



## Thanks Shaye!

As many of you know, Shaye has been interning at NCN since 2012. She has spent a great deal of time learning about nonprofit work and how to run ministries.

Shaye has been a huge part of the Urban Farm and 180. She has also been a great asset around the office. Shaye just graduated from Kuyper College, and thus finished her time interning with us.

On behalf of everyone at NCN, I want to say thank you to Shaye for her hard work and all the time she gave to impact youth in our community!

## Run for NCN in 2014

*Run, NCN, Run* is coming upon us quickly. This year the race is on the 10th of May; less than four months away! In 2014, there are some great ways to get involved.

We are looking for:

- Kids to be part of the Fun Run.
- People to walk the 5k.
- People to run the 5k and 10k.
- People to run the 25k.
- People to pledge money. For every \$1,000 we raise, Eric will run 1k. The more we raise, the more he has to run.

If you want to be part of *Run, NCN, Run* you need to know the following information:

- You are responsible for registering yourself with the River Bank Run.
- If you collect at least \$100 in pledges for NCN, you get a t-shirt.
- There will be a prize for the individual who raises the most pledges.
- All the kids who race will receive a special prize for participating!
- Pledge forms can be found at: [newcityneighbors.org/pledge-form/](http://newcityneighbors.org/pledge-form/)



# Stories

The Newsletter of New City Neighbors

## God is Faithful - Eric Schalk

Today is January 7. I'm sitting in my house in the midst of the snowpocalypse. My thermostat says 67 degrees indoors, but because my house is old and drafty, it feels much colder than that. Julie and I have lived in this house for 12 years, and over that time we have worked hard to insulate and improve it. We've installed new windows, blown insulation into the walls, and remodeled rooms, all in an attempt to make our home a little more prepared to weather the storms like this. Based on the drafts I'm feeling in my living room today, I think we have more work to do.

There is always more work to do. Whether it is work on a home, yard, self (getting in shape for another *Run, NCN, Run*), there is always something else that needs to be done. The kids who worked on the Farm or in the Bakery this past summer learned that well. For every task they finished, another one was waiting for them.

Spiritual lives are like that too. This past year, we saw tremendous growth in the lives of the kids we worked with. There were a few kids in particular who grew educationally and vocationally, grew as leaders, and began to follow Christ seriously.

We rallied behind those kids, cheered them on, and kept praying that their growth would continue, and for some it has. Lance and I have celebrated with two of our farm students who were able to get jobs this past fall because of the work experience they received on the farm.

I have been amazed at the maturity I've seen in some of our high school students as they have faced huge challenges in their families.

I have also grieved at the chaos of sin, and the way it has pulled some of those kids back into old destructive ways.

On December 23, I had lunch with a student who had been making great progress. Then, as December hit, he fell back into his old ways, started making



**January 2014** Seeking to be a diverse, welcoming ministry that works with Northeast Grand Rapids neighbors to restore and develop their community.

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bad choices, and found himself in trouble. As I had lunch with him, his demeanor was cold. The lunch didn't go well, and I'm truthfully worried about his future.

I have to remind myself that God is faithful. God is the one who ultimately changes hearts. God always had a plan for that student, and God will continue the good work He began in him. In the meantime, I will trust God's plan and, with Him, relentlessly pursue that student.

God is faithful! We saw that firsthand in 2013. Looking back, it is easy to see God at work through the ministries of New City Neighbors. If you have read our newsletters, been to our fundraisers, or scouted out our website, you have no doubt read or heard stories of transformation. Not only did we see God at work in kids, we saw Him at work by blessing us with a record group of volunteers who poured into our ministries and, more specifically, into the lives of children. We saw God at work in blessing us with a record-setting Fall Auction & Dinner, both in terms of attendance and donations.

God is faithful. That is why I put the picture of the rainbow over the farm on the front cover of this newsletter. It's a reminder to me, and you, that He keeps His promises, and He will not fail. As we cross the threshold into 2014, I can't help but contemplate what lies ahead, and I can't wait to see the good work God will do.



## Trying to Flourish in Food Deserts - Lance Kraai

What you eat matters. We've all heard someone say, "Eat your vegetables," "You are what you eat," or "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." We know good food is a key to our body's health and ability to flourish. Yet, for many, good food is becoming less accessible. The days of having a quality local grocery store down the street has given way to the big box store on the highway. For the person with a car, this move means more affordability and more selection, but for the person with a bus pass and a pull cart, this means the trip to the grocery store involves half a day of bus transfers and lugging around heavy grocery bags.

The emerging vacancy of the local grocery store has given rise to the term "food deserts." According to the USDA, if you live in an urban area and you must walk more than 1 mile to obtain fresh, local produce, you live in a food desert. It is important to note that food desert primarily refers to the lack of fresh produce. While there may not be fresh fruits and vegetables, there is usually a corner store with pop, Cheetos, and corn puffs.

Imagine you just got off the bus from work, you're tired, and you need something to eat. You have a serious dilemma. Do you spend the afternoon walking/taking the bus to the grocery store that is over a mile away? Or, do you walk down the block and buy some snacks so you can spend the afternoon doing chores instead? You see the issue. Food deserts make it a lot easier to make bad food choices and those choices lead to obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. People do not flourish around a table of corn puffs.

Due to changes in our community, Creston has become a food desert. It is very difficult to get quality, fresh produce without taking the bus out of the neighborhood.

New City Neighbors has a long history around food. For the last seven years, our community garden has given numerous families the opportunity to grow their own food. Year after year families have delighted (okay, sometimes toiled) in growing their own produce. While the garden is great for a select number of families, the Urban Farm is paving the way for our neighbors to have fresh local produce.

In 2013, we received a grant to construct a farm stand and purchase equipment to accept Bridge Cards (food assistance). We also partnered with Catherine's Health Center, a clinic for the uninsured, so its clients could be introduced to our stand and the produce we offered. We were able to sell \$569 of produce to Bridge Card customers through the stand and CSA shares, and we averaged about \$50 of produce sales a week at the farm stand (not counting the 61 families that came every week for their CSA share). That is a lot of produce entering the desert!

## Ministry Wish List

- Measuring Cups & Spoons \$50
- Art Supplies \$100
- Cash Register Equipment \$400



That being said, we are only scratching the surface, and we hope to make a much larger impact in 2014. We are working to bring the YMCA's Veggie Van to our farm on Thursdays to offer additional produce. We are also looking into accepting *Double up Food Bucks* which allows people to double their Bridge card dollars on any purchases made on local produce.

We believe that these steps will make our farm stand more consistent, convenient, and affordable for our neighbors. We trust that the Urban Farm will continue to grow and allow our neighborhood to be a community filled with a little more good food.

## 2013 Annual Report

We had over 80 adults and high school students regularly volunteer at our ministries this year. When factoring in the people who brought meals for our ministries or showed up on Farm workdays, we had nearly 200 people volunteer this year. That is an amazing jump over the 120 we had last year.

Those volunteers put in over 2,500 hours of time with children!

Over 150 children participated in our ministries, with many of them receiving at least one of the 2,100 plates of food that volunteers served.

26 families grew produce and made new connections in the Community Garden.

Through the Breaktime Bakery and Urban Farm ministries, we were able to provide over 3,100 hours of job and lifeskill training. The bakery saw its best year of sales ever! We sold out most days and made too many baked goods to count.

Through our second year of the Urban Farm, we had around 60 families purchase shares of produce, up from 20 in our first year.

God was at work growing NCN in 2013, and we can't wait to see how He uses NCN in 2014!