

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Community, student mentors recognized

Additional mentors sought for five-county program

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A quiet group of adults and high-school students in Carroll and surrounding counties is working to help area kids.

Although they usually fly under the radar, the mentors in New Opportunities' mentoring program were recognized in January as part of National Mentoring Month.

For a dozen years, New Opportunities has matched area adults with kids looking for role models — first in Sac County, then in Carroll, Audubon, Guthrie and Greene counties.

In Carroll and Sac counties, high school students have been tapped as mentors as well.

As part of the community-based program, kids are matched with an adult volun-

teer from their community. The pairs spend at least four hours a month together — playing games or cooking at home, going to movies, going bowling or participating in other activities.

In Carroll County, high school students are matched with elementary students in a separate student mentoring program. They meet during school, usually weekly, to play games, work on STEM projects and chat.

The student-mentoring program in Sac County takes place after school twice a month in Sac City and Wall Lake and matches both high school students and adults with elementary and middle school mentees. They have guest speakers, such as local fire or sheriff's departments, play games and work on crafts together.

Miller-West described one mentee in Sac County who is a senior in high school and has been matched with her mentor since she was 5 years

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old. She's in National Honor Society and has participated in 4-H and FFA and attributes much of her success to her mentor.

Adult participants in the program go through a background check and interview; all mentors are volunteers.

Every other month, mentors and mentees from all five counties get together for a larger activity, such as a trip to the zoo or a tie-blanket drive.

"We really stress volunteerism and having them give back to the communities they're in," said Jamie Miller-West, mentoring coordinator for New Opportunities based in Sac City.

And for an often thankless job, a month focused on mentoring allows these volunteers to be recognized.

"We like to take advantage of (National Mentoring Month) to recognize mentors, because what they do is really important to kids in their communities," Miller-West said. "It opens doors and opportunities for kids they may not otherwise get."

Chamaïne Sims, another mentoring coordinator based in Carroll County, met with Carroll High School mentors recently to thank them and give them certificates. A separate event was held at Baratta's Steakhouse to recognize adult mentors from the area. That event also served as an opportunity to recruit more mentors.

There currently is a waiting list of kids waiting for mentors. Those interested in becoming a mentor can contact Miller-West at jmiller-west@newopp.org or 712-662-7291. Potential mentors also can fill out a survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/NewOppMentorApp.

Student mentors serve an important role as well, providing a role model to younger kids who is still accessible.

"I know some of our kids really enjoy that connection they get with their mentees," Miller-West said. "It's like a little brother or sister to them, and they really like having a kid be excited to see them and look up to them as a role model."

She added that she appreciated the opportunity in January to formally recognize mentors.

"They're just doing it to make a difference in the life of a child," she said. "It's pretty special, the people going out of their way to do this."

"I read a quote, 'Be who you needed when you were little,' and that's how I think about it when it comes to mentoring. Be that person you needed as a child for someone else."



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Participating in a ceremony honoring student mentors at Carroll High School are (front, from left) Carroll High guidance counselor Kathy Cordes, Emerald Siepker, Erin Olberding, Emily Weber, Sam Murray, Makayla Buelte, (back) Hayden Thooft, Trinity Tassell, Grace Pettitt, Mallory Schultes, Alexa Schroeder and New Opportunities mentoring coordinator Chamaïne Sims. Not pictured are Vanessa Bauer, Aleah Casebeer, Kenzie Honold, Rylee Ludwig, Chelsey Schulz, Lauren Snyder and Laura Sweeney.



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Community mentors involved in New Opportunities' mentoring program honored at a ceremony at Baratta's Steakhouse in Carroll include (from left) Barbara Brockelsby, Lindsey and Jared Brinker, Michelle Schuette, Jane Heithoff, Diane "Pudy" Pudenz, Beverly Kramer and Carla Church. All mentors pictured are from the Carroll County program except for Church, a mentor in Guthrie County.