Every day, people make a difference in the lives of Columbia’s kids. This section tells their story and the story of the kids they help.
Columbia mentors help kids go above, beyond

This spring, the Missourian examined a topic that’s often overlooked. Our reporters spent months finding out more about the people who inspire Columbia’s kids.

The idea arose, in part, from a recent award the city won for being one of the 100 best communities for children in the U.S. That award singled out several local organizations, including: the Youth Community Coalition; Central Missouri Community Action, which provides job training, housing assistance, mentoring and life skills; Sol House, which offers shelter and other help for homeless teens; and Rainbow House, an emergency shelter for abused and neglected children.

We challenged our reporters to go beyond the institutional framework of these and other organizations to find personal stories of people who make a difference in kids’ lives.

The mentors and volunteers we found devoted their time to helping kids, but they weren’t always adults themselves, as in the case of Michael York, a student at Hickman High School.

By seeking out these role models, we learned more about the challenges they face. We also sought out the expertise of those in Columbia running and researching programs to help children and asked them about the importance and benefits mentoring can offer to children.

Finally, we reached out to readers and residents, asking them to help us learn more about what kids need in Columbia, and to help us find people trying to help them succeed.

The stories in this section reflect suggestions from the community and our own reporters’ work. We’ll also be accepting additional nominations for community members who are making a difference in the lives of kids. Submit them at bit.ly/ComoHeroes or submissions@columbiamissourian.com.

Thanks for spending some time with the Missourian today, and we hope you enjoy reading these stories about our future.

On the cover: Columbia’s fifth-graders

Fifth-graders at Parkade Elementary School spent a few hours in February with mentors to learn about their life and work.

This is part of the “Celebrate the Dream” program, which aims to connect children with mentors in the community.

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Obstacles facing children, teens
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Environmental lessons
Hickam High School junior Michael York teaches children with his not-for-profit effort, Coordinated Recycling.

An early start
A reading program two years old at Nora Stewart Early Learning Center continues to prepare kids for the future.

A portrait of the future
Find out what fifth-grade students at Parkade Elementary School take away from time they spent with mentors.

Bracelet entrepreneur
Kiona Hughes, 16, started selling her Wacky Bandz bracelets to raise money for a mission trip, and with the help of Granny’s House, she’s started selling the bracelets to MU Sororities, with some of the profits going to philanthropies such as True North.

Ensuring success
Through mentorship, local groups, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri, look to make the community a better place by giving children positive role models and relationships.

Finding help and assistance
A list of services, groups and agencies that aim to aid children, teens and parents throughout Columbia and mid-Missouri.

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THE IMPACTS OF THE BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS PROGRAM
READ THE STORY ON PAGE 24.

According to national statistics, after 18 months in the program, the youth who participated in Big Brothers Big Sisters were 45.8 percent less likely to start using drugs and 27.4 percent less likely to start alcohol use. They were also reported to have lied to their parents 36.6 percent less. Academically, the youth who participated in the program were also doing better. Their grades were 3 percent higher, and they skipped 36.7 percent fewer classes. They’ve also provided 2.3 percent more emotional support to their friends.

Source: PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES

—Kaikang Wang

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OBSTACLES

A lot of people want to help you grow up here. “Even in the midst of tough times, there are assets in the community for youth to succeed,” Youth Community Coalition coordinator Ryan Worley said.

That’s what made Columbia one of “100 Best Communities for Young People” in the United States in 2011 — an award by the organization America’s Promise Alliance.

There are still problems. While there is so much positive work for youth, “interlaced with that there’s a lot of real stuff that happens here,” Worley said.

Like violence, poverty, teen pregnancy and substance abuse, he said.

This year has been marked by the death of two teens, and a rash of shots fired recently, which police say is “gang related.” In March, Columbia mourned the loss of DeAudre Johnson, a 17 year-old Douglass High School student, an innocent bystander killed in a shooting. This month, another young man, Bryan Rankin, 17, was shot and killed outside a party.

Persistent poverty is gaining attention. Almost 40 percent of students in Columbia Public Schools qualify for free or reduced price lunch, and Heart of Missouri United Way recently decided it will shift its funding focus to young people and families to promote education, financial stability, health care and a stronger safety net.

“In looking at the problems that a lot of agencies deal with in our community, the United Way felt that we were putting Band-Aids on problems and dealing with the results of problems, but not the causes,” said Karla DeSpain, head of the agency’s Education Advisory Board.

Some challenges are quiet. Children and teens in Columbia face daily obstacles that keep the city from being the most nurturing place it could be. Activities, dealing with stress, responsible adults and transportation are a few gaps that people in Columbia identified as not being as readily available for young people.

Worley said one word defines the challenges: access. That means asking questions. Can young people get things they

Please see CHALLENGES, on the next page
need — mental health counseling, for example — or take advantage of things they want such as interesting after-school activities? Or is something like transportation, money or adult support missing?

“It just goes down to what are the true needs in our community, what are the resources we have,” Worley said. “How well are we matching up those needs with those assets?”

### Activities

Columbia is much more fun than New Madrid County, where Steven Grissom, 18, moved from last May. The Hickman student is a regular at the Armory, where he plays games, jokes around with the staff and learns to DJ.

“Most kids here, they would say there's nothing to do, there's no way to be successful,” Grissom said.

Whatever they're thinking, they're wrong.”

Under a blue sky one Saturday, three young men skateboard in the parking lot of the Columbia Mall.

