

Region 7 (Fairview Independent) ~ Westwood Baptist Church Wins Non-Profit Bridges Over Barriers Award

by Brenda Hale, Coordinator, Fairview Independent FRYSC

Ashland (KY) • As the coordinator of the Fairview FRYSC, it was my honor to nominate Westwood Baptist Church for the 2014 Bridges over Barriers Award.

As any FRYSC coordinator will tell you, the faith community plays a huge part in helping us provide for the children and families that we serve. When I came to Fairview 18 years ago, one of the first community partners that helped me was Westwood Baptist Church. They have always stepped up and assisted families in time of need with food baskets and other items they might need.



Each year the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, all six churches located in the Westwood community hold a combined Holiday service. The offering that is collected each year from this service has been donated to the Fairview FRYSC for the past 16 years to help with our programs and to assist with student needs. The fact that they chose our center to receive these funds has always meant so much.

Ten years ago, a group of women within the church decided to do a clothing drive and immediately open up the doors of the church for the community to come in and get the clothing that they needed. Thus the "Keeper's Closet" was established. Twice each year, the first time the week after school starts and the second time before Christmas the church collects clothing. The members then sort, size, launder and display the clothing in their gymnasium. They contact the FRYSC so we can do an "all call" to our families and put it on the school's website. This program has been a huge success and has taken a huge burden off of many families in providing for their children.

Drema Holmes, a member of the church and a retired Fairview teacher, came to the FRYSC three years ago and asked if there were items that the FRYSC needed that the church could try to get. At that time, we were really low on blue jeans in our clothing closet so it was decided that they would collect blue jeans for the entire month. The church membership got on board and the jean drive was a huge success, so much so that they didn't want to stop. They said what can we do next? And that is how we now receive monthly donations from the church. We have established items to be collected each month, but those can be changed as needs change.

May brings me to another service that they provide to the community. In May and June, they collect food the entire month. Some members like to give cash toward the project and these funds are used to purchase perishable items. Fairview FRYSC identifies families that are in need of help with food over the summer months and they come to the church the first of the month to pickup these food baskets. Families often share that when their children aren't in school that that is two extra meals a day that they have to provide, and sometimes it is very difficult. WOW! With all that said I bet you thought that I was done! Well you would be wrong.

Three years ago, one of the Sunday school classes had read in the paper about one of the other area schools distributing weekend snacks to students every week. Ms. Judith Gambill called the FRYSC and wanted to know if we had that program, and when they found out that we didn't, they wanted to know if we felt there was a need. And the ball was rolling and rolling quick, within two weeks we had permission forms back from 35 students and the weekend snacks have been going home ever since. This year the snack bags are being distributed to 47 elementary students on a weekly basis.

And then Mrs. Drema Holmes, who I had mentioned earlier came up with the idea of hosting a weekly 4 You program at the church every Friday all summer long! As a former educator, Ms. Holmes never tires of educating our youth. For three years now she has spent every Friday, all summer long, from 10 am to 11:30 am, playing games and teaching our community children. Yes they have a gospel lesson, but they also learn self-esteem, following directions, listening skills, and the list goes on.

I tell everyone that will listen that I have the BEST job in the world! It is community partners like Westwood Baptist Church that make what FRYSC coordinators do possible!