

Horizons program brings youth mentoring to Woodbine

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 facilitated Woodbine's involvement in *Horizons*. It was during that time that several important 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 adult volunteers would help improve academic achievement, school attendance, 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 thereafter, 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, Woodbine Christian Church and private individuals. By the end of the 2007-08 school year, *TeamMates* had far surpassed its original goal with 18 mentor/mentee matches and set a new target of 28 by the end of 2008-09.

Sarah Cox, Woodbine High School science teacher and student council advisor, volunteers as a mentor. "It's been very rewarding to watch the communications skills and confidence levels 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.

"The idea is to provide another caring adult in children's lives—someone who will help with homework, talk to them or play games or help them with hobbies."

- Karen Ryerson, a seven-year Woodbine resident and Horizons committee member

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