

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

Caring adults, receptive kids help Woodbine mentoring program blossom

Woodbine, Iowa is a participant in the Northwest Area Foundation's *Horizons* Program which helps develop leadership skills and reduce poverty in small communities facing tough economic times. According to the 2000 census, Woodbine qualified with a population of 1,564 and a poverty rate of 10.4%. Throughout 2007, Iowa State University Extension helped facilitate Woodbine's involvement in *Horizons*. During that time several critical community needs were identified and committees formed to act on them.

One significant priority was a youth mentoring program. Residents felt that support and guidance from caring adults would help improve school attendance, academic achievement, discipline, and relationships among youth in the community. The idea was taken to the Woodbine School Board in April 2007, and the board voted to support the program during the 2007-08 school year. Shortly after, the group affiliated with a nationally recognized youth mentoring program, *TeamMates*, started by former Nebraska head football coach, Tom Osborne.



The initial goal was to develop six mentor/mentee matches featuring regular weekly visits during the school day. Generous support came from local Optimist and Kiwanis Clubs, a Methodist men's group, the Woodbine Christian Church and private individuals. By the end of the 2007-08 school year, *TeamMates* far surpassed its original goal with 18 mentor/mentee matches and set a new target of 28 by the end of next year.

Hattie Moores and mentee, Shelby, enjoy time together at a Woodbine basketball game. "We're really starting to get to know each other and feel at ease," says Hattie. "I hope it's been as much fun for her as it has for me."

Sarah Cox, Woodbine High School science teacher and student council advisor, volunteers as a mentor. "It's been rewarding to watch the communications skills and confidence grow throughout the year," Cox said. "All the students in *TeamMates* take great pride in it. They seem more comfortable talking with adults in the building, and it gives them another source of help with either studies or social issues. They just seem happier to be in school," she concluded.

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—Sarah Cox, Woodbine High School teacher and *TeamMates* volunteer

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