

Kids Hope USA pairs Christian mentors with at-risk children

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Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

ATLANTA—Some elementary school children in the United States have new Christian friends this fall as a part of the national Kids Hope USA program, which pairs church members and at-risk children in a one-year, one-hour-a-week mentoring relationship.

Partners in the program include the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Buckner Baptist Benevolences, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and Dallas and Tarrant Baptist associations.

“Church members who possess the love and life-changing message of Jesus Christ are being asked to drive around the corner, into the schools and the lives of children and families. This is a low-risk, high-impact way for ordinary Christians to go into the neighborhood for Christ—to form relationships with their neighbors and then welcome them into the congregation,” said Kids Hope USA Founder Virgil Gulker.

CBF Global Missions matched a \$7,000 grant from Fort Worth's J.E.S. Edwards Foundation to provide scholarships for partner churches to

participate in the Kids Hope USA program. Churches must pay a one-time affiliate fee, which covers program development, training courses and support. Churches can receive up to 50 percent—but no more than \$1,000—toward the fee, which varies according to a church's adult membership.

CBF will help match seven churches with seven elementary schools in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, where more than 179,000 children come from economically disadvantaged families, according to school district reports.

Although the J.E.S. Edwards Foundation grant must be used in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, the Fellowship has \$13,000 available for churches in other areas of the United States. About \$3,000 already has been disbursed to churches.

“This is a partnership the local church can be involved in, and CBF Global Missions strongly believes in empowering the local church and reaching out to the community,” said Laura Cadena, CBF Global Missions partnership relationship manager.

The program targets at-risk children, who often struggle with low reading or academic skills, trouble concentrating, difficulty making friends and low self-esteem, said Carrie Tracy, an educator and director of the mentoring program at First Baptist Church of Richardson.

“That's where we help,” she said. “Kids Hope USA mentors can meet the needs of children through a faithful, caring relationship.”

First Baptist in Richardson signed up for the program in January, seeing it as an effective opportunity to meet at-risk children's needs, Tracy said. Even church members who can't mentor can be involved through prayer. Each mentoring relationship has the prayer support of a church member committed to pray daily for the child.

Kids Hope USA began in 1995 with three pilot programs in Michigan and has grown to more than 271 programs in 26 states, mentoring more than 4,500 children. Ninety percent of participating churches stay with the program, with many churches reporting continued commitment among most of their volunteer mentors.

For more information, contact Laura Cadena at (800) 352-8741, lcadena@thefellowship.info or visit www.thefellowship.info/GlobalMissions/gmpartnerships/buckner.icm

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