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We are delighted to be able to make this case study available to you to help you make your mentoring program a success. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools under contract with EMT Associates, Inc. Although this publication has not yet been officially released by the U.S. Department of Education, we have been authorized to make it available on the Web at this time to solicit your feedback.

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Sincerely,

Judy Strother Taylor
Project Director



U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center

Case Study

By Jerry Sherk

Making the Faith-Based Connection: The Chosen To Achieve Program

Case Study

Making the Faith-Based Connection

Introduction

Churches, temples, and other religious organizations are a great resource for recruiting mentors. When people of faith congregate and worship, they often have a unified vision of working together to help others. The motivations for congregants to serve mentoring programs are many. People of faith frequently have a heightened sense of social responsibility; many faith-based organizations are already working with youth and families in their community. There is typically a strong commitment to serve and assist fellow community members.

More and more, mentoring organizations are experiencing success as they reach out to the faith community to fulfill their volunteer needs. "Amachi," the original children of prisoners program (based out of Philadelphia) is a prime example of developing collaborations and recruiting volunteer mentors. In the first year of operation they were able to mobilize over 400 mentors from faith-based organizations.¹

But the recruitment of mentors of faith is not automatic. Like any aspect of a recruitment plan, mentoring organizations need to do their homework. Important considerations when assessing a congregation include determining the entity's "organizational beliefs," which refers to "...the goals of a

congregation, including the extent and nature of congregational priorities related to reaching out to those in need.²" Also important is "organizational capacity," defined as "...the problem-solving capability, leadership, economic and human resources, and member skills within the congregation that allow it to accomplish its primary goals."³ In other words, is the specific organization motivated to serve your population, and do they have the capacity and leadership to do so?

When approached by mentoring and other volunteer programs, not all organizations of faith respond to the call. As "Moving Beyond the Walls; Faith and Justice Partnerships Working for High Risk Youth"⁴ points out, recruiting mentors from congregations depends not only on the faith organizations' respective mission and vision, but on how they were approached, and by whom. In this study, churches were much more responsive when local pastors and church leaders "championed" the mentoring effort, by making recruitment pitches to their own as well as other congregations.

² "Faith-Based Organizations," Maton, Domingo, and King, from Handbook of Youth Mentoring, DuBois and Karcher, Sage Publications, 2005 *this is chapter within the book.*

³ Cited from Pargament & Maton (2002) "Faith-Based Organizations," Maton, Domingo, and King; from Handbook of Youth Mentoring, DuBois and Karcher, Sage Publications, 2005

⁴ Public/Private Ventures, Tracey A. Hartman, 2002

¹ "People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise," National Crime Prevention Council, 2004

This document will highlight the Chosen to Achieve Mentoring Program and provide specific strategies on how to best approach faith organizations for volunteer mentors, or for other collaborative purposes. These tips should be helpful to both Department of Education Mentoring Programs that are implemented within faith-based organizations and secular mentoring programs that want to collaborate with organizations of faith.

Program Description

To support greater academic achievement for African American students, Saint Paul Public Schools came together with the African American community in 2002-2003 to create and implement a culturally-specific mentoring initiative. This program, named Chosen to Achieve, was designed to be a school-based mentoring program for students in their transitional, early teenage years (7th and 8th grades).

During the summer of 2003, a Leadership Team (comprised of African American community members) developed the vision and mission for Chosen to Achieve, designed the core components of the program, and supported mentor recruitment efforts. The majority of these original Leadership Team members continue to serve on behalf of the Chosen to Achieve program.

In 2004, the Chosen to Achieve program acquired a three-year federal grant from the United States Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools to provide school-based, culturally specific mentoring services in the Saint Paul Public School system—the second largest school district in Minnesota.

In the fall of 2003 Chosen to Achieve worked with 60 students and three schools. In the Fall of 2004 the program added an additional 60 students and added three more schools for a total of six schools. Now in its third year, the Chosen to Achieve program is offered in all eight Saint Paul Public School middle schools serving 120 young people who are connected with 240 mentors.

The Chosen to Achieve program philosophy consists of:

1. Offering a culturally specific program based in history and values of the African American community
2. Strengthening the capacity of young people to reach their potential
3. Building relationships at all levels of the program (from the community and school level to the mentor-mentee relationship)
4. Implementing a shared model of leadership
5. Relying on collaborative relationships to share the risks as well as the rewards

Mentoring Design. Two African American adult mentors work with an African American youth who is in the 7th or 8th grades and enrolled at one of eight middle schools that offer the program. Caring mentors provide emotional support and direction for the purposes of strengthening students' hope, motivation, commitment, and academic achievement. The core components include:

- African American adults mentoring African American youth
- Assigning two adult mentors to each youth mentee
- On-site mentoring at the student's school
- Mentors meeting with each mentee twice a month for a minimum of one hour every two weeks or a maximum of one hour each week
- School staff nominating youth who might benefit from a mentoring relationship to augment their leadership and academic potential
- Team Leaders guiding programming and overseeing mentors

Evaluation Findings. As part of the evaluation, students, mentors, teachers, and school district staff have had the opportunity to share their perspectives about the program's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, school record data (student grades, behavior, and attendance) is monitored monthly and analyzed on an annual basis to

report on program outcomes. Preliminary evaluation results show that students and mentors are developing strong relationships, school support for the program is evident, and students in the program are benefiting personally and in terms of their academic achievement.

