

A photograph of two young women with wet hair and skin, smiling and hugging each other. They are wearing blue life jackets and are in a body of water with large blue and yellow inflatable rings in the background. Other people are visible in the background, also in the water.

A TIME TO EMBRACE

looking back on a
summer of community,
worship and service

the pandemic, mental health & young people
new at youthfront | youthfront mvps



The Pandemic, Mental Health and Young People

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on so many churches, Christian organizations and ministries. I remember the moment, one month into the pandemic, when an overwhelming sense of despair gripped me over the bleak reality of shutting down programs and the closing of our headquarters and ministry sites. It seemed like a tragic ending of the amazing privilege I had experienced serving Jesus during 45 years of ministry at Youthfront. It felt like impossibility (death) was closing in to get the final say. In the midst of that existential crisis, God came as minister to me, to Youthfront, to bring possibility (resurrection) and hope.

Now, as I look back, I'm astonished at what God has done in our midst and through the ministry of Youthfront. You can see and read in this edition of Youthfront News how new ministries were birthed and how much deeper the passion for following Jesus Christ in ministry for young people and their families has grown. In many ways, the pandemic has led to a recalibration of the ministries of Youthfront and has reordered our priorities in line with God's Kingdom agenda. We have engaged in processes of discernment about how to respond to the spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical needs all around us.

One of the issues that became obvious to us during the pandemic was the accelerating mental health crisis in our country. Even before the pandemic emerged, the Centers for Disease Control, in its Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Data Summary and Trends Report for 2009 to 2019 highlighted the developing crises. More than one in three high school students had experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2019, a 40 percent increase since 2009. In 2019, approximately 1 in 6 youth reported making a suicide plan in the past

year, a 44 percent increase since 2009. Approximately half of all mental health illnesses and conditions emerge by the 14th year of life but most go largely ignored and untreated. The March 2021 edition of US News & World Report reported that researchers found that 46 percent of 977 parents of teenagers interviewed declared that their children had shown new or worsening mental health conditions during the pandemic.

Researchers at Pew Research Center have stated that the increase in adolescent mental health issues have been fueled by increased ownership and use of smartphones and social media. Parents report that the disruption of the pandemic has dramatically increased the use of, and dependency on, texting and social media use. Particularly at risk are teen girls, who report almost double the anxiety and depression compared to boys. With the recent revelation that Facebook and Instagram have been aware how devastating their algorithms are, we are shocked that they doubled down their efforts to make their apps even more addictive as they fuel unhealthy eating disorders and unrealistic "ideal" body images. This is demonic and destructive to our young people. We must speak up about inhumane technology consumeristic strategies that are so harmful.

In August, Youthfront launched Presence-Centered Counseling Center (read more about it in this on p. 6). We are already adding a second therapist to respond to the growing mental health needs we are addressing. Please pray for this initiative and pray for this emerging generation of young people facing such profound challenges in their lives.

Mike King

NEW AT YOUTHFRONT

Nights in the Neighborhood... and more

Youthfront's YF Neighborhood has launched a new suite of local programs designed for youth and small groups. The best of Youthfront's Missional Journey service and relational experiences are now packaged into something youth and small groups can participate in and include in weekly or monthly rhythms. Nights in the Neighborhood (Wednesdays) and Service Saturdays include a chance to meet new friends in intercultural fellowship, taste authentic dishes from local cooks, and serve in projects that better and strengthen the Argentine (KCKS) neighborhood. Learn more and register for an upcoming experience at youthfront.com/yfnexperiences.

Resourcing Youth Workers

This fall, Youthfront hosted youth ministry workers and volunteers at a workshop featuring author and theologian Andy Root. Root's "Youth Ministry in an Age of Over-Parenting" session focused on the persistent "I don't have time for youth group" challenge and how youth pastors, volunteers and the church can use narrative and story to reframe what youth ministry offers. View a recording of Andy's presentation at youthfront.com/ywt-videos. Youthfront also hosted a dialogue for youth workers with Erik Leafblad, Assistant Professor of Missional Ministries and Practical Theology at Bethel University in St. Paul, MN, who was Youthfront's theologian-in-residence this fall.

