

The Seattle Times

Sunday, July 4, 2010 - Page updated at 12:01 AM

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With faith and volunteers, Jubilee Reach Center helps one and all

By Nicole Tsong

BEFORE THERE was Jubilee Reach Center, there was the sidewalk in front of Bellevue's Lake Hills Elementary School. Kids showed up as early as 6 a.m., dropped off in the dark by parents hurrying to early work shifts. There the children waited, sometimes as many as 10, sitting under a breezeway or chasing each other for up to an hour alone in the cold, dark and wet.

The school tried opening its cafeteria at 7:30 a.m. It wasn't early enough. Parents sometimes sat in cars with their kids until somebody on the staff arrived and let them sit in the school's entryway. Up to 25 kids often waited for the cafeteria to open.

In 2005, when Jubilee was still just an idea, its leaders asked the principal how they could help. Her response was swift — a program to get those kids somewhere safe and warm, where adults could keep an eye on them and keep them busy with homework or games.

A year later, the idea became reality — Jubilee was born as one of First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue's biggest, ongoing community projects. What began with a commitment by church leaders to serve their community has bloomed into the center, a nonprofit with programs that now serve 700 families with help from 500 volunteers recruited through a network of local churches and social-service agencies.

In just four years, many of its constituents agree, Jubilee has redefined the modern church safety net and the way social-service agencies can serve a community.

The needs are great in a city where at last count, 33 percent of its residents were foreign-born — the state's highest. And the Lake Hills neighborhood is one of the city's most diverse. Of the 500 or so students at Lake Hills Elementary, 60 percent speak a language other than English at home and 66 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Jubilee, housed in a rambling, two-story building a block from the school, seeks to identify holes in the system and come up with programs to fill them: A computer class for parents who didn't know how their kids were doing in school (parents graduate with a free computer); a dental van originally serving kids and now treating parents without health care; a coffee hour giving isolated moms a way to connect.

During the school year, Jubilee opens at 6 a.m. and soon bustles with energy. Sleepy-eyed kids slurp up bowls of Apple Jacks or Fruit Loops, then rush off to play the board game Mouse Trap or paint ceramic tiles. Some bounce around on pogo sticks while one boy begs program director "Ms. Mardi" Taylor to use the computer room. In the afternoon, kids from Lake Hills plus another elementary and two middle schools fill up on homemade snacks like pozole soup, then head to one-on-one tutoring or homework sessions overseen by volunteers.

"From my experience of living in Bellevue and teaching in Bellevue since the early '80s, I knew there were resources in the community and caring people," says former school principal Judy Buckmaster, who was at Lake Hills when Jubilee began. "I'd always



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Celene Calderon, 17, attends Jubilee Reach Center's after-school program with her 2-year-old brother, Bryan. Through the leadership of First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue, the center relies on some 500 volunteers to serve 700 families and has created a modern model for a church-based, social-service agency.



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Jubilee Reach Center chaplain the Rev. Tom Brewer shares a smile with 8-month-old Angel Dominguez, whose parents have been going to the center for the past three years. All services there are free, and Brewer says the center is there to love its neighbors. "People call it a community center," he says. "We call it a center of community."



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On Cinco de Mayo, kids at the center's after-school program join a conga line as part of the celebration. According to chaplain Brewer, 59 percent of the population served by Jubilee is Hispanic.

thought, 'How could I reach out to those people and tap into that group?' This was the answer."

TO KNOW Jubilee, you must know First Presbyterian Church. To know the church, you must know Scott Dudley.

Dudley is the voice, the youthful face and the spiritual force behind First Presbyterian. The senior pastor is a not-so-senior 49, with three kids ages 10 and under. Easygoing and quick with a quip, he wears jeans unless it's Sunday. Meet him away from the church spotlight, and "pastor of 4,000 people" is not the first description that comes to mind.

But spend time with Dudley, and you'll find out Jesus changed his life. He wants the world to know how great Jesus is. But the man with the doctorate in English prefers to show, not tell. His church is evangelical, but avoids preachy pamphlet-pushing. He encourages parishioners to do work that prompts the question "Why?"

The answer is Jesus, Dudley says.

"We'd rather provoke the question," he explains. "Shoving something down someone's throat never works. If they ask the question, no one feels oppressed by that."

Dudley's own path to senior pastor was less than straight ahead. After graduating from the University of Washington, the Tri-Cities native enrolled in seminary at Princeton University in New Jersey. Bored by seminary, he decided to be an English professor.

