

Local Teacher Inspires Youth to Give Back

Written by Kyle Taylor

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As a substitute teacher at various elementary, middle and high schools throughout the city, Angela Robinson knows the important role education plays in the development of a young adult. Because of her role as an educator, Robinson is also aware that not everything a child needs to further that development is available in the classroom.

With that in mind, Robinson started the Friendly Volunteers Youth Group. Primarily comprised of students at city public schools, the group volunteers at various events throughout the Baltimore area. With the idea of working with the kids outside of the school setting, Robinson said she wanted to execute her own ideas without needing supervisory approval from anyone.

“I wanted to do trips and different things with the kids— I wanted to be able to work with the kids collectively and be my own boss with them and do things with them outside of school,” Robinson said. “I wanted to culturally broaden their horizons to other academic avenues.”

Robinson is the coordinator of the volunteer group and started it in January of this year. Since then the group has volunteered at a number of events including the Race for the Cure in Hunt Valley last month, and will be helping out at the Light the Night Walk in Baltimore on November 3.

The group, which is made up of students 14 and older has about ten active members and regularly volunteers with the Helping Up Mission, an organization that provides in-house living and programs for men, as well as job training and adult counseling. The Friendly Volunteers serve lunch to the members two to three times a month on Sundays. Robinson said the kids get something out of volunteering, and it’s something that will help them down the road.

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“Volunteering boosts your self-esteem,” she said. “It makes you feel like you’re doing something joyous, and gives you an optimistic feeling to give back. Not only is it developing them, but it’s getting them ready for the workforce, and it gives them the learning service hours they need towards high school graduation.”

The group isn’t all work and no play. Because of their volunteer work, the group was recognized as a Baltimore Ravens’ Honor Row recipient for outstanding service and commitment to volunteering by the Maryland Governor’s Office of Volunteerism, and received 30 tickets to attend the opening season game at M&T Bank Stadium in September. This, said Robinson, was an example of teaching the kids that hard work can lead to great rewards.

“I’ve always wanted to do things to reward kids,” she said. “I like to take kids places to see things that they may not see based on their background. Many of the kids have never been to New York. Many of them may never have that opportunity. Many of them may never visit M&T Bank Stadium. What we expose them to, the positive things, they will never ever go away. It will always be there with them if we expose them to it. That has been my motivation.”

Robinson hopes that despite their socio-economic backgrounds, the kids will look at what they experience through the volunteer group as proof that they can make a positive difference in someone’s life, and that that is the greatest gift of them all.

“I want them with the thought that they will not look down on others, and know that they can make a difference,” she said. “I want them to say ‘I’m going to try to find me a job and put these things that I’ve learned to good use,’ and that they will have enough faith in themselves to use what they’ve learned to make themselves better men and women. And with that, they will come up with a plan to live a good life.”

For more information on the Friendly Volunteers Youth Group, contact Angela Robinson at: happiness26love@yahoo.com or alrobinson@bcps.k12.md.us.