



LITTLE LIGHTSTIMES

SPRING 2018



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April 4th, 2018 marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His life and untimely death is an example of a lifetime filled with faith and abundant in purpose and vision, transcending personal ambitions.

The Bible points to God's desire for human beings to live an abundant life. Personally, I would like to live an abundant life and want that for members of my own family and for all people connected to Little Lights.

Yet, I think few people find it. The assassination of Dr. King was so tragic for the country and for those who care about equality and justice. However, I believe Dr. King's example shows us the way to a truly abundant life, a life that points the way to the kingdom of God.

As we reflect on this 50th anniversary of his death, I pray that God would help all of us discover what Dr. King discovered, a vision of beauty and a purpose so meaningful that he was willing to give his physical life for the fulfillment of that mission.

Little Lights is about the good news of Jesus. It is this kingdom of God that Jesus ushered in—and that Dr. King envisioned and dreamed about.

I was especially honored earlier this year on Martin King, Jr. Day when Georgetown University selected me as the recipient of the John R. Thompson, Jr. Legacy of a Dream Award, which was presented to me at the Kennedy Center. What a humbling experience to even be associated with Dr. King and legendary coach John Thompson, Jr. who grew up in public housing in Southeast, DC and became a renowned coach and civil rights activist.

Little Lights will be partnering with Georgetown University for an entire year and receiving ongoing support from the school through free classes in nonprofit management and in the business school for our senior staff. We will be partnering with the University in numerous other ways, as well.

I am grateful to all those who have supported, prayed for, and nurtured the vision and mission of Little Lights over these many years. In 2018, we are more committed than ever to be a light and a source of hope in our city.



Steve Park
Executive Director & Founder

A Truly Abundant Life

If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW INTERNS



Ashley Hill

Hometown:

Fort Valley, GA

Fun Fact:

I love Faux Calligraphy! I'm determined to find a class soon so I can perfect my craft, until then Pinterest will continue to be my best friend.

How did you discover Little Lights?

I've been going to conferences at a church in Baileys Crossroad, VA for the past two years and was led to become a part of that body through much prayer and direction from God. So while exploring my university's job board, I saw that Little Lights was featured as a host site through a program called TechMission. TechMission places interns at ministries and Christian non-profits across the country. They have over 100 sites listed but Little Lights was the only one in the DMV area, so it was literally a match made in heaven.

How has working at Little Lights affected your worldview and what do you hope to accomplish during your internship?

I grew up in a rural town in Georgia and I've lived there my entire life. Therefore, being exposed to the constructs of public housing in an urban setting, plus being able to discuss topics like social justice and racial reconciliation, has been extremely eye-opening. We tend to live in our own world and not pay attention to those around us. Little Lights has shown me how to tangibly display the love of Christ, and do something to affect my generation. I hope to serve those around me and use this opportunity to make a difference.

Dominique Scruggs

Hometown:

Washington, DC

Fun Fact: I am the first person in my family to graduate from college.

How has your interaction with Little Lights over the years impacted your life and/or influenced your decisions?

As a kid, Little Lights showed me the way towards being a better person in life, and I carried that over into becoming a better man. I wanted to make an impact in my community by impacting the lives of young children that are growing up in similar situations I grew up in. Without continuous contact with Little Lights, I don't know where I'd be right now. They kept me going in the right direction.

What do you wish other people knew about Little Lights?

I wish that people knew the true impact Little Lights has on its students. I wish people knew the background stories of the the kids who grow up in the community and how hard it is for most of them to succeed in their environment. Little Lights is a major help within the neighborhood and because of them there are many success stories that come out of the community.





Kayla & Deniesha

A Look Inside Their Mentorship



About to move to DC and in search of volunteer opportunities, Kayla Slagter was browsing through the Christian Community Development Association's website where she stumbled across Little Lights - from there she became involved in Girls Night, the Mentoring Program, and our monthly giving program, the Ignite the Light Giving Society.

What was your first impression of Little Lights?

My first time visiting Little Lights was on a Wednesday during Girls Night, and I remember being so amazed by the volunteer and staff's energy, compassion, and faith. From there, I began to know the girls. They made me laugh and challenged me spiritually every time we met, so I knew I wanted to stay involved.

