

May 23, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to recommend Cindy Elsbernd for the Women of Influence award. I have known Cindy for the past seven years, first through my involvement as a running mentor with See-Us Run Des Moines, then through my employment as a teacher in Des Moines Public Schools (2005-2015), and finally through my service as a board member for Iowa Kidstrong. In each capacity, Cindy has been a compassionate friend, a strong role model, and a phenomenal leader.

First, I was introduced to Cindy through See-Us Run Des Moines, a division of Kidstrong, the non-profit organization that she founded to combat childhood obesity, promote healthy lifestyle skills, and enhance self-esteem and self-worth. Through See-Us Run Des Moines as well as KidStriders, Cindy has reached an incredible number of children as well as their families and has continued to provide fitness foundations and programming throughout Des Moines.

During my tenure as a See-Us Run Des Moines mentor, I encountered remarkable students who beat unfathomable odds. Some of our teen runners were refugees from war-torn countries, and others were battling wars within their homes. Some dealt with mental health disorders, and others struggled with disabilities. Starting in April each year, these "unlikely marathoners" started running, trained four days a week, and competed in one race each month. Through Cindy's coaching and guidance, students who were unable to run one block in the spring completed the IMT Des Moines Marathon in October. More importantly than the medals they received at the finish line, See-Us Run Des Moines participants gained the knowledge that they could overcome any obstacle in their way.

Approximately 20 teenagers participated in See-Us Run Des Moines each year, and countless running mentors and volunteers were part of the program as well. Over the past 11 years, hundreds of youth have participated in KidStriders, and I am confident that not only has the Kidstrong programming positively benefited the children, but it has also had great impact on their family members, their friends, and the community as a whole. None of this would have been possible without Cindy's dream, dedication, and determination.

In addition to her astounding accomplishments as founder of Iowa Kidstrong, Cindy has been an integral member of the Des Moines Public Schools Board of Directors since 2011. She has served as the President as well as Vice President and has been an outspoken advocate for traditionally underserved youth as well as organizations, programming, and strategies to support them. She is an ally to teachers, administrators, the community, and most importantly the students whom she serves. Des Moines Public Schools -- as well as the entire community -- is incredibly lucky to be served by Cindy's compassion, strength, and leadership.

I can think of no one more deserving of the Women of Influence award than Cindy Elsbernd. I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with her and to learn from her. She has been and will continue to be a strong role model, and for this, I give her my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

Emily Bollinger

Ph: (763) 569-7600

Fx: (763) 569-7606

7300 Brooklyn Blvd.
Brooklyn Park, MN 55443

district279.org