

Power of Recycling Discovered Through STEM Mentoring

Ten-year-old Angelia shook her head side to side at the notion of challenges of building a miniature functioning garbage disposal system out of Legos with her team. “Was it hard to work together? No, it just seemed that way. I had to do a lot of math in my head and share it with my team to make the conveyor belt work.”

Legos, trash, machines and mentoring seem an unlikely combination, but that was exactly the focus of first module of Wakeman Boys & Girls Club’s new STEM Mentoring Program at the Smilow-Burroughs Clubhouse on Fairfield Avenue in Bridgeport. STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering & Math - is much more than a buzzword at the Club; it’s a way to engage members in fun, hands-on activities combining critical learning skills and conservation.

Funded and supported by the Sea Research Foundation and U.S. Office of Justice Programs, the program matches 24 third and fourth graders with 6 adult mentors for weekly small group mentoring. After researching and tinkering for several months, mentees and mentors recently presented their work from the Waste Wise Challenge module to families, friends and staff.

“We got to be creative and enjoyed having an older person to be our mentor. She helped us make our board,” explained nine year old Yarian, while pointing to his team’s poster of diagrams and explanations related to their recycling mechanism.

Other mentees also shared enthusiasm for the attention of their role models along with the chance to play with Legos and learn about recycling efforts around the world. While Legos have a magical way of bringing out fun and smiles, it’s the underlying use of math, reading and critical thinking that excited adult mentors.

Fairfield middle school teacher Leah Brown-Wilusz spends one afternoon a week as a STEM mentor. “It’s really fun to work with a different age group than I normally teach - the way they think and want to do things creates challenges and opportunities, but I’m able to help narrow their focus to articulate their goal.”

With the Lego Waste Wise Challenge conquered, program participants are turning their attention to a Quickball Math module in partnership with the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation, followed by an Endangered Species module in partnership with Mystic Aquarium. Due to the program’s success and need to continue cultivating STEM skills in youth, the Smilow-Burroughs Clubhouse plans to offer an additional mentoring program this fall for older members.

About the Sea Research Foundation:

Sea Research Foundation (SRF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on conservation, education, research, and youth development. SRF is a recognized and respected leader in providing mentoring and academic enrichment to underserved youth. Over the past decade, SRF has partnered with more than 100 Boys & Girls Clubs and other youth-serving organizations across the country to implement its group mentoring programs in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). These programs not only build STEM skills in youth but also foster conservation-minded citizens of the future. Most recently, the United States

Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) awarded SRF a grant to implement the innovative STEM Mentoring program at more than 60 youth-serving organizations in 38 states and Puerto Rico.

About Wakeman Boys & Girls Club

Since 1913, Wakeman Boys & Girls Club has offered activities combining athletics, education and service to youth in first to twelfth grade with nationally acclaimed programming and a mission "to guide and inspire young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, and responsible citizens." Led by professional staff and volunteers whose sole purpose is to help kids BE GREAT, the organization now serves more than 3,600 youth annually through its Southport Clubhouse, McKinley Outreach in Fairfield and Smilow-Burroughs Clubhouse in Bridgeport.

For more information, visit www.stemmentoringprogram.org or www.wakemanclub.org.