

Stories

The Newsletter of New City Neighbors

A Hot Summer for Breaktime/Bakery - Eric Schalk, Executive Director

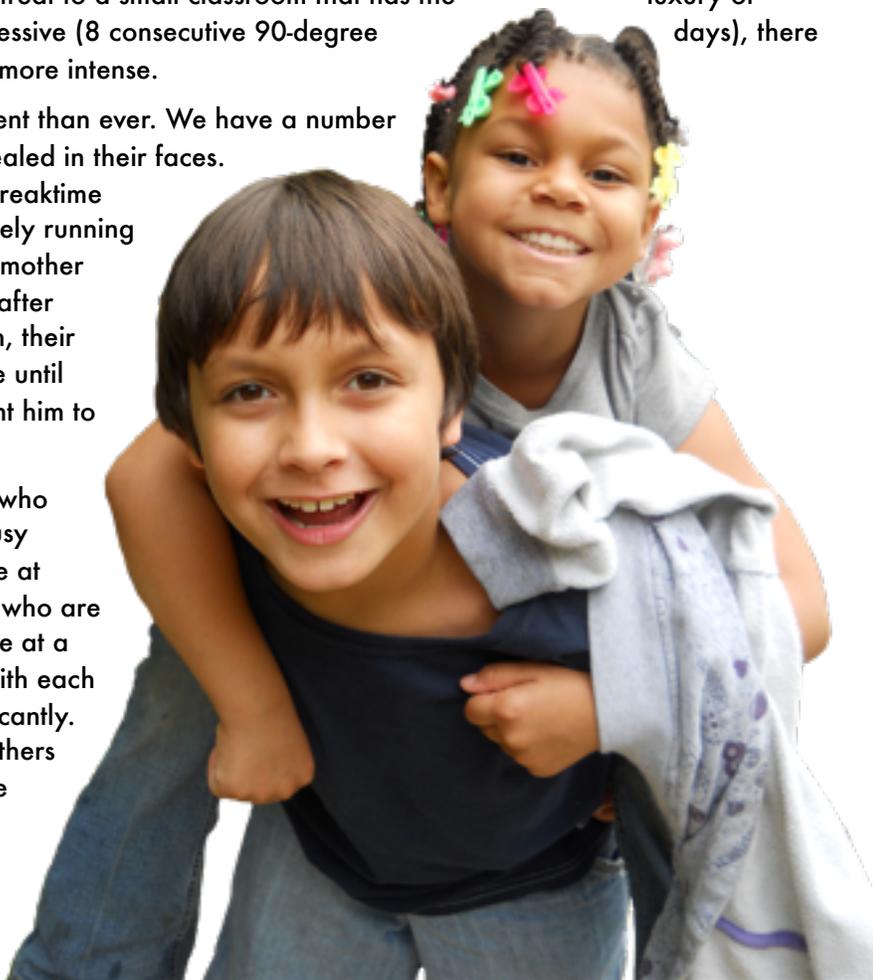
Back in May, as I met with Erin and Laura to get ready for Breaktime, we spent some time talking about air conditioning. The room we use for Breaktime is huge, has lots of windows, perfect storage space, and internet connection, but it does not have air conditioning. Every once in a while it would be a problem, but this summer the heat has been so intense that they have had to retreat to a small classroom that has the luxury of cooled air. While the heat outside has been oppressive (8 consecutive 90-degree days), there is another kind of oppression that has been even more intense.

The results of sin and evil have been more prevalent than ever. We have a number of kids who are showing up with a heaviness revealed in their faces.

We have a couple of kids who have arrived for Breaktime without shoes. Those same kids are often seen freely running the streets when they are not here, because their mother doesn't want them in the house. Two weeks ago, after coming home from a Friday field trip to the beach, their mother wouldn't let the youngest boy in the house until 6:00PM (four hours later) because she didn't want him to wake his sister.

We have a younger girl, entering second grade, who often has to ride her bike a mile and cross two busy streets to get to Breaktime, simply because no one at home wants to bring her. We are seeing children who are struggling because of divorce. Each week they are at a different home, and the emotions ebb and flow with each transition. Some Bakery kids are struggling significantly. Some of them are hearing the call of the street, others have very low self-esteem, and still others struggle with learning disabilities.

On top of all this, our community is recovering from the tragic deaths of seven people who were murdered just two weeks ago. Kids in our program knew the victims and others knew the



Summer
2011

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

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murderer and had great fear that day.

There are days when my heart is heavy as I wrestle with how to process these issues and come alongside the children who are struggling. I trust and pray that God will redeem each child and provide them with the hope they so desperately need. There are signs of hope. I have been awed by the glimpses of maturity I see in the Bakery kids. A couple bakers have struggled this year, and the other ten kids have responded with genuine concern rather than mocking jabs. I have seen them put their arms around the hurting and provide comfort. They have encouraged each other in ways I didn't know was possible in middle school. The Holy Spirit is a part of this, and it is incredible to watch.

