



YouthFriends®

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News



Mentors Make Great People Possible • youthfriends.org

Be a Friend, Bring a Friend

For prospective volunteers, sometimes seeing is believing

YouthFriends volunteers know how rewarding mentoring can be. And although many want to share their stories and encourage others to volunteer, trying to put their YouthFriends experience into words can be quite challenging.

For example, last week Liz Carter-Stevenson, a mentor to two middle school girls in the Liberty School District, shared her YouthFriends story with me. She told me how much she loves volunteering and how she looks forward to visiting with the girls on Fridays.

But Liz also told me that she wished there was a way to show everyone just how much fun it is to be a YouthFriend. She said that if everyone could see how rewarding it is to mentor—and could see how the students “light up” when their mentors arrive each week—others, too, would want to get involved.

I couldn't agree with her more—sometimes



Lisa Adkins,
YouthFriends President

seeing *is* believing. And that's why we're encouraging every YouthFriends volunteer to invite someone—a friend, co-worker or family member—along with them to an upcoming YouthFriends visit.

We know from experience that it's true; if you *show* others what YouthFriends mentoring is all about, chances are that they, too, will want to get involved.

Just imagine: If every person receiving this newsletter successfully recruited *just one* new YouthFriends volunteer, there would be twice as many YouthFriends mentors making a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of students in Kansas and Missouri.

So, give it a try. Bring a friend with you next time you volunteer—and show them just how fun mentoring can be.

Patsy A. Adkins



Liz Carter-Stevenson of MarketSphere Consulting (center) with Safara (left) and Washita (right) have fun during a recent mentoring session. Carter-Stevenson believes that if everyone could see how rewarding it is to mentor others would want to get involved with YouthFriends.

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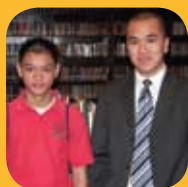
Preparing for Your Final Visit

Find out ways to make your final visit of the school year extra special.

Tips for Handling Difficult Situations

YouthFriends Coordinators share tips for turning negative situations into positive situations for you and your YouthFriend.

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The Power of Mentoring

A mentoring pair at Scuola Vita Nuova continues to grow closer thanks to shared backgrounds and a love of chess.

Sharing Inspiration

Mentoring programs inspire YouthFriends Corps volunteer to reach for the sky

YouthFriends Corps mentor Katherine Meinig has been inspiring students in the Paola School District for years and is preparing for future adventures as graduation approaches.

“Katherine has been a wonderful Corps volunteer for two years,” said Carol Knoche, YouthFriends Coordinator for Paola. “We love having her in the classroom working with our students and their teacher.”

Meinig volunteers with a third grade class every other day for about an hour and a half. She became involved with YouthFriends Corps because her older sister and brother were both involved for two years in high school. But she stays involved because she finds it fulfilling.

“I really like the activities you get to do with the kids,” Meinig said. “I really like working with them. They make me laugh.”

The students and their teacher enjoy working with her, too.



From left: High school senior and YouthFriends Corps volunteer Katherine Meinig mentors third grader Bryce Huber.

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Mentor
Resources

Tips for Handling Difficult Situations

Volunteers learn during YouthFriends training to speak truthfully, ask questions and smile a lot when mentoring. But what do you do if your mentoring experience is not as positive as you had hoped? Here are some tips for creating positive experiences.

If your student doesn't seem interested when you visit...

Independence (Mo.), YouthFriends Coordinator Laura Vernon suggests monitoring the situation for a month.

"If things don't improve, see the YouthFriends building connector to find out what else might be going on in the student's life," she said. "Don't take it too personally. It might just be a phase."

If a student tells you something but asks you not to reveal the information to another person...

"Keep the information to yourself unless it involves the health or safety of the student or another human being," Vernon tells mentors. "If that's the case, you should go ahead and report the matter to the YouthFriends building connector or the student's teacher. School staff is trained in judiciously broaching sensitive issues with students in seemingly casual conversation."

If you mentor older elementary students or high school students, be sure to invite the student to go with you when you talk with school staff.

When students seem shy...

