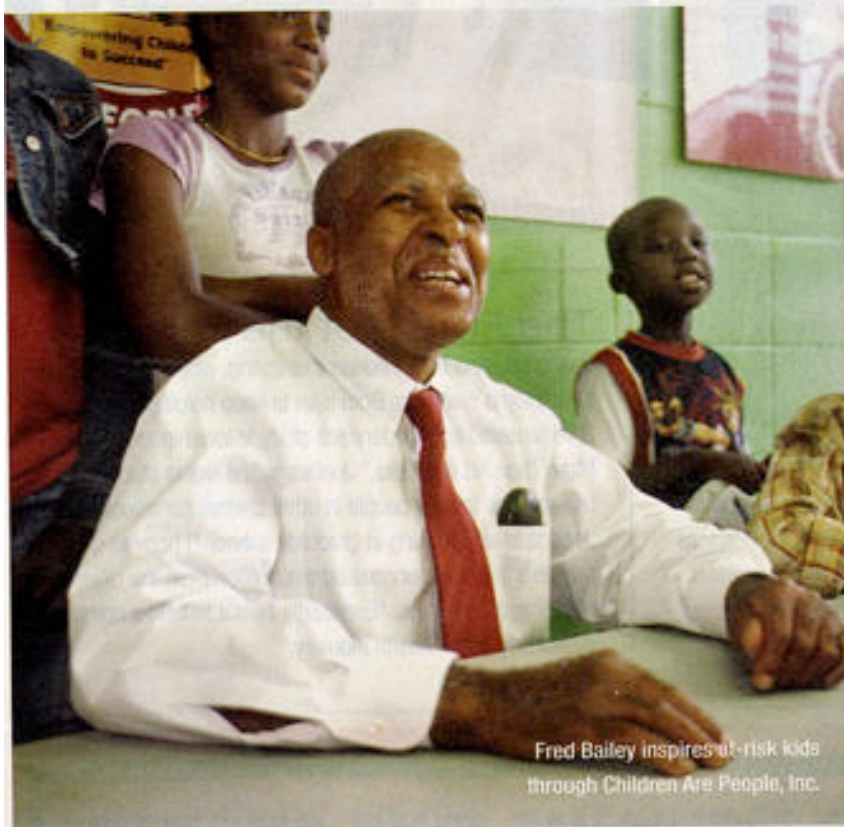


Leading by Example

Fred Bailey and a host of volunteers teach children how to succeed, no matter what their circumstances.



Fred Bailey inspires at-risk kids through Children Are People, Inc.



Kids of all ages and sizes crowd the bright green room in the donated building. Participants in Children Are People, Inc. (CAP), they keep the chatter to a low roar until a gentleman dressed sharply in a crisp white shirt and red tie begins speaking. Instantly, all eyes focus on him, and the room hushes to cathedral quietness.

Fred Bailey's voice rises and falls with the cadence of a gifted preacher. His message—a combination of praise and admonition—mirrors that of a coach, no doubt honed during his earlier days as a wrestling instructor. Fred now pours his energy into CAP, the after-school and summer program he founded in the Gallatin area to help disadvantaged kids.

"Straight As and A/B grades, these are what I accept," he tells the children. "You cannot make an F and stay at the center. Step it up a notch this year. Take yourself to a greater level. That means you're going to be working hard." He pauses, and no one—not even the very young—breaks the silence. Then he switches gears.

"I talked to the camp counselors," he says, referring to an off-site event the children recently attended. "They tell me you were the best kids there in terms of your manners, your behavior, and your cooperation. So I know you guys are learning and listening to what we say. Did y'all have a good time at the summer camp?" he asks.

"Yes," a couple of the children respond.

"Yes?" Fred parrots them, eyebrows arched.

"Yes, sir," they hurriedly correct themselves.



TOP: Fred, with board members Sandra Thompson and Ken Hatchett, strives to be a role model. The children, top row from left: Chol Rambang and Nyamoch Tonygik; front row from left: Mut Khan, Tiron Dalton, Nyabuowy Chol, Lunychieng Thiyang, and Nyarel Khan. ABOVE: Goamar Makuach (left) and Mut Khan pound buckets as drums.

"That's one thing that sets these children apart," he tells a visitor. "Manners. We stress them hard." He shakes his head, "I can't take a kid saying 'yeah' and 'no' to me." He pauses, breaks into a huge smile, and adds, "I can't take someone rubbing on my head either."

Joyous laughter fills the room, while the tiny culprit standing behind him continues to pat Fred's irresistible dome.

Reading, Writing, Respect

That scenario tells a lot about this from-the-heart program as well as its founder. Fred is at once both a stern taskmaster and a caring mentor. These at-risk children need extra attention, and they get it at CAP.

"The program has grown in a few short years from a small room with 8 students to an 8-room facility, 55 students, and a long waiting list," says

CAP board chairman Ken Hatchett, a retired food-service executive. He adds, "At first, Fred was the only instructor, paying for everything out of his own pocket." Even today, no state or federal funding is used or sought.

As people learned of Fred's work and the results, the community rallied, giving time, money, and in-kind donations. Volunteers and board members range from a state senator and the county's executive director to teachers, police officers, and medical personnel.

Secret Weapon

Self-responsibility permeates Fred's philosophy. "Obstacles and stumbling blocks mean nothing," he says as he walks with a group of children. Fred specializes in overcoming obstacles. "I'm one of 15 kids," he says. "My daddy was an alcoholic. My mother




ABOVE: Volunteer Jean Roberson gives Annisia Staton helpful tips on how to keep her eyes healthy.



RIGHT: Chol Rambang upped her grades from failing to honor roll worthy after joining Children Are People, Inc.

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Mike Cook of the Sumner County EMS staff gives a hands-on lesson. Field trips and demonstrations broaden the children's experience.

worked in people's homes from sunup to sundown." Then he adds the kicker: "I went all the way through the third grade before they knew I was blind." (So gifted is Fred at maneuvering through the world, that half the kids refuse to believe their nimble mentor is sightless.) But he speaks with authority when he urges children not to let "perceived disadvantages" rule their lives.

Fred may be blind, but his vision about what it takes for a child to grow strong and true remains crystal clear.

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

For more information visit www.capinctn.org, or call (615) 230-5702.

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