

ON THE LEVEL



YOUTH VIOLENCE IN THE CITY

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www.devosurbanleadership.org

SCHOOL'S OUT, SUMMER'S IN TAKING STOCK OF CHANGING RULES

By Nick Bolden

It used to be that as youths, we could be excited about the prospects of a fight. Usually fights were scheduled for after school or in some cases the very last day of class. There was a love for the sound of "the 3 o'clock bell" – we could count on a good exchange of blows waiting to erupt right outside the doors. Interestingly enough, no matter how big the fight, there was always an important consideration: the rules of the game.

Back then, we had the courtesy, respect and discipline to wait and handle matters after school. That discipline is gone. Once the fight broke up, we went home. You could choose to settle it the next day, or remain enemies. Oh, and another thing; at the end of it all no one was left dead.

As a Midwestern youth worker, when given the assignment to take stock of my community, some terrible reports had to be submitted - all of which left me with a single conclusion; the rules of the game have changed.

Here in Indianapolis, once affectionately known as "Naptown," the reality of the changing rules is becoming a little too common for comfort. Indiana Pacers' Jamaal Tinsley was out for a night on the town when an argument broke out at a local club. He left the club and was followed. Perhaps he thought being downtown Indianapolis, among bright lights and nearby police headquarters, was enough to

conjure up images of peace and safety. The people following Tinsley didn't see it that way. They decided to start shooting which happened to be right in front of the new Conrad Hilton Hotel. For Tinsley and his entourage, who were running for cover, it seemed that somebody changed the rules. Not only was one of the Pacers' officials wounded, but also buck-shots were found all over downtown Indianapolis landmarks.



January 15, 2008 the city of Indy made national news concerning what has been called the Hovey Street Murders. The story was that two women and two babies were killed. Robbery motivated by profit from alleged drug sales appears to have been the motive. Yet there was an interesting twist of events. The gang bangers and drug dealers of the city in a reversal of roles began

to advise the Indianapolis Police Department. "Find these killers or we will find them for you," they said in a fit of rage. It seems that there was a code of honor even among serious gangsters, "You don't kill women or children." Since these killers violated a gangster code, even the gangsters, having taken stock of the community concluded that the rules have changed.

Another detrimental development in the Midwestern city of Chicago made news

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HERE'S MY TAKE

NOT IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD!

By Gerald Bell

Really, it is old news! Youth and gang related violence has reached every ethnic and economic class in America. Like crossover music – armed robberies, school campus shootings, home invasions, along with other heinous acts are occurring in neighborhoods where historically it just wasn't heard of.

In a Las Vegas gated community with tennis courts and a golf course live the 311 Boyz. This gang made news headlines in 2003 for beating several teens – leaving one in need of titanium plates in his face and another with a broken jaw. The mostly Caucasian gang, police said were “from middle-to upper-class homes, and students at Centennial High School, a campus tucked away in an affluent section of northwest Las Vegas.” (2003)

This case is only one of the kind of uprisings bringing shock to many communities that are grasping for a plausible solution to end the spread of youth and gang violence in well-to-do areas. DeVos alumnus John Echeverria (San Diego, 2000) Ken Johnson (Indianapolis, 2005) and Natividad Mendoza (Phoenix, 2008) have first-hand insight about young gang developments among society's upper echelon. Here's their take...

Ken Johnson – Former Police Officer with Tulsa Police Department from 1984-2000

Today, some of the most prestigious neighborhoods are being hit hard by young gang bangers. You now have what black gangsters are calling “Wiggers.” These are white youth who want to act like black

gangsters. They are more dangerous than real gang members because they are acting out what they think being in a gang is. What they don't know is that real gangs are about protecting their people and their money, and they have codes for that. Real gangsters are kids conducting armed robbery like the bank robbery that happened about two weeks ago here in Indianapolis. The bank teller that got shot was a pregnant woman and she lost twins. In no other time have we been able to say we are raising a generation that has no spiritual foundation. It used to be that the worst of the worst kids were at least going to church. Now, too many have no Godly values or knowledge of God at all.

