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MENTORING: CAN YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE?

The Oxford Educational Foundation Mentoring Program

Mentoring seems to be a fashionable term throughout the media. We hear the word “mentoring” in television infomercials, read it in print, and hear it in many personal growth programs. But, what does it have to do with our everyday lives?

The dictionary defines a mentor simply as a “wise and trusted counselor,” but to a number of students in the Oxford Area School District and to their adult volunteers throughout the community the term has a greater significance.

Since 1995, the Oxford Educational Foundation has been operating a mentoring program, placing hundreds of mentors in the Oxford schools. Volunteers and students from the community are matched with the expectation of developing a continuing relationship between a child and a positive role model. The program is administered by Karen Olivieri, retired OASD teacher and Volunteer Coordinator for the OEF. The OEF encourages mentors and students to meet at least once a week through activities which may include visiting the library or museum, attending a sporting event or school activity, or simply finding a quiet moment during or after the school day to talk about events in each other’s lives. The program can be effective if a relationship between the adult and the youth is based on the following: personalized attention, caring, mutual respect, trust and commitment, along with positive and high expectations for both mentors and students.

Many times these students have difficulty handling conflict, and the mentor is an excellent resource for offering alternative solutions to problems. The goal of the OEF program is to help provide a positive outlook on life by building self-esteem, developing coping skills and forming attainable goals for the future.

The program’s impact on individual students can be noticed in the child’s increased school attendance and academic success, decreased discipline referrals, and improvements in social skills. It has an impact on the lives of the mentors, as well. Mentors have reported a sense of satisfaction in recognizing that they can make a difference. The program is not a cure-all for the needs and challenges of today’s youth, but it can provide a meaningful, positive relationship in the life of a child that otherwise may receive very little encouragement. These children need to know there is someone to whom they can turn not only when they have a problem, but also to share a success.

According to Dr. Raymond Fischer, Executive Director of the OEF, the key to a quality mentoring relationship is to have a caring adult who is consistently there for a young person. The Oxford Educational Foundation Mentoring Program promotes this type of mentoring by carefully matching such an adult with the mentee and by providing ongoing support to everyone involved.

Did someone make a difference in your life? Would you like the opportunity to give back? Give the **Oxford Educational Foundation** a call at (610) 932-7200 or e-mail us at oxfordeducationalfoundation@yahoo.org if you are interested in becoming a mentor for an elementary or secondary student.

BE Someone Who Matters TO Someone Who Matters.

