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Dear Project Director:

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

Mentoring Resource Center



Creating Matches that Last Friends for Youth Best Practice

By Elsy Arévalo

Introduction

In recent years, mentoring has emerged as one of the most successful strategies to support the healthy growth and development of youth. Mentoring has been associated with increased self-esteem, improved grades, and reduced violence. Many communities nationwide have met these positive research findings with enthusiasm and as a result mentoring programs have been started and taken root in almost every community in America in the hopes of replicating similar positive outcomes for the youth they serve. However, as a field we have also learned that not all mentoring programs lead to the same results, that mentoring can be effective but not in all contexts, and that not all mentoring approaches work.

The length of a match has been shown to be a key element that makes a significant impact in the outcomes obtained from the mentoring relationship. Grossman & Rhodes (1999) explored the predictors and effects of relationship duration in mentoring. They found that youth who were in mentoring relationships that lasted a year or longer reported improvements in academic, behavior, and well-being. On the contrary, youth whose relationships ended earlier showed progressively fewer improvements. Of most interest, however, was the finding that youth who were in relationships that terminated within a very short period of time reported decrements in several indicators of functioning. Research such as this has shown us that programs that do not follow the field's best practices should not only not expect the same results, but they should be

very careful not to obtain negative results for the youth they seek to serve and protect.

So what leads to long-term matches? First, mentors who understand that the strategy, the intervention, and the formula is the formation of the relationship itself. Successful mentors follow a developmental mentoring approach¹. That is, they seek to listen and get to know their mentees first instead of being judgmental and following their own agenda. They are also consistent and persistent. In other words they do what they say they are going to do when they say they are going to do it regardless of the reaction they get from their mentees. Finally, they do not do it alone. There are several structural elements necessary to help mentors and mentees form a long-term relationship. Those elements orienting all participants to the mentoring process, training them prior to the match, and providing consistent and ongoing support.²

The following case study is a good example of how program structure affects the establishment of successful mentoring relationships. It is also a good reminder that because in mentoring we ask so much of our participants we must also offer a lot to help them succeed in their role.

¹ Styles, M., & Morrow, K. (1995). *Building Relationships with Youth in Program Settings: A Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures

² *MENTORING ADOLESCENTS: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?* Cynthia L. Sipe

Friends for Youth Mentoring Services

Over the past 26 years, Friends for Youth's Mentoring Services program has matched over 1,600 at-risk youth with caring adult mentors. The program has an 88% success rate of creating long-term friendships, a percentage significantly higher than the 33-67% rate for similar programs nationwide.³ The program offers community-based, long-term one-to-one relationships, enrichment activities, and support services. Through these services, the agency strives to provide youth tools to stay in school, enhance their self-esteem, and avoid problems with violence, delinquency, substance abuse, and teen parenthood by helping them set higher educational expectations and break cycles of poverty or violence. Research has found that participants demonstrate increased self-esteem and academic achievement, decreased problem behaviors, and a broadening of horizons for their future.

The program's mentors are adults from throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, and their background and experiences reflect the diversity of the community. All volunteers are extensively screened and trained according to the mentoring field's Recommended Best Practices (e.g., fingerprinting, home interviews, references). The program's mentees are youth (8 to 17) who live in San Mateo and northern Santa Clara Counties. These voluntary participants are referred by teachers, counselors, probation officers, and other youth professionals as being "at-risk" of not reaching their full potential due to challenges at home, at school, or in their neighborhood. Such challenges put them at-risk of dropping out of school, committing or becoming victims of violence, using drugs or alcohol, becoming teen parents, or simply not living up to their full potential. The ethnically diverse participants are generally from economically disadvantaged households. Overall, mentees have an additional special need: many have never walked on the nearby beach, visited a college campus, been to a ball game, or had experiences

typically associated with youth. Rather than offer broad-based services to a large number of youth, Friends for Youth provides intensive support to the children most in need of mentoring services. Each year, the program supports both new matches and "Active Alumni" who are choosing to continue involvement past their one-year commitment.

Strategies: Friends for Youth Best Practices

Friends for Youth was selected as exhibiting Best Practices through sound, thorough program implementation. The process for youth referrals, volunteer recruitment and screening, participant training, match selection, and ongoing support has been proven effective in supporting the program's mentee population. Developed with a former Public/Private Ventures researcher, Friends for Youth's formal outcome process (such as academic achievement, self-esteem, skill development) is integrated into ongoing operations, allowing the organization to track and gauge its effectiveness, as well as enhance services to maximize program resources. Here we highlight some of the strategies they implement to ensure the creation of long-term matches:

Mentoring Philosophy

Friends for Youth ensures that referral agents, parents, mentees and especially mentors understand that the number one priority of the match is to build a consistent, caring, long-term relationship. Mentors (Senior Friends) spend a minimum of three hours a week with their mentee ("Junior Friend") for at least one year. Prior to ever being matched, volunteers are oriented, trained and instructed on the importance and value of building a trusting and caring relationship with their mentees. Through those efforts, volunteers come to understand that in order to serve as positive role models who motivate youth to succeed academically

³ Marc Freedman, *The Kindness of Strangers*.

and personally, they must offer their consistent, nonjudgmental, and ongoing support. This philosophy is carried out in every facet of the program from the way youth and their families come to view the program, the philosophy followed when support services are offered to both mentors and mentees, and particularly in the training of all staff members.

