While House students and alums were excited to hear DaVon perform “You Don’t Know How it Feels” live during The House DC Alumni 20-year reunion celebration, the story behind the lyrics makes the piece even more powerful and poignant.

With encouragement and support from House DC music producer Jacob Johnson, DaVon was able to write an emotional piece about the daily struggles of surviving in Anacostia. He raps about the pain he feels from the loss of his mother, and how painful it is growing up without kisses, hugs and affection from a parent. DaVon shares how difficult it has been for him to grow up in the streets without his father there to guide and protect him. He expresses how bad it feels to watch a friend get buried simply for trying to make money for his family to eat.

DaVon goes on to share his feelings about how hard it is to change directions in life and walk towards a brighter path. As the song comes to an end, in the last verse, DaVon touches on just how scary it is in his community, comparing DC streets to the war zone in Iraq.

DaVon has taken a lot of falls, but he continues to get up. After his mom, “Ma Deuce” died, DaVon and his brother took on the responsibility of raising their little sister. With his brother and sister by his side, they continue to survive, and though every day is a struggle to pay the bills, DaVon has set his sights on a brighter future. He closes his rap by telling the audience that the lyrics from the song were from his heart and that he won’t stop pushing until he reaches the top!

Many people may not ever personally know what it feels like to go through the kinds of obstacles our students face on a daily basis. Against incredible odds, our students press forward in faith, overcoming hurdle after hurdle. Being free to express their pain and share their dreams in an oasis like The House DC lets them know they are heard, loved, and cared for deeply — all the things they long to feel.
20-YEAR ALUMNI REUNION
OH, TASTE AND SEE!

The word went out on social media and the buzz began to build—The House DC was hosting a 20-year reunion of House alums! And, even more special, it would take place in the actual community of The House DC at the new Busboys and Poets restaurant in Anacostia! The Busboys and Poets chain of restaurants are named in honor of African American Langston Hughes, a renowned poet who worked as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel in the 1920s. The restaurants are known for their delicious food and for hosting “open mic” nights, where audience members take the stage and share their poetry and talent. The House DC celebration was no exception as House student DaVon took the stage to share a poignant original rap entitled “You Don’t Know How it Feels.” House Program Manager Britney Smith, accompanied by House students Zakayia, Davine, and Asia, dazzled the audience with her original poem entitled, “I am Woman.” Both presentations would have made Langston Hughes proud.

The Anacostia neighborhood and the alums have come a long way in 20 years, and the reunion was an inspiring time to see the ongoing transformation of both. Alums came to the celebration straight from work, some still in uniform, others wearing...
or bringing special outfits to change into to mark the occasion. Some attended the reunion from beginning to end, others pressed their way to make it right at the end.

House DC Co-founder Steve Fitzhugh and many of the former House DC staff members also attended. They were truly touched by the powerful testimonies of the alums who spoke about the lasting, generational impact of The House DC’s ministry. One alum even reminisced about being temporarily suspended from The House DC, comparing how he felt about the discipline when he was a student to understanding now the important lesson it taught. Siona, Steve’s youngest daughter, who was two years old when The House DC opened, shared about the love and strong sense of family she gleaned while growing up alongside The House students and staff.

Every attendee received a gift, and married couples’ gifts included “Mr. and Mrs.” items, one of the many thoughtful touches from the anniversary planning committee. Former House student and college graduate, Ayana Smith, chaired the anniversary committee, and diligently covered every detail. When she attended The House DC as a student, Ayana was once asked why she would always go over to the office of House President & CEO, La Wonda Bornstein. Ayana replied, “because one day I’m going to have her job.” Well, today Ayana is the Development Assistant working directly with La Wonda, and tomorrow...who knows!

The wonderful evening was capped off with a delicious buffet. Alums and former staff sat down and broke bread together in an unforgettable moment where all were able to look back and look ahead to “taste and see that the Lord is good”!
The “Candy Corn 5K Race” was a victorious kickoff of The House DC’s Health Day. House DC supporters Regina Williams, Kate Engbert, and Amy Solis worked alongside House staff to launch the inaugural race on Saturday, October 19. The weather was bright and sunny with just enough of a chill in the air to keep the runners comfortable, as an enthusiastic, widely diverse group of participants came from all walks of life to run together, jog together, walk together, and simply be together in support of The House DC.

