

Teen Trendsetter Mentor Overcomes Barriers, Taps Experience to Mentor At-risk kids.

Imagine moving to a foreign country in grade school and not knowing the language. Teen Trendsetter™ Waisin Tam doesn't have to use his imagination.

As a child, Boynton Beach High School senior Waisin Tam emigrated with his family from—literally—the other side of the world. “I am Chinese/Asian, born in Hong Kong. I came to America when I was 8 years old,” said Waisin. “I started school knowing no English. I also had a hard time in middle school because of racial prejudice.”

Today Waisin is a senior at Palm Beach County's Boynton Beach High School, and he has big dreams for the future. He credits the challenges he overcame in school with inspiring him to help others through the Teen Trendsetters™ Reading Mentors program.

“Young children need a role model and someone to talk to, especially if they've had a hard day. It helps them get through it,” he said.

Looking back on the journey toward his upcoming graduation, Waisin reflects on obstacles he faced in school along the way. He remembers what it was like to be 8, struggling to learn and wanting to fit in. He uses those experiences to help make himself a better mentor. Waisin is keenly aware that the elementary students he mentors at Poinciana Elementary School and Galaxy Elementary School are the same age he was when he moved to America, and he believes what he is doing makes a big difference.

When it comes to Teen Trendsetters, the numbers prove Waisin right. The program is a win-win, with positive outcomes not just for the mentees, but also for the mentors themselves:

- At-risk mentees with a Teen Trendsetters mentor double their reading performance over the course of a single school year.
- 99 percent of Teen Trendsetters mentors graduate from high school, versus 69 percent of non-mentors.
- 74 percent of Teen Trendsetters mentors earn college scholarships, versus 38 percent of non-mentors.

Waisin's older sister serves as a Teen Trendsetter herself and encouraged Waisin to join the program. He thanks her for

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getting him involved. As for sticking with the program all four years of high school, he gives that credit to the mentees.

“The reasons I volunteer year after year are the happy faces of the children,” said Waisin.

From Teen Leadership to Student Government to IT Academy, Waisin is busy preparing for graduation, but he makes the time one hour a week to make an impact in the life of a child. His words of wisdom for fellow Teen Trendsetters: “Make a connection, build the relationship, and have fun. It will fall into place,” he said. “If you're not having fun, the child isn't either.” The average yearly cost for a mentor/mentee match is just \$220 a year. With a small donation, you can help to match an at-risk child with a desperately needed mentor.

No doubt Waisin will continue to make a big impact in the future and, following his own words of wisdom, he'll undoubtedly have a little fun doing it. Waisin plans to attend Florida Atlantic University in the fall of 2013. He would like to be a “Geek Squad” employee while working toward his degree.

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