What motivates you to continue volunteering in programs like Girls Night and the Mentoring Program?

I can't imagine my life in DC without the girls from Little Lights. In the DC world, there's so much pressure to be focused on yourself and prioritize what is best for you. But if for one hour a week I can show these girls that they are a priority to someone outside of their peers, then my prayer is that God would use my one small offering in His bigger plan for their lives to demonstrate their value and worth. I remember being amazed in middle school when older women would spend time getting to know me. It made a huge impact in my life.

What made you want to mentor a student at Little Lights?

Becoming a mentor after being involved with Girls Night was a very natural step. Mentoring opens the door to getting to know one girl really well, and also inviting her into my life. What I didn't expect was how much I would connect with my mentee. I identify with many things that she is working through, and it's truly a joy to be able to walk alongside her as she journeys to become the incredible woman God has made her to be!

You're a committed donor, what would you tell someone who is thinking about donating to Little Lights?

Little Lights is rooted in DC for the long haul, even if I am not. Even more than Little Light's impressive growth over the last 20+ years is the way they have remained unwavering in the excellence of the programs they offer, the partnerships they form, and the team they build. I've also seen firsthand how much of a difference financial support can make, and the faithfulness of Little Lights to steward that well. That is exactly the kind of organization I encourage people to support for the long haul!

What would you say are some of your strongest beliefs about our cause?

I strongly believe that God has always been working in the communities that Little Lights serves, and that Little Lights has the unique privilege of being intertwined in His kingdom building work. There are so many nonprofits that seek to fix, change and move on to the next funded project. Little Lights seeks to remain faithful and does so through lifelong relationships, which is what ultimately transforms everyone involved.

Kayla and Deniesha, now in 7th grade, were paired together through Little Lights Mentoring Program in 2016. They have cultivated a deep, personal bond by hanging out one-on-one and even withstanding one of life's toughest obstacles together - losing a family member.

How has your relationship with Kayla motivated you over the years?

It's mostly through school work. It's motivated me because I can stay positive and true. I can tell her what's going on in school and I don't have to worry about her looking at her phone while she's with me or being uninterested in what I have to say.

Can you remember one moment where you were sad and Kayla brightened your day?

When my mother died, and pops gave her my number so she could call me and text me to support me. That was a really hard time because you lose your loved one and they're gone forever and you can't see them no more unless you go to their burial site. Even that will bring back memories, so she was there with me during that time.

What is the nicest thing you've ever done for Kayla?

I invited her to my Winter Showcase because I play the clarinet, so I asked her to come see me perform. She enjoyed it! I like giving her hugs, too.

If you could give Kayla a piece of advice, what would you tell her?

I would tell her when life gives you lemons squeeze them, like squash them. What that means is when life gives you problems and you don't know how to deal with them or don't want to deal with them, squash it and make it something beautiful like lemonade.

What is one thing you want Kayla to know?

Thank you for being my mentor and for always being around to support me. You're not boring. Just throwing it out there so she knows! You're joyful, a good listener, you give good advice and I enjoy spending time with you!

“ Little Lights seeks to remain faithful and does so through lifelong relationships, which is what ultimately transforms everyone involved. ”

OVERCOMING EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS

at the Family Center



LITTLE LIGHTS is often associated with its high-quality programs for children and youth. But also central to Little Lights' mission is helping adults find gainful employment through our Family Center, so they can move out of the cycle of poverty.

Established in 2010, the Family Center was born out of a desire to holistically support entire families within DC's public housing communities. One of the ways we do that is by empowering adults with the tools to become self-sufficient, like high-speed internet, a computer lab, resume help, workforce development programs, trainings and other essentials like diapers and clothing - all of which are provided through the Family Center at no cost.

In 2017 the Family Center assisted 43 adults in finding jobs. Jalone and Sheila were among that number.

JALONE

Jalone found a job, after nearly four months of unemployment.

Growing up in Potomac Gardens, Jalone is very familiar with Little Lights programs. He faithfully attended our after school programs and summer camps as a kid. His younger siblings, Javon and Makala, are now attending programs. But after his high school graduation he found himself utilizing Little Lights for a very different reason: to look for a job.

Linda, Little Lights' Associate Director, has watched Jalone grow up and knew he was looking for work, so when she found out about the grand opening of Trader Joe's near Eastern Market on Capitol Hill she mentioned it to Jalone.

