

# ON THE LEVEL

## **Kim Emch**

*Since 2007 this executive director has addressed poverty in her community while modeling for youth the good in hard work.*



**Celebrating  
20 Years**



# Heaven's Sudden Gain

Orlando Rivera: August 03, 1965 – May 28, 2018

The DVULI family is mourning the tragic loss of Orlando Rivera (Orlando 1998) who went to be with the Lord on the morning of May 28, 2018. His unexpected death was the result of a head-on highway collision.

Since its inception, Orlando has been affiliated with DVULI. He was part of the original listening groups that helped shape the program. He was one of our first City Coordinators and soon became a DVULI workshop instructor, national conference presenter, morning devotions speaker, cohort coach, part-time staff liaison, and contributor to our curriculum redesign.

Orlando touched countless lives in a very special way and will be sadly missed by a significant number of DVULI alumni and participants that he impacted over his more than 20-year involvement in the Initiative.

There was a profound outpouring of love and support from DVULI fellows who called, sent text messages, emails and thousands of social media posts expressing condolences, sympathy, sorrow and shock.

Celebration of life services were held in both Orlando, FL and on the East Coast with a very large number of people in attendance to honor his life, legacy and impact.

Our prayers remain with the Rivera family.

We miss you Orlando.





# Hope for The Heart

Resource recommendation by Angela Reeves (Chicago 2002)

As a Young Life staff person for (a combined) 19 years, I've found that counseling youth is inevitable. In doing so, not only do I have to lean on God and the power of His Spirit, but I have also looked to a very valuable and supportive resource in *Hope for The Heart: A Biblical Counseling Ministry* by June Hunt.

This series is an effective resource for youth workers because it offers Biblical tools that provide the leader the advantage of viewing life from a wider perspective, as they empower individuals and families to reach their God-given potential. Youth leaders will learn the essence of building solid relationships (which is essential in partnering with youth and families) and offering practical solutions to many of life's daily struggles.

The series emphasizes reconciliation and restoration. It will challenge leaders to become more compassionate in reflective listening, understanding the challenges of young people, and problem solving while encouraging the leader to develop a deeper level of insight and spiritual maturity. Hope for The Heart is a multi-faceted approach to understanding and addressing the complex needs of others and accounts for all four dimensions of personhood created by God (physical, social, psychological and spiritual).

Those who use this tool will learn or rediscover that there is an intrinsic value, dignity and strength within our youth and their families – despite their problems. Over the years this series has helped me become more effective as an instrument in the hands of God! It continues to be a life-saver for me and others.

Visit <http://www.hopefortheheart.org>



# HOPE

*for the Heart*



# Double Vision, Singular Focus

Maneuvering the Gospel among church and non-church youth

by Din Tolbert (New York 2009)

In the youth church where I began my formal God learning, it felt like young people of all types could encounter a supportive atmosphere for faith development. Arriving as an unchurched pre-teen (supported in my faith, but never really informed by my immediate family), I worshipped alongside preacher's kids and children of "first pew families," but I never felt like the gospel being presented was for them and not me. There is a skill in fostering that type of vibe, one I tried to emulate when I became pastor of that very same youth church in 2007. During my five years there, my team prayerfully focused on the commonalities of youth and how to faithfully present Jesus to all who walked through our doors, from functional atheists to future pastors.

Since resigning as a church youth pastor, I have spent the last six years in youth development and advocacy in predominantly secular settings which has only served to crystalize my thoughts on how to effectively introduce youth to Jesus. While a good deal of the church training I received on breaking down the Gospel for a captive audience still had merit in detention facilities and afterschool programs, the approach to connecting – and the journey towards earning trust enough to be heard – in my secular work spaces were humbling learning curves for me.

Therefore, because I'm still learning, I recently took the opportunity to sit down with two of my deeply committed bivocational colleagues to discuss what works, what doesn't and what's on the horizon for youth ministry. My friend Tiffany is a minister and teacher in the Metro DC area and Katrice is an Area Director with YoungLife and worship pastor in New York City.

