The Friends Youth Mentoring Program aims to connect Merrimack County youth with mentors as to provide them guidance, stability, access to opportunity and positive modeling. Our hope and expectation is that each match meet for a minimum of one year’s time for research and experience suggest that this duration provides successful outcomes. Many of our volunteer mentors generously give one, two, three years of their time to foster a bond with a child in need. We are highly appreciative of all our mentors and their willingness to do so, but we are uniquely grateful to one mentor in particular as she and her mentee celebrated their 10th year together this past April. Inevitably, a lot has happened and changed during this past decade; but, one thing that endured was Betty Lenehan’s commitment to her mentee, Amanda. Tonight, we are honored to recognize Betty as an extraordinary advocate for the Youth Mentoring Program and for her support of the agency’s collective mission; to strengthen communities by building relationships that empower people, encourage community service and restore faith in the human spirit.

Betty and Amanda, who recently turned eighteen, were initially matched a decade ago when Amanda was in the second grade at Dame School. Betty’s compassionate nature, positive outlook, strong connections to community resources, and professional experience as a school psychologist were all assets that fostered a solid foundation for their mentoring relationship. Throughout the years, their bond has blossomed and although Amanda has “aged out” of our program, the two express their connection will remain long-lasting.

Over the years, Betty and Amanda have attended dozens of Friends Program activities and events, where their participation has encouraged other matches to grow in their own mentorships. Betty and Amanda demonstrate the importance of the 1:1 mentoring model as Betty’s individual attention and support bolstered Amanda’s confidence, expanded her world and encouraged her to work hard towards achieving her goals. Betty has offered Amanda space to complete homework and encouraged her artistic endeavors. They have enjoyed conversation over numerous dinners together and celebrated their match anniversary every April at Arnie’s with an ice cream treat.

In addition to giving hundreds of hours as a volunteer mentor, Betty served as a Friends Program trustee for nine years, assuming the position of chairperson of the Program Committee for seven of those years. She currently is an active volunteer with RSVP, driving seniors to their medical appointments and necessary errands. Not only does she offer transportation, she provides these seniors a gentle smile, a listening ear and a companion to share a conversation.

Having witnessed the selflessness and kindness Betty shows through her many volunteer roles, Amanda expresses a desire to give back to her community as well. Amanda shared that Betty’s advice and support provokes her “motivation and determination to do better and be more involved in simple acts of service.” In Amanda’s own words, “(Betty) is like a grandmother to me. My favorite part about having Betty as my senior friend is how she can turn a bad/hard day into a joyful one by her love, support and smile.” Amanda’s mother expressed sincere appreciation for Betty as well, noting that she can’t imagine what it would have been like all these years without her in their lives.

On behalf of the Youth Mentoring program and the entire agency, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Betty for her longstanding dedication, support and generosity. We are delighted to recognize her as this year’s recipient of the Youth Mentoring Volunteer Award.