



**17**

**17 years of difference making  
words of wisdom  
and reflection  
from Stanislaus County Mentors**

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words of wisdom and reflection  
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**A Special thanks...**

to the County Board of Supervisors  
for their long standing, proactive stance  
on youth development in our  
communities.

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Bill O'Brien	District 1
Vito Chiesa	District 2
Terry Withrow	District 3
Dick Monteith	District 4
Jim DeMartini	District 5

Modesto City Schools  
Stanislaus Office of Education  
Our Non-Profit, Service Club and Business  
Partners  
Student Volunteers



"mentoring is... a brain to pick,  
an ear to listen,  
and a push  
in the right direction..."

John C.  
Crosby



## Preface...

Why do this?

Why compile the stories of success and the journey that is the adult-child mentor experience in Stanislaus County?

Easy answer.  
Celebration.

The Stanislaus County Employee Mentor program, now well into its 17th consecutive year, continues to thrive and grow. The not-so-secret success of this effort continues to be in its mentors - those caring adults who give of their time and share their life lessons and abilities with young people.

The testimonials within these pages are unedited. They are straight talking - straight feeling reflections from some of our participant mentors. I do hope that their words inspire you as much as they did me.

Thank you for giving this little compilation a few moments of your valuable time.

Perhaps you too, could join this very special movement.

With admiration for those who give back...

Keith D Boggs  
Winter 2015

[employeementors.com](http://employeementors.com)

# Testimonials...

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Part of a Village

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A Bright Light Shines

Living in the Present







# A Flicker of Hope

Tom Changnon, Superintendent  
Stanislaus County Office of Education

Mentoring provides a flicker of hope that, when tended, can burst into a powerful flame of opportunity for young people to have a game plan for life. Psychologist Norman Cousins believes that the capacity for hope is the most significant fact of life. It provides human beings with a sense of destination and the energy to get started. I truly believe mentoring is the avenue that can provide one-on-one hope for young people to see a future for themselves.

I have been a mentor for the past six years and I have had the pleasure of visiting three different school sites during this time. It is always enjoyable to learn about the culture of each of the schools and get to know some of the staff members as well. I have enjoyed the experience and always look forward to meeting with my Mentee.

I have had the good fortune of working with a Mentoring team each year. This allows flexibility with our schedules and also provides the student the opportunity to become friends with another caring adult.

Although I have mentored a few high school students, I find my greatest satisfaction comes from working with elementary age students. They seem to be more open and receptive to an adult in their life.

Many of the youngsters I have mentored have been dealing with several unfortunate issues in their life. Often times they have a grandparent that is trying to raise them or they're living in situations that are not conducive to promoting a productive lifestyle. As mentors, we try to work with these young people to assist them academically and help them regain confidence in their academic skills.

I have personally seen the changes over the course of the school year when mentoring a student. The smiles, the eye contact, and the self-confidence, reaffirm the importance of mentoring for me. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to connect with a young person each year and look forward to continuing as a mentor for the sake of students as well as my own personal satisfaction.



I often feel it does more good to just engage the student in a conversation about themselves and various topics of interest. I certainly agree with Andrew Mecca who said, "Mentoring can break the back of the debilitating social epidemics that plague our youth."

Our County office has undertaken a countywide initiative called Destination Graduation. Our goal is to increase our graduation rates throughout our schools. Studies show that when young people have mentors, 98% stay in school, 98% do not join a gang or become teen mothers, and 89% don't use drugs. We have discovered that mentoring, when used as a development strategy, breaks the back of many of our social epidemics.



## Circle of Friends

Patty Boardrow  
Stanislaus County Library

I first began mentoring at John Muir School 3 years ago. My co-worker asked me to consider becoming a mentor and spoke at library staff meetings about how rewarding the experience had been, not only for the student, but for her too, as a mentor. I thought it sounded like something I could do but I put it off until she asked several more times. Finally, I decided I'd give it a go.

I signed up with a partner so I would only need to go once per week during my lunch hour. At first, I felt (selfishly) as though I would be sacrificing my "freedom" at lunch time. Once I met my student, however, that feeling quickly diminished. I looked forward to riding over to the school with my buddy to meet up with our students.

We formed a little "circle of friends" and we would gather as a group sometimes, and even sit outside occasionally, and the students would take turns reading and discussing interesting topics. We formed a bond and I realized this was an experience that was every bit as important to me as it was to my student. Just knowing someone was cheering her on and counting on her to excel was enough to make her want to do her best. She wasn't embarrassed to be called out of class; she was happy to see me every time I arrived. Knowing how much she counted on me to be there made it something to look forward to each week. She loved to share special highlights of her life and we developed a mutual respect for one another. I believe her success was due, in part, to her desire to prove herself to me. I had confidence in her abilities and she wanted to do her best to thrive in the learning environment.

