

## Mayor Catherine E. Pugh' Press Conference Announcing Roca Baltimore

December 13, 2017

### Remarks from Molly Baldwin, Roca founder & CEO

Thank you, Mayor Pugh and the City of Baltimore, for your remarkable generosity, due diligence into our work, and your incredible commitment to help very high risk young people. This is the beginning of an extraordinary partnership.

Thank you again, Mayor Pugh, for all your belief in young people, belief in our work, and kind words. We are humbled to be with you all here this afternoon and we are deeply honored to join the City in its tremendous efforts to find a way out of violence, shootings, and so many unnecessary deaths. Like you and the residents of Baltimore – we know change is possible!

30 years ago we started Roca in Massachusetts to work with the young people who were left out. Since then, we have been privileged to work with thousands of young people across Massachusetts, and we now see over 1,000 every year.

Whether we understand why or why not, whether we like it or not, something has gone terribly wrong for so many of the young people in our country. Too many of them have learned that violence is the only way to live, that shooting gains respect, that guns are normal, and that dying young is just what happens.

We know that the world is full of great programs (many here in Baltimore) --- programs for young people and even young people in trouble who show up. But we also know that no one really works with the young people who are not ready, willing or able to go to a program or keep a job. Those who never show up.

They are angry, they are left out, they are depressed, and they often cause harm – and no one wants to be with them.

It's a small group with a lot of impact – and they are *the whole purpose* of our work at Roca.

Someone walks into Roca ready to participate, we show them the door. But run from us, tell us to go to hell – you're in!

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Roca is not only about how to reach these young people – it is also about fundamentally changing ourselves. We build relationships with every institution – police, criminal justice, health, employers, street outreach workers, parents, and anyone else that is either in the lives of our young people, or should be – because we’ve learned that even if it’s hard, working together and leaning in saves lives.

The challenge, however, is that we spend time with people who don’t show up, so working on education and job skills becomes an interesting task. We have essentially built a get-your-life-together school. We drag young people out of bed. They can come for a day or for a week, get mad at us, threaten us, get high, disappear, and we go back and get them again.

Some young people are in such dangerous gang relationships that they can’t even come into programming, so we take it to their homes with a roaming teacher or provide a workforce readiness lesson any safe place we can!

We believe we owe the best to our young people. So we track them and we track ourselves, to figure out if what we are doing is actually helpful.

The data also shows that we’re onto something. When Harvard looked at our numbers, they found that in three years, Roca reduced future incarceration by 35% as compared to a similar group of young people and that Roca was on track for a 65% reduction over five years. **These young people can change!**

The data isn’t just data, our numbers are real lives!

One of things we do at Roca is teach young people emotional regulation skills, to make a choice before they act. They have numbers 1 to 10 and funny names like “fill your tank” and “feel your feelings”, but we’ve learned that simple is better.

Last year, one of our youth workers got a call from Joe, a young person he chased in the streets and in and out of prison, for almost two years. Joe told his youth worker, “hey, this Roca thing actually works!”

He shared that he had been in the park the night before with his girlfriend, when another young person looked at him from across the park. Joe took it as big time disrespect and called one of his friends to bring him his backpack, his mask and a gun.

And then Joe says – “I’m sitting at the park and thinking ‘skill 8 - flex your thinking’, maybe this guy didn’t even see me; and then ‘skill 9 - problem solving, maybe shooting him isn’t such a good idea.”

And Joe decided not to shoot.

He did not shoot.

That moment was worth all the years of relentless outreach, every change we had to make, every painful moment and every difficult conversation with young people, our partners and ourselves.

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I grew up in Baltimore, and like all of you, I am devastated by the violence in our city. As you are so painfully aware, we can neither arrest nor program our way out of this – we need a different approach.

We will work with the City and others to develop and implement a performance based model using data and ensuring accountability. We will share what we learn and strive to be an excellent partner.

Over the next few months, we will work to analyze data and understand more about the young people who are at the highest and critical risk. We will identify the appropriate site, finalize and implementation program plan, we will hire a local Executive Director and staff team. I along with a few of my colleagues here will lead the planning work and I will live here at least half time. Consistent with evidence based practices for replication, we have detailed step by step plan and have one staff member who will move from Massachusetts to work in Baltimore. We will work with anyone and everyone we can.

The budget for this project is modeled to serve up to 300 young people a year in a few years. It is staff intensive to do the relentless outreach, behavioral health work, and skills development needed to help young people learn to think different to do different and make meaningful change. We are honest, direct, and committed to learning everything we can to help young people change.

We are humbled by the incredible efforts in the city to bring about change. We are inspired by your leadership, Mayor Pugh, and your willingness to lean in on these difficult and painful issues instead of run away from them. We know that so many in the city – terrific organizations, committed people, public agencies, elected officials, businesses, foundations, community leaders – young and older, parents and young people – who believe in the future of this city and wake up every morning to make it a reality. I can't express in words how honored we are to join you all today.

We are not magic, and if there's one thing we know, it is that change takes time. But in the midst of this extraordinary pain and violence, we know that change is possible. We are so grateful for the invitation to help and committed be part of the solution. Thank you.