Opportunity sometimes rides a bus.

Terri Benson has seen what offering students a simple bus ride to a college campus can bring to those who might not have considered attending college.

“It’s an experience they normally wouldn’t get,” Benson said. “I think it’s great. You say ‘pretend you are here,’ and they start seeing themselves in a different light.”

Benson spent 29 years as a guidance counselor, the last 18 at Southeast High School before retiring three years ago. She took part in regular bus trips to college campuses with students, and in retirement she and her husband, Fredric, are working to maintain the possibilities the trips bring with the establishment of the Benson Family Fund through the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln.

The Fund’s early focus will be on helping support the bus trips taken by high school students from Springfield. She will chaperone some of the trips. There are usually 5-6 trips scheduled each year, and the trips are supported through a variety of grants.

“(The Fund’s) immediate goal is to help school college trips that let the students set foot on a college campus. They get to see what it is all about, what we are telling them they need to go do,” Benson said.

A traditional bus trip would take local high school students to multiple colleges in a day, for example, Bradley, Illinois State and Illinois Wesleyan. The students receive a tour of the campus, meet with academic and financial advisors and get a feel for the campus.

Benson began teaching at Lanphier High School in 1972. She spent nine years at home raising her daughters Sandra and Leslie before joining Southeast High School’s staff in 1989 until her retirement. Her daughters graduated from Southeast.

“The vast majority of our kids are working and doing their best with what they’ve been given and doing the best they can,” Benson said. “…I want to encourage rather than discourage. “

Benson became familiar with the Community Foundation through her association with the Women for Women giving circle and former Community Foundation board member Judy Stephens. After spending the majority of her life working with Springfield youth, the Benson family was happy to continue to support educational efforts.

“We feel fortunate we can do something and give back to a community that has done so much for us,” Benson said.