"Trust and sharing take time with kids," said Pam Polson, North Kansas City (Mo.) School District Coordinator. "Shy kids are a challenge. Let it be okay if they are not very talkative at first."

Ask students a lot of questions about their families and school, she said.

"Then, it is important to check back on those details. That helps build trust and shows you care."

Polson also suggests playing a game or taking an object that can generate conversation. Take pictures of your family, interests or pets. This shows students that adults are real people.

"Kids may be quiet at first, but they all ultimately enjoy sharing," Polson said. "Kids truly need adults to care and listen. That is our gift as YouthFriends."

When students seem hyperactive...

First and foremost, listen. Sometimes there is a simple explanation as to why students act out. Some children may be hyper because of a medical condition, but others may simply be looking for attention from other students, teachers or anyone who will listen.

"Try to find a game that they might enjoy," suggests Stacy Long, assistant coordinator in Excelsior Springs (Mo.) "It helps to find a subject they are really interested in and bring books, or go to the library and pick out books about the subject. Let the students do the looking and talk about the subject. This opens up conversations and it calms them down to a level that you can handle."

Like adults, children want to be appreciated and made to feel they are okay just being themselves. Also, it is important to talk about expected behavior before you begin activities.

For more mentoring tips, visit the Resource Center of youthfriends.org.

Kids truly need adults to care and listen.
That is our gift as YouthFriends.

— Pam Polson, YouthFriends Coordinator

End-of-Year FAQs Preparing for final visits

May I take a coworker with me to visit my YouthFriend?

Absolutely! In fact, it's one of the best ways to show your friends and co-workers what it's like to be a YouthFriend. You can make arrangements by contacting your building coordinator a few days before your visit.

Now that my mentee is getting older, are there other things we can do besides have lunch or read together?

Yes. There are still many ways to connect with your mentee. First, talk to your building coordinator and/or classroom teacher about what age-appropriate options are available and then ask your mentee which of those options sounds most appealing. Together you can find a way to continue your relationship and still have fun.

How can I stay in touch with my mentee during the summer?

Even though volunteers cannot directly contact students during the summer, there are several ways to stay connected. Consider some of these ideas:

- Exchange photographs during your last visit
- Give your student a notebook or journal to keep a record of books read, summer activities and/or vacations to discuss when school reconvenes
- Give your student a disposable camera to record events or activities that can be shared when school resumes
- Write several notes to your student and put them in sealed envelopes to be opened on designated days throughout the summer
- Jointly select a book to read over the summer and share thoughts when school resumes

Is it possible for me to volunteer more than one hour per week next year?

Absolutely! Hundreds of YouthFriends already do. While the typical minimum time commitment for volunteers is one hour per week, teachers and staff are often excited to have YouthFriends volunteers for extended time periods or multiple days a week.

My mentee is moving next year. Is it possible for us to keep meeting at her new school?

Most likely, yes—as long as she attends a school in a participating YouthFriends district. Your current school district coordinator can help you make arrangements for next year, or you can call YouthFriends Central at 816.842.7082 for more information.

For more mentoring tips, visit the Resource Center of youthfriends.org.

Sharing Inspiration

Continued from front

"Katherine has been a tremendous asset to our classroom," Sunflower Elementary teacher Danny Stotler said. "She helps to create a positive learning environment by consistently modeling high expectations and actively engaging students. The kids all love to work with Ms. Meinig."

Mentors make great people possible

Meinig is proof that mentoring programs can inspire people to pursue their dreams. Besides being involved in YouthFriends while in high school, Meinig has also been an active member of the FIRST Robotics program.

She is excited that her team qualified to attend a national competition in Atlanta this spring. The competition challenges teams of young people and their mentors to solve a common problem in a six-week timeframe using a standard kit of parts and a common set of rules. In essence, the teams have six weeks to build robots.

Meinig is graduating in May and will be attending the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. She leaves for basic training June 26.



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"I've always loved to fly," she said. "I've always felt the need to serve my country."

Her fascination with flying began during childhood vacations when she would get to see the cockpits of commercial airplanes. And just as pilots inspired Meinig in her youth, she, too, is inspiring others.

Stotler said Meinig demonstrates flexibility when dealing with students and provides assistance to anyone in the school who needs help.

