



CELEBRATING OUR STUDENTS

We have an amazing opportunity to be a positive force in our students' lives. No matter what they've been through during the week, they come to our program and experience a safe space where they can be celebrated and pushed to fulfill their potential!

Above is a picture of our annual Christmas All-Star Banquet. Every year we eat great food (a turkey dinner provided by our phenomenal cook Cindy!) and then watch our two all-star games.

All fall, our students work hard, trying to prove that they have what it takes to play in these games. Only a few students get selected, so it's quite a prestigious honour in our community. The two captains are the leading scorers of our senior league, and they get the opportunity to captain, coach and pick the teams for the night. **It's an amazing thing to watch and be a part of.**

It may seem a little too exclusive for people outside our community, but this gives our students something tangible to work for. An opportunity that matters to them, and their peers. When it comes to selection, character, work ethic, attendance, commitment, leadership, and finally skill are all taken into consideration. They notice when a skilled player is snubbed from the selection due to attitude. **No one wants to be that great player with a bad reputation that got overlooked for the all-star game.** We call it positive peer pressure; where the students pressure each other to be better.

We tell our volunteers to encourage one kid every night. Just one. Obviously, this is a really low bar; a goal that regularly gets blown out of the water, but **these kids need encouragement and it doesn't come often. I know for a fact most of our kids have never heard an authentic "I love you."** Usually, those words are a tool of manipulation and not a statement of care and affection.

Time and time again we hear heartbreaking stories of how much the people in their lives call them out negatively instead of speaking words of affirmation. They hear lots of comments about how stupid they are or how annoying and disruptive they can be. **We have a community that gets to combat this, speaking life and potential into these students.** We get to show them love and affirmation through something they are passionate about! **We know that Jesus sings a banner of love over our students and we get to play a part in helping them hear that. He has given them good works to do, things that only they are made for. The thief brings death, but He speaks life. That's our part to play.**

*Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
- Hebrews. 10:23-25*



YFCHL

Youth Unlimited

“THEY CAN LEAVE”

I've learned something about the social system for teenagers in the last couple months. It's not something I'm happy about and leaves me a little disheartened thinking about teenagers in violent situations.

It was “John’s” birthday. He made a point of not telling anyone at hockey, it was his brother that let the cat out of the bag. Naturally one person finds out and shouts at him, causing everyone else to make a big fuss about it. It was the loving kind of fuss, nothing too embarrassing!

I needed to do something for John’s day. It wasn’t as though he was going to have a party. His brother actually started coming to our program a little young because I got a text from John saying “Can, my brother come to hockey? My dad’s passed out, I think he’s drunk.” I asked him what he wanted. Ice cream? Burgers? Pizza? He finally decided on TJ’s pizza, so we dropped off all of the other students and I grabbed a pizza for him.

I asked what else he’d gotten for his birthday. I was surprised to hear he’d gotten a couple hundred bucks; he was thinking of finding a used guitar. I asked him about a bank account and he explained that he didn’t have a birth certificate so it’d be impossible to get a bank account. “Great... so he’s got to carry all his money on him, what could possibly go wrong with that...” I think to myself.

I drop him off with his pizza then get a text saying 20 minutes later, “My mom just took all of that money. Apparently it was actually for my brother.” He lets out a few more expletives before saying “All my mom does is threaten me.” He was careful not to actually say his mother was abusive; he was careful to allude to it. Last thing John wanted was the possibility of being removed from his house against his will. If he was going to move out, it was going to be on his own terms.

This was serious, I informed him that I might have to report this, he was adamant that I don’t. I finally managed to convince him to let me call the social service number with him in the vehicle; I could do the talking.

I explained the situation to the social worker on the phone, she asks his age then says, “He’s over 15, the social system won’t do anything for him. They’ve determined that if the student is 16, they can just leave.”

They can just leave.

I guess no one asks the next obvious question “and go where?”

But that’s what a 16 year old can do in an unsafe situation. Call the cops and just leave. If they get into the social system they can enter a program for older wards of the province. It’s run by a 23 year-old roughly a year into this job, because the turnover is so high. And it’s not simple to get into that program. That’s our option.

So I tell this story because its real and maybe a little dark. But this is what we’re dealing with; darkness. Where else is light needed, then in the darkness? When I say we need prayer all the time. This is what we need it for.

Evan & Rebecca

