

MID-VALLEY TODAY

Church's program serves kids

Community Corner fosters safe after-school time at a low cost.

BY MARLIN BROWNELL
Special to the Statesman Journal

"My kids love to be here," said Adam Matot, a father of two boys who attend the Community Corner, Trinity Covenant Church's popular daily after-school program for children in first through fifth grades.

"I love the proximity to Liberty School. My boys cross the street together, come over here and hang out. They are safe, and it is a great environment for them."

"The Corner," as it is nicknamed, is focused on serving children from single-parent homes or homes in which both parents work. It offers an alternative to paying for day care or leaving children home alone.

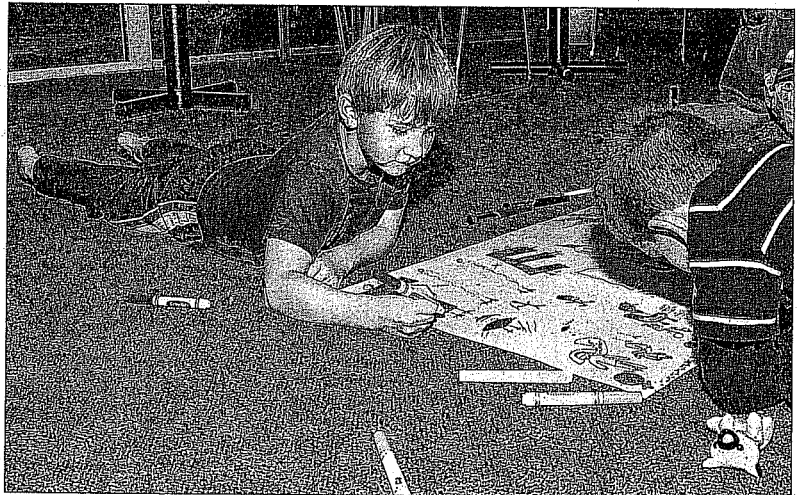
"It saves the families a lot of money on child care, they know that the children are in a safe, welcoming environment at the church, and the kids are not just at home getting into trouble or being bored," said program director Cliff Herman, who joined the Trinity Covenant staff as its children's ministry coordinator when the after-school program started five years ago.

When volunteer Jeanne Gallagher-Munoz tells parents that the cost is \$5 for the academic year; "some of the parents weep, asking me, 'Do you know how much child day care costs for just one month?'"

From 3 to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, about 40 children do educational activities and play under the watchful eyes of Herman, part-time employee Megan Wymore, several volunteers and four junior leaders, middle school students who have earned the right to return to the program as helpers.

"We get to use computers and read books and do homework or worksheets," second-grader Travis Steffes said. "There are lots of people and we can play lots of games, like basketball, soccer, foursquare, dodgeball and volleyball."

The Corner, a drop-in center modeled after the Boys & Girls clubs, also offers arts and crafts, and special events such as speakers, movies, field trips and seasonal



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Luke Scheuble (left) and Andrew Connelly work on a poster at Trinity Covenant Church's Community Corner after-school program.

Information

SALEM LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION can be contacted at (503) 315-8924 or info@salemlef.org.

TRINITY COVENANT CHURCH is at 5020 Liberty Road South. Cliff Herman can be contacted by calling (503) 581-5675.

events such as Thanksgiving dinner.

Churches as Neighborhood Centers

Trinity Covenant started its after-school program with the help of Salem Leadership Foundation.

SLF worked with Trinity Covenant for more than three years to help develop and expand the after-school program, which "is serving the Boone-and-Liberty neighborhood deeply, with meaning, and with success," SLF executive director Sam Skillern said.

The church discovered there were needs even in South Salem, then asked, "What can we do to help our neighborhood? Let's open up our building." Trinity Covenant also participates in the Interfaith Hospitality Network and hosts homeless families four weeks out of the year, giving them hospitality and connections to better housing.

The South Salem church is part of a movement among churches that are reaching out to their neighborhoods. Capital Park Wesleyan

Church was Salem's first CaN Center. Trinity Covenant, Salem Mennonite, Grace Community and Morningside United Methodist also are graduates of the SLF program.

Currently funded CaN sites are Our Savior's Lutheran, Christian Center, Emmaus Community and St. Edward Parish, with West Salem Foursquare soon to join, Skillern said. The goal is to add two new CaN Centers per year.

Any church that serves its neighbors can be a CaN Center and does not have to be in a contractual partnership with SLF.

For those that do team with SLF, start-up and expansion funds are available. During the past decade, SLF has helped raise more than \$5 million for local partnerships in terms of schools, homeless programs, youth activities, ministries, community centers, affordable housing, gang rehabilitation and neighborhood revitalization.

SLF works with churches for three years and raises money, which the churches have to match.

"It's amazing what a little bit of money can do to help the church get started," Skillern said. "The goal is for the church to be self-sustaining so that reaching out to their neighborhood is just as important as preaching and teaching, music and worship, and missions."

Martin Brownell is a freelance writer. You may contact him at brownellm@comcast.net.