



ON THE LEVEL



YOUTH VIOLENCE IN THE CITY

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THE VIOLENT TAKE IT BY FORCE

TAKING STOCK AND ADAPTING THE MISSION

By Amy Williams

- Kadreidrah Marsh (15) shot over a boy by a 20 year old
- Albert Vaughn (18) beat to death with a baseball bat by a 22 year old
- Arthur Jones (10) caught in gang crossfire, shot by 17 year old
- Roky Uriostegui (16) targeted and killed by a 16 year old gang member

MURDERED: Miguel Gomez, 16 - Karlton Well, 16 - Leonardo Otero, 15 - Paris Bassett, 16 - Israel Mendoza, 13 - Dalvin Miller, 14 ...and sadly, the list goes on...

Chicago seems to have been dubbed the "teen murder capital of 2008" by most that have seen and experienced the increase of violent crimes in 2008 alone.

According to the July 25th edition of the Chicago Sun Times, "Murders are up 13 percent. During the past school year, 29 Chicago-area youths were killed by gunfire. On one April weekend, 40 people were shot. Over the July Fourth weekend, nine people were gunned down - with three more killed this past weekend."

AssociatedContent.com reporter Zane WaltZ stated in his article *Obama Campaigns as Chicago Murder Rate Soars* that "during the first four months of 2008, 134 murders were committed in Chicago. In comparison, according to icasualties.com, a total of 160 Americans were killed in all of Iraq during the same period."

Chicago is in trouble! ...and I am sure you can say the same about your community. As a result of this tension, the fear among students and residents, the lack of effective policing strategies, and an increase of gang activity, our communities are desperately screaming for solutions to curb the violence...and we, as urban youth leaders, are looking to God to bring peace to a violent nation in the midst of instability and uncertainty...and peace to our youth who struggle with turmoil in their hearts.

As urban youth leaders, we have experienced how violence affects our ministries, the schools and community. We know that violence comes in many forms - not just murder - but also domestic violence, sexual abuse, bullying and harassment, and verbal abuse to mention a few. Though many of our youth have experienced one or more of these at a time, many of our youth are also the perpetrators of such violent acts. This can be a true struggle for the youth worker to balance and juggle such a mixture of youth.

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HERE'S MY TAKE

TIME FOR A NEW MODEL?

By Gerald Bell

It's fast becoming a hard reality for many urban youth workers. Adding youth violence or gang intervention to their programming is now a necessity. How many who felt the call to work with at risk kids imagined it would mean head on confrontation with gang affiliated youth. Yet more and more leaders are getting caught between serving kids holistically and protecting them from recruitment or harm by local gangs. The violent uprising being perpetrated by urban youth is changing the way many ministries and organizations are addressing their cause to improve neighborhoods. From LA to Philly, alumni of DeVos Urban Leadership contend that the price of doing youth ministry has never been higher due to violence...Here's their take!

Jonny Fine (Cleveland, 2007)

At Youth for Christ I have about 80 kids that come to club each week, and I'll bet one out of five... are in a gang or affiliated. I have hired Cleveland police to provide security for 2 ½ hours a week to protect our youth and our volunteers. Addressing youth violence or intervening in gang activity is a part of the ministry but not a part of the ministry objective. So we have created small character groups that teach kids purpose. We let them know that the world is bigger than their five block radius. We try to help them realize, for instance, that the mathematic skills they have could be a career if they'd use it legitimately and not for running drugs

on the street. I've had to become a community liaison to mediate between rival gang leaders with the support of the police department, key church leaders and indigenous adult leaders that kids respect. Although Cleveland gangs are not as big as Chicago or LA gangs, the biggest and craziest gang is the Skulls. We also have the Latin Kings and the Bloods. One time an enforcer from the Bloods came to YFC Club Outreach and threatened me because one of their recruits (my youth) wasn't wearing his colors at all times. So I am confronted with violent youth all the time but because it's in me to advocate for a safer community, I'm not going to run.

