



## A Dream for a Dollar

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**Abstract:** *The Center for Urban Youth and Family Development located in Detroit, Michigan, is an organization that empowers youth transitioning out of the foster care system by providing substance abuse prevention, life skills training and workforce development programs. In 2012, the Center had the privilege of receiving \$50,000 from the Maxwell House Drops of Good Community Project with which an abandoned house was renovated to provide a place for aged-out foster youth to call home.*

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<sup>1</sup> Marsialle Arbuckle is the Executive Director and Founder of the Center for Urban Youth & Family Development.

<sup>2</sup> Venkata Krishna Nadella is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA), Indiana University, Bloomington. He hails from the historic Nizam city of Hyderabad in South India. He has a Master's in Public Affairs with concentrations in Economic Development and Policy Analysis from SPEA and a Bachelor's Degree in Information and Communications Technology. His research and professional interests are in International Economic Development and Social Policy.

<sup>3</sup> Veronica Torbert is a 2012 summer intern with the Center. Veronica is a junior at Indiana University majoring in Health Administration with a minor in Human Resources. She grew up in West Bloomfield, Michigan and graduated from West Bloomfield High School (WBHS) in 2010. While at WBHS, Veronica was a member of the National Honor Society as well as the varsity volleyball team. Veronica is involved with the Hudson Holland Scholars Program and the Indiana Health Student Association at Indiana University (IU). She is the daughter of Ronald and Melanie Torbert, who live in West Bloomfield. Her brother, Harold, is a graduate of Florida International University. After graduating from IU, Veronica plans to earn a Master's Degree and then pursue a career in health care management.

## The Center for Urban Youth and Family

It all began when Marsialle Arbuckle, the Executive Director of the Center for Urban Youth and Family Development (CUYFD), bought a rundown house in Northwest Detroit for \$1. His hope was to convert the home into a community center for foster care youth that have aged out of the system. Now, a year later, with help from the Maxwell House Drops of Good Community Project and some substantial renovations, Arbuckle's dream has become a reality.

"This (the house) was given to me. I happened to be chatting with a gentleman from church and knew he worked at a bank. I was hoping to ask him for a loan to get one of these dilapidated buildings and he said 'you want a broken down house? I'll give you one!' So he gave me one for a dollar," Arbuckle explains.

Despite being given the house, Arbuckle was unsure of where to find the funding to make the renovation possible. Being a member of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) Distinguished Alumni Council, Arbuckle shared his vision with members of the SPEA Nonprofit Management team and took their suggestion of adding interns. After initially signing up to participate in the Maxwell House Drops of Good Community Project contest, Arbuckle turned over the project to his SPEA interns, Veronica Tobert, a junior at the time in the SPEA program, and Venkata Nedella, a SPEA PhD candidate. These two interns, used their social

media skills and knowledge gained in SPEA to help the Center win the \$50,000 grant.

Construction ran from mid-June 2012 until the grand opening in August 2012. The Children's Center, a welfare agency that works with the Department of Human Resources will assign youth ages 18 to 21 to the center as soon as it is certified as a safe and nurturing space in which to live. More than a roof over their heads, the center will offer these young people the Step Beyond mentoring

program, substance abuse prevention and treatment, life skills development, and workforce development and training.

"We're going to utilize the space during the weekends as an Internet café that other fostered youth can use," Arbuckle adds.

Different volunteers from many walks of life aided this renovation project. Home and gardening expert and blooming television personality Katie Brown from Create TV was an integral part of revamping the old house into a modern, inviting home. "You get approached to do a lot of things but this one in particular meant a lot to me. I have a thing for bringing beat-up houses back to life and if it's for a good cause, that's all for the better," Brown says. "I also have an adopted baby and I like to think we saved her from the foster system." Although she spends much of her time traveling, she makes it a point to come back for charity work going on in Michigan, as this is where her roots lie.



This home, run by the Center for Urban Youth and Family Development, is truly a product of community collaboration, goodwill, and philanthropy at its best.

Today, the Center for Urban Youth & Family Development Living & Learning Facility is in full operation. Currently, there are two full-time residents, along with a Resident Assistant. The residents are receiving "wrap-a-around" support services including substance abuse prevention and life skills training. Both will begin classes at local community colleges in January 2013 and continue with part-time jobs.

The Center plans to launch its "Internet Cafe" at the facility on the second Saturday in January 2013. This activity will allow other youth that are transitioning in and out of foster care to utilize internet services at the facility for free. We will identify participants from membership in the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative, which is an organization sponsored by the Michigan Department of Human Services, to provide support to youth transitioning out of the foster care system.

The Center for Urban Youth & Family Development also continues to operate "The Step Beyond Program," providing substance abuse prevention, life skills, and work force training. This program will continue to take place on Saturdays throughout the school year and Monday through Thursdays during the summers.

Overall, the project has been an enormous success with the Center continuing to change lives and spread hope thanks to the many dedicated people who helped see this project through to fruition.

### **Interns – A Quantifiable Resource**

Venkata Nadella and Veronica Torbert spent the summer months of 2012 interning with the Center for Urban Youth & Family Development. As a newly emerging program, these interns were vital in the development and implementation of the organization's goals. A brief description of their work experiences at CUYFD will demonstrate how these two individuals impacted the program.

As part of his internship, Venkata Nadella was responsible for conducting an evaluation of CUYFD's summer and evening programs. His evaluation discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the Center's programs, while also highlighting the need for further growth in outreach services to include one of the most vulnerable populations in the country. In addition to program evaluation, Venkata was also involved with communication and outreach activities. He designed, and was actively involved in, creating the Center's annual report, its website—including an online fundraising portal—and other corporate and program communication materials. Venkata's experience in Detroit reinforced his enthusiasm and dedication to social service, and he is looking forward to a long-term relationship with the Center's programs and activities.

Veronica Torbert served as a key contributor to CUYFD's successful funding campaign to raise \$50,000 through Maxwell House Coffee's "Drops of Good" nationwide community service project. She was responsible for communicating, through social media and at community events, the value of the project in an attempt to win the \$50,000 prize. After winning, the

CUYFD used the money to renovate an abandoned house in Detroit and turn it into a semi-independent residence for youth aging out of the foster care system.

In addition to her work on the capital fund campaign, Veronica also coordinated and helped manage CUYFD's Step Beyond summer program for foster youth ages 16-21. She created the program's six-week master schedule including daily lesson plans and itineraries, led discussions on topics like anti-bullying and body art, and coordinated fun and educational field trips for program participants. During her internship experience, Veronica improved CUYFD's social media presence, met with legislators and government officials in Detroit and Lansing, attended meetings and seminars dealing with parenting, bullying, and substance abuse treatment/prevention, and was given the opportunity to participate in the White House Urban Economic Business Forum.

Please watch a video of the "Drops of Good" – Center for Urban Youth & Family Development project here: <http://youtu.be/0c9eePcLJk0>

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