

Grassroots programs key for black males

By Darlene Superville
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Limited government resources and public hostility toward social programs leave grassroots efforts as the best way to improve black males' futures, concludes a private study released Tuesday.

The report, "Repairing the Breach," also urges people of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds to help clear away the tangled webs trapping many black men and boys in cycles of poverty and despair.

"If we really want to make America what America ought to be, we all have to give something," said Bobby Austin, director of leadership programs for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Kellogg Co.

Kellogg created the National Task Force on African-American Males in 1992 as part of a broad effort to develop ideas for organizations and individuals to use to strengthen communities, families and black males.

The \$11 million initiative also includes funding for 32 projects across the country aimed at improving opportunities for black males at risk.

The report, which is the latest to reaffirm the dire state of

black male life in America, makes more than 60 recommendations, most of which the 53-member task force plans to enact on its own.

The study calls for little that can be considered new, and suggests that programs that are known to work be introduced in other communities.

"We find that this was not a dark time," said task force Chairman Andrew Young, the former U.N. ambassador and former Atlanta mayor.

The recommendations focus on black males because of the inordinate risks they face from violence, drug use, AIDS, joblessness, prison and alienation. But the suggestions can work just as easily for other segments of society.

During 18 months of meetings, the panel of civil and religious leaders, scholars, professionals and educators learned of many programs - ranging from youth leadership and mentoring to gang intervention and entrepreneurship.

For example, members of the MAD Dads organization roam the streets of Omaha, Neb., and dozens of other Americans cities in hopes of rescuing black boys from the quicksand-like life of crime and drugs.

The group, whose name stands for Men Against Destruction - Defending

Against Drugs and Social disorder, began in 1989 with 18 black men who were fed up with the gang violence and illegal drug trade in Omaha.

It now has more than 25,000 members in 42 chapters in 12 states.

"There are hundreds of men standing up, doing what is necessary," said Eddie Staton, co-founder and national president of MAD Dads.

The report makes the point that inner-city blacks must organize to help themselves, saying "grassroots democracy is the tool to bring about change in their communities." The study also states that Americans must begin a "serious, direct, frank dialogue on the issue of race" relations.

Over the next five years, the task force plans to:

- Create a national think tank to continue the panel's work through the next two

decades. The work will be done by a reconstituted task force, to be called the American Futures Institute.

- Establish an endowment, the Village Foundation, to raise money to enact the 60-plus recommendations. Austin estimated needing between \$50 million and \$100 million from foundations, corporations and individuals.

Kellogg Co. promised a \$1 million donation Tuesday.

- Initiate a national conversation on race relations.

Panel members also appealed to the media for help in changing the public's perception of black males through more positive news coverage.

"For every black man on television in the evening, there are 100 black men doing things with their lives," said Thomas Dortch, national president of 100 Black Men of America.

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Rested Marion Barry back to run troubled Washington, D.C.

By Janelle Carter
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Mayor Marion Barry, launching yet another political revival, ended an extraordinary 2 1/2-week absence from the nation's capital Monday, declaring himself fitter than ever to deal with the city's financial problems.

He had left mysteriously and on short notice April 27 in search of solitude and recovery from what he at the time called "tell-tale signs of spiritual relapse and physical exhaustion."

The rapid turn of events had prompted questions about Barry's fitness as mayor and whether he might have returned to alcohol or drug abuse. Barry has denied renewed drug or alcohol problems.

At a combined rally and news conference, attended by about 150 supporters, Barry declared Monday: "I come back rested, with more energy, with clearer vision and more determined than ever before to transform our D.C.

government."

Barry's supporters greeted his homecoming speech with sustained applause and standing ovations.

Barry, who spent six months in jail in 1991-92 on a misdemeanor cocaine conviction, sought to reassure district residents he has the ability to lead the troubled city and its 567,000 residents.

The 17 days he spent at retreats in rural Maryland and St. Louis renewed his faith in himself and the city, Barry said. "I am better prepared and better able to govern. ... I'm all right. I'm ready to move forward."

The mayor said Monday what troubled him was that he had begun missing weekly Alcoholics Anonymous meetings while putting in 16-hour days at work and lying awake at nights. He said he also had resumed smoking nearly half a pack of cigarettes a day after abstaining for 12 years.

Barry said he also had pushed himself too hard and not taken enough time to recover from prostate cancer surgery in December.

