

Mentoring organization seeks volunteers

MARION - Marion Mentors 21 coordinator John Shank calls it "21st century mentoring." What he's after are mentors who will dedicate time to mentoring Marion City Schools students – long-term if possible. It's mentoring dedicated to helping the school district help students achieve.

Marion Mentors 21 is a volunteer mentoring program meant to help students set goals, build character traits that support student success, and provide skill building opportunities. Shank's seeking caring adults who will dedicate an hour of time a week to develop a relationship with a student. The organization hopes to recruit volunteers for the 2016-17 school year.

"This unique relationship provides support and encouragement, and can help a young person develop the academic, social, personal and leadership skills to foster success in the future," he said.

The program will also work to expand students' vision of opportunities and reinforce The Leader in Me concepts being introduced to students.

Marion Mentors 21 is funded by an Ohio Department of Education Community Connectors Grant, corporate sponsorship from Nucor Steel and in-kind services from Marion City Schools, Marion Family YMCA and the United Way of Marion County.

During the 2015-16 school year there were 69 active volunteers mentoring 101 students. Many of the mentors come from Marion's faith-based community including the First Church of the Nazarene, which encouraged congregation members to volunteer.

Sue Bechtle's among First Church of the Nazarene members who are volunteering their time. She helps a kindergarten student at George Washington Elementary School every week.

"I love it," she said. "I've always liked small children. Mine are grown. It's just fun watching them light up when they learn something. And I light up too."

Teri Duprey, another congregation member, is volunteering her time to mentor at Grant Middle School where she works with students in reading and math. She remembers her father playing Santa at school and helping out in other ways when she was young. She wanted a way to give back to her community.

"I just thought it would be the thing to do to help out," she said.

While Marion City Schools already had mentors, Marion Mentors 21 will act as an umbrella that coordinates mentoring efforts. Shank hopes it adds sustainability to mentoring efforts and suggested that mentors may want to stick with the students they are mentoring, continuing their mentoring relationship when the child moves to the next grade. His goal is to develop one on one long-term matches between students and mentors, similar to Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Central Ohio.

Shank works with educational service providers and guidance counselors in each building who help define what students would benefit from mentoring.

"You are looking for those kids who are kind of hidden," he said.

Mentors go through a background check that is paid for by the district. They are trained in how to communicate and mentor effectively.

More information is available at marionmentors.org or by calling 740-725-9622 ext. 33.