



# youthfront NEWS

VOLUME 86 | ISSUE 1

## NOT ALONE

Youthfront's newest  
ministry addition  
walks with teenagers  
in tough situations

faith conversations with our kids | unexpected gifts  
youthfront neighborhood commons opens





## A Word from Mike

### *Faith Conversations with Our Kids*

One of the most common questions we hear from parents is how to have conversations with their kids about matters of faith. Parents and grandparents tell us they want to engage with their kids about Jesus but they feel either stuck or unequipped to know how to start.

It's important to remember that Jesus didn't use a highly developed curriculum... he had a way of sharing and teaching about God's love through the ordinary and familiar. Flowers, birds, mustard seeds, mountains.

We're giving life to Jesus' everyday approach to faith conversations through a new project borne of our Christian Parenting and Caregiving grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. We're blessed to be a grantee in that Lilly initiative, and we're charged with developing resources to help parents, caregivers and congregations engage their children in spiritual formation through classic Christian practices. Our Presence-Centered Parenting and Caregiving initiative has expanded YF Family as a laboratory and launchpad. Through our conversations with churches and caregivers, we've recognized there's no shortage of curriculum, but there IS a vacuum when it comes to guidance on having natural, organic faith conversations with our kids.

To that end, we're excited to be developing a project we're calling "As You Go," which will provide parents, grandparents and caregivers with easy-to-use guides to engage kids in faith conversations in everyday life - from a trip to the zoo to a car ride to soccer. Our staff and a number of our pastor partners are in the midst of developing content for "As You Go" - I've written several and have tested them with my grandkids! Look for a rollout in 2025.

As we close our second year of this Presence-Centered Parenting and Caregiving initiative, we were excited to host Meredith Miller, author of *Woven*, at three different events for churches and parents in the metro area this fall. Visit our YF Family Parenting page at Youthfront's website or sign up for our YF Family newsletter for more resources and to join us for future parenting events.

As always, thank you for your support for Youthfront and we're excited to introduce more tools and resources for churches, youth, young adults and families in 2025. Stay connected!



*Meredith Miller speaks to a room full of local children's and family pastors.*

Mike King, President and CEO

## NEW AT YOUTHFRONT

### Serve with Us in February

Churches, youth and school groups and lots of individuals and families will be joining together to pack meals for those in need at Youthfront's Something to Eat city-wide meal packing event on Saturday, Feb. 22 and Sunday, Feb. 23. Sign up for a shift for your family or your group to help bless our neighbors with shelf-stable meals. To register or donate to support the event, visit [youthfront.com/something-to-eat-kc](https://youthfront.com/something-to-eat-kc).

### Counseling Center New South Location

Youthfront's in-house affiliate, Presence-Centered Counseling, has added a south Johnson County location to serve couples, individuals, families, and youth seeking counseling, including play therapy for young children. Learn more about our two locations, therapists and services at [presencecenteredcounseling.com](https://presencecenteredcounseling.com).

### New Faces at Youthfront

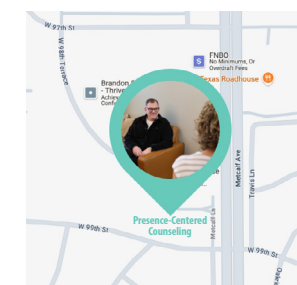
Youthfront welcomed the following new staff since the last issue of Youthfront News: Bob Bonifield as finance director, Anna Dimmel as administrative specialist, Christy Hansen as counselor for Presence-Centered Counseling, Collin Ferguson as associate director of overnight camp at LaCygne, Allison Henry as program coordinator for elementary age programs, Jacob Kopaska as program coordinator at Camp LaCygne, and Adam Reck as cabin leader coordinator. In addition, Youthfront welcomed Alex Mathew, Andrea Mathew, Megan Fountain and Nathan Sanders as the new Youthfront Pathways ministry team. Read more about their work on p. 4.

