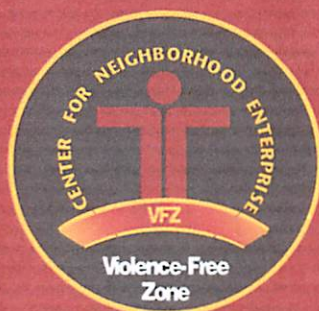


Center for Neighborhood Enterprise Violence-Free Zone



Successful Youth Violence Intervention/Prevention





THE MISSION OF THE
CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ENTERPRISE
IS TO TRANSFORM LIVES, SCHOOLS,
AND TROUBLED NEIGHBORHOODS
FROM THE INSIDE OUT

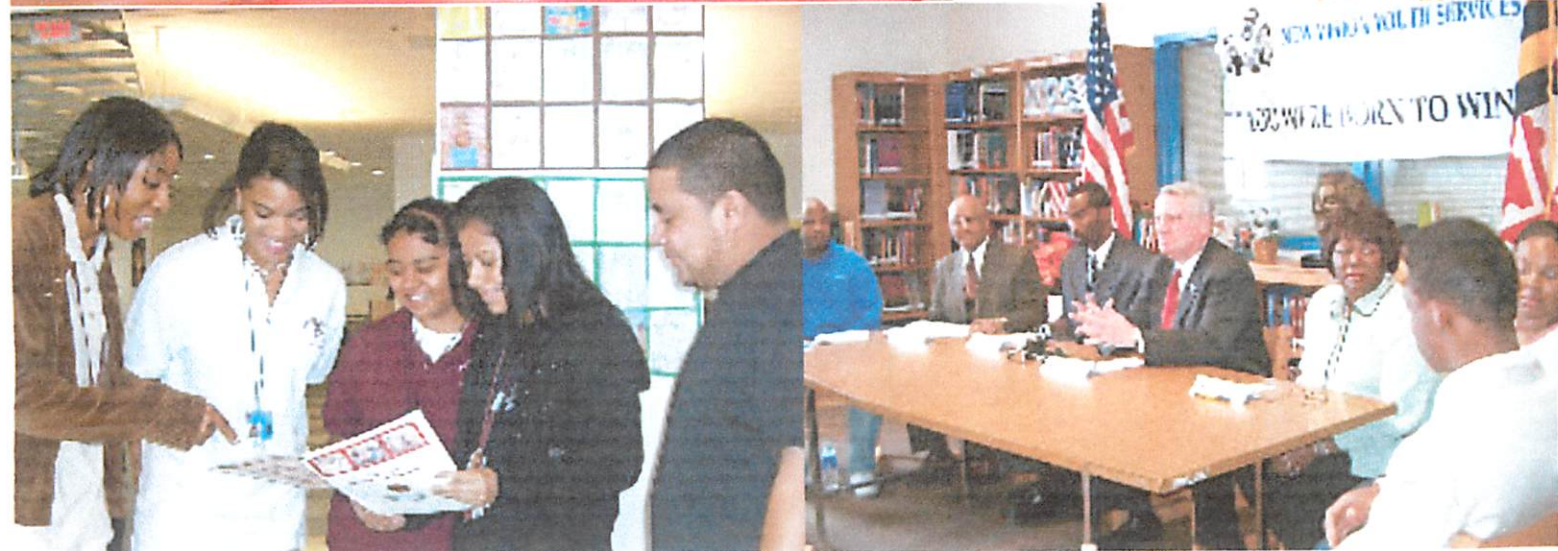
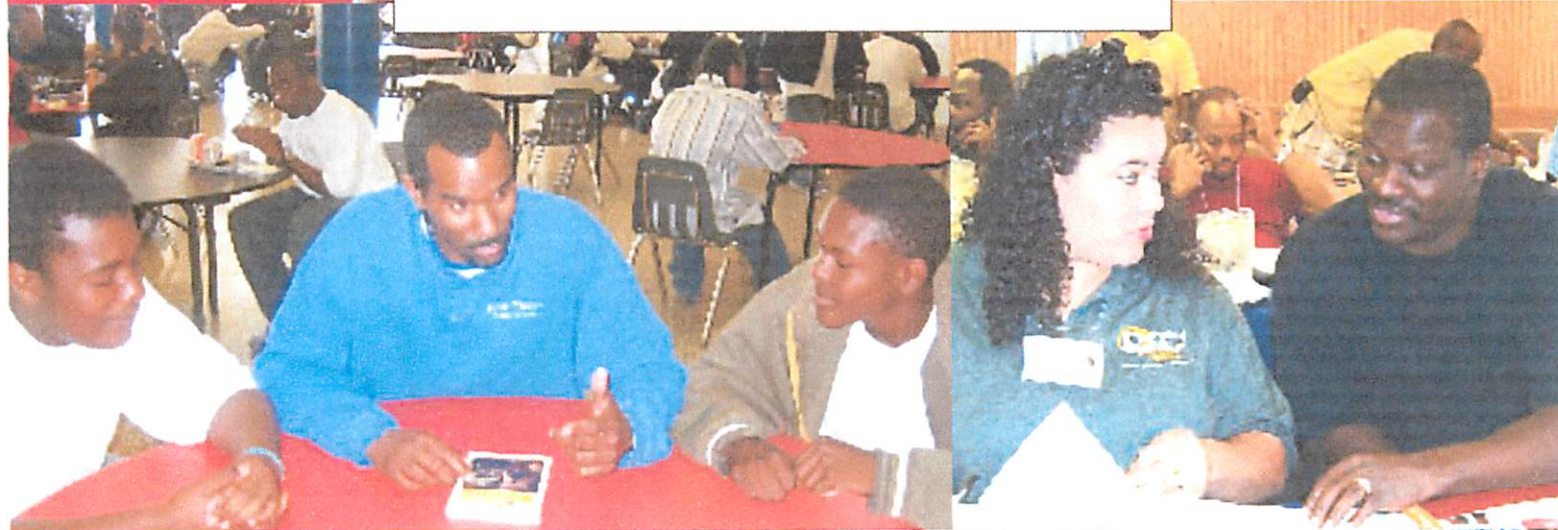


