



Stacy Clark

Volunteer, Koch Elementary

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Stacy Clark understands that education is much more than what happens in the classroom. It's why the former police officer turned realtor invests his own time and money in bringing new experiences to the students he mentors as a Little Bit volunteer at Koch Elementary.

Introduced to The Little Bit Foundation in 2015, Clark's first instinct was to open his checkbook, but says Rose Hanley, Little Bit's co-founder and executive director, wanted something more. "She talked about the lack of male role models for many of the students and asked if I would think about volunteering in a school," he says. Not knowing what to expect, Clark visited Confluence Academy-Old North during the last three weeks of the school year.

"I saw myself 40 years ago," says Clark. "I was that kid who sometimes didn't have new shoes. The child of divorce, I also knew the reality of an absent father. And everything I saw Little Bit doing was good. They were working to fill in some of the holes. I decided immediately that I wanted to help."



When Little Bit entered Koch Elementary, its first school in the Riverview Gardens School District, in the 2015-16 school year, Clark signed on as a weekly school

rep. A resident of Florissant, he was aware that the level of poverty in the North County district compared to that of the inner city, and just a few

days from the senseless shooting of 9-year-old Koch student Jamyla Bolden, also knew they were not immune to the same violence.

Not long into supporting Koch, the principal noted how the students beamed when Clark arrived and would instinctively follow him around. He asked Clark if he wouldn't mind taking a few with repeated behavioral issues under his wing. "First there was Lonnie," says Clark. "He was a second grader who was constantly getting into trouble, yet was reading on a fifth grade level. I figured out that he was just bored." Clark identified a struggling reader - "ironically, he was a fifth grader reading at

a second grade level," he says - and paired the two together as reading partners.



Then there was Malaysia. A straight-A student who talked about one day working

for Little Bit as an accountant, she suffered two devastating losses back to back, when her grandmother and father passed within a span of three weeks. "Her grades began to dip and we were all worried for Malaysia," says Clark. "I spent time with her as she processed her feelings and reassured her that her dreams are still possible."

Now in his fourth year at Koch, Clark has about 20 students that he routinely mentors. Some he employs as helpers on Little Bit days of service and, for all, he will show up early to talk with them

about their interests and worries and to share bits of his personal story. “I’ve come to realize that many of them just need someone to give them attention.”

He also appreciates the value of exposing kids to “the world outside of the five-block radius most are confined to” and has planned and funded trips to the City Museum and The Magic House for his crew (with the involvement of parents and the school). “If these kids can see another side of life – even if only for an hour or two – and be taught about respect, caring and giving, we can break through some of the protective barrier many of them create that can hold them back.”