



Chapman Partnership in downtown Miami

Chapman Partnership houses and empowers the homeless to achieve self-sufficiency.

Desmond Meade plays with children at Chapman Partnership, which helped him turn his own life around.

chasing the law

THANKS TO CHAPMAN PARTNERSHIP, **DESMOND MEADE** IS NO LONGER HOMELESS, AND INSTEAD IS BECOMING A LEGAL HERO. BY BRETT GRAFF

It's noon on a Thursday afternoon in Miami, and Desmond Meade, a third-year law school student at Florida International University, is preparing for a presentation he'll give at a convention criticizing the state's push to privatize prisons. It may sound like Meade is taking a natural step for an overachieving law student, but nothing about his climb to this situation was particularly likely. Just about a decade ago, Meade was homeless, suffering from a chronic substance abuse problem, and contemplating suicide.

"If someone would have told me, 'Desmond, don't jump in front of those trains because you're going to serve on boards and get into law school and meet the president of the United States,' well, I wouldn't have believed him," says Meade, now 45.

Chapman Partnership, founded by former Knight-Ridder CEO Alvah H. Chapman, guided Meade's ascent to a position of leadership. The nonprofit organization houses and empowers the homeless to achieve self-sufficiency. Residents are required to take active roles in their rehabilitations, attending classes and doing chores around the facility. A caseworker motivates each adult to tackle the debilitating issue at hand, such as a layoff, health problem, or substance abuse. The treatment is monitored weekly, and the average stay for residents is 47 to 60 days. "Sustainable income is what we're after," says Dan Vincent, Chapman Partnership executive director. About 63 percent of participants become gainfully employed.

There wasn't a single incident that led to Meade's dire situation. Following high school, he pursued a military career, which ended after he was caught stealing liquor while stationed in Hawaii. He then returned to Miami, where he became a celebrity bodyguard—a job that exposed him to long nights, a fast crowd, and hard, life-destroying drugs that eased his pain when his mother died. Meade moved into the home his mother had left him but was forced out after letting the mortgage payments go unpaid, turning to a precarious life on the streets of Little Haiti. "There's also a

continued on page 104



Meade with kids at Chapman, which provides after-school care and children's services



With Chapman Partnership executive director Dan Vincent

continued from page 102
harsh emotional aspect," he says. "No one really cared one way or another if you lived or if you died."

Meade was led to the Chapman Partnership in downtown Miami and was surprised by its inviting atmosphere. "It was like an oasis," he remembers. "There were trees and grass, clean running water. And I was in heaven. They treat people with respect. And they loved me until I learned how to love myself."

The nonprofit's \$13 million annual budget comes from private donations and the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust. The downtown campus, at 1550 North Miami Ave., was founded in 1995 and today maintains 2.5 acres, 80,000 square feet, and 456 beds, says Vincent. (A 44-bed family dormitory

and enhanced Family Resource Center will be added this summer.) In Homestead, a separate facility can house 300 people and even their dogs, as it has a kennel and veterinary services. Both premises have dining rooms, health care clinics, dental services, mental health physicians, and job training classes. And since 43 percent of residents are families (another 43 percent are single men, and 14 percent are single women), there's a Family Resource Center for after-school care and children's services including Head Start and Early Head Start. Children are enrolled in school—with a uniform and supplies—48 hours after arrival. Most recently, 34 of those students were put on the honor roll. "It's because we maintain that kind of structure," says Vincent. "We have volunteers and staff to assist with tutoring."

Meade, for his part, has set goals that go beyond completing higher education. Though he once contemplated taking his own life, he is now following in the footsteps of civil rights advocate

Rosa Parks, who spent her life serving the community. He earned a degree from Miami Dade College after completing drug treatment but he learned his biggest lesson at Chapman, when he helped a fellow resident, who later thanked Meade for making a positive impact. "I realized all the pain and suffering I went through all my life became worthwhile when I used it to help someone else," Meade says. "I realized that was my purpose—to help those less fortunate." **OD**

HELPING OUT

Financial donations: Whether it's a personal donation or a corporate sponsorship, cash donations fund everything from basic services to essential staff.

Donating goods and services: Items such as furniture, clothing, computers, books, toys, towels, and linens are essential. Businesses can also donate legal assistance, tutoring, and training to Chapman residents.

To make a donation or volunteer, call 888-651-8582. For more information, call 305-329-3000 or visit chapmanpartnership.org.

Charity Register

OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE

BY JONATHAN BORGE

MIAMI CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL FOUNDATION



Cause: Fundraising efforts to raise awareness and provide medical resources for children of all backgrounds and needs

President and CEO: Lucy Morillo-Agnetti

Event: Miami Marlins Charity Partner Weekend with Miami Children's Hospital Foundation, July 13–15, Marlins Park; mchf.org

SHARE OUR STRENGTH

Cause: Easing access to food in order to end childhood hunger in America

Event chair: Chef Allen Susser

Restaurant chair: Chef Andre Bienvenu

Event hosts: Laurie Jennings, Calvin Hughes, and chef Ralph Pagano

Event: 25th Anniversary of the Taste of the Nation Miami, Thursday, July 19, at 7 PM, Turnberry Isle Miami; strengthflorida.org

STYLE SAVES



Cause: Efforts to provide personalized outfits to underprivileged children on their first day of school

Founder: Rachael Russell

Event: One Year Anniversary Party and second annual Summer Fashion Show Fundraiser, Thursday, July 19, at 9 PM, Soho Beach House; stylesaves.org

EASTER SEALS SOUTH FLORIDA

Cause: Education and support for people living with autism and other disabilities

President and CEO: Luanne Welch

Event: Easter Seals "Small Miracles" Luncheon, Thursday, August 23, at 11:30 AM, Jungle Island; easterseals.com