

NAF Atsugi youth participate in own sponsor program

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SPONSORSHIP

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – Being a child in the military can be intimidating at times. There’s always a new town, new home, a new school, and new friends. But youth at Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi are trying to change that through the local Youth Sponsorship Program.

The Youth Sponsorship Program is a program where youths are given the opportunity to sponsor other youths their age who are new to NAF Atsugi.

“To me, it’s about helping people and telling them what to do and not to do,” said 10-year-old Shannon Williams, daughter of Aviation Maintenance Administrationman 1st Class Tanya Williams. “Sharing with them what’s going on around Atsugi and telling them what schools to go to and what stores they can go to.”

The program incorporates children ranging in ages of 10 to 18 years old who are assigned incoming youths of their own age and gender.

There are two meetings held twice a month at the NAF Atsugi Teen Center. The first meeting is for the sponsors to plan the month's major activity. The second meeting is the actual big activity for all the kids to get together and meet new friends.

"We do parties and invite kids that are new to our base so they can meet other sponsors and other kids we invite who are also new just like them," said Da'Yon Brower, student at Shirley Lanham Elementary School and daughter of Master-at-Arms Chief Nathaniel Brower. "Kids who have been here before, we ask them if they'd like to be youth sponsors and sponsor [other] kids."

The youth sponsorship program has been a concept in motion for over a year now, overseen by School Liaison Officer, Rheamia Burns and Ellis Ward, program assistant for the Teen Center.

"We try to have this to where the kids run the program and not us," said Ward. "I can make programs, schedule trips, calendars, and everything else. But as far as this sponsorship program, we want it to be driven more by the kids themselves. We're kind of just here as guides and [we] just let them start the program and run it and hopefully build it to make it better."

To enroll your child in the Youth Sponsorship Program, visit the teen center or call 264-6381.