As we prepare to bring 2017 to a close and bring in a new year, we are reflecting upon the many ways God has used The House DC to help students overcome incredible challenges. One of our biggest successes has been helping youth break out of negative cycles in which each successive generation would get caught up in the same traps and obstacles that hindered the previous generation.

At The House DC, students interact daily with young men and women who once walked in their shoes, but who are now living testimonies to the power of Jesus Christ to make them overcomers. Having ministered to the same community for 18 years, we definitely trained up a lot of children in the way they should go, and now that they are older, they are employed by The House and leading the next generation to victory.

For the first time in our history, House DC alumni represent the majority of staff persons who work with youth. At the first “Life Lessons” meeting of the year, House staff who are alumni of the program shared testimonies of their early years in Anacostia, how The House DC changed their lives, and where they are now. Britney shared her story about not having enough food in her home growing up and coming to The House simply to get food. Ayana hated living with her grandmother as a child, but Child Protective Services took her out of her mom’s house.

There wasn’t a dry eye in the completely silent room as these stories were shared. The students were able to see their own stories reflected in these heart-breaking accounts of trial and triumph. For the first time, they saw others who have experienced their same pain and disappointment but who have also found hope and healing. Normally only about 20 minutes long, this “Life Lessons” session lasted well over an hour, and the moment it was finished, the students began opening their hearts to staff and stating: “I’ve also been abused.” “I have no one to turn to for help.” ”My family can’t always feed me either.” “My house isn’t safe for me.”

As these relationships grow deeper over the coming years, please pray for our staff as we continue to honor God by loving and leading His beloved children out of those old tragic cycles and into the newness of life in Jesus.
TIFFANY EARNs AN A – IN A DELICIOUS WAY

The most basic need we seek to meet is combating constant hunger in Anacostia. Serving an average of 70 students a night, The House DC’s cook, Eric, is a rare find who, every night, feeds our students a snack and then a home-cooked meal. For many students, this is the most consistent, healthy meal they receive, and it is the reason many of them begin attending The House after school. Our 8th graders quickly fell in love with food prep and spending time alongside Eric in the kitchen, especially one new student named Tiffany.

On the surface, “Tiffany” is a vibrant and joyful young lady. She has been the life of the party since the day she walked through The House DC’s doors. But, if you sit down and actually spend time with her, it will become evident that there is incredible sadness behind her happy, carefree façade. Every day, Tiffany lives with the heartbreaking reality that both of her parents are dead. Their deaths have left her struggling to figure out who she is and what’s really going on in life. Some of our students display anger as a defense mechanism, others, like Tiffany, hide behind hollow happiness.

Tiffany felt comfortable enough with Eric to ask him for help with a school project where she had to prepare a Latin American dinner for her Spanish class. Eric eagerly agreed to help. Needless to say, she aced her project!

The House staff are committed to our students. Sometimes this commitment looks like talking through difficult life events, sometimes it looks like serving them dinner, and sometimes it looks like cooking a fiesta for our students for whom a seemingly simple homework assignment to “get their parents to help with” is a far weightier request than anyone could imagine.

WELCOMING IN 8TH GRADE

Culture change is a long-term goal of The House DC. Our students grow up in a world where violence and anger are so pervasive that they are a part of their daily lives at home, at school, and anywhere else they go. We’ve begun to see this culture shift at the high school with our students making pledges to stop fighting, quit gang activity, and rededicate themselves to their schoolwork. Each transformed heart has an impact on those around them.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the middle school. This past year, House staff has been pulled into breaking up fights between the middle school students almost daily. After speaking with some of the teachers and administrators, it became clear that there was an opportunity—and need—to incorporate some of these students into our programming.

Welcoming these new students has brought new energy to The House and LaShawn is one of those students. LaShawn is being raised by her two older sisters since their mother was killed.

