

# FORUM

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## Mentors teach self-respect, self-control



The Enquirer/Tony Jones

Master Wali Fard uses karate to teach self-discipline to students in the Friends of the Children mentoring program.

By Krista Ramsey  
*The Enquirer*

No one would connect the pleasant Friends of the Children office in Price Hill with anger management. As about 20 elementary-age children make artwork and prepare for a weekly potluck dinner, no one is angry, and everyone seems to be managing emotions and behavior very well.

But this national program – one that uses paid mentors to help high-risk children form relationships, set goals and learn social skills – may be one of the most effective ways to help children manage or diffuse their anger.

First lady Laura Bush visited the Portland, Ore., headquarters of the program last month, and Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer recently introduced legislation to federally fund and expand the program.

“We take these kids off the street where they had to fight, scratch and claw. They’re so guarded in themselves, and anger is their best guard,” said mentor Trevor Orr. “We teach them respect, honor, integrity, self-control – words that

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Joe Schurtz, mentor

are not even in their vocabulary. And we teach them that life can be lived in a different way.”

The mentors are each assigned four to eight children, from kindergarten on, and spend at least four hours, and often more than 10 hours, each week with each child. It’s a practice they’ll continue through the child’s high school graduation.

The adults get involved in the everyday lives of the children, attending school events with them, going out for meals playing sports or doing arts activities together. They also help arrange counseling and other support for the children’s families.

The children attend classes such as karate that teach them discipline and self-control.

In the process, the children learn they have a place to talk about their anger and frustration and to practice such things as settling disputes and reaching compromises that can replace the aggressive behavior they see on the streets.

“Just listening is what they need the most – listening to how hard it is to start at another new school because their family moves a lot, listening how all their relationships are torn up again and again,” said mentor Joe Schurtz. “With one of my children, when his anger is gone, he has an outlet to tell me what’s going on in his life and we can problem-solve. Those are the kinds of skills these kids need and don’t have. They don’t have any options other than anger and violence.”