

September Outreach of the Month

Kid's Hope



Pizza lunch for staff on the last day of school.

The September Outreach focus is Kids Hope. Please support us with an extra offering using a pew envelope, direct deposit at MSFCU, or use our donate button on the website, www.ulcel.org. Indicate "Kids Hope" in the memo. Read below how we are really making a difference.

One afternoon five years ago Pastor Gary called and asked me if I would be the Director for Kids Hope USA at ULC. I had never heard of it before and had no clue what it was. He told me he had been a Kids Hope mentor at his previous church for eight years and thought it was a terrific ministry which would benefit students in a local elementary school. I soon learned that Kids Hope USA is a national ministry that began in western Michigan over 25 years ago and has spread to more than 35 states with over 800 programs. It assists church members in mentoring students with a goal of establishing a relationship with at-risk students, so they feel special and loved. Volunteers mentor at the school for one

hour each week.

After accepting the role of director, the first order of business was to find a local school for this new ULC ministry to partner with. Ms. Brown, the principal of Forest View Elementary, a pre-k through third grade building in the Lansing School district located three miles south of ULC, let us know she believed we could make a positive difference in the lives of her students.

The next step was to find mentors and pair them with a child to begin the process of supporting a student who needed the extra help and attention. Great care is taken in making a match that will be a blessing to both the student and the mentor beginning with a referral form filled out by the student's teacher and reviewed by Principal Brown and myself. Some students need academic help while others are struggling to make friends and feel like they fit in or are dealing with the disruption of big changes in their home life. What all our mentees share is the need for unconditional love and one on one attention.

So, how were the ULC mentors going to help these children who could be in kindergarten through third grade? The most important thing a mentor does is to show up. There is great power and love in letting a child know they are there just for them. That one hour in the child's life can become the highlight of their week. Having an adult care enough to be present with them whether they are having a good or a bad day and to interact with them without judgement is the true blessing of this ministry. The hour is also most often filled with fun. Our Kids Hope supply room is filled with materials to use including games, puzzles, puppets, art supplies, books, and educational materials. Many of our mentors can share stories of a breakthrough in reading, in math, or in connecting with a student who struggles with communicating.

Each mentor also receives extensive training both in person at ULC and online through the national headquarters. Kids Hope has experts that share how to teach a child life-skills such as resiliency and ways in which they are smart to build self-confidence; as well as tools for coping with trauma, child safety, overcoming barriers to reading, closure and much more. Recognizing that there will be days when a mentor needs support, Kids Hope is structured so that each mentor is paired with a prayer partner with whom they can share the blessings and challenges of their mentoring journey and who assures that they enter Forest View fortified with prayer.

Also, the blessing does not end with the students. Our mentoring team works together to show the teachers support and love as well by providing small gifts, treats and an end of the year meal that lets these public-school heroes know they are recognized and appreciated for the challenging work they do day in and day out.

The ULC Kids Hope ministry is sustainable only as long as we have members willing to mentor partnered with a caring individual who will support and pray for the match. If you would like to make a difference for a child by participating in Kids Hope USA as a mentor or prayer partner or learn more about it, contact me at barbkissling@gmail.com or talk with Pastor Gary.