

KEYS to Success

Katy students find confidence and achievement through Katy ISD's mentoring program

Written by Holly Leger

About once a month, Martha Brown and Lauren Kelly get together for dinner. They laugh, talk, and show each other pictures from their phones. When Kelly asks how Brown is doing, Brown usually gives a concise reply and then quickly focuses the conversation back on Kelly.

But that's okay. Kelly is comfortable sharing her life with Brown. It's what she's done ever since the two met in 2008 through the Katy ISD KEYS mentoring program. Back then, they sat across the table as two strangers: a mentor and a high school senior. Now, they sit across the table as close friends.

A History of Success

Brown and Kelly's story is just one of many great ones from the mentoring program. KEYS, which stands for Keep Encouraging Youth toward Success, was created for children who are on the brink of success, but need a positive influence in their lives to help them reach it. The program provides each of its students with a mentor, who commits to seeing the student for one hour each week for a year.

Brown, a senior specialist in the Katy ISD Partners in Education department, says KEYS was first piloted during the 1995 to 1996 school year at Winborn Elementary. Four first-grade students were mentored by four volunteers from Exxon Mobile. "Those four little first-graders saw huge improvement in behavior as well as grades," Brown says.

The following year, the department offered the program to other Katy elementary schools. Over time, word about the successful program spread, and what was once four volunteers at one elementary school turned into nearly 1,000 volunteers serving at all Katy ISD schools - elementary, junior high, and high school.

Giving Back

Although mentors and students build close relationships with each other during the one-hour sessions, Kelly says it can sometimes feel a little awkward at first. When she was placed in the program during high school, Kelly was nervous and angry, because she didn't think she needed a new friend in her life.

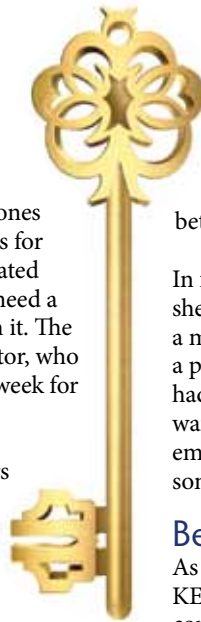
However, the more Kelly talked with Brown, the more she enjoyed their time together. "Before I met her, I had absolutely no patience," Kelly says. "I was quick to anger, to judge - all of those things. She really taught me to slow down and put the brakes on life. After I learned that from her, my grades went up, and I had better interaction with my family and friends."

In fact, Kelly felt so grateful for her KEYS experience that she decided to give back to the program by volunteering as a mentor during her freshman year of college. Kelly made it a point to truly focus on her female student, just as Brown had always, and still does, focus on her. Kelly shares she wanted to do so because she wanted her mentee to feel the empathy and the encouragement that comes from knowing someone else cares.

Become a Mentor

As someone who has experienced both sides of the KEYS mentoring program, Kelly says she hopes the Katy community will continue to embrace it. She knows the program works. She even made a friend out of it. "Anyone who has the opportunity to mentor or to be mentored should definitely do it because it is such a life-changing experience," she says. "It's amazing to see what can be done for students in Katy ISD, and it's amazing if you have the chance as a mentor to give that." **KM**

To learn more about becoming a KEYS mentor or student, visit katyisd.org



Martha Brown became Lauren Kelly's mentor through the Katy ISD KEYS mentoring program in 2008



Seven Lakes High School student artists unveil the "Spread Your Wings and Fly" commemorative piece for Katy ISD KEYS

Photo by Buller Photography

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About Dr. Bill Sheppard

In addition to being Katy's predominant chiropractor, Dr. Sheppard works in conjunction with a company that provides medical services and consultation to the Houston Texans, the Super Bowl, WWE pro wrestling, AMA Supercross, Indy Car Racing Series, and the world's top pro skateboarders and free-style motorcross riders.

Q&A

About the DRX9000 Spinal Decompression

Why do you use the DRX9000 Decompression Machine?

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How does it work?

Patients typically undergo a series of 15 or 20 sessions; each treatment lasts between 30 and 45 minutes, depending on the diagnosis. After a session, a cold pack is applied with electrical muscle stimulation.

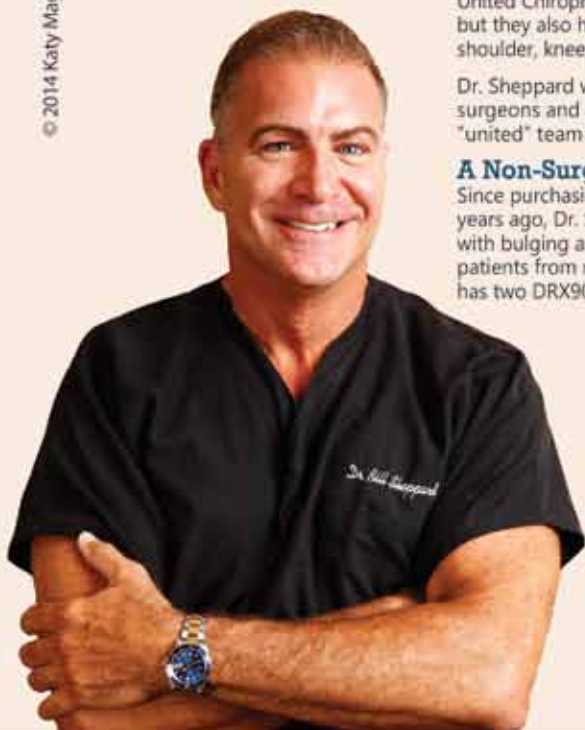
What does it feel like?

Patients describe the treatment as a gentle pull on the spine. Many patients find it relaxing, even to the point of falling asleep during the treatment.

Questions about the DRX9000?

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