I saw my student with some of her family members at a neighborhood Halloween event, and she came over to introduce her family to me. She was proud to have someone spending the extra time with her to help her achieve success in school. I often think of the students I've dedicated time to and hope that I've made an impact on their lives.

Now I think of the time as dedication to helping a student succeed, not as a sacrifice of my time. Not only does it help them with their reading and comprehension, it allows them the opportunity to communicate with other adults besides their parents or teachers. It's a non-threatening atmosphere where they don't have to be afraid to ask questions, share their dreams and just be themselves.

# Biggest Kid in the Class

Kathy Davis  
Stanislaus County Library

I have been mentor for... let's just say a long time. The beginning of the new school year is always exciting. I find myself wondering which student I will get this year. Will I get a boy or a girl? I wonder what they will like to read. I can't wait for the first meeting. I arrived at John Muir a little early excited to meet my new student for the year.

This particular year I was given a boy to mentor for the year. They gave me his name and his room number and I hurried over to his class to introduce myself. The teacher asked who I was here for and called out the young man's name. A tall boy arose from his seat and walked over to me. We spent the first minutes talking and getting to know each other. He was a rather shy young man. I noticed he kept his head down most of the time and never looked me in the eye. I asked him what he liked to do when he wasn't in school. He told me he liked to go to his friend's house to play videos and ride bikes. Unfortunately, his bike was stolen so he didn't have a bike to ride. His mom couldn't afford to get him another bike, but sometimes his friend would let him ride his bike.

During the school year we read and his reading improved greatly. He even started reading at home. He began to feel comfortable talking to me and asking questions. One day he told me he had already been held back once. That was why he was the biggest kid in the class. He was worried about being held back again. He told me his teacher had said he might be held back again if he didn't pass an upcoming test. I advised him to talk to his teacher about what he would need to do in order to pass the test.

The next week he came back and told me the teacher offered to tutor him after school, but he wasn't sure about that because it would mean he wouldn't be able to play football after school. I advised him to take all the help he could get because he could always play football later. I let him know if it was alright with him I would be willing to speak to his teacher and find out what we should be working on to help him pass.



The following week he couldn't wait to tell me he started staying after school for tutoring. He also told me his teacher wanted to talk to me. I told him how proud I was of him for choosing tutoring over football. I conveyed to him that he had made a very mature, responsible decision. I made a deal with him and told him if he worked hard on his school work and studied for the test, I would buy him a new bike. I knew he could pass, if we could just build up his confidence. He worked hard and he did pass. I kept my promise and bought him a new bike. We were able to get the bike he wanted just before spring break started. He was grinning from ear to ear as he jumped on his new bike and rode it for the first time.

Being a mentor to these students brings so much joy and a sense of accomplishment. I consider mentoring to be very rewarding and truly enjoy the hours spent with the children.



# Removing the Struggle

Norma Baker  
Stanislaus County Chief Executive Office

Mentoring with Stanislaus County has been an experience to remember. When I saw posters scattered throughout the office advertising the need for mentors, I was not sure what the program was about. I was not optimistic that this would really be very much help, but it was. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that this minimal amount of time was enough to get the children that have fallen through the cracks, so to speak, tremendous benefit.

My next year, I started at a different school site with another child. I could not figure out why this child was in the program. She was able to read with accuracy and speed. Why was she here? It took a little bit of time to get to know her and discover that although she was able to read well, she did not understand any of it. Her comprehension was just non-existent. We worked on her understanding and she jumped two grade levels before the end of the school year. I had the same student the following school year and she continued to excel. She had a good foundation to continue on to the sixth grade.

It is so heartwarming to arrive at the school site and the children you are there to sit with are so very excited to see you. They were remembered and they know that you are happy to be there to spend your valuable time with them. It does make the children feel special and they are so willing to work on their reading and discuss a story.

Everyone learns in different ways and at different speeds. It is amazing to get to know these young people and their unique personalities and learning styles. I am always so pleased to know that I made a positive difference in a young person's life.



# The Pokemon Difference

Brandon Schut  
Stanislaus County Office of Education

From the evolved form of Oshawott to the legendary Ender Dragon, learning about Pokémon and Minecraft, through mentoring has helped me become a better parent. Prior to mentoring this year, I really had no clue about the complexity of the Japanese inspired manga comic Pokémon, even though it has grown into TV shows, videogames, and a fairly popular card game in the past decade. I also was unaware of the popularity of the creative and building videogame Minecraft. Mentoring a student this year changed all that...and much more.

