



LITTLE LIGHTS **TIMES**

FALL 2019



Feature

An Uncertain Future for Public Housing

DC Housing Authority released a draft 20-year plan to drastically shift the structure of public housing.

pg. 6-7

Students Practice Gratitude This Fall

pg. 3

Father & Daughter Find Work & Hope at Little Lights

pg. 4-5

What is Christian Community Development?

pg. 8-9

Working and leading in a ministry like Little Lights requires a lot of centering. In this work, there are many ups and downs, highs and lows. So many have come at us in 2019 that I feel a bit dizzy.

The lows we have experienced this year have been dramatic. Little Lights is still dealing with the shock of Linda Rice, our longtime Associate Director, being diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer. We continue to support her as she fights for health, but we miss her gracious spirit and joyful presence at work.

This fall we have also had to deal with traumatic violence at Potomac Gardens. One of our former students, a 17-year-old who is well-known in the community, was shot six times in September. Thankfully, he is alive and recovering, but he may not be able to walk again. A couple of weeks after this shooting, Marcus Williams, a DC Housing Authority maintenance worker who was very well-liked and respected, was shot and killed.

It is hard to grapple with the grief we have experienced this year. And yet there is much happening at Little Lights that also fills us with encouragement.

The Clean Green Team, our social enterprise, continues to grow and change lives. Some of our team our returning citizens and I'm truly inspired by their dedication to their craft and work. Our team consistently gets rave reviews from customers on Capitol Hill.

Our students had a wonderful Summer Lights day camp full of adventure, field trips, swimming, and various elective classes. Plus they worked every day on academics to avoid summer

Another great success was our annual Little Lights Benefit, where we raised awareness and funds while having a great time at the historic Howard Theatre. One of the highlights of the night came from the Little Lights Choir.

One of the reasons the performance went so well was that we were able to have our first choir retreat in August at our newly renovated retreat house in Anacostia! The addition of a new large common area was completed this June and our choir was able to take advantage of this new space to practice their song during a weekend lock-in. The choir students loved being at the new and improved retreat house!

This holiday season, we have so much to be thankful for. Yet, there is also so much to pray for, especially for the end of gun violence in our city.

As we enter into our 25th anniversary in 2020, I know that Little Lights needs God's favor and compassion more than ever, as well as the support of our friends. Thank you for your partnership.

Peace,

Steve Park
Executive Director & Founder



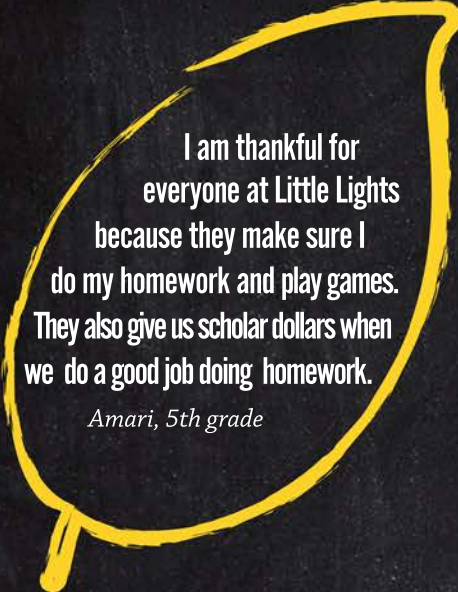
THANKSGIVING

REFLECTIONS

This fall students at our Hopkins Center reflected on who they are thankful for at Little Lights while also committing to memory a poem to welcome the autumnal season.

LEAVES

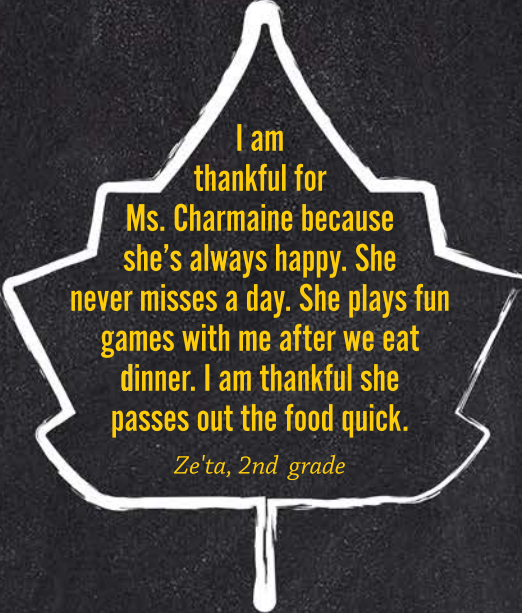
by Elsie N. Brady



I am thankful for everyone at Little Lights because they make sure I do my homework and play games. They also give us scholar dollars when we do a good job doing homework.

