

THE VOICE OF HOPE

SPRING 2026

A PUBLICATION OF HOPE MINISTRIES

Devon Smith, 33, grew up adopted on Chicago's South Side, cycled through foster care, juvie, and years of running from himself. Now a resident at Hope Ministries in South Bend, he's raising his five-year-old daughter, rebuilding his life — and finally finishing something.

"It's a great community. And that's what we are here — a community. A family. Because even when you leave here, you still got Hope."

—DEVON SMITH, HOPE MINISTRIES RESIDENT SINCE MAY 2025



Devon's Story

Tell us a little about where you came from.

My name is Devon Smith. I grew up on the South Side of Chicago — Inglewood area. I was adopted when I was three years old, so growing up I always felt more abandoned than anything. I was constantly moving around — Chicago, the suburbs, Harvey, University Park — always asking myself, am I ever going to find where I belong?

I loved gymnastics. My high school didn't have a program, but I was determined. I told them, if it's not a curriculum, let's make it one. By sophomore year they started to see my talent and came around. But that was kind of the story of my life back then — I'd start something, show real promise, and then not finish it.

What kind of trouble did you get into growing up?

By 14 I'd gone to juvenile correctional facility — nine months for possession of a stolen motor vehicle. I didn't steal it per se. We found a car in the alley and I was going to joyride a little bit. But that experience taught me a lot. It showed me a path I did not want to go down. After that I stayed out of serious legal trouble. I never been to prison. Don't have a DOC number. Nothing like that.

But staying out of prison and having direction — those are two different things. I knew I wanted to be somebody. I wanted to leave some kind of dent on life that said, hey, Devon was here. I just didn't know how to get there yet.

How did you end up in South Bend?

My mom was here — God rest her. My brother came to Chicago to get me. I was hiding, honestly. My friends told him where I was. He said, little bro, give me one month. If you don't like it, I'll put money in your pocket, get you a new wardrobe, send you back home. I said, all right. I like that deal.

My first job ever was cleaning businesses after hours. When I got that first check, I was just like — wow. This is what being in the world feels like. I decided to stay. That was 2016. Now it's 2026. Ten years.

What happened in those ten years?

I look back and it weighs heavy on me. I did the same thing I was doing in Chicago — just without the legal trouble. It was time for a change.

In 2018 my mom was sick, and she sat me down and said, son, you love landscaping — make it a career, make it your own business. And I did. I started DS Landscaping. I had trucks, clients, contracts. I felt like I was finally building something, leaving a legacy for my daughter. Then COVID hit. I sold my equipment piece by piece until I had nothing left to sell.

I rebuilt it. Got my first apartment in Elkhart — me and my daughter. Signed my first lease. But I got big-headed with the money. Thought I could always replace it. I spent too freely, fell behind on rent, and lost the apartment. Eviction on my name. Credit already bad. Back to square one.

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Tell us about your daughter. How did getting custody of her change things?

Her name is Dy'Linnii. She's five years old. Oh my God — she is the best thing that ever happened to me. She didn't ask to be here. So she deserves every ounce of my being that I can give her. It didn't matter what was going on or what I had — I made sure she had it.

Winning full custody of Dy'Linnii was the biggest turnaround of my life. I was nervous. I already had a son I couldn't be in the life of the way I wanted to be. But I stood on it. And once I stopped smoking, stopped drinking, stopped the cigarettes — when my mind cleared — God took me all the way back. From being adopted, to bullets flying past my head in the streets, to landing here at Hope. He showed me the whole time, he had me.

What was it like when you first came to Hope Ministries?

I tried to sabotage myself. I'd come in drunk and just tell them I was drunk. I wasn't hiding anything. I'd say, what are we about to do? I just wanted to say I tried it — so I could run on to the next thing. Because that's what I always did. I never completed nothing. I didn't complete high school, didn't complete jobs, didn't complete relationships. I always ran. But Hope didn't let me go. And that's the thing about this place — they don't give up on you, even when you give up on yourself. If they see something in you worth saving, they say, okay, we know what to do. We're going to work with him.

After ten months here, what's the biggest change you've seen in yourself?

My attitude. I used to be so quick to pop off — puff my chest out, get the last word, prove I was tough. I was using marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes like ADHD medicine just to keep my temper down. Whole time, all I needed was what Pastor John taught me: pause, process, proceed.

Now I step outside myself, look at the situation, process what's actually happening — and then I proceed. I can say, you know what, I was wrong. I don't even need to get mad. I don't smoke now. I don't drink. I don't need cigarettes. Because I don't have an anger problem anymore.

What has it been like raising Dy'Linnii here?

Testing. A lot of testing. I had to learn a whole different way of parenting. I learned that communication is everything — sitting down with her, spending one-on-one time, going over her kindergarten homework. I realized she was acting up in school because I wasn't giving her the attention she needed. Kids only act out when they want attention.

Every day she asks me, Daddy, when are we moving? And I tell her: we're going to move when God says ready. Right now this is

our starting position. You got your own room. Nobody's couch. This is getting us ready for when we get our own place. Keep your room clean.

What would you say to someone considering Hope Ministries?

Just be ready with yourself. When they tell you, let us know when you're ready — they mean all the way ready. You've got up to two years to get yourself together, with everything provided for you. Clothes, shoes, emotional support, substance abuse help — anything that's got your mind cloudy, Hope will help with that. You are never going to get two years like that again in your life.



A lot of people hear Hope Ministries and think it's a church program and they don't want any part of that. They don't force any religion on you. But as long as you're truly going to be real with yourself and real with the program — it's going to work. Even if you fall, they see you trying, they are not going to give up on you.

**To read more Stories of Hope,
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When God Says Ready

God's timing is often a mystery. There are things I think should happen right away and God says "not now". And other things I don't think should happen yet and God says "now". We may not always understand (or like) His timing but we know it is good, because He is good.

I am grateful for Devon's courage in sharing his story in this month's newsletter, and grateful for the ways he is learning to follow God's time. His words to his daughter – "when God says ready" – show his faith in God's good timing.

And I am grateful for you – our friends and supporters in the community – for providing the funds and resources to ensure Hope Ministries is available to people like Devon and Dy'Linnii. When God brings people to the point that they are ready to change, we are here to provide the space, support and love they need. Thank you for making our ministry possible.

With Gratitude,

David

David Vanderveen
Executive Director



Support Hope Ministries Through Your Estate Planning

Ensure your continued financial support of Hope through a gift from your will or living trust or through a Charitable Gift Annuity that pays you a fixed income for your life with the remaining balance coming to Hope at your death.

Will or Living Trust

Remember Hope, and other ministries you care about, in your final estate documents. You can leave a set amount or a percentage of your estate as you direct in your will

Charitable Gift Annuity - CGA

Make a gift of cash, securities, or real estate now and receive fixed interest payments for the rest of your life (a CGA can be set up for two individuals). The remainder in the annuity account will be given to Hope at your death. Much of the interest payments from the charitable annuity are received tax free.



For more information contact the
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Hope Ministries Top Five Needs

ALL ITEMS CAN BE BROUGHT TO OUR FAMILY LIFE CENTER AT 432 S. LAFAYETTE BLVD.



- Mens Undershirts in XL & 2XL
- Twin XL Comforters
- Ground Beef
- \$25 Walmart Gift Cards
- Washer And Dryer

For our complete needs list, visit our website at

www.hopesb.org

Donate Through Our Amazon Wish List



Hope has a Wish List available at Amazon where you can purchase items that we need. This list is updated regularly to reflect our most urgent needs. Some find the Wish List as their favorite way to support Hope. You can scan the QR code or go to hopesb.org/wishlist.

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