Natividad Mendoza – Former gang member and prison inmate

What makes being in a gang attractive to affluent youth is no different than what makes building a corporate dynasty appealing to their educated parents – everybody wants to be successful. Youth, however, are seeking success in acceptance. Their peers have a way of making them feel more important and accepted than their family at home – so it makes choosing gang membership easy. Also, gangs have a certain popularity that suburbia doesn't offer some kids. To be fully accepted in a gang, you have to prove yourself. Like a businessman, you have to do more than the next person in order to climb higher and reach the level of the people you look up to. A gang leader says ‘you can't be like me until you die to yourself.’ That means assaulting or hurting someone in your own family or community to prove that the gang family is more important than your real family. Once that happens it is hard to get out.

John Echeverria – Substance Abuse Counselor with San Diego County Probation Division

I meet kids who have joined a gang because they made a B or C grade and disappointed their parent's high expectations. The camaraderie and attention from the gang is a thrill that gives youth a high after feeling put down by mom or dad. We call them MTV gangsters. They are not in low income communities. They are educated, well-off kids who live in million dollar homes and their parents are well established business owners. In San Diego, kids get involved in various forms of gang-life such as cyber-wars which is online gang banging. Or tag-banging, which can get you a death sentence for crossing the graffiti line. Still, robberies, drug dealing and car-jacking are the most primary crimes these gang members commit. I know a kid who went up and knocked on another kid's door and shot and killed him while standing inside his living room. Unfortunately, these young minds are not cultivated enough to see the consequences of their choices.

Annually, the DVULI publishes three issues of *On the Level*. This year, the staff decided that due to the profound rise of violent youth crimes and gang affiliation, we would devote each edition to fostering a better understanding about what urban leaders are facing across the United States under such dire circumstances. We realize not every urban youth worker is reaching children exhibiting these behaviors. Therefore, the goal of this theme is to encourage the prayers and preventive measures of our readership and, most importantly, to inform. Your feedback is appreciated.

– Gerald Bell

BRIEF NEWS AND BREAKTHROUGHS

Arto Woodley (Orlando, 1998) is a recipient of The Heart of the Leader Award presented to graduates of the Lifework Leadership Orlando. Presented on May 15, 2008, at the Disney Contemporary Resort, Arto was one of three honorees for his exemplary example of Christian leadership. "Today, I have become the leader I am because of you," says Arto in an email statement announcing his award.



Jennifer Jones (Grand Rapids, 2006) is the new Youth Director for the Hope Center in Kansas City. Jennifer is responsible for leading the youth program staff, daily operations of their boys and girls leadership training program, and outreach bible study. She is also responsible for the high school Leaders in Training and Teen Bible Study. Jennifer relocated in April and is settling in to this new position and city just fine. "I enjoy the deep level of discipleship that we're giving the kids who have decided to come here 3-4 days a week and receive from our training," she said. Kudos to Chris Jehle (Kansas City, 2001) for offering the position to Jennifer which she discovered posted on the DVULI website.



Milton & Tiffany Chen (Houston, 2005) had a boy! Kaiden Jamal was delivered into the hands of Papa Milton on October 5, 2007, at 9:13pm. With the nerve-racking task of cutting the umbilical cord, Milton said, "It was scary because I didn't want to hurt him. I just thank God that he's healthy." Kaiden, their first child, weighed 6 lbs. 8 oz. and measured 19 inches long.



Rachael Greathouse (Albuquerque, 2004) announced her graduation from Central New Mexico Community College with a degree in Accounting. On May 2, 2008, she walked across the stage with approximately 350 students. Rachael plans to begin working on her Bachelor's degree in January 2009. After 12 years in the non-profit sector, Rachael said reaching this milestone, "felt good because I am the first in my family to get a degree." Rachael plans to stay on course all the way to the completion of her Master's degree.



