



FYI partners with Truck N4 Tykes, BCU on Christmas toy, food aid event

FYI, Bethel Churches United (BCU) and Truck N4 Tykes are once again partnering on a holiday toy and food giveaway this month. But this year, it will look a lot different due to the continuing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The annual FYI Grinch event at New Carlisle Elementary School had to be cancelled out of safety concerns. That didn't stop us, though. Truck N4 Tykes still held their second annual pre-Christmas event Nov. 21, adding more than 200 toys to those already collected during their first Christmas In July Toy Run.

Another donation of over 700 toys was made by Christian nonprofit partner Agape Distribution in Sidney, in connection with Toys For Tots.

These toys plus other gift card donations from BCU churches will be pooled together to create a Christmas Toy Shop at FYI's office (468 N. Dayton-Lakeview Rd. in New Carlisle) on Sat., Dec. 12, with all distributions being made by appointment only. Around 100 families and between 300-400 children are scheduled to get toys that day. Then on Dec. 21 and 22, BCU will be serving more than 240 families with donations of 2-3 days worth of holiday food, plus assorted extras like gift cards, candy, fruits, veggies and other holiday treats.

BCU has 11 churches and two organizations (ROTC at Tecumseh High School and American Legion Post 286 in New Carlisle) helping them with what has become an annual service to the western Clark County community.

"There is so much of a need," said Robyn Anderson, BCU's president. "I also feel that we are meeting their needs spiritually. Our mission is to be a cooperative outreach ministry and to commit to the basic needs, feeding them each year."

Harvesting Hope a big hit

FYI's Harvesting Hope hybrid event Oct. 15 was a smashing success on all levels, with the biggest winners being the kids and young families who are and will be rescued through our mission.

So far, with your prayerful and heartfelt help, FYI has raised a new record of almost \$21,000 through this event. However, we consider that secondary to what we know is the most impactful blessing: gaining more supporters of FYI. We have been blessed to witness how God is adding daily to FYI's family.

"God has been amazing," said FYI Executive Director Nikki Stefanow. "I cried (with joy) all weekend about the responses we got. On the bottom of one response card, someone wrote 'I have a story.' I can't wait to hear that story!"

More than 100 champions attend the in-person event, with 65 of them checking out FYI for the first time. Several others tuned in via the virtual video event that was offered at the same time.

"People said, 'I've never heard

about your organization before and here it is in our backyard,'" Stefanow said. "The money is secondary. Having so many people who had never heard about us before that night was amazing. You can't outdo God."

Another blessing of the hybrid event is that the virtual event's 21-minute video can be shared with supporters throughout the year. We would like to ask everyone who supports FYI's mission to share the video on their Facebook page and/or email it to people who may be interested in learning about FYI in our fight for the most vulnerable of our communities. The video can be found at fyiohio.org/harvestinghope.

FYI is still accepting donations to raise funds for its important mission.

"Our goal was \$25,000, but somehow God is telling me it will be \$50,000," Nikki said. "Maybe it won't come like we think, but I believe God is going to provide everything that we need and even more than we can hope, dream or imagine." Donations can be made through mail or on our website at www.fyiohio.org/support-us.



Brown feels called to new position

FYI's new Parenting Network Director Amy Brown isn't quite sure why God led her to FYI, but she does know He is the one who led her to a job where her skills could be used for a good cause.

"It was such a smooth and easy process that I know I am supposed to be here," she said. "I don't know why He has put me here, but I know He has put me here."

Amy had recently returned to the workforce after a five-year absence but wanted a job change with flexibility. Her new position offered that and more.

"I like what FYI stands for," she said. "I've known mostly about the Parenting Network. There is an extreme amount of potential for growth and having a business development background I can help in the transition of what Nikki (Stefanow, FYI's Executive Director) wants to do."

Amy spent six years in business to business sales, then 10 years running her own direct sales business as she stayed home so she could pour into her two young children. She has a degree in organizational leadership and was able to use it in direct sales. Her new position at FYI offers her a chance to use it even more.

"When I had the opportunity to go back to work part-time and use my leadership skills, it seemed a natural choice," she said. "I really didn't choose FYI, it just kind of happened. I've always known about FYI because I was friends with Nikki. We met for coffee like we do every year just to stay in touch and it just happened."

Amy already has set goals for the Parenting Network.

"Right now, we want to get back to full schedules of assisting our clients, either by phone or in person," she said. "(We'll focus on) helping families who need assistance and growing our client base. Moving forward (in the future), I'd like to see more growth in the amount of people we can see and adding employees so we can help more people."

FYI's 'Bike Whisperer' retires

Mike Kammer, who has been fondly referred to as FYI's "Bike Whisperer," has announced he is retiring. Because of this, FYI can no longer accept used bikes for the Dominic's Bikes For Kids program.

