

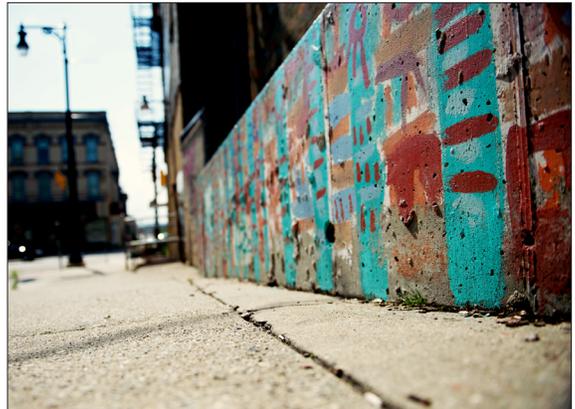
Growing up, John didn't have many people in his life to look up to. His father left when he was just a baby and his mother bounced from job to job trying to make ends meet. When he was five, John and his mother moved in with his Grandma, but because of the tough economy, no one was ever around to look after him.

As he grew older, John began spending time with the older boys in his neighborhood, who had been recruited by a local gang to sell drugs on the street. **While John had never pictured himself as a gang member, he felt a sense of belonging that he had never found at home** and enjoyed having the extra cash around that he made from selling drugs. Soon enough, though, John's actions caught up to him, and he was expelled from his high school after he was caught carrying a weapon onto school grounds.

All of a sudden, **at just fifteen years old, John's future had become very bleak.**

"Will my life really consist of selling drugs, constantly looking over my shoulder, and hoping not to get caught in the crossfire of a gang dispute?" he wondered.

John's mother had also never graduated from high school, and he feared he would never be able to leave the streets if something didn't change. John soon decided to go back to school but found that because he was expelled, the law did not allow him to return to any public school in his district. And with his family's financial situation, private school was out of the question. Despite his desire to change, John's future seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer.



Unfortunately the reality is, **teenagers like John are not alone.**

Just recently, the 2011 Kids Count Data Book published numbers showing that **one in eight children in Michigan lives in a household grappling with job loss.** With the tough economy and broken families, the appeal of negative influences like drugs and gangs is stronger than ever to teens. And on any given day in Kent County nearly 1,000 students are not attending school due to truancy, suspensions and expulsions.

This means that without options, many expelled teens are faced with a future of crime and poverty.

Thankfully, another option exists. **Lighthouse Academy, which was started in 2005 with support from Wedgwood Christian Services,** provides a beacon of hope for expelled youth. As a strict discipline charter school academy, expelled students can attend Lighthouse Academy at no charge and continue their education.

After learning of the opportunity Lighthouse Academy provided, John was relieved to know he could have a second chance at his education. Upon enrolling, John was not only given individual attention to improve his academics, but he was also paired with a Transition Coordinator. This Transition Coordinator helped John to identify a clear career path, as well as the necessary steps he needed to take to get where he wanted to be. John also found the support he had been missing at home from his caring teachers as well as the Young Life leaders who provided fun and spiritually enriching activities after school.

Three short years later, John graduated from Lighthouse Academy with plans to attend community college. He was the first in his family to obtain a high school degree.

With a solid plan in place for his future, and the tools he needs to progress into the job market, **John represents an end to the cycle of poverty in his family.**

Recently, the Grand Rapids Press shared about the importance of fighting poverty in West Michigan through education.



“Educating kids and putting their parents back to work are the best weapons for fighting poverty. Reducing the number of children in poverty so they are able to reach their full potential is in the best interest of the state long-term.”

Educational support to Lighthouse Academy is just one of five transforming services that Wedgwood Christian Services provides to help struggling children and youth in our community. **These five transforming services are funded 100% by donor contributions to the Children’s Hope Annual Fund and include Chaplaincy/Young Life, Wellness, Employment Training, Prevention and Educational Support.**

Your past support indicates that you understand just how critical these services are to breaking the cycle of poverty in our community by equipping our youth for bright and productive futures. Won’t you consider giving again today to help make a difference in the lives of teens like John?

Grace and peace,


James N. Boelkins, Chairperson
Board of Directors


Samuel A. Beals
President/CEO

P. S. This past fall a sister school of Lighthouse Academy, Hope Academy, was opened in the Garfield Park neighborhood of Grand Rapids with the help and support of Wedgwood. This school serves at-risk children in grades K-12 and has already grown to more than 300 students. To learn more about Hope Academy or Lighthouse Academy, visit www.hopeacademywm.org or www.lighthouseacademyschool.org.