

# DEVOS URBAN LEADERSHIP



## Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

Andrews University  
*July 2008*

Curtis J. VanderWaal, Ph.D.  
Andrews University

**Statistical Analysis and Survey Support**  
Neil Carlson, Ph.D.  
Calvin College

**Co-Authors and Research Assistants:**  
Candace Cain, Shannon Trecartin,  
Cynthia Ichoya, Rachel Bishop & Marie Louis



# **The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative:**

## **Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future**

---

Executive Summary

Andrews University  
July 2008



# **The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative: Executive Summary**

## **Introduction**

Over the past ten years, the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI) has been training youth leaders to make a positive impact on the lives of disadvantaged, urban youth. To our knowledge, this is the longest-running inter-faith urban youth leadership program in the nation. While many success stories have been shared with DVULI founders and staff, no formal evaluation of the program had ever been conducted. In July 2006, the DeVos foundation staff asked both Andrews University and Calvin College to conduct an evaluation of the program. The primary purposes of this evaluation were to:

1. Validate the investment the DeVos family has made in the development of urban youth leaders;
2. Begin to understand what components of DVULI were making the greatest impact on participants and communities in order to maximize their influence;
3. Describe DVULI's growth and change over time, including strengths, areas for future improvement, and lessons learned;
4. Work with DVULI leadership to document the rich personal stories of how DVULI had influenced the passion, skills, and personal and spiritual disciplines of youth leaders throughout the nation;

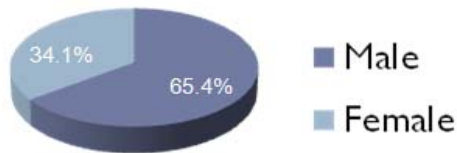
As part of this evaluation, researchers at Andrews University conducted focus group interviews and a DVULI staff member completed case study interviews in nine cities around the nation. Researchers at Calvin College coordinated an on-line survey that asked questions relating to program impact, strengths, challenges, and directions for the future.

This executive summary condenses a much longer report, titled *The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future*. This report includes comprehensive findings and analysis from the survey and the focus groups, along with recommendations for changes to the DVULI program in the future. Three other reports were related to graduates' educational involvement, educational needs and interests, and suggested models for meeting those needs, including: *The Role and Impact of Education*; *Assessing the Need for Academic Credit*; and, *DVULI Credit: An Academic Credit Model for the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative*.

# DVULI Graduate Profile

*Surveys.* All DVULI graduates with known e-mail or mailing addresses were asked to complete an on-line survey regarding DVULI program impact, strengths, challenges, and possible directions for the future. Sixty-nine percent of these graduates

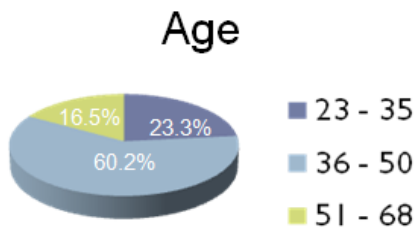
completed this survey, totaling 272 graduates. Graduates from twenty cities answered survey questions, with an average of almost 14 people responding from each city. Denver and Kansas City had the highest number of respondents and Paterson, NJ and Pittsburg had the lowest response rate.



Graduates who completed their training from 1999-2006 responded to the questions, with fairly even numbers of responses from each graduating class.

Survey respondents ranged from ages 23 to 68, with an average age of 42 years. The majority (60.2%) of the graduates were between ages 36-50, with another quarter (23.3%) being between ages 23-35 and the remaining 16.5% between ages 51-68. Almost two-thirds (65.4%) were male. Slightly over half (51.5%) of all respondents identified themselves as Black or African American, almost one-fourth (23.5%) said they

Ethnicity	
Black / AA	51.5%
White / Caucasian	23.5%
Latino / Hispanic	19.9%
Multi-racial	2.6%
Asian / Pac Island	1.5%
Native American	0.4%
Other	1.1%
No Answer	1.1%



Average age – 42.0 years

were White or Caucasian, almost one-fifth (19.9%) described themselves as Latino or Hispanic, with the remainder selecting Multi-racial (2.6%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.5%), Native American (.4%), or Other (1.1%).

Close to half (42.7%) of the respondents had been in professional ministry between one and ten years, with 37.4% in ministry between 11-20 years. Not quite one-fifth had been in professional ministry between 21-30 years and less than three percent had been in ministry for more than 30 years.

*Focus groups.* Two-hour focus group interviews were conducted in nine cities across

the nation – Denver, Chicago, Grand Rapids, Philadelphia, Houston, Albuquerque, Orlando, San Diego, and Indianapolis. DVULI staff and researchers chose these cities to get a wide variety of perspectives from early, middle and later graduates, as well as explore regional differences. Broad questions covered the impact of the DVULI training on the graduates’ personal lives, ministry, and the community or communities that they have served. A total of 76 people participated in these interviews, representing a broad cross-section of ages, gender, ethnicity, and church affiliation. Graduates who participated in the focus groups were very similar in demographic profile to those who completed the survey. Thirty percent of the survey respondents also participated in the focus group interviews.

