



Redeemer Community Partnership

UPDATE



South Central Los Angeles

Spring 2008



LIGHTS...CAMERA...ACTION! BY JENNIFER LO

Chaos. Potential. Energy. Discipline. Rinse, repeat and hang dry. These are the words that come to my mind as I reflect on the month I spent producing a movie with a group of neighborhood youth. I was one of many volunteers who assisted with REEL Joy, a film-making project led by Streetlamp Studio.

Almost 30 young people, grades 6-12, showed up for our first session. The Streetlamp Studio team shared poetry, rap and personal reflections on two of Jesus' parables: The pearl of great price and the treasure in the field. The kids then responded to the discussion question, "Is God this cool to you?" Lots of perspectives. "Having God is better than having money because money can run out but God will always be there." "The problem with God is you can't see him so it's hard to know if he's really there." "When I was alone and afraid I went off by myself to talk to God and he really made me feel peace!". These parables, and the kids' reflections on them, would provide thematic content for three short films and a music video. The kids each chose their favorite from four brief summaries and got into groups to start creating storylines.

Teenagers have a lot of energy, and when you combine that with a cramped space and 8-10 adult volunteers who may or may not know much about film-making it can quickly add up to chaos!

I love Adventures Ahead. It is a place where children work to improve their reading, writing and comprehension, and a place where they connect with adults who want to be a positive influence in their lives. But 30 teens and tweens developing four original films stretched the capacity of our little center to its outer limits!

You must picture this group of rising stars. There were the clowns, ring-leaders, church folk, non-church folk, space cadets and trouble makers. There were youth willing to put themselves out there and those that weren't quite ready. An ice-breaker game of charades revealed early on who would tend towards which end of the spectrum.

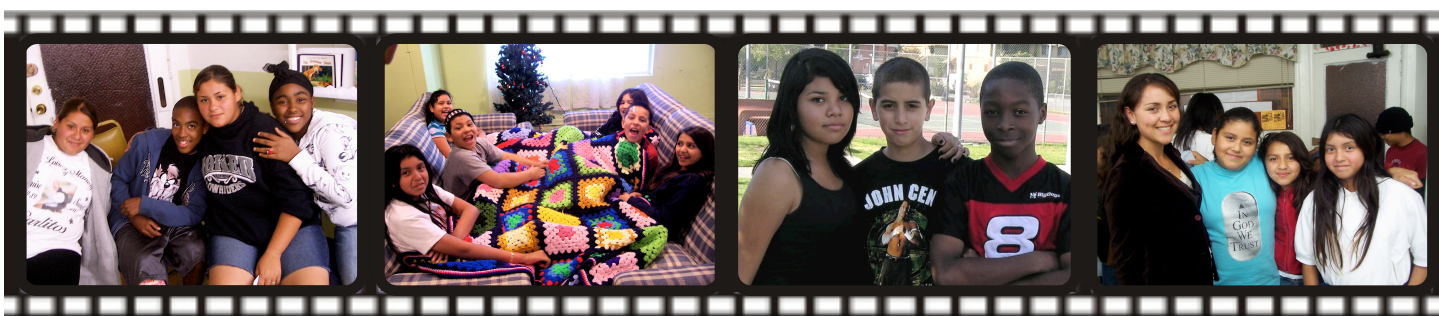
The kids in my group wanted their main character to demonstrate the realities of becoming addicted to drugs. They wrote a story that showed a young woman losing sight of the good things in life, like friends, or playing in a band, or God. Her character would eventually face the reality that she needed God. The group wanted her to learn about the forgiveness and love of God. All of these ideas originated from the teens themselves, not from me or my co-facilitator. This was the narrative that they wanted to see unfold. There, in that loud, chaotic tutoring center, I was reminded of God's love, goodness and redemptive plan for all. I was reminded that though these people may be young, many have experienced

suffering that I do not know. And they long for things to be different, for their lives to be made whole by God.

Young people want to be famous, and they want to produce something that will be *seen* by the world. Even in a community where many families don't own computers, these kids all have myspace pages filled with images, music clips and quotes. There is a feeling in this generation that anyone can become a star, and this desire gave our recruiting efforts a tremendous boost. The catch is *what* these young people will become a star for. There are plenty of people, young and old who will submit themselves to any type of shame to get their piece of the world's attention. But REEL Joy challenged our kids to tell stories that expressed truth and hope. There would be humor, violence, dancing, cute girls, crime, cool skate moves and surprise endings. But the Streetlamp Studio mentors challenged each group to use these elements to say something important. This proved to be hard work and there were moments when these teenagers wanted to give up and peace out. But they kept working.

On the night we premiered the four films, Jenny Hall spoke about how God loves these young people and how much they are worth to him. She called the kids' attention to all the hours that various adults had put into helping them make their films... industry

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professionals who directed and filmed them, editors who added music and put the films into a polished form, mentors in writing and acting, church members who prepared food and inexperienced volunteers like me who walked with them through each step of the process. All these adults, she told them, gave you their time because they believe you are worth it. And everything they gave you is just a tiny, miniscule, microscopic fraction of how much you are worth to God!

There is a desire in many of us, I believe, to communicate to these young people just how valuable they are. "Discipline your energy and potential because your participation and presence is needed. You are irreplaceable. I know that the world, myself included, teachers and people in authority may tell you otherwise. Our actions may say, 'You don't matter' or 'You're a danger, a nuisance, a problem to be solved'. I see this, and want to say 'I'm sorry' for the things that I have said through my look, my tone, my attitude. Please forgive me." Jenny spoke for all of us that night, and the kids listened.

On the Saturday that we did our filming, I had driven to pick up three young ladies from their new home in Long Beach. As I entered the house, I was overwhelmed at the number of children who were there. I didn't know if they were all siblings or friends, or distant relatives, but there were many children in that house and only one mom. She is a lovely woman, with an open face, full of love. The night the REEL JOY movies were unveiled one of her daughters took the stage. I watched her stand and raise her hands to get the audience to chant her name. Her glowing smile showed her pleasure at wielding this power over the crowd. She carried herself with a confidence and poise that can't be easily taught. She put her hand to her ear to get us to chant louder, confessing with a laugh, "I've always wanted to do that". She read a scripture about joy, then grabbed the microphone and flashed us all another huge smile. With a wink, she offered a spontaneous and sincere word of thanks to her mother, "I love you Mom!" This young lady's name is Star, and that night she truly felt like she was.

Sitting in the audience to receive that joy was her mother, with all of her 8 children. There is such hope in the example of this teenager's mom, who packed up the car with all eight of her children to come see her daughter's grand debut! And such joy is mine, to have been a piece of the picture and to have seen the hope and joy of the Lord, which are mine and yours to share in.

Jennifer Lo is a local church member and Streetlamp Studio volunteer.

Thank You!

Thank you Jenny Hall and Streetlamp Studio for creating an amazing experience for neighborhood youth and all involved with REEL JOY!

Thank you to all the filers, editors, and volunteers who contributed time and talent to making the movies!

And thank you to all of our supporters who have offered up prayers and resources on behalf of the families of this neighborhood!



Donation Opportunities

a web designer
a vacuum cleaner
a digital camera
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school supplies
prizes for our prize shelf

**Would you like to learn
more about Redeemer
Community Partnership?**

Come & See!

**Tour our neighborhood and
tutoring center
Saturday, June 14,
from 10:00 a.m. to noon.**

**R.S.V.P. to Richard Parks at
(323) 377-9686**

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