Fernando, a quiet 4<sup>th</sup> grader, was having problems reading. While he would read during our sessions, he was very timid and would not share much about what he enjoyed. At the end of one session, however, I commented on the very colorful shirt Fernando was wearing. The shirt had a yellow mouse with lightning bolts. I had seen this character enough to recognize Pikachu from Pokémon. As soon as I mentioned that name, Fernando lit up like the character on his shirt; his smile beaming from ear to ear. I went home and checked out a Pokémon book from the library and watched an episode on Netflix so that I could offer up some information about the subject. The next time we met, I brought up some of the names I had learned. Not only was he excited, but he spoke rapidly about what he loved best about Pokémon.

One subject turned this quiet child into a very animated, vocal person, just as tapping into anyone's likes will do.

Outside of Pokémon, our Mentor team also found Fernando was a Minecraft fan. A fellow mentor brought an iPad to add visual definitions as help during the reading session. Fernando saw the Minecraft app logo on the iPad and immediately became ecstatic. This topic turned out to be just as exciting for him and allowed us, as a mentor team, to speak about more than just Pokémon. We used this excitement when choosing things to read during our sessions.

While I may not have become a Pokémon connoisseur, I am now able to relate to something this child enjoys. After a few sessions he admitted that it was nice to talk to someone who knew about different things. This is the type of thing that makes me love mentoring. Although I was trying to learn about something he enjoyed to better serve him as a mentor, I felt like I had become the mentee; his comments and attitude made me rethink what I was doing as a person and even question my parenting skills. I went home and was able to look at my children in a different light; to look at the things they enjoyed but I might have glossed over because I was not as interested. It sparked a want to really look at the things my children are passionate about.

When people ask about mentoring, I always answer that it is life changing. What I do not think these people understand in my answer is that the life that has changed has been my own.





# Hooked on Mentoring

Joyce Fisher  
Stanislaus County - Retired

If you had asked me back in 1995 to become a mentor, I would have said no. I am not sure if I knew what it meant to be one or how much time it would take, but I was already doing plenty. I volunteered and taught classes at Parent Resource Center, read to the kids in school, bought coats for the foster kids at Christmas, and my husband and I always supported our neighborhood school programs and athletic teams. There was no way I would have agreed to take on any more.

One Saturday, my husband and I were asked by Parent Resource Center to chaperone some under privileged elementary school kids on an all-day fishing trip at Don Pedro Lake. "Get kids hooked on fishing, not on drugs" was the slogan. That seemed like a great way to spend a Saturday. And as it always goes, there were more kids than the bus had room for. So we offered to give a couple of kids a ride in our car.

That is where we met a tall, spunky, beautiful Hispanic

6<sup>th</sup> grade girl who said she wanted to be a police woman someday. It was a great day on the lake helping kids who had never gone fishing bait fishing poles and take turns driving the boats. When the day was over, the one girl asked if we would drop her at home instead of school. We did and although we did not speak Spanish, were welcomed by her family and thanked for taking her on the day outing.

I later found myself thinking of the girl and wondering how she was. So I began occasionally phoning her or dropping by just to visit and see how school was going. She invited

us to her 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation and I remember how excited she was because we had taken the time to attend. And that is how my husband and I got "hooked" on mentoring without even planning to.

As the months turned into years, my husband and I developed a wonderful relationship with the young girl. As her parents got to know us better, I began picking her up and taking her places. She volunteered with me at Parent Resource Center doing some babysitting and cleaning. She desperately needed braces and I worked out an agreement with an orthodontist to take monthly payments. Then her dad and I agreed to share in making the payments. This change alone did so much to boost her self-confidence. She then had a beautiful smile to go along with her bubbling personality.

Before she was old enough to drive, I encouraged her to interview for the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Explorer Program and without any coaching, she became the youngest Explorer ever to be hired. I truly feel that five year experience has made the most positive impact on her life.

Today that young girl is 30 years old.

She has a four year college degree, has become a United States citizen, has a full time job and yes, she still hopes to be a policewoman one day. We have watched how she has grown into a thoughtful, caring person and become a role model for so many in her own culture. She is always looking for ways to give back. We still visit with her and her family often and are so proud of what she has already accomplished.

We probably all have had a mentor without even realizing it. It was the one person we connected with for whatever the reason. In my life, it was an aunt who made sure I got picked up after school and then took me to church every Sunday. I remember thinking she was the only person who cared.

Mentoring isn't expensive.

Mentoring is about noticing and caring. It is about paying attention and listening. It is about being a friend and maybe giving a little nudge when needed. You can give a little or a lot and it will all be gratefully received. It comes from the heart and makes you feel good in return.

My son once told me that there are a lot of great kids out there, they just need a chance. I am so thankful my husband and I have had the opportunity to be mentors to one of those kids.



