

## **Beacon House - Press Articles**

### **The Brightest Light in Edgewood Terrace**

#### **Article in Update**

#### **D.C. Agenda Collaborating for Washington's Future**

#### **Spring/Summer 2001**

Bold crayon drawings made by young hands and snapshots framing ebullient smiles bedeck brightly painted green and blue walls. Paperback books, soft and worn from years of love and handling, cram wooden shelves. Iguanas, guinea pigs, snakes and lizards crouch in glass boxes awaiting the arrival of their caretakers. In several hours, approximately 75 children will appear to create more art, request help with homework, and feed their exotic friends. Beacon House Community Ministry Inc. is a neighborhood-based civic organization that provides at-risk children and youth with the support and resources necessary to realize their greatest potential. It nestles within the cityscape of Northeast DC's Edgewood Terrace, creating a haven of community for the residents of a once-troubled urban neighborhood.

#### **THE ORIGINS**

"Before I established Beacon House," said Reverend Donald E. Robinson, an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and the organization's founder, "this complex was an open air drug market. There was no sense of community among residents. Structures were neglected and dilapidated. The children had no place to play. It was not a pretty place." In the decade since its creation, Beacon House has created a sense of community for residents of Edgewood Terrace and the surrounding area, and has even inspired residents to fix the problems that once plagued their troubled neighborhood.

Robinson established Beacon House in 1990 after retiring early from the DC Youth Services Administration, where he worked for 20 years as a social worker. He resigned in order to pursue a Divinity degree at Howard University and to reach people's lives in a more direct and profound manner. Beacon House evolved from Robinson's aspiration to create a community ministry and a desire among the tenants of Edgewood Terrace for a neighborhood-based service to support the needs of its residents, especially those of its children and youth. For the first seven years, Robinson ran the ministry's programs out of a vacant four-bedroom apartment.

Today, thanks to a multi-million dollar renovation by the Community Preservation and Development Corporation, a nonprofit housing development corporation that bought the complex in 1995, Beacon House operates out of 6,000 square-foot center within Edgewood Terrace. A multicolored facade now greets visitors at the ministry; inside, a maze of activity rooms offer entertainment and enrichment to young neighbors.

## ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL ENRICHMENT

Beacon House serves its young constituents in several important ways. It offers academic support, recreational activities, and mentoring programs to children and youth from ages 5-17. Last year it served over 300 children from Edgewood Terrace and the surrounding neighborhood. Among the most popular activities are an after-school study hall and snack program where children can receive academic counseling and nutritious snacks. The "Falcons," Beacon House's intramural basketball and football teams, offer kids the opportunity to compete against teams throughout the city. Another activity, "People-Animals-Love," teaches kids to care for animals while exploring life concepts such as birth and death. Also popular are field trips to local museums, libraries, and sporting events that are led by volunteer mentors. Recently, a "Literacy Lock-up" hosted 65 kids for a sleepover that included games and entertainment illustrating the pleasure and enrichment of reading.

## A WEB OF SUPPORTS

Robinson credits the collaborative nature of Beacon House's mentoring programs as the source of their success. In-house programs such as Reading Star, sponsored by Georgetown University, and Project Northstar, which pairs youth with volunteer tutors from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, embody Beacon House's commitment to bridging socio-economic disparities that have simultaneously isolated and defined Edgewood Terrace in the past. Wraparound mentoring, which gives children the opportunity to establish meaningful bonds with adult mentors by extending mentoring beyond group activities to an individual dynamic, draws volunteers from around the Beltway, many of whom are a part of Robinson's extended congregation of Unitarian Universalist churches.

Beacon House works in partnership with the Edgewood Brookland Healthy Family/Thriving Community Collaborative, a family preservation service that draws on the support of the DC Child and Family Services Agency and neighborhood organizations. While the Collaborative and Beacon House maintain distinct charters, the Collaborative provides assistance in building the capacity of Beacon House to enhance its ability to serve at-risk children in the community, as well as children in the Collaborative.

## THE FUTURE

The sustained presence of Beacon House in Edgewood Terrace for over ten years attests to the success of its outreach activities. Where disrepair and neglect once prevailed, a cohesive community now thrives. But there are goals still unattained. Robinson dreams of future renovations for Beacon House, including larger facilities equipped with multiple athletic centers, classrooms, computer labs, music rooms, space for teenagers to hold weekend social functions and kitchens and gardens where participants can receive vocational training. Until then, there are more immediate needs to be addressed. There are math problems to be solved, mentoring sessions to be hosted and hungry stomachs to

be filled. Beacon House will continue to meet this need while providing inspiration and hope to residents of Edgewood and Brookland.

For additional information on Beacon House Community Ministry, please contact Rev. Donald E. Robinson or Stacey Gold at (202) 529-7376.

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