Lad Lake’s Spiritual Care Program seeks to meet youth on their level, in interesting and interactive ways, through group sessions and one-on-one mentoring.

Participation in this voluntary program has exceeded our most optimistic expectations, particularly with Lad Lake’s residential clients. According to Jeffries, one residential unit has 100 percent participation, while two other units fluctuate between 50-60 percent participation.

“It’s encouraging to us that these kids come to our evening meetings, especially since they have the option of being somewhere else,” said Ben Hall, one of the spiritual care counselors. “I’m here four days a week, and each night we conduct a spirituality group in each unit. We engage the boys through videos, movies specifically geared toward youth, or hip-hop songs that get their attention. Then we discuss them. The curriculum is pretty ecumenical, but if they truly ask, we share our faith. We don’t push or force faith on them,” said Hall.

“What’s been most rewarding for me,” Hall continued, “is when I hear from staff that the boys are supporting each other, and fighting for each other instead of against each other, and saying things to each other that I’ve said to them; that’s huge. They’re passing on to others what they’ve learned and when opportunities present themselves, they’re modeling behaviors we discussed in the spiritual care program.”

LAD LAKE’S SPIRITUAL CARE PROGRAM is not intended to hit the boys over the head with spirituality, but to provide them with alternative solutions to addressing challenges. Besides evening meetings and Sunday Celebrations, at the request of the youth, spiritual care counselors meet with the boys one-on-one, sometimes befriending and hanging out with them as pals. “Getting faith-based volunteers from the community - people who want to make a difference in the boys’ lives - involved is a next step” said Jeffries. “It’s all part of widening their experiences with couples who want to be ‘Godparents’ to some of these boys from broken or foster homes.” An initiative seeking additional funding is also underway, with the goal of expanding the program into Lad Lake’s two Milwaukee locations.

Added Hall, “Sometimes we take walks along the lake and just talk, or shoot hoops. We make ourselves available to them in non-threatening environments, where they’re free to discuss life issues with us. We just want them to know we’re here for them. We care for them. Once we gain their trust, we open the door so we can share hope, faith, and our personal experiences with them that their lives can improve going forward. Many times, all they want is for someone to listen and really care.”