

SUMMIT

Winter 2014

Grant 'lifts' automotive vocational program to next level



No longer a fledgling project taking shape in a former storage facility at the Diakon Wilderness Center, the center's automotive program has received a \$25,000 grant that will go a long way toward expanding the scope of Diakon Youth Services' vocational training for at-risk youths.

"With the award, we will be purchasing and installing a car lift, tire-changer, tire-balancer, and an assortment of power tools and air guns," says Corey Carothers, executive director of Diakon Youth Services. He adds that without the lift, the program would have been limited in impact. "To have the ability to put an entire class of students under a vehicle to view mechanical items really moves the program to a higher level in terms of its impact."



Given by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the grant recognizes the center's intensive effort to align its programming with vocational standards and outcomes established by PACTT (Pennsylvania Academic and Career/Technical Training), a project of the state commission and the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services.

Long-term goals of the PACTT Project are to help youths served by providers such as Diakon Youth Services and the Diakon Wilderness Center to develop the necessary competencies either to continue their academic careers or to enter the competitive job market following release from court jurisdiction.

"PACTT has helped us to create a standard curriculum that is tied to certain certifications," Carothers says. "By aligning with PACTT and winning these grant funds, we can take a huge step forward."

Car lifts, tire-changers, tire-balancers, and similar equipment are basic necessities in a garage and necessary to provide adequate basic training in auto mechanic skills, Carothers notes.

"If we can help our students to become competent in how to use them, it makes them that much more prepared to land that entry-level job," he adds. "Thanks to this award, we have increased the quality of the program for our students and established a fully functional classroom that will train them in the field of auto mechanics."



Center Point uses ski slope for classroom



The ski slope has become a classroom for students in Diakon Youth Services' Center Point Day Program.

As part of the program's outdoor adventure element, students and staff members recently traveled to Ski Roundtop in Lewisberry for two days of snowboarding and tubing.

"We are trying to broaden the horizons for youths in our programs," says Michael Savario, an adventure specialist with the Diakon Wilderness Center. "Prior to our trip, their science teacher taught them about how ski slopes are created and how they affect the environment."

For the students—whose daily schedule is packed with school counseling and vocational requirements—the trip also provided a break from the routine.

"These kids have to push through a lot. They are learning to stick with something and dealing with the consequences," says Savario. "With snowboarding, you have to get up over and over again."



For 16-year-old Kristian Stahl, learning to snowboard meant being able to let go of your fears.

"I practiced going down the regular slopes with no jumps and then eventually moved on to the freestyle course," Stahl says. "Once you get to know the basics, you have to tell yourself you can do it. You might fall, but eventually you'll do it."

The snowboarding trip is one of six outdoor adventure programs planned throughout the year as part of the Center Point program. Students must meet specific requirements to participate as well as to stay on the trip, notes Savario.

"We use it as a challenge and to promote working as a team," he says.

Ski Roundtop, which has been the trip destination for three years, helps to make the adventure possible by offering substantial discounts on lessons, rentals, and lift tickets.



Speaker relates how books can transform lives

Sharing her love of books and how they can transform lives, Tracey Jones made a positive impact on youths and families when she spoke recently at the Diakon Wilderness Center's Christmas luncheon.

The president of Tremendous Life Books, Mechanicsburg, Jones continues the work of her late father, Charlie "Tremendous" Jones, a motivational speaker who believed he could change the world one book at a time. Flanked by her two Australian Shepherds, Jones told the audience about how her dogs overcame early obstacles to lead happy lives.