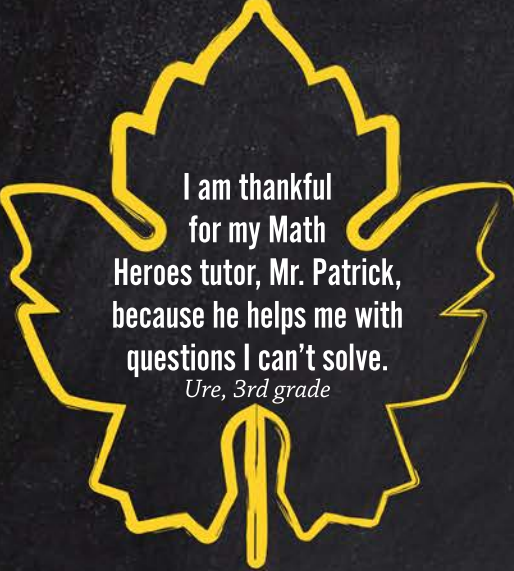
Amari, 5th grade

How silently they tumble down
And come to rest upon the ground
To lay a carpet, rich and rare,
Beneath the trees without a care,
Content to sleep, their work well done,
Colors gleaming in the sun.
At other times, they wildly fly
Until they nearly reach the sky.
Twisting, turning through the air
Till all the trees stand stark and bare.
Exhausted, drop to earth below
To wait, like children, for the snow.



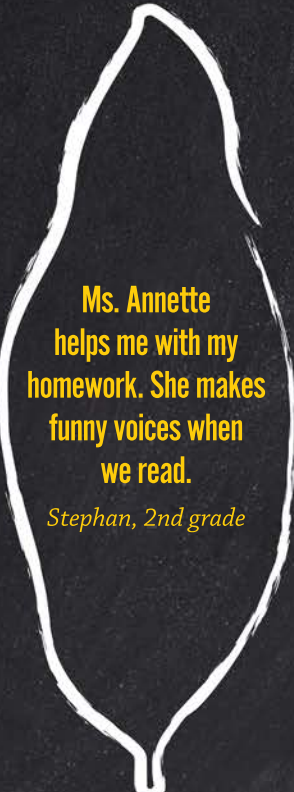
I am thankful for Ms. Charmaine because she's always happy. She never misses a day. She plays fun games with me after we eat dinner. I am thankful she passes out the food quick.

Ze'ta, 2nd grade



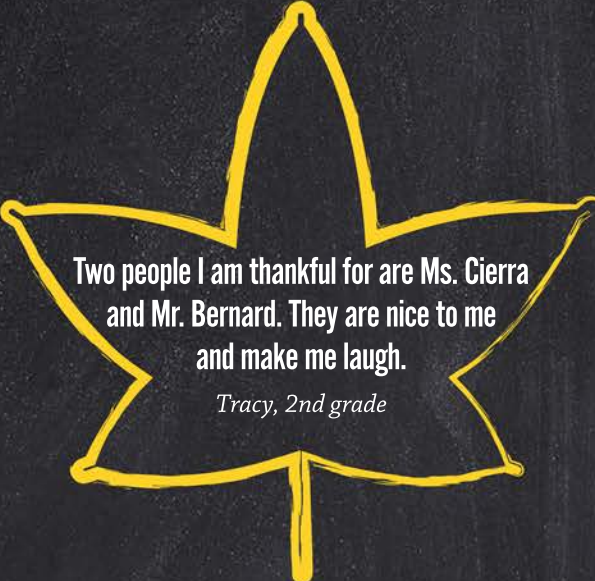
I am thankful for my Math Heroes tutor, Mr. Patrick, because he helps me with questions I can't solve.

Ure, 3rd grade



Ms. Annette helps me with my homework. She makes funny voices when we read.

Stephan, 2nd grade



Two people I am thankful for are Ms. Cierra and Mr. Bernard. They are nice to me and make me laugh.

Tracy, 2nd grade

Father and Daughter Find Holistic Care and Hope at Little Lights

At the Little Lights Benefit in September we premiered a new video following father-daughter duo, Bernard and Deniesha, who collectively take part in almost every Little Lights program.

