

AUDACIOUS THINKING

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER
FROM OSI-BALTIMORE

SUMMER 2010

9,000 PEOPLE

RETURN TO BALTIMORE FROM PRISON EACH YEAR

They come home with the best intentions to build a new life.
How can we insure that each person actually gets this opportunity?

IN THIS ISSUE *

- 2 Visiting Hagerstown**
Reflections After Visiting the MD Correctional Training Center
- 4 Real Opportunity**
Group Ministries and Civic Works
- 6 Rhonda Elsey-Jones**
Audacious Individual, Baltimore Community Fellow
- 8 Kept In Jail Without a Court Date**
And Other Stories of Unfair Practices
- 10 Otis Rolley**
A Conversation with an OSI- Baltimore Board Member
- 12 Neal Friedlander and Virginia Adams**
Profile of OSI-Baltimore Investors
- 14 Audacious Priority**
Every Child in School, Every Day

CONGRATULATIONS...

...to **Baltimore Community Fellow Miriam Avins**, who was recently awarded the Aileen Hughes Award for Leadership in Land Conservation for 2010 presented at the Maryland Land Trust Alliance Conference on May 27. The award is in recognition of her pioneering work to preserve land in Baltimore City, working with communities and government to create community spaces from abandoned lots.

And to **Diana Morris, Director of OSI-Baltimore**, who received the Greater Baltimore YWCA's Racial Justice Award for her efforts to raise public awareness of and increase public discourse about the continuing presence

and consequences of racism in Baltimore City and beyond. For the third year in a row an OSI-Baltimore affiliated woman has won this award. Two years ago, **Sherrilyn Ifill, OSI-Board Member**, was the recipient; she then presented the award last year to **Monique Dixon, Director of Juvenile and Criminal Justice**.

At the annual Tuerk Conference on April 20, **Diana Morris and Kima Taylor, Director of Tackling Drug Addiction**, both received the Outstanding Advocate Award for 2010 from the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) in Maryland.

HELP US MAKE LASTING CHANGE.

Your financial gift to OSI-Baltimore helps create opportunities, justice, and economic stability for those in our city who need it most. We tackle Baltimore's most challenging issues.

We welcome all gifts of every level. Every dollar given is matched 1:2 by our founder, George Soros. Our donors share a common goal: to revitalize Baltimore. They realize that, by investing in OSI-Baltimore, they play a vital role in improving our city's future.



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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I recently attended a national press conference in Washington, D.C. where the W.K. Kellogg Foundation announced that OSI-Baltimore is receiving a grant from their “America Healing” initiative. The initiative aims to address the “devastating impact of racial inequalities on communities across the country.” OSI-Baltimore will use its grant to achieve a reduction in the disproportionately high numbers of African-American youth in our juvenile justice system.

Like our “Talking About Race” forum series, which is attracting hundreds of Baltimoreans to each session, the initiative has tapped into a profound community need to discuss the hurt, wasted potential, and economic instability caused by historical and current racial discrimination. The damage affects individuals, families and the region at large. **The flip side is that racial equity can lead to prosperity in Baltimore. That is just one reason we should fight collectively to remove barriers to opportunity that continue to affect people of color.** And as we do this, we need to look at existing systems – e.g., housing segregation, concentrated poverty, and a justice system which currently embraces punishment over treatment and rehabilitation.

Here’s an example. To revitalize our economy and build a strong workforce, we should make sure that the 9,000 people who return to Baltimore from prison each year – most of whom are African-American men – get the education, training, and jobs they need to be successful. **The overwhelming majority of these individuals want nothing more**

than to build a good life for themselves and their families. Economic prosperity for each one of us is closely linked to opportunity and those who have been incarcerated are no different. It’s not only a “win-win situation,” it’s the right thing to do. The region will prosper by ensuring that we actively redress racial inequity – e.g., the over-representation of African-Americans in jail and prison – by giving individuals second and third chances to get back on the right road.

This issue of “Audacious Thinking” describes some of the efforts OSI is undertaking in partnership with the state and with non-profit organizations to reduce racial inequity by helping people with criminal histories join the workforce and community life successfully.

Let’s work together to put opportunity for all squarely into our economic development plans for the region.

DIANA MORRIS, Director of OSI-Baltimore

VISITING HAGERSTOWN:

REFLECTIONS AFTER VISITING THE MARYLAND CORRECTIONAL TRAINING CENTER

By **Robin Wood**

OSI-Baltimore
Board Member

A recent visit to a Maryland correctional institution, where upwards of 67% of the inmates are black men, has had me thinking quite a bit about a group of people who previously crossed my mind only on the rarest occasions.