- 76% (during the 05-06 school year) to 92% (during the 04-05 school year) of students and mentors maintained a relationship for at least one year.
- 80% of mentors interviewed believe they are making a positive difference in the life of the student they mentor.
- In 2004-2005, 45% of CTA students showed a decrease in their unexcused absences and in 2005-2006, 33% of CTA students showed a decrease in their unexcused absences.
- In 2005-2006, 41% of students improved in English and 29% improved in Math (44% of students improved in other subjects).
- Students and mentors describe each other as “friends”, feel close to one another, and say they talk about school the most when they meet.

Best Practices and Strategies

There are several key strategies that Anna Young and the Chosen to Achieve program team have employed to create long-term partnerships with a number of faith-based organizations in St. Paul.

#1 Finding Common Ground

Getting Started. Each faith based-organization has a different “personality.” This is a composite picture that can include the organization’s belief system, mission, the diversity of their members, organizational capacity, and their history of participating in service programs. This is why mentoring programs need to do research on each congregation by considering such characteristics, such as:

- Their mission, vision, goals and objectives.
- Past and existing programs, and the populations they frequently serve.
- Demographics of their members (gender, age group, race, culture, socio-economic background, etc.).
- The dynamics of the neighborhood that the church is in (affluent, poverty, gang-affected, etc.), and also if the congregants live in the neighborhood, or do they commute?
- The history of collaborations with outside programs and organizations (are they “inwardly” or “outwardly” focused)?
- Do their leaders seem dynamic and visionary, or conservative?

Also find out if anyone working with your program, such as staff, administrators, or board members, worship at or knows someone internally within the faith groups being targeted. As the saying goes, “a ‘warm’ contact is much better than a ‘cold’ one for opening doors.

Approach Churches with a Similar Mission To Yours. One way to build trust and to get a commitment from an organization of faith is to find out what is important to them. What is the mission of this organization, and what are the particular interests of the decision makers that you are connecting with? Very often they have a goal of serving children that attend their place of worship. If so, maybe you can include their children in your program, and then it would become a win-win for both organizations.

As you are making your pitch to a religious organization, if you have already identified the mentee population, bring in a map that shows the neighborhood around the church, and mark it with the locations of the mentees’ homes. This can have a tremendous impact, as it will show leaders that their members will be serving children at their very own doorstep.

#2 In for the long-haul: building long-term partnerships

Whether you are one organization of faith reaching out to another, or a secular mentoring program seeking to recruit mentors from faith organizations, building trust is a must--so developing solid ongoing relationships is the key. Here are some tips for approaching these organizations and for building relationships:

Navigate Your Way Through the Hierarchy⁵. Especially in large religious organizations, you might not be able to obtain an immediate audience with the head person, so be patient and enter through the appropriate channels. This means, for instance, that you may have to be meet with a youth pastor or a program director Before the door is opened to the ultimate decision maker.

Don't Treat them Like a "Spigot."⁶ Organizations of faith feel put off when mentoring programs expect them to automatically offer up their volunteers Many programs assume that just because those of faith are "good people who want to do good things" that a steady flow volunteers should be forthcoming from their ranks. If you want to raise the ire of the faith community, just take it for granted that they will being sending a large number mentors to your program

#3 Build the Relationship on the Front-End

Include Faith Organizations in Planning. Invite key members from faith organizations to take part on your advisory or mentor recruitment team. If these leaders become part of the decision making process, they will more fully understand the benefits of youth mentoring and the mission of your program.

⁵ "Recruitment: A Strength-Based Approach," Arevalo, Sherk & Urbani, Center for Applied Reseach Solutions, 2006

⁶ Ibid

If just one enthusiastic person from your advisory team champions your program—spreads the word to members at their place of worship--it can be a tremendous boon to your mentor recruitment.

In the mentoring world, the term "champion" refers to a person of power and influence who makes a wholehearted commitment to support a mentoring program. This can be done by helping to recruit mentors, by seeking financial and other resources, or by making the connections that help forge collaborative partnerships.

Address the Issue of Sharing of Faith. Most faith-oriented volunteers want to know if, when, and to what extent they can share their beliefs with a mentee. Although mentoring programs receiving federal funding cannot allow their mentors to proselytize, each program should clearly define their guidelines in this area, and then let faith organizations and mentors know them during the recruiting process.

Chosen to Achieve decided to hold Leadership Team meetings in the community—not at school-based sites—but at African American faith-based organizations. During the planning process the leadership team met in a number of different churches. Once the project was begun, the mentors began meeting on a monthly basis at African American churches to build relationships, ensure strong communication, and participate in ongoing training led by African American individuals.

