



HOPE

in ACTION

Fall 2025
Newsletter



From Stranded to Strengthened

After what was supposed to be a weeklong trip left her stranded for two months, Ebony came back to a life turned upside down. That's when she turned to the Bellevue Family Success Center for support and hope.

A Letter from Kelly

It's already fall in a year with lots of ups and downs here in Washington, DC. We are navigating federal and DC budget cuts that are devastating for the people we serve. Medicaid changes will impact some of the 11,000 people we serve who are Medicaid recipients. We are bracing ourselves for a projected increase in homelessness. And we are worried about food insecurity with reductions in SNAP and WIC programs.

And yet, we remain focused on our vision that everyone in DC is healthy, housed, and hopeful. We are grateful for the extreme generosity of our community, for the solid foundation from 45 years of impact, and for our capacity to pivot. These pages are full of examples of our impact. Thank you for your ongoing support.

Kelly

President and CEO

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A Legacy of Hope: Vernon Oakes

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For nearly four decades, Vernon Oakes has been a leader, advocate, and friend to Community of Hope. We proudly honor him as the 2025 recipient of the Tom Nees Award for Exceptional Service, recognizing his extraordinary commitment to our mission.

Vernon first became involved in 1986 when his Stanford alumni consulting

team helped shape our strategic plan. In 1987, at the invitation of our founder Tom Nees, he joined the Board of Directors, serving with distinction for 18 years. In 2000, Vernon stepped in as Interim Executive Director, guiding the organization through a leadership transition. He was instrumental in opening the Girard Street location, and in donating and opening Hope Apartments, our first location in DC's Ward 8.

"When I came to Community of Hope, I wanted to help one family," says Vernon. "Through the years, I rejoice that many people have been given hope." He explains, "I often say, 'but for the grace of God'. While I was on the board, I discovered that one of my nieces, along with her five children, was staying in the Community of Hope shelter. It struck me deeply, because I knew what it was like to grow up working poor—living paycheck to paycheck, with more month than money. I realized I could have easily been in the same situation." That empathy and connection have carried through all of Vernon's service.

He has not only helped Community of Hope grow—he has also entrusted us with his own health. Just last year, our medical team identified a heart issue and ensured he received life-saving care.

Beyond Community of Hope, Vernon has advanced cooperative education and housing justice across DC. In 2014, he launched Everything Co-op, a radio show that amplifies leaders building stronger communities. He connects that work back to Community of Hope, recognizing that both provide stability and hope.

Vernon credits his mother and grandfather for instilling the values of education and community, which he has carried forward. Today he brings the same curiosity and care to his personal life that he applies to his work. He enjoys visiting his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, as well as dancing, riding his motorcycle, traveling, and practicing hot yoga.

Community of Hope appreciates Vernon's decades of service and his consistent vision for what's achievable when people come together.

This award, given in memory of our founder, Tom Nees, recognizes its recipient for their long-standing, deeply impactful service to the people who turn to Community of Hope for help. Since 2015, the organization has recognized twelve recipients for their service and impact.

Hope Happenings

Back to School Gratitude

The 13th Annual Bellevue Back to School Bash was a joyful success! Co-hosted with the Bellevue Neighborhood Library and DC Fire and EMS, this Ward 8 tradition brought more than 1,700 neighbors together to celebrate the new school year. More than 1,200 backpacks filled with school supplies went to students from pre-K3 through 12th grade, and we gave away many more to families in housing, well-child visits, and resource connections. Families enjoyed live music, story time with local illustrator, petting zoo, raffle prizes, community resources, and more. We are deeply grateful to the many volunteers who made the day run smoothly and to the generous support of our partners, including Amazon, CoStar Group, Bloomberg Industry Group, Consigli, GCS Sigal, Miller & Chevalier, Pebblebrook Hotel Trust, Passion City Church, Giant, Health Services for Children with Special Needs, Inc., MedStar Family Choice of DC, Wellpoint DC, AmeriHealth Caritas DC, and NATCA.



Girard Street: Back to Family Shelter

Girard will transition back to a family shelter in December 2025, returning to its roots of serving families in need. For 33 years, the Girard Street site has been a cornerstone of Community of Hope's mission — making it our longest-running location in our 45-year history. Since opening in 1992, Girard has provided shelter and support to more than 500 families and, through its more recent Bridge Housing Program, helped over 220 individuals experiencing homelessness on a path toward stability and independence. This next chapter builds on decades of impact, ensuring that Girard continues to be a place where District families find safety, stability, and a path to a long-term home.

Top 20% of Health Centers Nationwide

We're proud to be recognized by the Health Resources Services Administration as a Health Center Quality Leader for 2025! We are one of two health centers in DC recognized at the Silver level. At Community of Hope, our teams go above and beyond to ensure families receive high-quality, compassionate care. We're nationally ranked for in the top 25% for diabetes and hypertension management, HIV and cancer screenings, and dental sealants.



