

Arika Davenport: Called to Serve, Restoring Lives with Love

Born in Baltimore City, Arika Davenport spent her early years living in the Lafayette Projects before being raised in the vibrant Charles Village neighborhood. Today, she is the Founder and CEO of Impactful Changes Inc., where she's building more than a business—she's creating a sanctuary for women recovering from addiction, rooted in dignity, compassion, and faith. A two-time graduate of our 2023 and 2024 Business Ownership Academy cohorts and the first alum to join our Board of Directors, Arika's story is one of divine calling, relentless perseverance, and joyful transformation.



Raised in Baltimore's Charles Village neighborhood, Arika grew up watching entrepreneurs line 25th Street, planting seeds of ownership and possibility in her imagination. After graduating from Lake Clifton High School in 1985, she studied business at Harford Institute and went on to build a 25-year career with Amtrak. Known for her warmth and leadership, she became the face of customer service at Penn Station and was even featured in VISIT BALTIMORE magazine for her professional and community contributions.

But Arika's most important work began quietly, in obedience to a whisper from God.

"One morning, I woke up and the Spirit told me to go and serve the people. At first, I thought that message was for my cousin, who was struggling to find her purpose. So we started small—distributing food and care packages to the homeless. But when she lost interest, I realized the assignment was actually for me."

Driven by faith, Arika began collecting winter coats and essentials from friends, coworkers, and neighbors. She handed them out from a modest house on Saratoga Street—giving out warmth, dignity, and encouragement to women living on the margins. The outreach grew quickly. In her first year, she collected over 250 winter coats. Each one came with conversation, prayer, and genuine care.

"God was already in the midst of all of it," she says. "I didn't know it at the time, but He was preparing me—teaching me that life is really about relationships."

Through a series of divine connections and sheer determination, Arika purchased that same Saratoga Street house where she had once rented. She began turning it into a licensed residential treatment facility. But she still didn't have the business foundation she needed to sustain the work.

That's when Wendy Merrick, a trusted member of Create U Network's Board of Directors, introduced her to the Business Ownership Academy.

"I came to the Business Ownership Academy through a trusted board member—Wendy Merrick. I had a program, but no confidence or knowledge to stand behind it. I work 16-hour days, five to six days a week, and used my downtime to build my business. Still, I made time every Saturday because without this Academy, none of it would've happened. Create U Network gave me a trusted space to learn, connect with resources, and grow. I've shared this program with everyone I know!"

Arika joined the program with a heart full of purpose but a vision that felt upside down. "It was like dressing a paper doll and putting the shoes on the hands," she says. "I had all the pieces, but nothing was in the right place." Create U Network helped her bring order to the mission—guiding her through business planning, board development, budgeting, insurance, marketing, and more. By the end of the cohort, she had a pitch, a plan, and a voice.



Arika introduces her business at a Create U Network's end-of-cohort celebration event



Arika accepts her certificate from Mr. Chester France and Dr. Louis Wilson

Then—she came back. "The second time around was sweeter," she reflects. "It helped me lock in what I had learned, especially the financials. I brought breakfast to class, shared my story with others, and helped build an alumni community. That's what family does."

Through Create U Network's support, Arika connected with Innovation Works, completed their BOOST program, and was matched with a financial mentor. She now has access to a thriving network of advisors, funders, and fellow entrepreneurs. Her nonprofit, Impactful Changes Inc., is preparing to launch services for men and will soon open an outpatient facility serving those returning home from incarceration.

Looking back, Arika is clear: this journey isn't hers alone.

"This was never me. God used me for this, and I just stayed focused. I remember one cold morning I didn't want to go meet with my mentor. I was tired. And the Holy Spirit said, 'If you put it down, you'll never pick it up.' So I kept walking. And every time I take a step, God puts the next piece in place. Create U Network was one of

those pieces. You all are my business family. I'm so grateful."