

SPRING 2020

FOCUS

WHAT IF HAPPENS IF WE SEE THE WHOLE PERSON AND STORY,
RATHER THAN THEIR LABEL OR CATEGORY?



MENTORING PROGRAM TURNS 1!

When Angel was dismissed from Escape's ASAP program in October 2018, we didn't want it to be the end of the story. Kristina, our Education Coordinator, piloted the relaunch of Escape's mentoring program and started to meet weekly with Angel. They made cookies, went thrifting, and shared life together. Now one year later, the relationship has truly changed them both. "It's been a roller coaster...but Kristina is like a second mom to me, and she makes me want to be that person for other people when I'm older...but I also don't think Kristina knew how much she needed ME." Angel says proudly. Kristina's tears were immediate. "My hardest days at Escape, I looked forward to going with Angel. She taught me so much about myself."

Over the course of the year, Angel applied for re-instatement at Escape and at Holland High, but was denied. She wasn't ready. This January, she tried again to get into Escape. This time, her heartfelt speech got to board to vote "Yes" unanimously. Her growth and her story are powerful. We are so proud of her, and hopeful for who she will become.

There are 10 mentoring matches and counting in our program, and the work is patient, relational, and committed. Not every story is a "success story" but we celebrate little victories! On the surface, one might see Angel as a project child, to be "fixed" or "improved" but when we adjust our **focus**, we see her humanity and her story and we can stay with her, through whatever comes. Because everyone is worth it.

NEW BOXING CLASS INVESTS IN KIDS

Ruben is used to training boxers who are ready to compete. But this winter's Young Gloves group (M, T, Th, 5-6pm) has shown him something new. He teaches the 6-12 year-olds the same skills as his older athletes, but the younger kids each react differently. "For Skylar, it's an anger release, for Samara, she's built her confidence in just a few weeks, and she's helping teach others already. For Alberto, he's coming out of his shell. It's cool to watch." He's passionate about seeing his athletes achieve greatness--at State Championships or in their personal development. Those are both incredible feats for young people. "I want to teach them the art of boxing, and I know it makes a difference, even 10 years down the road." The Young Gloves class starts its next session in April.

Contact Escape to enroll a student or to sponsor a kid to box!





ASAP Receives City of Holland Social Justice Award

ASAP exists to give kids who have made mistakes a second chance. It stands in the way of the school-to-prison pipeline, and has given nearly 500 students second chances in school since 2012. On January 15, Escape was awarded the Human Relations Commission Social Justice Award in the category of Education. Landis Bryson, parent of an ASAP grad, said at the ceremony, "The entire [ASAP] staff give selflessly...because they know that **everybody deserves to move forward in acceptance and love.**" It makes a difference.

The Brotherhood

Since September, The Brotherhood has been an open space for young men to eat together, share life, goof off, and talk about what it means to be a man, which is especially key for guys whose fathers aren't present. There's never a dull Tuesday evening with these guys! Slowly, they're growing. Mario's take: "I've learned I can speak out of how I feel, and **what a real man looks like.**" That's worth it.

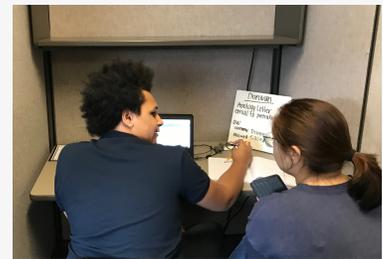


RESTORING HOPE

ASAP returns 17 students to school in fall semester!

It was a (not very cold) week in January, and Escape seemed empty. Why? Because so many students had completed their classes and gone back to school. This fall, Education Coordinator Kristina Sage and her team found what kids needed to succeed and motivated them to get their online classes done well. As a result, Paul graduated high school while at Escape in December, and Tyler finished his fall classes 3 weeks early. Mason, Esperanza, and Donovan finished EXTRA classes, and Jaz got back on track to graduate with her class this coming May. "I'm so proud when I see our students achieve more than what they thought possible." says Kristina, "I can't give them enough credit for being brave enough to keep trying and keep working on themselves, even with a lot of obstacles in their lives." Some students are still in the process, working to complete classes, recover from addiction, or manage their anger. If we broaden our focus, we can see these youth as "brave," "hurting," "insightful," or "loved" instead of "troublemakers." **They might start to see themselves differently, too.** It's all a part of the process of returning to themselves, escaping their "labels", and letting God to do his miraculous work.

