

## **“Then & Now” Child Wellness Program**

by Jenne Battaglia, Child Wellness Coordinator

Service has been a common thread woven throughout the fabric of my life. I grew up in Boardman, Ohio and volunteering in the community began in middle school and continued throughout high school. Upon graduation, I continued the call to service by joining the military. Upon returning home to finish my degree in Early Childhood Education at Youngstown State University where my connection with Beatitude House began.

During a World Religions class my first semester, Sister Norma came into class asking if anyone would like to volunteer with her tutoring program with Immigrant Outreach. Little did I know when I raised my hand to sign up to volunteer that I would be embarking on a decade long journey with Beatitude House. Over the past ten years, I have graduated from college, moved to North Carolina to teach 2nd grade with Teach For America, and taught at a charter school in Columbus; but, despite a variety of life changes, I have always come back to Beatitude House to volunteer with the children’s program. By being involved with the children’s program for so many consecutive years, it has enabled me to understand the positive impact lifelong positive relationships have on children. Throughout my college education and teacher training with Teach For America the most important pedagogical takeaway was the importance of building and maintaining relationships with your students.

When the Child Wellness Coordinator position came available at Beatitude House, it was an easy decision to take the steps to come into that role. My job as the Child Wellness Coordinator started at the beginning of COVID in March of 2020, which required us to rework many of the normal programming we did with the children. We reconfigured our 6-week long summer programming for the children to take place virtually. During our online summer program, we met with 21 children in our program three times a week. We took them on virtual field trips, did science projects, art projects, music lessons, and social-emotional learning. At the start of each week, we dropped off packages that included enrichment activities, food, and supplies they would need for the upcoming virtual activities. We were also able to offer in person mentoring and tutoring for students who most needed it. Over the course of the summer, we also partnered with Camp Fitch and were able to send families to experience a week of camp together.



Throughout this past year, the program has extended beyond our after school tutoring program for children in K-8th grade. We saw the importance of continuing relationships with our high school and college aged students. Our teen group consisted of 7th-12th graders with the intended purpose of exposing the children to a wide variety of post-secondary options, the paths available to them, and the steps taken to bring their future to fruition. We took the group to YSU, EGCC, and Brilex Industries. Our college group focused on financial aid, loans, scholarships, career tracks, and general guidance on balancing work, life, and school. The group participated in career exploration and personality assessments through YSU in order to establish career options that would be most align with their interests and strengths. Our summer learning program geared toward K-6th graders was centered around entrepreneurship this year. During our program, we collaborated with the Youngstown Business Incubator for their Lemonade Day business curriculum. The children learned what it means to be an entrepreneur along with marketing, advertising, financial literacy, consumer relations, and collaborating with a team. At the culmination of our summer program, the children had a lemonade sale where they were able to put all that they learned together to sell their product.

Our after school tutoring has expanded for the children in our program as well to include both online and in person to best accommodate the needs of the kids. This upcoming year we are including more one-on-one counseling, family counseling, mentoring, and SNAP ed healthy choices education.

As we look at then & now of the Child Wellness Program at the Beatitude House we see the importance of ensuring the children feel seen, heard, valued, and cared for above all else. The relationships developed and maintained allow the children in our programs to thrive and see a greater vision for their lives. Looking forward to the next 30 years we hope to carry on the mission and charisma pioneered at Beatitude House's inception.

