

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

BUFFALO DREAM CENTER | WINTER 2018



## RESTORING PEOPLE, REBUILDING DREAMS, AND RECLAIMING THE WORLD

PASTOR ERIC T. JOHNS

BOXES  
OF LOVE  
FINAL REPORT  
INSIDE!

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My wife and I have been pastoring the Buffalo Dream Center for twenty-four years. During that time, I have talked to people who have not realized that the Dream Center is a church. They have seen the outreaches taking place in the community. They have watched news stories about Boxes of Love. When they find out the Dream Center is a church they are surprised.

I believe God's plan to bring revival to our cities, our nation, and the world will come through the church. The church is God's plan.

During the past decade, there has been an "anti-church" movement. People say things like, "I can love Jesus, but not go to church." They are against "organized religion". They think man invented church. But the church is not man's idea. It is God's idea. The church is not only His plan to bring the world to Christ – it is His only plan!

So, after twenty-four years, I am still telling people that the Buffalo Dream Center is a church.

There are three things we are doing. We are restoring people, rebuilding dreams, and reclaiming the world. It is a huge task. But all of these things are God's purpose for the church.

The exciting thing is that as hurting people come to the Buffalo Dream Center, and they are transformed by Jesus, they become a vital part of the family of God that is impacting the world.

We feed people. We give beds to families who are sleeping on the floor. We have an after school program. All of these things are important. But they are also things that could be done by a community center or a government funded non-profit organization. So how are we different? When a child climbs aboard the bus for Kidz Club, he may come for a free meal and fun, but he also gets introduced to Jesus. Our goal has always been to connect each child, homeless person, or family to the local church. It is in the church where someone is

restored. When a person becomes a part of a church family, God is free to rebuild the dreams that have been destroyed by circumstances in their lives.

But it doesn't stop there.

Those who have had their lives restored and their dreams rebuilt are now ready to reclaim the world! One of the greatest pleasures of my life is to go on the mission field with a team of young men and women who were once the kids who rode the bus from the housing projects. Many of them had no fathers. Some were abused. They had dreams that seemed impossible to reach as they lived under generational curses of poverty and addiction. So many city kids never finish high school. They never get their driver's licenses. They never move from the neighborhood or the housing projects in which they were raised.

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This is why it is so exciting to see broken lives restored. Those people, because they are so thankful for what God has done in their lives, become part of the army that reaches out to others.

When a twenty-year-old gets on the airplane to go to Honduras to build houses and preach the Gospel, it is more exciting for me than for other pastors. Why? Because that kid didn't have a dad. He grew up surrounded by drugs and gangs. But he came to the Buffalo Dream Center one day. Maybe it was to get free candy. Maybe our teams delivered food to his family. Whatever the reason – he eventually found Jesus. Now he is impacting others.

When someone is the first one in their family to go to college, I get excited. When I officiate a wedding for someone who is going to be the first person in their family to get married before having children, I can see the power of God at work. But when these same people are also the ones driving the bus, delivering beds, mentoring youth, and preaching to those who have never heard about Jesus overseas – then I see the power of the church.

## BUFFALO DREAM CENTER

# MIKAYLA JOHNS SERVING FOR FIVE MONTHS IN GUATEMALA WITH HOUSE OF REFUGE

Mikayla Johns has been on many mission trips. But Central America has touched her heart more than any other place in the world. She has taken ten trips to Central America, which included trips to Honduras and Guatemala.

In January Mikayla moved to Guatemala. She will be in the country for five months. After graduating high school she completed a course on Teaching English as a Second Language which gave her a certification to teach English. While in Guatemala she will teach English as well a study Spanish.

As soon as Mikayla arrived in Guatemala she began assisting Steve and Karla Stoffelsen with their ministry to the people of the streets at House of Refuge Street Ministries. She has helped with mission teams and organized children's outreaches. She also plans on being a part of a children's feeding program and helping with programs for youth and children at Shaddai Church. Mikayla is the first full-time foreign missionary sent out from the Buffalo Dream Center.



## TABLE OF GRACE – ONE YEAR AT THE DREAM CENTER

In January the Buffalo Dream Center and Kenmore Alliance Church teamed up once again to serve a delicious hot meal to the homeless and families in need.

Maria Bampton, who organizes and leads Table of Grace,

approached Pastor Eric and Michelle one year ago and asked if the Dream Center would consider partnering with Kenmore Alliance. On Saturday, January 20th the one-year

anniversary of their partnership was celebrated as more than seventy people attended the free meatloaf dinner. Members of Kenmore Alliance cook the meal each month. The Buffalo Dream Center provides the place for the meal to be held.