V.J. Smith (Minneapolis, 2006)

At MAD DADS we encounter gangs on the street every day. North Minneapolis is where a lot of them come from, and one of the toughest youth gangs is the Emerson Murder Boys. Every time we're in one of their territories they fire gun shots in the air. That doesn't stop us. Our first approach is to show them love. We give them the hug they haven't been getting. The hug that says we want you to live. It's our way of addressing the emotional piece. Sometimes their emotional needs aren't met until they are incarcerated in a detention center. It is a mixed blessing to see that same thug who we encountered on the street connect to Mad Dads when they are locked up. The next step is to offer life skills training and equip them to believe in themselves. Our last step is to provide sustainability on the job by showing them how to communicate

with supervisors and co-workers and to remain employed. Coming from a city with 200 homicides last year, that is no big deal to most gangs but it is a big deal to us. We have to help them figure out how to make the right decisions and give them the tools to live right.

Melvin Cole (Kansas City, 2001)

At Freedom Fire Ministries our mission is to equip youth to guide the community spiritually, economically and socially. But I am getting more and more experience in this community than I ever had in dealing with both violent youth and gangs. I've noticed a twist in how youth settle their beefs with each other. A gang called Five Ace Duce shows up here to use our computer lab. They go online to access Facebook and Myspace and threaten other gangs back and forth. They'll say "I'm going to kill your momma, your family, and then you," all on the internet. These youth will meet up some place to retaliate...and not with fist fighting, they have guns. We allow gangs to use the computer lab and it allows me to get to know them because they have to sign in. That's my entry to asking questions and start opening up the lines of communication. In bits and pieces, I win the right to be heard. Eventually I find out what felt needs are not being met and connect them with people who can address those needs. Most often these young boys just need a good Christian man in their life. We're seeing how it's best to go deeper versus wider.

BRIEF NEWS AND BREAKTHROUGHS

Harold Sparrow (Boston 2000) is now Sr. VP of Development for the YMCA of Greater Boston. Harold is overseeing a multimillion dollar capital campaign that includes both corporate and individual donors. Funding will go towards the renovation and building of three new YMCA's in the Boston area. "I've been able to maximize what Danny Cortes taught in Resource Networking," Harold said. "Leveraging resources has been very applicable to my achievements in ministry."

Chana Edmond-Verley (Grand Rapids, 2000) recently began working with RDV Corporation as the Foundations Senior Program Officer, Community Initiatives. Chana will lead the foundations' efforts in identifying strategies for community impact, especially focusing on youth in the Grand Rapids area. "Like Nehemiah

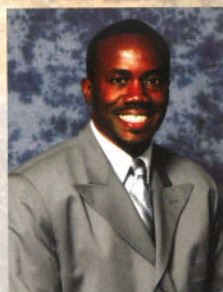


my heart is burdened by the 'broken down walls' as evidenced by the violence and despair prevalent in our city," she said. "I am honored by the charge to influence and resource systems change for the 'peace and prosperity' of all youth in our community."

Eddie Cole (Orlando, 2000) was elected for his third term on City Council for the city of Eatonville, Florida. Eddie is responsible for the policies and procedures of the city.

"I plan to work even harder for the youth this term," he said. "I don't believe kids are at-risk. I believe the communities where kids live are at risk systems." With that Eddie plans to approve more support for local youth services and programs.

Andrew Campos (Kansas City, 2001) accepted the position of Grants Coordinator for Swope Health Service (SHS). Andrew monitors the organization's grants/



contracts insuring proper reporting and compliance to the mission of the organization. "It is a change in environment from my past work but I am up for the challenge," he said. SHS is a local nonprofit that serves low-income uninsured, under insured and homeless. "I really like working here," adds Andrew. "You can feel the Lord's presence in the staff and within the facility."

Paul Espinosa (Denver, 2003) has become the new pastor of Zion Assembly of God Church in Grand Junction, CO. Since August of 2007 Paul has been shepherding and leading this congregation where he succeeded the prior pastor. "This is a church that was ready for change," Paul says. "We have felt no resistance and I couldn't have asked for anything more."

Gerald and Debbye Bell (Kansas City, 2003) blissfully exchanged wedding vows on July 18, 2008 in Battery Park in New York City. The five clergy ceremony pronounced the couple husband and wife for their first kiss. "It all seemed



to happen so fast," said Gerald about the ceremony. "I just remember crying as my bride walked down the aisle and staring into her eyes at the altar." The newlyweds spent their honeymoon in Cabo San Lucas.

Liza and Daniel Cagua-Koo (Boston 2006) married on July 26, 2008 at St. Paul AME Church in Cambridge, MA. "It was a spirit-filled gathering and such an anointed ceremony," recalls Liza. "There were a lot of DeVos alumni there too." Liza said of her husband who took



off 4-years from med school to minister to high risk Vietnamese youth, "He's amazing!"

