



## Adult mentors offer benefits to children

—By James Monteleone— The Daily Times

Posted: 02/07/2010 12:00:00 AM MST

FARMINGTON — A majority of children given the attention of a mentor do better in school, get along with other children better and have higher self-confidence.

With so many benefits that come from a relationship between children and their mentors, community groups like Big Brothers, Big Sisters and the Boys & Girls Club are working hard to find more volunteers interesting in helping.

The Boys & Girls Club of Farmington each year works with more than 1,900 children. With diverse needs, children are given individual mentoring where appropriate, but the club also offers a lot of group mentoring.

One such program hosted at the Boys and Girls Club branch on Troy King Road invites high school students from Navajo Prep to come spend time with the children, tutoring classwork, playing games and just being a friend, said Boys & Girls Club of Farmington President Benedikte Whitman.

"We've found that the kids are really blossoming with this," she said. "You know how little kids are, they love being around older kids. It's nice to be in a situation where they're accepted."

Navajo Prep students come visit the Boys & Girls Club members on a weekly basis.

"The Navajo Prep kids are such good role models,"

Whitman said. "They're the kids who are really dedicated to doing well in school. There's a real ability for them to connect there."

But with so many children to serve, many more volunteers are needed to help the children have more positive interactions with adults.

"We just sometimes have adult volunteers who come in and want to do something with the kids," Whitman said.

Some children who show behavioral challenges get referred into more individualized mentoring programs, either with the Boys & Girls Club or with other community organizations.

One such organization is Big Brothers, Big Sisters, which offers one-on-one mentoring programs tailored to schoolwork or social interaction, said Christine Garcia, the CEO of the San Juan County program.

Children mentored through the Big Brothers, Big Sisters of San Juan County program last year showed a 72 percent improvement in academic performance, 72 percent improvement in classroom behavior, a 74 percent improvement in class participation and an 85 percent improvement in self-confidence, according to an annual survey of local teachers taken before and after participation in the program.

Mentors either visit their "littles" at school for one hour each week, or take the children out for some kind of social activity once each month.

"It's not a huge commitment, but the impact it makes on the children we serve is incredible," Garcia said. "We really need people in our community to come forward and mentor these children."

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