

## **Organizational History**

Youth Opportunities Development (Y.O.D.), officially incorporated in 2012, originated as a result of a need to more fully address the root causes of violence in Pittsburgh. Y.O.D. merges the practical knowledge and experiences of Mr. Taili Thompson and Mr. Brandon Ziats, as well as research and evaluation experience through Dr. Joseph Johnson in an effort to build effective methods in successfully addressing violence. In particular, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Ziats are former Area Managers of the One Vision One Life (OVOL) program, at which Dr. Johnson played a role in evaluating the effectiveness of the OVOL model as a RAND researcher (please see the “Executive Administrative Staff” section for a more detailed biography of these individuals). Working together for several years, and after many discussions, these individuals came to a similar consensus that the effective methods in successfully addressing violence in Pittsburgh needed to be more preventative than intervention-based. Furthermore, any effective violence prevention model also needed to be closely tied with data collection and an ongoing evaluation of its own methods and model. As a consequence, these individuals worked to develop a five-pronged model designed to “ensure peaceful, prosperous communities through the mentoring, education, and empowerment of youth.” And, as of 2012, Y.O.D. includes in its model the following components: Community Outreach, School-Based Services, After-School Programming, Mentoring and Consulting/Training services.

### **Executive Administrative Staff:**

Taili Thompson has over 10 years of experience with outreach work dealing with at-risk youth and adult populations. He began his career as an outreach worker for One Vision One Life, working in the North Side Area. In 2006, he became an Area Manager supervising the entire outreach staff for the North Side area. From 2010 to the present, he has served as Project Manager for outreach collaboration between PIRC Initiative and One Vision One Life.

Dr. Joseph Johnson is an Assistant Professor in the Law and Justice Studies Department at Rowan University (NJ). Receiving his Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from Michigan State University, his research and teaching interests are centered on violence prevention programming and specifically programming efforts that utilize street outreach workers to quell gun, gang and/or clique activities in high crime neighborhoods. He has previously worked with Rand Corporation in an effort to evaluate the One Vision One Life organization. Since the original evaluation of the One Vision One Life organization, Joseph has continued to work alongside of street outreach workers in an effort to better understand their practices and experiences.

Brandon Ziats has worked in the Violence Prevention field for over 6 years, serving both as Data Analyst and Area Manager for One Vision One Life. Throughout this period of time, he has managed operations and supervised outreach staff in the communities of Clairton, McKees Rocks, Hill District, and South Pittsburgh. He also supervised mediation efforts inside of Sto-Rox School District and the Clairton Education Center. During this time, he was also responsible for preparing organizational reports and maintaining the One Vision One Life Information Database. Brandon received his Bachelors Degree in Sociology in 2007 from the University of Pittsburgh.