“We have to work really hard to make sure that we have food on the table for our little sister. Knowing that this place is here takes a huge burden off of our shoulders. Now we know that she’ll be safe after school and given a meal,” says her sister. They are so excited to have found something like The House in Anacostia.
AN UNEXPECTED SENSATION

Jonathan Harris, Executive Director of Life Skills Education, was always planning to include a spiritual development piece of the Life Skills’ Program. How it took shape, however, was a surprise to everyone. Jonathan shares an unexpected sensation:

“On the first day of class, I was rushing to get to class ahead of the students and just ran out of time to do my morning quiet time. When the students arrived, and we were beginning our program for the day, I told them that I hadn’t done my quiet time yet and said that I wanted to read a chapter of the Bible with them.

Looking for something quick, I opened up Proverbs and simply chose the chapter corresponding to the calendar day. I had no idea what a hit this would be; the students absolutely lit up! The questions and discussion that this reading spurred on were incredible.

It was clear from that point that, rather than having spiritual development be a singular piece of our program, we would now be doing a morning devotion at the beginning of each day of programming.

After we finished Proverbs, I began leading us through two of the Gospels, looking at Jesus’ life and how he humbled himself to serve those around him.

As we wrapped up the program and finished our Bible study, I’m excited to say that we had two young men come to Christ because of the lessons we had gone through together!”

The Life Skills Education program was created to prepare the young men and women of Anacostia with the tools they will need to sustain a successful career, but, as with everything The House DC does, we always have an eye fixed on eternity. Mark 8:36 demonstrates our perspective best: “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” As we continue to learn and adapt from this first program, we will continue to find ways to prepare our students—professionally and spiritually—for whatever their future may hold.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS

• 100% High school graduation
• 10 Youth attending college
• Successful partnership with Capitol Hill Pregnancy Center
• Building bridges with DC Police Department
• Completion of our first graduating life skills class; alumni have now found jobs and started college.

House students serving Thanksgiving dinner to their teachers at Anacostia High School.
I anticipated September 22nd to be a family reunion. It was officially The House’s 18th Birthday Banquet, and I was excited personally just to be heading back down memory lane. I had not seen many friends and family of The House DC since I made my departure as a staff person back in 2007. The highlight of the night was seeing alumni students that I had not seen in 10 years. Students that were in high school when I left them, but when I saw them on September 22nd, I saw grown up, active contributors to society.

Chantayle Barber, who as a student held the title “Speaker of The House,” because of her leadership skills and active involvement with The House, is now a wife and a loving mother of four. She credits The House for being the family that she needed.

Bryan Harris, at one time, a smooth-talking young man that didn’t have a care in the world; yet today, he is a worship leader at his church and the primary caretaker of his grandmother, who is terminally ill.

Keith Kelly, a young man that I mentored personally had very little hope and confidence in himself and was about to drop out of school, but quickly realized at The House that he had a knack for making music “beats.” He matured in his gifting as a production engineer with many long hours spent in the recording studio. Now, he is the production engineer at The House, and he works with middle and high school youth.

And then there was James Daniels...wow! James Daniels was a hot head at times! He didn’t like receiving correction. He had a lot of anger issues, carried a gun, and was in a gang. He reminded me at the banquet of the time I kicked him out The House for the day. However, I wasn’t just having a conversation with James Daniels, former House student, I was having a conversation with James Daniels, present-day chemist, and contributor to neglected communities. James is now enrolled at Howard University School of Pharmacy with the goal of providing quality care to neglected communities. Wow! This is a testimony of a changed life that is now changing lives because, somehow, through the relationships that stemmed from The House, this young man experienced life change.

I left the anniversary celebration with a heart filled with joy, thankful, and humbled to continue to be tethered to such an amazing organization. The House is continuing to redirect young lives for the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Written by Eric Kellum
A DIVINELY ARTISTIC LYRIC

An artistic lyric can take a vivid picture that exists only in the mind of the artist and transfer that joyful image to someone else. The House DC has experienced this phenomenon quite literally through the artistic hand of a developing young painter named Lyric.

