

ON THE LEVEL

Issue 2 | Winter 2024 DVULI.ORG



JEREMY DEL RIO HAS THE
SECRET SAUCE
FOR NATIONAL COLLABORATION



SCAN FOR AN
INTERACTIVE
PDF VERSION
OF THIS
NEWSLETTER

PROFILE

Maurice Winley champions justice-impacted youth and families in NYC

SPECIAL

Gail Reese is Cleveland's go-to collaborator

WE ARE ONE / NEW DVULI LEADERSHIP Embraces Collaborative Model

For more than a quarter of a century, the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI) has consistently woven into its training content the fact that working in collaboration is the better way to sustain a youth ministry.

In his book *Well Connected*, author Phill Butler affirms, "Working together is God's idea." He contends, "Our individual potential is only realized, our wholeness only experienced, in relationship with others. God created us to trust and to work with others."



In alignment with this belief, Ron Carter (Birmingham 1999), Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003), and Shannon Pothoven have assumed leadership of DVULI, now entering its 27th year.

The triarchy leadership model allows Ron, Gerald, and Shannon to retain leading their individual departments while partnering on vision, strategy, and execution of the big picture.

"This is a great opportunity to continue functioning within our strengths," said Ron, Director of Training and Equipping. "But it's also a chance to explore innovative ways of growing the initiative collaboratively and not have to do it in isolation."

DVULI's organizational structure consists of three departments: Training and Equipping, Alumni Support and Communications, and Operations.

Pointing to the concept of shared vision, Gerald said most programmatic decisions were made as a team during his 20 years with DVULI. "When we were a much smaller staff, the program was being built from the ground up. So, it made sense to share ideas and collaborate with staff who were both alumni and non-alumni team members."

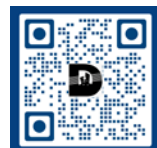
Since 1998, more than 1,400 urban youth workers have completed the national training program. At the core of DVULI's ethos is a genuine regard and care for the urban youth worker, something the entire team embodies.

"Our whole team is pretty excited about the new chapter we're entering as an organization," beams Shannon, Director of Operations. "I think it's terrific that we can model leading this way and live out our calling and passions."

"Co-leadership is nothing new, and I feel strongly that even better days for DVULI are ahead," said Gerald, who serves as Director of Alumni Support and Communications. "Honestly, I don't know that we've ever had a bad day because God's Spirit has been on DVULI in a rich way all along."

Any immediate DVULI changes will not be felt by alumni and friends of the initiative. However, in 2025, the training schedule and program delivery process will roll out a new system for the incoming five city cohorts.

Gerald Bell
(Kansas City 2003), Editor
[f gerald.bell](#)



SCAN
to watch the
full interview.

Contact DVULI: 200 Monroe Ave. NW | Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616-643-4848 | staff@dvuli.org

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WELCOME NEW STAFF

By Eileen Schuring,
DVULI Intern



"I AM VERY EXCITED AND HONORED TO JOIN THE DVULI TEAM AND WORK ALONGSIDE EVERYONE. I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO SERVING IN THIS CAPACITY AND SUPPORTING THE MISSION AND VISION OF DVULI"

EMILY FARWELL, Administrative Assistant

In June, Emily Farwell became the newest member of the DVULI team, assuming the role of Administrative Assistant. In her new role, Emily will take on the logistical planning of workshops and conferences. She reports directly to Shannon Pothoven, the DVULI Director of Operations.

Emily, a native of Grand Rapids, comes to DVULI after serving as Associate Athletic Director at Cornerstone University. In her previous capacity, she gained many logistical skills and business acumen that prepared her for her role at DVULI. Before working at Cornerstone, Emily worked for Bethany Christian Services as a Licensing Specialist, helping foster families prepare to welcome a child.

Emily also coaches volleyball at nearby Grand Rapids Christian High School, which is one of her greatest passions. "I love to coach because I get to see the growth that happens in kids," she says. "Even if they don't want to be there at first when they see they have improved, or they've built a relationship, it's special." Through coaching at a Christian school, Emily ministers to her team. "Every week, we do a devotional, pray together, and discuss using the athletic world as a platform to reach others through faith," she explains.

