

BEHIND THE SEEN

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PEEL photography and
poetry experience

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A Word from Mike

The transformative impact of our newest programs

Welcome to our spring issue of Youthfront News. Our team really struggled choosing what to include in the limited space of this newsletter. There are so many incredible stories we'd love to share with you. So I hope you will visit our website, subscribe to one or more of our email newsletters, blogs and updates, and consider getting involved in one of our many programs.

In this issue, we will highlight two programs that are new to us at Youthfront. You'll read about our growing engagement serving incarcerated youth in the Kansas City area juvenile detention centers, and two new aftercare programs designed to help them create a flourishing life upon release.

Our cover story is about a program called PEEL, that I will assure you is holy ground for all of us. This unique program welcomes teenagers and young adults into a rich interpersonal experience where Jesus Christ is deeply encountered. We're honored to be launching this program at Youthfront that was originally developed in the UK to combat the mental health issues exacerbated by social media and our digital age.

I'll share a letter we received from the parent of a young man who participated in PEEL with us:

I wanted to share some meaningful feedback about the PEEL Project you hosted a few weeks ago. Our son John is a few years out of high school and has been struggling with isolation and a lack of purpose. Even though he's attending the local community college, he's been having a tough time making new friends. When he decided to attend your three-day event, we were excited but uncertain about how it would go.*

He was very skeptical on the first day, but he chose to return each day. After he completed all three days, we finally had the chance to talk with him about the experience. It turns out this encounter with others during the project had a very positive impact on him.

What struck him most was meeting people who weren't like him—he saw their uniqueness and heard their different views on life. Through these interactions, he realized how much he'd been isolating himself and how that isolation had led him to think negatively about others. His key takeaway was clear: he needs to get out of the house and take risks to meet new people.

In the 2-3 weeks since the event, we've noticed a real change. John has been more engaging with our family and, for the first time in a while, is talking about how to get out into the world and what might be next for him. We're deeply thankful for this experience and the ongoing impact it will continue to have as he transitions into greater independence. With his increased confidence, we believe this can only lead to good things for John. Thank you for creating a space where young people like John can encounter others and discover new possibilities.

Donors, volunteers and friends, thank you for all you do to make transformations like John's - and all Youthfront's ministries - possible.

Mike King, President and CEO

*- name was changed for privacy reasons

NEW AT YOUTHFRONT

Day Camp Weeks at Camp West

Youthfront's beloved Day Camp program for kids entering grades 1-5 will be hosted at Youthfront Camp West in summer 2026. Campers will enjoy all the property has to offer for two sessions of camp designed for Day Campers only. Camp families also have more transportation options with three metro area pickup and dropoff locations for campers to get to and from camp. Learn more about this year's Day Camp at youthfront.com/day-camp.

New Faces at Youthfront

Youthfront welcomed the following new staff since the last issue of *Youthfront News*. Abby Fry as Associate Director of Arise New Hope, Ashlyn Green as Coordinator of Arise New Hope, Willie Johnson as Juvenile Justice Coordinator for Arise, Eli Krogmann as Facilities Associate, Michelle Lundberg as HR and Finance Associate, Ashlee Mortenson as Youth Service Coordinator, Nadine Nibimenya as Young Adult Service Coordinator, Wes Parham as ImagineX Program Staff, Rachel Pierce as Administrative Assistant, Chelsea Philgreen as Cabin Leader Coordinator, and Lawrence Wills as Youth Pastor Program Staff for Youthfront Neighborhood.

High School Serve Opportunities Expand

High schoolers who love Teen Staff in the summer desired more ways to serve throughout the year. Students in grades 9-12 are invited to join our new Serve Retreats. Small groups of high school students come alongside church/adult retreat groups at Youthfront Camp West, helping in the kitchen and with other hospitality roles. These weekend serve opportunities include formational reflection and worship times alongside the community time that students love about serving at Youthfront. Learn more and sign up for an upcoming Serve Retreat at youthfront.com/high-school-retreats.



