

ON THE LEVEL

Volume 24 | Issue 1 | Spring 2022

DVULI.ORG

BREAKTHROUGH

Obed Escobar Unites and
Transforms Youth Leaders
in the City of Phoenix

OPINION

Bwana Clements Sees Mental
and Emotional Health as Ground
Zero for Leaders

**BROOK MARIE ENEAS BELIEVES EVERY
MESSAGE TO YOUNG WOMEN IS A MATTER OF**

LIFE & DEATH

THE LAW OF REPETITION

LETTER
FROM THE
EDITOR

The law of repetition states that repeating a behavior makes it more powerful.

If that theory holds true, then every practice or habit a leader engages in will inevitably produce some desired (or undesired) fruit!

Brook Marie Eneas (Miami 2009), Jennifer Hicks (Los Angeles 2010), Obed Escobar (Phoenix 2017), and other DVULI alumni are in the habit of being consistent. They realize the losses that are at risk when failing to make good on promises.

Consider the behavior(s) you're committed to,
**AND PONDER IF THEY'RE PRODUCING THE KIND OF
FRUIT THAT ADVANCES YOUR GOD-GIVEN CALLING**
or if they are gaining ground in ways you'd prefer not to discuss.

Without question, today's urban youth demand consistency from their mentors, leaders, and ministers. Once there is a gap or glitch in whatever commitment you've made, it becomes convenient for students or mentees to divert their attention to the vices they find more reliable.

We've heard it said that we are all creatures of habit. Consider the behavior(s) you're committed to, and ponder if they're producing the kind of fruit that advances your God-given calling or if they are gaining ground in ways you'd prefer to not discuss.

In this issue of OTL, the focus on healthy habits is not because most New Year's resolutions have flopped by now. However, let the best practices of Brook, Jennifer, Obed, and Bwana Clements (Indianapolis 2013), our opinion columnist for 2022, prove that you don't have to be a genius to achieve the great results that come with being consistent.

Trust the process!

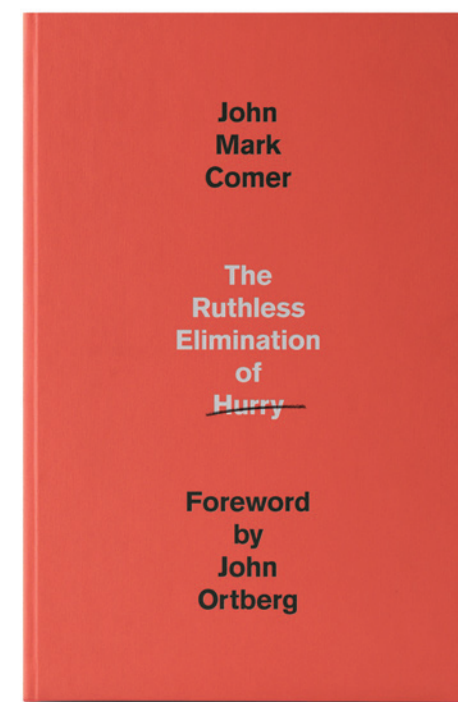
Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003), Editor

 [gerald.bell](https://www.facebook.com/gerald.bell)

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

On the Level is a quarterly publication of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI). All content is property of DVULI and may not be republished or reproduced without permission. Views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the DVULI staff, RDV Corporation, or the DeVos Family Foundations.

The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative is a 501c3, founded in 1998 and made possible by the generous support of the DeVos Family Foundations. © 2022



The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

John Mark Comer

By Brandon Woodard (Cincinnati 2021)

As youth workers, we're always looking for habits to implement that help us tackle our many commitments. However, for many of us in youth work, we are simply too busy to learn new habits. We are on the run constantly, whether in meetings, events for youth, counseling, or countless other commitments. With all of the busyness, the question we must ask ourselves is this: What time in my busy schedule do I carve out for God?

In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, Pastor John Mark Comer provides a roadmap for how to **REORIENT OUR LIVES AROUND THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMITMENT WE HAVE.**

How we answer it makes all the difference. In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, Pastor John Mark Comer provides a roadmap for how to reorient our lives around the most important commitment we have. He also offers habits

that set us up for holistic success. In this easy-to-read and highly practical book, you will learn how to take simple steps to create healthy habits of Sabbath, simplicity, silence, and solitude in your spiritual life that will lead to living a life from a full cup instead of an empty one.

