

## TUTORING NEWS: INSPIRED YOUTH

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### BELINDA

A first grader named Belinda came to the Saturday program in April 2004 with her 12-year old aunt. We found she could read, which was not usually the case with other first graders in the program. She recited a short poem for Family Night. We tried to find Belinda in October 2004 when we started the new program. The phone numbers didn't work. We couldn't find her aunt. We couldn't find her.

One day a woman said "Hello" to Beth Palmer in a public library. She was the mother of students who had been in the program in 1986-1990. Beth found out all about Teresa, Ociel, Veronica and Mario. Their mother said that Veronica's daughter was going to Goudy School. A week later, outside of Goudy School, Beth saw Veronica and her daughter, Belinda, whom Beth had been trying to find! Veronica said she had been trying to enroll her daughter in the Tutoring Program because she wanted the same good things for her daughter that she had had. Veronica had been very quiet as a child, among her noisy brothers and sister. All four siblings had been in the tutoring program in early elementary school. They had been in the youth choir and had sung at several nursing homes. They had gone to Parents' Nights. They dropped out of the program when they moved.

Belinda rejoined the Tutoring Program in November 2004 as a 7-year old. She said on her goals sheet: "I want to be a music teacher when I grow up." (No one has ever said that before!) She joined the Inspired Youth Singers and sang in several concerts during the year in nursing homes and other places -- just like her mother when she was that age!

In September 2005 we saw Veronica's determination. Belinda had been put in a bi-lingual class because she has an Hispanic surname. Veronica said, "They do this to Belinda every year! She should be in a class conducted in English." So Veronica carried her new baby's large stroller up the stairs to the assistant principal's office. He said he couldn't do anything, but that she should talk to Belinda's present teacher. So Veronica carried the stroller up to the second floor to see the teacher. The teacher wasn't there. So she carried the stroller downstairs to talk to another official. That person said to talk to another classroom teacher. Up the stairs again to talk to the other teacher. That happened at least three times, up and down, up and down with the big stroller. Finally Belinda was transferred to the class in English.

In October 2005 we got more surprises. Coming out of school one day preparing to go to afternoon tutoring, Belinda was holding a "chapter book" open to the page she had been reading. A few children walk around with the book open to the page they are reading, but *no one in the Tutoring Program!* The book was a *Magic Tree House* book. She said she had read two books in the series, so we showed her where *The Magic Tree House* books were in the library, and she checked out four more. Two weeks later she confided in Beth Palmer, "Something is wrong with me. I only like *The Magic Tree House* books. I don't like any other books." Beth put that in context for Belinda and eased her worries.

In November 2005, walking to youth choir practice one day, Belinda was disturbed. At first it was hard to discern what she meant. Finally we realized she was talking about the Ten Commandments. She said, "He's breaking the 3rd commandment." ("Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.") Belinda had been going to confirmation classes at St. Ita's church on Saturdays. She had memorized the Ten Commandments and knew what they meant. We talked about the commandment and what the boy had said. A few minutes later she said, "She's breaking the 9th commandment." ("Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."-- "You must not lie.") Several minutes later she said, "What does 'vain' mean?" During choir practice after we had sung, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," she asked, "Is Bethlehem real?"

We are proud that Belinda, the daughter of a tutoring grad, Veronica, is doing so well. The influences of the Tutoring Program are part of the weavings that contribute to the lives of many children and families.

## **PARENTS' NIGHT: CELEBRATE AFRICA!**

In November, elementary school children of the Tutoring Program, brothers and sisters, parents, friends, and tutors gathered for a Family Night to "Celebrate Africa." Parents and tutors met each other, parents saw other children in the program, and all had a good time together. We "Celebrate Africa" because many of the major problems in the world today are over ethnic relations, and people in the United States know very little about other countries. This was an opportunity to begin learning something about other countries and cultures.

For the potluck dinner, people brought plenty of delicious food to share. The kids love to eat, and one boy said, "I had three full plates!" Some people tried Ethiopian injera from a near-by Ethiopian restaurant.

A tutor, Deborah Hawes, brought her collection of African drums and percussion instruments. One instrument represented a lion's roar. Another sounded like thunder. The children loved playing and experimenting with the drums and the kalimba.

The Inspired Youth Singers sang several songs, including two in Spanish and one from Africa, "Marching in the Light of God."

Magazines of stories the students had written were passed out to the people. 26 5th-8th graders wrote articles on "The Year 2025"; 13 1st-4th graders wrote stories on various topics.

