

KEEPING UP WITH CSC!

2026 WINTER EDITION



A Message From Our Executive Director



PENELOPE GRIFFITH, LICSW

WELCOME 2026 WINTER EDITION

Stepping into 2026, we celebrate our 30th Anniversary with excitement and gratitude. It feels like just yesterday I joined the Collaborative, guided by a vision for stronger, healthier communities.

Thank you for linking arms with me and the entire CSC team as we've upheld our mission for three decades.

This year, we'll highlight milestones from our 30-year journey, leading up to our September Gala—more details to come. Here's to many more years of impact!

NEWS INSIDE

- CSC CELEBRATES 30 YEARS
- CSC IMPACT
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Anniversary Series By John DeTaeve

30 Years of Serving Families – Transforming Communities

The Beginning

“I know the conditions under which you were born. For I was there. And though your father and mother and grandmother, looking about the streets through which they were carrying you, staring at the walls into which they brought you, had every reason to be heavyhearted. Yet they were not. Here you were to be loved. To be loved, baby. Hard at once and forever to strengthen you against the loveless world.”

James Baldwin, *Fire Next Time*, 1963

“Teachers, parents and students should form a model community of love, collaboration, and mutual correction.”

Archbishop Oscar Romero, 1978

2026 marks the 30th anniversary of the Healthy Family/Thriving Communities Collaboratives, as well as the Collaborative Solutions for Communities (CSC), formerly known as the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative. Over the next several months, we will reflect on our journey by sharing personal stories, community anecdotes, and highlighting CSC programs from the past three decades.

In alignment with CSC’s commitment to healing and transformation through strength-based, solution-focused, and restorative practices—while paying attention to both systemic issues and individual needs—we hope this series will spark reflection and foster deep community conversations. Ultimately, we aim to inspire a renewed commitment to neighborhood-based support for children and families.

This month we will discuss the beginnings of the District’s neighborhood-based system of care.

The Troubled 1980’s and 1990’s

In 1989 the American Civil Liberties Union went to US federal court charging the District of Columbia’s foster care system was in total disarray. In February, 1991, U.S. District Judge Thomas F. Hogan wrote in *LaShawn A. vs Marion Barry*, that evidence had shown that, “**District children relegated to entire childhoods spent in foster care drift...A lost generation of children whose tragic plight is being repeated every day.**” Judge Hogan ordered an overhaul of the District’s child welfare system. However, four years later the District had still not taken action. And in 1995 Judge Hogan held the District in contempt of court and appointed a Receiver to run the agency. The District became the only child welfare system in the country taken over by a federal court.

It is important to note in 1985, a similar lawsuit, *Jery M. vs District of Columbia*, was filed against the District’s juvenile justice system. We will visit this issue in future articles.



Being a young person in Washington, D.C. during the late 1980s and 1990s was marked by trauma and hardship. For many, street-level violence was a daily reality, often resulting in the death or serious injury of a sibling, family member, or friend. Charles Dickens once described the District as a “City with Magnificent Intentions.” However, like many U.S. cities, especially in the South, neighborhoods in D.C. were racially and economically segregated. While landmark civil rights cases of the 1950s and 1960s began to expand housing, employment, and educational opportunities for African Americans and emerging Latino families, many white families in the District were moving to the suburbs.

Unlike other large U.S. cities, the District of Columbia has historically been a colony of the federal government, lacking representation and a vote in Congress. Federal funding has consistently depended on the political party in power, which adds to the uncertainty of the District’s financial resources. The exodus of white residents to the suburbs significantly drained the District’s tax base, leading to even more instability in funding local services.

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the widespread destruction of entire city blocks during the disturbances of 1968 further destabilized neighborhoods in D.C. For decades, large areas of land throughout the District, including numerous, contiguous parcels throughout the Columbia Heights and Shaw neighborhoods, remained vacant.

By 1991, the District’s population had fallen from 802,000 in the early 1950’s to 600,000.