The program, named to honor the memory of the late Dominic Maiorano, started in 2017 to give foster kids their own bicycles and grew due to his efforts.

"Without Mike, we wouldn't have had this program," said FYI Executive Director Nikki Stefanow. "What initially started as an effort to get 10 bikes for foster kids turned into 100s of bikes for foster children over the years."



Real Life adapting to constant change

"Semper Gumby" is the motto Real Life ... Teen Choices Director Rebecca Swearingen used in her military days to refer to the constant flexibility needed when things changed "again." It has also been the motto the Real Life team is living by these COVID-19 hampered days as they adapt to the needs of the schools they are serving.

"Semper Gumby is a play on words from the Marine Corps motto Semper Fidelis, which means always faithful," Rebecca said. "So Semper Gumby means always flexible. Gumby was the little green toy that was super flexible. It applies to our program because we are having to be super flexible."

At the start of the school year the Real Life schedule was pretty full. However, they knew at any given time things could completely change ... and they have. From week to week, day to day and sometimes minute to minute teaching plans have been fluid, moving from in-person to virtual to sometimes even blended.

The team has worked together to make it work and persevere through the continuous change. That teamwork has spilled over to their own families, who recently helped with the rearranging of the Real Life area of the FYI office.

"All the members of the Real Life team are parents and struggle with the constant change at the schools with our own children," Rebecca said. "We have to support each other through this time through laughter, tears, stories and prayer."

As 2020 closes, the team continues to serve the students the best they can and complete as much of the curriculum as possible with the given restraints.

"The team is committed to bringing joy and hope to the schools and doing the best they can with what they are given," she said.

That means remaining "real."

"The team is living what they teach ... flexibility, healthy coping techniques, communication and conflict resolution," Rebecca said.



Community garden hits donation goal

The goal for FYI's community gardeners was lofty: 2,000 pounds of fresh produce donated to local food pantries in 2020 after giving away 1,300 pounds in 2019. The growing season has ended and the goal has been reached ... and more.

This year's community gardeners donated 1,122 pounds of produce to Bethel Churches United's New Carlisle Food Pantry and 932 pounds more of veggies to the Park Layne Food Pantry, for a total donated amount of 2,054 pounds.

There were nine families who tended plots for their own produce during the 2020 season, also an increase from last season. Most also pitched in on the community plots.

"I was really happy," said Tipton of the results. "All of the gardeners were really proud of what they did. The biggest challenge was not having the right equipment to do the job. A tractor, plow and tiller would come in handy."

More community donors are helping as well. Among them is charity-minded Henderson Turf, which donated the use of the land, while The Plastic Lumber Store in Springfield donated materials for a second water bench (pictured).

Other supporters were United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties, Gateway Business Group, New Carlisle Rotary Club, Clark County Combined Health District, OSU-Clark Extension and Clark County Solid Waste District.

Mentoring expands in Springfield

How do you continue to positively impact students with empowering life skills training when your mentoring efforts that were mostly based in schools have pretty much been shut down due to health concerns that stem from a pandemic?

"We're just kind of shaking trees with other organizations who also help kids and saying, 'This is what we do,' 'This is how we can help kids,' and 'How can we work together to help kids?'" said FYI Mentoring Program Co-Director Julie Driskill. "I am really excited about all of these new opportunities."

Among those "new opportunities" is a budding collaboration with the CoHatch Marketplace in downtown Springfield. FYI is also working with the Department of Jobs and Family Services' Children's Services, Global Impact STEM Academy and Project Jericho on possible future collaborations.

Add these to an already established partnership with the Clark County Juvenile Detention Center that began the fall of 2019 and it's easy to see that the direction God is taking FYI is not only towards schools but also outside their walls.

FYI's agreement with CoHatch for meeting space gives it another presence in downtown Springfield. The Parenting Network has already had an office in Springfield for years. Now the Mentoring Program's footprint is expanding there as well. FYI is renting a conference room at CoHatch for eight-week group sessions using the PATH curriculum, a clarifying tool that helps one manage, navigate, and lead their best lives.

After that, FYI will be referring kids to a one-on-one mentoring relationship.

"Mental health throughout COVID has really been challenged," said Mentoring Program co-Director Bryan Moore. "This is giving kids a safe place to come to where they can express mental health concerns in a judgment-free environment." The need for the CoHatch meeting space was partially necessitated by referrals coming through collaborations outside the school building and the growing impact on Springfield.

"The best thing is that we have more parental engagement," said Moore. "(We are) reaching out to the parents and working through them and getting them engaged with what we are doing. Then we're able to share other FYI resources from our other programs with these parents."

Driskill, in her fourth year in the Mentoring Program and second as its director, is excited about its continued growth despite the current COVID environment.

"When COVID hit, we knew we had to get creative," Driskill continued. "We are different. Where we really want to grow is helping kids to be more self-aware. To get them into a pathway that they like, so they can get a mentor or an internship; showing them where those opportunities are."

