

Developing leaders
by making long-
term investments
in children from at-
risk communities.



ANNUAL

REPORT

2017



Nurture the child.

Strengthen the family.

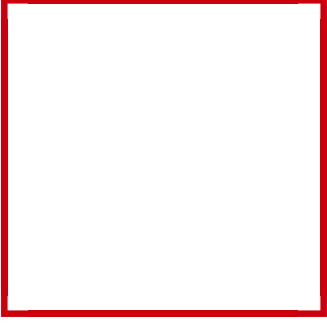
Rebuild the community.





Dear Team,

As I have shared with many of you, the year 2017 brought two major milestones to Youth Life Foundation of Richmond (YLFR). We saw our first student who was in YLFR K-12 go off to college; and we also planted a new learning center in the southside of Richmond, venturing out of the northside for the first time.



Arturion recently completed his first year at Chowan University. His journey has helped us reflect as we prepare our current high school students for life beyond YLFR. Some of our students will go on to further education and some will enter the workforce. We feel tasked with the opportunity to mentor them in a wide variety of areas like finances, apartment leases, and apologetics to better prepare them for the future. Regardless of the next steps after high school, they will need new skills and a clear mind to step into adulthood.

It has been with great joy that we extended our reach southward to include students from Greene Elementary School and Southwood Apartments using the wonderful space in Woodland Heights generously donated by Redemption Hill Church. These students and their families have become a part of the YLFR family this year, joining us for group events such as I Have a Dream and our Christmas party. We have loved hearing English and Spanish mixed at these events; it reminds us that we are all a lot more similar than we are different.

With great anticipation, we look to 2018: Jervon graduating from John Marshall High School, seeing new students join our YLFR family, and doubling the size of our Southwood Learning Center. I hope that you enjoy the enclosed articles highlighting these momentous events and giving credit to all the board, staff, mentors, monthly partners and other funders like the Wheless Family Stewardship Fund who have made this growth possible.

If you are receiving this annual report, you have been a part of this success – thank you. Your gifts, large and small, all made it possible for us to reach over 90 students last year. I hope that you will consider continuing to give to YLFR in 2018 as we anticipate extending our reach to 30 more students!

Feeling very humbled and blessed,
Heather Goodlett, Founder and Executive Director, YLFR



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Southside Expansion: Southwood Learning Center



A few years ago, University of Richmond student, Jane Schmidt, approached Heather with the idea of opening a learning center in the Southside of Richmond. Jane had been working at Greene Elementary, and saw a great need in the academics and hearts of the students. Heather admired her vision but knew that the timing was not right for expansion into the Southside. A couple years later, Redemption Hill Church offered space in their building in Woodland Heights if Youth Life would be interested in starting a new learning center in that area. Though there are several schools in the community, they already happened to have some connections at the same school we'd been hearing about: Greene Elementary.

Almost all the students who attend Greene live in the Southwood Apartment complex. Southwood, a predominantly Latino community, became the target of recruitment for future students. Pieces of the puzzle began falling into place and the vision for a Southside learning center became a reality. In December of 2016, Heather approached Nathan, a teacher at the Delmont site, and asked if he would help lead the initiative in starting up the learning center and the expansion slowly began. The first step was bringing on a part-time employee who was fluent in Spanish. Jackie Jimenez, a member of Redemption Hill, immediately expressed interest. Jackie is from a Latino background, Spanish is her first language, and she has a strong heart for Latino families.

The summer of 2017 was spent getting everything in place: purchasing the new minibus, recruiting students, filling a library, painting, and so much more. Redemption Hill was a great support in this whole process making us feel right at home in our new space. In September, the Southwood Learning Center officially opened and it has been a great first year with 12 students in kindergarten through third grade. The families have been nothing but supportive and our mentors have been fantastic!

Starting this summer, Jackie will join the Youth Life staff full-time as we expand the Southwood Learning Center to double the capacity next school year. We are excited to recruit more students, talk with more families, and bring in more mentors in the coming year.

Mentor Spotlight: John-Mark

"We talk about everything. He's like my adult best friend." Ti'Yon has been mentored by John-Mark for two years now and they have come to know each other well. John-Mark's consistency paid off in that area because it took a long time for his student to warm up to him. There were weeks in the beginning when Ti'Yon barely acknowledged him, but knowing it would take a while to build trust, John-Mark stuck with it and says that eventually the trust was there and they became friends. It was clear their relationship had come a long way when John-Mark told Ti'Yon earlier this year that his wife was pregnant and Ti'Yon exclaimed, "I'm going to be an uncle!"

