



Initiatives in Action: Youth Success Initiative



We can do more together.

Someone To Count On

At first glance, James Woodall is a typical twelve-year-old boy. He's into all kinds of sports, especially football, and is developing healthy social skills. What sets James apart from others his age is his story.

When James was 7 years old, his mother died. He had no contact with his father, so he went to live with his grandmother, Bobbie Morgan.

A couple of years passed. James was growing, getting older. He was doing well in school and had lots of friends, but his grandmother says she realized he needed something more.

"He seemed lonely," says Bobbie. "I knew right then that I had to do something- had to get moving with him."

That's when she contacted Metro Denver Partners, a youth mentoring organization that receives support through Mile High United Way.

As an active part of Mile High United Way's Youth Success Initiative ([hyperlink](#)), organizations like Metro Denver Partners offer at-risk youth, like James, the opportunity to be paired with responsible, caring adult mentors. The goal is to give kids an adult role model--someone they can look up to, learn from and talk to about anything.

Enter Matt Brower. A young, real estate professional, Matt says he was looking for a way to give back to his community and help kids at the same time. A friend connected him

with Metro Denver Partners and within a few weeks, he was matched with James.

"That first meeting was real quiet," says Matt. "James just sat back and listened. He didn't say much at all!"

"That's just the way James is," says grandma Bobbie. "He just listens and takes stock of a person, but I knew right from the start that Matt would be someone he could count on, trust and talk to."

Within a couple of weeks, James came out of his shell.

"Matt is a positive person," says James. "He has taught me that even though there may be tough times, you have to remain positive and I like that."



Matt Brower, Bobbie Morgan and James Woodall. These three were brought together when Matt became James' mentor.

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Nearly three years since they met, Matt and James are very close. They go to movies, share meals, play sports and talk. They both say that they are more than friends now—they are family.

“My experience with James has exceeded my expectations,” says Matt. “Here I thought I would be the one imparting the knowledge and experience, but James has taught me much more than I ever expected about just being yourself and not allowing others to influence you. He’s a very special person.”

James’ grandmother, Bobbie, is thrilled with how her grandson has grown with Matt’s help. “It’s definitely been a good thing, for all of us,” she says. “With Matt’s support, James is becoming the outgoing, responsible young man I always knew he could be.”

As for James, he says he and Matt are talking a lot about college plans these days. He hopes to study business management at either Louisiana State University or Syracuse. But, he admits, Matt is most helpful when it comes to talking about a particularly important and sensitive issue that is filled with teen angst and plenty of hormones.

“Girls!” says James. “It’s kind of awkward to talk about girlfriends with my grandma.”

For more information about our Youth Success Initiative, please visit our website at www.unitedwaydenver.org.

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Mile High United Way