We were headed to the prison to see a play some of the inmates would perform at the invitation of Bashi Rose, a young man who has worked directly with the men to help them develop this piece of theater. Roughly 15 men were involved in the production. Another group of maybe sixty inmates made up the audience. Those assembled represent about 1/100th of the total number of individuals detained at this facility.

There is no way to convey with words the sick feeling that comes with the realization that thousands of human beings are being warehoused on this sprawling property. And, this pattern repeats all across America. There are currently more than 2,000,000 U.S. citizens being held in prisons and jails on American soil.

So here we were, three curious women, in a room filled with 75 inmates of this medium security prison. Scanning the rows, I was struck that these vital, poised, articulate men in the prime of their lives would be sitting out their next 10, 15, 25 years under lock and key, in the custody of the State of Maryland, at taxpayer expense.

While I do not pretend that these guys are serving time for anything less than their own poor choices to break the law, still it is noteworthy that perhaps as many as half of these young men are imprisoned for low-level, non-violent

drug crimes. Many others have been returned to prison for “technical” violations of the terms of their parole or probation. Large numbers of them will be middle-aged by the time they are released. The reality of this unfolded surreally for me.

The play was a meditation on self-reflection, anger, loss, political hypocrisy, and the consequences of the inter-generational cycle of paternal abandonment.



This experience has reinforced my determination to work in ever more substantive ways to provide black boys and young men with alternative spaces in our society to quietly contemplate their paths, clarify their values and goals, and galvanize themselves to go out into the world to seek positive and fruitful lives.

Speaking with some of the men after the final curtain, I was jarred by what I heard. **Man after man suggested that prison had saved his life** – they intimated that they'd found their spiritual selves, their more compassionate selves, equanimity, and a desire to become educated while in prison.

I came slowly to a soul-numbing understanding of what they were saying; that given their existence in our society outside the prison walls, ironically, prison has been the place they have been able to effectively tune out the chaos of their lives and find a solitary space for introspection and focus. The thought of this was wrenching. What incredibly sad commentary this is on the continuing disparities of access and opportunity that plague our society!

This experience has reinforced my determination to work in ever more substantive ways to provide black boys and young men with alternative spaces in our society to quietly contemplate their paths, clarify their values and goals, and galvanize themselves to go out into the world to seek positive and fruitful lives.

OSI-Baltimore's focus on keeping young people in school and helping them find meaningful employment and other opportunities

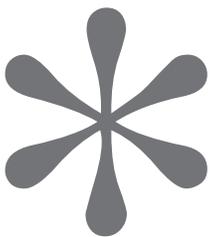
in the out-of-school hours, its work to break down barriers to addiction treatment, and its focus on reducing our over-reliance on incarceration is a strategic, nuanced set of substantive efforts being undertaken to change the opportunity landscape and offer second chances. OSI founder, George Soros, has also recently established a Campaign for Black Male Achievement with aims to fundamentally improve the life chances of black American males. OSI-Baltimore's work seeks to achieve these same goals.

I am a believer in the transcendent nature of the human heart and mind. I believe that both those who have been favored by good fortune and those who have been challenged by misfortune are capable of transforming their lives in ways that can bring grace into the world. **As the mother of a young black man, I am hopeful that we will marshal our collective resources to bring the scourge of mass incarceration into fuller light and to determine a more transcendent approach to changing the realities faced by black boys and men in American society.**



REAL OPPORTUNITY

FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST



The Rev. Horace Smith grew up in West Baltimore's Rosemont neighborhood, became addicted to heroin and even spent some time behind bars for minor offenses.

Today, at age 65, Smith uses his "past life as a passport to other people's lives," as he puts it. A graduate of Morgan State University and associate minister at New Psalmist Baptist Church, Smith leads Group Ministries, a nonprofit he founded in 1997 to provide housing, jobs and drug treatment to former prisoners, people recovering from addiction and those living with HIV/AIDS in the Rosemont neighborhood.

Group Ministries is one of four nonprofit organizations that recently received substantial grants from OSI's Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation. This fund, which totaled \$6 million locally, was created by philanthropist

George Soros to help those most hurt by the recession. The most recent grants from this fund, totaling \$1.5 million, will provide job training and placement for over 140 individuals with criminal records. In addition, OSI was able to leverage its \$1.5 million with a one-to-one match from Maryland's Department of Human Resources, enabling more people to be trained.