We've also seen children come alive in Breaktime. One girl named Kim struggles to have confidence in her reading. She often chooses to not participate in reading time and can actually cause a lot of trouble. Two weeks ago, as the Breaktimers began to work on a readers' theater, she suddenly took charge of her group, and led them to a great performance. She even participated in the reading in front of a large group of people.

God is at work in our ministries, and as we wind down the summer programs, we ask you to join us in praying that God will continue to bring about transformation in the lives of the children we reach every day.

Helpful Produce - Jeff Milkamp

We are halfway through our community garden season, and we are starting to taste the fruits of our labor.

Sadly, we had a few families decide to not do the garden for various reasons, so it left a few open plots. We filled up most of the open plots, but still had a few small plots available in an area near the church parking lot. A few gardeners and I had an idea to plant a charity plot to help local food pantries and nonprofit organizations around the area. What was amazing was that as word spread around the garden, we had many plants donated from our fellow gardeners, as

well as a great donation from our friends at a local nursery. This helped us fill the open area with good plants; can I say...Awesome!

Now, the really cool part is that in the weeks to come we will begin to harvest the veggies. At that time we will start the deliveries. This is where we hope even more gardeners will get involved. Our goal is to round up as much extra produce as possible so that we can truly bless some local pantries with fresh produce for families who might not otherwise have the opportunity to enjoy it. We will be posting the dates on the NCN website so that all of the gardeners will know when we plan to deliver the goods and so that you can also help us out if you have some produce to donate.

I am so excited because this the perfect opportunity for us to show what a fantastic community this garden has become, and more people get to eat healthy. It's turning out to be another great year in our Community Garden!



There's an Emergency on the Northeast Side

Rebekah McDowell, Board Secretary

It has been quite a month to live in the Creston neighborhood. Over the past four weeks, we have lost nine residents in senseless tragedies. Another man is in jail on attempted murder charges. We have been in the news more days in July than we haven't, and the news rarely seems to be positive.

For those of us on the board or involved in New City Neighbors, it all began on July 5, with an email from Eric Schalk about a Breaktime Baker named Chris. Chris is like many other kids his age in the Creston neighborhood. He comes from a broken home, and he is pressured to commit acts of violence. Recently, he has started to know the thrill that comes from stealing from others. On July 5, he told Eric that he was ready to quit

the bakery and have fun running the streets. Eric asked us to pray. On July 6, he reported that our prayers and positive peer pressure from other bakers convinced Chris to stick around and give the bakery another go.

On July 7, news broke of a mass murder and a fugitive on the loose in the Creston neighborhood. As the story unfolded, and the media began to report the history of Rodrick Shonte Dantzler, I was struck by how many children I know with similar histories. I thought about Chris. Both of them come from broken homes. Both of them lacked the stability and support that I enjoyed growing up. No one wakes up one day and decides to become a mass murderer. I think it must build up for years. It did for Dantzler. And that hurt, anger, disappointment, lack of support . . . that is all building up for kids like Chris, too.

There is an emergency on the Northeast side of Grand Rapids. It became apparent on July 7 and again on July 18 when a tragic car accident took the life of a two-year-old boy. His step father then attacked the driver of the car with a knife as several children watched. What are those children dealing with now? The trauma of a child's death and the horror of a stabbing. Add that to the anger and the disappointment, and you have a true emergency.

That was when I truly realized, perhaps for the first time, just what New City Neighbors, Breaktime, and the Breaktime Bakery really are. It is not just about learning to read, first encounters with Bible stories, or baking some bread. Sure, those things are important. But it's really about peace. And hope. And support. And unconditional love. Chris has the bakery, and I am so grateful for that. I wonder how things might be different today if Rodrick Shonte Dantzler had had the bakery, too.

There is an emergency on the Northeast side of Grand Rapids, and we need your help. Please pray. Pray for the families of the victims of July 7 and July 18. Pray for Chris and the kids like him who are pressured in ways that most of us cannot imagine. Pray for the NCN and Breaktime staff members as they try to bring hope into broken lives. And, as you pray, also consider how you can get involved. Fall ministries will be starting soon, and we need volunteers. We also need financial support. Give a gift today to bring peace back to the NE side. Today's investment can change the future.

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newcityneighbors

2011 Fall Auction

Save The Date!

We are having our Fall Auction on Saturday, October 29, at 5:30PM. Once again, our auction will take place in the dining hall of Kuyper College. The evening will begin with a delicious meal, followed immediately by the silent auction. Dessert will be provided by the Breaktime Bakery and followed by a live auction. More information about dinner and auction tickets will be mailed to you soon.

We Need Your Help

We are looking for some great items for our Fall Auction. If you have something you would like to donate, or know of someone who can help us out, please contact Eric Schalk today at 970-4817 or send an email to erics@newcityneighbors.org.