### Camp Buck Bonus

Know a child who'd love to go to camp this summer? Lock in Youthfront's lowest camp pricing before Dec. 15 and enjoy \$20 in free Camp Bucks to spend at camp. Register a camper or reserve for a group at [youthfront.com/gotocamp](https://youthfront.com/gotocamp).



All ages are welcome to be a part of Something to Eat KC



New south Johnson County location for counseling



Get \$20 in free Camp Bucks when you register for camp by Dec. 15





# Not Alone

Youthfront’s newest ministry addition walks with teenagers in tough situations

“When I was in prison, you visited me.” – Matthew 25:36

The sound of laughter and competitive shouts fills the air of the large room while kids slap down cards in a friendly game of spades. Christian hip-hop music is playing in the background and bags of chips get passed around. This could be the start of any youth group meeting at a local church. But at the end of the night there will be no line of moms and dads waiting in minivans outside. In fact, these kids aren’t going home tonight. They are spending the night behind bars.

In a place where the most common sound is metal clanking and the jarring echo of heavy doors and clicking locks, Youthfront staff and volunteers are now bringing the sound of hope. Kids spend the night in single cells furnished with concrete slab beds, tile walls and a small sliding opening in a large gray door for tray delivery. Youth ages 11-17 in detention facilities spend most hours alone, including when eating their meals. The air often feels heavy with grief, anger, regret and isolation.

“We may be one of the few outside faces they see during their time inside these walls,” said Alex Mathew, director of Youthfront Pathways, of its juvenile justice ministry program staff and volunteers. “That relationship can be the difference between hopefulness and hopelessness. We know that 70 percent of incarcerated youth who don’t have a mentor will end up back in the prison system.”

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Formerly associated with another organization, the local Kansas City-based ministry staff joined Youthfront as Youthfront Pathways this summer. “We have known and respected Alex Mathew and this team’s ministry for many years,” said Mike King, President/CEO of Youthfront. “There was just tremendous synergy between Youthfront’s mission to bring youth into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and their ministry work reaching teens who are incarcerated or are struggling with the realities of parenthood.”

**Youthfront Pathways creates paths for teens in tough situations to discover God’s love through authentic relationships in Arise juvenile justice and Teen Parent Connect programs.** In these ministries, caring adults - four staff members and 30 volunteers - curate redemptive spaces for youth to experience God through mentoring and building Christ-centered communities.



The leading ministry in the Kansas City metro area for youth in juvenile detention centers, Arise is like a youth group, sharing Bible study or a book together with snacks and a game, while sharing God’s love through community and connection. Teen Parent Connect provides support, skills, and needed resources for youth who find themselves pregnant or parenting. Many of the youth in the program get connected to Youthfront while incarcerated and are facing parenthood after release. From meals and diapers to Bible study and parenting courses, Teen Parent Connect comes alongside teens on the tough road of parenthood so they don’t have to walk it alone.

The detention center ministry bore a special kind of fruit this fall for the Pathways team, when two teenagers in the program asked to be baptized. The detention center staff coordinated with the teens’ parents to make it possible for the Pathways team to meet that request. “There just aren’t words for how moving that moment was,” said Alex Mathew. “We’re praying that this expression of faith is a milestone for these youth and will continue on as part of their testimony to God’s faithfulness in their lives.”

Committed volunteers and donors are an essential part of the Youthfront Pathways ministry. To learn more about helping with a ministry program at a local juvenile detention center through Arise or mentoring a young family through Teen Parent Connect visit, [youthfront.com/pathways](http://youthfront.com/pathways). To make a gift to support Youthfront Pathways or other ministries, visit [youthfront.com/give](http://youthfront.com/give).

## Teen Prayer Requests

“Please pray that I’m able to go home as soon as possible and that I’m able to be there for my little girl that I have on the way. Pray I can get back in school for a high school diploma or GED. Pray for better days and that God gives me a second chance to show him the man I really am and the grown man I’m becoming.”

“I need help sleeping. Please pray for my mom’s health. And pray for my time here and placement in a safe group home.”

“Please pray for my little sister, that she finds her way in the world.”