The inaugural race took place in Anacostia Park, on a flat scenic route tracing the Anacostia River. Participants included families with infants in strollers; a mother-daughter team with a 70-year-old and a 50-year-old; novice first-timers; experienced some-timers; and veteran long-timers including Boston Marathon runners and triathletes. All were side by side—at least at the start of the race!

Enthusiasm remained strong from the winning runners all the way to those who proudly brought up the rear. A total of 77 people participated, and as each one crossed the finish line they received a medal in recognition of their accomplishment. A healthy meal and exciting raffle prizes awaited participants, friends, and family back at The House DC where Howard University’s Student Pharmacy Outreach Team, aka HUSPOT, and the HealthDesk—a joint venture between The Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church and George Washington University Medical Faculty Associates—provided valuable health resources.

Cash prizes were awarded to the Top Finishers in three categories: Men—Caleb Hess; Women—Kate Engbert; and House Student—Zakia. All who participated were thrilled to be a part of history while also helping The House DC raise an amazing $27,000! This was surely the first of many more Candy Corn 5K races to come! Much appreciation to our incredibly generous sponsors who made the event a sweet victory all the way around.
The words, “peer pressure” usually bring to mind images of teens negatively influencing other youth to go in the wrong direction or to do something destructive. In this case, peer pressure is proving to be a positive force as one student’s academic success is ramping up the pressure for his peers to follow his lead.

House DC student Mike recently started college at Shaw University in North Carolina. You may remember Mike, whom we celebrated in a previous newsletter for overcoming anger, apathy, and failing grades to making the Honor Roll and receiving multiple achievement awards during his senior year in High School.

Mike has acclimated quite well as a first semester freshman—so much so, he’s been posting on social media about all the fun and excitement college life has to offer. The word about his new life spread quickly on the neighborhood block where Mike used to hang out with his friends, making a far greater impact than we knew!

Mike’s enthusiasm sparked interest not only in his high school friends, but also among those who are not even in school. Inspired by Mike’s social media posts, a few young men who were high school dropouts came to visit Jonathan Harris, The House DC’s Executive Director of the Life Skills Education Center, to inquire about how they could go to college. This was an exciting opportunity for Jonathan to talk with each one about the advantages of finishing high school. For the first time, they were able to see the importance of education in building a realistic path to success. This is one of the many ripple effects of the work of The House DC. Every student we reach has a sphere of influence that we are, in turn, able to reach, and so on.

Jonathan was glad to hear about how much Mike was enjoying himself in college, but he was also a bit concerned that Mike might be having too good of a time and might forget the reason he was in school in the first place! So, even with limited funds available, Jonathan decided to travel to North Carolina to personally check on Mike. The timing could not have been more perfect. The day he arrived and picked up Mike on campus was his birthday. They spent the whole day together. They talked, went to lunch, and even made a trip to the mall for a little shopping because Mike needed t-shirts. The House DC also surprised Mike with a pair of shoes he wanted as a birthday gift.

One of the conversations Jonathan and Mike had that day was about how many young guys back home are watching him as he enters this new chapter in life. They truly look up to him. They talked about the fact that Mike is not just attending school for himself, but that his success—both now and in the future—is definitely a positive influence on his peers.

Please join The House as we continue to pray for God’s protection, grace and favor over Mike and all those who want to be like Mike.
Our fitness program, PUSH (Pursuing Ultimate Success through Health and fitness), not only pushes our students to work toward healthy bodies, but for healthy hearts, as well. Our students carry a lot of pain. They come to us with aching hearts and the weight of the world on their shoulders. PUSH has been a strength builder and a weight reliever all at once. For a lot of our students talking about their problems can be difficult. Those tough conversations come only after a bond of trust is formed. In our fitness room, Activities Manager, Dequwan Smith encourages students to push. Whether he’s teaching a new workout routine or challenging a student to move on to heavier weights, you can always hear him say “Come on! Push through! DON’T QUIT!”

When Kyle, a star athlete on his school’s football team walked into the House DC devastated and ready to quit, Dequwan took him to the fitness room for a one-on-one session.

During the session, Dequwan learned that Kyle was injured that evening at practice and probably wouldn’t be able to play in the playoffs starting the following week. Kyle also opened up about the drama in his home life and how hard things were for him. He was ready to give up and told Dequwan that football was a way to escape. Playing football was his way of enjoying life. The 20-minute session turned into an hour. During that time Dequwan was a listening ear. Dequwan talked to Kyle about the battles he faced at that age and the battles he still face today. He reminded him of how amazing an athlete he is and that he couldn’t give up and miss out on all the things God has in store for him. Dequwan helped him with exercises to strengthen his leg to get him back on the field faster. Each day after practice Kyle came to the House and straight to the gym to work on strengthening his leg with Dequwan.