The section on Sabbath was worth its weight in gold for me personally. Sabbath was such a foreign practice that I didn't think I could implement because of my commitments, but after being challenged to "start where you are and build slowly," it's been immensely life-giving for me, my family, and the ministries I lead! As theologian Walter Brueggemann stated, "People who keep Sabbath live all seven days differently."

If you are looking to start healthy habits, I encourage you to check out this work by Pastor John Mark Comer.



BRANDON WOODARD (Cincinnati 2021)

 [brandon.woodard.127](https://www.facebook.com/brandon.woodard.127)

 [bwoodard06/](https://www.instagram.com/bwoodard06/)

 [bwoodard06](https://twitter.com/bwoodard06)

 [linkedin.com/in/brandon-woodard-813093a1/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/brandon-woodard-813093a1/)

WATCH YOUR WORDS

By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff Writer

Pageant competitor turned youth worker believes every message to young women is a matter of life and death.

As a 15-year-old girl, Brook Marie Eneas (Miami 2009) will never forget the day her aunt told her, “I used to look like you.” Staring back at her, Brook saw an older woman who struggled with health and weight issues for as long as she could remember. She wondered how her aunt, and many of the women in her family, transformed from young and healthy to worn and sickly. Brook asked, “Lord, what do I need to do to change this?” The experience planted a seed that became a 25-year journey and Brook’s call to coach young women about establishing and sustaining healthy habits for life.

In college, when Brook gained the freshman 15, she was “frustrated with the lack of quality foods available to students.” With no guidance to help her navigate the food desert, Brook became that person for herself. Her study of chemistry and molecular biology, combined with being a fitness instructor, uniquely paved the way for a career as a fitness/nutrition/mental wellness coach. After receiving a master’s degree in public administration from Florida State University, Brook went on to compete in beauty pageants with the “pure motivation of establishing a platform to influence young women and girls.” Winning Miss Florida Panhandle USA and running a Miss USA franchise did just that, and she launched Rockthestagefitness.com, a pageant fitness consulting business. She prepares her young women for competition while also addressing the whole person—this is her ministry.

Brook’s ultimate goal is to help young women reach their calling. “I want you to fulfill whatever purpose you feel like God has called you to,” Brook tells them. “So what is going to help us do that? It starts with eating well.”



f [brookmarieeneas](#)
@ [brookmarieeneas](#)



“When kids are eating a whole bunch of junk, artificial flavoring, sugars, salts, and preservatives, it causes them to change mentally—a chemical rewiring occurs,” explains Brook. “I have them link their mood with the food they eat using a food log at times throughout the program, so they see the parallelism.” Youth can then spot trends behind bad habits like overeating, skipping meals, and binging.

“What I’ve learned is that the relationship with food matters,” observes Brook. “So sometimes youth have unhealthy relationships because there’s another part of their life that is out of order. Food becomes the source for them versus God.”

Brook believes that today’s young women are growing up in a hostile and artificial environment that falsely tells them who they are and what society demands of them. “There’s no escaping the pressures of social media and its false depiction of what is real versus what is photoshopped. It’s a major issue,” explains Brook. “Add to that bullying, word curses, and lack of affirmation in the home. It’s all compounded.”

Brook’s first step in disarming the pressure is with dialogue that probes the mindset with the following inquiries:

- Can you show me a picture of someone you admire and want to look like?
- Why do you admire this person?
- Why is it you think this way?
- Why is it you see yourself this way?
- Who has framed this level of thought in your life?
- Who has been your biggest influence?
- What caused you to get here?
- What do you expect to get out of this program?

She walks young women through concepts of love, self-love, and understanding the beauty of discipline in a positive way. “The idea is to move past the cosmetic outward appearance to what lies beneath,” she shares. “We spend a lot of time unpacking these questions.”