Provision of Relationship Building Activities

Friends for Youth offers activities are designed to assist Junior Friends in their overall personal development. They focus in four areas: recreation, life skills, community service, and academics. Examples of recent activities include ice-skating, a knitting workshop, camping, workshops on gang prevention and college planning, a self-defense course, and such community service projects as volunteering at a park clean up.

Consistent and Ongoing Match Support

Staff provides ongoing, individualized support to maximize the success of each Friendship. These support services include:

- Ongoing contact with the mentee's family, referral agent, and teacher.
- Weekly telephone contact with mentors for the first three months of the match, twice a month after the initial period and more as is needed by the match.
- Mentor support groups where mentors come together to discuss and receive support on issues they are facing within their matches.
- Three-month reviews during which each mentor and mentee meets face to face with their program counselor to discuss the match. The counselor then meets the pair to reinforce the positive aspects of the match and to assist them with agreed upon goals
- Referrals to outside resources are provided to youth and their families to support the overall well being of the children involved as well as to alleviate the self-imposed pressure many mentors feel to solve and provide for all of their mentee's needs.
- Through the implementation of the Friends for Youth Mentoring Institute, the organization is now able to develop tools and resources specifically designed to help mentoring pairs establish long-term relationships. They include publications such as the

Academic Activity Guide, the *Bay Area Activity Guide*, and the *Friendship Scrapbook*.

- Anniversary meeting meetings are designed to bring together each match once they fulfill their first year commitment. This meeting helps the pair process their experiences, celebrate accomplishments and clarify next steps and expectations for the match.
- Alumni support- all matches are encouraged to continue meeting and in fact the majority do continue to meet for much longer than the initial one-year commitment. These alumni pairs continue to be supported.



Replicability

Research in mentoring has helped us understand that helping mentors and mentees build long-term, caring relationships is the key to helping youth reach their full potential. We have also learned that in order for these relationships to flourish, programs must establish a strong system of match preparation and support. Friends for Youth's program is a good example of some of the ways in which organizations can support the mentoring pairs. Here is a checklist of key structural components to guide your efforts as you consider strategies to create long-term matches:

- Our staff understands, can articulate, is trained on and actively promotes a mentoring philosophy and approach that results in effective mentoring relationships.
- Each program participant feels they have a personal relationship with at least one staff member within our organization.
- All of our youth are volunteers. That is, not only do they chose to be part of the program voluntarily, but they are also treated with the same respect and attention as the volunteer mentors.
- Referral agents, parents, and guardians have a clear understanding about the program.
- Mentors and mentees are oriented and trained prior to the match.
- Mentees and their guardians are contacted on a regular and consistent basis.
- Mentors are also contacted on a regular consistent basis even if things seem to be going well.
- Once the match is made, the mentoring pair is supported through a variety of organized activities and is provided with tools and resources that promote relationship building.
- We ensure that mentees meet with their mentors on a regular basis. In fact, we ensure they meet not just during the school year, but also through the summer months.
- Our organization encourages and has adequate resources to support each mentoring pair after their initial time commitment.

About Friends for Youth

Friends for Youth is dedicated to creating quality-mentoring relationships for youth who need them most and works to achieve its mission through its Mentoring Services and Mentoring Institute. The Mentoring Services creates and sustains community-based, long-term one-to-one relationships. The Mentoring Institute disseminates information to the mentoring community on safe and effective practices. For information about trainings, products, and services offered through the Mentoring Institute, contact Becky Cooper, Executive Director, at 650-559-0200 or becky@friendsforyouth.org.

About the Author: Elsy Arévalo

Elsy Arévalo is an experienced trainer with firsthand knowledge of mentoring and effective mentoring practices. She has served as Director of Friends for Youth Mentoring Institute and Mentoring Project Director at the Center for Applied Research Solutions (CARS). Through these leadership positions, Ms. Arévalo provides vision and direction to technical assistance initiatives, serves as key presenter at statewide mentoring forums and conferences and develops mentoring curricula and training materials. She is the author of publications such as “Running a Safe and Effective Mentoring Program,” “Mentoring Document Kit,” and the online training “Developing and Implementing a Recruitment Plan.” Ms. Arévalo serves on the board of the Silicon Valley Mentoring Coalition and has been instrumental in organizing the annual Northern California Mentoring Conference. Importantly, Ms. Arévalo has recruited, screened, trained, matched, and counseled mentors and mentees through the challenges of building a lifelong friendship.

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 and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL).

Let's Hear From You!

The MRC Case Study Series offers effective strategies and insights from successful programs on various topic areas. We are always on the lookout for successful programs and potential topics. Please contact us with your recommendations for future Case Study articles.



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