

Fr. M. Jeffery Bayhi
2018 Angel Award Honoree
Metanoia Manor • Zachary

Fr. M. Jeff Bayhi was ordained in 1979, and he's spent a lifetime working with men and women all over the world to build coalitions that help the most vulnerable. He has worked extensively with student ministries, prison ministries and mental health. He has an uncanny ability to recruit – to convince people to start and join movements that change things.

An Italian nun, Sister Eugenia Bonetti, introduced Fr. Bayhi to the work that has become central to his life: the rescue and recovery of victims of sex trafficking. Fr. Bayhi came to learn that it isn't just an international crisis; it's happening in our own back yard.

The Texas-to-Florida corridor is a major route for human trafficking. In 2017, Louisiana identified more than 1,000 victims. More than 70 of those were under the age of twelve; desperately in need of a safe place focused on their unique needs to rebuild and recover.

So Fr. Bayhi returned to the pattern of work that he knows best – collaborating with the church, philanthropists and government. Together, they built Metanoia Manor, a facility for young female victims of trafficking. The facility is the first of its kind in Louisiana.

Today, Metanoia Manor can house up to 16 girls at a time and is staffed 24/7 by professionals and catholic nuns who work to meet the educational, developmental, mental and physical needs of residents. Through faith, devotion, and love, the Metanoia team rebuilds the self-confidence of women and girls whose lives were stolen by sex slavery, and helps them transform into productive members of society who will not be defined by their past.

Audry Bernard Spencer
2018 Angel Award Honoree
Empowering the Community through Excellence • Crowley

Crowley is home for Audry Bernard Spencer, and her roots there have inspired her to work selflessly for its children, a commitment that has endured her entire lifetime.

Audry spent her professional career as an educator, working in the classroom. Retirement has been a new beginning, leading her to a new path for getting children to succeed in school.

In 2012, Audry started Empowering the Community for Excellence (ETCFE), an education nonprofit, and invested \$20,000 of her own money to renovate her grandmother's home into a learning center available to all children at no cost.

That first year, ETCFE employed three certified teachers and worked with 20 students. Today, the organization is housed in a 5,000 sq. ft. facility donated by the Florence Mauboules Charitable Trust and serves more than 100 students. It houses nine classrooms, a computer lab, an outdoor reading area and a community garden.

ETCFE has grown into a kind of community center, supporting children and parents throughout the year; even when school is out of session. And it's working- the majority of its students are meeting educational benchmarks and advancing one or more levels.

Audry continues to lead the organization with extraordinary grit and determination, knocking on doors of businesses, civic leaders and others to raise funds and support ETCFE – all of whom have given generously and nurtured the center's growth. Her risk has paid off for an enthusiastic community. Ask anyone in Crowley – *anyone* – and that person will know Mrs. Spencer, her teachers, and their work.

Phyllis M. Broussard
2018 Blue Angel Award Honoree
Capital Area CASA Association • Baton Rouge

At work, Phyllis M. Broussard's colleagues know her as a force of energy, with an infectious enthusiasm and a deep sense of commitment. Certainly, she's great at her job. But what distinguishes her is a true servant's heart – a desire to lift others up and help them succeed.

These qualities of exceptional character are what also make her an effective Court Appointed Special Advocate, a role she's has taken on between work and family for the last ten years. With a mandate to speak for the welfare of children, Phyllis is more than an advocate – the children she works with know her as counselor, friend, and mother.

Phyllis' duties as an advocate for children require her to step into complicated and painful situations, working with children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect. But she builds trust to get a sense of each child's experiences and what his or her future could be. In court, she represents only the child and speaks for their best interests. Phyllis has been an advocate for more than a dozen children, with a 100% reunification rate.

Phyllis sees her duties as more than meetings and paperwork – she becomes a confidante and mentor to each child. She wants the children assigned to her to know that, no matter what, they have someone in their corner – someone who will fight for them.

It can be hard to be a witness for children who are taken away from everything familiar in circumstances beyond their control. But Phyllis perseveres in a spirit of hope that each family can grow and be reunified.

Carolyn D. Hoyt
2018 Angel Award Honoree
NextSTEP of Central Louisiana • Alexandria

After three decades working in human and family services, Carolyn Hoyt has seen the devastating brutality of domestic violence. She teaches that violence is a cycle doesn't discriminate: young, old, rich, poor – it doesn't matter.