About starting this new position, Emily says, "I am very excited and honored to join the DVULI team and work alongside everyone. I am looking forward to serving in this capacity and supporting the mission and vision of DVULI, as well as getting to know all our current participants and alumni!"

Away from the office and the court, Emily enjoys visiting coffee shops, being on the lakeshore, or spending time with her family and two dogs.



Emily Farwell (pictured in back row on far right) and the Grand Rapids Christian Eagles Volleyball team are 2024 District Champions.



By Ebonie Davis (Washington DC 2022), Contributor

OUT OF BROKENNESS

We often think of breakthroughs as a specific moment in time we can point to where everything changes, but Sarah Richman (New York 2011), Director of Teen Programming at New City Kids, describes her breakthrough as a “slow burn, peeking through, bits at a time.”



In 2011, life was messy for Sarah. Reeling from an impending divorce, the brokenness played out in her life in disorienting ways. In her mind, God had moved her to NYC for acting, but fear of rejection held her back from fully pursuing this path. Instead, life became her stage as Sarah adopted a performance mentality. “For years prior,

my life was performance after performance. I’d literally go from directing one play at the after-school center to directing another at church.” But it wasn’t just the literal stage where performance seemed to rule her world. She was surviving but not living her life and overloading herself with

“good things” to hide the pain of her failed marriage inside. Ministry, and just about everything else, became another performance.

Reflecting on her life, Sarah is grateful for her parents (parachurch youth pastors), but she also realizes that this mentality originated from a perceived need for perfectionism being raised in the church. “My parents were and are amazing people. As much as they tried to instill God’s grace

**“AS MUCH AS THEY TRIED TO
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in me, it took me walking through life myself, messing up, and experiencing God’s love. I could experience God’s love through my parents, but I had to experience his grace and forgiveness for myself.” On the occasions when she fell short relationally, she was wracked with guilt and faith-up-ending questions. “I know what good Christians do, and I hadn’t done it. Could I still be loved anyway? Could I still be wanted anyway?” she questioned.

Perfectionism defined Sarah’s life all the way through 2019 and impacted everything from her lack of balance to the way she led her staff. “I was leading from a position of wanting them to like me, so I was afraid to confront anything or hold anybody accountable.”

**SARAH’S BREAKTHROUGH HAS
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THAT’S ENTICING AND WELCOMING
WHILE ALSO LETTING KIDS KNOW
IT’S NOT GOING TO BE PERFECT.
THEY TOO, ARE LEARNING THAT
GOD INVITES THEM TO BE REAL
WITHOUT BEING REJECTED.**

Eventually, Sarah stepped down from her position at the church. During this season, when she was perhaps at her lowest point, it felt like yet another blow. She was no longer able to afford the rising rent on her apartment. “I was this divorced white woman struggling in the city, working at a nonprofit, trying to pay my bills, and now I needed to move.” A friend who heard about her need in passing, happened to own a vacant condo nearby. It was a pivotal moment that reminded Sarah she was a treasured daughter. “It wasn’t because of anything that I’d done; in fact, it was despite everything I’d done wrong,” she reasons. “I was blown away by how much God didn’t care about my mistakes in that moment. He cared about me and me having a genuine relationship with him.”

Sarah started the process of healing and rebuilding using the skills that DVULI had given her—she lives out the core values and loves systems thinking. She jumped at the opportunity to attend grad school. Though a restructuring at New City Kids resulted in her demotion, she says it ended up being “the best thing that could have happened.” Her new director was a great coach, empowering her and helping her see her gifting and the value of her years of experience. God used others in her life as well. When meeting Sarah, one would never guess that behind all the performances, there is an extreme introvert. She learned to collaborate with colleagues who had giftings that she did not. One of her courses required her to see a counselor. The experience was so impactful that she decided to continue after

the class concluded. Mentors who walked with her held her accountable and helped her hone the DVULI skills she learned but never applied. God continued to peek through. Looking back on that season, Sarah could even see how He redeemed the pain of her divorce. She learned how to be real without being rejected.