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Foreword

Robert L. Woodson, Sr.

Over the past decade, millions of dollars have been invested in public schools throughout the nation in an effort to "reform the schools." Virtually all of these initiatives have ignored an obvious reality: real reform can only take place on a foundation of civil order. Failure to develop a plan to bring about peace in our schools is like discussing school reform in the middle of a combat zone. Until rising school violence and disruption are curbed, academic progress will continue to suffer, there will be more children inadequately prepared, and the rate of high school graduation will continue to drop.

School systems rely almost exclusively upon metal detectors, cameras, and security guards or police to secure the schools. While these external approaches have their place, they are limited in the control they can exert. They may suppress some behaviors, but they do not confront the causes of those behaviors.

What is needed is a strategy that identifies who it is that kids turn to when facing a crisis—at the time when there is opportunity for intervention. But the conventional educational establishment is not tuned into the young people's frequency, and thus conflicts occur right under their noses. The most effective approaches are internal to the youth culture and rely upon the identification of influential leaders among the population of young people creating the problem. Many of these local leaders are a few years older than the youth, come from the same background, and have overcome many of the same challenges faced by the students.

These natural community leaders are like antibodies developed by the body itself. They operate in different cultural zip codes than the professional educational establishment. Trusted by the students, they offer a source of emotional support. Students see them as older brothers or sisters. Since confiding in them is not considered snitching, information about impending conflicts is shared with them so that intervention can prevent a violent outcome. They act as moral mentors and character coaches, and they are role models that prove that no matter how dysfunctional the environment, it is possible to succeed.

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise's Violence-Free Zone initiative, partnering with community-based organizations that implement it in each locale, has achieved significant success in more than 30 high-violence urban schools across the country. In Milwaukee, for instance, Baylor University researchers who studied the VFZ reported that violent incidents, disruptions, and suspensions were significantly reduced and GPA's rose in six Milwaukee high schools that had the VFZ program, while the rest of the schools in the system lost ground or remained the same (see page 17).

The Violence-Free Zone not only is measurably effective in reducing violence, it is cost-effective. It produces savings to the community by decreasing police and other emergency calls to the schools, avoiding court and incarceration costs, and by promoting attendance and academic achievement. It makes it possible for teachers to teach, and prepares students to learn. Especially in difficult financial times, the Violence-Free Zone program is a sound investment that heals from within, saving taxpayer money as well as salvaging young lives.