*Case studies.* Thirteen interviews were conducted by the DVULI Program Director with graduates in most of the same cities where the focus groups were conducted. These interviews were designed to document the rich personal stories and life experiences that resulted from DVULI training. Ten of these interviews have been analyzed and written up in condensed format in order to document and better understand the impact that DVULI has had on individuals in the program.

## Personal and Leadership Transformation

### Reduced Burnout Rates

One of the major personal goals of DVULI training was to reduce the burnout rates of urban youth leaders. Because of the heavy professional demands on their time, many youth leaders neglected other areas of their lives, often leading to physical health problems, family frustrations, and little attention to mental or intellectual, social, and

*“I don’t know that I could’ve made it...another year. I was that worn out. So this was awesome – it really helped me restart...”*

*~ Houston*

spiritual needs. DVULI training attempted to improve participants’ self-care in these areas. So, to better understand the impact of DVULI training on graduates’ self-care, the Alumni Survey asked graduates whether DVULI training had improved their lives in relation to their physical needs, family needs, mental & intellectual needs, social needs, spiritual needs, and involvement in their ministry (Table 1).

*Physical needs.* A majority (72.8%) of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly

Agreed that how they cared for their physical needs had improved. Although 22.4% of the graduates remained neutral, very few (4.8%) either Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed, showing that DVULI training was successful in conveying the importance of the physical wellness.

*Family needs.* A strong majority (88.9%) of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that care for their family needs had improved as a result of DVULI training. Very few (11.1%) remained neutral or disagreed, indicating a very strong increase in levels care for family needs.

*Mental & Intellectual needs.* An even larger majority of graduates (92.6%) either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that care for their mental and intellectual needs had improved. Only 7.4% of graduates remained neutral or disagreed, showing that DVULI training ministered to graduates' mental and intellectual needs.

*Social needs.* 87.9% of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that care for their social needs had improved after DVULI training. Only 12.1% of the graduates remained neutral or disagreed, indicating that graduates had strongly integrated care for social needs into their lives.

*Spiritual needs.* 88.2% of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that care for their spiritual needs had improved following DVULI training. Only 11.8% of the graduates remained neutral or disagreed.

Focus groups and survey results showed that the Initiative clearly had a powerful and transforming impact on graduates' personal ministry and leadership. It first helped to prepare them for leadership by cultivating a broader vision and focus for ministry. It also helped them think in new ways about ministry, develop new ministry tools and resources, and strengthen their current ministry skills. In addition, the Initiative helped them understand the importance of building relationships and sharing ministry roles and gave them the courage to ride out the rough spots in their ministries. While some felt that they had received so much information they were unable to process it all at the

Table 1

DVULI training has improved how I care for my:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Physical Needs	1.1	3.7	22.4	39	33.8
Family Needs	0.7	2.6	7.8	32.2	56.7
Mental and Intellectual Needs	0.7	1.8	4.8	46.3	46.3
Social Needs	0.7	2.2	9.2	51.5	36.4
Spiritual Needs	1.1	2.6	8.1	39.7	48.5

time of the training, they found that the concepts kept coming back to them in a variety of situations and they were also able to consult with each other and the DVULI training manual when they needed to brush up on concepts and principles.

The Initiative also helped to transform graduates' ministries by changing their attitudes in a variety of ways. Prior to their training, some participants were experiencing ministry burnout, but the DeVos program helped them re-connect with their ministry or become more proactive and focused about their ministry. For others, their vision for ministry became more holistic and inclusive, in some cases as a result of more enhanced ministry reflection. Graduates' attitudes also shifted by reducing their own self-importance and becoming more God-centered and by increasing their self-awareness and personal growth. As a result of these changes in attitude, graduates believed that their ministries improved and they became better people.

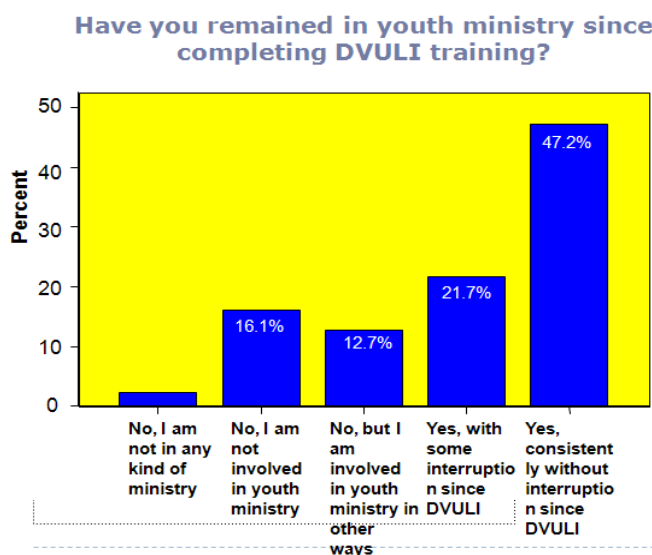
## Reduced Turnover Rates

Another major personal goal of DVULI training was to reduce the turnover rates of urban youth leaders. High stress levels from the heavy demands of youth ministry too often resulted in frustration, physical and emotional fatigue, leading many dedicated youth workers to leave their ministries, sometimes finding other less demanding positions and others leaving the ministry altogether. DVULI staff and trainers recognized these challenges and developed the training curriculum to address some of these issues. Our interviews and surveys validated that their training was very effective.