Instead of trying kick flips at the crowded city skate park, they skate in front of Target before getting shooed away. Then they play a version of the game Horse, called Skate, in the lanes between parked cars.

With a board covered in names of his favorite musicians, Orlando Strickland, 13, said Columbia can be boring, and his weekend routine of movies, mall, skatepark and city recreation center will get old eventually.

Inside the mall, five girls evaluate Hollister shirts and thumb their phones. Gentry Middle School seventh-grader Curnesha Stewart said Columbia needs a cheaper cheerleading squad.

“I love being on stage, showing off,” she said. Curnesha went to practice with a squad once, but the program, including the $175 uniform, “was just too high,” she said, and she never went again.

“She's been wanting to dance since forever,” Curnesha's mom, Tina Simpson, said. “I called so many organizations, and it does cost a lot. If you're not financially ready, being a single parent, then there's no way your kid can do it.”

At home in the garage, Curnesha found a way to perform for free. For five years, she's gathered neighborhood kids in her own squad called the “LOL Girls,” Simpson said.

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Please see **CHALLENGES**, on the next page
“They’ll play music, and I just let them go,” she said. “They have a dance routine and a pledge that they say.”

It’s written on a big poster board on the wall: “One nation, one girl. Heaven, fun and all living life and being strong. Stand tall, dance until you fall. LOL Girls are the best with justice and all.”

Simpson recently enrolled Curnesha in the Boys & Girls Club, which is more affordable. Next year Curnesha will go to Oakland Junior High and try out for its cheerleading team.

Dealing with stress

“I am one of the most stressed people I know,” Rock Bridge junior and honors student Maria Kalaitzandonakes said. It’s self-induced stress, although she said her parents push hard.

“When I get an A-minus, I freak out because I’m afraid I won’t be able to succeed,” she said.

About 30 percent of Hickman and Rock Bridge high-schoolers said they had “a lot” of stress in their lives, according to the 2011 Adolescent Health Needs Assessment of Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services.

The No. 1 stressor for high-school students surveyed was school and academics, followed by “thinking about the future.”

Kalaitzandonakes said she’s lucky not to have to work, “but I have a ton of friends that have to take care of their siblings or work a 40-hour week on top of school.”

Family was listed as the third highest source of stress in the survey.

It’s easy to take your parents’ heartache about money for bills and groceries as your own, Douglass High School junior LaShawn Tay Soil said.

“You’re always trying to find things to make it better,” she said. “You’re just as stressed as your parents are.”

She’s learned to manage her money wisely and not let home finances worry her.

“Don’t make things harder for yourself,” she said.

In the health department’s research, teens often talked about how the demands of life kept them from eating right or exercising. Our “fast-paced society” contributes a lot to young peoples’ feelings of stress, Maureen Coy, who led the health department’s research, said.

“It’s really good to have some of the instantaneous technology we have, but it has a downside, too,” she said. “Everything is moving so fast, which could cause a lot of stress, and that could lead to various health issues.”

The research suggested a gap in mental health services for young adults. High school students frequently responded that they didn’t have a person or a place to help them when they were stressed out, Coy said.

There is an effort underway to get a quarter-cent sales tax for youth mental health services on the ballot this November.

It’s the third time the issue has been raised since 1994.

In August, MU’s Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs analyzed surveys from 21 different agencies and found that hundreds of children were turned away or on the waiting list for mental health programs last year, including 357 children turned away from or on the waiting list for counseling and therapy.

The tax would fund services such as temporary shelter for youth, outpatient chemical dependency and psychiatric treatment programs, and professional counseling and therapy.

Relationships with responsible adults

There’s a difference between an after-school tutor and an uncle who cares about you. Soil said she remembers being in programs where “I would look up to the teenage tutor, then they’d be gone and you’d never see them again.”

She said what teens really need are people who will be there to teach them positive life lessons.

“Kids my age are going head first into the grown-up world and don’t really know what they’re doing,” Soil said. “They don’t have a positive role model year-round.”

It’s hard to find a lot of adults with their act together, Parks and Recreation Youth Sports Coordinator Camren Cross said. Some teens he’s around “know people in jail, way too often,” he said, and adults around them are “making bad choices over and over.”

Adults need to nurture young people from day one.

United Way Education Advisory Council head, Karla DeSpain, said kids need someone to simply talk to them when they’re young, and teach them colors and numbers. Regardless of income and race, “a responsible adult in a child’s life is crucial,” she said.

Transportation

Kalaitzandonakes loves Columbia. Her blog is devoted to the city’s smallest virtues. One thing, though, is off the list. “Teenagers can’t get places they want to go,” she said.

A lot of them don’t take the bus at night, don’t have a car or don’t have money for gas, Kalaitzandonakes said.

Other teens find ways to get around on their own: Steven Grissom walks, Orlando Strickland skateboards, Curnesha Stewart gets rides from her mom, dad or grandma.

Transportation is a problem for after-school programs like Fun City.

“We only have one van and we can only have 13 passengers on it,” coordinator Consuela Johnson said.

Right now there are five children who don’t regularly come to the program because their mom can’t bring them in and there’s no room in the van.

A working group on public transit has been gauging what teens think about the bus system and will present its findings to City Council. Worley said the most common feedback is that young people want to keep fares under $1, longer bus hours and bus stops in more areas.
Based on the 2010 census, there were more than 20,000 children younger than 18 in Columbia, accounting for about 19 percent of the population of the city.

