

FOLLOWING THE TRAJECTORY OF EDUCATION

THOUGHTS FROM LVC ALUM EARL PHALEN, EDUCATIONAL REFORMER & ADVOCATE

“Education is a way to treat one another more decently,” shares LVC alum and national education reformer Earl Martin Phalen (Washington, DC, 1989-1990). “It’s an equalizer, a civil right, and a social justice issue.” This firm belief has led Phalen on a path to become an accomplished educational reformer and advocate. “Education can make a world of difference in the trajectory of someone’s life. My life could have been much different if it hadn’t been for my parents and their emphasis on getting an education.”

After college, Phalen was looking for something different. A friend working in Jesuit Volunteer Corps suggested he take a look at LVC. “I loved the notions of simple living, intentional community, and direct service.” Phalen felt called to serve in Washington, DC, and this led him to Luther Place Night Shelter. He had no experience working with homeless people, but his volunteer year was transformative and powerful. “I was constantly inspired

by the love, optimism, strength, and resilience of the...women with whom I worked. They, and my Volunteer House community, pushed me to grow in so many ways.”

After his year as a Volunteer, Phalen attended Harvard Law School, and with several of his classmates started

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an afterschool program, Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL). The project grew into Summer Advantage USA, which Phalen led for 18 years.

After working on former Harvard Law classmate Barack Obama’s first presidential campaign, Phalen started

a summer academic program through the Indiana Department of Education. Due to the performance success of the students, Indiana encouraged Phalen to take his model and turn it into a school. After visiting over 60 high achieving schools, he created the model for the George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies, named after his parents. He applied for and received funding for 10 schools which opened this past August.

Located in low-income communities, they offer an excellent education to populations who normally might not be privileged to have this opportunity. “Our schools emphasize partnership with parents, arts and academic enrichment, and blended use of technology as a learning tool, in addition to the traditional “three R’s” of education.”

“LVC provides the Volunteers with an education. They are taught the tenets of social justice, how to live intentionally and consciously, and how to create authentic connections. Having this experience with LVC showed me that it’s possible to live this way – intentionally, deeply, and in the pursuit of justice.”

