

BUFFALO PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER



CHILDREN’S ACADEMY AT GERARD PLACE

We have some exciting news to share! Our new Children’s Academy at Gerard Place powered by EduKids Early Childhood Learning Centers is open for business! We are so grateful to the organizations that helped us make this dream a reality; M&T Bank, Delaware North and the Jacobs Family, Wegmans, Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, The John R. Oishei Foundation and the Robert G. Wilmers Family Foundation.

M&T invested \$1.6 million to renovate the early childhood education space on the Gerard Place Campus. In addition, Gerard Place offers vocational training, culinary arts and family enrichment programs as well as their monthly mobile food pantry.

Stop in or schedule an appointment to visit!!



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

CA AT GERARD PLACE—PAGE 1

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS—PAGE 2

MENTORING MONTH—PAGE 2

HOLIDAY DANCE RECITAL—PAGE 3

PARENT ACHIEVEMENT—PAGE 3

CITY OF LIGHT—PAGE 3

HOLIDAY BASKET DRIVE—PAGE 4

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT—PAGE 4

ABOUT BPN

- ◆ Buffalo Promise Neighborhood is an education initiative aimed at supporting our children from cradle to college and beyond.
- ◆ Buffalo Promise Neighborhood in partnership with M&T Bank also includes community residents and numerous community based organizations as part of our team.
- ◆ We are committed to providing children with access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support.



COMMUNITY SCHOOL EVENTS



December was a busy month for our schools! Here are a few highlights:

Silent Auction at Highgate

Each year, Highgate teachers, staff and administration host a silent auction for their students. Tickets are given to all students to encourage positive behavior and attendance, and each student has an opportunity to win toys, games, books, and so much more. Almost 300 gifts were donated by teachers, staff and community members- the largest amount to date!! Kudos to all of the Highgate staff who make this event so amazing for the kids!

Saturday Academy at Highgate & Westminster

Both of our schools hosted a Saturday Academy in

December. Highgate's theme was Winter Wonderland which included a carnival and tree lighting ceremony hosted by the B Team, family portraits taken by CEPA Gallery and face painting by Squiggly Art. Westminster's theme was Around the World highlighted by Jebus Henna tattoos, Salsa and Bollywood dancing, as well delicacies from Ireland, Latin America and China.

Holiday Canned Food Drive

We are so proud of our Highgate and Westminster students who worked with community members to collect food items to be given to families in our neighborhood! Each school held a canned food drive competition as well as helping to sort food and prepare baskets for our annual Food Basket Giveaway. Between the two schools, they collected over 1200 cans! These students exemplified the true meaning of the season!

JANUARY—NATIONAL MENTORING MONTH

Michelle Billittier—BPN Volunteer & Mentor

Last year I began to volunteer at Westminster Community Charter School. I was involved in Reading Superhero's and the after school program and crafts so I was there three days a week. I really became attached to the kids and we all built a great relationship, which continues today. It was brought to my attention that maybe I should look into being a big Sister. I realized I had the time and I truly wanted to make a difference in a child's life. Ta'Naye and I were matched up last April and I can't say enough about what a perfect match we are. Our personalities and likes are so similar it makes being together that much better. When I pick her up first thing we do, in the car driving to our destination, is she tells me about her week in school or at home.

This young lady is so amazing, she has a heart of gold, she befriends kids at school who are being bullied, or are sitting alone at lunch time, oh and she will call people out, in a polite way, as to why they are being so mean. I also know the love she has for her parents and siblings as every time we leave her house she tells them she loves them. She has been student of the month the last three months and takes such pride in that!



We have had so many outings it's so hard to pick out a favorite because we laugh so much together and just have so much fun. This past weekend I took her to Dave & Busters and she just loved it. We go to the movies, The Foundry, my house, play the Wii, Old Maid (she loves to tell Miss Sheila when she beats me); Bills games; miniature golf etc.

Mentoring has impacted my life in such a positive way, just knowing I am bringing joy, laughter and love into a young lady's life, but more importantly I have gained an extended family and I am the lucky one to have met Ta'Naye. I am just so proud of this little girl she could teach us all some valuable lessons.

HOLIDAY DANCE RECITAL

Our UPK girls at BPNCA by EduKids participated in a very special holiday dance demonstration for their families.

The students improve balance, coordination, and cognitive functioning all while having fun in dance class each week.

This past December, they showed off their ballet and tap dancing skills in addition to their beautiful smiles!



PARENT ACHIEVEMENT ZONE HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS



PAZ Café: PAZ Café is a free monthly event for families with children enrolled at the BPN Children's Academy, Gerard Place Children's Academy, Westminster Community Charter School and Highgate Heights Elementary.

December's Café took place at Westminster Community Charter School. Families enjoyed a Holiday Feast with all the fixings served by M&T Bank volunteers.

Following dinner, families participated in games, crafts and cookie decorating. The children even had a visit from the big guy himself, Santa Claus. Families, staff and volunteers shared in the entertainment and laughs were had by all!

CITY OF LIGHT IN BUFFALO PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD

Community Affairs partnered with B Team City of Light and decorated over 85 homes in the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood footprint. Thanks to the kind donations of sponsors homes on Winspear, Highgate and Rounds were decorated for the holiday season.

They also partnered with Highgate Heights School#80 at their Winter Wonderland Saturday Academy. All children who attend the event received a free gift from Santa's Workshop, had their photos taken with Elsa and Anna from Frozen and had fun trying to win prizes at assorted carnival games. The evening culminated with a tree lighting ceremony, hot chocolate and cookies. What a great way to kick off the holiday season!



HOLIDAY FOOD BASKET DRIVE

For the past four years, the BPN Community Council has hosted an annual Holiday Food Basket Giveaway.

Thanks to the hard work of our students at Westminster, Highgate Heights, community members and sponsors, this year we were able to provide 170 food baskets to include a turkey or ham, fresh fruits and vegetables and all the festive fixings. Holiday baskets were distributed to our neighborhood community families in need.

Another reason we are proud to serve the residents in the 14215 zip code!



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT—WNY UNITED



We wouldn't be able to do what we do without partnerships! Here's a look at one of them.

Joe Olgin is a Prevention Specialist for Western New York United Against Drugs and Alcohol Abuse and works at Highgate Heights School in our Buffalo Promise Neighborhood. He teaches social emotional lessons in grades Kindergarten through six as well as assists with ELA and Math in grades four and five. Additionally, Joe oversees Leaders in Training (LIT), a leadership and life skill development program for students in grades seven and eight. Their community service, summer programming and educational field trips are an integral part for building on students' current strengths.

In addition to his current responsibilities with WNY United, he also coaches sports at Highgate Heights. Last year, Joe spent hours working with Highgate's cross country team and they actively competed in seven district meets/races.

Joe's dedication to the school continues with his coaching of girls' basketball, boys' and girls' intramurals as well as Girls on the Run and Flag Football. This year with Joe's help, Highgate Heights won the Dash for Diversity run and received a pep rally from Kiss 98.5.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Joe Olgin as not only a partner but part of the team that makes us great at what we do – influencing and shaping the lives of our children!



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[Buffalo Promise Neighborhood!](https://www.facebook.com/BuffaloPromiseNeighborhood)



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