

ASLAN YOUTH MINISTRIES

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OCTOBER 2008

Dear Friends,

It's been a year since Kathryn and I returned to Aslan. In that time many changes have taken place here at Aslan as well as in our personal lives. Most recently, Kathryn and I welcomed Micah Stephen into the world. He is a beautiful, precious blessing from God. Everybody warned me that with the arrival of a baby would change my life. Sleep would be a luxury of the past. There would be less time to do what I wanted to do. An endless parade of dirty diapers would invade what little sleep I did get. And finally, I would experience a general loss of sanity! Of course, these changes don't compare to the joy I have when holding Micah in my arms!

What I was not anticipating is how becoming a father would refocus the way I look at the Aslan kids. Holding Micah I am struck with a greater sense of urgency and determination to see Aslan kids empowered to overcome the difficulties they face in reaching their dreams. My hope for Micah as he grows up is the same hope I have for the Aslan kids today, that they will discover their inherent self-worth and develop the skills necessary to transcend life's obstacles. Many of the dreams they grow up with fuel the drive and determination needed to succeed in school, in relationships, and in the broader world. Unfortunately for many of the kids we work with, many of these dreams break under the stress of trying to survive the hopelessness and disillusionment that surrounds them.



This reality is captured in the story of Jonathan. Jonathan was the type of kid who had stars in his eyes. He dreamed everyday of becoming an NBA basketball star. Everyday he practiced his basketball game, improving his skills and impressing all who had the opportunity to watch him play. Jonathan's dream stood in stark contrast to the reality of his daily life. His mom was in and out of jail and his father struggled with extreme alcoholism, leaving Jonathan to fend for himself. As Jonathan grew older, many of his friends gave in to the pressure of the various gangs that



preyed on his neighborhood. These pressures seemed to lurk around every corner, threatening to steal Jonathan's dreams.

When Jonathan started attending Aslan, it didn't take long to fall in love with this sweet, starry-eyed kid. However, Jonathan's big dreams, as with so many of our kid's dreams, risked mutating into an unrealistic escape from the gritty reality of his daily life. He was at risk of having his dream turn into a fantasy. Becoming an NBA star, as fantastic as that may seem, is a wonderful dream if it encourages him to work hard. It slips into the realm of fantasy when that dream tricks him into thinking he doesn't have to work hard because he's already an amazing basketball player.

At the heart of every Aslan program is the goal of establishing a personal relationship with kids so that we can share Jesus' love with them. This is not a warm and fuzzy kind of love. This is a love that demands us to head straight into the brokenness of

these kids lives and offer a hope that empowers kids like Jonathan to courageously confront the fractured reality of their lives. It is a Love that commands us to do all that is within our power to help kids like Jonathan transform life's obstacles into opportunities!

Jonathan's story did not end with a broken dream and an escape into fantasy. He still has his dreams. The hope for Jonathan however, is that through Aslan someone took the time to lovingly and relentlessly pursue him. He still has to struggle with the reality of his broken home, a father that continues to fail him, gangs enticing him into their world, and a society that has given up on him. But these struggles are less threatening, less intimidating, because Aslan has made every effort to shine Jesus' love into the darkness of Jonathan's world. He may never become an NBA basketball star, but he has learned to recognize that his dreams require him to face the reality of his life today so that he can develop the skills he'll need tomorrow. Aslan has shown him that with Jesus he can once again aim high!

In His Service,

Douglas C. Eagles

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P.S. There are countless Jonathan's walking the streets of Asbury Park, Long Branch, Red Bank and Ouanaminthe, Haiti. The only way we can continue reaching these kids is through the generous support of individuals who recognize the value of sharing love with a young child. **If you have not donated to Aslan in a while, please consider writing a check to support our efforts. Any amount helps!**



* We've changed the names of Aslan children to protect their identities.

