





# Stephanie Marshall



When asked why I wanted to return to Houston after I had skipped a year, my response was definitely because God told me to. I had no idea why; after all, my first experience at Houston left me feeling uncomfortable and rejected. But God said try, and so I did. It was a more incredible trip than I could ever have asked for. God blessed not only me, but those around me, and especially the children that we worked with. I was once again astounded as I watched our teens pour themselves out to all those children and to watch them work so hard. I enjoyed every part of the week, from Liberty Island and to our daily stations, and lastly, the end of the day where we came back to God to refresh ourselves. We have an amazing youth group and awesome chaperones! Thank you for let me being a part of it!

# Alicia Castillo

This year on our most current mission trip, there were so many amazing experiences with the children, adults, and hundreds of teens that I was able to meet throughout the week. From the kids at VBS to Service on Sunday to seeing our partnering youth group from Searcy, Arkansas, the week we had in Houston was one that I'll never forget. ☺

When we got to the church building on Saturday, the energy and excitement just hit everybody when we were driving up to the church building. Good thing we got enough sleep for Sunday! The church service at Impact was so amazing. It was so energetic and you could just feel that the whole congregation was so happy just to be there and worship God. It really got you ready for the long week ahead; just being there refreshes you and restores you in a way. Words cannot explain how much everybody enjoyed service and what a great job Impact does at getting the message through.

On Sunday morning after a whole year, we got to see our partnering youth group! It was awesome to see how much everybody had changed and how much people had changed with their walk with God. I was so excited I screamed in the church parking lot when I first saw them! It was also lots of fun seeing all the new faces that traveled so far and decided to spend a week just giving their all to these kids and the work of The Lord, rather than hanging out with friends or traveling to other places for other reasons. It really is beyond inspiring to see other teens who own their faith as well.

On Monday morning when VBS started, it was really chaotic, I'm not gonna lie, but just seeing how much the kids had grown throughout the year and seeing them smile was one of the best parts of the week. Even some of the kids who went to VBS last year remembered me! I worked with the first graders. At the beginning of the week, my little buddy Amy didn't really talk or engage in the activities but by the end of the week, she was dancing and singing with me. She was a totally different kid from that Monday. It really is amazing how these kids really get attached to you. I think I'm speaking for most of our youth group when I say that the kids in Houston really hold a special place in our hearts. During the course of the week, we got to build strong bonds with the kids by taking them

home and picking them up from their houses on routes. During the route that I went on, the kids were very open about their life at home and very fond of us. One little boy from the fourth grade, Ricardo, was going through my bag and asked if he could have one of my eye shadows for his mom because the family couldn't afford to buy his mom anything for his mom for Mother's day. Earlier that week, Ricardo and his friend Isaac asked me to be their mom because their moms weren't very nice to them. Some of these kids really open up your eyes and give you a new perspective on how you look at things. They also help you realize all the things you take for granted. I'm really happy that these kids are able to hear about God and have the opportunity to learn about Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit.

On Monday evening, we went to a home for mentally and physically disabled adults. We had a devotional with them and we sang. After that, we served them cookies and coke and got to talk with them. It's so moving to see them singing and excited to learn about God. If they are capable of doing that, I don't see why it's hard for us.

Another great thing about the trip was getting to see all the people from last year that we met who are part of the congregation at Impact. I kept in contact with some of the people in their youth group so it was exciting to see them and a lot of other people who I recognized.

I'm so excited that I was able to go on this trip. I hope that I will be able to go next year and make it even more satisfying to God than the last!



# Max Chavez

My experience in Houston was a great one. This was my second year going. This time around was a little different, there were some tears, some laughing, some lecturing, LOTS of dancing, some new friends were made, and I even walked across the Houston water wall! The list could go on and on. I think one of my favorite things about these trips is just the awesome chance we have to meet new people and strengthen our relationships not only with each other but also with Christ. Another thing I enjoyed was the time we had every night before our devotional to journal for 10 minutes and reflect, pray or read the bible. I also had an experience to lead singing and present a devotional myself. I look forward to going next year and meeting some new people!