*Remaining in youth ministry.* DVULI graduates were asked whether the Initiative helped them to remain in youth ministry. Approximately 80% of all graduates either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they had remained in some form of ministry, with almost 70% stating that they had remained specifically in youth ministry either consistently or with some interruptions since completing DVULI training. Only 2.2% stated that they were not involved in any kind of ministry.

*Ministry improvements.* Graduates were asked whether their involvement in ministry had improved as a result of

Figure 1





DVULI training. In response, 79.4% of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that their involvement in ministry had improved. About a fourth (20.6%) remained neutral or disagreed with this statement.

*“...it [DVULI training] sustained me for long term youth work. Because I know at that point I was ready to quit [before DVULI] and I'm still doing it...”*

~ Grand Rapids

*Attitudes about ministry.* DVULI graduates were asked if the training had improved their attitude about ministry. Almost all respondents either Agreed or Strongly Agreed (90.4%), while only 9.6% remained neutral or disagreed. For example, in a focus group response, one Denver graduate stated:

*“I think my understanding of leadership before was to get a list of tasks done, which is just you always driving at things, you're not taking any space for reflection, you're not taking any space for evaluation. DeVos taught me that leadership is much more about investing in people and investing into a larger vision and in being able to really kind of plan out where you're going rather than being so run by whatever the task at hand is.” ~ Denver*

Clearly, DVULI training had a profoundly positive effect on graduates' ministries. Strong majorities believed that they had reduced their turnover rates through increased longevity and involvement in youth ministry as well as improved attitudes about youth ministry.

Another important way to measure reductions in turnover is to ask individuals if they are better off now than they were before the Initiative, assuming that those who are better off are less likely to move to another job or type of employment. The DVULI Alumni Survey asked graduates how the training had helped them improve in job performance, job satisfaction, and earning the respect of supervisors and colleagues (see Table 2).

*Job Performance.* A large majority (89.5%) of the graduates either agreed or strongly agreed that DVULI training had improved their job performance. Very few (7.5%) chose to remain neutral, while even fewer (3%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Clearly, job performance for almost all graduates has been enhanced by DVULI training.

*Job Satisfaction.* More than three-quarters (76%) of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly

DVULI training has helped me to improve in:	Table 2				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Job Performance	1.5	1.5	7.5	44.4	45.1
Job Satisfaction	1.9	5.0	17.2	41.6	34.4
Earning the Respect of Supervisors	2.4	4.8	26.3	33.5	33.1
Earning the Respect of Colleagues	1.1	3.8	18.0	42.9	34.1

Agreed that the training had improved their job satisfaction. Less than one-fifth (17.2%) chose to remain Neutral, and even fewer (6.9%) either Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed. While job satisfaction ranks lower than job performance, it is clear that a large majority of graduates were more satisfied with their jobs than they were prior to the training.

*Earning the Respect of Supervisors.* Two-thirds (66.6%) of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the training helped them in the area of earning the respect of their supervisors. Over a quarter (26.3%) of them chose to remain Neutral, and 7.2% either Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed. The one-third of respondents who were neutral or disagreed may reflect the challenges that some graduates had in translating DVULI language and concepts into their work settings.

*“It’s like when you talk, you are talking about something with substance...it’s [DVULI training] helped me tremendously...”*

*~Indianapolis*

*Earning the Respect of Colleagues.* A large majority (77%) of the graduates either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the training helped them gain the respect of their colleagues. Close to one-fifth (18%) chose to remain Neutral and even fewer (4.9%) either Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed. DVULI training clearly had a positive impact on collegial interaction for the vast majority of graduates.

Finally, the survey asked graduates if the training helped them to increase their personal income. The majority (44.8%) stated that they either Agreed or Strongly Agreed with this statement, with 31.5% choosing to remain neutral. Only 16.1% stated that they either Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed.

## Enhanced Ministry Development

Graduates were trained in a variety of leadership principles, many of which were adapted from current management theory and practice. Survey results indicated that the vast majority of graduates were incorporating values such as balance, accountability, empowerment, interdependence, and leverage into their personal lives and ministries on a daily or weekly basis. The majority of graduates were also practicing the skills of personal assessment, collaboration, ministry assessment, systems thinking, scenario planning, resource networking, and asset mapping on a daily or weekly basis.

DVULI graduates were also asked if the training increased their self-confidence in their ministry and leadership abilities. Again, virtually all of the graduates (93.7%) either Agreed or Strongly Agreed with this statement. Very few (4%) remained neutral

and only 2.2% of them either Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed. This emerging self-confidence helped them to love and respect themselves to a greater degree and also gave them the courage to act with confidence, but with an attitude of transparency and genuineness. This transformation was experienced through the mentoring of DeVos trainers as well as through peer mentoring from other participants. Without question, graduates' preparation for leadership, attitudes towards ministry, and self-confidence were dramatically transformed through their participation in the Initiative.

The DVULI Alumni Survey also asked graduates if the Initiative strengthened their relationship with a local faith community. The majority (79%) either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that this had occurred as a result of DVULI training. Few (15.9%) chose to remain Neutral and even fewer (5.2%) either Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed.