Youthfront Day Camp moves to Camp West for 2026



Teen Staff returned to Camp in the fall to help at Serve Retreats



Serve Retreats include faith formation and community time



Portrait of Isaac McKeag by Paddy Jacobs from the December 2025 PEEL experience at the Eva Reynolds Fine Art Gallery.

Behind the Seen

A look inside the PEEL photography and poetry experience

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I don't want to forget how this feels. To connect with people authentically, not over my computer or phone. I hope to be able to go forward and help those around me connect face to face daily.

In the midst of skyrocketing anxiety and depression, a group in the United Kingdom created a three-day process inviting young people into an experience shaped by photography and poetry. The process - known as PEEL - cultivates a deeply personal encounter with another in which both people are deeply seen and heard.

In groups no larger than 12, young people are paired with someone else, interviewing them at length and listening to their story. They then write a poem about this other person and take a photograph of them, while receiving photography training. The whole process is built to upend “selfie culture” and allow young people to be really seen and heard by each other.

The PEEL project builds relational trust among a small group of youth while giving them photography and writing skills. Largely designed as an “anti-social media” effort, the PEEL project’s success among youth in the United Kingdom and in early testing in the U.S. led to its launch at Youthfront through Lilly Endowment Inc’s National Youth and Young Adult Initiative on Faith and Service.



Top: Schuyler Impens captures a photo of Raylee Saunders during the December 2025 PEEL experience. Bottom: Portrait of Sam Wheeler by Ryan Bronson. Right: Portrait of Ashlee Mortenson by Lexi King. Cover: Portrait of Joslyn Griffin by Jacob Mann.



“There is something deeply spiritual that happens in PEEL,” said Mike King, President and CEO of Youthfront and the grant project’s lead investigator. “I’ve called it holy ground and it is...every student who’s gone through this process has been changed by it, so we’re honored to be launching this project with youth in the U.S.”

PEEL participants share that they experienced the presence of Jesus Christ in the process - their evaluation feedback included learning more about themselves, while being listened to like they’ve rarely experienced before. Project participants’ experiences have already demonstrated strong mental health benefits. Students rate a set of statements before and then after the experience and their responses are compared. Every data point saw an increase, and several had significant jumps. “I’ve been feeling good about myself” had a 35% positive increase, “I’ve been feeling close to other people” saw a 32% positive increase, and “I sense the presence of God with me” had a 15% positive increase. Youthfront will lead 25 PEEL projects for youth ages 13-29 in the next four years.

To view the 2025 PEEL portraits and poems, visit: youthfront.com/peel-project



A Future of *Hope*

"I think I can see my life actually changing."

A young man in Youthfront's Arise program for incarcerated youth uttered those words after going through Youthfront's ImagineX program.

The Youthfront Neighborhood and Pathways ministry teams offered the four-week ImagineX program for youth in the Wyandotte County juvenile detention center in 2025 and launched it with Jackson County Family Courts at Hilltop this past summer.

The program invites youth to consider what it would take to keep them from re-offending. What would it look like to follow God into a flourishing life after release? Each cohort of incarcerated youth has come up with a different set of innovative and striking answers...but they all included community, holding each other accountable, and serving others.

"We've always dreamed of offering an aftercare program for the young people we work with inside the area youth detention centers through Arise," said Alex Mathew, director of Youthfront Pathways. "But working with Youthfront Neighborhood to give those students a chance to tell us what they need after release was a game-changer. It has shaped so much of what we're offering moving forward, and we're excited to see where God is leading."

Club Arise launched this year, offering a program of accountability, community and mentorship to youth who have had encounters with the justice system, are on parole or have been released from detention.

Youthfront was also awarded funding for a new program,

Arise New Hope, which is an 8-week course using a curriculum designed for justice involved youth. The program serves youth in Wyandotte and Johnson counties who were recently released from a juvenile detention center or who have had an interaction with the juvenile justice system. Arise New Hope is designed to serve youth seeking skills for anger management, building healthy relationships and recovery from addictions. Arise New Hope also offers support for the youths' families. With support from a Kansas Department of Corrections' Community Programs Juvenile Justice Involved Youth Programs Grant, Youthfront's Pathways and Presence-Centered Counseling teams are implementing the program.

