

While Baltimore Is Caught in Political Crossfire, This Ministry Is Actually Making a Difference in the City

As the city of Baltimore is caught in the crossfire of political and social media banter this week, Somebody Cares Baltimore, a chapter of Somebody Cares America, continues to bring hope and connect people to much needed resources on a daily basis, as it has done for the past 10 years through a collaboration of the church, business and law enforcement communities.

On July 27, SCB hosted an annual Day of Hope event in Bocek Park, the first of two this summer. The second Day of Hope will be on Aug. 10 at Frederick Douglass High School.

“Day of Hope is a one-day special community event that is designed to meet both human and spiritual needs of our residents,” says SC Baltimore Director Matt Stevens. “It is an all-out lavishing and saturating of schools and communities with prayer and acts of kindness.”

Going to the most violent and impoverished areas, Day Of Hope has mobilized thousands throughout the years to serve more than 20,000 residents in 14 different Baltimore city neighborhoods. In a festival atmosphere with music, food, and prize give-aways, kids play games and jump on moon-bounces while their parents receive free groceries and visit with service providers, from doctors to bankers to community resource representatives. They can get their blood pressure checked, learn how to avoid foreclosure, and receive information on programs that can help set them up for success. At the prayer tent, which is manned by local churches, people

receive prayer and learn about Jesus.

“The events of the day draw people in, but we desire to see ongoing life change for them as they learn more about Jesus and discover tools to help them,” says the SCB office.

Each Day of Hope is staffed by over 300 volunteers from churches as well as the community. Somebody Cares chapters from New England, Houston and San Antonio also participate. Mark Royce, director of SC San Antonio, brought the Holy Smoke Grill Team for the July 27 Day of Hope and cooked up 1,000 pounds of chicken. “It was a great day of serving and sharing the love of Jesus,” he said.

Each year, SCB coordinates catalytic events like Day of Hope and other projects that serve tens of thousands of people. ServeFest is a day when churches partner together to invest in their own neighborhoods by completing service projects such as painting, pulling weeds and planting. Having mobilized more than 4,500 volunteers, the greatest impact comes from churches connecting with their neighborhoods and expressing new levels of compassion.

SCB also serves 300 members of the homeless community each Christmas at the Code Blue holiday celebration, named after the program that is activated in Baltimore whenever temperatures fall below 15 degrees Fahrenheit—any shelter that has available space opens their empty beds to anyone who is homeless. Somebody Cares visits one of those shelters before Christmas to serve brunch and perform a Christmas program, where they sing carols, share the gospel and give out Bags of Hope, filled with donated toiletries, socks and washcloths.

Launched in 2010, SC Baltimore also works in the areas of homelessness, foster care, at risk teens and violence, addiction and crisis preparedness by connecting and mobilizing people and organizations to serve their communities together. Knowing a three-fold cord is not easily broken, the SCB

strategy has been to bring together churches, local businesses and the police department to bring lasting change.

Building on this foundation, SC Baltimore's pastors have learned that what they can do together far outweighs what they can do alone. This was especially true during the riots that followed the death of Freddie Gray while he was in police custody. While tempers flared and emotions raged on the streets of their beloved city, pastors linked arms and marched the streets, in direct contrast to the violence. SCB and area churches helped coordinate volunteers to be on hand early the next morning to serve in the clean-up from the evening's damages, and just to love on people. One morning, over 100 pastors and bishops from all denominations and ethnic backgrounds came to pray and intercede.

"I've been to Baltimore on many occasions, even before our Somebody Cares chapter was started," says Doug Stringer, founder and president of Somebody Cares America. "A strong foundation of unity and a network of relationships has already helped them break down many barriers and see much fruit from their labors."

He continues: "Regardless of political bantering, there are churches and ministries that don't get a lot of attention who are serving their community and having a positive impact for the city and its residents."

Somebody Cares America/International is a nonprofit based in Houston, Texas. SCA/I empowers the church to be a unified and tangible expression of Christ for lasting impact through four key avenues: united prayer, compassion evangelism, leadership development and disaster response.

Listen to the podcast for more from Doug Stringer!

Doug Stringer is founder and president of Somebody Cares America and Somebody Cares International, a global network bringing hope and healing to communities through prayer

initiatives, compassion outreaches and cooperative efforts. He is author of numerous books, including In Search of a Father's Blessing and Leadership Awakening: Foundational Principles for Lasting Success.