



Not-for-profit Venture

Tiffany De Masters • tdemasters@thespectrum.com • Published: March 12, 2011 4:55AM

ST. GEORGE - At Heritage Elementary, 13 third- and fourth-grade students are getting attention from grown-ups and learning positive life skills.

Through a partnership forged between Big Brothers Big Sisters - a nationwide mentoring program - and the School of Life Foundation - a curriculum teaching youth successful life skills - employees in the flight operations department at SkyWest are mentoring the students at the elementary school.

Jack Rolfe, founder of the School of Life Foundation, said the idea of the partnership began three years ago when he founded his organization, but the concept didn't pull together until last year.

"The more I got to know about them (Big Brothers Big Sisters) as an organization, I learned they got into schools and that they didn't have an established curriculum - I thought, 'why not the School of Life?'" Rolfe said.

Big Brothers Big Sisters was open to the idea, Rolfe said. The next step was a business that would want to participate.

"Everybody wins from this," he said. "It gives employees an opportunity to serve outside of the business and the children benefit from it."

Employees from SkyWest have befriended the children since November as a big brother or sister using the "Straight As in Life" curriculum from the School of Life Foundation to mentor them.

There are 10 concepts: appreciate, assist, attitude, aim, associate, align, action, avoid, adapt, always.

Terri Iverson, Southern Utah program coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters, said the program at Heritage Elementary has been wonderful.

"Not only is it good for the kids, but we're seeing a cohesiveness among the SkyWest employees - they have this common goal," Iverson said. "It's exciting their workplace and it's helping them be more engaged in their jobs because they're serving together."

The curriculum is good, Iverson said, because it's things children should be taught anyway.

Fourth-grade teacher Lacy Osborn has three of her students in the program.

"It's been a really positive impact on them," she said. "It's really helped their self-esteem. They're always paying more attention and participate in class."

The students chosen for the program, Osborn said, were students who maybe lacked attention at home or lacked social skills.

It's good for students to have other role models aside from their teachers and parents.

"They (volunteers) make them feel special," Osborn said.

Creta Cheesman, counselor at the school, said the volunteers help the students with their homework, eat lunch with them, have written thank-you notes to parents and grandparents and have done service projects.

"There are kids who need another adult in their life. Any child can appreciate more attention from another adult," Cheesman said.

Trista Rochell, 9, has a "big sister."

"She's really nice, she's playful and fun - she's pretty," Rochell said.

Rochell thinks the program is fun.

"I've learned stuff about attitude and how you can control how your day goes," she said. "It's taught me how to be better in class."

Rochell's favorite activity since she's been participating in the program was pulling weeds around the school.

"I mostly like that we were helping the school and it was fun," she said. "We got to get out in the fresh air and got to get together and pull weeds."

The volunteers at SkyWest have also been impacted.

"This is the best thing I ever did. I never knew I could make such a difference," said SkyWest employee Liz Spurrier.

Patti Mitchell, another SkyWest employee, agreed.

"I'm a grandma and none of my grandkids live here," she said. "She's (student) just the most loving and bright girl."

Rolfe presented the program during the Chamber of Commerce luncheon Wednesday. In his presentation he said he wants other businesses to consider creating a new vision for their business.

By getting involved with the youth, Rolfe said, they are less likely to skip school, use drugs or alcohol or bully.

"Today I'm asking you to help your business by helping your community," he said.

Iverson agreed.

"We would like other companies to take on different schools. For them to take ownership it builds greater, stronger communities if we can see it on a grass roots level," she said.

More information

For more information on the youth mentoring program contact Jack Rolfe at 632-2947.



SkyWest employee helping children at Heritage Elementary with the School of Life principle of "Assist."