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Mentoring Month focuses on important resource — kids

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Courtesy of SMILES mentoring Mentor Leslie Ann Britton of New Bedford and her mentee, Janasha Cromwell, a first grader at Carlos Pacheco Elementary School in New Bedford, are working together on new experiences.

January 06, 2010 12:00 AM

compiled from staff reports

NEW BEDFORD — The snow and frigid temps aside, there's a real warm feeling about January in New Bedford.

That's because it's Mentoring Month.

New Bedford Mayor Scott W. Lang issued the proclamation making that declaration on Tuesday, at the same time encouraging SouthCoast residents to consider becoming mentors to local youth.

"Research supports the anecdotal evidence that mentoring works," said Lang in a press release. "I urge New Bedford citizens to learn about our local mentoring programs and to support them. Make a difference in a young person's life simply by committing to spending time as a friend, a caring adult and a role model."

Taking part in what is actually a national observance of Mentoring Month are a host of local groups and organizations. All have a special focus on the region's most important resource — its kids.

They include SMILES Mentoring, Child and Family Services' Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater New Bedford, Coastline Elderly Services' Foster Grandparents and PAAACA's Citizen Schools. Representatives of all of them joined Lang and City Council members in the Charles S. Ashley Room at City Hall Tuesday to recognize the positive impact that volunteer mentors have on youth and the community.

But that gathering is only one facet of what's planned locally during Mentoring Month.

On Jan. 21, approximately 50 mentors and proteges from SouthCoast will join with other mentor matches from across the commonwealth for the Fourth Annual Youth Mentoring Day at the Statehouse sponsored by the Mass Mentoring Partnership.

Planned activities include a keynote speech by Tito Jackson, Boston City Councilor and youth mentoring advocate, as well as opportunities for the youths and their mentors to speak with state legislators about how mentoring has impacted their lives.

There will also be time for some fun activities, organizers promise.

Closer to home, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Jan. 27, Big Brothers Big Sisters, SMILES Mentoring and Big Friends Little Friends of Fall River are sponsoring a mentoring rally at UMass Dartmouth's Woodland Commons.

Local organizations that serve youth are being asked to participate. The public is invited to attend this free and fun-filled event. More information is available by contacting Nicole Almeida, SMILES' director of development and mentor recruitment, at (508) 999-9300.

Boyd Rourke is just one of the many who have already stepped forward to help.

Rourke, a local business owner who is also involved in many civic organizations, is both a SMILES mentor and a Big Brother to a child in the New Bedford Public School system. His protege attends the Carlos Pacheco School, where Rourke helps the youngster improve his reading skills in a literacy-based SMILES program. Plus, as a Big Brother, he takes the child out in the community to discover new experiences.

While grateful for the efforts of Rourke and others who volunteer, officials say many more mentors are needed to help the children who would benefit from them.

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