# Momentos that Spark

Leticia Sida  
Stanislaus County Office of Education

My personal mission is to develop supportive, healthy and resilient relationships with the children that I mentor. It is through my own personal experiences of once seeking guidance and support that helps me understand the importance of truly involving those that I am supporting and basing the support on where they are. I believe that establishing positive and resilient relationships is fundamental in helping children reach their highest potentials.

I believe that the connections made during mentoring sessions are critical for students to build their confidence, refine their skills and tap into other areas and experiences that they may have not ever considered. The children that I have been fortunate enough to mentor seem to enjoy the connection; this is evident by the excitement they show when they see their mentor standing at the door. The relationship usually starts off with us getting to know each other and eventually grows into a relationship where we look forward to seeing each other each week and miss each other when we are not able to make the session; it becomes a friendship.

Throughout out the years I have received many warm thank you notes from children; many of them have taken the time to write poems, draw beautiful pictures and make thank you cards. All of those special mementos are things that I proudly display in my work space as a way to spark conversations with visitors and to encourage them to become a mentor. I believe that mentoring makes a positive impact not only for the child but for society as a whole.







# We all Take Lunch...

Cheryl Phillips  
Modesto City Schools

It's been a pleasure to mentor the students at John Muir School for the past four years. It is a joy to spend a little time each week to help a student with reading, playing a game or just sitting and talking with them. It's so nice to see the kids enjoy this awesome mentoring program as much as we enjoy the program. This is my 4<sup>th</sup> school year to mentor at John Muir School. For the people that work for Stanislaus County, Modesto City Schools or Stanislaus County Office of Education that haven't had the opportunity to mentor a child, I want to let you know you are missing a wonderful opportunity to put something back into our community.

I worked for Stanislaus County for the past 17.5 years. I'm presently working for Modesto City School District. I plan on mentoring for Modesto City Schools next school year, and I will continue mentoring as long as I'm working.

I have four sons, a step-daughter and eight grandchildren with two grandchildren on the way. Life goes by so fast. Being able to be part of the mentoring program has brought me such joy. I love kids and being able to be a part of a child's life and help them to read and also to help them socialize is a great reward.

A lot of the kids are quiet at first and after spending time with them each week, you see them start to open up to you and bloom like a flower.

We all take a lunch each day, so one day a week is not much of your time. I know from experience that the children really enjoy us each week. Just seeing the smile on their face when you come to their classroom and say their name. They know you are there to spend that one on one time with them and help them to read. I hate to see each school year end because you get to know the child and really enjoy helping them, but I know the next year I will have a new child to mentor and spend an hour a week with them and help them to be their very best.

# Fly a Kite

Miguel Galvez  
Stanislaus County Planning Department

My mentee and I were reading a book that included a father and his son flying a kite. My mentee had never flown a kite and did not understand how it could fly. So, the following week, I purchased several kites and we went to the school play field and discussed how kite flying works and flew kites (along with some of the other kids in the mentoring program).

Needless to say, these kids were able to experience firsthand the joy of flying a kite. Other kids at the school quickly came up to them to see the kite flying, and the mentee students were able to explain the mechanics of flying a kite. It was moving to witness the confidence and joy, these children demonstrated when they engaged their peers.

Through the mentoring program, I feel privileged to be part of the memory making experience in the lives of these young people.



# A Loyal Advisor

Jeremy Howell  
Stanislaus County Clerk Recorder's Office

When I am recruiting other employees, or explaining why I need to leave the office at an appointed time to mentor, I am often asked why I volunteer in the mentoring program. I will admit that the answer has evolved over the years. While I certainly hope that my assigned protégés learn something positive during the time I spend with them, the truth is that I gain an infinite amount of satisfaction and achievement in watching these young community members grow and progress as they gain confidence and trust in the process of education and overall learning.

Each of the protégés I have worked with has taught me how important it is to be involved in our community. The students we receive are most definitely not incapable of learning. As a rule, we are given the privilege of working with those students who need a little extra time on a specific subject, or a dose of confidence in their abilities. Reading with those students and taking the time to question them on what they have understood in the reading helps them to sharpen their critical analysis and comprehension skills.

Working with the teachers and individual Reading Specialists confirms what many of us already know. Classrooms are full in many of our elementary schools and individual teachers simply do not have the time to stop and work with individual students as much as they would like.

Working with the faculty and administration to identify those students and provide that extra focus can and does make a significant difference in a student's performance.

When I first began to volunteer as a mentor, this is the role I envisioned; take an hour or two a week to listen to a student read, ask a few questions, make sure they are improving, and return the following week to do the same. However, it was not until after a few months into this journey that I began to appreciate the definition of a Mentor.



A bit of further research revealed the story of Mentor.