He was finishing his Ph.D. at Stanford University in California when he heard a local church needed help with Bible study for college students. He went on to become the church's college pastor and gained a following.

Still, when First Presbyterian asked him to apply for the job, he refused. He was only 40, had been divorced. He wanted to be a professor, not the head guy of a massive church with the administrative duties that came with it.

God knew better, Dudley says. It was 2002; he'd remarried. He and his wife, Christina, didn't want to raise their kids in the San Francisco Bay Area. And despite his refusal, First Presbyterian came back. By the end of that year, Dudley and his family had moved to Bellevue.

"It's the best thing that ever happened to me," he says now.

When Dudley arrived on the Eastside, he knew from experience he would likely find what he called "poverty of spirit" in the church's wealthiest homes. He did not expect to find real poverty.

As it turned out, Dudley inherited a church that already had a long history of community involvement. But the pastor saw the congregation was ready for more.

In 2005, First Presbyterian was in the midst of celebrating its 50th anniversary with a year of service in honor of Jubilee, a Christian concept in which slaves and prisoners are freed and debts are forgiven. The church was thinking big.

Parishioner Brent Christie also was searching for a new home for the Eastside Academy, a Christian high school for at-risk teens. He found an old school near Lake Hills Elementary, but it seemed too big for the small academy. Christie, Dudley and other church leaders hatched the plan for Jubilee. They developed a mission statement that reads "Bring Jesus' healing, build community, transform lives." But they remained mindful of Buckmaster and other school administrators who made it clear Jubilee was not to be an evangelical center.

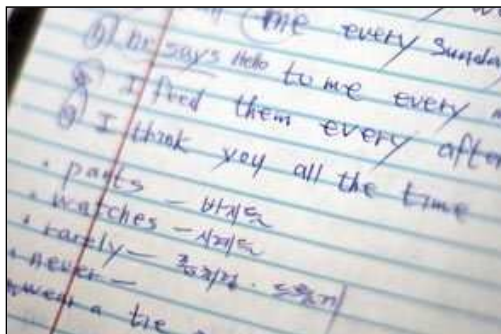
The church wrapped the Jubilee project into an ambitious capital campaign to raise \$14 million to pay for the building, rebuild a church property to house the Eastside Academy



JOHN LOK / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Selena Castro, 14, concentrates on her French homework while attending Jubilee's after-school program.



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While the center has many programs for children, Jubilee wants to be welcoming to all ages. It serves others in the community, including folks like Youting Zhu, 76, in an introductory English-as-a-second-language class.



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Students eager to learn take detailed notes in the English-as-a-second-language classes. The center has 160 students enrolled in ESL classes this year.



JOHN LOK / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Senior Pastor Scott Dudley of First Presbyterian Church in Bellevue raises his hand in prayer during a recent weekday-evening service. Church members who volunteer at Jubilee do not talk about their faith unless asked, he says, because "shoving something down someone's throat never works."

and build a school in Rwanda for street kids. Unlike other capital campaigns, the "Ripple Effect" was devoted to helping people outside the church. The response was overwhelming: \$16 million raised.

Dudley says it comes down to this bedrock belief:

"A church should bless the community it's part of."

That conviction is never far from Dudley's sermons. On a spring Sunday, he appeals to his congregation not for money but for time. He shows a video featuring a volunteer at Jubilee and cites the biblical story of Ananais, who loved Paul even though Paul was persecuting Christians. After Ananais showed Paul love, Paul became an apostle and spread Christianity throughout the land.

Ananais changed the world through one small act, Dudley says, noting that we all want to feel like we matter. You don't have to be famous to know you made a difference, he adds.

"Great doors swing on small hinges."

THE CALL CAME from Lake Hills Elementary to the Rev. Tom Brewer, Jubilee's chaplain. A little boy had mentioned there was no water at his house. The school was asking Brewer if he would accompany a Spanish-speaking worker to make a house call.

When they arrived, they found five families living in one house. The landlord had taken their money and not paid the bills. They'd lived without water for 10 days, and the stench was unbelievable. One woman had a year-old baby, but no diapers and no formula.

They got to work.

Brewer persuaded the city of Bellevue to turn the water back on. Formula and diapers were delivered. In tears, the mother thanked him and called it a miracle.

Brewer's job is community care, a program that is difficult to explain yet in some ways is the most critical. Volunteers are partnered with a family, often for years. All volunteers must go through a background check; community-care volunteers attend another 10 hours of training with Brewer.