Robert L. Woodson, Sr.
President, Center for Neighborhood Enterprise



Left to right: CNE Violence-Free Zone Program Director, Kwame Johnson; CNE Founder and President Robert L. Woodson, Sr.; CNE Vice-President Terence Mathis



Chapter 1

History of the Violence-Free Zone Initiative

Roots of the Violence-Free Zone

In the early 1970s, Philadelphia was known as the "Youth Gang Capital" of the nation. At that time and during the 1980s, CNE founder Robert L. Woodson, Sr. assisted and chronicled the gang intervention strategies of a unique grassroots organization in Philadelphia. The House of Umoja was founded by Sister Falaka Fattah and her husband, David, who learned that one of their sons had become an active member of a youth gang. They responded by inviting 13 members of the gang to live in their small row house, moving out furniture and putting mattresses on the floor. They established rules together to govern behavior. Because conflict threatened the home, they created a means of coming together to solve disputes called the "Adella." The young people were required to go to school or work. Soon other gang members heard about the safe haven and asked to come to Umoja. With the earnings of the group, Umoja was able to buy and renovate neighboring houses and the program grew.

To gain safe passage in the neighborhoods, the Umoja members negotiated peace treaties with neighboring gangs. The former predators became

"The important lesson of Umoja is that the cure came from within. Sister Falaka's was not a top-down professional approach parachuted in from some other place. It was successful because she was able to motivate and transform a few young people who became the moral equivalent of antibodies spreading their healing to others throughout the city."

– Robert L. Woodson, Sr.

ambassadors of peace, and in 1974 Umoja hosted a city-wide gang peace summit. As a result, Philadelphia's youth gang deaths dropped from more than 40 annually to less than two, where it remained for many years.

Woodson identified the principles established in this landmark effort and outlined them in several books. He also learned what qualities characterize the effective neighborhood leaders who could motivate young people to positive change. This knowledge made it possible to apply these principles to other troubled communities across the nation.

A Transformation in Benning Terrace



Rival youth crew members came together in a truce.

In January, 1997, a 12-year-old boy was shot and killed in violence between rival youth factions in a crime-ridden Washington, DC public housing development. Woodson and the CNE staff coached and supported members of a local grassroots group called the Alliance of Concerned Men as they brought the leaders of the two warring factions to CNE's offices to negotiate a truce. Using strategies learned from the Philadelphia experience, Woodson, the CNE staff, and the Alliance helped craft a peace agreement between the factions whose conflicts had caused more than 50 youth deaths in the years before.

Benning Terrace, continued

Once the young people agreed to sign a peace pact, a meeting was held to determine what they wanted to do with their lives. Surprisingly, they said they wanted to clean up the neighborhood they had terrorized for so long. DC Housing Receiver David Gilmore offered jobs in the Housing Authority's maintenance program, and a program of employment and life skills was created as an alternative to the drug and crime-filled lifestyle they had agreed to leave.

The effect on the neighborhood was immediate and profound. The young people formerly involved in the violence were suddenly seen as positive influences. Neighbors who had cowered in fear came out to bring them water and sandwiches. The former crew members took their first paychecks and threw a neighborhood cookout for the community and bought sports equipment for the younger children. A number of the young men organized football teams for the kids and started holding after-school practices and Saturday games—activities that continued more than a decade later. After more than 12 years, there were no additional crew-related homicides in the area.

Many lessons were learned in the Benning Terrace experience. Among the most important was the realization of the profound influence held by those who had formerly led the negative activities, and who had publicly chosen to promote peace. The leadership qualities they had once employed in a negative way

were now directed to cleaning up the neighborhood and setting the younger children on a positive path. The youngsters who once looked up to them because of their street reputations now looked at them with respect. They were willing to take direction from them and they trusted them because the older youths had come from the same background they did. They were living examples that no matter how dysfunctional their home, their neighborhood, or even their own lifestyle, change was possible.

The Benning Terrace story was dramatic, and it was celebrated in local and national television coverage. But Woodson's previous research had made it clear that this was not just a unique incident—an anecdote in the history of youth violence. There were other grassroots organizations like the Alliance around the country that had the same level of influence in the neighborhoods—influence that had been won because of their service to the community. They had the trust and respect of young people and the ability to summon them to responsibility.