In Greek mythology Mentor was the trusted friend of Odysseus, who, along with others, accepted the important responsibility of looking after Odysseus' son Telemachus during the Trojan War.

It is certain that none of us can ever take the place of a child's parent. However, all of the mentors associated with our program take the time with our students very seriously. Their safety, academic and social progress is foremost on our minds during the brief time we share.

In looking back on the experiences I have had, all have been very rewarding. I remember one experience in particular. This young man was assigned to me and two others from my Department and we had the opportunity to mentor him twice a week. When we first began, our student was very shy and often seemed insecure. As we got to speak with him more and more it seemed that he was self-conscious about the fact that English was his second language. I am fortunate enough to speak Spanish, so I was able to connect with him and gain his confidence during those conversations.

During that time, we were able to learn that he was a soccer fanatic as well as a gifted player. We had discussions about how far he had come as a player and how he had to stick with the sport and listen to his coaches along the way. Within a short period of time, he began to open up.

My fellow mentors did an excellent job of taking time before his reading period to just talk and give him an opportunity to tell us about his day and after school activities. We often took a moment to take him and other students to a garden area where we could discuss the different vegetables that were planted and their various stages of progress. Within a very short period of time we learned a lot about our student. He was now eager to speak, really loved soccer and proved to be very intelligent.

I was especially touched by the way he spoke about his family and how he lit up whenever the subject was discussed. Due to his initial insecurity regarding his accent and still evolving mastery of the English language, he simply did not interact much, or raise his hand during class. This may have led others to believe that he was not advancing, or understanding his assignments. However, it was very apparent that he possessed a gifted mind and other abilities.

As we read more and more and he gained confidence in his ability to be understood, he simply took off. I hope we were successful in communicating our sincere belief that he could achieve any goal he desired. There is no doubt in my mind that he will find success in all phases of life. The pinnacle of that experience was when his drawing and quote were chosen to highlight the annual mentoring poster. That poster occupies a prominent place in my office even to this day.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that mentoring has proven to be some of the most important work I have performed over my time with the County. I would encourage anyone to get involved; you and your community have much to gain by participating in this worthy experience.

# The Significance

Jim and Cathy Blair  
Stanislaus County General Services Agency

The word 'care,' though small in nature, is significant and powerful enough to build structures up or bring them down. For us "caring" symbolizes strength, endurance, vulnerabilities, courage, presence, commitment, forgiveness, humility, focus, determination...love.

There are many more verbs that can express 'caring,' but none so great as unselfish love; the giving from the bank of your highest treasures toward the goal of assisting a fellow person and expecting no reward but seeing their growth. Whatever the intent that first drew us to mentoring, none is more revealing than the moment when caring becomes a spirit that won't allow us to turn back.

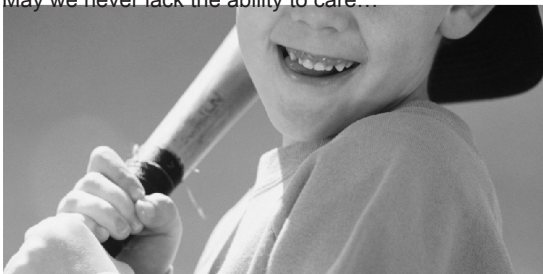
Caring provides an avenue into hope that on the surface may seem impossible, but along the way, we commit to the evidence not yet seen. The beauty of caring may not be so evident as we embark upon the opportunities to touch lives; having that touch returned in the experience of seeing what mentorship does. The short segments with our students once or twice a week are riveting opportunities to set the course in life for both the mentee and mentor. There are times when one may question if what we are doing is worth the while and there are moments that tug at our hearts confirming that we are on the right path. Caring is always good, whether short term or long. Whether one feels equipped or lacking in abilities, it's always good to show that we care! This past year has not only been a blessing in mentoring for the student, but a valuable lesson for us in courage and commitment as we marveled watching the victory of a 1.8 GPA blossom into a 3.8 GPA by the end of the school year.

What a testimony to the power of 'CARING.' Caring doesn't have a size, color or sex, caring is just finding oneself and others as HUMAN. No matter how young or old...caring reaches into those areas of life that we hold close to our hearts and is reserved only for those who are present long enough to stay the course, because "caring" takes time.

