

Hope strengthens reading, writing, and leadership

Written by Ge Gao, TC Dailey Planet
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Every Saturday, about 50 volunteers come to [Hope Community](#) center to volunteer in the tutoring program with students from different backgrounds. The children from 6-9 years old are mostly from Somalia or Mexican immigrant families. For two-hour sessions in the morning and afternoon, volunteers sit down with students doing reading and writing together.

Six years ago, Hope Community held a listening session with 20 residents about their school experiences and their concerns for their children's education. Most parents said that their children weren't strong in reading and writing. So Hope Community started a series of youth program based on leadership and skills development.

This tutoring program is organized by Hope Community [Learning In Community](#) project. According to Dihp Hopkins, the Youth and Family program manager, starting these tutoring programs is not only about helping kids develop reading and writing skills, but more importantly, about helping them build confidence. "Because a confident person would like to try and learn new things." Hopkins explained, "and if they fail, they still learn from that and keep continuing trying."

In 2006, Hope Community partnered with the [University of St. Thomas](#) and built up some basic concepts of community learning. Hopkins said, "The idea is we are not a school. So we want to develop a environment that kids can learn in a community." What this means is it's not a tutoring program happening only between tutors and children, but involves everyone who wants to be a part of this program.

Each semester, before tutoring actually starts, there is an orientation for parents. "We need to tell parents who we are and what we do," Hopkins said. And there is another orientation for both parents and their kids explaining that joining this program is a commitment. The volunteers, most of whom are college students, also have an orientation teaching them how to interact with kids, especially the kids from different backgrounds, and introducing various reading skills volunteers can use.

This program has been operating for six years, though still facing difficulties of funding, capacity and sometimes language issues. Hope Community's tutoring program has a good reputation.

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"Actually, the majority of kids are from outside of Hope Community," Hopkins said. "All our programs are available for any kids. You don't have to live in Hope to be involved in. I know some kids are from Maple Grove."

This year, for the Saturday program, there are 45 children and 50 volunteers. Besides this program, there are weekday tutoring program focusing on helping kids with homework and academic enrichment, a [girls' program](#) , a [documentary program](#) , and the [Step It Up](#) job training program designed to serve different age groups.

Talking about the changes in the last six years, Hopkins said with the change of demography in Hope from African American shifting to Somali and Mexican families, they keep trying new things each year. For example, now the tutoring program sets up pretest and posttest for each student to see what level a student is in before the program and to track how much each student improves. Hopkins said confidently "We do know the improvements because parents say their kids at home read more and read to their little brothers and sisters. And teachers say kids now are more interested in school work."

Now, Hopkins is planning to bring an e-reader as a new experiment. "We do carry traditional reading, writing, and storytelling skills," he said. "But lots of kids don't have the access to the Internet." He said that it will be important for students to use the internet in their lives, so they will try to work on these skills.

Hopkins also said that the bottom line for the tutoring program is volunteers. [University of Minnesota, Twin Cities](#) works with Hope Community on these tutoring programs. In some classes, professors require students do [service learning programs](#) and that's how Hope gets most of its volunteers. Some volunteers choose to stay in Hope after their U of M class.

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