

2023

GRATITUDE REPORT

MOUNTAIN T.O.P.



IN 2023 WE INVESTED 1.05M IN APPALACHIA. THIS REPORT IS FILLED WITH REASONS WHY WE DO THIS AND WHY WE THINK IT IS STILL IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE THIS MISSION.

ALLEVIATE

SUBSTANDARD HOUSING: TO PROVIDE DIRECT SERVICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT THAT ADDRESSES SEVERE HOUSING ISSUES IN OUR SERVICE AREA.

TO PROMOTE LIFESTYLES THAT SUPPORT HEALTHY CHOICES.

HEAL

DEVELOP

TO ENGAGE IN SOLUTIONS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS FOR HOLISTIC AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY GROWTH.

TO FOSTER GROWTH AMONG THE COMMUNITY,
PARTICIPANTS, DONORS, AND STAFF.

LEAD

EDUCATE

TO PROVIDE AND SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND PERSONAL GROWTH FOR ALL AGES.

EACH YEAR WE REFLECT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR MISSION

CULTIVATING

Looking Forward

So how is your new year going?

Even in the cold and (recent) snow of winter, it has been a pretty busy time at Mountain TOP. Recruiting is in full swing, church groups and individual volunteers are calling and being contacted, families and potential projects are being visited, summer camp staffers are being interviewed and hired, and our two camps are getting prepared for the year. As I write this, we are also busy getting ready for Friends Weekend, and for the Brick and Mortar Dinner. This has always been one of my favorite weekends at Mountain TOP, because it brings together a wonderful mix of our long time friends and supporters, as well as some of our newer camp staffers. It always makes for a fun weekend. Stories are shared, camp projects are worked on, and the weekend culminates with our time together on Saturday evening. We are also adding an event to the weekend this year. On Friday afternoon we are going to have a special time of remembrance for those members of the Mountain TOP family who have passed on during the previous year. Going forward, we plan to have this as part of future Friends weekends.

I think that's one of the reasons that I like Friends Weekend so much - it represents a mix of both remembering where we've been, and the excitement of moving forward. Mountain TOP has a lot to be proud of - we have been changing lives and helping our neighbors have better housing for almost 50 years. That is worth celebrating!

EACH YEAR WE REFLECT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR MINISTRY

GRATITUDE & VISION

But there is also the excitement of what comes next. I'm excited about the campers who come here and have life-changing experiences. I'm excited about the spiritual growth and leadership development that we see in our summer staff. I'm excited about our wonderful full-time staff, who represent the best of Mountain TOP and of our community. I am also excited about our new housing initiatives, such as the collaborative home build project between Mountain TOP and Mr. Tucker's construction class at Grundy County High School. I am excited about our partners who we work with across the Cumberland plateau and in the Sequatchie valley. There is a lot of mission and ministry that we are blessed to be part of in our area. I am excited to see where God will lead us in 2024.

This wouldn't happen without you and your partnership with us. As you read our gratitude report, keep in mind that your support helped to make all these things possible. Your prayers, your financial support and your interest made our work possible. We are excited about what's coming next, and look forward to working with you. Thank you for partnering with us as we dream and work together toward expanding the opportunities for housing and hope in our area. Because of your support, we are able to be ready and open to where God is moving us in mission in this beautiful area that we call home.

Gratefully,

Mike Feely | Executive Director

HOME REPAIR IS ABOUT MORE THAN BUILDING A PORCH OR CLEARING A YARD. IT'S ABOUT THE ACCESSIBILITY THAT IS GAINED WHEN A FAMILY NOW HAS A SAFE WAY TO ENTER AND EXIT THEIR HOME. IT'S ABOUT HOW THAT ENTRYWAY WILL SERVE AS A MUCH MORE SIGNIFICANT ENTRYWAY INTO A HEALTHIER, MORE SUSTAINABLE, AND MORE SOCIALLY CONNECTED LIFESTYLE.

2023 HOME REPAIR EXPERIENCE **YSM**



66

For me, Mountain TOP has given me a place where people have accepted me. It has changed my life.

It has opened my eyes on the world and all the people who need help even if it is just a little thing to help them with.

