



EXPRESSIONS

The newsletter of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches

Mentoring creates mutually transformative relationships

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: KINSHIP

Sarah Wright Walstrom, her husband Dave and their three boys Davey, Derek and Jackson met their Kinship kid Elijah for the first time in April of 2013, when Elijah was five years old.

Recalling this first meeting, Sarah remembers that Elijah was very animated. “I was thinking we could get, like, a quiet child,” she joked, “and Elijah was not that!” Elijah’s two siblings already had Kinship mentors, so he was over-the-top excited to meet these new friends of his own.

“He was so sweet,” Sarah said.

Over the next two years, the Wright Walstroms and Elijah bonded and became like family. “My middle son, Derek, who is a year older than Elijah—they are like brothers,” said Sarah. “They play, they fight. They are like brothers.”

Spending time with the Wright Walstrom family helped Elijah gain confidence. At home, as the youngest child, he was often picked on by siblings, but with his Kinship family he always felt cherished and valued. “He was a celebrity,” said Sarah, recounting how her three boys would often fight over who got to sit next to him at dinner.

As Elijah grew in confidence, Sarah also detected a change in herself. Though



Elijah and the Wright Walstrom boys shoot pool during a family outing.

she signed her family up for mentoring as a way to help someone else, she felt like she was the one being helped. She had found a purpose. “I realized that mentoring was exactly what I was meant to be doing,” she said. “You do it because it’s a good thing to do and you think you’re helping a child, but really you are helping yourself.”

In March of 2015, Elijah’s family made the decision to move to Arizona. Sarah said the news was especially hard on her son Derek. Before Elijah left, they all had family pictures taken. They made pillowcases with paint handprints

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To support any of our programs, go to gmcc.org/donate. Designate your gift to a program of your choosing.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Division of Indian Work

Women of Traditional Birthing and **Fathers' Services** parenting classes are now on Thursday nights from 5-7 p.m. in Dakota Lodge. • DIW received \$10,000 toward our **Raise the Roof Campaign** from Bethel Lutheran Church. These funds will go toward a matching grant from Shakopee Mdewankaton Sioux Community to repair the aging roof of the DIW building. • After a vibrant summer of hosting the nation's first American Indian-focused Children's Defense Fund Freedom School[®], **Youth Leadership Development** staff are getting back into the rhythm of the school year.

Minnesota FoodShare - text GMCC HUNGER to 52000 to donate \$10 to this program today.

Pack the Pews: Harvest Edition encourages congregants to bring donations of fresh produce and other healthy foods to their place of worship the weekend of September 18-20 as part of the **Harvest Campaign**, a two-month healthy food drive running August 1 – September 30. • Minnesota FoodShare staff will attend the **Food Access Summit** November 8-10 in Duluth. • Join Team Minnesota FoodShare or sign up your own team for this year's **Walk to End Hunger** on Thanksgiving morning at the Mall of America. Contact Suzanne Shatila at **612-276-1530** or sshatila@gmcc.org.

Kinship

Kinship kids who are waiting for a mentor visited **Thrivent Financial** in downtown Minneapolis for a fun birdhouse-building event on August 12. Thrivent employees helped the youth craft sturdy homes for birds out of repurposed wood.

Metro Paint-A-Thon

Approximately 1,000 volunteers spent about 10,000 hours painting homes during this year's Metro Paint-A-Thon, sprucing up homes for low-income seniors and disabled adults across the Twin Cities.

HandyWorks

Help rake and bag leaves for seniors this fall to help them prepare for winter. This year's **Rake, Rattle and Roll** will take place the last week in October through the middle of November, weather permitting. For more information or to sign up a team, visit gmcc.org/handyworks/volunteer or contact Molly Chandler at **612-276-1579** or mchandler@gmcc.org.

Urban Immersion Service Retreats

Book a weekend, half-week or week-long retreat at gmcc.org/urbanimmersion. Register for a summer retreat by November 18 and receive one half-price leader registration for every five paid participants! • Urban Immersion also offers **Poverty & Privilege Trainings** customized for organizations, congregations and corporations. Visit gmcc.org/urbanimmersion/povertyandprivilege for more information.

West African Family & Community Services

The program formerly known as Center for Families has reopened on the border of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center with the goal of serving the West African immigrant community more closely. See page 4 for more information about the new location and programming.

Clinical Pastoral Education

A group of eight ministers-in-training completed their CPE unit on August 1. Congrats to Joyce Burt, John Curran, Jen Johnson, Jaesun Kim, Chris MacDonald-Dennis, René Mehlberg, Kim Oakins and Grant Spencer. • The next CPE unit began September 1 and will conclude December 11.