A Record Breaking Night of Hope: 45 Years of Impact



L. Dijon Anderson, host committee chair and Giving Moment Leader brought the energy.



Legacies of Leadership among Lisa Bartusek, Beverly Lunsford, Bob Sloan, Annabelle Lockhart, Kelly Sweeney McShane, Vernon Oakes, Chris Kerns, Rob Huey, Laura Worby, Kay Nees, Dan Nees, and Jen Swetz.



Kisa Carter and Cedric Starks of sponsor, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, pose for a photo.



Smiles all around from board members Cathy Austin and Lisa Madden.



Generosity raises its hands: Grace O'Toole, Christoph Hundack and Jennifer Chilton, Mick Brady, and Charles Hennessy.



Host committee members Drew Hubbard and Dr. Faith Gibson Hubbard capture the moment of April Simpkins' touching speech.



April Simpkins, Night of Hope speaker, shares a heartfelt embrace with her mother. Read her story and speech at the QR code to the left.



Kelly with host committee chairs, Geoff and Denise Eaton and Dr. Paula and L. Dijon Anderson.



Adrianna Hopkins—Emmy Award-winning journalist, 7News DC morning anchor—our Director of Ceremonies.

*Night of Hope was full of memorable moments.
View more here!*



On October 3, Community of Hope celebrated 45 years of impact at its annual Night of Hope gala, raising a record-breaking \$600,000 to support housing, health, and family programs across DC. More than 360 guests attended, with Adrianna Hopkins, WJLA anchor, leading the evening. Highlights included a moving story from April Simpkins, recognition of Vernon Oakes for 40 years of service, and a powerful Give Hope Moment led by L. Dijon Anderson that unlocked a \$150,000 match. President & CEO Kelly Sweeney McShane reaffirmed our vision of a healthy, housed, and hopeful DC.

Thank you to our committee!

L. Dijon and Dr. Paula Anderson, co-chairs	Chris and Carole Kerns
Denise and Geoffrey Eaton, co-chairs	Annabelle and BJ Lockhart
Alex Beshara	Lisa and David Madden
Frank Boyd and Kathleen Montgomery Boyd	Ray and Jen Martz
Jennifer Chilton and Christoph Hundack	John and Ann McAllister
Colette and Kelvin Coleman	Michael and Krista McGee
Damian and Alex Conway	Melissa McGuire and Andy Miller
Ryan and Christina Duffy	Raynold and Tawana Mensah
Erica and David Farhat	Kellen Moore and Erin Henderson Moore
Lisa Gold	Vincent Ratliff
Jenna Kirkpatrick Howard and Adam Howard	Ellen Riddleberger and Nick Tabbal
Drew Hubbard and Dr. Faith Gibson Hubbard	Susan Saulny
	Minh Ta
	Ward Van de Water
	Maria and Lee Weber

Thank you to our sponsors!

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Influencers: Commercial Real Estate Advisors; Tom and Elissa Davidson; MedStar Family Choice Plan; Palm Facility Services; Pontius Tax Law PLLC; Red River; State Farm – Ray Mensah; State Farm – Tawana Mensah; The Corey Group - Merrill Lynch Visionary Eye Doctors; WC Smith

From Stranded to Strengthened



Mr. Eugene and Ebony have built a long-lasting bond.

What began as a celebratory trip quickly became a fight for survival. Ebony planned a weeklong vacation that turned into her being stranded for two months when Hurricane Dorian hit the Bahamas during her stay in 2019. "I was planning to celebrate a major milestone, but had no clue that a storm was coming," says Ebony. Once the storm hit, planes were grounded and her savings for the trip quickly dwindled leaving her stranded physically and financially.

"It was a fight to get back, but it took volunteer doctors from FEMA to help me get back home," says Ebony.

When Ebony returned to D.C, life looked nothing like she expected. She had spent two months navigating danger and uncertainty. By then, she had lost her footing—no stable housing, little to no nearby family support, and mounting anxiety after such an ordeal.

"I made getting stable my full-time job," she says. "I went to the library every day. "I had an aunt that let me crash at her house while I started to rebuild."

One day at local farmer's market, a stranger overheard Ebony talking about food and transportation challenges and said, "You need to meet Eugene." That led Ebony to the Bellevue Family Success Center (FSC) where she found exactly what she'd been searching for: people who listened, responded, and followed up.

Over the past two years, Ebony has built steady relationships with the Bellevue FSC team—especially Eugene and LaToya—who became her bridge to practical help and peace of mind. "Sometimes your mind is overwhelmed," Ebony explains. "Just having someone patient who says, 'We don't know, but hold on—we'll look it up,' makes all the difference."

At Bellevue FSC, Ebony received direct connection to resources, quick calls to check in, and thoughtful referrals. Staff helped Ebony navigate her health insurance, secure a dental referral, and connect to emotional wellness resources as she healed.