2023 - YSM Campers

215

Projects completed through the Minor Home Repair program

1,090

dollar investment each camper brought into the service area

99

percent of volunteers who want to serve in the valley below after working at MTOP



STORY OF MINOR HOME REPAIR **YSM**

One of the biggest places of impact for me came from working with Ms. T and her roommate to build a monster 60 foot wheelchair ramp. Planning and estimating it stretched my mind a lot, and that's coming from someone who is going to college for construction. It took a whole lot of effort to come up with the best and most efficient use of materials that got us the ramp we needed, and Allie and I went through a number of revisions before we found the right layout. The project continued through all three weeks of camp at Baker Mountain, and work was also graciously supplemented by some of the staff at Cumberland Pines. It was pretty awesome to get to see each YRG build off of the work of the previous. Talking with Ms. T each week of camp was a treat. I learned a great deal about her life and what plans she had for it. She was a selfless person. One of the days we were talking about cultivating passion at daybreak. I talked about a passion project of mine and asked the YRG if they had any. One of the campers asked Ms. T if she had any passion projects. She started going on and on about a dream she had of getting more space in front of her house built so she could refinish furniture. You could hear the excitement in the way she talked about the prospect of her getting an opportunity to do something she loved and get an income out of it. That showed me the impact of the work we do at Mountain T.O.P.

It was definitely difficult work, but the ramp turned out really well. I felt a massive wave of satisfaction and relief when I received pictures of the finished product. Unfortunately, Ms. T passed away less than a week after the ramp was finished. I was devastated hearing that news. Seeing the goals someone has for their life get dashed by death is something that will never get easier for me to stomach. She thanked us for our work often, but even if she never had I could see her appreciation in how she immediately started to take care of the ramp. As soon as the ramp had decking put on, she started decorating it with lawn chairs and plants. It was by no means easy to experience, but I'm thankful that God put everyone related to that ramp in my life.

Mason Condo | 2023 SPMC



2023 DAY CAMP EXPERIENCE **YSM**

Building resilience, exploring community, reading, growing in healthy lives, playing, learning about Jesus—this sums up a week of Day Camp. Five days of Day Camp broadens horizons, brightens futures, and builds hope in youth ages 6-11 from Grundy County.



95 percent of Day Camp kids care about their community

6

“My child found a place where she was fully accepted and embraced for who she is. She gained self confidence and met people from different places. The good things she’s learning at school and home were reinforced by the program. I thank Mountain T.O.P. for the opportunity it brings to young people right in their back yard.”

-2023 Day Camp Parent

89 percent of Day Camp kids experienced a growth in self confidence

108 opportunities for local children to experience Mountain T.O.P.’s Day Camp program

“And anyone who welcomes a little child like this one on my behalf is welcoming me.” - Jesus, Matthew 18:5

I laughed, cried, spent a lot of late nights in Elroy, and created a summer of so many memories. I worked with a total of 114 people during Weeks 1, 3, and 5, including 57 kids from Grundy County. I hope and pray that I planted seeds within my day camp kids by embodying what it means to be generous, passionate, caring, and showing them what it means to belong.

2023 DAY CAMP EXPERIENCE **YSM**

I was deeply impacted by a little boy named Carson. His parents are deaf, and he has the ability to hear. Carson’s parents invited me into their home without question. Even though we had to communicate a lot through writing, they accepted me as one of their own. I felt at home.

If you know anything about Day Camp, you know it can get loud! I often found Carson wandering from the crowd because he had not been used to a loud environment. He always participated in the activities; he just liked to do it by himself. There was a volunteer named Dan who wanted to be with Carson. Dan and I were slowly trying to build a relationship with Carson to help him feel more comfortable at Day Camp, and we did just that. Carson was one of the most outgoing and involved kids we had by the end of the week.

I was so grateful knowing that I had a hand in helping Carson discover his place at Day Camp. I just think it's cool because I know it is something Mountain T.O.P. strives to do. I had many campers tell me how impactful and inspiring Carson was to them, and it is something that generally makes my heart feel warm and fuzzy. Because of the generosity of Dan, Carson and his sister were able to attend another week of Day Camp. Both of these kids perfectly embraced what a loving home is in my eyes. I hope Carson and his family received the same love that they showed me last summer. I am daily inspired by all of the incredible families I met during the summer of 2023.

Scarlet Sweat | 2023 DCMC



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My first time here - I never felt that I could contribute much before - but I was convinced to come and I feel like God used me in His plan. -2023 YSM Camper

2023 CAMPER EXPERIENCE

YSM

26,496 Volunteer hours completed

48 Unique churches represented



This has been one of the most meaningful things I'll ever do in my life. I felt so many emotions and learned so many lessons that I needed to learn like being humble with all the amazing blessings I'm given and just being more open to meeting people. This is something I will hold with me and will make me a much better person.

-2023 YSM Camper

66

I thought that this would just be a fun week with friends. While it was, it also changed my relationship with God for the better. -2023 YSM Camper



2023 SUMMER STAFF EXPERIENCE

The summer was great and awesome. I learned leadership qualities that will be very helpful in my future. I learned a lot about myself, too.

