

Missouri Couple Reaches Inner-City Children Through Feeding Ministry

Each year Granny's House serves thousands of after-school meals to youth

Gredia Bell, 21, sat in her dark apartment praying for God to help her.

Lonely and pregnant in Columbia, Mo., Bell had no relatives to call. She was in a new city and had lived most of her life in foster homes after her mom gave her up. "I never had a mother or a father, and I prayed for grandparents for [my daughter] Mahogany," Bell told Charisma.

Her answer came in the form of a doctor's wife, who was going door to door through Bell's apartment complex with a friend, praying for the residents.

"Pam [Ingram] asked me if she could pray for me and my unborn baby," Bell recalled. After the prayer, Ingram left and returned with gifts for the baby.

The gesture sparked a relationship between the women that has since morphed into a ministry known as Granny's House, through which Ingram and her husband, Dr. Ellis Ingram, feed and mentor inner-city children.

The ministry was officially born in 2001 in the Douglass Park Public Housing complex, where Ingram met Bell. "I wanted to

call it Granny's House because we provide a home-like atmosphere that's bright and colorful," said Ingram, 52. "We share life principles with the kids and do things with them that you would with your own children."

Granny's House serves more than 7,000 free meals each year out of two adjoining apartments that the Columbia Housing Authority (CHA) provided at a reduced rate. "They [Granny's House] are a safe refuge for the children," said CHA Director Doris Chiles. "Not only do they get food, but a sense of trustworthiness. I've never seen anything like this in the seven years I've been the [CHA] director."

The ministry feeds 35 to 50 children from ages 4 to 12 every day after school. "They come running off the bus with their backpacks still on into Granny's House," she told Charisma. "They all call me 'Granny Pam,' and we love them and pray for them."

Six of those children belong to Sheryl Carter. "My children have been going to Granny's House for two years," Carter said. "They do crafts, play activities, eat an evening meal and snack, and learn Bible verses."

Carter said she has seen a difference in her five sons—Michael, 12; Robert, 10; Antonio, 8; Anthony, 7; and James, 6—since they started attending Granny's House. "My boys are more gentleman-like," she said. "They are respectful. She [Ingram] teaches them kindness and how to handle situations rather than fight and be rude."

Raised in the inner city themselves, the Ingrams said they felt God "sending us back where we started" in 1994. The

couple had been mentoring youth for years—25 to date—but their ministry officially began with their door-to-door Free-Prayer outreach at Douglass Park.

Today Pamela Ingram estimates that Granny's House has an annual budget of \$28,000 because she doesn't take a salary. But the couple say they see the fruit of their investment in the children's lives.

Known affectionately as "Poppi," Dr. Ingram, 53, works quietly behind the scenes. He takes the boys to sports activities and arranges special trips to places such as the University of Missouri Medical Center and the Career Center Laser Technology Lab.

Though unassuming, the ministry has not gone unnoticed. In 2001 Missouri state Rep. Vicky Riback-Wilson hailed Granny's House as a model faith-based organization, prompting a visit from Gov. Bob Holden the same year.

With plans to expand into another community across town, Granny's House has a faithful staff of volunteers from churches around the city. Martha Lee, 14, serves food and plays with the children every Friday. "It's put in me a servant's heart and gives me a chance to give back," Martha said. "I take a couple hours to make someone else's life better."

Volunteer JoAnn Wilson, 65, is a retired businesswoman. "We've just started a Bible study with one of the mothers," she told Charisma. "We pray every Thursday for Granny's House. Usually two to three little ones will knock on the door, and we'll pray over them. They are always ready for prayer."

Prayer, Pamela Ingram said, is still the foundation of the ministry. It is what led her to Bell, now 25, and her daughter, now 4, who have become an integral part of the Ingrams' lives. "I helped take care of Mimi [Mahogany] after she was born," Ingram said, "and I can't imagine life without her."

Leilani Haywood