Today, Ebony's calm confidence tells the story of her own resilience—and how far hope has carried her. She recently received a permanent housing voucher, is working toward her diploma, and plans to launch a nonprofit to fill community gaps.

"People don't understand how hard it can be to just get a meal or sustain yourself as you go through this type of trauma," says Ebony.

"When you have an ounce of hope, you build resilience."

Through the Bellevue Family Success Center, we walk alongside families in Ward 8 and beyond connecting them to resources, strengthening resilience, and supporting lasting stability.

**You Inspire
Hope In Action!**

*Thank you to our amazing
CFC and DC One Fund
supporters! Your generosity helps
families thrive and brings hope to
communities across DC. We're so
grateful for your continued
support!*

Sign up to volunteer at our weekly Fam-Club to give back to families in our family shelters. To learn more, visit communityofhopedc.org/volunteer.

Volunteer at Fam-Club!



Community of Hope: 45 Years of Impact

On September 12, 1980, Community of Hope was signed into existence. What began with a single housing site and a small health clinic at 1417 Belmont Street in Columbia Heights has grown into a support system for thousands of families across Washington, DC.

20,000

People served last year by **450 staff**

5,000

Health visits in 2003



84,000

Visits in 2024

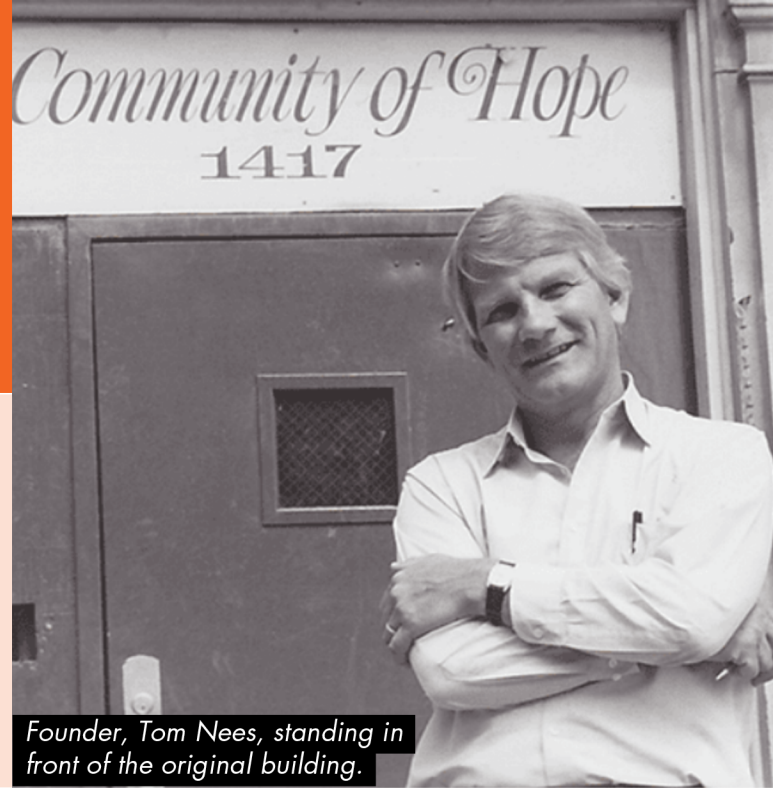
76

Families housed in 1990



1,600

Households supported in 2024



Founder, Tom Nees, standing in front of the original building.

Health & Wellness

In 1977, nurse Lois Smith (now Wagner) launched the health services in a single exam room. Health now offers medical, dental, emotional wellness and patient support to about 16,000 patients through three community health centers, telehealth, and home-based care.

2011: Family Health and Birth Center becomes a part of Community of Hope, doubling patient care.

2014: Conway Health and Resource Center opens in Ward 8.

Housing & Stability



At the Fall 2005 groundbreaking of Hope Apartments - Vernon Oaks (3rd from left), Advisory Board; Annabelle Lockhart (5th from left), Chair, Board of Directors; Kelly Sweeney McShane (6th from left), Executive Director; along with DC government officials.

From renovating a single apartment building to now supporting families in shelters and their own apartments all across the city, Community of Hope is a leader in ending homelessness through prevention, shelter, and long-term solutions.

- 4,600 people, including 2,600 children served last year.
- 90% of households achieve a positive, stable housing outcome.

Community & Growth

Outside of health and housing, Community of Hope has always answered other community needs. From GED classes and legal aid to Family Success Centers and WIC programs, Community of Hope continues to meet evolving needs. The HONEY program supports pregnant women experiencing homelessness.



Thank you to our founding board chair, Bob Sloan; John Lunsford, who led legal services; and Beverly Lunsford, former health director.



Lois Smith (now Lois Wagner)



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