

ON THE LEVEL

DVULI.ORG

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Serving Urban Youth Leaders
FOR 25 YEARS

VIRGINIA WARD

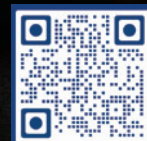
COMMITTED TO EMPOWERING
NEXT-GENERATION LEADERS

SPECIAL

Gordon MacDonald, NC1's
Spiritual Father for 25 Years

BREAKTHROUGH

Lutunji Abrams Heeds the Advice
of the Late Richard DeVos



SCAN FOR AN
INTERACTIVE PDF
VERSION OF THIS
NEWSLETTER

REFLECTIONS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

LETTER FROM EILEEN KOOREMAN



I never dreamed I would work at the same place for over 25 years!

I moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, with my family in 1996 for a temporary stay while my husband went back to school. Little did I know, God had other plans.

I started working at the DeVos Family Foundations on October 3, 1996, as an administrative assistant. At my job interview, it was mentioned that the DeVos family was thinking about doing a philanthropic project together. This was not how they usually did their philanthropy, and they weren't sure what direction it would take. That project became a mission—to strengthen and build up Christian leaders who were called to serve urban youth.

Ginny VanderHart and I, the only two staff members at that time, had one big problem.

How would we carry out a mission to do something we knew nothing about with leaders who worked in a context completely different than our own?

THE SOLUTION: It turns out that not knowing is the best way to approach something new.

WHAT I LEARNED: Question assumptions. Be open to seeing things differently. Allow yourself to be in uncomfortable spaces. Listen for the truth even when someone tells you that you have it all wrong, and when unsure of yourself, go to the Lord and pray, pray, pray.

Being part of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative has been such an amazing experience. It has shaped me as

a leader and blessed me beyond my wildest dreams. It has opened my heart to the joys and challenges of the hundreds of urban leaders who go unnoticed for their work every day. People like you who make daily sacrifices for kids and community, want to be better and finish strong, and believe the gospel still has the power to transform lives. You have invited me into your cities, homes, ministries, and churches. The friendships I've made and the opportunity to be a part of your world have changed me in profound ways.

The friendships I've made and the opportunity to be a part of your world HAVE CHANGED ME IN PROFOUND WAYS.

As Dr. John Perkins is fond of saying, "My friends are my treasure." Let me rephrase that—my friends, YOU are my treasure.

I hope DVULI has changed you as well. I hope you are up for being a lifelong learner, for being curious about the way others see the world, the way others approach God in loving worship, the way others bring their gifts and their culture and offer it for all to savor. We serve a God who is that big.

Let's embrace each other as we move forward to the finish line.

Eileen Kooreman  [erkooreman](#)  [ekooreman](#)

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Happy 25TH ANNIVERSARY!

By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff



Serving Urban Youth Leaders FOR 25 YEARS

OUR STORY

In 1995, Richard and Helen DeVos had the idea to launch a national philanthropic project that their whole family could work on together. They challenged their four children and spouses to collectively develop a philanthropic program based on their shared interests. An intensive discovery process revealed a common passion—disadvantaged urban youth.

The DeVos family determined that optimal impact could be made by creating a faith-based leadership development program focused on sustaining urban youth leaders in ministry while building their capacity to develop effective organizations and produce leaders. After much research, interviews, and focus groups with ministry leaders and youth workers, the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI) was launched in 1998.

For 25 years, DVULI has remained committed to its goal of investing in the lives of YOU—urban youth workers. Serving you is invaluable kingdom work and is an immense honor for the DVULI team and the DeVos family!

DVULI IMPACT:

82% of alumni say collaborative work **fosters community** change.



92% of alumni say **DVULI prepared them for leadership** in their community.



68% of alumni have **developed a network of people**, organizations, or businesses to seek ministry resources.



96% of alumni regularly reflect on their **personal growth** and development as a leader.



81% of alumni **lead organizational change collaboratively** with other urban youth workers.



73% of alumni regularly **involve youth** in planning and implementing ministry.



THE DVULI WAY:

Yearly Up to 60 leaders invested

Program Length 15 months

Urban Cities 37

Graduating Classes 25 national cohorts

25+ Year Club 61 alumni

National Youth for Christ Cohorts 2, Class of 2009 & 2018

Partners 625, UYWI, Legacy, Lead Like Jesus, CLI, and GRIL

Graduates 1,300 alumni

2nd Gen Grads 6 alumni whose kids are alumni

Fuel Network Cities 10

Alumni Reunions 7 (including 2023)

Number of Supplemental Trainings Offered 4

BREAKTHROUGHS



[f sharod.tomlinson](#)

SHAROD TOMLINSON (New York 2009)

One could joke that Sharod Tomlinson (New York 2009) wore an invisible “S” on his chest. The single father leading a youth ministry was known for coaching high school basketball, traveling as a speaker, volunteering in the community, teaching Sunday school, and completing a master’s degree—all while working full time in student development at Berkeley College of New York.

At the point of burnout, Sharod was accepted into a DVULI cohort that required him to pause and reflect on the health of his life choices. “I used to feel like I was the only one dealing with the issue of imbalance,” he notes. “I now understand I have others I can turn to for help.”

Being comfortable embracing the help of others clicked for Sharod at the first national conference in Orlando, Florida, where he heard a presenter speak on making healthy changes.