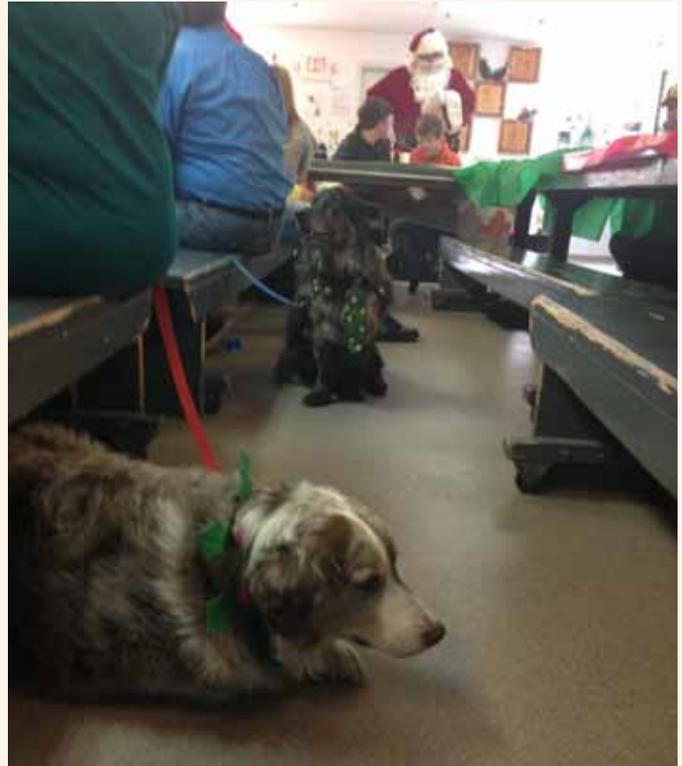
"My dogs came from not the greatest starts in life," she says. "It was fun to share their transformation process with the students. It's all about whom we surround ourselves with and where we want to go in life. We, and only we, can change our lives."

Including the dogs in her presentation was an excellent way to reach out to the youths, says Robert Kivlan, Diakon development officer.

"She rehabilitated both dogs through care, love and guidance and now they are superstars. Many of our kids could relate to that, having come from challenging situations," Kivlan says. "By reframing the discussion, we are talking about what our kids can do but putting the discussion in the context of the two dogs. It is a very relatable and safe way to explore the topics."

Jones is excited about expanding her relationship with the Diakon Wilderness Center and bringing youths to visit her bookstore, which features motivational books about overcoming challenges and finding success.

"The offerings in her bookstore are in line with what our kids can and should be reading," says Kivlan. "She is a huge source of community support and we fall right in line with her mission."



Tracey's rehabilitated Australian Shepherds help to illustrate how lives can be transformed.





The Flight Program in HAITI

Participants make a difference in orphans' lives

The Flight Program had the opportunity to spend a week serving orphans in Haiti over holiday break with the ministry, Freedom Global Outreach, which is run by Program Manager Matt Reichard.

The participants spent their week working in ministry support for FGO. They also spent time in a tent city called Canaan, where Diakon Giving Officer Rob Kivlan and Flight graduate Tom Kemper oversee a school and church.

The Flight participants took care of the needs of the orphanage children and spent time playing, coloring, writing letters to sponsors, opening Christmas gifts, making bracelets and assisting the FGO nursing staff with the kids' annual physicals.

They were very busy in the hot, muggy weather taking care of the kids. Along with working with the children, Flight participants had the opportunity to work alongside



Diakon Gift Officer Rob Kivlan with Francky and Rika at Freedom House Grace Boys' Home in Jacmel.

other team members in a variety of ways. They assisted the nurses, worked with the builders and even went door-to-door in the tent city to hand out supplies and pray with families.

The Flight participants were moved outside of their comfort zones and, through that process, learned a lot about themselves. They learned how strong, resilient and capable they are. They left a lasting effect on Haiti and with the kids of the orphanages, and Haiti left a lasting impact on all of them.



Sangelica at Freedom House



Emmanuel, from FH Grace Boys' Home in Jacmel.



Flight participant Mike Lee dances with several girls and Logan Reichard at Freedom House Bethesda in Port-au-Prince.



“Everybody needs a hero sometime”

We have a saying in our Haiti ministry that “everybody needs a hero sometime.” There are times in all of our lives when we are down and out...when we are struggling...when we are lost and alone. Those are the times when we all need somebody to pick us up, brush us off, love us and make sure we know that we matter. Those are the times when we need a hero.

