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# FROM BONDAGE TO DELIVERANCE

## **And the Birth of Damascus House Community Development Corporation**

By Kevin G. Williams

In the 1980s, I experienced a traumatic event that my brain completely suppressed but that would cause me to develop self-destructive behaviors. I started abusing alcohol, which resulted in the loss of my college football scholarship opportunity and was the beginning of my life spiraling out of control. Alcohol led to drugs, drugs led to crime, crime led to incarceration, and I nearly destroyed every family and social relationship I have ever had.

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## A Cycle of Incarceration

Believing a change in surroundings would change my behavior, I moved from Maryland to California in 1990 to pursue a business opportunity with a friend. Within six months, however, I was involved in everything I had left the Washington, D.C. area to escape and more. I was arrested within a year, sentenced to county time, released, rearrested, and sentenced to state prison for three years. For the remainder of the 90s, I cycled in and out of prison, spending only a year and a half on the street.

I returned home to Maryland 11 years later when my parole was transferred and thought that with my faith in God and the Biblical studying, teaching and preaching I did while incarcerated I would be fine. For the next three years, I worked and rebuilt relationships. However, since I had never really dealt with the underlying causes for my addiction or how to identify the triggers of my self-destructive behavior, I ended up recidivating through the Prince George's County Correction Center.

## The Way Out

Finally, in June 2010, three significant events would lead to my ultimate deliverance. The first event was that I was incarcerated again. This time, however, I fell beside my bed and asked God why I kept ending up in this place I hated. At that instant, that portion of the memory I had suppressed to protect myself was released.

The second significant event occurred late one afternoon as I watched a guy who had been released from our unit that morning return to the same cell before dinner. As I watched him nonchalantly walk toward his cell, I remembered

the words of Isaiah 58:12: *Those from among you shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundation of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of the Streets to Dwell In.*

In that moment, the concepts for Damascus House Community Development Corporation (DHCDC) and Game to Glory Ministries, LLC, were conceived. Initially, I did not understand why God had placed the vision for this ministry in my heart, because I was facing a maximum of 69 years, but I continued to pray. I told God: "If this is You, get me out of here with nothing holding me. Allow all the charges to be dropped, the probation to be canceled, and all the traffic tickets and fines to be dismissed. If You do this, You won't have to worry about me again."

The third event started to unfold as I witnessed the answer to my prayer. Within three months, each case and fine against me was dropped and the probation was terminated. I went to rehab and directly into a sober-living house. I engaged in mental health counseling integrated with Christian principles and confronted the trauma that so easily beset me. I attended Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and used the principles I learned from studying Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promise Land to guide my personal and business decision making.

## From Vision to Reality

After earning a few hundred dollars, which my mother matched, I had enough to start Game to Glory Ministries, LLC, a metal recycling business. The money raised from this endeavor



June 7, 2021 ribbon-cutting ceremony for Miriam’s House, an eight-bed home in Temple Hills, Maryland. From left to right: Victor J. Coelman, Pastor of Temple Hills Church of God in Maryland; Maryland Senator Arthur Ellis; Kevin Williams, RISTORE’s Executive Director; Maryland Delegates Geraldine Valentino-Smith and Andrea Fletcher-Harrison; and Prince George’s County Council Member Rodney Streeter.

funded the purchase of Damascus House Community Development Corporation (DHCDC), the first transitional house that would help others through their transitional process to successful and productive lives. It opened in 2013 in Riverdale, Maryland, and I employed men in transition along the way. I learned what works by first walking through the process myself!

I received my bachelor’s degree in Biblical Studies that same year and, ultimately, my master’s and license in professional counseling. From 2013 through 2015, seven of the 12 men who I met through NA and AA, and who had been housed by DHCDC, successfully transitioned and continue to be active in the recovery community.

Game to Glory Ministries, LLC, was the sole funding source for DHCDC’s residential efforts until the end of 2020 when we received money from [Mustard Seed Foundation](#), [Alfred Street Baptist Church](#) and [Destiny, Power and Purpose](#), an organization which funds returning citizens from the Prince George’s (PG) County Department of Corrections. The PG County Executive Office followed suit and selected DHCDC for the FY 2021 Community Partnership Grant Program.

In the past year, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, DHCDC RISTORE Program has been blessed to open one fully functional 10-bed men’s house. DHCDC gained nonprofit status in 2016, and with the help of Katina Burks, our invaluable program administrator, and the DHCDC board we are energized to expand the organization’s therapeutic transitional services. DHCDC opened Miriam’s House for women in June and is poised to open another men’s house within the next two to three months.

### The Goal

Over the next two years, Maryland will receive hundreds of returning citizens and Prince George’s County will be home to many of them. DHCDC’s short-term goal is threefold: (1) to demonstrate to returning citizens that through the RISTORE Program, they can learn to lead productive lives, (2) to demonstrate to the community that the program’s success will increase its safety and security, and (3) through these accomplishments, to secure increased support from the local government. With 35 to

50 beds, our empirically based programming and evidence-based interventions, which include spiritual principles, are successful in transforming returning citizens and should be incorporated as a best practice in Prince George’s County. We realize that not everyone will be open to using spiritual principles, but our individualized approach to treatment planning will ensure that those individuals will not be excluded from taking part in our program.

Our ultimate goal is to operate a free-standing 150-bed facility, capable of delivering residential, outpatient and family reunification services for returning citizens. We also want to strengthen our partnership with the State Navigator’s re-entry service efforts for those in Maryland State Prisons, as well as with Prince George’s County Department of Correction’s at the county jail level, to streamline the transition



Kevin Williams, RISTORe’s Executive Director, celebrates the opening of Miriam’s House with Kimberly Clark (far left), DHCDC Board Secretary; Rev. Dr. Trisha Miller Manarin (in blue jacket), DCBC Executive Director/Minister; and Katina Burks, RISTORe Program Administrator.

process once returning citizens are released to our program or the community.\*

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