“I was about 300 pounds at that conference,” Sharod reveals, who is now 80 pounds lighter. “I realized my life was on this crazy spiral of overworking and lots of stress. I understood I was not the only leader in the room who was burned out. I also knew it was up to me to do what’s right to get control of my life.”

In both high school and college, Sharod was an accomplished student athlete. He knew the kind of discipline required to get fit but still needed help. He sought professional medical advice and admitted that was his best first step.

“I remember sitting outside the doctor’s office in tears because I remember watching my grandfather and father battle diabetes. I said I am going to do everything not to be in that position,” recalled Sharod. “Now I am in a better place and have eliminated stress, which was the number one contributor to my unhealthiness.”

Not only did Sharod embrace the support and counsel of others, but he also modeled it for the youth he served at St. Luke Cathedral in Queens, New York, where he is now an associate elder. One of the youths he mentored, Kayla Allen, joined the ministry while an elementary student. Raised in a single-parent home, Kayla endured a contentious relationship with her absent father. She also dealt with the typical pressures from peers and battled low self-esteem as a public school student.

Kayla, 22, will never forget when her high school guidance counselor said she would never succeed at her dream to study medicine and insisted she choose something “more practical.” This encounter would go down as one of her most memorable childhood disappointments. “At that moment, I felt like an insecure little girl with that voice in my head telling me I wasn’t good enough,” she says.



Sharod with St. John’s University students.

Sharod would offer the counter voice Kayla leaned into that reassured her of what she could achieve. “Mr. Sharod helped me create a vision and execution plan for my future goals,” says Kayla, a junior at New York City College of Technology studying health science. “From his guidance alone, anyone is lucky to have him as a mentor.”

Today, Sharod continues to inspire young people to pursue their dreams in his roles as the associate dean of student success and engagement at St. John’s University, girls’ basketball coach at Christ the King High School, and father to his 10-year-old son, Isaiah.

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life,” offers Sharod. “Since graduating from DVULI, I have experienced breakthrough in all aspects of my life, and I am grateful.”



LUTUNJI ABRAMS (Twin Cities 2008)

It started with a prophetic word from the late Richard DeVos.

Lutunji and her fellow cohort participants were at a DVULI luncheon in 2008 when Mr. DeVos spotted her. He beelined to her

through the packed room and thoughtfully read her name tag aloud. Taking her hand in his he said, “You’re supposed to be an entrepreneur. Work for yourself.” Intrigued by this beautiful yet curious interaction, it would be years before Lutunji realized God spoke to her through Mr. DeVos that day.

Equipped with a BA in Community Development and a MA in Organizational Leadership, Lutunji strategically put herself in a position to fulfill her mission—to start a charter school for disenfranchised teen moms and dads.

As she prepared for an important meeting with a pastor of a historic church in South Minneapolis to discuss the charter school, Lutunji packed up some homemade peach cobbler. “Everybody grabbed a plate and we got to work.” Pastor Jeff blurted out, “Girl, you’re going to sell this cobbler in our farmers market!” Skeptical, Lutunji laughed, thinking, “Lord, I went to college, got in all this student loan debt to pursue my teaching degree, and built a career.” She was a woman on a mission, yet she also realized she had just received yet another prophetic word. Two months later, she launched Lutunji’s Palate at Whittier Farmers Market in South Minneapolis, and her career took a divine and delectable detour.

Today, Lutunji spins many plates. She opened the doors to Lutunji’s Palate Cafe in downtown Twin Cities in 2022. Her passion for cobbler and the joy it brings is the catalyst for her outreach organization, Voices of Effective Change, Inc., which she runs from the cafe. “Impact is literally baked into our model,” she explains of her cafe/organization hybrid. “We’re a social enterprise that offers the community employment opportunities and direct support. Her organization has contracts with the city of Minneapolis that help provide resources for teens and young adults, as well as a work re-entry program for the previously incarcerated. She also partners with community organizations to develop collaborative programs for disadvantaged teens and young adults.

While serving the community tasty treats, her staff learns baking skills and gains business acumen. She’s clear to point out, “It’s not only a place of employment but a way to learn life skills while discovering one’s gifts and life purpose.” She continues, “It’s a ministry, but they don’t even know they’re being ministered to through dessert!”

Charter school plans are still in her sights, but right now, she’s being obedient to His call. “Until God opens the doors to the school, this is the way we do community. I’m loaded with degrees and a plan, but that doesn’t matter,” she says with resolve. “God said, ‘You’re the one,’ and I love being the person He chose.”

LUTUNJI’S STRONG WORK ETHIC AND LOVE FOR CULTIVATING COMMUNITY among the disadvantaged were baked into her being.



Lutunji with local youth cafe staff.

Meanwhile, Lutunji works hard to keep her work and personal life in balance—a core value she neglected prior to her DVULI training. “In order to lead, one must be whole enough to make a significant impact for change,” she said in her breakthrough plan. “Without my health, how could I make wise decisions and articulate thinking that mobilizes youth?” Lutunji works hard to prioritize work, daily living, family life, and recreation. You can’t convince her to share her prized peach cobbler recipe, but she’s more than happy to dish on her favorite self-care practices. Lutunji starts each day belting out worship music in the cafe before the open sign turns on. She loves walks through the city and she enjoys reflection and meditation. Lutunji regularly meets with her cohort and other Twin Cities DVULI alumni at her cafe, and they aim to collaborate on a project soon.

