



Johns Hopkins

Urban Health
INSTITUTE

Building a Healthier East Baltimore

The Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums

“What is it that we – together – can do to improve our community for young people, for families, and for everyone who lives here?” Robert Blum, director of the UHI, asked this fundamental question of a dedicated group of colleagues and community leaders at the May 2008 Community-Faith-Hopkins Forum.

Over the past year or so, the Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute (UHI), together with Clergy United for Renewal in East Baltimore (CURE), has held three Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums in an effort to facilitate communication between Johns Hopkins Institutions (JHI) and the East Baltimore community. The forums brought together academic deans, faith leaders, community-based organizations, and neighborhood residents for candid discussions about issues affecting East Baltimore.

Conversations from the first of these forums, held in May 2007 at the Garden of Prayer Baptist Church on Homestead Street, revealed a range of concerns shared by the community, including violence prevention, HIV awareness and treatment, employment opportunities and workforce development, the relocation of East Baltimore residents, and chronic health conditions like hypertension and diabetes. As a result of this initial dialogue, the UHI resolved to continue the discussions, focusing each on specific issues of concern.

The second Community-Faith-Hopkins Forum, held in November 2007, centered on youth violence prevention activities and improving health care services in East Baltimore. Today, as a result of this open discussion, the UHI is working with Johns Hopkins Medicine to establish the Hopkins Health Zone, a geographically defined area in East Baltimore in which Johns Hopkins will be the primary care provider.

“The Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums have increased awareness of both the needs of our surrounding communities and the willingness of community members and Hopkins staff to help meet those needs.”

– Ronald R. Peterson,
President, The Johns Hopkins Hospital and Health System

In May 2008, the UHI held the third Community-Faith-Hopkins Forum with leaders from Johns Hopkins University and the East Baltimore faith community. Over 40 participants gathered in the fellowship hall of Zion Baptist Church on North Caroline Street to discuss mentorship programs and employment opportunities for young people.

While panel members highlighted successful programs and initiatives targeted at Baltimore youth, participants agreed that it is simply not enough. “Hundreds of recreation centers across the city have closed over the years,” said Douglas I. Miles, Bishop, Koinonia Baptist Church. “Young people have no viable place, no safe place, no safe space to be young.”

Conversations among panelists and participants revealed the need for mutual understanding of the circumstances and needs of young people in East Baltimore to create practical and effective programs that engage as many students as possible.

What follows is a snapshot of the questions, frustrations, discussions, and suggestions of the third Community-Faith-Hopkins Forum.

“To have a healthy community surrounding Johns Hopkins is extremely important. Many of the people working at Johns Hopkins live in the neighborhood and to have a healthy workforce is critical for us to achieve our mission. The Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums have helped us all understand the challenges in creating and sustaining a healthy community. The forums also reveal new ways to improve the health of everyone.”

– Edward Miller, Dean, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

How do we engage young people and provide meaningful experiences?

- Understand that young people in Baltimore City want the same things as other young people—to learn, to grow, and to be a part of the community.
- Never underestimate a young person's talents or abilities.
- Recognize that many young people come from difficult circumstances.
- Create as many opportunities as possible.
- Listen to young people. Listen to their parents.
- Spread the word! Reach young people through schools to raise awareness about opportunities.

“Don't be surprised at what young people can do. They have interests and business skills. They want to be employed.”

– Marshall Prentice,
Pastor, Zion Baptist Church

“This is a job for the entire community. We have to come together and figure out which programs will engage students and how to scale these programs so we can make an impact on all the young people in the community. This is a challenge we have together. Johns Hopkins is your partner. We are committed. We're here to work shoulder to shoulder with the community.”

– Kristina Johnson, Provost, Johns Hopkins University

How do we scale programs to engage as many young people as possible?

- Partner with community organizations, including churches, to expand existing programs and come together in a focused way.
- Identify opportunities for faculty and students to become involved.

“A mentor points a young person to the future and gives them hope. A mentor can guide and relate to the young person and show them dignity in their work.”

– Carol Reckling,
Executive Director, Child First Authority

How do we create sustainable businesses?

- Develop more internship and employment opportunities within the neighborhood.
- Connect young people with mentors.

“Young people need to see examples of success from the community. They need role models. We need to work together to incubate businesses and help young people to intern there and learn basic business principles so they can see it from the top. You need to be able to see it from the top so you can reach for it.”

– Frances “Toni” Draper, Pastor, John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

As a result of the May 2008 Community-Faith-Hopkins Forum, the UHI has reconnected with leaders from Johns Hopkins and the East Baltimore community to develop concrete plans for the future that will provide meaningful educational and employment opportunities to young people in Baltimore, that hopefully will result in school completion and the pursuit of post secondary education.

The Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums reveal visions for the future of this community. The dialogues build relationships and trust as well as strategies for change. The Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums are about making connections and finding solutions. Through the forums, the UHI is working to reestablish and strengthen ties between JHI and the surrounding communities. Over the years ahead, we will continue the Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums and expand the dialogues, inviting to the table our neighbors and community and religious leaders to share ideas so that, together, we can build a healthier Baltimore community.

The mission of the Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute is to serve as a catalyst that brings together the resources of Johns Hopkins Institutions with the City of Baltimore, and especially East Baltimore, to improve the community's health and well-being and, in so doing, serve as a model of community-university collaboration regionally and nationally. The UHI collaborates with faith leaders, including members of CURE, to plan the Community-Faith-Hopkins Forums.