After filling out the application at the Family Center Jalone walked the short distance between Potomac Gardens and Trader Joe's. When he arrived at the new neighborhood grocery store he was interviewed and offered the job on the spot.

Since September 2017, Jalone has worked part-time, alternating between being a cashier and stocking Trader Joe's inventory during the overnight shift.

"With the Family Center being here I feel like I can do more for myself. Working at Trader Joe's is not enough for me. It's just another step, a stepping stone to open up more doors for myself," Jalone expressed.

Even though Jalone is working now, he still visits the Family Center regularly to check in with Linda and access helpful resources. "Things that I don't have at home, like a computer, I know I can use at the Family Center," Jalone said.

"I hope he'll continue on this path," Linda said, offering some additional advice to him, "No matter what is going on around you focus on your life; be determined to keep moving forward."

SHEILA

Sheila is another adult who found herself utilizing the Family Center a lot, especially because it is located in Potomac Gardens, just a short walk from her apartment door.

During her two-year period of unemployment, Sheila spent days and weeks browsing job postings and submitting employment and workforce training applications in the Family Center's computer lab.

As a single mother of a two-year-old daughter, the proximity of the Family Center and the help from the staff ease the burden of having to travel with her child while she's looking for work.

Recently Sheila completed a training program she found through the Family Center, which helped her to land a full-time position in January 2017 working for Sodexo, a food services and facilities management company.

It has encouraged the staff of the Family Center to see adults, like Jalone and Sheila, find the resources they need, resources that are making a tangible difference in their day-to-day lives — and in the overall well-being of our community.

CREATING ACCESS TO STEM

STUDENTS LEARN TO BUILD WEBSITES & MORE IN NEW TECH CLASS

In January Devon Alshire, a Homework Club volunteer who works for Microsoft, started a computer course at our Potomac Gardens Center. He is currently teaching three middle school girls the basics of computer programming with the hope of helping them both express their creativity and gain a real understanding of what the field entails.

While STEM-focused learning has grown in popularity over the last several years, it is not always equally accessible to everyone. Students who live in underserved communities like Potomac Gardens, Hopkins, and Benning Terrace public housing lack access to some of the basic resources necessary to foster an interest in STEM, like laptops, computers, and even access to the internet.

To help bridge that gap is a Little Lights volunteer named Devon.

Devon hopes to cultivate an interest in STEM among Little Lights' students and expose them to the broad range of things they can do with computers, no matter what careers they choose.

"One of the things I've noticed," Devon said, "is a lack of basic understanding and navigation around the computer... it's such a big skill these days, no matter what job you go to you're probably going to have to touch technology."

As jobs utilizing technology continue to rise, we are excited to see students at Little Lights being equipped for future career opportunities, whether in STEM or otherwise.

Makala, a 7th grader in the the new computer course, says she enjoys "learning to create multiple colors [using coding], and learning how to build a website."

This new course only adds to our efforts to expose students to the world of STEM. During Summer Lights 2017 we introduced a coding workshop to students as young as six years old. Taught by Josh Larkins, a Little Lights volunteer and professional data engineer, the workshop challenged students to learn the basics of computer programming by constructing an online adventure game. To build on what students learned last summer, Josh has committed one day a week throughout this school year to teach computer basics to our elementary students.

Students who live in underserved communities... lack access to some of the basic resources necessary to foster an interest in STEM...

Although Devon and Josh have focused their lessons on rigorous topics like web development and coding, they always encourage students to have fun while learning. "I didn't want to turn it into a school class," Devon said, "I wanted to try and make it more fun. When you teach them something that they like or when they get to be more creative, you see them a little bit more excited about it."

The Evolution of Public Housing

From the first affordable housing experiment to today's concentration of poverty.

Public housing. While the term is familiar, most of us probably only know the stereotypes about it: “poor” and “black” and “urban.” But what is the deeper story? Why do those associations exist?

For more than two decades Little Lights has worked in public housing communities and we believe it is key for all of us to understand how public housing came to be—and that story is a complex one, marked by decades of government-sanctioned discrimination.

