School Completion

Contents

The Need for Volunteers

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001), one out of every ten children in America is at great risk of failure because he or she experiences four or more factors that influence their future prospects. The factors are: not living with two parents, having an underemployed parent, living below the poverty line, having a parent or guardian who is a high school dropout, not having health insurance, and/or receiving welfare benefits. While any one risk factor increases the likelihood of negative outcomes for children, the presence of four or more places the child at a tremendous risk of failure. The Census Bureau identified 7.1 million children who fall into this high-risk category.

Research shows that having a mentor decreases the likelihood that youth at-risk of failure will engage in violent behavior and drug use, while improving the chances that they will attend school regularly and improve academically. Compared to a control group, young people assigned a mentor were 46 percent less likely to initiate drug use, 27 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use, 33 percent less likely to hit someone, and 58 percent more likely to achieve higher grades (Public/Private Ventures, 1995 and 1999).

According to MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2.5 million young people in the United States are currently in formal high-quality mentoring relationships. This leaves millions of young people who are at-risk of failure without mentors. Yet a survey conducted for the AOL Time Warner Foundation indicates that 57 million American adults would seriously consider mentoring, and 99 percent of those mentoring now would recommend mentoring to others. This leads us to believe that the challenge lies not in a shortage of willing volunteers, but in a shortage of connections between potential mentors and the organizations around the country that can train them and match them with youth in need.

In his 2003 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush reiterated his call to service by asking Americans to focus their time and talents upon mentoring youth at-risk of failure in our communities. He announced that he will ask Congress to invest in two federal programs that will help more than one million disadvantaged youth find a caring mentor over the next three years through grants to youth-serving organizations.

Grantees must fulfill the essential features of successful mentoring programs: screening and matchmaking, orientation and training, and ongoing support and supervision. And the grantees will be rigorously evaluated according to their outcomes both in terms of inputs (volunteer hours, youth served) and outcomes for youth (academic achievement, school attendance, juvenile crime, and the avoidance of risky behaviors, such as substance abuse).

School-Based Mentoring for Disadvantaged Youth

The U.S. Department of Education will administer one of the programs. That program will support the development, expansion, and strengthening of exemplary mentoring programs targeted at disadvantaged middle school students in order to cultivate mentors for these young people.

The Education Department will invest $300 million over three years in grants to nationally-affiliated youth-serving organizations and independent community and faith-based organizations that can provide one million new mentors to disadvantaged students during their middle school years through school-based programs.

The school-based mentoring program will build on the Mentoring for Success Act passed as an amendment to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Mentoring Children of Prisoners

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will administer a program to help more than 100,000 children of prisoners between the ages of 10 and 14 over the next three years gain access to an adult mentor. They will operate the program with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice and a network of other agencies with a budget of $150 million over three years.

The program will further the goals of the Safe and Stable Families Amendment of 2001, which called for the expansion of services to strengthen families, including creating and expanding mentoring programs these children through networks of community organizations, including faith-based organizations.

How Can I Make a Difference?

Research tells us that we can help young people successfully complete school by offering them mentoring relationships with caring adults. Mentors can give young people who are struggling in school the extra encouragement and support that may help them choose to stay in school, raise their achievement, and graduate. The following is information you will need if you want to be an effective mentor.

About Being a Mentor

What is a mentor?

A mentor is a caring and committed adult role model in a young person's life. By spending a few hours a week sharing activities, listening, encouraging, challenging, and building skills and self-reliance, volunteer mentors can help children from kindergarten through high school achieve academic success. Research conducted by Private/Public Ventures (P/PV, 2000)[1] found that

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[1] Grossman, J. B., & Tierney, J. P. (2000). Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. *(www.ppv.org/content/mentoring)*

youth who are successfully matched with an adult are 52 percent less likely to skip school, earn slightly higher grades, and feel better about how they are doing in school.

Why mentor?

Consider becoming a mentor if you enjoy spending time with young people and are concerned about their success. Children and youth benefit from a spectrum of community support that includes adult role models from all walks of life. People often become mentors to:

1. Honor important adults who made a difference in their own lives
2. Gain a sense of fulfillment from helping young people
3. Help young people increase their school success
4. Expose young people to career opportunities
5. Help young people make better life choices

How can I find mentoring opportunities?

