

Teens with Down syndrome help develop special-needs ministry in Germany

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BURLESON—People who know Tyler Tooley and Blake Dorchester see them as extraordinary in countless ways. Both born with Down syndrome, the young men do not let special needs prevent them from serving God.



Blake Dorchester (left), 17, and Tyler Tooley, 14, participated in a trip to Germany with Alsbury Baptist Church in Burleson to help a church in Andernach develop a special-needs ministry. Recently, Tooley and Dorchester traveled to Andernach, Germany, with 22 other members of Alsbury Baptist Church in Burleson to help develop a special-needs ministry at City Church, a congregation their church launched.

‘Every person deserves to know God’s love’

Alsbury Baptist offers a thriving ministry to children and adults with special needs. On any given Sunday, about 10 percent of the people in the congregation have a special need—something Pastor Scott Sharman is honored to say.

“Every person deserves to know God’s love,” Sharman said. “Every person deserves the opportunity to grow in relationship with God, and that includes people with special needs.”

When members of City Church noticed people with special needs in Andernach, they felt an urgency to develop a ministry much like their Texas sister church provides.

“City Church is trying to connect families who feel like they don’t have a place in the church,” Sharman said.

Alsbury Baptist members traveled to Germany to help City Church begin the ministry. They conducted vision-casting and training events, offered insights on teaching children with special needs, led recreation with local children with Down syndrome and helped operate a soccer event that included children with special needs.

‘No one did a better job than Tyler and Blake’

At the beginning of the week, the Germans were reluctant to connect with Tooley and Dorchester, Sharman said, but that quickly changed.

“As the week progressed, you could see the people’s connections with those two boys change,” he said. “By the end of the week, it was like they were saying goodbye to their best friends.”

Sharman praised Tooley and Dorchester for their contributions to the mission trip.

“No one did a better job than Tyler and Blake,” he explained. “God just

used them mightily.”

Special-needs ministry can be demanding and tiring for workers, Sharman admitted. The behavior of church members with special needs sometimes can distract other worshippers, he acknowledged.

But Alsbury Baptist members believe the gospel is for everyone, and they strive to make sure their church “has a place for every member of the family,” Sharman said.

“If we don’t intentionally provide an avenue for families with children with special needs, then we just cut those people out of the family,” he said. “Parents aren’t going to go if their kids aren’t welcomed. If you don’t do some sort of modification based on need for children, then you leave those kids out.”

Thanks to Tooley and Dorchester—and the other Alsbury members who journeyed to Andernach—German families with special-needs children feel right at home in City Church.

For more information about ministries for children and adults with special needs, contact Diane Lane at diane.lane@texasbaptists.org or at (214) 828-5287.