Today their friendship is marked by a playfulness and comfortability, but certainly requires a level of patience at the end of what has already been a long day for both of them. Still, Ti'Yon is able to see the positive influence of having John-Mark as his mentor. "He's a really kind and generous person. He's always there for me (and his wife and his kids). He pushes me forward to do harder things in life."

**"Ti'Yon is one of the smartest people I've ever met. He has a very clever sense of humor, almost too clever. I want him to know that he is smart and capable. I think my presence in his life has been an encouragement to keep working hard in school."
(John-Mark, mentor)**



John-Mark's consistency at Delmont continues to have ripple effects on both him and the students there. He has been surprised how even the children he doesn't mentor have accepted him and come to know and trust him. "I work with Cru, a college campus ministry, and I have a desire to see many of the [college] students I work with volunteer with Youth Life." His vision is to come to Delmont from VCU with a car full of mentors and serve alongside them. "I think it is good for children to see examples of academic success represented in people that look like them and share similar backgrounds." We are thankful for the ways he has invested his time, sees the bigger picture, and opens up his life to our kids.

Student Spotlight: Jervon, Next Youth Life Graduate

Jervon Prince Fisher is a high school senior who will be graduating from John Marshall High School with high hopes of becoming a welder, and eventually the owner of two dogs and husband of one wife. You may have seen him joyfully dancing to a good song or rapping on stage in front of hundreds of people at a Youth Life event, but Jervon wasn't always this outwardly confident, and extremely tall, social butterfly.

In the words of one of his most influential teachers, Ms. Leahna Sullivan, "Jervon has always been lovable and outgoing, but ten years ago he was also often unsure of himself and angry." Jervon entered the Youth Life program when he was in the third grade. On the outside he often seemed angry and afraid, and on the inside his fear of failing kept him from trying new things. Young Jervon would eventually come to realize that when you fall down it is not the end of the world. Being surrounded by people who loved him gave him the strength to get back up and try again. This transformation was not overnight, but due to the long and faithful service of many in the life of Jervon. While reflecting on his early years at Youth Life, Jervon pointed to one who played a pivotal role in convincing him the he was surrounded by people who love him. "If I needed a shoulder to cry on, she was always there for me. If I needed to talk to someone, Ms. Sullivan was always there." And knowing that his words were being recorded he said, "And if she's actually looking at this, put in there 'Ms. Sullivan I love you.'"





This pattern of being surrounded by people who love and care for him continued throughout Jervon's Youth Life experience. Mr. Dan, Jervon's first mentor, is credited with teaching him how to read. Ms. Katharine, his Youth Life teacher in middle school, taught him much about patience. Ms. Gabi, one of his more recent mentors, always makes him smile when she arrives. He said Mr. James Fifield, his first male teacher at Youth Life, "shaped me, and threw me like a baseball to Sam, who shaped me into the man I am today." Sam Vaughn (Jervon's primary high school mentor of 3 years), upon reflection on their years together wrote that "Jervon has grown in confidence in his identity with Christ." Sam continued to explain that such confidence has manifested itself as kindness to others and a genuine joyfulness in life. Not only was Sam huge in shaping Jervon, but Jervon likewise had an important role in shaping Sam. "Jervon has taught me to enjoy the moment I'm in, and that the Word of God is meant to live in our hearts, not just on a page."



Jervon shared that if he never got involved with Youth Life, he would be in his room asleep, illiterate, struggling to graduate, and down in the dumps with no hope in the world. But today Jervon, speaking as one who has been through Youth Life, with a strong faith in Christ, and with an amazing mother, sister and supportive friends, says, "I am ready to move on, because of the beautiful men and women that got me this far, and I thank them so much."

Donor Spotlight: Wheless Family Stewardship Fund

When we look back on the important milestones over the past year, it is amazing to think that much of our progress has been largely the result of significant support from the Wheless Family Stewardship Fund. Sending graduating seniors out into the world has always been the dream, but it was through meeting the Wheless family three years ago that we were able to hire a high school teacher for the first time and focus our efforts on adapting to the needs of that age group at a pivotal time in Youth Life's history. While providing much of the funding to develop the LC Remix program, they also encouraged us to really solidify the foundational components of what we do and how we do it. This process was hugely beneficial and resulted in the outlining of five Strategic Pillars (shown on the back of this report), which serve as a guide for decisions and efforts towards organizational improvement and expansion. Their support also allowed us to move towards those improvements, especially with the addition of an Operations Director to focus on program support and adding hours for the Executive Director to focus on expansion. Most recently, their generosity also allowed us to move forward with the opening of Southwood Learning Center. A few months ago we were able to sit down with them and go through a two-page list of highlights describing the impact their investment has made. It was a wonderful time of reflection and encouragement to celebrate together what God has done through this partnership.

