

Mentoring firm takes family approach [NC Edition]

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RANCHO SANTA FE -- Coaxing a child to do homework can be frustrating.

A tutor can help solve the problem.

A mentor is even better, said Stefan Hochfilzer.

Hochfilzer, 24, has been a mentor to young people since he was a 14-year-old entrepreneur in Del Mar. His business was called Stef's Tennis Camp. Later, he coached children in tennis and homework as a student at the University of California Berkeley.

Now, with a bachelor's degree in business, Hochfilzer still operates as a mentor through his Rancho Santa Fe-based business, Club Xcite.

He started the endeavor about a year ago, after working as a risk consultant in Los Angeles. The consulting work was good, but his heart wasn't there, he said.

"My heart and my passion have always been working with kids," he said.

Club Xcite is different from a typical tutoring company. Hochfilzer and his friend and marketing partner, Matt Carey, 22, have tried to create an organization that feels like a big family, they said.

Parents and children can buy memberships, which feature discounts on tutoring services and invitations to social events where mentors and families mingle.

During summer there are organized, camp-style activities. Over the school year, mentors are matched with families.

Philip Molin, 13, meets two or three times a week with his mentor. His mother, Elise Molin, said they found one person to match four of Philip's needs: to practice good study habits, finish homework correctly, run soccer drills and learn the guitar.

"You pretty much make a wish and they will give you a program," Molin said.

Finding Club Xcite proved helpful for other reasons, said Molin, who moved to Rancho Santa Fe from Sweden three years ago.

The mentor can drive Philip home from school and, more important, act as a role model separate from parents and teachers, she said.

Philip attends seventh grade at R. Roger Rowe School in Rancho Santa Fe. His mother said she wanted to find a coach for Philip who was not as imposing as a teacher or parent and could demonstrate how to do well in school and why it is important.

It can be helpful to have a person outside the family work on such skills, said Jim Shenk, who has a doctorate in psychology and has referred clients to Club Xcite.

"Parents have certain roles they need to take with their kids that can strain that relationship," Shenk said. "They need to be a cheerleader and manage a lot of basic day-to-day activities in the home.

"When a new person comes in, the mentor can establish a fresh relationship without having some of the negative that can come up with parenting."

Shenk directs the Cognitive Therapy Institute in La Jolla. He said he has been looking for something like Club Xcite because some of his clients need support with academics and self-esteem.

Hochfilzer and Carey said those are important components when hiring their mentors. They look for people who will be positive role models.

Mentors are college students or recent graduates. The majority are working to become teachers, psychologists or counselors, Hochfilzer and Carey said.

"We're super-selective," Carey said. "We want all our mentors to have past experience working with kids, a fun, energetic personality kids can relate to, and, on top of that, we look for a passion."

Carey is a mentor and has a bachelor's degree in business. He attended Benedictine College in Kansas, where he was valedictorian of his graduating class.

For more information, call (858) 539-6211 or go to www.exciteway.com.