Finally, over 60% of all graduates had completely or mostly implemented their Breakthrough Plan, with most of the rest saying they had somewhat implemented their plan. Similarly, around half of all graduates had completely or mostly achieved their plan's goals, with another 43% who had somewhat achieved their plan's goals. Virtually all graduates *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* that that the Breakthrough Plan was a useful exercise for future planning and had made a lasting impact on their ministries. Further details emerged in the written portion of the Alumni Survey, where graduates discussed different ways in which the Breakthrough Plan had influenced their lives and ministries.

*"Being involved in DeVos Urban Leadership allowed me to be involved in some statewide initiatives, some county-wide initiatives and take the leadership that we developed in the inner city to another level. I don't know if I hadn't had that training, whether I had the right mentality to be able to go to take on those responsibilities or probably I would have been too overwhelmed."*

*~Orlando*

Overall, the ministry changes experienced by participants were powerful, life-changing and long-lasting in nature and appear to have been experienced by the vast majority of participants.

# Return on Investment

## Multiplying and Sustaining Leaders

Mentoring is a key component of the Initiative's goal of impacting urban youth by investing in their leaders. As DVULI empowers graduates, they are then expected to empower other individuals by developing their strengths and leadership abilities for the future. Mentoring others ensures that graduates are able to delegate responsibilities to others with the confidence that they will have the skills to succeed. This includes mentoring ministry partners as well as urban youth. As graduates complete the DVULI training, they are challenged to re-evaluate their roles as leaders and consider the impact of passing on their leadership skills in order to create lasting change within their communities.

To measure a portion of this impact, the Alumni Survey asked graduates how many individuals they had mentored in the area of leadership development. While mentoring was not defined, it was clear that graduates believed this was a focused, time-consuming process that involved forming a meaningful relationship with a mentee. Focus group results indicated that graduates used DVULI values and skills when mentoring others. Only 3.9% of the graduates had not mentored any individuals, and 66.4% had mentored between one to ten people - with an average of 10.6 individuals mentored per DVULI graduate. Focus group findings showed that graduates were able to describe a number of mentoring relationships, including mentoring others, having their own personal mentors, developing mentoring programs for youth to pass along DVULI values and skills, and developing mentoring experiences for their ministry teams. One program participant noted that:

*"But what I really valued was this group - this DeVos group. Here's another group that loves me, that we hold one another accountable, they're concerned about what concerns you."*

*~Chicago*

*"We have a puppet and drama team but we incorporate these Breakthrough Skills into it and the older ones get to mentor the younger ones. That's part of them not paying for the program, that's part of their way of paying back. They take what they learned and train younger [ones] so when [the older kids] go to college, the younger kids step up and keep rotating over and over..."*

Another DVULI goal is to have graduates establish personal and ministry networks between other DVULI graduates in their own and other cities. This network creates opportunities to build relationships with each other as well as to develop collaborative



activities that benefit the community. However, this objective is dependent on graduates making efforts to stay connected with each other. DVULI training sought to reinforce the need for collaborative relationships which can result in resource linkage, feedback and accountability between graduates, and opportunities for partnerships within communities. To measure this communication, the Alumni Survey asked graduates how many other DVULI graduates they communicated with in a typical month. While only 15.3% of the graduates did not communicate with anyone during a typical month, the large majority (66%) communicated with other graduates between 1 to 5 times with other graduates - with an average of 3.9 contacts per month.

*"I think it helped me not feel so alone, because, honestly...I felt very alone in ministry. Just me, and if I don't have the answer I better make one up 'cause I don't know where else to turn. Especially now that I'm in this position where I'm way the heck over my head, I'm glad I've got people now to turn to 'cause I don't have all the answers and the ones I make up would probably be horrible...." ~Denver*

Focus group findings also confirmed that these relationships were being established and maintained. Graduates were able to talk specifically about how they stayed in touch with each other through telephone, emails and small groups. They also discussed difficulties they sometimes had maintaining that regular communication. Graduates' primary reasons for communication were to obtain personal and ministry support and mentoring, plan future projects, and to use each other as a resource linkage. The most common partnership activities included developing and implementing youth programs, programs for youth ministry workers, partnering with DVULI groups from other cities or groups from other organizations, and planning for future activities.

## Expanding Ministry Connections

Increasing and expanding levels of community involvement is another important goal of DVULI training. The DVULI Alumni Survey wanted to know how DVULI training had inspired graduates to a greater involvement in their community and in collaborative projects such as broad ministry networks, political & civic affairs, volunteer work in their community, and cross-denominational activities. As can be seen in Table 3, findings indicated that graduates became much more involved in their communities across

*"Now we've formed an alliance of pastors in our community and all different denominations... and instead of one church doing a small amount, we are doing a big amount..."*

*~Philadelphia*

a variety of settings. Table 3 shows that 76.1% of graduates Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they were more involved in broad ministry networks, 78.0% were more involved in community development activities, and 72.0% were more involved in cross-denominational activities. A somewhat lower, but still substantial percentage of graduates (62.4%) Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they were more involved in volunteer activities and political and civic affairs (45.8%) within their communities.