CNE set about helping these informal grassroots organizations by raising financial support and providing training and technical assistance in areas of organizational and financial management. Woodson named the initiative the CNE Violence-Free Zone, and sites were created in Washington, DC and other locations in the country.

MYTHS ABOUT YOUTH VIOLENCE DISPELLED

The dramatic experience of Benning Terrace dispelled a number of myths:

Myth #1: Some youths don't want to change.

— Even hard-core gang members and drug dealers have been reached by CNE's grassroots leaders.

Myth #2: Young people won't give up a lucrative street life to work for the minimum wage.

CNE found that the youths willingly gave up the life when offered a chance to change. Hundreds even pledged peace and performed community service just to be on a waiting list for the program.

Myth #3: Only professionally credentialed service providers should work with youth.

Experience shows that neighborhood leaders who have faced and overcome the same challenges as the youth virtually are the only ones that can reach these young people.

Myth #4: Change takes a long time.

CNE's grassroots leaders have been able to reach the most violent young people and negotiate peace agreements almost instantaneously. Getting support to cement these achievements—with jobs and other opportunities—has been the challenge.

Myth #5: Stopping youth violence will be expensive.

Contrasted to the hundreds of millions that have been expended on conventional programs, the Violence-Free Zone concept has been extremely cost-effective. In DC's Benning Terrace, for instance, expenditures of about \$1 million resulted in savings of more than \$12 million.

THE BENEFITS OF STOPPING VIOLENCE

In testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee on May 7, 1997, Washington, DC Department of Housing Receiver David Gilmore said that before the truce, he had concluded that the only way to stop the violence in Benning Terrace was to demolish the public housing complex and relocate the residents.

"I have been asked many times about the changes I have witnessed in the Benning Terrace housing development in DC. When I see the landscaped flower beds and the neighborhood alive with activity, I am honored and grateful for having been allowed to be a participant and partner with Bob Woodson, the Alliance of Concerned Men, and the Concerned Brothers of Benning Terrace ... We have received a remarkable return on our investment in Benning Terrace, not only monetarily, but, even more important, in terms of human benefit."

– David Gilmore, Washington, DC
Department of Housing Receiver, 1997



The former rival crew members went to work together to remove gang graffiti in Benning Terrace.

SAVINGS ATTRIBUTED TO BENNING TERRACE VIOLENCE-FREE ZONE INTERVENTION

ITEM	PROJECTED COST – \$
Site Demolition	2,000,000
Rentals Lost	200,000
Police Protection	90,000
New Construction	8,000,000
Individual Fire Alarms	2,700,000
Family Relocation	500,000
COSTS AVOIDED	\$13,490,000

**Approximate Youth
Training Program Cost \$1,000,000**

**Total Savings
Achieved by Peace \$12,490,000**

Violence-Free Zone Goes into the Schools

It was the Dallas site, led by a former gang intervention specialist named Omar Jahwar, that first introduced the Violence-Free Zone concept in the schools. His organization, called Vision Regeneration, put the same kind of transformed young adults from the neighborhoods into Madison High School to act as hall and cafeteria monitors and give special attention to those students who were causing the most disruption. The VFZ staff members were called "Youth Advisors." Gang incidents dropped from 113 to 0, and the principal and area school board member credited the program with changing the school culture.

The VFZ program has since been introduced into more than 30 of the nation's most troubled middle and high schools and has achieved dramatic, measurable results in reducing violent incidents, disruptions, and suspensions in the schools.



Dallas' Omar Jahwar (left) and Madison High School Principal Robert Ward.

"I think this program has helped us in a number of ways to increase the overall effectiveness of this campus. I can see there has been a reduction in the number of negative interactions between children. The number of fights has dropped off. The number of neighborhood, territorial or gang-related fights has dropped significantly since three years ago. The number of students who leave school has dropped. There has been an increase in the attendance rate and an increase in the number of students who are college bound."

— Dallas' Madison High School Principal Robert Ward, 2004



In 2004, former Deputy Attorney Generals Eric Holder and Larry Thompson co-hosted a conference on CNE's Violence-Free Zone at the Brookings Institution. Shown here, left to right: former DC Housing Receiver David Gilmore, Eric Holder, former DC Housing Police Chief Ray Tarasovic, and CNE President Bob Woodson.

