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- Bill Freund, KEYS Mentor

Men Who Mentor

Volunteers Reach Out To Help Katy Students

Written by Shetye Cypher

TBrian's* mother was struggling with lymphoma and his schoolwork was taking a back seat. It had always been just him and his mother, and he worried what he would do without her. The life of a junior high student is already trying, but when fear and sadness over possibly losing a loved one come into play, it becomes clearly tougher. A teacher who was familiar with what was happening with Brian recommended him for Katy ISD's program, Keep Encouraging Youth towards Success (KEYS) at school.

The KEYS program pairs mentors with students based on need. Students can be referred for a variety of reasons including low grades, excessive absences, excessive discipline referrals and family or life circumstances — all of which can be signs of problems in the student's personal life. “Students can be referred to the KEYS program by administrators, counselors, and teachers,” says Martha Brown, a specialist assistant with the Katy ISD Partners in Edu-

cation program. “We recruit using the district's eNews, the Katy Chamber email blast, send postcards and submit press releases to local media. Our mentors themselves recruit, as well,” Brown says.

Connecting through Conversation

Bill Freund, 48 and the student and connections pastor at Redeemer Community Church, is one such mentor. Freund, who has mentored at Taylor, Cinco Ranch, and Beckendorff Junior High, has been mentoring for almost four years. When he meets with students, they sometimes play computer games or cards. Mostly, Freund just talks with students about things they're interested in and how they're doing. He has seen first hand the difference such conversation can make in their lives. “When I met James*, his dad was dying of cancer and he just needed someone to meet with who would just listen to him each week,” says Freund. “James' grades were in decline and his attitude towards life was poor. Four months



Katy ISD's KEYS program pairs mentors with students for a variety of reasons.

after I began meeting with James, his dad passed away. During this critical time in his life, I watched a young student not only grieve, but also exemplify maturity beyond his years. As weeks and months passed, his grades began to come back up, as well as his attitude.”

Changing Lives

James was eventually asked to be a leader in the student assisted grief program at Taylor High School, helping other students deal with grief in their lives. “It was a privilege to be a ‘significant other’ to him during those crucial years and I still keep in touch with him as he is in his first year of college,” Freund says. “I believe James is a model of what KEYS can do to help students on the brink of success, and I would recommend this program to anyone. Investing in the life of a student pays unequalled dividends.”

Michael*, a senior at Mayde Creek High School, has been mentored



Four supporters at the Men Who Mentor breakfast
Mark Grisdale – Principal, Morton Ranch High School.
Ted Vierling – Principal, Beckendorff Junior High.
Rick Hull – Principal, Cardiff Junior High.
James Cross – Principal, Cinco Ranch High School.

since the second grade with the same mentor, who has proven a comforting constant in his life. He credits his mentor with helping him be a successful student. “I like that you have someone you can really connect to in school,” says Michael. “We consider my mentor part of the family. He’s very connected with my parents. I would trust him with anything.”

Building Trust

For BP Land Manager Kemper Howe, 50, making kids feel special is what drives him to mentor. Howe has mentored elementary boys and has brought them lunch, played with them at recess, and talked and listened to them. “Most of the successes have come with improving the child’s self esteem,” he says. “Seeing a child go from not talking or making eye contact to smiling and laughing makes it worthwhile to me.” Independent auto dealer Michael F. Hughes, 63, who owns AMH Motors, has been mentoring the same young man at Morton Ranch for three years. He fondly recalls a story. “Something that meant a lot to me was how he had been saving his change and he cashed it in to buy me a gift, not easy to talk about,” says Hughes. “I think what I’m most happy about is how he has relaxed and opened up more and seems to look forward to our time each week.” **KM**

SHETYE CYPHER is a freelance writer who has lived intermittently with her family in Katy since 1976. She is also the journalism teacher and publications advisor at Mayde Creek High School.

Become a Mentor

Mentoring is not just for men, KEYS welcomes women, moms, dads, and even college students. If you can make a one-hour commitment to a student once a week during the school day for the school year, you may be eligible. Potential mentors will complete an application that includes a background check. Visit katyisd.org.

Call Martha Brown with
Katy ISD Partners in Education at 281-396-2468