**Q: What is one of the biggest differences in the way kids show up outside of church as opposed to in church?**

K: The filter...or the complete lack of one [laughs]. The motivation and processes are different. Some of the kids I work with are still on the fence with their faith and may not have the language to describe their evolving thoughts in Christian or spiritual terms but they know they want to "be what we've been to them, to another kid,"

so they keep showing up. That's a different kind of energy in the room. They're really putting a microscope on you, asking uncomfortable questions (again, no filter), testing the limits of your patience or composure to see if your love runs out. They're checking for your life's consistency with the essence of your message, sometimes before they begin to intentionally pursue the Christ whose message it is.

T: Outside of church, the distress is more visible in their speech, actions and demeanor. They want to discuss what's going on in their personal lives and, though they are always ready to learn, they are more so concerned with having an outlet to express themselves. In the church ministry space, they show up prepared to discuss the word of God. It's more structured.

**Q: Assuming you have operational control in both**





settings, it seems like that's more an issue of design. Some might say that you could keep the conversation more structured in the non-church space if you wanted to.

K: But why would you want to? Whatever behavioral, emotional, development issues a kid is having are important. Meeting them where they are and hearing them out first earns you your right to be heard, to minister. I'd rather have a young person know they won't be judged for what they share and that they will be accepted for who they are because then, you don't have these "eggshell conversations" where they're hiding and you're both pretending that they don't think or act in ways that they do.

Q: Agreed, I think it's a bit of a false victory when policed behaviors don't show up in church. That doesn't signal change to me as much as it does fear or something else. What do you think about that?

K: Yeah, in church, sometimes people believe kids have to be a certain way to be in a room. It's very much about the appearance. That type of thing needs to be unlearned so people can embrace the way that Jesus actually did this ministry. It's about seeking a heart transformation that will then affect the behavioral piece.

T: Absolutely. It's important to set expectations, but to always create an outlet for them to express themselves and, in your responses to those expressions, to pick and choose your battles. Know that not everything needs to be made into a big deal.

Q: Do you prepare for your work with youth any differently, depending on the context?

T: My sense of mission during my work day is not separate from my church-based work. My calling is to work with and empower youth and young adults and so I am always immersed, learning and growing in that work. I am very intentional about ensuring that my life spiritually and socially aligns with God's will and purpose for me.

K: Same. I commit and recommit myself to living like Jesus in all of the spaces I occupy, moving into the community of people's lives

Q: Living with that level of intentionality, particularly for the benefit of others who are often at the beginning of a difficult and lifelong process can be hard work, with long gaps of time between clear victories. How do you keep yourself encouraged?

K: You have to redefine what a victory is. I have found that just a little moment of me opening up and showing care gives kids the opportunity to share their truth. When you're dealing with youth who – because of hopelessness, fear or shame – have been walking alone through very scary and difficult seasons of their lives long before they met you, every moment they don't literally run away from you is a win. So, when these happen, it's important to establish memorials of what God has done for you and for them, a thing that reminds you of God's good pleasure and delight at the work you have said yes to.

T: This may sound weird but, say I'm sorry as often as the opportunity calls for it. Frustration can easily come from feeling like I'm pouring out and it's not being received gratefully. I need to recognize that I make mistakes, offend unintentionally and am in a process of learning too. It's encouraging and exciting to see that I still have room to improve, that God is calling me – and equipping me – to get better at loving and serving. Plus, centering myself in the humility of apology, opens me up to receive the grace, resilience and wisdom that our young people quietly carry.



*Din E. Tolbert (New York City, 2009) is a STEM Program Director at the Posse Foundation in New York City. With over 15 years of youth and leadership development experience, he is a sought-after workshop facilitator, preacher and panelist.*



# Breakthrough — Cynthia Peña (Phoenix 2017)

In December of 2016, my 14-year old son was diagnosed with prediabetes and high blood pressure. My daughters, ages 12 and 10 at the time, were both diagnosed with high blood pressure as well.

