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**Harlem Children's Zone Reflection**  
**May 2015**

As a child, I had heard many stories about Harlem, New York. My parents had fallen in love in a brownstone building on 137th street in the heart of this famous neighborhood. Unfortunately, the stories I had heard were ones of extreme poverty, hunger and dangerous streets. Of course, these were coupled by lively stories of musicians, and art, and brown and black friends sitting on doorsteps to jam together, laugh and gossip about "El Cojito", "Shorty" and other loved friends.

So as I rode the M-60 Shuttle from La Guardia Airport to our hotel in Harlem, I passed a section of Harlem that was full of disheveled people on the streets, trash and police cars (I was later to find out that this area was not targeted by the Harlem Children's Zone). I got off the bus at Frederick Douglass Blvd to walk 1-½ blocks to the hotel and it felt like a hustle and bustle of any big city in the North America (reminding me dearly of my beloved Mexico City).

As the days unfolded and we learned about the Harlem Children's Zone, I thought a lot about my parents - how different the neighborhood was back then with poverty and danger screeching out. This time, I noticed the vibrancy of the parks - so clean with kids playing basketball and running around; the murals painted of our brown and black heroes; folks running to take the bus and subway to work; children with their moms back from school; vibrant small businesses supported and owned by people of color. Gentrification was happening - but the community had predominantly remained the Community. And I was struck by how much the HCZ was in fact led and supported by people of color who either came from the community and had succeeded in school and work, or by folks with similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds - like Geoffrey Canada, Anna - the new ED, or Julia - graduate of Baby College and now a community organizer, who had committed themselves to a common vision to bring up "Harlem's most vulnerable and disenfranchised children".

So, two keys images will remain in my mind: one) when we walked up the steps of the HCZ preschool and I saw 3 and 4 year old brown and black kids from my neighborhood in inner city L.A. learning French and Spanish and leading group lessons; and two) hearing about and seeing the HCZ Wellness Policy in action in order to promote healthy bodies and minds which reminded me of our Chicano and Black Panther movements that stressed these as forms of resistance and empowerment.

And now back in Orange County, I continue to ask myself - How CAN we support our most vulnerable and disenfranchised children in the midst of incredible economic and cultural divisions? How can I speak out and help folks understand that we DO have vulnerable and disenfranchised families (mostly of color) in our perceived utopia of Chapel Hill? In light of recent racial clashes in the U.S. and in our own community, why does Chapel Hill have such a difficult time acknowledging its own racism and admitting that racial tensions exist, and seeing that our poor communities are heavily comprised of brown and black people? And what about the Achievement Gap, the Health Disparity, etc. - will our young people of color be ready to step up as leaders and those that are - will the folks in power really listen to them, respect their voices, and be open to their solutions? Will the FSA really have a vital role in changing the outcomes for our most disenfranchised and vulnerable children?

At this time, the weight of providing voice and advocacy for my community is often a heavy and isolating role. But thanks to HCZ I have furthered deepened my hope and commitment to our children and families. As I fight against the charity model of service provision, the HCZ remains a model for me of community autonomy in that funds are given to brown and black leaders in order to solve their community's own issues and as such, they have developed a highly successful international model for lifting children out of poverty. I almost wish in my heart that the Family Success Alliance could truly support our leaders and our youth in the brown and black communities and work with us and entrust us to resolve our own issues, feed our hope, and develop solutions as we know our communities best.