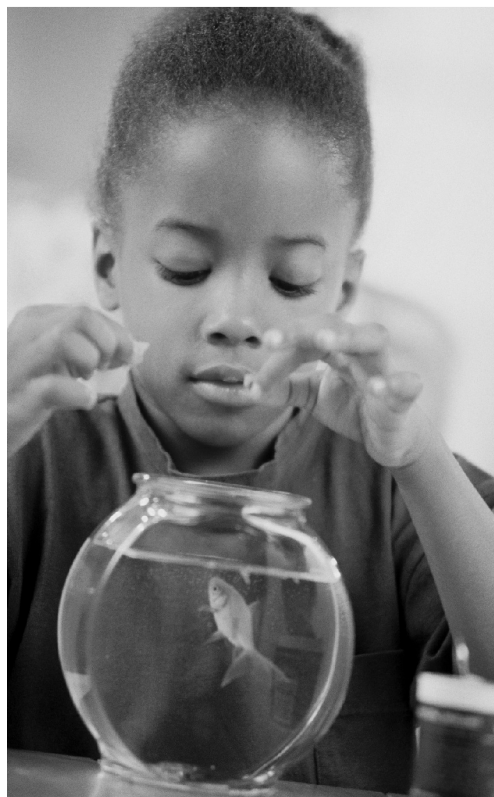
Mentoring has taught us that we're not just giving, we are receiving too! Mentorship is a most noble way to invest in others of that which has been invested into you; the Mentor. Sometimes, we may never experience the effects of mentoring/menteeing possibly until years later. However, Mentorship is taking the empathetic posture alongside the person who needs encouragement (applause) and says to them, I am with you, unconditionally, not because of what successes you may celebrate, nor failures you may suffer, we are with you and support you because we honor who you are!

We would not change anything about the last three years of mentoring. Mentoring has allowed us the opportunity to care, share and invest in what could potentially be the greatest exchange between strangers ever.

The good ground for good growth is proper identity. Mentoring equals 1 ounce responsibility, plus 1 pound fulfillment. Opportunity sets forth the path for HOPE. So what does the face of caring look like? Try it and see! May we never lack the ability to care...







# A Small Change

Michele Machado  
Stanislaus County Library

Being a part of the Stanislaus County Mentor program for the 2013-2014 school year was an absolutely wonderful experience!

My mentor site was John Muir Elementary School. I have volunteered in schools in various capacities, so I was familiar with how much of an impact even a short amount of time spent in a classroom can have on students and teachers as well. A small change is still a change.

I spent about 30 minutes a day, one day a week, with a wonderful boy. He was very shy and quiet when we first started out. The routine was to read and then talk about what we read. In the beginning, he was hesitant to do more than answer the questions I had for him. I could tell that he was bright and just needed the confidence to get past the shyness. Every week he showed more progress. He would answer my comprehension questions and maybe add something that he had learned about in class that pertained to the reading or something he knew about the topic.

I started to notice other things as well. When I would pick him up from class he was more enthusiastic and would relay to me things that had happened with other kids or something that he thought was interesting in school.

In some cases we would read with another young man and I again saw improvements in the "tag team reading" as I called it. At first he was overshadowed by the other boy being that he was simply more shy and willing to let the other boy lead. As time went on, he actually began to help the other boy with difficult words and to assert himself to make sure he was heard. It was as though simply being recognized and encouraged gave him a chance to put his reservations aside and be comfortable in his skin. His opinions once shyly given were shared with more confidence.



I would like to think that a listening ear and a simple interest in what he had to say helped him gain some confidence.

By the end of the year, he was not necessarily a stronger reader, as he had been very strong from the beginning, but a more confident reader. This is what makes this program worthwhile. It may seem like a small action to actively listen and engage in a conversation with a child, but if that is something that the child doesn't get or think he or she deserves then one small action can really impact a life.

At our pizza party on the last day, my protégé was laughing and goofing around in that way that only children can do when they realize that they are truly respected for being themselves.

Join this program.

Make a small change.

You never know what you may be doing to positively impact a life.

# Provide an Ear

Kelly Carter  
Stanislaus County Library

Mentoring has been such a rewarding experience for me. I first found out about mentoring about a year ago working at the County library. Some of my co-workers had been mentoring for a few years and mentioned to me a little more about it.

I have worked with children in different capacities for a few years and I know how important it is to encourage in all aspects. The opportunity to meet with a elementary student weekly and to provide guidance is very important.

Some of our proteges come from broken families and have little support. The student I was working with this past year was a sixth grader. She was having multiple attendance issues at school. I was a little nervous at first because I am used to working with younger children and she was twelve years old and nearly as tall as me. But as I got to know her more I noticed how she began to open up.

I learned a little more about her family as well. Each time we met we either played a game or did a craft together while chatting - just connecting with one another. I also found a few similarities we shared when it came to musical instruments.

I played violin for one year in elementary school and my protégé is also playing violin currently at her school. I can see now just how important the mentor program is - knowing that there are so many more young people that do not have someone in their life to talk to and connect with.

Mentoring is rewarding - not just for the student but also for the adult mentor as well. I would definitely recommend participation to my co-workers and community members because there are so many students out there that are in need of time and attention.

