

FOCUSING ON OCEANA COUNTY

By Brian Beckman

Greetings, Ladder Family!

I hope you have had a wonderful time this summer enjoying the outdoors. Oceana County is a great place to experience summer. We are grateful for your investment in God's Kingdom here in Shelby and Oceana County. Without the Lord's help and your help, the events at The Ladder would not and could not happen. Thank you for your heart to help our Lord, our community, and this county one individual at a time.

May I call your attention to The Ladder's Vision, which focuses on our community and our county:

Our Vision:

The Ladder is God's movement intent on mobilizing and equipping men, women, youth, and children to bring the love of Jesus to every person and every home so that Oceana County is transformed in the name of Christ.

Our goal is to equip people to be relational disciples who bring the love of Jesus, the truth of His Word, the peace of Jesus, and the hope one finds in Him to everyone. We trust that God is at work in each person we serve at The Ladder, so Shelby and Oceana County can be transformed.

GOD'S WORK IN THE DAVIS* FAMILY

Ryan Davis* was in sixth grade when he began attending The Ladder daily in October 2022. Many days we would go to great lengths to arrange a ride home after his time with us. We grew to love this young man. Then the second week of November 2023, he made a poor choice and was expelled from school. Up to this point, communication with the family was minimal. We reached out many times but did not receive responses. On the day he was expelled from school, our Youth and Men's Coach, Troy, and Youth and Family Coach, Mechele, were the first people Ryan's mom, Brenda*, called. As you can imagine, this was very traumatic for the Davis family, but Troy and Mechele were willing to walk with them through this trial.

In December, all our youth volunteers were brought together for a meeting to explain Ryan's situation. We wanted to know whether we had enough volunteers to support their family in trying to help them walk this path. Many volunteers stepped forward, and Mechele became the point person and devised a plan.

In January, we started executing the plan to help Ryan and his family. We had people who provided rides to The Ladder for both son and mom. Volunteers stepped forward to tutor and teach Ryan math and language arts. Some worked to put together resources for him academically. A couple of homeschool moms helped Mechele with the logistics of providing schooling for Ryan. Still other volunteers gave money to help pay for the resources we needed. A couple of people even attended court hearings with the family.

Besides academics, we wanted both mom and son to grow in understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Spiritual mentoring happened in conjunction with their visits. Both Ryan and Brenda had a weekly schedule

to meet with their spiritual mentors. During this time, they read the Bible, discussed what they read, and prayed.

During the semester, Ryan was challenged to work as hard as the people helping him. In the beginning, he was on top of it, but about midway through the semester, he became complacent and came to his tutoring appointments without his homework complete. Mechele talked with Ryan about giving 100%. After the talk, Ryan kicked it in and finished strong. He completed his academics, his spiritual training, and his community service by the end of May. It was not without struggles for him and for us. This was a huge task for Mechele. We are grateful for her leadership and for all the volunteers that gave of their time and money.

Recently, Ryan petitioned the school for re-entry and had his meeting with the superintendent and the committee. During this meeting, the committee wanted to see if Ryan had matured as a student and in his character. Mechele shared the things that Ryan had completed and the ways he had grown. The committee noted the support that The Ladder had given Ryan and the support it will continue to give.

After a week, Brenda received a phone call from the superintendent stating that Ryan's request to return to school had been accepted. Shortly after that call, Brenda called The Ladder with excitement and thankfulness. "We want to thank The Ladder staff and its volunteers for all the ways you have helped our family and Ryan," she said. "Going back to school would not have happened without the support we felt and the support you delivered to our family and Ryan. We are so thankful to you all."

I hope the Davis family has gone (or will go) one step further to thank the Lord for the way He provided for their family during this trial in their life. During times of suffering, God draws us toward Himself, generously pouring love and perspective into our lives. He helps us focus outwardly, instead of just on ourselves.

Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)

³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Thank you for your help in the work God has called us to do. Your investment makes this happen.