Group Ministries, for instance, will offer job training and internships to 20 people with criminal records so they can achieve journeyman status as plumbers, electricians and carpenters. Participants first will be assessed in reading and math and, for those whose skills are lacking, Group Ministries will help develop an educational plan. Through on-the-job training and classroom instruction, participants will learn basic occupational safety and the proper use of

LEFT: Reverend Smith (far right) directs Group Ministries participants at a local building site.
BELOW: A Civic Works' retrofit crew works to make a home more energy efficient.



hands tools. They'll learn skills such as reading blueprints and house plans. Those who complete the program will be eligible to become apprentices in a program recognized by the state.

Group Ministries also will help participants find jobs in the building trades and will pay a wage subsidy to employers of \$10 an hour for 40 hours a week for six months. In return, employers are encouraged to hire participants full-time at the same or higher salaries. Group Ministries already has four partner employers and is identifying others.

In addition, a case manager will help the participants access public benefits and resolve problems they face during their job placements.

On top of all that, the home that the men will renovate, through their on-the-job training, will be used as transitional housing for people returning from prison to the Rosemont neighborhood.

"We're trying to give people the skills to deal with the barriers they face when they get out of prison," says Smith. **"You come home with the best intentions and then life takes it toll. You can't find a job. You can't find a place to live. We try to help with all the issues that really hinder people from becoming upstanding citizens."**

Civic Works is another of the four nonprofits training ex-prisoners for good jobs with career ladders. The OSI grant will enable Civic Works to train 44 people with criminal records for green jobs, such as making homes more energy efficient. "When we lock people out of society, especially formerly incarcerated people, we punish all of society," says John Mello, green projects

director at Civic Works. "Opportunities open to all people are necessary to build a viable, equitable community in Baltimore."

Like Group Ministries, Civic Works will offer wage subsidies to employers and has already identified more than 40 potential companies.

Civic Works is grateful for OSI's recession-relief grant. "We appreciate all of our funders," Mello says. "But to me, OSI-Baltimore has always been a little bit different and more progressive. They're willing to do something in a different way. They're audacious."



WHY WE FUND IT

"Many people who are released from prison or otherwise have criminal records want a second chance to show that they can make meaningful contributions to their families and communities. These grant awards will offer our fellow Baltimoreans the opportunity to develop job skills that will place them on successful career paths. Their families and the entire city will benefit from their work."

MONIQUE DIXON, Director of Criminal and Juvenile Justice

AUDACIOUS INDIVIDUAL

RHONDA ELSEY-JONES, BALTIMORE COMMUNITY FELLOW

To some on the outside, the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women might seem a fortress of female felons. But OSI-Baltimore Community Fellow Rhonda Elsey-Jones sees the women inmates quite differently.



“About 90 percent of them have experienced trauma in their lives,” says Elsey-Jones, who counsels women in the Jessup, Maryland facility. She talks with them about how past trauma influences behaviors. She also has worked with children visiting their mothers in prison. “We talk a lot about generational trauma,” she says.

Elsey-Jones survived familial sexual abuse and witnessed domestic violence herself. At age three, she promised her baby sister she would always take care of her. Unfortunately, when Elsey-Jones was 29, her younger sister was killed by her husband. “It was the most devastating experience of my life,” says Elsey-Jones, today 55. She numbed the pain with drugs. After her second arrest, a compassionate judge offered treatment and a suspended sentence. Elsey-Jones chose recovery.

Working with the National Women’s Prison Project, a local organization, Elsey-Jones is using her fellowship to assist other women who have experienced trauma, have been incarcerated and have had substance abuse or mental health issues. Her project is called Women Healing Our Lives Entirely, or WHOLE, and she is sharing and teaching alternative wellness therapies that she used to transform her own life.

WHOLE teaches women ways to cope with their past trauma, including journaling, meditating and expressing their feelings through art.

WHOLE embraces wellness, self-healing and nurturing. It introduces the women to trauma education and awareness. They are learning to meditate, journal and identify and name their feelings. Elsey-Jones formed a partnership with Maryland Institute College of Art – and now, MICA students are teaching art to about 20 women, using clay, oil paint and chalk, among other media. A planned new partnership will provide therapists to work with the women. Elsey-Jones also works with women at Martha's Place, a transitional housing program for women struggling with addiction. She also will work with Power Inside, which serves women from the Baltimore jail and is run by alumni OSI-Baltimore Community Fellow Jacqui Robarge.

