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EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH MENTORSHIP

The story of Marcus Grinde, an award-winning mentor in Sammamish, WA, demonstrates the importance of mentorship programs in empowering and positively impacting the lives of young individuals.

Sammamish WA, June 20, 2023 – In a rapidly changing world, where the challenges faced by our youth seem to grow by the day, the role of mentorship has become increasingly vital. Mentorship programs provide invaluable guidance, support, and inspiration to empower youth and foster their personal growth and sense of belonging.

Today, we highlight the story of **Marcus Grinde**, a mentor with Lake Washington School District’s **LINKS Lunch Buddy Program**, who recently received the Brad Owen Excellence in Mentoring Award for his outstanding dedication to youth mentorship.

This esteemed award, presented by Mentor Washington, celebrates the everyday heroes who selflessly devote their time, energy, and resources to make a difference in the lives of young individuals.

Partially sponsored by [Lake Washington Schools Foundation](http://www.lwsf.org), the [LINKS Lunch Buddy Program](#) brings LWSD students together with caring adults. This year, over 200 students had the opportunity to spend quality time each week with a mentor during their lunch period.

Marcus Grinde’s journey as a mentor began last year when he was invited to become a “lunch buddy” at Samantha Smith Elementary School in Sammamish, WA.

“I was very involved in the PTSA at [Samantha Smith],” said Marcus. “When my son graduated from the school last year, the secretary said, ‘You should come back and be a Lunch Buddy next year!’ So, I agreed.”

Initially unsure of what to expect, Marcus accepted the challenge and embarked on a fulfilling experience that would impact both his life and that of his buddy.

“For the first couple weeks, I wasn’t sure if I was making an impact, but the staff at the elementary school were amazingly supportive and encouraging.”

The power of one-on-one connections became evident in Marcus's mentoring journey. By offering his undivided attention and showing genuine interest in his lunch buddy's life, Marcus created a safe and welcoming environment for open communication and personal growth. This unique bond allowed his buddy to develop increased confidence, enhanced social skills, and a stronger sense of self-worth.

"It's been very gratifying to see him grow," said Marcus. "I've had the opportunity to see a student who initially seemed apprehensive about school grow to be more interactive and comfortable. Just having a grownup who they know is there to give them undivided attention and show them that they are valued at school can really boost a child's confidence."

Kellie Eaton, Lunch Buddy Coordinator and Office Secretary at Samantha Smith, remarks, "Since Marcus started mentoring him this year, we have watched his buddy become more expressive and proactive in starting conversations. He shows genuine happiness and joy at seeing Marcus every week."

Marcus's recognition as the 2023 recipient of the Brad Owen Excellence in Mentoring Award highlights the importance of community support and involvement in mentoring programs. It serves as a reminder that each one of us has the power to positively impact the lives of young individuals through mentorship and support.

"I believe that investing in the development of children is one of the most important things we do as a society," shares Marcus. "And, although I may not be a teacher during my day job, this is one small way I can have a positive impact."

Marcus's impact extended beyond his lunch buddy. The positive changes observed by school staff and fellow mentors reflected the ripple effect that mentorship can have on an entire educational community. His involvement in school events, dedication to volunteering, and genuine care for the well-being of all students have made him a respected figure within Samantha Smith Elementary School.

Congratulations, Marcus Grinde, on this well-deserved recognition. Your dedication and commitment to mentoring are an inspiration to us all. May your story inspire others to step forward, become mentors, and positively impact the lives of young individuals in their communities. Together, we can nurture tomorrow's leaders and create a world filled with limitless possibilities. Visit www.lwsd.org/links to learn about becoming a mentor with LWSF's Lunch Buddy Program.

The Lake Washington Schools Foundation has been serving the Lake Washington School District for 18 years, providing resources and support to help students achieve their full potential. For more information on the Lake Washington Schools Foundation and its programs, visit www.lwsf.org.

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The Lake Washington Schools Foundation gathers and deploys community resources to enhance academic access and to nurture all students' emotional well-being.

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