This news was a game changer for my family! I looked for people to blame, but I knew that the one to blame was me. I was the one who did the cooking at home.

We did not exercise, nor did we eat healthily. Yet somehow I expected us to be healthy. The doctor told us that if we didn't make a change that very day, in 2016, that I would have to start injecting my son with insulin. Right away I went home and disposed of all the sugar I had in the house. I threw out all the noodles (the kid's favorite). I threw out all junk food from our home and replaced it with vegetables, chicken, ground turkey, and meal prep containers. We started on a weight loss journey together.

I'm not going to lie! The first 35 days were extremely hard! At our dinner table, there were tears from my children. Tears because they were still hungry. Tears because they didn't like what they were eating. Tears because they didn't want to follow a meal plan. My kids wanted to eat the way I had always let them eat but I stuck to our new routine and told them this was the new lifestyle we were going to lead. Not only did I have to lead, I had to be the example for my children. I insisted that everyone in our home was going to eat healthily.



**The Peña family determined to notice a healthy difference in their lives.**

Our next step was to find a place locally to exercise. We found a free workout program right in our community. We went to our first workout session and that was very hard as we did not have the habit of working out before. It was VERY tough for us but we got through it. Session after session we pushed through and kept the schedule that required us to work out every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday – and even some Saturdays.

Six months into our journey everything was going great, so much so that we started to coach the fit camps. We wanted to help others on their journey as well! Ultimately, we started our own fit camp,



a workout boot camp for the whole family at any age and completely free. We also started our own nutrition shop where we sell smoothies. We relished helping, caring and loving other families on their weight loss and journey to a healthier life.

A year later, I took my kids back to their doctor and he told me that my children are healthier than they have ever been. What exciting news! Full of joy, my kids jokingly asked the doctor if they could go back to eating unhealthy again!

This gave me the perfect opportunity to explain to them the importance of living a healthy lifestyle while they are young, so that when they are older it would be easier to practice preventing many of the health risks that come from an unhealthy lifestyle. I also had the opportunity to teach them that it is God's will for us to be healthy. Healthy in body, mind, and soul. First, it starts with our relationship with Jesus than with our relationship with food and exercise.

We are so grateful to, as a family, say Jesus is the one who gave us the strength because we wouldn't have been able to accomplish this in our own strength. Now, almost two years later, I am down 80 pounds, my son has dropped 65 pounds, my now 14-year old daughter is down 30 pounds, and my youngest daughter is 26 pounds lighter! We can honestly say today that we are finally living life in the abundance the Bible speaks of. I am living the life of balance that I have prayed for.

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## Reunion 2019 Contest

Celebrate **20 Years** of DVULI and win **20%** of your travel costs!

If your travel distance is more than 100 miles from home to the Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass in Phoenix, AZ, you qualify for the grand prize giveaway of a travel voucher for **20%** of your round trip travel expense to Reunion 2019!

Go to: [dvuli.org/ReunionContest](http://dvuli.org/ReunionContest) and enter in the code: **contest2019**

Deadline to enter this issue's contest is September 3, 2018.

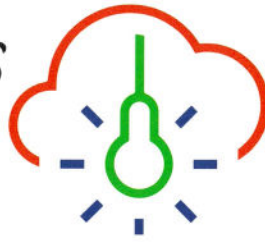




# Dream Catchers

## Letting Children Lead the Way

by Kim Emch (Columbus 2017)



It was late June 2012 at Serving Our Neighbors (SON) Ministries' Free Lunch Summer Camp for Kids when God revealed a new level of relationship and opportunity He was providing us with. Our program feeds children facing poverty in a suburban community. This camp was taking place when school was not in session, and access to free or reduced-priced lunch was no longer an option for the summer months.

Sixteen of the fourth, fifth and sixth-grade campers began acting rather ornery. It was clear they were bored. We sat them down to talk (one girl and fifteen boys) and started to dream together.