"When you continue to believe you are a victim, you operate under a victim mentality," says Elsey-Jones. "But when you start believing and feeling that you have some power to change, you have the power to do that." How does one know she has healed? **"When it doesn't hurt to talk about it," she says. "That's what being WHOLE really means."**

When you start believing and feeling that you have some power to change, you have the power to do that.

Elsey-Jones has seen that sort of progress already in her fellowship. She introduced one woman to a new technique that dredged up bad memories. The process concluded with a campfire in which the woman forgave a past tormentor. The woman then took a long nap and awoke, saying she felt so much better. "She said, 'All that stuff that came out, it doesn't even hurt anymore,'" Elsey-Jones recalled.

Elsey-Jones wants that experience to be realized by all traumatized women. One of her ultimate goals is to establish a safe house for women called Diane's Desire, so named in honor of younger sister and "the desire to be all that you can be."



WHY WE FUND IT

"Our Community Fellows sometimes are able to connect the dots in ways that others can't. In this instance, Rhonda Elsey-Jones knows the pain these women experience personally and combines her intelligence and tenacity to make a big difference in their lives."

PAMELA KING, Director of Community Fellowships and Initiatives

KEPT IN JAIL * JAIL WITHOUT A COURT DATE

And other stories
of unfair practices

One of the nation's oldest and largest jails, the Baltimore City Detention Center routinely operates at 100-percent capacity, housing nearly 4,000 people a day.

But nearly 90 percent of the 4,000 people inside haven't even gone to trial yet. And most of their charges are nonviolent ones, such as drug offenses and probation violations.

Those are among the startling findings of a new report by the Justice Policy Institute (JPI), funded by the Open Society Institute-Baltimore. The report explores why the Baltimore jail is packed with people who don't need to be there, costing the state too much money and hurting the community.

"We were concerned about why so many people are in the jail who haven't been convicted of a crime," said Nastassia Walsh, the JPI research associate who wrote the new report. "We felt it was important to examine current policies and practices that contribute to the over-incarceration of Baltimore residents."

The numbers tell the story:

- In most other jails, about two-thirds of the inmates are being held pretrial (i.e., before they are convicted of a crime) compared to nine out of 10 in Baltimore.
- The Baltimore Detention Center houses not only men and women but even youth ages 14-17, all awaiting trial dates.
- Two-thirds of those in the Baltimore jail were arrested for non-violent offenses.
- The jail population has remained constant, despite a big drop in crime in recent years.
- About 90 percent of those in the Baltimore jail are people of color, even though only 64 percent of Baltimore residents are African-American.
- Trial postponements can keep people in jail pretrial for months or even years.
- Many people remain in jail because they can not afford to pay bail amounts that may be as low as \$100 and as high as \$1 million.



Natassia Walsh, research associate, and Tracy Velazquez, executive director

“Forcing people to remain incarcerated while they await their day in court has serious, far-reaching consequences for families, communities and individuals,” says Walsh. “People may lose their jobs and benefits such as Social Security and Medicaid while they are sitting in jail waiting for their trials.”

Pretrial incarceration is also costly.

“The state spends around \$150 million a year to incarcerate people in the Baltimore City Detention Center,” Walsh says. “At

approximately \$100 per day per person, more cost-effective alternatives should be explored.”

Many options do exist for pretrial supervision in the community, but Baltimore appears to be underutilizing these, the JPI report suggests.

The report explains that pretrial supervision outside of jail, such as that offered by the Pretrial Release Services Program in Baltimore, is a far better option than pretrial detention.

“Pretrial supervision yields high court appearance rates and low re-arrest rates for people who participate,” Walsh says. “In addition, people who are released pretrial are less likely to receive a prison or jail sentence, which may lead to fewer people incarcerated in Maryland.”

The report also notes that the Baltimore jail does not offer adequate re-entry services, such as drug addiction treatment and housing and employment assistance.

“Remedying this could have a significant impact on the number of people who return to jail after release,” Walsh says. If fewer people were held in the jail, it would be less crowded, allowing the facility to offer more of the programming it doesn’t have currently, such as treatment and re-entry services, she noted.

JPI released its report in early June to the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, which operates the jail, as well as to city leaders, advocates and the media, with the goal of changing practices and policies to reduce the number of people held in the jail, especially those who are held pretrial. JPI also recommends better re-entry services at the jail as well as better coordination among city and state agencies.

“At every level, there’s something that can be changed,” Walsh says. “This is a unique opportunity for Baltimore and the state of Maryland to have a positive impact on communities.”



