

# **OHANA OF HOWARD COUNTY, INC.**

## **Community Building Plan: Phase 2**

**August 2020 - August 2021**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **The Essence of OhanaHC**

Think back for a moment and answer this question: When you were a teenager and/or a young adult, who helped you figure out how to overcome the barriers you faced and the path you should take? We have asked this question to nearly all of our OhanaHC volunteers, and their answers continually inspired us. Many said a parent, a teacher, a relative, a family friend, a community member or a first employer. Nearly all of us had that type of guidance that helped us change our lives. It is the essence of our mission - including young people in our lives and community.

#### **Why Howard County?**

Although Howard County is one of the wealthiest counties (by household income) in the country, Columbia and the Route One Corridor have many neighborhoods of moderate and low-income families. Over 22% of the families in Howard County are eligible for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS = poverty level). Four high schools in the county, all in Columbia, have the highest FARMS populations that average 40%: Hammond, Long Reach, Oakland Mills, and Wilde Lake. For many of the children in these families, the opportunities in Howard County are often out of reach and they struggle academically.

Although we live in an amazingly diverse county, many community members are segregated by wealth, race, or ethnic background. Most of us are isolated or segregated, and do not develop meaningful friendships with people who are different from us.

#### **The Mission**

OhanaHC's mission is twofold. Our primary goal is to work with students who have struggled with academic achievement yet demonstrate learning and leadership potential that will be actualized with the right combination of resources and opportunities. Most of us have had to overcome barriers to become emotionally and economically successful. And most of us had help. At OhanaHC, we surround 9th graders with four community members who follow the student for 10 years - through high school and either through college and/or career training. This group of people, an Ohana, build trust with the student and work with them to identify the barriers they face and ways to overcome those barriers over a ten-year period.

The second part of our mission is to reduce isolation in Howard County. Each Ohana is diversified by age, gender, race, and ethnicity. People from different backgrounds work on a long-term mentoring goal and get to know people in the community they otherwise would likely never meet. Eight Ohanas form a Village where our mentors develop friendships, learn, and help each other, reducing everyone's isolation.

Each OhanaHC mentor receives approximately ten hours of training in mentorship, OhanaHC policies, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). DEI is a cornerstone in accomplishing our mission of mentoring underserved young people and reducing isolation in Howard County.

### **Our Model**

Ohana of Howard County, Inc. (OhanaHC) is modeled on the amazing work of Thread in Baltimore. Thread has a 15-year track record of successfully helping hundreds of kids who start the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile academically; 85% graduate from high school, and 70% go on to complete a two or four year degree or certificate program.

### **Our Path**

OhanaHC is growing quickly. This nonprofit/public partnership started in December 2019 after a discussion with Marcy Leonard, Principal of Wilde Lake High School. OhanaHC received its 501c(3) status in March 2020 and launched its pilot in August 2020 at Wilde Lake with ten 9th graders and 41 volunteers. For the 2021/2022 school year, we intend to expand into the other three high schools and back to Wilde Lake with eight students each and approximately 150 volunteers. At full capacity, we will need to serve around 400 9th graders each year, which will require 1,600 volunteers each year. To reach this level of volunteer activity, OhanaHC will need the support of most of the organizations in Howard County where serving in an Ohana will become a community norm. Ohana means family, a community family - we never leave a family member behind.

### **From Marcy Leonard**

"OhanaHC is an incredible community partner with us at Wilde Lake High School, collaborating with us to ensure that our students and families who face substantial challenges are not left behind or forgotten. The deep commitment from the OhanaHC mentors and organization is an example of our Howard County community's commitment to walking the walk, not just talking the talk. The relationships between our participating students, our parents/families, the Wilde Lake staff, and OhanaHC are the foundation for our students' academic and social-emotional success now and for the future. Lots of people and organizations talk about equity; OhanaHC creates opportunities for equity in tangible and research-based practices. We are grateful to OhanaHC for investing in our kids and in our community in such powerful, substantial, and deep-rooted ways."

*- Marcy Leonard, Principal, Wilde Lake High School, Howard County Public Schools*