

Starlight

TAKING THE CHURCH TO THE STREETS
A program of Emmanuel Gospel Center

NEXT TRAINING:
Sept. 26, 2009 at EGC
Learn about homelessness
and what you can do
about it. Visit www.egc.org/programs/starlight/
for information.

Goodbye van, hello change!

by Liza Cagua-Koo

As we enter our 20th year of ministry, Starlight Ministries is in the midst of a season of re-envisioning and change. While some of the factors that have driven our modifications were initially unwelcome, the prospect of change has spurred Starlight through a powerful period of renewed vision and has reawakened our urgency to equip the church to engage the streets. Our mission remains not to grow Starlight, but rather to grow the church's ability to do the very things Starlight does, and more. We are improving and growing our model to train and empower the Church to bring Jesus' transforming love and power, as well as the practical know-how of navigating social service systems, to each person who is open to change.

When Starlight started in 1990, we began by serving people who are homeless. Our focus became chronically homeless adults, including groups gathering at Boston Common. In nineteen years, the Boston Common's homeless community has seen some significant changes: now folks there are offered food and other items by a different ministry outreach every weeknight and by three different outreaches on Saturdays! The presence of so many outreaches with hand-outs can encourage people to feel entitled to be served or reinforce feelings that there is nothing they can do for their situation, aside from receiving relief from others. These feelings are just some of the elements of a "street culture" that keep an individual trapped in the streets, and make the practice of engaging folks by offering material goods an awkward starting point for healthy relationships.

Starlight's response to the challenges of this street culture, as well as the changes in the environment in Boston and Cambridge, have led us to make two significant changes to how we do ministry:

1. Transitioning our evening outreach from primarily van-based to teams on foot: Until January 2009, Starlight offered van outreach every Wednesday evening at the Boston Common and Thursday evening in Harvard Square. This year, however, we are adjusting our night outreach strategy, especially on the Common, to leave behind the vehicle and focus on foot access to individuals. First, the van's attraction of a crowd had some unintended negative consequences, such as attracting individuals who wanted clothes but were not homeless, or reinforcing a dynamic that focused on material goods rather than relationships and community. Second, city agency initiatives (such as "Making A Safer Boston Common") requested that we curtail our use of a van to distribute food and clothes to people in the area. Third, owning and operating an outreach van is expensive! Finally, doing outreach in small, mobile groups allows us to get to know individuals over a wider area. This gives us the opportunity for more intimate conversation and the chance to invite more people to a gathering spot to worship together. In light of all this, this year we decided to give our van to Outreach Boston, a partner Christian outreach ministry.

2. Increasing our focus on individuals who may be more receptive to change, in addition to walking alongside individuals who are still entrenched in street culture: While we continue to engage individuals wherever they may be, we desire to identify and be especially present in potential life-changing turning points that individuals might have. As such, we plan to increase our outreach at facilities around Boston where individuals, temporarily off the streets due to hospitalization, arrest, or some other episode, might contemplate change as something possible and within reach. We are currently developing a multi-dimensional "pathway to wholeness" that



ABOVE: The Starlight van throughout the years. (Photos: EGC file photos)

identifies leverage points in an individual's life toward change, and helps our staff and volunteers engage these moments more fruitfully. In several of our activities, we are increasing the number and scope of volunteers and church-based teams, and involving volunteers and interns in activities that were previously the realm of trained Starlight staff. Our hope is that through modeling every part of our ministry, more church-based teams would grow in their capacity to minister in their neighborhoods with faith, wisdom, and the tools they need to help individuals through their many barriers.

Please join us in prayer and partnership as we enter this exciting season for Starlight, and see even more churches and individuals *taking the church to the streets!*

Photo: Steve Daman



In Step with Pastor Clarence

by Steve Daman

point their energy to something that will help, like schools, jobs, churches. It's been a hard thing to do," says Pastor Clarence.

