



Merry Christmas

December 15, 2020

Dear Friends & Family,

I have lived in Fargo for five years, been on staff with Red River Youth for Christ for over three years, been dating my boyfriend, Cody, for almost three years, and lived in the same apartment since I moved here. I have had many different visitors and roommates here, including a pregnant and homeless teen mom this past year. To say that COVID has brought about challenges in all areas of life this year is an understatement. As adults, we have been struggling through this year, and we at Youth for Christ have seen firsthand how this ministry is needed now more than ever. There is a whole list of repercussions happening from everything surrounding COVID, not just the death tolls projected in the news. We are seeing lonely, depressed, and isolated teens who need the healing that only the Lord can offer.

As if 2020 alone has not stretched me personally to my limits, I felt led to take in a homeless, pregnant teen mom. Momma B is a young lady I met a couple of years ago in West Central I have been building a relationship with ever since. For many of the kids we love, merely showing up is like speaking love through a megaphone to them. This past year Momma B and I went to countless appointments together, I helped her obtain permanent housing, and I was even headed into labor and delivery with her. Though external circumstances left me at the door, I was the one who showed up for her. When I picked up the two to bring them home, baby B was barely over the car seat weight limit, and I am confident I have never held such a teeny baby. Within weeks of bringing momma and baby into my home and countless prayers, momma B's housing got approved, and our team moved the two into their very first apartment. I also got to be part of encouraging the rekindling of momma B's relationship with her mom. Recently, Momma B and the boyfriend have been trying to work things out, causing some issues leading to baby B's placement in CPS's care. We are currently navigating through the ups and downs and CPS's attempt to reunite mother and child. Two and a half years into our friendship, and she has my phone number memorized. I am her emergency contact on almost everything, we have spent countless hours doing life together, we attend church together whenever possible, and I aim to keep loving on her and pointing her to Christ through all life's ups and downs.



There are many youth like Momma B, and some of them we meet within the West Central Regional Juvenile Center. West Central is mostly finished with its several-year expansion project and moved from a 15-bed non-secure and 32-bed secure facility to a 32-bed non-secure and 65-bed secure facility. This expansion includes a new dorm-like housing and life skills program called the CLIPS Program (Community Living Independent Programming and Skills). This program is for various youth, such as those aging out of the system or who have no placement. The goal is to teach them life and independent living skills to become successful adults and re-integrate them slowly into the community. This program is only the second one of its kind in the nation, and the only other is in Texas. We are excited about this program and the unlimited opportunities to partner with them through this new adventure. It is partly sad in this expansion that so much space is needed, but also a blessing that they can keep so many of these kids closer to home versus sending them to other facilities hours away. This brings us more opportunities to love on kids. We are now running two weekly church services, 3-4 weekly Bible studies, and numerous one-on-ones. We have also been strengthening our aftercare program. Being minors, it is a kid's job to contact us when they get



out of the facility if we cannot be there when their guardian picks them up. Many are starting to cash in our bribe for a free meal if they connect with us when they get out. We have had more youth contact us this last year alone than we have had in the previous three combined. We have helped them with many different things from rides to the food shelf, to obtaining employment, to seeking out housing, and so much more. During the first round of COVID shutdowns, we were locked out of the facility from Mid-March to Mid-June. However, we were able to hold daily Zoom and Google Meet Bible studies and one-on-ones. When the restrictions were adjusted, we were among the first programs let



back in. We have recently been told by top staff and administration that they value what we do, and should we face another shutdown, we would be deemed an essential service. To God be the glory of these opportunities and open doors!

New this year, we are implementing a memory verse of the week challenge at West Central. We are offering special snacks for those who memorize and can recite the scripture. A \$.24 pack of gushers or two seems like a relatively simple way to encourage youth to memorize scripture, but if that is what motivates them to get in the Word, by all

means! The center staff has even started helping the kids practice the verse during the week; how amazing is that!?! We usually barely even make it in the pods before kids start excitedly shouting the verse at us. This year we even had a girl come through the facility who didn't speak English. One of our wonderful volunteers went home and translated that week's verse into her language and brought it to her so she could participate and memorize it too. We pray that this scripture will stick with them and come to them when they need it most.

Another testament to the ministry is that only a small percentage of Bibles are left behind when kids leave. Previously, it would not be uncommon for a Bible to be one of the many belongings left behind when a kid gets out, but they have started making them their own. They mark the verse of the week and often have questions about the stories or other scripture passages. We are so thankful for the opportunities to give teens personal Bibles.

Due to many of the schools flipping between in-person and virtual learning, our interaction with the alternative schools is limited this year. However, we did a big kickoff picnic (outdoors and socially distanced) with Red River Alternative Learning Center this fall. That has allowed us to re-connect with some of the youth and created further opportunities for one-on-ones. We have also been permitted to do (socially distanced) lunches with Woodrow students twice a month, the Christmas Dinner, and the Graduation Celebration for them. We are just thrilled that we can be interacting and loving on these students again.

This is just a snippet of the exciting things God is doing through the ministry of RRYFC. We know that only God can heal these kids, and this ministry is needed now more than ever before. Would you please keep our team and I in your prayers as we continue to befriend these teens, get to know their story, share our story, and ultimately connect them to God's story? Please pray that God would continue to use us as vessels to impact teens' lives for eternity.



As 2020 comes to a close, would you consider ending on a positive note by making a year-end gift and supporting the ministry Red River Youth for Christ? Since we are a non-profit, we rely on partners like you to help fund this ministry. Due to the tough times all around, financial support has been down as expected. Would you please prayerfully consider making a year-end financial gift and investing in the lives of teens? Donations can be mailed in the enclosed envelope, or you can give online by going to www.redriveryfc.com and clicking on the "Give to YFC" link at the top of the page. All donations are tax-deductible and will be receipted if an email address is included.

I am so thankful for your prayers and support! Thank you from everyone here at Red River Youth for Christ and the students we love! Your thoughts, prayers, and support are truly a gift!

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

Danielle Hill

