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## In His Steps Ministries: Helping Children, Families

by Linda Buford-Burks

**M**ississippi College student Khrysten Glass couldn't be happier volunteering in the In His Steps (IHS) Ministries Afterschool Program in Canton, MS. In fact, she says her best reward is untold insight that will give her an edge when she graduates from MC and becomes a teacher in the public schools.

"I love it. It's so great," Glass says enthusiastically. "I wouldn't change anything."

A Canton native, Khrysten has volunteered with In His Steps Ministries since Summer 2016 and wants to use what she's learned to teach children the values of Christ without saying one word. She's committed to teaching in the public schools when she finishes her degree in elementary education because that is "a critical need area."

"I feel like that's where a lot of people tend not to go because they feel like the public schools are just too far gone," she said. "But they need people. They need the help. They need people with the experience, the passion and the drive" to help students reach their potential.

"Everybody here loves her," said Makayla about Glass. Makayla is one of the 16 eighth grade students in the IHS Ministries Afterschool Program. All 16 of them have been a part of the program since second grade. Makayla first came for the snacks and warmed up to other, more valuable offerings as time passed.

"We learn about God, and that's important," Makayla asserts. "When I came here, I didn't know about Him." She also did not know her "times tables" but soon got the hang of how the

numbers work together and now is comfortable with them. There's a reason for that.

"When I came here, we practiced on our time tables every day."

"Every day," she emphasized. "At first, I didn't know anything. But they help us with our school work. They help us grow more."

Makayla said that her attendance at the In His Steps Ministries' Afterschool Program also means that she has to "read every day."

Carolyn Bacon, IHS director of personnel and volunteers, said that students in the program also have a devotion every day. Then, she asked Makayla to recite Psalm 1.

Makayla cited it word perfect. She also named all 66 books of the Bible when requested.

"We start with our kids in the

RIGHT: Student Makayla, foreground, works on the computer while Carolyn Bacon, Personnel and Volunteer director at In His Steps Ministries in Canton, looks on. BELOW: Volunteer Khrysten Glass, a Mississippi College student.



second grade and work with the same group of kids until we can get them into college," said Bacon.

She and her husband Rev. Jasper Bacon started In His Steps Ministries more than 21 years ago, using a table from their bedroom as their only piece of office furniture. Since then, their first 20 students have graduated from high school, and five are attending college.

"These are first generation college students," Bacon pointed out. She said the students attend Tougaloo College, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, the University of Southern Mississippi and Southwest Community College.

As Bacon gave a tour of the facilities, she pointed out various components of the work being done with students and their families.

Inside a room with planets and stars of the galaxy looming large on the ceiling and walls, Bacon talked

about getting students excited about science.

"We just try to get our kids used to science because a lot of kids are really afraid of science," she says. "I guess they think that it is so hard that they are not willing to even try."

A volunteer who knows all about science helps the young people relate to the subject.

"We're hoping to build kids who have a love for science," Bacon explains. "We want engineers. We want doctors."

"Our kids can do it, but a lot of times their self esteem is so low that they won't even try to tackle it."

But Carolyn and Jasper Bacon are in their ministries' work for the long haul, believing that it is work God has called them to do and that there is much more to this story than has already unfolded.

The afterschool program where 16 eighth graders attend this year has three younger participants

who are siblings of several of the eighth graders. They come too because their older siblings would have to stay at home to keep them otherwise. Because the Bacons wanted the students to come, they made the concessions needed to cover the younger children, keeping them in a safe environment with age-appropriate activities and care. The Bacons work with the public school system in the area to identify students who need the ministry most: they tell officials that they want young people who are struggling academically and socially.

Much of the program's success is because "we try to make everything hands-on," said Bacon, using scripture as an example to be illustrated by the students.

"We don't just care about them academically," Bacon said. "We don't just care about them spiritually. We care about all parts of their lives."

