



Mario Faulk is an expert at showing kids how to have a good time, but his job as a role model is something he takes very seriously. As the Childcare Director at the Suffolk Family YMCA, “Mr. Mario,” as the kids call him, feels he has a great opportunity to be a positive influence on every child that walks through the door. “There are a lot of bad things going on in the world,” he said. “If we have them here, not only are they safe, but they are having fun and developing themselves.”

A FAMILY GUY

Faulk was born and raised in Suffolk. “I’m from the country part of Virginia,” he said. He credits his family, Shirley and Clarence Faulk, and brother, Marcus, for helping him develop character. “I wasn’t born with a silver spoon in my mouth,” he says. “They gave me what I needed to survive, and I love them for that. That made me grow up strong.”

Faulk described a rich childhood filled with Sunday dinners at Grandma’s and playing football with the cousins. He had the full support of the whole bunch. “I always had someone that I knew that was there for me.” Faulk said that motivated him to want to mentor others. While attending college, he formed an organization called the Men of Alliance, where upperclassmen “help young men become strong men.”

“MY PASSION AND LOVE IS WORKING WITH KIDS.”

Faulk started out as a summer camp counselor at the YMCA while he was still a student studying

sociology at Virginia State University. He was promoted to lead counselor, then school age Site Director before getting the job as Childcare Director in May of 2005. “I love what I do. I wouldn’t change anything about my life,” he said. “I love the individual growth I can see in the kids on a day-to-day basis. That’s what gets me up in the morning.”

More than 200 students are enrolled in the after-school and summer programs at the YMCA. They



swim, create arts and crafts, play games and learn. “If the kids are having fun it’s easier for them to learn,” he says. “They might not even realize they are learning.” The facility is large and there are all kinds of activities for the kids. “We offer such a great program. The parents know if they come here their kids are going to have fun, be safe, and be treated with respect on a daily basis.”

Faulk spends as much time as possible with the kids, playing basketball, Legos or helping with homework. It’s all about making connections. “I refuse to fail, it’s not in my vocabulary, it never will be in my vocabulary,” he said. “If I see someone come in with a frown in the morning, I know I can make that into a smile by the end of the day.”

Sometimes though, at the end of the day, the kids don’t want to leave. For Faulk, “That’s worth more than the paycheck.” ■

MARIO FAULK

Makes it fun to play at the YMCA.

I love the individual growth I can see in the kids on a day-to-day basis. That’s what gets me up in the morning.

Mario Faulk
Childcare Director
Suffolk Family YMCA