

Reflections in the Word: Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

By Brian Beckman

I hope you are seeing the light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel. The past couple of months have given me time to think about our youth and pray for the community. Because I love Shelby and Oceana County, I am passionate about building a structure to train and support youth in the area with The Ladder team. There are three important components The Ladder has included in its youth program that we believe God will use to transform the lives of the youth. My passion comes from having received these three components while living in Oceana County the first 25 years of my life and wanting to provide these opportunities for all youth in the county moving forward.

Strengthening Relationships in the Family

A healthy family contributes to healthy youth. Growing up in Shelby, I was raised by my parents to understand the importance of family and neighbors. Most of my family's activities revolved around our extended family or our neighbors. Many of my childhood memories revolve around our family helping our neighbors. My family by no means was perfect, but I did know that my parents loved and cared for me. Mom and Dad "were there" for me through the ups and downs of life.

Many of the youth who attend The Ladder have experienced multiple traumatic events and some have little support from their family. It is The Ladder's goal that each youth will be surrounded by a loving family. The staff works diligently at encouraging and communicating with the parents of the youth. Research shows that relationships with caring and competent people are vital contributors to resilience and recovery. Connecting the youth back to the primary or nuclear family gives healing and stability for the teens. In most cases, the staff and mentors would be considered the secondary family. Some situations warrant the use of The Ladder family as the primary family supporting a teen.

Providing Mentors for Accountability

Caring mentors are essential to helping young people become goal-oriented adults. I was fortunate to have mentors who helped me set and achieve goals in my life. They held me accountable. I am grateful to Todd Kraai and Jim Tate for the time and wisdom they gave me as I made important decisions in my life. I am not sure all students in my graduating class had a mentor, but the school environment provided two for me.

Youth who attend The Ladder usually do not have mentors at school to help and support them. The upperclassmen who attend are usually not connected to sports or extra-curricular activities that provide coaches and teachers that naturally become youth mentors. Many of the youth have no dreams or goals and no one to hold them accountable to a higher standard. The Ladder assures that each youth will have a mentor who will help them achieve goals, believe in them, and guide them to be all that God has called them to be. The hope is that these mentorships will turn into friendships that will last a lifetime.

I Thessalonians 2:8 says, "Having such a deep affection for you, we were delighted to share with you not only God's good news but also our own lives, because you had become so very dear to us."

Fostering a Thriving Community Through Faith

Faith builds resiliency in youth. I didn't grow up in a household that went to church or lived out a faith. It wasn't until I graduated college and took my first teaching job in Pentwater that I was introduced to David and Esther Lloyd-Jones. These two individuals over a nine-year period loved me, prayed for me, coached me and modeled for me what it meant to live a life of faith, obeying God and making disciples. I am grateful for their willingness to invest in me and show me what it means to love God and my neighbor. My life was changed by God forever.

Many leaders believe education and economic prosperity are the answer for our youth. Although both are very important, the real game changer for the youth is having a personal relationship with Jesus. What Shelby and Oceana County truly need is a spiritual awakening. God desires for all to love and serve Him. God has placed The Ladder here in Shelby for such a time as this. I shared with you in our February newsletter about reading Exodus 19:3-6 and hearing God speak to me, "If you want to see a change in Shelby, you must be bold and make disciples."

Research shows coaching and modeling a life of faith to our friends who are mired in dysfunction can move them on a journey to health, wholeness and heaven. The Ladder guarantees that the staff and mentors will teach and model to each youth what it means to live a life of faith, obeying God and making disciples. The staff and mentors are serious about guiding youth to love and follow Jesus: read God's word, live in step with the Holy Spirit, and make disciples. This high priority will help the youth be transformed by God; it's the only real hope for change in Shelby and Oceana County.

