

Why is change so hard?



Alan, Kirk and Tina having fellowship together

Do you ever ask that question in relation to politics, business, spirituality, or your children's behavior? My daughter turned 4 years old this month, and I keep waiting for that magical day when discipline will no longer be necessary. For you parents reading this, please write in with the secret keys to immediate obedience in children. I naively expect that today will be the day when she obeys what I ask with a joyful and willing heart, never complaining or questioning. Of course we know that human behavior just doesn't work that way. Agape is also nearly 4 years old, and as of yet, the secret to changing behavior has eluded me. I cannot cast a spell of obedience on anyone yet nor can I save anyone from themselves. I've had to learn

this lesson most painfully, not with the members of Agape Development, but with myself. Don't get me wrong. Heart-rending pre-marital sex, life-crushing drug use, or soul-sucking self-deceit continue to wreak havoc. But those evils were all on the outside of my happy life. I am amazed to find that jealousy over another local ministry creeps up from within me, and despite my years in Christ, I can still lose control of my temper in difficult situations. I am not immune to temptations of embellishing (*I just can't bear to call it lying*), gossiping, and coveting, and as a lifelong Jesus Follower and director of a ministry, I cringe when these sins bubble to the top. I take both comfort and challenge in Paul's letter to the Philippians ¹²*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* ¹³*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,* ¹⁴*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* Because of His grace I am able to , continue in my faith. Because of His grace, I am encouraged by the faith of our members. Because of His grace together we can forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead. Please pray for us as we all press on.

By Kirk Craig

Trip to Atlanta

During spring break week, the residents of Agape Development's Gateway Program attended a leadership seminar in Atlanta, GA hosted by Psalm 23 Ministries where the guest speaker was Pastor Joe Smith of Tampa, FL. The residents were exposed to leadership tools that will not only benefit them in their spiritual development but also on the job and in their personal lives. The Gateway residents also experienced a time of spiritual renewal through evening devotionals and Sunday worship with the members of Psalm 23 Church resulting in three residents choosing to recommit themselves to Christ. Gateway residents were greatly impacted by rooming with young Christian men and women from another city striving to accomplish the same goals. Agape participants spent time serving, praying, cooking, playing, and worshipping in the discipleship houses in Atlanta which have been in operation for many years. The residents have returned home with renewed excitement and commitment to face the challenges ahead after having spent time with those who have overcome the same economic and family hardships themselves. With a renewed vision for our community, Agape residents see the kids, the parents, and the surroundings with new eyes and new hearts.



Agape Member Highlight

In September, Trevion Jones moved into the Gateway House as part of the inaugural class. As a long time volunteer and assistant Physical Education Coach at Yellowstone Academy, Tre affects the lives of young children everyday. We are so proud that Tre has chosen to give back to the kids of the Third Ward and provide a better education than he himself received. Tre is pursuing an education degree as a certified coach and teacher. Through Agape, Tre is adding maturity and discipline to his natural giftedness with children. Through some very direct accountability and confession, Tre has faced some of the hardest challenges for men in Third Ward, and we couldn't be more pleased. If you ever need an extra member for your Rock Band, or another player for your basketball team or just a friend to hang with, then Trevion Jones is your man. He is a shining star both in Agape and at school.



Tre does friendly battle with the kids

What can interns do with Agape?

A whole lot is the answer to that question. For two weeks, Second Baptist High School seniors Tommy and Caleb worked with Agape in Yates High School recruiting new Gateway Residents, at Robinson Community Center playing basketball with inner city young men, at the Food Bank collecting donations for our neighborhood, in the office preparing research on foundation grants, and in the Third Ward researching property for a potential office and worship space for Agape. As a final project, Caleb and Tommy presented proposals for funding and real estate development. If you know a high school or college student looking to learn about inner city ministry as well as gain some transferable skills to any career field, contact us at volunteer@agapedevelopment.org or 713-658-1001. Agape staff will take the time to share our successes and failures in urban ministry in the hopes of passing on wisdom to the next generation. We believe that the best learning comes by doing, and we would be honored to have interns, especially if they are as good as Caleb and Tommy.



Thanks for your help guys!

Building Something Together

Over 40 volunteers from Agape Development and St. John the Divine spent a Sunday afternoon landscaping the yards for Gateway House. Men, women, and children carted wheelbarrows of topsoil and mulch, dug up hard clay, planted flowers and planted some beautiful trees to help improve the overall look of the backyard. The most challenging part was assembling a playset for the kids with slide, sandbox, swing and fort. Many jokes could be made about how many Episcopalians does it take to ...? But after completion, the kids and the neighbors loved it. After singing the gospel song *Falling in Love with Jesus*, about 20 kids flooded into the backyards. Tony Mayer who helped organize the event said, "nothing will ever replace the memory of all the



neighborhood kids clamoring to be in the fort and on the slide!" The partnership was great because the Agape members were not being served by St. John's, but the two communities built something together in partnership, which is exactly how empowering ministries should be. Special thanks goes to Ann Cochran who coordinated several projects simultaneously for St. John's that day, though ours had the best volunteers by far. If your group wants to work on a project together with Agape, let's talk!

