

# Wings: Teaching kids to fly

**INNOVATION:** WINGS for Kids Inc., a 501c3 non-profit organization based on Sullivan's Island, is an educational program focused on social and emotional learning during and after school and serves elementary school-age children.

**H**ave you ever thought to yourself, "Too bad I didn't know what I know now when I was in school; life would have been so much easier?"

For Ginny Deerin, that realization came when she was in her early 40s.

"It was at that age that I found myself learning relationship skills, empathy," Deerin said, "what today we call people skills. Kids who have those skills pick them up through their parents and in some cases, in school, but there have always been those who missed the lessons.

"I decided to dedicate my professional life to helping children learn those life skills and created WINGS," Deerin added. "A little league coach teaches kids how to hit a baseball. A little league coach with WINGS also teaches them how to handle it if they miss.

"Our students like to say we 'sneak' the lessons in, making these social and emotional lessons part of a basketball game or day-to-day classroom work."

For 10 years, WINGS for Kids Inc., based on Sullivan's Island, has offered an after-school program that focuses on life skills beyond the classroom, starting a pilot program at Memminger Elementary School. The program currently has 15 part-time staff members

engaged in providing social and emotional learning—the educational process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs to enhance self awareness, social awareness, self management, relationship skills and responsible decision making.

"There are 85 organizations teaching these life skills in classroom settings, but we are still the only one working with children after school," Deerin said. "Our staff must undergo 40 hours of training before beginning work at Memminger. We're now trying to figure out how the program can be effective when others are running the program."

WINGS began a series of clinical trials earlier this year, introducing the program into five existing after-school programs—three in Charleston and two in Washington, D.C. Deerin plans to add an additional program at four trial sites in 2008.

To date, more than 2,100 area children have gotten WINGS by learning to deal with life's challenges in a more-effective manner.

The WINGS program has been recognized by The Academy for Educational Development and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. ■



**Ginny Deerin** has turned a personal crusade to teach social skills to area school children into a thriving Charleston-area business that is gaining national attention.

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