"She will be greatly missed when she graduates," Stotler said.

Get involved

Like Meinig, high school youth can inspire younger students by becoming YouthFriends Corps volunteers. For more information, contact 816.842.7082 or visit youthfriends.org.

A Friend for YouthFriends

YouthFriends volunteer services representative ready to assist you

Karen Grover serves as director of education services and as the YouthFriends volunteer representative.

While school district coordinators remain a volunteer's first point of contact about YouthFriends issues, Grover supports coordinators by being another resource for volunteers with questions or concerns about their YouthFriends experience.

Grover, who has been involved with YouthFriends since its creation, promises to respond to volunteers within 24 hours or the next business day. She can be reached at 816.842.7082 or 913.322.1401 or toll-free outside the Greater Kansas City area at 877.842.7082. Or e-mail her at grover@youthfriends.org.



Karen Grover

Making a Connection

Shared background brings mentoring pair closer

YouthFriends mentor Vince Nguyen happily loses at chess each Friday. Why? Because the word “checkmate” is coming from his YouthFriend, Sang, a sixth grade student at Scuola Vita Nuova Charter School in Kansas City, Mo.

The weekly chess games are a tradition the two have been sharing for nearly a year and a half now.

“Every now and then we’ll change things up to focus on reading, drawing or playing on the computer,” Nguyen said. “But he loves playing chess and almost always beats me.”

Common bonds

Nguyen and Sang have other bonds, too. Nguyen also attended preschool at Scuola, and both mentor and mentee have Vietnamese backgrounds. Nguyen’s family came to the United States in 1978 and he was born shortly after they arrived; Sang’s family arrived about five years ago.

Nguyen believes their shared cultural background has strengthened their relationship.

“When I first met Sang, he barely said a word to me,” he said. “But being able to speak Vietnamese and my background have helped me to relate to him better. He opened up after a few months and now we enjoy jokes and conversations together.”

Indeed, Sang and Nguyen have become good friends, which is obvious when seeing them together. Sang smiles when he sees Nguyen checking in at Scuola’s front desk.

And when Sang is asked if he looks forward to

their Friday chess games, he grins at Nguyen and jokingly says, “Maybe.”

Nguyen has enjoyed watching Sang’s tremendous growth and has even noticed him interacting more with his classmates.

“Vince helps me learn,” Sang said. “I like having a Youth-Friend at my school.”

Reaching out

Nguyen also has established a solid relationship with the school.

YouthFriends Coordinator Izette Villasenor said Nguyen has been instrumental in helping school staff overcome language barriers.

“Nguyen puts a lot of effort into YouthFriends,” Villasenor said.

That dedication comes from his belief in the power of mentoring.

“I would whole-heartedly recommend Youth-Friends to others,” Nguyen said. “The amount of time that needs to be invested with a YouthFriend is so insignificant compared to the immeasurable return both people receive. I have other friends that are currently



From left: Scuola Vita Nuova sixth grade student Sang and his YouthFriend, Vince Nguyen, who is a fundraiser for the United Way of Greater Kansas City.

YouthFriends and have heard nothing but great stories about the impact we have on students’ lives.”

Do you know a second language? YouthFriends is always looking for English Language Learners (ELL) Mentors to work with students. Talk with your district coordinator to find out about ELL opportunities.

Partner with a School Program Grows

New business partnerships help strengthen YouthFriends Kansas

Even more students throughout Kansas will be connected to YouthFriends mentors thanks to a new initiative and several new business partnerships.

The YouthFriends Serving Kansas Schools Initiative is a much-needed partnership between corporations and the education community. It is designed to provide local schools and students with programming, resources and an adult mentor, in order to give students the direction and encouragement they need to be successful.

Part of the initiative is the Partner with a School program, through which YouthFriends and school districts collaborate with area businesses to develop or expand their corporate volunteer programs.

Thank you to the following new partners:

Atmos Energy

Atmos and its employees are donating time and resources to support students throughout Kansas.

Capitol Federal

Capitol Federal employees have become active in the YouthFriends effort, something the business’ management encourages. The company is particularly interested in programs that help students.