This DVULI grad introduces them to the value of embracing their own genetics and celebrating the blessing of being healthy. “This doesn’t always click right away,” Brook notes. “Because many young women suffer from unhealthy association with food causing a host of undiagnosed eating disorders. Many don’t want to admit they have a problem.”

Brook goes on to explain that the cause of this issue ranges from trauma to a seemingly benign comment from a family member. “Sometimes parents don’t recognize the weight of their words,” asserts Brook. “It’s surprising because family—even in their good intentions—can cause significant hurt. It’s dismantling what the enemy has said

through man. So, watch your words! You can change an entire child’s or teenager’s perspective based on words. It’s critical to think before you speak as the words you choose may be a matter of life and death.”

In terms of body image, Brook says, “Young women need help to see a better depiction of themselves. Youth workers can be a powerful voice of influence, especially with the young women who don’t have a father at home. I’m intentional about my salutation in every conversation, text, voice message, or Instagram comment,” explains Brook, whose go-to phrases are, “Hey, beautiful. Hey, love. Hey, gorgeous. I’m proud of you. You are loved!” She further encourages youth workers to “take it beyond ‘you’re pretty’ and beyond what the youth are doing to ‘you matter’ and ‘you have a purpose.’”



Brook finds the act of pausing and reflecting has been erased in our culture. “We’re constantly going, accelerating,” says this wife and mother of two sons. “The practice of Sabbath, sitting, thinking, and reflecting is out the door, especially for this generation.” A low-cost way to kick-start this healthy habit is journaling, and Brook recommends this as a daily practice, including food logs, followed by a time of reflection every Friday. She consistently checks in, asking, “Hey, can we celebrate something this week? What was a win for you? What were you proud of?”

Brook advises youth workers to pay attention to the unspoken. “If you see a young lady who’s always covering herself and in baggy clothes all the time, she’s saying something without saying something,” she advises. “If you see a young lady dressed provocatively, she’s saying something without saying something. Speak to the deeper need.”

To promote healthy eating and clear-headed thinking, Brook suggests providing healthier options at hangouts to set an example of “kingdom health.” Brooks says, “This could be the only healthy food some children have access to.”

Brook’s message to today’s young women and for the female youth worker is one in the same: “Take back your sense of natural dominion over your life and your health so you can achieve your dreams, live your purpose, and conquer emotions that cause procrastination, emotional eating, and self-sabotage,” she exhorts. “Don’t wait until later on in life to recognize the fault in this. Working on one habit can drastically change your life, even if it just begins with the truth we believe and the words we use.”



PORTLAND,
OREGON



DETROIT,
MICHIGAN



INTRODUCING THE ADVULI CLASS OF 2022 COHORTS

By Kimberlee Mitchell, DVULI Staff

Specially selected from Detroit, Louisville, Portland, San Antonio, and Washington DC, these 5 cohorts have begun their 15-month DVULI leadership journey.

As always, we welcome them and look forward to seeing the breakthroughs that will take place in each of their lives and careers.



SAN ANTONIO,
TEXAS



WASHINGTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



TRUST THE PROCESS!



LOUISVILLE,
KENTUCKY





OBED ESCOBAR
(Phoenix 2017)

Titus Foundation celebrated the graduation of its first cohort of Phoenix-based youth workers on February 29, 2021.



By Kimberlee Mitchell, Staff

Nine years ago, a group of local youth pastors decided to hold a prayer walk in downtown Phoenix. To their surprise, more than 1,800 youth workers, youth, and parents showed up. This extraordinary event planted the seed in Obed Escobar's (Phoenix 2017) heart to launch a practical training hub for local youth workers. The idea was a divine appointment, but the challenge of executing it was overwhelming because he and his team were not yet fully equipped for the task ahead.

f [escobar.obed](#) @ [obed_pv](#)

Obed had recently started the 15-month DVULI journey and learned early on that before he could address his team's needs, he had to address his own leadership at home. At NC1, Henry Greenidge's testimony of ministry success and personal failure hit Obed hard. "I'll never forget his powerful story," shares Obed, who had never before heard a pastor be so open and vulnerable. What Obed took away from Henry's case study was that investing in his marriage and family needs to be priority one. "I love my wife with all my heart," shares Obed in his written breakthrough plan. "But I was failing miserably in demonstrating my love for her with actions." To create daily connection, he implemented a chat group with his wife and family where they could get real with one another and share prayer requests and scripture. Obed realizes, "I can only give what I have, and taking care of my spiritual life and home life first is the most important thing I can do to lead others."