The wholistic approach keeps

students busy learning new ideas and making discoveries in areas in which they might previously have resisted. Afterschool students have a devotion and a snack everyday. They also read every day. Additionally, each day brings a new focus on specific areas. Mondays, the middle school students have a special session with a volunteer computer programmer who teaches them computer programming through hands-on instruction and special assigned projects.

Tuesdays are science days, while Wednesday is math time, and Thursday is the day for language arts and some fun time. Life skills classes also are fitted into the students' itinerary.

Asked about the kind of life skills students learn, Bacon gave the example of a session where students were asked to think

of three words that they want people they meet for the first time to remember about them. This led to students writing, reading and illustrating a group project. They even went on a field trip to a construction site where they retrieved an old tractor tire that they used for an art project.

Bacon says the ministry sometimes does a bit of "hand-holding" for parents who sometimes need help maneuvering through the school system or help paying utility bills and so forth. Parents compensate for money paid on their behalf by helping in the ministry's garden or doing other chores that benefit the ministry. Parenting classes also are among sessions offered.

The afterschool program is just one dimension of In His Steps Ministries. Volunteers like

Khrysten and like William Ward and Cameron Arcemont in the sports ministry are the hands, heart and feet of many activities: college students and professors, businessmen, high school students, church partners, and many others supply the manpower, money and various other resources to make the ministries work well.

There's also a Saturday Morning Reading Program each week for struggling students in grades 2-4.

Another group of students, branded as the Chosen Generation, comes on Saturdays for a session tailored for 9-12th graders who "want to go deeper in the word."

"Rev. Bacon works with them," his wife says.

While some of the "chosen generation" students may come to the Saturday sessions more because



**A few of the participants, staff and volunteers stop for a photo.**

"they know they are going to eat, play basketball and have other activities." Bacon points out that "Our goal may be different than some of theirs."

That's not all. The ministry also hosts groups that come from out of state to help the community in specific areas. Volunteers from Gloucester, Massachusetts have been bringing from high schoolers up to age 80 years old to the ministry to help out for the past 19 years. An Indiana group of high school and college students has come every year for more than a decade, as has a group of young professionals from California. Many of these groups have a Wheaton College connection to Rev. Bacon, who graduated from the Christian liberal arts college.

"We've had groups anywhere from 40-45 each including chaperons, from high school to young professionals and even an 80 year old coming to repair houses of the elderly, teach students special skills that they possess, bring supplies for a math and a



