

The Transylvania Times -

TVS And Mountain Sun Students Team Up With Books - Brevard, NC

By [Kayla C. Leed](#)

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Transylvania Vocational Services (TVS) and Mountain Sun Community School have teamed up to create a Reading Buddy program that allows first through third graders (Acorns) to connect with TVS clients through reading and storytelling.

Over the course of the school year, the Acorn students meet with their reading buddies every other week for about an hour-and-a-half. The class and four TVS volunteers are split into four groups, and they spend their time reading a variety of books and discussing ideas about personification, setting, plot and the common language of the love of books.

Once the sharing has happened, there is usually a task for the group. This can be a skit, a storyboard for a new story, a “what would happen next” illustration or other creative ideas.

Lead Acorn teacher Brigid Fox said, “I cannot overstate the beauty that happens when we work with our reading buddies. It is seen both in the moment to moment interactions as well as the longitudinal growth of all of the participants.”

This relationship has been mutually beneficial, both for students at MSCS and the participants from TVS. The adults from TVS are earning a higher self-esteem, a deep sense of pride and reading, leadership and social skills, while students at MSCS are reaping similar benefits and also learning how to have healthy relationships with people who are different than they are.

“It has been just an amazing opportunity for our folks to really feel like they are giving back. They feel valued and appreciated for who they are and it is so warmly and beautifully reciprocated from the children. It has also been great for the children to be exposed to folks who are different than them. They are learning that whole aspect of humanity,” Jeanette Wayne, Interact supervisor at TVS, said.

One student in the Acorn class initially kept her distance from her group’s reading buddy, but upon returning to school after winter break, she embraced him with a hug.

“I watched her give him a big hug and I almost cried. The fear was gone. And let me tell you, the man she hugged is not a hugger, but he really appreciated this one,” said Wayne.

The Reading Buddies Program is a great way for everyone involved to interact with a new population and complements both the missions of TVS and MSCS.

Fox wrote, “We have formed friendships with each other that reflect the honest care we have for one another. I have seen children who are initially uncomfortable with new adults, crowding in close to see and hear the stories. There is celebration with the reminder that reading buddies will be happening. It also helps that we are not starting out new each year because our children are in the class for three years. The elders are able to soften and spread their joy when the program begins in September.”

Both organizations educate and encourage meaningful connection with the community. The Reading Buddies Program has bridged two groups of people together through literature, creating excitement, acceptance, encouragement, leadership and overall confidence.

On Dec. 12, 2017, the Acorn class went to TVS to see what they do on a day-to-day basis. This allowed the adults at TVS to be the hosts and give tours to show what they do, while the Acorns embraced this new experience.

“What a joy it was to have the children come here. That [hosting the children] is not a small thing for our folks. This kind of thing means everything,” said Wayne.

The students were equally impressed.

“Visiting TVS was a huge treat for the Acorns. I believe it gave more dimension to the value of our relationships,” said Fox. “While the children do not necessarily articulate that, they do interact with more closeness and connection.

“Any time people can actively engage another group of people who are different in a meaningful and positive way, something wonderful can be learned. My hope is that this serves as practice for all the participants (myself included) for a life of community rather than living separated and accepting the isolation otherness creates.”

This is the second year TVS and MSCS have come together to run this program.

TVS hopes this program will expand into other classrooms at MSCS and into other schools in [Transylvania County](#).

One Acorn student highly recommends the program. She said, “It’s really nice to read to someone else. Our reading buddies have some troubles doing some things, but they gain love from coming here and we feel happy because they feel happy.”

TVS specializes in blending and packaging dry powder products for government and commercial customers, while providing employment and vocational services to adults with disabilities and other barriers to employment. If you think a program like Reading Buddies would be beneficial to your organization or classroom, reach out to Jeanette Wayne at jeanettew@tvsinc.org.

(Mountain Sun Community School is a nonprofit 501c3 independent school in [Brevard](#), N.C. Mountain Sun serves children ages 3 through middle school and combines Montessori education with outdoor exploration, artistic creativity, and community service. Visit <http://mountainsunschool.org/or> call (828) 885-2555 for more information.)

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