



ASLAN YOUTH MINISTRIES

A Presidential Point of Light

65 West Front Street ❖ Post Office Box 270 ❖ Red Bank, New Jersey 07701-0270
Telephone: 732-741-7824 ❖ Facsimile: 732-741-3284 ❖ E-Mail: aslanyouth@aol.com
Web Address: <http://www.aslanyouth.org>



*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

February 29, 2008

Dear Friends of Aslan,

“The Inner City.” What mental images do these three words bring to mind? Poverty? Minorities? Ghettos? Crime? Corruption? Or perhaps this phrase speaks more to fear ~ both for those who live in the inner city and for those who do not live there.

Monmouth County, New Jersey is a place of amazing contrasts. When people think of communities like Colts Neck, Rumson, Deal, Spring Lake, and Red Bank’s Eastside (increasingly considered one of the “hipper” towns in the Northeast), they are reminded that this area located along the Jersey Shore is one of the most affluent and beautiful places to live in America. When they think, however, of communities like the Westside of Asbury Park, Neptune, the housing projects of Long Branch and Red Bank’s Westside, completely different images come to mind. Although there is much talk about the revitalization of Asbury Park’s and Long Branch’s oceanfront properties (along with plans for “westside” development in Asbury in particular), the local front page headlines are still dominated by articles about problems in these communities with the Crypts and Bloods street gangs and a number of other often violent crimes.

One local newspaper article discussed the various reasons why children join a gang ~ a strong desire for identity, a desire to belong, and the deep need for a sense of family. These very reasons are precisely why Aslan Youth Ministries has for 32 years been so successful in turning the lives of at-risk children around. Every week, year after year, we remind our kids that they are a part of the Aslan family; and, most importantly, they are a part of God’s family.

For those children who stick with us and keep coming back, it is rare that we ever lose them back to the streets and the gangs. The key words here are “those children who keep coming back.” It sometimes takes years and years (and years) for the seeds that we’ve planted to bear fruit. Yet we continue to trust that even in the saddest and most discouraging cases, God will eventually use the seeds of His Love and His Word that have been planted.

Lynn Ann and Craig recently had dinner with Chris and Birgit Butler and their young seven-year-old son, Cian. They point to Chris as the ultimate that Aslan could ever hope for in the life of an Aslan child. Growing up in abject poverty in a single-parent home in this area, they remember the days when Chris had an old threadbare blanket for his bedroom door. Now thirty years later he is happily married and tremendously successful. Having reached the rank of Commander in the Navy, Chris served his country faithfully for over 20 years as one of the

(Over)

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leading Naval scientists in the world. Throughout his illustrious career he has been involved in critically important security issues that continue to affect our country. Since retiring from the Navy, he, Birgit, and Cian now live in Perth, Australia, where he works for a major Australian company.

Then there is Aimee*, a young woman from our Asbury Park program who has attended Aslan for 8 years. Having experienced some of the most traumatic conditions of any Aslan child we've ever worked with, Aimee has ~ with Aslan's help ~ gradually been transformed into a sweet-spirited young 15-year-old. Last year she was selected from hundreds of applicants to receive a comprehensive four-year scholarship to the Milton Hershey School in Hershey, PA. Through the Hershey School she is receiving one of the best private school educations in the country that will prepare her for college and for a successful and fulfilling life. Aimee is just one of many examples of children who ~ through the faith and love they experience with Aslan ~ are finding hope.

Although I will say it, it truly goes without saying that we cannot reach children like Chris, Aimee, and hundreds more without your support and prayers. In closing, I want to ask you one more question. How does God see the "inner city"? Are the inner city areas of Asbury Park and the other cities Aslan serves too hard for God to change and therefore beyond hope? Of course not. God, however, uses people like you who are reading this letter to give your financial support and your time so that Aslan's faithful staff and volunteers can be His hands, His feet, and His voice for children who are discouraged, downtrodden, and seemingly beyond hope. Pray for God's Kingdom to increase through the work of Aslan. And believe ~ as C.S. Lewis wrote ~ for Aslan's "deeper magic" to break the spell of the evil one. Thank you again for your past, present, and Lord willing, continued future support.

Serving with joy,

Jim & Yvonne

Jim & Yvonne Barnickel
Aslan Volunteers ~ Asbury Park

* Aimee's name is changed to protect her privacy.



*Changing the world . . .
one child at a time!*