Transformation at the core of GMCC

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



When I look to the heart of what we do here at GMCC, it all comes down to creating change, making a difference in the lives of those we serve and partner with. That's why the theme of this volume of Expressions is *transformation*.

Transformation is what you can't always see in the photographs. It is a process, often quiet, and can't be summed up in a single frame. But when you're there, sitting next to a child who has improved their reading scores, standing next to a home freshly painted by volunteers, or pulling weeds from a thriving community garden that used to be an empty lot, you can feel it. You can feel the change happening.

As an organization, GMCC always rises to meet the needs of the community around us. When the community changes, we change too, undergoing constant transformation to live up to our mission statement of uniting people of faith to serve people in need.

This summer, we moved our West African Family & Community Services program (formerly known as Center for Families) to the border of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center in order to be more responsive to the needs of West African immigrants. We established a partnership with Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota® to host the nation's first American Indian Freedom School right here at our Division of Indian Work building. The programs of GMCC are dynamic, never static. We know that transformation is a two-way street. If we, as individuals, organizations and congregations want to help transform the lives of others, we must be willing to be transformed ourselves. As the apostle Paul says in Roman 12:12, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Thank you for everything you do to support GMCC, creating change and renewal in the Twin Cities and beyond.

Noya Woodrich

Sharing summer's bounty

Minnesota FoodShare coordinates a garden called Wuju Wakan (Sacred Plants), which supplies the Division of Indian work food shelf with tomatoes, corn, kale, chard, cabbage, beets and more. Thanks to the hard work of staff and volunteers, Wuju Wakan has produced 576 pounds of food so far this growing season, with plans to hit 1,000!

This effort is in conjunction with Minnesota FoodShare's **Harvest Campaign**, a statewide healthy food drive focused on getting fresh, locally-grown produce into food shelves. Similar to the March Campaign, Minnesota FoodShare works with congregations and other organizations throughout the months of August and September to collect food donations and get them to those who need it most—the hungry.



Beets harvested from Wuju Wakan garden

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Focused on helping seniors, empowering urban American Indians and West African immigrants, nurturing families, fighting hunger and mentoring youth, the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches is a nonprofit where compassion inspires action by uniting people of faith to serve people in need.

FOOD AND CLOTHING DONATION ITEMS

Help us open the doors of our food shelf and clothing closet by donating the following items:

Food shelf donations:

Fufu (plantain flour)

Garri

Canned vegetables

Black-eyed peas

Corn

Okra

Pumpkin

Yams

Tomatoes

Rice

Millet

Baby cereal

Diapers (all sizes, including open packages)

Other foods (child-friendly)

Canned soups

Macaroni & cheese

Healthy snacks

Clothing closet donations:

Career clothing (gently used and clean)

Suits

Dress shirts

Dress pants

Sport coats

Ties

Skirts

Dresses

Blouses

Dress shoes

Other clothing:

Baby clothing

Child and teen clothing

Mens' and women's clothing

Outerwear for all ages (coats, boots, hats, mittens, gloves, etc.)

Move to northwest suburbs brings new life to West African program



Executive Director Edmund Ocansey and Career Development Specialist Keafon Lainjo

“I am very glad that we have moved to where the people we serve live.”

- Edmund Ocansey, executive director

West African Family & Community Services

West African Family & Community Services (formerly known as Center for Families) relocated in early July to Brooklyn United Methodist Church on the border of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center. The move was based primarily on the high concentration of West African immigrants in that area. Edmund Ocansey, executive director of West African Family & Community Services, wanted the location to be more accessible to people seeking assistance. “We’re right in their neighborhood,” he said of the new location. “I am very glad that we have moved to where the people we serve live.”

At the new location, services will be offered in three main program areas:

Basic Needs

Provides access to food, clothing and household supplies through a culturally specific food shelf and clothing closet.

Career Services

Assists clients with career skills and job searching through hands-on training in computer use, resume writing, interviewing and more. Career clothing will also be available.

Immigration & Legal Services

Helps immigrant families and individuals address legal issues and processes through consultation with volunteer lawyers.

West African Family & Community Services is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday from noon-5 p.m. and Sunday from 3-8 p.m. We are currently working on stocking our food shelf and clothing closet with quality goods, so please take a look at the lists of suggested food and clothing donations and consider contributing one or more of these items. Contact Edmund Ocansey at **612-276-1527** or **eocansey@gmcc.org** to drop off donations during operating hours. Cash donations to this program can be made using the enclosed envelope or online at **gmcc.org/donate**.

Mentoring creates... from page 1

as a way to remember how much they care about each other.

