

Spiritual Exploration for Children and Families

Sunday Program!

NC-CTWK = a North Chapel Change The World Kid. Currently Aidan and Forrest.

SE Kid = a North Chapel child in grades K-6

November 12

Children: 4 plus 2 CTWK NC Kids

Begin Christmas Eve Children's Choir rehearsal with Michael Zsoldos.

Michael is just incredible. He shared two songs that he is suggesting the children do for the CE service. He will be working in musical parts for the students who wish to play an instrument. During the class you could tell the kids were maybe a little shy to sing but Michael has such a great way with kids he had them laughing, the older boys were playing air saxophone and another kiddo was expressive dancing. At one point, Michael suggested that they sing the word "Go" sort of loud and forcefully and while others were still somewhat quiet, a younger child belted out the "GO" so beautifully and with such force I think she surprised herself even - but Michael was so impressed and noted this and this girl just beamed with pride. It was a beautiful moment.

November 5

Children: 9 SE kids and 2 CTWK NC Kids

CTWK came to speak about the annual Holiday Hearts Initiative. The children helped create the hearts and set up a table for coffee hour and helped CTWK distribute hearts.

Our group of kiddos are natural Social Justice Stars. When they learned that they were working on the heart again this year, they were just ecstatic. Many remembered what to do from the previous years and wanted to get right to work -giddy with excitement. While we don't get the names, we can see the family size and the age of the kids. Great conversation is had as each SE kid works on their hearts and discuss why some people ask for what they ask for - such as - why do so many moms want crockpots? And why iTunes card? Do homeless people have phones?

Many kids picked hearts to buy gifts themselves. My daughter wanted 5 but when I told her she had to pay for the gifts out of her own money she cleverly negotiated that I take one and called Jeff and allocated one for him too. That evening she went and bought one of her gifts and I can not tell you how she was filled with such excitement and pride for how she was helping someone less fortunate. She used the last of her money and bought a gift she couldn't play with and instead imagined how this other girl would react when she opened her gift. She was moved to tears as was I.

Sunday October 29

Children: 5

Ben and Murray led the children in an expressive arts mural and drumming.

Sunday October 22 - CHaD

Children: 11 plus 4 CTWK NC Kids and 11 adults

**See note on CHaD below for details.

Sunday October 15 - Pancake Breakfast and Music with Michael

Children: 9 plus 1 CTWK NC and 3 adults helping

The children did an incredible job and I just got so many rave reviews of the breakfast and of course all in the hopes that it will happen again next year :) We raised a total of \$517 from the breakfast less some for expenses.

After the breakfast the children joined Michael where they learned about how music can be used to spread a message during times of strife such as during the Civil War.

Upcoming Schedule:

November 19: Spiritual Exploration with Jess and Geraldine

November 26: Wreath decorating with Amy and Geraldine

December 3: CTWK and Geraldine complete work on Christmas Hearts Project

December 10: Music as a Spiritual Practice with Michael Z (Christmas Eve Rehearsal)

December 17: Music as a Spiritual Practice with Michael Z (Christmas Eve Rehearsal)

Weekly Children's Yoga

On Wednesday September 20th we started a weekly "Story and Yoga Time with Angel" at the NWPL fro 10:30am-11:30am.

Attendance as follows:

October 18: One adult and one child

October 25: 4 new children. 5 children in total - 2 adults (caregivers)

November 1: 7 children 3 adults

November 8 10 children and 4 adults

November 15: 10 children and 5 adults

As you can see above we have seen an steady increase in attendance in our Children's Yoga class. The feedback we are getting is incredible and just today (11/16) Angel shared a few stories of just how blessed she feels to be able to share her skills and get to be witness to the moment and growth of the children. We have seen an increase in parents attending who have toddlers or preschoolers and infants. Angel describes the older kids doing yoga while the moms are able to sit and breastfeed together. She described the scene as feeling like "being at home".

