

Cornelia's Neighbors Celebrates with West Philadelphia Residents

When Jane Silverman, the Executive Director of Cornelia's Neighbors, began planning the ministry's summer enrichment program this year, she was hoping she could enroll at least 30 kids. Needless to say, when 85 kids turned out to register, she was shocked and thrilled all at the same time. Concerned that she would not be able to enroll all of the kids, she was faced with a dilemma and asked, "What could I do – turn kids away?" She knew she couldn't and so, in July, the program kicked off with all 85 kids attending.

The ministry's board of directors, though left somewhat speechless, was excited by the tremendous response from the community of West Philadelphia, where the ministry is located. Soon, they dutifully began ensuring that having 85 kids would not exceed the building's occupancy rate. Luckily, no occupancy rates were being defied and the program went off without a hitch. Well, except for the day when the kids made fruit salad – it came complete with strawberries that still had the tops on them and plums that still had the produce stickers on them!

The children, who ranged in age from three to fifteen, were not charged fees to attend the program, which ran daily throughout July and August. Designed to be culturally enriching, the program included a little bit of everything – cooking, dance, poetry, jazz, music, pottery, crafts, and even day trips. Guest speakers attended weekly and gave presentations on countries such as Latin America and China. In developing solid community relationships, one of the organization's main goals, the local police were given an open invitation to drop by at any time to talk with the children. Several often came and spent their lunch hour with the children.

Cornelia's Neighbors, a ministry of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, was founded in 2001 by Sr. Jeanne Adams (M. John Bosco), following a trip to Haiti. She

found the trip so inspiring that she came back to the States determined to find the Haitian community in Philadelphia. In West Philadelphia, she located a four-square block area that was mostly Haitian. Here, she founded her community center, which today offers English as a Second Language Classes (ESL), GED classes, a sewing program, and a women's program, in addition to its summer enrichment program. In the fall, the organization will again start up its afterschool program.

The summer enrichment program wrapped up in August with a "Celebration of Summer Fun" Street Fair hosted by the children. For the event, Jane secured a permit from the city to close off part of the block on N. 64th Street where the organization is located. The children, who had created everything from African masks to strawberry soap to jewelry, displayed their artwork, and also performed several dance routines that they had learned throughout the summer. The parents, who provided homemade dishes for lunch during the Street Fair, were thrilled with the program. One was even overheard saying, "I need to get my child on the waiting list for next year's program!"

The event's highlight, however, was the dedication of a mural that the kids had painted throughout the summer. You can literally step into the mural, as it covers the side wall and ground of the ministry's building! Cornelia's Neighbors partnered with Art Sphere, an organization dedicated to culturally educating youth in Philadelphia, to create the mural. During roundtable discussion with Art Sphere artists, the children gave input into the mural's design. At the heart of the mural is the Society seal, from which a flowing rainbow radiates outward and weaves through the design. The children's fingerprints are literally all over the mural – in fact, their fingerprints created the blooms on many of the flowers! They also dipped their hands in paint and left their handprints on the mural, as a final touch.



Children covered their hands in paint and placed their handprints on the mural as a final touch



Several boys in the program work with their dance teacher



Police officers often dropped by the summer program to talk with the children



Families enjoyed the street fair held at the end of the summer program



Children painted flowers on day as part of their art lesson