Today Sarah is proud of how she leads her team and creates a sense of community at New City Kids. She describes herself as a recovering perfectionist. “My next level breakthrough has been learning to be “okay” with things not being how I had planned them. I recognize now that throughout my life, I’d run ahead of God and say, ‘Are you catching up? We’re doing this, right?’ And His response was, ‘No, no, no. Come back! This is the way we’re doing it.’ There’s been a lot of redirection, but the core of me hasn’t changed, and the giftedness hasn’t either. The way He is using my gifts, however, is not what I expected. Though I’m not intentionally pursuing acting anymore, I’m creating a place where people can be creative.”

Sarah’s breakthrough has made her a more authentic witness to the teens she serves. She models and presents the goodness of the gospel in a way that’s enticing and welcoming while also letting kids know it’s not going to be perfect. They, too, are learning that God invites them to be real without being rejected. “Earth is far from perfect, but we can still see the goodness of God in the midst of it,” she muses. “I want teens to understand that He isn’t a Band-Aid that’s going to make everything better. He is a lifeline to cling to when it’s the worst storm ever.”

Photo credit Diana Jimenez



CLASS OF 2025-26 CITY COORDINATORS



Martin Lawson
SEATTLE, WA

in revmartinllawson



READY TO STEP INTO 2025

We are thrilled to introduce the five new city coordinators for the class of 2025-26! These exceptional and highly vetted leaders are ready to walk alongside their city cohorts through the DVULI leadership development journey.

PLEASE JOIN US IN WELCOMING THEM!

Ebony Fadis: Columbus, OH

Lateefah Gofoe: Grand Rapids, MI

Kilton Janvier: Miami, FL

Robert Loyd: St. Louis, MO

Martin Lawson: Seattle, WA



NOW RECRUITING
FOR 2025-26
DVULI.org/Nominate



Lateefah Gofoe
GRAND RAPIDS, MI

in Lateefah-gofoe-mpa

f GRCityYL



Ebony Fadis
COLUMBUS, OH

ebb_fadis

f ebbfadis



Robert Loyd
ST. LOUIS, MO

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f robert.loyd.568



Kilton Janvier
MIAMI, FL

kiltonkess_

f kilton.janvier

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» NOMINATE NOW!

WE WANT YOUR REFERRALS!

If you know a Christian leader who serves urban youth in any of these five cities, please consider submitting a nomination on **DVULI.org/Nominate**.



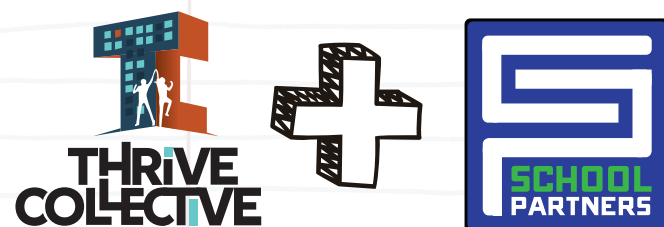


A CASE STUDY FOR COLLABORATION

By Ebonie Davis (Washington DC 2022), Contributor

Ask Jeremy Del Rio (NYC 2020), and he'll tell you he learned the most foundational tool for collaboration from a youth, Rollie Barnes, who was the biggest knucklehead in his group. The teen spent much of his time poking fun at the young, optimistic youth pastor (and initially only came because of a girl). He didn't cut Jeremy any slack. "He was always in my face, asking hard questions and challenging everything I did," said Jeremy. "This developed resilience in me, and as I stuck with him and invited him back, he kept showing up. It would have been so much easier to keep him away. But I think about him all the time because that kind of tenacity is required to build collaborations that last."

THIS GAVE BIRTH TO SCHOOL PARTNERS USA, WHICH PROVIDES TOOLS, TRAINING, AND COACHING TO HELP YOUTH WORKERS PARTNER WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



That tenacity has paid off. Today, the organization Jeremy founded, Thrive Collective, is in its 10th year. Based in New York City, Thrive creates hope and opportunity through arts, sports, and mentoring in and around public schools. At the heart of the organization is a passion for meeting kids where they are in a tangible, concrete way.

