ECM’s youth programs have been running since the beginning of the ministry, and have taken many forms over the years. Despite all the changes, the core of these programs has always been the same: **support youth in our community as they become the next generation’s leaders by helping them grow and thrive socially, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically.**

In this edition of our newsletter we’d like to bring you up to speed with our youth programs as they are today, and tell you about some exciting new additions to our team!

Becky Johnson, ECM’s Youth Programs Manager, runs our programs for teens and oversees the overall direction of all youth activities. She is also one of the members of our team who’s been here the longest. With a tenure of over a decade at our ministry, she has seen much of the ebb and flow of our programs, and has been part of creating many elements of our programs as they are today.

The following is a Q&A with Becky, reflecting on how the youth programs have developed over her years here.

**How long have you been at ECM, and how has your role changed during your time here?**

I have been here for 11 years. My role has grown as we have expanded the programs we offer to youth; there is a lot more to coordinate now! When I started, ECM had a small homework club two afternoons a week. I coordinated that, and I would also do activities with the kids during the food co-ops. On a fun note, three of those former pre-school-age co-op kids are now high-schoolers and are still involved in our youth programs!

I still do some direct teaching and leading activities with kids, which I still really enjoy, but I also now do quite a bit of training young adult interns to plan and lead activities for younger students. I also coordinate with volunteers and other staff, who have added tremendously to what we offer our community’s youth.

**Can you give a brief description of the youth internships? What do they entail, and what is the goal of the program?**

Each semester and summer, we offer paid internships for local high school and college students. We have also facilitated several work-study internships. Our goal is to inspire and equip young people for faith-based social justice, community development, and non-profit work. Regardless of their future careers, we hope our interns will be positive, mindful leaders who work to make the world better.

Our Interns work a set number of hours every week in one or more of ECM's programs, such as our urban farm, thrift store, or children’s activities, to gain hands-on experience and to help these programs. The Interns also participate in weekly group trainings on topics such as non-profit work, social justice, Christian Community Development principles, spiritual formation, self-care, etc.
Youth enrolled in our summer 2017 programs: 106
Children regularly attending pre-school co-op: 10
Cost of running 1 internship for 1 semester: $450
Countries “visited” during summer 2017 K-5 program: 9

How did the internships start?
In the early days of ECM’s Urban Farm, it needed more help, and the idea came up of paying some kids from the community to help out. They could learn job skills, be involved with something positive, and ECM would get some genuinely-needed help! We also wanted to keep our younger kids’ activities going over the summer. Many of our adult volunteers were not consistently available over the summer, but teens from the community were not only available but looking for more things to get involved with. Finally, there were some young teens that would hang around that we were trying to engage more, and we would periodically ask them to help with specific things like painting over graffiti on our walls, which helped them take more ownership at ECM and feel like they were a part of it.

These ideas all came together around the same time, so we created an internship and trained and paid youth to help in different areas where we needed help.

What have been some of the biggest changes in the internships over the years?
We have added more training, so that the youth are not only involved by working, but are learning about issues important to us as an organization. I always tell the kids it is not just a job but a learning experience.

We have also expanded it from starting with younger teens to now including college students. The college students generally have come through our programs for teens, so they know the organization pretty well and have already had a fair amount of leadership development. They are therefore able to take on quite a bit of responsibility. Our current college interns completely plan and lead activities, and have run classes for younger kids themselves; we just provide some oversight.

How did you develop the curriculum you use for the trainings?
We use a combination of curriculum designed for training student leaders, we take bits and pieces from curriculum on other topics, and some of it I have developed myself. We read a lot of articles or books, watch videos or talks, or bring in guest speakers about topics that relate to our community, values, non-profit work, or current events. We have a lot of group discussions and team-building exercises, and we also ask for a lot of feedback from the youth and use that in planning future trainings.

Whenever we talk about social justice issues, for example, the youth almost always get very interested and vocal. It does not seem to be something they comprehensively learn about elsewhere, and several have said that schools should teach this more or that every teen should take a class on this. So while we continue to incorporate it into our internship, we also now offer a weekly faith-based social justice class for youth outside of the internship.

What has been a highlight for you during your time managing the internships?
I have many highlights; that’s why I love this job! I love when students get really passionate about something or make a change in their personal life because of something they have been challenged by here. I love seeing returning youth grow and take on more leadership over time.

Our internship also draws a very diverse group of students – kids from the surrounding neighborhood, kids from local congregations that support ECM, kids interested in civic engagement – and we work hard to create a community where everyone has something to contribute and to learn. I am always impressed that our youth are not “clique-ish”. I think new youth are embraced really well by the youth who have been around a long time and they all really make each other feel welcome here.
Pre-school Cooperative

In March, we launched a brand new bilingual preschool cooperative. This program had been requested by parents in our food cooperative for a long time, so we are excited to finally get it off the ground!