# Dixie Thomas



Every year I come home from Impact Houston, I have the same question...why not Albuquerque? It's an empty question with an empty answer if all I do is wait until I can start to forget. And if I can forget then I don't have to live response-able. I can ungrudgingly live apathy.

The thing is, if I ignore, then who will go? A thousand times the sun has set and the moon has risen, and I have ignored; Ignored the blessing of His love, ignored the calling of His voice. I have closed my eyes. I am sorry that I didn't see sooner; Sorry that I have wasted time and moments. It's not distance that divides us from our neighbors — only indifference. Where has my heart been? Why hasn't it softened sooner? Who will help if I live in a place of indifference? I know that when we wait for someone else to do the right thing it leaves a broken world with a lonely question.

*"Where is anybody to help?"* Every year I come back thinking I have to go; Go to someplace, go to somewhere. The problem with that is it's an excuse...I shut my eyes to the broken lives right now right here. I believe that I can do nothing now, from where I am, because I ignore the poverty all around me and leave a wake of brokenness in my untraveled path. It is so true and the realist lie I have ever allowed myself to believe. Here's what I want to remember, what I want to do with you. I don't want us to wait, we don't have to wait for tomorrow to bring another sunrise. We can go today. I can go today. Now. Someone needs me today. They need you. When I'm hungry for life's amenities and not hungry for God, *I make very real people, mothers, children and neighbors poor.* I know that when I am in a right relationship with God and my neighbor, resources right themselves. What do the poor really lack? What do I really know? What can I really offer? What the poor really need is connection; Being connected. Connection with God and connection with those who have much knowledge to share and much love to give and much hope to offer. God is calling, beckoning the rich and poor alike — *and He's calling us all into right relationship.* Because what this world needs most is a wealth of love. An abundance of people living loved, loving living and living His love; Of people making relationships not rationalizations. I don't know what I will be doing or how to bring Impact to Albuquerque or Colorado Springs or wherever God is calling us next. I may not have wealth, talent or fame. But I do know how to live with hope, to begin to live blessed, to cast off poverty by living like Christ, bending low. Because when we bend low, we put on Christ and our lives touch the hurting next door and bring the revolution of God's upside-down kingdom to where ever we go.



# Tanner Whittenberg

The Impact Houston mission trip is by far one of my favorite parts of the summer. I have been going for three years now, and each year has been more amazing than the last. I love getting to spend time with my own youth group, as well as the youth group from Downtown Church of Christ from Searcy, Arkansas. The best part about the trip, though, is getting attached to all of the children. It is amazing to see God's love through them. The trip is an amazing opportunity to serve others and work in God's kingdom.



# Kathy Whittenberg

This was my third year to go to Houston. Every time I go, I am blessed beyond words. Our mission at Impact Church of Christ is to create, coordinate and run a one week VBS program for K-5<sup>th</sup> graders. Even though our goal is to love and spend time with these sweet kids and share God's word with them, the kids and people at Impact end up leaving a lasting impression on my heart!

During our time in Houston, we also visit a place called Liberty Island, a facility that houses adults with mental and/or physical disabilities. We sing and worship with them, and I always leave there feeling better than when I arrived. These special and energetic people show me the true meaning of loving and praising God!

Another huge blessing for me has been getting to know the kids in our youth group, Anthony and Sunshine, and the other chaperones. It is wonderful to work alongside such a great group of people. They all inspire me to grow, and challenge me to get out of my comfort zone. In spite of long, exhausting and hot days in Houston, we have such a blast together. I love this group of kids and adults, and the experiences we have together help us grow closer to each other and closer to God.

Each time I go to Houston, I come back with so many wonderful experiences and make memories that I know will last a lifetime. I see God's hand in the work that is done there, and I am so happy to be a part of it. Thank you Netherwood, for all of your support, love and prayers. You help make this mission trip possible, and you are making a difference in the lives of so many people!



# Kyle Whittenberg

## Participating in the Kingdom

Even though I had plenty of pictures and stories from those who had been to Houston to serve with the Impact Church I really did not know what to expect from the trip. The preparation, planning, and praying all beforehand was an experience in itself and I quickly began to understand that this trip is one of active involvement, not a tag along for bystanders.