Her motto on the cafe wall is telling, “Built with Purpose; Fortified with Love.” Lutunji’s strong work ethic and love for cultivating community among the disadvantaged were baked into her being. Perhaps Mr. DeVos saw that in her back in 2009—two kindred entrepreneurial souls brought together by a shared love for Christ and the human spirit. When Mr. DeVos passed away in 2018, Lutunji overnighted peach cobblers to Grand Rapids. They arrived warm—baked with love and fulfilled purpose.

[@lutunjispalate](#)

NCI'S SPIRITUAL FATHER

REVEALS HIS PASSION FOR MENTORING ABOVE PREACHING

By Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003)



Serving Urban Youth Leaders
FOR 25 YEARS

FOR 25 CONSECUTIVE YEARS, Gordon MacDonald has been a featured keynote speaker for DVULI's national conferences. The repeated invitations for Gordon to annually address a room of leaders who work with urban youth have never been questioned—his presence and words just seem to fit. With his commanding gentle tone, Gordon is a meaningful storyteller. Listeners nearly salivate as they grasp for pearls of wisdom from the now retired pastor.

About a year before the launching of DVULI's initial cohort, Gordon was invited by program consultant Gordon Loux to speak at the first national conference (NC1) in Orlando, Florida. "I'd be delighted," responded Gordon to the invitation. "I was told the conference had to do with urban leaders, young people, and people of various cultural backgrounds. It sounded like the very thing you just drooled to be a part of."

Gordon's talks further enhance what participants experience in A SPACE INTERWOVEN WITH WISDOM, NURTURE, TRANSPARENCY, AND GENEROSITY.

While seated at the dinner table on the first evening of NC1, Gordon admits to being uncertain about what would be the focus of his keynote. Ginny Vander Hart, the program's then director, got up from her seat at the table to introduce Gordon. "I'm listening, trying to pick up hints of how people think and feel," Gordon recounts. "While Ginny's remarking, I'm saying to myself, 'How am I going to get this talk off the ground?'"

Like a dedicated father who carefully engages his children in conversation, Gordon began his DVULI address by telling a story. Calling it "The Stomping Boots," he shared the account of a mission trip to Hungary with his wife, Gail, and how the couple landed tickets to a Hungarian dance troop live performance.

During the show, Gordon became enamored at the sight of a black bug attempting to maneuver the stage among the dancers who wore boots. "The bug entertained me for some time as it

made its way up above and around the stomping boots of the Hungarians," he describes. "And then, finally, there came the terrible moment when the bug was squashed. Remembering this story, as Ginny's introducing me, I'm saying to myself, 'We have a story of history here.'" Gordon goes on to reason, "What leadership often requires is the ability to lead others through stomping boots to a safer place. And so that became the opening story of my talk that night with about a 40-second warning."

Several years followed, and "The Stomping Boots" was an NC1 staple at the request of Ginny and other DVULI staff. Gordon's keynotes are always accompanied by his humble expression of thanks for the rousing applause and standing ovation his speeches garner.

"I learned very early to always be a storyteller," says Gordon. "Jesus was an incredible storyteller. And if you look through culture to the great speech givers and sermon preachers, all of them have been storytellers."

The atmosphere at a DVULI national conference could be described by some as enchanting. Gordon's talks further enhance what participants experience in a space interwoven with wisdom, nurture, transparency, and generosity. When the weeklong events come to an end, it tends to be bittersweet, and Gordon couldn't agree more.

"If I were to have one regret about my visit to Orlando every year in April, it would be that there was not enough time to really get to know the men and women in the audience," confides Gordon. "You got the feeling—over and over again—that you'd say something, and you could feel people leaning forward in their chairs wanting to question, 'What did you mean by that?'"

Gordon continues, "One of the things that happened particularly with, may I say, African American and Hispanic men who were in the audience was that they would come up and want me to autograph one of my books. You could tell they wanted to say something as long as no one around was hearing. And then inevitably, one would say, 'I'd give anything if I had a father like you... I wish there was time to ask you questions.'"

Annually, Gordon includes in his introductory remarks that he'll be speaking to participants from the heart of a father.

In recent years, the preface has changed to the heart of a grandfather, the result of a widening age gap.

"You realize that a lot of these men didn't have the advantage of the one-on-one conversations they so desperately needed," observes Gordon, who says his father was too busy to offer the same. "I would have loved to sit in a circle with them late at night and let them ask this old guy questions. But the conference was too packed with good stuff. So, I accepted what time I got."

"ALWAYS BE PASSING OFF THINGS THAT GOD IS TEACHING YOU into the lives and hearts of other men and women who will take it further than you."

The "View from 80" is a keynote that Gordon has delivered at both NC1 and the DVULI 2019 reunion. This presentation offers 15 principles he stands by as valuable to any emerging leader. On the list is, "Be a spiritual mother or father to teachable people who may someday inherit your responsibilities." Gordon places high value on mentoring individuals who may be following in a leader's footsteps. He credits his success to the nine mentors God placed in his life throughout his career.

"Have some disciples! Always be passing off things that God is teaching you into the lives and hearts of other men and women who will take it further than you," urges Gordon. "I think that's more important than preaching. I love to preach. You can't stop me when someone invites me to preach. But if there's anything more important than preaching, it's mentoring men and women who are going to pick up the next generation."



