



# Summerhill Community Ministries, Inc.

January~February 2006

*Sewing Inner-City Youth and Families*



**Justina Dix**

## A Mother's Heart - Education Concerns

What mother am I talking about? This time, it's me. In 1991 I was a young wife and mother of three. I really wanted to be a good mother and be involved in my children's education, so I made a commitment to volunteer at my children's school a few times a month. My son Justin, who gave me permission to tell his story in hopes that this won't keep happening to students, was in kindergarten and very shy and quiet. When I constantly asked his teacher how he was doing academically, she always assured me that he was doing just fine. To my surprise however, at the end of the year she called for a conference. During the conference she stunned me with some of the worst news a parent could hear from a teacher about their child.

I was told that my child was not on the academic level he should be on; as a matter of fact he was way behind. I asked this teacher of 40 years how could this be when I had inquired about his progress several times and was always given positive, good news. She went on to explain how Justin had her fooled. She

thought he was getting the lessons until she gave the end of the year assessment test. I was heart-broken and in disbelief. I wanted someone to take the blame and explain to me how this happened. I never received an answer, but I did find out that 7 other children in Justin's class significantly performed below grade level. (This teacher retired the next year.)

Although the first grade teacher tried her best to work with these children who were way behind, Justin's self-esteem continued to decline. We decided to have him tested and held him back in the first grade to help him catch up. After testing, it was determined that Justin had a learning disability (LD). He learned at a slower pace and needed extra time to complete work. He was put into all resourced special education classes (SPED), which caused him to endure ridicule from other children.

I immediately began to pray for his learning, comprehension and self-esteem, as I've done with all of my children. After a couple of years of praying and working with Justin after school, he began to make the honor roll in his LD classes. I attended four meetings a year to discuss Justin's progress and where he would be the next year. By 5th grade, he was mainstreamed into 2 general education classes and attended resource for the other subjects. In middle school, he was doing so well that he only required resource support for 2 classes. When he reached high school, the only class he was resourced for was 9th grade Literature. He succeeded in both semesters with an A and a B.

From the very beginning, I told Justin he is going to have to work really hard to pass his classes. His goal is to receive a regular education diploma. All of Justin's teachers speak of his determination to "make it". They

praise him for his good conduct. He receives after school tutoring on Wednesdays as well as my help with his homework (After I leave the ASP, I am on duty to help my own kids.)

Now, it is 2006 and Justin's senior year. Since, it is mandatory for all the seniors to meet with their counselor near the beginning of the year, Justin and his brother Joel (who is also a senior) met with their counselor and brought me back a sheet saying that Justin was on track and Joel would have to make up a class in night school. Later that week, I strongly felt the need to meet with the counselor myself. As she began to go through the transcripts, she got a bit confused. After several more meetings with conflicting information, I expressed

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**Summerhill Community Ministries will be featured in the February edition of the PCA magazine, "By Faith." Look for it soon!**

## We Made the Grade!

Our volunteers do make a difference in the lives of our kids. When report cards came out last week, almost all of our students had a 100% improvement from midterm grades. 7 of our kids made the Honor Roll.

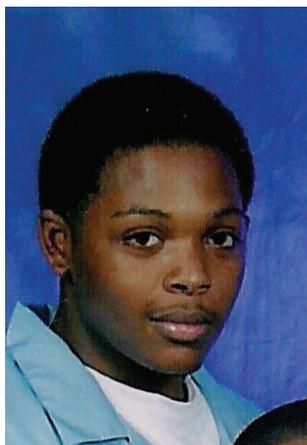
Thanks volunteers for the one-on-one tutoring and care you give to the students.

**Next issue -  
SUCCESS STORIES!**

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my aggravation at this whole back and forth process and pleaded for a simple answer to my simple question. It took 3 more meetings and a new counselor to get me the accurate information.

Joel did not have to take a night school class; he was on track to graduate. However, Justin did not get credit for the year of the 9th grade literature classes because it was under the SPED program. He would have to take the classes during the summer and graduate then. Again, my heart dropped. It was worse than hearing news of his learning disability.



Justin

Questions formed in my mind: Why didn't the counselors catch this...isn't it their job to make sure students are getting the classes they need? It's been 3 years and we could have made this up if we had only known. The guidance office offered their apologies and assigned blame to the former counselors. I followed up this meeting with phone calls to the Board of Education. Although special permission was granted to receive credit for one class, the decision on the other one is still pending. Justin's teachers are rooting for him as well as his peers. One teacher and counselor stated that it is not often that a student starts out in special education and works their way out to a regular diploma.

I thought about how I have tried to be there for my kids and their education

yet, something like this still happens. I also learned that almost half of the seniors will not graduate on time because they don't have enough credits or they have not passed parts of the High School Graduation Test. The school has now added a summer graduation program for students. It's sad that the goals for our kids are changing. It used to be an honor for students to walk with their class. If adults are not motivating the kids to look forward to this, how will they stay motivated to finish? Parental involvement is critical to insure our children are getting the education they deserve and need.

Justin has made his decision. Though he could graduate with a special ed diploma and walk with his class in June, he without hesitation announced, "Although I really want to walk with my class, I've worked too hard for a regular diploma, and that's what I want." Our entire family supports him. Please pray for him and for the many students who are falling through the cracks of "lacking credits" and lacking parental and school support to look forward to a hope and a bright future.

Justina Dix

**Save Summerhill postage!  
Please consider receiving this  
newsletter via email. To be  
added to the list, email  
anneburlas@hotmail.com**

## SCM Basketball (WE GOT GAME)

Both of our basketball teams are undefeated as we go into our 4th week of play. Most importantly, our young men are demonstrating strength of character and good sportsmanship by refusing the challenges of the opposing team to get in a fight. Thank you to our coaches and our prayer partners for uplifting and supporting our youth.

## Christmas Cheer

We truly appreciate all of our supporters for making Christmas a happy time for our ASP kids. The response was overwhelming and the wrapping party a great success. We especially want to thank all of our Sponsors, Volunteers and East Cobb Presbyterian Church and Christ Church for their generosity and faithfulness.

## How You Can Help

- Cleaning supplies: big garbage bags, mopping & cleaning solutions
- Snacks for 25 ASP kids (5 days a week)
- Gently used or new 15 passenger van
- Van maintenance (clean, change oil, rotate tires or put on new tires, tune up, repair windshield crack, brakes)
- Paper Goods: paper towels, napkins, toilet paper, plates, silverware, cups
- TV and VCR
- A working computer with internet access (Pentium 4 and up)
- Color printer
- Copier paper (white and colored)
- Fax/scanner/printer/copier (4 in one machine)
- Up-to-date dictionaries
- Stamps, envelopes
- Gift cards to Office Depot/Staples or Wal-Mart for office supplies
- Electric heaters
- Boxed cards for birthdays, encouragement, illness, condolences
- Basketballs, footballs, and soccer balls
- BP gas cards for vans
- Ongoing monthly contributions and one-time gifts.

Can you teach an enrichment or life skill with our 25 After School kids? We have a 30 minute time frame set aside for this activity. Some examples are dance, music, drama, arts-n-crafts, cooking, sewing, wood works, sign language, pottery, gardening, etiquette, cosmetology, how to: tie a tie, change a tire, etc.. If you have something you might be interested in sharing, please call or email Justina.