Opportunities to mentor exist in most local communities. Schools, faith-based organizations, community service, and youth serving agencies host a range of structured mentoring programs. These programs can provide you with the training and support that will help you serve as an effective mentor. Explore the following links to find mentoring opportunities in your area that match your interests and needs:

- USA FreedomCorps www.usafreedomcorps.gov
- National Mentoring Partnership www.mentoring.org
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America www.bbbsa.org

What qualifications do I need to be a mentor?

Good mentors are people who genuinely enjoy children and youth and like to spend time with them. They have the time and energy to commit to a regular meeting schedule, and they know they can follow through on the commitment. Good mentors are flexible, have healthy boundaries, are patient, and self-aware. They display a good sense of humor, good communication skills, and are enthusiastic about making a difference in the lives of young people.

What is the process for becoming a mentor?

Though the process varies from program to program, it generally begins with an application process which may include a confidentiality statement, a rights and responsibilities form, and an interest checklist, as well as fingerprinting, background check, reference check, and an interview. Some programs require a Tuberculin screening and verification of valid driver's license with proof of insurance. After an orientation to the specifics of your program, you'll be matched with a youth.

What activities can I do with a youth?

Mentoring activities also vary from program to program. Though supportive relationships are key to all effective mentoring efforts, some programs focus on providing homework help or tutoring; others may focus on enrichment activities. Mentors and youth may read together, engage in a service activity, bake cookies, go for a walk, play basketball, visit a museum or the library, tour the local community college, work on homework, construct an airplane model, take a bike ride, learn about other cultures, take up a sport, make a collage, tour a hospital, visit a radio station, pick local fruit at a U-Pick farm, visit a local bank, create a time capsule, do a job shadow, listen to music… the ideas are endless!

How can I be most effective as a mentor?

Based on a study of Big Brothers Big Sisters, the following strategies help mentors develop trust and build a sustained and effective mentoring relationship. (For more detail, check the resources section below or download *Building Relationships: A Guide for New Mentors*, available online at www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packfour.pdf)

- Be an advocate and a role model. Your role is not to replace parents or serve as an authority figure.

- Be consistent and maintain regular contact. Many young people have been disappointed by adults in their lives. One of the best ways to build trust is to be a patient and regular presence in a young person's life.

- Set realistic goals and expectations. Work to build a trusting relationship first. Changes such as improved school performance take time. Achieving short-term goals (e.g., better school attendance) can build confidence and motivation to tackle long term goals.

- Give your mentee voice and choice in deciding on activities. Provide a range of activity choices for youth. Youth feel more invested in the relationship if they can exercise some control.

- Be positive. Offer frequent encouragement and expressions of direct confidence. Notice and remark on positive behaviors.

- Let your mentee have control over what the two of you talk about — and how you talk about it. Be sensitive to the youth's cues. Don't push for confidences or fire too many questions at your mentee.

- Listen. "Just listening" is a critical form of emotional support.

- Respect the trust your mentee places in you. Respond in ways that show you see your mentee's side of things. Give advice sparingly. Maintain confidentiality.

- <u>Remember that you are responsible for building the relationship</u>. Take responsibility for making and maintaining contact. Understand that youth may not give mentors feedback and reassurance, but this does not mean they are not benefiting from the relationship

- <u>Have fun together</u>. With parents' support, mentors can expose young people to a range of new activities that are both fun and educational. Spending time with a mentor should be enjoyable for young people.

How much money might I be required to spend?

The focus of mentoring is on the quality of the relationship. Mentors are encouraged to provide low-cost or no-cost recreational and learning opportunities for youth. Use money sparingly to avoid setting up monetary expectations that you may be uncomfortable with later. If an activity involves some cost, it is wise to agree beforehand on how much money you will spend. Make sure your mentee's parent/guardian feels comfortable with the activity.

<u>Resources for Mentors</u>

Many resources have been developed for mentors and mentoring organizations. Here are a few that feature ready-to-use tools, activities, and information specifically for mentors.

