

A Day In The Life Of A SMASH Mentor.....

The greatest gift you can give someone is your time, because when you give your time you are giving a portion of your life that you will never get back.

How does one address a teenager, I wondered, as I waited in the sports hall to meet the current group of mentees (young people) who were in line for a Mentor. “Hey”? “Hi”? “How do you do?”? Or just a small wave and a smile?

I can't remember which option I went for. I do remember having a huge amount of respect for these young people though. A damp November night, when they could have been elsewhere, and yet here they were. Prepared to engage in team building exercises with a group of adults they had never met before.

As the hall filled up, I made eye contact and smiled where I could. I thought about what I could talk to them about. I'm not particularly good at everyday small talk, and asking about hobbies or favourite school subjects felt too mundane somehow.

I needn't have worried; the SMASH (Swindon Mentoring and Self Help) team were quick to get us started on some collaborative tasks. The first involved building a snowman out of sticky tape, pipe cleaners, and loo paper, among other things. We were fortunate to have an engineering student in our team, who began to emerge from his shell to put forward ideas as we progressed.

The evening moved on to other exercises, including agility tasks and relay races. It was the most wonderful time, and it was great to see the adults and youngsters bonding over common goals. Pizza arrived in due course, and conversation flowed as we ate.

The time flew by, and before long, we had reached the end of the evening. I'd had time to speak to most of the potential mentees, and felt somewhat embarrassed at having been nervous of meeting this lovely group.

I heard from SMASH within the next couple of weeks, and was told that I'd been paired with the engineer from our first exercise. A smashing young man, we'd found we had quite a few shared interests. Before beginning to work with him as a Mentor, I had a chance to meet his family.





This was as much to make sure they were happy with the pairing, as it was an opportunity for me to meet them. This was another nerve-wracking part of the experience, as they were placing great trust in me. I wanted them to feel secure in the pairing, that I would take care of my charge and be a suitable role model. There was no need to worry. The family were lovely, and very supportive. We agreed the best time and day for mentoring sessions, and exchanged contact information.

I wasn't sure what to do for our first meeting, so decided we could go for a coffee. Again, I found myself at something of a loss as to what to talk about. It was important to build trust, and create a rapport. Mentoring is a big responsibility and I wanted to fulfil the role to the best of my ability. Recalling a conversation about super heroes at the matching evening in November, I decided to revisit the subject.

"Which do you prefer, Marvel or DC?" I asked. "Marvel," came the reply. "Although Batman is pretty cool."

I knew at this point that we were going to get along fine.

So how have we spent our first six months? Well, we've talked a lot. From Marvel, to future hopes, from kittens, to family. As well as talking, we've shared some fun experiences. SMASH provides you with a wide ranging activity list that helps you to think about what you can do with your mentee.

We'll work together for a full year, at which point our relationship ends and I move on to a new mentee. My mentee, in turn, moves on in his life, hopefully in a better position to do so than he was twelve months ago. With his, and his family's agreement, I hope to keep in touch and follow his progress.