Earl James (Grand Rapids, 1998) was hired by the Reformed Church in America and was appointed Coordinator of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice. He accepted the appointment to serve as a staff representative to the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, the Commission on Christian Action, and the Multiracial Congregation Team, and began developing relationships with people in these groups. "Scripture is the bedrock and rudder of our multiracial and social justice engagements," Earl offers. "Both efforts are undertaken for the sake of the gospel."

Ulises and Sarah Gonzalez (Phoenix, 2000) announced the birth of their second son, Jacob Lee Alexander Gonzalez. Jacob was born March 5, 2008, at 3:02 pm - he weighed 5 lbs. 10 oz. and measured 17 3/4 in. "So far he appears to be a very mellow boy," said Ulises. "But when he grows up I want my son to be a bold follower of Jesus Christ."

Claudia Vasquez-Puebla (Kansas City, 2003) gave birth to boy number three, Hugo Cuauhtemoc Puebla on Thursday, April 10, 2008, at 8:52 pm. Hugo weighed 8 lbs. 15 oz. and stretched 21 inches long. Claudia says the fact "that he is here" brings her so much joy. She hopes that Hugo "will be an example and a true model for youth and live godward" when he's grown.



Shanea Leonard (Pittsburgh, 2006) was ordained by the Presbyterian Church as youth pastor on December 9, 2007, at Bidwell Presbyterian Church. Shanea said she is so happy to have completed the process that she's been looking forward to since she was 15 years old. "I plan to take it up a notch," she said. "Not just with the youth, but to become more of a presence with the total church body." Pittsburgh DVULI alums were in attendance to offer support.



Andrew Campos (Kansas City, 2001) is the new Grants Coordinator for Swope Health Service, a local nonprofit that serves low-income uninsured, under insured and homeless. He monitors the organization's grants/contracts ensuring proper reporting and compliance to the mission of the organization. "I really like working here, you can feel the Lord's presence in the staff and within the facility."

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

INTRODUCING THE SUPPORTING CAST FOR 2008

With every training year, each current city group gets a City Coordinator, and the City Coordinator gets a Coach. Both of these supporting roles are in place to ensure that the participants and City Coordinators have the best learning experience possible. This year, the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative welcomed back Leroy and Donna Barber as Atlanta's city coordinators – coached by Hilda Guinn (Memphis, 2004). First time city coordinators are: Melvin and Marie Cole in Kansas City – coached by Vernon Hubbard (Houston, 2003), Ron and Becky McConico in Minneapolis with Cynthia Burton (San Diego, 2000) coaching, and Pete Contreras in San Diego – coached by Phil Abeyta (Denver, 2003). These match-ups will be a strong source of leadership for every city group to help build lasting relationships, team cohesiveness and values for sustaining ministries and community. Orbi Gonzales, from Phoenix, was unable to make the photo shoot. The Phoenix group is supported by Coach Rick Diaz.

