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***Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, Inc (FWEP)***  
***Interview with Mr. Ernest McMillan (CEO)***

Nonprofit Organizations have received some bad press over the last few years and the trusts for various organizations have become somewhat shaky. That's why I was honored to choose an organization that has proven itself not only trustworthy, but self sufficient for well over twenty three years. The Fifth Ward Enrichment Program (FWEP) that is also affiliated with the United Way, is an organization that has played an important role in the Houston area and has made a tremendous impact on young men's lives of all nationalities. Founded in 1984 by a concerned person of the community, Mr. Ernest McMillan, whom I gathered to be a no nonsense individual, felt that there was a serious problem in the community.

Teen pregnancy was up at an alarming rate and a trend was starting to take place. Unwed mothers left to raise children on their own were influencing young boys to grow up with the mentality that a man should not have to be responsible for their children. Mr. McMillan felt this needed to change. With his concern and perseverance, he organized a nonprofit organization to teach young boys to be responsible adults. Taking the negative influences portrayed in the community, he was able to provide a new light, a chance that most inner city boys would not or could not obtain.

I was able to talk to Mr. McMillan in a brief, (at least it seemed brief to me) but very in depth conversation. Mr. McMillan's organization started like any other nonprofit organization. Searching for sponsors and donations were tough but he was able to turn a struggle into a challenge. The organization sponsors classes in computer repair, photography, and t-shirt making.

The kids learn a skill and in the process make a profit from these workshops. Profits are split between organization cost, materials, and some to the kids. This option allows for the nonprofit to make money to keep it afloat. It worked out so well in fact, that the organization can choose what donations they wish to partake of or deny. With this, it showed me the independence the organization has in the development and future projects on the horizon and the faith they have in their workshops and kids.

With 200 plus teens in the organization and more joining, FWEP is able to meet the needs of the community and provide a new beginning for a once troubled teen. Mr. McMillan not only spends time educating the young men of the community but also the young parents. Mr. McMillan is instilled with the philosophy, "It takes a village to raise a child". This holds so very true. In order to correct the trend you must first attack the root. By encouraging single parents with workshops and meetings, the FWEP is able to ensure awareness and pride in the community as well as notating the importance of being a good parent and a positive mentor.

I was able to find out some of the struggles of creating a nonprofit and the most demanding thing he encountered was getting the proper funds to keep the organization going. He specified that with the programs instilled in the organization now, it has alleviated most of the cost, but contributions and donations are still needed. His philosophy: *“Sustainability and continual revitalization are the challenges... we learned that we must be mission-driven when it comes to reaching out for support, that we can't accept money especially when it does not coincide wholeheartedly with our mission/goals. There is a tendency by NPO's to expand for the sake of expansion, to be driven by "community needs" or to take money w/out realizing or valuing how it impacts on the strategic pathways.”*

The goals for the FWEP are definitely being met:

- ✱ Keep inner city youth off the streets
  - preventing temptation for future drug dealers, drug use, or gang related activity
- ✱ Help prevent teenage pregnancy
  - manhood development seminar (modeling a young man to be both responsible and obtain self pride, self respect, and self awareness)
- ✱ Promote future employability
  - The ability to have a sufficient skill to be a productive citizen in the society
- ✱ The importance of a good education
  - Promoting kids to make the most of an education and to use that education to remove themselves from a negative situation to a positive
- ✱ Provide a process for youth to experience success which improves self image
  - This is important. Once one feels good about self one can and will succeed.

One thing that Mr. McMillan stated during the interview that really stuck with me: *“Just because a kid grew up in the ghetto does not mean the ghetto has to grow up in him...”* His passion for the job he is doing really hit home. One story comes to mind about a young man named Randy, who was a victim of Katrina. He expressed the hardships he encountered while in New Orleans the near death of his sibling and his courage in the face of danger. The outreach of the FWEP helped Randy and other Katrina kids tremendously. So well in fact that Randy stated *“I want to go home, but I want to stay here, too. It's like 50-50. I want a part of Houston to come home with me too.”* I asked Mr. McMillan if they planned to expand to other locations i.e. Louisiana and he clarified that that was not to be. *“Our work is here and this is where we tend to concentrate”*.

Although I was unable to talk to other members in the organization due to my schedule and the busy schedules of the others in FWEP, the interview I was blessed to obtain from Mr. McMillan was very enriching and refreshing. His eye for the success of the FWEP mission, and his passion for a better community shows in his drive, determination, and success for the FWEP organization. His next avenue, to have a scholarship fund created to aide young men to obtain a college education and to allow FWEP to be that extra stepping stone in obtaining a good education, a new found pride, and an achievement of success both now and in all future endeavors.