We will not delve deeply into all the challenges that the District faced during the 1980s and 1990s. While these issues have had a profound and lasting impact on District families, they are documented in more detail elsewhere. Below is an abbreviated list of key events:

- The mid-1980s and 1990s saw a dramatic increase in crack cocaine flooding into neighborhoods, leading to violence that heavily impacted areas such as S Street in Shaw, Fairmont/Girard Streets in Columbia Heights, 17th Street in Adams Morgan, and Mt. Pleasant Street in Mt. Pleasant. Crews and Gangs became even more vigilant in carving out and protecting their respective turfs to sell drugs and promote prostitution.

- A police-involved shooting of a Latino man in 1991 triggered two days of unrest in Mt. Pleasant and a four-day state of emergency in Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, and Mt. Pleasant.

- In 1991, the District recorded 479 homicides, earning it the label “murder capital of the world,” a title it took years to shed.

- In 1995, President Clinton and Congress established a Financial Control Board to oversee and revamp District finances and the DC Public Schools.

- The 1995 Million Man March took place on the Mall in DC, followed by the Million Woman March in Philadelphia in 1997.

- There were two federal government shutdowns related to the political debate over welfare reform. In the end, “welfare reform” reduced the number of welfare beneficiaries by 60% and imposed strict requirements on those who remained eligible for federal assistance.

- Early signs of gentrification began to emerge, with white residents and large developers buying homes and properties for refurbishment. The National Community Reinvestment Coalition estimated that 20,000 Black families in DC were displaced between 2000 and 2013.

Despite the violence in the community, the upheaval and instability of local and federal systems, and the whirlwind of change that characterized the 1980s and 1990s, we are reminded of James Baldwin’s letter to his 14-year-old nephew: “I know the conditions under which you were born. I was there. Although your father, mother, and grandmother had every reason to feel heavy-hearted as they carried you through the streets and looked at the walls of the world into which they brought you, they were not. You were here to be loved. To be loved, baby. It is hard, but it is a love meant to strengthen you against the loveless world.”

A federally funded planning grant secured through the newly established Receivership, would help begin to lay the foundation from which the strength of a family’s unwavering love for their children and their hope for their children’s future, even in the face of challenges, could lead to both family and community stability.



30 Years of Serving Families – Transforming Communities

Building a Community Strategy—Not a New Program

Beatriz “BB” Otero recalls the excitement Fred Taylor displayed when he asked for her assistance in implementing a planning grant to create a neighborhood-based, family-centered support system. At that time, BB was the Executive Director of Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center, which later became known as CentroNia. Fred, sadly deceased, was the Executive Director of For Love of Children (FLOC).

Both shared a belief that with adequate resources, families and communities have the capacity to build and maintain safe and loving environments for their children. BB and Fred initiated a series of community meetings in each of the four quadrants. BB recalls that Fred had an 8x10 piece of paper filled with drawings and narratives, illustrating what the collaborative model could look like in each quadrant.

BB and Fred recognized that child maltreatment is connected to various individual, family, and community factors. They believed it was essential for stakeholders from different sectors within the community to collaborate in identifying and implementing strategies that address needs at all levels—child, family, and community. They argued that a strategy focused on changing the environments in which people live—thus creating healthier conditions that encourage better decisions and actions—would have a more profound and lasting impact than multiple programs targeting individual circumstances.

Just like surfaces that effectively capture rainwater at its source—nourishing both existing and newly planted vegetation while preventing runoff and pollution from impacting larger bodies of water—we can implement a proactive, decentralized, neighborhood-based strategy that provides essential services and support. This model is both self-sustaining and self-generating. By adopting this approach, we have the power to keep children and families out of costly and bureaucratic systems. As emphasized in her Four Pillars strategy, the former CFSA Director aptly named this concept “Narrowing the Front Door.”

The key was to find the right people to build and implement the strategy. Six months into their well-received and productive community meetings across the District, BB and Fred attended a community forum sponsored by the Children’s Defense Fund program “Stand For Children.” Marian Urquilla was the presenter. Marian was presenting how to bring community organizing strategies to systems change and identifying community priorities. They offered Marian a position to help design the Collaborative strategy.

Soon after being hired, Marian and Timothea Howard co-facilitated a series of community mapping sessions and interviewing of key stakeholders (institutional, community, resident). Marian explains, “We formed a set of relationships and funneled them into a multi-day Future Search Conference (1996) that brought together almost one hundred people to think and dream about what we could do. Coming out of that, we worked with small groups of people who had specific ideas they wanted to pursue.