Table 3

DVULI training has led me to greater involvement in...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
...broad ministry networks	0.4	3.7	19.9	37.5	38.6
...community development Activities	0.4	3.7	17.9	48.5	29.5
...cross denominational activities	0.4	4.5	23.2	36.0	36.0
...volunteer work in my community	0.4	6.8	30.5	40.6	21.8
...political and civic affairs	1.1	14.1	38.9	29.4	16.4

One graduate commented:

*"I find myself trying to forge new partnerships on different levels...forging some relationships on the city-wide level where DeVos [DVULI] helped us to not just aimlessly do something. ...if you want to make an impact in your city, in your community, don't just randomly do a food pantry - find out if that's what's needed."*

Increased involvement in these areas is exciting to see because it shows that graduates have internalized the values of interdependence and leverage and are practicing the Breakthrough Skills of systems thinking, collaboration, and resource networking. The initial challenge of grasping these somewhat abstract concepts and the even harder task of actually forming relationships and developing partnerships is noteworthy and important since graduates appear to be living out these principles in their everyday ministries.

*"I think for me it really challenged me to take collaboration to another level. I've always believed in sharing resources but the Initiative not only*

*affirmed that but challenged me even more in that area. ...our ministry, \_\_\_\_\_ {name of ministry}, is basically a ministry that reaches out for at-risk youth teaching guitar lessons and bible study, and...of the 21 churches we partnered with in the last couple years, only 1 has been Baptist.” ~Albuquerque*

Such collaboration with community partners clearly impacted the number of youth who were served by DVULI graduates. The Alumni Survey asked how many youth graduates ministered to in a typical six-month period, both before and after DVULI training. Ministry was understood to include any activities that involved youth participation. While numbers varied, graduates ministered to an average of 166 youth *prior* to the Initiative training. In contrast, they ministered to an average of 304 youth *after* DVULI training, an almost 50% increase.

The DVULI Alumni Survey then questioned graduates about how many individuals they had trained in a typical six-month period. A definition of training was not provided for respondents, but comments in the focus groups indicate that most training involved the use of the DVULI curriculum with both youth and adults. While 9.7% of the graduates did not train any individuals, 25% trained between one and ten individuals - with an average of 128 individuals trained per graduate.

Ministry and training impacts illustrate the important relationships that graduates were able to help develop with people within their communities. As these relationships were strengthened through ministry contacts and training, those who were trained and mentored became more prepared to connect to other individuals and resources, thereby strengthening their churches and communities.

## Increasing Community Networks and Partnerships

The ultimate test of a program is whether it actually makes a measurable impact on the community. While it is difficult to measure ultimate impacts such as reductions in crime or poverty, a variety of shorter-term outcomes can be measured, including the development of new organizations or partnerships in the community. To measure this impact, graduates were asked how many projects, programs, or organizations they had developed in a typical six-month period. While 72.9% of the graduates had developed 1 to 5 projects, programs or organizations, 10% of them had not developed any – with an average of 3.7 programs per graduate. One program participant remarked:

*“Right now the most impactful thing we are doing is another organizational collaboration called \_\_\_\_\_ {name of organization}. It serves low income parents and expecting parents to help them build*

*relationships with each other and learn communication skills in ways that bless themselves and bless their children. And as of last week Thursday or so, in 2 ½ years, about 1050 participants completed the program through that collaboration.”*

The DVULI Alumni survey also wanted to know how many organizations the graduates had partnered with to provide ministry or services. While 5.1% of the graduates had not partnered with any organizations, 55.5% had worked with between one to five organizations to provide ministry or service. However, graduates partnered with an average of 8.8 organizations, reflecting the higher number of partnerships created by a smaller number of graduates. Graduates partnered in areas such as after-school programs, sexual abstinence programs, and teen violence reduction programs.

Focus groups also showed many ways in which graduates developed new or improved community relationships. First, DVULI prepared graduates to apply networking skills and concepts to their own ministry programs. The result revitalized some ministries, increased collaboration within organizations, and led to the creation of new projects. In addition, graduates were able to delegate project responsibilities to other ministry team members or agency members because of newly formed relationships.

Second, graduates described community outreach work that reached thousands of individuals. Many were able to secure grant money to invest in their neighborhoods while others were able to bring services that had been absent in urban communities through the collaborative networks they developed using DVULI skills. These graduates were able to expand their reach outside of their own ministry and into neighborhoods and communities because of the new or improved relationships that resulted from DVULI. A recent graduate noted:

*“We didn't necessarily have a thought about ‘community’ before the DeVos thing. It was simply about my little ministry, my little corner of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ [street names omitted] and what I'm doing with these kids. And I didn't know what else was out there and I didn't think it was important.... But coming together with this group of people, the people in my city group, showed me how the city of Grand Rapids is so much bigger than my little corner. And I never had that perspective before.”*

Graduates in Grand Rapids went on to develop a new organization called Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders (GRIL) ([www.grileadership.com](http://www.grileadership.com)), which trains teen and adult youth leaders in DVULI values and skills.

Third, DVULI training caused a significant shift in thinking as far as collaborating with other denominations as well as generating a number of interdenominational



collaborations. In addition, graduates described the synergy that resulted from multiple congregations coming together for one common purpose. They were also excited about the potential for a broader impact when denominational barriers were broken and a common goal was shared.