"IN ORDER FOR US TO MAKE A DENT AND EFFECTIVELY REACH YOUTH IN PHOENIX AND TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES, WE HAVE TO DO IT TOGETHER."

With his family headed in the right direction, he set out to make changes at work. The core value of interdependence made a deep impression on Obed. He was able to put into action a precedent-setting city-wide collaboration. With the help of his fellow DVULI alumni and pastors from local churches, they combined efforts in one huge youth service. "It was awesome to see everybody," recalls Obed. "We had African American, Hispanic, and Asian kids from FCA, Young Life, and other youth ministries."

Obed goes on to describe, "It was a perfect example of working together and putting our organization names to the side. In order for us to make a dent and effectively reach youth in Phoenix and transform communities, we have to do it together."

DVULI's Community Youth Development (CYD) workshop shifted something in Obed when it challenged him to view the community of Phoenix in a different way. In the past, he labeled the community as "at risk" and struggled to see its resources. The CYD training transformed his mindset by



City-wide prayer walk with 1,800 youth workers, youth, and parents in downtown Phoenix in 2016.

opening his eyes to see a wealth of organizations, partners, volunteers, and donors who were ready and willing to work together. They simply needed to be asked and galvanized.

With a new perspective, Obed discovered what he now calls an "at hope" community bustling with promise. "The workshop allowed me to see the difference between preaching the gospel and living out the gospel together in the community we all call home," admits Obed. "The tools allowed me to see the needs and see the resources."

What started as an idea for a training hub for youth workers has grown into a nonprofit called [Titus Foundation](#). Obed uses the DVULI model for his work at Titus and credits being able to expand and execute at a higher level due to his training. "Although my team was already working on equipping youth pastors and leaders, DVULI gave us a complete set of tools, training, encouragement, and clarity to effectively engage, equip, and empower the next generation of leaders in Arizona," explains Obed.

Titus Foundation now hosts leadership training cohorts, worship events, and city-wide conferences, which reached 300+ youth pastors and leaders in 2021. In January 2022, the foundation celebrated its first graduating class of 11 participants. The training is condensed into one year, and instead of a breakthrough plan, participants are tasked to present a plan of how they are going to bring transformation to their communities. In the coming months, there will be 11 community projects rolling out across Phoenix as a result. "It's because of DVULI and the generosity of the DeVos family that the city of Phoenix is going to be transformed," he says with gratitude.

Obed and his team hope to expand by adding more cohorts and more cities to prepare even more youth workers "to be ready for every good work" (Titus 3:1 ESV).

MAKE IT A HABIT

OPINION
BY BWANA CLEMENTS
(Indianapolis 2013)

» Basic human development and psychology inform us that all behavior begins with a thought, feeling, or emotion. If basic human psychology is true, it's imperative to examine how we think and reflect on our behaviors. Is a certain behavior or habit causing more discomfort than it's worth? Is it a good reflection of who God has called me to be?



As leaders, forming healthy habits begins by observing our own thoughts and behaviors and then deciding if **A CHANGE IS NEEDED.**

Being mentally and emotionally healthy is ground zero for effective leaders.

Know thyself! Effective leaders are honest about who they are, what they've been taught, what they've experienced, and how all of it impacts the way they think and behave. They don't fool themselves by hiding their history, hurts, and hang-ups, acting as if those things don't affect them. Effective leaders make it a habit to identify, process, and appropriately deal with the things that impact their mental and emotional health so that they can bring their best selves to their family, work, and others.

NO ATTENTION OR INTENTION
was given to play, relaxation, or self-care.

Effective leaders have healthy habits in the area of self-care.

As a PK (preacher's kid), I grew up in a home where self-care was not practiced or modeled. It was all about work and ministry. Dad would leave daily for work at his full-time job at 6:00 a.m. and work until 4:00 p.m. On Wednesday, he went to a prayer meeting. On Tuesday and Thursday, he taught at the local Bible college. On days Dad was home, he studied, wrote sermons or lesson plans, and took calls from church members, mentees, or people who needed to speak with a pastor. No attention or intention was given to play, relaxation, or self-care.

