading skills among inner-city children.”
Highlights from a newsworthy year

“...a shining example nationally of sustainability and community support for summer learning and out-of-school time programming for at-risk youth.”
-Marian Wright Edelman, Founder & President, Children’s Defense Fund

LOCAL LUMINARIES HELP WITH SUMMER STORY TIME

$300,000 will help kids learn over the summer

The Charlotte Observer
MONDAY • JULY 6, 2009 • 760

A CONVERSATION ON FAITH by Ron Godbold

“I see him at the Freedom School today. For three summers now, I’ve been writing stories and staying in touch, hoping to help you see what it means to bring students from the South Bronx to Charlotte to learn. By the time they are 19, they will graduate with a college degree. That is what we are working for.”

FRANCO ORDOÑEZ

“The Lee Foundation announced Tuesday that it is donating $300,000 to help build summer-school programs to help at-risk kids. The grant, to be distributed over three years, supports Freedom School Partners, which provides afterschool literacy programs to disadvantaged children living in high-poverty areas.”

M. Neil McPherson, director of Freedom School Partners, said learning losses over the summer is the biggest reason for the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income students. Freedom School Partners is the new name of Seigle Avenue Partners, which changed its name Tuesday in a 10-year anniversary celebration. The program provides nine summertime Children of the Freedom Fund Afterschool programs for Charlotte students living in poverty. McPherson said that at-risk kids can lose almost half a year learning over the summer months when they’re not engaged in learning. A recent study conducted by the University of Rochester in Charlotte, however, showed that 60 percent of students participating in summer programs increased their reading levels and 30 percent maintained their reading levels.

“Our results are outstanding,” said Tom Reeves, executive director of the Lee Foundation. “We did a $300,000 grant to help expand this program in Charlotte.”

“…”

“[Seigle Avenue Partners] grassroots effort and the public-private partnership is a model of community support for education for all our children”
-Peter Gorman, Superintendent
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools
Thanks to our Contributors
10/1/08 - 9/30/09

$2500 to $499

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Elevation Church
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Foundation For The Carolinas
Johnson C. Smith University
The Merica Foundation
Myers Park Presbyterian Church
Myers Park United Methodist Church
Women's Impact Fund

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Burch and Arrington Mixon
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Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of our donor list. If you have made a donation to Seigle Avenue Partners and do not see your name, please call Tracy Montross, 704.371.4522.

Excludes gifts to We Are Seigle Family.
Celebrating Ten Years
Seigle Avenue Partners to Become Freedom School Partners

As part of its ten-year anniversary celebration on November 24, 2009, Seigle Avenue Partners announced it has taken a new name, Freedom School Partners, and has plans for a major program expansion. The event, attended by over 200 community partners and volunteers, was held at Myers Park United Methodist Church. Children’s rights advocate Marian Wright Edelman delivered an keynote address. Edelman, Founder and President of the Children’s Defense Fund, which operates the larger CDF Freedom Schools® program, called the Charlotte program a “wonderful bellwether” for the national effort.

Executive Director Mary Nell McPherson said the new name is meant to emphasize the group’s growing role beyond the Seigle Avenue community, where it was founded in 1999. By 2014, McPherson said, the newly named organization hopes to operate a Freedom School in at least 43 Mecklenburg communities—one in each neighborhood where Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has a “FOCUS school.” (FOCUS schools receive additional resources because of high poverty rates). Each Freedom School would serve up to 100 children. To spearhead the expansion, the Leor Levine Foundation announced a $300,000 gift to the organization.

Financial Summary
October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009

Contributions

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Operating Expenses

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A copy of the complete audited financial statement is available upon request.

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- Aubrey, Niklas and Keegan Bader
- Mace Bennight and Family
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