"We're excited to equip youth to build new futures for themselves and their families - futures with hope."

Arise New Hope also was created using the input of incarcerated youth. ImagineX participants specifically identified a core need in an aftercare program focused on community support and accountability. Based on this valuable feedback, Arise New Hope aftercare is shaped to provide evidence-based interventions for making

lasting change, individual and family therapy, and community-building mentorship.

"We're in the unique position of having so many assets to serve these youth - from staff and volunteers who have walked in their shoes, to a licensed inhouse therapist at Youthfront. We're excited to equip youth to build new futures for themselves and their families - futures with hope," Mathew said.

Learn more about Youthfront's Arise and other ministry programs at youthfront.com/pathways



how you can get involved

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AT YOUTHFRONT

Youthfront's ministry depends on volunteers and donors like you! With a wide variety of programs and activities, there are opportunities for giving back no matter your age, time commitment or skills.

Youthfront Neighborhood

Help us unmake the dividing walls of our neighborhoods. A variety of seasonal and year-round volunteer opportunities are available in the Argentine community of Kansas City, KS.

Enjoy interacting with kids or teens? Volunteer at the **Adventure Academy** after school program, become a mentor at **The Good Life** youth group, or serve at the popular youth hangout space, **Snack Shack KC**. Or lend a hand during the summer at the **Argentine Day Camp**.

Interested in meeting a physical need? Help us sort, package and hand out food at our monthly **food distribution**. Or join us for a **Service Saturday** as we help local neighbors and churches with light repairs, painting and yard work.

Youthfront Camp

Play a part in creating an unforgettable camp experience for kids and teens. **Camp volunteers** are needed during the summer for our overnight and Day Camp sessions. You'll serve alongside Summer Staff, assisting with camp activities and spiritual formation times.

Additionally, the camp facilities team in Edgerton, KS welcomes individuals or teams of volunteers year-round on a one-time or ongoing basis. Needs include

mowing, painting, landscaping, tree trimming, cutting wood, snow and ice removal, construction and repairs.

Youthfront Pathways

Join us as we create paths for teens in tough situations to discover God's love through authentic relationships.

Youthfront's **Arise juvenile justice program** is the leading ministry in the metro area for youth in juvenile detention centers. Volunteers engage with youth at one of four detention or residential facilities for two hours each week for a time of Bible study, discussion or games. Volunteers with **Club Arise** mentor youth as they rejoin their community and invite them to monthly gatherings.

Volunteers in the **Teen Parent Connect** program serve as mentors to local teen parents through monthly gatherings and Bible study. Individuals or groups are also needed to provide childcare or a meal for around 20 people on Thursday evenings.

GET INVOLVED:

Learn more about all of Youthfront's volunteer opportunities and sign up at youthfront.com/volunteer



4600 Rainbow Blvd, Kansas City, KS 66103



SOMETHING TO EAT *KC*

Thanks to all the volunteers, donors and sponsors who made Something to Eat KC 2026 possible. Together, we made a big impact on hunger in our community. Through our partnership with Harvesters Community Food Network, all meals packed at the event were distributed directly to local food pantries and community organizations within Harvesters' trusted network, ensuring the food reaches those who need it most.

2026 in Numbers

55,152 meals packed

777 participants

24 groups

2026 Event Sponsors: The King Family, The Brenneman Family, Phye Family Dentistry, Jon & Gayle Stanley, Risk Strategies, KC Parent, Campbell & Co. Communications, Trinity Fellowship, Central Solutions & The Nobrega Family, Kenton Brothers, Sylas & Maddy's, US Foods, The Redfearn Law Firm, Northland Ready Mix, and Keller Owens.

***Mark your calendar!* Join us next year on 2.27.27**