Liz Hickman (Indianapolis, 2007) has assumed a staff position with Brookside Community Church. As a member of the BCC staff Liz is responsible for communications, outreach missions, women's counseling and women's Bible studies. "This opportunity will help immensely as I continue to strive for a more 'balanced life,'" said Liz in an email blast. "I am honored to be able to do this in partnership with a DVULI grad who, like me, desires to see the people in the Brookside Community become its leaders."

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

HISPANIC PRAYER BREAKFAST 2008

BY RICK DIAZ

Graduates of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative were among hundreds of ministry leaders and pastors who gathered in Washington, DC in June for the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast. The 3-day convening of Hispanic American clergy addressed the value of community engagement, the relevance and importance of advocacy vs. lobbying, and the lack of adequate housing in the Hispanic community. In addition, there were opportunities for networking, ministry resource exhibits and visits to museums, monuments and other local sites.

President George W. Bush delivered the keynote address at the breakfast, which is the largest of its kind. The president encouraged attendees to remain strong as a community of faith and to remember "you're sustained by prayer." With prayer and worship as part of the agenda, many prayers were offered up for our nation's leaders, troops, families and children. Following President Bush's speech, DVULI delegates were among the first to meet and greet him with hand shakes, words of encouragement and photo ops.

Esperanza Martinez (Miami, 2007), an alumni delegate said she "was most impacted by the breadth of work that is being done across the U.S. to raise up leadership within our community. And [I] was even more motivated to see the coming together of not just Hispanics, but of people of faith."



The following were selected to represent the Initiative in our nation's capital:

John Echeverria (San Diego, 2001)
Willie Maldonado (Chicago, 2000)
Esperanza Martinez (Miami, 2007)
Robyn Moya (San Diego, 2001)
Refugio Moya (San Diego, 2001)
Chris Negrón (Chicago, 2007)
Mary Rengifo (Miami, 2007)

Dear DeVos Family,

Thank you so much for giving my husband Cuco and I the opportunity to attend the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast and Conference. We counted it such a privilege to attend. We learned a lot and we were encouraged to be able to meet other Hispanic Christians who have a passion for the same things that we do.

I found the immigration workshop to be especially informative. I learned a lot of practical information which I intend to pass on to those in our community. I also appreciated being able to listen to the campaign managers for both presidential candidates.

Cuco loved being able to meet other Hispanic Christians, and he was extremely blessed by the worship and prayer times. We were also thrilled to be in Washington D.C. It was Cuco's first time. All in all, it was a wonderful trip and we so appreciate the opportunity to be able to attend.

Ever since I went through the DeVos training in 2001, I have marveled at how much your generosity has affected so many people in profound ways. Thank you so much! May you and your loved ones experience God's abundant blessings.

Love,

Cuco and Robyn Moya

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN
BRINGING THIS TRAINING TO
YOUR CITY, PLEASE CONTACT OUR
OFFICE.

LEADING FOR LIFE

ALUMNI EQUIPPED TO LEAD NEW DEVOS TRAINING

BY EILEEN KOOREMAN

Six excited alumni arrived in Grand Rapids the week of August 4, for training and orientation to become Leading for Life trainers for the DeVos Initiative. Graduates from cities that will potentially host Leading for Life were invited to apply. Some 20 applications were received and six people were chosen for the first round of certification. This opportunity will be repeated as the need for more trainers arises in the future.

The orientation process included actually presenting the material to each other and our staff as the audience and then receiving feedback on how the presentation went. Though preparing and presenting in front of peers can be nerve racking, each person did an excellent job, and we expect they will 'do us proud.'

Leading for Life was then presented to an audience of ministry workers from Grand Rapids. The feedback from the evaluations was again testimony to the powerful impact this material has each time it is presented to a new audience.

We now have six newly qualified trainers to present Leading for Life on behalf of DVULI in their own cities and in other locations as needed.

Congratulations new Leading for Life instructors!

Ray Banks (Chicago South 2007)
Cynthia Burton (San Diego 2001)
Khary Bridgewater (Boston 2006)
Anna Scott (Orlando 2000)
Karin Wall (Boston 2000)
Amy Williams (Chicago 2007)

COVER STORY- CONT.