As the executive director of the Family Counseling Agency, Carolyn helped many families recover and begin to thrive as survivors of domestic violence. She was familiar with the ecosystem of services that supported people after they *survived* violence – but what if we could stop it from ever happening in the first place? What if there was no violence to survive?

Carolyn left her job in 2005 to found NEXTStep Cenla, a leading nonprofit whose curriculum *A Fight We Can Win* has become a model for teaching young people about dating and domestic violence. Since then, she's built a nationally recognized program of classroom instruction, online learning and music videos to reach more than 18,000 Louisiana students.

Carolyn's hope is that by helping students learn their worth, they will learn to recognize abuse and how to walk away. This is no small task: her research indicates that a third of teenagers know someone in their circle of friends who is being abused by an intimate partner.

Carolyn and her team hope to build a legacy of empowerment for young people, and a support system to end domestic violence before girls become women, before high school sweethearts become parents, and before cycles learned at home repeat.

As an advocate, she collaborated with lawmakers and testified before the Louisiana House Education Committee and helped draft a law making dating violence education mandatory for all high school students. At her own expense, she continues to crisscross the state, presenting *A Fight We Can Win* to thousands each year. She trains teachers, parents, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, professional organizations and civic groups to raise awareness for intervention and education at an early age.

Kacy Edwards and Julie Scott
2018 Angel Award Honoree
Career Compass of Louisiana • Baton Rouge

Twelve years ago, Kacy Edwards and Julie Scott were teachers at the same school. They were and are best friends and co-conspirators.

Each friend has her own style. Kacy is a little quiet; Julie is not. Even though their classroom experiences were different, they noticed the same thing: many of the students they taught were graduating high school without any plans or direction for the future.

They knew that their students yearned to succeed. But the information about post-secondary education and the *how* of getting there overlooked a lot about the reality of students' lives, especially those coming from families in poverty.

Kacy and Julie saw a need, and decided to help their students develop and execute plans for college success. They began with the students in their own classrooms. When that work showed promise, they made a plan and then took a huge leap of faith: they cashed out their retirement accounts to start Career Compass of Louisiana, a nonprofit college and career access organization.

Today, they are co-leaders of more than 80 coaches who help students across the state remove the obstacles that would otherwise prevent them from getting a postsecondary education – whether that's a two- or four-year college, or a high-quality credential.

To date, Career Compass has assisted more than 77,000 seniors in Louisiana, 98% of whom have applied to a post-secondary education program, and all of whom have a plan for what to do after graduating. Career Compass coaches also step in to overcome all kinds of barriers, whether it's lacking a credit card or family bank account to pay online fees or needing transportation to and from higher learning institutions for tours and interviews.

With enough time, Kacy and Julie hope to reach every graduating senior in the state to make education a reality for those who want it.

Abram Freeman
2018 Angel Award Honoree
Acts of Love • Lafayette

Here's an incomplete list of the roles Abram Freeman plays on any given day: insurance agent, driving instructor, pastor, executive director, husband, father, coach, mentor, friend, life-saver.

Abram has long had a vision of finding and supporting children with one or more incarcerated parents. He wants to create a loving community that positions each child for success and lifts them up to a better life. But the work is complicated: there's no easy way to make it all better. So Abe and his wife Yolande do their work one child and one family at a time.

Abe provides career counseling and helps single parents find jobs. His church provides daycare services free of charge, along with annual family trips (also at no cost). As a minister, he becomes part of dozens of families, showing up for kids at school, at home and in between. Abe and Yolande run a food pantry, counsel children in juvenile delinquency and are active in prison ministry.

In short: whatever it takes, wherever it's needed.

Abe is particularly focused on the mental and emotional health of children, working with more than 100 a year. Abe's team is trained to look for depression, anxiety and signs of suicidal intentions, and helps children get the counseling and emotional support they need.

The Freemans run multiple businesses to support these ministries. Much of their own income is channeled into the work, though the community Abe dreams of is becoming a reality. When one family is ready to stand on its own legs, it pitches in to help another. Together, they are making sure no child is overlooked.

Tanya McGee
2018 Angel Award Honoree
Ainsley's Angels of America • Lake Charles

On the weekdays, Tanya McGee is the executive director of the Imperial Calcasieu Human Services Authority. She and her team manage all of the state and federally funded programs for mental health, substance abuse and developmental disabilities in Southwest Louisiana.

