

FRIENDS OF THE CHILDREN FUND—*The Power of Mentoring* was recently established through the Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin by Connie Kreider, a former employee with Stanislaus County. The fund was created to make a difference in the life of a child by providing more time for struggling young readers to close their reading gaps and to bring new hope to young lives with reading through the power of mentoring. This program provides opportunities for struggling readers to be matched with a mentor for a minimum of 30-45 minutes per week throughout the school year.

I learned about employee mentoring while working at Stanislaus County and participated in that program for two years at Everett Elementary School in Modesto, CA. I have seen firsthand how mentors can help struggling readers succeed and to also make life-long friendships between mentor/mentee.

Mentoring – a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, advice, friendship and encouragement – has proved to be a powerful tool for helping young people fulfill their potential. At this time, I am working with Cheri Polster, Reading/Language Arts Coordinator, from the Stevens Point Area Public School District, and Madison Elementary School in an effort to recruit volunteers to mentor kids during the early-morning literacy program that they currently have in place at Madison. It is a great opportunity to read and talk about books with students of various ethnic backgrounds and reading levels.

I have approached several businesses in the community encouraging them to support mentoring by highlighting mentoring in employee newsletters, sponsoring a mentoring event or becoming a key leader for a local mentoring program by allowing employees to spend time each week with an at-risk child at a local school. Workplace-mentoring programs create employee loyalty, increase productivity, and build stronger ties between the organization and the community.

Another source I used to promote my fund was the United Way's volunteer program where I set up an online account. This program helps connect people as volunteers with community programs.

I have received support from, and was invited to speak at both the Optimist and Kiwanis clubs where I emphasized how mentoring has gained widespread support as a successful strategy for positive youth development and that it can definitely help lower those high illiteracy numbers recently reported in a federal study.

It takes a big commitment on the part of volunteers to make mentoring successful, and I am continually making an effort to be sure all of these kids get the support and encouragement that they need. Plus the mentors get a sense of fulfillment in their lives too!