



Photos at left: Children from the community participate in a Harvest Festival at Valley View United Methodist Church.

# Change for Children: A pocketful of coins can make a big difference

By Rheta Murry

**A** number of children in the Holston Conference know a pocketful of change can make a difference when added together.

At-risk teens get GED degrees. Children who might not otherwise step foot inside a church are active participants, thanks to a bus that picks them up and takes them home. Grades improve because tutors are willing, able, and available on weekday afternoons.

This is only a sampling of what Change for Children grants accomplished last year. Seven Holston groups shared \$27,500 of grant money received from churches that give to the Change for Children offering. An equal amount was donated to Hope for the Children of Africa.

Each year, children's ministries in Holston are invited to apply for grants that will aid them in reaching out to the community. This year, the application deadline is Feb. 15. The Change for Children Committee will review applications and award grants at Annual Conference in June. For more information, go to <http://holston.org/ministries/children/> and click on "Change for Children Grant Application."

Here are the 2007 grant winners:

## ■ Harrison UMC Chattanooga District (\$3,500)

Harrison UMC found a perfect ministry right next door to the church. In fact, partnering with the nearby elementary school created a win-win situation for both organizations.

The church had a limited number of youth, a "missing hall of children," said Jody Hancock, spokesman for "Open Hands Ministry" at Harrison UMC.

"We have lots of ability to minister and be a partnership for our school," she said. "We came up with 'Open Hands Ministry.' We wanted to be very giving but also wanted to receive them (into the church) and support faculty and staff."

Through Open Hands, the church sponsored a block party for the school—a back-to-school bash that included games in carnival-style booths. Prizes consisted of badly needed school supplies. The event "brought our church together," Hancock said.

Harrison Elementary School received a failing grade from the state. The school, which is 37 percent African-American with small Asian and Hispanic populations, needed help academically, Hancock said. Twelve to 15 volunteers from the church now help tutor students in reading.



Above: Harrison UMC hosts a block party for students of the school next door. The prizes were desperately needed school supplies.

"If people can't read, they can't learn," Hancock said. "We provide a book for each child at their reading levels. We encourage them to share with another child, to swap books."

Hancock said the Change for Children monies helped support the block party, which included inflatable activities. The grant also aids the reading program. "When we got the grant, it was a confirmation for the church," Hancock said.

## ■ Valley View UMC Oak Ridge District (\$2,500)

Valley View UMC also didn't have to look far when selecting a community of children.

"We have been trying to reach out to children in a mobile-home park within walking distance to the church," said the Rev. Pat Bishop. "We want to be able to do some events and things to bring in those children, and hopefully, their families."

The church sponsored Vacation Bible School in summer and a Harvest Festival in October with inflatable activities such as the moonwalk. The congregation also provided food and clothing for the families during Thanksgiving and Christmas. Bishop is pastor of the church with 114 members.

"It was such a success," Bishop said of the Harvest

Festival. "(The children) brought their families. We want to include more, but it takes money to do that."

The grant will cover about half of the projected amount needed for outreach activities. Church members will conduct other fundraisers to bring in more money.

"We are hoping that if we advertise and make our presence known, we will get more (people)," Bishop said. Other plans include a children's Bible study. The church hopes to get a van to transport children from the neighborhood.

## ■ Roan Mountain UMC Johnson City District (\$5,000)

Roan Mountain UMC must search a little farther to find children to serve. That's why the church requested a Change for Children grant to purchase, maintain, and fuel two passenger vans used for outreach activities.

"We live in the village and the children live in the mountains," said Jancy Caldwell. "It takes at least 45 minutes per trip to get them to church. If the van didn't run, we wouldn't have any (children)."

Caldwell estimates an average of 20 children ride the bus for each of two meetings: Sunday school and Sunday-evening activities. The church serves food to the children, ages four to college, and then has classes for them each week. The congregation also offers special activities such as dinner at Pizza Hut followed by a baseball game, bowling, or a movie.

Roan Mountain's outreach, like most churches receiving grants this year, also includes school clothes, shoes and supplies for the children they serve. The congregation also provides food for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"They are not exactly from church families," Caldwell said of the children. "But they are from families who care and who want them to go to church. They just don't have the means that most people have. Ninety percent wouldn't be able to go to church without the van."