Parenting Help and Resources

Youthfront's YF Family monthly enewsletter offers guidance to families on timely topics along with a chance to ask our licensed counselor your toughest parenting questions. Visit the Youthfront blog for featured content and subscribe to the enewsletter at youthfront.com/yffamily. YF Family also offers onsite parenting sessions. If your church or group would like to host an event, please contact us.

New Faces at Youthfront

Youthfront welcomed the following new staff since the last issue of Youthfront News in July: Emma Bartel, Director of high school and young adult ministries; Joe Gonzales, Program Staff for YF Neighborhood; Colton Laptad, Director of Camp LaCygne; and Farren Laptad, Program Coordinator at Camp LaCygne.



Now offering Service Saturdays



Andy Root presented in Oct.



YF Family resources on our blog

Camp Adventures
Friends enjoy treats from the Snack Shack at Camp West (left). Campers laugh together after a fun round of Shaving Cream Wars (right).



a TIME TO EMBRACE

Following a long season of isolation and uncertainty, youth and families found pathways to community, worship and service at Youthfront this summer.

Summer Camp

After a shortened season in 2020, Youthfront was blessed to host a full season of camp this summer. More than 2,750 overnight campers experienced Camp West and 575 elementary kids experienced Day Camp at Camp LaCygne. All but one of the 10 sessions of overnight camp were full. Thank you to the families and church partners who joined us this summer.

Youthfront's Medical Advisory Team, a group of seasoned health professionals who volunteer their expertise, guided all of our health and safety protocols. This team again enabled Youthfront to provide a safe and healthy camp environment that began with Covid-19 rapid tests for all campers and staff.

Our 2021 camp theme and curriculum explored the "I Am" statements of Jesus and what those mean for us as his followers. At worship gatherings each day, campers got to hear from our storytellers about each of Jesus' statements - such as "I am the bread of life..." and reflect on who that means they are to God and in the world. Our camper journals for both elementary and middle/high schoolers included cabin activities, prayers and reflections to help campers learn more about how God loves them and ways of reflecting God's love to others.

Youthfront also hosted church partners providing their own summer programming for more than 700 guests at camp.

Youthfront's high school (Teen Staff) program had the highest enrollment ever, with more than 350 students who served across 10 weeks at both camps. Teen Staff help make camp operations possible, and those students also form a special bond of faith and friendship in their community as they work together.

From cabin leaders to worship music to the HYPE activities crew, Youthfront's Summer Staff pour into campers all summer. This staff of college students provided day-to-day leadership for both Day Camp and overnight camp alongside fulltime staff and church/parent volunteers.



Summer Days in the Neighborhood

Volunteers sort and distribute groceries at the Franklin Center (left). Missional Journey participants play a simulation to understand the challenges many face in under-resourced neighborhoods (right).

“IT WAS HARD LETTING GO, BUT MY SON HAD AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE. HE TOLD ME HE GOT CLOSER TO GOD AND MADE NEW FRIENDS...” -CAMP PARENT

YF Neighborhood

Youthfront's YF Neighborhood programs were bursting at the seams this summer with the largest volunteer response in history. Thirteen churches and other groups sent Missional Journey serve teams 165 volunteers strong who assisted in the Argentine district of Kansas City, KS, with neighborhood day camp, beautification and clean up projects and building relationships in the community.

YF Neighborhood's hands-on social entrepreneurship program for youth in Argentine imagined a way to amp up fun for kids in the neighborhood. For four weeks, middle school students in the ImagineX program worked together to identify and solve a problem facing youth in Argentine.

They confronted the issues of isolation and loneliness to develop a venture pop-up fun concept. "Amp'd Up Summer" brings shade tents, activities, sports equipment and snacks to local parks to give youth affordable fun. Students made their concept presentation at a "Pitch Night" to the community in July.

Youthfront's Something to Eat™ program continues to meet the critical need for food assistance in the community. This summer, students in middle/high school overnight camp programs packed 18,144 meals for the hungry. In addition, Youthfront's monthly food distribution events with Harvesters in Argentine were supported by volunteers all summer - from grandparents to campers - who help sort and distribute food to those facing food insecurity.