After daily conditioning, praying, and encouragement, we’re proud to say that Kyle started in the 2019 Championship Game! We were front and center rooting and cheering him on. Thank you, Lord for helping Kyle to PUSH through!
A RENEWED FUTURE: A LITTLE HELP UP GOES A LONG WAY

Carlos was all out of options and hope. After being put out of his home, he turned to the streets as he searched for ways to survive. As a former House DC student, he knew what we were about and came to us one evening for a meal. It was there in the kitchen that he met our chef, Eric. The two connected instantly and remained connected since that day. Instead of hanging outside, Carlos began to volunteer at The House in the kitchen with Eric. He assisted with preparing meals and serving plates. He also worked with Eric on carpentry projects around The House DC. Carlos looked up to Eric and they built a relationship of respect and trust, so it felt natural for Carlos to turn to Eric when times became harder than ever.

Carlos was reaching his breaking point. He was trying—trying to become a better man, looking for jobs, all while still having no consistent place to live. He was tired and once again feeling hopeless. However, this time was different. Instead of being alone with no one to talk to or no one who understood, he had Eric. He finally had a person in his life that he knew he could depend on. He had a person that he could be honest with, without the shame of feeling judged. When Carlos let Eric know about the obstacles he was facing, it was easy for Eric to invite Carlos into his home. There Carlos was able to get much-needed rest. He was able to focus on his goals and come up with a plan for his future. Finally, he had peace.

After a short time of living with Eric, Carlos got a call for an interview. Carlos was overjoyed when he shared the news. Eric made sure he had a button-up shirt to wear and he gave him a fresh haircut. After a few words of encouragement, Eric drove Carlos to the interview. Carlos walked into the interview in full confidence and walked out hired on the spot, with a job and a renewed future! God is good! All Carlos needed was a helping hand to help him stand, for truly “two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor; if either of them falls down one can help the other up.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10.
We are dedicated to the mission of providing long-term aid to radically change the lives of youth in Anacostia and we are calling on our donors to help us continue to make a difference.

A CHANGED LIFE: FROM ATTITUDE TO ALTITUDE

Tia is a natural born leader. She will take charge of any situation placed before her. She never backs down and she always uses her voice. When Tia came to The House DC two years ago, she came in with attitude. She constantly debated with staff about why she didn’t have to follow the rules. Tia was the start of every argument and in the center of every fight. Instead of using her leadership skills for good, she used them to cause drama for her entertainment. Talking to Tia did not seem to be effective. Suspension from The House for a day became a regular thing for her. We knew we had to do something different.

Tia was an amazing dancer, however, because of her failing grades she was not allowed on her high school dance team. So, Tia began using the stage at The House DC as her platform. Staff would watch her come up with entire routines, memorize them, and teach them to her friends. When she’s teaching, she’s calm ... she is patient ... she’s in her element.

All Tia needed was responsibility, and we gave her just that. We sat down with Tia and let her know that we were putting on a community event, and we needed her to be in charge of the dance performance. We explained to her how important the event was and that we were counting on her to handle this for us. We also expressed how impressed we were with her dancing and that we truly believed she would be a famous choreographer one day. A huge smile appeared on her face, she said “I got it covered, you can depend on me.” Tia worked with her peers for weeks. She was consistent and took her job seriously. On the day of the event, Tia and the girls performed a beautiful dance, and everyone clapped and cheered!

Since the moment we gave Tia a position of leadership at The House, we’ve seen a complete change in her. She follows all of the rules, and apologizes and takes responsibility when she doesn’t. Not only is she on top of her behavior, she’s on top of her peers’ behavior, as well. You can always hear Tia shouting, “Watch your mouth in The House!” Today Tia is the president of our L.I.T squad. Leaders In Training. The L.I.T squad is a group of House DC students who show outstanding leadership skills. In our program we teach youth how to lead in a positive way. We give them responsibility and create platforms for them to put their leadership skills to work.

Tia’s grades have improved and she is now the captain of her high school dance team. “As the President of the L.I.T Squad I feel like a real leader. I know that I am, but this really makes a difference to me. I know that I’m going to be something great one day.” That’s the attitude that will increase her altitude!

Congratulations to former House student Andre’ Duckett on his wedding. Many of Andre’s groomsmen were also former House students. We pray that God continues to bless his family and guide and protect them.