Pretty early on, we realized that the challenge/opportunity was both about WHAT we could do, but also about changing the HOW of how services were delivered. That led to a lot of exploration about strengths-based practice and how to work on crisis, not from a hodge-podge of referrals, but a more systematic front-end assessment and a more systematic coordination of wrap-around supports for families.”

Among the interviewees were Moms and Dads with “lived experiences” with the child welfare system and contacts with other DC government agencies. Their experiences would become invaluable. Their experiences with the agencies would help inform the reforms needed within the agencies. Their direct or indirect lived experience could help other neighborhood children and families address similar challenges they were facing before having to come in contact with the system. And finally, integrating persons with lived experiences with folks from outside the community who had social work, public policy degrees benefited everyone. Integrating service delivery with systems change would become the cornerstone of the Collaboratives work over the next 30 years.

“Teachers, parents and students should form a model community of love, collaboration, and mutual connection.”

There were at least 20 different languages spoken in the Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, Mt. Pleasant, and Shaw neighborhoods and schools in 1996. The neighborhoods were among the most diverse in the US. Building a multi-racial staff and Board was crucial to addressing the myriad of issues facing children, youth and families in the neighborhoods from so many different racial and cultural backgrounds. Priscilla Francis remembers meeting with Marian Urquilla and Fred Taylor at the Florida Ave. Grill, in May, 1997. The same month her son died in a tragic car accident. At the time, Ms. Francis was the Director of the United Planning Organization, a community-based organization her family had been associated with for generations. Ms. Francis remembers, “Youth violence, housing, and gentrification were affecting our communities. After my son died, I needed to be involved with bringing communities together. Becoming a part of the Collaborative family was healing.”

“We formed a set of relationships and funneled them into a multi-day Future Search Conference (1996) that brought together almost one hundred people to think and dream about what we could do.”
Marian Urquilla

In May, 1997 DC Agenda hosted a City-Wide Conference “Moving Toward A Neighborhood-Based Child Protection and Family Support System.” Three Collaboratives had been formally established and in attendance, Columbia Heights/Shaw, Edgewood/Brookland, and Far Southeast. Janet Martin, former CSC staff member and community leader, represented the Collaborative at the Conference and participated on a panel discussion. Ralph Smith, then Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation gave the Keynote Address. Special thanks to Ms. Martin and her granddaughter Tabitha Edmond for preserving the Conference Booklet.

Below are excerpts from Mr. Smith’s address.
“We have come to this partnership not out of some romantic idealism. We have come to this partnership out of necessity. We have come to this partnership because we can now...with amazing certainty predict the large and growing number of children who will fail, who will experience rotten outcomes, and whose futures will be compromised by circumstances over which they have no control. We can predict it with such certainty we can tell you where those kids live.” “This is a problem that public agencies, no matter how well designed, no matter how well funded, will not be able to solve and solve alone. The problem has become so place based that the solution must be place based.” “We’ve got to figure out how to match formal with informal, the funded with the unfunded, the professionally trained social worker with the indigenous community leaders and knows and understands the community...who has the credibility in the community and who can speak truth within the community.”

“We need to understand that families in crisis are very similar to families in recovery. It is the constant support, the constant reinforcement, it is the connection to the community, a connection to a larger group... maybe, just maybe, we won’t have another child falling through the cracks, through the safety net, and into our child protection system. Public systems don’t do that. Local communities can.”

Over the last 30 years, CSC has worked hard to be that “constant reinforcement” and “connection” that families need in times of crisis. We have worked closely with our community and public agency partners to design a seamless garment of interconnected services and supports throughout the community. We have worked along side and witnessed with young people, parents, community leaders advocating for change in their communities.

In the weeks and months ahead we will share stories about the people behind strategies like: Moms Against Violence Act; Nehemiah Project; Rita Bright Family and Youth Center; Girard St. Playground; Digital Connectors; Gang Intervention Partnership; Positive Resources and Opportunities for Youth; Cool Down Group; Green Teams; DC Mural Project; Family Group Conferencing; Solution Focus; Social Corners; Crossing the Lines; Safe Passages; Healing Circles; Cosmic Wolves; Safe Passages and more. We will also look ahead.