Hopkins public housing community in Southeast DC is home to Deniesha and her father, Bernard.

When Bernard received word that Little Lights had acquired a space to operate after school programs inside Hopkins in the fall of 2013, he set out to see whether the programs would be a good fit for his daughter.

Shortly after touring the programs Bernard enrolled Deniesha into Little Lights.

“I’ve learned to get along with people, ask for help when I need it, and how to have fun while doing homework,” Deniesha shared.

From that point on Deniesha got involved in Homework Club, Reading and Math Heroes, Girls Night, Choir and even got paired with a mentor — together all of these programs have encouraged her creativity, fostered her social and emotional skills, and supported her robust desire to learn.

“I’ve learned to get along with people, ask for help when I need it, and how to have fun while doing homework,” Deniesha shared.

Now, Deniesha is involved at Little Lights in a much different capacity than when she came in as a 4th grade student.

This past summer Deniesha worked at Little Lights as a program assistant - her first summer job. As she led students through summer camp activities and performed clerical duties around the office, Deniesha knew what she was doing was more than gaining professional work experience, she was modeling

leadership and success for students in the same programs she grew up attending

While Deniesha worked her summer job, Bernard was also hard at work, too.



Alongside 7 other men on the Clean Green Team, Little Lights’ landscaping social enterprise, Bernard spent the hot days of summer mowing lawns and trimming hedges in neighborhoods surrounding Capitol Hill. And in the afternoons Bernard worked with students at Little Lights and helped out around the Family Center.

Without the paychecks he receives through Little Lights, Bernard admits, “If it wasn’t for Little Lights I don’t know if I would still have this apartment.”

A few years ago when Bernard suddenly received a notice that his disability status had changed, he went to the

A Special Thank You to the Sponsors of the Little Lights Benefit

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SuprTek Inc.

Brandon Park, a longtime donor of Little Lights, is President and CEO of SuprTEK, an IT engineering firm that provides information security and IT operations management for the federal, state and local government. Among SuprTEK's notable recognition is a President's Securing Americans Value and Efficiency award nomination.

Gold Sponsor



The Gaskins Team

Based out of Falls Church, VA, The Gaskins Team was recognized by Arlington Magazine as a top real estate team working with buyers and sellers across the DC metro area.

Silver Sponsors

Highlands Residential Mortgage

Ranked #1 in Best Mortgage Companies to work for by the National Mortgage News, Highlands Residential Mortgage is one of the top mortgage companies specializing in real estate loans in the greater DC area.

Stewardship Partners Investment Counsel, Inc.

Stewardship Partners serves both individual and institutional clients' investment management needs using a Biblically Responsible Investing (BRI) approach.

Georgetown University

Georgetown, the nation's oldest Catholic and Jesuit university, is committed to social and economic justice. Last year the University presented the John Thompson Jr. Legacy of a Dream Award to Steve Park, which kicked off a year-long partnership with Little Lights.

Neuma Consulting

Neuma Consulting LLC is a minority-owned small business that crafts revolutionary business and technical solutions to defense and intelligence agencies.

Bronze Sponsors

The JLC Team

Jackie, Libby, and Crystal, real estate agents who comprise the JLC Team, have collectively lived on Capitol Hill for 52 years. They bring their unique approach and invaluable insight to every purchase or sale.

City First Bank

Regarded as DC's first bank solely dedicated to community development finance, City First Bank of DC specializes in providing financial services to low and moderate income communities.

Little Lights Family Center, where he was quickly connected to employment opportunities.

"I thank God that I've been blessed to have the good life I'm having -- with being with Little Lights, being able to still work and take care of my daughter," Bernard reflected.

Since the passing of Deniesha's mom in 2017, Bernard has made it his mission to take care of Deniesha. And Little Lights plans on continuing to be a place of support for the both of them.

Whether it is helping Deniesha with her homework or guiding Bernard in the process of finding a job, Little Lights seeks to fully support our students, which also means helping their families navigate through life's challenges.

"I thank God that I've been blessed to have the good life I'm having - with being with Little Lights, being able to still work and take care of my daughter," Bernard reflected.



To watch their video head over to
YouTube channel, Little Lights Online.

youtube.com/LittleLightsVideos



an **UNCERTAIN FUTURE** *for* **PUBLIC HOUSING**

Change is happening fast for DC's public housing communities. This spring, the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) released a draft of a 20-year plan to drastically shift the structure of public housing in the District of Columbia.

What is prompting the changes?