About 1 in 4 households in Columbia had one or more children under 18 years old.

On average, 38 out of 1,000 Columbia women between the ages of 15 and 50 gave birth to one child or more every year.

According to the 2010 census, about 3,300 Columbia children were living below the poverty level, which accounts for about 20 percent of all children in the city.

According to the 2010 census, there were more than 12,500 white children, about 3,000 black children, and more than 3,500 children in other ethnicity groups in the city.
Readers nominate community members
Missourian readers recognize people making a difference in kids’ lives

As the reporters were beginning to cover kids in Columbia and those making a difference in their lives, the Missourian’s community outreach team asked readers to take part in directing the coverage. We began by asking for nominations about those making a difference in the lives of kids.

Then we asked what you, local parents and volunteers think kids in Columbia were in need of. Here’s how readers responded to these questions.

Who is making a difference in kids’ lives in Columbia?

Sharen Garrett, a teacher at Southwest Play School, was nominated by Alyce Bader Cooley.

Sarah Bowman, a recreation specialist at Paquin Tower, was nominated by Charles E. Dudley Jr.

Kristin Sohl, medical director of the Autism Medical Clinic, part of the MU Thompson Center, was nominated by Robin Wilcox.

Stuart Parnell, who coaches for the Columbia Youth Football League, was nominated by Cheryl Unterschutz.

George Frissell, a teacher at Hickman High School, was nominated by Mariah Miranda.

The Boy Scouts were nominated by Deanna Sharpe.

Misha Franks, a teacher at Jefferson Junior High School, was nominated by Chris Brown.

Susan Himmel, a teacher at Columbia Catholic School, was nominated by Mary Richardson.

Amber Quest, a music teacher at Gentry Middle School, was nominated by Deborah Neff.

What do kids in Columbia need most?

“Kids in Columbia need safe, exciting, educational after-school teen venues.”

— Gabriella McCord

Please see OUTREACH, on the next page
Hickman junior turns trash to treasure
High school student teaches environmental awareness with unique toys

By Elizabeth Laubach

Children crowd around a duct-taped cardboard house scribbling on it with crayons, sometimes slapping the house in excitement.

A pyramid of used soda cans go flying when a toddler breaks them up as part of a makeshift bowling game. A paper “rocket” ejects from a 2-liter bottle following a hard stomp. Not only do they have a cardboard box to color, but recycled paper and a homemade bin for recyclables, too.

High-pitched exclamations of joy and wonder create a friendly ruckus that Michael York returns to every Friday, bringing with him all sorts of recycled things for the children at New Jeru Kids Daycare to play with.

Michael, a junior at Hickman High School, duct-taped the house together with cardboard donated by a local store. He gathered the old soda cans and bottle, along with other materials to make the rocket. Michael picks up recyclables from various locations for his handmade recycling bins made of almost nothing but recycled material.

“Everything but the screws,” he said.

Michael’s recycling efforts are far-ranging, and are all part of Coordinated Recycling, a not-for-profit company he created in the fall with his mother, Bonnie York. He's used carpet scraps to make cat-scratching posts and salvages wood to build “cat condos” and doghouses for the Central Missouri Humane Society.

Michael has been visiting New Jeru Kids since November to teach larger themes about reusing what you have and caring about the environment. For one project, the children made a terrarium out of an old 2-liter bottle that creates their own “little earth” to witness the process of evaporation, precipitation and transpiration.

Michael, 16, wants to instill environmental stewardship and awareness to children at an early age. He began his first recycling project in the Cub Scouts that involved collecting aluminum and plastic from the elderly to recycle, and returning the refunds to them. At the time, he was living in Yakima, Wash., where his mother grew up on an Indian reservation.

York said her son has long been surrounded with an environmentally conscious support system. Off the reservation in Yakima, she raised Michael and his brother, Sheridan, according to the Yakima Indian culture, which emphasizes social unity and nature.

“Recycling is in his blood,” she said.

Sarah Wilson, the main caregiver at New Jeru Kids, is also the pastor at New Jerusalem Outreach Ministry next door. Wilson said she wouldn’t trade Michael for anyone.

“They are paying more attention to what he’s doing,” Wilson said.

An assistant to Michael volunteers at the daycare and reports back about the learning habits of each kid. That way, Michael can create projects that reflect lessons about caring for the Earth.

“I like knowing that the kids have a general idea of why you should recycle,” Michael said. “I think that most people who see recycling at an early age don’t really think much of it, but will think about it as they get older.”

After a good amount of playtime, the kids gather around Michael to learn sign language. Besides advocating recycling, Michael has a passion to sign. He taught them how to sign “recycling is cool” before adding the word “can” to teach “recycling can is cool,” referring to the recycling bin he brought in.

“Every time I go over there, they’re like ‘Teach me something else, teach me something else,’” Michael said. “You know that you’ve taught them something and they’re going to take that somewhere else in the community, and their life. It’s a good feeling, that you can do something, and it’ll help everybody.”
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Reading skills nurtured, a page at a time
Local learning center partners with Minority Men’s Network, civic clubs

By Richie Bernardo

It’s “Mr. Vincent’s” turn to read to Miss Jackie’s kids. “Miss Jackie” Ford, their teacher, rounds them up. Quietly and obediently, the children juxtapose themselves on the floor in an “L” formation, sitting cross-legged.

Vincent St. Omer shakes each of their hands as he introduces himself, and the children return the favor.