EASY WAYS TO GIVE TO FYI

FYI is a faith-based, non-profit organization that relies on generous giving which starts with God and comes through our champions. All donations allow us to positively impact the children and families He brings to us. There are several ways you can give ...

Of your resources

1. One-time or monthly online through our website www.fyiohio.org.
2. Call us at (937) 845-0403 to donate or



ask for info to mail in a donation.

3. Call our office to arrange for an in-kind donation of items. (For specific items that the Parenting Network accepts, call our office.)

Of your time:

1. Just call us and we'll get you set up right away in an area that fits your skills.
2. Become an intern (year-round).
3. Students can volunteer some of their community service hours with us.

FROM NIKKI'S HEART

FYI has so much to be thankful for

Celebrating the Thanksgiving holiday naturally brings with it a realization of all that we have to be thankful of. Recently, as I thought of the positive impact FYI has made on our community and the countless number of lives it has saved in the four-plus decades of its existence, that attitude of gratitude swept over me.

At the top of that list is our thankfulness for the tireless work and persevering determination of co-founders Pat Banaszak and the late Carol Tipton. Their vision and fortitude to start FYI 42 years ago has given us the opportunity to continue this mission of rescuing children and families from trauma and giving them hope for a better future. Without their initial vision, we wouldn't be here today.

I am thankful for the staff that God has brought here to work with us. Because of their passion and their constancy of purpose to be here, lives are being changed and saved from a future of hopelessness.

I love the volunteers who serve with joyful hearts, supporting us in so many ways - big and small. They bring great encouragement to our team, and are



imperative to the success of our mission.

I feel blessed that God has given us an opportunity to come alongside those we serve, from the tiniest baby to the troubled teen to the unsure parent. He has allowed us to be a light to them in a world full of darkness.

It has been a difficult year for so many, but we can still rejoice, being mindful of the blessings God has given. As we begin to celebrate this Christmas season, remember the true light that comes from Christ, bringing hope and joy to the world.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Counting it All Joy,
Nikki

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS: WHAT OUR STAFF IS THANKFUL FOR

Despite the challenges and trial of 2020, we at FYI still have so much to be thankful for. If you have a home, food and people who love you, you are blessed. So in the spirit of Thanksgiving, we asked our staff and board to share what they are thankful for:

Julie Driskill, Mentoring Program Co-Director:

"I am thankful for second chances, grace, and a new day; that God watches over His children and leads with a light, steady hand if we oblige. I'm thankful I don't have to know the future, but I can trust the hand of the One who guides me and all who call upon His name."



Driskill



Swearingen

Rebecca Swearingen, Real Life Teen Choices Director: "I am thankful that I have a job that I am passionate about; that I work with fantastic people who are also passionate about what we do; that I am a flexible person; for life, health, family and friends; for quiet moments; a director that cares about me and our ministry!"

Amy Brown, Parenting Network Director: "I am thankful for the chance to be a part of an organization that is working to empower families and transform lives."

Jennifer Kennedy, Real Life Teen Choices Educator: "I am thankful for my kids. They make me happy and remind me that life is worth living, to grow and challenge myself. I am thankful for my job and the opportunity to grow, change and lean on God to help kids in our community. I am thankful for friendship. to have people in my life that love me through the good, the bad and the ugly!"

David Johnston, board member: "I am thankful for: People with a quick smile and a slow scowl; people who take their mission seriously, but not themselves; people who have seen it all and can still be surprised."

FYI VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

FYI has been blessed with another new board member, Ryan T. Wallace. We asked him a few questions so you can get to know him better:

What is your background? Ryan is an administrative law attorney who resides in German Township. He currently serves as vice president of the Friends of the New Carlisle Public Library, is an Ohio High School Athletic Association basketball official, serves as a voluntary arbitrator and is an active member of the Gathering of Miami Valley men's group. He has also been involved with FFA, was a board member for the Springfield Arts Council and was an assistant football coach at Urbana University for two years. He is a graduate of St. Louis University's School of Law and Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business.



What is your family like? He and wife Kristian have four children: Olivia, Ali, Hunter and Hayden. "Family is important to me. My flexible work schedule affords me some time to be with my family and be involved in other things in the community."

What are your passions? Besides being actively involved in the community, he is passionate about heavily involved in multiple efforts to fight human trafficking.

Why did you join the FYI team?

Ryan said his strong passion for FYI's mission of rescuing children and empowering families led him to volunteer. "I want to help provide every reason for students to have a successful life and mothers to have successful pregnancies and a positive experience as a mother."

How do you hope to impact the FYI mission? "Certainly, my legal background can help in some areas. But I think I bring a lot more to the table than that, like my experience in team building as a coach, building relationships in the community and I love setting and achieving goals. I am very goal-oriented. I like challenging situations and being able to overcome them."