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WEDNESDAY'S WOMAN

Internship opportunity sparks Hall's passion

BECCA OWSLEY The News-Enterprise

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Jeleena Hall serves as the youth coordinator at Mission Hope for Kids.

Submitted photo

Getting to know Jeleena Hall

Church: St. Stephen Church, Hardin County campus, where she helps out as an audio engineer.

Favorite movies: "Hitch," "Coach Carter," "Remember the Titans," "Miss Congeniality 2," "The Green Mile" and "The Help."

Hobbies: Driving any and everywhere, singing and listening to music, dancing, roller skating and riding her motorcycle

Favorite sports team: University of Louisville

Community activity: Hardin County Youth Sports, where she has coached basketball and baseball since 2016. Her team, the Grizzlies, won the 7-8-year-old division before the COVID-19 shutdown.

Jeleena Hall started at Mission Hope for Kids for internship experience and stayed to help make a difference in young lives.

Hall, 34, works at Human Resources Command as an assignment manager and at Communicare serving people in crisis.

She became involved with Mission Hope for Kids in 2015 while searching for an internship placement through Western Kentucky University to complete her master's degree in social work.

"I went to three places in Louisville before they recommended I try Mission Hope right here in Hardin County because of my work schedule," she said.

At the time, Hall didn't know what Mission Hope was. She was just looking for a place to intern.

"But, I needed Mission Hope for Kids and it needed me," said Hall of Radcliff.

When she started, mentors in the youth program were outnumbered on Fridays, she said.

“During my internship, I learned the routine and the history of Mission Hope for Kids,” she said. “I volunteered Monday through Thursday with elementary students and Fridays with middle and high school students.”

After the internship was over, Hall planned to do other things. But said she fell in love with the program and the change it was making in the community.

“Just in a year I could see growth, not just in the kids physically, but emotionally, spiritually and mentally,” she said. “I’d like to think I had something to do with this, but I know it wasn’t anyone but God.”

Through serving at Mission Hope, Hall said she felt a true sense of purpose.

“I wanted to help as much as I could to ensure our kiddos had the best opportunities available,” she said. “Mission Hope for Kids is everything a kid needs to grow into a productive young adult.”

Hall now serves as the youth coordinator, finding curriculum for students to learn during group time and helping them visit places to help enrich their lives.

“We allow them the opportunity to talk to us,” she said. “It’s hard to do with only four hours a week, but we make the most of it and our kids keep coming back.”

Mission Hope Executive Director Nelle Thomas described Hall in a quote she had heard, “great leaders don’t set out to be a leader, they set out to make a difference.”

It was just a few months of seeing Hall in her internship role when Thomas could tell Hall’s mindset was different.

“It was not ‘what can I get’ but rather ‘what can I give?’” Thomas said. “How can I help make this place different or how can I leave this place better than I found it?”

Thomas said Hall wasn’t just there to get her intern hours. She was there to make a difference

“It has been refreshing to watch her grow as a student and as an individual,” she said. “She is zealous, enthusiastic and energetic and I love it when Ms. Jeleena is in the building.”

Hall said she likes being a part of Mission Hope because it “exudes love.”

“I can talk about how great it is all day, but until you experience it, especially pre-pandemic, you’ll never understand,” she said. “MHFK is a safe place, a mentoring program, guidance center and most

importantly, a second family.”

Quoting Frederick Douglass, Hall said Mission Hope for Kids is important because “It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men.”

“The earlier we make an impact on our youth, the better they will be as individuals and the better our community and future will be,” she said. “I tell our kids all the time, they have an advantage over every other student in Hardin County because they have an entire second family.”

Hall enjoys working with children because she says with them, there still is hope.

“For the most part they listen and are open to learning, especially if you can make whatever you are trying to teach them fun and relative,” she said adding that’s how she learns so she can relate.

Hall said children are the future and investing in them is investing in a better tomorrow.

Thomas said Hall has many strengths, among them are dedication, dependability, a teachable attitude and commitment to serve and be a positive source for her peers.

“She has won the hearts of students and volunteers alike,” Thomas said. “She is also a huge asset outside the walls of Mission Hope as she pursues ways to establish collaborations with other entities in the community, all for the sake of the kids.”

COVID-19, Hall said, slowed them down but didn’t stop them. Attendance dropped and some families opted out because of COVID concerns. The groups had to be split to limit the amount of people in the space at one time so the mentors didn’t get to meet with kids weekly, she said.

“This also means the kids aren’t as comfortable with each other as fast,” she said. “So it’s been a slow start, but we are flexible.”

As Thomas looks back to 2015, she said she had no idea Hall would become one of the greatest assets to the youth program.

“I’m so thankful that she chose to become a permanent part of our Mission Hope for Kids team and it has been one of my greatest privileges to be her mentor and coach,” Thomas said adding she’s grown to love her like a daughter. “Some people come into our lives and quickly go but others like Jeleena leave footprints in our hearts and we are never the same.”

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