

common ground montgomery



P.O. Box 1866, Montgomery, AL 36102
1516 Mobile Rd, Montgomery, AL 36108
334.593.5803

Dear friend of Common Ground Montgomery,

I am honored to be able share the enclosed story with you of one family and their experience of our mission. Summer came to CGM as a volunteer years ago and has poured her life out in many relationships along the way.

You can't talk with her and not see the deep, life changing, merciful impact this place and the amazing people abiding in our neighborhood have had on her. It is said that mercy is not receiving what you could have received - in terms of judgment, consequences, or condemnation. However, it is also the gift of compassion and help in extreme times of need.

I have experienced great mercy in my life.

My reckless choices, selfishness, apathy, neglect, and hurtful treatment of others has not met the just consequences from God and others that it deserves. Conversely, in my deepest pain and in my lowest unrecognizable disintegrations, God has shown me overwhelming mercy. And, He has chosen most of the time to do it "wrapped in a person".

I have come to believe that CGM is a place where all kinds of people come to both give and receive mercy. For some kids from the neighborhood it looks like not being in a gang, carrying a pistol, dying on a front porch, dropping out of school, or starting kindergarten with developmental deficit. For others who give and come from outside the neighborhood, it's what their life, time, financial resources would be spent on without being connected to their purpose. It's about how their own lives and the lives of their children can be impoverished or damaged by being in spiritual isolation, despite having great material affluence and influence.

And then there is the flip side. Kids escape gangs, teenage pregnancy, murder, lack of education, and fatherlessness to be developed into producers: who love others well, who begin a legacy of an intact family, and creatively change the world. And, they will do it better because they aren't racially, politically, and socially isolated. "Resourced" people who get involved experience God in ways they never thought available to them, and find their story in His story. And the line between mercy giver and mercy receiver becomes blurred as we find kinship, together, in this place

This is what we get to see over and over again here. Thank you so much for investing in our work. But we still need your help. We are growing in the neighborhood and are excitingly expanding outside our city. Will you help us with a much needed year-end gift and will you also consider a monthly pledge for 2018?

Psalms 34:3,

Bryan Kelly



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Today, I received an amazing gift.

I went to the Mercy House, one of Common Ground Montgomery's ministries in the neighborhood, to hear the story of a family that wanted to share their experience. They hoped that God would use it to say thank you to those who had given towards the mission of CGM.

I arrived at the Mercy House and was immediately put to work. By now, I should have known better than to think I could come only in the role of interviewer. That's not the vision and example of Pastor Ken Austin. There are no other roles than that of a participant. There were already four families in the lobby that were receiving food boxes, a homeless woman that needed to take a shower and asked me to help her pick out something to wear from the clothes closet, and a couple of homeless gentlemen in our neighborhood that were washing their clothes.

I remembered immediately that lines of giver and receiver were blurry and interchangeable in this place. I thought of the many kids enrolled in our leadership programs a couple of blocks away, their parents, and so many others who have benefited from this house of mercy and continued to come serve here. There was and is no culture other than participant here: receivers and givers of mercy.

So I participated. In the same way that I have seen kids, moms, dads, grandmothers, and grandfathers from our own neighborhood come to do when they come to cook, wash, and assemble food boxes and clothes to take to people they know that are having a hard time.

The Mercy House is a powerful space and strangely **other** experience where people routinely walk in, feeling desperation, chaos, harassed, disoriented, and hopeless. When you and your kids are hungry, have no electricity on, or no access to water, or no place to sleep tonight in the cold - it is terrifying.

In homelessness, you are assaulted minute by minute by depression, the deep pain of unprocessed loss, voices that reinforce the contempt you see in the expressions, words, and actions of others, it has a deep effect. But then there is another effect: when you feel you are invisible. The toll of that is devastating when humans don't even see you, or acknowledge you are there.

Then, there is the shame and loss of dignity. This is as bad as any other part of it. This is the home that so many of us find ourselves in and struggle to escape. This is the abuser that destroys and that finds fuel in the interactions with even well-meaning givers.

But today I would get to participate in another gift of Mercy.

Antwan and Janele arrived as I finished my unplanned shift, and we sat down so I could hear a small but important part of their story.

They have four children from elementary age to high school. The house they were living in burned down. The stress of a forced move, along with the losses that came with it, drove them past the slim margins they



summer williams

currently had. Janele was also soon laid off from her job and Antwan was working hard but still struggling to find a well-paying job to support his family of six. They were evicted and eventually made aware that their remaining things were curbside where strangers were already plundering their family's stuff. They picked up the pieces they could recover, and went first to a hotel for a while and then eventually transferred to an extended stay where they are currently residing. It was in the hotel and this overwhelming place that someone led them to Pastor Austin and the Mercy House.

They next shared of some of the timely resources he helped them secure. From school uniforms for their children to keep attending school, assistance to help out with the cost of the hotel, clothing to keep them employed and in school (Janele is in school to become a Medical Assistant), and food for their family. They didn't even try to suppress the tears and range of emotions that telling the story evoked. My own tears came as I realized what they were granting me: the gift of intimacy.

Listening to their story, I, in a relatively small but important way, felt both some of the anguish this family had been through and the gratitude for the provision of things that played important pieces of needed relief in their suffering.

They went on to say that the most important and impactful thing that happened to them at the Mercy House was beyond the relief. **"We were loved, we were prayed for, people walked with us in the darkest times of our life and they are still doing so. Pastor Austin answers the phone every time we call and is always there for us: with help, a hug, a prayer, or a word of encouragement. The other stuff was so big, but that was the most important."**

I was shattered. Mercy was here. Ken, and others, had demonstrated the type of dignity and connection that was the most needed. The lines in his life were so blurry as to giver and receiver that he simply acted as a participant in their life. He was present: not in a role of savior, helper, or giver, but just with them. God Himself transferred His own nearness to both Ken and Antwan and Janele's family. That's the gift they got. That's the gift they were giving me. Through them, their intimacy, honesty, and vulnerability, I experienced Him.

I remembered again at that holy moment, that **other** kind of moment, that this is the gift we get to be a part of: transferring the nearness of God.

The gift Antwan and Janele gave me today is far larger than anything we have ever done or could ever do. They gave me the gift of their story and God Himself was present in it. To know that in the midst of pain and suffering, He is present. He is working through people and placing them in situations to love others. He is using struggles and crazy situations to bring people together that might not have otherwise ever met. He is reminding me that the gift we get to give is love, dignity, and connection, because that is what He has and is giving to us.

Rounding out our interview, they said they were looking forward to being in a home by year's end. Antwan continues to work, Janele is still going to school, and the children are doing well.

Thank you for helping CGM in our mission to love people, to walk with them during the hard times, and to have our lives shattered for the good by these beautiful interactions. You are giving us the gift of time, space, and resources to show up and be in the lives of others: consistently and lovingly present in the right now.



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