PRESENCE-CENTERED
counseling



Jamie Roach, LPC (top)
Caroline Oas, LPC (bottom)

Youthfront Launches Counseling Center

**TO BE A HOPEFUL AND HEALING PRESENCE IN THE LIVES
OF INDIVIDUALS, COUPLES AND FAMILIES**

An increasing number of parents and youth have asked Youthfront staff for help in seeking counseling or therapy services over the last several years. Mental health services, especially for adolescents today, is a dire and largely unmet need. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Association together declared a national emergency in children's mental health in fall 2021, citing the serious toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on top of existing challenges. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found between March and October 2020, emergency department visits for mental health emergencies rose by 24 percent for children ages 5 to 11 years and 31 percent for children ages 12 to 17.

This fall, Youthfront launched a new affiliate, Presence-Centered Counseling, which grew out of the desire to provide needed mental health services to youth, adults, couples and families. The Center's mission is "to be a hopeful and healing presence in the lives of individuals, couples and families." Led by Youthfront's Senior Director

of Family Ministries, Jamie Roach, a licensed professional counselor (LPC), the center offers a range of services for clients of all ages.

Jamie is a 35-year veteran of Youthfront - a former pastor, spiritual director, communicator, and author. He received his Master of Divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary and his Master of Arts in Counseling from MidAmerica Nazarene University. Jamie will continue to provide leadership for Youthfront's YF Family ministry while he offers therapy and counseling services through Presence-Centered Counseling.

In November, Caroline Oas (LPC) joined Presence-Centered Counseling on a part-time basis offering child-centered play therapy for children ages 4-10. This therapy focuses on helping young children undergoing mental health issues as well as children who have experienced loss or other trauma. Caroline also works with teenagers using a person-centered approach and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques. She earned her Master of Arts in Counseling at MidAmerica Nazarene University.

Learn more about Jamie, Caroline and the Center's range of services at presencecenteredcounseling.com.

Youthfront MVPs

Spotlighting volunteers and leaders serving our ministry



anna shoup

Anna got connected to Youthfront as a camper in 7th grade. She served on Teen Staff all four years of high school and was a Teen Staff Leader her final year. Last summer, she was head lifeguard as a Summer Staffer at Camp West. She's currently a student at Olivet Nazarene University. We asked her what has kept her coming back to Youthfront.

"I kept coming back for many reasons, but most importantly, Youthfront gave me the most treasured relationships I had (have) in my life and helped me step into my faith. Teen Staff especially gave me the space in community and leadership opportunities that allowed me to learn about myself and develop crucially as a person and a leader. Learning how to live in relationship and community with others is a life skill, and Youthfront was an incredibly fun and formative place where this occurred in my life. On the spiritual side, the clarity I gained in my faith walk while at Youthfront is innumerable and intangible - I grew into a confident Christian with a strong sense of purpose and worth, which is a liberating place to be and one that many don't have the opportunity to experience at all, let alone in high school. Although my faith will continue to grow and change with me, having a solid foundation has brought immense fruitfulness to my life thus far and for that I am so grateful."

brent blake

A Youthfront grandparent, Brent has been faithfully serving at Youthfront's monthly Something to Eat™ food distribution events for more than two years, where he sorts and loads food into the cars of families in need. He and his family have also participated in a Something to Eat meal packing experience. We asked him what got him involved in serving and what keeps him coming back:

"Our grandson attended Youthfront Camp a few years ago. My wife and I were invited to the camp's finale on the last day. Somehow, Youthfront's Ed Garlich got ahold of me and shared information on the monthly food distribution. I had recently retired and was seeking serve opportunities. Ed met me at my first distribution... his faith and enthusiasm won me over. I found it very satisfying to serve the needy, who arrive in waves, at the distribution. I especially enjoy seeing the smiling faces of the young kids accompanying their parents on the drive-through food bank excursion. I truly believe the Lord arranged my participation in the event. When we are serving others, we are serving Him."





4600 Rainbow Blvd, Kansas City, KS 66103



CHRISTMAS *at Camp*

Holiday Attractions

Light Displays
Nativity Walk
Live Music
Bonfire & S'mores
Holiday Treats
Silent Auction
Craft Making
Games

Dec. 2 - 4 | 6 - 9 p.m. | Youthfront Camp West

Experience the wonder of the season in this event for the whole family! Fully decked out for Christmas, Youthfront's Camp West features an illuminated lake walk with interactive experiences to retell the Nativity story.

Tickets & More Info: youthfront.com/christmas