Malika's Story

Since 1992, the Ryves Preschool Program has offered children and their families an opportunity to participate in educational curriculum to better prepare for the demands of public education. We consider our role in this effort as vital to the future of the educational potential of these at-risk children. More than 75% of the children enrolled in this program are homeless and their families are otherwise unable to afford this opportunity. That is why we have a waiting list and most days the classroom is full.

The Program operates Monday – Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. Each child is provided breakfast, lunch, dinner as well as a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack. During a child's first few days, we often observe them practically attacking the food that has been denied or have been un}

able to obtain the quantity or quality of food their growing bodies need. After a couple of weeks everything changes – attitude, attention, ability to learn and of course their overall health.

This was especially true for one little girl named Malika. Undersized and yet determined to please the classroom assistant, Malika would spend extra time coloring or going over the days reading assignment to make sure she comprehended the lesson. As the weeks passed, it seemed to take Malika more time to fully understand what most of the other children were able to grasp. In spite of Malika's cute and charming personality, something just didn't seem right. With the assistance of a health check we were able to discover that Malika had lead poisoning, the result of previous, substandard housing for the family. Today, with additional support, Malika is doing better. When we followed up with our Preschool staff, one volunteer assistant commented, "It's not perfect, but knowing what the challenge is for these children allows us to get them the help they need, and maybe make improvements for a brighter future."

There is an old saying that goes, "If you worry, pray; so if you pray, why do you worry?" I suppose it's haman nature or is it lack of faith? I remember going through an extremely stressful situation during a particular time in my life and not sleeping well at night, someone told me to give it to God, after all He's going to be up all night and believe me He is the one in control!

Several years ago it was common to see people wearing bracelets that read "WWJD." It was a great reminder for us to check our own behavior and actions by reflecting on what our Savior would do in the same situation. I would have to guess that most of us fall well short of His example. But how do we know what He would do if we don't have a relationship with Him?

I recently heard something that really hit home for me. A pastor was delivering his homily and he mentioned how their food pantry and outreach programs regularly see as many as 100 people each week looking for different levels of assistance. As he spoke, it reminded me of the assistance our agency provides.

The pastor went on to say how their program only sees those seeking assistance when things get really tough and they have no other place to turn for help. In between they wouldn't visit or call until things were really bad. What came next really stopped me in my tracks. How many of us treat our relationship with Jesus in just this way? How many of us only turn to Him when things get really bad?

If you’ve ever visited our programs or one of our member agency programs, you will see volunteers, staff members, and clients all interacting. They know each other’s names, their parent’s names and their children and grandchildren. Inevitably someone, a volunteer, or staff member will know one of our clients with a speciality, with Jesus in just this way? How many of us only turn to Him when things get really bad?

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Renewal

Spring – warm sunny days, spring flowers and children playing outside. It is thought to be a time of renewal and the desire for school to be out builds within our youth. The staff at Ryves Preschool are reminded how, no matter what time of year it is, there are endings and beginnings.

Spring means that it is time for our 5-year-old students to graduate from preschool and prepare to enter kindergarten in the fall. The teachers, volunteers and parents have a celebration in early June for these little graduates. It is truly amazing how much these little preschoolers have blossomed from shy, little toddlers into confident students. Many of the little ones just need one-on-one time to learn and to be heard. Monday thru Friday, all year long, our preschool strives to be a stable force in the lives of these precious, small children.

Creating Hope through Healing Hunger

Jenna Mungoven’s friend, Sara, was in a bad place. Recently laid off, this single mom’s world revolved around trying to get food on the table, placing her in a cycle of worry where finding her children’s next meal was all she could think about.

Jenna urged Sara to use the Bethany House Soup Kitchen and Deli Days Programs in Terre Haute, but she resisted: “Others really need this more than me.” “I’m not the kind of person who needs charity.” And finally, “What will everyone think of me?”

Jenna, one of several volunteers in the Soup Kitchen, assured Sara that a little help is nothing to be embarrassed about. What’s more, the ability to temporarily nourish her family through tough times is precisely the program’s point.

What happened next for Sara was a textbook scenario. Using the Soup Kitchen literally moved Sara from desperation to hope. The program’s allocation of healthy offerings from our daily, canned goods and meat – supplied by the Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank – enabled Sara to feed her family and save her limited money to put gas in her car. This allowed her to find a job and stabilize her family’s financials.

After finding a job and creating stability in her own life, Sara donated her car to Catholic Charities in gratitude for the help and to pay-it-forward for others in need.

“The other day, someone who used the Soup Kitchen said, ‘I’m not the kind of person who needs charity. ’ Others really need this more than me. ’ “I really don’t know what we would do otherwise,” said one woman picking up food for her disabled husband and their children. Both she and her husband are out of work, and the food pantry helps free-up income to buy school clothes for her children. “This program helps us right now,” she said. “We go hungry otherwise. We really need help.”

Across the service area in Clay County, Shelby Olson relies on the Foodbank Mobile Pantry to support her 12-year-old twin sons. She too felt the sting of downsizing and decided to enroll in college to study nursing. “You really can’t survive on a just a job now; you’re not going to make it. You have to have a career in this day in age,” Olson said.

 Olson also volunteers at the Mobile Pantry site where she sees many families in similar situations. “At least 100 families come through the Pantry each month,” Olson says. “There are a lot of people who are not eligible to sign up for food stamps, but they still need help. Jobs aren’t what they used to be and ends don’t quite match. Catholic Charities really helps out with food. Everyone could benefit from a little help at some point in time.”

Catholic Charities exists to provide help and create hope for all in need. We know feeding the hungry is just one step to meeting the needs all families face. More importantly, we know if families and children are hungry, they can work better, deal with and improve the other challenging areas of their life.

Me and You – Homelessness Around the World

Soulaﬁ Abas first came to Ryves Youth Center in the summer of 2014. Soulaﬁ came from Damascus, Syria and now teaches at Indiana State University. With the problems occurring in Syria, Soulaﬁ wanted to create an educational opportunity where children from Ryves Youth Center could bond and learn from Syrian children who live in a refugee camp in Amman, Jordan. In Soulaﬁ’s words, “The idea for the project was simple: to enable children in two different places in the world, who come from totally different cultures but have similar challenges and difficulties in their lives, to communicate with one another and see what happens.”

Soulaﬁ worked hard with the Ryves children who wrote letters and created art projects for children in the refugee camp. Soulaﬁ then traveled to Jordan where she met with the children living in the Amman refugee camp. At the end of the summer Soulaﬁ brought back the letters and artwork created by the Syrian children to the Ryves children.

This project has taught the children at Ryves Youth Center that homelessness exists around the world. They found children living across the world who could share their feelings and show support through both letters and art. For this moment in time the children of Ryves Youth Center and the refugee camp in Amman, Syria were connected. Each one’s heart touched the other.

Soulaﬁ created a book, Me and You, documenting this project. Soulaﬁ pointed out that, “What happened is a book that embodies pure hope and joy!” Each child who was highlighted in the book received one to keep. Other books remain on sale at https://www.createmypage.com/5071882. One hundred percent of the proceeds for the book go to helping the Syrian children who participated in this project. More about Soulaﬁ Abas can be found at http://www.soulaﬁabas.com/.