In 1998, the District’s population reached a low of 565,230, the lowest since the mid-1930s. By 2025, the estimated population was projected to be just over 700,000, with estimates for 2030 over 800,000 residents. In August 2014, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) featured a story on the Shaw community titled, “Washington, DC: From Murder Capital to Boomtown.” The article stated that after Washington had “bottomed out,” a virtuous cycle began as people began to reinvest in affordable land and housing. Affluent young professionals (mostly white) opted for the convenience and vibrancy of living closer to the city center, often moving into attractive old buildings in areas that had previously been considered out of reach.

However, the article also acknowledged that the area’s unique character and African American identity have been diluted. Many individuals who grew up in the area no longer return, having been displaced by rising costs. In fact, numerous families and staff associated with CSC, who have lived in the area for generations, have been priced out of our neighborhoods. This has led some current and former staff members to consider how CSC programs may have contributed to gentrification and questioning how we might have addressed issues differently. Harold Valentine, longtime Shaw resident and CSC Board member suggests, “We need healing. Gentrification has caused a tremendous amount of racial tension.” What could CSC’s role be in facilitating a healing process?

And finally, our immigrant community is facing significant trauma due to the current federal administration’s policies. We have extensive experience in keeping families and youth safe while complying with local and federal laws. However, these times are unprecedented. Our families and staff are experiencing levels of anxiety, fear, and trauma that are unimaginable in the nation’s capital. CSC is dedicated to finding new and legal ways to ensure the safety of our community and our immigrant families.

Thank you for reflecting with us on our Beginnings. We hope you join us in the journey ahead.



CSC PROGRAM IMPACT: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR

Strengthening families, empowering youth, and building safer communities across Washington, DC.

FAMILY SUPPORTIVE SERVICES & PESP



700+ Children supported



300+ Families kept together



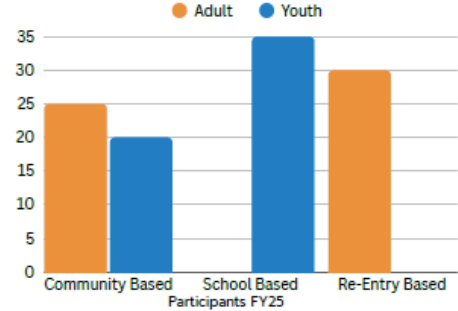
118 Parenting class graduates

Family Supportive Services connects families to resources that strengthen stability and help prevent foster care involvement. This includes our Parenting Education and Support Program (PESP).

Prevention: Keeping just 100 children out of foster care saves DC over 3 million dollars per year

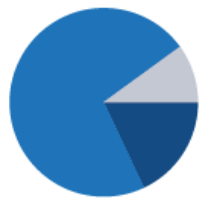
TAMAR

The graph shows participants served in the community, in schools and under our Success in Re-entry program



Trauma recovery groups provide education, peer support, and coping strategies for individuals impacted by trauma.

RAPID RE-HOUSING YOUTH



- 16 Clients Employed
- 4 Clients Attended Training Programs
- 2 Clients Enrolled in GED Programs

Supports young adults experiencing housing instability through employment support, education pathways, and stable housing connections.

SUCCESS IN RE-ENTRY



Provided Healing Circles supporting family reunification



Provided clients with housing support



Provided career training and employment support

Supports family reunification and stability through Healing Circles, case management, housing support, employment pathways, and mental health resources. The program provides TAMAR workshops at the DC Department of Corrections and life skills groups at Fairview Transitional Housing to help reduce recidivism.

YOUTH DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Serving over 100 youth, CSC programs use athletics, mentoring, leadership development, and STEM exploration to build coping skills, prevent violence and gang involvement, and empower young people to lead.