In addition to maintaining the vans and buying gas, the grant will be used to purchase Bible School and other educational Christian materials, Caldwell said.

## ■ Wesley House Community Center Knoxville District (\$4,500)

Director Richard Gibson knows the importance of tutoring and mentoring for school-age children, especially those from inner-city schools.

"The TCAP scores have been low in inner-city schools," Gibson said (referring to the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Achievement Tests).

"Seventy-seven percent of the kids enrolled (in Wesley House) made honor roll this past school year by the end of the spring semester."

The Change for Children grant supports the children's after-school education tutoring and mentoring program and the CARES program, Gibson said. The organization picks up students from school, drives them to Wesley House, and then helps them with homework. Wesley House also provides additional classes in reading, math, and composition. Fourteen regular volunteers, including several retired teachers, minister to 65 children in the program.

Gibson said students are charged a minimal fee. The grant helps subsidize the children who are on scholarships or needs assistance. Wesley House serves eight schools in the Knoxville area within a mile radius of the center, located near downtown Knoxville.

## ■ Green Meadow UMC Maryville District (\$5,000)

The School of Hope, sponsored by Green Meadow UMC, reaches out to an older population: teen mothers.

"The School of Hope is a place of non-judgmental opportunity for teenage parents and those who are expecting to finish their education," said Linda Daugherty, coordinator. "We had a vision to help that population, because they tend to be marginalized. Plus, we're trying to break the poverty cycle."

Young mothers or mothers-to-be often feel alienated—they don't feel they fit in, Daugherty explained. Teen parents typically don't complete their education, while their children tend to be underdeveloped and underachievers. The School of Hope helps by providing classes and child care for young mothers, along with developmentally appropriate activities for their children. The grant supports the child-care facility.

"(The students) need a place of grace that can show them God continues to love them even though they didn't make right decisions," Daugherty said. "I think it's a population that is very needy and is in need of the church's support and love."

The school uses a Christian curriculum, Alpha Omega, to teach the young women. Daugherty said the group is able to keep the students up with their public schools so that, if they desire, they can eventually return.

School of Hope has operated much like the biblical fish and loaves, Daugherty said. The program started last year with \$8,000 in the bank and ended with \$8,000 in the bank, although there were numerous expenses. Last year, the school served 10 students. Of those, four have earned their GED, one has graduated.

## ■ St. Andrews Center Chattanooga District (\$6,000)

The St. Andrews Center requested a Change for Children grant for two separate outreach ministries primarily supported by the United Methodist Church.

"The first is an after-school program for children who are in the English as a Second Language program at East Side Elementary School," said the Rev. Mike Feely, in his proposal sent to the Change for Children Committee. "The second ... is a free pediatric clinic for children with no insurance."

The children from ESL classes receive academic tutoring and homework assistance, art, puppetry, scouting, and soccer activities after school for four days a week. The grant was used to provide healthy snacks for these students and to buy gasoline, allowing the center to transport the children to and from their schools and homes.

The clinic will use \$1,000 of the grant to replenish medical supplies needed during the first six months of operation and for upcoming needs in the 2007-08 year. Feely said in a letter that any child needing assistance is welcome at the clinic, which operates two afternoons a week at St. Andrews and by special arrangement in

urgent-care situations. A licensed pediatrician and two registered nurses, all volunteers, help staff the clinic.

## ■ Morgan's Chapel UMC Wytheville District (\$1,000)

Thanks to the grant, Morgan's Chapel will be able to grow its children's ministry.

"With the funds we are starting a First Thursday Night Movie Night," wrote Andrew Hamblin in an e-mail. "We'll be showing newly released movies to the children in the church and community. With this ministry we are seeing the un-churched children bring their family to church and/or bible study."

Hamblin said the church also plans to purchase a Pioneer program to use with Kids Klub. Morgan's Chapel already has a few children from an area church and a few un-churched who now attend regularly.

"In the future we see God reaching out to people in the community with our ministry," Hamblin said. ■

Rheta Murry is a member at Cokesbury United Methodist Church in Knoxville District.



Above: Jancy Caldwell of Roan Mountain UMC fills up the church van with gasoline, paid for with a Change for Children grant. Church members travel 45 minutes into the mountains to bring children to Sunday school.