**The Minds Behind the Visionz Project**

The Visionz Project was created by a father and son, both deeply concerned with how at-risk teens were expected to live and survive in the world without the critical life skills to help them succeed. Here’s more on the project’s founders:

**Willie E. Rivers**

For dozens of years, Willie Rivers has played a key role in the community, helping people from all socio-economic backgrounds succeed through mentoring, leadership and job training. After earning a B.A. in Economics from Grambling State University, Willie’s educational legacy began at one of America’s largest car companies.

More than 30 years ago, Rivers was hired at Ford Credit. His focus? Financial services. Over the years, he held a succession of senior positions, managing a budget of more than $300 million and a staff of almost 500 people. Willie’s role was to help dealerships with their sales and marketing strategies, but his passion for the “people” side of business influenced his career, as well as how Ford would hire and develop their staffers.

Chairing the Personnel Development Committee, Willie created career development plans for 175 management-level employees, mentoring them so they could thrive and succeed at Ford Credit. Working with minority dealers, Willie focused on diversity, crafting recruiting strategies for minority conferences and events. Thanks to this inclusion strategy, Willie was able to help almost 400 minority dealers hire, train and nurture minority talent.

In 2003, Willie founded the R&R Group, a consulting firm for both corporations and consumers. With a focus on customer satisfaction and diversity awareness/inclusion, Willie now uses workshops and seminars to help people master financial literacy, credit and money management.

Now retired from Ford, Willie is pouring his educational passion into the Visionz Project, where he hopes to help Detroit teens succeed, professionally and financially.

**Chris Rivers**

Chris Rivers grew up in the shadow of his father Willie’s legendary career at Ford Credit, but that hasn’t stopped him from carving his own legacy as an educator and successful businessperson with substantial experience in sales, marketing and business startups.

For more than 15 years, Chris has worked with established companies, startups and offshore environments to help then maximize revenue, develop distribution strategies, and deliver unparalleled customer service. When he worked at Time Warner alone, he launched five major, national sales campaigns, raising the bar for sales performance for hundreds of employees.

Despite his success at Fortune 500 companies, it was his passion for helping young people that drove his development of the Visionz Project.

In 2011, during a visit to his hometown of Detroit, Chris connected with a former high school classmate who, despite being a highly regarded athlete with good grades and a bright future, fell into a repetitive cycle of petty crime and unemployment. At 40, his friend could not find a way to escape that cycle. Feeling a sense of helplessness, Chris created the Visionz Project to help at-risk youth escape the same fate.

Since 2001, Chris has mentored at-risk youth, partnering with the Boys and Girls Club and providing engaging and interactive educational training. In the mid 2000s, Chris created a Seattle Partnership to give away free, refurbished desktop computers to at-risk youth who completed an educational program. He has also helped vulnerable North Texas youth develop their musical talents, providing encouragement and financial support when necessary.

With the Visionz Project, Chris will help at-risk Detroit teens learn the skills to earn money, save it, and invest in their futures. His past experience as an educator and mentor will prove invaluable to the project.