

success attributes, and a best practice leadership and mentoring program model.

"The goal is to create a community where all learners can celebrate their accomplishments and experiences," says Dr. Meltzer. "Younger learners get the chance to connect with someone who has been in their shoes and understands what they are going through. Older students who mentor develop leadership skills and become effective role models."

"We're proving that SMARTS can turn

around the life of a child by sparking resilience, persistence, effort and positive self-concepts in a very systematic, but highly personal way," says Lynn Gray, SMARTS Program Director. "It's been particularly exciting to see SMARTS expand to the inner-city Boston schools and transform students on the brink of dropping out into leaders who want to make positive changes in their school and mentor younger learners."

SMARTS has grown from a handful of volunteers to over 100 learners in

the Greater Boston communities and in Boston schools. With some early successes, the SMARTS program has garnered much support and has recently been launched at the English High in Jamaica Plain and New Mission High in Roxbury. With research and program evaluation showing strong signs of success, Dr. Meltzer and Dr. Roditi hope to replicate the program and implement it in more schools nationwide. ResearchILD is currently seeking funding to create SMARTS Online in response to the overwhelming number of requests for the SMARTS program from schools and after-school programs in the U.S.A., Asia and Europe.

Of course, the benefits of the program are best explained by those who are part of it.

As one SMARTS mentee put it, "SMARTS is always fun and my mentor has also taught me strategies that make it easier for me to do well on the things I struggle with in school...It's great to meet people who know what it's like to be you and let you know you're not alone."

A SMART Start: Fostering Motivation, Persistence and Resilience through SMARTS, an Innovative Peer Leadership and Mentoring Program



strong bonds through regular phone calls, e-mails and monthly group meetings organized by ResearchILD. This program is run by the local non-profit Research Institute for Learning and Development (ResearchILD), and has an outreach branch at selected inner-city Boston schools.

Everyone excelled at different things! This was the theme of the SMARTS Showcase. Zachary showed off his complex LEGO creations. Emily demonstrated the proper way to make the perfect smoothie. Elise displayed her handmade, one-of-a-kind jewelry.

"SMARTS is a gift to the world," said one SMARTS mentor. "I think about how I could have excelled when I was younger if I had had the kind of unique support that SMARTS gives kids."

Another SMARTS mentor who helped to run the highly successful "SMARTS Showcase" on Sunday May 3rd, 2009, said, "I'm a SMARTS mentor because I think about how empowering it would have been to have had someone there for me when I was younger and understood what it was like to learn differently."

The SMARTS Showcase was a chance for mentors and mentees from the Lexington-based SMARTS Leadership and Mentoring Program to share their unique talents and interests with over 100 enthusiastic community members. At the SMARTS Showcase mentors and mentees worked together to share their impressive strengths through activity booths, display tables, onstage performances and creative posters which explained each SMARTS participants' unique learning style to the community.

The SMARTS Showcase epitomized the goals of SMARTS, which pairs younger and older students who can help each other achieve success by building motivation, effort, resilience, positive self-concepts and use of research-based learning strategies. Mentor-mentee pairs build

showed off his skillful drumming to the tune of "Sweet Home Alabama," while Tyler, another junior mentor, played the electric guitar. Ananth and Tyler have become friends through SMARTS and were able to support each other through the process of preparing for their first live concert. The audience relished the rhythms of Ananth's and Tyler's music and began clapping along to their tunes excitedly.

A group of highly dedicated mentors who are part of the SMARTS Leadership Council (SLC) planned and ran the event. In addition, two SLC members inspired parents and students with a moving presentation about their personal pathways to success, called "Motivation in the Lives of Students with Learning Differences."

The Showcase celebrated the end of the second year of the transformative SMARTS Program, the brainchild of education and learning differences expert, Dr. Lynn Meltzer, who co-directs ResearchILD with her colleague, Dr. Bethany Roditi. SMARTS seeks to build a supportive, proactive community for learners from elementary school age to graduate school and beyond. SMARTS transforms the lives of these students by bringing together research-based learning strategies, targeted development of key