

ON THE

Volume 25 | Issue 2 | Summer 2022

LEVEL

DVULI.ORG

BREAKTHROUGH

Laassah Taylor-Marshall
Dances to a New Attitude

OPINION

Bwana Clements Urges Leaders
to Preach More Than Scripture

MYRON BERNARD HAS HAD ENOUGH
WITH URBAN YOUTH FACING

HOUSING INSECURITY



COLD, DIRTY, AND LUXURIOUS

LETTER
FROM THE
EDITOR

On a recent overnight camping trip in Northern Michigan, I had the privilege of being a parent chaperone for nearly 100 sixth graders, and my 12-year-old daughter was among them. In preparation for the two-night adventure, I had two concerns: staying dry and staying warm. Sweatshirts, long-thermals, hoodies, knee-high socks, gloves, and more were all crammed in my bag. Lodging was a nylon waterproof tent by Coleman (not by Marriott?).

I admire Boris Villacorta (Los Angeles 2005), Bwana Clements (Indianapolis 2013), Myron Bernard (Seattle/Tacoma 2011), and other DVULI alumni who advocate for a population whose options for lodging most nights are no different (and sadly worse) than the two I faced on nylon-covered dirt.

The heart-wrenching reality is countless urban youth in our communities are functioning under such conditions.



There I lay in the dark, wind blowing, rain falling, preteens screaming, sleeping bag zipped over my head,
**AND THE LORD IMPRESSED ON MY HEART,
“THIS IS HOW SOME PEOPLE LIVE EVERY NIGHT.”**

Forewarned I would be rooming with another sixth-grade parent, imagine my thoughts when we were handed a bag about the shape and size of a loaf of bread containing Coleman tent assembly parts, including a bottom tarp no bigger than a twin-size bed sheet.

With the tent in place, I decided to call it a night first so I could establish my share of the tarp ahead of “Mr. Parent Roomie.” There I lay in the dark, wind blowing, rain falling, preteens screaming, sleeping bag zipped over my head, and the Lord impressed on my heart, “This is how some people live every night.”

Like Boris, Bwana, Myron, and others, I believe housing insecurity in the US is solvable. Prayerfully, their stories will inspire a reaction that will reduce the number of youths concerned with keeping warm and dry and wondering if hard dirt is the best lodging option.

Trust the process!

Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003), Editor

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THANK YOU! Those two words are filled with more meaning than my words can express. My deepest gratitude to all DVULI alumni and friends for sharing hope, kindness, growth, patience, encouragement, disappointment, inspiration, honesty, forgiveness, care, and celebration over the years. Your expressions of support since I announced my retirement mean so much. I’m grateful now to join your alumni ranks and can’t wait to hang out with you at the Philadelphia reunion in 2023! I will always be praying that the work God started in each one of us on our DVULI journey will continue to bear fruit in our lives and for His glory.

Ginny Vander Hart, Senior Advisor, Philanthropy



**I WILL ALWAYS BE PRAYING THAT
THE WORK GOD STARTED IN
EACH ONE OF US ON OUR DVULI
JOURNEY WILL CONTINUE TO**

**BEAR FRUIT IN OUR LIVES
AND FOR HIS GLORY.**

FORGING FAMILY

FOR THOSE IN THE MARGINS

Myron Bernard hopes to close the homeless gap among urban youth.

By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff Writer

➤ To see Myron Bernard (Seattle/Tacoma 2011) speak or lead a training session is impressive. His resume is equally as telling. One would never assume that his career choice of serving youth pushed out to the margin is rooted in his own childhood trauma.

The second son of first-generation Korean immigrants, Myron's parents met and married in Korea. Prior to their union, however, his mother was subjected to fundamental abuse. She was sex trafficked as a child, which led to significant trauma. After his parents moved to the US, Myron's mother was hospitalized to treat schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression during his formative years.



Young Myron in kindergarten, circa 1985.

"While I was in fourth through seventh grade, she remained in the hospital," recalls Myron. "I didn't have my mother. It wasn't like she was trying to abandon us—the circumstances of her health didn't allow her to be present."

