Sharon Snow (00:00):
Okay. My name is Sharon Snow and I am president of the Cylburn Community Action Association. I've been the president for the last 15 years, and I actually grew up in the Sandtown-Winchester area of Baltimore city, attended Baltimore city public schools, graduated from Coppin State College back then, worked in the field of education, teaching in the Baltimore city public schools for a few years and then decided to go to graduate school to get a degree in guidance and counseling, but ended up being offered a fellowship in vocational rehab counseling. So it was pretty hard to pass that up when they were paying your tuition and giving you a stipend. So that's ultimately the feel I went into working for the state of Maryland for about 12 years and in private industry for another maybe 10 years and recently retired in 2016, and continued all along to fulfill my responsibilities and my passion for making a difference in the Cylburn community and actually moved into the Cylburn community in 1982.

Thought it was and still think it was a great community. It's pretty stable, it's healthy. Baltimore has these pockets of what I call healthy strong neighborhoods, but you can go two blocks or three blocks in any direction and it's a whole different set of circumstances, but I consider Cylburn to still be a pretty healthy, stable community. It has a large number of homeowners that have been there for quite a while, we have a strong community association and we try to continue to make a difference in the community, it's something as a community leader and advocate, you cannot do by yourself. So it involves a lot of people who want to see and make a difference as well as the young people, have to pass the torch, we have to get them involved because young people are our future. And if we don't invest in them, then we have a lost future.

So that's pretty much how I kind of look at my role as a leader in the community.

Speaker 2 (03:06):
I thought you can maybe describe a project or an accomplishment or tell a story about something that you were able to make happen in your time in Cylburn.

Sharon Snow (03:15):
Yeah. One of the major things that I'm pretty proud of and has been such a benefit to our community, is a partnership with a LifeBridge Health, specifically Sinai hospital. Initially there was no partnership, although Sinai supported what the community did in terms of allowing the community to use their facility for meetings and different activities, but there was no solid partnership and so it came to a point of... They needed something from the community and the community needed something from them. And so we sat down at the table and some of the things that our community needed, that I recommend was scholarships, a summer camp, being able to financially support our children and go to a summer camp, employment opportunities. What else did we have?

And there were a number of other things... I was pretty pleased with the scholarships and the summer camp, and of course the employment, but our kids had nowhere to go during the summer and we are a working community. So parents have to work and our kids needed to be in structured well supervised activities during the day. We didn't want latchkey kids. So out of that negotiations came this partnership with Sinai, that was around maybe 2006, somewhere around there. And so it's been a very healthy and beneficial relationship since then, we've had several kids who have graduated from college.
and got the support of scholarships, up to 25 kids per summer were going to a summer camp. And we supported the community summer camp that was initially established by the Grace Outreach Community Center and then in later years, the Grace Presbyterian Church continued that summer camp.

So we had up to 25 kids, to the point where the kids were going every summer, that eventually they reached an age where they became counselors at the camp. So that was pretty big for me to see the kids want to come back and make a difference as well, through a program that they benefited from through the years. And like I said, we have several kids that have graduated from college and it's just been a wonderful partnership. Last year, because of the pandemic... Two major activities that we have each year, that is a back to school bash, that was going on before I moved into the community in 1982, they were doing this back to school bash where they were giving out school supplies to a couple of hundred kids, had a parade through the community, and then the actual activity was held at Sinai hospital's Zamoiski auditorium, with speakers, with activities for the kids, with lunch, and then giving away the school supplies.

So last year, because of the pandemic, we couldn't do any gathering or having activities like that and so I suggested that we support Pimlico Elementary Middle School by purchasing tablets for those kids who did not have tablets as of yet. We had several thousand dollars left in our budget at the end of that fiscal year and so we were able to purchase 14 tablets and Sinai matched that. And so we were able to supply 28 tablets to 28 kids, not just from our community, but wherever they lived, that attended Pimlico Elementary Middle School. So that was pretty significant because as an educator, that's my number one goal, is to support Pimlico Elementary Middle School, so that our children can have a chance in having a better education and that's one of the things that kind of keeps me going, is making sure that education is first. And so we strongly support Pimlico Elementary Middle School and the principal, and the staff there.

Speaker 2 (08:45):
What do you want to still kind of see change or improve in your neighborhood or in Cylburn?

Sharon Snow (08:52):
Yeah. One of the things is education because back in the 60s and 70s, and 80s, Pimlico Elementary Middle School was one of those premier public schools. It had good teachers, it had a strong support system, the kids were functioning above average there. It was just a great school, people came to that community to purchase homes and to settle because of Pimlico Elementary Middle School, but over the years, I guess, a lack of support or just the sign of the times, it has fell below what is really needed for our children to succeed. And so that's one of the things I would like to see come back, is a strong educational system at that school. Also housing, we've had a lot of homeowners that have either moved out or passed away and the property has just been left and has come to being just a shell or a place for crime and grind.

