



Awardees Announced for NCCF's 2023 Gala – CONNECTED! The HeART of Community

On Saturday, October 14, 2023, at 6:00 PM, at [Bethesda Blues & Jazz](#), the **National Center for Children and Families (NCCF)** will honor seven (7) exemplary supporters and organizations that champion the universal importance of a healthy and experience-rich childhood, at [CONNECTED! The HeART of Community](#).

Co-Hosts & Community Connectors, Catherine Leggett (First Lady of Montgomery County) and Jeffrey Slavin (Mayor of Somerset), will welcome attendees, sponsors, performers, and awardees to an exceptional evening of connection and celebration. Lead by three powerful Black female artists, Honorary Committee Chair [Brianna Stoute](#) (Kinky Boots!), Emmy Award-winning broadcaster [Allison Seymour](#) (WUSA9) and 17-year-old, [Drew Olivia Tillman](#) (*This is Us, Mixed-ish*), CONNECTED! is the in-person event of the season. Special guest, [Marcus Johnson](#), a Billboard-ranked Jazz and Chill Hop musician, will open an evening filled with powerful poetry, music, and dance by local youth entertainers and performers.

The incredible roster of distinguished honorees includes:

Humanitarian Lifetime Impact Award: Reverend Timothy Warner (Emory Grove United Methodist Church)

A passionate leader, Rev. Timothy B. Warner is devoted to his calling to help marginalized people and communities realize and achieve their goals in times of change and uncertainty. From his leadership in the Montgomery County Executive's Office of Community Partnerships as the Community Liaison for the African American and Faith Communities and the Chief Engagement and Partnership Officer for Montgomery County Public Schools to his current appointment as pastor of the Emory Grove United Methodist Church, Rev. Warner has demonstrated success at the intersection between faith communities, non-profit and for-profit corporations, local governments and passionate, individual leaders.

Tom Cookerly Exceptional School Superintendent Leadership Award: Dr. Michael J. Martirano (Howard County Public Schools (HCPSS))

Officially taking over the position in July of 2018, Dr. Martirano, grew up in poverty and faced a number of challenges in his early years. At the age of 10, he was placed in foster care after the death of his mother but found education to be a great equalizer for him. His years as an educator have been guided by the principle, "to teach a child well, you must know a child well." Dr. Martirano is committed to giving every student an opportunity to succeed in an inclusive and nurturing environment. His Strategic Call to Action places each student at the heart of all decisions and places a focus on the 22% of HCPSS students living in poverty, as well as those facing language barriers and mental health issues. Other key leadership foci are equity, narrowing the achievement gaps among student groups, student safety, increase in community engagement and transparency of school system to the community.

Champion in Our Midst: John Pierce, Esq. (The Invisible Hand Foundation)

John Pierce, attorney, and humanitarian has dedicated a lifetime to giving back to his community. A founding officer of The Invisible Hand Foundation Inc., a non-profit aimed at aiding financially distressed individuals in the greater Washington DC-Maryland- Virginia region, Pierce has helped countless youth and families



overcome housing and economic disparities in the last two decades. Pierce is a highly experienced former Federal prosecutor and trial attorney, who continues to contribute to his community in the fight for justice by offering pro bono legal services to those who cannot afford the cost of legal representation. The impact of Pierce's contributions to his community remains ongoing and cannot be overstated. John Pierce continues to be a champion for the fair and equal treatment of the underprivileged among us.

Humanitarian Spirit Award for Leadership: Gustavo Torres (Executive Director, CASA)

Gustavo Torres oversees the largest Latino and immigrant organization in the Mid-Atlantic. He is nationally and internationally recognized for his leadership and vision in the immigrant rights movement in the United States. Under his leadership, CASA has grown from a small social service organization with a handful of staff members to a nationally awarded, multiservice, advocacy, organizing and support agency with a staff of nearly 150 and a membership of over 97,000, which operates in multiple states including Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania. Mr. Torres helped to lead CASA in 2012 to pass the Maryland DREAM act, which provided in-state tuition to undocumented students. He has established Welcome Centers that have served as a model for organizations across the nation and lead efforts to allow all Maryland drivers to obtain a driver license, regardless of status. Most recently, he helped to pass housing protections for tenants in Montgomery County, and Police Accountability legislation in Maryland.

Humanitarian Spirit Award for Volunteerism: Zion Baptist Church

Since 1948, the Zion Baptist Church has been a pillar of volunteerism, community education, and outreach in Washington, DC. As a crucial NCCF community partner, the Church consistently opens their doors to serve the educational and spiritual needs of all children and youth in the region. The church provided, free of charge, use of their location to NCCF's Freedom School in Ward 4 as well as the Freedom School Enrichment Camp this summer for some of the city's most vulnerable population – young residents of short-term family housing facilities. Over the years, Zion Baptist Church demonstrated its understanding of the need for family fun in stressful times by treating children and parents from NCCF's Kennedy and Sterling Short-term Housing Programs in Wards 4 and 5 as well as students and families from the J.C. Nalle Community Sports and Learning Camp to tickets to the UniverSoul Circus. To ensure a truly unique experience, Zion provides transportation and dinner and arranges for all families to attend pre-show festivities where children are treated to special one-on-one interactions with the circus cast. Zion Baptist Church is a true example of how the community supports the most vulnerable in their midst.

Humanitarian Spirit Award for Volunteerism: Riley Chi, Sylvie Cohen, Zoey Rees, and Dalia Rees (Girl Scout Troop 5585)

Riley, Sylvie, Zoey, and Dalia of Girl Scout Troop 5585 chose to reorganize and redecorate the playroom in the Daycare Center at NCCF's Greentree Shelter for their Girl Scout Silver Award project. Over the course of three months, they completely and entirely renovated the space. They began their project under the mentorship of the gROH! Playroom, a D.C.-based studio that creates interiors that focus on designs that inspire play, learning and family time. From the educational experts on staff at gROH! they learned how to organize and edit the existing toys and divide the room into purpose specific areas. These young humanitarians show their spirit in action by creating an updated and modern play and learning space for homeless children in Bethesda.



John F. White Alumni Award: Ms. Tigist Tesfay

A former client of the Greentree Shelter who overcame many barriers personally and professionally to build a better future for herself and her children since transitioning out of the shelter. Ms. Tesfay escaped ongoing war in Ethiopia with her three children, arriving in the United States without resources or familial support. While living in the shelter, she actively pursued all avenues to exit as quickly and as well prepared as possible. She is currently employed in two jobs, at a daycare center and a law firm, while simultaneously taking classes to develop proficiency in English. She completed a certification program and obtained a certificate as a Home Health Aide. Last year, she was approved for a two-bedroom apartment and purchased a vehicle for her and her family; she is now directing all her efforts towards saving for an affordable home of her own.

CONNECTED! The HeART of Community is an in-person, community event. Tickets are available to the public at [Bethesda Blues & Jazz](#).

About The National Center for Children and Families:

The National Center for Children and Families (NCCF) empowers communities in the National Capital Region to take care of the less fortunate in their midst, transforming and improving their quality of life. Our programs provide comprehensive and tailored services that, while demonstrating cultural humility, help children, youth and families become confident and self-sufficient, leaving trauma and poverty behind. Learn more at www.nccf-cares.org.

Contact:

Rachel Spassiani

Director of Communications

202-713-6108

rspassiani@nccf-cares.org