Starlight offers many opportunities for people who are homeless—and those who have recently found housing—to help them make good progress in their lives. On Monday and Thursday afternoons, an average of 30 men and women will come to Emmanuel Gospel Center. The staff offer a snack, a change of clothes, a shower, and when asked, a haircut. They work to develop meaningful relationships with their guests in a conspicuously Christian environment, with the hope that they can begin to pray with their friends and help them move to the next best step for them. Last week, Sara Mitchell, Starlight's community advocate, was talking to a gentleman who came in for a haircut on his first visit. He had been out of prison for a few months. While she was cutting his hair, he told Sara that he really wanted to make a change in his life. Sara then told him that any real change that we make comes from the inside out.

Sara went on to explain to the man that this is really why Starlight is here. "Anybody can give food and clothes, but we offer hope for a lasting change that comes through knowing Jesus," she told him. Then she explained that we all need to "hand the keys to our life over to Christ." He

In June, Pastor Clarence McGregor, outreach pastor with Starlight, ran across a man he knew well, but hadn't seen recently. "For three years I had worked with this guy trying to help him get into permanent housing," he explains. "I had seen others receive housing, but this guy had been on the list longer and yet he still didn't have housing. Now after a few months I meet this guy again and all excited he shouts, 'Pastor Clarence! I got my own place now! I've been there three months!'" He told Pastor Clarence how good it is to go home, watch TV, or take a shower or read a book. Pastor Clarence continues the story, "And then he says, 'God is good!' Then I said, 'Yes he is! God is good all the time.' And as he is leaving he says to me, 'Thank you for your help and prayers, man. I am *in* now!'" Pastor Clarence concludes with a smile, "A conversation like that makes my day."

The number of people who are homeless in Boston is 7,681, according to the City's December 2008 census. At a recent meeting of service providers from various homeless agencies, one official said that at least 150 people have gotten off the street recently, and more are finding housing all the time.

Recently, in Blackstone Park, Pastor Clarence ran into three more men he had not seen in a while, and learned that they also had their own places. One has been in housing for a year. They, too, said how happy they were. Still, there they were in Blackstone Park in the middle of the day, hanging out with friends who do not have housing. This phenomenon is a matter of concern for service providers. "We have been asking ourselves how to structure something positive, still recognizing that some people do not like programs, yet somehow

said, "Yeah, kinda like handing over the keys to a designated driver to take you home." Sara said, "Yes, surrender is one of the hardest things to do, but it is the only way." They continued to talk longer and then she gave him a Bible, set a time to continue their talk, and invited him to Pastor Clarence's Bible study.

At just over 60, Pastor Clarence is still going strong, though he is not on the streets as many hours each week as he used to be. For one thing, there are more responsibilities at the Center, such as the bi-weekly drop-in times, the weekly Bible study and recovery groups, and coordinating the Wednesday night outreach program. He is learning to deal with the fatiguing effects of diabetes, diagnosed a couple years ago. And then, as he says, "I am not 16 anymore!" Still, Pastor Clarence keeps up a regular routine visiting people who spend their days—and, for many, their nights—on the streets.

"Pray that God gives me the strength to keep going and minister to people in different areas of Boston," he says. "That is my calling. That is what God wants me to do and that is what I want to do. Wherever there is a person that needs help, I want to be there to help him out."



Photo: Melissa Kirkwood

Say hello to Melissa!

Melissa Kirkwood became Starlight's newest team member in June when she started a new position, Resource Network Coordinator. Melissa will spearhead the development and management of resources, volunteers, and churches in order to equip individuals and churches to engage those who find their home

on the streets. She will also be a vital link to supporters and partners and help us understand the social impact of Starlight's efforts in order to better facilitate effective and sustainable models of ministry.

Melissa moved to Boston in 2006 to start graduate school at Boston

College, and received her Master's degree in social work last year. Before moving to Boston she lived in South Africa, working and building relationships with street-involved kids and their families. She also helped develop policy and procedures for an AIDS hospice. Prior to her time in South Africa, Melissa worked at International Justice Mission in Washington, D.C.