Many of Ford’s students and the other children at Nora Stewart Early Learning Center are members of ethnic minorities. Many come from low-income households; some of their parents juggle multiple jobs.

Likewise, St. Omer was born to a single mother with an elementary education who sold baked goods and soft drinks to support her two sons. His family was among many other low-income families in St. Lucia, a 238-square-mile island in the West Indies, where education was a privilege, not an opportunity.

Mentors who included a Nobel Prize winner in literature guided St. Omer to success.

To help him finance his first year of college, his mother sacrificed her home, and he saved his wages from working at a mink ranch at Ontario Veterinary College in Canada, which he attended. Despite his family’s circumstances, St.
Omer went on to become a doctor of veterinary medicine, an educator and a school administrator.

These days, he's an inspiration to Columbia's younger generation. In 1979, he joined the Minority Men's Network, a group of predominantly black professionals who serve as role models and award scholarships to minority students.

In 2010, he spearheaded a reading program at Nora Stewart, a nonprofit early learning center that dates to 1933. The center, initially a nursery for black children, accepts children from all backgrounds.

Once a week, a member of the Minority Men's Network or the Columbia Kiwanis Club reads an age-appropriate book to the children at Nora Stewart. The reading program focuses on, but isn't limited to, underprivileged ethnic minorities between the ages of 2 and 10.

“They love it when these guys come in and read stories to them and just to be involved,” said Ford, who has taught at Nora Stewart for five years.

Every year, the Rotary Club of Columbia, to which St. Omer belongs, donates dictionaries to Columbia Public Schools. The club's focus on reducing illiteracy is more global than local, saying that he thought once that “We do have a problem right here in Columbia.”

Researchers have long reported on the correlation between poverty and illiteracy. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 23 percent of Columbia residents lived below the poverty line between 2006 and 2010. In its most recent report, the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that 6 percent of all adults in Boone County were unable to read and understand any written information or only able to recognize easily identifiable text.

“Early childhood intervention is key,” said St. Omer, whose research interests include developmental neurobehavioral pharmacology. “The greatest development of the brain is from birth to three years.”

Children who aren't prepared early can find it tough to catch up in kindergarten, he said. “If a child cannot read or write age-appropriately by third grade, that child will likely
drop out of high school and become an illiterate adult.”

Nora Stewart director Cheryl Howard said the center tries to go a bit further than the guidelines set by Columbia Public Schools for kindergarten.

“Most of my children, when they leave Nora Stewart, can at least count to 50,” Howard said. “They know how to write their names. They know phone numbers.”

The reading program and adult interaction, Howard said, are “enriching the lives of the children as far as the educational process is concerned.”

Parental involvement and a stimulating environment are crucial factors in the successful development of a child, St. Omer said. “Even if the parents aren’t very literate, they can still provide an enriched environment.”

He noted that parents who lack literacy skills can help their children comprehend books with illustrations. Pictures help tell stories, and a child can easily understand a story if parents ask questions about the images.

Nora Stewart encourages the children to read beyond the classroom, but many of them don’t have books at home.

To help them, Nora Stewart provides age-appropriate books donated by the Minority Men’s Network and others in the community that the kids can take home for themselves and other children in their household. On holidays, some children receive the books as gifts.

Five-year-old Keyana said she enjoys reading by herself at home and being read to by her parents at bedtime. Her favorite stories are about dogs and butterflies.

“There are lots of misconceptions we have that if a child is in an impoverished environment, grows up with a single parent, that child is doomed,” St. Omer said. “That child may have obstacles, but that child can succeed.”
A PORTRAIT OF THE FUTURE

Celebrate the Dream connects students with business mentors

Photos by Parker Blohm; Reporting by Madeline O’Leary; Design by Will Guldin

As part of the Celebrate the Dream program, each of the fifth-grade classes at Parkade Elementary School spent three days in February piling into buses to spend a couple of hours in the everyday lives of professionals.

Sky Jimenez, director of Celebrate the Dream, founded the program in 1995 because of what she saw as a noticeable disconnect between students and black mentors in the community.

“The students did not know the work of black professional people in Columbia. That was hard to believe, and I wanted to fix it,” Jimenez said.

Including doctors, teachers, principals, insurance agents and coaches, Jimenez pooled together a group of mentors for Parkade students to interview and socialize with. After two hours of immersion in the professional world, students return to school to write a report about their experiences. The result, Jimenez said, is a complete transformation in attitude and confidence.

“When we pick them up to take them to their mentors, they’re nervous and quiet. But they come back different people,” she said. “They’re confident and return to the school saying things like, ‘I’m going to go to college. It will be hard, but my mentor had challenges too and I know that I can do it.’ It’s so inspiring for them.”

After running the program for 17 years, Jimenez said she’s amazed at the impact it’s had on both students and mentors. “When it’s over, the kids know that there’s an adult in the community that cares about them.”

Alvonta Flemings
Mentor: DJ Johnson, Hickman High School basketball coach

Alvonta, 11, didn’t know Johnson once played professional basketball. As an aspiring player himself, he was pleasantly surprised when he visited the Hickman coach. Johnson took him around the school and motivated Alvonta to pursue his dream of playing professionally. “I wish I could do it all over again,” Alvonta said.

