

## Afterschool Provider Spotlight

*Ms. Lillian Curlett*  
*Jamison Memorial Agency*

When the teacher called Lillian Curlett's name and asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, her answer could not have been further from anything in the education field. Winner of the 2011 National Education Association (NEA) Mary Hatwood Futrell Award, Lillian Curlett always thought she would be an attorney. Lillian was happy working as the Vice President at a Fortune 500 company and volunteering at her church as the Sunday School Teacher and Youth Director. It wasn't until her pastor came to her with his vision for an afterschool program that Lillian's career path began to change. Stepping out on faith, she left the corporate world and is now co-founder and Executive Director of Jamison Memorial Agency. Each day, Lillian and her staff are making a difference through education in the lives of more than 300 youth and their families.

Jamison Memorial Agency is a faith based nonprofit organization whose mission is, to provide academic enrichment by way of educational classes structured through workshops and program interaction. The organization does not work with the youth only, but provides intergenerational services addressing the needs of the entire family. The afterschool and summer program



provides youth with a safe haven. "What we do is give youth a place to feel safe if they fail a place where they can feel safe that somebody cares enough about them, that if they do fail, they are not going to be ridiculed. We're going to pick them up, help them to dust themselves off, and start over and do it the right way." The afterschool program runs Monday through Friday from 3:00pm until 7:00pm. When youth arrive to the program, they have dinner where they laugh talk and eat as a family. Following the meal, students participate in Harambe, homework then break into any number of activities that provide enrichment of one kind or another. Ms. Curlett sees the greatest needs of today's youth being academics, parental guidance, and constant positive role models. Each day, Ms. Curlett and her staff work tirelessly to make sure these needs are met. The staff at Jamison Memorial wants to ensure youth advance at least one grade level during the course of the program. "At the end of the year, some youth cry because they don't want to leave, but we see the achievements they have made in that year and we know they are ready to go wherever they have to go."

Lillian feels the key to the uniqueness of this program is **the staff**. "They are invaluable." Lillian hires interns who are not far removed from the ages of the youth Jamison Memorial Agency serves. The Interns establish relationships that last for years and years. "They inspire them to get better grades and perform better personally. We change ideas and attitudes because the interns are in front of them every day, communicating with them, telling them what's not cool." There is a family who has moved to the city, yet the father picks his daughter up from the catholic school in the city and brings her to the Normandy site so his daughter can continue in the program.

As the old saying goes “good news travels fast.” The afterschool program grew from working in a church to four sites in the Riverview Gardens School District, one site in the Normandy School district, and three sites in the City of St. Louis. If you ask Lillian what keeps her going, she will tell you, “I don’t work for myself, I’m here to help somebody else and the somebody else we help are near and dear to my heart, and my question is: If I don’t do it, who will?”

A wonderful tribute to Lillian Curlett and her staff can be found on YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dP-1-CUbeQ>.