Children are reaching developmental milestones while in class, they are navigating relationships and at times conflict, they are learning to find ways to control their bodies and their breath... even just learning that they have breath!! Exhausted parents are getting to take a break. Sit down and relax if they can or join in with their child if they can. There is no pressure either way.

Mellissa at the library, myself and Angel feel very happy with how this program is coming together.

Our Whole Lives Grades 4-6

Reminder: North Chapel has 3 children attending. At least 2 other children are participating that do not have a home church but found out about OWL through the posting North Chapel made on the community listserves. Sparrow (DRE of Norwich) asked me to co-lead the OWL session with her which turns out to be a wonderful learning experience. We meet weekly - Sundays from 4pm-5:30pm.

I pick up the children, including another Woodstock child who attends another church in Norwich and transport them to the class and then bring them back home again. This helps the parents from having to make the trip and saves our environment from many cars driving.

There are over 15 children signed up for the OWL class between the Norwich UU, the NC UU, Norwich Congo Church and some children not associated with a church.

After School Program at the NWPL

No “official” changes to the after-school program following our meeting with Amanda the ED of the library and others. I am trying to find ways to regularly visit the library during after school hours to spend time with the children and get to know them. This included one day when I needed help to process the Quest. I took a big box of newsletters to the library and asked a few kids if they would like to help me and they were more than willing. About 6 children hung out with me and worked on the newsletters. We had a good time talking about general things like school and sports. I asked the children if I could bring them a snack the next time I came to say thanks for the help and they enjoyed making a list of things which included a tray of sushi from Macs.

The next week I returned to the library with a tray of sushi and I received a really big hug from the child who had requested it and many other children heard there were other snacks and come around to eat.

After School FOOD Program at the NWPL

With getting to spend a little time at the library and being able to talk to Melissa the children’s librarian it has become evident that there are kids who hang out at the library after school who are going hungry, as they don’t have snacks or a meal. Lunch is served really early in the elementary school so some children then go hours and hours with no food. Some children can go and get sandwiches and candy from the stores in town while others go hungry.

Melissa and I spoke about looking to find a collaborative way to help create community by feeding all the children who come to the library. We think this will be a great way to help break down some barriers, create a sense of community between the children and most importantly feed hungry growing children. What child isn’t hungry after school?

I have been in contact with the Woodstock Food Shelf to see if they would be willing to collaborate with us on perhaps providing some food. They will be discussing this at their next board meeting. Melissa spoke to Amanda the ED of the library and we have her full support as well. The North Chapel board is also going to use the Thanksgiving Offering to begin a fund to help cover the costs of food for the kids. We will talk to local businesses and restaurants and see if they too might be willing to offer some food.

The idea is to serve a healthy snack every day after school in the “activities” room in the children’s area from around 3-3:45pm. Library staff and perhaps sometimes myself (geraldine) will prepare the snack for the children. Examples being cheese and crackers, bagels and cream cheese, granola bars, apples and such.

Book Group (For the parents/caregivers)

It is important to give parents and caregivers time to establish connections and to make time for themselves. Creating a healthy ritual of reading for pleasure and time to connect with like-minded people. This is a very enjoyable time where folks get together, enjoy some wine and snacks and good conversation.

We are continuing to read "When Breath Becomes Air" by Paul Kalanithi. We will meet on Thursday December 7 at 6:00pm to discuss and will follow that with a holiday party!

CHaD Hero's: Run4Ryland

Words can not adequately express the amount of love that could be felt for the children and community during the day of the CHaD Hero's event. 26 North Chapel participants (11 adults and 15 children). Registration costs for the North Chapel were \$625 and a fundraising minimum of \$800 needed to be met – therefore a total of close to \$1500 was needed for all to participate. To date we have more than met our goal.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this such a successful and heartfelt campaign and a great time spent together as family alongside friends. But thanks most especially to the children for wanting to commit to making this happen and largely leading the fundraising initiatives such as the Bake Sale and the Pancake Breakfast. They took on real ownership for this to happen and they did more than succeed.