Elijah's birthday came in May—two months after he moved to Arizona. Sarah, who had been keeping in touch with Elijah through postcards and occasional phone calls, made the decision to fly out for a visit. "I got to his house right before he came home from school. I was standing in his living room," she said. "He runs to me and hugs me and I pick him up and he's crying and laughing...all this emotion all at once."

"Everyone should mentor," Sarah insists. "How many people in their everyday lives feel like they are actually making a difference? When you mentor, you get to make a difference in a child's life."

Please consider being a source of change and empowerment in a child's life by mentoring with the Kinship program. Visit gmcc.org/kinship/becomeamentor or contact Jerod Petersen, associate director, at 651-588-4655 or jpetersen@gmcc.org.

The ripple effect of mentoring: a historical note



The Reverend Robert Nervig always had a passion for mentoring at-risk youth. After graduating from Luther Theological Seminary in 1956, Nervig started a program for mentoring troubled teens in the Twin Cities, a program that later developed into Kinship of Greater Minneapolis. One of the teens in the program (pictured lower left corner), grew up to become the father of Paul Johnston, current vice president and deputy general counsel at Thrivent Financial in Minneapolis.

At the Kinship fundraising luncheon hosted this past spring at Thrivent Financial, Paul Johnston pulled up a slide of the above photograph and described the transformation in his father's life set into motion by mentoring.

Bob Nervig passed away in 2011, but his legacy lives on. Kinship of Greater Minneapolis now serves more than 300 youth in the Twin Cities. These youth, with the guidance and companionship of passionate mentors, will grow up to become the next generation of teachers and doctors, businessmen and businesswomen, ministers and leaders. They may even choose to pass along the gift they received by becoming mentors themselves.

Mentoring starts small, but its impact is limitless. Change the life of a single child; change the lives of that child's family. Slowly, generations change. Communities change. The ripple continues.

KINSHIP SUPPORTER IN THE SPOTLIGHT: BOARD MEMBER JIM WEINZETL

An excerpt from Jim's speech at the Kinship fundraising luncheon in April:

"Every Saturday morning or weekday night, one of our 200 mentors gets up, laces on their shoes, steps out into the cold or heat or rain and drives a few miles to pick up his Kinship kid.

At the kid's house, the mom gets him up, gives him a piece of toast and he stands at the window, wondering: *Is he going to show? Can I trust him or will another person disappoint me?*

The car pulls around the corner about 200 times over the next four and a half years (which is our average match length) and they spend an average of about 450 hours together. The love and the trust and the empowering grow. And the kid watches. How does her mentor react to bad situations? How does she manage her money? Is she kind? How does she treat her family and her mother? Does she have many interests and passions? Does she persevere in tough times? Does she get joy out of her job and accomplishments? How did she get her education and career? Does she make carefully thought-out decisions?

And unknowingly at first, the mentor follows the word of the Talmud, which says, "Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers GROW, GROW!"

The venues—the ball games, the movies, the walks in the park, the breakfasts and art galleries and museums—aren't the important thing. It is the opportunity for the kid to observe and learn how to live a better life that is important. It is the time spent together with a good quality person. And the kid is slowly empowered and transformed."

Thank you, Jim, for your tireless efforts on behalf of Kinship kids.

GIVING UPDATE

This year, we are introducing the following giving societies to recognize individuals, corporations, foundations and congregations who demonstrate significant financial support for GMCC:

The GEM Circle recognizes donors who give every month in any amount through a pledge paid by credit card, check or Electronic Funds Transfer.

The Cornerstone Society recognizes donors who make a total combined annual gift of at least \$1,000.

The Changemakers Club recognizes donors who support more than one GMCC program annually with at least one gift to two or more programs/projects for at least two consecutive years.

The Loyalty Society recognizes donors who have made financial gifts to GMCC in any amount for at least ten years in a row.

The Faithful Givers Circle recognizes congregations who have made financial gifts to GMCC in any amount for at least ten years in a row.

Additionally, we continue to recognize donors in the **Soaring Eagles Society**—special friends who have contributed cumulative gifts of at least \$50,000 and the **Heritage Society**—those who have remembered GMCC in their estate plans.

To join any of these giving societies, contact Lisa Jacobson, VP and Chief Advancement Officer at ljacobson@gmcc.org or 612-276-1501.

Save the date

September 18-20 – Pack the Pews: Harvest Edition

September 21 and 28 – Free farmers market at DIW building, noon-2 p.m.