Please join us in praying for the youth and asking God how you can join The Ladder in laying the groundwork for God to transform Shelby and Oceana County. Battling for the hearts and minds of the youth and families is a daunting task. With God's power and wisdom, The Ladder will impact the families for Christ. Excitement builds as we continue to walk in faith by training the youth and waiting on God to transform lives. †

Our Friends

By Michelle Deuling

With the beginning of Spring, The Ladder's outreach took on a new look. The Stay Home Stay Safe order from our governor closed our doors to our regular daily fellowship times. The Shelby Public Schools began distributing meals at The Ladder, and we partnered alongside them with crafts and devotionals for the kids who wanted to participate.

Congratulations to Yadial, Javier, Kaden, Anna, and Emma, who consistently succeeded in completing the devotionals and earned FREE slushies, popcorn, donuts, \$5 gift cards from Shelby Wesco and subs from the Pizza Factory! We even gave student Bibles to those who needed them.



Left to Right: Yadial, Kaden, Emma, Anna

"I like this one best," said Yadial, as he pointed to the sand art cross craft he had finished this past week.

Many parents have expressed their appreciation, saying that the crafts are fun and entertaining and help keep their children busy. One family said they thought the jelly bean craft was the best. Another

said they don't usually do crafts in their home, so they can't wait to get the next one. Melanie Rabe said that all her kids are enjoying the prizes, and her 8-year old, Anna, loves the crafts.

While meeting the physical need for food is important, we at The Ladder are also grateful for the opportunity to help meet spiritual needs. Three parents allowed us to give a Bible to their child that didn't have one in their home, so they could do the devotionals. The crafts, thanks to the Community Foundation's Urgent Needs Fund, are also a way to point others to God.

We are thankful to God for Shelby Wesco and the Pizza Factory, who provided coupons for youth who completed each week's devotional.

Community Resource Food Box Distribution

By Michelle Deuling

Proverbs 22:1 KJV A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.

Building relationships with our neighbors during the past four years has enabled us to minister during this pandemic. We thank God for the "good name" here at The Ladder and for the friends that have blessed us to be able to reach out through the various food box distributions.

During the first distribution of Senior Resource boxes on May 25, we served 15 families with dry good ingredients for 22 meals each. The next projected distribution is June 13.

Muskegon-Oceana Community Action Partnership (MOCAP) has continued to distribute its commodities here at The Ladder and, partnering with some of our staff and volunteers, we have delivered to many of the more vulnerable in our community. Beginning with the May distribution, MOCAP will go to a two-month supply every other month. The next projected distribution is July 14.

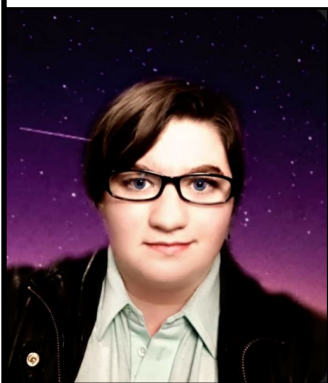
The Shelby Public Schools have continued providing student and adult meals available for pick-up at The Ladder every weekday and have also invited us to participate in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program that distributes boxes of produce each Friday to those that signed up through The Ladder, Shelby Wesleyan, or West Golden Wesleyan Churches. The first distribution of 105 boxes was May 22 and is projected to run through the summer.

Senior Resources is also participating in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. This allowed us to make available a different box each week to seniors over 60 years old who are affiliated with The Ladder. May 27 was the first distribution of 65 boxes. Through this program, there are four different boxes, each ranging from five pounds to 12 pounds and containing vegetables, fruit, or cheese.

The feedback has been that of grateful hearts from those receiving these blessings. We are thankful for the opportunity to touch the lives of our friends here and for the volunteers that have put boxes in vehicles so our seniors don't have to leave their cars while receiving their boxes.

Senior Highlight

Congratulations to the teens in our youth program
The Pursuit on their high school graduation!



Lauren Hams

What's Next: Enrolled in Muskegon Community College

Favorite Memory from The Ladder: Talking to mentors

Biggest take-away: Be a little more social and outgoing



Nicholas Jagnow

What's Next: Working during gap year

Favorite Memory from The Ladder: Thursday Family nights when we all got to hang out together

Biggest take-away: Learning to respect others

Our Mission

The Ladder is dedicated to impacting families by guiding people to love and follow Jesus: read God's word, live in step with the Holy Spirit, and make disciples.

