

Circle of Friends is looking for new mentors

By Helen Schmidling
Correspondent

“Oh, to play like a kid again ... and know what I know as an adult!”

Has that thought ever crossed your mind?

The Circle of Friends (CoF), a volunteer mentoring organization in Sisters, is looking for a few new mentors. See the smiling faces in the photograph? They are some of the current mentors who work with Circle of Friends, and they welcome you to join them as they join in activities — they love to “play” — and they teach and guide at the same time.

A mentoring open house will be held Thursday, March 5, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Circle of Friends clubhouse, 164 N. Elm St., in Sisters. This event is open to potential mentors and anyone interested in volunteering their time to lead special activities.

Staff and current members will be available, and refreshments will be served.

The CoF motto is “Transforming Lives, One Child at a Time.” But no doubt, the lives of the mentors are transformed as well.

Sisters resident Art Blumenkron became a mentor last year, after reading a story in *The Nugget* about a middle school boy in need of a new mentor. He was familiar with Circle of Friends because his wife, Anna, mentors an eight-year-old girl.

“The article inspired me to help out,” he said.

“My childhood in Southern California wasn’t

the smoothest,” he said.

His mother, “the crazy artist type,” left when Art and his brother were aged six and four. “David and I were on our own a lot.” His dad remarried, but his stepmother was bipolar; that marriage did not last. When he was 12, his father married again, and Art and his brother had a stable family life thereafter.

“I would encourage new mentors, because you get as much or more out of (mentoring) than the kids do. It makes you feel like you’re doing something worthwhile,” Art said.

The Blumenkrons have two grown children, a 31-year-old son who is running the family wood-milling business in Portland, and a 28-year-old daughter soon to be married in Florida.

“Anna and I have been married going on 32 years, and our kids had a very stable childhood,” he said.

Art is an avid mountain-biker, and as it turns out, so is his mentee. “We go three or four times a week, to Peterson Ridge, Suttle Lake, and all over. He’s gotten taller, thinner, and stronger,” Art said. “I’ve introduced him to J.R.R. Tolkien’s ‘The Lord of the Rings,’ and we’ve done Lego robotics at the clubhouse.

“It’s great for the kids,” he said, “if you can change one child’s experiences when they’re young, it can change their whole life.”

Last year, Circle of Friends worked with 48 children in the Sisters area, kindergarten through high school. These are vulnerable young people

who have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience. Many live in single-parent homes, or with guardians other than a biological parent, and without supervision, spend their after-school hours alone.

CoF mentors guide and encourage the young mentees, helping them to achieve their greatest potential. Mentors also receive guidance from CoF in a program built around nine core assets that aid youth in developing resiliency through learning. Ideally, a mentor-mentee relationship will span many years, developing a bond of respect and friendship. And, ideally, the mentor and mentee will meet a couple of times each week.

Programming at the clubhouse in downtown Sisters also includes ukulele classes, cooking, sewing, crafting, art, and manners. The manners workshops culminated in a dinner, where the young people demonstrated all they’ve learned, from cooking to setting the table and eating a proper meal. There are also regular hours set aside for homework and tutoring.

“I know that more awareness of our program and the need for mentors is beneficial for CoF and for our kids who are waiting for a mentor,” said Scholl.

The mentor open house is an opportunity for interested parties to meet current mentors and staff, and see if the program is a good fit.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Mentors make a big impact on the lives of youth in Sisters.

“We currently have eight kids without mentors, with the highest priority in matching our five elementary-aged boys: one fourth-grader, one third-grader and three first-graders. The need for mentors is high — it only takes

one caring adult to change the life of our kids,” Scholl concluded.

If you think you might enjoy working with a young boy or girl, contact Kellie Scholl kellie@circleoffriends.oregon.org or 541-588-6445.

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