Jeremy describes the early collaboration that undergirds Thrive Collective's success as "organic." He recalls, "We'd find people who were of like mind and like heart in different places and encourage one another with stories, best practices, ideas, and resources." Some of those early connections were through DVULI and other organizations. A hot topic in this growing network was how Thrive was successfully engaging with schools and what that process looked like. Jeremy openly shared everything he knew: "Freely we have received, so we're going to give it away!" He credits this philosophy with deepening the relationships within their network of youth workers.

The pandemic pause gave Jeremy and his team the time to go beyond informal shared learning and think more systematically about their work. This gave birth to School Partners USA (SPUSA), which provides tools, training, and coaching to help youth workers partner with public schools. "We were able to extrapolate what worked and what didn't and share it in a much more proactive and structured way," said Jeremy. Alongside NYC, they launched in Dallas, San Diego, and Oakland, with local city coordinators (DVULI alums) who were similarly engaged with the public schools in their respective cities.



LEARN MORE ABOUT DVULI COLLABORATION GRANTS
Log in to DVULI.org to view.

When it came to training resources, there was no need to reinvent the wheel. SPUSA used the DVULI framework, content, and processes as a replication pilot for the organization. This is a valuable yet underutilized resource, and Jeremy encourages alumni not to leave it on the table. "At the end of every local workshop and national conference, DVULI gives you the keys," explains Jeremy. "We walk out of those experiences with all the ingredients to either replicate it as presented or tweak it and customize it to your organization's needs. The invitation for seed grant money is always offered to every cohort. However, I very rarely saw anybody run with it. We took DVULI at their word, leveraged the funding that was available, and the result has been amazing."

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From left to right in back: Jeremy Del Rio (NYC 2010), Tara Bollinger-Okuszler (Dallas 2019), Demoree "Truck" Evans (Oakland-SF Bay Area 2017), Carlos Nicasio (San Diego 2008), Kekoa Hubbard (Oakland-SF Bay Area 2021), Lawrence Coles (NYC 2010), and Fred Lynch (Dallas 2011) in front.

Each SPUSA city has its own unique application of what it means to partner with schools in their local context, but some elements of successful collaboration remain true across the board. Jeremy says it is important to maintain the posture of a servant. "The way Jesus engaged each person He connected with was to serve, listen, and be responsive to their felt needs," he explains. "I think that's a universal truth. When we come in with that savior mentality, we undermine collaboration. To find that sweet spot takes effort, listening, and a lot less talking and prescribing. It's a discovery process."

The success of the multicity collaboration also meant that resource networking would necessarily take on a new dimension. Jeremy finds it helpful to think of that in two parts. He explains, "Networking starts by asking, 'Who do you know?' As you cultivate those relationships, build your tribe with those whose passions align with your own." Jeremy also cautions against spending too much time commiserating. "At some point, people get tired of just talking about problems or dreaming about solutions. Translating that shared commitment into a project, event, or initiative gives the relationship fuel. People want to know that their time investment adds value."



To be able to resource well, leaders must clearly define what they feel compelled to do, break that down into its component parts, and then ask, "Where do I get that stuff?" Jeremy has often found that within his network, he was a lot closer to what he needed than he realized. As the organizations grew and he began to seek funding beyond grassroots donors, he found it helpful to diversify funding sources to include local institutions, businesses, churches, civic associations, and government.

Recently, Thrive Collective was commissioned to produce a mural in honor of the Today Show host Hoda Kotb's 60th birthday. It was Thrive Collective's 600th mural completed over a decade as an arts education nonprofit. Jeremy is quick to point out that he is an "accidental curator." He can't do any of the work that Thrive has a reputation for producing, but with some tenacity, he could be a catalyst for collaboration.

Reflecting on that knucklehead youth, Jeremy is grateful for the way the teen transformed him. "There's been a lot of beautiful results, and that's because of the commitment to wonder—always asking and always being open to the unexpected."