- National Mentoring Partnership (www.mentoring.org)

- With a website that provides mentoring activities, online training, and support, the National Mentoring Partnership hosts the largest database of mentoring opportunities in the U.S., as well as legislative advocacy and information to encourage adults to serve as mentors.

- Mentoring Answer Book, *by Cyndi Klapperich, in cooperation with BBBS of McHenry County.*

- Down-to-earth, practical answers to common questions from mentors. To order, call (815) 385-3855.

- My Mentor and Me: The Elementary School Years, *by D. Susan G. Weinberger.* Thirty-six weekly activities, one for each week of the school year. Order online, at: www.mentoring.org/run_a_program/resources/resources.adp?Entry=resources?Community=4

- My Mentor and Me: The High School Years, *by Dr. Susan G. Weinberger.* Thirty-six weekly activities, one for each week of the school year. Order online, at: www.mentoring.org/run_a_program/resources/resources.adp?Entry=resources?Community=4

How Can My Organization Help?

Many types of community-serving organizations offer mentoring opportunities to volunteers in their community. The following are tips you may want to consider in developing a new program or evaluating an existing program to make sure you are using mentors well and that you are having the greatest possible impact on the children in the communities you serve.

What is a Mentor?

A mentor is a caring and committed adult friend in a young person's life. By spending a few hours a week sharing activities, listening, encouraging, challenging, and enriching a youth's skills and self-reliance, volunteer mentors can help young people from kindergarten through high school achieve academic success. Research conducted by Private/Public Ventures (P/PV, 1999) found that youth who are successfully matched with an adult are 52 percent less likely to skip school, earn slightly higher grades, and feel better about how they are doing in school.

Starting a Mentoring Program

P/PV found that many mentor programs fail due to lack of adequate infrastructure or support for mentor matches. A "bad" or poorly-supported mentor match can be worse for children than having no mentor at all. If your organization is small and will rely on volunteers to staff the effort, consider the following tips before starting out.

- Be realistic. Mentoring programs should not be mere "add-ons" to existing programs. They are programs within themselves and require dedicated staff time to create, monitor, and support.

- Identify current mentoring efforts in your area. Can your organization partner with another organization already running a high-quality mentoring program? Brainstorm the potential benefits you could offer: clients, recruitment assistance, training opportunities, funding, in-kind support, etc.

- Understand the cost of mentoring. On average, programs spend $1,114 per year per youth (*P/PV, Contemporary Issues in Mentoring*). Depending on the number of mentor-mentee matches you're considering, identify the staff resources you will need for matching, training, and support.

- Think small. Develop a small pilot project with fewer than 15 mentor-mentee matches to start. Starting small will help you refine your services without compromising program quality.

Characteristics of Quality Mentoring Programs

The National Mentoring Partnership has developed the following ten standards of practice that serve as an excellent guide for developing a quality mentoring program.

Though many mentoring efforts do not begin with all ten elements fully in place, these standards correlate with those programs that achieve positive and lasting impacts for children and youth:

1. A statement of purpose and long-range plan that includes:
    - Who, what, where, when, why and how activities will be performed.
    - Input from originators, staff, funders, potential volunteers, and participants.
    - Assessment of community need.
    - Realistic, attainable, and easy-to-understand plan of operations.
    - Goals, objectives, and timelines, for all aspects of the plan.
    - Funding and resource development plan.

2. A recruitment plan for both mentors and participants that includes:
    - A portrayal of accurate expectations and benefits.
    - Year-round marketing and public relations.
    - Targeted outreach based on participants' needs.
    - Volunteer service opportunities beyond mentoring.
    - A basis in your program's statement of purpose and long-range plan.

3. An orientation for mentors and participants that includes:
    - Program overview.
    - Description of eligibility, screening process, and suitability requirements.
    - Level of commitment expected (time, energy, flexibility).
    - Expectations and restrictions (accountability).
    - Benefits and rewards participants can expect.
    - A separate focus for potential mentors and participants.
    - A summary of program policies, including written reports, interviews, evaluation, and reimbursement.