This unhealthy lack of work-life balance is why so many in the ministry struggle with unhealthy habits and behaviors.

The relentless grind makes it virtually impossible for leaders to be as effective as they need to be. Leaders that burn the candle at both ends are vulnerable. Unhealthy habits and sin can easily creep in with little resistance from drained, worn-out, unbalanced leaders who think being constantly busy is equivalent to God using them. During my participation in DVULL, this was my major takeaway. I was doing God's work without God. The lopsided, unhealthy "I can rest when I die" mentality (that I observed and learned from Dad's ministry) had fueled the charm and charisma God gave me and created a leader who existed on pure talent and drive instead of God's directives.

Finally, effective leaders should value the habit of life-long learning.

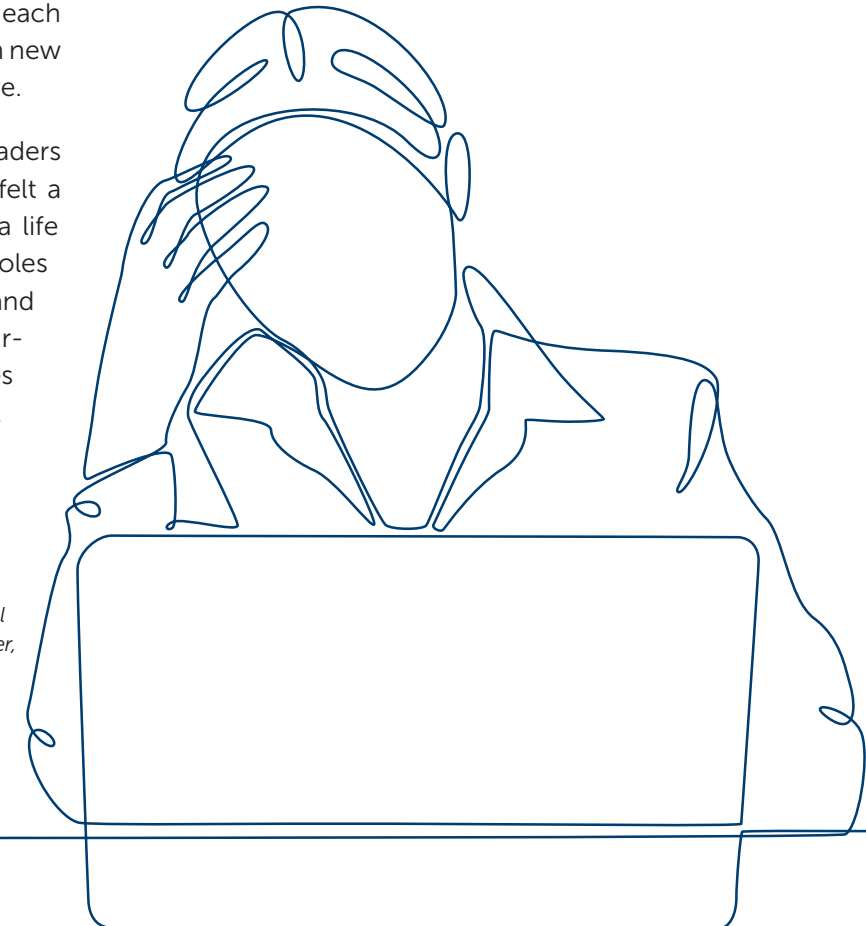
Being a leader is not a static position. It is possible to rise into leadership and fall from leadership. We see it every day in the news, on social media, and in our communities. One of the most consistent habits of effective leaders is continued learning. This habit sets them apart from everyone else. Effective leaders stay fresh, relevant, and excited because they make consuming new information and ideas a habit. These aren't people who spend hours each day scrolling Facebook! Effective leaders love to learn new and innovative ways to connect with those they serve.

