



Mentor Brian Clare listens to jokes from Chase Saylor, 11 (middle), and Deontae Smith, 12, at the Volunteers of America office. STEPHEN HOLMAN/Tulsa World

# 'Building a relationship'

## January is National Mentoring Month

BY ANDREA EGER  
World Staff Writer

January is National Mentoring Month, so the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is partnering with state mentoring organizations, schools and businesses to encourage Oklahomans to mentor a child in their community.

Brian Clare, whose own son is now grown and in college, signed up for Volunteers of America's Mentoring Children of Prisoners program about 18 months ago. He's a mentor to two sixth-grade boys, one in north Tulsa and one in Broken Arrow.

"I just felt like I wanted to give something back," Clare said. "I like it because Volunteers of America gives you a lot of opportunity to be very flexible with timing. I travel a fair bit with my job. It doesn't take as much time as people think it will. For some reason, men especially don't feel they have the time to mentor, but that's absolutely not the case. You can make time to do things you want to do."

Clare meets with the "lads," as he calls his mentees, twice a month. He has taken them to see the holiday lights at Utica Square, to the park or oftentimes just to Wendy's to read a book together over a meal.

"The other thing that seems to scare people from mentoring is they don't know what is expected of them," he said. "You don't have to have this extraordinarily level

of knowledge or a degree in social work. The kids are just looking for someone who is going to be honest and realistic and who will be reliable ... It's about building a relationship."

Clare also said he likes that Volunteers of America provides training and networking opportunities so mentors can share ideas and information.

"And it's fun," he added. "It really is."

The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is a nonprofit organization founded in 1985 by then-U.S. Sen. David Boren that recognizes academic excellence in public schools. In 2005, the foundation launched the Boren Mentoring Initiative to promote school-based mentoring statewide.

Visit the foundation's statewide directory of more than 70 mentoring opportunities at [tulsa-world.com/okmentors](http://tulsa-world.com/okmentors).

In the Tulsa area, prospective volunteers can also call the City of Tulsa Helpline at 211 to learn about mentoring opportunities.

Volunteers of America's Mentoring Children of Prisoners is a community-based program that serves children ages 4-15. Mentors commit to four hours of service per month. For more information about the program, contact Sherry Clegg at [sclegg@voaok.org](mailto:sclegg@voaok.org) or 307-1500

Andrea Eger 581-8470  
[andrea.eger@tulsa-world.com](mailto:andrea.eger@tulsa-world.com)