

MY TURN

Help your community: Become a mentor

By William 'Smitty'
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Over the past several years I have seen firsthand the benefits of supporting mentoring programs in Massachusetts. Every year I fight for increased funding for mentoring in the state budget because I believe in the importance of these programs. So today I write to bring your attention to the need for more mentors and ask you to consider becoming a mentor in your local community.

At some point in our lives, we have all had a mentor. Whether it be a parent, a teacher, a coach or a friend, we have all benefited from having someone we can rely on for advice or to help us through a tough spot. I know I wouldn't be where I am today were it not for the support of my mentor, my father.

Unfortunately, a growing number of our youth these days are growing up without this adult presence and are ending up in situations they shouldn't be in. It is particularly hard for these kids to succeed in school

without such a presence and often times they drop out and fail to graduate high school.

With the school year already underway it is important to take a step back and ask ourselves what else we can be doing to help our children and youth navigate the hardships that arise in the classroom.

Our teachers and school administrators do a wonderful job of helping guide students through the educational system, but there is only so much they can do and only so many dollars to go around. One way to help out is to become a mentor and provide a positive adult presence in the lives of these children and help them mature and become young adults.

Among the proven outcomes of mentoring relationships are increased attendance and graduation rates, improvement in literacy levels and increasing post-secondary educational options for students. We know firsthand that mentoring can lead to dramatic improvements in all these categories and therefore

improving not just the lives of these youth but for their communities as well.

Currently there is a great need for more mentors. According to the 2010 Mass Mentoring Counts survey, there are currently about 2,700 youth on program wait lists for mentors across the Commonwealth. These youth need our help. By supporting mentoring programs and becoming a mentor we can be assured that we will be leaving Massachusetts a better place for generations to come.

There is no better investment than in our children and it is our duty to provide them with the support and assistance they deserve so that they can improve their lives and have the same opportunities that we did when we were their age.

We have many wonderful programs here in South Berkshire County, such as the Railroad Street Youth Program, and I strongly encourage you to give them a look. This is an issue that affects all of us and we need all hands on deck.

Smitty Pignatelli is a Mass. state representative.

