

Youth Matter/Bright Futures Annual Event
2019 MASSB/Revere Bank Innovative Program Award Presentation

During the past several years, Washington County Department of Social Services, in partnership with multiple community partners including the Washington County Mental Health Authority, MD Coalition of Families, Way Station-Healthy Transitions Initiative, One Stop Job Center (DLLR), Bester Community of Hope, Tru Ops-Potomac Case Management, Goodwill/Horizon Inc./Project REALIZE, SECU Banking, Office of Consumer Advocates and Lifehouse Church, have hosted the **Youth Matter/Bright Futures Conference** at Lifehouse Church at 515 E. Wilson Blvd, in Hagerstown, Maryland.

The purpose of the all-day event is to educate vulnerable youth, ages 14-25, about various relevant topics, including job readiness, and provide an opportunity for youth to build positive life skills for future success. The yearly conference's themes have varied from "How to Become Your Own Best Advocate" to "Empowering Youth Potential." Youth from the partnering community agencies as well as foster youth are the primary participants in this event and an average of 50 youth participate each year.

Honorary attendees have included both Secretary Lourdes Padilla and Loney Nguyen, Foster Youth Ombudsman, from the Maryland Department of Human Services. They have addressed the youth to encourage and support them in their efforts to pursue their self-sufficiency goals.

The following breakout sessions have been offered to participants over the past few years:

1. Resume Building
2. Interviewing Techniques
3. Career Exploration Test
4. Financial Fidelity
5. Dangers of Vaping and Juling
6. Positive Police Interaction Tips
7. Street SMART (Skills Mastery and Resistance Training)
8. Self-Defense Techniques
9. Human Trafficking Awareness *Hunger Games themed*

This year, after being educated about job readiness, youth were encouraged to browse fully-stocked clothing closets, which included donated, gently used professional attire that they could wear to a job interview. Suits, ties and shoes were available for the young men while the ladies had dresses, blouses, skirts, and dress pants to choose from. Participants were encouraged to change into their clothing for their mock interviews. Human Resources representatives from local businesses were the mock interview moderators and the interactions were overwhelmingly positive from all participants.

Participants are entertained at this event by a local DJ, Spencer Jackson, of Spence 4Hire, who emcees the event. Throughout the day there are a variety of activities offered, including a poetry reading session, a basketball skills session, a fun photo booth as well as professional head shots, and ice cream. Door prizes are offered to the youth present at the conference and have included bicycles with helmets, Bluetooth speakers and gift cards to various businesses.

Funding for this event has come from various sources of the community partners and the average cost per year is about \$2,500, depending on the keynote speakers, lunch choices, and donations offered. Originally this event was spearheaded by the Washington County Mental Health Authority to encourage positive mental health services to vulnerable youth in the local community. Washington County Department of Social Services (WCDSS) assumed the primary planning role a few years ago but continues to offer this event to the same vulnerable youth population in our local Washington County

community and surrounding areas. WCDSS will continue to facilitate this event for the foreseeable future and if awarded this prestigious prize, we would utilize the funds to offset the cost of the next summers' expenses. We will like to offer the same level of programming as well as the fun activities to attract the youth we are supporting in their goals of becoming successful adults. After reviewing the surveys from this year's event, one of the themes suggested for next year's event is "Adulting 101" with practical life skills being the focus (cooking, laundry, cleaning along with basic money management and what insurances are necessary). Any monetary allocation from the Revere Bank Award for Innovative Programs would assist the Department in making our Bright Futures/Youth Matter event successful.