The people at the Impact Church in Houston are truly engaged in showing God's love to people in their community. And not a valentine, pink heart, hugs and kisses, chocolate candy, let me give you some money, send you on your way, wish you well, follow these 5 steps, see you Sunday kind of love, but an open door, serve a meal, shouting songs, crazy dance, learn to read, "got your Jesus on", exploding soda, face painting, big buddy, bear hug a stranger, red, purple, orange, blue, green, yellow, don't spare the rod kind of love. It's the kind of love that props people up, gets them on their feet, scrubs the dirt off, feeds them, gives them work, gives a child stability, lets them know that someone cares and is willing to spend quality time with them just because they are loved. It is the kind of love that laughs until it hurts, sings so loud you lose your voice, throws water balloons, wiggles through hula hoops, and stays up late and gets up early. It is participating in the lives of other people.

I am reminded of a quote from a book I read recently called *Love Does*, "I used to think believing was enough, but now I know that Jesus wants us to participate". Believing is not enough. Doing is required. We are called to take action. Impact church in Houston is taking action and I am thankful I was able to participate.





# Matthew Morse

As I am a short-winded person, I will keep my accountings of my experiences in Houston brief. Despite the fact this trip is exhausting, and we have almost no reprieve from work for most of the day, I still believe that it is definitely worth going to as it a very rewarding experience. It is incredible getting to see the kids, and their boundless energy, and it is a good chance to spend time with the youth group. We do still have a few great chances to relax, such as when we all spent a while at a pizza restaurant playing pool. None of these, however, are the main reason that I go. I feel that through everything that we do at Impact, I am brought closer to God than I feel anywhere else. It is that incredible experience that keeps coming back to Impact.



# Sunshine Favors

**“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” -Lord Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:10.**

Our team leads a very nomadic lifestyle the 10 days we travel to and serve in Houston. We stay in classrooms of church buildings; sleeping on the floor with a sleeping bag and pillow, on top of table(s) as a makeshift bed, sometimes we get creative and line up a group of chairs to make a bench to sleep on, other times the more fortunate of us will sleep on cots or air mattresses. Every morning we gather and pack all of our stuff (sleeping equipment, luggage/bags, etc) to store in a closet so that the classrooms can be used for their intended purpose. Then we unpack all of our stuff at night. We pack and unpack all our stuff for every day of our trip, even at multiple locations during our trip! This becomes problematic when it comes to food and other VBS supplies because we are only assigned/loaned 2 shelves in the kitchen pantry and a shelf on one side of a refrigerator to hold/store breakfast and lunch to feed 30+ members of our team – for the whole week. I share this because it reminds me of the time when the Israelites wandered in the desert, depending on God for everything – food provisions, shelter and meeting their spiritual needs. Like the wandering Israelites, we could’ve complained and been miserably discontent with our unsettling conditions. Instead we chose to live for 10 days, as nomads depending on God to meet our every need and trusting that He will do it! Lesson learned: Be content to serve during, and in spite of, uncertainty.

**“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”**

One day, an adult chaperone notices a child without a name tag (each VBS child is required to wear a name tag). The adult chaperone leads the child to the director for a name tag. When asked why she didn't have her name tag, she begins to explain her and sibling (ages 9 and 7) missed their bus to take them to Impact. So they decided to walk from their house to the Impact building; which is a little over 2 miles. She further explained

**“we didn't want to miss VBS because then we can't learn about God with our big buddies”. For the children who attend VBS, their big buddies are a tangible expression and affirmation of God's love for them and presence in their lives. We, as their big buddies, get to love on them, talk to them about their days, their family and whatever else is on their hearts and minds. The VBS kiddos cling to us big buddies every moment we're with them to return the love we dote on them.**

**It's just a beautiful picture of the way God intended and designed His people to live in community! Lesson learned: Don't take kingdom relationships/community for granted!**

**“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”**

I joyfully choose to leave at 4:30 in the dark and quiet hours of the morning, load/cram 30+ people with ALL of their stuff into vehicles and drive almost 900 miles in the humid and hottest days of summer so we can serve in Houston, TX. I joyfully choose to spend 4 months with all the members of the Impact Houston team members, prior to our trip, immersed in scripture to develop curriculum for the children that we will teach and lead during our session of vacation bible school at Impact Houston Church of Christ. I choose to be without all the comforts that my home provides or the convenience of my daily routine. I choose all of this as one of many opportunities God grants me to live out.....

