

## Matthew Hawley



Matt began volunteering at Volunteers of America Dayton Community Center in 1996 with the fledgling youth programs. As a direct result of Matt's volunteer work, the programs grew and he was hired to lead the children's and youth programs in 1997. He works his normal 40 hours each week with the kids and then "volunteers" on weekends and other times just to see that the kids have a safe place to come or leads them in primitive campouts. When programs funds are short, Matt often buys the materials he needs with cash out of his own pocket. The children who participate in the center's programs are his number one priority, but he is continually seeking ways to reach out to include more.

The bulk of Matt's work is in afternoon and evening programs. These programs exist to first give the children a safe, positive environment with positive role models to emulate. The emphasis of the programs is on good character trait building such as self-control and diligence. Matt does not teach down to a child's level, he talks in basic terms in a respectful manner which allows the kids to rise above their own level. Matt's programs officially are geared for children ages 6 to 18, but the programs are frequently populated by kids 4 to 21. There are cases where children are forced to baby-sit younger siblings. These kids could not attend programs without bringing their charges. Matt makes room for these younger kids and sees that they are included. This is the type of realistic program that few attempt, but Matt excels with.

As a mentor, Matt has helped some of his youth become not only productive citizens, but volunteers in the community as well. It is these long-term results that Matt strives to achieve. By teaching and exhibiting self control and self discipline combined with self defense instruction, the children in the programs can begin to feel safe which is necessary to develop better self esteem, which leads the child to be able to effectively take control of his or her life. This is the philosophy and principals, which allow Matt to

develop programs that engage the children and help them grow as individuals.

When told that Matt was going to be nominated for the Brother Fitz award, the children all wanted to help and volunteered to write letters of support to the judges. It is a rare cause that would motivate 20 kids from the inner city to want to write anything, much less letters of support. In only fifteen minutes, each child wrote a letter from his or her own heart. This is the greatest testimony as to the commitment and care that Matt has for these kids. Matt's commitment and care is being returned in the form of the children's loyalty exhibited in these letters. There is no doubt that Matt's commitment to long term positive results is reflected in the letters from the children.

The two characteristics that separate Matt from most people is perpetual positive attitude and unbridled concern for people. He is soft at the core but outwardly firm, without being abrasive. It is this combination of assets that makes Matt a genuine person – a believable person. This allows him to engage people in an effective way, whether it is a homeless ex-con drug addict or a city councilman. Evidence of his ability is found in the sheer number of relationships Matt has formed with various agencies and organizations. A short list should include Building Bridges, Camp Fire, the City of Dayton, Child Evangelism Fellowship, East End Community Services Corporation, the Dream Shop, Planned Parenthood, Dayton Schools, Marca Terrace Widow's Home, food pantries, home school groups, churches, neighborhood associations and many more. But most importantly, Matt has the ability to effectively communicate with the parents of the children with which he works. He maintains an open dialogue in a way that few agencies or organizations can match.