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Spotlight on Mentoring: Sam Dudley, Los Padres National Forest Fire Fighter

By Lauren Haines, May 1, 2013

Just over a year ago Sam Dudley became a Mentor for the Fighting Back Mentor Program. Sam has always had a variety of mentors in his life and feels that he was fortunate to have the guidance that he needed to excel in his career. As a fireman for the U.S. Forest Service, Sam has traveled throughout the United States to reduce the impact that fires and natural disasters have on our communities, including a recent trip to New York to aid in the recovery from Hurricane Sandy.

Sam’s dedication to social responsibility is something that he hoped to pass on to Santa Barbara youth, which prompted his Mentor Advocate to match him with Daniel, a fifth-grade boy who lives with his mother and three siblings. While Daniel is smart and social, he struggled with proper behavior in class. Daniel was referred by his teacher to the Mentor Program in the hope of finding a Mentor who would reinforce the importance of school and give him the one-on-one attention that he craved.

Sam noted, “Daniel wasn’t forced into this program and he knows that he can benefit from it. He is volunteering his time just like I am.” That’s how our Mentor Advocates have crafted this program- to create friendships between community members and local youth which will be beneficial to everyone involved.

The positive impact of this relationship has been verified by many, including Daniels teacher who called the Mentor program to ask how they were able to help Daniel improve his behavior so quickly. When Sam and Daniel were matched, Daniel lacked ambition. Sam said that it was apparent that Daniel was a smart young man, but that it would take time to build trust and the ability to communicate openly. Through their time spent together, Daniel ran for class representative and won!

One of the things that both Sam and Daniel enjoy about the Mentor program is the freedom to decide how they’ll spend their time together. Sam and Daniel enjoy hiking, fishing and discovering all of the fun, healthy activities Santa Barbara has to offer. Sam’s wish for Daniel’s future? “That he will one day become a Mentor too.”