



A Note from the Executive Director

By: Allison McJunkin,
Executive Director

Over the past five years, the number of kids living in foster care in WV has increased 24%. In addition, the opioid crisis has increased the need for programs like Education Elevators. [This recent article from Educationweek](#) details how the opioid crisis is impacting schools. The [video](#) at the bottom is about WV and outlines the huge need for programs like Education Elevators.

A principal at one of our partner schools told me that **at least half of the parents are addicted to heroin or meth** (and that number does not include the parents who are using drugs but can function enough to get their kids to school).

Elevators serve as role models and show kids that there is a better life out there for them if they avoid taking drugs. They connect students to their strengths and help them identify their "sparks" which leads them to avoid risky behaviors. They also provide stability to students who are in and out of the foster care system.

Thank you to all the Elevators, teachers, and generous donors who have helped make the lives of children a little brighter this year!

Cultivating Sparks



We are all interested in many things. However, there are only a few things that makes each of us tick. These are referred to as our "spark". A spark is something that gives meaning to our life; it is a passion. When a child has a spark, it gives them motivation to succeed in that area, but it can transfer into other areas of life as well, such as academics. In addition, when a child engages in their spark activity, it strengthens their character skills, helping them develop into prosocial members of society. When kids find their sparks, they are more likely to avoid risks.

The hardest part is often just identifying what their sparks are. The adults and mentors in kids lives should seek to determine what kids are passionate about and help them nurture that passion.

But how do we find the spark in a child if he or she does not know what it is?

-Talk with them. Keep a journal of things that they say they like or dislike. You can revisit the journal at any time and see what kinds of activities they are interested in, or what they talk about a lot. You can plan activities around these topics of conversation.

-Ask questions. Find out what is happening when they are happy or excited and who they are with when they feel that way. When you and your student are doing an activity together, ask them questions like, "Are you enjoying this activity? What do you like most about it?" By listening to their answers, you can plan future activities based on what they say they like or dislike about an activity.

-Observing the activities they chose. Does your student always go for building materials? Or art supplies? Watch your student as they participate in an activity and see what makes their face light up, or what they seem to be engrossed in.

-Provide tools, resources, time, and energy. Try to plan different activities with your student in order to expose them to many different areas of possible interest. If you see that from these activities your student is excited to do it again or learn more about, this may be a spark. Research that subject to find other opportunities to tell your student about.

When children show a spark for something, in order to nurture it, we should acknowledge it and push them to reach for goals in that area. Seek out books and other activities that to their spark activity.

Encourage them to try new things. If you never try, you never know if you might really like it. The time they spend with you engaging in their spark activity is a safe place for them to be themselves despite how it may be perceived by others.

We aren't trying to find their future career, but their sparks could definitely lead to a future job. Teaching students to discover their sparks helps them feel confident and brave enough to try other sparks as they come along.

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School Spotlight: Piedmont Elementary



The Education Elevators program was founded at Piedmont Elementary almost ten years ago. From the beginning the school has considered the program to be a valuable asset to the students, teachers and families.

"The students enjoy coming to school to see their Elevators. They look forward to seeing them at special school events and spending time with them."

-Caitlin Lastoria
School Coordinator

Partner



Suttle & Stalnaker Elevator
Marie Long and her Student Ana



Business Partner.....Suttle & Stalnaker
School.....Piedmont Elementary
Length of Partnership.....4 years
Length of EE Partnership...In the 1st Year
Current Elevators.....5
Students Reached.....8

Why We Partner: Suttle & Stalnaker started their partnership with Piedmont about 16 years ago with the Thanksgiving Card Art Contest. Each year the students of Piedmont draw a picture of what Thanksgiving means to them. They then select a 1st, 2nd, 3rd and grand prize winner. All winners receive a back pack full of art supplies. The grand prize winner receives a gift card for Toys R Us and his/her picture is used for the Thanksgiving Cards that Suttle & Stalnaker sends to their clients and friends of the firm.

In 2013 they met with the principal and counselor to see if there was anything additional that they could do to help support the community. They asked if they could give their time to mentor a child. They enthusiastically said YES! They love being a part of these children's lives. The employees and staff enjoy hearing about what they are doing and seeing the finished projects. The matched employees really enjoy their weekly meetings. It definitely helps morale. This is our first year as an official Education Elevators Partner. The EE/mentoring program shows employees that their employer cares about the employee and the community they work in.

From the Elevator's Perspective: "I love being a mentor. You get to see a child grow and become more confident. It makes my day to see her face light up when I arrive for our meeting time."

-Marie Long

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