JEREMY'S INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS





GAIL REESE: CLEVELAND'S GO-TO COLLABORATOR

By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff

In 1987, Gail Reese (Cleveland 2007) initiated the Ministry of Reconciliation (MOR) with the mission of uniting churches, businesses, organizations, and individuals in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio to address the spiritual, physical, financial, and social/emotional needs of the community. MOR's largest initiative is the Adopt-A-School Network, a program connecting 43 church and parachurch ministries that have adopted 27 schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District among other districts. In all, some 470 volunteers reach various school districts throughout Northeast Ohio.



In Cleveland, the name Gail Reese is synonymous with collaboration. She is respected as a “go-to” ally for church and citywide Christ-centered events. A self-admitted perfectionist, she once did much of this ministry work alone. After a DVULI training experience, Gail made significant changes which she attributes to sustaining her 30-plus years serving urban youth.

HER ETHOS IS ROOTED IN HER DESIRE TO “EMBODY THE LOVE OF JESUS AND REACH PEOPLE WITH THE GOSPEL.” TO ACHIEVE THIS, SHE NOW NEVER WORKS ALONE.

GAIL SHARES HER FIVE KEYS FOR HEALTHY COLLABORATION

1 **Wield the Power of Prayer**

Intercessory prayer is the cornerstone of Gail’s collaborative leadership. She believes “prayer is essential before, during, and after any collaborative effort.”

“Prayer became my primary means of seeking God’s guidance and support in all endeavors,” explains Gail who has collaborated with national and local ministerial alliances. “Through prayer, God reveals how we are to connect and serve together.”

Realizing that reaching the world for Christ requires working in unity, Gail further adds, “By humbling ourselves and seeking God’s direction first, we can truly empower each other and foster spiritual growth and maturity.”

2 **Be Watchful for Passion**

When entering a potential collaboration, Gail is “watchful” and looks to work with those who are genuinely called to the mission. She’s open to working with others, even non-Christians, “as long as they are passionate about the cause of uniting resources to help meet the needs of the

people and understand we will share God’s love through Jesus Christ to help meet that need.”

For Gail, a collaborator’s motives must align with the goals of the ministry. “I want to see their true intentions, ensuring they aren’t just trying to connect with me for financial gain or other agendas,” she explains. “The focus is on impacting and, in some cases, saving young lives.”

3 **Serving Versus Using**

Gail is committed to serving those who serve with her; she hopes their involvement is not just about fulfilling a role but about mutual growth and support. “Jesus was about the person, and I work to embody that,” she shares.

Gail tells how one of her multitalented team members was passionate about starting a home daycare. “When I learned that was her desire, we prayed, and God opened the door!” recalls Gail. “She recently bought her own home and is pursuing a home daycare license.”

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“JESUS WAS ABOUT THE PERSON, AND I WORK TO EMBODY THAT.”

Gail’s encouragement and investment in her team members’ personal goals exemplify her commitment to encouraging others’ aspirations—even outside of their ministry work.

“If I don’t [encourage them] I’d feel like I’m just using people, and I don’t ever want that,” she offers. “I believe we are called to be kingdom people, to serve together, and love one another.”

4 **Interdependence & Empowerment**

Gail understands no one person has all the gifts or knowledge. So, to thrive in ministry it takes “a team of people and organizations working together.” Gail demonstrates this interdependence by partnering with others who can fill

gaps where expertise is lacking. For instance, she knew she didn’t have the knowledge to help suicidal youth. So, she collaborated with Life Act, an organization that teaches the warning signs of suicide and how to address them. Through this partnership, they offered workshops that reach hundreds of youths with lifesaving information.

“If I see that someone is more equipped and developed than I am, I encourage them and provide an opportunity to step up,” she explains. Gail empowers others by supporting and helping them to find their strengths. This ensures that everyone can grow and contribute effectively, fostering collaborative and empowered organizations.

5 **Be a Bridge**

“Sometimes it takes stepping outside of your comfort zone to build [collaborative] capacity,” explains Gail. Early in ministry, she connected with Youth for Christ (YFC), Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Young Life to observe how they worked. She saw the potential for these well-resourced ministries to benefit the entire city and felt called to bridge that gap.