WHY WE FUND IT

“We hope that this report will inform the public about who is held at the Baltimore City jail and why. It has the potential to serve as a catalyst for a collaborative effort to safely and responsibly reduce the city’s jail population, which ultimately will save money and lives.”

MONIQUE DIXON, Director of Criminal and Juvenile Justice

A CONVERSATION WITH AN
OSI-BALTIMORE BOARD MEMBER:

OTIS ROLLEY

*What surprises me is that
Baltimore still doesn't realize
how phenomenal it is.*



OTIS ROLLEY is senior manager at Urban Policy Development, a Baltimore-based public sector management consulting firm where he concentrates on planning and zoning, community and economic development, and public administration. Prior to that, he was founding president and CEO of Central Maryland Transportation Alliance, a transportation advocacy organization. He also worked for the city of Baltimore for more than a decade, including stints as planning director, first deputy housing commissioner and mayoral chief of staff. He holds a bachelor's degree from Rutgers University and a master's from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Hailing from Jersey City, NJ, he has lived in Baltimore for the past 12 years. He serves on the boards of Park Heights Renaissance Inc., Kipp Baltimore, Middle Grades Partnership, the Urban Land Institute and now the Open Society Institute-Baltimore. He and his wife have two children.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO CITY PLANNING? DO LITTLE BOYS GROW UP DREAMING ABOUT BEING CITY PLANNERS SOMEDAY?

By the time I'm done with my work, there will be more little boys and girls who think that way. In college, I was interested in international public policy work. A professor at a summer fellowship at Princeton confronted me and said, 'So there are no problems in this country?' It was like he punched me in my stomach. I was so frustrated by the injustices here. I think I was trying to run away. I thought the problems I saw growing up in the inner city were too deep. I wanted to do domestic-based work but, aside from producing a lot of white papers, I thought there might be a disconnect in the field between research and reality. I saw planning as a practical way to move forward in terms of real action.

HOW DOES CITY PLANNING ADDRESS THOSE INJUSTICES?

City planning can be a positive force for change or a negative force for inequity. It has to do with how resources are allocated – what schools get funding, which roads get built, where lighting is installed. On the economic development side, there is success when there are well-thought out plans.

WHAT SURPRISES YOU ABOUT BALTIMORE?

What surprises me is that Baltimore still doesn't realize how phenomenal it is. When we finally realize this, we will be dangerous in a good sense.

WHY IS THAT?

We believe the media in terms of 'The Wire' and 'Homicide' instead of seeing how great the people are here. I see where we could be and what we would be if we could step back and recognize how beautiful, intelligent and talented we are.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING THE CITY?

We need to improve our educational system, and we need to encourage businesses to come here, both small and large. There is the issue of substance abuse and many public health issues. On the educational front, I love what Dr. Alonso is doing with the school system. He has a great vision.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO WORK TOWARD CHANGE?

