

FaithBIT



God Calls the Right People to the Right Place

Reflection by Kim Rathjen

Every time I gather a team of volunteers together to serve at a Camp Noah, I ponder why we are being called to that community. Always, Camp Noah is a therapeutic day camp for elementary-aged kids who have experienced a natural disaster in their community, so providing the camp is the overarching goal. My experience leading Camp Noah teams over the past 13 years has taught me that God calls the right people to the right place through Camp Noah to provide what is needed in that time and place.

The team of 12 Immanuel women who were called to serve in Port Aransas at the end of June were a mix of repeat and new team members. We were very well staffed, so I thought God was preparing us for a large number of kids at the Port A camp, but when we arrived on a Sunday afternoon to set up, we were told that only 14 kids had registered. To be honest, in that moment it was a bit disappointing to have made the trip to the Gulf of Mexico for 14 kids! We also had 9 local student leaders to help us with the camp, so we were heavy on leaders and light on kids. This, as it turns out, was God's plan all along and there are at least two reasons we were called to Port Aransas.



“God used the Immanuel Team to bring hope and healing to the community.”

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The first reason was for a family with 3 boys who were with us for the week - two were participants and one a student leader. We had been warned about one of these boys who had really struggled after Hurricane Harvey impacted their family in August 2017. He had been taken out of school last year for behavior issues. He was angry, and clearly did not want to be at Camp Noah. His younger brother was outwardly happy but inwardly unhappy. The older brother took care of both younger brothers to the best of his ability. During the week relationships developed.

We didn't see bad behavior from the middle brother and slowly his gifts and talents emerged as he was loved unconditionally by our team. Like layers of an onion, the stories of the family's experience were shared during the week. Their Mom told us that her middle son had never shared his thoughts about the hurricane until this week. The younger brother is a big boy. We were told that he got teased a lot because of his size. We loved him and his kind and gentle spirit. On the final day of camp, he cried multiple times because he didn't want us to leave. The local community leader told me that he probably had never felt so loved and accepted. We also referred him to a local health care provider to check on the possibility that he has diabetes. The family does not have health insurance so hasn't had good health care for a long time. God called us to Port Aransas to love these boys and to help them know they are worthy of love. I will not forget them.

The other reason we were called to Port A was for the Student Leaders, 3 young women and 6 young men. They were so very helpful whenever we asked for their assistance. Four of them helped in the small groups, 3 worked the puppets each day for a puppet show, and 3 acted in the daily skits. On Tuesday at Camp Noah all kids share their storm stories in their small groups. Feeling a nudge from God, I invited the Student Leaders to meet with me and Jennifer Urbanski to tell us their storm stories. Some shared their stories willingly, some needed to be coaxed and a couple just folded into themselves, not wanting to talk about it. What these young people experienced through Hurricane Harvey is unimaginable. They are in various stages of recovery, but all displayed resilience and the will to make things better in their families and community. The Student Leaders decided that they bonded so much during our week with them that they want to continue meeting as a Youth Group. They decided to meet once a month beginning in August. The Immanuel Team will send a care package for that first meeting to help them get going and to let them know we are praying for them.

God used the Immanuel Team to bring hope and healing to the community. We experienced God's transformational love at work in the lives of our campers and Student Leaders. And I experienced it in mine.