To keep a roof over their heads, Myron's father had to work several jobs, which meant leaving his sons (born a year apart) home alone.

"My brother and I would go for a week or two without seeing an adult in our home," Myron says. "We grew up, like a lot of children, wanting to be good kids; however, we didn't have direction and were hungry, so we ended up at the mini-mart to steal a bag of Doritos for dinner."

Myron and his older brother developed two distinct responses to their environment. Myron finished high school with a 4.1 GPA, whereas his brother graduated late after dropping out. "I was trying to earn love and make people love me," divulges Myron. "And my brother was kind of giving two middle fingers to the whole thing."

Myron struggled with his areas of trauma, abandonment, and family attachment issues and had to work through those things as an adult. "Later in life, as Jesus began to work on my heart, I found massive love for young people who did not experience God's love in a family unit," he explains of his healing journey. "That's what really drew me into urban youth work. My heart always went out to young people who were pushed to the side."

Within 48 hours of becoming homeless, ONE IN THREE YOUTH WILL BE APPROACHED BY THE COMMERCIAL SEX TRADE.

As a youth worker, Myron found himself serving young people who were contending with unstable or inadequate living arrangements. "There's a difference between chronic homelessness and those who are transitionally or temporarily homeless," explains Myron. "The vast majority of people experiencing homelessness are not in that chronic state. Some couch surf for years, bouncing from house to house."

The broad spectrum of housing insecurity ranges from living on the streets or in a car to having a roof over your head but under the constant threat of being forced to leave. "Seeing eviction notices on the front door and wondering if you have a place to stay that night leads to significant trauma in the young person's life," says Myron, who was never homeless but moved often—living wherever his father could afford at the time.

In Pierce County, Washington, where Myron works, 1 in 20 youth are homeless on any given day. Statistics show that if youth do not have consistent, safe housing (i.e., reunited with their families or given assistance to transition to independence), they become more vulnerable to being preyed upon.

*In fact, within 48 hours of becoming homeless, one in three youth will be approached by the commercial sex trade.

"The biggest challenge is that the current system is not designed for young people who are in that space because youth are treated differently legally," explains Myron of the system's failure to properly protect and support minors. "They're always asking, 'What is going on with the parent?'"

God has always worked in tribes, collectives, and COMMUNITIES OF PEOPLE WHO SURROUND, LOVE, AND CARE FOR EACH OTHER.

We get to help build and be part of that community as a forged family.

As Myron got more involved in youth ministry, he began to see firsthand how easy it was for youth to face homelessness. One summer, he had a poignant reality check when Youth for Christ (YFC) hosted an inner-city youth camp.

Two campers needed to leave camp urgently due to being evicted, and their mother needed help moving their belongings. During the car ride down the mountain, one of the sisters was overheard asking the question, "Is this dude Jesus going to give us a place to sleep tonight?" Her question hit Myron hard. A "Jesus experience" at camp wasn't their fundamental need. He identified this as a real-life correlation to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and concluded, "Unless there's a foundation of some stability and safety in life, the ability to spiritually receive and process who Jesus is will not be possible."

For youth workers, recognizing signs of homelessness in young people can be tricky because they all want to fit in. Inconsistent adequate hygiene is the most common sign, but youth can hide it well. Another sign is when youth direct you to meet them somewhere like a friend's house when asking where to pick them up.

"When family and the emotional and physical support are removed from someone's life, it's easy for homelessness to become a reality," explains Myron. Meaning there are a lot of complicated factors that lead to the experience of homelessness, especially chronic homelessness.

Myron believes urban youth workers have the unique opportunity to bridge that gap and be a connector. "We get to forge a new family around them when the nuclear

Sources: *nn4youth.org



Myron and his kids celebrate his eldest daughter's high school graduation. Pictured left to right are Jacob, Jubilee (the graduate), Myron, Ruby, and his youngest Jojo (in front).

family breaks down," he says. "Forged family is the creation of resources and the strength around the youth's life that God had intended the family to provide. God has always worked in tribes, collectives, and communities of people who surround, love, and care for each other. We get to help build and be part of that community as a forged family."