"But the fact of the matter is that there is a limit to what we can accomplish through law enforcement at the federal level, even in our own backyard. Federally-funded and trained police officers can work locally with community leaders to collaborate on crime-fighting strategies. But police officers cannot offer young children living in Benning Terrace and elsewhere a decent education, a summer job, or a way out of poverty. To effectively combat the plague of violence in our most troubled neighborhoods, the only life that Darryl Hall knew, requires a mutual and unflinching commitment from community leaders, local businesses, lawmakers, philanthropists, and residents themselves to literally recreate the social fabric."

— Eric Holder, 2000 speech about the Benning Terrace truce.
U.S. Attorney General
Former U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia

Chapter 2

Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, as one grassroots leader put it, "is like a Geiger Counter that goes around the country and finds out what's working in low-income neighborhoods. Then it applies 'miracle-grow' in the form of training, technical assistance, and resources."

CNE was founded in 1981 by Robert L. Woodson, Sr., to help residents of low-income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities. Since its founding, the Center has provided capacity-building technical assistance to more than 2,000 leaders of community-based organizations in 39 states.

CNE's mission is to transform lives, schools, and troubled neighborhoods from the inside out. Current principal programs are the Violence-Free Zone, Training and Technical Assistance, and Adult Financial Literacy.

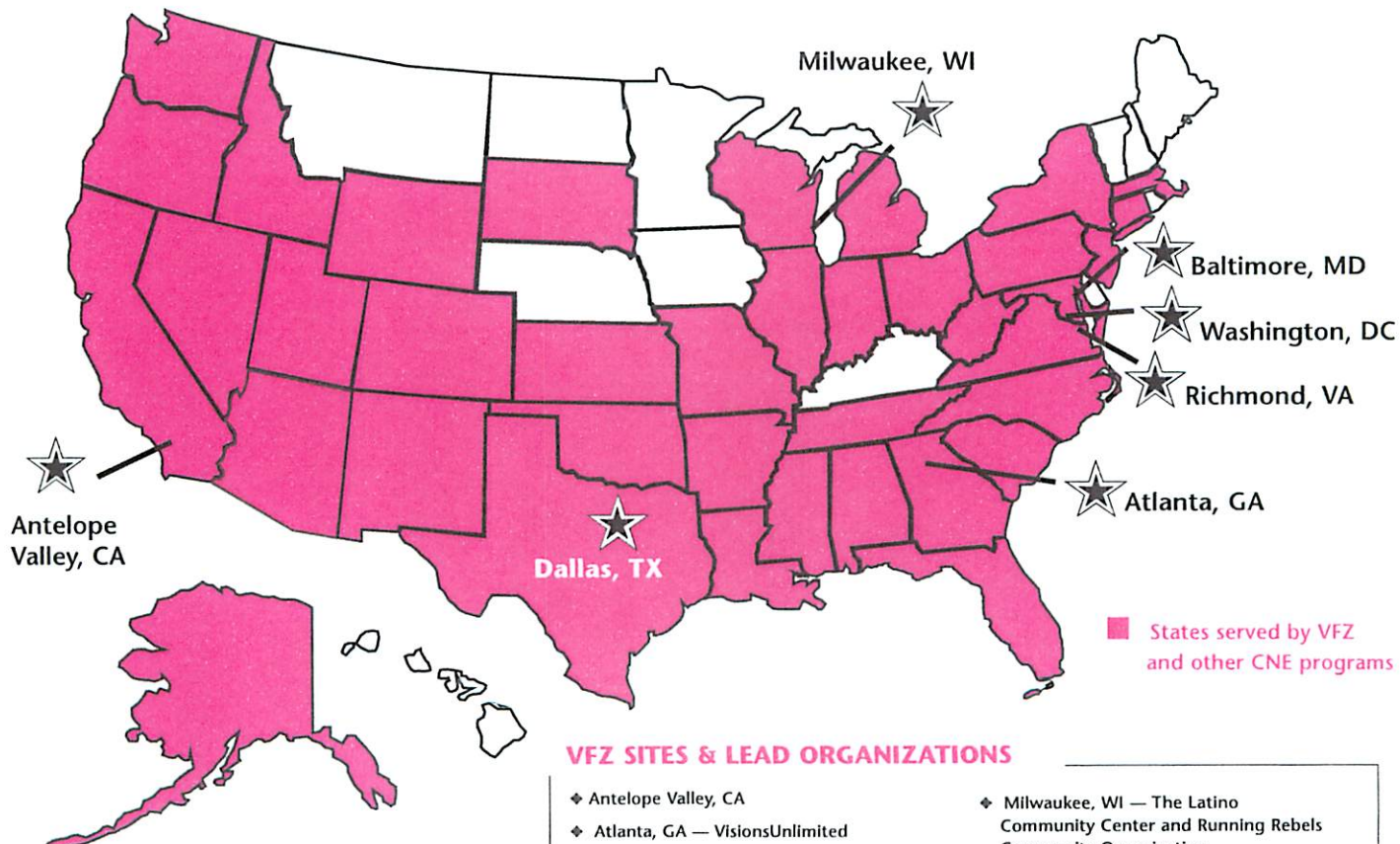
What CNE Does

The Center has a unique ability to identify effective community-based organizations in low-income communities. It then prepares them through training and technical assistance to be good managers and stewards of resources. CNE's goal is to help the groups



CNE negotiates contracts with school systems and helps launch VFZs in each city, which are implemented by CNE community partners. Shown here, Milwaukee VFZ participants with School Superintendent William Andrekopoulos (4th from the right) and Bradley Foundation President Michael Grebe (far left).

★ Violence-Free Zone Sites



VFZ SITES & LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ◆ Antelope Valley, CA | ◆ Milwaukee, WI — The Latino Community Center and Running Rebels Community Organization |
| ◆ Atlanta, GA — VisionsUnlimited | ◆ Richmond, VA — The ROC |
| ◆ Baltimore, MD — New Vision Youth Services | ◆ Washington, DC |
| ◆ Dallas, TX — Vision Regeneration | |

What CNE Does, continued from page 5

create enough administrative structure to be accountable, but not become so bureaucratic as to stifle creativity. CNE then showcases the organizations and their successes so that local foundations and businesses will support them, and helps them connect with the leaders of the larger community. It then monitors the relationships to ensure their success.

