
NOBODY COULD TELL BY APPEARANCES THAT THESE SQUIRMING, GIGGLING, JABBERING, ATTENTION-GRABBING FOUR- AND FIVE-YEAR-OLDS IN THEIR IDENTICAL SCHOOL UNIFORMS ARE HOMELESS.

To them, the Boyce L. Ansley School, housed in St. Luke's Episcopal Church, is a comfortable, safe place in an often turbulent world.

It's Monday morning, and identical brightly printed backpacks hang in cubbies near the door of a big, cheerfully decorated classroom. Kid-level shelves hold baskets of toys, crayons, paper, books, and anything else a prekindergartner could want. A room full of children wearing uniforms of khaki shorts or skirts and white polo shirts squirm on a rug with squares of primary colors to mark their spots. "Mrs. B" calls the class to order.

As the children continue their chatter, her voice becomes softer and slower. After a few seconds, the class comes to attention as well as prekindergartners can.

On the surface, this looks like your typical preschool classroom, but the 12 children enrolled here come from six different shelters in and around metro Atlanta.

Two were left without a place to live because their landlords failed to maintain their apartments. When the city condemned the buildings, their families had nowhere to go. Two were moved from one shelter to another in the first six weeks of the school year, forcing their older siblings to switch public schools. Some of the families have been homeless for years; some have lost their living spaces only recently. Some have been in and out of homelessness more than once.

One student's father, 30, says the school has made a huge difference in his four-year-old

son. He has a job, but his family lost their home when he had to have unexpected surgery. The family could find no available shelter space where everyone could stay together, so his son ended up in a shelter with just his mother. The dad is still "between places."

The boy's enrollment at Ansley has been a silver lining in an otherwise bleak situation, his dad says. "He's more aware, more confident now. He can sit down and have a conversation. I can't tell you how much better his speech is."

And maybe best of all, "he wakes his mother up in the morning now because he can't wait to get to school."

WHERE THERE IS NEED || The Boyce L. Ansley School began as many enterprises do. "This evolved from being in community and seeing a need," said Kate Kennedy, its founder and executive director.

Kennedy, a former television producer with seminary training from the Emory University Candler School of Theology, became a stay-at-home mom for 20 years, taking care of her four children, one of whom has learning disabilities. She was chair of the board of Crossroads Community Ministries, a nonprofit agency headquartered at St. Luke's, which assists homeless people by providing meals, a mailing address, MARTA cards, job training, clothes, and applications for identification cards and birth certificates.

A few years ago, she and other volunteers noticed that more clients were arriving with children in tow. To accommodate the ▶



OPPOSITE TOP The book bags that hang in students' cubbies were donated at the start of the school year, along with uniforms and other school supplies.

OPPOSITE A pre-K student and Donna Taylor, an assistant teacher and St. Luke's parishioner, read a book together in Ansley's newly outfitted classroom.