The rationale for gathering at churches is purposeful, intentional, and it reflects the culturally specific focus of the program. Meeting in African American churches emphasizes the important role that churches have played in the culture's history. African American churches were at the center of political action, the force behind organizing the Underground Railroad, and churches both advocated for education and served as schools. By holding meetings at African American churches, the program emphasizes the need for the culture to return to its roots

in finding community-based solutions for caring for and connecting with young people.

Provide a Menu of Volunteer Opportunities. As it is a huge commitment for individuals to commit to mentor a young person for an extended time, suggest other ways to volunteer. One possibility is to ask them if they will “pray for youth and the matches” on a consistent basis. This can also help the faith organization to maintain an awareness of your mentoring program, and its needs. In addition to prayer, possibilities for engaging religious organizations include:

- Helping obtain food for an event
- Offering bus transportation to a field trip and providing chaperones
- Donating space for trainings
- Securing financial resources
- Developing a collaborative community service event
- Suggesting additional venues for recruiting pitches

On an ongoing basis, Chosen to Achieve staff set recruitment goals for mentors and work to strengthen existing community support. During the first and second year of the program, there were no mass advertising campaigns or impersonal calls to potential mentors or community partners—all contacts happened on a personal level in order to build and develop relationships. This goal was accomplished through the staff or Leadership Team members making personal contacts in order to understand how involvement or support of the program might benefit the interested party as well as what the individual or group might have to contribute to the program. In addition, African American organizations and community leaders nominated mentor candidates or suggested groups who would be valuable community partners. Finally, program staff retained memberships with important African American-based organizations, such as the Urban League and NAACP, in order to remain connected with the community.

#4 Give to Get

Offer Your Help. Do not come empty-handed. When you’re approaching a religious organization to seek mentors or other resources, bring something of value to give them. For example, provide church members with information on other resources available in the community (e.g., other children’s programs, referrals to mentoring programs that might be a better fit for their children than yours, daycare services, or health and mental health resources). An additional example is that a faith organization might be looking for volunteers to participate in their summer carnival, or help out at a food drive. You, your staff, and maybe even some of your mentors can provide this assistance.

Provide No-cost Trainings. Another way to collaborate with faith organizations is to offer staff and even men’s and women’s groups training on how to interact with young people. Put together a brief workshop using the strategies and philosophies from your mentoring program, and during this training, provide education along with fun and interactive exercises that will show individuals how to have greater impact on their youth. After covering subjects such as, “what a mentor is and isn’t,” “the benefits of developing relationships of trust and respect,” and “tools for communication,” also mention your mentoring program: “If you are committed to grasping a better understanding of youth, and if you are really set on improving your skills, consider joining our mentoring program for just one year.”

Program Replicability

The bottom line in reducing staff burnout is to let your staff know they’re appreciated. Praising, recognizing, and supporting employees is key, but it is also critical to make them feel they’re a real and important part of your team. Solicit staff feedback regularly, and use what you learn to make program improvements. Ask your employees to think creatively about their jobs and make suggestions to help the program—then, as

much as possible, use their suggestions. Include staff in planning meetings and in decision-making whenever possible, and create an atmosphere where everyone in the agency feels that they're part of the mission of the organization.

Replication Checklist

Tips for Recruiting Mentors and Building Partnerships with Faith-based Organizations.

- Assess local faith-based organizations for the likelihood of collaborations. Look at their mission and their history of working with other youth-serving entities and other characteristics, such as the age group, race, culture, and socio-economic background of their members.
- To gain an audience with the targeted organization, determine if anyone in your organization knows its leaders or members.
- Spend the time needed to develop trusting relationships. Don't take the religious organization for granted. Instead, attend their services and events, and eat meals with them, if possible.
- Sell your effort to the organization's leader. Whether a pastor, priest, Rabbi, etc., encourage them to develop messages to their members that highlight mentoring relationships in a religious context. Ask if you can follow up by providing a recruiting pitch.
- Give presentations to the organization's men's and women's groups.
- Invite religious leaders to become part of the decision-making (and recruiting) process by asking them participate on your advisory team.
- Offer your organization's assistance. Consider ideas such as providing resource information to members, volunteers to staff their activities, and no-cost trainings to staff and men and women's groups.

About the Author

Jerry Sherk runs Mentor Management Systems, a business that provides technical assistance for organizations that want to develop youth mentoring programs. Mentor Management Systems also helps adult mentoring programs, so that mentees can improve their skills and advance in their careers.

Over the past 10 years, Sherk has helped develop 250 mentoring programs. He leads workshops, develops training materials and mentoring systems, and writes workbooks related to mentoring. Sherk was one of the founders of the Mentoring Coalition of San Diego County and is past president of the NFL Retired Football Players Association in San Diego.

Mentoring Resource Center

Case Study Series

The Mentoring Resource Center (MRC) has been created to provide United States Department of Education Mentoring Program grantees with training, technical assistance, publications, research, and consultation, all in an effort to help their program staff design and implement the highest quality mentoring programs. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, the MRC is a collaborative effort between EMT Associates, located in Folsom, CA, and the National Mentoring Center, located in Portland, OR.

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