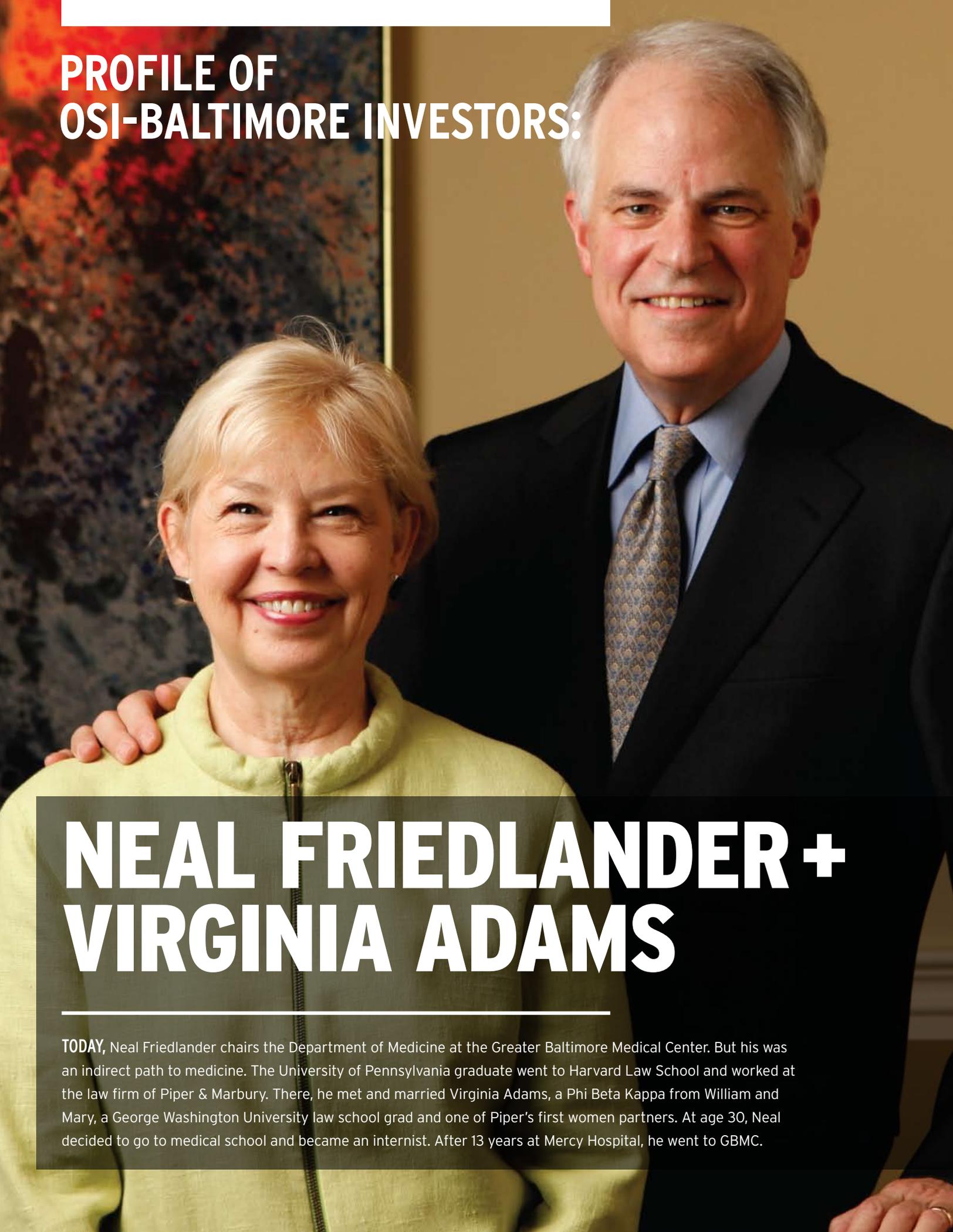
My faith and my experiences. I get really frustrated with inequity. My high school was one of the worst in New Jersey. I was the first kid from my high school to go to Governors School, a summer program in which kids from some well-off public schools were complaining about how (then) Governor Florio's attempt to address funding inequities at poor schools would mean they wouldn't have heated walkways or 24/7 computer labs. In these debates, I would say, 'At my school, we have one computer, and we don't have walkways because we have only one building.' I was angered to the point of action.

HOW DID YOU GET HOOKED UP WITH OSI-BALTIMORE?

I knew of OSI's work and was very impressed with it. I like that they think outside the box. OSI has a track record of being revolutionary, asking, 'How do we solve this problem, not just how do we tweak around the edges.'

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BALTIMORE'S FUTURE?

I'm very optimistic. I look at the 13,000 families who would have left but who instead chose charter and transformation schools. I see our crime rate dropping. I look at OSI and see an organization pushing the envelope and trying to do things smartly. I look at the election in 2008 and saw 214,000 Baltimoreans who wanted change and hope. It was exciting to me to see so many people vote and say they want a better Baltimore.



PROFILE OF OSI-BALTIMORE INVESTORS:

NEAL FRIEDLANDER + VIRGINIA ADAMS

TODAY, Neal Friedlander chairs the Department of Medicine at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center. But his was an indirect path to medicine. The University of Pennsylvania graduate went to Harvard Law School and worked at the law firm of Piper & Marbury. There, he met and married Virginia Adams, a Phi Beta Kappa from William and Mary, a George Washington University law school grad and one of Piper's first women partners. At age 30, Neal decided to go to medical school and became an internist. After 13 years at Mercy Hospital, he went to GBMC.



After 22 years of corporate law practice, Ginny decided she wanted to study art history, and earned master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Maryland. She has taught art history at that University, Loyola University Maryland, and Maryland Institute College of Art, and lectures on issues of modern and contemporary art. She is a trustee of the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Enoch Pratt Free Library, whose board she has chaired. Neal co-chairs OSI-Baltimore's Leadership Council, is vice president of the board of the Contemporary Museum, and is a member of the board of directors of the Midtown Development Corporation. They both grew up in Baltimore County but have lived in Bolton Hill for 35 years, raising a daughter, Robin, who is now at Columbia University Medical School. Married for 30 years, they are passionate art collectors and travelers. Neal took up marathons at age 55 and Ginny, herself a fitness buff, is there to congratulate him at the finish line.