“I knocked on the YFC door and said, ‘Hey, you guys have a rich ministry. Have you ever thought about sharing resources with the east side of Cleveland?’” YFC bought into Gail’s vision and eventually hired her. For nine years, Gail was a part-time YFC staff member. She faced the challenge of being the first black woman to work on the Greater Cleveland YFC team. However, she persevered building relationships and bridging resources from affluent communities to those less fortunate.

During this time, Gail would help to birth the Greater Cleveland Youth Leaders Network that became the Northeast Ohio United Networks of Youth Ministries. This network connected and equipped youth workers and student leaders through specialized trainings and monthly network meetings.

Another key bridge building initiative was March for Jesus, which united churches across denominations and races in Cleveland. This ministry gathered believers of like passion to exalt Jesus together in prayer and praise!

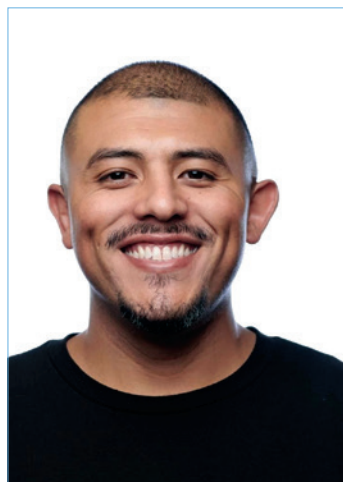
Gail remains busy in a way that truly enriches life. She strives to stay balanced through what she learned in the DVULI training, as she cares for her elderly mother alongside her sisters, as well as being a wife, mother, and grandmother. What has made Gail hard to replace as a “go-to” leader is she forges unbreakable bonds, transforming colleagues into family.

DVULI WELCOMES TWO NEW LIAISONS

By Eileen Schuring, Intern

**IN JUNE 2024, THE DVULI TEAM
WARMLY WELCOMED TWO NEW LIAISONS,
Juan Chavez (Phoenix 2017) and Mike Newton (Indianapolis 2013).**

Juan will oversee participant and alumni relations in Albuquerque, Denver, and Phoenix, while Mike is set to serve alumni in Indianapolis.



JUAN CHAVEZ
(Phoenix 2017)

Raised in South Phoenix, Juan Chavez is passionately committed to the revival of his hometown. After completing his education, Juan returned to his high school to teach and coach football. He quickly recognized the drastic need for positive role models and an introduction to Christ in many of his students' lives. In 2019, he collaborated with the school to launch AZ Reach, a nonprofit that offers mentoring programs

and additional curriculum during school hours for students dealing with behavioral challenges.

Seeing a further need for spiritual connection, Juan is currently laying the groundwork for Beloved South Phoenix, a church intended to serve as a community hub for his students and their families.

Aligned with his mission of discipleship in his hometown, Juan accepts the role of a DVULI liaison after careful prayer and consideration. He is particularly enthusiastic about building relationships through existing connections. Having worked with numerous youth organizations in the cities he will serve, he helps foster a sense of unity locally. "I would like to see greater relationship development and collaboration amongst Christian leaders and organizations serving youth—cross-cultural and cross-denominationally," he says.

Juan looks forward to shadowing the current liaison, Phil Abeyta, and getting to know more members of the current cohort and the future cohorts he will lead. "I hope to see both the Christian leader and the organization keep a rich love of God and a deep sense of dependence on Him for the work before us, keeping the posture of prayer always before us," he says.

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Juan juggles multiple roles: DVULI liaison, church founder, pastor, and nonprofit leader. Yet, his most cherished roles are those of a loving husband and father. Juan and Tina, his wife of 11 years, are parents to Jael, Violet, and Jacob, and they hold dear the memory of their son Jovani, who is with the Lord. On his days off, Juan relishes the chance to disconnect and fully engage with his family, always eager to grant his children's wishes.



