

Megan Sickler

### Book Buddies: Finding Beauty amid Chaos

On a frigid winter morning in January of 2015, I stood at the door of Seven Loaves Food Pantry, handing a numbered card to each client who entered. “Veintitres, veintitres,” another volunteer called out behind me. “Does anyone have the number twenty-three?” After several moments, the twenty-third client rose from her seat. Although the volunteer had been calling the client’s number repeatedly, the woman had been distracted by her restless children. In fact, a plethora of children were running around the food pantry, disrupting the important work taking place there.

While driving home from the food pantry, my mom and I discussed the behavior of the clients’ children. We agreed that it was not the clients’ fault that their children interfered with the operation of the food pantry; after all, many were single parents and therefore had no choice but to bring their children with them while retrieving their food. With that in mind, we began to brainstorm ways in which we could entertain the kids in order to keep them out of trouble. Eventually, we decided that we would ask the librarian at my middle school to donate her old bookshelf and a few extra books to the food pantry so that we could read to the children and allow them to take one or two books home. And thus, on that chilly January day five years ago, our organization, called Book Buddies, came to life with the goal of increasing the literacy of disadvantaged Collin County children.

When I reflect on the mission and achievements of Book Buddies, the word ‘influential’ comes to mind. Our program makes a difference in the lives of local impoverished children by allowing them to feel the joy of reading. As the kids choose books from our shelf, they visibly gain a sense of confidence and independence through their ability to decide what they will read. Each time I spend one-on-one time with a child at Book Buddies, they experience the companionship and understanding that comes from discussing books with a friend. When a little one learns how

to pronounce a word correctly after struggling to do so, they feel successful and understand that, little by little, their newly obtained knowledge enables them to make a difference in the world. Finally, as the children wave goodbye, proudly holding their new books, they find joy in the ownership of items that belong solely to them, a rare occurrence for children who grow up in underprivileged families. Every time I interact with a child through Book Buddies, I impact their life by allowing them to experience a childhood where literacy is emphasized and celebrated.

Another word I use to describe Book Buddies is ‘enlightening.’ My role in the program has been and continues to be a fundamental learning experience for me. Throughout the many hours I have devoted to Book Buddies, I have gained immeasurable knowledge about Christ’s love and the way in which it binds us to each other. Just as God calls me to generously share my material possessions, such as books, with those in need, He also calls me to freely love others like He did at the time of His death. Book Buddies shows me that the love of Christ bridges the gap between the affluent and those in need. Each time I read to a Spanish-speaking child, I see that Christ’s compassion transcends all barriers, including those of language. In addition, the joy I find in reading to children over a decade younger than I am demonstrates that Christ’s love enables me to connect with people of all ages. The days I spend serving others at Book Buddies never fail to teach me lessons about sharing the gifts God has given me and loving others with abandon.

Although that winter morning years ago challenged my patience and frustrated me, it blossomed into the influential and enlightening community of love that is Book Buddies today. Without that initial struggle, 22,000 books would not have made it into the hands of intelligent yet resource-limited children in Collin County. If my mom and I had not encountered adversity, hundreds of volunteers would not have shared the powerful love of God with little ones in need. Perhaps our experience serves as a reminder to everyone who sees injustice in the world, prompting them to serve others to combat and overcome difficulty.