Melissa says she is "excited about being part of a community that is working to equip and empower the church as the corporate body of Christ and as individual believers—to love, serve, and build personal relationships with the poor as a natural outflowing and response to the rule of Christ, and in such a way that is very natural to how we spend our lives."

—Grace Lee

What a great way to start the weekend!

All about the Starlight Café Lounge

Over the years, Starlight Ministries has hosted a variety of creative fund-raising events such as banquets and arts shows with original works by youth from the streets. The most recent event was the Starlight Café Lounge on Friday, May 8, 2009, held at Christ the King Church in Cambridge. And what a great way to start the weekend! Guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, coffee, tea, and dessert while they viewed the latest creations from the Sanctuary Arts Community. Similar to the Wake Up! art show a couple years back, guests had an opportunity to bid on a variety of art work. Each piece gave a reflection of the different workshops the arts community has held including microfiction, photography, and pottery. However, the Café Lounge wasn't just about viewing art, listening to the background music of Christ the King's art group (Opus 99), and eating delicacies; the crowd was also entertained by an eclectic variety of performances from Sanctuary members. From a one-man cover band delighting the crowd with some popular mainstream songs to a reinterpretation of a classical Mozart piece, the musical program left the audience wondering what was next. The attendees were even invited to join the show with an impromptu sing-a-long of "Happy Birthday to Sanctuary," accompanying an accordion played by a Sanctuary member.

As evidenced by the Happy Birthday rendition, the evening was a real time of celebration. "There are few opportunities for Starlight volunteers, staff, supporters and friends to come together to celebrate what the ministry means to them and give back in a special way," says Alex Grant, Starlight Youth Outreach Coordinator. The evening gave all these groups a chance to understand Starlight more deeply and support the ministry through a financial offering, the purchase of an art piece, or by sharing a testimony. Alex noted how grateful the staff is for the various expressions of support and the faithfulness of Starlight and Sanctuary's community. No matter what special event or creative performance that Starlight comes up with next, one thing will never change—everyone leaves knowing they are part of this ministry family.



Photos: Emily Barr

URGENT NEEDS FOR SUMMER 2009

Please consider how you can partner with Starlight as we continue to meet the spiritual and physical needs of those who find their home on the streets and as we strengthen our efforts to educate and equip the body of Christ to love and serve their neighbor. We need:

- ◆ NEW men's socks and underwear
- ◆ Men's pants
- ◆ A laptop computer for our new Resource Network Coordinator
- ◆ Increased financial resources
- ◆ Individual and church group volunteers and interns

Think you can help? Please contact Melissa Kirkwood, Resource Network Coordinator, at mkirkwood@egc.org or 617-262-4567 x182.

What We Do

NIGHT OUTREACH: Staff and volunteers "take the Church to the streets" at Boston Common on Wednesdays and in Harvard Square on Thursdays. We provide food, clothing, blankets, and referrals to social services. Each outreach concludes with a worship service on the streets.

DAY OUTREACH: Staff minister five days a week in various locations around Boston where people congregate. Through resulting relationships, many have begun the transition off the streets.

OPPORTUNITY RESOURCE CENTER: We have a safe and supportive environment where volunteers and staff offer case management, clothing, recovery groups, Bible studies, showers, and more.

YOUTH OUTREACH: We serve street youth 14-24 through an indoor arts community, street outreach and case management.

CHURCH TRAINING: We train groups on homelessness and how to respond as individuals and churches, how to do effective relational outreach, and how to support people both now and when they transition off the streets.



From the Director

Brian Gearin, Interim Director

In John Chapter 21, Peter and several of the disciples are perplexed about the chaotic nature of the post-resurrection events. In their confusion they desire to return to their former profession of fishing. Perhaps the disciples were thinking that a return to their former profession might bring some type of ordinary routine back to their lives after the three years of full-time ministry with Jesus. However, the results are tremendously underwhelming to say the least as the total number of fish that were caught that night equaled zero.

