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Making a Difference

BY OLGA E CORTES-DOMINGUEZ

As I was driving to work one morning, I was thinking about how hectic my mornings used to be when I had to make sure my daughters were ready for school. In a way, I missed that since recently my house had been feeling a bit empty since my own children were gone to college. Just as I was thinking that, I heard about Kinship Mentoring Program on the radio. It just happened to be in my city and that's the moment I decided to become a mentor. I thought it would be a great way to make a positive difference in the life of a young person.

The relationship with my mentee, Jacey, is a work in progress. It takes a while to get to know people and it's important to understand that you can't come in someone's life right away and make a difference. It's a gradual process and most importantly, you need to build up trust. Every opportunity we have to talk and listen to one another teaches me something about her and something about myself.

As I get to know Jacey, I have found little by little what Jacey likes to do. In a lot of ways, she reminds me of my daughters when they were her age. I enjoy the time we spend together whether it's cooking together, watching TV, playing with my dogs, or shopping, to name



Jacey and Olga

a few. We also like to talk about life, school, her feelings and opinions. She's even introduced me to her mom and her brothers and sisters. I like to believe that she knows that there's another person out there who looks at things with a different perspective and I'm not here to judge or criticize. I'm here to encourage her and let her know that nothing is impossible, just as I have done with my daughters. I hope this is the beginning of a great friendship and that she knows I'm here whenever she needs advice.

Jacey probably doesn't realize that she is also helping me because mentoring has put some meaning back into my life. My advice to anyone who is considering becoming a mentor: DO IT! IT'S WORTH IT!

It's Chili Bowl time!
See insert for details.



New Matches

(Since our last newsletter)

Kelci Meade and Jordan

Jason Empey and Grant

Colleen Lamke and Tasha

John Michels and Dayton

Vanessa Christiansen and Winter

Waiting Kids

These are just a few of the almost 20 kids who are waiting for a mentor. Maybe they are waiting for YOU to be their mentor and friend!

Stacy—age 15 loves reading books. She would like an adult friend to talk to about the books she reads and possibly have her own little book club. She also loves to write stories. She needs some one-on-one time away from her sister just to chat and talk about the symbolism of the moon.

Kim — age 6 lives in Nashwauk. She is looking for a mentor to help her expand her world. She lives in an apt. with mom and brother and doesn't have access to a lot of experiences.

John — age 12 enjoys playing the guitar and also plays the tuba in the school band. He's interested in engineering and archeology. He also likes basketball and baseball. And video games (of course!). John lives in Pengilly, but the family does hope to move to the Bovey/Coleraine area in a year or so.

David — age 8, and Sam, age 9 are brothers who live in Marble. Both are really wanting mentors to hang out with. Both enjoy sports, reading, fishing, swimming and bike riding.

Waiting kids...cont. on pg 6

Nancy's Notes

January is National Mentoring Month

What if you could light up the life of a child just by walking into a room? You can — by becoming a mentor through Bridges Kinship Mentoring. A mentor is an ordinary person doing ordinary things with extraordinary results. You don't need to do anything dramatic, it could be time spend fishing, playing a game, baking cookies, building a birdhouse.



Mary and Liz

January is a time for re-evaluating our priorities and our goals —which is probably why January was chosen as National Mentoring Month. This is a national initiative that focuses on the need for mentors.

Based upon experience and research, we know that when done well, youth

mentoring holds great promise in helping young people succeed in life. Studies of programs that place youth in formal one-to-one mentoring relationships have provided strong evidence of their success in reducing the incidence of delinquency, substance use and academic failure. These studies further

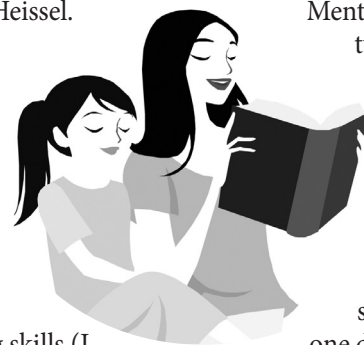
indicate that formal youth mentoring programs can promote positive outcomes, such as improved self-esteem, social skills and knowledge of career opportunities.

So when we ask you if you are ready to be a mentor . . . say "YES!! I'm ready!!" Start making a difference in the life of a child. Become a mentor. And, like Olga said in her *Making a Difference* article — put some meaning (and fun!) back into YOUR life.

Introducing...