**“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.**





# Caleb Ortiz

My week in Houston was good, this being my second year attending. I went because I enjoy spending time with the youth groups, ours and Searcy's as well as seeing the kids from Houston. I enjoyed our devotionals each night and our get-togethers with the Downtown group at Liberty Island and The Water Wall. I especially enjoyed the singing, helping the kids with the reading class and the field trip to the children's museum. I enjoyed the challenge of our daily rotations especially when Josh lost his voice and we each had to step up and improvise our lesson for the day. It was a time of personal growth for me. In all it was a great trip and I look forward to going next year.



# Danielle Ortiz

The week in Houston was fulfilling in so many ways. I have gone to Houston for the past three years and it has changed me for the better each year. This year I was with an awesome group of 4th graders. I was amazed to see the change in both the kids, big buddies and the adults of VBS. One of the examples of this change was in my brother, Caleb. During the course of the week I saw him become more outspoken and less shy. It reminded me of my first year in which the same thing happened to me. (Ask Anthony if you don't believe me...) It is great to see God working in the lives of both the kids and the adults of Houston and Netherwood. There is no greater feeling than to know that you played a role in changing someone's life for the better. I am very blessed to have had the opportunity to serve in this transforming week with great people.

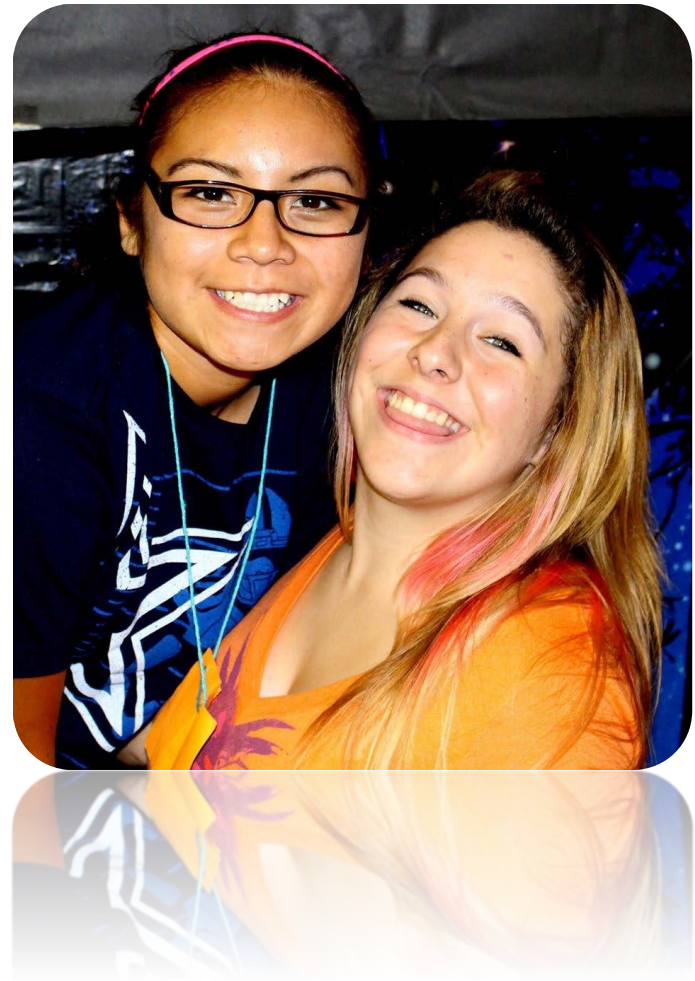




# Karlene Calavaza

This year was my second year going to Houston. It was so much fun this year because I got to know more of the Searcy group and I got to make new buddies. I didn't get out of my comfort zone as much as I needed to last year. I always thought it would be the scariest thing I had to do but when I stepped out of it I felt like a different person. When we arrived at Impact Church Of Christ I was thinking it was going to be a long week. On that Monday after we picked all the kids up from their Routes, I met a little boy named Alexis, and before I got to know him or his name he was already jumping on me like we've known each other for a long time. After that I bonded with him and I got attached, that day I lost track of time and paid a lot more attention to the kids and to the VBS. On our last day it hit me that we've only been there for a week because it felt like we've been there for months. I've learned a lot since I've gone, I understand where the kids come from and that summer might be the only place where they learn or know about god. When I'm with the kids I feel like I'm eight again because of the energy they have. I really enjoy going to Impact, and I would stay there for a whole summer if I could. God has given me a different perspective.