Finally, a large group of focus group participants described how the Initiative helped them move beyond racial, ethnic, and gender barriers. For many of the graduates, the Initiative was the first time they had ever had the opportunity to directly challenge their prejudices, including some they did not know existed. As a result, their approach to ministry and leadership changed and they began focusing on collaborating and interacting with people from cultures and ethnicities other than their own. These graduates began placing a higher value on diversity and purposefully choosing ministry partners who represented other racial, ethnic, age, and gender groups. A program participant commented:

*“That’s where it has to start to become a reality - in our churches, our church leadership... think about what the organizations look like. And for me, I’m required to have an advisory board team and so it’s helped me strategically place people in that position that look different than me - some are different gender and it’s very different from the culture that I’m a part of, but you know, I think that’s part of becoming a diverse organization or feeling that that’s important...”*

## Multiplying Community Investments

As mentioned previously, it is difficult to directly connect DVULI training activities to ultimate impacts within a community, such as reductions in crime or poverty. However, a variety of shorter-term impacts can be measured, including bringing new dollars into the community. To measure this impact, the survey first asked graduates how many grants they had brought into their or others’ organizations following DVULI training. Although a substantial number (40.5%) of the graduates had not brought in any grants into their or others’ organizations, 47.2% brought in one to five grants, for an average of 2.8 grants per person.

To better quantify these findings, the survey also asked how many dollars the graduates had actually helped raise in grants and or donations as a result of DVULI training. The overall amount the graduates helped raise was \$19 million, of which \$10.5 million came from seven large grants.

*DVULI graduates helped raise approximately \$19,000,000 in grants and donations as a result of the DVULI training.*

However, even apart from the seven big grants, an average of approximately \$50,000 was raised per person. There were also 15 grants that were between \$100,000 and \$600,000, with typical grants between \$10,000 and \$100,000. By bringing in new dollars to their communities, graduates were able to link resources from outside the community to develop services and activities within the community in ways that created improvements.

## Personal and Ministry Challenges

Although comments about DVULI training were generally very positive, graduates also experienced some challenges and frustrations related to the training or its consequences. The two greatest challenges will be briefly described here, with more details on these and other challenges in the full project report. The first major challenge, *Job Stability and Transitions between Ministries*, was identified as a challenge by about one-third of all graduates. The responses within this theme were related to frustrations that have emerged within the graduates' careers relating to various life changes. This challenge sometimes surfaced when the graduates discovered that the people they were working with were not ready for the changes the graduates knew needed to be made, causing some to feel that their mission was not being fulfilled. The graduates agreed that when moving to something new, whether it was a new position in the same organization or a completely new organization or church and new position, the hardest part was adapting the DeVos principles to the new environment.

*"The most frustrating challenge I have faced was learning all the amazing concepts and then taking them home to the ministry I worked with. I received little or no support from my pastor in incorporating new ideas."*

*"The organization simply didn't want to be a learning organization and refused to rethink their philosophy and strategies. With much heartache (because I truly loved the work that I was doing), I left and have found myself in a number of different careers and juggling part-time ministry work."*

The second major challenge, *Resistance to DVULI Ideas*, was related to the challenges and frustrations experienced by almost 20% of graduates as a result of the resistance they received from work colleagues, friends, and family who did not receive DVULI training. This major challenge showed that when graduates returned to their homes and places of ministry they were excited about the skills and values they learned. However, when they tried to convince others of the importance and value of the training they had received, they were met with less enthusiasm than expected. Such a challenge is often

the case when people are exposed to a whole new vocabulary and, indeed, a whole new philosophy of life and ministry. Despite these challenges, however, it is important to remember that most of the graduates agreed that the Initiative was excellent and had been beneficial to their lives and ministries no matter what circumstance they had found themselves in. The following section will make several recommendations to address these challenges.

## Leveraging the Future

In Chapter 11 of the DVULI Final Report, titled *Looking to the Future*, we conducted a number of analyses based on graduates' gender, age, years in ministry, year of graduation, hours per week in ministry, city size, and several other variables. While this Executive Summary does not permit discussion of each of the recommendations from these analyses, we are including several key finding and recommendations that we believe have the highest potential for improving the Initiative's return on investment.

### Changes in Recruiting

*Graduates' age and years in ministry.* Graduates who were younger in both age (ages 23 – 35) and ministry experience (10 years or less) experienced the strongest changes in the areas of personal improvement, breakthrough plan accomplishment, and involvement in cross-denominational networks. While multiple factors could be involved, it may be that younger graduates feel a stronger need for such leadership training, particularly at the early, formational stages of their careers. Compared with graduates who have more ministry experience, those who are younger in *age* also appear to struggle more with job-related challenges, perhaps due to their more junior age and position within their ministry organizations.

Since the graduates' age appears to matter more than number of years in ministry for many of the categories that we analyzed, DVULI staff can have strong reasons to believe that greater involvement with younger graduates will yield a greater return on the DeVos investment. However, it is also important to remember that those with longer ministry careers (over 20 years) showed substantially greater numbers of youth served, individuals trained, and dollars gathered when compared to those who had less years in ministry. These findings likely relate to both ministry position and career stage. So, while younger graduates showed greater personal growth and larger ministry improvements across most analysis categories, older graduates were more productive in a variety of ministry outcomes.