The talk went like this:

Leaders: "You all seem bored, are you?"

Children: "Yes!"

Leaders: "Well what would you rather we do here at camp? We're *dream catchers* [right?] We dream BIG here at the Hilliard Free Summer Lunch program... Then we go after our dreams. What do you dream about?"

Children: (After much discussion) "We want to start a restaurant! A Mexican restaurant! We'll use our families' secret recipes. We'll run the whole thing. We'll make the food [ourselves]..."

Leaders: "Ok, if you create this whole restaurant we'll bring you customers... real customers!"

Children: "We thought we'd just be serving the younger campers... REAL customers? Let's start this Friday!"

We were amazed; in effect, their dream was to WORK and SERVE people!

The room exploded. The dream had begun. Each child was on fire with the passion that only dreams can give! While the children created an entire restaurant, camp leaders got busy inviting key community friends (mayor, pastors, superintendent of schools, city council, employees of the BMW Financial Services and lawyers, restaurant entrepreneurs, congressmen, senators, and others).

They named it "Taco Bell Jr." and it debuted ONE WEEK from our dream talk.

missed by these amazing children. There were chefs, hosts, servers, managers, treasurers, buyers. They even wrapped pipe cleaners around the napkins holding the plastic silverware. I had to leave the room at four different instances because I was sobbing (happy tears rejoicing at what God had done).

Every week the restaurant grew; desert got fancier, artwork was added, and the children became increasingly proud of a job well done.

Leaders throughout the community witnessed how even "the least of these", are endowed with immense assets and can do great things when adults, who love them unconditionally through Jesus, surround them, listen to them and encourage them to dream!

By inventing and running a real restaurant, these children taught me:

1. Adults can make work appear



The morning of the restaurant's opening had been rough for me (one of our staff had a tree fall on her house, another's car was missing – feared stolen) but nothing was going to keep me from this launch. I had made a promise to 16 children! I ran through the parking lot determined to be on time. I walked in and was BLOWN AWAY as I was met by a "young host" who greeted me with a cheery welcome and escorted me to my seat in their "Taco Bell Jr." restaurant. No detail had been

undesirable to children: When we say, "I'll help you" or "I'll do it for you," (when they really don't need help) we steal the joy of work from them!

2. Working and serving people is FUN: When asked to dream, the children did not ask me to take them shopping or to Disney World. They wanted to work and serve others.

3. When we work there is a feeling of pride unlike anything else!





4. At any age, children can do work that they are proud of.

5. Adults spend a tremendous amount of time at work and we should like, if not love it!

6. Work helps us find our gifts and talents, and learn how to work with and appreciate people.

So, we fanned the flame! The children dreamed of this going worldwide – children running their own businesses. We formed a partnership with Junior Achievement USA, and we brought in CEOs and business owners to teach the children about running your own business and multiplied this camp curriculum. Children were learning to invent and run their own business inside our free summer lunch camp at two more summer free lunch campsites serving hundreds of children.

This very summer of 2012, we had two new businesses created outside of camp! We wanted to use this camp season with the children to help them become their best and hopefully equip them to combat poverty.

As a result, two fifth-grade-girls invented their very own business selling slime. They wrote a business plan, found an ‘investor’ (Grandma), tested their product, added coloring and scents, did a price analysis and sold it as customers left Taco Bell Jr. (and to their friends at camp). They are planning to expand their clientele by selling their product on

Etsy!

Another elementary school aged child who volunteered at SON Camps with her mother this summer made cupcakes. She set up a sidewalk stand on her street and sold the cupcakes by chanting; “Free cupcakes, donations accepted for SON Ministries”. Her mom proudly said, “Apparently the lessons about life skills and running your own business rubbed off for my child too!”

Since 2012, countless members of our community have entered the doors of SON Ministries. While each child comes for a daily lunch, community members get to see and meet children with amazing gifts and talents and have the opportunity to encourage them to become champions as they run the businesses they dreamt up.