MY PRAYER FOR YOU AND FOR ALL OF US AT THE LADDER IS THIS:

"Lord, please help us to walk worthy of you today, pleasing you in everything we do. May we be fruitful in every good work, and increase in the knowledge of God. Help us to always give thanks to our great God who provides for all our needs. In Jesus' name, Amen."

*This name has been changed to maintain privacy.

YOUTH & FAMILY

An “Out-of-the-Boxy” Summer Season

By Troy Love

We are told in 2 Timothy 4:2 to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season.” For some young people, the summer is marked by boredom, stagnation, and self-indulgence. The summer season for The Ladder youth was marked by growth, adventure, and service in our Summer Break Out program.

MONDAYS, WEDNESDAYS, AND FRIDAYS: “GROW”

“Grow” days included deep-dives into God’s Word. The challenge this summer was to get to know Jesus better by reading one chapter a day all summer starting in Matthew. Along the way, several students memorized and recited The Lord’s Prayer to be entered in a drawing to win a bike donated by a Ladder member. We were also inspired and encouraged by testimonies from people, including a recent Shelby graduate and a Shelby police officer. One sixth grade girl who attended Summer Break Out said, “The Ladder is a good place to learn about God.”

TUESDAYS: “GROOVE”

We took youth on adventures in our community, which included a lighthouse tour, Michigan’s Adventure, a fishing trip, a dune hike, an escape room, tubing, Unity Christian Music Festival, a high ropes course, and miniature golf. Each adventure helped forge great relationships among the youth and volunteers, as well as an appreciation for the area we are blessed to live in. A Bible lesson that related to each adventure made each experience even more meaningful. A seventh-grade girl said her favorite adventure was the high-ropes course at Camp Ao-Wa-Ki-Ya because “we got to test our bravery.” Not every young person is able to afford these adventures. Thank you to the donors who stepped up to bless these kids with these growth experiences.

THURSDAYS: “GO”

We go out in the community to serve people in unique ways, with the goal of showing God’s love in practical ways. The youth pulled weeds downtown, put on a free car wash, hosted a parent appreciation dinner, washed windshields, and swept walkways. The joy and enthusiasm our kids have as they serve catches people off guard and puts a smile on their faces.

One hot day we went all over town handing out freeze pops with a business card that said, “This freeze pop is cool. Jesus is cooler! Showing God’s love in a practical way!” Two of our middle school-aged girls went into the Pizza Factory armed with freeze pops and cards to give to employees and customers. They handed one to a man at a table. He looked at it and said, “I travel around the world as an evangelist. What you’re doing is amazing! This is out-of-the-boxy kind of stuff that is better than all of the theological stuff I share with people. You meet them at their place of need with a popsicle and use it to share Jesus with them. This made my day!”

Break Out is young people at The Ladder loving God, serving others, and sharing the Good News of Jesus in the summer. That sounds like a successful season!



GROOVE! Youth were victorious in finding the treasure after only 37 minutes of solving all the escape game puzzles.



GO! Ladder youth pulled 150 pounds of weeds in 70 minutes!

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Meal Program Update

We praise God for sending two faithful donors who each gave The Ladder \$1,000 in August, bringing our present deficit to \$158.24.

JANUARY—AUGUST	
NUMBER OF MEALS SERVED	3,865
COST OF MEALS (NOT INCLUDING COST OF SUPPLIES OR STAFFING)	\$11,595
COLLECTED FROM PARTICIPANTS	\$4,577.26
TOTAL DEFICIT	\$7,017.74
SPECIAL DONATIONS RECEIVED	\$6,896.50
AMOUNT STILL NEEDED TO COVER JULY & AUGUST	\$121.24

Learning Together

By Sue Beckman

We celebrated our Kids Hope volunteers and families at our annual Party at the Play-ground event on July 28. What a beautiful night as we gathered at the new Shelby Township Park to enjoy being together with Kids Hope families. Two families came, and a third, unfortunately, arrived as we were leaving. Some of the mentors were disappointed that their mentee didn't come, which is understandable, as they were so looking forward to seeing them. But I want to share with you the joy of that night, as well as several things the Lord is showing us as we seek to engage with families.