Our kids in Haiti have been through their share of struggles. We have kids who come from abuse, kids who lost their parents in a tragic earthquake, kids who were abandoned and kids who were child slaves. In Flight, we have young men who have had their own struggles and their own tough times in life. They have lost loved ones, they have been homeless, they have been hungry. They know, in a small way, what our Haiti kids are dealing with. They can feel how they feel.

During our week in Haiti, the Flight participants had the opportunity to do something heroic for our kids. I don't mean that they jumped in front of traffic or rescued them from a life or death situation. Sometimes our cultural definitions of heroes are too much “movie” and not enough “real life.” The Flight participants were heroes to the kids in ways that matter to the kids. It wouldn't make for a great movie scene, but it keeps running in my head over and over again.

Heroic actions can seem so simple, like Big Mike and Keith sitting on a bench with a group of orphans making bead bracelets and necklaces all day, or Jordan, Eli and Mike making fools of themselves dancing “Boogaloo” with a group of kids. Little actions can be heroic; the smallest things sometimes make the biggest differences.

Our kids in Haiti have been through a lot, and sometimes, though they are very well taken care of in our homes, they need a little something extra. They need some extra love, some extra hugs and some extra things to make them smile. The Flight participants were that extra something; they were that little spark the kids need sometimes to keep them going.

JFK once said, “It's better to light a candle than sit and curse the darkness.” Our Haitian kids have been through a lot, and though they are in a better place now, there is still an element of the darkness of their past that they deal with. When we work with the kids we can choose to ignore it, we can choose to be upset about it, or we can



Flight Program Director Matt Reichard with Fritznerline at Freedom House Grace Girls' Home in Jacmel, Haiti.

choose to turn on a light and help to drive out the darkness. Flight, at least for this week of ministry, was lighting candles in the darkness for all of our kids.

Now, I don't mean to sound as if a week with us takes away all of the pain of their pasts; that would be silly.

They still see counselors regularly and work through their struggles, but there is a part for us to play. When one of our orphan kids is shown the unconditional love by one of us, by one of our Flight participants, it gives them a small glimpse of God's love. We always tell the kids, “As much as we love you, God loves you so much more!” It's a light in the darkness.

I have never been more proud of each one of the young men of Flight who came on this trip. They went outside of themselves, they put others first and they were heroes for some of the kids on the days when they needed one. The day when Elismene needed to be held, Big Mike was there. The day that Wideline was sad and needed somebody to care, there was Jordan. Claudette needed a hug, and there was Mike. Clifford needed somebody to play with him while he was alone, and there was Eli. Nobody ever notices Abigaëlle, shy and quiet in the background, but there was Keith making sure that she was noticed and a part of everything. Our Flight participants were heroes to somebody at sometime and nothing will ever change that. Our Haitian kids' lives are better today because Flight was a part of them...and so is mine.

- Matt Reichard



Flight trip to Haiti...

The day we went to Canaan started off like any other day on our trip. We packed ourselves and 16 kids from FH Bethesda into the truck and started down the road. As we got closer to Canaan, there was less and less traffic and people. We pulled onto a dirt path road. The team started saying, "We're here." I looked around and saw nothing but desert.

I stood up to get a better view to see if I was missing something. As I looked closer I saw small one-acre plots sectioned off by barbed wire or rope. Inside these plots were tin shacks or partial houses with no walls or roofs. A couple homes were tarps or military tents barely held together.

We came to the school and I looked around to see families living in these structures; families displaced by the 2010 earthquake. We broke into groups and went out to visit the families. We took them supply-bags filled with tooth-paste, soap, shampoo and some clothes.

When we delivered the supplies we talked to families and asked them what we could pray for. They didn't ask us for food or for money, just prayer for work so they could support their family.

It struck me on this visit that the people don't value things like jewelry or money. They value their faith in God and each other. I envied some of these people who tangibly had nothing, but spiritually had everything.

- Mike Lee

Canaan is a place where, despite the terrible conditions, there is hope. After the tragic earthquake in January 2010 people fled the city and headed to the base of the mountain. The government eventually helped settle



Flight participants and other team members meeting with families in Canaan.



Flight participant Mike Blue leading prayer for a family in Canaan.

the land and gave families small, one-acre plots. Families constructed makeshift homes out of what-ever they could find. It wasn't great, but it was better than living on the streets back in the city.