The results also suggest that middle ministry (11 – 20 years in ministry) graduates are beginning to hit their career stride and are showing greater benefits than both younger and older ministry graduates across a number of categories in this analysis. DVULI training appears particularly important in reinvigorating their ministry mission and vocational impact. Such strong findings confirm the effectiveness of the DVULI curriculum in revitalizing middle-ministry graduates, thereby lengthening their ministry careers by reducing burnout and increasing ministry effectiveness. To further expand these successes we make the following recommendations:

- Alter the DVULI recruiting strategy by: a) recruiting a larger percentage younger-aged participants; b) retaining a substantial proportion of mid-career participants; and c) reducing the total number of older participants;
- Modify the DVULI curriculum to target the unique issues and needs of younger, middle, and older age and ministry experience groups, possibly delivered in separated breakout training sessions;
- Assign more experienced ministry graduates to mentor younger ministry graduates following graduation;
- Train graduates how to replicate DVULI training back in their home communities, particularly with their ministry teams.

*Graduates' level of involvement and pay in ministry.* Graduates were compared across a number of categories based on the number of hours per week they were involved in some form of ministry. Findings generally showed that the lower the average number of hours per week a person served in ministry, the less likely they were to practice the values, skills, and actions they learned in the Initiative. They were also less likely to remain in ministry and less likely to demonstrate ministry involvement in changing people's lives in a wide variety of ways. Quite simply, the return on investment appears to be less for people who are unable to devote significant amounts of time to ministry.

We also analyzed the difference between graduates who were either paid for their ministry or who volunteered a significant portion of their time for ministry. Analyses showed that paid graduates consistently and strongly practiced values and skills that require interaction with others in ministry. Such interactions would be much more likely among those who were paid because they would more likely be in ministry positions that provided the time and connections to empower, collaborate, and network regularly with others in and out of the ministry. They would also be more likely to have



the freedom and leadership status to shape their own ministry direction and implement their Breakthrough Plans. As a result, Paid graduates showed higher impact in a number of areas, particularly those that involved collaboration and networking. Based on these two similar findings, we make the following recommendation:

- Recruit and train more graduates who can spend half or more of their time in ministry, with particular focus on those who are in paid, full-time ministry positions; volunteers who are accepted into the program should be able to demonstrate a certain level of autonomy and flexibility to shape their ministries.

## Extending Ministry Longevity

While very similar in many areas, graduates in large cities experienced stronger gains than those in medium and small cities across a number of categories. However, they were also most likely to have experienced challenges in both explaining DVULI concepts to colleagues, family, and friends and remaining in their current employment. They were also most likely to have experienced job turnovers. Conversely, they were most likely to believe that DVULI training had helped them to stay involved in ministry and earn the respect of their supervisors and colleagues. Recalling the two personal and ministry challenges noted above - *Job Stability and Transitions between Ministries* and *Resistance to DVULI Ideas* – we make the following recommendations:

- Train graduates to anticipate job transitions and more effectively prepare for and cope with these inevitable life changes;
- Develop city-based ministry teams to conduct simultaneous or follow-up training on DVULI values and skills with graduates' work colleagues and supervisors;
- Train a greater number of participants from large cities within the same year or over several consecutive years (preferably in adjoining neighborhoods) in order to develop a critical mass of alumni, thereby facilitating the networking and social interaction that are a challenge in larger city environments.

## Opportunities for Higher Education

Higher education plays a critical role in positively influencing a wide variety of career and life outcomes for graduates in the United States. This impact is particularly profound for Black and Latino citizens, who have higher school dropout rates and generally lag significantly behind Whites in major indicators of economic and social well-being. Because approximately 70% of all DVULI graduates are either Black or Latino, it is important that DVULI provide these important community leaders with current and future opportunities for economic and social advancement. Such opportunities are extremely important - for example, research on Latino clergy shows that those with a bachelor's or master's degree were much more likely to be ordained and work in full-time ministry positions when compared to clergy with no formal religious education. Research also shows that more educated leaders lead congregations and organizations that make a greater impact on urban communities. Such individuals are particularly important in minority communities where religious leaders are often under-educated.

To better understand DVULI graduates' educational levels and aspirations, the Alumni survey asked graduates a variety of questions about their level of education, current educational involvement, and future educational plans. Over a third (33.9%) of graduates reported that they were in the process of completing some educational degree and one-fourth (25.4%) said that they had completed a degree since they graduated from DVULI. Based on this high interest and involvement in education, the survey asked the graduates if they would be interested in receiving academic credit for their completed Initiative training. The results showed that the vast majority (89.7%) of graduates would have liked to receive credit for their completed work. Thus, offering some form of educational credits or partnerships with other undergraduate and graduate educational institutions would appear to be an important area for change in the DVULI program, providing graduates with an opportunity to leverage their current and future educational aspirations. Such opportunities provide graduates with more options for personal and professional growth and, as seen in a separate analysis on the role and impact of education on community outcomes (see separate report titled *The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative: The Role and Impact of Education*), higher levels of education also allowed graduates to more effectively leverage the resources within their communities. Two separate reports, titled *The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative: Assessing the Need for Academic Credit* and *DVULI Credit: An Academic Credit Model for the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative* describe these issues in greater detail and provide a variety of options for enhancing the academic credit opportunities of DVULI graduates. Our recommendations include the following:

- Provide participants with an ACE Credit review, offered by the American Council on Education, so that current and future DVULI participants can receive transferrable academic credit for their DVULI training;
- Develop a pilot program where selected past graduates can be involved in a portfolio development workshop (provided through DVULI or another academic partner) to showcase their activities and further develop their academic and life goals;
- Collaborate with an institution of higher education to have academic credits for DVULI training and coursework directly applied to an undergraduate or graduate program in Christian leadership or similar programs.