The problems the volunteers see are complicated, and can include serious illness and domestic violence. They're not tasked with fixing the family, Brewer says; their job is to listen.

"What people in general need in life is someone who takes them seriously and gives the message you have value," he says.

Two years ago, Brewer showed up on Rose Rios' doorstep. A former methamphetamine addict, Rios was trying to survive after a stint in prison for fraud and identity theft. She lived with her ex-husband in a house packed with 11 people; she and her children slept on the floor. Her daughter had developed rashes, and a school nurse noticed.

Brewer got her daughter to a doctor and helped pay the security deposit and first month's rent on another apartment. Since then, he has been a reference for a job and vouched for her so she could move into transitional housing managed by parishioners from First Presbyterian. Jubilee helped her furnish the place through its thrift shop.

Brewer has proofread her homework, gotten her a car donated by church members. When Rios, a Catholic, feels upset or wants him to pray for her, she e-mails him.

Rios has used other social-service agencies, but there are limits to how many times they can help, she says. Sometimes, they make her feel bad about coming back. Jubilee never makes her feel like a burden. "I never thought there would be people who'd help with all their heart, not pushing for something in return."

They've been her biggest support, she says, especially with her recovery from drug addiction. "They didn't make me feel like such a bad person in doing something wrong. They're proud I'm doing better."

Now 42 and clean four years, Rios feels more stable but is still barely getting by on less than \$1,000 a month with two part-time jobs. She is looking for a third. When she has more time, she hopes she can volunteer and give back to Jubilee.

"I could never be where I am right now without them," she says. "I wouldn't have confidence in myself."



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Attendees stream in to register at Jubilee Reach's second annual fundraiser recently at the Redmond Marriott. Nearly 400 people attended the auction and dinner, which raised more than \$300,000 — 24 percent more than last year.

THE JUBILEE Reach Center is an easy place to linger. After ESL classes, students sit in the airy common area, talking with friends in their native language or in broken English. They eat fresh muffins that show up by midmorning on a counter perpetually set with tea, coffee and crackers. Guests wander the halls freely.

The open atmosphere can result in comical problems. Program director Taylor recently had to stop ESL students from taking starter plants set aside for before-school-program kids to plant in the center's garden. They figured the plants were free.

That openness also makes the center feel happy and safe, a crucial component when serving undocumented workers, as the center does. Jubilee asks its participants for an address, but not immigrant status. The center's families are roughly 59 percent Hispanic, 31 percent Asian Pacific Islander, 3 percent African American and 6 percent Caucasian.

The Bible calls to care for the poor, Dudley says by way of explanation.

That Christian mission drew volunteer Richard Miyauchi to Jubilee. He first came to the center to decide if he wanted to donate via a foundation in memory of his son, Michael, who died of cancer at age 20 in 2004.

Miyauchi, who attends partner church Lighthouse Christian in Bellevue, has been steadfast about volunteering for the after-school program ever since. He knows kids whose parents are struggling financially. "Nobody's home after school," he says, as a boy named Roberto stealthily moves a chair behind Miyauchi, then leaps onto his back for a piggyback ride. "They need some guidance."

Despite its Christian foundation, there are no worship services at the center. If someone asks, Brewer or other staff members will pray.

"They've built such a reputation that they don't go there," says Jeannie Anderson, coordinator for Wraparound Services, a city, school and United Way program that coordinates services for families at Lake Hills and works with Jubilee. "If people want additional information on religion or their relationship with God, they will gladly step in and provide that. But that is not their first priority."

Tammy Awdatalla, a single mom of four, knows that to be true. One day she couldn't pick up her kids right after school. She'd heard about Jubilee Reach in a parents' meeting, and told her kids to walk over and wait outside for her.

When she arrived, her kids were inside, drinking hot cocoa. A volunteer handed her paperwork for the after-school program. People were respectful when she told them she was Muslim, she says.

Her 7-year-old, Tamer, who speaks Arabic at home, was struggling in ESL classes. Jubilee gave him a tutor and by the end of the school year, he no longer needed ESL class. Eleven-year-old Arin was part of the kids' group that sang "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)" to donors at a May fundraiser for Jubilee.

Raising kids the right way, alone, is hard, Awdatalla says. But her kids love Jubilee.

"There's no way you don't feel welcome there. It's like your home."

Nicole Tsong is a Seattle Times staff reporter. She can be reached at 206-464-2150 or ntsong@seattletimes.com. John Lok is a Times staff photographer.

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