I see and feel the shift in tone of my ministry when I am teaching a class and a gang member enters the room, when a bully tells a kid where they can sit, when youth are afraid to walk home because they have to pass the Latin King's corner, when we lose a teen to murder, when a youth decides to join a gang for protection and money, when a girl has been raped and you try to give her a hug...

Sometimes, we feel hopeless. Many times, we feel helpless. Most times, we feel overwhelmed. But at all times, we must pursue the peace and wisdom of God and the hearts of our youth.

As a youth pastor in Humboldt Park (a community known for its rich Puerto Rican culture and for being extremely gang infested), I have seen how the increased violence on, with, and through youth has impacted ministry – both negatively and positively.

The negative effects are quite obvious to most ministries, including increased security measures, more anger control issues, more time spent transporting youth through rough communities both day and night, more conflict resolution between students, more time visiting juvenile detention centers, etc.

But I would like to focus more on how I have seen the violence impact Chicago ministries positively...sounds crazy right? Who would have thought Romans 8:28 would take on a new meaning?

Community wide, I have seen ministries come together for the first time to see how we can invoke the power of God that lives within us to supernaturally change our situation. There are already so many violence prevention programs, after school initiatives, STOP the Violence workshops, conferences and concerts offered by both by secular and faith based organizations. But what makes my heart beat with joy, is seeing ministries and churches gather together for prayer, doing more outreaches together (something Chicago churches are not known for)! I have attended meetings where a group of youth pastors gathered to see what we, as believers, can contribute to the

work already being done. We didn't start with putting together another program but by praying every Saturday morning for an hour at three local high schools. I have seen more collaboration and partnerships formed because the focus has become more about how to prevent losing more youth not how to build bigger ministries.

Ministry wide, I have seen an increased desire in our youth to be involved in social justice and community issues as it relates to violence. They are on the front line! This is affecting them more

intimately than it ever has – and I know my youth believe they have the power to change it! It has also opened doors for more discussion, leadership trainings and teaching youth more about their responsibility and the power they have to change their schools and communities. I have witnessed my youth reaching out more to their friends and more of these friends attending our events/services as they look for ways to stay off the street. With the many STOP the Violence gatherings, youth have had opportunities to participate, march and share their voice with community leaders...and the list goes on.

Violence has been a huge part of human existence, as even documented by the Bible. It will never go away. It may even get worse as time goes by and yet, we serve a God that desires us to be on the frontline. We have chosen to walk side-by-side with youth as they navigate this journey called life. I encourage you to

not become overwhelmed by the violence but to remember Matthew 11:12 - the violent (we) must take our youth and communities BACK by force – through prayer, love and accessing the power of Almighty God!

Amy Williams (Chicago, 2007) is the Youth Pastor of Tha Christ C.R.E.W. (Called and Radically Equipped Warriors) at La Casa del Carpenters in Chicago, IL. She is a published contributor to magazines and the Urban Devotional Bible.



BEFORE YOU GO

Welcome Taylor Voss

By Gerald Bell

The staff of DeVos Urban Leadership is pleased to welcome Taylor Voss to the team as Communications Assistant. Taylor will support the communications manager by providing photography and graphic arts design for the DVULI eBlast, newsletter and other print materials. He will also coordinate updates and ongoing development of the Initiative's website.



Taylor is a 2008 graduate of Calvin College with a degree in Urban Studies; Sociology, Geography, and Environmental Studies. He has a sharp creative side that allows him to express his love for the urban community – which makes him a quality addition to our team!

"I feel honored to serve on the DVULI team," said Taylor. "Since my first interview

with the staff I knew that this would be an environment surrounded with amazing people in the office and in ministry across the [United States.] I am excited to be part of such an amazing program, Glory be to God!"

Originally from Phoenix, AZ, Taylor's love for photography and graphic arts happened in his high school web design class. Building sites for friends as practice led to helping businesses. One company gave Taylor a camera and he "ran with it from there using photography and [his] love of design to jumpstart a graphics art career."

Taylor is enjoying his life as a Grand Rapids, Michigan resident where he says friendships and "the supportive atmosphere" has contributed to his desire to stay. "Grand Rapids is filled with a plethora of Christ centered powerful organizations that are doing great things that I am passionate about (urban ministry and development)," says Taylor.