## Passing the DVULI Torch

Throughout this report we have provided clear evidence that the Initiative is achieving the goals that were envisioned for its graduates at the founding of the program. Given these highly positive outcomes, perhaps the two most important issues facing the Initiative into the future relate to *critical mass* and *sustainability*. Critical mass refers to the size and scope that the Initiative needs to reach and maintain within a given community or city in order to truly create a major and lasting change. In order to achieve such fundamental changes, the Initiative must develop the capacity of the leaders within those communities to the extent that they begin to create noticeable impacts on issues such as poverty, crime, gang activity, youth violence, or educational achievement. In order to achieve such impacts, leadership training programs must equip urban leaders with personal and spiritual values and skills needed to enhance and sustain long-term training and involvement with urban youth, including collaboration with other city-based youth education and development programs. When enough leaders begin to tackle a critical social problem, people begin to take notice and change begins to happen.

This evaluation has shown that substantial activities involving the networks and resources of increasingly large numbers of people are happening in cities across the nation. However, based on focus group and anecdotal comments from graduates in many of the cities, it is not yet apparent that critical mass has been achieved. The Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders (GRIL) and a similar initiative in Boston are showing the beginnings of such a movement, but more can clearly be done to build capacity within these cities. Consequently, we make the following recommendations:

- Increase the number of individuals per city who are trained in the Initiative to develop a critical mass of graduates for collaborating, networking, and developing sustainable change at a scale that will produce substantial impacts;
- Support and expand initiatives such as GRIL in order to mentor and train the next group of young leaders within these communities so they can continue to disseminate DVULI values and skills across generations and throughout their neighborhoods and schools;
- Continue to evaluate these programs to determine whether they are effective and can be offered at a scope and scale that will produce a substantial, positive impact in urban communities with complex needs and challenges.

The second significant challenge for the Initiative is the long-term sustainability of the program. The DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative is clearly a signature national program that needs to be sustained and promoted. One recent indication of this status was the opportunity to showcase the findings from this evaluation at the June 2008 Innovations in Effective Compassion conference, sponsored by the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives in Washington, D.C.

<http://innovationincompassion.hhs.gov/>)<sup>1</sup>. The conference selected the DVULI program from a large group of applicants in order to recognize the role of private philanthropies in developing high-quality, evidence-based programs. Such findings begin to place the DeVos Foundations in the company of other major foundations in the country.

While signature programs such as the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative are well-funded and complex, such programs must ultimately be affordable and replicable across a wide variety of settings in order to effectively transform communities through networking, collaboration, and cooperative ministry activities. Given the current costs and time commitments of the Initiative, it is not likely that a large number of other groups or organizations would be able to easily replicate the program in their own communities. As a result, we make the following recommendations:

- Continue to develop training models that can expand and replicate DVULI values and skills in affordable, high-quality ways;

---

<sup>1</sup> The entire paper can be found at:

[http://innovationincompassion.hhs.gov/documents/DeVosUrban\\_CJV.PDF](http://innovationincompassion.hhs.gov/documents/DeVosUrban_CJV.PDF)

- Compare these shorter and less expensive DVULI training programs with the current program to determine what size, length, and program components offer the greatest impact;
- Expand the reach of DVULI training by creating a resource and/or training center for disseminating program materials and training activities.

## The DeVos Experience

Finally, when asked to describe what the DeVos Experience meant to them, graduates described an overwhelmingly positive experience. The overall tone and flavor of these comments was one of warmth, gratitude, enthusiasm, and satisfaction. Participants described feeling loved, pampered, and made to feel special throughout their experience. They also described their puzzlement and then amazement at the generosity of the DeVos family and its commitment to their training and the improvement of their urban communities. It was abundantly clear that the Initiative was more than just a training program – it was a challenging, transformative, and rejuvenating experience that was powerful and life-changing in its impact. The

*“Tears, love, relationships, bonding, family, training; the ultimate life-changing experience.”*

*“A great group of people who took the time to invest in me and the Kingdom and change my life. They gave me the tools to do what was in my heart but not in my head.”*

experience was dramatically enhanced by the warmth and generous hospitality of the staff and DeVos family, but was also shaped by the intense and lifelong relationships that developed as a result of the Initiative. While again keeping in mind that graduates who never completed the survey may have had some negative experiences, the dramatic lack of negative comments on the part of virtually all of those who completed the survey is an amazing tribute to the program, the staff, its trainers and the entire DeVos family.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

Andrews University  
*July 2008*