In April, the DVULI class of 2023 got to hear Gordon speak at NC1 in Orlando via Zoom. Although the time for Q&A was limited, he and the participants relished the moments. "I've never had a bad day in Orlando in all 25 years," affirms Gordon with a smile.

INTRODUCING

DVULI NEWEST STAFF LIAISONS

NAME: Thomas Brackeen
(Washington, DC 2009)



STAFF LIAISON:
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Washington, DC
thomasb@dvuli.org
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By Gerald Bell, Kansas City 2003

This year, we are super excited to welcome two DVULI alumni to our family of liaisons. Thomas Brackeen (Washington, DC 2009) will assume alumni relations in Columbus, Ohio, and Washington, DC, while Cheryl Cuthbertson (Seattle/Tacoma 2011) will serve the Portland and Seattle/Tacoma regions, respectively.

A career-long youth worker, Thomas joins DVULI with a rich history of commitment to reaching marginalized populations. He is the Minister to Youth and Families at Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, DC, and says he finds it fulfilling to build "long-term relationships with youth and watch their journey to becoming successful adults who give back to their communities."

A career-long youth worker, Thomas joins DVULI with a rich history of COMMITMENT TO REACHING MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS.

In this role as a liaison, Thomas expressed excitement for bringing leaders together and developing new relationships in a way that will forge greater paths of collaboration. "I also look forward to meeting the alumni and youth leaders in Columbus and learning from their ministry models," he said.

Thomas has a national rapport for empowering and developing leaders who minister to youth. He is the Washington, DC, area Fuel Network leader, a youth and young adult ministry consultant and DEI trainer, as well as the founder of the Keep It Real Fridays Movement.

Whenever he can schedule some downtime, Thomas exerts his energy on the basketball court or in front of the TV watching basketball. He might also be found soaking up wisdom from one of his favorite authors, the late Howard Thurman. "What I have been enjoying about reading Thurman's work is that it's redefined my theology and how I look at biblical justice for the marginalized and the underserved," said Thomas.

A Temple Hill, Maryland native, Thomas grew up about 10 minutes outside of Washington, DC. Although catching him at home may be a gamble, he maintains an active presence on nearly every major social media platform. So, look for him there!

Identical to Thomas, Cheryl stays on the move. An international trainer, author, and thought leader, she currently serves as VP of Sustainability and Engagement at Children of the Nations (COTN). The organization provides holistic, Christ-centered care for orphaned and destitute children in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and a host of other countries.

While her calling to the nations is a demanding one, Cheryl's first passion is family. She is the mother of two adult sons and six grandchildren who all reside in the state of Washington where she lives.

"I am very intentional about time with my family and friends," notes Cheryl, who served as City Coordinator during her training year. "I learned something about balance when I was a participant in [DVULI]!"

Along with balancing family and profession, Cheryl has a heart for ministering to women and leaders. She loves being in spaces—upfront or behind the scenes—where people are thirsty for growth and development.

"I just want to see these leaders catch the fire and put what they're gaining into action," says Cheryl. "These concepts we learn in DVULI apply to everything you do, not just your organization."

Born in Jamaica, a neighborhood in Queens, New York, Cheryl has a military background and spent 12 years in the Navy. She admitted to a season in life when she believed the only person who could be relied upon was herself. Her DVULI coach was a voice of reason, encouraging her with the words, "Come off the cross," meaning you are no Messiah.

"Ron Carter told me to stop overthinking everything and trust the process," Cheryl continues, "I now say life is a process, and it's about trust. So, don't overthink it. Just trust."

Cheryl and Thomas will make initial visits to their respective liaison cities as part of their onboarding and to form and strengthen relationships with their fellow DVULI alumni.

Welcome notes can be sent to them at thomasb@dvuli.org or cherylc@dvuli.org.

Along with balancing family and profession, **CHERYL HAS A HEART FOR MINISTERING TO WOMEN AND LEADERS.**

NAME: Cheryl Cuthbertson
(Seattle/Tacoma 2011)



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VIRGINIA WARD IS PACING HER PURPOSE

Virginia Ward (Boston 1998) knows a few things about empowering next-generation leaders. Those who have been in spaces where she's training or speaking might argue "a few things" is an understatement!

By Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003)

Known for her ability to equip and energize an audience, Virginia is highly knowledgeable about the principles and values urban ministry leaders should embody to be effective today. Her passion for instructing stems from the regimens she acquired being raised by a school-teaching mother who also taught Sunday school and vacation Bible school. In addition, her father was a pastor.

Since age 16, Virginia has been reaching, inspiring, and mentoring a variety of youth who live in complicated and unfortunate conditions. Their challenges, however, are not unfamiliar to Virginia, whose parents divorced when she was in junior high school.

"It greatly affected our family financially," reveals Virginia. "My mother raised four children on a teacher's salary in the city."

Virginia is sensitive to the breakdown of the family structure that is pervasive in underserved neighborhoods and how these dynamics too often drive youth to make poor decisions. She recalls being one of those youths confronting the temptation to choose unwisely. "I can relate to the struggles urban youth [face]," she admits. "I understand that without godly, adult guidance, it is difficult to develop godly character."

Virginia's spiritual development and faith formation point to Charles Street A.M.E. Church in Boston, where she faithfully attended with her mother and siblings. This is the church that afforded her an early platform to speak publicly and where she cut her teeth in youth ministry. "My A.M.E. roots gave me a voice as a young, gifted, and black woman that has built a solid foundation for ministry and leadership," she describes.