November 26 – Walk to End Hunger at the Mall of America

Welcome new staff



Mika Barrett

Attendance Liaison, be@school
Youth Leadership Development Program
Division of Indian Work



Robyn Baumgarten

Congregational Relations and Volunteer Coordinator
Advancement Team



Ira Dixon

Live It! Coordinator
Health Services
Division of Indian Work



Sharee Fischer

Counselor/Educator
Strengthening Family Circles
Division of Indian Work



Keafon Lainjo

Career Development Specialist
West African Family & Community Services



Mike Loud

Coordinator
Healing Spirit Boys' House
Division of Indian Work



Seth McGaha

Digital and Media Communications Manager
Advancement Team



Mary Serie

Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
Finance and Administration



Corinne Wanstall

Anpa Waste Coordinator / Parent Support Outreach Worker
Strengthening Family Circles
Division of Indian Work

Press conference brings Governor Dayton to DIW



Governor Dayton participates in a round dance with Freedom School students and staff. Above: Dayton answers questions from a student.

“...our state has more work to do to narrow achievement gaps and eliminate other troubling disparities among children. We are determined to make Minnesota a great place for every child to live, learn and grow.”

- Governor Mark Dayton

Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton and Children’s Defense Fund-Minnesota (CDF-MN) Research and Policy Director Stephanie Hogenson convened at the Division of Indian Work (DIW) on July 21 for a press conference surrounding the release of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2015 KIDS COUNT® Data Book. The Data Book, which assesses indicators of child wellbeing nationally and across the 50 states, ranks Minnesota number one overall.

In response to the number one ranking, Dayton and Hogenson paired pride with a call to action. “We are proud of this national distinction and the many Minnesota teachers, parents, doctors and others who made it possible,” said Governor Dayton. “But our state has more work to do to narrow achievement gaps and eliminate other troubling disparities among children. We are determined to make Minnesota a great place for every child to live, learn and grow.”

“We cannot be content with a high ranking that masks chronic inequities for children of color in our state,” said Hogenson.

Holding the conference at DIW highlighted one of the groups often impacted most by these inequities—American Indians—as well as the innovative programs rising up to close the gap.

This summer, CDF-MN partnered with DIW to launch the nation’s very first American-Indian focused Freedom School. The Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School® program empowers students and curbs summer learning loss by offering developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant curriculum. “We have been able to able to infuse the Children’s Defense Fund curriculum with our own culturally specific youth programs, such as Mashkiki Ogichidaag, which educates students about traditional tobacco usage versus the dangers of commercial tobacco,” said Louise Matson, executive director of DIW.

After the press conference, Governor Dayton joined the Freedom School students for a round dance and conversation. The round dance, whose origins are traced to the Cree people, has been adopted and interpreted by many North American tribes. One of the students explained to Governor Dayton that the dance represents “friendship and the circle of life.”

27 years of going above and beyond

Since 1988, volunteers from the 934th Airlift Wing Maintenance Group have partnered with Metro Paint-A-Thon to paint the homes of seniors and disabled adults across the Twin Cities. In addition to priming, painting and scraping, these dedicated volunteers put their mechanical skills to use performing additional home repairs for Paint-A-Thon clients.

This year, the team raised extra funds by raffling off bean-bag-toss boards crafted by team leader Greg Jacobson. The raffle raised a total of \$855, which allowed the team to repair a run-down service door and pair of garage doors at a southwest Minneapolis home. After three days of hard work, the home, which formerly had a citation from the city of Minneapolis, was completely transformed. “Overall I believe it was a huge success,” said Jacobson. “As always it was a very positive experience.”



A volunteer from the 934th Airlift Wing Maintenance Group paints trim on a Minneapolis home.

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Our family of programs:

Clinical Pastoral Education
Division of Indian Work
HandyWorks
Kinship
Metro Paint-A-Thon
Minnesota FoodShare
Urban Immersion Service Retreats
West African Family & Community Services

Thanks to...



AARP for inviting Minnesota FoodShare to be a partner at the "Field of Dreams" movie event at CHS Field. The opportunity for direct social impact was tremendous and together we significantly raised awareness of the issues surrounding senior hunger.



Central Bank for sponsoring the Kinship program, as well as your recent donation of tickets to help mentor matches attend a sporting event in the Twin Cities. Many of the kids attending had never been to a game before, so it was quite an experience for everyone. We appreciate your commitment to changing lives in our community.



Brooklyn United Methodist Church for opening up your doors to the new West African Family & Community Services program. We are looking forward to a lasting partnership helping West African immigrants in Minnesota succeed.



Plymouth Magazine for featuring Kinship of Greater Minneapolis in your September edition. We appreciate your support of this program, recognizing the difference a caring mentoring relationship can make in a child's life.

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