Hello! My name is Emily Heissel. I am the newest addition to the Bridges Kinship Mentoring Team and I am bringing Mentoring to the middle school! Last May I graduated from The College of Saint Benedict with an elementary education major. I am extremely excited to combine my teaching skills with my mentoring skills (I was a student mentor through Bridges all throughout high school) to make this new program a success. I had such an amazing time being a mentor in high school. I am glad to be back!

Middle School Mentoring is a collaboration with the Reading Learning Academy. Learning Academy is a "school" within the RJE Middle School that works with students who are at least 2 grade levels behind in reading. Middle School



Mentoring adds a fun twist for the students by matching them with adults in our community who will work on reading projects based around the interests of the student. They meet one day a week after school to find the "SPARK" of that student. The SPARK could be the outdoors, sports, bicycling, animals...the list is endless.

My goals with this program are: to build confidence for, give encouragement to, boost self-esteem in, and provide importance and meaning for school and continual learning for fifth and sixth grade students. Middle School Mentoring will start up at the end of January.

Welcome, New Board Members

Bridges would like to welcome three new members to our Board of Directors. Betsy Johnson with the University of Minnesota Extension; Greg Taylor, retired Grand Rapids State Bank; and Brianna Roberts with Children's Mental Health. Each one brings a tremendous amount of knowledge and expertise that will help Bridges to continue to grow and make a positive impact on our community.

Kathy McCarty moves into the role of Board Chair, and Bob Holycross is the new Vice Chair.

Retiring board members include Teresa DeVries, Mary Jones and Dawn Renee. Each will stay involved with Bridges through our committees — and we're very happy about that!

Actor Morgan Freeman once said, "Literacy is the ladder out of poverty. We just need to be fit enough to climb it." This is true for all children. Literacy is the ladder to being a contributing and successful citizen in our world.



Sweet treats needed!

We need your specialty desserts, pies, cookies, bars, breads, snack mixes, etc. for our bake sale at the Chili Bowl on February 5. Last year we ran out of items by 12:30 — and we don't want that to happen again!!! Will you help by donating some items for the bake sale? Remember that Super Bowl is the day following the Chili Bowl . . . and football enthusiasts may be looking for something special to serve at a Super Bowl party. If you can help in this way, please contact Bridges and let us know! We also need pans of bars for the dessert table at the Chili Bowl event.

Annual Chili Bowl: Saturday, Feb. 5 @ St. Andrew's Lutheran Church

The Rotary Clubs, with additional support from Kiwanis Daybreakers, are gearing up once again to help with the 10th Annual Chili Bowl on Saturday, February 5, from 11am to 2pm at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church. All proceeds from this event support Bridges Kinship Mentoring and our programs.

You will find a variety of chili — from extra mild to spicy, venison chili, chicken chili, and vegetarian chili. The cost of the lunch is \$5, with kids 5 and under free. Chili-to-go will also be available. (Peanut butter sandwiches are available if you have a little one who isn't a chili lover!). New this year is the option for seniors living in senior apartment/condo settings to preorder and have our delicious chili delivered. If you're interested in this option, give us a call at 326-4700.



The Chili Bowl will once again feature a bake sale and a silent auction which will include a variety of wonderful items — including a Raven by renowned woodcarver Collin Clough. Raffle tickets are also being sold for \$5 each prior to as well as at the event. See the insert with this newsletter for a listing of the raffle prizes. You do not need to be present to be a winner. Use the newsletter insert to preorder your raffle tickets as well as the chili bowl tickets.

This is one of Bridges' major fundraisers and the proceeds help tremendously in supporting our programs which, in turn, help kids in our community. Join us, your neighbors, and friends on February 5 for this fun event!

Tickets are available through Bridges Kinship Mentoring or at the door. For more information, call Bridges at 326-4700 or log on to www.bridgesmentoring.org.

Taste of Itasca

Put this date on your calendar as a must attend event of the year! **Taste of Itasca**, to be held this year at the Timberlake Lodge, provides area restaurants and caterers a venue to share samples of their specialties for attendees to taste. Wine and beer tasting will precede dinner.

Taste of Itasca has become the *talk of the town* and definitely a highlight of the year! Tickets will be available late-March / early-April and can be purchased individually or group [a table for eight]. Business sponsorships are also available for either a table for eight or a half table for four.