MIKE NEWTON
(Indianapolis 2013)

Much like Juan, Mike Newton's dedication to youth development is evident from the first encounter. With a 19-year tenure at Young Life, he is now in a global position as the Director of Organizational Health and Belonging. Specializing in cultural intelligence (CQ), Mike stands out as one of only 18 certified CQ fellows worldwide, bringing a unique perspective to his work.

Beyond his Young Life role, Mike coaches football at the high school where he conducts Young Life, leveraging sports as an additional channel to connect with teenagers. "I work hard to go to places that people often choose not to go," he says. "The theme verse for my life has been Matthew 9:35 (NIV): 'Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.' He didn't skip a community."

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BUT ALSO TO SHOW THE CITY HOW
DIFFERENT MINISTRIES CAN COME TOGETHER
TO DO GREAT WORK."**

Mike champions the cause of collaboration. He believes that emerges when youth workers transcend individual pride and rally together toward a shared vision. "I think in the city, we are beyond a place where one individual can do it all," says Mike. In his capacity as a liaison, he hopes to encourage collaboration among his alums and between cities. "My goal as a liaison is to be an advocate for them, make sure they are healthy and thriving individually, but also to show the city how different ministries can come together to do great work," he says.

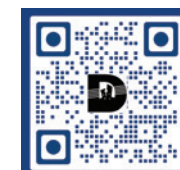
**MEET
JUAN & MIKE**



A North Carolina native, Mike made the move to Indianapolis in 2012 following his marriage to Kristen. Together, they take pride in raising their daughter, Amari, now seven years old, who Mike delights in spending time with. A creative spirit, Mike indulges in his passion for music by DJing in his free time, a skill he joyfully shares at various Young Life and youth ministry gatherings, fostering connections through the universal language of music.



**MEET ALL THE
LIAISONS**



DVULI ALUMNI PROFILE

By Ebonie Davis (Washington DC 2022), Contributor



MAURICE WINLEY

(New York 2010)

Organization:

Living Redemption Youth Opportunity Hub in Harlem, New York

Position:

Pastor and Executive Director

Maurice Winley (New York 2010) founded the Living Redemption Youth Opportunity Hub in Harlem, New York, out of his own experience with redemption after facing life in prison. The organization's mission is "saving lives and healing communities one relationship at a time." He's an advocate for justice-impacted youth and families and a collaboration champion. Maurice has served as a DVULI presenter, speaking on the core value of interdependence.

How long have you been involved in youth programs?

I started as a volunteer, and my first assignment was teaching primary boys in Sunday school. I went through the ranks of the youth ministry at the church, and as a youth pastor, I began to get opportunities to do outreach in the community. My students would invite me to their schools to speak to their peers, which led to connections with principals and, in time, running rites of passage programs in those schools. The Lord kept opening doors as I was tapped to be a part of other initiatives. Eventually, I was invited to be a chaplain and later a director at St. Christopher's Inc., an adolescent residential treatment facility for special needs teens. That experience helped me understand many of the root causes and family challenges affecting justice-impacted youth. I saw how youth are processed through systems without receiving the individualized care and attention they need. Serving there was a powerful opportunity that really helped me grow. That's where I first learned how to write proposals to receive funding for our work with youth.

What challenges has the organization had to overcome?

We were working in the intersection of a system that didn't have a good relationship with the community. Building a collaboration with the NYPD, the District Attorney's Office, and New York City Department of Probation created some tensions; sometimes, we were the lightning rod for those tensions. We had to learn to maintain credibility by staying true to our core and speaking truth to all sides.

Our founding grant proposal included everything we wished for at that time. When we were awarded \$10.6 million to develop initiatives to prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system, it was mind-blowing! We didn't even have an organization yet; we were just a project team under a fiscal sponsor. We'd been more focused on the ground game with youth and families, but now we had a government reimbursable contract. This was a milestone performance-based grant that required us to hit benchmarks to receive funding. We had to learn a lot about data, business operations, and fiscal operations. Often, it just felt overwhelming.

We had to build an organizational structure and all the things that come along with that. As our staffing needs grew, we had to think about developing a culture. This is heavy work! When you're dealing with gun violence and entering into the crisis of youth and families, it can take a toll. So, how do we cultivate a culture of self-care, balance, and interdependence? We had to create an ethos that lived out these values.