-Karlene Calavaza



# Seth Whittenberg

Houston for me was the beginning of a change of heart for me. God placed this door for me to go through last year and once again have followed him through it. Impact Houston is a place where you can see the love of Christ demonstrated not only through the people there but by the kids that come every summer to rejoice in God's presence. This year for me was different being in more of a leadership role. Our group of kids is one the most well behaved, most engaged and loving that I have seen in my two years going though. Being in a leadership role I feared I would feel a little detached from the children. That was not the case at all. I helped with the Kindergarteners again and this little boy, K'Saun found me. He was very shy but by the end of the week he was opening up to me. Through a short conversation I had with him, he told me how his mom and dad lived far away from each other. He had several older siblings and he didn't live in the best of neighborhoods. He had much against him that life was dealing him yet he wanted to be at impact. The kids I meet every year continue to shape me more than I shape them. God has used it all to plant a seed within my heart to continue work with kids.

There are so many opportunities to serve Gods Kingdom and I intend to continue on through the doors God opens for me.





# Alicia Lyons

*My first time going to Impact Houston was two years ago, I was actually in the youth group, but this year I went as a chaperone! The week started Friday at 5am, we were on the road for a total of twelve hours on Friday. Being on the road for so long simply forced us all to get to know each other better, and bond with those who were in the same vehicle. Once we got to Impact we met up with the group from Arkansas who usually works the same session with us. Wow, what a great group of people! They were all so close with each other, and all of them had such beautiful Christian hearts. VBS finally starts on Monday and we are all just so excited to get started! We choose our color groups which are classified by the grade that the children are in. I chose the orange group which is all of the third graders. We all start out by singing and dancing to all of the VBS songs, all of us probably acted sillier than the kids there, but that's okay. Lunch came around and that is when all of us big buddies must basically bribe all of these kids to eat their (not so good looking) lunch by offering them tickets! Finally the day is over and it's time for all of the kids to go home. Some of us big buddies are allowed to ride with the kids home on their busses, so that gives us the opportunity to get to see where they come from. Some of them come from better places than others, but you couldn't tell because these kids all had this joy within them. Throughout the week I became closer with these kids in my group, quickly started to get to know them all. Playing games with them such as thumb war, bubble gum, truth or dare, staring contests, and rock paper scissors. I thought it was hilarious that all of the kids there call it "Paper Rock Scissors" and they laughed at us big buddies because we say "Rock Paper Scissors." As we were all singing and dancing to the VBS songs the kids were acting like they were too cool for school, so us big buddies had to force them to dance. That was the day that I met my little buddy for the week. His name is Imanol and he is eight years old. He loved reading group, and he might have been the only one. He asked me to be his big buddy and it just melted my heart. From then on he always wanted to sit in my lap even though I'm pretty sure he was the tallest third grader there. We got extremely close, and towards the end of the week I viewed him as a little brother. There were just so many beautiful and intelligent kids in my group! Zabrina was a little girl that I connected with, she didn't have the nicest clothes, they were ripped and some of the kids made fun of her, but she was one of the happiest little girls I have ever*

*met. She was so on fire to get to know God, and she was so smart. Another kid that I connected with was named Carlos. I didn't get to know him until the last day I was there. He didn't have a buddy, he was really quiet, and may have been viewed as an outcast. I reached out to him because I saw him sitting alone, and from that point on he was always at my side. He told me that he wasn't able to go on the*

