

**Interview with Delores Beaman,
Area Director for Young Life Northwest Jacksonville**

Continued

Young Life Northwest Jacksonville serves several schools and a teen club. How does Young Life function within these sites, and how does it meet the needs of the students and schools you serve?

DB: We serve urban schools on Jacksonville’s Northside, operating primarily as after-school programs. Our approach is relational and engaging—we play games (the crazier, the better), build trust, and then share the Gospel message. Students are always given the opportunity to accept Christ.

Beyond school hours, we create experiences that broaden their world—bowling, skating, college tours, and other outings. Because many of our students are under-resourced, one critical way we serve them is by providing meals. For some students, school is the only place they reliably eat.

Our goal is to guide students toward becoming productive members of society—spiritually, academically, and socially—by surrounding them with care, structure, and opportunity.

What are the student bodies like? What strengths and challenges do you see, and how does Young Life support them?

DB: Our student population is primarily African American, though we also serve Caucasian and Hispanic students. One of their greatest strengths is resilience. Even when basic necessities are lacking, they continue to show up with hope and determination.

Their biggest challenges are often financial hardship and unstable home environments. Many come from single-parent households with limited income, which makes it difficult for them to afford camp or outings. This is where Young Life donors play a vital role, helping us bridge that gap.

We support students by helping them become college-ready or military-ready. We provide tutoring when needed, accompany them to appointments, monitor grades, and stay engaged to ensure they meet graduation requirements.

How do you work with school administrators and principals? Are they supportive of your presence?

DB: The principals and administrators at all of our schools are very welcoming and supportive. I also serve as a substitute teacher, so when schools are short-staffed, I step in to help, which has strengthened our relationships even more.

Administrators consistently notice positive changes in students who become actively involved in Young Life—especially those who attend camp and commit to their faith. Those transformations speak volumes.

How would you describe your leadership style with students, and what do you believe makes an effective youth leader?

DB: My leadership style is rooted in honesty and genuine care. Students often tell me they know I love them—even when I’m correcting them—because they feel seen and valued.

An effective youth leader must love God first, love kids deeply, and remain consistent even when students are not. Being non-judgmental is also critical. Our youth are navigating incredibly difficult realities, and they need safe spaces to ask hard questions.

How do you introduce faith into your programming?

DB: We call it “The Talk.” After games and raffle prizes, we tell students this is the most important part of the night. For 10–15 minutes, we open the Bible and introduce them to Jesus. We do this every time we gather.

We also invite students to camp, where they experience days filled with fun and nightly Gospel messages. Camp is truly life-changing—once a student attends Young Life camp, everything shifts.

What does a typical day look like for you as Area Director?

DB: Because we share the Gospel, our ministry work begins after school hours. High school clubs start around 2:30 PM and middle school clubs around 4:00 PM. We meet students on campus in cafeterias or designated spaces, where the fun begins.

We also host a Monday night club from 6:00–8:00 PM, which includes games, meals, and a Gospel message. On non-club days, we spend lunch periods on campus building relationships and reminding students about upcoming meetings.

Some days I substitute teach from 7:00 AM–2:00 PM, lead on-campus Bible study, then host evening club. Transportation is another part of my role—I often pick students up and take them home because they don't have reliable transportation.

How have you seen Young Life impact students' lives?

DB: I've witnessed God work powerfully through Young Life. One student was brought to me by her parent, asking if we could help support her. I began picking her up for church and Young Life. Over time, she surrounded herself with positive peers, and her mother recently shared how dramatically her behavior and outlook have improved.

We know the true difference-maker is Jesus, and it's a privilege to introduce students to the One who brings real transformation. (it's our secret Sauce shhh).

How can readers support or contribute to your work?

DB: Absolutely. Supporters can give directly to Young Life Northwest Jacksonville at: <http://giving.younglife.org/NorthwestJacksonville>