

## The Teen Rejects

By Tamar Hela

Imagine living with other teenagers in a home that's not yours, and the adults at the home are caretakers rather than your own parents. This is the life of an at-risk youth in "foster care." Babies and young children who are not in the care of their biological parents will often become adopted or placed in foster care with a family, but who wants a teenager? With nowhere else to go, many foster teens must reside in group homes during one of the most challenging stages of one's life: raging hormones and the search for personal identity.

At **Help One Child**, Jill Sandy works with others to provide a network for foster families and at-risk children and youth. This year's Beautiful Day campaign incorporated **Help One Child** as one of the projects—*Group Home Makeovers*. When I asked Jill, "What was it about the project that really affected those on the receiving end?" she enthusiastically told me that the WestGate teams "...went above and beyond. The staff was so appreciative." She continued to describe to me how it made a huge difference for the staff to see volunteers from a *church*. And just as touched as they were, I assumed that the teens would have felt the same. However, Jill shared something with me that never crossed my mind.

The group home teenagers have people constantly in and out of their lives, and are dealing with the emotions of rejection from previous experience. Therefore, when new people—even kind-hearted volunteers—show up to do something nice, many kids respond with guarded cynicism. Their attitude is more like *What are you doing here and why are you invading my space?* rather than one of gratitude. And who could blame them? But that's where *Louder Than Words* truly speaks volumes.

Living a life that reflects Christ involves a commitment to consistency. And such consistency is seen in the "Supper Club." Because of the Supper Club—one of the activities coordinated by **Help One Child**—many teens have taken to the volunteers who come to cook dinner with them. These volunteers not only spend time with the group home teens, but also teach them a new life skill. Jill let me know that activities like this club are what speak louder than words to these kids. She hopes that those especially who were involved in the Beautiful Day home makeovers had their interest piqued in becoming further involved in the ministry—perhaps joining the Supper Club or something similar. One of the best things about being involved with **Help One Child** is seeing "what's being stirred in hearts," she told me.

This is where the church comes in. To quote Jill, "We want the community to ask, 'Why are Christians doing this?'" In other words, why is the Church taking the time to go out of their way—and more than once? Do you feel led to volunteer with "teen rejects" to make a difference in their lives? It's not easy, especially when an offer of "help" is not always enthusiastically received. However, speaking *Louder Than Words* is the life to which Christ has called us. Perhaps this ministry is one that will give you that very opportunity.

If you feel that this ministry is something you're being called to, look for more information on becoming involved at: <http://helponechild.org/>