After the shared dinner, two people from Africa spoke: Flora Amaefule, from Nigeria, and Rev. Mbu Walters, from Cameroon. Flora Amaefule told the people, "I have known Beth Palmer for over 10 years. My children were in the Youth Choir and my daughters tutored in the Tutoring Program, so I know all about your program. In my country, Nigeria, education is very, very, very, very important. The family, the whole family, is very important. 'It takes a village to raise a child' -- that comes from Africa. In my country a child will not say, 'You can't say that to me; you're not my mother.' No, all the adults are responsible for all the children in the community, because when the children grow up, they will help the community. What you are doing here is very important. I know you'll do well." Mrs. Amaefule was deeply passionate about what she said and people knew she cared about them.

Rev. Mbu Walters is from Cameroon and a member of Edgewater Presbyterian Church. He is a pastor and also a substitute teacher. He has written and published two books, one about traditional African culture and heroes in the culture, and one about the current political situation. Rev. Walters taught the children a song from Cameroon. He showed some banners, and he demonstrated three dances from Cameroon. He told the people, "Cameroon is a microcosm of all of Africa. It has all of Africa in it. It has rain forests, grasslands, and hills. It is bi-lingual--English and French. It has three religions--traditional African religions, Christianity, and Islam. Education is very important. Schools teach students to be good at academics, sports, and morals. Morals is how people behave." The song he taught was this: "One, two, three, four, five, I caught a fish alive. Why did you let it go? Because it bit me so! Eeyow!" Rev. Walters knew how to interest the children in what he was saying and keep their attention. People could see what a remarkable person he was. One of the parents, Ms. Tripp, marveled at how Rev. Walters used humor to engage children and adults, and how he got everyone to participate. The children still remember the song he taught them.

Parents' Night ended with everyone singing "Kum Ba Yah." The beautiful tone and the soothing strains of the singing created a warm sense of community in the gathering. A mother said of the evening "Bonita." A child said, "It was cool."

## **ALL FOUR SECTIONS OF INSPIRED YOUTH TUTORING ARE GOING WELL**

Inspired Youth is tutoring at Bezazian Library, 1226 W. Ainslie, on the weekdays and at Margate

Park, 4921 N. Marine Dr., on alternate Saturdays. Around 67 students, first grade through high school participate along with around 44 tutors. Monday evenings are for high school students, Tuesday evenings for 5th-8th graders, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons for 1st-4th graders, and alternate Saturdays for 1st-7th graders.

Tutoring focuses on academic skills involved in the students' school homework. This is important because the homework assignments are very difficult for most of the youth. One girl said, "I'm not going to do it. I don't like math." Another girl did not know what proper nouns to capitalize because she hadn't heard of organizations and landmarks such as the boy scouts of america or the golden gate bridge (which is how they looked in the book). A 5th grade boy didn't know the times tables and didn't want to do math assignments. A 6th grade boy asked, "What does the word 'UNICEF' mean?" These were part of school assignments which the students were capable of learning, but they hadn't learned yet. If the Tutoring Program can fill some of the gaps in their education, the children will learn more at school.

Students enjoy being at the library. Many received library cards through their school, and they are checking out books for science projects and book reports. Several of the students hadn't checked out books before this year; they feel grown up being able to check out books.

## **SATURDAY TUTORING**

At Wilmette Jr. High School, 94 eighth-graders signed up for the bi-weekly Saturday peer-tutoring program with Inspired Youth, but the limit was 56. For 12 years students from WJHS have been traveling 18 miles two Saturdays per month to help elementary school students of the Tutoring Program with basic academic skills and to have fun with them doing crafts projects and fitness activities.

This year, 42 children from Chicago signed up to work with the 56 8th graders. Most have been in the Tutoring Program for a few years. Some moved from the neighborhood but still want to come. Tutoring grads have enrolled their children. Relatives of students in the program want their children to be involved. Children of one of the basketball players at Margate Park are also coming. Children are coming from West Belmont, West Cabrini Green, Ravenswood, and Rogers Park, as well as Uptown/Edgewater. Some children walk 1½ miles to come to Saturday Tutoring.

They meet two Saturdays each month at Margate Park and have a wonderful time together. The students read (some don't actually read at school) and work on math and writing skills. This fall they played exciting games of kickball. Some of the youngest elementary students had never played kickball before, so their tutors played right along with them. All had a good time. For crafts, one group made colorful lanterns and another group made "slime." The kids loved that.

