

Student Mentors Board the Bus To Make the Ride Home Safer, Smoother for Youngsters

St. Ignace School Wants To Expand Program Next Year

By Karen Gould

Four St. Ignace students have been riding the school bus as mentors in a trial program that pairs older and younger students on the journey between home and school. The bus mentors give attention to the students, show support, and offer kindness and friendship.

From their efforts, the program already has been judged a success. The mentors and the younger students have benefited from it, and problems on the bus have decreased, school administrators say. St. Ignace Area Schools now plans to use their work as a stepping stone for developing other mentoring programs, including school safety officers and sidewalk volunteers.

Sarah Smith and Angela Donajkowski, both fifth grade students at St. Ignace Elementary School, and LaSalle senior Michael Foster and junior Frank Beaudoin III are the four mentors who helped pave the way toward creating a more complete mentoring program in the schools.

Riding Randy Gustin's bus, the four volunteers have each been assigned a younger student to help as the bus travels its route. The program, said Mr. Gustin, makes for a safer trip for the bus driver and students. The younger students are kept busy and are learning how to make use of their travel time.

Mr. Gustin, who has been a bus driver since 1997 and a full-time driver for four years, would like to see the program expanded and tailored for each bus next year. The school operates five busses, with



St. Ignace LaSalle senior Michael Foster (from left), fifth grade students Angela Donajkowski and Sarah Smith, and junior Frank Beaudoin stop by one of the school buses Tuesday, March 25. Volunteering in an experimental program, the four students were bus mentors for St. Ignace Area Schools this year. From their success, school officials plan to expand the program next fall.

up to 60 students aboard each. Some after-school bus routes are completed by 4 p.m., while others can run until 5:30 p.m. or later, depending on weather.

Mr. Gustin also proposes a safety officer on each bus to assist all students.

"We just have to tweak it a little bit and it will be a good thing," he said of the trial program. "All in all, I think it's a plus for everybody, drivers and kids."

All of the students agreed that the eight hours of training was

worth it, mentoring others has been beneficial for both them and the students they mentor, and given the chance, they would do it again, said Mr. Foster.

The mentors serve as role models. They coach the young students on homework, play games, and become friends. Reading books, coloring, and bringing a stuffed animal along for the bus ride, said Miss Smith, helped create a friendship with her assigned student. Now, she said, they do a lot of talking and the young student has a lot

of questions.

"Little kids," she said, "are more than what they just appear to be."

Miss Donajkowski agrees. "I'm better with little kids now," she said.

The two girls have worked together to help a young bus rider by tactfully stopping a bullying situation one day.

The bus mentoring program was brought to St. Ignace Area Schools by Paula Ramelis, a peer mentor coordinator with Michigan State University Extension, and the mentors were trained by Phillip Quinn of the same agency.

The program began as a pilot project at Engadine Consolidated Schools last year, said Mrs. Ramelis, following the suggestion of retired teacher Marjorie Nelson.

Mrs. Ramelis was talking about the 4-H peer mentoring program at an Engadine School Improvement Team meeting and Mrs. Nelson suggested what the school needed was a bus mentoring program. Since Mackinac County was already receiving a grant for peer mentoring, Mrs. Ramelis worked with Extension to begin the bus program. Today, while other counties have grants for peer mentoring, only Mackinac County also offers bus mentoring.

Following its success at Engadine, the program was offered to St. Ignace this year and Mrs. Ramelis now would like to expand the program to other schools, including Cedarville.

The program, said Mrs. Ramelis, helps keep the bus quieter and safer. The goal is to build relationships between students and develop the leadership skills of the mentors, who also receive community service hours. In the training, the students learn about self esteem, advocating for other students, developing listening skills, and bus safety.

By setting an example for model bus behavior, the mentors provide positive influences for younger students who need a little extra attention and a good support system. Some students are uncomfortable riding the bus.

"It's fun to hang out with the little kids," said Mr. Beaudoin, "and they look up to you." A Saints football player, Mr. Beaudoin said younger students like to learn about sports.

The mentors also have found they benefit from the program.

"It's a lot of fun to help out with the little kids," Mr. Beaudoin said. "There's never a dull moment."

Deanna Kreski, student and family advocate at the school, said the mentors have shown a sense of responsibility for their role, and problems on the bus have dropped.

"The program has helped the mentors and mentees," said Mrs. Kreski. "You can't beat that."

When he was younger, Mr. Foster said, he would have appreciated having a bus mentor. This motivated him to volunteer for the program.

"It makes me feel more responsible," said Mr. Foster, "that I have to help somebody out."

Miss Donajkowski agreed and said the program has taught her to help others in various situations.