Rumors were rife that Barry had succumbed again to alcohol and drug problems. There also was speculation he was returning to the flamboyant nightlife he once had been known for. At one point even some of his closest associates raised the possibility that he ought to step aside.

On Monday he took those rumors directly.

"Let me just say that as long as I maintain balance and order in my life, there is an excellent chance that (alcohol or drug) relapse will not ever occur," he said. He said he was determined to lead the city as mayor.

The capital's financial problems - and an erosion of his political power - have been known to weigh heavily on Barry.

The District of Columbia is struggling under a \$378 million budget deficit. Congress has turned much of the financial decision-making over to a financial control board that has been put in charge of the pursestrings once controlled largely by the mayor.

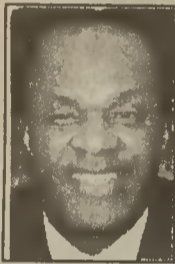
Republicans in Congress also have sought to use the city as a testing ground for such GOP social initiatives as school vouchers programs. While Barry was away, both the control board and the city's chief financial officer indicated they would take steps to fire or dismiss thousands of city employees - many beholden to Barry.

It was not the first time that Barry decided to seek escape and rejuvenation. In 1988, Barry suddenly left the city to meditate at a spa in upstate New York and came back saying he was a better person.

But in January 1990, FBI agents videotaped Barry smoking crack cocaine in a local hotel. Barry was convicted on a misdemeanor charge and spent six months in prison. His political career was considered by many to be at an end.

Yet not long after his release from jail, Barry captured a seat on the city council and then capped his comeback by winning a fourth term as mayor in 1994.

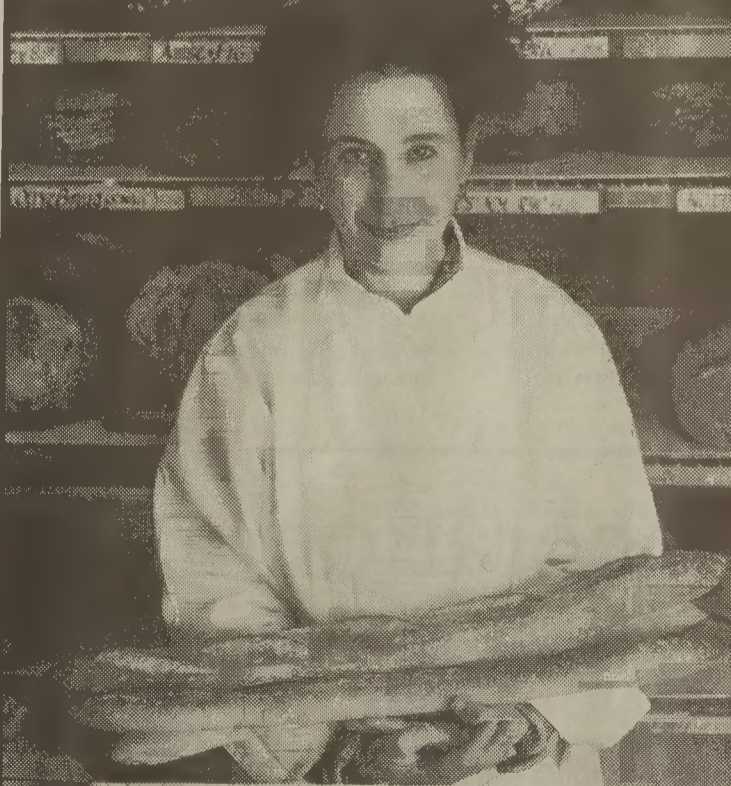
Six years ago "we went through arrest, trial," Barry said Monday, but since then, it has all "been nothing but upward."



Barry

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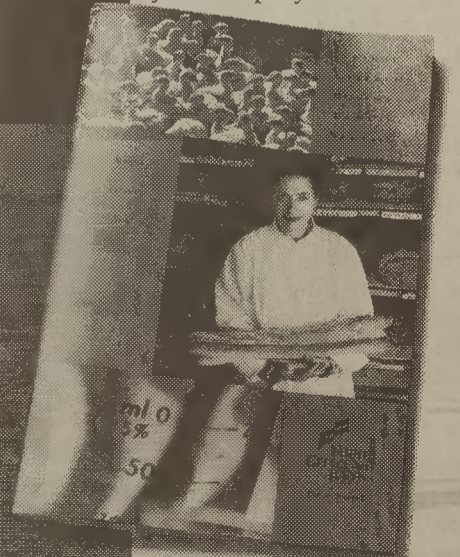
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