When it comes to serving broken and marginalized youth, Myron insists you have to intentionally go to the borders just like Jesus. "It's an encouragement for every youth worker and youth organization," he charges. "There are kids in every city and community across America on the verge of tragedy and trauma. Jesus calls His church to protect those lives. They're not going to necessarily come to us. We have to meet them where they are."



Myron Bernard (Seattle/Tacoma 2011) is the Senior Director of Community Engagement at Tacoma Rescue Mission (TRM) where he shares the stories of compromised youth with donors so TRM staff can infiltrate the margins, find the lost, and be the bridge between displacement and hope in

Christ. He also works part time at Youth For Christ, where he previously served full time for 12 years.

Instagram: [myron.bernard](#) Facebook: [myron79](#)



BREAKTHROUGH



LAASSAH TAYLOR-MARSHALL (GRAND RAPIDS 1998)



By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff

For the past 10 years at DVULI's second national conference in West Michigan, Laassah (pronounced Lay-ah-sah) Taylor-Marshall (Grand Rapids 1998) has been a featured member of the DVULI alumni worship team. Her voice and heart of worship are so contagious that everyone in attendance—even hotel employees and guests—stop in their tracks to sing, clap, and dance with her.

The fact that Laassah was raised going to church and began singing at age three reveals a few things about her wiring. Of course, she's committed to her faith in Christ, artistically gifted, and has a natural affinity for the stage. But there are other qualities about this "creative burst of energy" that are not as easily noticed.

 [laassahtaylormarshall](#)
 [xpressions.dance.1](#)

Laassah longed to be loved in a healthy way and craved a safe place to be herself which led her to hide behind singing. These insecurities manifested into a fear of speaking publicly, so she learned to do ministry without having to talk. Once she became a young woman, Laassah accepted God's call to youth ministry and actively served at her church for more than 15 years.

"I was operating at a high level of energy and passion with a lack of relational support," admits Laassah. "There was no distinction between my personal life and my career—they were completely merged."

What looked good on the surface was actually a place of fear and isolation for Laassah, who has a local following from sharing the stage with nationally renowned Gospel artists.

When the DVULI staff accepted her into the inaugural Grand Rapids cohort, one of the insecurities Laassah would have to face was her extreme difficulty opening up to others. "If you weren't family, I wasn't letting you in," she reasons. "Learning to trust a group of like-minded leaders who were strangers was a challenge for me. But, for the first time, I found out it was okay for me to be unapologetically and authentically me with people outside of my own family."

Fully committed to the DVULI training requirements, what kept Laassah trusting the process was her devoted relationship with God and focus on ministry and community. But on the other side of her impressive achievements was the reality that she was headed toward burnout.

IN THE LAST 15 YEARS, LAASSAH HAS LED MORE THAN 1,000 YOUTH IN SONG AND DANCE, INSPIRING THEIR OWN PERSONAL METAMORPHOSIS OF HEALING, GROWTH, AND HOPE.

"I knew there was something I needed. I just didn't know what until I became a DVULI participant," reflects Laassah. "It was at a turning point in my life. My cohort is truly an extended family that shares in prayer, spiritual intimacy, and friendship."

Her heart to help youth lacked boundaries. Laassah would open the doors of her home for youth in her ministry as well as homeless youth to provide a roof over their head. But it ultimately created chaos. "The DVULI program showed me how to create a healthy balance between my personal life and ministry life," she explains. "It's okay for me to say no."

She also learned to focus on the Savior instead of trying to be a savior for her youth, learning, "I am enough, and God's validation is more important than all others. Processing life and ministry through living out the core values helps me see things in a healthy way."

Laassah and Xpressions of Praise Christian Dance & Performing Arts at Festival of the Arts Grand Rapids.



Laassah (pictured in the blue visor) and a local group of supporting artists.

