



Oppose Poverty



One Saturday every other month, you'll find between 12 and 15 youth hanging out in Washington, D.C.'s Franklin Park, not just to have a barbecue with friends, but rather to spend time with the park's homeless.

There, the youth of Marlow Heights Baptist Church in Front Royal, Va. (marlowheights.org), toss footballs with the homeless men, listen to their stories and pass out food and clothing they've collected as part of a national initiative called Teens Opposing Poverty (TOP; teensopposingpoverty.org).

Teaching youth the need to be actively involved in the fight against hunger and poverty, the non-profit Christian organization TOP informs churches about local homeless situations, then invites that church's youth and their friends to take a TOP trip.

"Teens have a special gift of reaching people, especially those who feel disconnected or disenfranchised from the rest of society," explains Steve Jennings, TOP's executive director. The trips allow the

youth to spend time with the homeless, ultimately teaching them to put Christ's love into action.

Marlow Heights Associate Pastor Larry Lawhon says his youth's TOP trips are simply a catalyst, though. "Initially, these trips help to form casual connections between the youth and homeless, but we really hope that they will lead to deeper conversations," he says. Toward the end of their TOP trips, the Marlow Heights youth invite the homeless to participate in a short worship and prayer time with them.

The group has also participated in TOP's weeklong summer mission trip called "Impact the Valley," in which groups of teens do home repairs for the elderly, single mothers with young children, and others who aren't physically or financially able to do the work themselves.

"The kids learn to see those less fortunate than themselves as people who deserve attention, respect and time," Lawhon says. "They see them as people who have the right to know God loves them."

—Kim James

LET FREEDOM REIGN

Slaves are not relics of the past, and neither are freedom fighters. As modern-day abolitionists, some 400 youth of West Ridge Church in Dallas, Ga. (westridge.com), are helping free today's 27 million slaves through the student-led campaign Loose Change to Loosen Chains (lc2lc.com).

Inspired by the recent film *Amazing Grace* about abolitionist William Wilberforce's work, the campaign was started by 15-year-old Zach Hunter, who also wrote the corresponding book *Be the Change* (Zondervan). Hunter's campaign educates others about today's slavery; collects change for the cause; and submits the funds to organizations on the front lines of the fight to end slavery.

To do their part, West Ridge youth are taking their cause to their schools and neighborhoods, inviting people to help stop modern-day slavery by simply giving change or joining the campaign.

"Our culture is not used to seeing students acting out the commands in Proverbs 31:8–9, and it makes people ask why!" says Sarah Hough, West Ridge's connection director for student ministry. "Our youth have had the opportunity to share with their friends, principals, parents, coaches and strangers."

Hough says the campaign has taught students to look outside their own situations. "They are starting to see and realize that the majority of Christ's ministry was spent with the poor and oppressed, and they're taking seriously the call to do the same."

—H.J.

42%

The percentage of Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 who say they have seen pornography online within the past year.

Source: University of New Hampshire