

WHY ATHLETES FOR KIDS HELPS MAKE OUR COMMUNITY, AND OUR COUNTRY, A BETTER PLACE

Ken Moscarel, Athletes For Kids Founder

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1st -- Our High School Athletes Become Better People

Athletes For Kids turns high school athletes into better, more empathetic human beings. We live in a sports-obsessed American society today where competitive athletes are placed on pedestals starting in high school. Yet it sometimes seems that fewer and fewer athletes at the higher levels of American sports behave as the positive, inspiring role models so many of us wish they would be. How many of us have wished that some of those athletes would display a little more maturity and humility to accompany their God-given talents and abilities?

In the Athletes For Kids program, our high school athlete-mentors, many of whom are stars on a local or state level in their respective sports, voluntarily step away from the pedestal in their local communities and reach out to a youngster who is very different from them, perhaps doing so for the first time in their lives. For our teen athletes, mentoring a youngster with a disability or special need can be a humbling experience which takes them out of their usual comfort zone. There are no cheers from the crowd, just the unfolding, life-altering experience during the mentorship of bonding with someone very different from themselves, yet finding commonalities between them that the mentor may never have even known existed before.

Our current and former mentors have reported many positive benefits in their own young adult lives from our mentorships, including:

- increased patience in dealing with other people;
- greater awareness that not everyone in life is the same as they are, but that our differences need not preclude friendships between us;
- not making snap judgments about people in life anymore based on stereotypes;
- feeling more grateful about their own success in life, instead of having an attitude of entitlement.

2nd -- Our Teens Become Better Peer Leaders

Has there ever been a more confusing time to be a teenager in American society, with so many conflicting, often unhealthy, mixed messages directed at teens by the media and the adult world? Athletes For Kids creates teen leaders who leave our program as far better young people than when they entered it, with a clearer, more inclusive vision of life. They are the future young leaders who we want in our community and in American society.

Our athlete-mentors make it "cool" as teenagers to be friends with very different types of people, especially people with disabilities and special needs. Instead of being seen as self-centered "jocks" on campus, their peers see our mentors "walking the talk" in their own lives in a truly authentic way. Their peers have reason to look up to our mentors as legitimate role models on campus, and they do. Further, many of our junior and senior class mentors in high school have reported that younger freshman and sophomore athletes have wanted to become Athletes For Kids mentors themselves because of the example that those older athletes set for them.

3rd -- Our Teens Become Better Future Business Leaders and Corporate Managers

Our teen mentors, who will soon be entering the American workplace full time, with its ever-growing emphasis on diversity and global markets, are better prepared to fit into that workplace because they are already comfortable with the notion that people who are different from themselves are still "assets" in the marketplace and in society. In today's and tomorrow's more-inclusive business world, which teaches that literally anyone can become your potential paying "customer," our mentors don't have to be taught that lesson by their future employers. Our mentors already live it.

4th and Finally -- Our Schools Become Better Places to Learn

Athletes For Kids makes our schools better places for all kids to be and to learn. As all kids on campus are celebrated, and youngsters with disabilities and special needs are included and embraced, schools become better learning environments for all students. Our mentors fight against social isolation and estrangement, which can become destructive forces in our schools, as we all know from media reports each week. When our mentors wear their Athletes For Kids T-shirts around their high school campuses, they are sending a powerful signal to all of their schoolmates and peers -- that they stand for something. They stand for the principle that everyone has their own special gifts to offer in life, and everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect in return.