DVULI's ministry assessment tool and the core value of empowerment led Laassah to a "life shift." Gaining access to information in the 15-month training led her to devise a transformative strategic ministry plan. "It has always been an easy task for me to empower others, but there was a huge void when it came to self-empowerment," she explains. "I was able to realign my personal and ministry outlook due to the mentor support I received throughout the program."

It comes as no surprise that Laassah's breakthrough plan was focused on opening her own dance studio. "My goal was to not operate as a normal dance studio," she explains. "We would empower youth with the tools to succeed by building character and self-esteem and being a safe space for them to dream big and reach their personal goals."

In 2009, Laassah opened Xpressions Of Praise Christian Dance & Performing Arts (XOP). God gave her the vision to "pour life, build self-worth, and demonstrate value to those who were X'd-out, told they weren't good enough, or called too fat, too skinny, too tall," she describes.

In the last 15 years, Laassah has led more than 1,000 youth in song and dance, inspiring their own personal metamorphosis of healing, growth, and hope. She keeps students motivated with the XOP motto: "You don't have to be great to start, just start to be great!"

In addition to living out her heart's passion, she also gained knowledge about the importance of community and operating with healthy skills. "To see the results of the person I used to be, transformed mentally, as a DVULI grad feels amazing! I will forever be grateful to DVULI for everything it has brought to my life. Words can't describe the gratitude I feel for the transformation that has taken place due to my connection with DVULI. I am encouraged to continue to embrace change, creativity, and interdependence as a leader in my community."

The relationships Laassah formed 23 years ago with her cohort are closer than ever today. She and her fellow alumni meet monthly for breakfast and one-on-one get-togethers. Her faithful DVULI family has helped her gain a new perspective on trust and accountability.

DVULI WELCOMES

TWO NEW LIAISONS

By Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003)

In June, the DVULI staff introduced the addition of Reggie Smalls (Boston 1998) and Valerie Wimms (Pittsburgh 2012) to the team of liaisons. Reggie will be responsible for alumni relations in Boston and Philadelphia, while Valerie will cover Cleveland and Pittsburgh.



REGGIE SMALLS
(Boston 1998)

PHILADELPHIA, PA

A trailblazer, Reggie comes from the very first DVULI cohort when the 15-month program was designed with twice the amount of content than it offers today.

"I was impressed with the level of instruction and the systematic way of teaching," says Reggie. "The learning was more academic, and coming from corporate America, I appreciated that."

At that time, Reggie was president of the youth department at Bethel Pentecostal Church in the Dorchester section of Boston, where he reached an average of 25 youth each week. As a leader who is still passionate about developing young people and getting them excited about God, Reggie now serves as the senior pastor at Bethel Pentecostal Church.

BOSTON, MA

"I look forward to making sure the two cities are doing their best to stay involved with each other and that **THE NEXT WAVE OF YOUTH LEADERS ARE EQUIPPED.**"

Filled with anticipation for the role of liaison, Reggie expressed, "I look forward to making sure the two cities are doing their best to stay involved with each other and that the next wave of youth leaders are equipped." He adds, "What excites me is that this is a great way to stay connected with alumni and participants, and it will help me stay sharp as well."

As a husband for 33 years to Monica and the father of two sons (Marquis and Isaiah), Reggie enjoys traveling, playing board games, and hanging out with family and friends. He also insists that everyone knows he is a huge Boston fan of the Celtics, Patriots, and Red Sox pro sports teams.

[f reggie.smalls.1](#) [@ reggie_smalls](#)



VALERIE WIMMS
(Pittsburgh 2012)

CLEVELAND, OH

PITTSBURGH, PA

In like fashion, Valerie refuses to deny her love for the Pittsburgh Steelers, even though she now lives and works in Cleveland, Ohio (home of her NFL rivals, the Cleveland Browns).

Considered a veteran urban youth worker, Valerie has been active in the profession for over 30 years. While living in Pittsburgh, she began as a volunteer youth director at Rodman Street Baptist Church, and 14 years later, she was promoted to full-time staff for another 10 years in the same role.

