



Meet Marvin and Jeanett Charles

Marvin and Jeanett Charles are the co-founders of Divine Alternatives for Dads Services (D.A.D.S.). Marvin has overcome a personal history as a foster child, a homeless man and a pimp in California, Montana, Spokane and ultimately Seattle. He did not find his biological mother until he was 43 years old. In the same year, he reunited with his father. His father, who has had a stroke and does not say much, is delighted to have his son and five grandchildren in his life.

Marvin had the courage and determination to move beyond his own history with drugs and alcohol, unlawful behavior, homelessness and promiscuity. At the age of 43, after having seven children out of wedlock, he began to realize that his life needed to be committed to God and to the kinds of good works that require honesty and hope in the face of hopelessness. In less than a decade, Marvin moved from getting clean and sober to having a personal mission to help other men and their children so that they can move beyond the ill effects of fatherlessness.

Jeanett was raised by a single father in an era when this rarely happened. She also struggled to be free from drugs and irresponsibility. According to Jeanett and Marvin, child protective services informed them that they would lose custody of their children if they did not turn their lives around in 90 days. The possibility of losing their children permanently to the state of Washington triggered powerful change.

Marvin and Jeanett worked to keep their four younger children under their roof. The impact of the family's separation persisted for many years. Not only have Marvin and Jeanett learned to be voices for their community, they have also learned to recognize how the challenges of

raising children and becoming new homeowners require new skills in managing family change and development.

D.A.D.S. was created in 1998 in Marvin and Jeanett's living room in Rainier Valley. In 2000, they completed the paperwork for a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. In 2004, D.A.D.S. opened a storefront office at 5709 Rainier Avenue South. Volunteers and generous donors contributed to rehabilitating a trashed lot into a playground and interior renovations created a family-centered house of healing and redemption.

Marvin often says his only education beyond high school has been the streets, and his B.A. stands for "born again." Jeanett has a quiet strength and steadiness. She holds the men accountable for their responsibilities in making change happen.

Men who go through D.A.D.S. begin making child support payments or begin to make more regular payments. A majority increase the number of hours they spend with their children in meaningful activity. As their problems begin to be resolved and become more manageable, some men marry and create a home for their children. Some men become the custodial parent of their children or grandchildren.

Some of the men find God and begin to know healthy relationships for the first time in their lives. Many of these men have traveled into their middle years without knowing the benchmarks of healthy relationships. It is hard for those who have not walked beside these men to appreciate how much it means to join in fellowship with other men, and to slowly reveal to each other their common needs and desires to become better fathers, grandfathers, sons and spouses.