



# Christian Activity Center, Inc.

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A Chat With Chet: Newsletter  
Fall 2011

*Hope is a good thing. Maybe the best thing.* That's my favorite line from *The Shawshank Redemption*. Hope is a good thing. A very good thing. In the context of the movie, maybe it's the best thing. But in my experience of the world, it springs from something bigger...one of God's great gifts that roots inside us like grass growing in the middle of concrete, thriving in a place where it just doesn't belong. Defying obstacles. Hope compels us forward, beyond what we are able to see. If our eyes find a glimmer of hope, there is a chance that faith can grow. Faith, then, is a second gift from God that assures us that dawn will follow the darkness, and that impossible things will happen. As hope intertwines with experiences of faith, the greatest gift happens...*and the greatest of these is love.* At the Christian Activity Center, our prayer is that we can foster hope enough for faith to grow in our kids. That our love here will sustain them.

Growing hope in youth this fall is Teen Violence Prevention, a new program at CAC funded by Daughters of Charity Foundation of St. Louis. (Thank you!) Violence prevention here uses teen employment as the change agent. DeVonta Slaughter, 16, was hired in July to engage kids in athletic skill building and life skills development. DeVonta works weekdays 3:30-8pm in our gym, weight room and Brotherhood class. Asked if he's gotten himself anything cool with his hard-earned money, DeVonta humbly answered: "No sir. I give what I make to my Mom to help with bills. When my brother (12) and sisters (10, 14) need things, I can just get them." What DeVonta does take for himself is pride in his work (research shows that kids employed before age 18 have a 90% likelihood of pursuing post-secondary degrees, 85% likelihood of establishing professional careers). DeVonta is grateful that "When fights pop out, I just walk away...I gotta go to work." DeVonta sees two roads now. "I'm on that road that gives me a chance to get out of here for real." CAC's Teen Violence Prevention program employs 12 teens currently, with the goal of placing 35 in after school jobs off-site. If you know of openings, please contact me!

Also growing hope in teens and tweens is *Pathways* – a new college access program brought to CAC by USA Funds, Jim and Jeanine Allsup, the Saigh Foundation, the Pott Foundation, and Best Buy Children's Foundation. At the helm of CAC's *Pathways* program is regionally renowned college counselor, Angela Whitlow. Whitlow accepted a full-time position in May 2011 to engage students grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> in wrap-around preparation, beginning with a love of writing (bring on the college application and scholarship essays!) to FAFSA completion, college visits, admissions assistance, and 1:1 advisement. Whitlow ensures that each child at CAC is prepared for college emotionally, academically and financially. In the short months since launching, Whitlow has learned that *Pathways* students do not have access to other college prep programs and that fewer than half of our students have visited a college campus by 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I want to say a special thanks here to CAC grant writer, Christine Krueger, for bringing hope to youth at CAC with the development of these new programs.

Teen violence prevention and college access fold perfectly into our culture, advancing our purpose of caring for children, youth and their families living in the Olivette Park neighborhoods of East St. Louis. While some would say that this is a place angels fear to tread, the staff of CAC knows this is exactly the kind of place God is most present, and thankfully, He calls us all to join Him here. It is God's people who have the ability to serve hope, call others to faith, and demonstrate love. With our 17+ daily ministries in full-swing this fall, 175 children are in our care each day to receive hot meals, help with homework, computer training, mentoring, Bible study, acting, art, music, martial arts, foreign language, college prep, work-readiness, worship, and on and on and on. Currently, 640 children come to us 3+ days/week. We call these our "regulars" and track their outcomes closely.



A higher standard.  
A higher purpose.

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~ Caring for Kids in East St. Louis ~

I'm going to take a moment to recap summer and recognize the *27 different mission teams* who served CAC kids, including groups from California, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Alabama, and North Carolina. (Summer 2012 is already booked, if you can believe it!) I cannot begin to name each amazing mission team that came to share their gifts with us, but I can thank you personally for blessing us with diverse talents as you step each year onto our mission field.

While wonderful groups were in our midst, groups of CAC youth traveled to summer camp and on mission in July. Three youth spent three weeks in South Africa ministering to children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Fourteen (14) youth traveled to Belize to conduct children's ministry and restore structures at a Christian camp. It is trips like these that change our kids' worldview. You would be proud of their selfless work and love for the people they served. Thank you to the Harold and Judy Booze Mission Endowment and to each supporter who sent our kids on mission. Thanks, too, to each one who contributed to our KENNY ALLEN CAMP FUND, sending 200+ kids into the countryside to meet God at Camp Penuel and Kids Across America.

Fall has been equally active here! The building is packed with kids, and we love the energy and excitement of fall. What happens here makes a difference in the lives of kids. Outcomes since last fall: 1,200+ unduplicated children have attended CAC; 822 participated in at least one program; 495 engaged in multiple programs; 206 participated in all three core curriculum areas (education, life enhancement, and arts/recreation). The more active a child is with us, the greater his success in all areas of life. Our baseline measurement of this is grade point average. Nationally, for a child in urban core communities like ours, the GPA is 2.10. In the United States, the average GPA of a college bound student is 2.90. A child at CAC involved in one program has a GPA of 3.05, two programs, 3.15, three or more programs, 3.30. Last year, 53% of CAC kids were consistently on the honor roll; 96% passed their grade level in school! Be proud of the development you are supporting at the Center – spiritually and academically.

To keep people in place to love our kids well and engage them in small groups, CAC's fundraising this fall has included the 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GOLF FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOURNAMENT on September 8th, organized by C5T Corporation with special thanks to Col. Arlene King for her incredible time on our behalf. The tournament raised \$20,000 for direct children's care, and we are tremendously grateful. On September 22<sup>nd</sup> we held our 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL FUNDRAISING BANQUET, where 55 kind table captains invited 558 guests to hear the testimonies, songs and writings of CAC youth and alumni. What a remarkable thing it is for our kids to be surrounded in a room of compassion as they open themselves up to ask for the things all kids should have – time, rest, love, learning. Thank you to each one who came and contributed. You raised nearly \$160,000 to directly feed, teach, and minister to children in East St. Louis.

Attached is our ADOPT A CHILD FOR CHRISTMAS appeal, along with an opportunity to purchase Christmas cards created by children at CAC. It is such a blessing for our kids to be provided for at Christmas. *Thank you* (to those still reading this!) for caring about what happens to children, and for loving kids in our city. The impact you have here is great, and I am grateful to be your partner in ministry. Please continue to pray for us – your greatest gift to our kids. Pray for our staff, volunteers, and especially for all the lives we have the opportunity to impact each day. May God richly bless you for what you are doing here. I am...

Gratefully yours,



Rev. D. Chet Cantrell  
Executive Director

On the Horizon

Run & Walk 4 Kids	Christmas Distribution	Trivia Night/Silent Auction	Golf Tournament
Sat Nov 12, 2011	Dec 15-17, 2011	Sat Feb 25, 2012	Fri June 22, 2012
Russell Smith	Margaret McCurdy	Cyra Lohman	Col. Arlene King
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