Lyric came to The House DC with many trials and challenges, some of which she still struggles through, but she found peace and joy in a new gift we have been nurturing. Lyric had no idea that God had placed within her the gift of painting. She discovered her gift in art class at school, and once The House staff learned about her gift, she was commissioned to do a painting to be auctioned at The House DC banquet. The encouragement from The House staff and the incredibly overwhelming reaction from the banquet attendees made Lyric realize that she was an even far better artist than she thought! She also realized that seeing the joy her art brings to others actually gives her immense joy.

Now, this sweet young lady who had been labeled angry and depressed is creating divinely inspired works of art that uplift others and herself. For Lyric, painting for The House DC brings her the most joy because it enables her to do something for those who have done so much for her.

We never know who God is going to send through our doors. But Lyric is a vivid reminder that each one is truly a masterpiece.

JASON & HIS B.R.O.S.

“Jason” attended a special Father’s Day Life Session at The House. The session provided a safe space where our students, many of whom are growing up without their fathers, felt free to open up and express their feelings about the absence of their fathers. Jason is not someone that shares his feelings, so we were surprised when he opened up and talked about how angry and hurt he is with his father, who wants nothing to do with him. At the end of the session, Jason put his cool, “bad boy” image to the side, and asked for a male mentor to help guide him. His plea was answered when he became involved in a small group summer program called B.R.O.S. -- “Building Relationships, Overcoming obstacles, Surviving these streets” -- created as a way to keep the young men engaged in positive activity and keep them safe.

As a young, black male growing up in the same area and hanging out on the same streets, B.R.O.S. leader Dequwan Smith knows first-hand how difficult surviving the summer can be. “I personally understand the importance of having a safe place for young men to escape the negativity of their environment where they can learn, grow, and become closer to God,” says Dequwan. The B.R.O.S. program seeks ways to build relationships, offer activities, and invite guest speakers to talk about topics ranging from faith to understanding the law.

Jason developed a strong bond with Dequwan, and, since the beginning of the school year, Jason has barely missed a single day. He is taking in everything The House has to offer, even at the cost of stepping away from his “crew,” which takes a lot of courage. Jason’s character development and overall growth are truly inspiring. “I feel personally responsible for the young guys in my community, ensuring they have a relationship with Christ and a positive outlook on life with a bright future,” says Dequwan. The program is a powerful example of being our brothers’ keeper.
MIND, BODY, & SPIRIT

Though only in high school, Alex was already a long-time gang member by the time he came through the doors of The House DC. When he was very young, he joined the local chapter of a national gang and was immediately pulled deep into their culture and rituals. Alongside his new “brothers,” Alex even began memorizing and reciting Islamic prayers in Arabic. When he visited The House, Alex was quick to admit that he was feeling lost in his life, and had grown tired of his gang lifestyle and the Islamic rituals he was practicing. While we were excited to hear that his heart was beginning to change, the reality was that he couldn't walk away from the gang he was involved with: once you're in, you're in for life.

We lost touch with Alex for several years after high school. One day, as Executive Director of Youth & Community Outreach, Andrea Counts and La Wonda Bornstein, President & CEO, were chatting in front of The House, Alex walked up and, as if no time had passed at all, opened a conversation with, “I have some questions for you about faith. I’ve been in a really bad place for a while.” Still struggling with the shadow of his gang life following close behind him, Alex had also recently lost two of his best friends, one who was sent to prison and one who died. He felt utterly lost. We eagerly welcomed Alex back, got him involved with Life Skills, and listened to his stories about what his life had been like since high school. The stories he shared were heartbreaking: forced into violent gang activity, repeated losses of members in his gang family, and only having external rituals to turn to for comfort. After just a few weeks of reconnecting with The House DC, Alex’s outlook on his future began to change dramatically.