4. Eligibility screening for mentors and participants that includes:
    - An application process and review.
    - A face-to-face interview and home visit.
    - Reference checks for mentors, which may include character references, child abuse registry check, driving record checks, and criminal record checks where legally permissible.
    - Suitability criteria that relate to the program statement of purpose and needs of the target population. Could include some or all of the following: personality profile; skills identification; gender; age; language and racial requirements; level of education; career interests; motivation for volunteering; and academic standing.
    - Successful completion of pre-match training and orientation.

5. A readiness and training curriculum for all mentors and participants that includes:
    - Qualified staff trainers.
    - Orientation to the program and resource network, including information and referral, other supportive services, and schools.
    - Skills development as appropriate.
    - Cultural/heritage sensitivity and appreciation training.

- Guidelines for participants on how to get the most out of the mentoring relationship.
- Do's and don'ts of relationship management.
- Job and role descriptions.
- Confidentiality and liability information.
- Crisis management/problem solving resources.
- Communications skills development.
- Ongoing sessions as necessary.

6. A matching strategy that includes:
- A link with the program's statement of purpose.
- A commitment to consistency.
- A grounding in the program's eligibility criteria.
- A rationale for the selection of this particular matching strategy from the wide range of available models.
- Appropriate criteria for matches, including some or all of the following: gender; age; language requirements; availability; needs; interests; preferences of volunteer and participant; life experience; temperament.
- A signed statement of understanding that both parties agree to the conditions of the match and the mentoring relationship.
- Pre-match social activities between mentor and participant pools.
- Team building activities to reduce the anxiety of the first meeting.

7. A monitoring process that includes:
- Consistent, scheduled meetings with staff, mentors, and participants.
- A tracking system for ongoing assessment.
- Written records.
- Input from community partners, family, and significant others.
- A process for managing grievances, praise, re-matching, interpersonal problem solving, and premature relationship closure.

8. A support, recognition, and retention component that includes:
- A formal kick-off event.
- Ongoing peer support groups for volunteers, participants, and others.
- Ongoing training and development.
- Relevant issue discussion and information dissemination.
- Networking with appropriate organizations.
- Social gatherings of different groups as needed.
- Annual recognition and appreciation event.
- Newsletters or other mailings to participants, mentors, supporters, and funders.

9. Closure steps that include:
- Private and confidential exit interviews to de-brief the mentoring relationship between: (1) participant and staff; (2) mentor and staff; and (3) mentor and participant without staff.
- Clearly stated policy for future contacts.
- Assistance for participants in defining next steps for achieving personal goals.

10. An evaluation process based on:
   - Outcome analysis of program and relationship.
   - Program criteria and statement of purpose.
   - Information needs of board, funders, community partners, and other supporters of the program.

Meeting the Ten Standards of Quality Mentor Programs

Several organizations and websites exist to help new mentoring programs with various aspects of program development. Here are a few of the most comprehensive resources.

Resources for Program Start-Up, Best Practices, Evaluation, and Sustainability

Evaluation, Management, and Training (EMT) (www.emt.org/publications.html) is one of the leading research organizations in the field of mentoring. The website features no-cost downloadable resources on mentoring topics such as program start-up, sustainability, best practices, marketing, mentoring special populations, and training. *Starting a Mentoring Program*: *Evaluation, Management, and Training* (www.emt.org/publications.html)

National Mentoring Partnership (www.mentoring.org) is the largest database of mentoring opportunities in the U.S., as well as support, resources, legislative advocacy, and information to strengthen youth mentoring programs and encourage adults to serve as mentors.

Resources for Training and Supporting Program Staff and Mentors

National Mentoring Center (NMC) (www.nwrel.org/mentoring) provides support to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JUMP) mentoring programs as well as mentoring programs nationwide. In partnerships with Public/Private Ventures and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the NMC has developed a no-cost, downloadable, research-based training curriculum, *Strengthening Mentoring Programs for Youth,* that teaches programs how to run an effective mentoring program. NMC has also produced eight *Technical Assistance Packets* to support excellence in mentoring program management. Other resources include a large lending library and the Mentor Exchange listserv.

Resources for School-based Mentoring and Mentoring School-Age Children

School-Based Mentoring: A First Look into its Potential (www.ppv.org/pdffiles/school-based.pdf) explores the strengths, challenges, and potential contributions of school-based mentoring. It describes two well-run school-based programs, the characteristics of the mentors and youth involved, the program practices and potential benefits to youth, implications for practitioners, and directions for future research.