Valerie relocated to Cleveland in 2019 to assume the director of youth, young adults, and outreach at South Euclid United Church of Christ. Before the pandemic, she and her team served an average of 80 to 100 youth. Those numbers have dropped to about half due to virtual options and other measures assuring youth safety.

"I still mentor youth one-on-one and at a nearby high school," explains Valerie, who says her main focus has always been instilling the love of God and salvation through Jesus Christ. "I tell kids each week we learn a little more about God and a little more about ourselves."

As the new liaison to Cleveland and Pittsburgh, Valerie hopes to revitalize the presence of DVULI alumni to have a greater impact on their youth and their leaders.

"I want to look at how we can energize the leadership with a sense of hope because so many of their young people have lost hope—especially since the pandemic," she notes. "But it will require going from me to we."

[@_valgal](#) [f valerie.wimms](#)

During her DVULI training, Valerie recalls how the content at the first national conference hit her like a ton of bricks. "I realized I was trying to be everyone's plan A," she said of her ministry leadership practices. "It hit me that I needed to make some changes and empower people to be their own plan A. I learned I had resources I could put to use and not have to do it all myself."

Valerie was recently introduced as a DVULI trainer for the Community Youth Development workshop. She has looked forward to being in this space for a while because she can relate to what youth workers need. "I know what burnout is like," she said. "And it takes a lot to bounce back from, and there's no need for our leaders to face that."

Reggie and Valerie will be making visits to respective liaison cities as part of their onboarding to form and strengthen relationships with their fellow DVULI alumni.

"I still mentor youth one-on-one and at a nearby high school," explains Valerie, who says her **MAIN FOCUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN INSTILLING THE LOVE OF GOD AND SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.**

BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE BASICS

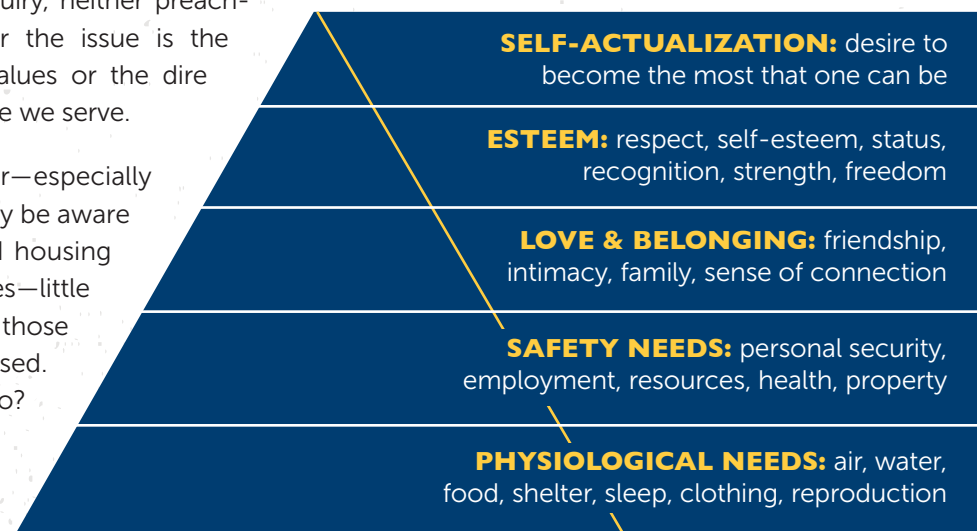
Throughout my life, I've heard the phrase, "The family is the building block of society." In church, this phrase was often attached to a message about the importance of two-parent homes rooted in God's Word and faithfulness to the local church. In the community, the phrase plunges into every political cycle along with issues such as single mom concerns, the rise of violence, and the societal responsibilities of caring for the poor.

Both the preacher and the politician seek to convince their audience that adherence to what we now call traditional family values will insulate them from the hardships of life. But like the chicken or the egg inquiry, neither preacher nor politician identifies whether the issue is the departure from traditional family values or the dire living conditions imposed upon those we serve.

