

**These men get mentoring!**  
**Jacob Cohen and Matthew Crump**

**Jacob's story:**

Three years ago, I had the good fortune to be paired with Matthew Crump, a highly motivated UNC Asheville student in a mentoring program that matches OLLI volunteers with undergraduates.

Matthew and I hit it off from the start. We enjoyed each other's company for our twice-monthly meetings. We discussed his courses in film studies and creative writing as well as his future plans. I saw a lot of myself in him, though he is a much improved version of me at his age!

Last May while attending Matthew's UNC Asheville graduation, I had the pleasure of meeting his proud family. Later in the summer Matthew moved to Philadelphia – my hometown – to participate in a year-long service project called City Year, which supports the public schools. He tutored sixth graders in language arts and math in a school near my own high school.

As a retired teacher, I know the special challenges facing urban schools. My concern for Matthew, a native of rural Morganton, North Carolina, turned out to be unfounded as he adjusted easily to life in Philadelphia. Last December, my wife Linda and I traveled to Philly to visit him. I expected Matthew to be interested in a second year with City Year when he could supervise new participants. But he had a better idea. He was accepted into a similar program called ArtistYear. In that program he will teach young people film production and creative writing. I know his students will be so excited to learn fresh ways to express themselves, and I am proud to have worked with him.

**Matthew's story:**

A March day in 2018 was our usual Friday at our usual spot in the UNC Asheville dining hall. My mentor, Jacob Cohen, walked in with that same ear-to-ear grin, shook my hand, and plopped down on the counter a dark brown, leather-bound book that must've weighed fifteen pounds. It contained faded pictures, school event fliers, letters addressed to "Mr. Cohen," crayon drawings — endless memories showcasing one man's impact of more than thirty years in education. Now, every day that I put on my City Year jacket I aspire to have the same dedication to my students that I saw in that scrapbook.

My service year at Olney Elementary has been very rewarding. With an amazing team of co-workers, I have been assigned to two dedicated sixth-grade partner teachers who allow me space and time in their classrooms, and, above all else, offer a chance to tutor twenty-eight of my own mentees. But that statement fails to acknowledge the challenges of my service year as well. All twenty-eight of those students whose resiliency I so admire have gained that quality by a variety of intense means. After every struggle, however, I think back to that leather scrapbook.

I also think about how Jacob attended high school right down the street from Olney Elementary. When I finally decided to move to his hometown by accepting the position with City Year, Jacob was giving me constant, invaluable advice. One piece that stuck with me was his belief that there are no bad students, only bad situations. Whether it be insufficient funding to public schools or the structural racism that creates the school-to-prison pipeline, our system has so many issues that the students are the last thing we should be thinking about as "problems."

Even though his mentor role officially ended once I was handed my diploma, Jacob "walks" with me every day. It was a real treat when he visited me in Philly in December, and we were able to *literally*

walk together the streets of his old neighborhood -- and my new one. He's supported every step I take, from when I studied abroad to supplying a recommendation letter for my ArtistYear application. I know how much of my decision-making skills come from those bi-weekly breakfasts in the dining hall. And so, as I embark on another Philadelphia service year, I know it will make just one of many pages in my own scrapbook—a book that I will dedicate to Jacob Cohen.