Dr. Ward empowers Latino youth leaders during a training to walk out their faith, their way.

Listening to Virginia talk (signature Bostonian accent included), you immediately know other sources beyond textbooks and coursework have shaped the credibility she's earned. For starters, she embraces being mentored by others and relishes the impartation she's received from leaders in church, academic, and business sectors.

"I met Dean Borgman (of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) who mentored me and encouraged me to enter seminary," notes Virginia, while observing how some of her mentors have been men. Among them would be her husband, Bishop Lawrence Ward of Abundant Life Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "He was the youth leader first and recognized my heart and talent for youth and then knighted me as his replacement," she explained.



Virginia Ward (Boston 1998) is Dean of the Urban Campus at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where she teaches courses in youth ministry and leadership. She instructs the Personal and Ministry Assessment and Community Youth Development workshops for DVULI. Ward is also Associate Pastor at Abundant Life Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She and her husband are the parents of two adult sons.
 @ [virginia.ward](https://www.instagram.com/virginia.ward)

Virginia goes on to credit the late Richard DeVos, who modeled leadership, relationship building, and valuing other people. She said her few encounters with Mr. DeVos were a key takeaway from her DVULI experience both as a participant and a facilitator. "For those times when he didn't remember my name, he called me Miss Boston," she recounts. "I could never tell if he forgot my name or just chose to call me Miss Boston, but I will always value those moments with him."

The DVULI training continues to be an ongoing source of development and lifelong learning for Virginia, who has been a cohort coach, conference keynote speaker, and facilitator for local workshops. She has taken full advantage of the DVULI relationships she's formed across the US and recommends past, present, and future DVULI participants do the work to build and preserve like-minded relationships.

"MY A.M.E. ROOTS GAVE ME A VOICE AS A YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK WOMAN THAT HAS BUILT A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR MINISTRY & LEADERSHIP."

"Be intentionally connected with youth leaders outside of your own space," Virginia advises. "Other youth workers helped to strengthen me where I was weak. They helped to supply needs that I just couldn't supply. They understand ministry from an urban context, and I didn't have to explain why I am doing what I am doing."

She continues, "We're all learning together! Even now, as a trainer going from city to city, I am still learning from urban youth workers. They are the national family that I didn't have before DVULI."

With access to a supporting community, active mentors, and strong family ties, Virginia works hard to balance her personal and professional priorities. Inevitably her journey encountered some challenges along the way, which is why she holds Proverbs 3:5-6 close to her vest and a pearl of wisdom from her loving mom.

"My mother repeatedly told me a woman can do anything," says Virginia, who has contended with being minimized and marginalized in some settings. "She modeled strength and exposed me to other strong women in various disciplines."

Virginia believes whether a leader is single or married, taking care of your own family is most important. This tip is coming from the now Dr. Ward, who used to tell the youth in her ministry that they can call her any time of the day and she'll be there.

Over time, however, Virginia has learned valuable lessons about work-life boundaries and pacing herself. Such life lessons have forced her to coin the mantra, "Pace is just as important as purpose!"



DVULI
REUNION 2023
PHILADELPHIA



CELEBRATE 25 YEARS OF DVULI!

"Come Together" with fellow DVULI alumni for a life-giving reprieve where you will reconnect, refresh, and create lasting memories.

Enjoy 3½ days in Philadelphia of dynamic worship, keynote speakers, networking, and DVULI-style brotherly love.

Our aim is to encourage and resource our alumni on how to lead youth in reframing their view of the other, listening to understand, and promoting healthy exchanges. Receive a renewed mindset that creates a ripple effect of goodwill and unity that filters into youth and our communities.

WHO: DVULI Alumni

WHAT: "Come Together"
Reunion 2023

WHERE: Philadelphia, PA

WHEN: August 30-Sept 2, 2023

WHY: DVULI is celebrating 25 years of serving urban youth leaders in 37 US cities. DVULI hosts a reunion every five years to refresh and galvanize our dedicated alumni.

Jesus launched a polarization-busting movement in the first century—

**DVULI REUNION 2023 HOPES TO
ADD TO THE MOVEMENT!**

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

Special Experience

Thursday, August 31

6:00 p.m.

We'll enjoy a special evening in honor of the DeVos family investment in the National Constitution Center.



REGISTRATION

Registration opens June 1, 2023.
Spots are limited.



SCAN
CODE TO
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NOW

FOR MORE INFO
go to DVULI.org/REUNION

DVULI
REUNION 2023
PHILADELPHIA

THE COMPASS OR THE CLOCK

by JoAnn Dean (Atlanta 2014)

The words “You are the mission” rang out! They lifted my view and vibration. They gave me a new vision and validated my viewpoint.



selfcare_for_success

You are the mission, for me, meant wherever I found myself serving, whether celebrating an accomplishment with a friend, helping a child with homework, assisting a seasoned senior who needed help with the computer, or praying for an overwhelmed group of mothers, all these events were entrusted to my care; therefore, they were a part of my mission.

ALMOST RUNNING ON EMPTY, I ASKED GOD FOR INSTRUCTIONS
on how to refuel and fill the gap broadening in my life.

I reached the point in my soul when my leadership fuel was running low. I thought what I needed was more time, but what I really needed was my compass for clear direction.

I had put away my compass and started running against the clock. Almost running on empty, I asked God for instructions on how to refuel and fill the gap broadening in my life.