Unfortunately, for the urban leader—especially the one in ministry who may not fully be aware of the impact of poverty, food and housing insecurity, or other social deficiencies—little progress will be made in the lives of those we serve until those issues are addressed. And isn't that what we're called to do? Make a difference in people's lives?

Let's take housing insecurity, for example, which is among the most basic of human needs. Abraham Maslow, one of the most influential psychologists of the early twentieth century, studied the lives of exceptional people and positive human qualities. In 1954, he wrote a book titled *Motivation and Personality*, where he introduced his Hierarchy of Human Needs Model. Within the hierarchy, he explains five domains of human needs that build one on top of the other: (1) physiological, (2) safety, (3) love and belonging, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualization.

ABRAHAM MASLOW'S Hierarchy of Human Needs



As leaders serving in the urban context, I can't think of a more practical and important model for us to understand and apply.

Stable housing is a foundational safety necessity. Knowing where we will sleep at night is extremely vital to the mental health and feelings of security for all people—most critically, children.

KNOWING WHERE WE WILL SLEEP AT NIGHT IS EXTREMELY VITAL to the mental health and feelings of security for all people—most critically, children.

As a consultant for an Indianapolis-based charter school, I watched families enroll and withdraw their children from school as many as three times in the same school year. I recall taking a de-escalation "walk n' talk" with a fifth grader after he got into a classroom fight. He was one of my regular "walk n' talk" friends as he was prone to aggressive and disruptive behavior. During this conversation, I was struck by his comment: "Mr. B, I don't really care if I get in trouble cuz we about to move anyway." When I asked him how he knew he was moving, he replied, "Cuz when the 'house man' give your momma that red letter, that means y'all got to move."

According to Maslow, stable housing sits in the second domain while problem-solving and morality are in the fifth. How then does the school, the community, or urban leaders like us honestly expect a young man like this to succeed?

I have no idea how many times his family has had to move homes. I do know the experience has been repeated enough for him to understand that a red letter from a landlord means he and his family must find a new place to live (again).

Whether addressing housing instability, food insecurity, utility assistance, or health care, we have an obligation as urban leaders to be informed about the basic needs of the people we serve.

We may not work for an agency that can meet the need, but we can and should familiarize ourselves with the resources of the community and be bridge builders whenever possible. (See resources on page 14.) This is especially true when reasonable progress is not being made, and we continue to struggle with the same unwanted behaviors or challenges despite the work being accomplished.

A warning light should go off that directs us to consider what stressors might be preventing us from achieving what we've set out to accomplish.

In my experience, remembering how Jesus made it a point to both feed and preach to people (Luke 9:11-13) refined my approach and brought a deeper sense of clarity to the barriers of progress.

I urge us all to make our first sermon building bridges to a meal, a bed, or a paid utility bill, before opening our Bibles to deliver scripture.

Bwana Clements (Indianapolis 2013)
is a social worker, professional consultant, program developer, and author. He earned a BS at Ball State University, and an MSW at Indiana University.
f [bwana.clements.75](https://www.facebook.com/bwana.clements.75)



D ALUMNI PROFILE

By Audra Beaty (San Antonio 2022)

NAME: Boris Villacorta (Los Angeles 2005)



NAME OF ORGANIZATION:
The Bresee Foundation

POSITION: Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) Case Manager

www.bresee.org Breseeela BreseeFoundation

Tell us about your youth program and how you fulfill its mission.

I have worked in youth programs for 34 years, including 20 years with the Bresee Foundation in Los Angeles, California. The organization’s mission is “to battle poverty by empowering local youth and families with skills, resources, and relationships necessary to thrive.” Bresee offers several programs for youth and their families that fulfill this mission. I serve as the case manager for the Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) program, where many young people experience housing insecurities, which can lead to gang involvement. The GRYD fram work is not limited to the prevention of gang involvement but also provides the community with resources to stabilize their living conditions.

**GOD HAS CALLED ME
TO LIVE AND WORK AS A
SERVANT OF THE GOSPEL
AS REPRESENTED IN
MATTHEW 5:14-16.**

Why do you think God has called you to this work?