And I would like to... With Park Heights Renaissance and the funding that's coming through the community, I'm looking forward to that change back to a more stable and thriving community surrounding the Cylburn community. So I think in about 10 years, maybe 15 years, we're really going to be back to seeing a difference. One of the things that I miss is the library, how do you shut down a library when you have a community full of children? But that'll be coming back, brand new 21st century library is on the books and so hopefully in the next couple of years that will be a big staple in the community for our children.

Speaker 2 (11:30):
Well, I guess, can you talk a little bit about what got you kind of involved in this work and why you do what you do? I heard you talk about the children... For the children, but were there people in your life that influenced you to do this type of work? What brought you to that role?

Sharon Snow (11:50):
Well, I grew up in a community of educators, across the street from where I grew up, there were three teachers, one of them became my first grade and third grade teacher. And then next door to me, she was vice-principal of Bates High in Annapolis. So I kind of grew up in an educational community, I had educators and social workers in my family, and I just come from a family of compassionate people and supportive people and people who are about education. You can't make a difference unless you're educated of about what's around you and how to make those changes that are needed. So I grew up with uncles and aunts who attended Morgan State University, who were involved in voter registration, equality and those kinds of things. And why I do what I do? I can't explain it. It's just a part of who I am and I do it without thought, I do it without... It's not a task and when you're doing things that aren't a task, then they're enjoyable. And I like working with people and I like seeing children. I like seeing the light bulb go off in a child's head when they discover something, that's why I'm really excited about your project, the art project and the activities that'll be going on at the Arboretum.

Speaker 2 (13:58):
Is there anything else you'd like to share about your work, your community, Baltimore, any other stories or thoughts?

Sharon Snow (14:11):
I'm a native Baltimorean. I love Baltimore in spite of all that's going on that is portrayed negatively. I still think Baltimore is a good place to live. It's a city full of communities and it's city full of people that are compassionate and have a passion for making a difference. And I've never lived any place else but Baltimore city, I'm a city person, I don't want to go to the county. I don't want to go out somewhere too far from the city. To me, the city is the heartbeat and it's where everything is thriving and everything else is systemic to that and I just like being a part of it. And I enjoyed the Harbor about what... And from 1997 until 2007, I worked downtown for the Empower Baltimore Management Corporation and it really was the first time I really got to appreciate and enjoy the Harbor.

We would go, take a walk for lunch and sit by the Harbor. It's a beautiful place, couple of times I forgot I was in Baltimore. I was like, "Wow, this is really nice." Because just going down there for an activity, but not just to enjoy and appreciate the surroundings. I love Baltimore and I'm going to continue to do what I can to make a difference and invest in the children because they are 100% our future, not 80%, not 90%, 100. Everybody was a child first, so we got to invest in them. They're our future and I'll just continue to do what I'm doing as God leads me.

Speaker 2 (16:42):
Yeah. What would you say to younger leaders, other young people that want to do similar work to you? What would your advice be to them, if they want to get more involved or if they want to take on leadership roles in their communities or neighborhoods?

Sharon Snow (17:00):

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Yeah, they can start writing their communities with their community presidents, doing things for some of the children that are younger than them or the elderly in the community. They can start with contacting their elected officials and it's easy to find out who your elected officials are, by going on the website for the city, you can type in, "Who are my elected officials?" And a site will pop up where you put your address in and once you put your address in, it will list. You can start with your elected officials because remember your vote got them in the office and so they're there to serve you. And you can get involved that way, you can get involved by just keeping clean where you live, picking up the trash in front of your door, cleaning your backyard, just start there. But it's not easy and just find your niche.

Speaker 2 (18:13):
And if you have a bad day or you get down or you're tired, what are some things that you do to kind of lift yourself up or take care of yourself?

Sharon Snow (18:25):
I contact somebody that I think may need something like a ride to the grocery store, or just to have a conversation or... I'm not one of these folks to have pity parties and I do have every now and then some relatives or some friends that are calling me and I say to them, "No, I can't come to your pity party today, not today. You can call me another time for an invitation, but not today." I'm grateful that I woke up this morning and feeling great, and in my right mind, I just want to help somebody else have a better day. And typically that call ends up being a call where the conversation gets to a point where that person is feeling better and we're making a difference in each other's lives, but I try not to go there.

    I do have some days that... Every day is a good day, but there's some days that are better than others. About in 2019, my 20 year old grandson died and so we were very close. And so that's been pretty devastating still, but I think about the good times and I just try to do something to make somebody else's day better.