

When I started volunteering with the YMCA mentoring program about 5 years ago, it was a program that addressed an important issue for me: kids in the foster care system. I previously had some young cousins in foster care and spent some time as a respite caregiver for them. When they were adopted by family members and moved out of state, I began to look for volunteer opportunities that involved kids in the foster care system. It wasn't long before I came across the YMCA mentoring program.

Volunteering at their FunDay events once a month is a great way to stay active. Holiday parties in the park, bowling, craft carnivals, arcades, Discovery Science Center, Knott's, Disneyland, the San Diego Wild Animal Park, the Orange County Fair...these are just some of the events I have attended. All these activities provide a day of fun and amusement for kids that otherwise may not have a chance to get out--and FunDays also provide the foster parents with an afternoon off. Not only are FunDays fun for the kids--the variety of events keep it fun for the volunteers, too!

Last year I decided to become a one-on-one mentor to one of the kids I had met and gotten to know at several FunDay events. Our match-up may seem odd to anyone who doesn't know us from FunDays--what could a 12 year old boy and a 42 year old woman possibly have in common? But spending time matched up at the FunDay events gave us both an opportunity to discover that even though I am "ancient" (or so my mentee says), we have amazingly similar tastes in books, movies, television, and music. We both have a weakness for pop culture, celebrity gossip, thrift store shopping, iced coffees, and sushi. And we both look forward to our weekly outings. It gives me a chance to be a bit of a kid once in awhile, and my mentee gets a weekly reminder that someone cares about him and is advocating for him.

Donors to the YMCA mentoring program should know that their efforts are greatly appreciated by the kids and the volunteers. My mentee and I not only get to participate in FunDays, but we are also occasionally able to take advantage of other donated opportunities for fun outings and adventures. And if you're thinking of volunteering, you should definitely check out the program. You're never obligated to volunteer beyond the amount of time you are comfortable with--but you are obligated to have a good time spending time once in awhile with some awesome kids!

~Nicki McVoy