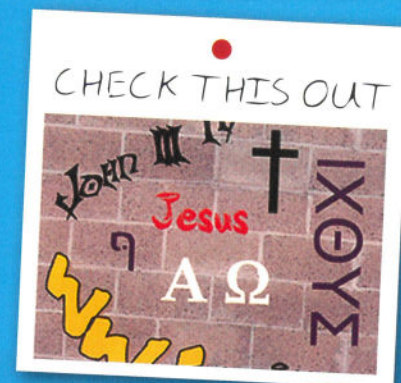
It is an exciting season for DeVos Urban Leadership, and having Taylor a part of all that is taking place adds to the excitement.

You can contact Taylor by email at: taylorv@rdvcorp.com.



Speaking of an exciting season...in case you didn't know, last January Ron Carter was re-welcomed as a telecommuting member of the DVULI team. His position is Manager of Resources and Training. "I believe God has more He wants to do through me with the Initiative. So whatever that is, I look forward to it!" Ron said.

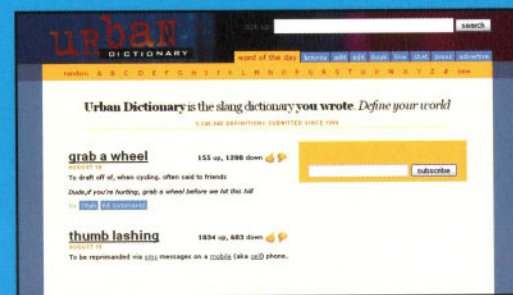
—Gerald Bell



YOUTH, GANGS, AND GOD.

Are you concerned about the impact gangs are having on your ministry and the youth you serve? Do you struggle to make sense of why young people join gangs? Have you longed for a resource—written from a Christian perspective—that not only deciphers the signs, symbols, language, and recruiting techniques used by gangs, but also provides practical strategies to help combat their influence? If so, get a copy of Michael M. Leonard's "Youth, Gangs, and God." It answers these questions and many more.

—Ron Carter



While you're browsing, click on www.urbandictionary.com and delve into a world of familiar words, but with unconventional meanings. You'll be "schooled" in the ever-changing slang lingo used by today's urban youth, which can help you in bridging this wide communication gap.

MESSAGE BOARD

These people have updated contact information:

Phone Number Changes:

Altricia Payton-Black (Cleveland 2007)
Vernon Hubbard (Houston 2003)
Harold Sparrow (Boston 2000)
Paul Espinoza (Denver 2003)
Derrick Reed (Pittsburgh 2006)
D'Andre Ash (Atlanta 2006)

Address:

Jennifer Jones (Grand Rapids 2006)
Liz Hickman (Indianapolis 2007)
Mark Singleton (Indianapolis 2007)
Marisa Wedges (Miami 2007)
Solomon Knight (Indianapolis 2005)
Andy Batten (Cleveland 2007)
Chris Negrón (Chicago 2007)

Email:

Noel Ritter (Chicago 2007)
Tomás Sanabria (Chicago 2000)
Liz Hickman (Indianapolis 2007)
Harold Sparrow (Boston 2000)
Deborah Wiggins (Orlando 2000)
Tony Wade (Memphis 2004)

*If you are interested in contacting any of these people, please visit the DeVos Urban Leadership website for updated contact information.
devosurbanleadership.org.*

CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2007!

It was a banner year for the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative as Chicago, Chicago South, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Miami comprised the DVULI's tenth graduating class. Each city group is to be commended for a breakthrough finish and coordinating graduation ceremonies that were done with excellence. This was a third round of training for Chicago and a first for Chicago South, Cleveland and Miami. Indianapolis completed its second training group respectively. Congratulations are in order for a job well done!



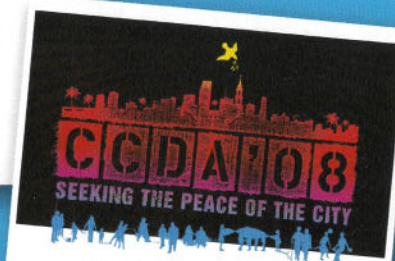
Second National
Conference

Systems Thinking

October 12-18
Holland, MI

2008/2009
Reload Tour
Urban Youth Workers
Training Event

See tour schedule at:
www.reloadtour.org



October 22-28
Miami, Florida

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