



common ground montgomery

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   @cgmlife

march

newsletter

2018



the mercy house

Staffer (and pastor) Ken Austin has never let the limits of Common Ground Montgomery's programs and focus stop him from trying to help serve the Washington Park community more and more. When he became the director of CGM's community ministries projects, he started the Mercy House as a way for CGM and various partners to help meet additional needs for families in our community beyond what we were already doing. The Mercy House is a combination food pantry, clothes closet, hot meal provider, and more.

So whether it is serving food in an effort to help stamp out hunger and food insecurities in Washington Park, providing a place to wash and dry clothes or to even bathe with warm water, installing free-of-charge smoke detectors in homes in our community, Ken is using the Mercy House daily to help meet immediate needs of our neighbors. Even when CGM's academic programs are out (as we follow along with Montgomery Public School's calendar year), the Mercy House is still open.

As we provide our annual By The Numbers graphic, we'd like to start with some Mercy House stats on the following page.



2500

number of families served with food boxes for the year

120

number of free smoke detectors installed in homes

3

average daily number of people that visit to take a hot shower

50

number of homeless persons served a hot meal on Thanksgiving Day

125

number of families that received food over Christmas Break

40

daily number of children provided with lunch and a snack during the summer

If you would like to get involved with the Mercy House, call Ken Austin at 334.398.0467

2017 cgm by the numbers

Leadership Development Program

63 student leaders in Lower School

14 student leaders in Middle School

14 student leaders in High School

483 hours a student spent in the LDP throughout the year

57

Volunteers in Fall Semester 2017

Christmas Store

570
total people served

134
families served

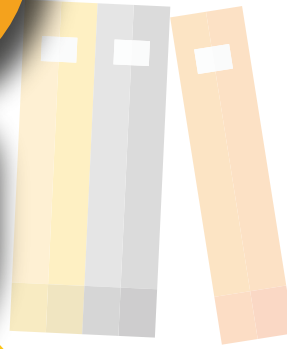
44

Mentoring
Partnerships



Summer
Campers

94



312

hours each camper
spends in Summer Camp

13

number of college
interns that worked
at the Summer Camp

15

Pre-K
Students





cgm pre-k



heroes in the normal

There was a time when violence and gun shots were a much more normal occurrence in our neighborhood than they are today. There were times when having a conversation in front of the building during program hours would be accompanied by a POP-POP.... PAP-PAP-PAP off in the not-so-distant air. When it wasn't early July we knew exactly what those sounds meant. They often meant police sirens would soon follow. It was normal.

This past week those sounds meant that a young man was having a shootout with police. It's a shootout that occurred on the same street that associate director Kevin King lives on with his wife and daughter. It was on the same street that we've dropped off children for years. It's a shoot out that ended a young man's life and left an officer wounded in the line of duty.

Because of the closeness of our community, and the principle of a story changing slightly the more people tell it, word of what **happened** reached us and the youth in our programs remarkably quickly. The details were muddy, but one thing was for sure, this boy was dead from police gunfire.

Two of his cousins are in our Leadership Development Program. The eldest of the two (let's refer to her as "Anna") entered the building clearly hurting from the news. Tears in her bloodshot eyes, slumped posture, and silence. However, the sadness of the incident was only compounded by the sadness with which she was forced to deal with it. After being consoled by a few of us, she was asked, "Do you want to go home? Do you need some time to yourself? "



justin hampton

executive director

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Anna's response indicated an unusual maturity that could only have come from multiple past experiences along these lines. She said, "No, I'll just stay here and do the program, because if I go home I'll be alone."

It made me think about how many times she's had to endure similar circumstances to reach such a self-aware conclusion. She clearly knew what going home and being isolated with these emotions would mean, because she'd done it before.

It made me recall how I felt a few years back when I saw the wall of another one of our students during a home visit. Her Gibbs Village bedroom wall was covered not in boy band posters, nor her artwork or with shelves of books, but with obituaries of her peers, family, and friends, most of whom had been violently taken away from her. It was a wall she woke to every morning and was the final thing she saw before going to sleep.

On the one hand, I'm glad that Anna felt emotionally safe at CGM. On the other hand, I was deeply saddened by the loss of the young man, and by the self protective mechanism Anna has been forced to create. Out of necessity, simply due to the frequency with which she must deal with catastrophic losses, she has made a way to cope with experiences only comparable to war-torn veterans.

Even sadder still is that, in her coping, we (society) expect her and others like her to be normal. Focus on school. Get good grades. Avoid acting out. Control your emotions. Make good choices. Your parents must not be doing a good job. Have you been tested for ___ disorder? Why can't you be - normal?

Because their lives are anything but, and for that daily triumph in the midst of pain, and so much more, these kids are my heroes. Anna is my hero, and always will be.



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