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Impacting Inner-City Kids for Christ

Interview with Rod Baker, David Boyd, and Gilbert Ceballos

Why is follow-up after a Sidewalk Sunday School important?

CEBALLOS: Follow-up and visitation are important parts of our ministry. We can conduct several Sidewalk Sunday Schools, but unless we go to the homes to see how families are doing and meet their needs for food and clothing, we're not doing all that we should. Besides taking a flyer telling them what's coming on Saturday, we ask if they need prayer. This is the reason families are coming to church and to Christ; they know we care.

BAKER: A few years ago I was overseeing the third largest bus ministry in America. I felt something was amiss. I picked up children once a week, loved them, and then sent them back home. But I wouldn't see them again for a week. I determined that I needed to have contact with these children more than once a week. We decided to disciple them. In addition to our bus ministry (we bus in about 1,500 kids a week) and Sidewalk Sunday Schools, we started kids clubs. Our kids clubs are cell groups in government-subsidized apartment complexes where kids are disciplined throughout the week.

In the immediate Tulsa area, there are 50 government-subsidi-

dized apartment complexes. We are in 46 of them. Through the outreach programs of our church, someone is visiting children three times a week. We bring food, counsel parents, and win families to the Lord.

Describe how your cell group ministry works.

BAKER: We call our cell groups *Victory Kids Clubs*. These kids clubs are like a Cub Scout den meeting. We provide a cassette tape of worship music and an agenda for a mini-children's church in homes.

Kids clubs can go anywhere—to the government complex or the suburban neighborhood, to homes or apartment complexes. Kids clubs become a mobile-children's church. Every week about 160 clubs meet throughout the immediate Tulsa area. We are reaching thousands of children with the gospel through our Victory Kids Clubs.

The kids clubs also provide opportunities for trained laypeople to minister. For instance, there may be a grandmother who loves children, has taught them in the past, and may believe she is no longer useful. By giving her a packet and letting her use her home to share the gospel with the children in her neighborhood, the church is not only utilizing a valuable min-

istry resource, but it is also discipling children in the process.

I write the Sunday School lessons. We also have a theme for the month, and each lesson revolves around that theme. Once a month we have a two- to three-hour mandatory meeting for our teachers where we review the lessons. We provide props and visuals and share with teachers the theme for the month. During this meeting, we also discuss certain situations in the neighborhood.

We want to do more than just win boys and girls; we want to win families. We put signs in the yards—"Victory Kids Club Meets Here." We give door flyers to each host teacher that identify him or her as a cell leader and list his or her phone number and address.

We also have back-to-school campaigns where our church members open their homes for an hour and bring in neighborhood kids. We provide resources for them. These are inexpensive ways to reach unchurched children with the gospel.

How do you acquire resources such as food and clothing to give to these families?

CEBALLOS: Many businesses and organizations are looking for places where they can donate food and clothing, but

most churches don't ask for donations. I ask, and I mail letters to businesses. This year we prepared book bags for students. The schools gave us information concerning what children needed for school supplies. We then asked Wal-Mart and other places for discounts or to help us supply the needs of the kids. One of our hospitals was planning an immunization clinic. They asked us to provide a Sidewalk Sunday School. We told them we would be preaching the gospel, and they said that is fine. We pray, and the Lord opens the doors.

BAKER: Last year I received \$3 million worth of goods. Proverbs 14:22 says, "A sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous." But the righteous are not going after it. Billions of dollars of goods are being thrown away. I received 30,000 pounds of groceries today. It's there for the asking. If people know you are aggressively fulfilling the Great Commission, it doesn't matter what size church you have or what size community you're in; they will donate. You have not because you ask not.

How do you discipline inner-city children?

BOYD: When children register, give them a membership card to ride the bus. This means you have to meet with the parents before the child can attend. This limits the number of visitors being brought because you first meet the parents and get their permission for their children to ride your bus. Then, if children fight on the bus, you pull their card. He or she must earn the card again after a certain length of time. It makes them members

of something, and they realize that membership has its privileges and its responsibilities.

CEBALLOS: If children want to come to our Sidewalk Sunday Schools, they must obey our rules. If they continue to misbehave after a warning, they can't come to church. We teach that coming to church is a privilege.

Once you develop meaningful relationships with the children, they will listen to you. Most of our bus kids are better behaved than many of the church kids because of the discipline, rapport, and respect we have built with the kids and with their parents.

BAKER: It's best to start by bringing the bus children in on a Saturday because these boys and girls are from a world we can't comprehend. Bus children want to be disciplined and loved. The Bible says whom God loves, He chastens. We talk about the rules. I tell kids who fight, "Nobody's going to hurt you here. If they hurt you, they're going to have to hurt me." We bring the love of God to them.

Certain people need to handle discipline. If an ex-marine sergeant starts jerking the children around, you're going to end up with a lawsuit. You need someone who has the heart and compassion of God, and who can say to the child, "Look me in the eye." We need to realize that most of our bus children have been beaten and abused.

What impact are gangs having on the children in your community?

CEBALLOS: Most of the gangs we see are in schools and are made up of kids. Most of

these kids are starved for attention. That's why they join gangs. Also, there's no male presence in the home. The only male they see is the gang leader, so they want to be like him. Until we show what a real father or man looks like and what God expects a man to be, they're going to follow that example.

BAKER: We've dealt with gangs a lot. I had one of the largest inner-city youth groups in America in the last church where I served. We bussed in 900 teenagers and children every week. These children are looking for identity, so we started soul-cell clubs because Proverbs 18:1 says a man that isolates himself seeks his own desire. We presently have 20 cell clubs.

We need to give inner-city kids a reason to be faithful to the gospel. Recently we started a junior leadership core group. Once a month I take 14-year-olds and older and put them through a training and discipleship series. They become leaders on the bus and in the ministry. My goal is to develop a group of people who will reach their community. I take them bowling, roller-skating, or to dinner.

Most children's pastors need help. Pastor Tommy Barnett says "Help is in the house." The very ones to whom they are ministering can minister to others. We must give the children ownership and responsibility, or we'll lose them. Giving without accountability leads to trouble. Instead of saying we're going to simply rescue them, I'm giving them a desire, a passion, and a purpose.