Celebrating the Life of a Champion: Shirley Claeys

November 14, 1937 - March 29, 2020

By Holly Baxter

Prior to our shutdown in mid-March, Shirley came to The Ladder almost every weekday for the past year to eat lunch. When she first started coming, her first impression was that of a hurting soul, somewhat defensive and standoffish. But after a while her heart softened, and her demeanor began to change. She seemed to look forward to her time with staff and fellow peers.



One day, after talking with Shirley about a need we had at The Ladder, staff member Michelle Deuling thought of a way to get her engaged in The Ladder: writing greeting cards for members. Shirley took her task seriously and seemed to look forward to her ministry of sending out cards on behalf of the Ladder. Michelle said, “Shirley would often send Lizzie into the office to remind me that she ‘needed the cards today.’”

As time passed, Shirley seemed to realize that the people at The Ladder really liked her. She had started accepting constructive criticism and realized her need to speak kinder words even when frustrated. “I loved seeing her smile and her eyes light up when I would greet her,” Michelle said. “She gave me hugs many times, thanking me for the little things.”

The Ladder and the friends who joined her for lunch here became a sort of family to Shirley. Shirley prayed and studied the Bible every day for two hours for everyone she knew at the Ladder. Michelle said, “I am so thankful for the prayers and her willingness to meet other people’s needs when she could.”

Ladder member Ruth Zaverl said Shirley had been a good friend from way back in high school. Ruth said in her younger days, Shirley sang at the Medical Care Facility for 13 years. “She had a pretty good voice,” Ruth said. “I’m going to really miss her and her hugs.”

Shirley graduated from Hart High School in 1955. She was active in several school programs, including Library Club, Dramatics Club, and Band, to name a few. Her high school yearbook quoted her as saying, “If talking were music, I’d be a brass band.”

In years past, Shirley worked as a county treasurer and a driver for the Scottville Senior Center. She also volunteered for many years at Ludington Hospital and the Salvation Army Store. Ladder member Neola Draggoo attended Walkerville Wesleyan with her at one time. She said Shirley helped build the physical church building in 1989, as well as the gym. “Pastor Bob could always get her laughing,” said Neola. “I’m going to miss her happy birthday calls. She called every year.”

Roma Battice, Transportation Coordinator for OCCOA, said Shirley enjoyed visiting with the bus drivers during her commutes, and they enjoyed her company, also. “She was a sweet lady and will be sadly missed,” said Roma.

Mary Jo Schaner, one of Shirley’s drivers, wrote this heartfelt note in memory of Shirley:

How do I even start to share my heart?...

Upon first meeting, I knew Shirley had been through some life experiences that were not pleasant. She had an edge—a wall—of hurt and despair. As the days and months went by, I listened, shared love and hope to her. I shared my faith; she shared religious items she received in the mail. She softened, she brightened, and both of our hearts were full. I loved that woman fiercely.

In the beginning I knew she would be a challenge, but as the time went by, we bonded. She knew I truly cared about her and her well-being. I looked forward to being her driver, and now her friend. She would ask the other drivers how I was, and I would ask the other drivers to send her my love.

My heart is sad today, learning of her passing, but I am also happy to know that she is finally out of pain, and is free from all her past worldly hurts and disappointments.

God knows her heart. Rest in peace to my beloved Shirley.

We are so grateful for the time we had with Shirley and the memories we will keep close to our hearts. 🙏

Our Vision

The Ladder is a friendly, intergenerational and ethnically diverse community center aimed at knowing and serving our neighbors and uniting our community around Jesus, so that lives are transformed.

Celebrating Investors

Buz & Nancy Wilson

By Brian Beckman

Jumping in to help The Ladder has been the pattern Roy (Buz) Wilson and Nancy Rengel Wilson have followed since the doors of the center opened almost five years ago. Many other people have also followed that pattern, and we are so grateful. We do not take any of our kind investors for granted. But let me introduce you to the Wilsons.