66

- 2023 Summer Staffer



95%

of summer staff said they were more confident with professional skills such as setting goals, meeting deadlines, and delegating tasks.

100%

are comfortable leading others spiritually after their summer at MTOP.

I'm excited to use the professional leadership skills I learned here, and apply it to my field of study, as well as try to become involved in a different initiative where I can serve in a different capacity. I also am looking forward to using certain conflict resolution skills and budgeting skills practically in every day life. - 2023 Summer Staffer



THE HOUSING SUMMIT

In September Mountain T.O.P. hosted the Housing Summit over two days. Building on the momentum of the first summit held the previous year, the 2023 summit included virtual and in person sessions that brought together regional leaders from across South Central Appalachia to center housing in the conversation of community development and social drivers of health.

55 total number of attendees

41 total number of organizations represented



What we learned

- **Housing affordability and energy efficient design must go together.** This is a point for both affordable housing developers and those who fund housing: we must let go of the dysfunctional idea that cheaper is better or that we must produce the maximum number of units for the dollars we have...which pressures those seeking funding to build to a lower energy standard. We must consider total cost of ownership and environmental impact, and we must make better decisions considering those most negatively impacted by the affordability vs efficiency debate.
- **Innovation in housing affordability is alive and well, at least among the organizations at the summit.** Though we didn't find the magic answer to solve our chronic housing situation, we inspired more collaboration and hope for folks working in some of the most difficult sectors of social services. Bonus: one of the most innovative answers to keeping our housing stock affordable is to make necessary home repairs and improvements. MTOP is at the head of this innovation.
- **Advocacy works.** Tennessee affordable housing developers will soon see an influx of millions of dollars as the state will be allocating 10M to a network of partners led by the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises dedicated to workforce housing. This is just one small example of how a concerted advocacy effort results in a huge payout.

I've never been more convinced that housing is key to human flourishing.

Julie Keel, Program Director

2023 MAJOR HOME REPAIR

92.5 percent of volunteers want service to be a part of their lives after a MTOP experience.

95.5 percent of volunteers said that the home repair projects were meaningful

It has been a humbling experience serving another community in need. Each time I come I'm inspired to be more mindful of planting seeds at home, serving, and being fishers of people.

- 2023 AIM camper



12

Families served through Major Home Repair

\$134k

Value of volunteer hours completed

298

Participants who contributed to vital home repairs

Utilizing home repair as a strategy for housing affordability, MTOP can take \$235 and 16 hours of volunteer labor and turn those into 3,525 dollars of short and long term impact for a homeowner.



before

after

WORKING WITH MR. AND MRS. D.

STORIES OF MAJOR HOME REPAIR **AIM**

Before the end of the first Adults In Ministry weekend, Mr. and Mrs. D. welcomed us into their family. MTOP was called to their home to address a leaky roof and an unsafe kitchen floor. Like many folks living in rural areas, Mr. D. has spent his life fixing things, but health concerns had caused him to slow way down in the recent years.

Utilizing the USDA RD Housing Preservation Grant, MTOP was able to bring \$3,523 in short and long term impact in just one weekend to the D.'s household. Mr. and Mrs. D. have traveled and lived in many places around the country and decided to settle right here in Grundy County. Because of necessary repairs to keep their home safe and healthy, they will be able to age in place in their home. This is good news to their young grandson who lives nearby and loves spending time with Mr. D. working on hot rods.

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It was a blessing to see the folks of all ages doing good work. We are so happy to have a warmer and dryer place to call home. - Mrs. D.



2023 NEW HOME BUILD REPORT

In the fall of 2023, MTOP officially entered into a partnership with Grundy County High School's Career Technical Education department to build a small footprint home. This was the culmination of a 5 year dream of MTOP to re-enter the affordable home development, addressing a long standing gap in the housing spectrum.



The goal of this project is to address two pressing chronic conditions on the Plateau - lack of affordable housing and holistic youth workforce development in the construction trades by building a small footprint home.



“[I]ncreasing access to affordable housing is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing childhood poverty and increasing economic mobility in the United States.” - National Low Income Housing Coalition



2023 NEW HOME BUILD REPORT

Building upon a relationship between the Rotarians of the Plateau and a bed building nonprofit, an idea was launched to expand the true-to-life construction experience in the classroom. We believe that this experiment of marrying affordable housing with high school workforce attainment is an innovative approach to address both chronic concerns, weaving together philanthropy, reinvestment, and volunteer labor.





OUTREACH MINISTRIES FOR YOUTH AND ADULTS



MOUNTAIN T.O.P.



CUMBERLAND MOUNTAINS, TENNESSEE