

The Sun

Mentoring program to focus on black men; Individuals, churches will be asked to fund the initiative

by Jamal E. Watson SUN STAFF

May 5, 1999 Page(s): 1B

Edition: HOWARD

Section: LOCAL

Length: 620 words

Index Terms:

Howard County

Record Number: 9905060362

The executive director of the Howard County Community Action Council says she plans to revive a mentoring program for at-risk young African-American men.

"We've got to find a way to keep our young black men out of jail," Dorothy Moore said, recalling a recent visit with inmates at the Howard County Detention Center in Jessup. "I thought we could start working towards that goal here in Howard County."

The African-American Male Mentoring Program will help them "develop and strengthen the tools they will need to become successful and responsible adults in our community," Moore said. "We want to help these young men understand themselves and the factors in the society impacting positively and negatively on their lives."

The program, slated to begin offering services in the fall to men 18 to 25 years old, will be a collaborative effort by the Community Action Council, the Howard County religious community and the courts.

"We want to let young African-American men know that this program will exist," Moore said. "So many of our young people may not be college material or want to go to college after they graduate from high school. We want to be able to provide an alternative for these men to help them learn how to get a job, or create a resume."

Three years ago, Moore developed a similar mentoring program, but it fell apart last year after organizers couldn't secure funding.

This time around, she hopes that most of the money would be raised from area black churches and individuals. She said she has no plans to solicit County Executive James N. Robey.

"I think it's important that the black community fund this initiative," she said.

"If we want a mentoring program, we're going to have to find the money to create it -- we're not going to beg people to fund a program for our own," Moore said.

The Rev. Robert Turner, pastor of St. John Baptist Church in Columbia, said he and his congregation support Moore's goal and are committed to raising the necessary cash to ensure that the program is maintained.

"I think that this is an important program," he said. "We should support our young people and provide them with opportunities."

Larry Hunt, director of programs, planning and development at the Community Action Council, said the plan is to initially recruit 70 young men in need of mentoring, and to hire three staff members to organize events.

Hunt said staff members will plan workshops on issues ranging from public speaking and time management to African-American history and culture. Program officials also will help participants find jobs, and older African-American men in the county will serve as mentors, offering advice on a biweekly basis.

The program will seek referrals from the courts and the public defender's office. Moore said she hopes that in some cases, judges would consider community service and mandatory participation in the mentoring program as an alternative to incarceration.

Judge Diane O. Leasure directed individuals on probation to participate in the previous mentoring program. She said she was impressed with the results.

"I think it's a wonderful program. It's a very genuine effort for the people who are involved," Leasure said.

"In the end, I think everyone benefits because it gives people a sense of purpose and an alternative way of living that doesn't involve criminal activity."

Information: Dorothy Moore of the Community Action Council, 410-313-6440.

Copyright 1999 The Baltimore Sun Company