



Budget: \$104K
 Paid staff: 2
 Established: 1994
 Service strategies: after-school programs, tutoring, computer lab, financial literacy, camps, discipleship/life skills

City Builders is Building the Next Generation

Memphis, TN

Visit City Builders Youth Organization and you may be tempted to write it off as little more than a five-room cinderblock building with a fairly standard computer lab, homework tables, a basketball court and a “rec” room.

But talk to youth who have been through City Builders since 1994 and you realize that it is more “people” than “place” — people who are out building the city, tutoring in schools, partnering with principals and policemen, staffing social service agencies, and most importantly, living in a neighborhood that others have forsaken.

City Builder’s mission is to rebuild the Highland Heights neighborhood “one youth at a time” where 90 percent of youth receive free or reduced school lunch and nearly 50 percent of all residents live in poverty.

(U.S. Census Bureau)

“Gang, drugs and the crime and violence that go with them are prevalent in our neighborhood,” said Executive Director Victoria Noblett.

Yet the goal is not to leave, said Noblett. “Many urban programs empower people to move out of the inner city, but we raise youth leaders, giving them the tools to stay and rebuild their own neighborhood.”

Exhibit A: James Moore, who came to City Builders at age 14 and is being

trained to take Noblett’s job.

“At City Builders I learned about God and what true friendship is — not the false allegiances offered by the gangs. I saw integrity modeled by the staff. City Builders shaped my character. It’s a heart thing. I’ve got it, others need it too. I want to pass on what I’ve been given.”

Cordell, spared a lesser fate.

Cordell Shelton, 17, is another bright young man from a single-parent home. Because of his stature and talent Shelton was heavily recruited by the Memphis Crips gang in 2004 who offered him protection on the often-treacherous streets in his neighborhood.

Though he had planned to shoot the gang members who broke his collar bone, Cordell reconsidered.

“True change is measured in generations,” said Victoria Noblett, who talked Cordell out of it. “Each youth that turns his back on gangs will one day raise children to choose peace instead of violence, education instead of ignorance, and responsibility instead of despair.”

Cordell refused, so they jumped him and beat him, breaking his collarbone.

His first reaction was to avenge himself, he said. “I had a plan to get a gun and kill them. That got me off track for awhile.”

But Cordell found a safe refuge at City Builders where he came to his senses. “I talked it over with Mrs. Noblett and she said, ‘Why would you go get yourself in trouble for those punks? God has a good future for you.’ If it wasn’t for Mrs. Noblett, I could be doing life in jail right now.”

Instead Cordell has become a role model for City Builders youth, said Noblett. “His leadership really blossomed through our LeaderTrek community service projects.”

Cordell plans to develop his leadership skills by going to college and to return to help City Builders reach other kids, he said.



Education, a solid foundation.

Providing one-on-one tutoring to Treadwell Middle and High School students, City Builders Computer Lab teachers prepare a select group, ages 12-18, for college and

track their academic progress, administering pre- and post-tests each year.

“We make sure, starting in 7th grade, that kids see what they’re capable of,” said Noblett.

“The parents of most kids in this neighborhood never finished high school so their children don’t see college as a possibility,” said Daryl McKinney, 24, who first came to City Builders in 7th grade. “But I’ve convinced 10 to 15 kids a year to go to



college. At first they said, ‘I might.’ I got them to say, ‘I am.’”

Financial Literacy. A crucial component of The City Builders Youth Organization is F.L.Y. (Financially Literate Youth). With the help of dedicated volunteer, Jana Cardona, middle school students are learning that money can not only buy new basketball shoes, but can also be saved and invested to meet long term goals. Stop in on a Friday and you will hear Cardona and the students discussing the cost and the profit of their latest project. F.L.Y. helps youth find their unique talents and empowers them with the knowledge and tools to start small businesses. Economic empowerment is vital to long term individual and community growth.

“We expose many kids for the first time to someone who works at a bank or has their own business, and help them see that cutting hair and fixing cars aren’t their only options.”

No. served annually: 300

Ethnicity: 95% African-American, 5% other

Programs: • **Clubs and Service Projects.** Over 300 children each year participate in social events and community service projects that teach communication skills, leadership and civic involvement.

• **City Builders Computer Lab.** About 15 students, ages 12-18, many without home computers, receive A.C.T. tutoring, homework help and computer skills, enhancing school performance and college readiness.

• **School Campus Support.** City Builder volunteers work as tutors and assist principals and faculty, monitoring halls, lunchrooms, and befriending kids, parents and preventing truancy.

• **Camps.** Up to 75 kids each summer attend camps around the nation, including LeaderTreks, designed to develop youth leadership skills, attitudes and character.

• **Life Application Bible Study.** A group of children, ages 12-18, receive guidance, motivation and hope through weekly discussions.



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Leadership development.

The City Builders Youth Organization is a seedbed for the future of their neighborhood.

“When I started at middle school I was playing around and not taking school seriously. I learned that playing around doesn’t get you anywhere. My mentor at The City Builders Your Organization helped me learn how to study for school. He also taught me about God and to do work hard in life to achieve my goals,” said Devin McVay, 15.

“Last summer I realized I was a leader when I went on City Builders’ service trip to the Appalachian Mountains in Kentucky. I helped others work as a team and encouraged them to take risks. It felt good to have others look to me as a leader.” The leadership skills of Devin and others like him are changing their school, neighborhood and their future work environments.



Volunteers make all the difference.

- Be a mentor
- Be a board member
- Provide business or professional expertise.
- Sponsor a youth.
- Provide gifts in kind.
- Be a donor.