

## QUICK TAKES

This spring, Side by Side was one of five organizations chosen to participate in a **Nonprofit Incubator Program** run by the Human Services Coalition of Prince George's County, MD. The program's nine half-day workshops focused on leadership, effective boards, grants, and fiscal and project management. The program also provides ongoing consulting help. Side by Side was excited to receive invaluable knowledge on how to grow and improve!

Through a relationship developed in the incubator program, Side by Side is exploring a partnership with the **Instituto de Educación Infantil** (Early Childhood Education Institute) in College Park, MD to deepen its outreach to Latino parents, who represent about 25 percent of our schools' families.

**First Baptist Church of Glenarden**, a large church in the southern part of our county, wants to begin a program based on our Family Academy and Great Start model.

In our first three years, almost **300 families** have participated in our Family Academies. Sixty-two kindergarten and pre-kindergarten families attended our pilot Great Start sessions at four schools in fall 2011.

Side by Side's tutoring and Almost Home **homework programs** served 30 children this year with extra help on school work.

Executive Director Joe Murchison dressed up as **Cookie Monster** and delivered cookies to Laurel schools as part of the "You Give Dough" online fundraiser, then took several banana cream pies in the face as part of the "Top Banana" school change drive. Check out the videos at [sidebysidelaurel.org](http://sidebysidelaurel.org)!



Laurel Elementary School fourth graders (from left) Kiyah Hemphill, Jaita Mills, Tristin Howell, and Christen Kelly performed at Side by Side's annual fundraising breakfast in March.

## ACADEMY PROGRAM DEEPENS

*Executive Director Joe Murchison described Side by Side's exciting expansion plans at its annual fundraising breakfast in March...*

Two weeks ago I was surprised to receive a call from a member of the Hagerstown Area Religious Council in Hagerstown, MD. Someone in her group had read a story about Side by Side in a newspaper and it sounded like we were doing great things. She wondered if she could drive down and talk to me about how a community program to strengthen schools might be duplicated in Washington County.

I said sure. As we proceeded to talk for 45 minutes on the phone, I told her some things I had learned from experience that she may not have wanted to hear, things like:

- Don't start a program for a year. If you want it to last, you'll need that time to build a core of committed people.
- Ask lots of questions to determine what the most pressing needs are in your schools.
- Make yourself known to parents, teachers, school officials, and community leaders, and listen to what they say.

(continued on back)

ACADEMY PROGRAM, from page 1

The last thing I told her was don't expect results for three to five years. That's how long it often takes to begin having an impact.

This year, Side by Side is turning three years old. Because of the essential groundwork that was done and generous support from many of you, our work with Prince George's County students and their families has gained real traction in the past year. Our Family Academies, for families from our seven local elementary schools, have given parents – including many African and Latino immigrants – tools to help their children succeed in school. Renee Sandford, a parent and former PTA president at Montpelier Elementary, told me that her child had become an excellent and enthusiastic reader, and she said one of our workshops on encouraging reading was a key reason. We love our families, and feel privileged to work with them in these programs. But we want to do more than help individuals; we want to help strengthen entire schools. Here's how we are beginning to do that.

Last fall, we launched a pilot program at four schools now called Great Start, which takes our Family Academy to a whole new level. We hosted a series of three evenings for kindergarten and pre-kindergarten parents, with a dinner, workshops in English and Spanish for the parents taught by teachers from that school, and activities for the children. The parents, including many Spanish-speaking immigrants, learned how to manage their children's difficult behaviors, help them become strong readers and help them build a solid foundation in math. Both the parents and the teachers who led the Great Start workshops gave us very positive feedback. As a result, next fall we are expanding the program for new parents from three evenings to six evenings. And we are increasing the number of schools from four to six—so that every elementary school in Laurel will have this support available.

Side by Side is not about dreams and visions. It is about results. This year, we implemented surveys to measure how parents attending our workshops are making changes that benefit their children's education. How many times a week do parents read with their children? How many times a week do they do a math activity? Do they have a library card? How often do they go to the library? How well are they able to stop misbehavior and motivate positive behavior? The surveys will give us invaluable answers to these questions. Next year, we plan to measure student achievement as well. We'll work with Prince George's schools Assistant Superintendent Andrew Zuckerman and our local principals to collect data on how much our Great Start children's reading and math skills improve, relative to those of children whose families don't attend the workshops. We are eager to see the results, and Andy is hoping to expand the program beyond Laurel to elementary schools throughout the county.

Our K and pre-K workshop series next fall will be ambitious. Instead of one Family Academy a month, as in our first two years, we'll be organizing 36 workshop evenings in three months. It's going to take a lot of organization and a lot of volunteers. It's also going to require \$35,000. But because of our great supporters, we'll meet that goal!

## KUDOS

"Side by Side is one of our most important nonprofit community partners. ... The (Great Start) program holds great promise, and we want to see it expand to schools around the county."

– **Superintendent William Hite, Prince George's County Public Schools**

"We are fortunate to have a community organization, Side by Side, that is working hard to strengthen our elementary schools...They really care about our schools and their families, and are making a difference." – **Laurel Mayor Craig Moe**

"Keep doing what you're doing. Catherine (homework club student) became student of the month in June and really improved since the start of school." – **teacher Andrew Kaetzel, Laurel Elementary**

"I give thanks for this homework club program because my son has improved in school. ... May God bless you and may this program grow so that it can help other children who also need it." – **parent David Canenguez**