A mentor once told me that I was going to learn the strength of God. And how do you do that? God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

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

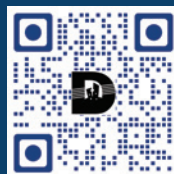
We've almost tripled our annual budget, so we're just getting started. I'm proud of the beauty of our workplace culture. As a youth minister, my passion and part of my identity is working directly with the youth, so I had to learn how to empower others. I had to move to the background to give them those opportunities. That shift helped us grow from 12 to 35 staff members. We have multiple sites throughout the city and are known for our integrity, innovation, and impact.

Another highlight is our model of Credible Messengers. Credible Messengers are individuals from the community who embody transformation and healing and have the credibility through their lived experiences to lead youth to transformation. God recently blessed us with a national stage as an anchor partner with the Credible Messenger movement. We're part of a five-state expansion of the work, with a goal of raising up 150 credible messengers to do this kind of deep community, transformative work over the next three years.

What do you think youth leaders need to know about collaboration?



SCAN HERE to see Maurice's video-reply to this question.



DVULI ALUMNI UPDATES



Ray Banks (Chicago 2007)

was honored with the Dr. John F. Sullivan Legacy Award for his transformative leadership at Restoration Ministries Harvey House.



Emory Berry (Miami 2009)

was inducted into the Morehouse College 2024 Collegium of Scholars.



Lawrence Cain Jr. (Cincinnati 2021)

published a children's financial literacy book titled *Little Lawrence Goes to the Bank*.



Phoebe Cruz (Phoenix 2017)

was ordained at Iglesia Vida Evidente in Gilbert, Arizona.



Adrian Ewings (San Diego 2008)

published a self-improvement book, *Principles That Will Make "Your Life" Predictable*.



Denise Fase (Grand Rapids 1998)

recently began a new position with West Michigan Youth for Christ as a Chief Leadership Officer.



Pervis Hall (Houston 2003)

was honored with the Houston Sun's Freedom Torch Award in recognition of his outstanding community service work.



Sable Horton-Coleman (Fresno 2023)

joined the California CSEC Action Team Advisory Board to support young people and their families affected by sexual exploitation.



Phil Jackson (Chicago 2000)

was acknowledged by the Chicago Defender newspaper as a 2024 Men of Excellence honoree.



Sheila Johnson (Pittsburgh 2018)

was honored as an inductee of the Western Kentucky University Music Wall of Fame.



Ayeisha Dennise Mathis (Boston 2016)

celebrated her Pastoral Installation for the Kingdom Impact Nation in Boston, Massachusetts.



Adrian McConnell (Dennis 2011)

was honored as a "Toast for Charity" 2024 Community Champion for his impact within youth ministry.



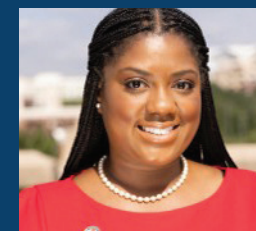
Cynthia Peña (Phoenix 2017)

celebrated 10 years of The Girls Movement, her nonprofit ministry which promotes spiritual growth and unity for Hispanic Christian girls.



Isaiah Sanchez (Phoenix 2017)

graduated from SUM with a Master of Divinity.



Angela Smith (Atlanta 2008)






began a new position as the Community Violence Intervention Senior Operations Manager at the mayor's office in Atlanta, Georgia.

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200 Monroe Ave. NW
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FOR THE CLASS OF 2025-26!

Do you know an outstanding youth worker in Columbus, Grand Rapids, Miami, Seattle-Tacoma, or St. Louis?
Please nominate them today!

NOMINEES SHOULD MEET THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

- Minimum of three years of experience in youth ministry
- Leads a program/ministry that directly impacts youth
- Passion to share leadership with others
- Desire to learn with a teachable spirit
- In a position to implement plans for change
- Able to participate fully as a part of his/her job
- Personally active in a church



CONTACT DVULI
or go to **dvuli.org/nominate**

