

NEWS

VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.

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Houlihan's Helps Celebrate "Thank Your Mentor Day"

The management and staff of Houlihan's in Hasbrouck Heights recently helped a group of children thank the grown ups who are mentoring them.

The children are part of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County's Volunteers in Protective Services (VIPS) program, which for over 30 years has screened, trained and supported caring men and women who are positive role models and dedicated mentors to Bergen County children age 5 to 18, who have experienced abuse, neglect or social isolation.

Houlihan's sponsored a catered luncheon for youth and their mentors in honor of "Thank Your Mentor Day," which was celebrated nationally in late January.

"These children rely on their mentors to believe in them, encourage them to laugh and to succeed," says VIPS program director Faith Samples-Smart. We consider time spent with mentors as 'free' time—free of the challenges that have been hard for them to face daily in their environment. What a gift to have this respite and safe zone with a caring adult."

The luncheon proved to be just such a respite for 25 children and their mentors—thanks to VIPS mentor Joseph Sherman's friendship with Houlihan's general manager, Ken Linhoff.

Mr. Sherman is an attorney whose offices are close to the restaurant; he usually eats lunch there 2 to 3 times a week, and has developed a wonderful friendship with Mr. Linhoff and other staff members.

He recently underwent the training to become a mentor and was matched with 8-year-old Adrien last August. Adrien was referred to VIPS along with his four siblings as

a result of substance abuse issues in the home. VIPS mentors have been assigned to each of the children, with wonderful relationships developing in each of the mentoring matches. With recent developments placing the children in foster care, Joe and the other mentors will have a true challenge before them as they work to support their mentees through this crisis.

Mr. Sherman says, “I’ve been involved in several community activities, but being a mentor to Adrien is very close to my heart. This little man has a tough situation, and I have seen him grow in confidence and even relax a little when we are doing fun things together.”

One weekend, Mr. Sherman brought Adrien to lunch at Houlihan’s and introduced him to the manager Mr. Linhoff. Mr. Sherman told him about the VIPS program and about the kids whose lives are made better by mentors.

Mr. Linhoff was impressed. “The staff at our restaurant is very much interested in becoming involved with the community and helping out where we can. The VIPS program especially hits home because many of us have children of our own, and know how important it is for them to connect with caring adults to reach their full potential. This is our way to salute the mentors and do something nice for the kids”

Several staff members of Houlihan’s came in on their day off to serve a kid-friendly lunch of pizza, nachos, chicken fingers and mozzarella sticks, washed down with lots of soda and ice cream sundaes for dessert.

“We thank Mr. Sherman for his promotion of VIPS and Mr. Linhoff for reaching out and giving the children and mentors a great time,” says Dr. Samples-Smart. “The children in the program, unfortunately, do not get a chance to experience the things that make childhood fun, like going out to your favorite Houlihan’s Restaurant and having and ice cream sundaes. But today, they did.”

More men and women are needed to become mentors—there is an especially great need to for men to mentor boys and for bi-lingual Spanish speaking mentors of both sexes.

To find out how to become a mentor, or to pledge a donation to support the children in the VIPS program, contact Eva Tobias at (201) 489-9454 Ext. 121, or visit www.bergenvolunteers.org and click on mentoring programs.

Founded by the Junior League in 1966, the mission of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County is to strengthen the community by connecting people with opportunities to serve, operating direct service volunteer programs, building capacity for effective volunteering, and participating in strategic partnerships that meet community needs.

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CAPTION

Picture #2020

Staff at the Hasbrouck Heights Houlihan's sponsored a luncheon for "Thank Your Mentor Day", to benefit the children and mentors in the Volunteer Center of Bergen County's Volunteers in Protective Services (VIPS) Mentoring Program.

Pictured L to R are: Waiter Ryan Michalski, **Wallington**; Mentor Joe Sherman, **West Orange**; VIPS Program Director Faith Samples-Smart, **Bogota**; VIPS Program Assistant Eva Tobias, **Teaneck**; Assistant Manager Dough DeMatteo, **Elmwood Park**; Assistant Manager Dawn Geraci, **Clifton**; Kitchen Manager Jason Cecala, **Cliffside Park**