

COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS PART 2

Impacting the lives of students in need for 35 years

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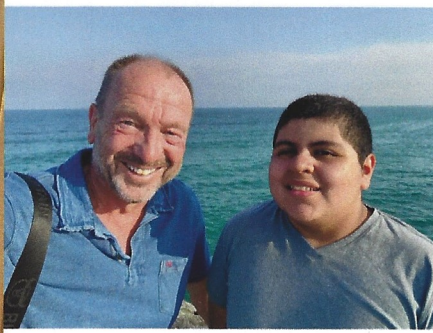


Since 1989, Chatham County's Communities In Schools has played an essential role in supporting students who need a healthy start and a promising future. Approximately 1 in 5 of the County's children under the age of 18 live in poverty. CISCC is dedicated to helping them navigate challenges that often stand in the way of success in the classroom.

A key ingredient is having a cadre of engaged volunteers to extend the reach of the staff. CISCC Executive Director Tych Cowdin explains: "We could not positively impact the lives of nearly as many youths without incredible people in the Governors Communities who continue to step up and support our efforts."

Among the ways to volunteer is the mentoring program, managed by CISCC staff leader Shirille Lee, who herself volunteered to be a mentor more than three decades ago. After serving on the CISCC Board of Directors, she joined the staff in 1998. "I've never left because I never thought of it as work!" she





says of her 26 years there. “Shirille is the driving force behind the mentor program,” praises Peter Hare, mentor and Governors Club resident. “Her dedication creates magic.”

Peter’s engagement as a mentor started almost three years ago when he was introduced by Shirille to Pascual, now 14, the third youngest of 6 children. Pascual is eager for his weekly visit with Peter who picks him up after school at The Nature Trail community where Pascual’s family lives. “He’s interested in food, and I am interested in cooking, so it works out splendidly. We come back to my house, decide what to make for dinner, go to the store to buy it, and then we cook together.”

Pascual is also fascinated by space, crafts, fishing and card playing. “You go where they are,” Peter said, “so I figure it out based on what he’s keen to do.” Their adventures have included trips to the Morehead Planetarium, building

a football table on sticks, and traveling to Wrightsville Beach for a fishing expedition. “I don’t know one end of a fish from another!” admitted Peter. “But Pascual doesn’t often get to the beach. I am thrilled to give him this.”

Bruce Kaye, another Governors Club mentor, credits Shirille for “tricking him” into volunteering. “She called me and pleaded: ‘I have a young man named Alex who really needs somebody.’” Shirille put the two together by personally driving Alex from Siler City to meet Bruce at McDonald’s on 15-501. When she left, it was awkward at first. But then Alex shyly confided about a problem he was having. “It made me proud that he felt comfortable opening up,” offered Bruce. “I get a huge sense of satisfaction when I can really help.”

Alex was 10 when Bruce started working with him during Covid. Alex had gone back to school but wasn’t doing well. “He wasn’t always showing up,” Bruce explained. But once Bruce became a consistent presence in Alex’s life, he started regularly going to school. “These are the golden moments,” Bruce reflects. “I am aiding a kid that needs it.”

Another volunteer opportunity is the annual holiday toiletries drive

for CISCC families spearheaded by Governors Club resident Joan Bullard. Committee members Paige Dixon, Jann Westfall, Colleen Mullins, Alice Gold, and Mary Clemming blanket the Governors Club community with an email request for holiday gift bag items. Paige coordinates donations for the purchase of \$25 gift cards which accompany the gift bags.

Last year, 150 bags and \$6,000 in gift cards were delivered to Siler City to be distributed for the holidays. “The recipients are so incredibly grateful,” shared Paige. “I have been so moved by how much this gesture means to these families.” The families and students who benefit from this generosity “have really more difficult realities than our own,” says Bruce Kaye. Peter Hare agrees: “With our standard of living, it can sometimes be easy to take things for granted.”

When asked why she believes in the mission of CISCC, Governors Village resident Laura Kiley offered her thoughts: “I think of having dual citizenship in Chapel Hill and Chatham County, which comes with a responsibility to be supportive of causes which benefit the larger community. I encourage everyone to champion the important work of CISCC for the residents of Chatham County.”

To learn more about Communities In Schools of Chatham County and to sign up for the newsletter, visit cisatham.org. To volunteer as a mentor or to make a contribution, contact Shirille Lee at shirille@cisatham.org.