

# An accidental mentor

John M.\* knew he wanted to do something meaningful with his free time. He just didn't know what. Surfing the internet one day, he stumbled upon Children's Aid and Family Services' website, [www.cafsnj.org](http://www.cafsnj.org). He read about the agency's Mentoring Program, where adolescents in the agency's care are matched with mentors according to their talents and interests, and became intrigued.

Mr. M. contacted Kelly Guerrieri, youth support services coordinator, and began a 4-week training session. During this time, Mr. M. was told what to expect as a mentor, and was given examples of situations he might encounter. He learned that it might take awhile for a child to open up, because most of the children had been abandoned or neglected by the people who were supposed to care for them. "Knowing that was helpful to me, and I went into mentoring with an open mind," he says.

He began mentoring Mike\*, a 15-year-old boy who lives at Children's Haven, the agency's group home for adolescents in Park Ridge. When Mr. M. first met Mike, the teen was nervous and didn't say much. With several failed foster placements, and a long-time separation from his mother and brother, there were not many people in his life he could count on.

Over time, Mike began to feel more comfortable around him. Mr. M. started calling him once or twice a week, just to ask about what was happening in Mike's life. They now have regular get togethers. They go out to breakfast every other Sunday. They've also gone to Dave & Busters to eat dinner and play video games, attended a basketball game, and spent time shooting pool.

"I remember how important it was for me to have meals with my family. I'm hoping these will be memorable experiences for Mike, too," says Mr. M.

*\*Name changed to protect privacy.*



John M. is mentoring a 15-year-old boy who lives at Children's Haven.

Slowly, Mike started opening up to Mr. M., and trusting him. The two now talk about music, videos, current events, and Mr. M.'s job as an event marketer with Foot Locker.

Mr. M. hopes that by meeting with Mike regularly and staying in touch, he'll help the teen to develop consistency and stability in his life. Mr. M. makes sure to keep their regular routine of phone calls and meals together, and looks forward to seeing Mike.

"I believe it's important that Mike knows I am taking the mentor program seriously," says Mr. M. "I think of myself as a friend to Mike, someone who will listen to him. I believe teenagers need someone to listen to their opinions – they are the future."

Children's Aid and Family Services Mentor Program offers children in the agency's care the opportunity to receive adult guidance from a different perspective other than a teacher or staff member. The mentor/mentee relationship helps to create stability in a child's life. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please contact Kelly Guerrieri at 201.445.7015, ext 218.

## Goldman Sachs donates 4-seat stroller



Thanks to a generous donation from Goldman Sachs, the staff and children at Turrell Child Care & Early Learning Center now have a new 4-seat stroller!