We will hold a live auction again and are seeking items to be included in the auction. Here's some ideas of auctionable items or services: *Do you love to entertain? Host a dinner for 6 at your home.* If you love to bake, provide a dessert a month. *Do you have season tickets to a professional sports team? Consider donating tickets to one game.* Ask your favorite jeweler for a classy donation. *Do you have a timeshare or a special cabin retreat that you'd be willing to share for a week or weekend?*

Contact Nancy or Lori if you're interested in contributing to the live auction.

Thank you!

to our donors

(gifts given since our last newsletter)

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Christmas Programs Brighten the Holidays

The third annual "Kinshop" was held December 14, 2010, at Community Presbyterian Church. This was an opportunity for kids who have mentors through Bridges, as well as their siblings, to be able to "shop" for a toy or gift item for each other. Over 60 children selected and wrapped a gift to give to a sibling, cousin or friend. This program is a way for children to experience the gift of giving, rather than focusing on getting a gift. The Minnesota Truckers Association provided most of the toys and gifts and additional local support was provided by Minnesota Power, Craiglow's Cake Kingdom and Walmart. We had some wonderful elves who helped the kids with gift selection, wrapping, refreshments and creating ornaments. THANK YOU to all who donated and volunteered with Kinshop this year.

Our other holiday program is "Adopt-a-Family." Families in need were paired with persons interested in purchasing Christmas gifts for an entire family. Seven families were adopted this Christmas by churches and organizations in the community with wonderful responses. It's wonderful to see that the groups who adopted the families were just as excited as the recipients!



Conner Jasper Middle School Mentoring

The students involved in the CJMS Student Mentoring took on a wonderful holiday community service project. They chose to decorate and pack cookies and treats for people who were at Grace House around the holiday season.

Nine sixth graders, who were matched with high school and college students from September to December, made cookies and candies, decorated sugar cookies from Janicke Bakery, and packed a load of goodies in boxes. They were then delivered to Grace House a few days before Christmas.

Student mentoring is an after school peer-to-peer mentoring program that involves fifth and sixth grade students in a "buddy" program with an older youth or young adult. They work on prosocial skills while building friendships. One of the goals is to involve students in a community service project. This helps them realize that we all have something to give to our community.





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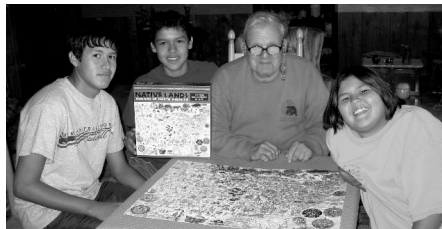
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Waiting Kids cont.

Rachel — age 9 is a bubbly energetic girl who loves to be outside doing just about anything. She has the gift of gab and conversation. Her mom doesn't have the resources to get her involved in a lot of activities and she would like someone who wants to be active with her. She has such a wonderful, friendly personality and is very easy going.

Jamie — age 8 Jamie lives in Warba and would like a big buddy who can do "guy" things with him. He would like to be in scouts, go fishing and play board games. He is a very outgoing young man who lives with 5 females with no positive male role model.

Stacey — age 9 This young lady would love to have a mentor to share time with one-on-one. She would like a mentor who loves to do manicures, pedicures and each other's hair. She loves to window shop, play board games and photography.



Carl — age 10 Carl has had a female mentor but really needs a guy to hang out with. He likes woodworking, science experiments, magic tricks and board games. He loves being outside and winter sports.

Steven — age 8 If you like to be outside, go biking, take things apart (and try to put them back together) Steven would be the perfect mentee for you. He lives in Marble and is very outgoing and inquisitive. Loves school and is always looking for new experiences. Lives with mom. Dad is deceased.

Karen — age 6 Lives in Marble, this young lady loves to draw and color. She likes going outside, biking and going for

walks, too. She loves school and is looking for a family mentor or one-on-one mentor who would show her new experiences and activities in the community.

Dean — age 9 Dean lives in Nashwauk. He likes being outside and loves fishing, bike riding. He reads Goosebumps books and watches movies. He needs to find a mentor who can be outside with him doing active stuff.

Janelle — age 14 lives in the Lawrence Lake area off of Scenic Highway 7. She is into art, writing, reading, swimming, basketball, camping and traveling. She loves the outdoors and is very creative and open to trying new things.

Sammy — age 11 Lives in Nashwauk and enjoys sports and playing with his dog. He'd like to learn more about mechanical stuff. He likes to try new things and tends to be adventurous. Sammy has also been waiting a LONG time!