

## **Dream Keep It Moving: “A Dream’s Tea”**

With the nonprofit, Dream Keep It Moving, Cynthia Walker has stepped up and out to be the difference she needed as a young teen mom for the young ladies in her community. Having grown up with a self-described *sad* childhood, she also found herself to be a mother of three by the age of nineteen. Cynthia soon settled in to raise her children and as she said they also helped to teach her too.

Her past experience and volunteerism with other nonprofits such as The Grand Rapids Ellington Academy, Rocket Football, and her current employer Job Corps have always been surrounding working with children and young people. After many years of service and following her youngest child turning 18 years old, Cynthia had her own personal plans of living out life for herself and on her terms. As an empty nester, she had a vision of recovering her “lost” teen years as a young mom. “When my youngest turned eighteen, I begin to think about what I wanted to do and become. Then one day, I had looked in the mirror and did not recognize the person who was looking back at me, and I finally had the time and opportunity to rediscover who I was and the things I liked to do.” But there is also a famous quote by the late actor Woody Allen that states, ““If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans” because He clearly had other plans for her.

Nursing an idea and passion for the community’s youth for years while raising her own, the vision for Dream Keep It Moving began to emerge as Cynthia finally took courageous leaps to follow her heart. She had also created “Dream Boxes” of gift journals, hygiene toiletries, and snacks for the youth as well as developed programs and curriculum to train and equip them with life skills and personal development to manage their journey to “adulting.” Her inaugural Dream event was launched virtually on her birthday in September 2021, highlighting four speakers.

Year 2022 included speakers and activities along with three young ladies who were nominated to receive a complete makeover and photo shoot. Cynthia remembered that time fondly as she watched those three girls be transformed physically as well as emotionally. The young ladies who were timid and had suffered poor self - confidence and self-esteem in their appearances and expressions were transformed through their experiences. She watched as their facial countenance and posture changed as smiles, conversations, connections, and new friendships

emerged as they became better versions of themselves through the power of encouragement and engagement.

“Our program, Dream Keep It Moving” was established as a vehicle to empower, educate, and celebrate young people while building connections and community for them, proclaimed Cynthia. Too many times, they are unheard and ignored. However, we want our community’s youth to know that we see them, we give them a voice to speak, and do hear them.” This year’s event, “A Dream’s Tea,” which includes the etiquette of a tea party with a fun twist, will be held in-person for young ladies at Madison Square Church with breakout sessions, lunch, and activities. Cynthia is so thankful for the Neighborhood Match Fund for making all of this a reality. “This year, we are fortunate to collaborate with Corlis Nichols “Breaking The Silence” and Ariana Hogan who specializes in making financial literacy and money fun. So, we are very appreciative to have the city’s and community’s support as we work to build up our youth to succeed.”