

Henderson Mentors Making a Difference in Chester, PA

By Karen Hicks, Executive Director, Andrew L. Hicks, Jr. Foundation

The Andrew L. Hicks, Jr. Foundation is connecting two culturally diverse communities by engaging West Chester area teens in mentoring at-risk Chester youth. Eighty Henderson High School students are in the Warrior Guides social mentoring program. Each is paired with a Chester 5th or 6th grader for the entire year. Together the group of 160 attends monthly events designed to foster their relationship. While the Chester students are exposed to new activities, venues and opportunities, the Henderson students are developing a tremendous sense of value, personal responsibility and leadership skills.

Thomas Caufield (2018 Henderson grad) and Jaylon Bantum (Chester 5th grader) were truly committed to the Warrior Guide mission this past school year! Warrior Guide events are designed to be fun and engaging, always providing mentoring pairs with different recreational and social experiences each month. They bond through play first, allowing pairs to become more comfortable with each other, find commonality, and explore differences. Jaylon explains, "I got to do a lot of things [in Warrior Guides] that I couldn't do before. I dreamed of going ice skating, and then I went! Events are fun because I try new things and meet new people." While engaging their Braves in purposeful play, Guides begin to ask more relationship provoking questions to learn more about their Braves, their family, their interests, and



Jaylon and Thomas at another monthly event, Warrior Guides Team Building Day, where they learned to work together to achieve their goals.

The Foundation was created in 2010 when Andrew L. Hicks, Jr., a rising senior at Henderson was killed while hiking the Coastal Trail in California with his family. Andrew had volunteered in Chester and wanted to see similar opportunities become available to children in Chester that he appreciated in his own hometown. Over the past 8 years the Foundation has created three-tiered programs that begin with Open Events for Chester elementary school children; move to Warrior Guides, and continue to the RISE Teen Leadership Development program for Chester youth in grades 7-10. Open Events such as an annual Fall Carnival, Open Bowling, an annual Toy Store, Learn-to-Skate and Camp Lionheart create safe opportunities where Chester children can explore and have fun while Chester County high school students can try out volunteering with low barriers to entry.



Thomas and Jaylon enjoying each other's company at the Army Navy soccer game at Talen Energy Stadium in Chester, PA.

what their Brave needs from them as a mentor. Jaylon shares, "Thomas is nice, funny, he has a big heart, and we talk a lot." Jaylon also wrote that he feels that he gets a lot of attention from Thomas, that Thomas cares about him, and the relationship is very rewarding. Thomas agrees, "Jaylon always comes excited for the activities and looks forward to trying new things. I realize that I have grown up a lot through this [mentoring] experience. I am grateful for the opportunities I have had in my life, and want to give back." The relationships formed in Warrior Guides help participants to adjust their perception of others different from themselves. Thomas shared, "Color shouldn't put boundaries on relationships. This program puts unlikely pairs together. It is a very good thing." Jaylon agrees, "Thomas is like a brother to me--it doesn't matter his color."



Jordan acting as a personal shopper, helping a young girl from Chester navigate the Andrew L. Hicks, Jr. Foundation's Annual Christmas Toy Store.

The Foundation is collecting new toys for its annual Toy Drive from November 16th – December 12th. Please visit www.ALHjr.org to find out how to support Chester families struggling to put gifts underneath the tree for their children.

Photo credits Cait Lentz