Please see the NEXT PAGE for more portraits

1. Shawn Pruitt
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3. Khudier Khudier
4. Britney Mallory
5. Alvonta Flemings
6. Ethan Ti’a
7. Andrew Harper
Lakia Ellis  
Mentor: Cheere Walton, Shelter Insurance

After spending the day with Walton at Shelter Insurance, Lakia, 11, learned she should never let anyone put her down. Lakia aspires to one day become a famous basketball player. Aside from visiting the cafeteria and meeting Walton’s colleagues, Lakia talked to Walton about the hard work she does on a day-to-day basis. “My experience was awesome.”

Shawn Pruitt  
Mentor: Kathleen Claxton-Rogers, MU School of Social Work

Hop ing to become a professional basketball player and doctor, Shawn, 11, is an ambitious young man. During his mentorship, Shawn talked to Claxton-Rogers, and he said he learned a great deal about helping people — something he hopes to achieve in the pursuit of his career goals. “I had a great time,” he said.

Brandon Sandoval  
Mentor: Marcus McCaster, State Farm Insurance

Brandon, 10, spent the day with McCaster, a State Farm insurance agent. Brandon explored the workplace and met McCaster’s colleagues. While on the job, Brandon learned that he should always try his best to do well in school. “Never give up,” he said.

Zach Strange  
Mentor: Steve Calloway, University Hospital Pharmacy

Zach, 11, wants to be a doctor when he grows up, so spending time with Calloway, a pharmacist, was right up his alley. Calloway introduced Zach to fellow workers at the pharmacy and let him observe the process of medications being mixed, counted and sorted into various bottles. The experience was “amazing,” he said.

Trisha Martin  
Mentor: Claudia Jones-Lewis, MU School of Social Work

Trisha, 10, took a glance into the life of Jones-Lewis at the MU School of Social Work. She said she did “lots of things” with her mentor, and was able to help with Jones’ work. Trisha wants to be a model when she grows up.

Please see the NEXT PAGE for more portraits
Antione Armstrong
Mentor: Stacy Dameron,
Shelter Insurance

Life while you’re a kid instead of getting into trouble. That’s what Antione, 12, said he learned while working with Dameron, a first-time participator in the program. Before his visit with her, Antione said he wanted to be a football player. But a day of watching her interact with people changed that. “It was awesome. On second thought, I might want to work there,” he said.

Chasity Watson
Mentor: Toni Hayes,
executive staff assistant for MU’s women’s basketball team

Chasity, 12, wants to be a basketball player when she grows up. Perfectly in tune with her career goals, Chasity was able to meet and get to know Hayes, the executive staff assistant for the MU women’s basketball team. While taking a tour around the athletic premises with Hayes, Chasity learned about the importance of sportsmanship and having fun.

Adilene Martinez
Mentor: Carla Johnson,
Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services

Adilene, 11, hopes to be a nurse one day, and was able to visit with Johnson. After getting the opportunity to observe how microscopes are used and how shots are administered, Adilene said she wishes she had more time to “hang out” and talk to Johnson.
Getting mothers, babies off to healthy start

Beth Johnson works as an onsite lactation nurse at Kilgore’s Pharmacy

By Xiaonan Wang

After working as a nurse at an obstetrical clinic for 14 years, Beth Johnson felt she was ready to leave and focus more on helping mothers feed their babies.

“I wanted to have more one-on-one time with moms,” Johnson said.

Johnson started her new career as an onsite lactation nurse at Kilgore’s Pharmacy one and a half years ago, which provides free services for patients who come to the store.

“Breastfeeding support is crucial,” Johnson said. “If there is no one supporting you, I will be the one.”

Breastfeeding has health benefits for both babies and moms, according to a project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health. Breast milk is more nutritional and digestible than formula, and it contains unique antibodies, which protect babies from illness. Breastfeeding moms have a lower risk for diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and breast cancer, according to the project.

Johnson said she felt passionate about providing lactation advice because she heard that a lot of mothers, upon leaving the hospital, gave up in the face of social and physical challenges.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding exclusively for about six months and continuing it until the child is about 12 months. Only 12 percent of women in Missouri exclusively breastfeed for six months, and 15.6 percent keep breastfeeding for 12 months, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Breastfeeding Report Card for 2011.

Johnson said breastfeeding is time-consuming and energy-consuming.

“A lot of moms are told breastfeeding is all natural and you should know how to do it,” Johnson said. “It’s not easy in any way.”

Johnson is certified by Lactation Education Resources, which is approved by the Lactation Education Accreditation and Approval Review Committee.

She said every moment of being a lactation nurse is memorable.

“It makes my day when I see a mother’s face light up because their babies latch on and start sucking milk, and I have those bigger moments when I received ‘fan mails’ — baby photos and their birthday party invitations,” Johnson said.

Melissa Creek, one of Beth Johnson’s patients who is breastfeeding her baby Kara, said she could never make it without Johnson’s help.

“I went through extremely bad postpartum depression after my first birth because I couldn’t breastfeed,” Creek said. “Not a day I have had this with Kara. I feel successful as a mother because I can give her the best thing of all.”

“I totally don’t want to be a hero,” Johnson said. “I can’t tell you how rewarding this job is.”

She also said the promotion by the formula industry makes breastfeeding even more difficult for some moms and she needs to provide the correct information.

“So many moms are sent home with ‘emergency’ formula, but you have breasts,” Johnson said. “Breastfeeding make babies healthier, smarter, and it’s better in the long run.”

Patt Stewart, another lactation consultant at Kilgore’s, feels strongly about formula given to moms as free samples at the hospital. “I’d like to call it artificial feeding,” she said. “Formula should be a prescription.”