Volunteers also come to other churches.

In January three vans were filled to capacity with the homeless as they were picked up from the downtown area and transported to the church. Other families walked from the surrounding neighborhood.

Every month the Saturday meal is preceded by a team that goes out on Friday night to invite the homeless. "Late Night Street Ministry" has become a favorite outreach for people as they hand out socks, sandwiches, and snacks in downtown parks and the bus station. Because the word gets out on Friday night, everyone attends Table of Grace on Saturday.



# BOXES OF LOVE REPORT: THOUSANDS OF FAMILIES HELPED WITH FOOD AND TOYS

Last November Pastor Eric left his home to live on the streets with Buffalo's homeless. Although he thought he would retire a few years ago, once again he found himself rolling up his sleeping bag and packing up a few belongings to live under a bridge and eat in soup kitchens for one week. After his week on the streets, the nineteenth year for Boxes of Love began. Volunteers came from several states and Canada to wrap gifts and pack food for families across Western New York. Hundreds of people also took part in distribution sites throughout Buffalo and Niagara Falls. Thousands of families were assisted as churches came together to make a difference.

Due to a massive load of food that was donated from Feed the Hungry, the Dream Center had enough food to make all of the bags required for Boxes of Love. Usually bags have to be assembled as donations come into the ministry. But this year, the warehouse was organized and ready to make all of the bags as soon as possible. On December 1st and 2nd, hundreds of volunteers assembled three thousand bags of groceries! It had never been done in two days before! With the food accomplished in two days, volunteers could concentrate on wrapping thousands of gifts.

Another miracle happened for the Dream Center this year. Someone donated a new forklift. This makes loading and unloading the trucks so much faster and easier.

The most exciting part about Boxes of Love are the distribution sites. The largest distribution site was held at the Buffalo Dream Center. More than three hundred families came through the church on a cold, snowy Saturday in December. Along with the volunteers who registered families, gave away toys, and distributed food, there was an army of volunteers from Kenmore Alliance Church that ran a free clothing store on the upper level of the Dream Center. A big truck load of clothing was unloaded and the church sanctuary was turned into a clothing store complete with sections for ladies, men, and children. Much of the clothing was new and it was all organized on racks for the families. It was an incredible site to see families walking back home, loaded down with food, toys, and clothing.

Boxes of Love distribution sites included churches, community centers, seniors' homes, and apartment complexes. Even though temperatures were extremely low during December, hundreds of people were waiting in lines to receive help.

For the second year, an outreach was held at the downtown bus station. Volunteers distributed special gift bags to the homeless who were in the bus station to get warm. A Gospel choir sang Christmas carols and worship songs. Hats, gloves, and hot apple cider were given to the homeless and travelers.

The Boxes of Love season ended with the annual Christmas Eve dinner. For fifteen years, the Buffalo Dream Center and Hearts for the Homeless have teamed up to serve a dinner on Christmas Eve to the homeless and families in need. Lou and Joanne Williams have cooked the meal every year. This year they served everyone a delicious lasagna dinner. Clay Handi Restaurant prepared chicken biryani for the Muslim families who live in the neighborhood.

"It was the best Christmas Eve dinner ever!" said Pastor Eric.

Two buses were filled to capacity with homeless men and women who were transported to the Dream Center from downtown. Families from the neighborhood walked to the dinner. More than four hundred people attended the dinner which was served on two floors of the Dream Center just to accommodate the large crowd. Everyone enjoyed Christmas music, games, door prizes, and a message that introduced them to Jesus. Many responded to the Gospel.



## LOOK WHAT HAPPENED @ BOL THIS YEAR!

**8,100**  
individuals  
assisted

**800**  
volunteers

**2,500**  
families  
received food,  
toys, & clothing

**21**  
distribution  
sites

**4,000**  
children received  
wrapped  
Christmas gifts





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## MICHELLE JOHNS DEPARTS FOR ASIA

Michelle is leaving for a country in Asia at the end of February. For security reasons, the specific country cannot be named in this article.

During her trip she will train pastors and church leaders and hold evangelistic meetings. Sometimes these meetings are designed to reach children. Other times, men, women, and children come to hear the Gospel. Michelle has seen many things happen during her previous trips. She has

brought the Gospel to 16 cities. More than 84,000 people have heard about Jesus. Nearly 4,000 leaders have been trained at special seminars.

In order to make this trip happen Michelle is still in need of about \$15,000. This will cover the costs of all of the outreaches,



festivals, and seminars. It also includes the cost of transportation.

Please consider giving something today. Nothing is more important to Jesus than people who have never heard about His love.