"It's helped me," she said. "I'm doing more around the house now. I feel I can do more, and then I just feel good about myself."

Elementary and Middle School Principal Bonnie Ledy, who retires in June, said she would like to see the program expanded next year to include student sidewalk volunteers who would help other students as they arrive and leave school each day.

Mrs. Kreski agrees, and would like the students to help with concerts and other school events, suggesting they have some type of identification, which might be a special shirt or badge. The identification, she said, would direct students to those who could help them.

In preparation for next year, a meeting will be set up with bus drivers to get their input on the program and suggestions on potential volunteers, Mrs. Kreski said. They will look for student mentors who regularly ride the bus for all or most of the route. Training for next year's volunteers would be in the fall.

Program Helps Families, Neighbors Settle Disputes

Training Sessions Coming Up for Volunteers

By Karen Gould

Mary, a single mother to nine-month-old Annie, thought John was using their daughter to try to make her life miserable. John, who had visitation rights, wanted to spend more time with the baby and thought Mary was being unreasonable by limiting his time with the infant. The couple argued.

Tired of the endless conflict, Mary called the E.U.P. Community Dispute Resolution Center in Sault Ste. Marie for help.

This is one of more than 200 cases volunteer mediators at the center hear each year. This month, the center is offering training classes for those interested in joining the 45 volunteers already mediating conflicts through the center in Mackinac, Chippewa, and Luce counties. The greatest need for volunteers, said Geraldine Stelmaszek, center director, is in western Mackinac County, St. Ignace, and Luce County. Mediators are trained to help people resolve any kind of dispute, including those in business, family, or community relationships, such as divorce, job disputes, or landlord and tenant disagreements.

Mediation is a confidential process, said Mrs. Stelmaszek, and the story of Mary and John, whose names have been changed to protect their privacy, gives a good general example of similar conflicts mediated by trained volunteers each year. This scenario, she said, happened years ago, and not in St. Ignace.

John, she said, agreed to participate in the mediation, and a neutral location was chosen for the discussion. He also was tired of the situation and willing to sit down with two trained mediators and Mary to come to a resolution.

"Basically," said Mrs. Stelmaszek, "both of them were really tired of arguing."

When the mediators met with the couple, Mrs. Stelmaszek said, the session began with a review of the ground rules for the mediation and the couple's agreement to follow them. This takes place at all mediations.

The rules include one person speaking at a time, no interruptions, no yelling, and no profanity. The mediators also asked the couple to look for a workable solution. Mary and John signed a copy of the rules and by doing this, said Mrs. Stelmaszek, they already had agreed to one thing together.

Usually, she said, the person who requests the meeting speaks first. As Mary spoke, John was given a piece of paper and pen to

make notes on comments he might want to bring up during his speaking time.

Mary, remembers Mrs. Stelmaszek, agreed it was in Annie's best interest to have a relationship with her father and to spend time with him. John may have thought she wanted him out of Annie's life, although that was not what she felt. Mary's real concern was the stress an overnight stay would have on a nine-month-old child. Annie was breastfeeding and she often got upset around unfamiliar people. Mary was worried John would not be the person taking care of Annie and that he would leave her with someone else, and she was afraid Annie would cry the entire time.

Mary made her needs and concerns clear, said Mrs. Stelmaszek, although when she began repeating herself, the mediators suggested John tell his side of the story.

His perception of the conflict was different than Mary's. John thought Mary only wanted him to provide child support, recalls Mrs. Stelmaszek, and he believed Mary wanted him out of Annie's life. Mary, said John, made visiting Annie difficult. Many women who breastfeed work, said John, and that should not be a problem for overnight visits, although he admitted he did not want to put Annie in a stressful situation. He was concerned that if Annie did not see him enough, he would become a stranger to her and she would cry when he came to visit. His solution was that he see her more and for longer periods of time.

Unfortunately, said Mrs. Stelmaszek, John used a sarcastic tone when he spoke, making it difficult for Mary to listen. The mediators stepped in and reviewed three things with the couple. They both agreed they cared for Annie, they each wanted to spend as much time as they could with her, and they agreed they were willing to do what was in the best interests of their child.

The mediators then held separate one-on-one conferences with the couple, seeking clarification on some points.

In her conference, mediators told Mary they noticed when she talked on and on, it seemed upsetting to John. They asked if she would agree to refrain from talking and set a visitation schedule in writing. She agreed. John's conference was similar. Mediators explained that his tone appeared to upset Mary and suggested they communicate through a written

visitation schedule, and he agreed.

As a group, the mediators recapped the agreements with the couple and the next visitation schedule was set with little talking. The mediators suggested, and the couple agreed, that overnight visits would not be considered for three months and John would have more frequent day visits.

