

MT. PLEASANT CARDINAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2008

My name is Jeneva Westendorf. I am a teacher at Mt. Pleasant High School. I was hired to start a program for in-coming 8th graders, freshmen and sophomores, who have difficulty doing well in school due to emotional and social issues. At present there are 35 students enrolled.

The purpose of this program is to support students in being successful in school, and therefore in life. From experience I realized that the more people are involved with these "at-risk" youth the better. Therefore, the first person I thought of was Pastor Sonny Lara and his Firehouse Community Development Organization. I have known Sonny Lara and his intervention work for the last 12 years. Last year I had the opportunity to bring him to Foothill Continuation High School where I was working. He conducted an after school class for youth with a history of gang violence. The class was a total success. This year I connected with Pastor Sonny and immediately invited him to be a part of our Opportunity Program. From the first week of school he has been coming two days a week, Mondays and Fridays. In my opinion, my program is a success because of his involvement.

In addition to Pastor Sonny he brings his team; Jenny Chavez & Choby Marquez and they all have been working very diligently to earn my class's trust. They have great integrity and have kept their word to them no matter what. Therefore, for the first time in their lives, for most of these students, they are developing positive relationships with adults.

In the beginning the students were virtually out of control! Their behavior, their language, their attitudes were all very negative and inappropriate. So much so in fact, that the second day of school the computer Tech at our school visited my class and his comments were: "How do you do this" and "What is the matter with these students?" Pastor Sonny and I know that this behavior was learned to get attention, because any other behavior didn't get the youth the attention they needed from either their parents or their teachers.

The criteria for being placed in the Opportunity Program were the following:

- Failing grades from 8th grade
- Poor attendance
- Poor attitude
- Gang Involvement
- Regular Discipline issues

Now, the students have 90% attendance; only 3 are failing all of their classes. The rest of the class is passing most of their classes. 7 students have no "Fs" at all. This is a tremendous improvement from the first day of school. Their attitude is now moving in a more positive direction. They are happier, they feel safer and they now have several adults upon whom they can rely. Our classroom is their home away from home. They truly love our team and are very disappointed when one or more of us is not present. They also enjoy the regular routine of the class. This also makes them feel very safe. They are rewarded for their good work and acknowledged for the beautiful kids they are. They virtually love being loved by us. Feeling this way makes them want to please themselves and our team. They love the positive attention. Also, they now do regular community service at the local Elementary School and almost half of them are now part of Mt. Pleasant High School's Robotics Team. Also, their behavior in their other classes has improved tremendously. In fact, our APA and advisors have commented that "Opportunity students are no longer showing up in the office for discipline reasons".

In conclusion, Pastor Sonny and his Firehouse Team have made a tremendous difference in the lives of our Opportunity students. The Firehouse has enriched the Opportunity Program, in addition to enriching and changing the lives of the youth involved. The impact that Firehouse has had has yet to be measured and I have multiple students who are working very hard to at getting all "As" and for the first time in their lives GRADUATION is a reachable goal!



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May 24, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jeneva Westendorf. I am a teacher at Mt. Pleasant High School. I was hired to start a program for incoming 8th graders, freshmen and sophomores, who have difficulty doing well in school due to emotional and social issues.

The purpose of this program is to support students in being successful in school, and therefore in life. From experience I realized that the more people involved with these "at-risk" youth, the better. Therefore, the first person I thought of was Pastor Sonny Lara and his Firehouse Community Development Organization. I have known Sonny Lara and his intervention work for the last 18 years. 6 years ago I had the opportunity to bring him to Foothill Continuation High School where I was working. He conducted an after school class for youth with a history of gang violence. The class was a total success. In the fall of 2008 I connected with Pastor Sonny and immediately invited him to be a part of our Opportunity Program here at MP. From the first week of school he has been coming two days a week, Mondays and Fridays. In my opinion, my program is a success because of his involvement. In 2009 we were blessed to receive a grant from Goodwill Industries for an after school leadership program that meets Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:15-5:15. Our attendance in this class averages between 12-15 students each day! This year 2010-2011 this class developed into a leadership class for girls called "The Girlz Spot" which I teach with Linda Lara, Pastor Sonny's wife. It was a total success 20 girls received a total of 70 elective credits.

In addition to Pastor Sonny he brings his team who have all been working very diligently to earn my class's trust. They have great integrity and have kept their word to them no matter what. Therefore, for the first time in their lives, for most of these students, they are developing positive relationships with adults.

In the beginning students are frightened and their behavior, their language; their attitudes are all very negative and inappropriate. Pastor Sonny and I know that this behavior was learned to get attention, because any other behavior didn't get the youth the attention they needed from either their parents or their teachers.

The criteria for being placed in the Opportunity Program were the following:

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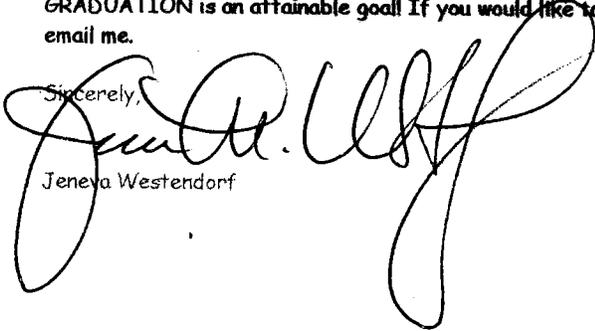
Now, the students have 95% attendance. The rest of the class is passing most of their classes. This is a tremendous improvement from the first day of school. Their attitude is now moving in a more positive direction. They are happier, they feel safer and they now have several adults upon whom they can rely. Our classroom is their home away from home. They truly love our team and are very disappointed when one or more of us is not present. They also enjoy the regular routine of the class. This also makes them feel very safe. They are rewarded for their good work and acknowledged for the beautiful kids they are. They virtually love being loved by us. Feeling this way makes them want to please themselves and our team. They love the positive attention. Also, they now do regular

community service at the local Elementary School. Also, their behavior in their other classes has improved tremendously. In fact, our APA and advisors have commented that "Opportunity students are no longer showing up in the office for discipline reasons.

In conclusion, Pastor Sonny and his Firehouse Team have made a tremendous difference in the lives of our Opportunity students and the general student body. The impact that Firehouse has had has yet to be measured and I have multiple students who are working very hard to at getting all "As" and for the first time in their lives GRADUATION is an attainable goal! If you would like to speak with me further, please don't hesitate to call or email me.

Sincerely,

Jeneva Westendorf

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jeneva Westendorf". The signature is written over the typed name and extends to the right.