Mentoring in Schools (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/actguid/mentor.html) looks at the ways in which mentoring can help create a healthier learning environment. The full publication is

available from the National Criminal Justice Reference System (NCJRS).

15 Tips for Effective School-Based Mentoring, from the Department of Justice's website (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows/pdftxt/mentor.pdf).

Mentoring School-Age Children: Relationship Development in Community-Based and School-Based Programs (www.ppv.org/pdffiles/mentorreldevel.pdf) compares volunteers' experiences and the development of their relationships with youth in both community-based and school-based settings.

Mentoring School-Age Children: A Classification of Programs (www.mentoring.org/resources/pdf/schoolage-classif.pdf) describes characteristics of youth mentoring programs, mentors, and the youth they serve. The programs sampled include group and one-to-one mentoring models from a variety of settings.

Resources for Faith-Based and Community Mentoring

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) (www.ppv.org/content/faith1.html) has produced some of the most valuable research-based products in the field of mentoring, including documents on the effects of faith initiatives on high risk youth. Most of the information is available for download at no cost. P/PV resources are required reading for anyone thinking about starting or running a mentoring program.

USA Freedom Corps (www.usafreedomcorps.gov) is a coordinating council housed at the White House and chaired by President George W. Bush. The council works to strengthen our nation's culture of service and help find opportunities for every American to start volunteering. The website offers opportunities for mentoring in community and faith-based organizations

Center for Faith and Service – FACES (www.ncpc.org) is operated by the National Crime Prevention Council, FACES works to increase opportunities for faith-based and small community-based organizations to use service as a strategy in their programs and projects.

Frequently Asked Questions About Mentoring Programs

What types of mentoring programs exist?

Several types of mentoring programs exist. Community-based models, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, allow mentors and mentees to spend time together doing activities in the community, such as going to the park, visiting a local university, or attending a sporting event. School-based mentoring takes place in a school setting. Mentors and mentees may have lunch together, work on school projects or homework, or play games. Site-based mentoring is similar to school-based mentoring; mentors and mentees meet at a specific site, such as a YMCA or Boys and Girls Club, to participate in fun activities together. E-mentoring is a relatively new model in which a mentoring relationship is conducted via the Internet. Other models include faith-based, group, and workplace mentoring.

How do I recruit more male volunteers?

If you are looking to recruit a specific population of mentors, your recruitment plan must be targeted toward that population. For example, use men as part of the recruitment team, use photos of men in promotional materials, and develop a catchy message aimed at men. When speaking to organizations or groups, have a male staff person or volunteer present the information from their perspective. Finally, go to the places in your community where men traditionally congregate, such as fraternal organizations, military bases, barbershops, and sporting events. For more ideas read: *Recruiting Male Volunteers: A Guide Based on Exploratory Research* from the Corporation for National and Community Service: www.energizeinc.com/download/blackman.pdf

How do we conduct background checks on our volunteers?

There are a variety of ways to conduct criminal background checks, depending on your program needs and the state you live in. There are many levels of criminal history, such as: convictions, arrests, deferred adjudication, wants/warrants, juvenile records, child abuse reports, and sexual offender registries. Organizations providing mentor services must create criteria for selection or rejection of potential volunteers before they begin the background check process. Youth-serving organizations generally agree that individuals should be permanently disqualified from holding positions that require substantial contact with children if their criminal records include any of the following: past history of sexual abuse of children, conviction for any crime involving children, history of any violence or sexually exploitive behavior. The following link provides ideas on where to go and issues to consider: www.mentortexas.org/files/screening_tipsheet.pdf.

Where do I look for funding for my mentoring program?

Look for funding from a variety of sources, such as individual donors, businesses, foundations, civic groups, churches, and state/local/federal government sources. Your program may be supported by a variety of funding types, including in-kind contributions, grants, sponsorships, fees for services, special events, or through partnerships. The more diverse your funding base, the more sustainable your program will be for the future. For ideas, link to: www.mentortexas.org/files/funding_sources.pdf