*field trip because he was in the hospital that day because some kids were bullying him and beat him up. It broke my heart to hear that. He also asked me if I would be his buddy, even though it made Imanol jealous it ended up working out really well. It was so hard saying goodbye. Some tears...soon escalated to my ugly cry. Throughout the week I began to see the immense amount of things that Impact Church really does. Seeing Impact and all they do made me realize how much my church needs to improve, and what to look for in a church. Throughout the week I also thought about how we tend to go on trips like these, and get this spiritual high that doesn't seem to last. I saw the big picture while I was there. We don't need to wait for the mission field to do the mission. We tend to have the mentality of being a servant of God on trips like this. We need to always have that mentality. Going to Impact helped me realize that I need to change. How loving I was toward those kids is how loving I need to become with my own siblings, and all children I encounter. They will know we are Christians by our love. I learned a lot at Impact. I can honestly say that I am a changed person. I now know that we don't need a reason to help people. We just need to be there for people. I felt the presence of God, and I saw Jesus in the face of a child. Impact made me realize that I don't want to be the person God wants me to be for just one week, while people are watching. I want to be who God wants me to be every day. Impact made that longing a reality, and the journey with a new perspective begins!*



# Preston Cleghorn-Gatewood

I don't know how to explain what a fantastic trip this was. Being my first year, I had no clue what to expect, but this trip has really helped me realize how blessed I am to have such an amazing home. This trip has shown me many ways God works through people and works through me. Seeing the joy on the kids faces when we picked them up, or when we would sing, or even seeing them excited to be there gave me an emotion so filled with happiness it's indescribable.

Singing for the mentally and physically disabled at Liberty Island gave me another example of how blessed I am. The experience has taught me things and shown me things I will remember for a lifetime. I cannot believe how much fun I had this trip and how much it has boosted my faith.

I cannot wait until next year. And I pray that God will provide me energy to serve him and continue to be able to do more trips like this in the future. – Preston





One of the first passages that come to mind when I think about this year at Impact and really every year is Romans 1:9-12, specifically verse 12 where Paul is talking about how he and the Christians in Rome can be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. This is what happens every single year we have gone to Impact and throughout the year as I look forward to going back. There are far too many significant and beautiful stories to recount here that occurred this year in Houston, stories of simple faith that make much of God, stories of the community of faith at Impact completely transforming their community around them because of God's work in them as ordinary and broken

vessels, stories of how I will forever be a changed man because of the ways in which I was able to participate with this community of faith. While I could go on and on about these stories, two words sum up my experiences in Impact and how I feel about the body there. These two words are grateful and humble. I could not be more grateful to be a part of the body of Christ, a member that is privileged and honored to GET TO serve and love in the name of and for the sake of Jesus. I could not be more humbled because I think, why me Lord? I know who I am and you could use so many better instruments but being in Houston humbles me to know that it's not about my

gifts but about the gift that the Lord has and continues to provide me.

On behalf of the Netherwood Youth Ministry, Impact Church of Christ, and the Downtown Youth Ministry, I want to thank the body here at Netherwood for making it possible for us to be a part of incredible work that is being done in Houston. Your prayers, money, support, and concern mean the world to us and are touching our lives and so many lives of people that you haven't even met. Thank you!!!

With Christ's Love,

Anthony Favors



# Gavin Blake

My sister Alicia told me all about how much fun Houston was last year. She told me about all the kids and all the singing. I thought about not going because of how long I would be away from home. Then I heard from other kids in the Youth Group about how much fun it is to see the kids so happy. So I decided to go. When the kids came in they were so happy to see us! I had such a great time playing, singing and teaching scripture to the kids. It made me feel so good to see how much fun the kids were having and how happy they were. The last day came so fast. We had a whole day planned with games, water games and popsicles for the kids to eat. I was so sad to leave the kids and I can't wait to see them all next year!

By: Gavin Wallace Blake



# Emily Marshall

Wow I do not even know where to begin when telling my experience at Impact Houston this year! What an incredible journey it has been. I absolutely love seeing our teens here at Netherwood Park work with these kids. They just pour out their whole hearts and gave all they had to the work at Impact Church of Christ.

I have been going to Impact Houston for three years now, and I must say that each year has been different. Each year has its ups and its downs, but this year was outstanding! I was shown God's love through the kids that I had the opportunity to work with. Most of these kids come from a rough background, but every single day we were there they always had a huge smile on their precious faces. I am extremely blessed to have been given the opportunity to work with this group! I pray that God continually work through us that His work may be completed!

God Bless,

Emily Marshall



