November 2024 OCS Overview: Outreach, Events, Key Activities, Hispanic Liaison Projects, Case Management, and New Mental Health Program

November was a month of continued community engagement, strategic planning, and collaboration across multiple initiatives. OCS has made substantial progress in providing support to families and residents while expanding partnerships and programs aimed at improving mental health, housing, and community services. Below is an overview of key activities and developments:

1. Community Outreach and Events

- **Georgetown East Elementary Health Fair**: OCS participated in the Health Fair, distributing resource guides and connecting residents with critical services and support.
- **Mills Parole Family Movie Night**: OCS attended and engaged with families, providing fun puzzles for kids, distributing resource books to parents, and gathering surveys to learn more about local needs.
- **Food Fridays Partnership**: We are coordinating with Food Fridays to schedule wellness van visits to distribute food donations and provide additional resources.
- **Wellness Van Visibility:** OCS is expanding the wellness van's role in the community through a partnership with **Pastor Joel Osebar of Fragrance Grace**. We are looking to provide mental health screenings with referrals to Fragrance Grace counseling program. We are also going to distribute supplies/hygiene kits to community members at various locations such as Parole, Robinwood, and Eastport communities.
- **We Care and Friends Community Thanksgiving Event**: OCS provided grocery items and assisted with raffle ticket distribution during this community Thanksgiving event.
- **Spreading Joy with Yoga Factor-** Christmas Giveaway in partnership with Yoga Factor, OEM, and the amazing Food Fridays initiative! 124 kids have signed up to receive special Christmas gifts this year! Sign-ups officially closed on November 15th. Gifts will be distributed by "Santas,"(volunteers from Yoga Factory, Food Fridays and OCS team) on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

2. Hispanic Liaison Projects and Activities

- **Spanish Translation of Resource Book**: The OCS Hispanic Liaison team successfully translated the community resource book into Spanish. The next step is transferring the translated content into a finalized booklet for distribution to Spanish-speaking residents.
- **Mexican Consulate Support**: OCS has partnered with the Mexican Consulate to assist residents with obtaining passports, IDs, and other personal services. This collaboration continues to be valuable for the community.
- **Planning for 2025 Consulate Visits**: Hispanic team is working on scheduling visits in 2025 from the Consulates of Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador to provide important consular services to residents.

3. Youth Engagement and Cultural Celebrations

- **Youth Poetry Contest**: The Youth Poetry Contest is now scheduled for **April 18, 2025**. This event will offer local youth the opportunity to showcase their creativity and engage with the community through poetry.
- **Día de los Muertos 2025**: The team is currently working on the Día de los Muertos celebration and the structure for the upcoming year.

4. Case Management Updates

- **Assisting with Housing and Utility Needs**: Case management services have remained steady, with housing and utility assistance being the most common requests. Due to depleted funding, OCS has been actively referring clients to additional community resources that can offer support for housing and utility needs.
- **Partnership Meetings**: Participated in the Overdose Prevention Team (OPT) Strategic Planning Meeting; **Benevolence Group meeting**, discussing and obtaining information from local churches and non-profits for assistance for Annapolis residents; **Homeless Services meeting**, a joint meeting between OCS, OEM, AA County Homeless Services and APD

5. Mental Health Program Development

- **Social Habit Program with Comms**: OCS is collaborating with Comms on a new mental health initiative called **Social Habit**. The initiative aims to encourage socializing and community connection to help build connections, reduce mental health issues, and increase social wellbeing. The program aims to educate young adults on the importance of community, connection, and strong support systems in fostering a positive outlook on life. It will highlight how vital these elements are for personal growth, well-being, and mental health, emphasizing their role in reducing the risk of mental health challenges and promoting a thriving, balanced life.
- **Program Launch**: The team is currently developing a communication plan for the program, with a planned launch in **late January to February 2025**. The program will offer educational workshops and events to foster stronger social connections and improve mental wellness.

6. Rental Assistance Program Updates

- **Meeting with ACDS**: OCS met with ACDS to discuss strategies for improving the rental assistance program, focusing on refining the vetting process, managing repeat clients, and adjusting income requirements to better serve the community.
- **Tenant Literacy Initiatives**: In addition to sharing fair housing information with rental assistance applicants, OCS is promoting financial literacy resources, including budgeting and saving workshops. Referrals to financial experts are available for individuals seeking help in developing budgeting plans.

- **Rental Application Recap:** We had a total of 151 applications. With 84 approvals. The neighborhoods with the most recipients were Bay Ridge Gardens with 22 and HACA with 14. Overall, applications were processed and payments were initiated in the City system within six working days after a complete application was received. Of the 85 payments, 20 were for utilities and 65 were for rent with the average rent support being $2,082.

7. Grants and Funding

- **Community Grants FY25 Q1 Reports**: OCS has successfully received and processed all FY25 Q1 reports and reimbursement requests from community grantees. To date:
    - 12 organizations have received their full grant amounts with one more check still in the process of being issued
    - 18 organizations have received part of their grant funds in line with their Q1 report with two more checks still in the process of being issued
    - 7 organizations submitted Q1 reports but did not request any funds
    - 11 organizations did not submit Q1 reports or submitted incomplete ones
    - 1 organization does not yet have a fully executed contract
- **Adopt a Community Grant**: The final submission for Adopt a Community Grant is pending from John Wesley. Vickie has reached out to Ald. Finlayson for assistance in completing this process.
- **Child and Family Success Grants**: 75% of payments have been made to grantees as part of the Child and Family Success Grant program, supporting local organizations dedicated to strengthening families and children.

8. Looking Ahead

As we move into the new year, OCS will continue to strengthen community partnerships, improve case management services, and enhance support for residents. We will focus on the upcoming launch of the **Social Habit** mental health program, and continue outreach efforts through increased visibility with the wellness van and community events. Additionally, we will work on enhancing the rental assistance program and expanding tenant literacy resources to better serve local families.

November has been a month of solid progress, collaboration, and planning. OCS remains committed to improving the well-being of residents by expanding mental health initiatives, providing crucial resources, and fostering meaningful community engagement. We are excited about the continued success of these efforts as we head into the new year.