PROGRAM SOLICITS STUDENT MENTORS

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News Editor

Four years ago when Wan Lim, an adjunct associate professor at UC's College of Medicine, moved to Cincinnati she decided the best way to learn about the community was to volunteer.

Lim began mentoring students from the Cincinnati Public School system through Cincinnati Youth Collaborative's Mentoring Program.

In an attempt to get UC medical students involved in the surrounding community as well, Lim began the UC Med Mentors program in conjunction with CYC's Mentoring Program.

She recruited 17 UC students to mentor young kids in the Cincinnati Public Schools.

CYC sponsors the Mentoring/Tutoring Program, in which volunteers across the city spend time with one of the 43,000 students in the Cincinnati Public School system.

According to Dr. Gary Lacy, president of CYC's Mentoring Program, mentoring is "one of the most direct ways you can affect a young person's life."

CYC's Mentoring Program was established 13 years ago in response to the high drop out rate of high school students in Cincinnati.

"The program has been a wonderful success," said Christina Singleton, program coordinator for the Mentoring Program.

Despite the program's success, Singleton said the program needs more volunteers.

According to Singleton, there are 1,776 volunteers currently working with Cincinnati Public School students, but there are 700 more children on a waiting list hoping to be matched with a mentor.

"The quicker we can get a mentor for a young student, the better," said
Lacy.

He added that students who have been mentored score higher on proficiency tests, stay out of trouble and are more likely to set a goal for post-secondary education.

Lacy hopes to see more college students get involved in the Mentoring Program.

"We would like to get more UC students involved because they have the energy to commit," said Singleton.

Lacy said the smallest percent of mentors are college students, who are significant assets to the program because they have the "ability to relate" to young students, since they are closer in age.

"We want young students to see the results of going to college," said Lacy.

Tim Johnston, a second-year law student at UC, has been a mentor for one year to a sophomore at Hughes High School.

"I've seen a dramatic improvement," said Johnston of the student he mentors.

Although it took time for them to get to know each other and figure out what to do together, he is enjoying the experience and continues to mentor the same student.

According to Singleton, becoming a mentor means more than helping students with schoolwork.

"We are asking you to include these children in your lives." Singleton said mentors can take their students shopping and to museums.

Singleton said volunteers can take the student they are mentoring when they go shopping or to sporting events, museums or plays.

"Mentors are asked to contact their student at least once a week," said Singleton.

Consistency in the relationship between a young student and a mentor has proven to be a "powerful success" added Lacy.

"It's not about giving money, but time."

Current volunteers include retired postal workers, teachers, attorneys and college students.

Lacy believes the best way to help the surrounding community is to become a mentor. "Anyone can do it."
According to Lacy, those who volunteer to become mentors must attend training sessions after CYC does an extensive background check on the potential volunteer.

Volunteers are required to provide references as well.

"We take a lot of care in how we choose mentors," said Lacy.

For more information about becoming a mentor visit www.thepowerof1.com.

Since Lim began the UC Med Mentors with 17 students two years ago, more than 40 students from the College of Medicine have joined.

According to Lim, the younger students benefited from the relationships and improved academically.

She added that UC students who are mentoring have learned to be involved in the community.

"We want (UC) students to step forward," said Lacy.

He added that participation in these kinds of community activities really helps to make students well rounded.

"We have a lot of problems in Cincinnati, and CYC is a step in the right direction."