-- Gerald Bell



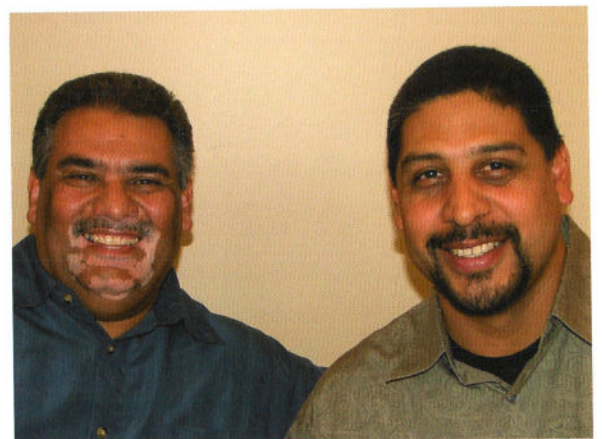
Atlanta



Kansas City



Minneapolis



San Diego

NEW CITY GROUPS

MARK THE START OF A NEW DECADE FOR DVULI

Entering the eleventh season of training urban youth leaders, DeVos Urban Leadership reached deeper into Kansas City, Phoenix and San Diego with a third round of training. Respectively, Atlanta and Minneapolis have entered round two to complete the five cities that will become the class of 2008. Having local workshops one and two and the first national conference behind them, these leaders are well into "trusting the process." They have assessed themselves, their ministries and learned to map out the assets in their communities. Off to a great start, this group was eager to embrace the tasks and challenges they heard the DVULI training offers. Yet they are more excited and motivated about having a strong finish, come next spring. Welcome leaders!



Kansas City



Minneapolis



San Diego



Phoenix



Atlanta

COVER STORY- CONT.

recently. The City of Chicago was facing an epidemic wave of violence resulting in an unprecedented number of youth deaths from gun violence. As a result the Rev. Michael Pfleger, a South Side Chicago priest decided not only to take stock of the impact, but to address it by offering a \$2,500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone responsible for the killing of another youth.

Since 1995, the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) has annually conducted the National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) of law enforcement agencies across the United States which considers the presence and characteristics of local gang problems. NYGC asked survey recipients to report information solely for youth gangs, which they defined as "a group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify as a 'gang'."

The nationally representative sample included the following agencies: all police departments that serve cities with a population of 50,000 or more (larger cities), all suburban county police and sheriff's departments (suburban counties), a randomly selected sample of police departments that serve cities with a population between 2,500 and 49,999 (smaller cities) and a randomly selected sample of rural county police and sheriff's departments (rural counties).

Below is a list of facts summarizing the survey's latest results in 2004.

WITHIN THE AREA TYPE

- "82% of the agencies that serve larger cities reported youth gang problems"
- "42% of the agencies that serve suburban counties reported youth gang problems"
- "27% of the agencies that serve smaller cities reported youth gang problems"
- "14% of the agencies that serve rural counties reported youth gang problems"

GANG MEMBERSHIP

"Larger cities and suburban counties accounted for approximately 85 percent of the estimated number of gang members in 2004."

"Approximately 760,000 gang members and 24,000 gangs were active in more than 2,900 jurisdictions that city (population of 2,500 or more) and county law enforcement agencies served in 2004."

"A nearly equal percentage of agencies with gang problems reported an increase (52 percent) versus a decrease or no significant change (48 percent) in the number of documented gang members in 2004 compared with the 2002-2003 survey period."

MIGRATION

"10% of responding agencies reported that more than half of the documented gang members in their jurisdiction had migrated from other areas; however, a majority (60 percent) of respondents reported no or few (less than 25 percent of documented gang members) such migrants."

"Among agencies that experienced a higher percentage of migration, 45 percent reported that social reasons (e.g., members moving with families, pursuit of legitimate employment opportunities) affected local migration patterns 'very much.'"

"Drug market opportunities (23 percent), avoidance of law enforcement crackdowns (21 percent), and participation in other illegal ventures (18%) were reported as reasons for migration to a lesser degree."

HOMICIDE

"173 cities with a population of 100,000 or more reported a gang problem and gang homicide data (i.e., the number of homicides involving a gang member) in 2004."

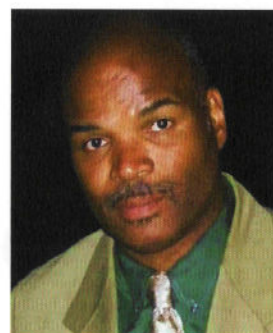
"In 2 cities, Los Angeles and Chicago, more than half of the combined nearly 1,000 homicides were considered to be gang-related. In the remaining 171 cities, approximately one-fourth of all the homicides were considered to be gang related."

