

⌘ ***Good News from Inspired Youth, 2008***

This fall in the Inspired Youth Tutoring Program, 91 children (K-HS) worked on school homework and extra reading, writing, and arithmetic with 81 adult tutor/mentor volunteers and 50 suburban 8th graders, at Bezazian Library and Margate Park. 22 students participated in six choir concerts and rehearsals in three people's homes.

And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And he shall be called "Immanuel" ("God is with us").

M. hardly said anything in 2006-2007 as a 1st grader. As a 2nd grader in 2007-2008 he communicated mostly by pointing his head instead of talking. During tutoring time, he would run out of the room and hide in the stacks of the small Bezazian Library. The librarians were concerned about him, too.

In November we asked a new tutor, Sue Schwendener, to work with M. She said she would if she could establish specific rules with him and give him some rewards (*Goosebumps*, computer time), and if we would talk with his parents.

We located M.'s mother and step-father and talked with them. Sue started working with M. He started reading our pre-primers and doing a little homework.

One day 7-year old M. doodled on a picture with gang symbols which a school classmate had drawn, and he started talking about gangs. We had a long talk with M. about gangs, and how a student from the Tutoring Program had been shot dead a few years ago because he was part of a gang. We asked if we could tear the picture up. M. nodded.

Another day we noticed huge welts on M.'s arms from insect bites from bugs in the bed. Two tutors and a librarian stood around M. talking with him about the bites. They gave him suggestions about getting rid of the bed bugs.

Another day the strap of M.'s backpack broke. The next day we brought a needle and some thread and tutor Susan Mattison sewed it up in a few minutes (she is a professional seamstress).

Another day a student said that M. and B. had taken some chips from the store on the way to tutoring, and they didn't pay for them. While still at the store, we searched both backpacks and found two bags of

chips in B.'s backpack and gave them back to the clerk. M. said that B. had told him to take the chips and put them in his backpack. We talked about stealing with the boys: in the store, on the way to tutoring, at the library, with M.'s uncle on the way home, and with B.'s mother after tutoring.

Sue S. was not able to continue tutoring, and M. began working with Peter Lukidis on Wednesdays and Nick Vecchione on Thursdays. During spring 2008, M. began reading more and more. Nick remarked, "M. is energized by reading!" On the last day, after M. finished his homework, his tutor wanted him to read "Happy Morning," our fourth pre-primer, but he didn't want to read. Beth Palmer came by M.'s table and remarked how much he had read a previous day. She suggested, "Why don't you read the next three chapters?" He was on p. 38. When Ms. Beth came back, she noticed M. was reading the last story in the book, on p. 69! She said, "No! I don't believe it!" His tutor said, "M. read the whole thing!" Five minutes later M. and his tutor brought the book to Ms. Beth to show her he had finished reading the whole book. M. was not running out of the room any more.

During the last week Ms. Beth asked M. to write a story for the student magazine. M. and Nick were trying to think of a topic, and one of them brought up Spider-Man. Ms. Beth thought that would be a wonderful topic, and they set to work. Nick and M. worked hard to write the story about Spider-Man. They painstakingly brainstormed one idea at a time. Nick asked M. to tell him about Spider-Man. M., who had hardly written anything all year, told Nick things that Spider-Man did and wrote them down, one by one. M.'s story, 11 lines long, in small printing, was a miracle, made from hard work.

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Fergus is a 9th grader this year. He failed first grade. When Fergus was in 4th grade, his mother enrolled him and his 2 older sisters in the Tutoring Program because his sister was doing so poorly in school. As a 4th grader, Fergus wouldn't speak to his tutor, so his tutor asked to work with another student. Fergus did not do well in school, but he and his sisters loved to "play on the computer." They called Beth Palmer almost every day that summer to talk to her. She could just imagine them sitting home, bored, saying, "Why don't we call Ms. Beth?"

In 7th grade Fergus finally started to work at his school work. He studied hard for a social studies test, knowing he knew everything

that would be on the test. When he didn't do as well on the test as he thought he would, he found out that the questions on the test do not always use the same wording as in the book. He still kept studying.

In 8th grade when his family moved, he transferred to a new school, but he felt he was not learning anything, so he transferred to a school which was more challenging.

During the summer after 8th grade, he didn't think he should go to high school in the coming fall because he thought he should help earn money for his family since his parents were in Mexico. His parents encouraged him to go to high school anyway.

In October Fergus called Beth Palmer to say that he had received all A's on his 5-week progress report. He also mentioned that he needed glasses. The Tutoring Program got him and two other students glasses.

In November, Fergus called Beth Palmer to say that he had received all A's on his report card, and he asked her what she knew about college scholarships. All those years, from 4th grade through 9th grade, Fergus had been "reaching for the brass ring." We hope he continues to do so.

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In December the Inspired Youth Singers sang at **Winter WonderFest** at Chicago's Navy Pier, as part of a Chicago Bar Association's fundraiser. When the 18 children, 4 parents, and 2 directors walked into the Winter WonderFest, they stopped and looked, with eyes wide and mouths open. Their faces shone as they saw the colored lights, trees, and decorations, and the huge Winter Wind Glider in the center beckoning them to ride on it. The kids couldn't imagine singing on a stage in such a wondrous place, but they were great! Directed by Dorie Burrell, the kids sang for 20-minutes, and microphones carried the sound across the Winter WonderFest. Genita Robinson, the new executive director of Lawyers Lend-A-Hand, said the children were cute and sounded good. She had come to their concert on Thanksgiving Day to audition them for the Winter WonderFest!

After the choir sang, the children got to explore the Winter WonderFest and go on rides – free with their special CBA bracelet. Their favorite ride was the Winter Wind Glider. They lay on their stomachs in a harness and went hurtling around, 40 feet high in the air, at a fast speed. As Wudassie (kind.), flew above her mother, she

shouted, “Mommy!” Afterwards she said she wasn’t scared. Nubia (2nd gr.) said, “I could feel my lungs move and my heart thump, but I wasn’t scared.” Later loud, high-pitched screams came from the ride. One of our 12-year old girls was screaming during the whole ride. Some kids went on the ride a second time.

Some children went on the carousel. Many ice skated for the first time. They loved skating. Cordell (5th gr.) climbed a vertical rock at least twice. He held onto a rope attached to the top of the rock with only scruffy, little knobs on the rock. Some kids decorated huge cookies. The Chicago Bar Association had special delicacies in a separate section for people from CBA. You can imagine how much the children enjoyed the wonderland. Karah (3rd gr.) left her bracelet on for a whole week.

As we were leaving at the end of the afternoon, a man said, “You all did very well.” He had heard the choir sing earlier in the afternoon and said he was a lawyer. We said, “Thank you, Lawyers Lend-A-Hand.” We went home by the Navy Pier trolley and an express bus.

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Blessings,
Beth Palmer, Director, Inspired Youth Tutoring Program
773-561-4759, inspiredyouth2@yahoo.com,
www.geocities.com/inspiredyouthchicago

Inspired Youth Inc. has 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, so gifts are tax-deductible. Donations may be sent to “Inspired Youth,” 5715 N. Ridge, Chicago, IL 60660.