WHY THE SWITCH FROM LAW TO MEDICINE?

Neal: I had thought about medicine even in law school. That was the late '60s and early '70s, and I'm a bit of a rebel. I was very happy at the law firm and had the opportunity to work with wonderful people. But physicians focus on individuals, and I wanted to do that in my work. Lawyers view problems from a much broader perspective, focusing on society and systems as a whole. That perspective, too, has never left me.

HOW DOES A CORPORATE AND SECURITIES LAWYER BECOME AN ART HISTORIAN?

Ginny: Although I hadn't studied art history, I had always been interested in art. I became a weekend docent at the Baltimore Museum of Art in the early nineties, and that deepened my interest. I'm fundamentally an academic person and wanted to know much more. I finished my Ph.D. in 2007.

REINVENTION SEEMS TO BE A THEME FOR YOU AND NEAL – AND BALTIMORE.

Ginny: We may be a little crazy. I came back here in '74 to practice law. At that time, Baltimore, under Mayor [William Donald] Schaefer, was just beginning to come back. I felt Baltimore had some real potential. We love living downtown.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO HELP SOLVE BALTIMORE'S PROBLEMS?

Neal: This is our community. It's our home. It's our city. Everyone has a responsibility to try to help. It's that simple. There is the wonderful challenge of trying to make things better.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH PHILANTHROPY?

Neal: Baltimore is very open in terms of allowing people who want to be involved to do so, unlike certain communities that are very closed. That's a big attraction for me – the fact that I can play a role in this community.

WHY GIVE TO OSI-BALTIMORE?

Neal: Not only is OSI optimistic about the future of Baltimore and willing to tackle the most difficult problems, but it does so in an interdisciplinary way. Solving community problems involves any number of different interests and perspectives. OSI brings everyone to the table in order to solve problems. They also measure the results of the people they fund and insist on a return on investment. That's exactly how we should proceed.

Ginny: The fact that George Soros has committed his financial capital and personal energy to this city through OSI is testament to his belief in its potential.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING PHILANTHROPY?

Ginny: Baltimore is not a terribly wealthy city. We've lost many corporate headquarters over the years and have therefore lost some major corporate philanthropic contributions. Thus, it's harder to raise large amounts of money. The economic downturn has made things more difficult, and I think it's very important for institutions to be able to give donors a good sense of what their donations are accomplishing. OSI measures the results of its programs so that OSI and its donors aren't just putting money into things without knowing whether they work. That approach is vitally important.

WHERE IS BALTIMORE GOING? IS THERE A SECOND OR THIRD ACT IN THE CITY'S FUTURE?

Ginny: A city can never stand still. I worry about the huge stock of vacant houses in Baltimore and about large pockets of poverty in East and West Baltimore. But I do feel we are progressing.

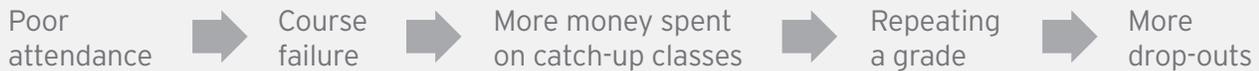
Neal: There's an openness and a willingness to embrace change in Baltimore that have been and will be the keys to our success.



In this issue of Audacious Thinking, we bring you a new feature – “Audacious Priority.” Each issue will feature an issue that we consider essential for Baltimore’s future – and the approach OSI-Baltimore is using to bring a workable solution to the problem.

AUDACIOUS PRIORITY:

EVERY CHILD IN SCHOOL, EVERY DAY



THE ISSUE



More than 40% of Baltimore’s high school students miss a month or more of school each year. These frequent absences are severely limiting the learning, job and college prospects of the city’s future citizens and workers.

The stories behind students’ irregular attendance are as unique as the students themselves. The problem frequently starts with a lack of family, school and community resources. Later, it often comes to include poor personal choices as well.



WHAT OSI-BALTIMORE IS WORKING ON NOW IN EDUCATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

OUR APPROACH



EXAMINE THE DATA. OSI awarded grants to establish the Baltimore Education Research Consortium, a group dedicated to conducting independent study of critical education issues in the city, and assigned internal staff and the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute to research the extent, causes and consequences of chronic absence.

SPREAD THE WORD. OSI hosted a forum series on attendance with national experts and developed fact sheets, issue papers, research briefs, and presentation materials for public use.