My life story begins as a young child growing up in El Salvador during the civil war in the 1980s. Our family immigrated to Los Angeles to escape the violence. As an immigrant youth, I could have easily gravitated to negative influences in a city like Los Angeles to fit in. Since I chose the right path, today I work with many immigrants who have fled their countries of origin in search of safety and economic opportunities.

In El Salvador, I attended church and heard Archbishop Oscar Romero speak. He inspired me to serve the most vulnerable in my community. Romero’s message said, “There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have

cried.” I remind myself of this when I serve urban youth. God has called me to live and work as a servant of the Gospel as represented in Matthew 5:14–16, which states, “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”



What do you hope to accomplish while you serve in this capacity?

I hope to provide a safe haven for young people when home isn’t safe or they have no home to go to at all. I mentor youth to discover their talents and gifts, support them as they overcome challenges, and teach them to believe in themselves and have faith. My goal is to empower youth to pursue their dreams and become future leaders who will make the world a better place for future generations. We hope to advocate for better education opportunities and safer housing conditions. Ultimately, we hope to end youth homelessness and youth violence. Father Greg Boyle of Homeboy Industries says, “Here is what we seek: a compassion that can stand in awe at what the poor have to carry rather than stand in judgment of how they carry it.” That is the kind of ministry I want to live out.

What challenges have you or the organization had to overcome?

We needed to rethink how to serve our community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic increased housing and food insecurities in our community. To address these challenges, we had food drives and became a pop-up site for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. We became a central agency in the Los Angeles area to support families needing rental assistance and food.

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

The youth we have mentored and counseled have returned to Bresee to serve others. Approximately half of the current staff at Bresee are youth who attended programs here. We have seen our students graduate from universities and are now teachers at local schools. We initiate conversations with parents to construct family strength and look within their rich cultural history in order to better support their children.



THE YOUTH WE HAVE MENTORED AND COUNSELED HAVE RETURNED TO BRESEE TO SERVE OTHERS.

What kind of collaborative opportunities benefit this work?

Los Angeles Unified School District actively refers youth to our afterschool programs and at-risk students to the Gang Reduction and Youth Development program. Our spiritual faith partners include Young Life, Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, and the Dream Center. Through grants from the City of Los Angeles and support from L.A. County, we continue to support our families by providing food, mental health resources, and transportation to youth development activities. With the funding from the City of Los Angeles, we can continue running the rental assistance program, provide free tax services, keep our family center open, and run our gang prevention programs.

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

Pray our organization will continue to be financially supported by people who believe in our cause. Pray that the young people who come through our doors become leaders who will continue this work. Personally, I pray the Lord continues to provide me with strong faith to commit myself to service in spirit and actions as a mentor for urban youth. I also pray I remember Oscar Romero’s words, “We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work.”

DVULI ALUMNI UPDATES

Share your personal updates and career benchmarks with us: [DVULI.ORG/YOURSTORIES](https://dvuli.org/yourstories)



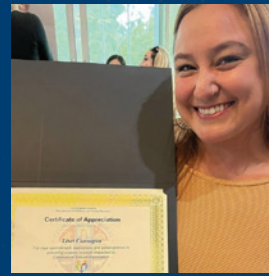
Lutunji Abram
(Twin Cities 2008)
is celebrating the opening of Lutunji's Palate Bakery & Cafe in downtown Minneapolis.
f [Lutunjispalate](#)
@ [lutunjispalate](#)



Cara J. Allen
(NYC 2010) and her husband, Matthew, welcomed Matthew Allen III into their family on March 24.
f [Cara J. Allen](#)
@ [carajanai](#)



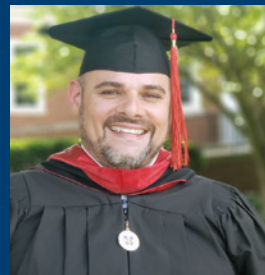
Larry Clifton Jr.
(Newark 2014) and his wife, Jennifer, welcomed their second child in April!
f [Larry.Clifton](#)