With almost two decades of declining federal funding for public housing, DCHA is facing a \$2.5 billion gap between their expected funding over the next twenty years and what they need to preserve safe, maintained housing units. A recent assessment determined that about 80% of DC's 8,000+ public housing units are in a state of disrepair, with approximately 2,610 units considered essentially uninhabitable due to mold, elevated levels of lead, insect and rodent infestations, and leaking sewage. Without adequate funds to address those issues, DCHA is turning to private developers.

How will the proposed 20-year plan change DC public housing communities?

DCHA identified 14 public housing properties to address over the next decade. Several will be gutted and rebuilt. For the other properties, DCHA is seeking

private developers to enter into long-term ground leases and create mixed income neighborhoods. Mixed-income housing would include units for those 30% and below the average median income (AMI), those 80% and below the AMI, and some market-rate units, as well. This is a switch, as public housing currently serves those far below the AMI. In the three public housing communities where Little Lights is located, most residents exist at around 17% of the AMI. Whether due to renovations or redevelopment, families in the 2,610 units identified will have to undergo long-term relocation.

Is this a positive thing? Or a negative thing?

Improving the often unsafe and unsanitary conditions in public housing is of crucial importance. Mixed-income housing has also shown some promising results in creating greater economic opportunity for those experiencing poverty. The end result imagined could be positive.

However, the imagined outcome may not be the actual outcome. And in the interim, many possible negatives exist. Families typically receive vouchers to relocate elsewhere during redevelopment. These vouchers can prove difficult to utilize, with many landlords refusing to accept them. Such difficulties have forced families to move out of DC in order to find a place to accept their voucher. Moving that far afield tears apart communities and makes it difficult for families to return to their original neighborhood once it is redeveloped. And when public housing is redeveloped into a mixed income community, there are often not as many.

low-income units, which can make redevelopment projects feel like a way to push out poor residents and increase the speed of gentrification.

How has this kind of redevelopment gone in the past?

DC's track record when it comes to redeveloping public housing is not very bright. One example is Temple Courts in NoMa, which was demolished in 2007 with promises to redevelop the property into a mixed income complex. Today, in 2019, the land is a parking lot. And residents of the former 211 apartment units are still displaced. For those redevelopment projects that have been accomplished, affordable units have often not been replaced one-for-one.

The 134 units of Ellen Wilson Dwellings on Capitol Hill were demolished in 1996. A mixed income development was built in its place, with only 67 units — half of the original number — open to those making less than the AMI. Most instances of redevelopment have led to the displacement of low income DC residents, primarily African-Americans. From 1970 to 2015, DC's African-American population decreased from 71% to 48%, putting our city at the top of the list for gentrification.

What could this mean for families involved in Little Lights?

Little Lights works within Benning Terrace public housing, which is one of the communities scheduled for major renovations. Relocation of residents at Benning Terrace is slated to begin early in 2020. Families involved with Little Lights may need to move out of the area for long periods of time and may no longer be able to access the resources and opportunities present at Little Lights, from after school programming to employment.

Given the history of public housing redevelopment, we are not sure what to expect for the families we know. This could be a positive change, though it seems more likely it might be a change that displaces and uproots families already struggling to find affordable housing and stability in DC.

20 year
plan proposes public-private partnerships to create mixed income developments

2,610
units deemed uninhabitable

80% of DC's 8,000+
public housing units in a state of disrepair

\$2.5 billion
short in federal funding to make repairs

Garret, T. (2019). *DCHA FY 2020 Budget Oversight Hearing Testimony - Director Garrett.*

Glambrone, A. (2019). D.C.'s public housing will be overhauled under new 20-year plan. *Curbed.*

James, C. (2019). D.C. Has Had the Most Gentrifying Neighborhoods In The Country, Study Finds. *DCist.*

Koma, A. (2019). D.C. officials pitch plan to solve public housing 'crisis,' make \$2.5 billion in needed repairs. *Washington Business Journal.*

Whitehead, D. & McDermott, B. (2017). This decade-old parking lot used to be more than 200 public housing units. Now there's finally a plan to rebuild. *Greater Greater Washington.*

YOU, THEM, THEIRS

WE, US, OURS

A Reflection by Amy Leonard, *Director of Development & Communications*

Go to the people,
Live among them,
Learn from them,
Love them.
Start with what they know,
Build on what they have:
But of the best leaders, When their task is done,
The people will remark, “We have done it ourselves.”

