

Parents as Their Child's First Teacher



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Author's Note: Guest bloggers, Janis Baron, Founder and Board President, and Ali Barekat, Executive Director of Sunday Friends (www.SundayFriends.org) in San Jose, California, contributed to the second of this two-part series.

As parents gain the skills and confidence to become effective role models and academic support partners in their children's learning, the very low-income parents and children of the Sunday Friends program earn redeemable tickets for their participation in community service and learning activities. The redeemable tickets can be saved in interest bearing bank accounts and used for purchases. The purchases can include subsidized rent funding, personal necessity products, toys, learning games, clothing, household items, and school supplies. Free food and books are also offered to all program participants.

This school-hosted parent partnership program is unique because it provides the family with an essential community of life skills support, mentorships, and economic sustainability. Most program parents know that devoting their attention to their children's development and education is important. When most of their time, attention, and energy are devoted to their daily survival, there is little left to offer to themselves, their families, and their future. By earning basic necessities through program participation, parents are able to open to changing and learning with their children. At the same time, through the earning structure of the program, families are practicing the most essential aspects of financial literacy. Program outcomes include:

Less stress and increased trust in the program's community of learners

Increased self-worth and stronger work ethic

Increased family time for play, healthy cooking, and exercise with reduced television viewing

Increased family time for talking and homework support

Increased random acts of kindness among family members as parents value their children's random acts of kindness.

Increased writing abilities as families write reflective essays on workshops topics

Increased cultural competence of parents to expand on their knowledge base and to strengthen their parenting commitments

Increased parent leadership in the program, at schools, and within the community

When parents first join the program, they feel isolated from other parents and the school. These parents fear that the schools have little regard for them and their abilities to support the academic learning of their children. When parents find a welcoming and respectful environment, they can grow from a positive place and share with their children. They are able to form a community of support that sustains themselves and other families. Second generations of families come back for ongoing networking and program support to break the cycle of poverty and succeed in education. Program parents gain stability in their lives and an increased ability to manage their money. This increased confidence ensures that their children will succeed in life and families can devote more attention to managing their future.

When considering the successes of this relevant program, what can you do to change the learning environment of your children's school to ensure that all students and their families are successful and prone to random acts of kindness? If you contributed an hour a week in helping your children's friends with tutorial support, providing carpools with loving dialogue, and participating in after school activities, what impact would you have in your community's sustainability? Please share your reflections about this blog in the comments section as we strive to support all of our community's families in healthy growth and academic success.

We love and respect for all!

Mary Ann, Janis, and Ali

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