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Second-grader Timothy Tillman (right) reads to Brian Hsu, a double management and finance major, at the Athens Tutorial Program Wednesday.

Tutorial program calls for students

Volunteer program receives national awards

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In a small corner of an old school building, wedged between walls of chipped paint and homemade signs, sits a staff dedicated to enriching the minds of Athens' youth.

Volunteers of the Athens Tutorial Program work in hopes that the youth they help will be able to rise above their often economically strained backgrounds. The program, established in 1981, seeks to provide one-on-one tutoring, mentoring and character-building opportunities to students in grades K-12.

Nearly 200 University students heeded the call for mentors and tutors, assisting hundreds of children in several local schools, said Barbara Thurmond-Archibald, the program's executive director.

Many students are labeled "at risk" due to their low socio-economic statuses.

"These children need role models to look up to, especially college students like us because most of them don't think they will ever go to college," said Tania Lugo, a student volunteer and sophomore from Augusta.

Athens-Clarke County lags behind the state with a graduation rate of 60 percent to the state's average of 69 percent, while the county's dropout rate of 8 percent nearly doubles the state's average.

"I really feel that we must come together to see any improvement," Thurmond-Archibald said. "What happens to the poor will eventually affect all of us."

Thurmond-Archibald said she has worked with nearly 4,000 students who have participated in the program since its origin 26 years ago.

Under her administration, the organization has helped combat the educational struggles in the area and has received many accolades for its collaborated efforts. In 1990, it was recognized as one of President George H.W. Bush's "Points of Light," a title bestowed to the country's most effective community service efforts. They also received the Jesse Jackson Community Service Award and nearly a dozen other community service awards.

Mehul Shah, a senior from Augusta, volunteers on a weekly basis and said he recognizes the need for volunteerism and outreach.

"We at UGA have all been blessed with a great education, and if students have time to help out, then I feel it is our responsibility to give back to the community," Shah said.

ATHENS TUTORIAL PROGRAM

More Information: Call 706-354-1653, or visit www.uga.edu/~atp/.

Thurmond-Archibald said volunteers are paired with a student on a regular basis. They assist in doing homework, studying for tests and providing companionship. There are no requirements for being a tutor, only "a caring heart," she said.

Students may volunteer at locations such as Alps Road School, Athens Area Homeless Shelter, Rocksprings Road and Whitehead Road Schools. A minimum of two hours each week is encouraged, although Thurmond-Archibald said any amount of time someone is willing to give is welcome.

"People are coming together from different races and different socio-economic situations," she said. "The more we understand each other, the better we will be."

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