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I've always enjoyed being the "go-to" friend for explaining complex math concepts or reviewing English essays for others. When I saw younger students in a nearby community struggle without academic support, I joined the Boys and Girls Club of Mount Vernon. Here, kids were waiting for homework help, staff were stretched thin, and the room ran on improvisation. I started as a tutor because that was the clearest need.

Ms. Penny, the volunteer director, changed my sense of what "showing up" means. She'd ask about my week...and actually wait for the answer. I mirrored this effort with the kids: after tackling math problems during "power hour," I let the conversation drift to siblings, teachers, and whatever had happened before they walked through the door. The club became less about "helping" and more about showing up for this growing extension of my community.

One of the boys I worked with, Jhace—"JJ," he insisted—barely spoke when we met. He kept his head down, pencil moving, shoulders tight. Over time, he loosened: he slid his doodles across the table to me, laughed louder, and, without drama, mentioned his mom's rehab while recounting his day. The week before school ended, when he told me he was moving away, I realized it was a loss of a relationship, not just a schedule change.

Recognizing a chance to bring new opportunities to the kids, I organized a Career Pathway Series and brought in local professionals to talk about their job trajectories, giving kids options they could picture. I still show up each week to explain fractions and edit sentences, but now leave thinking about what holds the place together: attention, consistency, and the decision to show up for each other.