[Ancient Chinese Proverb]

This fall I had the immense privilege of meeting Dr. John Perkins in Jackson, MS. He leaned in close across the table, wearing his trademark newsboy cap and holding a coffee mug bearing his face and the words “Get your Perk on,” and he recited the proverb above from memory.

It is a saying that has guided his life’s work — and the creation of the Christian Community Development Association. In the 1960s in the rural Mississippi town of Mendenhall, Perkins started Voice of Calvary Ministries, which became the prototype for Gospel-led community development. He started a church and Bible classes for students. He led voter registration efforts. He started a food co-op, built a gym, founded a school, and opened a medical clinic. He developed leaders within the community, and then he left the ministry in their hands and moved on to start similar efforts in Jackson and then in California.

To Dr. Perkins, the Gospel is holistic. It is not simply reconciling people to God, it is also about reconciling people to people. That model has influenced the holistic approach of Little Lights, as well as hundreds of other ministries nationwide. Steve Park, our Founder and Executive Director, sits on the board of CCDA and recently spoke during the CCDA Conference in Dallas, TX.

Christian community development (CCD) is core to Little Lights.

As I listened to Dr. Perkins in Jackson, MS, I saw the direct link between his **three R’s of community development** and what we strive to accomplish at Little Lights....



Dr. John Perkins, *Christian Community Development Association Founder*



REDISTRIBUTION

CCD believes in a just distribution of resources. It asks the people of God who have resources to come alongside their neighbors to address problems, to invest in building new skills, relationships, and opportunities that will help residents help themselves. This philosophy is why we hire residents of public housing at Little Lights, it's why we have the Clean Green Team social enterprise, it's why we believe the funding our donors invest in our work is of critical importance.



RELOCATION

Modeling the incarnation of Jesus, CCD practice encourages people to live among the poor, whether that requires moving, returning, or remaining. Living in disinvested neighborhoods turns “you, them, and theirs” into “we, us, and ours.” It makes the biblical injunction to desire for your neighbor what you desire for yourself a reality. You both now have a personal stake in the well-being of your neighborhood. Steve and Mary made a conscious choice to raise their family in Anacostia, just minutes from Little Lights, for this reason.



RECONCILIATION

CCD asks an important question: “Can a gospel that reconciles people to God without reconciling people to people be the true gospel of Jesus Christ?” We want to see everyone connected to Little Lights transformed by the love of God, and we also believe that an experience of God’s love should break through racial, ethnic, and economic divisions. Towards that end, we offer opportunities for spiritual growth, Christian mentoring, and Steve teaches the Race Literacy 101 course to bridge divisions and build solidarity.

Along with the three R’s, CCD practice also encourages the development of local, indigenous leaders and emphasizes the importance of listening to the community, because they know what they need. Little Lights has listened to the needs expressed by public housing residents, and that is why we started providing jobs to adults, we expanded our programs into new areas, and we opened the Family Center. It is easy to listen to the community, because we have so many community members on our staff. We share in this work together, and they have a large voice in how it happens.

All of the various components of Christian community development can be summed up in something Dr. Perkins shared. The first thing he said during our conversation was that **“The gospel is about the renewal of society.”** No pie-in-the-sky religious abstraction, the gospel transforms people and it transforms communities.

Read, Watch, Listen: Staff Selections

***The Bridge to Brilliance: How One Principal in a Tough Community Is Inspiring the World* by Nadia Lopez**

Recommended by Linda An, Program Coordinator

This book is about a principal who started a middle school in one of America's poorest communities. She inspired change in her community and worked hard to create a safe place for students.

"Strong Back, Soft Front, Wild Heart," An Interview with Brené Brown, On Being Podcast

Recommended by Amy Leonard, Development & Communications Director

In her humorous and winsome way, Brené reminds us that it is hard to ostracize people up close, and instead encourages us to move in, get closer, get curious, and ask questions — that, she says, is when we will experience a sense of belonging.

***White Awake: An Honest Look at What It Means to Be White* by Daniel Hill**

Recommended by Steve Park, Executive Director & Founder

An insightful book written especially for evangelicals on racial awakening for whites.

