

A Humbling, Gratifying Experience: Become A Mentor

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Before arriving at Celia Clinton to meet Sarah, I enthusiastically pictured a little girl with a big smile and lots of personality who was going to love visiting and tackling multiplication problems together. Upon meeting Sarah, I instantly realized that she was not the student envisioned.

Sarah appeared with an emotionless face and remained painfully quiet and withdrawn during the entire session. Our second encounter was not much better; not even a bag of candy cheered her. It also became obvious just how far behind Sarah was in math.

After several of these Mondays, I began to feel frustrated and wondered if being paired with another student would work better. But in my mind were Mike Chittom's words...*"This young girl desperately needs attention. She has had an extremely tough life of abuse and neglect, has been in and out of foster homes, and really needs us to show we care."*

How could I give up on her? That's what everyone else in her life had done.

I decided to take on the challenge and approached the next week even more determined to make it work. Sarah gradually opened up and we began to talk more at each session and make progress on math. I brought her gifts at the holidays, we celebrated her birthday, when she seemed especially low we made crafts or played a game, and when it was time for standardized testing we worked extra hard. Sometimes I may have pushed her too much in efforts to make the most of each weekly session, but it was always with her best interests in mind.

I mentored Sarah for two years until she "graduated" from Celia Clinton. We had sessions where I walked away feeling good about what we had accomplished both academically and socially, and others where I drove home on the verge of tears wondering if the mentoring was making any difference and questioning if she even liked me. However, the truth to both was apparent, as she always showed up on Mondays and her grades and behavior records showed improvement over our time together.

The experience wasn't easy and it wasn't a perfect situation; *ironically, that is what made it so gratifying.*

I challenge every Rotarian to take on a student like Sarah.

Most of us were blessed as children to have been given almost everything we needed to flourish in school and in life. We did not have to worry about where we were going to sleep at night or whether or not our mom's boyfriend was going to abuse us. It was relatively easy for us to learn long division and carry on a conversation without having to deal with a host of other problems.

Mentoring is extremely rewarding, but not because it makes you feel as if you are doing something heroic; rather, the result is humbling and enables you to realize your good fortune and how important it

is to take what God has blessed us with and share it with those who were seemingly given so much less.

It is easy to ignore situations that seem too overwhelming for one person to handle. However, if every Rotarian "adopted" a student, hundreds of lives would be forever impacted in a positive way, Celia Clinton would be a better school, and the Rotary Club of Tulsa would be an even more outstanding organization.

Our committee is dedicated to improving the lives of these students and we have many opportunities for you to help us do so. I am caring full time for our new baby and will not be at the school this year, but those of you whose schedules will allow might like to try mentoring. Events such as "Dictionary Day" and "Responsibility Party" are welcome opportunities to do so.

If you would like to help, please contact the Rotary office. For all Rotarians already involved at Celia Clinton, thank you! We so appreciate your generous support.

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