

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (WI)

November 3, 2008

Mentorship program gets under way UW-Parkside effort will enlist other nonprofits

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Some people in LeRoy Petersen's social circle don't understand his relationship with Christian, a teenager he's mentored for more than three years.

One friend jumped to conclusions after hearing that Christian's parents are Spanish-speaking immigrants.

"The person said, 'Oh, you're teaching him English,' " Petersen recalled. "I said, 'He and I are learning French together. He speaks English very well.' "

Petersen, who helped Christian pick a high school and takes him on weekend outings, is the type of adult whom University of Wisconsin-Parkside officials want to participate in **Mentor Kenosha & Racine**. The new program, which had its official launch on Friday, is housed at the university and recruits, trains and places volunteers in schools and social development agencies in Kenosha, Racine and Walworth counties.

The program is part of a growing statewide effort to pair Wisconsinites with both kids and adults who could use a stable source of support.

The campus' Center for Community Partnerships has already created a kind of accrediting agency that serves would-be **mentors** in search of worthwhile ways to lend a hand. San Juan Diego Middle School in Racine, Christian's alma mater, is one of three organizations that have earned accreditation, a process that's forced the Catholic school to prove it has an infrastructure in place to support long-lasting, goal-oriented relationships.

Stamp of approval Laura Sumner Coon, the school's executive director, said she expects the partnership to put both volunteers and parents at ease.

"There should be some stamp of approval both for the parent and for the **mentor** that you're going to provide safe and adequate surroundings and supervision and that there will actually be some outcomes," Sumner Coon said. "There are a lot of places that say they have mentoring, but nothing comes of it."

Mentor Kenosha & Racine also intends to partner with agencies that serve adults. A **UW-Parkside** study issued to the Racine County Workforce Development Board in 2006 and based on 2000 census data reported that 36% of Racine residents ages 18 to 24 do not have a high school diploma.

Racine County Executive Bill McReynolds said he expects the program to help decrease recidivism among ex-offenders and prepare adults for entry-level jobs.

"Our employers are telling us that they're having problems finding people that are responsible to show up on time and work all five days," McReynolds said. "Mentorship and guidance take people to that next level."

Phuture Phoenix Program Another UW campus has been ramping up its partnerships with the surrounding community in recent years. Three years ago, UW-Green Bay started the Phuture Phoenix

Program, an effort to get low-income fifth-graders at nearby schools onto campus and paired up with education majors for continued support through high school.

Earlier last month, 1,500 fifth-graders from Brown and surrounding counties flocked to the campus wearing T-shirts with the words "College Bound" on the back to visit with professors, students and coaches. Participation in the program's ongoing tutoring component is required of all UW-Green Bay education majors, said Kimberly Desotell, the program's director.

Unlike **Mentor** Kenosha & Racine, which encourages **mentors** to commit at least a year to their mentees, the Green Bay program connects students at the participating high-poverty schools with a new **mentor** each semester. What's important is that they all drive home the idea that post-secondary education is an option, Desotell said.

"That can be just as vital as one adult sharing that message," she said.

For more information on **Mentor** Kenosha & Racine, visit www.mentorKR.org.

For more information on the Phuture Phoenix Program, visit www.uwgb.edu/phuturephoenix.

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