Gary* and Jackie* are grandparents and guardians to Camden* and his six siblings. When they arrived, I could see Jackie was hesitant. She was greeted warmly and with excitement as we were introduced to each of her grandkids. The volunteers showed interest in her and her family. As the conversation continued, the kids wiggled away to do sidewalk chalk and play on the farm truck. Soon it was time to eat, and I observed conversation and laughter as Dave (a mentor) and Janette (his prayer partner) sat at their table. Others stopped and joined the conversation. Games followed, and Jackie jumped in to play the last couple of games.

As we began to clean up, Jackie said to me, "I really didn't want to come. When I come to stuff like this, I never feel like we fit in. But I had a really good time, and I felt like we fit in!" What a compliment to our volunteers. What a praise to our God, for we prayed that the Holy Spirit would be among us and enable us to love well. He is faithful.

Melissa*, a mom to seven kids (three of whom are part of Kids Hope), said it was good to be a part of a positive environment where she could laugh and have fun. As she was leaving, she asked if she, Mechele (The Ladder's Youth and Family Coach and Kids Hope mentor), and I could get together. She is looking for positive friends to be around. Praise God!

A Hispanic mom, Mayra*, and her family arrived late, and she was so sad. Parties for the Hispanic culture go well into the night, so it was a surprise to her that we were done. We are learning and so are they. We want to embrace them and love them well. We are on a journey together.

Another mom, Jen*, called on Tuesday and said she was so sorry they didn't come. They were looking forward to meeting us, but in the busyness of the weekend, they forgot.

Look at the wonderful connections we made! And the kids didn't want to quit. They wanted to know when we could do this again.

After Jackie's comments, I was thinking how difficult it must be for a family to show up someplace looking for people they don't even know. It's not hard to understand why they would be hesitant to come.

What we are learning is that we must be more intentional about connecting with parents at the school – school concerts, assemblies, PTO events, etc. The more touchpoints we have at the school, the more comfortable they may be coming to a Kids Hope event. We ask the Lord for wisdom on how to strategically grow our relationships with families.

Remember, we are growing trust in relationships. It will take time. But God has called us, and we persevere trusting our faithful God. He loves these families, and He loves that you have chosen to love these families as well.



Mentors, moms, and kids came together at Shelby Township Park on a hot day to play water balloon volleyball.

**This name has been changed to maintain privacy.*

Our Vision

The Ladder is God's movement intent on mobilizing and equipping men, women, youth and children to bring the love of Jesus to every person and every home so that Oceana County is transformed in the name of Christ.

Men: Pit Road is Open!

By Troy Love

I watched NASCAR driver Chase Briscoe win recently at Darlington. His victory came down to a well-timed, well-executed pit stop at a key point in the race. His pit crew quickly put on four new tires that provided grip, fueled him up, and peeled a layer of windshield to clear his vision. Without a crew and pit stops, there's no way drivers can race their best. Men are the same way. We all want to run the race of manhood well, but when we try to do it on our own, it is impossible to be our best. We need a crew, and we need pit stops!

HERO is a men's movement at The Ladder entering its third season. We provide Pit Stops every Tuesday evening from 6:30-7:30 starting in October and running through November. Pit Stop meetings are quick, and they help men get refueled and make adjustments for the next leg of the race. Pit Road is open to men ages 12 and older. If you are a man and know that you were built to be a HERO and do Manhood God's Way, you need a crew. It's time for a Pit Stop!



HERO
MANHOOD GOD'S WAY

SPONSOR

If you would like to sponsor a future newsletter, please contact Anne at (231) 259-0211

LIVE WELL

Pursuing God's best in mind, body & spirit

Boots on the Ground

By Sue Beckman

Six days before the first day of school, three dozen people gathered at the Shelby High School parking lot for our Annual Back to School Prayer Walk. It was boots on the ground. Yes, we can pray for our schools wherever we are, but at times, God needs us to be boots on the ground to release His authority and power on location through prayer.