I have little doubt that we all want to be effective leaders in our communities. It's typical of leaders to have felt a blessing or calling on their life that led them into a life of servant-leadership. How effective we are in our roles as leaders is heavily contingent on the behaviors and habits in our lives that either distract us from our purpose or empower us to be our sharpest. This requires intentional focus to identify and build healthy habits. When we do that, we put ourselves in a position for God to do nothing but great things with us.



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](#)

Unhealthy habits and sin can easily creep in with little resistance from drained, worn-out, unbalanced leaders **WHO THINK BEING CONSTANTLY BUSY IS EQUIVALENT TO GOD USING THEM.**



ALUMNI PROFILE

by Will Cumby (Houston 2010)

NAME: Jennifer Hicks (Los Angeles 2010)

How long have you been involved in youth ministry and how did you know you were called to reach this generation of youth?

Since graduating from school, I have been involved in ministering to youth for more than 20 years. I didn't have a burning bush moment in my life, and I cannot point with certainty to a specific affirmation. However, I have always been one to pray about being a good steward of my gifts.

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

Neighborhood Homework House (NHH) was founded in 1997 as a grassroots organization. We offer a junior high program that provides homework assistance and places students in mentoring groups to discuss character formation. Our senior high program offers a study hall space for students and a curriculum to prepare students for life after high school. The program also offers coaching for students and resource field trips.



We intentionally partner with parents through seminars, computer-based adult literacy in English and Spanish, committee leadership opportunities, familial support groups, and community-building events. We provide holistic ministry for the entire family. In addition, we have a Mommy and Me early childhood program and an elementary homework program. As executive director, many of my responsibilities involve donor development, partner and stakeholder relationships, and administration. I still have some interaction with youth but in less hands-on ways.

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

I hope to walk alongside children in their early years and see them graduate from high school and go on to college, especially if it means they'll be the first in their families to do so. I hope to see them grow to become independent adults who are equipped to empower others. I also hope their parents are a part of the journey and able to lead their child to that goal.

I AM PROUD OF MAINTAINING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS THAT PROVIDE BENEFITS TO OUR YOUTH ON THEIR JOURNEY.

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

I had opportunities after graduating from college to work with either a suburban church or a nonprofit to address LA's Skid Row neighborhood. I remember feeling as though a suburban church would not have a problem filling the vacant position. The little nonprofit couldn't even afford to pay me back then, but I felt they could use my talents and ministry skills more. Also, there was a deeper connection with the organization because it was located in the San Gabriel Valley, where I grew up.

While I have a passion for youth, I also have a passion for parents. I believe we need to do more than just send a letter home or have one meeting a year. Partnering with parents and equipping them for their role is very important. Sometimes youth ministries can put themselves at odds with parents. We must remember that parents have the greatest impact on the life of the child, not the youth ministry.

What challenges have you or the organization had to overcome?

Like other organizations, we have been hit by the pandemic. Staff turnover has been a challenge, perhaps because NHH tends to attract people right out of college. Some believe they will participate just for a couple of years until they launch their careers or find a better-paying job. Turnover impacts our students and families because youth ministry and community development are relational. If a staff member packs up and moves to Texas, it takes a while for youth or parents to build that much-needed connection with someone new.

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

I am proud of maintaining collaborative relationships with community partners. These key relationships provide benefits to our youth on their journey. For example, we have a young lady who has been in our program since the second grade. There's a picture of her in our conference room from that time, and as I was interviewing her, I asked where the picture was taken. The photo was taken at the ministry where I worked before I came to NHH. Recently, I received a random \$5,000 check from a church partner who I have been developing for years. Because of COVID, they had some unused funds and decided to give them to NHH. There are some deep wells with our community partners, and we are reaping the overflow of those nurtured relationships.

Who does your organization partner with that is benefiting this work?

We have about five churches that generously provide financial support. They also offer us volunteers, prayer support, and various training for youth and parents. They even invite our youth to attend their church youth group gatherings. The Azusa Unified School District (AUSD) is another community collaboration that shares several opportunities including student referrals to our program from the teachers, community leadership team participation, parent engagement, and participation in training. We also partner with Azusa Pacific University, Immigration Resource Center, Pasadena Tournament of Roses, Southern California Gas Company, and more. These partnerships afford us service projects, bilingual support, and youth camp opportunities. Our partners are our allies, and NHH is the same for them.

