



What Can One Ministry Do?

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For 11-year-old Monice*, April 22, 2016, is a date that will be forever etched in her memory. It was supposed to be another ordinary Friday of hanging out on the playground behind Frayser Elementary School. This was the only place in the neighborhood that parents considered to be safe for their children. But sadly, the parents and little Monice would find out that no one could guarantee safety—not even for children on a playground.

Just as the sun was about to set and practically every kid in the neighborhood was behind the school, two shadowy figures emerged from one side of the building. Before anyone could tell what was happening, the pair opened fire in the midst of the crowd. Monice and other children ran for their lives. But when she looked back for the friend that they all knew as Karra Lay, she could see his lifeless body lying crumpled on the ground. 17-year-old Kerr-Dulea Neil had been shot to death right where they had been playing.

Needless to say, parents went into panic mode. What could they do? How could they protect their children when a shooting had happened on the playground?

Later that evening, I received the telephone call from Monice’s mother, who described how Monice and the other children had barely escaped with their lives. Almost in hysterics, she kept repeating the question, “What are we supposed to do to protect our children?”

The question was haunting, especially since I already knew that Kerr-Dulea Neil had just joined the ranks of more than 400 children in Memphis who had been shot, shot at, or killed since 2015.¹ So, I clearly understood parental concerns as the summer months were looming just weeks away.

The question that lay before our ministry was: *what could we do* to address such a huge problem? What would God have us to do? We decided to pray for God’s wisdom to guide us. Then, we began to look at options to help these desperate parents.

The result was the birth of the *Summer Enrichment Camp for Teen and Pre-Teen Girls*, which was launched at the end of the school year and continued to the beginning of the next.



Ten girls between the ages of 11 and 14 were enrolled in the camp, which provided spiritual guidance, enrichment activities and group discussions. The camp featured daily devotions, talks about community issues, civil rights matters, the elections, and discussions on the contributions of African-American women. The camp featured outings to colleges, to noted sites around the city

including: The National Civil Rights Museum, Slavehaven Museum, The Children’s Museum, The Bass Pro Megastore and Museum, and The Peabody Hotel Ducks Promenade, to the taping of the television news program, *Informed Sources*, and to the Memphis City Zoo. Other educational outings included visits to historic markers for Robert R. Church, Nathan Bedford Forest, and Tom Lee.

The teens visited the Putt-Putt Golf and Game Center and had lunch at Hard Rock Cafe. They also participated in a Service Day to learn what it means to serve the needy and help others. They went to the library, were involved in a reading program, and were engaged in daily painting, coloring, and crafts activities. They used the computer, had cooking classes, and participated in table setting and practice in etiquette. Finally, the girls produced and performed their own fashion show, entitled *Beyond the Lights Extravaganza*. All of the fashions were taken from donations made to the ministry.



As we said, the program was organized quickly, and the ministry had limited funds. There was no paid staff. All of the work was done by volunteers. Our mantra has always been, *if each would do a little, then no one must do a lot*, so we stepped out on faith believing that we would succeed. And, we did. In less than three weeks, we were able to raise \$1,700, and the camp was born.

After the camp had ended, we asked our participants to write us letters to summarize their thoughts and critiques about the camp, and to let us know how we might improve it next year. Following are a few of their comments:

“I liked the camp because I got to meet new people. We went on field trips, and we learned about the Bible. We also learned about slavery and about Black women who are still alive and doing great things today.”
–Janosha, age 12

“Every day, we would come into the camp at 8:30am, pray, and then say our books of the Bible. We went to the library in groups where the teens would go to Cloud 901 room and younger girls would go to the children’s area. We went to a lot of educational places and learned why they are so important. Thank you for all that you have done. I had a lot of fun.” –Nevijah, age 13

“I learned the 66 books of the Bible. We went to the Civil Rights Museum and learned about slavery and segregation. We talked about Black women who are alive today and making history, like Oprah Winfrey and Michelle Obama. We painted and cleaned one of the ministry houses and had a good time. I think the camp will be even better next year.” –Jamaya, age 11.

“I learned many things that would help me to grow as a teenager. It has had a huge boost to my confidence and was fun-filled. We learned many life lessons, biblical studies, etiquette, Black History, and talked about political issues. The home that we fixed up for the homeless person to live in was an awesome experience. We worked hard and played at the same time. HER Faith Ministries Summer Camp was like a second home for me. I can’t wait until next year. It meant the world to me!” –Jada, age 14.

“I’m only 13 years old, but I learned a lot in summer camp. We went to many outings, walked along the Mississippi River, and went to Tom Lee Park. We saw Mud Island and drove to many areas around Memphis that I had not seen. I liked eating pizza and milkshakes. We had so much fun. I hope I can do this again next year.” –Octavia age 13.

Sadly, Monice was not able to participate in the camp in 2016. We are hopeful that she will be able to do so this year. All of the participants asked whether they might pre-enroll now in order to save their camp space.

Our Ministry learned that though we were not able to serve all the children in the Frayser community, God showed us how to make a difference in the lives of a few.



The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at awatkins@nbacares.org.

ⁱ WMC-TV News – Action News Five, “435 Children Shot, Shot At in Memphis During 2015.” <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mom-of-slain-memphis-teen-says-rap-song-describes-shooting/>

*Not her real name.