Nancy has been coming to Little Point Sable since 1952, when her parents rented a summer cottage. After her marriage to Buz (1968), they would visit her parents' cottage for summer vacations. As a family, the Wilsons moved quite a bit, both in the U.S. and overseas. Each time, they found stability through being involved in various community service organizations.

Planning for retirement, they bought their own property at Little Point Sable in 1999 with the intent of spending about six months each year in the Shelby area. They were part of the team that produced the summer charitable concerts at the Little Stone Church and established the Arts Fund at the Community Foundation. Buz later served on the Community Foundation Board. This is how they found out about The Ladder.

Since discovering the community center, they have been true champions. Older people found it difficult to walk across the gravel alley from the west parking lot to the front door. Roy and Nancy stepped up to pay for a slab of cement. Our members were so pleased, especially the ones who used a wheelchair, a walker, or had difficulty walking. After the first cement was laid, a person parking in the farthest parking spot still had to travel across the gravel. The Wilsons approached The Ladder's staff and said, "We do not want to leave a job half finished," so they paid for the rest of the cement. Wow, we felt so blessed!

Last year, Roy and Nancy were thinking of The Ladder's future. They really desire to see the center thrive well into the future and were the first to donate to an endowment fund (see article below). Last Christmas, they responded to the Community Foundation's Wish List and gave The Ladder a baby changing station for the restroom. Recently, The Ladder felt led to purchase devotionals for our senior meal recipients to give them peace of mind during these troubled times. We wrote a grant through the Community Foundation, to which Roy and Nancy responded. Roy told us, "Nancy saw this request for devotionals and she said, 'We need to buy these devotionals for The Ladder.'"

Sharon, a recipient of a devotional, recently wrote this note to The Ladder: "Thank you so much for the Guidepost devotional book. I love Guidepost. They offer inspiration in an easy-to-relate-to way. Times are difficult, and the book was just what I needed."

Roy and Nancy, we are so grateful for your generosity to our community! 🙏

Do you know someone who might like to receive our newsletter? Have them contact us. We can send it to them via snail mail or email.

Call The Ladder: (231) 259-0211 or

Email: anne@theladdercommunitycenter.com

If you do not wish to receive future newsletters, you may opt out any time by contacting us using the methods above.

Give Generously

A HUGE THANK YOU

to the folks who have provided the following items we needed in April & May:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| • Water | 160 bottles |
| • Hand Sanitizer Spray | 2 |
| • Bingo Prizes | 10 |
| • Small Envelopes | 300 |
| • All-Purpose Cleaner | 1 |
| • Newsletter Sponsor | 6 issues + postage |
| • Monetary Gifts - April | \$6,541 |
| • Monetary Gifts - May | \$7,625 |

WISH LIST

Item Requests:

- Postage Stamps
- Bingo Prizes
- #6 Peel & Seal Envelopes
- #10 Peel & Seal Envelopes
- Parchment Sheets (12"x16")

Monetary Investment Requests:

- Cost of Grounds Maintenance (any amount)
- Cost of Printer Ink (\$118 - \$136 each)

What's New at The Ladder COMMUNITY CENTER

Endowment Fund

By Cathy Zoulek

The Ladder now has an Endowment Fund with the Community Foundation of Oceana County. This new fund, initiated by Roy and Nancy Wilson of Little Point Sable Association, will help support and sustain the future of The Ladder. Roy and Nancy believe in The Ladder's mission. We celebrate their leadership in establishing this fund for The Ladder for both today and tomorrow's needs. We thank them for their generosity of spirit and their love for our center and the people we serve.

Anyone can help build The Ladder's future with a gift of any size. We hope you will consider playing a part in the future of The Ladder. For details on how to make a gift to The Ladder's Endowment Fund, contact Brian at The Ladder (231-259-0211) or Tammy Carey at The Community Foundation for Oceana County (231-869-3377 or tammy@oceanafoundation.org). Gifts can also be made online at oceanafoundation.org/give/give-now. 🙏