

# buddy break

## a ministry for all

by Rick Jordan, CBFNC Church Resources Coordinator

“It is a safe place for my child. It is his special day.” “She loves it so much, I can’t tell her it is Buddy Break weekend, or she won’t sleep all week.” “It is the best thing I have ever been involved with for my child.” “I know my two children will be taken care of, and, very importantly, they will not be judged.” These quotes are from parents of special needs children who participate in a monthly Buddy Break at Greystone in Raleigh.

Nancy Register, a member at Greystone, heard about the national Buddy Break program while listening to the radio. “I had a burden that our church needed some ministry that could involve all ages working together. I do not have a special-needs child, but when I heard about how this program works, I knew, ‘This is it!’”

One Saturday a month, 12-20 special-needs children aged 3-19, enter the fellowship hall of Greystone, immediately recognized and appreciated. Buddies are the volunteers who give parents a respite and give children an opportunity to explore art, music or just to play games.

“They get to choose what they want to do, which is something rare for them. Their Buddy finds out what they want to do that day, then escorts them to that center and stays with them. They can do one center all day or they can move to as many centers as they choose,” said Nancy. “Now that we have been going for two years, the Buddies and the children know each other and feel very comfortable around one another.”

One of those Buddies is Lauren Jones, a senior at Sanderson High School. “I came to be a Buddy through the Key Club to get service hours. I thought it was really cool, so I got trained to be a Buddy, which is pretty easy.” Lauren is a Buddy to Madison. “She is so sweet. Usually, she just wants to go to the library to read books about animals, so that’s what we do. I am not really doing this for hours anymore. I like seeing all the children and seeing how they cope with their predicaments. I used to only see special-needs children from a distance or on TV and would think,

‘how could you take care of someone like that?’ But this has changed my perspective. Now I think that someday I would like to adopt a special-needs child. You find that the key is learning how to communicate with this person. Once you discover that, you can have a really good relationship.”

Lauren is one of many Buddies who are not members at Greystone. The ministry is open to leadership from outside the congregation as long as the person takes the training and pays for a background check.

I visited Buddy Break on Valentine’s Day. The children could make heart puzzles or dig through a huge container of rice looking for hearts. “We have some things that are consistent every month,

because consistency is important for some. But we also have a theme each month so some things will change. In March, the tactile box will be filled with green colored noodles,” said Annette McSpadden, another coordinator.

After several hours of playing, reading or making crafts, the children gather for a final program. Recent programs have included therapy dogs, fire engines, and often music. Faith is woven through



the day, such as a prior month’s theme on the story of Noah.

“Buddy Break ministers to people all over our county and it involves persons of all ages in our church. Persons as young as 14 can, and do, volunteer. Sunday school classes fix meals for the volunteers. One Sunday school class even made lasagnas for the Mother’s Day Buddy Break for the mothers to take home with them,” said Nancy. One person serving lunch the day I visited was Martha Castleberry, age 89. “I hope this is as helpful for the parents as it is for me,” she said. “This program started the year my husband died and it has given me a great outlet.”

Greystone celebrated their 30th anniversary last year with a campaign called Pay It Forward. Their goal was to raise \$30,000 for ministries reaching persons outside the church. Part of those funds will be used to offer matching grants to churches interested in beginning their own Buddy Break ministry. For more information on Buddy Break or the grant, contact Nancy Register at [buddybreak@greystonechurch.org](mailto:buddybreak@greystonechurch.org).