Tanya's young cousin Ainsley was diagnosed with an extremely rare condition and spent much of her life wheelchair bound and without speech. Ainsley's dad, Rooster, started to push Ainsley in races and marathons, which she loved. It brought their family closer and gave them a way to spend recreational time together.

When Ainsley passed away, her family decided to build a legacy for kids with disabilities around that same idea – creating a sport that families could do together. They founded Ainsley's Angels, which provides adaptive equipment needed for angel runners (able-bodied runners) to push athlete riders (children with disabilities) in road races across the nation.

Tanya has been a part of Ainsley's Angels since the beginning, leading an ambassadorship program that has led to 62 Ainsley's Angels chapters in 27 states across the country. She personally has pushed athlete riders in more than 100 race events. Her boundless energy and enthusiasm are inspiring, and her love for all kinds of children makes them, in turn, love her back.

Children with disabilities often sit on the sidelines of athletic events. But Ainsley's Angels puts them front and center, builds self-esteem and gives families a positive conduit for playing together. Today, thousands of families are participating in road races each year.

Caleb Seney
2018 Angel Award Honoree
MedCamps of Louisiana • Ruston

Caleb Seney has spent most of his life at MedCamps, a summer camp experience for children with disabilities. He'll tell you that he started as a volunteer in 1993 and never left. In his time with the organization, Caleb has worked as a camp counselor, a camp director, volunteered on the board of directors and, finally, became its executive director in 2003.

MedCamps are residential and run 24 hours a day, five each week, ten weeks each summer. Caleb works tirelessly with camp counselors and medical professionals to give a fun-filled, no-cost week of camp to children with all kinds of disabilities – orthopedic conditions, cerebral palsy, asthma, sickle cell anemia, autism, epilepsy, visual and hearing impairment, speech impairment and developmental disabilities.

In case you're wondering, campers do everything you'd expect at summer camp. They go swimming, ride horses, shoot archery, ride a zip line, and have dances (DJ'd by Caleb). He spends part of each day getting to know and bonding with each camper, making them laugh. In some cases, campers' disabilities are profound, but they still smile when Caleb comes to see them.

When the summer ends, Caleb spends the rest of the year raising the hundreds of thousands of dollars necessary to run a highly specialized camp. He also forges community partnerships to make MedCamps sustainable. He's built relationships with dozens of civic clubs to raise funds for campers. He's partnered with the Louisiana Tech School of Design to have third-year architecture students design and build fully accessible and barrier-free structures.

The campers don't really know all of this. While they're at camp, they're busy having fun like anyone else. But of the 5,000 campers who have come through MedCamps over the last twenty years, each and every one of them knows Caleb's name.

And his camp name- "Big Tuna."

Luis Arocha
2018 Angel Award Honoree
Café Hope • Gretna

Luis Arocha was working in his family's mortgage business when his friend, Tim Falcon, recruited him to join the board of directors of Café Hope, a new nonprofit.

The idea was that Café Hope would recruit young people from difficult backgrounds and train them in the hospitality industry through running an actual café. Then they would help these kids find a job with flexibility and get into college.

First, Luis thought he was going to be a board member. At the first meeting, though, Tim "volunteered" Luis to be the president. And, a few years later, he was so in love with the work that he resigned from the family business and became Café Hope's full-time executive director.

Since Luis joined the organization, Café Hope has graduated more than 500 kids. The restaurant is housed at the Timberlane Country Club in Gretna. Their students get an education in working the front of the house, and then they switch to the kitchen. By the time they graduate, they are ready for placement in New Orleans' biggest industries.

To his students, though, Luis is more than a boss. He's a mentor and father figure. Things get tense in a hot kitchen; sometimes Luis is tough and the kids are tough right back with him. But they learn to treat each other with respect and navigate high pressure with positivity and productivity. His students become part of his family – they look up to him, often coming to him for advice when working out complicated problems at home.

Running Café Hope means working with the board, ensuring compliance and most of all, raising the money necessary to operate. But Luis is also hands-on in the Café Hope restaurant. You can find him working the register, in the kitchen, or mopping the floor. He's a long way from his family's mortgage business, but he wouldn't have it any other way.