

FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS, Lad Lake has provided highly individualized care for at-risk youth and families in southeastern Wisconsin. Focusing on the core areas of Education, Independent Living, Mentoring, and Education, all programs share the goal of life skills development and successful independence in our communities. Serving more than 1,800 youth and families a year, Lad Lake continues its commitment to changing lives and guiding growth.

[ladlake.org](http://ladlake.org)

mind body spirit



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## Lad Lake's Spiritual Care Program seeks to meet youth on their level, in interesting and interactive ways, through group sessions and one-on-one mentoring.

Participation in this voluntary program has exceeded our most optimistic expectation, particularly with Lad Lake's residential clients. According to Jefferies, one residential unit has 100 percent participation, while two other units fluctuate between 50-60 percent participation.

"It's encouraging to us that these kids come to our evening meetings, especially since they have the option of being someplace other than here," said Ben Hall, one of the spiritual care counselors. "I'm here four days a week and each night we conduct a spirituality group in each unit. We engage the boys through videos, movies specifically geared toward youth, or hip-hop songs that get their attention. Then we discuss them. The curriculum is pretty ecumenical, but if they directly ask, we share our faith. We don't push one faith onto them," said Hall.

"What's been most rewarding for me," Hall continued, "is when I hear from staff that the boys are supporting each other, and fighting for each other instead of against each other, and saying things to each other that I've said to them; that's huge. They're passing on to others what they've learned and when opportunities present themselves; they're modeling behaviors we discussed in the spiritual care program."

**LAD LAKE'S SPIRITUAL CARE PROGRAM** is not intended to hit the boys over the head with spirituality, but to provide them with alternative solutions to addressing challenges. Besides evening meetings and Sunday Celebrations, at the request of the youth, spiritual care counselors meet with the boys one-on-one, sometimes befriending and hanging out with them as pals. "Getting faith-based volunteers from the community - people who want to make a difference in the boys' lives - involved is our next step," said Jefferies. "It's all part of widening their experiences with couples who want to be 'Godparents' to some of these boys from broken or foster homes." An initiative seeking additional funding is also underway, with the goal of expanding the program into Lad Lake's two Milwaukee locations.

Added Hall, "Sometimes we take walks along the lake and just talk, or shoot hoops. We make ourselves available to them in non-threatening environments, where they're free to discuss life issues with us. We just want them to know we're here for them. We care for them. Once we gain their trust, it opens the door for us to share hope, faith, and our personal experiences with them that their lives can improve going forward. Many times, all they want is for someone to listen and really care."

AFTER ALMOST A YEAR of planning and anticipation, in 2009 Lad Lake launched its Spiritual Care Program, a unique and holistic way of reaching out to its youth to help and heal their spirit, mind, and body.

With the support and vision of John Kasdorf, and under the leadership of Carol Jefferies, the program seeks to help youth and families access their spirituality and reconnect with or build a faith base to assist in their growth and healing. The program also serves as a resource to connect youth and families with pastoral support and spiritual formation. And, while the history is recent, the impact has been notable and extensive.

"It is not our place to proselytize or persuade individuals as to how they should believe," says Jefferies, "We do, however, rely upon our own Christian faith backgrounds to ground and support our ministries."

**LAD LAKE'S SPIRITUAL CARE PROGRAM** is not the first faith-based initiative Jefferies and Kasdorf have undertaken. With Jefferies' background as a psychiatric chaplain and Kasdorf's background in business - and as founder of the Kaztex Foundation - they also developed the spiritual care program at Rogers Psychiatric Hospital in Oconomowoc and West Allis, Wisconsin and currently are developing spiritual care programs in other human service agencies in Waukesha County.

One unique aspect of the Spiritual Care Program is that the curriculum is not cookie-cutter. Jefferies

and her three spiritual counselors have worked together with a therapist and Lad Lake residential unit supervisor to develop a very specific model of youth-focused programming.

"Lad Lake has always tried to think 'outside the box' when it comes to programming for at-risk youth", said Gary Erdmann, executive director of Lad Lake. "For us, the Spiritual Care Program represents more than just being innovative. We have done a good job over the years meeting the physical, emotional, social, and mental health needs of our youth, but struggled with finding the right approach that would focus on their spiritual and moral development. We believe we are on the right track with the Spiritual Care Program."

**LAD LAKE'S SPIRITUAL CARE PROGRAM** seeks to meet youth on their level, in interesting and interactive ways, through group sessions and one-on-one mentoring. Once a month they also hold Celebration Sunday, where they invite various faith-based speakers to share their testimonies or messages of inspiration, have live music, and invite the boys to join in singing.

"We're fortunate each of the spiritual counselors have musical abilities," said Jefferies. "We get the youth involved and engaged by letting them write songs, poems, and rap; all for the purpose of focusing on positive values and character from a faith-based perspective, and allowing them to find hope and healing in what may seem like hopeless situations."



### RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

The residential treatment facility hosts approximately 50 full-time staff members, as well as 20 part-time employees who mentor, modeling positive behaviors for the young males enrolled in the program. Among them are a school administrator, registered nurse, psychiatrist/medical director, licensed AODA (Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse) counselor, several psychotherapists, youth care workers, teachers, and others - all professionally qualified and more than willing to go out of their way to help our residents. Whether regarding physical health, mental health, interpersonal skills, or emotional stability, Lad Lake attends to them all.