In Milwaukee, for instance, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation asked CNE founder Bob Woodson for help in finding viable grassroots programs in the inner city, a task local university urban experts had been unable to perform. Within a couple of weeks, Woodson and CNE staff identified some 70 promising organizations, and provided leadership and organizational management training over the period of a year. The process helped Bradley Foundation officials acquire knowledge of how to find and assess such groups and they became expert in finding others and supporting them.

The Center also broadens the horizons of the groups by taking them to other sites to learn from counterparts in other locales and facilitates communications to share information and best practices.

The Violence-Free Zone Program

The goal of the Violence-Free Zone initiative is to reduce violence and disruptions in the schools and prepare students for learning. It does this by identifying and mobilizing the "healing agents"—the unique individuals and organizations that exist within every community. Designed to

"We are expanding the Violence Free Zone initiative because it works. This pilot program, using community engagement and the support of key community organizations, has proven to be a proactive way to support the needs of young people in lieu of having them get trapped in the criminal justice system."

— William
Andreopoulos
Superintendent
Milwaukee Public
Schools

VFZ Management Process

- CNE selects established youth-serving organizations in each community
- CNE provides management, administrative, and financial oversight, technical assistance, and linkages to sources of support
- Local organization screens, hires, trains, and manages young adults from the same neighborhoods as students to work in schools as Youth Advisors
- Youth Advisors act as hall monitors, mediators, character coaches and moral mentors to high risk students in the schools
- Results are measured and reported and best practices are shared with other VFZ sites across the country

operate in the highest risk schools in low-income urban centers with high levels of crime and violence, the VFZ has produced measurable decreases in violent and non-violent incidents and suspensions in more than 30 schools across the country.

The Center provides overall management and direction to the Violence-Free Zone initiative sites, and the CNE community partners implement the VFZ model in the schools.

Funding

The Violence-Free Zone is supported by public and private funders. The Center raises funds nationally and negotiates contracts with local school systems and police departments. It also helps the community partners raise funding from local foundations and businesses.



CNE's Technical Assistance Program

The objective of the CNE Technical Assistance Program is to strengthen the general operations, management practices, governance, programmatic capacity, and impact of the participating VFZ community partner organizations. Technical Assistance areas include Board Development, Organizational Development, Program Development, Revenue Development Strategies, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Financial Management.

From left: CNE Technical Assistance Manager Geanie Kase with TA consultant Henrietta Smith.