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## **Usher and Friends Speak Out**

Written by [Ellen Miller](#) on Aug 11, 2010

**By Chandra R. Thomas**

The raindrops cascading from the sky Friday didn't put a damper on the mood of the celebrities inside the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Center. They strolled the red carpet in support of pop star [Usher Raymond](#)'s first ever World Leadership Awards. Touted as a salute to those who are "committed to inspiring and encouraging youth," the event was held in conjunction with his [New Look Foundation](#), which mentors young people as global leaders.

Currently in seven cities, New Look has worked with over 8,700 young people, and has provided more than 150,000 hours of leadership training. The program trains high school youth in leadership, business, education and service. Now in its 11th year, New Look reports a 98 percent high school graduation rate among alumni. With its Powered By Service campaign and an international call to youth service, the foundation aims to make service more diverse, relevant and accessible to all young people.

A-lister entertainer [Justin Bieber](#), winner of the Global Youth Leader Award, slipped past our cameras and former President Bill Clinton chose to forgo the red carpet altogether, but here's what some of the attendees had to say about youth empowerment efforts and juvenile justice.



**Usher Raymond, Entertainer & Founder New Look Foundation.**

"It might be surprising, but the juvenile court system is actually what inspired me to create the model for my foundation. My mother would tell me about all of these cases involving kids. A lot of them were abused and neglected. Many of them were poor and frustrated so they were getting into trouble. I felt like they needed somebody to show them that they can make a difference in this world. I knew I wanted to do so much more to influence the young people and let them know that they can be something in life. I also want our kids to come together and motivate each other. Some of the best movements ever were started by youth."

**Nia Imani,**

**Broadway Actress & Singer**

"I don't think prison is the best option for young people. I think you need to talk to them. It's also good for other young people to encourage each other. I think a lot of young people will listen more to a friend than their parents, because their friends understand them better."



**Ciara,**



### **Recording Artist**

“It’s all about the kids tonight. I am just here supporting Usher. I think it’s really important to give back. I’ve been blessed to have a successful career and I am honored to be able to use my success to inspire some young people. I am so honored when a kid walks up to me and says they want to be like me. What Usher is doing is really cool.”

### **Nadji Jeter, New Look Alumnus & Actor**

“The main thing kids need to know is to just stay away from trouble. When kids do the wrong thing you have to teach them a lesson. Doing the wrong thing can land you in the wrong place at the wrong time. Usher’s doing the right thing by helping young people with his foundation. He keeps us motivated and shows us role models to look up to.”



**Lisa**

### **Borders, Former Atlanta Mayoral Candidate & City Council President**

“When the largest educational system in Georgia is the penal system, something’s wrong with that picture. Anything being done to work against that is very important.”



**Jamahl**



### **Anderson, Former Atlanta Falcon**

“It’s very unfortunate and disturbing when you look at the juvenile justice system and see that it is disproportionately African-American. Of course you always want the best and hope for the best, but no matter how you look at it, there’s no way to legitimately account for the disproportionate numbers. It just doesn’t add up. We need to look at our laws and the way they’re being enforced and who they’re being enforced on in Georgia.”



### **Victoria Rowell, Actress & Author**

“Usher’s contribution is very significant. He’s extremely relatable to the youth and he can mentor through music. I’d like to see more educational programs and efforts to pair children with mentors. We need to educate our young people through the arts. When you take art out of a child’s educational experience you take away a piece

of their humanity.”

### **Shawn Wilson, New Look Foundation President**

“We’re really focused on prevention. We believe in empowering youth to deter them from a life of crime. We let them know that they have the power. A lot of youth are doing [illegal] things for attention because they feel hopeless and helpless.”



**Jeanne Ashe, Arthur Ashe’s Widow & Youth Catalyst Award Honoree**



“Young people have to make a decision on the spot about whether they are going to do the right thing or not. We are at a critical point with our young people in this country that if we, as adults, don’t step up we’re going to lose them. We need to be there to let them know ‘you can be proud of who you are in this world.’”

### **Mary Carillo, Professional Tennis Player, Sportscaster & Youth Catalyst Award Honoree**

“If Usher says to 1,000 kids you can be something special; you can inspire people around the world. You don’t think they would listen? If Usher tells these kids that they are part of something bigger on this planet they’re going to listen. I have a couple of kids and they turned out well. I’m so grateful for that. You’ve got to hang out with them and watch who they hang around. It makes a big difference.”



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## **One Response to Usher and Friends Speak Out**

**T. Meadows**

August 9, 2010 | 10:22 am

Thank you Usher for taking a stand and thank you Juvenile Justice Information Exchange for giving him the voice.

We are advocating for children and youth at <http://www.childrens-hopeandvoice.org>

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