When the bus drops off children at the Cherokee site, the children sprint towards the BOOST learning center to see who can high-five Isaac or John-Mark first. At Hillview, the students eagerly come in to grab a snack and hangout with tutors who know each of the students by name. For some students, BOOST is almost a second home. They get their homework finished, they learn about life, they get to read books, once a week they eat dinner with the tutors, and perhaps most importantly, they know that it is a place of acceptance and love no matter what is going on in their school and personal lives. When the students enter the learning centers any observer would be hard-pressed to find a child without a smile on their face.

The BOOST Mission

The mission of BOOST is simple: to combat educational injustice by providing engaging, scholastic programming for the students of Jefferson County in order to increase academic performance, enhance character development, and promote college access. BOOST accomplishes this mission through homework help, classroom learning time, and being available as a positive influence to the students. The program is offered everyday through the academic year and an intense six week Summer Reading Program.

BOOST is a collaboration of the Bonner Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at Carson-Newman, and the Jefferson City Housing Authority. Bonner Scholars comprise most of the BOOST volunteer staff, and Bonner Scholars also contribute to seven leadership positions that develop the curriculum, order snacks, and manage the tutoring sites. Carson-Newman has allotted BOOST as an approved site for students to receive Federal Work Study aide. The Jefferson City Housing Authority provides space for the BOOST program at the Hillview and Cherokee locations with 47 students registered for its program. BOOST works with a variety of community partners to reach the goal of academic literacy.

What is Educational Injustice?

Understanding educational injustice is key to understanding the mission of BOOST. Tennessee is one of the worst performing states in educational rankings. Almost 75% of third and fourth graders cannot read or perform math at their appropriate grade levels. Reading levels barely improve by the time students are tested again in seventh and eighth while math scores continue to get worse. In 2011, Tennessee spent almost $7,000 per student while spending $14,827 per incarcerated prison. Locally, Jefferson City has an alarming poverty of 30%, three times the national average, while unemployment is approximately 12%. The 2000 Census reported that of the 4,200 adults 25 and older, 26% finished high-school while 34% had less than a 12th grade education. Educational injustice can thus be defined as the lack of potential for academic advancement for youth in poverty.

The impact of educational injustice is evident among the children who benefit from the BOOST program. For example, one fourth grade participant currently reads at a first grade level. Lacking essential academic skills severely limits the potential economic viability of this child once he graduates. Studies show that by the end of third grade, students who are drastically behind their reading levels seldom catch-up.

What BOOST Hopes to Accomplish

There is much labor to be done in the field of academic advancement. John Perkins, the Christian Community Development Association (www.ccd.org) founder, states that it takes 10-15 years of investment in an oppressed community before the systemic structures begin to change. BOOST implements a 3D Development® approach in working with the community in the Jefferson City housing authorities. The first D stands for dedication. The BOOST staff utilizes principles of solidarity, empowerment, and encouragement when working with our children. Almost half of Carson-Newman’s Bonners do their service with BOOST in order to meet the dedicated commitment for development. The second D represents data. BOOST collects report cards, attendance, completes student evaluations, and measures every student’s reading level in order to best facilitate literacy improvement. The final D is for donors. BOOST seeks to massively multiply their budget so they can purchase classroom materials needed for lessons and create a full-time staff position. We have applied for multiple corporate grants, continually look for individual donors, and are seeking means to receive state funding.

The future of BOOST is extremely exciting! The program is looking to evolve from being a well-functioning student organization toward becoming a professional center for academic change in Jefferson City. In many ways, the BOOST programs are extremely close to this goal, but still have some big steps to accomplish. The dedicated staff possess a love for the children that clearly shines in the learning centers any day after school. Through community work, BOOST aspires for a brighter future for the children of Jefferson City.

This article is written by Matt Cummings, the new BOOST Program Coordinator and graduate student at Eastern University in Urban Studies and Community Development.
C-N Receives Highest Presidential Recognition for Community Service

Washington, D.C. – The Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Department of Education awarded Carson-Newman College with the Presidential Award in the 2012 President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for its commitment to bettering the community through community service and service learning.

Carson-Newman, received the Presidential Award, the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to community service. “Selfless service is a Carson-Newman value,” said Dr. J. Randall O’Brien, president of Carson-Newman College. “Our mission is to produce educated citizens and worldwide servant-leaders. With or without rankings, with or without recognition, our faculty, staff, and students quietly make a difference in our world every week. I am very proud of Carson-Newman. For the White House to call attention to our service is humbling.”

“The goal of the Bonner Center and all of campus is to continue to move from one-time, episodic service to relationships with the surrounding community that result in long-term connections,” said Dr. Nicole Saylor, who directs the Bonner Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement. “Such connections serve the community needs and provide our students opportunities to learn more about the community and apply what they learn in the classroom. We want to make C-N resources available to the community because when the community and the College join together, students learn more and serve more. The community also meets more needs and becomes stronger.”

The Corporation for National and Community Service oversees the Honor Roll in collaboration with the U.S. Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development, Campus Compact, and the American Council on Education. Honorees are chosen based on a series of selection factors, including the scope and innovation of service projects, the extent to which service-learning is embedded in the curriculum, the school’s commitment to long-term campus-community partnerships, and measurable community outcomes as a result of the service.

Recipients of the Presidential Awards were honored in four categories: General Community Service, Early Childhood Education (Miami University, Oxford, Ohio), Promise Neighborhoods Model (Seattle University), and Summer Learning (University of Pennsylvania). A complete list of recipients and descriptions of service is available at www.NationalService.gov/HonorRoll. More information on Carson-Newman and its service awards and initiatives see http://www.cn.edu/news.

Bonner Center Director Nicole Saylor (left) and Provost Kina Mallard accepted Carson-Newman’s Presidential Award during ceremonies in Los Angeles.