Community Partner Spotlight: Pop, Hop, and Rock

Preston Blackburn, founder and backbone of Pop, Hop, and Rock, has been an anticipated Fun Friday guest since 2016. She started with Youth Life by organizing active and healthy Friday activities for our Delmont, Highland Park, and Northminster sites, and this year she expanded to the Southwood site as well. Pop, Hop, and Rock focuses on health and child motor development, but if you asked the kids, they wouldn't even realize they were learning such fundamental life skills. Preston makes her subject fun and engaging for the students each time she comes by including a variety of games as well as food preparation and enjoyment. Not only does she provide awesome Fun Friday experiences throughout the school-year, but she also offers a great summer elective for each of our sites. The kids love "Miss Preston" and the feeling is mutual. She commented, "I couldn't be more impressed with the children: their curiosity, their eagerness to learn and play, their joy, their respect for guests, their quick wit and humor... And their ability to take a little teasing and give it right back!" We are so thankful for her gracious partnership with Youth Life, and both the teachers and the students look forward to many more exciting afternoons with her.



**"My favorite thing about Pop, Hop, and Rock is when we eat the cucumber noodles. I also learned that exercise is good for your body and it is always good to try something new."
(Nacala, grade 5)**



**"I personally value my time with the children and find it to be a true blessing. I suspect there is a chance I get more out of our time together than they do!"
(Preston of Pop, Hop, and Rock)**

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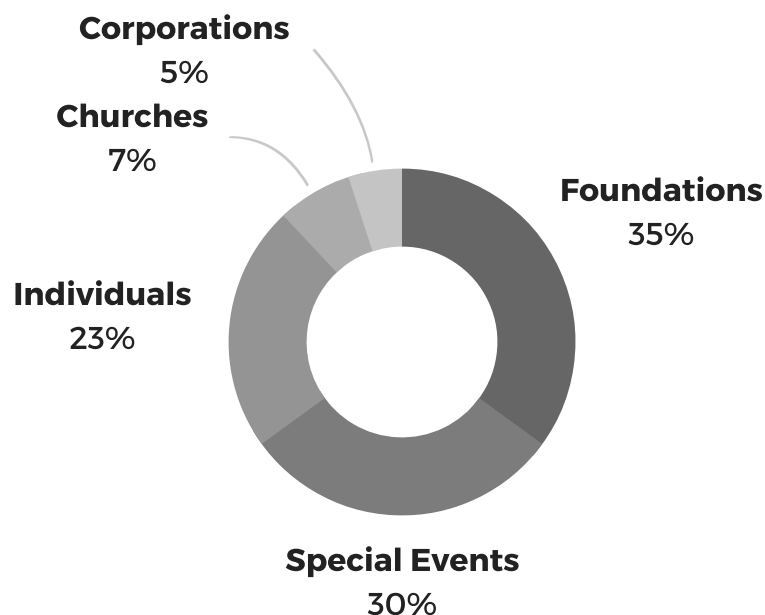
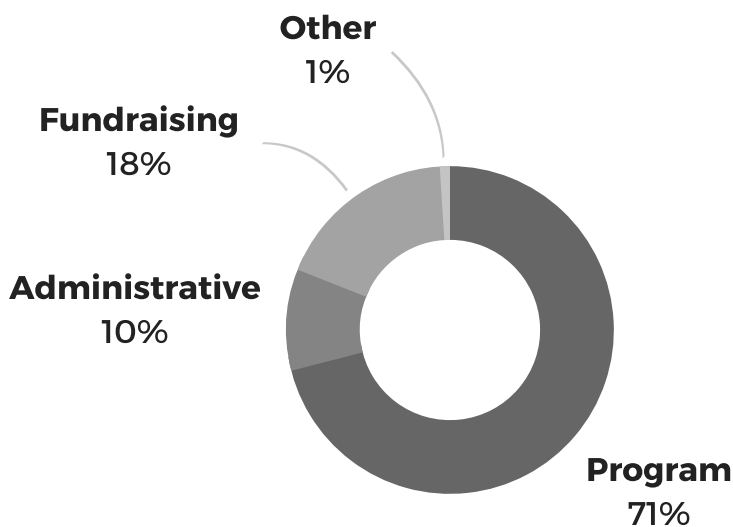
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STRATEGIC PILLARS

To enable at-risk children to reach their full potential and become successful adults.



Academic

Equip students to perform at or above standards and prepare for next grade or life step.



Emotional & Physical

Provide a safe environment with emotional security.



Family & Community

Exemplify family structure and connect with the community in order to rebuild.



Spiritual

Help build an identity and hope in Christ.



Operational

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