Each week, youth in Arise and Teen Parent Connect write prayer requests that are prayed over by the Youthfront Pathways volunteer prayer teams and staff. If you’d like to be part of the prayer team, sign up at [youthfront.com/pathways-prayer-team](http://youthfront.com/pathways-prayer-team).



Top: Two teens in the Arise juvenile justice program took a big step in their faith journey through baptism at a local Juvenile Detention Center in September. Middle: A teen mother and son in the Teen Parent Connect program enjoy some fun with mentor Ashlyn Green at a local carnival. Bottom: Teen Parent Connect families take a hayride at their annual visit to Shawnee Mission Park.



# Unexpected Gifts

Young leaders find meaning at the intersection of faith and service



JACKSON E.  
2024 SUMMER STAFF

"I would say it's really formational in the sense that you learn so much about yourself, about campers, and even about God through everyday interactions with the campers and my coworkers."



IZZY R.  
2024 TEEN STAFF

"It's really cool to be on that side of things and see how much work it really takes to give the campers the experience that I got when I was a camper. That's why I like being on teen staff. I like giving the campers that great experience."

Each year, hundreds of teenagers and college students take a role at Youthfront to provide ministry to young people. The hours are often long and the work (and play!) can be demanding physically and emotionally. From Youthfront's camps to its Neighborhood ministries, youth and young adult leaders serve on the frontlines through the Teen and Summer Staff communities...and find their own faith deepened in the experience.



AIDEN F.  
2024 TEEN STAFF

"Serving on Teen Staff is really different because it's not like a job. It's more about having fun while also serving God and the campers."



ABBIE J.  
2024 SUMMER STAFF

"I had to really put my trust in God that I'm there to do His work and plant the seeds that the Holy Spirit is telling me to do. It's been an incredible learning experience and it's helped me become a better person and a better future teacher."

## Youthfront Neighborhood Commons *Opens Its Doors*

*After months of renovations, the former Argentine Mennonite Church property has reopened as the new Youthfront Neighborhood Commons.*

The church donated the property to Youthfront this past year with the hope that the church's 100+ year legacy of ministry would continue on the site, which is directly across from New Stanley Elementary School. Thanks to the generosity of donors and volunteers, the building has been refitted for youth ministry and to house missional teams and youth groups serving in Argentine (Kansas City, KS).

Youthfront Neighborhood's programs have historically operated in shared or rented space but without a permanent home.

"The AMC congregation has entrusted us to bring their legacy of service to this neighborhood into the next generation," said Kurt Rietema, Senior Director of Youthfront Neighborhood. "We're grateful to them for this permanent home - and so thankful for the many people who gave their labor and those who made financial gifts to help us renovate the space."



*The Argentine Mennonite Church passes its mission and the keys to the building to our YF Neighborhood staff. Church members attended the Youthfront Neighborhood Commons Open House to celebrate the beginning of a new chapter for the building.*

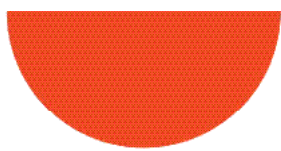


The newly renovated building includes a multi-purpose space for games and large group gatherings, as well as a kitchen, four full bathrooms and multiple meeting spaces. All were enjoyed during the Youthfront Neighborhood Commons Open House on Oct. 15.



4600 Rainbow Blvd, Kansas City, KS 66103

join us for



# SOMETHING TO EAT <sup>KC</sup>

**City-Wide Meal Packing Event**

**Feb 22 & 23 | 10AM - 6PM**

**90 min. sessions**

**All ages are welcome!**



Come be a part of this city-wide effort to fight food insecurity in Kansas City. In one weekend, we'll pack thousands of meals for our neighbors, living out Jesus' call to serve in Matthew 25, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me...."

But this event is about more than just one day—it's about seeking ways to serve others long after. After your meal packing session, you'll have the option to attend breakout sessions and experiences that dive deeper into the biblical call to justice, the importance of seeking people out, and what it means to love our neighbors locally.



**REGISTER ONLINE:**  
**[YOUTHFRONT.COM/SOMETHING-TO-EAT-KC](https://youthfront.com/something-to-eat-kc)**