This program will focus on early childhood education and Kindergarten readiness skills. Participating children will learn the basic concepts—colors, shapes, numbers—and behaviors—sitting still, listening to teachers, taking turns—that they need to thrive in a Kindergarten classroom setting. We also hope to inspire a love of learning, so lessons are delivered in a fun way, using games, crafts, and songs.

Parents are a key part of the cooperative too! Parents play a role in running the program by taking turns leading activities. This not only increases their ownership of the program, it also solidifies the bonds of community between children and adults in our community. Parents who aren’t able to participate in the preschool sessions learn about the day’s activities when they pick their kids up, so they can replicate them and reinforce learning at home.

Heading up this program is our new Pre-School Coordinator, Itzel Ceballos! With her passion for working with young children and her many years of experience in early childhood education, Itzel is the ideal candidate to lead this new program. She has always loved working with kids, ever since she started babysitting at age 11. She has worked taking care of kids at a community center after-school program, as an educational assistant at APS, and teaching Kindergarten and first grade in Mexico. She’s also volunteered at La Mesa Elementary school, where she has served for 9 years both in the Kindergarten program and with the Parent-Teacher Association. Itzel was requested by name by the parents in the cooperative, so she comes highly recommended! We are excited to introduce her to all of you!

K-5 Programs

In May, we rounded out our array of programs with a new slate of activities for kids in grades K-5, consisting of meaningful enrichment activities designed to complement, reinforce, and deepen what kids learn in school. The activities also aim to start building kids’ awareness of social justice issues, ability to empathize, and leadership potential at an age-appropriate level.

Over the summer, this took the form of weekly world cultures-themed activities. Geography can often be a struggle—especially when it’s presented as a slew of dates and names—so we wanted to help students connect to the human side of the subject. Each week, kids “traveled” to a different country—India, Japan, Kenya, Russia, etc.—via crafts, games, food, and more.

As the fall semester ramps up, we will transition into after-school “Fun-tivities,” a twice weekly session when kids will participate in science experiments, play math games, do team-building exercises, and get homework help. These activities will build on both the academic concepts and social skills learned in the classroom, while also encouraging kids to have fun, enjoy learning, and build their confidence.

Carey Franklin, the newest addition to the ECM team, will be coordinating these programs. Originally from Colorado, Carey is returning to the Southwest after having lived in many different places, including 12 years in Nicaragua, where she taught at a K-12 school, helped launch and directed a new school, and navigated the joys and challenges of being immersed in another culture. We are excited for Carey to bring her bilingual and bicultural experience, as well as her years as an educator, to the team here at ECM!
Bits and Pieces

Raise the Roof!

We need your help! We need to raise about $30,000 to replace the section of our warehouse roof over the youth room and olla workshop.

Our warehouse building has served us well, but it is old. You may remember that last year we worked hard on repairing the roof of the back section of our warehouse. Now, it’s the whole front section of the building which needs a totally new roof.

Please help us raise the roof today at www.crowdrise.com/ECMRaiseTheRoof

Calling All Dentists!

We are looking for some additional volunteer dentists to expand our team at One Hope Centro de Vida, as well as some dentists who would be interested in serving on a steering committee to help strengthen the future development of the dental program. If this is of interest to you, e-mail Blanca at blanca@eastcentralministries.org

Join us for a Kermesse!

We are hosting a kermesse (or a community-run carnival) to raise funds for emergency patient needs in our clinic! Members of the community will run games, paint faces, donate gifts for raffles, sell food, and more.

We do everything we can to keep our clinic fees as low as possible. Even still, sometimes patients can’t afford to pay for the vital services they need to get healthy and stay healthy. We want to build up an emergency fund for these patients so we can waive or reduce their fees and help them pay for medications, without letting the operations of our clinic suffer.

Please join us for this fun event on Friday, September 29, from 4:30 to 8:30 pm, at 123 Vermont St NE. Want to help out? E-mail Christy at info@eastcentralministries.org for a list of volunteer needs.

Book Review: Healing Across the Educational Divide

Escuela Luz del Mundo (ELM), a small Christian middle school which graduated over 100 students during its 7 years, was a partner organization of East Central Ministries from 2007-2014. The school was run by Dr. Richard Kitchen — or, as we know him, Rick — a former board member of ECM. Rick has now written and published a book about some of the lessons learned during his time with ELM, called Healing Across the Educational Divide. Please visit our website for a description of the book, and a link to purchase it.

Visit the Website: www.EastCentralMinistries.org
Phone: 505.266.3590

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