Stewart said breast milk is irreplaceable because what a mother produces is specifically for her baby. A mother’s

Please see BABIES, on the next page
immune system can sense the germs the baby is exposed to and produce a particular antibody for her baby.

Stewart is an international board-certified lactation consultant, recognized by the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners, an independent global authority in the lactation and breastfeeding area.

Lori Lampe, a board-certified lactation consultant at MU Children’s Hospital, said breastfeeding means more than health benefits for both moms and babies.

“It’s a very important time for women who give birth to their own children. It’s such a special connection,” she said.

Lampe said she always shares the excitement of the bonding between mothers and babies. “Being a part of this important time of their lives is the best for me,” she said. “I see them in the community maybe a month later. There are smiles, there are confidences, and they are having a healthy baby. That warms my heart.”

It’s a very important time for women who give birth to their own children. It’s such a special connection.

— Lori Lampe
lactation consultant at MU Children’s Hospital

Three week old Kara Creek lies on a scale to determine if she is at her target weight during a lactation consulting appointment at Kilgore’s Medical Pharmacy on Feb. 24.

Lampe said, there are about 11 board-certified lactation consultants working at the Boone Hospital, MU Women’s and Children’s Hospitals or for the city’s Women, Infant, Children Supplemental Program.

Stewart said some breastfeeding mothers not only need technical support in how to correctly nurse their babies but also need someone who can give them confidence and encouragement.

“When moms watch baby grow on a daily basis and recognize that it’s my milk that does it, it’s a very empowering thing.” Stewart said.
Granny’s House a home away from home

Kiona Hughes finds entrepreneurial inspiration for bracelet business

By Grace Lyden

Kiona Hughes, a 16-year-old sophomore at Hickman High School, wore a bow in her hair, a headband, earrings, scarf, a watch and about nine bracelets on her wrists.

“This is nothing compared to what I wear to school,” Kiona said. “This is because I was rushing earlier.”

The bracelets include three or four made from braided, colorful strips of bandanas, and it’s a marketing strategy for her to wear them constantly — except when she’s playing basketball for the Kewpies’ junior varsity team.

“I always make sure I put a Wacky Bandz on,” Kiona said.

Wacky Bandz raised almost $200 for charity in an MU sorority challenge that ended in October and helped fund Kiona’s mission trip to Jamaica to build a house last June.

The Crossing, Kiona’s church, sponsored three Granny’s House kids for the trip. Granny’s House is a faith-based nonprofit founded by Pamela Ingram that operates out of two public housing units in the Douglass Park Housing Project. Ingram, whom the kids call “Granny Pam,” grew up in Kansas City public housing and said she created Granny’s House to be “a lighthouse in public housing.”

“A lot of the kids have to shoulder burdens that maybe adults would have trouble shouldering,” Ingram said. “But they’re bright. They are hungry for help. They are hungry to be affirmed, to have somebody open the window and show them there’s more to life.”

Each day after school, about 40 kids come for food, homework help and groups such as Experiencing God in Real Life Situations, a Bible study for girls that Kiona goes to every Friday. Kiona has been in Columbia for six years and has been going to Granny’s House for five of them.

“This is her home away from home,” Ingram said.

Kiona started selling Wacky Bandz at West Junior High School in May, when Granny’s House program coordinator Angie Azzani told her she needed to raise $200 as spending money for the mission trip.

A friend of Kiona’s had been selling bandana bracelets to save
for an iPhone, and she taught Kiona how to make them. Kiona hadn’t wanted to compete with the girl’s business at school, but when she suddenly needed $200 and students offered to buy them, she changed her mind.

To avoid conflict, Kiona gave half of her first week’s profits to her friend. Kiona sold the bracelets for $2 each — the other girl’s were $5 — and she made $400 in two weeks. With more than enough for her trip, Kiona stopped making bracelets until mid-September, when Ingram suggested she sell them to MU sororities.

Kiona initially wanted to give back a percentage of the sales to Granny’s House, but Kristen Donnell, a Granny’s House volunteer and MU senior in Alpha Chi Omega, said sororities would be more motivated if the money went to their philanthropies.

Kiona proposed 50 percent of the profits, but Ingram thought that was too high for the time it would take, and they settled on 75 cents for each $3 bracelet.

“Kiona just has such a pure servant’s heart,” she said.

Kiona visited the sorority houses during their weekly dinner-speaks to pitch the challenge and sell her bracelets. Although she had around 150 bracelets to begin with, the favorites ran out quickly, and then she started taking custom orders for Wacky Bandz in sorority colors.

Determined to finish before basketball season, she set Halloween weekend as the deadline, and on the morning of Oct. 30, presented a check for $195.50 to the Alpha Chi Omega sorority for buying 118 of the 256 bracelets sold.

The money went to True North, a local shelter for victims of domestic abuse. It was Ingram’s idea to present an oversized check.

Ingram also helped Kiona come up with the Wacky Bandz name, and she designed Kiona’s business card. When it’s not basketball season, Kiona visits the office nearly every day, and all of her closest relationships are at Granny’s House, often with volunteers. Last year, Kiona built a volunteer board to welcome new volunteers and provide them with information like Ingram’s phone number and a list of upcoming events.

“We need help with cleaning or whatever,” Ingram said. “She just wants to help. She loves Granny’s House. It’s like her lifeline, in a way.”

Although torn between interests in business and radiology, Kiona has told Ingram she would love to direct the organization one day.