It started in the 1930s, during the Great Depression, when America faced growing numbers of impoverished people without adequate housing. President Franklin Roosevelt introduced his New Deal efforts to help combat the economic turbulence of the era. Two of those initiatives particularly shaped the creation and evolution of public housing.¹

With the Housing Act of 1937 Roosevelt allocated funding to state and local governments to build affordable housing complexes, the first instances of public housing. By 1940 at least 500 public housing complexes were in-progress or completed. Initially, many middle and lower class families of all races utilized public housing.

Since the 1930s America has witnessed a vast and growing disparity in wealth between white households and African-American households; this is due to a whole host of factors...housing discrimination is one of the main players.

The diversity found in public housing at the start soon disappeared, however, as white people were given access to greater housing options through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), founded in 1934. The FHA lowered interest rates and down payment requirements, allowing a significant number of middle class Americans to purchase homes—white Americans, that is. African-Americans were denied these opportunities through a practice called red-lining.

From its start the FHA utilized a color-coded system to distinguish which neighborhoods were eligible for investment. Green neighborhoods, those prioritized by the FHA, were described as “homogenous,” while red neighborhoods, where the FHA refused to extend loans, were described as containing a high concentration of African-Americans, an “undesirable population” as they termed it.²

Redlining spread beyond the FHA to become a widely used standard throughout the mortgage industry. Block-busting and contract selling also became prevalent predatory practices, where contract sellers would instigate white flight to the suburbs, buy the homes whites had vacated, and sell them to African-American families at double the price—and on

contract. By buying on contract African-American families could not build equity in their homes. Only after they had paid off the entirety of the contract (over 10, 20, or 30 years) would they own any part of the home. And if they missed one payment they could be evicted and would lose all of the money they had paid toward the contract.

Systematically, African-Americans were blocked from accumulating wealth through home ownership, which increased segregation and concentrated poverty, often in urban African-American neighborhoods.

Not surprisingly, then—stripped of economic agency and isolated in impoverished areas without access to quality education or decent jobs—many African-Americans slipped further into poverty with public housing becoming one of the only viable options.

With the passing of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, discriminatory housing practices were made illegal, yet the ramifications of decades of discrimination extend to today.

Since the 1930s America has witnessed a vast and growing disparity in wealth between white households and African-American households; this is due to a whole host of factors, however our history of housing discrimination is one of the main players. Across the nation white households have an average net worth 13 times greater than African-American households.³ In Washington, DC that number is even more staggering with white households possessing a net worth 81 times that of African-American households (\$284,000 vs. \$3,500).⁴

This wealth disparity is why in 2017 DC public housing had a wait list 47,000 households long—and why 91% of those households are African-American.⁵

In the Potomac Gardens, Hopkins, and Benning Terrace public housing communities, where Little Lights focuses our efforts, families of four exist on between \$12,000 and \$14,000 per year—roughly 17% of the median DC income.⁶

Today most people look at public housing and see two options: Get rid of it or get people out of it. At Little Lights, we believe there is a third option: To acknowledge the value of these communities, invest resources into them, and restore them from within so that people can thrive where they live.

To Deepen Your Understanding:



The Warmth of Other Suns by Isabel Wilkerson

“Living in a Poor Neighborhood Changes Everything about Your Life” by Alvin Chang via Vox

“The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates via *The Atlantic*

“How Red-Lining’s Racist Effects Lasted for Decades” by Emily Badger via *The New York Times*

¹Samuels, A. (September 22, 2015). The Power of Public Housing. *The Atlantic*.

²Madrigal, A.C. (May 22, 2014). The Racist Housing Policy That Made Your Neighborhood. *The Atlantic*.

³Pew Research Center, (June 27, 2016). On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart.

⁴Georgetown University (2017). An Analysis: African-American Employment, Population & Housing Trends in Washington, D.C.

⁵Georgetown University (2017). An Analysis: African-American Employment, Population & Housing Trends in Washington, D.C.

⁶Zauzmer, J. & Melnik, T. (September 14, 2017). While most cities’ incomes rise, D.C. sees a possible end to the boom years. *The Washington Post*.