Many of us also desire (as the disciples may have) predictability and sameness when we are in the throes of highly charged emotional situations. In these types of situations we may want to just “survive” this process of change and be

content to just “get through” the crisis. Many of our friends on the street have these similar feelings as they struggle to obtain housing, get a job, and live life well. However the answer for them and for us does not lie in trying to construct plans to make life work on our own. The answer for the disciples on the beach that day and for us is to come to Jesus and ask for his leading, direction, and guidance. It was after Jesus directed them that they were able to catch so much fish they were afraid their nets would break!

Notice that it is Jesus that calls us to a deeper relationship with Him especially during these types of confusing times. Notice that Jesus ministers to the disciples by providing breakfast on the beach. In our lives and the lives of our friends on the street, Jesus ministers to us through his leading, his Word, through our prayers, and as

we are in fellowship with others.

In Starlight Ministries we desire for our friends on the street to have these types of interactions with the Lord and experience his power, healing and forgiveness in their lives. As Starlight we want to create and train others to provide these types of healing environments for people where they live and interact. In the outreaches on the streets of Boston and Cambridge, we pray for people to make life-giving choices that are influenced by their connection with God.

Will you pray along with us for these types of healing environments to occur throughout the city? Will you join us in the work of creating these “safe environments” for healing and wholeness?

Alex Grant and Steve Comer Run the Boston Marathon for Starlight

by Steve Daman

What’s the best thing about running the Boston Marathon? Is it the starting gun, the crowd of competitors, the cheering fans? Ask Alex Grant, youth outreach coordinator for Starlight and one of two people who ran the Boston Marathon on April 20, 2009, to raise money for Starlight. The first thing he mentions is... the finish line! “It was a great feeling to finish,” he says. His 26-mile run started well, but Alex experienced a setback halfway along. “Though my legs cramped up at mile 12, and I wasn’t able to run much afterward, we



Alex Grant waves to the camera as he nears the finish line in Copley Square.

finished! I say ‘we’ because I couldn’t have made it without the Lord, my family, friends, and the rest of my supporters.” In fact, his supporters were another high point for Alex. “I was blown away by the supporters,” he says, “especially those who did not know Starlight, and friends of some of the EGC staff who have not even met me.” People volunteered to help Alex with fundraising, publicity, record keeping, and just “keeping me encouraged throughout

the process.” Sara Mitchell, Starlight’s community outreach worker, hosted a fundraising ice cream social the day before the race. Alex brought his racing clothes with him, and everybody signed them, from his shirt to his shoes, leaving him encouraging notes. The next day, Alex was puzzled for quite



Steve Comer shows his just-picked-up number at the finish line.

some time as spectators along the way kept calling out to him, “Go John!” “You can do it, John!” Then he discovered that someone had written a quote and reference from the Gospel of John in large letters right in the middle of his shirt. He had a great laugh once he figured out why everyone was calling him “John.”

Steve Comer, a friend of the ministry, also volunteered to run and help raise money for Starlight and, together, Alex and Steve raised over \$8,000. Starlight is grateful for both of these men, for their courageous efforts, and for demonstrating such perseverance. Thanks to John Hancock Financial Services which procured the two runners’ spots for us. We are also very grateful for many friends and family members who so generously supported the run for Starlight. Thank you!

Photos: Liza Cagua-Koo and Steve Comer

Our Staff

BRIAN GEARIN <i>Interim Director</i>	MELISSA KIRKWOOD <i>Resource Network Coordinator</i>
CLARENCE MCGREGOR <i>Outreach Pastor</i>	ALEX GRANT <i>Youth Outreach Coordinator</i>
SARA MITCHELL <i>Community Advocate</i>	JANE DIZAZZO <i>Volunteer Staff Outreach Worker</i>

Contact Us!

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