“Since I’ve been going to Granny’s House, I’ve wanted to do social work,” Kiona said. “I want to do something Granny Pam has done. Hopefully, I can do it at Granny’s House.”

Ingram is all for it. “If ever there’s a kid who could do it, she could.”
Kiona Hughes takes a phone call and sets up a later appointment with C.A.R.E. Over the past 5 years, Kiona has taken on a lot of responsibilities helping out with younger kids at Granny’s house.

ABOVE: Kiona Hughes laughs at a comment by Granny Pam, the owner of Granny’s House, while trying to pick out photographs for the house’s volunteer board, February 8, 2012.

LEFT: Kiona Hughes shows off bracelets which she creates herself. Kiona started a bracelet-making business to pay for her mission trip to Jamaica and then used the bracelets for a sorority challenge, for which 25 percent of proceeds went to the winning sorority’s charity of choice.
The role of a mentor in the life of a child can vary from a trusted confidant, an exemplary role model or a welcomed friend. Whatever the approach, it’s the mission of each mentor to play an influential part in the life of a child.

“A lot of kids just need another positive influence in their life,” said Joe Bradley, enrollment and matching specialist at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri. “Sometimes a child just needs one more adult, one more college student, one more friend asking about their life. It can make all the difference.”

Big Brothers Big Sisters views youth mentorship as crucial in encouraging the success of a child, said Sara Echternach, coordinator of community-based mentoring for the organization’s Central Missouri chapter.

“We really do feel that one-on-one mentoring is what works,” Echternach said. “It’s individualized attention. The mentor is there to point the child towards good decisions.”

Tina DeClue, coordinator of school-based mentoring at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri, said successful mentorship is all about modeling.

“Through mentorship and seeing a positive role model, the youth take ownership, become more responsible, look forward to time with their mentor and, ultimately, start to believe in something.”

Mentorship benefits

National research has shown that positive youth mentoring can advance the success of a child by contributing to:

- More confidence in their schoolwork.
- An ability to get along better with family and friends.
- Being 27 percent less likely to begin using alcoholic substances
- Being 46 percent less likely to use illegal drugs.
- Being 52 percent less likely to skip school.

— Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri

Guidance

Mentoring provides positive influences

Big Brothers Big Sisters helps children ‘start to believe in something’

By Karee Hackel

Mentorship benefits

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— Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri

Please see MENTORSHIP, on the next page
According to the organization’s mission statement, mentoring provides positive relationships that enhance a child’s development into positive, healthy and able community members.

“One hour a week can completely change the life of a child,” DeClue said. “Your community is going to naturally, as a whole, become better, more effective and a better place.”

What makes mentorship effective?

Marcia Kearns, a doctoral student in clinical and developmental psychology at MU researching interventions for youth, family relationships and development of autonomy in youth, said mentoring programs that have been demonstrated through research to be effective in helping youth achieve a desired outcome have the greatest probability of being successful.

Mentoring can contribute to improvement in social, psychological, academic and career-focused areas, Kearns said. “I have seen research say the kind of mentorship programs that are most effective are those that carefully select the mentor, have clear expectations and provide oversight,” Kearns said. “The successful programs select mentors that have similar interests to the youth they serve and don’t just match them to characteristics such as racial ethnicity.”

Matching mentors with children helps ensure an effective relationship. Claire Slama, homeless youth program director at Rainbow House, said her agency’s volunteer mentor program consists of application, background screening, interview and training. From there, youth and mentors are matched based on their life goals and interests.

“Mentors in our program are there to kind of teach the youth what it’s like to be an adult,” Slama said. “Sometimes they will take them to a meal to model to the youth proper etiquette, sit down to create a budget of some sort or perhaps teach a skill such as making a resume.”

Echternach said it’s crucial to indicate a serious commitment to the volunteers interested in serving as a mentor. Along with the matching process, this commitment builds trust and, in turn, allows the relationship to blossom.

“We have stated consistent guidelines for our mentors to follow. The building of the relationship takes awhile,” Echternach said. Please see MENTORSHIP, on the next page.
ach said. “Over a course of a year, the mentorship relationship will have more effectiveness.”

Cindy Smith, a doctoral candidate in special education at MU with a research interest in mentoring as an intervention for high risk adolescents, said quality is the most important aspect. Most mentoring programs rely on volunteers, so it’s essential to have support and training.

“Recent research has found almost 50 percent of mentoring relationships end before they are six months old. They are often ended by the mentor and not the adolescent,” Smith said. “This is why it’s so highly important to have a strong support program for the mentors.”

Emotional connections are another key to a successful relationship, Kearns said, along with personalities.

“If they don’t connect, it can undermine the success of the mentorship model whose whole foundation is based on them having a positive relationship,” she said.

**The impact of community attitude**

Youth Community Coalition of Columbia has served as a central point for the various mentorship agencies to discuss the issues of recruiting and maintaining mentors in the community, said Ryan Worley, coordinator of Youth Community Coalition or YC2. This initiative is called The Mentoring Collaborative.

“Just recently this year, we started The Mentoring Collaborative,” Worley said. “YC2 brings all of the agencies that focus on youth mentoring, various resources and experts together in order to find out what they can do collaboratively to make mentorship better for everyone in the community.”

Worley said the mindset of YC2 is to see the community think about how it can help the successful development of youth.

“Mentoring plays into the community attitude where young people grow up and are supported and cared for,” Worley said. “It’s about taking a personal interest to make sure the youth of the community succeed.”