According to Stephen Covey’s book *First Things First*, “The clock represents our commitments, appointments, schedules, goals, activities—what we do with, and how we manage our time. The compass represents our vision, values, principles, mission, conscience, and direction—what we feel is important and how we lead our lives. The struggle comes when we sense a gap between the clock and the compass—when what we do doesn’t contribute to what is most important in our lives.”

The mission of serving others has always satisfied me. So, what changed that led to a near-empty tank?

I transitioned from the workforce as a social worker to full-time ministry. That changed my title and shifted my mindset. I thought I had to become someone else to succeed in the role of the pastor’s wife. I wrestled with this limiting belief. After all, I am a trained, spirit-led social worker who serves with all my heart. Just because my title changed, I didn’t have to, but I did. I found myself shrinking, believing this was biblical submission.



THE STRUGGLE COMES WHEN WE SENSE A GAP BETWEEN THE CLOCK AND THE COMPASS —
when what we do doesn’t contribute to what is most important in our lives.

I took on the mindset that in ministry and marriage, there could only be one vision. The thought of the possibility of my vision no longer becoming a reality incited rage in me. I privately processed these feelings. What was the root of this thinking? It stemmed from some of the teachings I received growing up in church.

As a social worker and life coach, I possess a certain skill set. This background, combined with the support I received from DVULI, helped me course-correct in a condensed amount of time.

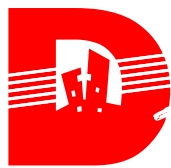
It extinguished the rage and filled the void by connecting with other leaders, worshipping, learning, and gaining practical tools. I reconnected with myself and extended gratitude for this experience leading me here.

Understanding who we are, what we value, and how it impacts everything we do is premium fuel. Releasing myself from the pressure of my new title and other titles allowed me to freely flow in my purpose as a leader.

You’re probably wondering how I released the pressure: It began with self-reflection. How did I get here?

- I took responsibility for my well-being.
- I asked for help while affirming God’s Word over my life.
- I recognized help when it showed up as an invitation to join DVULI.
- I was present for the lessons and the blessings in the form of support and guidance.
- For as long as I can remember, I’ve believed in the power of journaling.
- I communicated with my spouse about how I felt.
- I gave myself grace as I applied the new knowledge.
- I wrote down the values for the new version of me. And those values drive my decision-making.
- Today I use my voice through writing, teaching, and speaking, helping others to heal and embrace all of who they are.

I AM THE MISSION.



by Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff

PROFILE

NAME: Bob Adame



NAME OF ORGANIZATION:
The Navigators Group, Inc.

POSITION: Navigator Representative



WELL DONE, BOB!
Kudos to 38 years of youth service!

How long have you been involved in youth programs?

God called my wife, Claudia, and me to youth ministry in 1995 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was reading our local paper about out-of-control teen gangs responsible for an increase in youth homicides. I immediately wondered why someone didn't do anything about this problem. God spoke to me, saying, "Why don't you do something?" I was middle-aged and unfamiliar with the youth culture, let alone gang culture. God said, "If you don't, I will get someone else." I surrendered to the Lord and was overcome by compassion for these gang kids. I wept for them, and God began a work in me.

Tell us about The Navigators and how you fulfill its mission. How long have you worked for them?

I've been with The Navigators for 38 years. Through the organization, we offer faith-based after-school and summer youth programs. We conduct Kids' Club in a rented space in an apartment complex in north-west Albuquerque. Most of the families in the complex are Hispanics, Native American Navajos, and African Americans. We didn't intend to minister to refugees, but Muslim families from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Africa lived in the apartment complex, so we started to invite their children to Kids' Club. One summer, we had 15 Muslim kids attend! Initially, we didn't meet with the Middle Eastern families thinking they wouldn't be interested due to religious differences, but God prompted us to knock on a door and meet a family from a war-torn country. After we enjoyed their hospitality of tea and cookies, the parents agreed to let their kids come to Eagle Lake Camp. Other families also responded positively. Now, when Claudia and I visit refugee families, we allow extra time to enjoy the hospitality.

Tell us about the area where you serve.

Albuquerque is a challenging environment; high crime dominates our particular apartment complex. Drug dealers give drugs to children free of charge to get them addicted, ensuring a pipeline of future customers. We find children looking for food in the dumpsters because their parents spend all their money on drugs. These underserved communities are increasing yearly in our city and every city in America. I would estimate we have 50 or more of these communities where high crime and poverty are the norm.

Why do you think God has called you to this work? What do you hope to accomplish?

Proverbs 29:18 states, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Working in this capacity was God's vision imparted to me. I merely obeyed. It's our hope to save children and teenagers from physical and spiritual death and raise up future generations of multiplying laborers and leaders for the kingdom of God. We also trust God to reach beyond the kids into their familial networks. We have seen many family members become involved in nearby partnering churches, and several single moms are or have been in Bible study with Claudia.

What challenges have you or the organization had to overcome?

Recruiting help is challenging. We rely on referral sources from multiple organizations for volunteers, including New City Church.

What collaborative opportunities benefit this work?

We collaborate with New City Church to serve underserved children from nearby apartment complexes. This summer we will together serve 120 local youth at our camp. We also partner with Ty Platero (Albuquerque 2015), a fellow DVULI graduate who works at Broken Arrow Bible Ranch near Gallup, New Mexico. This camp serves our large population of Native American kids with a culturally sensitive camp experience.

