

American-Caribbean Experience

Newsletter

“WHO’S

that

LADY??”



Dawn Wheeler, aka The Child Sponsorship Whisperer

For ACE this month, we wish to highlight some of the behind-the-scenes people who make ACE great in the view of our donors, volunteers and all around supporters.

Dawn gets asked lots of questions all day long. We thought it would be fun to interview her as if we ourselves were calling to inquire about a child needing sponsorship in the ACE program. Perhaps you may find one of your questions in the following interview. Some of our sponsors are so loyal to their children that they probably already know the answer before Dawn picks up her pen to answer.

Interviewer: How many children are currently in ACE’s child sponsorship program?

Dawn: We currently have 237 children in our sponsorship program. When I began with ACE three years ago, we had just over 100 children in the program. Due to the dedication and hard work of our ground staff, the number of sponsored children has increased each year.

Interviewer: If someone is interested in sponsoring a child, how can they receive information about a sponsorship?

Dawn: Anyone interested in a sponsorship can download our APP on their smart phone, Google Store or iTunes Store. Type in “American Caribbean Experience” and download the app. Or you may go to our website — acexperience.org — and fill out the information form for child sponsorship under the “Sponsorship” tab.

Interviewer: How do sponsors communicate with their sponsored child?

Dawn: Sponsors may write to their sponsored child as often as they wish. All correspondence is hand-carried to our children by a staff member or volunteer who is traveling down. No Facebook, no text, and no hash tags, so letter writing is the best way to do this. That is also, by the way, a great

way for these students to work on their writing skills. Everyone — including me — enjoys a letter in the mail from a sponsor and I know our Jamaican students love it too. And, as always, we welcome sponsors to come to Jamaica for an ACE mission trip, where we will make special arrangements for them to visit their sponsored children at their schools or homes. What a great way to feel truly connected — to receive hugs in person!

Interviewer: What is the best part of being the Stateside Child Sponsorship Coordinator?

Dawn: The pay is fantastic! (Just joking!) Actually, what’s fantastic is being able to share in the excitement of a sponsor when they receive a photo and information of the child that they have been matched with for sponsorship. God is in the details — like the time a child who said she wanted to be a nurse was matched with a sponsor who is a nurse, or when a sponsor was matched with a child whose name was the same as her father that had just recently passed. I found out this information after the fact. It is always exciting to see how God guides and directs in this process.

Interviewer: What is the toughest part of being the Child Sponsorship Coordinator?

Dawn: To inform a sponsor that their child is no longer eligible to be in our sponsorship program. The reasons that a child is removed vary from the child moving out of the area to the parents of the sponsored child not fulfilling their part of the contractual agreement (which they sign when their child is accepted into the program). Excessive absences of the sponsored child from school would be a reason for ineligibility. Our ground staff does a fantastic job of contacting the sponsored children’s parents by phone calls, home visits and warning letters. They give the parents plenty of opportunities to correct the problem before terminating a child’s sponsorship.

One thing I appreciate about ACE is that we come alongside the parents to help and encourage them to become more proactive in their child’s education. This is done through parent meetings and training classes that ACE organizes. We don’t just hand them a sponsorship; they must do their part. This is “tough love” but a love that is often necessary.

ACE is truly changing lives and transforming communities — one child at a time.



I have learned a lot of things while being down here, but one of the main things is to embrace the Martha persona instead of Mary. In Luke 10, Jesus goes to Martha's house where she quickly tries to do things for him, while Mary sits at his feet and talks. Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help him and instead Jesus says "Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42, NASB). This is such a great explanation of my time in Jamaica. I am a doer; I like to stay busy and help wherever I can. The most impact, however, is not the physical things I did, but instead the friendships and times I have been able to get to know people. I have been able to see relationships grow, myself grow, and other people grow, Jamaicans and teams alike.

We have a group from Ohio State University that has come down for the past two years, led by a past intern. This is a business fraternity and a mix of people. They may not all be believers, but they all are hard workers and have a servant's heart. They came down this past March and worked super hard with two full days of construction and an infirmary field trip, but they loved every minute of it. The awesome part was not just the work that they did, but also the work God was doing with and through them. They had about six people return from the previous year and you could visibly see the work God was doing in them. It was such a blessing and awesome experience to sit with them and talk about what God is doing in their lives and how he is opening their eyes. It also made me realize that while not all of our teams are believers, they have an impact on the community and even better God can be seen in what we are doing. Isn't that what we are all meant to do? Allow others to see Christ through us and bring people into the kingdom of God.

a picture of their group from a picture someone took of them during their stay. With much glee and excitement, they turned over the cash and the picture waiting for the completion of what they thought would be a lifetime image of the best iQuest team ever at ACE.



To this day, I have that picture in my house. (The closet) The memories and the images of Mary upstaged the artist's ability to paint her. You see, Mary has a passion for the deaf, and no artist could capture her joy and enthusiasm.

We have a deaf son named Kal who works at the hotel. He's 36-years-old now, but he was eight-years-old when I adopted him from a children's home in Montego Bay many years ago. Mary and Kal were friends when she was here. When I adopted Kal, there were more deaf children in Jamaica than any other country per capita in the world. Now they are all adults. And, there is nothing in St. Mary that provides a social interaction and, even more, a spiritual challenge to these adults.

ACE is introducing a ministry for the deaf called Defining Moments. Now don't hold us to the details, but there is a need for these deaf adults to have the same social interaction hearing adults experience. That's where Mary comes in. We asked Mary to use her passion to sign several teaching series we love that do not have any deaf translations.

Without hesitation, Mary said yes! This was a confirmation that we are on the right track to moving our deaf friends closer to each other and further along their journey to find out who loves them more than anyone: Christ.

If you want to help with this new startup outreach called Defining Moments with ACE, please let us know. We need so many items to pull this off. We've already been given a projector for the DVDs. If you are interested in ministering to the deaf, please contact us, and let's see where we can go from there.

Thank you, Mary! I think this is just the beginning – and perhaps you might be part of a better painting with all our deaf friends to send me. I promise I won't keep it in the closet.

Love, Marla & Allen

Marla's Minute

Meet Mary Parker, or as she is known today as Mary Wagenblast, wife to a fantastic guy named Lee and mother of two boys.

I have a painting hanging in my house of Mary and fellow iQuest teammates when she served with ACE in Jamaica in 2008. It's a funny story about this painting. It seems that one or two of them met this Jamaican artist while in Jamaica and hired him to paint

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