

SMALL STREET RAIN GARDEN



*Funding, technical assistance and training provided by
The Parks & People Foundation*

Thanks to Justine Bonner, a Baltimore City native and active gardener, the community just north of Baltimore's Lafayette Square Park in Sandtown Winchester is starting to be cleaner, greener and less overcome with crime and trash. A natural leader and community organizer, Bonner is known throughout her neighborhood for the large flower garden she created behind her Carrollton Avenue home, an area that was once covered in run-down alley garages and loads of trash. Unlike other residents, Justine Bonner knows most of her neighbors by name and can always count on numerous neighborhood volunteers to help plant flowers in her amazing garden.

In addition to her own garden, Bonner holds herself responsible for smaller gardens throughout the community. The most recent garden that Bonner created and now cares for is located on Small Street, a tiny alley about a half a block from Lafayette Square. The Small Street Garden is unique to Bonner's other projects because it is a rain garden. It incorporates swales, which have been planted with native plants to capture rainwater and filter it through the soil.

Now an up-and-coming, revitalized area, Small Street and the surrounding Lafayette Square neighborhood was, at one point, an area that had fallen into decline, promoting disinvestment and significant drug use and crime. Working with the Parks & People Foundation and the Civic Works crew, Bonner was able to renovate a lot where garages once stood to a green space for community gatherings. Removing buried brick and

concrete foundation, cleaning up trash, trimming tree cover and creating the rain garden on Small Street has significantly improved the area.

Primarily due to Justine Bonner and her gardening efforts, neighborhood residents are now aware of the power of natural areas. Tending to the garden has created a tighter-knit group of neighbors, many of whom work together on a regular basis to keep the neighborhood clean and green. Children around Small Street help plant the brick flower boxes or front stoop gardens along the 900 block N. Carrollton Street and often learn about the vegetables grown in the garden behind Justine's home.

Anyone who has experienced the Small Street Garden knows that the long-term success and sustainability of the garden is primarily due to the never-ending efforts of Justine Bonner. Bonner has successfully created breathing space in-between the row houses in the Lafayette Park area of Sandtown Winchester, while helping residents gain a sense of ownership of the area in which they live and play. Drugs and crime are slowly being pushed out of the neighborhood and former illegal dumping sites are now blooming with flowers. In essence, Justine Bonner and her neighbors have transformed over seven vacant lots in a four square block area of Sandtown Winchester. She is a model homeowner, investing time, energy and even her own money, into improving her neighborhood through the simple act of greening vacant spaces and nurturing new stewards.

WHO

Justine Bonner, Garden Founder

WHAT

Small Street Rain Garden Project

WHERE

Small Street, near Lafayette Square Park

WHEN

Est. 2000 by Justine Bonner

WHY

To naturally improve her community