We partner with New Beginnings, our home church, on community outreach, including a year-round food pantry and Project Angel Tree during Christmas—70 kids were blessed with gifts last year. Grace Church helps by shuttling kids to and from Wednesday night Bible study through its bus ministry.

Formerly launched as Kids' Club by Claudia and me in 1995, our former intern and DVULI grad, Laura Jenkins, took over the ministry, renaming it The Navigators Juntos. She reaches out to at-risk youth on the southeast side, allowing us to start a Kids' Club in the northeast.

How do you and your wife, Claudia, work together?

We minister by reaching out to the kids in the apartments and teaching them Bible truths through our Kids' Club. Regarding personal one-on-one discipleship, Claudia works with the girls, and I with the boys.

What are you most proud of that the program or your work has accomplished?

Our greatest joy is seeing those we've invested in discipling others. A young man I discipled in the 70s still calls to keep in touch! Two young men who had been part of our Kids' Club for years now work with youth in our church. David is a full-time youth leader, and Chris is a volunteer assistant youth leader. Both young men currently mentor youth. Two of Claudia's mentees now serve alongside her in the Kids' Club ministry.

**IT'S OUR HOPE TO SAVE CHILDREN
AND TEENAGERS FROM PHYSICAL
AND SPIRITUAL DEATH AND
RAISE UP FUTURE
GENERATIONS
OF MULTIPLYING LABORERS AND
LEADERS FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**



Some of the youth the Adames mentor.

Will you ever retire from this work?

I am 80 years old and still working! When I am physically unable to do the ministry, I'll retire.

What's the main impact the DVULI training had on your work/career?

I was greatly encouraged by the training that I received from DVULI, especially the breakthrough plan process, which I used to start a Hispanic ministry at The Navigators. I am currently planning a new initiative to minister to the Native American youth in the apartments. I am discipling a young Navajo man in our church who could possibly be a leader for the Navajo youth in our city.

What words of wisdom do you have for urban youth workers today?

Step out in obedience and faith with the dreams and visions God has given you. Do not be afraid.

How can your DVULI family be praying for you as you move forward?

Please pray for young laborers with a deep passion for the Lord and people, especially young people. Pray for continued fruit among the ministry to generations of children, teens, and families in this neighborhood. Praise God for volunteers and pray for more workers to come alongside kids.



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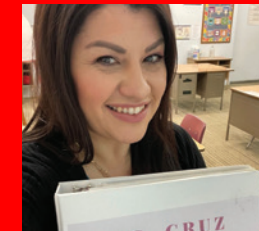
Last November, the National Latino Evangelical Coalition announced the election of the first female Board Chair, **Rev. Enid Alamazar (NYC 2010)**.



Benny Anctil (Portland 2022) is now the Ministry Site Director for Youth for Christ in Portland.
f [ben.anctil.3](https://www.facebook.com/ben.anctil.3)
@ [benny.anctil](https://www.instagram.com/benny.anctil)



Eddie Cole (Orlando 2000) was inducted into the Rollins College Athletic Hall of Fame at the Alford Inn in Winter Park, Florida, on March 23, 2023.
f [ColeMind5](https://www.facebook.com/ColeMind5)
@ [colemind58](https://www.instagram.com/colemind58)



Phoebe Cruz (Phoenix 2017) is now a kindergarten teacher and Spanish Marketing and Recruitment Representative at Redeemer Christian School.
f [phoebe.cruz](https://www.facebook.com/phoebe.cruz)
@ [pcruzie](https://www.instagram.com/pcruzie)



Isa Farrington-Nichols (Seattle/Tacoma 2011) released a book last year titled *RESTORE: A Guide for Truth and Reconciliation of Traumatic Experiences*.
f [isa.nichols](https://www.facebook.com/isa.nichols)
@ [isafarrington](https://www.instagram.com/isafarrington)



Bernard Franklin (Kansas City 2001) is now the Managing Director at Uncornered in Boston.



John James (Paterson 2000) is now the Director of School Engagement and Student Support at the Hope Center in Kansas City, Missouri.



Randy Mason (Newark 2021) was featured in the Hunts Point Express about his rap mentorship program R.H.Y.M.E. (Rap Helps Young Minds Excel).
f [IamRandyMason](https://www.facebook.com/IamRandyMason)
@ [randymasonmusic](https://www.instagram.com/randymasonmusic)



Domingo Mota (Los Angeles 2005) is now the West Zone Field Director for CarePortal.
f [mingorok](https://www.facebook.com/mingorok)
@ [mingorok](https://www.instagram.com/mingorok)



David Stanley (Kansas City 2003) is now the Advancement Officer at Donnelly College in Kansas City.
f [davepaulstanley](https://www.facebook.com/davepaulstanley)



Aaron & Emily Starr (Columbus 2017 & 2015) welcomed Xavier into their lives in 2021. After a long, difficult adoption process, they officially welcomed him into their family.
f [Emily9Starr9](https://www.facebook.com/Emily9Starr9)
@ [aaronstarr insta](https://www.instagram.com/aaronstarr insta)



Sandy Vogelmann (San Antonio 2017) is now a Claims Specialist for Youth for Christ.
f [sandyvogelman](https://www.facebook.com/sandyvogelman)
@ [cindy_sandy.s.v](https://www.instagram.com/cindy_sandy.s.v)