We were **BLESSED** to have Pastor Josh, Kathy, and Diane join us from New Beginnings, a church in Shelby. Kathy and Diane live in Rothbury, but the Lord has given them a great love for Shelby, and they have been faithful to walk and pray through the Shelby community.

We were **ENERGIZED** to have our youth, Huddle volunteers, and Young Life volunteers join us and pray for the teachers and students at the middle and high schools.

We were **ENCOURAGED** to gather with Kids Hope Mentors, Prayer Partners, and a group from Love INC who persevered through the heat to pray over our teachers, staff, and students at Shelby Elementary and the Early Childhood Center.

We were **THANKFUL** to be present when Carlos, a staff member at the high school, came for an important meeting with the principal. Seeing us gathered, he came over and asked the group to pray for him and the meeting. We did. After he wrapped up his meeting, he located us once again and shared how grateful he was that we were there to pray. His meeting went very well!

As we gathered at the end, we knew the Lord had been present among us and that He is influencing not only the spirit and culture of our schools, but He is changing the hearts and lives of our students and families. We continue to pray with eyes wide open to see His power unleashed among us.

We encourage you to gather with other Christians and be boots on the ground on a regular basis, praying as you walk or drive through your community. If you would like to join us in praying regularly for our community, please consider joining our prayer team. Call Sue at (231) 259-0211 or email Sue@theladdercommunitycenter.com.

Do You Love Jesus?

By Sue Beckman

At 8:30 on an August morning, eight-year-olds Jake* and Simon* arrived for 5 Day Club at The Ladder. They walked the three blocks eager and excited for the day. Eager and Excited—5 Day Club wasn't set to begin until 10 am.

Michelle, our Office and Kitchen Manager, rounded up some breakfast for them. She joined them at the table and began asking them what stories they knew from the Bible. The conversation was animated as Simon and Jake would twist parts of one story with parts of another - something like Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness with only five loaves of bread and two fish...

Once they had eaten, the boys made their way to the gym to play foosball and air hockey. Seeing them get a little rough with the equipment, I asked them if they would do a job for me. I was in the midst of taking inventory of our Kids Hope mentor supplies, tallying crayon boxes, glue sticks, and the like. I asked if they could count and record.

"Yes!" Simon and Jake were all in.

I gave them a whiteboard and marker to record the number of each item. After their job was

complete, they asked if they could write on one of the other whiteboards.

As I handed them a board, they began to write. Simon asked, "How do you spell Jesus?"

"J.E.S.U.S." I replied.

They wrote some more. Simon then asked, "Miss Sue, do you love Jesus?"

"Why, yes, I do!" I said emphatically.

"Well, would you then sign our board?" asked Jake.

Jake then handed me the board, which said "WE LOVE JESUS," and I gladly added my name to theirs already written on the board.

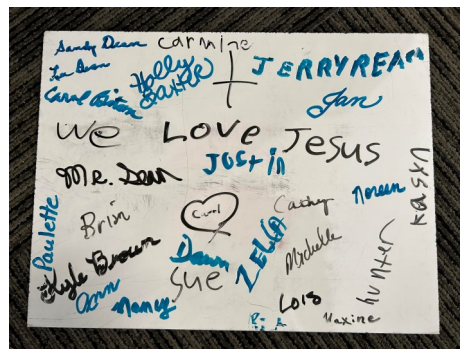
While the boys had been eating breakfast, adults had gathered in the café to play cards. Remembering, Simon asked, "Can we take this board out there and have others sign it, too?"

"Well, that's a wonderful idea," I told them, and they skipped off to the café. I headed to the office to tell Michelle. She and I watched them make their way to every adult in the café. Adults embraced them and one by one, names were added to the board. Afterward, Simon and Jake looked around, making sure they didn't miss anyone. They looked down at the board, smiles erupting on their faces. Their whiteboard was full of names!

That morning, every person was approached by a child and asked one simple question:

"Do you love Jesus?"

Sign here please.



**This name has been changed to maintain privacy.*

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