

EMS is growing! In the last month our numbers have doubled as children bring their friends and spread the word. Lives are being impacted each week through the love and compassion of Christ being lived out through this group of diehard volunteers. In a moment, you'll read a brief note from James Gommesen on why he helps out at EMS. Before you do, I want to draw your attention to the picture next to this article.

At our annual Halloween party, James came as The Bachelor, complete with a handful of roses to hand out. At the end of the night, James handed out a rose to any girl that wanted one. I wish you could have been there to see their young faces light up with joy because someone thought they were special. James's small act of handing out roses made a lasting impact, and to be honest, it brings tears of joy to my face as I write this.

EMS - One Volunteer's Perspective

By James Gommesen

I volunteer at EMS because I feel that it is a way I can serve God. Sharing the love God has given me with those who need it most is what I feel is one of the most important things we are called to do. Letting these kids know that there is someone who loves and cares about them is something that I feel is being accomplished at EMS. These kids need someone that they can come to and talk about their day or week.

In the last six months, I've gotten to know a few of the kids pretty well, and when I show up on Thursday they want to tell me how they are doing in basketball or some other thing. That's what we are there for: to listen to them and encourage them when they are going through a tough time. EMS isn't about the leaders or a particular church. It's about reaching kids with the love of Christ. The love and care the kids receive brings joy to their week. That's what EMS is about to me: Loving the kids.



New City Neighbors is a 501(c)(3) nondiscriminatory, nonprofit organization.

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Ways to Join the Mission of NCN:

"Seeking to be a diverse, welcoming ministry that works with Northeast Grand Rapids neighbors to restore and develop their community."

1. Volunteer

There are many ways to volunteer through NCN. You can help out at EMS, our Thursday night ministry, by leading a small group, hanging

out with kids, or planning events. If you're looking for short-term involvement, you can supply a meal for EMS. Other options include being a special friend for a young girl at GEMS or mentoring a high school student.

2. Donate

NCN relies on generous gifts from people like you to keep its mission moving forward. Whether it's a one-time gift or a monthly donation, your generosity helps us impact lives.

3. Pray

We need prayer daily to lift the work of NCN to God who supplies our needs and prepares hearts ahead of us.

4. Be an Advocate

NCN is still young, and there are many people who don't know about the work we're doing. A great way to support NCN is to tell your friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers about us, pass out brochures, or share this newsletter.

Stories



My Story

As I prepared for the first newsletter of 2008, I asked some of the board members for ideas for articles. A couple of them suggested I tell my story. I suppose it's appropriate in that in many ways the story of New City Neighbors is my story. It's also appropriate because as you support NCN, you are also supporting me and the work I do each day.

I grew up four blocks away from Fourth Reformed Church and have always called the Creston Neighborhood my home. My earliest memories are from my childhood on Penn Street at a time when the neighborhood was going through serious turmoil.

In the late 80's and early 90's the neighborhood was plagued by gangs, drug houses, and a series of home robberies that occurred at all times of the day. The neighborhood hit an all-time low when a gang

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member shot his own father in the leg over a disagreement. Just when it seemed that the only answer would be to flee the neighborhood, something powerful happened. Neighbors from all over the community banded together to take back the streets, stop the burglaries, and push the gangs out. The actions of the people resulted in a dramatic change to the neighborhood. The coming together of the neighborhood inspired me to want to make a difference through my own life.

Years later I went to Reformed Bible College and simultaneously became the youth director at Fourth. The first few years of youth ministry focused primarily on the children of the church. I was hired to lead them and that's what I did, until something mysterious happened. The neighborhood kids started coming to our programs uninvited. We never sent out an invitation, but God brought them to us, and their arrival has changed the way we do ministry.

Our first step was to abandon the traditional vacation Bible school in favor of something that would make a greater impact. In the summer of 2000 we began our Breaktime program, a six-week day camp dedicated to making a lasting impact in the lives of kids. Through Bible study, life-skills, literacy work, and fun activities we work hard to show Christ. For seven years we've had Breaktime, changing it each year to better reach students. Two years ago, we added a fully-functioning bakery that allows us to teach important job skills along with providing students with encouragement and love to boost their self-esteem.

Our youth groups also changed. The weekly Jr. High meetings evolved into EMS, a Thursday night program that provides a nutritious meal, homework help, fun activities, and Bible study. Our girls ministry, GEMS, has also adapted, and the leaders pour themselves into small groups of girls so they can know how to be godly women.

2007 birthed our first community garden. In its inaugural summer, produce wasn't the only thing that grew. Relationships also grew out of the soil. Relationships that helped some find jobs and others find Christ.

The changes continue. In 2008 we hope to launch a new job-readiness program for High School students that will take them through the necessary steps to become productive adults who can make a good decision regarding college and/or the workplace.

In the midst of all this change, God provided me with a wife, Julie, and two children, Abbie and Josh. We continue to live in the neighborhood, just a short distance from Fourth where we do all our ministry. Next year, Lord willing, our daughter will start kindergarten at Kent Hills Elementary, part of the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Our hope is to get involved at the school, provide encouragement to the staff, and build relationships with parents along the way. Now it's true that some kids have faces that never change. One child in particular always wears a smile. In fact, one week when I picked him up late, he yelled at me with a smile on my face. It was the first time I was criticized and still good about it! My story this far begins and ends in this community. Julie and I work hard to improve our neighborhood anyway that we can. Our hope and prayer is that this community will be transformed into the likeness of God's Kingdom.

The faces of other children aren't so frozen. The night of our Christmas party, a young boy walked in with tears streaming down his face. He desperately wanted to be at his school's choir concert singing with the other kids, but his mom refused to take him. It was more convenient for her if he went to EMS, so she shipped him out the door deeply wounded. After a couple hours filled with warm hugs and listening ears, he left with his burden lifted and the pain wiped from his face. The love he received had begun to heal him.

It is amazing to see the many different faces that come to EMS and the stories of life they carry with them. What's more amazing is the way the faces of the volunteers respond to each child through the love of Christ.

I have witnessed volunteers shedding tears with a child because of the child's pain. I have seen others dance with joy as they celebrated a great accomplishment with a child. A child's story will make the volunteers cringe with anger, fill with sadness, burst into laughter, warm with a smile, or look with longing for a day when all things will be made new.

It seems like the face is the first place where the heart of Jesus will be revealed. If that's true, then New City Neighbors is blessed to have some of the finest volunteers in the city.



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