

## Local mentoring program expands

By Hillary Gavan hgavan@beloitdailynews.com | Posted: Wednesday, January 28, 2015 4:00 pm

After having success with a male mentorship group, Community Action Inc. is launching a mentoring group for high school girls.

“They have different needs than young men. They need a place they can turn to as well,” Nicole Pfundheller, Workforce Investment Act in-school youth program coordinator said.

The group titled Young Ladies Mentoring and Personal Responsibility Education Programs will have its first meeting from 5 - 7 p.m. Monday. Anyone who wants more information should call Pfundheller at 608-313-1325. Those under the age of 18 will need a parental consent form signed. Transportation will be offered to and from events.

The young men’s group called Filling the Void Mentoring Program meets on Mondays and Wednesdays at Community Action Inc. from 5 - 7 p.m. with 15 to 20 young men in attendance. Led by Community Action Director of Planning & Development Marc Perry and Fatherhood Initiative Program Manager Erick Williams, the program guides young men in making positive choices.

“I’ve seen how well Erick and Marc interact with the young men’s group so I just wanted something like that for the ladies as well. I was born and raised here, and I just know there is a need,” Pfundheller said.

The female group is designed for youth without a parent or role model in their lives. They are identified through teachers who may notice a drop in grades, attitude, attendance or school involvement. Efforts will be made to help the young women avoid the criminal justice system and unhealthy relationships. It also will support them to get employed, budget their money and work toward self-sufficiency.

There are already 10 young ladies signed up, although Pfundheller said she won’t turn anyone away.

“If they really need it I want to be able to help them. I have a passion for youth and passion for the city,” Pfundheller said.

Meeting on Mondays, the girls will eat an evening meal together and go on trips to sporting events for fun and to colleges and universities.

Williams said the young men’s group is going well. None of the young men have been expelled, and all have passed their classes. On Mondays the group meets at Community Action and on Wednesdays it meets at the Beloit Learning Academy so the guys can play basketball.

The group formed nine months ago in response to the summer violence in Beloit.

“Why do we want to wait until they get in trouble? Why wait until they are Fatherhood Program participants? Let’s reach them before they have all that stuff going on in their lives,” Williams said.

Williams said all but two of the young men in the group have their biological father absent from their lives. Some of the young men find turning 18 scary, and may wander around aimlessly before getting involved in unhealthy activities.

Many of the struggling young men need direction and are in search of themselves. He said programs like the Fatherhood Program help address behaviors, beliefs and principles, examining why they make the choices they make and how detrimental their decisions can be to others. The group also makes plans to make and reach goals.

“We make sense out of the world they live in,” Williams said. “We let them bring us to the table and tell us what they need, and also hold them accountable.”