

SAMMAMISH

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Neighbors

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Athletes for Kids Youth Mentoring: Impacting Lives – One Mentorship at a Time

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Athletes for Kids Youth Mentoring: **IMPACTING LIVES – ONE MENTORSHIP AT A TIME**

By Teresa Gray | Photos provided by AFK



Athletes for Kids Youth Mentoring – let’s break that down. Once upon a time there was a family with a special needs child, and the parents just knew that if their son had a mentor who took an interest in him and encouraged him, it could really change his life for the better.

That explains “Kids” and “Youth Mentoring”; here’s where “Athletes” come in. These parents approached nearby Skyline High School in Sammamish, knowing they had a winning football team, and asked if there was anyone at the school who might be able to help mentor their son. After being introduced to local star athlete Simi Reynolds, they could tell that Simi would be a great influence on their child.

Simi quickly agreed to spend time with their son each week as a mentor. That relationship became so life-changing for their son that Simi agreed to recruit a group of fellow athletes at Skyline to mentor other children with medical conditions,

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AFK Youth Mentoring

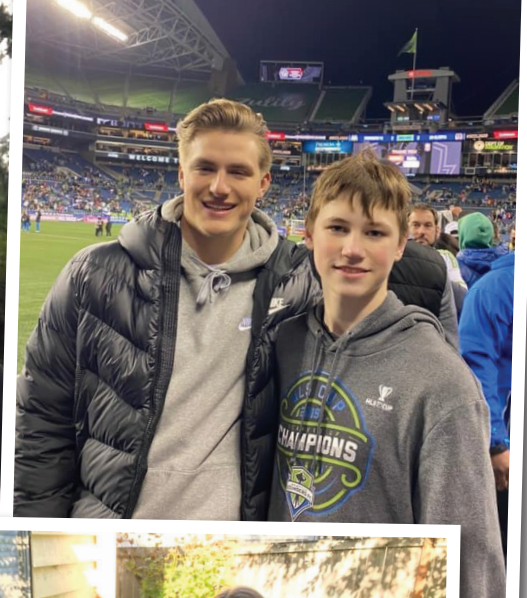
A NOTE FROM AFK EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MARNI KURTZ...

“I am inspired daily by the connections witnessed between mentors and buddies. Both parties have a profound effect on one another, and I am proud to be the face of such an amazing organization.”

“I have been involved at AFK for six years. My background is in education; I began as a part-time Mentorship Coordinator for the program then moved into the role of Executive Director two years ago. I am humbled by and proud of the work we do and am very happy to be part of such a great team.”

“Mentoring works—plain and simple. What is so unique about our program is that the mentor receives as much from their buddy as they give to them.”

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AFK Youth Mentoring

THE MENTOR EXPERIENCE

Time and again AFK mentor exit surveys find results such as these:

"My buddy changed my life more than I changed theirs."

"I learned patience, empathy, a different culture and/or a different way of life."

100% FEEL THEY MADE A DIFFERENCE.

95% REPORT THAT THEY GAINED COMPASSION AND PATIENCE.

95% REPORT THAT THEIR PARTICIPATION IMPROVED THEIR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND REDUCED STRESS.

OVER 90% OF MENTORS INDICATE THAT THEY WILL TRY TO GO BACK OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY AND HELP.

85% FEEL THEY GAINED LEADERSHIP SKILLS.

A lot of mentors find the experience so fundamental to their own development that they base their college application essay on their involvement in the program and how it affected their lives.

Mentors are often later presidents of student groups in college because of what they gained from their time as a mentor.

Many mentors go on to study and pursue careers in special education.

disabilities and special needs of all kinds. And that is how Athletes for Kids Youth Mentoring was born.

By 2002, Athletes for Kids (AFK) was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and established the first mentor chapter made up of six athletes from Skyline High School. Beginning with a small chapter of eight students in Sammamish, AFK has expanded over the years to serve children in the cities of Bellevue, Issaquah, Kirkland, Mercer Island, Newcastle, North Bend, Redmond, Renton, Sammamish, Snoqualmie and Woodinville. They now serve 417 youth annually and have served over 2,500 youth since their founding.

Located in Sammamish, AFK defines itself as a youth mentoring program that pairs a high school athlete with a child who has a special need or disability in a one-to-one peer mentorship that lasts between one to three years. The mentor can be either a sophomore or junior when they begin the program. The buddy they are paired with can be in 1st through 12th grade. Mentors are most often older than their buddy; the mentor can be the same age but not younger.



Usually, mentors meet in person with their buddy but have pivoted to mostly virtual interactions during the pandemic. AFK provides an ever-growing bank of virtual activity ideas to help support mentors in the program. Mentors have also come up with lots of original and fun ideas, such as YouTube simulations of rides at Disneyland, and some mentors send their buddy a weekly postcard. At AFK, friendship is the heart of the organization. And connections, especially during this unsettled time, are more important than ever.

AFK always welcomes and encourages volunteers to connect as well; there are a variety of ways community members can be involved: supporting monthly mentor and buddy events (being held virtually for the time being), helping with the annual Mentor Celebration and annual Beneath the Same Sky auction (a fundraiser supporting the bulk of AFK's operating expenses), outreach,

data entry, grant writing, and more—including AFK's biggest community event, their Skyline Mini Camp and activity day held each September.

AFK Executive Director Marni Kurtz goes on record saying, "We are often told that we are 'the best kept secret on the Eastside,' and although we love accolades, we don't want this one!" Smiling, she explains that AFK is always looking for ways to become more visible in the community, with their goal being to serve more mentors and more buddies. "Human connection, now more than ever, is vital to the health and wellbeing of our community. Athletes for Kids provides this connection, and we will continue to do so."

Currently, all AFK staff are working outside of the office. Any inquiries can be sent to afk@athletesforkids.org. Anyone interested in the program is strongly encouraged to access the AFK website at www.athletesforkids.org.

AFK FAMILY TESTIMONIAL

"AFK has not only changed the life of our child but it also changed our family. We love the monthly activities that AFK organizes because it's the only time we socialize with other buddies, mentors, parents and siblings. This is very important because this gives us a sense of community and support."



AFK Youth Mentoring

AFK CORE VALUES

YOUTH FIRST

Every decision we make is based on how it will affect the youth we serve. Attention to safety, growth, wellness, leadership, and learning necessary life skills is our focus.

COMMUNITY

We build connections and collaborate with other partners to complement existing resources to accomplish more. We help strengthen our communities through education and engagement.

RELATIONSHIP

We believe having a compassionate and supportive relationship outside of the family has the power to restore hope in a child's life. Many mentorships turn into friendships which improve a child's quality of life, happiness, confidence and self-esteem.

INCLUSION

We promote kindness and acceptance while celebrating, respecting, and including the rich diversity that make up our AFK family.

INTEGRITY

We conduct business in a way that is honest, transparent, and ethical so that we continuously earn our donors, stakeholders and the public's high regard. We hold ourselves accountable to being good stewards of the resources bequeathed to us.

EXCELLENCE

Our experienced, knowledgeable and passionate staff are committed to providing the highest quality of service to the youth and families we serve.