



# POTTSTOWN AREA HEALTH & WELLNESS FOUNDATION

Community Benefit Report | Winter 2022



## Pottstown Students Are 'Created For Greatness'

*STRIVE mentors and students enjoy time together at Dorney Park last summer.*

When Pottstown School District resumed in-person learning this fall, the STRIVE Initiative was there from day one to ensure that the Created for Greatness school-based mentoring program would help support middle school students to take on the challenges of the year ahead.

STRIVE's coordinated, community-based approach to mentorship pairs volunteer adult mentors with individual Pottstown Middle School students to build the students' academic, behavioral, and social skills. Ultimately those skills translate to success in and outside of the classroom as well as helping young people discover passion and purpose in their lives.

Students commit to the mentorship program one year at a time, and often continue from year to year as they build trusting relationships with their mentors.

"The data shows that those relationships that carry on three or four years really can have significance for

students and their mentors," said David Charles, the STRIVE Initiative's executive director, noting that the benefits of the mentoring relationship go both ways. "Mentors want to stay committed. They want to keep growing those relationships because they learn from those students and feel good about being part of the life of a young person who they can help guide and pour their knowledge into."

While the pandemic created challenges for STRIVE's model of mentoring, which typically involves connecting in person over lunchtime at Pottstown Middle School, mentors found ways to build bridges and even forge new connections that make for a stronger community during remote learning.

"The way we build community is connecting with parents, even during COVID. Our programs are based on human connection and being with each other physically," said Charles. "We had to go to...

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## A Message from Our President



Dear Foundation friends,

We've emerged from another tough year together, and I believe we've come through as a stronger, more closely knit community. What I see on the horizon for this year is hope—hope that we can put the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic behind us, and hope that Pottstown is emerging as a more prosperous, healthy, and engaged community.

I think this optimism is justified. We've found new ways to look after one another in the past two years. We've listened to community partners and adapted our grantmaking processes to ensure equitable access and impact. And we're building on our investment core competencies and development efforts to encourage Tri-County residents to leave perpetual gifts for future needs of the region.

As we adapt to constantly changing conditions, we also recognize that positive, transformative change has arrived in Pottstown. New opportunities for education and employment are coming to the borough, with renewed support and energy to make fair funding a reality for local schools. Meanwhile, Amtrak's planned service to connect Pottstown with Reading and Philadelphia promises to connect residents with opportunities beyond the borough.

Our priority remains ensuring that all residents can partake of the opportunity we see on the horizon. I believe that greater prosperity will lead to improved health outcomes across the board. As a Foundation, we will continue to listen and learn about the needs of our neighbors, and work closely with our nonprofit partners to ensure that Pottstown's bright future leaves no one behind.



David W. Kraybill, President

houses of some of the students and parents with masks on. It became more about connecting with people. We would go and sit and be there for 45 minutes just talking about staying connected and keeping up with school online. We just wanted to make sure people had what they needed."

Those relationships between parents and mentors were strengthened in the process, but the return of in-person learning brought back opportunities for mentors and students to reconnect in a more structured way, and participants in the program kicked off the semester with an outing to Dorney Park to encourage the students and build mentor connections. However, one of the most fulfilling parts of the day was seeing students create bonds with one another.

"We had one student who didn't like heights, so he didn't ride the roller coasters. He came because he was invited and he felt welcome. It really opened my mind and my heart. These students in Pottstown, when you get them connected in a relevant scene or place, they will bond and they will join forces and be better together," said Charles. "They were laughing and having fun and by the time we got back they were really close. The opportunity is there."

Strengthening community connection in Pottstown is an important component of the STRIVE Initiative's ultimate purpose of empowering Pottstown youth. It's easy to see how the network of neighbors, teachers, students, adult community members, and local youth that the mentorship program brings together, but STRIVE also hosts community conversations and advocates for individual residents to become agents of change for a more equitable, inclusive Pottstown.



STRIVE's executive director, David Charles, puts an emphasis on building relationships to empower Pottstown's youth.

In a testimony to the strength of those connections, STRIVE received a gift of more than \$17,000 on behalf of former Created for Greatness mentor Jeff Richardson, who died of pancreatic cancer last September and wished to leave a lasting impact on Pottstown students through supporting the work of STRIVE.

"Building meaningful relationships—restoring community." That's STRIVE's motto, and the organization's leadership and volunteers are continually adapting to meet the ever-changing needs of the Pottstown community.

There are several ways to support the work of the STRIVE Initiative, including becoming a mentor, volunteering with STRIVE, or donating to the cause. [Learn more at https://striveinitiative.org/project/created-for-greatness/](https://striveinitiative.org/project/created-for-greatness/).