

### **Mentor program is a win-win**

For the past five years I've spent a half hour a week with a middle school student from Norwalk. I'm not a social worker or a psychologist, and I have no special skills or training.

Officially, what I am is a mentor; but the reality is I play video games, shoot hoops, throw a baseball or play chess with this great kid once a week. That's it. Nothing deep. Nothing dramatic. To me it's simple, but to him it makes a world of difference.

I'm telling you this, of course, because the CT mentor program is desperately in need of help. In Norwalk alone there are 350 kids who need someone to come by their school and hang out with them once a week.

Of the 11,000 students in the Norwalk Public Schools 2,000 of those students have one or more parents incarcerated. Studies show that young people who are mentored are 73 percent more likely to raise their goals, 59 percent more likely to get better grades and 46 percent less likely

to start using drugs.

According to the Governor's Prevention Partnership, "an astounding 17.6 million young people - nearly half the population of young people between 10 and 18 years of age - live in situations that put them at risk of not living up to their potential."

We're not talking about kids in Bangladesh or Laos; these are children who live 10 minutes away. While most of us struggle to spend enough time with our own children, it's worth taking a moment to think about how fortunate we are. In fact, I will assert, it's worth taking half an hour a week. I promise, it's worth it!

If you'd like more information, please contact Jackie L. Effren, coordinator, Norwalk Mentor Program at 849-1111 or [jeffren@hscct.org](mailto:jeffren@hscct.org).

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