Speaker Biographies - Helping Young People Build Social Capital During Social Distancing

Networking for Southern Economic Mobility Virtual Learning Series
October 14th

**Lorenzo P. Lewis, Founder and CEO, Little Rock, AR’s Confess Project**

Lorenzo P. Lewis, Roddenberry Foundation and Echoing Green fellow, is the founder and CEO of The Confess Project, a national grassroots movement dedicated to redefining mental health culture for Black boys, men, and their families. His work is inspired by his own troubled adolescence and has been featured on several platforms, such as CNN, USA Today, NPR, and Men’s Health Magazine. To date, he has trained approximately 160 barbers in 15 American cities to serve as mental health advocates in their communities.

**Dr. Grace Gowdy, Assistant Professor, NC A&T**

Dr. Grace Gowdy is an Assistant Professor at North Carolina A&T University. Dr. Gowdy’s research interests include community and family influence on individual upward mobility, with a particular focus on the adolescent stage. Her most recent publications are on informal mentors and their ability to promote economic upward mobility for youth vulnerable to intergenerational persistence of poverty. Dr. Gowdy currently works on multiple studies examining formal and informal mentoring relationships, all surrounding how caring non-parental adults can influence young people’s chances of mobility.

**Edward DeJesus, President, Social Capital Builders**

Street Credible, Research Backed and Impact Driven

More than 100,000 educators, policy-makers, and young adults unanimously agree that DeJesus’ message about the importance of life, freedom and future economic opportunity is an important message that all young people need to hear. Born and raised in the Bronx, NY, DeJesus is a top speaker at over 20 major youth conferences each year. As a former
VIBE magazine editor puts it: “DeJesus’ message hits home with the weight of a project building falling on your head. And once every brick has touched down, audiences will have a clear idea of what must be done.”

Thirty years of experience in the trenches in some of the toughest neighborhoods and policy-making environments has prepared DeJesus to reveal the true social, political and cultural dynamics that keep so many youth from educational and workforce success. Through creative and inspirational storytelling mixed with cold hard facts, DeJesus argues that every community has the seeds to set up the structures that make a difference in their youth’s future. And, through his message, audiences learn how to make these seeds grow.

Edward DeJesus is the President of Social Capital Builders. Their mission – “All Youth Connected.” In the U.S. today, 4.6 million youth are disconnected from work and school and millions more are struggling to hold on. DeJesus and his team create policy and programmatic solutions to connect the most marginalized youth and adults to opportunities to earn, learn and grow.

DeJesus is a W.K. Kellogg Foundation National Fellow and holds a MS in management and urban policy analysis from the New School for Social Research. He is the author of Making Connections Work and the best selling youth book, “MAKiN’ iT.” His work has been featured on NPR, in the Washington Post, the Baltimore Sun and the Miami Herald.

DeJesus has blended his love for reaching youth with a special ability to impact policy by conducting research on effective programs that help youth acquire and maintain jobs. DeJesus served as a youth policy expert for the Sar Levitan Center for Youth Policy at John Hopkins University and served on the Task Force on Employment Opportunities for young offenders for the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. He has served as a consultant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the U.S. Dept. of Labor, and the National Education Association. In his spare time, DeJesus competes in Ironman triathlons. Learn more about DeJesus’ work. Visit www.socialcapitalbuilders.com.