

Mentoring group hopes to make a difference

By Hillary Gavan hgavan@beloitdailynews.com | Posted: Thursday, January 29, 2015 4:00 pm

Are you positive, motivated and hard-working?

If so, you are invited to become part of the Community Arms Reaching Everyone Spiritually (C.A.R.E.S.) team mentoring program. Those interested are invited to attend the first meeting set for 6 p.m. Feb. 6 at the Merrill Community Center.

“If you’re serious about your city and really want to see a change, please help me and make this mentoring program a success,” said Pastor Keith Stamper.

Stamper, part of the BeloitStrong movement, helped organize a soul train dance event in Beloit along with other anti-violence events this summer. He and a group of about 15 volunteers then started a loosely knit mentorship program, primarily headed by clergy. Although the summer mentorships are still going strong, Stamper wanted a program open to the community with more structure. The newly-formed intense program will feature regular meetings for the mentor and child every other Friday, outings and more.

“If you are in it, you have to be committed for the long haul,” Stamper said.

There will be college tours held during spring break, outings to basketball games and more.

“By sharing fun activities and exposing youth to new experiences, a mentor encourages positive choices, promotes high self-esteem, supports academic achievement, and introduces the young person to new ideas,” Stamper said.

Mentors aren’t meant to replace a parent, guardian or teacher, and won’t act as disciplinarians or decision makers. Instead, Stamper said mentors can be part of a team of caring adults, echoing the positive values and cultural heritage parents and guardians are teaching at home.

A mentor may help a young person plan a project for school, set career goals, make healthy choices or help them think through a problem at home or school. Stamper hopes the group of mentors will support each other and become somewhat of a family. Depending on the number of mentors, they may be paired with more than one youth.

The group is hoped to connect people who have specific skills and knowledge with youth who need or want the same skills and advantages to move up in work, skill level, or school performance.

“My goal is to have a successful mentor program that helps break down barriers and creates opportunities for success,” Stamper said.

C.A.R.E.S. may get names of students, primarily from 8th through 12th grades, from the School District of Beloit, Boys and Girls clubs and Merrill Community Center.

Twenty people have already committed to joining the group, although about 16 of them are female. Although both genders are needed, Stamper is encouraging more men to step up. People who have been homeless or have a criminal background or gang affiliation and were able to turn their lives around, are strongly encouraged to sign up.

Any parents that have a teen or young adult that they are concerned about can contact Stamper at 815-299-0316.

Stamper stressed that parents of youth in the program will be invited to attend the meetings as well so everyone can work together on goals. One of the first events will be getting together to have coffee with police officers to help youth become more comfortable with them.