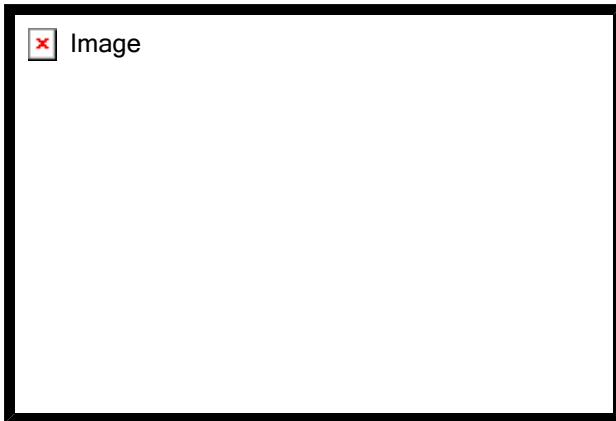


Alive and Free Conference

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Written by Bobby Marvin

Alive and Free Conference Movement comes to Baltimore



According to youth advocates, the city of Baltimore is gravely ill, suffering immensely from addiction to incarceration and death syndrome, a disease that stems from youth violence.

This ailment was critically assessed and given a cure recently at the Alive & Free Movement National Conference held at Lake Clifton High School in East Baltimore.

Dubbed as a violence prevention prescription, the Alive and Free Movement was created in 2006 by Dr. Joseph E. Marshall Jr., co-founder and executive director of the Omega Boys and founder and president of the Street Soldiers Consortium, a youth development and violence prevention organization based in San Francisco, Calif. Making its first appearance in Baltimore, the two-day event was produced in part by Dani Johnson of A Special Gathering and hosted by Street Soldiers National Consortium in conjunction with Safe Healing Foundation, the Baltimore Consortium member led by Executive Director Nzinga Oneferua-EI.

Participants and speakers included Mayor Sheila Dixon, Dr. Andres Alonso, Superintendent of Baltimore City Public Schools, comedian Sinbad, actress Terri J. Vaughn of the former co-star of the WB sitcom "The Steve Harvey Show," Kemba Smith, a national youth advocate and speaker and Ray Upchurch, director of the insightful film "Daddy Hunger."

A critical documentary that focused on fatherlessness, attendees viewed Daddy Hunger with solid attentiveness and reflection. "It hit me one day like wow, because I'm a father myself, and all I could think about is the most important thing I could do on this planet [is] raise those two young men to grow

up and help somebody else,” said Upchurch when asked what brought about Daddy Hunger.

After the viewing of the film, audience members participated in giving their own testimonies, with eyes all around the auditorium tearing up, many expressed their hunger pains of absent fathers.

“We as adults have to take a different kind of stand, we have thought that every time we see children who act a certain way, or demonstrate negative behavior that we should lock them up. We’re not realizing that the reason why so many of our children are acting out is because some of their basic needs are not being met. A lot of those folks don’t have fathers and that hurts,” said Oneferua-EI.

Also to the dismay of many, gangs are also on the rise in the city of Baltimore, with the potential to possibly arrive to extent of California’s gang epidemic. Agreeing with Upchurch, Dr. Marshall supports that gangs are born to a lack of structure at home.

“We got to get young people to deal with the issues of fathers. Because young women get involved with the wrong guys because they don’t have their dad. Young men have no idea how to be men so they go out and father children, so it’s killing us,” said Dr. Marshall.

Despite the sometimes painful moments of the conference, positive energy was alive and well along with praise and gratitude. The conference ended with the attendees gathered holding hands in prayer, with the hope for a troubled young generation.

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