

TeamMates: To Find Your Potential

There are many types of programs that people can be a part of. Whether it is online or in person, you can choose different kinds of programs to participate in. So, what is Teammates about? Teammates is an in-person program that offers a mentor for students/mentees. Mentors provide students with support and give encouragement. Jennifer Hampton, the Western Regional Coordinator, explained that TeamMates began as “a nonprofit organization founded by Dr. Tom and Nancy Osborne in 1991.” The concept of the program “materialized when Nancy was watching a Eugene Lang story on television about mentoring that inspired her to make a similar impact in the community.” According to www.lincolnteammates.org, the program enables students to explore and identify their talents while providing them with a sense of hope. Usually, mentors and mentees meet once per week and spend 30-60 minutes together. During the meeting time, both the mentee and mentor will chat, read books together, make crafts, go on walks, play board games, or complete other activities. It allows the mentee and mentor to build a friendly relationship throughout the process. This process is completed with students from 3rd grade to 12th grade until graduation. The goal for Teammates is to help students grow and help them find their purpose while also building a relationship with their mentor. This allows students to reach their full potential while also becoming successful.

Many mentors in Teammates have been glad to help students in the program. Mrs. Julie Cochran, the Bayard Chapter Coordinator, reports her favorite part is “seeing how successful we have been with the number of mentors and mentees that we have!” Cochran continued, “Our mentors are amazing!” The mentors love spending time with their mentees. The particular interests and passions that mentors have in the specialty are “having an extra person in your life to talk to and spend time with.” Mentors feel that it's a blessing to have the opportunity to do this.

Cochran's work hours are spent with the team working around 5-10 hours per week on the Teammates program. The time is spent on “recruitment of new mentors, training, getting mentors and mentees together, paperwork, communicating with mentors, and following up on questions people have for the Teammates program. Cochran would highly recommend the program to others, saying, “If you could give time once per week to meet with a mentee in every existing chapter, it would be great.” According to Cochran, the Teammates program first became a discussion when the superintendent was “approached by a community member to start a Teammates program last school year” and continued with many “people being asked if they would be interested in becoming the program coordinator for a new chapter.”

Cochran has “been a part of Teammates before in a different chapter and wanted to help implement the Teammates of Bayard's Chapter.” With the supportive residents, the team has been extremely impressed with the support from the Bayard community. Flyers had been asked to be hung and “hand out brochures at community businesses.” The Teammates chapter “has hosted a tailgate cookout for the Bayard High School football game and a BBQ at the school's back-to-school open house.” Teammates say that the Bayard community “has been very supportive.” According to Ms. Hampton, things that can make a successful program are “the strong mentee/mentor relationships that are formed, consistent communication, trained and committed volunteers, and local leaders. In addition, supportive school partnerships and a focus on what is right about our students, not just their struggles.”

Whenever adults are paired up with a child, there is always a concern about possible risks. Ms. Hampton explains that the program addresses this situation in several ways. “We are an in-school mentoring program, which means all meetings take place at the school during the school day. The mentor and the mentee will never be alone together or outside the school. Risks are managed through background checks for all adults that may come in contact with our students, reference calls, mentor training, clear policies and procedures, regular check-ins, and close collaboration with schools to ensure students safety. Safety is a top core value, and we not only do initial screening, but we also continue the screening efforts throughout the mentoring relationship.”

According to Ms. Hampton, things that can make a successful program are “the strong mentee/mentor relationships that are formed, consistent communication, trained and committed volunteers, and local leaders. In addition, supportive school partnerships and a focus on what is right about our students, not just their struggles.” Currently, there are over 51,000 students/mentees who have Mentors in the nation. There are 187 local chapters, along with the post-secondary program. TeamMates operates within many “school districts across six states: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming.” Ms. Hampton says, “Each chapter is led by a program coordinator(s) and also has a board. The program coordinator is responsible for various items, including recruitment and training of mentors, matching mentors and mentees, match support, etc. These chapters are supported by the TeamMates National Office that provides support in a variety of areas—accounting, development, screening of mentors, data evaluation, training, match support, etc.”