Bradley, who is working with Big Brothers Big Sisters through AmeriCorps, said there are 700 to 800 children enrolled in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri program.

“We’re working to target the whole community,” Bradley said. “Getting 800 kids in our community to have another positive influence in their life will positively affect the entire community.”

Mentorship is an important intervention for any community, Smith said.

“If you look at what mentorship can do, out of the lives of 10 youth, even if you have only one youth that does well, stays in school and stays off the streets, the possibility of the payback to that program and to the community is so huge.”
orking with children used to scare Erin Carrillo. Now she can’t see how anyone could not love it.

Carrillo sometimes spends as many as 80 hours a week working as a recreation specialist for Columbia’s Parks and Recreation Department, a residents assistant at Sol House and a vice chairwoman at the Youth Community Coalition, which is a local youth advocacy organization.

Despite the busy schedule, Carrillo loves helping children. “This is the most rewarding position I’ve ever held,” she said.

Before she started working with kids she was more interested in sports than academics, she said. She had jobs at places such as hotels and coffee shops.

After taking an introduction to leisure studies course at MU, she became interested in working in recreation. During her junior year she found a part-time job at Columbia Parks and Recreation, and through a friend at the Youth Community Coalition she learned about Sol House, a transitional living program.

It made her realize that she had a passion for working with children, and she decided she wanted to help make changes in the community, she said. As a residents assistant at Sol House, Carrillo mentors homeless, couch-surfing or at-risk teens, helping them make positive choices and find their way off the street.

She does this by building self esteem and giving praise for positive things the teens do. If they make a mistake, Carrillo works with them to discuss and agree on a consequence. She wants to give them an opportunity to talk and “be proud of themselves,” she said. Carrillo recalled one individual she helped, who is now a student at MU. Another, a former resident at Sol House, now works part time there.

“That’s the success stories which make it worth it,” Carrillo said. “Even if it’s one out of hundreds, I think it’s worth it.”

Carrillo said that there is a negative view on teenagers and a stereotype that they’re always “causing ruckus.” Society as a whole doesn’t give them enough respect, she said.

“They have so much to give,” she said. “They don’t want to be looked down upon.”

Carrillo has a genuine desire to see kids succeed, said Ryan Worley, Youth Community Coalition’s Coordinator. It’s obvious, especially during the community events she puts together, that Carrillo cares about the teens through the way she talks to them...
and the way she smiles, Worley said.

"That's why kids keep coming back to those things," he said. "They are received so well when they come."

Teen Fest on April 18, a partnership with the Youth Community Coalition that showcases local talent with live bands and art projects, is among the numerous community events Carrillo organizes through Parks and Recreation. She also helps with the annual Tons of Trucks and other family and outdoor activities. For preschool children, she has parties with themes like St. Patrick’s Day or pirates anywhere from three to six times a month, she said. Carrillo said that working with young children is the best part of her job.

Sometimes she asks herself what else she could add to an event to make it more enjoyable for everyone. "I want children to be happy," she said. For someone interested in getting involved, Carrillo said, there are "tons of opportunities to volunteer" in both Parks and Recreation and Sol House.

Sol House, through the Rainbow House volunteer website, is always looking for teen mentors or simply someone to provide food.

Carrillo said that what kids in Columbia need most is a support system, a friend or guardian either in school or in their personal lives. When they don't have this kind of support, she said, teens can fall through the cracks. Even though it's sometimes difficult to be a teenager, no one should be afraid to ask for help, she said.

"Sometimes everyone needs help," she said. "There are people that care."
Resources: Groups help Columbia’s children, teens

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Missouri:**
Provides one-on-one mentoring for children, including at-risk groups such as children with an incarcerated parent.

**Boone County Family Resources:**
Service, information and links for individuals of all ages, including behavioral, speech and physical therapy, housing assistance, and other services.

**Central Missouri Community Action:**
Provides Head Start and Early Head Start, job training, housing assistance, mentoring and life skills training to youth.

**Columbia Housing Authority:**
Manages low-income housing for more than 300 school-aged children and their families. On-site services include a food pantry, parent/child training, financial management training and after-school tutoring and mentoring.

**Division of Human Services:**
Resources offered by the Health Department’s Division of Human Services include assistance with utility bills, health insurance, medical assistance, pregnancy testing and other services.

**Missouri Connections:**
Free resources that include help determining career interests, creating a resume, finding a college and paying for classes.

**Missouri Developmental Disabilities Resource Center:**
University of Missouri Kansas City program that provides information, support and volunteer opportunities regarding developmental disabilities.

**Missouri Families:**
Informational resources for families, relationships, health, nutrition and other topics.

**Pregnancy Resources:**
A list of pregnancy service and information providers. Published by Family Health Center in Columbia, an organization dedicated to providing healthcare to the under-served.

**Real Teen Resources:**
A guide to teen-centric services including substance abuse prevention and treatment, bullying help, counseling, LGBTQ+ resources, education opportunities, housing assistance and other helpful information put together by the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services.

**Youth Community Coalition (YC2):**
A group of more than 70 organizations and individuals that helps Columbia's youth with education and information on substance abuse prevention and treatment, pregnancy, homelessness, violence, suicide, poverty, employment and more.

**Youth Empowerment Zone:**
Helps neglected, at-risk urban youth make a successful transition into adulthood.

— Compiled by Ben Harms
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