For Mary and John, the mediation process worked. During discussions, mediators could see a positive change between the couple as they shared their feelings. A 60-day follow-up meeting takes place in all mediation cases, said Mrs. Stelmaszek.

"Those who see miracles or turning points right in front of them," said Mrs. Stelmaszek, "that is what keeps the mediator going. That's a real reward for a volunteer."

Volunteers are trained to use a neutral voice and neutral words to help people resolve their conflicts that include family issues, divorce, adult and child guardianship and placement, special education, business employment, contract, landlord and tenant, creditor and debtor, and neighborhood disagreements. The center also offers workshops on conflict resolution for schools, businesses, and other organizations by request.

The center began mediating conflicts in 1995. It operates on funds from the United Way of the Eastern Upper Peninsula, contract and service fees, small grants, and donations. An endowment fund for the center was created in 2007 with the Chippewa County Community Foundation.

People who want to learn more about conflict resolution can attend upcoming training sessions. Mediator training classes are scheduled for April 24, 25, and 26, and May 1, 2, and 3 in Newberry. The 40-hour course includes information about the mediation process, mediator skills, negotiation skills, communication skills, agreement writing, conflict resolution, and ethical issues.

The training includes lectures, observing mediation, and role playing, said Mrs. Stelmaszek, with an emphasis on role playing.

A \$650 registration fee is waived for trainees who commit to observing 10 hours of actual mediations within six months of completing the training, and volunteering for at least 25 hours of mediating within the next two years. Deadline to register is April 17.

For more information about the upcoming classes or the mediation program, and fees for mediation services, contact the center at (906) 632-5467.

Suspects Arrested in Connection With Burglary Ring

Linked to 6 Crimes in Mackinac County

Five suspects in a seven-county burglary and theft operation have been arrested, were arraigned in 91st District Court in Sault Ste. Marie Monday, March 31, and were then lodged in the Chippewa County Jail. The suspects include Todd William Carrick, 19, Jonathon Edmund Craven, 18, Michael Joseph Juday, 25, and Troy Cameron McSorely, 29, all of Brimley, and Alisha Ann-Ruby Peake, 19, of Kinross.

The suspects were allegedly involved with crimes throughout Chippewa, Mackinac, Luce, and Schoolcraft counties in the Eastern Upper Peninsula. Officers also seized evidence connected to other crimes in Cheboygan, Otsego, and probably Emmett counties in the

Lower Peninsula. The suspects are linked to 11 crimes in Chippewa County and six crimes in Mackinac County, including communities such as Brevort, Curtis, Engadine, and Pickford.

Mr. Juday and Mr. McSorely recently relocated to the Eastern Upper Peninsula, while the other three suspects have been living in the area for some time. All will remain in jail until their next court appearance, tentatively scheduled for April 10.

Detectives were assisted by troopers from five State Police posts, Bay Mills Tribal Police, three sheriff's offices, and a federal law enforcement officer assigned to the United States Coast Guard. Since November 2007 the agencies have investigated more than 20 business burglaries, in which large amounts of cash and property were stolen.

Friday, March 28, police

searched two homes and seized three vehicles in Bay Mills in Brimley. Property was recovered and identified as being from Eastern Upper Peninsula and northern Lower Peninsula thefts. Officers also seized a duffel bag containing burglary tools, ski masks, and gloves. Cash and illegal drugs were also confiscated as evidence.

Detectives developed suspects when a concerned citizen noticed and reported a suspicious vehicle driving around Trout Lake last month during the early morning hours. A license plate number eventually led police to issue several warrants.

Detectives will sort through all the evidence and will contact business owners in the near future. Anyone who has additional information on this or any other crime is asked to contact a police agency or Crime Stoppers at (800) 465-7867.

St. Ignace, Mackinac Island Ferry Service Resumes



Ice in the Straits of Mackinac was thick enough near Mackinac Island to force the *Huron* to reroute its trip to St. Ignace by traveling near the far side of the Island, lengthening the first ferry trip of the season Friday, April 4. Island Mayor Margaret Doud said the extended trip was welcomed by Islanders, who had been without boat service since January 19. Pictured are (front, from left) *Huron* Captain Keith Duffton, Alex Dodson, Clara Chambers; (back) St. Ignace City Manager Eric Dodson, Jack Dodson, Arnold Transit General Manager Bob Brown, CEO Paul Brown, Mayor Doud, and Island City Councilman Armand "Smi" Horn. Departures from St. Ignace are at 7:30 a.m., 11 a.m., and 4 p.m. and, from the Island to St. Ignace, at 8:30 a.m., noon, and 5 p.m.