It only took a couple weeks, and Escape isn't so empty any more. More parents call in with suspended students, the seats fill up, and the restoration process starts fresh with new faces. We take joy in serving these youth and their families, but we can't do it without your help. ASAP needs \$120,000 annually to keep giving students second chances. Thank you to all those whose contributions have brought ASAP this far. **Will you join the team?** Your donation today helps keep great teachers like Kristina, Jeremias, and Espy fighting with and for the students who most need it, both in and out of the classroom.



PRAY. DONATE. SHARE.

- FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS.
- FOR MENTOR MATCHES.
- FOR THE BROTHERHOOD.
- FOR FUNDING.
- BY MAIL
- IN PERSON
- ONLINE
- WITH LOVE
- FOLLOW US ON  
- INVITE FRIENDS TO OUR FUNDRAISING DINNER.
- TELL THE STORIES.

These stories happen only because of your support. Keep them going today!



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Dear, ESCAPE Family & Supporters,

As we FOCUS on 2020, ESCAPE can't help but think about the great things that have happened in 2019: - ESCAPE's ASAP program has successfully returned 17 kids that had been expelled or suspended this semester, and only 2 out of 37 students did not finish the program. In spring 2019, one of our students graduated from VR Tech with the highest GPA in her class and received a scholarship from Herman Miller. ESCAPE received the Spirit Award from the NGCRC for Outstanding Service directed at achieving gang prevention, gang intervention, and gang counseling. ESCAPE was also awarded the City of Holland Human Relations Commission Social Justice



Tutoring Tuesday kids with surprise Christmas gift cards from Gentex!

g achievement. ESCAPE will FOCUS on our Christian responsibility to youth in the Holland community: showing more of Jesus' love through relationships. We will be adding much-needed programs that the school systems have asked for, taking in elementary and middle school students who need ESCAPE's intervention at an earlier age. We are excited to be able to provide more jobs for inner-city youth to keep them off the streets in the summer. In addition, we are looking forward to doing more work with gang members to provide different outlets for youth that may feel trapped by gang life.

I have a question for you: What would you be willing to give in order to gain peace of mind, knowing kids are cared for and our community is safer? Let me explain: Drugs are being used by more kids than ever before. Drugs are pouring into every neighborhood, not just the 'bad' ones, and gang influence is present in every school. ESCAPE intervenes.

They are a contributing part of society instead of a "threat."

To date, ESCAPE has helped 312 kids in Holland and Grand Rapids get out of gangs. ESCAPE has put over 500 youth to work since 2013, helping to drop the juvenile crime rate here in Holland. Many youth who had their first job in Escape's summer job program are now working in jobs as adults. They are a contributing part of society instead of a "threat." So what would you give to gain peace of mind knowing ESCAPE is on the front line in making our community safer? To offer all the programs we can for our community \$537,000. This is for:

- Expanding our ASAP program: hiring 2 new teachers to serve elementary students.
- Providing 10 more youth with jobs through our Career Connections program.
- Training new mentors for youth in our programs.
- Adding curriculum for our after school programs.
- Supporting kids who are looking to get out of gangs.
- Providing new laptops to replace our outdated ones.
- Providing meals for ASAP students and after school groups.



Escape ASAP staff: Jeremias, AJ, Espy, and Kristina

Your giving makes a direct impact on your community. As far as our staff, can you think of them as missionaries? Many of them come here because of their passion to help kids in at-risk environments. They are not here for the pay, but they do have to take care of their families. So when you think about giving, consider supporting some amazing people who are working on the front lines to help our youth.

Please join us for our Fundraising Dinner, Tuesday, April 21st at the Civic Center in Holland from 6pm-8pm to FOCUS with us on empowering our youth!

God bless you,

Pastor Willie J. Watt Jr.





FOLLOW US!



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HIRE THIS TEAM.



>>> **AMBITIOUS TEENS ARE READY FOR YOUR SPRING & SUMMER PROJECTS!**

ESCAPE CAREER CONNECTIONS 2020

Contact Escape to schedule a team weed, spread mulch, paint, move, rake, or something else!

connections@escape-out.org **Contact Escape**
616-396-4481 **for rates & availability**



WHAT'S INSIDE:

Mentoring Program Turns !!



FOCUS: Restoration in Education



ASAP receives Social Justice Award



Ruben's new boxing class



SCAN ME

ESCAPE MINISTRIES FUNDRAISER DINNER

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN US!

TICKETS AT ESCAPE-OUT.ORG/DONATIONS OR AT ESCAPE MINISTRIES

AT THE HOLLAND CIVIC CENTER

Tuesday, April 21, 2020 // 6pm - 8pm

FOCUS / 2020

Don't miss it!

