

# COMMUNITY COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

## “Helping others to live better lives”



### **LIVE B4U DIE SUMMIT**

**June 13, 2009**

“*Live B4U Die*” . . . This is precisely the message brought forth in a recent summit presented by the Community Council of Metropolitan Atlanta (CCMA) on Saturday, June 13, 2009. This summit, *Live B4U Die: A Wake-Up Call for Teenagers and Youth*, included a New Orleans-style mock funeral of a young male who lost his life to the streets. *Live B4U Die*, a standing-room-only event hosted by Central United Methodist Church, was the vision of Norma Joy Barnes, President and CEO of CCMA. Barnes was inspired to develop this summit because of the many factors that lead to the statistically high mortality rate of our young people. The summit highlighted homicide, suicide, auto accidents, and HIV/AIDS because these are leading causes of *preventable* deaths; and are four areas where teenagers and youth can proactively and substantially participate in reducing their mortality rate.

Recognizing that our youth have inherited and are not responsible for the many societal dysfunctions that place them in situations where less-than-optimum decisions are made is a basic premise for the many people who came together to make this summit happen. That being understood, *Live B4U Die* focused on *enlightenment* (e.g. have you thought about what *really* made you pull that trigger?) and *empowerment* (making positive life choices, building self-esteem, and learning the skills necessary to envision bright futures). *Live B4U Die* was supported by a network of community individuals, businesses, churches, and organizations that are collaborating to provide education, counseling, healing, and other support services for our youth.

This *Live B4U Die* Summit included a mock funeral, facilitated by Willie Watkins Funeral Home, complete with hearse and pallbearers who carried an empty casket. The New Orleans-style funeral dirge was performed by musician *Milkshake Mayfield*, who brought tears to many eyes with his processional trumpet renditions. *Live B4U Die* was not intended for entertainment, but one could not help but to be captivated by the requiem, which was a dramatic presentation by *Radical Mime Ministry of Anointed to Dance International Ministries*. This performance demonstrated through mime (complete with “white-face”) the violent and senseless way in which many of our youth are dying daily (gangs, guns, and drugs). The Reverend Paul Thibodeaux, Youth Pastor at Cascade United Methodist Church, delivered a powerful eulogy, sharing that we should *PAUSE (People Always Using Spiritual Experiences)* before responding or making choices in what could be life threatening and life altering circumstances. Rev. Thibodeaux

believes that this *pause* allows one to reflect and to allow a *Divine Spirit* to intervene and direct us in choices that are for our highest good—individually and collectively.

The Order of Service for *Live B4U Die* was consistent with many well-planned funeral services, and the complexities involved in holistically restoring and healing our communities were not dismissed. The service included a post mortem forum with panel members representing the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety, the Fulton County Juvenile Court, the Atlanta Police Department, Recovery Consultants of Atlanta, and the Priority Male Institute (PMI). This post mortem forum was an interactive discussion between panel members and audience, and it allowed many to share their grief, concerns, experiences, professional expertise, resources, and life lessons learned.

Many young people, including PMI graduates Demarco Harrison and Lawrence Moore, Kesha Crockett (consulting producer for CAU-TV), and Terence Lester (author of three books including *U Turn*), were involved in the presentation of this summit. Attendees of *Live B4U Die* ranged in age from six years to 90 years. Michael, age 19, stated that this event was a real eye opener for him. “It was right in my face! I know that I can do things to help save my own life.” Sixteen year-old Jasmine stated, “I have seen in my family how bad choices [can] lead to bad results. I am glad that we have someone to help make things better for us.”

Connecting young people to needed resources was a major objective of *Live B4U Die*; and program resource booklets were provided to all participants. Resources and supporters for this summit included: NOYS (National Organization for Youth Safety); SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions—Governor’s Office of Highway Safety); Rock of Escape Creative Youth Development Organization; the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline; Project KARMA, Inc.; Love from Afar, Inc.; Bridges 2 Success; Ben Hill United Methodist Church (UMC); Headland Heights UMC; King Memorial UMC; Mount Bethel UMC; Friendship Baptist Church; Gammon Theological Seminary; United Way; WSB-TV; WYZE Radio; and a host of other community members and businesses who contributed their time, talents, and financial support to *Live B4U Die*.

When asked what were her visions for future work and partnerships for *Live B4U Die*, Barnes stated, “We have a communal responsibility to enlighten, support and empower our young people to live better lives. The CCMA is determined to do this through its free life skills programs. I look forward to future partnerships with churches, organizations, and others to collectively continue this life-saving endeavor.” Sounds a little bit like the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

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*(CCMA, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose purpose is to develop, convene, and coordinate programs and services to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Programs include the Priority Male Initiative, a life skills and job readiness training program for young black males ages 18-28, and the Live B4U Die Summit for teenagers and youth. For more information, visit [www.communitycouncilma.org](http://www.communitycouncilma.org), or call (404) 935-5859.*

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