

Clean and Sober Support held two neighborhood cleanups and a picnic with City match funds

Dericee and Marvin Hamilton started Clean and Sober Support (C.A.S.S.) about five years ago to give people in recovery a place to socialize with others who were sober.

Marvin Hamilton explains the need for this. "Giving the people somewhere to go that struggle with drugs and alcohol. Because there's nowhere for us to socialize. So helping the community, doing cleanups and picnics, it gets the community involved with us. Because most people that are sober don't know each other. That was a big thing with the picnic, we met a lot of different people."

They learned about the Neighborhood Match Fund this past year when their daughter, Keoshia Banks was researching ways for them to grow their nonprofit's funding. With the money they received from the Neighborhood Match Fund, they were able to subsidize three different events.

The Hamiltons held two neighborhood cleanups and a big summer picnic. All three were a success and brought out the community.

The first cleanup was held in the Eastern and Franklin area on August 17, 2019. Marvin Hamilton says several people from their group came out. They used the Neighborhood Match Funds to pay for the mobile garbage cans, brooms, rakes, garbage bags, a bunch of gloves, a biohazard box for needles, garbage grabbers and 'Stop the Violence' t-shirts which the group wore that day. C.A.S.S. also provided snacks during the outing and dinner later to celebrate their work.

Marvin Hamilton says when they do cleanup events, folks in the neighborhood usually come out to see what they are doing and help. Because of this they usually end up with more people at the end of a cleanup event helping than when they started. This is also a way the Hamiltons spread the word on the work they are doing through C.A.S.S.

The second cleanup event C.A.S.S. held was in the Jefferson and Franklin area on September 11, 2019. As with the first cleanup, neighbors came out to help. Marvin Hamilton also noted when they do cleanups, the people who help not only receive t-shirts, they also receive \$10 gift cards to Meijer or other local stores.

A large picnic at Garfield Park on August 17, 2019 was the third C.A.S.S. event for which they used the Neighborhood Match Funds. The Hamiltons used the money to buy the t-shirts and the food for the event, which they turned into a feast. "Ribs, turkey knuckles, chicken, hamburgers, mac-n-cheese, green beans, baked beans, potato salad, lots of water, chips, and cookies," were all involved said Dericee Hamilton.

When asked how the community responded, Marvin Hamilton said, "They were overwhelmed there was no drinking, no weed smoking, no beer drinking. No confrontations out of 120 people. They were mentioning that it was lovely and already talking about next time that they could have fun without drinking and drugs. Some people said they'd never had that much fun."

"We had the community out there, like some of the kids that fight each other. They were all out there eating with us because these are the people's grandkids and kids. But when the kids see us out there getting along, they said 'How am I gonna beef with you if your grandma and my grandma are playing cards?'" said Marvin Hamilton.

“Our group really builds bonds with people with different groups - meetings tend to attract different races/ethnicities. We bring all people together,” he adds.

The Hamiltons provided popular yard games and favorite activities like playing spades, jumping rope, dominoes, corn toss, and lawn-sized Jenga. They said the picnic was a big success with 120-140 neighbors attending.

When asked how they got out the word about their events, the Hamiltons said they promote their events on C.A.S.S.' Facebook page and their own pages, and Marvin Hamilton hands out flyers after local AA or NA meetings and at church.

Marvin Hamilton again notes how important these events are and how important it is to have new people coming out to each event and getting to know folks who are at their fourth or fifth event. "A lot of people are afraid to let folks know they previously struggled, and coming to events helps folks be more open and receive help," he says. The Hamiltons say they've also done coat drives for young kids of the folks who come to their events, Thanksgiving dinners, and sober dances. Dericee Hamilton adds they've also done a Mother's Day dinner where the men serve the mothers.

In the future they hope to have their own building so they don't have to keep renting out others' spaces and can offer more services like having programs throughout the week, help people in recovery with resumes, their interviews and getting jobs.

The Hamiltons encourage others to also apply for the Neighborhood Match Fund. They were relieved to find it much less complicated than other funds they've applied for in the past.

Marvin Hamilton says it's common for people to reach out three or four years later to thank them for the help. "A lot of people, they're afraid to let others know that they were in that situation before and once they come to our events and see how other people react, how they're so open with it, it makes them feel more comfortable with opening up, with being willing to come, and being willing to receive the help that we have to offer."