Brandon Woodard (Cincinnati 2021) is now the Church Planting and Multiplication Coordinator at Harbor Network in Louisville, Kentucky.
f [brandon.woodard.127](https://www.facebook.com/brandon.woodard.127)
@ [bwoodardsr](https://www.instagram.com/bwoodardsr)

ALERT

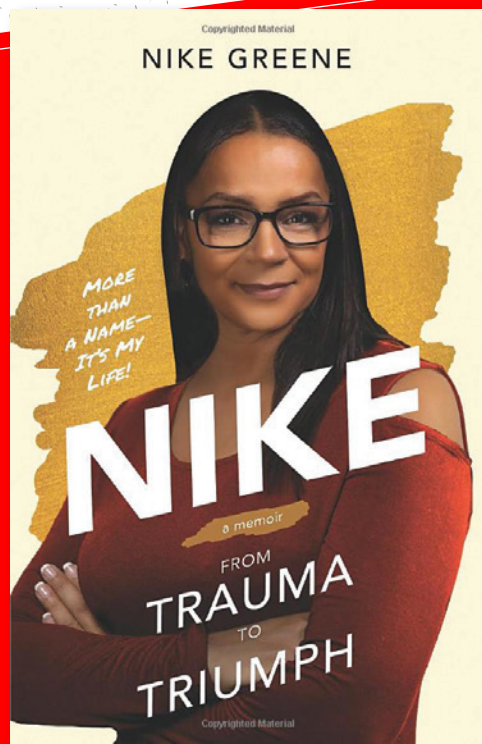
WHAT COMMUNITY-WIDE IMPACT ARE YOU LEADING?

Marsha D. Carter (Twin Cities 2018)

invited around 75 women to a pop-up store that "had no price tags or cash registers." With the help of several non-profits and a few volunteers, these unhoused moms were able to take part in some self-care, including a hot meal, new outfits, and even a coloring book station to keep their kids busy while they "shopped."

@ [marshadcarter96](https://www.instagram.com/marshadcarter96) f [marsha.carter.96](https://www.facebook.com/marsha.carter.96)





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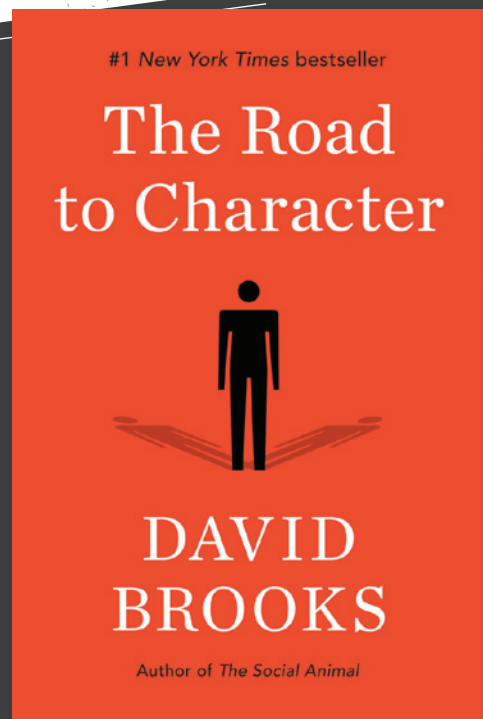


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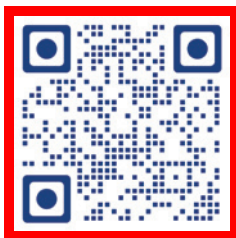
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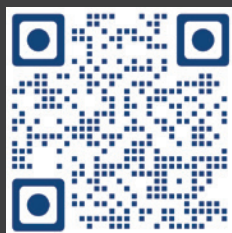
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The Road to Character
By David Brooks

**#1 New York Times
BESTSELLER**



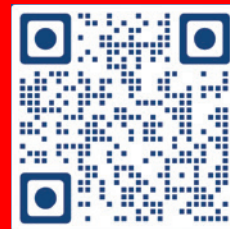
SCAN TO READ the online book review
by DVULI's Ron Carter

"The Road to Character is a must-read. It offers an insightful analysis into the importance of character to long-term leadership sustainability."

- Ron Carter, DVULI Staff

Nike, More Than a Name It's My Life: From Trauma to Triumph

By Nike Greene
(Portland 2015)



SCAN TO READ the online book review
by DVULI's Eileen Kooreman.

"Nike Greene uses her own story to tell about her journey with abuse and trauma. As a marriage and family therapist, Nike knows better than anyone that just acknowledging trauma is important but not enough. She shares how she took action that finally freed her to heal and gave her victory over her past."

- Eileen Koorman, DVULI Staff

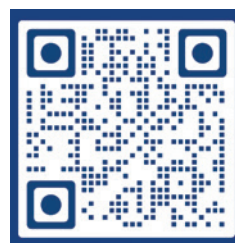
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WHAT YOU GO THROUGH!*

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Journal daily in faith trusting that your mindset will improve over time.

STUCK? Seek help from an accountability partner, pastor, or a behavioral health professional.



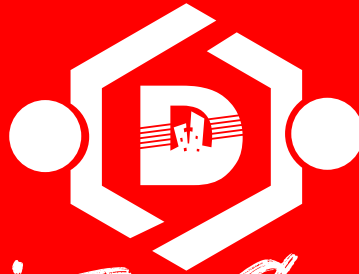
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