

Akesha Vickers

Akesha Vickers found Hopkins Park on the internet. It was as simple as logging in, searching, and clicking on the town in which she wished to relocate. Once she arrived however, she found more than the small, sputtering town. There she found a non-profit to rejuvenate the community. She found Faith and Action.

Now we sit, huddled in a van, outside of the Hopkins Park library, waiting for the librarian with the keys to come unlock it. Akesha, grins, ready to talk.

“Faith and Action has been great,” she says. “During the time that I have known them they have been kind, and considerate, and helpful.”

The Los Angeles Native was looking for somewhere small, not deserted, but quiet and friendly, somewhere to raise her kids. She says she wanted the Chicagoland area, but not Chicago. She wanted somewhere in between. Hopkins Park seemed to answer all of that.

She arrived in a small, trailer laden, cornfield surrounded town where the only business that she could see was a gas station. Hopkins Park was not all that it had promised from Akesha’s Los Angeles computer screen. “I did not quite know what to expect being born and raised in a big city,” Vickers said. “I found that this community was really behind as far as where the rest of the world has made advancements.”

Akesha wanted to be a part of the small community she had just joined: that was why she came. Living on the far side of town, however, left Akesha isolated. The town does not have much to offer visually, with a large part of the community being abandoned buildings and torn apart trailers. “When I got here I was really surprised. I didn’t have a car at the time so I had no idea what was here and what wasn’t here.”

Now belonging to the community for three years, Akesha stands separate from many of the families in Hopkins Park. Most of the families in Hopkins Park have either been here for centuries, or have family roots they have returned to. So Akesha is an anomaly but that gives her a unique perspective.

Akesha talks with her hands, waving them, motioning, she leans forward in the excitement of her own story.

“One of my neighbors happened to be coming by and introducing themselves and they told me that there was in fact a library here, which was the old library down in the park. She took me down there, and the first day I went down there I started volunteering. I figured if for nothing else I could get dibs on the new books that were coming in. I got there and I started to realize that there actually was a need for someone to come here and acclimate some of these people here to what was going on in the rest of the world and learning how to connect themselves to the rest of the world.”

The old library, the one Akesha first started volunteering at, now sits abandoned, and anyone who drives by would assume it is a house rather than the library that it used to be. The old farmhouse sits at the top of a grassy, overgrown hill. The yard below shows what is left of an old playground, the bright colors quickly fading off of the big bulky objects. An old baseball field sits to the right, dejected and ignored, the land unused, where long ago it prospered as a community center.

Akesha says she realized there was a need in the town the moment she began volunteering. She started getting involved, and getting her family involved. She says the community has great needs for its children and its elderly, safe zones and opportunities alike. She was shocked to come and find that the children in Hopkins Park did not have the same resources as her children had elsewhere. "I raised my children in a library. No matter where it is that we have been, that's been the one place that is safe for them."

So of course Akesha was excited when she heard of the new library which was being built.

The sparse grass hill on which the new library stands, where Akesha works, and where she brings her kids and grandkids, does not match the rest of the town. The library, new, clean, and crisp in appearance has become the pride of the town, built solely by the hands of volunteers, volunteers of the community and volunteers of Faith and Action.

Akesha says that it is Faith and Action's work in the community that is bringing it back to life. "Since the Faith and Action group came by, they were here before me, but I can say that without them being here this library would never have happened. I don't think that without their help, this could have really been achieved."

The new building brings computers and internet access into the community. It brings many new books, and many new spaces for all members of the community to enjoy. Because of the library, Hopkins Park now has a conference room, a banquet hall, offices, and playing centers just for children. There is now a space, within their own town, for kids to complete their homework.

Akesha knows that the library, through Faith and Action, has restored the community. It has provided them with a new community center, and it has allowed people like Akesha who work in the community, a resource in which to help from. She says, "This library is the medium I use to get that done."

The library is more than just a building for Akesha Vickers. It is a promise to the community from Faith and Action. It is someone from the outside saying that Hopkins Park has something bigger to offer, that people here can succeed, that this town has life in it still.

"I want all of the children out here to know that this is a safe place for them. There may not be anywhere else for them to go out here and anything else for them to do, but this is a place that is always welcoming to them."

Akesha says that Faith and Action has had an impact on Hopkins Park that extends past the library and out into the rest of the community. Their presence has been felt from all within the community, from single mothers, to children, to people searching for stable housing. And Faith and Action's presence continues to be felt. They are still there now helping and filling the gaps, finishing the library and reaching further into the community.

"My interactions with Faith and Action have left me with nothing but good things to say about it."

Now the librarian has arrived to unlock the building. Akesha climbs out of the van to lead us in.