Liset Cunnigan
(Los Angeles 2019) was given a Certificate of Appreciation from the LA County Department of Children and Family Services.
f [liset.cunnigan](#)
@ [yupitsmua](#)



Brandy Frias
(Columbus 2017) is now an academic advisor at Central Ohio Technical College.
f [brandy.frias](#)



Mike Gault
(Miami 2018) just graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Theological Studies from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
f [mike.w.gault](#)
@ [bigdaddydolphins/](#)



Chase Grogan
(Boston 2016) was named Coach of the Year by Boston Public Schools.
f [chase.grogan.127](#)
@ [grogan_44](#)



Willie Kelley
(Houston 2010) earned a doctorate in Executive Educational Leadership from Houston Baptist University.
f [willie.kelley.3](#)
@ [communitywfkelly2](#)



Sean Nelson
(Houston 2010) accepted a youth pastor position at Windsor Village United Methodist Church.
f [seanclleve](#)
@ [seanmotorcty](#)



Yicaury Pacheco
(Boston 2016) graduated with a Master of Arts in Leadership from Gordon College!
f [Yiry13](#)



Tamir Reyes
(Newark 2015) and her husband, Nii Ato, welcomed baby Nalani Eve into their family on April 1!
f [treys11](#)



Felicia Sanders
(Chicago 2007) is now the Chief Schools Officer of Chicago Public Schools.
f [felicia.h.sanders](#)



Dr. Margaret Sebastian
(Chicago 2007) was given the Nia Award by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).
f [margaret.sebastian.77](#)
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Tyrell Shoemaker
(Chicago 2021) and his wife, Rachel, welcomed their fifth child into their family!
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Phil Skei
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Confronting Housing Insecurity Among Urban Youth

More than 4.2 million youth in the US experience homelessness each year. As youth workers, many of us have had conversations with youth who are currently displaced from their homes. The complexities and broad spectrum of youth housing insecurity make recommending one specific resource a challenge. However, one thing is clear after researching this topic: prevention is vital.

Below are some crucial steps to take if youth in your ministry are facing displacement.

2-1-1 **CONTACT 211**
Get Connected. Get Help.™ Dialing 211 or going to 211.org will provide a list of baseline resources that can assist youth facing homelessness. Sponsored by United Way, the 211 network specializes in mental health resources, which is critical as many young people struggle with the weight and trauma of displacement.

CONTACT LOCAL SCHOOLS
For leaders working with children under the age of 18, be sure to contact the youth's school. Each school is funded with resources to assist children in navigating their displacement situation.

GOOGLE SEARCH "YOUTH DROP-IN CENTER NEAR ME."
Each city has organizations that provide safe places for youth to grab meals, take showers, do laundry, and make connections. You can also try nationalsafeplace.org.

My hope is that these resources will help you take the necessary steps **TO EQUIP YOU AND YOUR MINISTRIES TO BETTER NAVIGATE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY.**



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Finally, below are some additional websites to equip you with vital knowledge to become a helpful advocate.



NATIONAL NETWORK FOR YOUTH
nn4youth.org

National Network for Youth advocates for federal policy and measures to be put in place to help eradicate youth homelessness. This organization also has a national youth advisory council that works to empower youth to help shape the policies and strategies to address youth homelessness.



POINT SOURCE YOUTH
pointsourceyouth.org

Point Source Youth helps connect youth with scalable rehousing opportunities. This organization offers resources and trainings to help youth workers better understand some of the factors that come into play with youth displacement.




YOUTH COLLABORATORY
youthcollaboratory.org

Youth Collaboratory created the Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center (RHYTTAC). This initiative offers information and training on how to build programs in communities that address youth homelessness. The organization also provides grants for these programs.



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NOW RECRUITING

FOR THE CLASS OF 2023!

Can you recommend a youth worker in Cleveland, Fresno, Orlando, San Diego, or New York City?

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](https://www.dvuli.org/nominate)