“In this moment, despite all of my hurt and everything that I have to be fearful of, I feel so much peace being here at The House. I’m learning life skills with Jonathan, so I’m preparing myself for the future. My weekly conversations with Andrea are putting my heart in a good place. And I’ve been exercising regularly with Dequwan, who is helping me to get in shape and find relief from all the stress I’ve been experiencing”, says Alex.

After many more conversations with Andrea, we are excited to say that Alex came to Jesus! Alex’s new relationship with Jesus has already begun influencing his actions and those around him. “For the very first time,” he said, “I feel like all areas of my life—mind, body, and spirit—are in a good place and are coming together.”

TALKING TURKEY; BUILDING BRIDGES

“I thought it was great that [the officers] had dinner with us. They seemed to be pretty cool.”

This past November, The House DC and the DC Police Department met for our first Turkey Bowl football game. The event was sponsored by “Code 3 for Change,” an organization that creates opportunities for police officers and communities to work together.

Over the years, The House DC has worked to develop good relations with the police in our community, recognizing the necessity to have real conversations and move toward healing an extremely damaged relationship. Many officers have expressed their appreciation for our work, and we have certainly appreciated their support for our community-wide events.

The idea for the Turkey Bowl came out of our first meeting with Code 3 for Change, as a visible way to demonstrate cooperation and working together. The football game was a very positive
experience for our students because the students actually got to play a fun game with police officers. It was a novel experience for our students.

The officers told us that they had looked forward to attending the Turkey Bowl because they wanted to meet and connect with young people in a different context than they normally would. One officer even said, “You’ve got a great group of kids here.” The officers told us that they think The House DC is a fantastic organization and they don’t want to this to be the last interaction they have with The House. Echoing that sentiment, one student asked, “will the officers be coming back for a rematch? I thought it was great that they had dinner with us. They seemed to be pretty cool.”

Both organizations want to continue to plan joint events in the future. In fact, we’re already planning to have a conversation about the level of trust between the community and the officers, and what can be done to build bridges between the two groups. The House DC is excited to get to know our local police officers better and build a larger safety net for our young people.

THE MVV AWARD

The decision to volunteer at The House DC was a no-brainer. It was a golden opportunity to help children who were in situations similar to my own growing up. I grew up in Anacostia where most of my friends, like me, were poor, from broken homes, and living among drugs and violence. Society had pretty much counted us out as lost and hopeless products of our environment, doomed to repeat the process.

Growing up hurt and broken, I searched for love in all the wrong places. Much later in life, through my personal relationship with God, I found out what true love was. But I wouldn’t wish the pain and loneliness that I went through before I got to this point on anyone. I had always wished I had someone to talk to, someone who understood me, someone who wouldn't be here today and gone tomorrow. But that wasn’t my reality. Sadly, the cycle was repeating itself in my children’s life.

When my children started coming to The House, I watched them experience the true love that I found when I started following Christ. They had people in their lives listening, understanding, and being supportive of them. I knew this was a place I wanted to be a part of. Even though I wasn't sure how, I just knew that I wanted in.

I was excited to hear that I could become a volunteer. I wanted the kids in the same situation I had been in to know that they are not alone; that someone does care; that people can love and care about you and stick around. I wanted them to find the same understanding, love and support my children received from The House DC.

What The House does really matters to the community. They don’t have to say it, you can feel it. The best part about volunteering is that it I think it blesses me more than it does The House, to be able to be a part of something so miraculous and God ordained.

This past year, inspired by my service at The House DC, I became a court-appointed special advocate for children in the District of Columbia court system.

CURRENT NEEDS

- Pro Bono Construction Needs: new roof, leveling of 4 office space floors, replace floors in youth outreach building, carpet, & parking pavement.
- Pro Bono Family and Criminal Attorney in DC and Maryland.
- Vehicle donation in good condition.
SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Thank you to our birthday committee: House Alumni, staff, Kendal and Brittany Fleming, and Susan Speers. This event raised $138,000.

Thank you to our 18th Golf Tournament Chairs, George Dunn and John Yetman. We raised $46,000.

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