Today, some four years later, Canaan has turned into an established community. There is still little infrastructure. There is no running water or electricity for the community. There are no paved roads and the wind blows up the dust terribly most days.

However, there are beacons of light scattered throughout the tents and shacks. One of those is Grand College Universal, a primary school overseen by Underdog Social Ministries. USM is run by Rob Kivlan and Tom Kemper, and we had the honor of working with them in Canaan, reaching out to the community.

We were humbled to share supplies with families and pray with them. The Flight participants led families in prayer for things that they desperately needed. Mostly, parents asked that we would pray that they had enough food to feed their children each day or that they could find some sort of work and be able to provide for their families' basic needs.

Canaan is a place of despair and of hope, a place where you can see what has already been, while catching a glimpse of what could be someday.

- Matt Reichard



One of Haiti's tent communities that have become "home" for people displaced by the terrible 2010 earthquake.

A once-in-a-lifetime experience



Flight participant Mike Blue playing with Adamson and Emmanuel at FH Grace Boys' Home in Jacmel.



Mike walking with Elismene and Fritznerline at Freedom House Grace Girls' Home in Jacmel, Haiti.

One week in Haiti opened Michael Blue's eyes. "I learned not to take people's lives for granted," says the 20-year-old former Flight participant. "It changed the way I look at life."

Blue was one of five current or former Flight participants who accompanied Matt Reichard, program manager, to

Haiti the week after Christmas. They, along with a team of health-care providers, builders, teachers, and others, three orphanages that Reichard and his wife operate as part of a non-profit ministry.

Based at the Diakon Wilderness Center, Flight is a voluntary mentoring and supportive program for youths who have aged out of traditional county-funded youth services.

"We had Christmas with the children," Reichard says. "The guys from Flight played and did crafts with the children, while the nurses did annual physicals and check-ups and the builders did projects around the homes."

Part of the trip also included outreach to Haitians living in a nearby tent community.

"We had some health kits and they went door to door giving out supplies," says Reichard, adding that in addition to living in tents, the residents have no water or electricity. "What we wanted to do was give the Flight participants an opportunity to see things outside of where they have lived their entire life."

Although many of the young men who participate in Flight have had difficult lives and can relate to the orphans, the tent community was a different experience.

"It was hot and there was no shade. I felt so sorry for the families," Blue remembers. "It was just heartbreaking to see that families were living in homes built from nothing."

Reichard believes that many of the Flight participants have preconceived ideas about what they can and can't do and an opportunity to visit Haiti can change their lives.

"For them to go to a Third World country and help kids is something they never would have dreamed they could do," he says. "It was a big growing experience for them; a way to see that there are a lot of things they can do—and that they have the ability to give back."

Blue agrees.

"It is one thing when you hear about [people living in these conditions], but it is another thing when you actually experience it," he says. "For a kid my age, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience."



Upcoming opportunities to volunteer at the Diakon Wilderness Center

March 29 • 2014
Hosted by Diakon Youth Services

April 26 • 2014
Hosted by Center Point Day Program

May 31 • 2014
Hosted by the Flight Program

Volunteer activities range from working in our greenhouse and gardens planting, pruning, and weeding, to general wilderness center campus landscaping or trail maintenance. Volunteers have the opportunity to work alongside our youths doing mulching, staining, and repair work, etc.

Volunteer hours are 9 a.m. until noon.

www.diakon.org/dwc



Coming Soon: Weekend Adult Program

The second half of 2014 will find the Diakon Wilderness Center offering a Weekend Adult Program for young adults.

Initially targeting 18- to 25-year-old residents of Bucks County, the program will focus on helping participants improve their compliance with court-ordered programs. Participants will rotate through a series of specifically designed program options that include counseling, community service activities, drug and alcohol awareness education, and the Diakon Wilderness Center's adventure-based activities—away from the distractions and temptations presented by peer influences at home.

One goal will be to expand the service to other counties.

To learn more about this innovative new program, readers may contact Corey Carothers, executive director, Diakon Youth Services, at (717) 960-6700.