

Calm after the Storm event sponsored by Summit Counseling and
Ridgedale Baptist Church

Saturday, June 25, was a special day in this community for families that experienced the devastation and damage of the tornadoes which occurred in our area two months ago. VIM participated in this event to provide helpful info (our information as well as Georgia information re: health clinics) to anyone who attended. I was privileged to be a part of a very nurturing, loving, caring, low-key, safe, relaxing environment in which many counselors and pastors, children's book author, husbands and children of many staff members, ministered to these families who are still hurting in many ways. Lyn Owen, newly appointed director of Summit Counseling, and her staff did a wonderful job of organizing fun-filled activities for the children as well as provide very educational lectures regarding all that these families have been through. Free counseling sessions have been offered through the end of September to any of the families who attended or to anyone they might know who could benefit from such care.

A number of things impressed me as we worked throughout the afternoon serving these families.

#1 Most of the families came at 10am and stayed the **WHOLE time (until 2pm)**, taking part of everything and anything that was offered...Free and relaxing fun for children in a safe environment---bouncy houses, face-painting, a number of art activities, hoola-hoop contests, water-spray bouncy house, snowballs, popcorn, Lunch provided by Chick Filet and Rib & Loin, Hot dogs, lectures by Summit staff, informal discussions with counselors and pastoral staff of Ridgedale Baptist, and lots of darling stuffed animals that the children could take home with them. The children's author who wrote "How Tall is God", was there to read his book and give signed copies to each child. He had a very approachable way with the children to discuss what they had been through.

#2 As the afternoon progressed, children transformed into "free-spirited" little ones, just having fun; and parents began to relax and enjoy just being cared for and looked after. One mother, whose child, is now afraid of **anything** that moves, said that she is literally at her wit's end trying to deal with the child's anxiety level.

#3 One little boy, who was about 8, stood at the initial booth for almost a half hour, resistant to come and participate, because he had already seen too many counselors (about 500 in his words) and did not want to attend any more "boring meetings"...after a time, we were able to coax him to start participating on some of the bouncy houses, but he would only if his mother did, and she did, even with a dress on!!! By the end of the afternoon, he was interacting with the other children and actually leaving his mom's side for a period of time and going on his own to have fun! He later said, "I didn't know we could do fun things today!" It was evident that the parents are doing anything

in their willpower to stabilize the situation for these children. Lots of extra hugs and squeezes throughout the day!

#4 By the end of the day, we who had participated thought it was a delightful way to minister to the families and that we did not need a tornado to do it! Many families did not attend due to the fact of the threat of bad weather and their children are so filled with fear, they do not bring them out during those times. But the weather held out for us and we were blessed with cooler temps! Hopefully we will start arranging something very similar to this event each year to minister to families and children in the area... VIM will be included in those plans as well.

Anyway, a nice way to spend a Saturday and seeing Happy Faces as we did it!

Pat, VIM administrator