SOCCER

- ✓ Weekly practices and leadership sessions
- ✓ Youth advanced to championship tournament
- ✓ Expanded program with career readiness components



STOP SCHOOL VIOLENCE

- ✓ Program launched in two schools
- ✓ Students engaged in leadership and prevention activities
- ✓ Early improvements in attendance and academic engagement



STEM

- ✓ Ten80 Esports racing challenges build STEM and teamwork skills
- ✓ Mentoring and leadership development activities
- ✓ Family engagement and support



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Helping residents secure and retain employment, build financial skills, and access career pathways toward long-term economic stability.



30-90 day job retention



180 day job retention



270-365 day job retention

CBCAP

CBCAP strengthens families through parenting education and early learning. Families participate in HIPPI, a home-based program that prepares children for school success.



70+ Spanish speaking families served through the HIPPI home visiting program



100% of families reported improvement in children's gross motor and reading skills



Domestic violence prevention workshops and family support services provided

SAFE PASSAGE, SAFE BLOCKS

90%

With ambassadors present near schools to support safe commutes and build relationships with students, over 90% of youth report feeling safer traveling to and from school.





COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR COMMUNITIES
CHANGING LIVES, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

30TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT SERIES
TUES., MAR. 26TH 12 - 1:30PM
ON ZOOM

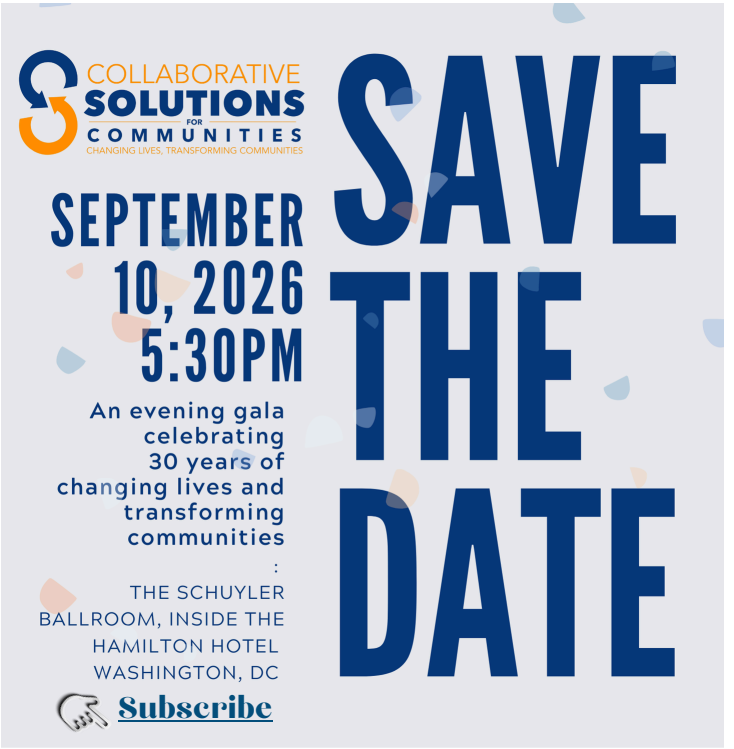
Past & Present board members, funders and community partners

YOU'RE INVITED!

Celebrating 30 years of changing lives and transforming communities

[Register here](#)

2026



COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR COMMUNITIES
CHANGING LIVES, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

SEPTEMBER 10, 2026
5:30PM

SAVE THE DATE

An evening gala celebrating 30 years of changing lives and transforming communities

THE SCHUYLER BALLROOM, INSIDE THE HAMILTON HOTEL WASHINGTON, DC

[Subscribe](#)

HELP Calling all alumni, employees, clients, colleagues, and partners to join us in activities, including volunteering for any 30th Anniversary Events - contact, Antoinette Murphy, Chief Operating Officer, amurphy@wearecsc.org

CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR WORK



DONATE 

Help us serve our families as we provide housing, violence intervention, youth engagement & workforce development programs.



CONGRATULATIONS COSMIC WOLVES!



We are grateful to Events DC for continued support and their donation to the Cosmic Wolves. The team received water bottles, uniforms, t-shirts, socks and soccer bags for their new season.

The team is happy and excited for their new items and looks forward to kicking off the Spring Summer Seasons.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Solana Vander Senior Manager of DC Events for making this contribution.



2026 WINTER EDITION

Love what we do? Then subscribe to our newsletter or donate!
Follow us on social media!