I think it is amazing that county employees from all job classifications and departments are coming together to make a difference right here in our own community.

In order for students to succeed and go on to college it is very important to have someone there for them, to encouraging them, to listen to them.

As student drop out rates continue to be problematic, I definitely believe that our efforts are making a significant difference. Mentors can never take the role of a parent but we can provide an ear to listen because our children have so very much to say.





# Part of a Village

Linda Chambers  
Stanislaus County Chief Executive Office

Imagine the year 2026.

Seems so far away, but that's the year when my protégé this year is slated to graduate from High School.

Reflecting on the recent Mentor school year brings a smile to my face and fond memories to my heart. I was part of a team of three adult Mentor Volunteers, and together we alternated each week our lunch time hour to mentor a wide-eyed, fun-filled, good spirited first grade boy through the basics of sounding out words, reading, coloring, and sharing a variety of topics from classroom friends to what was served for lunch that day in the school cafeteria.

The real highlight of my work week routine was being greeted at school by our youngster with his energetic high-five in the air hand shake and a very kind and gentle hug good-bye at the conclusion of our time together. There is something so refreshing about the kindness of a child with no hidden agenda, no expectations, and no pretenses, just a feeling of appreciation for time spent together.

Being part of a "village" to positively influence a child's development and future strikes an important personal cord with me. Every child matters and it is my goal to plant the seed of their importance during our time together. Self-esteem is so valuable for children and every human being to embrace and personalize.

According to Webster's Dictionary the noun "Mentor" means: "a wise and faithful counselor or monitor."



What the definition doesn't convey is the satisfaction and rewards a Mentor will reap sharing the journey of a child and feeling the emotions of the relationship.

Children are like the wild-west great frontier.....you never know what to expect and each day is an adventure!

In today's fast paced lifestyles, I am reminded of how powerful a simple one-on-one conversation with a child can be. Where else can you spend a lunch hour reading, "No More Monkeys Jumping on the Bed" and enjoy the pure laughter of a child while simultaneously inspiring the joy of reading.

As the Mentor Program embarks on the 17<sup>th</sup> year of commitment to excellence in our community, I am thankful for the opportunity to participate with so many caring County employees and business community leaders. Many significant people have mentored me through the years, so I know first-hand the impact.

After all, what we do today will come back ten-fold in the future. Every child matters and mentoring is our opportunity to "pay it forward" for the next generation.



# A Year to Remember

Sue Gonzales  
Stanislaus County Community Services Agency

This mentoring year, my experience was full of smiles, laughs, personal stories, trust building, love, gratitude, openness, and community; one hour at a time.

This is why:

I mentored a 10 year old boy from Bret Harte. He was chosen to be my young protégé because of his need to acquire social skills, not academic skills. During our first visits, I noticed he walked and talked without holding his head up, looking elsewhere, but not at me. My first thought was, "I can't wait to know him."

In the beginning, I spoke about myself and my family. My goal was to build trust. I told him I was a mother and grandmother. I told him where I lived, hobbies I enjoy, and anything else he wanted to know about me. When I shared stories about my grandchild, I could see he was listening, and finally he looked up at me. That was our first happy moment. At the end of each visit, I asked him if I could visit again next week, he always said "Yes." This made my heart happy.

As our weekly visits continued he told me about his family. I had a feeling and belief that he trusted me at this point. I learned so much about him, such as his love of science, which included the solar system. What he likes to do after school which is building Legos. He has many Lego books, I think he said 32! We talked about music because he was learning to play the violin this school year. He told me he wanted to invite me to his school concert, but he didn't know the exact day. I felt honored that he thought of me. He told me he would like to learn the guitar, at a later time in life.



As a teenager I played guitar and I had many stories to share about the type of music I played and how I felt when I played music. I feel my stories helped him to think about what he might want to play later in life. I told him playing music was a good outlet for me, because when I played I just thought of music and it made me very happy. It made me feel special, and it built up my self esteem. We talked about when music is in his life, he would be drawn to other children who also enjoy music, because they have a similar interest. I told him this means he will have a happy feeling inside with friends who enjoy music, and they would feel the same way.

We played board games and some days we ate lunch together. Our time together seemed to go by fast because we were growing together as friends. I could see he was happy to see me. We could talk about anything we wanted during our time together.

Before each visit, I asked him if there was anything he wanted to talk about. We talked about his school mission project, and how it was progressing every week. He was very willing to tell me detail by detail what he worked on to complete his project. I watched his eyes light up. It seemed he did the project with great pleasure. Over this last school year, we both grew, and learned a lot, one hour at a time.

He loved the attention I showed him and I loved giving him the attention he needed.

