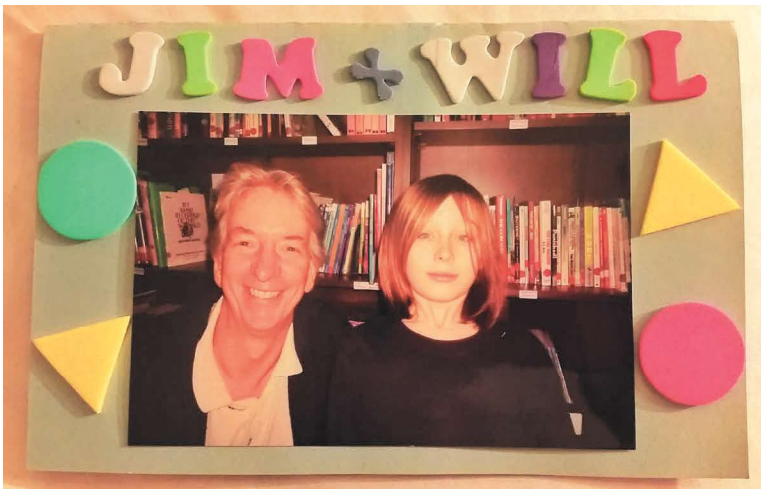


Will & Jim

'We still have pictures of Will and Jim hanging in our house!'

Everybody Wins! Vermont can change the lives of children for the better—and Beth Sightler is the first to tell you so. Her 13-year-old son, Will, almost didn't get the chance to go through school with the rest of his classmates. "Will had been slow to read," Beth recalls. "[His] teacher approached us; we found out he had a visual impairment in one of his eyes that we weren't aware of. We thought he wouldn't progress at a normal rate in school." Then, Will joined the Everybody Wins! Vermont mentoring program, and everything changed.



This photo of Will and his mentor, Jim, has a special place in the Sightler home.

Will met his mentor, Jim Wolvington, when he was in the fourth grade. Though Will's shyness often overshadowed his affinity for story-telling, weekly get-togethers with Jim boosted his confidence. Beth was amazed by the changes she saw in her son. "He just loved interacting with Jim and looked forward to seeing him every week. By the end of the year, [Will] had really improved in reading. I don't want to [exaggerate], but Will went up by about two or three grades in one year."

For Will, the time spent poring over books with Jim was an escape from the stigma associated

with learning at a different pace. "It wasn't stigmatizing at all for Will; he felt like he was doing something fun. He never felt self-conscious about getting the one-on-one support," Beth noted. Will's take on the experience? "A lot of people do it [so it doesn't make you stand out in a bad way]. After we had lunch, we'd go into the library and read—I think it was Harry Potter—and it was really fun. I got a higher reading level and I think that was because of Jim."

Over the course of fourth and fifth grade, Jim was Will's mentor, and his friend. "Jim really helped Will a lot. Reading reduced stress in Will's life. Will was transitioning into middle school [at that time] and it really boosted his confidence." On family vacations, Will would send Jim postcards, to which the mentor would respond in kind. "We still have pictures of Will and Jim together hanging in our house!"

Beth recalls speaking with other parents at an end-of-the-semester event at Will's school. "They saw what a positive thing it was for Will and were asking me how they could get their kids involved in something like that." Will couldn't agree more. When asked what advice he would give to future Everybody Wins! Vermont participants, he said without hesitation, "I would tell my friends it's not just boring reading; you get to interact with a mentor. It's only one day a week and you get to have lunch and read for the rest of the time. It's really fun to go up there and do!" Two years, three reading levels, and an Everybody Wins! Vermont mentor later, one thing is clear: Will is right on target.



Learn more about becoming a reading mentor:

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