Three key principles you can take away to your youth program that we learned through DeVos and you can see in this story:

**1. God created work before the fall.** We yearn to instill in every child facing poverty that we love and serve a commitment to being lifelong workers, learners and community change agents. Part of that is flipping the paradigm of *work* – making it FUN again! See it through the eyes of a child. Our experience has shown us that the lifelong learning and community change agent concepts come as a natural outpouring from work.

**2. Youth have a voice.** I did not sit at a table with super-smart youth leaders and brainstorm this child-invented and operated restaurant idea! The children invented it when we invited them into our refuge, built a respect-filled relationship with them, and then asked and listened. The youth voice needs to be at the decision-making table throughout our communities. So, it must start at our ministry - asking and listening to the children. “What do you know? What can we learn from you?” Ask and learn.

**3. View young people as assets.**

People are and have resources. Which means youth are and have resources and assets too. As youth workers, we should never think they don’t or won’t until they are older. These children were fourth, fifth and sixth graders – hardly on the planet one decade. They could dream; dream big, create and execute well.



*Kim Emch (Columbus 2017) is the Founder and Executive Director of Serving Our Neighbors (SON) Ministries in Columbus, Ohio. SON-Ministries.org*



# INCLUSIVE HEALING FOR #MeToo

Opinion by Juan Garcia (Newark 2014)



The #MeToo movement has come and impacted all spheres of culture as we know it. It is not a “poor me” movement. It is not a movement that says, “I’m down with that too.” It is a movement for those individuals that have bravely decided that “enough is enough and I am not going to be a silent victim anymore.”

This is a movement that has been empowered to speak for the silent sufferers of sexual abuse, harassment and overall inappropriate behavior in a sexual context. This is a movement that has been emboldened to make it clear, to all who will listen, that it is here to fight for the right to be an individual who will not be taken advantage of.

As youth leaders in an urban context, we need to be aware of the reality that sexually inappropriate behavior is not going to just disappear. We need to take steps to be relevant and effective in this very important cultural crisis. Be it small group

discussions or viewing videos that stimulate open dialogue, we must be positioned to listen and allow others to talk openly.

It’s easy to have forums and lessons about sex in the context of marriage, and it being enjoyed the way God intended it to, but we have to address what is standing in the way of our youth embracing what the Bible says (and not what their body’s desire is). We need to be available and ensure that we create a safe environment for conversation that is healthy, holistic and sensitive to not only those that have been victimized but also the family and loved ones of those afflicted by sexual violence. Moreover, we need to create some preventative measures, as well as an awareness of potential warning signs for being taken advantage of and those that are doing the advantage taking; especially if they are in leadership.

Which raises the question of

how do we address the leader that is using his or her position to take advantage of someone? Are we ready and willing to go into prayer and ask the Lord that truth be revealed? Are we willing to speak the truth in love

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and grace to those that may be in denial about their actions? These are some of the questions that we, as leaders, must be prepared to address and have much dialogue about.

Addressing this need must be a big commitment for those doing urban ministry! I believe that never in the history of leadership





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has it been more important to hold people accountable and ask the right and extremely uncomfortable questions to prevent sexual violence. Let us not be part of the problem by remaining silent.

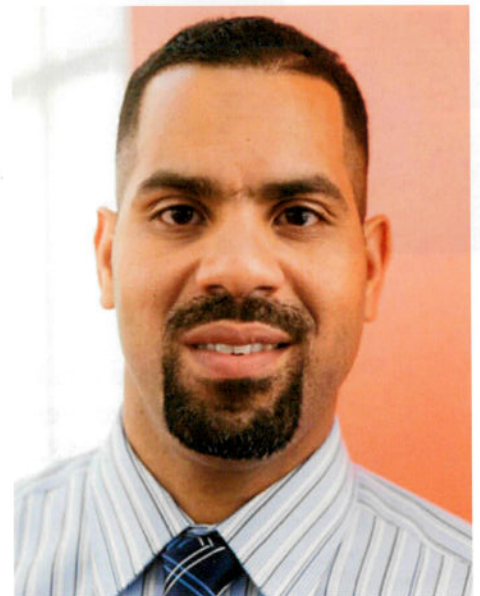
they were violated by someone who is also crying out. And there is a strong likelihood that the victimizer has only repeated what happened to her or him – thus perpetuating this sad cycle.

