

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 28: Dante Wilson

Welcome to Just Words—the stories of working people in our community.

Alright we got to straighten the line up. We getting a little crooked. You know you in a straight line when you see the head directly in front of you. Now you all young Kings and Queens and you know how we do. That means your attitude means what? Alright lets walk.

That's Dante Wilson, the founder of Reclaiming our Children and Community Project. He's leading a line of elementary school students down the street on a hot Baltimore afternoon.

The double line of around 40 children marches past drug corners and expensive construction projects alike. He goes to two different schools every single day to pick these children up.

What's happening in my opinion and why I started Reclaiming our Children and Community Project is that, when I look at the community I see zombies. They're walking dead, and it is a mental and spiritual sense when I say that. I feel like a lot of people play with the word dysfunctional, so I am not talking about anyone when I say dysfunctional. When I say dysfunctional I am talking about any type of living that is so unhealthy it keeps you from being successful. That's what I mean when I say dysfunctional. And what has happened in this community is that individuals have been operating in a dysfunctional environment for generations and because it has happened like that for generations, we think it is functional. So we have to debunk that, so we have to reeducate and reclaim them and empower them strengthen them and things of that nature they will begin to change all these things around.

On the third floor of the building that houses the program, the children circle around one overworked air conditioner, and read the nine guiding principles of the program

Number three, I strive to get others respect because I want to be respected by others. Number four I strive to talk kindly because I want others to talk kindly to me. Number 5, I strive to help others because I may also need help at times. 6, I will not point fingers or shift blame instead I will be responsible for my actions. Number 7 I will think first before reacting to any concerns. Number 8, image and attitude means what? EVERYTHING. Number 9 I will strive to bring solutions to problems in my house community or school or keep my mouth closed because I am part of problem. Until next time we have what type of day? SUPERIOR DAY!

Every day, Dante finds out which children did not have superior days, because of fights or other disruptions in school. Over the hum of the air-conditioner he helps them see the mistakes they made. One girl tells him about a fight she got into with a classmate over who had the right answer to a math problem.

If I look outside and I say that sky is orange, you be like no Mr. Dante that sky blue. I be like, no that sky is orange. You be like, no Mr. Dante, it's blue. Does it make sense to go back and forth with me if I believe that sky is orange? 'Cause I don't know what the answer was two or four, but to the teacher that is a disruption.

Dante will continue to do this every single day, with almost no funding, almost entirely out of his own pocket. He does it because he loves these children and wants to help them survive. He knows the odds they face everyday, and is desperate to see them beat those odds.

We'll hear more from those kids, next week.

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Music: Asheru, *Theme Music*.

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

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