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WEDNESDAY'S WOMAN

Purcell has heart for local youth

ANDREW CRITCHELOW The News-Enterprise 9 hrs ago



Ashley Purcell serves as children's minister at Grace Heartland Church in Elizabethtown. She has served in children's ministry for 10 years.

ANDREW CRITCHELOW/The News-Enterprise

Ashley Purcell of Elizabethtown has been a caretaker and advocate for children for most of her life. The oldest of eight children, Purcell said she always enjoyed looking out for those younger than her.

“Even as a young kid I always babysat and I was the one who had the backyard Bible club,” she said.

This is why Purcell has spent the last 10 years in children’s ministry. She currently serves as children’s minister for Grace Heartland Church in Elizabethtown.

Originally from Atlanta, Georgia, Purcell moved to the area in 2005 after her husband Scott – who was enlisted in the U.S. Army – was stationed at Fort Knox. She said she was charmed by the region and felt as though it was a good place to raise a family.

“When he got out of the Army we had fallen in love with this sweet community and just wanted to stay put,” she said.

Though Purcell initially planned on being a stay-at-home mother, she said she felt called upon to pursue children’s ministry. She said she earned a degree in elementary education from Western Kentucky University in 2007.

Purcell began her career in children’s ministry at Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown. She began working with Grace Heartland in 2017.

Through her role at Grace Heartland, Purcell organizes twice-weekly children’s ministry sessions; counsels children and parents; handles many social media pages for the church and coordinates curriculum. She also plans vacation Bible school, which takes place in June at the church.

Purcell said her ultimate goal is to provide a solid foundation of Christian teachings and community spirit through the ministry.

“We’re building relationships over time to help them know that they have a place where they belong,” she said.

Upon joining Grace Heartland’s team, Purcell has made it a mission to help local foster families. One way she has done this is through the church’s Orphan Care Closet, a donation program designed to assist foster families, grandparents who need assistance raising grandchildren or families in need with clothing.

Though the program is geared to foster families, it is open to any family in need. Purcell said recently the program was used by families displaced when the Cardinal Inn in Elizabethtown burned down in March.

“We’re here for the community,” she said.

Northside Baptist Church Children’s Director Jennifer White said Purcell has an unconditional love for serving families.

“Ashley does not have limits on who to help or love, she just does it when people need it,” said White, who is friends with Purcell.

Purcell also meets weekly with foster parents to host Bible study sessions.

The mother of three foster children, Purcell said foster care ministry is a cause that is close to home.

“Not everybody understands our world,” she said. “Not everyone understands the brokenness that we see on a daily basis. So, being able to gather with other foster parents and love on them and encourage them is really important to me.”

In March, Purcell helped Grace Heartland raise money for Mission Hope for Kids through the Forget the Frock campaign. The campaign is an annual nationwide effort to spread compassion for Easter. Purcell said more than \$2,600 was raised for Mission Hope for Kids through the campaign, going towards the organization’s mission of providing educational, emotional, physical and spiritual support for at-risk children in the community. She said Grace Heartland will continue the campaign next year, supporting two ministries.

Looking to the future in her role at Grace Heartland, Purcell said she hopes to provide a spiritual home and support system for as many children as possible. She said it is important to have compassion for all children in the community.

“If we would do a better job of seeing every child as our child, then I think we would see more kindness,” she said.

Jessica Crepps, a member of Grace Heartland and a friend of Purcell's, said Purcell is adamant in her mission of serving families.

“Ashley is just a ball of magnetic, joyous energy,” she said. “She loves with every ounce of her being and is fiercely dedicated to the children in our community. I’ve not met someone with a bigger heart.”

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Getting to know Ashley Purcell

Hobbies: Spending time with family and friends, camping.

Family: Her husband Scott and five children.

Pets in the household: A dog, lizard and snake.

Sports: The Georgia Bulldogs.

Books: “Pride and Prejudice.”

Film: “October Sky.”