Little Lights' Take on Marvel's Newest Film Black Panther

Marvel Studios' blockbuster film, "Black Panther," has been widely acclaimed since opening in theatres earlier this year. The impact of Black Panther - the first major superhero movie to have an African protagonist, the first to star a majority black cast, and the first Marvel film written and directed by a black man - was felt by many including those at Little Lights. We asked one of our students and one of our staff members to share what the film means to them:



Black Panther was an amazing film because it inspired young kids and adults, alike. My friends and I were excited to watch the film because we can finally relate to a superhero. We all say "Wakanda, forever!" The message of the movie is although someone may look or sound different, they can still make a difference in the world. Watching this movie made me feel empowered because I don't have to feel limited by what people think of me.

This movie deserves five stars because it sends a good message to the world. This movie can help people in their lives and show that anybody can be a role model for everyone. - Jeffrey, 11

The highly anticipated Black Panther movie is out and the excitement about it is massive. The joy of seeing a Black superhero surrounded by so many strong positive Black characters was exhilarating. T'Challa the rising King, Nakia the spy with beauty, courage and character, Okoye the strong and brave general, and Shuri the smartest person in the world and a new Black Disney Princess was such a beautiful representation of Black people. Even the villain, Erik Killmonger, is sympathetic. His methods are wrong, but many people understand his reasons are rooted in abandonment and a feeling of being lost and disconnected.

This is a typical Marvel movie in that it is old fashioned popcorn movie fun. However, its positive images resonate deeply with the Black community. My daughter Trinity loves Leia and Rey from Star Wars, because they are clever and strong she says. Now she has Okoye, who she calls brave and awesome. Black Panther is a great movie because it is fun, but it is also a great movie because so many little boys and girls now have superheroes that look just like them.

- Karmen Taylor, Program Director



Steve Presented with Georgetown University Honor



This January President John J. DeGioia of Georgetown University presented Steve with the John R. Thompson, Jr. Legacy of A Dream Award during the University's 16th annual Let Freedom Ring concert. Recognized for his unwavering commitment to public housing communities in Southeast DC, Steve accepted the award in front of Little Lights supporters, family, friends, and the DC community at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Along with the award comes a year-long partnership with Georgetown that will allow Little Lights to enhance and strengthen its efforts within DC's most vulnerable communities. Congratulations, Steve!

Top Photo, from left to right: John J. DeGioia and Steve Park

Bottom Left Photo, from left to right: John R. Thompson Jr., Steve Park, Kayla Park, Dylan Park, and Mary Park.

Bottom Right Photo, from left to right: Steve Park, Mary Park, Brenda Atkinson-Willoughby (Georgetown University's Director of Partnerships and Community Engagement), and Charles Willoughby.



Little Lights Retreat House Gets Rave Reviews



Volunteers from UVA and VA Tech enjoying the Retreat House during their spring break service trip.

Students and volunteers have loved the new Little Lights Retreat House. Instead of sleeping bags, visiting volunteer groups now have bunk beds, a large common space, and a full kitchen at the Retreat House. On off weeks, when we do not have visiting groups, we have opened up the Retreat House to our middle school students, hosting one-night retreats to foster shared experiences and deepened friendships among our students.

Located on a quiet, peaceful street in Anacostia, the four-bedroom Retreat House was made possible through a generous couple who have invested in Little Lights for many years and wanted to make a special gift toward our work in 2017. Having a place to house volunteer groups had long been on our wishlist, and we feel excited and grateful to see it become a reality.



Save the Date

Innovative Job Solutions For Our City at the Little Lights Breakfast

April 26th, 2018 | Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital | 7am- 8:30 am

Join us for a fresh take on our annual Little Lights Breakfast, as we delve deeper into one aspect of Little Lights' mission: Creating innovative solutions for our city's under-employed.

Over breakfast, you will hear from a panel of community members as they discuss the various barriers they have personally faced when seeking employment—and some of the creative solutions Little Lights brings to the table.

To claim your seat at breakfast visit www.littlelights.org.

Do More 24 — 24 Hours of Giving
May 17th, 12pm - May 18th, 12pm

Little Lights Benefit
Saturday, October 13th, 2018
At the historic Howard Theatre



LITTLE LIGHTS

760 7th Street, SE
Washington, D.C. 20003



Give to Little Lights from your paycheck through either the Combined Federal Campaign (for government employees) or the United Way (check with your employer). Be sure to tell your friends and coworkers that they can give to Little Lights too!



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