



Better Communities.
Bigger Dreams. Brighter Futures.

Rob's Story

Compeer of Shawnee County

In the year that I have been involved with the Compeer Youth Program only one thing comes to mind, life-altering. Not only has it been life-changing for me, but for my match as well. I notice positive changes each and every time we hang out. This change has been like night and day, and here is how that change began.

My match was less than thrilled with the prospect of having a mentor. Our first meeting had me observing a young boy who obviously had anxiety when meeting new people, and his mother would later confirm that he was worried about what kind of person I would be, so that fueled his anxieties even more. The match meeting got off to a slow start. My match wouldn't even look at me. His mom had to get after him to sit up and pay attention. I could only smile and allow him to warm up to the situation in his own time. His caseworker explained his situation to me, and got him to tell me about some of his interests, but overall I was worried. I was worried that I would be facing several weeks, maybe even months of non-responsiveness, or disinterest with me or what was going on. Our meeting ended, we planned our first solo outing to take place in a couple of weeks, but I still couldn't shake the feeling that I was going to have my work cut out for me.

Two weeks later I nervously waited for my match to get out of school. I wasn't even sure if he would remember what I looked like, or what my name was. I didn't have to wait long to find out. He came shuffling towards my truck, hopped in and the onslaught began. Inquiry after inquiry fired my way in rapid succession left me reeling a bit. Was this the same boy who didn't even want to be involved in the match program? He gabbed about anything and everything; it took a good 15 minutes before I could even ask him what he wanted to go do. Finally catching a pause in the conversation, I asked if he wanted to see a movie or go somewhere in particular. The movie perked his interest because as soon as I mentioned it, he knew what movie he wanted to see, and wanted to know if we had time to play the video games in the lobby, and if he could get some candy. How could I say no to any of it? I had fully prepared myself to have no direction from him, and here he was 100% into what was going on. We made our way to the movies and also to a wonderful afternoon. I wasn't sure what was happening, but I went with it.

That first outing was the beginning of something extraordinary. It was the first of many outings in the last year that progressively and exponentially showed positive changes in both of our lives. We have bonded faster than I would have ever expected, and I can only see it continuing well into the future. I can't point to any one exact moment thus far that has contributed to an overall transformation in him, but I can tell how he has made an impact in my life. For instance, getting a phone call from his mother expressing how much she appreciates me spending time with her son, and how much he looks forward to hanging out again. Or getting a call on Christmas Day from my match, wishing me a Merry Christmas, and excitedly telling me about the gifts he received, and that he missed getting to see me that week. Or any number of random times where I seemingly said or did something that would make him laugh so hard that he would fall down or drop what was in his hands. I really can't count the times where the both of us sat just smiling and laughing, and enjoying the time we spend together. I have witnessed my match on more than one occasion doing something that he normally would shy away from, such as being in large groups or interacting with someone new. I can't begin to describe how seeing his progress has made a difference in my life. Many of my own fears in life and living have gone away because I see this kid pushing past his own self-imposed barriers, and I think to myself, "If a 12 year old can do it, why can't I?" It is those types of intangibles that the Compeer program can take credit for. They are not just helping their consumers, they are helping their volunteers. That alone makes this program essential and relevant.

I fear that my brief synopsis doesn't adequately touch on what I have experienced, because it has been overwhelming for me. I can only imagine what it has done for my match. I am consistently surprised what I find out about myself when I spend time with my match. He is fast becoming my conscience, and my reality check, because he only knows what he sees. His questions, his observations on people, and the world, are humbling and poignant in ways that I never thought possible. It is eye opening and humbling spending time with him, and I look forward to what the future holds for us. I know for sure that I am not just a mentor anymore, I'm his friend.

Compeer programs provide one-to-one volunteer supportive friendships and mentoring relationships to adults and youth in mental health recovery.