



Great Oaks News

Camping & Urban Youth Ministries

Jul-Sept 2020 Report

Recently, I read a news article about a local business that was still shut down due to COVID-19. The article stated that this particular business was one of the first in our area to close back in March when COVID-19 hit. The owner of the business was quoted saying that, unfortunately, they will probably also be one of the last businesses to open back up once all the dust settles and the Coronavirus dissipates. As much as it pains me to say so, that statement rings true for camp as well. Originally, when we closed in March, we were hopeful we would open back up at the end of May. Well, as you probably know, the Governor extended the stay-at-home order for an additional 30 days; therefore, we had to stay closed until the end of June. As the end of June approached, again, we were praying for a miracle and hoping we could open in July (to, at least, offer a shortened opportunity for summer camp). However, when the Governor released the guidelines for Phase Four, we realized overnight camps were still prohibited from opening; therefore, we have remained closed for any overnight camping. Currently, in Illinois, Phase Four will not end until there is a vaccine, which means we will, indeed, be one of the last organizations to fully reopen.

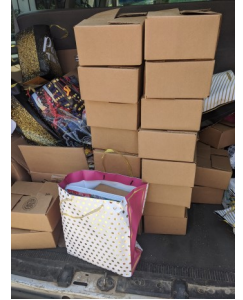
Because of the guidelines we received regarding camps re-opening in Phase Four (or NOT reopening in our case), we decided the best way to serve our at-risk campers would be through our “Box Program.” (You can read more about that program in Paul’s article). As of right now, we are able to serve some of our Retreat Groups but only as *day groups*. If a group is willing, they can come out to camp and utilize our Adventure Challenge Course, as well as our paintball course, if the group consists of <50 people. However, that is problematic for us in many cases because many of our groups are not local; therefore, coming for just a day is not really an option for them. Therefore, in July, we have only been able to serve four small day groups. To put that in retrospect, in 2019, we served over 5,000 people. So far, this year (since March 15th), we have only served about 75 people!

I tell you this not to complain but to help you see and understand God’s provision for Great Oaks during this time. Realistically, because of our current situation, we *should* have experienced a great financial loss; however, because of you and your generous giving, we are OK. Over the past four months of the pandemic, we have still been able to pay our staff their regular salary, as well as (almost) break even for the year. This is amazing, and it’s all because of you. Not knowing when we will be able to open fully is a little stressful, but we remain hopeful the Lord will continue to provide financially during these uncertain times. Your sacrifices and gifts will make this possible. Thank you, again, for supporting us through this season of life. Finally, please continue to pray for Great Oaks and other camps who have been greatly impacted by COVID-19. Also, please remember to pray for the at-risk youth that have not been able to attend summer camp this year. For many of our campers, Great Oaks is a place of solitude, rest, and rejuvenation, as well as an opportunity for many of them to meet Christ for the first time. Because they have not been able to receive that positive experience this summer, we do pray the “Box Program” gives them a little bit of hope and allows them to feel God’s love and presence in their lives during this time. Thank you for your continued prayers.

Tyler Keene
Executive Director

Even though we were not able to have camp this year (thanks to COVID-19), we were still able to minister to our at-risk campers by taking a little bit of camp to them! Through our “Box Program,” we were able to connect with about 30 different households and about 52 campers and deliver to them “Camp in a Box!” Every box included:

- ◆ An Action Bible- *The Action Bible* is an illustrated Bible aimed at children by capturing their imaginations through both pictures and words. The compelling blend of clear writing plus dramatic images offers an appeal that crosses all age boundaries. We are thrilled that every camper was able to receive their own Bible!
- ◆ An *Our Daily Bread* specifically designed for campers. To encourage youth to start (or continue) a daily quiet time with God, this booklet contains 30 different reflections and studies all designed with campers in mind. The booklet, put together in conjunction with the Christian Camp and Conference Association, is titled “Beyond Camp.”
- ◆ Every summer, there are two activities which *all* our campers love doing: making paracord bracelets and making keychains! Therefore, each box included instructions and all the supplies needed to make a bracelet and create their own keychain out of plastic lacing.
- ◆ Another activity our campers love to do is play UNO (the card game). Therefore, each camper got a set of UNO cards!
- ◆ An activity book filled with various games, puzzles, etc
- ◆ Glow in the Dark light sticks and a container of Galaxy slime



Although we are deeply saddened by the fact that we cannot have camp this summer, we are excited about the impact these gifts will (hopefully) have in the lives of our campers. Also, these boxes were designed with the hope that this will be a positive way for us to stay connected to our campers; therefore, making it easier to reconnect with them when we are able to bring campers out again (which, hopefully, will be sooner rather than later)!

This “Box Program” could not have happened without your continued prayers and financial support, and because of that, we thank you. Despite such difficult times, the “Camp in a Box” gifts were received with great anticipation and much joy. Although these small boxes cannot replace a week of camp, the fact that each camper has received *The Action Bible*, which will encourage them to engage with God’s Word in a new way, is extremely exciting. It’s during these times we remember--God is faithful to those who remain faithful to His ministry and seek to do His will; therefore, we pray that even the smallest gifts can grow exponentially and impact not just campers but their entire family as well.



Light and Darkness

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” 1 John 1:5

Light is an incredible thing. For the purpose of engineering light, from building fires to flipping switches, the idea of harnessing energy to create brightness has certainly evolved over the years, and through it all, we can see how pivotal light has been to/for us. It is essential; we need light. I believe God has built, into His creation, evidence of His truth that Light has overcome Darkness. Just think of a dark night with no moon. Even though we feel as if we are surrounded by darkness, even the smallest light, given from the pinprick stars above, enables us to see. Therefore, it is true; darkness cannot overpower light.

“And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” John 3:19-21

As a child, I used to detest winter mornings. Oftentimes, when we would get up before the sun had risen, the flip of the light switch in a dark room would bring instant pain to my eyes. I loved the darkness and hated the light. However, I was also afraid of the dark. If it was easy for me to hide in the dark, I often questioned what else could be hiding in the dark, as well. Truthfully, I believe there are times when God’s light does bring about an uncomfortable vulnerability in our lives, but it also brings a sense of safety and peace, knowing that all can be seen. May we all live as though our deeds may be seen like a fire in the dark.

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16

Graham League