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

Many in our community are experiencing housing insecurity, which is so hard for us. It's a complicated problem. Pray that we can keep kids safe. Also, when an organization is short-handed, the people working there are prone to burnout. We are living in a challenging job economy, and if the pay doesn't meet needs, people look in other directions. We need prayer for staff sustainability.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION:
Neighborhood Homework House

POSITION: Executive Director

[henniferjicks](#) [nhh_azusa](#) www.ONHH.org

ADVULI ALUMNI UPDATES

Share your personal updates and career benchmarks with us:
DVULI.ORG/YOURSTORIES



Hilda Arsenault
(Memphis 2004)

was given the Trailblazer Award for her "unwavering support and unrelenting guidance" in Memphis.
f [hilda.arsenault](#)



Tanja Turner Bell
(Birmingham 2001)

was named Director of Business Diversity Development for the Nashville Airport Authority.
f [tan.turner.75](#)



Katrina Belser (Atlanta 2014)

was promoted to elementary principal at Curtis Baptist in early December 2021.
f [katrina.moore.37](#)



Brent Hyden (San Diego 1999)

and his wife, Amanda, welcomed "miracle baby #1" into their family!
f [bpnvt.h](#)
@ [brenthyden](#)



Danny Marquez (YFC 2018)

is now Director of Victory in the City, based in Indianapolis!
f [bit.ly/DannyMarq](#)
@ [dannymarq_nearwest](#)



J Martinez (Miami 2018)

was made CEO of Hope for Miami shortly after being made COO!
f [MrJmart](#)
@ [hopeformiami](#)



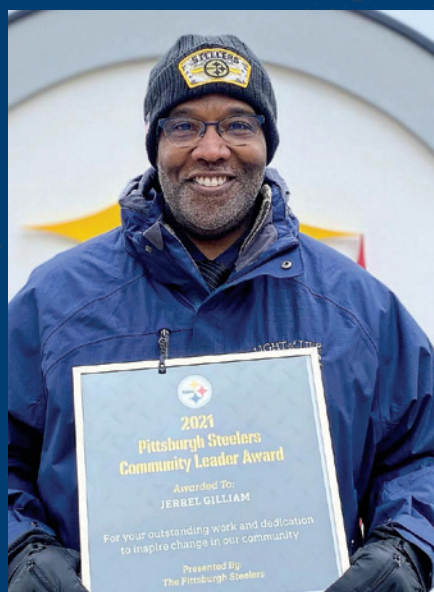
Mario Butler (YFC 2018)

accepted a new position as Youth Services Program Supervisor with Grand Rapids Center for Community Transformation.
f [bit.ly/MarioButler](#)
@ [supa_m_14](#)



Carlton Collins
(Cincinnati 2021)

is now the Program Manager for the Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship!
f [carlton.collins.967](#)
@ [educ8drebel](#)



Jerrel T. Gilliam
(Pittsburgh 2012)

was given the Community Leader Award from the Pittsburgh Steelers.
f [bit.ly/JerrelGilliam](#)



Larry Thomas (St. Louis 2019)

has accepted the position of Assistant Program Manager at Lehre Haus.
f [larry.thomas.908](#)
@ [thomaslalaj](#)



Ron Tinsley
(Philadelphia 2004)

is now the Pastor of Outreach at Oxford Circle Mennonite Church.
f [ron.tinsley.73](#)



Chraine Walls (Orlando 2010)

has been promoted to Associate Pastor of Christian Education at her church, the Experience Christian Center.
@ [chrainewalls](#)



200 Monroe Ave. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Follow Us



[instagram.com/dvuli/](https://www.instagram.com/dvuli/)



[facebook.com/dvuli/](https://www.facebook.com/dvuli/)



[linkedin.com/company/dvuli/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/dvuli/)



[YouTube.com/dvuli](https://www.youtube.com/dvuli)



twitter.com/dvuli

25 Year REUNION

SAVE THE DATE!

AUGUST 30 - SEPTEMBER 2, 2023

PHILADELPHIA, PA | [DVULI.ORG/REUNION](https://www.dvuli.org/reunion)