Before the race started we gathered the children all together and we recited our Opening Words "We believe in truth, We believe in love, We believe in helping others, This is our life search". Jess and I spoke to the children about what an incredible job they have done in making this event happen for our families and thanked them for a great job done fundraising. We once again reiterated that the funds go to help those who are patients at CHaD and their families and so importantly help honor the memory of Ryland. I hope the children are really proud of their accomplishments.

A couple of take aways from the day! There was a child who found out about CHaD on the Friday evening before Sundays big event. He really wanted to participate so he created a "Go Fund Me" page and raised a quick \$125 to cover fundraising goals and then worked for his grandfather to make the additional \$25 registration fee!

For many children this was their first 5K race and I think many fell in love with it. Already there is talk with some parents to get the kids signed up for the Zacks Place Turkey Trot!

In our SE Joys and Concerns, each week many of the children express joy over raising these funds for a cause such as CHaD and Run4Ryland!

Walking Group

Our Walking Group continues to meet on Thursdays at 8:30am. This is a wonderful time for parents/caregivers to get together, walk, hike and talk. Childcare is available and is used every week. Starting in December, we will start doing yoga with Phoebe again.

Vermont Family Based Approach

The North Chapel (SE for children and families) continues to belong to the VFBA Coalition. No current update at this time.

Prosper Valley School Trust

I currently sit on the board as Secretary of the Prosper Valley School Trust. This trust is an independent 501c3 which is tasked with enriching the lives of the students who attend the Prosper Valley School from Bridgewater and Pomfret. The Trust has been instrumental in funding enriching experiences and resources that fall outside of the school budget. This fund has helped to nurture artistic, musical, athletic and theatrical talent, propelled eye-opening field trips and innovative workshops, installed projectors and SmartBoards in classrooms, funded computer labs, beautified school grounds and even assisted in expanding school meal services with the addition of the new school kitchen. Sitting on this board helps me to stay connected to the children and families in the communities of Bridgewater and Pomfret and to play an active role in making sure we offer healthy enrichment opportunities to all of our children.

Mindful Parenting with OHF

In the summer my children and I had attended a Free workshop hosted by OHF around Mindful Parenting. The classes were great and my children enjoyed them. The instructor, Susan and I both thought that holding another workshop would be a great idea and we discussed a possible collaboration. I contacted the ED via email with my idea and followed up with a visit to her office.

I did then later notice that they had put together another event for October - November but learned that the workshop didn't run due to low enrollment. I once again wrote to the ED and suggested a possible collaboration and she responded that she would be interested in collaborating and trying for something in the new year. I will follow up with this as the new year approaches.

Divorce Support Group for Parents

Going through a divorce is a very difficult and lonely time. Divorce carries a stigma that can make a person feel ashamed or embarrassed. What one really needs is love and support and a cheerleader when most often the divorce is happening for good reason. This is a difficult time for children too and can really take its toll on the family.

I had a local parent who is going through a divorce approached me recently and suggested that she and I possibly co-lead a sort of "Divorce isn't for Dummies" group. I mentioned this to Susan, Denise and Leon and they are in agreement to look into hosting a dinner group meeting for the new year and seeing if there is a response to the call. Leon and Geraldine will discuss the details, but thought is that Leon might get some folks together to cook for the group that Geraldine and the other person will lead.

Strengthening Families

In my years working with families and children there are three programs that stick out to me. Strengthening Families, Search Institute's Developmental Assets and Bridges Out of Poverty.

While all are great, I would like to share some information on "Strengthening Families" framework this month. I find myself more and more often these days turning to what I have learned in the "Strengthening Families" training and realizing more and more how my position

here at the North Chapel lends itself to creating this type of overarching reach to include more than just the child in our “Spiritual Exploration”. We have been working on Family SE and creating ways for the families to come together be this through intergenerational events, meals such as Potluck at the Maliks or SE table at CTWK Dinners and also for parents to take time for self-care eg. book group, walking group, meditation and such. I find my role very often moves to a “pastoral care” role, where I am able to use this Strengthening Families framework. I have included a brief overview for your perusal.