Our families went to a Mentor appreciation dinner that was held at the library. It was a great evening for all. It was nice to put faces to his family members. His mother and I both noticed a change in him, a good change. It was apparent he feels more self confident. At dinner, there was a raffle. He won a gift basket. Seeing him smile and chatter away made us all very happy. Our families took pictures together and it was like we had known each other forever. We felt even more connected when we said "good night" after the dinner event.

We had a luncheon at school on the last day. I brought him a gift card and he made me a sweet thank you card. I asked him if it would be ok if I came back next year to see him. I was pleased when he said "Yes." We certainly connected.



# A Bright Light Shines

Debbie Myetich  
Stanislaus County Department of Child Support Services

There are many things in life that we are able to measure: how tall we are, how much of an ingredient for a recipe, how much oil to put in your car, but measuring the benefits of mentoring is not as easy.

Our mentoring program has been in place for many years and numerous students have been through the program. Some mentors stay year to year, others may have to take some time off (as I have), the program is continually updated but the reward of mentoring remains the same.

One of the first students I mentored was through Bret Harte School. She was nine years old and very shy. She spoke mainly Spanish at home and English at school. For us, that was a bit challenging as I have almost no knowledge of the Spanish language. There were times when she would struggle with a word while we were reading. Through long discussions she would be able to understand what the word was in English and during the process, she would teach me the word in Spanish.

When we first met, it was hard to get her to open up to me and tell me things that had happened during the week or over the weekend due to her shyness. We began each of our mentoring sessions talking about what had happened since the last time we met. I showed her pictures of my daughter and told her of things we did as a family such as going to a park, or for a bike ride or playing games. These moments shared with her, led her to finally begin to open up and share things she and her family did.

She began telling me of funny things that happened over the weekend.



Her reading ability began showing improvement. We also worked on vocabulary and spelling. Math was another area we worked in. We were able to make flash cards to use when trying to complete as many problems as possible in a set amount of time. Her English began showing marked improvement and when she was teaching me Spanish, it was as if a bright light began to shine on her. She would talk more animatedly and search for items that were present in the room to use as a tool for getting her point across to me. At the time, you don't always notice the changes, but at the end of the year, when you look back it is amazing the change you see !

The transformation I saw in her over the course of the year was remarkable!! By the end of the year, she came into the room and couldn't wait to tell me about her week, get started reading or whatever we were going to work on that day.

I've worked with many other students over the years and each one brings a different experience and leaves me a better person for getting to know them even it is for such a short amount of time. There may not be a way to measure our feelings when we mentor but the knowledge they bring to us is simply amazing. Seeing life through the eyes of a child can bring such clarity to our lives.

# Living in the Present

Ali Arshad

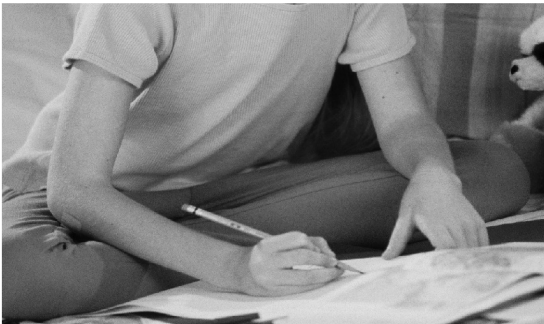
Stanislaus County Environmental Resources

Mentoring is the lunch break we look forward to each week. Not because we have special wisdom to impart, but because spending some time listening to a young person has a way of giving us purpose. It doesn't take much to let someone know you're there for them, by simply playing a game, reading, or doing some mathematics and diving into life together.

It sure gives us so much in return.

I have been able to meet with my protégé every week since we first met. We generally meet for a lunch break in the school classroom or the library for 30 minutes or so. My protégé has gone through quite a bit already, both physically and emotionally, but has met these issues head on with courage and a smile.

He has matured into a more confident boy. He greets me with a smile and courtesy. He's always excited about doing a new activity or sharing stories of his family like the dinner last night or his little sister's birthday.



The impact in my life can be summed up in one word - "privilege." It has been a privilege for me to sit across the table from a young man who is growing, changing and is vulnerable. He gives me a unique view into today's kid culture. I love the strength of my protégé. He wants to be true to himself and his family.

The relationships that result (from mentoring) are priceless. I leave our meetings feeling very enriched by our interactions and I believe that he has been too. I thoroughly enjoy being part of the mentoring program. The orientation and training tips are always extremely helpful.

Watching someone grow week over week is a testimony to living in the present and it is a blessing. I love my protégé and the warm satisfaction he has brought to my life.







## Thank You...

to the wonderful mentors who contributed to this work. To our school affiliates for their guidance and direction, to our organizational partners who believe in the power of the mentor experience, and to Norma Baker, who makes everything come together seamlessly, with love and tireless dedication.

Boggs  
2015

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