For Thanksgiving, the eighth grade tutors raised money to give every family in the Saturday program a turkey. The families appreciated that.

Besides having fun, the students gain a lot at Saturday tutoring. We were particularly elated to find that at least three students who came to Saturday tutoring last year but not to the afternoon or evening tutoring sessions, gained tremendously from last year's work. Steve (2nd gr.), Gustavo (5th gr.), and Zuleyka (6th gr.) are doing levels better this year. Their parents are proud of them.

## **INSPIRED YOUTH SINGERS**

The Youth Choir rehearses at Edgewater Presbyterian Church every Monday afternoon. On Columbus Day 16 youth and 2 chaperons walked to the Alden-Lakeland nursing home to sing for the residents. The audience loved the children singing. They sang and clapped along with the kids. The following Monday 3 new students joined the choir. When one of the new students, Ilse Dominguez, was given a tape of the songs, she memorized the songs in a week. The choir is practicing Christmas music for 2-3 concerts in December. The children also plan to sing for shut-ins.

## **LEAPS IN STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

An exciting thing about September is seeing changes in the children. Some children get worse and some get better. In 2003-2004, in 4th grade "Fabio" played around during tutoring time. He refused to work with one tutor, and then refused to work with another. In 5th grade his tutor had many

difficult struggles with him. He did some homework and some math, but refused to read. In May 2005 we wrote how there were signs of possible improvement in Fabio, and that the story wasn't over yet. In October 2005, in 6th grade, Fabio is a changed person. He still enjoys math the most, but he will read a little. When asked how he liked a Saturday tutoring session, he said, "I didn't like it. I *loved* it!" Another day when he came to evening tutoring he said to his tutor, "Thank you for helping me study for my math test last week. I got 95%!" Very few students thank their tutors; very few comment one week on what was done the previous week; very few connect their tutor helping them with doing well in school. Fabio is starting to do well.

In March 2005 "Zoie" cried, "You're punishing me! You put two books in my folder to read. You're punishing me by asking me to read!" So Beth Palmer had a long talk with Zoie and her mother about the importance of reading. In October 2005 Zoie came running in waving a sheet of paper. "Look," she exclaimed. "My progress report in reading says I'm doing very well. 'No conference needed!' Whoopee!" Zoie was so proud. One day she even went to the library on her own to get books for her science project. She is putting her assertive energies into her schoolwork!

### **EYEGLASSES**

Steve Hogan, a tutoring grad, saw Beth Palmer one day and told her how much he had appreciated the program. He said he was serving in Iraq and was home on leave. He walked away to talk to someone else and came back a few minutes later and said, "Thank you for getting me glasses."

Tutoring grad Teresa Trujillo enrolled her sons Fernando and Jonathan in the Tutoring Program and Youth Choir this fall. When asked what she remembered from when she was in the program, 1986-1990, she said, "The Lions Club got me glasses."

### **GIFT FROM KIWANIS CLUB**

In September the Kiwanis Club of the North Shore gave Inspired Youth funding to buy six more tables for the auditorium at Bezazian Library. The tutors from last year wanted the students to be able to spread out more, so they could work better. Every single table is being used, and so far there are enough. Thank you, Kiwanis Club!

### **DECEMBER: INSPIRED YOUTH RECEIVES 2006 MUCH SHELIST FOUNDERS' AWARD**

On Dec. 8, Inspired Youth was asked to bring 8 children to the City Council Chambers in downtown Chicago to sing a song for Mayor Daley as part of the Chicago Bar Association's Lend-a-Hand awards ceremony. Two of the children (Jasmine T. and Fabricio) were asked to give speeches on how the Tutoring Program was important for them. The singing ("Count on Me") and the speeches were fantastic. Seventeen mentoring organizations received awards from the Lend-a-Hand Program. Inspired Youth received the 2006 Much Shelist Founders' Award. (Much Shelist is a prominent firm of attorneys in Chicago.) The children told everyone, "We won the prize! We won the prize!"

Much Shelist and Lend-a-Hand provided a shuttle for our trip (the day of Chicago's first big snowfall). When we got into the shuttle to go home, the children found bundles of very fancy gingerbread people waiting for them. It was a beautiful day.

### **DONATIONS WELCOME**

Inspired Youth welcomes your donations. We are doing a lot with minimal funds, and your contributions go a long way toward enriching the lives of children and families in Uptown/Edgewater. Checks may be made to "Inspired Youth" and sent to Inspired Youth, 5715 N. Ridge, Chicago, IL 60660.