

A little time can go a long way

By JULIAN KESNER

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For New York kids, getting by with a little help from their friends is one thing. Listening to their parents, meanwhile, is another. Fortunately, there's a middle ground: mentoring, a decades-old concept that's finally catching on in Big Apple communities.

The premise is simple: Pair a child with an adult (not a family member) who can simultaneously be a friend, confidant, adviser and sounding board, and the child's chance at life success grows exponentially. Best of all, it doesn't take long to see results.



Roberts for NEWS

Mark (r.) and his mentor, fashion designer Michael Simon (l.), met through the Reciprocity Foundation.

The Reciprocity Foundation & The Appreciate Network

THE PROGRAM: A design industry veteran, Taz Tagore co-founded the nonprofit with Adam Bucko after volunteering at Covenant House.

"All these people started coming out of the woodwork with these scruffy notebooks, saying, 'Can you take a look at what I do?'," recalls Tagore. She wondered: "What if we can take that creativity and help them earn a living?"

Both Tagore and Bucko quit their jobs to start the foundation and its nonprofit gift business, Appreciate.org, which employs the 20 or so mentees as junior designers. All money raised goes to the foundation, and corporate partners include Newman's Own and Moby's Teany.

SUCCESS STORY: A turbulent relationship with his stepfather drove 20-year-old Mark from his New Jersey home four years ago. "It came to the point where he took it physically and hit me," he recalls, "so I left."

Mark ended up at the Green Chimney transitional living program, where his creative side was soon recognized. "I've always been the type to walk around with my drawings in my bag, showing them to different people," he says.

The Reciprocity Foundation got Mark teamed up with clothing designer Michael Simon, whose artistic knits sell for top dollar at stores like Neiman Marcus and Ms. Montage. Now, Mark works with Michael and his team one or two times a week and hopes to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology someday.

"He seems to have the talent for it," says Simon. "We look at what he does, and we're like, wow, this kid could actually jump in and work with us. It should be very interesting. They really put the right kid with the right people."

"He's teaching lots of different things, and giving me advice and tips on what I should and shouldn't do," raves Mark. "I'm really excited."

For more information, call (718) 387-3874 or visit www.reciprocityfoundation.org or www.appreciate.org.