

# Checkered past to power to change

**I**t was the summer of '86 when I moved to Springfield from Alton.

Even then, at the tender age of 16, I was longing to be part of something — to make a change in my community. I wanted to be empowered and in return empower the less fortunate. However, I went about obtaining that power in all the wrong ways.

I got involved with gangs. I sold drugs and eventually landed myself in jail. That lifestyle and quest for power went on for the next 25-plus years



REGINALD DALE

to no avail.

In the summer of 2014, while attending a hot lunch program at Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, I was invited to bring my family to Sunday service. It took a couple of invites, but I eventually did just that.

In fact, my beautiful

family and I joined the church and became active members. I was even blessed with a job doing janitorial and maintenance work at the church. I also volunteered to try to help curb the violence on the east side through the Cease Fire Program, yet I still wasn't content. I felt as if I still needed to do more and be more for me, my family and my community.

I got involved with registering and educating voters and the GOTV (get out the vote) through

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my pastor's son, Samuel Johnson. I worked on both Sen. Andy Manar's and Rep. Sue Scherer's campaigns. After having that taste of victory, I wanted to get more involved with my community.

My pastor, Silas Johnson, is the president of the Faith Coalition for the Common Good and through him I met my mentor and friend, Shelly Heideman. I was introduced to the "art of organizing."

In the wake of the Michael Brown uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, I participated in a press conference with local law enforcement to build the bridge of respect between the police department and the minority community.

Last December, I also spoke at Faith Coalition's Prayer Vigil following the Ferguson decision.

In the spring of 2015, I worked on several projects that required me to go into the eastside community and build relationships with people in the neighborhood, encouraging them to get involved in discussions that addressed everything from nutrition to securing gainful employment.

In November, I attended a Gamaliel weeklong leadership training in California. Gamaliel is our parent organization. It was during this training that I really had a chance to do some deep soul searching, and I got clarity on what it was that I was put on this earth to do.

#ORGANIZE

Since I've returned from the Gamaliel training, I've been working closely with

the Faith Coalition to help change the dominate narrative of systemic racism and to spread the word about our mission to bring equality to all people through various issue task forces.

I am also working with Andre Neal and the Community Health Connector to form a task force that will advocate for better medical care, health coverage and supplies for those who need it the most.

This work has given me hope, excitement and motivation. I know that our person can organize many to make a powerful change in our community. I want to be that person. My goal is to be a professional organizer for the Faith Coalition.

— Reginald Dale is an active member of the Faith Coalition for the Common Good.