Hutchinson Hospital

YouthFriends in Reno County and Hutchinson Hospital are creating a win-win partnership that makes area students a top priority. Linda Harrison, Hutchinson Hospital CEO, has decided to provide time for employees from each administrative department to volunteer at least one hour a week in a local school.

Among the hospital’s volunteers are Director of Laboratory Services Carl Caton, who has been a YouthFriends volunteer for more than five years, and Director of Children’s Community Outreach Services Steve Edwards. By partnering with programs like YouthFriends, the hospital is setting the tone for other community businesses.

Midwest Energy

Midwest Energy is supporting a reading program at Washington Elementary School in Hays, Kan.

State Farm

A joint partnership between State Farm, YouthFriends Kansas and the YouthFriends Central office in Kansas City will bring many opportunities to students and partnering districts through volunteerism, e-mentoring, UpLink activities and general support. *For information about UpLink, see the UpLink News section of this newsletter.*

Westar Energy

Westar Energy is providing generous financial support to YouthFriends efforts in eight Kansas school districts: Cheney, Emporia, Haysville, Hutchinson, Independence, Pittsburg, Royal Valley and Wichita.

Currently, more than 60 volunteers from Westar participate in the Wichita, Kan., area, both in traditional and e-mentoring programs. Westar has also adopted Robinson Middle School and Northwest High School in Wichita and participates in the e-mentoring program at the schools.

In Their Own Words

I really like YouthFriends because it has given my child another adult that he can trust.

— YouthFriends Parent

My daughter went from hating school to looking forward to her buddy time and buddy lunches.

— YouthFriends Parent

Donations Needed for Judge Cordell Meeks Memorial Scholarship

Now you can help make college more affordable for a deserving high school senior by donating to the Judge Cordell D. Meeks, Jr., Memorial Scholarship fund.

Established to honor the memory and legacy of Judge Meeks, a founding YouthFriends board member, the scholarship is awarded to a student graduating from Wyandotte County who has previously been matched with a YouthFriend, or who has volunteered as a YouthFriends Corps member. The scholarship is worth up to \$500, \$250 per semester (renewable for the second semester if eligibility criteria are met).

To donate, please use the envelope in this newsletter or go to youthfriends.org and then to the Donate page. Select the Donor Edge Donate Now button.

Applications for the 2008-2009 memorial scholarship must be received by June 1, 2008. Application information is available at youthfriends.org or gkccf.org.



Judge Cordell D. Meeks, Jr., late YouthFriends Board member



MentorMap®

Sharing the Knowledge

In February, mentoring professionals from across the country attended YouthFriends National Training Institute for School-Based Mentoring at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, Mo.

Traveling from as far away as New York, Oregon and Virginia, attendees spent three days learning how to build or strengthen their mentoring programs. Participants found the institute "motivating" and full of "wonderful presentations and information."

One attendee said, "This training conference went beyond my expectations."

Training institutes are conducted through MentorMap, YouthFriends comprehensive system of tools, training and technology available for school districts and communities seeking to develop and grow mentoring programs.

The next institute is in October. For more details, visit mentormap.org.

Save the date for 2009 National School-Based Mentoring Conference

Mark your calendars for YouthFriends National School-Based Mentoring Conference, 4th Edition, that will take place June 16-18, 2009, in Kansas City, Mo.

Previous conferences were attended by mentoring professionals from across the United States and abroad.

"I walked away with new ideas and a renewed sense of purpose," one attendee said of the previous conference held in 2007.

Visit mentormap.org often for more details as they are available.

Club Members REACH out to Bishop Ward Youth



YouthFriends from the Leawood Rotary club mentor Bishop Ward juniors and seniors on March 7 about college and careers as part of the REACH (Rotary Encouraging Academic Collegiate Help) mentoring program.

Celebrating Volunteers

YouthFriends would like to recognize hundreds of dedicated volunteers who are celebrating 5- or 10-year service anniversaries this year. Combined, these mentors have invested thousands of hours making a difference in the lives of students throughout Greater Kansas City. Volunteers can be viewed at youthfriends.org/recognition.html.

For more information about YouthFriends, visit youthfriends.org



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Opening New Worlds for Kids Since 1995

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