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PRESS RELEASE

ALLENTOWN ORGANIZATION MARKS 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF FREEDOM SUMMER WITH OPENING OF THE JIM LAWSON FREEDOM SCHOOL

FREEDOM SCHOOL TO OPEN IN ALLENTOWN



Rev. Gregory J. Edwards (r) presents plaque naming Freedom School in honor of Rev. Jim Lawson (l) at the 2013 Annual Urban Angels in Allentown.

After a year and a half ruminating and discussing the plight of children and education in Allentown in many a circle, Pastor Gregory Edwards- Sr. Pastor of the Resurrected Life Community Church and CEO of the Resurrected Community Development Corporation (RCDC), is finally realizing his vision for a Freedom School. In partnership with the Children's Defense Fund, The James Lawson Freedom School will officially open its doors this summer 2014 to its first students with equal representation from Allentown's elementary, middle, and high schools.

Pastor Edwards is a prolific leader, educator, and humanitarian whose platform has and continues to be equity in education and economics for the Allentown community he serves.

He cares deeply about young children and adolescents and the importance of education being done in a way to boost opportunities for disadvantaged youth. A child does not get to choose the family into which he/she is born but it sure plays a powerful role in determining lifetime opportunities. Children who are raised in disadvantaged environments are much less likely to succeed in school or society for that matter, and also are much less likely to be healthy adults. Pastor Edwards, Resurrected Life Community Church and the Resurrected Community Development Corporation are committed to doing whatever they can to ensure that disadvantaged children in the city of Allentown are able to benefit from opportunities that come with quality education. Named in honor of the Rev. Jim Lawson, Chief Non-Violent Strategist for Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement and friend of Pastor Edwards, the creation of the Freedom School is not only his brainchild but a step in the right direction for the many children who are not kindergarten-ready, who are reading below grade level, and who are unable to graduate high school on time or at all.

Pastor Edwards' role as CEO of the RCDC and the Executive Director of the Resurrected Life Children's Academy (RLCA) bodes well for him in opening his Education Enrichment Center's doors to children for the first Freedom School in the history of Allentown and the Lehigh Valley. From the beginning of Freedom Schools in Mississippi in 1964 through the Freedom School that is coming to Allentown this summer 2014, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and partners have been working together to create powerful, positive, effective, transformative communities of change, doing the hard work of organizing to dismantle the systems of injustice.

Freedom Schools nurture life in defiance of the systems which do not operate in the best interest of the disadvantaged. A recent evaluation shows that 90% of the children in Freedom Schools either hold on to or increase their literacy rates following participation; in spite of communities and structures that continue to raise barriers for children, especially children of color from impoverished communities, Freedom Schools provide young people with skills in critical thinking and conflict resolution, in the ability to identify and explore problems in their neighborhoods and to become change agents, partners in finding solutions. Rooted in the American civil rights movement and the courageous efforts of young people to make a difference, Freedom Schools create a safe and culturally relevant learning space in which young people find their voice and vocation. In any Freedom School across this country, you will see children defying the odds – you will find them clapping and chanting, laughing and loving, singing and shouting, dancing, dreaming, and daring to be all God has created them to be. Kids who struggled in school fall in love with reading and books, with learning and working, with the certainty that they are somebody wonderful. Students in Freedom Schools are referred to as scholars.

The first phase of The James Lawson Freedom School of the Lehigh Valley will begin in July and operate Monday through Friday 8:00am to 3:00pm at the Resurrected Life Education and Enrichment Center in Allentown. In this first phase the school will provide fifty eligible families with children pre-school through grade 12 with an opportunity to participate in a high quality interactive learning experience,

receive nutritious meals, and engage their history, heritage, and community from a perspective rarely experienced or supported in public and/or private educational environments.

The Rev. Janet Wolfe, Director of Non Violent Social Change for the Children's Defense Fund expressed CDF's excitement over the partnership with Pastor Edwards and RCDC in stating *"he is poet and prophet, jazz musician and justice major, a friend and fiery freedom fighter who is courageous and creative, persistent and passionate, a consummate visionary with fierce determination and holy boldness. Here is a leader who is unquestionably committed to change and called to push and prod, to provoke and problematize, called to educate and animate, agitate and advocate, organize and strategize, disrupt and disturb, reconcile and redeem, companion and comfort, trouble and transform until change, real change, comes. And that work will require all of us."*

The RCDC Board of Directors, staff, as well as the congregation of Resurrected Life Community Church are committed to supporting their leader's vision of bringing change and freedom to the city of Allentown's most marginalized population.

For additional information on the James Lawson Freedom School or any of the initiative sponsored by the Resurrected Community Development Corporation, please contact 484-221-8179 or admin@rcdclv.org