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Community Centered

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STORYTELLER: Barbara Pinson

CARILLON

The first time I saw Carillon we were riding down Stewart Street during Christmas Time and it was just so beautiful. Every house was decorated. It looked like a wonderland, and I knew I wanted to live there.

I've loved being able to give my children a place like Carillon to grow up in. They're grown up and moved out now, but to them it's still "The Neighborhood." My kids were close enough to a school where they used to walk there and back with their friends, and then be all over the block afterwards playing ball. The kids were always out, and there were always people looking out for them too. When they were down the block playing and doing something they weren't supposed to, any adult who saw them would



chastise them, and you'd bet I'd hear back. We all looked out for each other, and neighbors were family. I used to never lock my doors. You never had to think about those things.

My house used to be called a do-drop-in. Anywhere people were coming from, anywhere people were going, they'd drop in along the way. Even now, when my son comes over and his car is in the driveway, people driving by know it's him and stop over. In no time my house gets filled with people. Every year there's a picnic where the old school used to be, and it's so packed you can't even get close.

Everyone used to watch out for each other, but not so much anymore. A lot of the old neighborhood has died off, and many of the new renters don't feel the same attachments. We're really trying to include them though because the neighborhood is still the neighborhood, and we're all proud to live here. It's just hard because there's nothing powerful enough to bring everyone together. The kids today have so much to deal with, and now more than ever they need a strong sort of community.

I've spent a lot of time working for Montgomery County, and I get to really see a lot of what these kids in the neighborhood are up against. So many of these young kids are vulnerable. You see a young girl, and she's 19 and has one kid and another one on the way.

It hurts my heart to watch these young girls get with these guys who don't care and watch their babies get hurt by the neglect. These kids don't know what they're doing. They haven't even grown up themselves. The young parents get frustrated and can't handle the pressure and end up hurting their kids, and it's devastating. And the babies that do make it out see too much too young, and they grow up into boys and girls who never got what they needed and don't know how to give it. I've met so many girls who don't have resources and support at home, and it's too easy for them to meet the wrong guy and not realize he's the wrong guy. They leave behind their families because it's the drug dealers who have the money and resources to give the girls what they think they need. But it's not what they need, and then soon enough the boys are in jail and these girls are alone again. The kids are trying, but it's an impossible burden because nobody's giving enough support. It's a cycle where everyone is a victim.

I didn't plan on mentoring the young girls that I met, but they had needs and I was there. My mom died when I was sixteen and my grandma raised us. She was an Evangelist and she had a knack for reading people and knowing what they needed. I think I got a lot of that from her. The girls would get my numbers and call me all the time for my morning prayer at 5:45, and tell

me what was going on and ask me to pray for them. **I'D TALK TO THEM AND TELL THEM, "YOU'RE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR LIFE. YOU ARE. AND THAT MEANS YOU DON'T GET TO LET SOMEONE BRING YOU DOWN." EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL, I JUST HAPPENED TO BE THERE TO HEAR IT.**

I believe in encouraging people to the max. Sure, there's a place for discipline, but what these kids ultimately need is someone who's going to see, not where they've been or where they are now, but who they can be, and someone who's going to push them to that place. There are so many nice young kids who didn't find this support soon enough and then find themselves in a hole. And when they get in this hole, they think that drugs are going to get them out, but then they find themselves in a deeper hole years later when they look around and realized they've spent so much time not doing anything. Kids need to know someone's got their back, and they need to know that someone's there to pull them out of the holes they've found themselves in. No one needs to feel that they're in it alone.

I see these kids get knocked down over and over again. I encourage them to read a bible or go to church because in a life with so many struggles, they need some hoping to keep them lifted up. They also need friends and peers to talk about these things with. It's one thing to

hear from an adult that these drugs are going to mess up your life, but it's so much more powerful when they can actually see someone like them who has turned their life around.

Kids today aren't just being raised by two parents, they're being raised by everybody. That's why what this neighborhood needs is a community center. What these kids need are mentors and a place to belong to. Girls need more than someone to depend on. They need a place where they can learn to be independent, and they need tools to learn to advocate for themselves. And these young boys need to know what their responsibilities are, and they need to know that we trust them. We need something viable that builds relationships and passions and belonging. There are people who want to give their time, and we need to give them a space to do that. We need a community center, if even just to provide a place to talk where people can share what's happening to them and hear that the same thing is happening to other people too.

The neighborhood has been changing, but that does not mean it stops being a neighborhood. We're still in it together, looking out for each other, and trying our best to give what is needed.