For 40 years, Friends Youth Mentoring has been matching Merrimack County youngsters with dedicated volunteers who encourage, guide, and support their Junior Friends. The Friends Program supports over 100 matches. Last year, volunteer mentors devoted over 13,000 hours to local youth. I am honored to have the chance to acknowledge the commitment, energy, and dedication of all these volunteers by describing the contributions of a mentor who’s emblematic of so many like her.

Sue O’Connor’s volunteerism is a natural extension of who she is and what she believes in. She is the mentor of a 10 year old girl named Lily who was seven when the Friends Program matched them. Sue is truly a hero in Lily’s eyes. She even sends Lily notes in the mail – beautiful letters offering words of praise and encouragement. Lily’s self-esteem has really grown and she is flourishing, in part to Sue’s involvement. Lily’s joined a soccer team and loves having Sue at the games. Joining a sports team was a big step for Lily – a step that was maybe just a little easier to take knowing that Sue believes in her. Lily’s more self-confident in social settings too, in part because of Sue’s encouragement. And recently, Lily was named Student of the Month at the large afterschool program she attends.

Sue O’Connor has been a Board member since 2006 and became Lily’s mentor during her fifth year serving as a Trustee. So she truly “walks the walk” and lives out a personal mission of serving others. She confidently, but humbly, provides extraordinary leadership - often by example. Under all circumstances, she steps forward with grace.

As an outstanding child advocate, she has contributed to the program beyond her considerable dedication to Lily. She often donates -or arranges for the donation of tickets and passes to area attractions, sporting events, and cultural venues. The availability of these resources lets other matches have some of the same kinds of opportunities that Sue and Lily have.

We could think of no better ambassador for Friends Youth Mentoring and appreciate her efforts to help us recruit new mentors – just last week she spoke at a new mentor orientation about her experience with Lily. Having her attend helps new volunteers appreciate the impact they can have on a local boy or girl.

There are currently 84 children like Lily who are on a waitlist for a mentor – so we truly appreciate her help in recruitment. I know it might be too much to ask or to even consider – but if there were more people out there like Sue, every kid who wants a mentor would have one. But she is really one of a kind and we are truly fortunate to have her involved as a volunteer.