Emanuel: The Untold Story of the Victims and Survivors of the Charleston Church Shooting

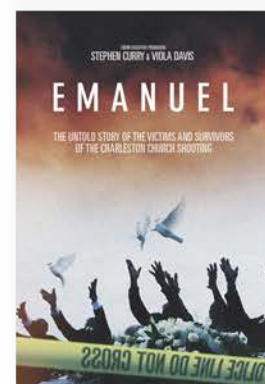
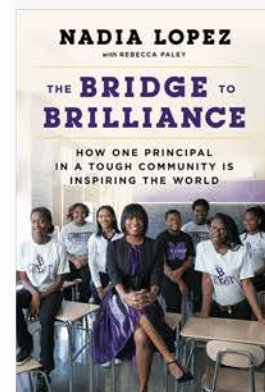
Recommended by Naomi Venerable, Development & Marketing Coordinator

Produced by Stephen Curry and Viola Davis, Emanuel is a powerful documentary featuring intimate interviews with survivors and family members of the Emanuel Nine. It is a moving story of justice and faith, love and hate, examining the healing power of forgiveness.

***Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Recommended by Karmen Taylor, Program Director

Life Together challenges us to look at participation in the Christian community through prayer and accountability as vital to a rich spiritual life and part of living a life for Christ.



Meet Our Staff

Linda An Program Coordinator, Little Lights Center

Hometown: Burke, VA **How long have you been working at Little Lights?** 4 months

Fun Fact:

One of the favorite places I have visited was Hanoi, Vietnam. The coffee, food and people were all part of an amazing experience.

If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be and why?

The world would be more empathy and understanding - there'd be no room for greed.



Katie Larkins Office Manager & Program Coordinator, 1430 Center

Hometown: Princeton, NJ **Fun Fact:** I can write in Elvish.

How long have you been working at Little Lights?

I started volunteering at Little Lights in Spring 2015, began working part-time in January 2016, and transitioned to full-time in October 2018 - slowly but steadily got drawn in.

If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be and why?

I would make the world a place where people are more easily listened to and had empathy for one another, regardless of differences.



Fighting Food Insecurity in the District

Food insecurity is deeply connected to the experience of poverty.

Food insecurity is deeply connected to the experience of poverty.

Distinct from hunger, food insecurity is limited or uncertain access to healthy and safe food, or the limited and uncertain ability to acquire such food for a household.

Food insecurity can show up in different ways. It can look like a family missing several meals a month simply because they do not have money to buy enough food. Or a family that lives far from a grocery store and finds it difficult to transport groceries home. Or it can show up in a student who is exhibiting behavioral or emotional issues and struggling to learn because necessary nutrients are missing from his or her diet.

Studies of low-income and poor D.C. students found that many students go home over the weekend to households with little or nothing to eat and return to school on Monday hungry and unable to concentrate and learn, which often results in behavioral issues. And during the summer months households with children are at higher risk of being food insecure because children lose access to school lunches.

Feeding students is an intentional part of Little Lights programs in order to ensure that students have the essential tools and resources (including meals) to thrive.

Because of these organizations, students in Little Lights programs can count on receiving a protein, a vegetable, a fruit, grains, and milk, each day they are at Little Lights,

both throughout the school year and all through the summer. Last year these organizations helped us serve 9,957 meals.

Cierra Peterson, a former Little Lights student who now manages programs at Little Lights Hopkins Center, sees families experiencing food insecurity on a daily basis.

“Families often come to get the extra milk we have to take home to their families to use. I know parents that call very often to make sure that the students take the extra milk cartons home.”

To Cierra, feeding our students a nutritious meal is one of the most important aspects of Little Lights’ aftercare programming. Last summer Cierra used USDA’s food chart to guide students towards making healthier food and drink options when she observed “students consistently eating junk food like chips, sunflower seeds, and pickled eggs and counting it as a meal because they were the most affordable and accessible foods.”

Apart of Cierra’s mission as Program Manager at Hopkins is to educate students on healthier food options. “Exposure is also a factor that limits student choice. They choose what they know. If they have never tasted something, they are less likely to choose it on their own,” Cierra shared.

Thanks to our food partners, Little Lights families can count on their child receiving a healthy meal each day during programs.

“While the parents are working, their kids are able to come here to not only receive academic support but to receive a complete meal,” Cierra says. “Their families can be confident that the student is well-fed when they come home in the evening.”

“Feeding our students is one of the most important aspects of our aftercare programming.”





LITTLE LIGHTS

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We have a **new** exciting way to give to Little Lights.

Text **SHINEBRIGHT** to **44-321** and
immediately receive a link to our secure giving page!



Give to Little Lights from your paycheck through either the Combined Federal Campaign (for government employees) or the United Way (check with your employer). Be sure to tell your friends and coworkers that they can give to Little Lights too!



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