Where is the person or resources to facilitate the healing that is needed? Is the church or our ministries that safe environment for a healthy dialogue? Is there a healthy journey to wholeness for those affected? I believe the #MeToo movement has shined a light on an important element of the sex conversation. But only the True Light that we possess in Christ can heal both those who are receiving and rendering the hurt.

For resources on how to minister to those impacted by sexual violence, visit [rightnowmedia.org](http://rightnowmedia.org) (search Sexual Violence).

*Got an opinion about subject matter impacting your work as an urban youth leader?*

*Email: [staff@dvuli.org](mailto:staff@dvuli.org)*



*Juan Garcia (Newark 2014) is a youth and family counselor, a Certified Life Coach to professional athletes, and a public speaker. Juan and his wife Deborah currently serve as Associate Pastors at Christian Community of Praise in Paterson, NJ. [juangarciaenterprises.com](http://juangarciaenterprises.com)*

*Opinions expressed by alumni do not necessarily reflect the views of DVULI.*

**Church have stayed silent if we do not rise up and be a voice for all. This includes the victimizer.**

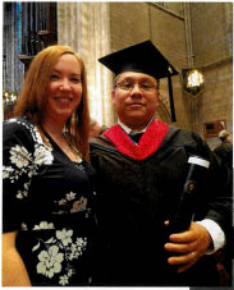
Far too many in the church have stayed silent and may continue to remain silent if good leadership does not rise up and be intentional about caring for all. This includes those victimized and the victimizer. While the young woman or young man that has been inappropriately violated is crying loudly for help, we should keep in mind that



# Alumni Updates



For more, visit:  
[facebook.com/dvuli](https://facebook.com/dvuli)  
[instagram.com/dvuli](https://instagram.com/dvuli)



Edwin Arevalo (Paterson 2001) received his Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary on May 19, 2018.



Jaye Hill (Detroit 2004) has become the new Campus Pastor for Woodside Bible Detroit East.



Elgin Tunstall (Memphis 2004) and his beautiful bride Kandice were married on March 17, 2018.

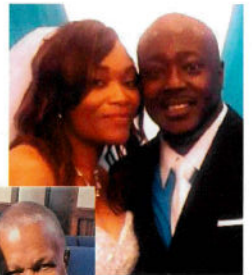


Sheronia Rogers (New York 2009) became Assistant Dean for Operations & Engagement at Rutgers University.

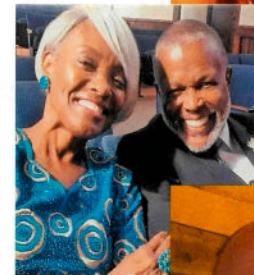


Mike Myers (Miami 2018) and his wife Alessandra are the proud parents of a baby boy. Benjamin Alexander Myers was born on March 1, 2018.

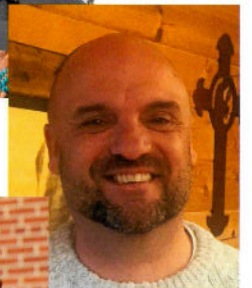
Jake Bradford (St. Louis 2017) and the beautiful April Bradford were joined in holy matrimony on March 24, 2018.



Thomas and Beverly Brown (Orlando 2010) had a scholarship established in their name at Florida A&M University.



Marshall Snider (Portland 2014) is the new NW Region Strategic Overseer at the Complementor and C4 Group.



Ron Carter (Birmingham 1999) completed his Master of Divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary on May 19, 2018.