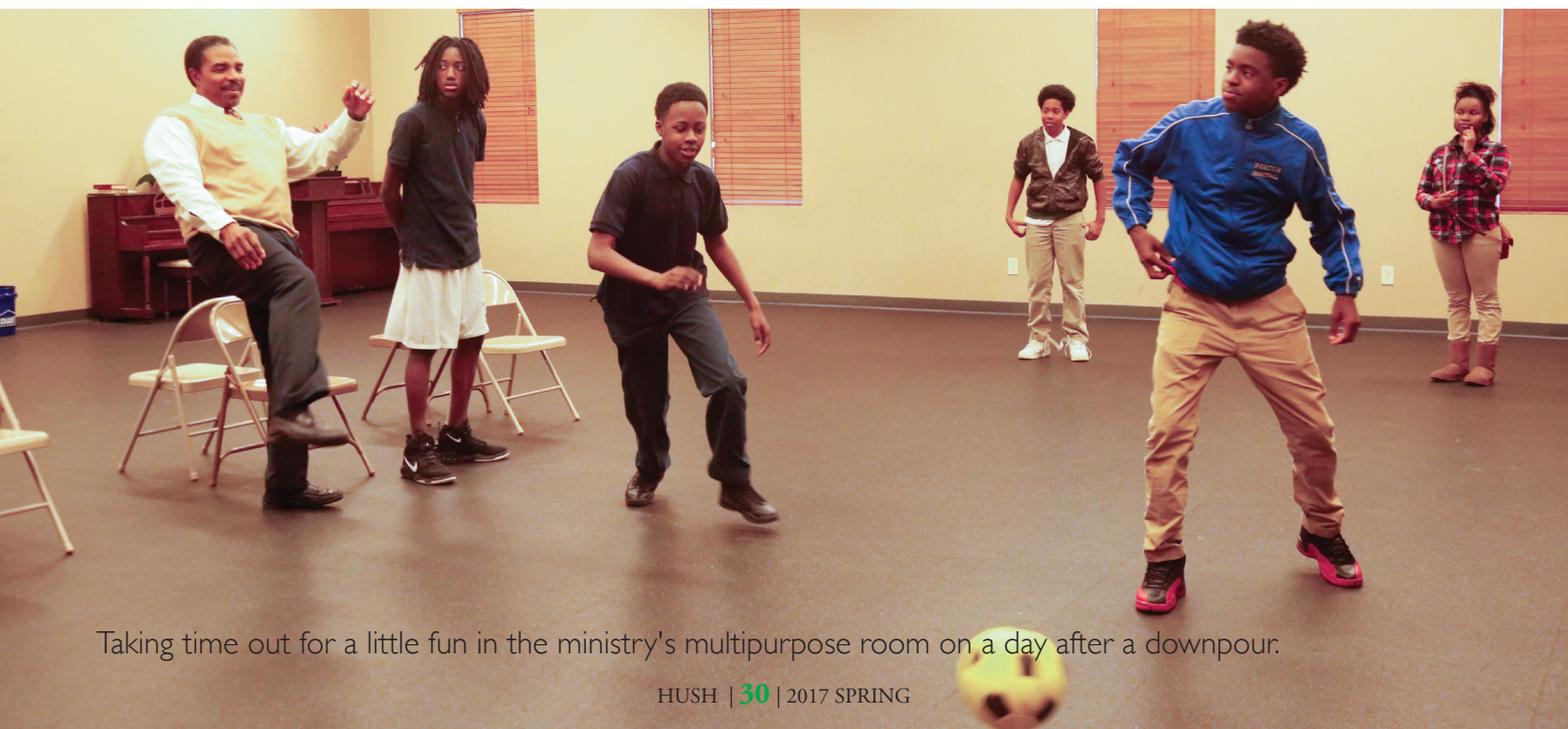
basketball camp as well as fill other needs.

"We try to match up needs with the skills they bring," Bacon said.

For Rev. Bacon, much of his time is spent in intervention ministry, working with young juveniles who have ended up in jail

or prison. He was shocked to know early in his ministry to young prisoners that "10 year-olds" were among them. Thankfully, "I don't see as many 10 year-olds as I did when I started doing this in 1994."

Rev. Bacon said that in his early ministry years, the 10 year-olds mostly came from single



Taking time out for a little fun in the ministry's multipurpose room on a day after a downpour.



Because many students don't have computers at home, they do research for homework and papers while at the ministry's afterschool program.

parent homes "where the mom let the kid have his way" and after becoming unable to control him, giving up and calling the sheriff to "come pick him up."

"I believe that if you don't start disciplining them while they are young, you're going to have trouble with them when they get older."

As Rev. Bacon continues to visit incarcerated young people weekly at facilities in several counties, his goal is to "show the love of Christ to these young guys because how you approach them will determine how they

receive what you have to say." He also believes that churches play a vital role in drastically reducing the incidence of youthful incarceration.

"I believe that if the churches would step up, we would eliminate the juvenile delinquency problem." A commitment by each church to take "10 boys" and provide education, social, mentoring activities would make a big difference.

"What we are finding is that we are so preoccupied with doing church activities instead of actually

being the church," said Rev. Bacon. "We make so many excuses as if God understands, but He holds us accountable."

In the meantime, Rev. Bacon and his wife keep plugging away at their several dimensional ministry, helping children, parents, grandparents and community to have better lives. Among their dreams, they see dormitories on their current property to give young people in impoverished and crime situations periodic respite as well as serve as lodging for hosting volunteers who travel to the community to lend a hand.



Under the guidance of a Jackson State University professor who came to volunteer, students at In His Steps Ministries expressed themselves on squares of material that were sewn together to make the quilt hanging above.