

Checkmates

Teens Mentoring Kids in Florida Chess Club

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What makes a chess club hip? Could it be that watching hours of Netflix's *The Queen's Gambit* made it more popular, or is it simply because of the players and facilitators involved?

At the Miami-Dade Public Library System's South Dade Regional Library, it is more of the latter. The library's weekly Chess Club program has been offered for nearly a decade, but in March 2020 it came to a halt when in-library programming was suspended due to COVID-19. When the club resumed at the beginning of 2022, turnout was lower than it had been in the past. We had a low turnout of about five kids when we started after COVID, but it steadily increased to about fifteen to twenty kids weekly, not including the teen interns.

During this time, I was training and mentoring my teen interns participating in Miami-Dade County's Fit2Lead Internship Program and decided I wanted them to take on a more active role in our programs. Jadon and Hailey, then 16 and 17, unbeknownst to me, were avid chess players. They started playing with the kids during our weekly program. As the weeks went by, we noticed that more and more kids and their parents were coming to play each week. Some were even asking for our interns by name.

As I watched and spoke with Eric Rodriguez (our YA librarian and facilitator of the program), we noticed that the teens made a world of difference in the popularity of the chess club. We eventually

had our other interns, Julie, Nyla and Rigel, assist with the program as well. At that moment I did not realize how impactful this intergenerational program would be on our patrons.

As weeks went by, more and more parents were bringing their kids to learn chess. Having the interns play an active role in the teaching and mentoring of the club has made it very successful. Jadon feels like he is contributing to the growth and development of the children. Hailey and Julie feel it has allowed them to come out of their comfort zone and be more sociable. Chess Club has opened new interests for Nyla. At first, she did not find it interesting, but says she feels happy that she is making it fun for the kids. The program is mutually beneficial for both the teens who teach chess as well as the kids who are gaining new game and strategy skills. In addition, both the interns and the kids gain interpersonal skills that will benefit them as they mature and venture out into the world. It's a win-win for everyone involved. &



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