



Be a Part of the Solution

by Kate Matthews, YAC member since September 2008

Opportunities for service are evident in communities all across our country. The best way for someone to answer our government's call to service is to identify a need that one is passionate about addressing. My parents both work in education and as a result, the issues facing schoolchildren have always been near to my heart. Thus, I have spent three years volunteering in a grant funded after school program at my dad's elementary school. I grew to realize that working with the children there was not only benefiting them, but was personally gratifying for me.

During my three years as a volunteer, I discovered that for many young students in my community, the task of preparing for promotion to the next grade is a daunting one. Beyond the pressure of rising standards for End of Grade tests, I live in a tier one county. Simply put, we are a less wealthy school district and consequently, many children are living in challenging conditions. However, despite such odds, I quickly discovered that a "big kid" tutor who takes an interest in children in need of a little extra help can be a great motivation to them. Assuming the role of a mentor and friend, I was able to positively impact the children I tutored. As I began to think about ways to further my impact and expand the assistance available to kids in our community, I decided to begin a tutoring partnership between my high school and the elementary school called "Tiger Tutors."

I recruited 15 high school volunteers and opened the tutoring program to 3rd graders. Letters were sent home resulting in interest from 24 children. Tutors were required to attend an initial session prior to meeting with students so that I could discuss some essential elements of tutoring. Parents agreed to provide transportation home and the program was enthusiastically supported by the teachers and administration. The "Tiger Tutors" program met for 8 weeks, one day a week for an hour. The program focused on increasing reading fluency and comprehension development, and also included math games when time allowed.

I was genuinely pleased by the results. The children told their teachers weekly how much they were looking forward to Wednesdays, our tutoring day. They demonstrated an increased interest in what they were studying because their high school partner captured their attention. While positive results on the EOG for these students will be attributable to the hard work of many, I would like to believe that our "Tiger Tutors" played a part. We provided positive role models, extra reading and math practice, and quality time with a "big kid". I was also happy to see that the students at my high school who volunteered as tutors experienced the same personal satisfaction that initially prompted me to develop this program - it was evident that both tutor and mentee were enjoying their time together.



In my opinion, the success of the program is illustrated through the answers to a survey the children took on their last day of tutoring. In the comments section at the bottom of the page, almost every child had written a positive comment:

“I think we should have tutoring every day!”

“Please don’t stop tutoring now.”

“Can we stay longer?”



Also fulfilling was what I witnessed at our culminating party, hosted on the last day of the tutoring program to celebrate the hard work everyone had put in. After the last cupcake had been served, I was heartened to look up and see every high school student sitting with a group of children. While teens usually don’t miss a chance to sit with their peers and socialize, every tutor chose to sit and chat with their elementary school partner instead. When it was time to leave, there were hugs all around and many questions. “Is this really the last day?” “You all are not coming back next week?” It took three

requests for the children to pack up their belongings before they finally said goodbye to their partners – and these were relationships that had been built while working on subjects that many of the children initially disliked and struggled with.

After this experience, I know that I really can make a difference in the lives of others. This program has proven to me that in a world with many difficult problems, we – young people- CAN be part of the solution and it is our responsibility to do so.