GET LEADERS ON BOARD. OSI made the case for action to the mayor and the City Schools CEO, offering to integrate a city-wide effort to address attendance into on-going school reform efforts and to provide staff support.

IDENTIFY PARTNERS. Because school attendance involves reliable buses and safe routes, healthy kids, engaged parents, and welcoming schools, OSI chose to partner with the Mayor's office, the City Schools, and community organizations to create the Student Attendance Workgroup.

DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN TO DRAMATICALLY INCREASE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE. The Student Attendance Workgroup investigated the issue and recommended a multi-agency, public-private plan to improve attendance. OSI then awarded grants to the Maryland ACLU, Kids on the Hill, Wide Angle Media, and the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute to support the effort.



KEY PARTNERS

Jonathan Brice, Executive Director of Student Support and Safety for Baltimore City Public Schools, serves as the co-chair for the Student Attendance Workgroup. Sue Fothergill, Executive Director of educationRISING, serves as the Workgroup coordinator.

PROGRESS TO-DATE

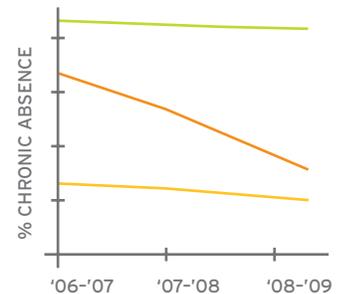


- Briefs completed and disseminated on best practices, attendance laws, transportation, health, data, and student mobility issues
- Student-designed print messages about attendance distributed to schools
- Outreach and training conducted for youth agency staff, educators, and federal, state and local policymakers
- School principals' data reports revised to highlight attendance
- School nurses informed about increasing absences for priority outreach
- After-school and Community School programs to use attendance as primary accountability and outreach measure
- Attendance incentive programs developed
- Reduced absence, especially at elementary and middle school levels
- Increased regular attendance, especially at elementary and middle schools

CHRONIC ABSENCE: missing 20 or more days **HIGH ATTENDERS:** missing fewer than 5 days

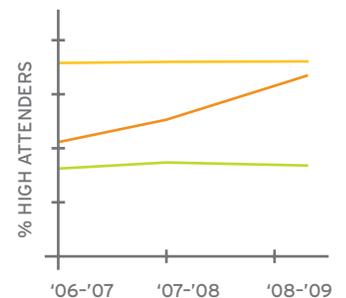
CHRONIC ABSENCE IN BALTIMORE IS DOWN

GRADE LEVEL	% CHRONIC ABSENCE		
	'06-'07	'07-'08	'08-'09
Elementary School	14.0	12.4	11.3
Middle School	33.7	27.0	18.6
High School	43.5	42.1	42.0
All City Schools	28.7	25.6	23.2



HIGH ATTENDANCE IN BALTIMORE IS UP

GRADE LEVEL	% HIGH ATTENDERS		
	'06-'07	'07-'08	'08-'09
Elementary School	35.8	36.1	36.7
Middle School	21.2	26.8	33.1
High School	16.0	18.1	17.1
All City Schools	25.6	28.0	26.7



WHAT WE KNOW: IF STUDENTS ATTEND SCHOOL, THEY WILL SUCCEED

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
15	ABSENT					20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
29	30	31					

WHEN IS 90% NOT AN "A"?

When students attend school 90% of the time, they miss almost a month of classroom learning.

NEXT STEPS



- Add incentive programs and activities in schools and classrooms
- Monitor data, especially for low attending schools and populations
- Focus more on high school where the problem is most prevalent
- Get kids and families to carry the message

HIGH SCHOOL ABSENCE IS AT EPIDEMIC LEVELS

When a lot of kids are missing in the classroom, all the students suffer. As a community, we need to tell our kids that they need to be on the "five day a week plan."





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* SAVE THE DATE

FORUM SERIES: Arrests in Schools: Evidence, Outcomes and Best Practices*



Diversion through Collaboration: Reducing School Referrals to Court in Birmingham, Alabama

Judge Brian Huff, Presiding Judge at the Jefferson Family Court, will discuss his approach to juvenile justice and school safety issues.

July 13, 2010, 10 AM



School Arrests and Student Outcomes: Using National Data to Improve School Safety

Jim Freeman, director of the Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track project at the Advancement Project, will provide a national perspective on school discipline and arrests.

September 29, 2010, 10 AM

*Space is limited; please reserve your spot at www.osi-baltimore.org