"In addition, the number of gang homicides recorded in these cities in 2004 was 11 percent higher than the previous 8-year average."

"More than 80 percent of agencies with gang problems in both smaller cities and rural counties recorded zero gang homicides."

In ancient Israel, the watchmen's role provides an excellent example of what it means to take stock in our community. The job of the watchman was to sit near the gates to ensure that no strange or untoward development crept into the city. Our cities and communities are facing all sorts of bizarre trends and detrimental developments because the rules of the game have changed. Indeed, by failing to take stock, not one child but all are "at-risk." Our role as prayer warriors, intercessors and youth working watchmen is to take note and to take appropriate action.

Nick Bolden is an ordained youth minister and freelance journalist based in Indianapolis.



Survey Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
www.ncjrs.gov

BEFORE YOU GO

NeXus Boston launches Leadership Initiative



By Eileen Kooreman

On April 25 and 26, NeXus Boston hosted the DeVos seminar "Leading for Life" as the kick-off event to their twelve month leadership initiative, a replication of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI) curriculum.

NeXus is a unique collaboration of six organizations, including a core group of local DeVos grads that serve youth in the Boston area. Never satisfied with the status quo, they became interested in partnering with the DeVos Initiative to tailor its program to fit the unique needs of their city. Last December the team applied for a Follow-up Grant on behalf of local DeVos alumni to replicate the DVULI training. The grant was approved and a plan was put in place to recruit and select participants for the 12-month leadership development training called the NeXus Leadership Initiative (NLI). Launched in May, the thirteen people selected for the training were required to attend the Leading for Life seminar along with their supervisors and/or fellow team members from their ministries.

Some 30 people attended Leading for Life, which was facilitated by Ron Carter (Birmingham, 1999) and Marvin Daniels (Chicago, 2002). This was a tremendous opportunity to meet the youth leaders who will be participating in NLI and others who are passionate about working with youth in the City of Boston.

The NeXus mission is to:
...seek to improve the lives of urban youth and their communities by encouraging, supporting and training Christian youth workers to serve urban and high-risk youth and their families more effectively. To that end our purpose is working with and for youth workers. We believe that we are serving the youth most effectively by serving those who work with youth. There are four areas that NeXus Boston focuses on to fulfill our mission: support, training, networking and research.

For additional information about Nexus Boston visit website at: www.bostonnexus.org

CHECK THIS OUT

NATIONAL
**YOUTH VIOLENCE
PREVENTION**
RESOURCE CENTER

Youth and gang violence is once again on the rise. This is particularly evident in big cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and Philadelphia. It could be that you and other leaders in your cities are deeply concerned about addressing this problem. I believe you'll find the website for the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center a valuable source that tackles the issues of youth and gang violence head on.

www.SafeYouth.org was developed in response to the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. Users will discover a comprehensive list of resources that include articles, statistics, warning signs, intervention and preventive measures.

Sponsored by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal agencies, the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center is committed to helping communities stop youth and gang violence before it happens.

— Ron Carter

Second National
Conference

*Systems Thinking/
Ministry Management*

October 12-18 - Holland, MI

MESSAGE BOARD

These people have updated contact information:

Phone Number Changes:

June Williams Smith (Pittsburgh, 2004)
Shanea Leonard (Pittsburgh, 2006)
James Landry (Los Angeles, 2005)
Jaye Hill (Detroit, 2004)
Randy VanderWeit (Grand Rapids, 1998)
Jennifer Jones (Grand Rapids, 2006)

Address:

Eunice Bello (Miami, 2007)
Robin Jenkins (Orlando, 1998)
Vernon Hubbard (Houston, 2003)
Veronica Lopez (Los Angeles, 2005)
Brian Gornik (Philadelphia, 2004)
Tony Wade (Memphis, 2004)
Loren Hogan (Portland, 2003)
Anthony Morales (Paterson, 2001)
Chris Sain (Grand Rapids, 2000)
Randall and Krystal Lassiter (Paterson, 1999)
Juliet Arrington (Birmingham, 1999)
Sheryl Richard (Detroit, 2004)
Frank Stone (Birmingham, 2001)
Edwin Arevalo (Paterson, 2001)
Jennifer Jones (Grand Rapids, 2006)
Terence Smith (Kansas City, 2008)
Archie and Melissa Collins (San Diego, 2008)
Lutunji Abram (Minneapolis, 2008)
Joannah Cook (Atlanta, 2006)
Ulises Gonzalez (Phoenix, 2000)

Email:

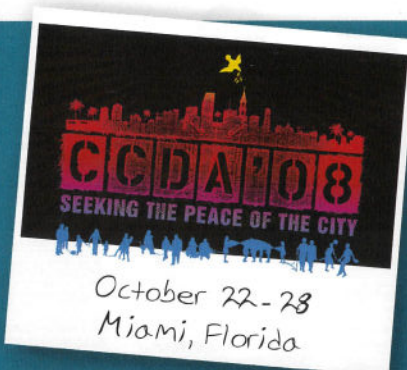
Lauren Walton (Indianapolis, 2007)
Vince Trujillo (Denver, 2005)
Debbie Poole (Cleveland, 2007)
John James (Paterson, 2001)
Edwin Arevalo (Paterson, 2001)
Aushyla Willoughby (San Diego, 1999)
Curtis Ross (Kansas City, 2008)
Mark Singleton (Indianapolis, 2007)
Donna Barber (Atlanta, 2006, 2008)
Carmen Means (Minneapolis, 2006)
Fred Woods (Portland, 2003)
Jim Bartels (Grand Rapids, 2006)
Marcus Thorne (Chicago, 2007)
Eunice Bello (Miami, 2007)
Jessica Frumm (Los Angeles, 2005)

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

Third Local Workshop Scenario Planning

August 14-16
Minneapolis,
Phoenix, San Diego

August 21-23
Atlanta, Kansas City



FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2008

Welcome to Orlando! The First National Conference welcomed participants from Atlanta, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Phoenix, and San Diego. Monday evening's dinner started the week off with keynote panelists Orlando Rivera (Orlando, 1998) and

Deborah Wiggins (Orlando, 2000).

The two alums shared how the DVULI program influenced their personal life and ministry.

The excitement continued! Each daily session began with praise and worship and Bible devotions.

Session instructors were Ron Carter with Henry Greenidge on Balance, Phil Abeyta on Accountability, Sandra Valentine on Interdependence, Cynthia Burton on Empowerment, Isaias Mercado on Leverage, and Marvin Daniels on Creating Healthy

Change. The participants were constantly challenged with the five Core Values that prepare them for the upcoming workshops and the completion of their learning journey. Gerald Bell closed the week of training with a session on preparing for

Breakthrough plans. Gordon McDonald was again profound with his *Stomping Boots* keynote address. Rich DeVos joined the group for a midweek lunch and discussion about his upcoming book. The

conference finale was a Friday night concert at the RDV Sportplex with Ron Kenoly who energized everyone with an evening of Praise and Worship.

-- Rick Diaz



DeVos URBAN LEADERSHIP STAFF

Rick Diaz
Program Director
rickdi@rdvcorp.com

Eileen Kooreman
Assistant Program
Director
eileenk@rdvcorp.com

Gerald Bell
Communications
Manager
geraldb@rdvcorp.com

Ron Carter
Resources and Training
Manager
ronc@rdvcorp.com

Liz Koster
Administrative
Assistant
lizk@rdvcorp.com

Taylor Voss
Communications
Assistant
taylorv@rdvcorp.com

Ginny Vander Hart
Foundations Director
virginia@rdvcorp.com

DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative
P.O. Box 230257, Grand Rapids, MI 49523-0257
Phone: 616-643-4700 Fax: 616-774-0116